

A Tale of Two Towers

Washburn Park and Its Water Supply

Thomas W. Balcom

THROUGHOUT the 19th century water was a vital concern of American cities, second in importance only to transportation. Municipalities struggled with the important water-supply problems of capacity and pressure as they planned and constructed waterworks in response to demands of concentrated populations. As urban areas grew larger and more dependent on water-distribution systems, the need for dependable reserve supplies increased. In addition, because urban destinies were inextricably tied to local health conditions, pollution of water supplies was a major worry. The specter of pestilence hung over a city without a pure water supply, deterring settlement and business development. By the turn of the century, elevated storage reservoirs for maintaining adequate pressure and for fire protection became an integral part of municipal waterworks systems.

Water was first supplied to the citizens of Minneapolis by direct pumping from the Mississippi River. Concern over its quality was expressed as early as 1883: "Attention must be given to the nature and condition of the surroundings of the stretch of water from which the

supply is derived. . . the water of Bassett's Creek in that neighborhood [between 7th and 8th avenues north, near Washington] must be of the foulest character. . . It must at least be said that the distance of about three quarters of a mile between our water pipe and Bassett's creek is too short to admit of any considerable destruction of the impurities by natural causes.

"In conclusion, . . . it [is] desirable that the water supplied to the city should, at the earliest practicable time, be taken from a point sufficiently far up stream to avoid the sources of contamination to which reference has here been made."¹

To address the problem, the city in 1899 built a 45-million-gallon, in-ground reservoir in Columbia Heights, an elevated area upstream of Minneapolis. Water from the Mississippi River was pumped up to the reservoir, and a combination of gravity and pumping stations directed the flow through distribution pipes to the public. From 1910 to 1915, to keep pace with the growing urban demand, the Columbia Heights waterworks were expanded significantly, gaining a water filtration and purification plant, and more reservoir capacity. Minneapolis also added to its facilities three water towers in the more elevated neighborhoods south of the Columbia Heights reservoir: the Prospect Park tower, built in 1910; the Kenwood tower, constructed in 1913; and the already standing Washburn water tower, which the city purchased in 1915.²

¹James A. Dodge, C. L. Herrick, and C. W. Hall, "The Water Supply of Minneapolis," in *Bulletin of the Minnesota Academy of Natural Sciences*, 3:42-44 (January, 1883). A rebuttal was not long in coming: "Not only the *quantity*, but also the *quality* of water supplied by the city has been a subject of debate, for which there is, at present, but slender cause. Whilst the increase of the city's sewerage, pouring into the river, must prove at no distant day, an actual source of pollution to the water, and suggests the propriety of a further removal of the works to a place of more assured safety than they at present occupy, there is, as yet, no real ground for alarm." Minneapolis Board of Trade, *Minneapolis, Minnesota: Its History and Growth*, 55 (Minneapolis, 1884).

²Minneapolis Water Works Department, "Water — Your City Department and You!" brochure, 1972.

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THERE WERE actually two Washburn water towers: the original structure, constructed in 1893 and razed in 1931; and the current one, built in 1932 and still in operation during the summer months. The functional and aesthetic features of both towers were important to the historical development and character of the neighborhood they have served for almost a century.

The residential area in South Minneapolis known historically as Washburn Park got its start nearly 100 years ago. When Cadwallader C. Washburn, Minneapolis flour industry magnate and former governor of Wisconsin, died in 1882, he left \$375,000 for the founding and perpetual endowment of an orphans' home near Minneapolis. His will stipulated that the site be outside the Minneapolis corporate city limits but within a few miles of downtown, that it be quality land not less than 20 acres, and that it be in a desirable setting with ample natural shade. Execution of this portion of the will was left in the hands of his brother, William D., and a board of trustees named in the will. William Washburn also got his start in Minneapolis as a result of his brother's initiative. C. C. Washburn had acquired lands along the west bank of the Mississippi River and associated water power interests, but neither he nor his business partners were interested in the day-to-day management of their Minneapolis Mill Company, formed in 1856. Cadwallader persuaded William, who was 25 years old at the time, to move to Minneapolis and become the company's secretary and agent. At that time, the city's population was about 2,000, there were no railroads, and the manufacturing industry consisted of one or two sawmills. Over the years, the younger Washburn became very success-

ful himself in the lumber industry and in flour milling; he established the Mississippi River headwaters reservoirs, built railroad lines, and represented Minneapolis and Minnesota as a representative and later a United States senator.³

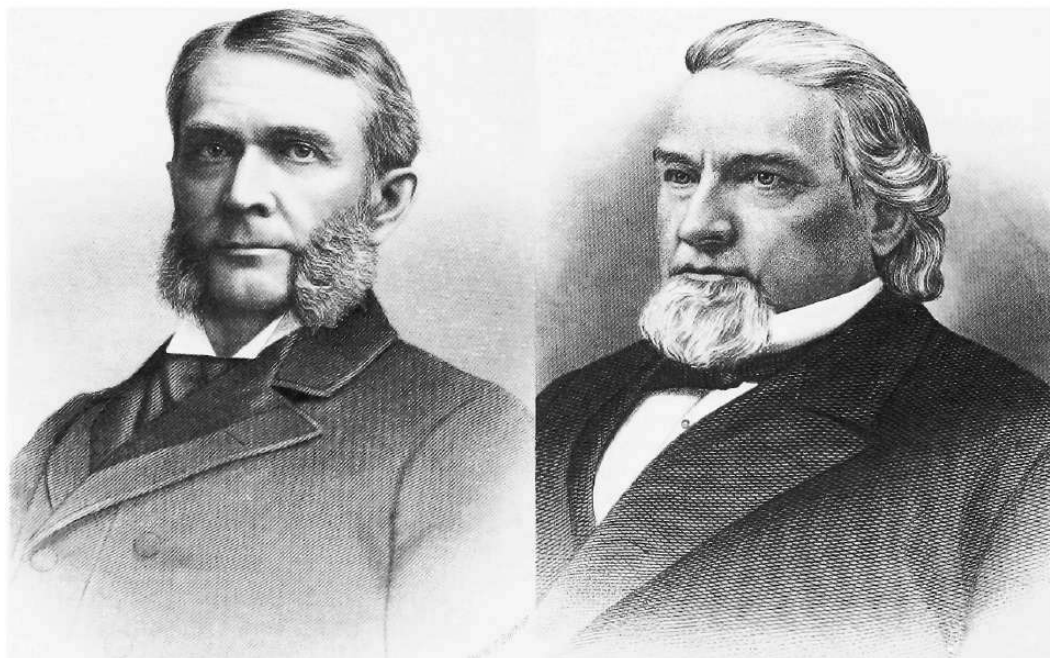
At the first meeting of the Washburn Orphanage Board of Trustees held at Washburn's Fair Oaks mansion at 22nd and Stevens avenues, members decided that their foremost objective was to secure a site in accordance with the requests made in the will. After a search of the countryside around Minneapolis, Washburn and the board settled on a "beautifully wooded tract" at 50th Street and Nicollet Avenue, directly south of downtown by five miles and outside the city limits at that time. For a total cost of \$77,000, E. Townsend Mix, well-known architect from Milwaukee, furnished plans, and the Minneapolis firm of Haglin and Morse constructed the building. The Washburn Memorial Orphan Asylum was completed on November 1, 1886, and the first child was accepted 15 days later.⁴

The Washburn Park plat was filed with Hennepin County a month after the orphanage opened. Washburn and 22 other landowners in the area were the proprietors

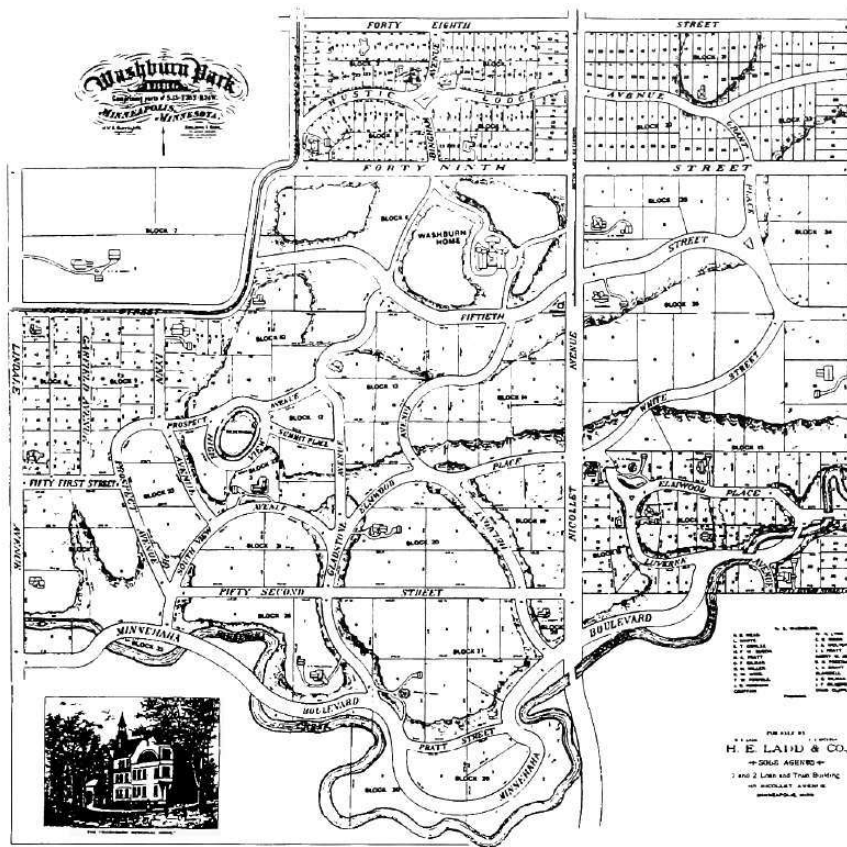
³ Isaac Atwater, *History of the City of Minneapolis, Minnesota*, 2:545-551 (New York, 1893).

⁴ "Dedication Ceremony Program of the Washburn Home in Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1887," p. 9-11, in Social Welfare Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis; Board of Trustees, Washburn Memorial Orphan Asylum, Minutes, July 28, August 16, 1884, May 8, 1885, May 24, 1887, in Washburn Child Guidance Center, Minneapolis, the descendent organization of the Washburn Memorial Orphan Asylum.

THE TWO Washburns, William W and Cadwallader C. (right), drawn about 1880



WINDING streets and gracious lot sizes were prominent features of the Washburn Park plat, the creation of local landscape architect H. W. S. Cleveland, planner of the Minneapolis parks and parkway system.



of what was essentially a real estate development consisting of 200 acres of wooded, hilly land, platted into large residential lots, surrounding the grounds of the asylum.⁵

Washburn Park was advertised in the 1886 plat map narrative as a place “where the men of business can get away from the noise of the city and the inconvenience of small lots and crowded neighborhoods.” Ironically, the area, promoted as a suburban retreat in 1886, was incorporated into the city of Minneapolis less than a year later. It appears that Washburn and the board of trustees of the home may have backed the annexation, which moved the city limits south to 54th Street. In 1887 the Nicollet Avenue streetcar line was extended from 37th Street to 50th, effectively linking the orphanage and neighborhood by public transit to the rest of the city.⁶

The promotional map also reassured potential customers about other amenities of life in Washburn Park: “With Minnetonka, Calhoun, and Harriet as a source of

supply, Minnehaha creek as the aqueduct and the reservoir that is to be built on the high hill near the center of the park for a local head, Washburn Park will have a complete system of water works.” It appears from the map that the original plan, never completed, was to build an oval-shaped reservoir into the ground. While there is no record of how water was supplied to the orphanage in the first six years, by 1892 the board of trustees expressed an interest in increasing the water supply through connection with the city’s system. During the next year, the board investigated the possibility of extending the city water main on Nicollet Avenue from 37th Street to 50th. Due to the opposition of property owners along the proposed Nicollet Avenue extension, however, the orphanage would have had to pay the entire construction cost of nearly \$12,000. When it was also learned that, even with the connection to the city water system, pressure would be insufficient to carry the water to the third floor of the orphanage, plans for the extension were dropped.⁷

The following year, the Minneapolis Board of Park Commissioners received a communication from Washburn, asking permission to dam Minnehaha Creek and lay pipe across Minnehaha Boulevard to supply water to the Washburn Home. This request, the first municipal record relating to a Washburn Park waterworks system, was referred to the Committee on Minnehaha Boulevard and the attorney for the park board. The board of trus-

⁵H. E. Ladd and Co., *Washburn Park Plat Map*, 1886, copy in Minneapolis Public Library, Minneapolis History Collection (MHC).

⁶Ladd and Co., *Washburn Park Plat Map*. The May 24, 1887, minutes of the board of trustees show an \$800 appropriation to aid in securing the extension of the streetcar line to 50th and Nicollet. Washburn probably contributed even more out of his personal finances to enhance the accessibility of his Washburn Park residential plat.

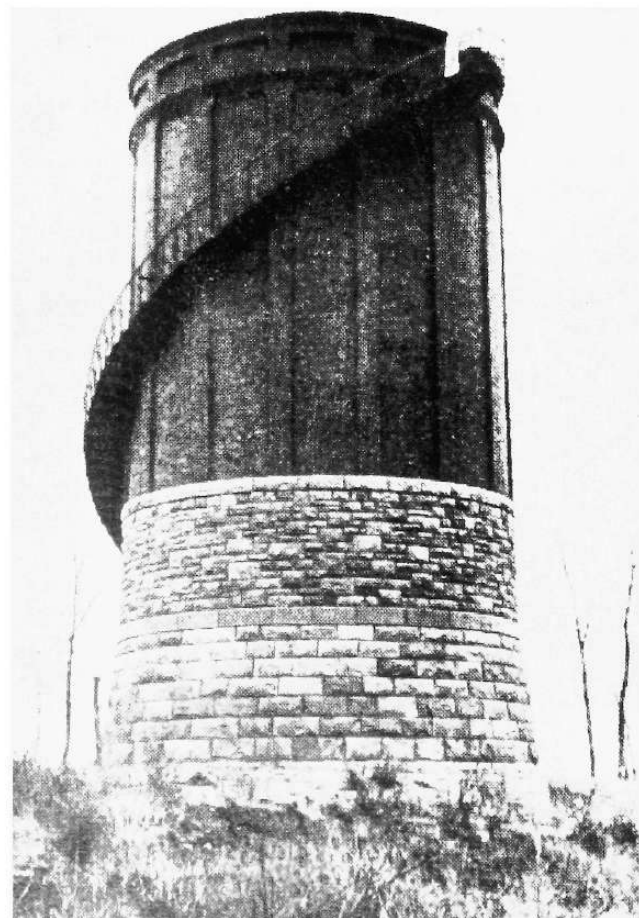
⁷Ladd and Co., *Washburn Park Plat Map*; Board of Trustees, Minutes, May 4, 1892, May 4, 1893.

tees of the orphanage then hired William de la Barre, engineer for the Minneapolis Mill Company, to provide detailed water-supply plans, and upon the submission of his report, a contract was drawn up between W. D. Washburn and the board of trustees enabling the orphanage to be supplied with water from Washburn's proposed private waterworks system.⁸

Two and a half months after Washburn's original request the park board resolved "That William D. Washburn, his heirs and assigns are hereby granted the right to lay a six-inch water main from Minnehaha creek, for the conducting of water to and upon lots or tracts of land within the boundaries of Washburn Park, an addition to the City of Minneapolis, to be used for fire protection, lawn purposes, domestic consumption, or for any other purpose, said water to be supplied by means of a pumping station, stand pipes and water power located on property belonging to said William D. Washburn. Subject to the supervision of Superintendent [William M.] Berry."⁹

On September 1, 1893 the city council affirmed the park board's action by passing an ordinance granting Washburn the right to lay water mains and pipes in the streets, avenues, and alleys within Washburn Park for

THE ORIGINAL Washburn water tower, set upon a knoll and surrounded with a circular drive (today formed by Prospect and Highview avenues), dwarfed the new trees of the young residential district.



the same purposes and by the same means as provided in the park board resolution. The ordinance also provided for the city to take over the water mains when the municipal waterworks system extended out to Washburn Park at some future time. The city would then also be required to purchase the pumping station and water tower at fair market value.¹⁰

BY YEAR'S END, the system was in place. Water was conveyed from Minnehaha Creek via the pump station and a six-inch water main up a hill to the water tower, built in the center of Washburn Park, and then on to the Washburn orphans' home, a distance of nearly a half mile. A 260-foot well near the creek supplied artesian water to the orphanage during the winter months when running water was not available.¹¹

Washburn's water tower stood at a height of 45 feet. An inner tank of riveted steel plates was surrounded by a six-inch layer of reinforced concrete. The outside base of the tower was stonework for the first 18 feet; the remaining 27 feet was of brick.¹² Although it has always been called a water tower, this type of construction is technically a standpipe, "a wrought iron, steel, or concrete column rising from a ground level foundation and containing water for its entire length." The form became common in the 1880s, and its architectural features received attention: "To any public-spirited person, the prominence of the water tower in the landscape would suggest the necessity of building something more pleasing to the eye than the now usual iron cylinder . . . man . . . should not erect structures placed on hilltops to be an offense to the eyes of this and future generations."¹³

⁸Minneapolis park board authority to regulate Washburn's private waterworks system is derived from Minnesota, *Special Laws*, 1887, p. 454: "Whenever the title shall have been acquired, for the purpose of this act, to the lands constituting the shore or shores of any stream of water, lake or pond, said board may regulate and control the use of such shore or shores and of the waters contiguous thereto." Minneapolis Board of Park Commissioners, *Proceedings*, June 2, 1893, p. 48; Board of Trustees, Minutes, June 15, July 5, July 11, 1893.

⁹Minneapolis Board of Park Commissioners, *Proceedings*, August 21, 1893, p. 68.

¹⁰Minneapolis City Council, *Proceedings*, September 1, 1893, p. 586.

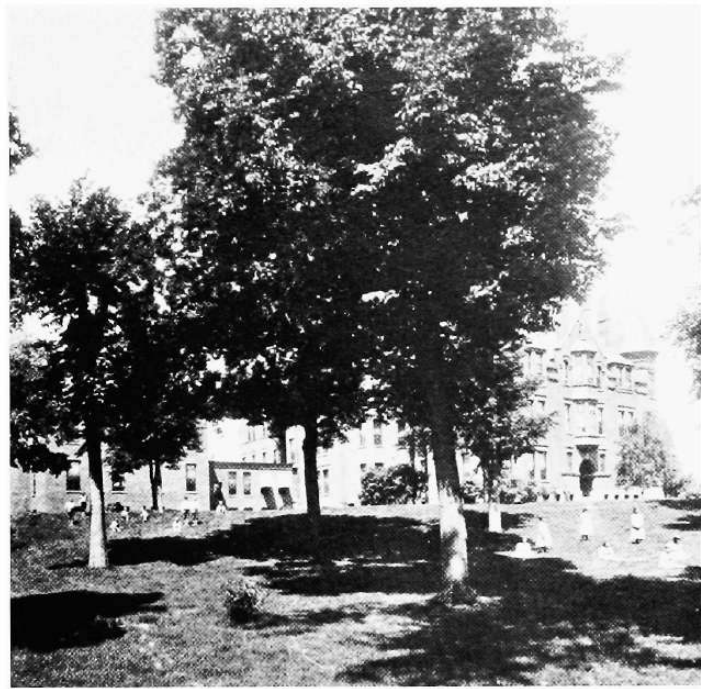
¹¹Board of Trustees, Minutes, May 22, 1894; Rascher Insurance Map Publishing Co., *Atlas of Minneapolis, Minnesota and Suburbs*, vol. 2, plate 210 (Chicago, 1892, with 1906 additions).

¹²Information on the original Washburn water tower is from two 1916 engineering drawings, showing plans to extend the tower's height another 25 feet; drawings on file at the Minneapolis Water Works Department.

¹³Carol Ann Dubie, "The Architecture and Engineering of Elevated Water Storage Structures, 1870-1940," 1, Master's thesis, George Washington University, 1980; "Competition for Pumping Stations and Water Tower Designs," in *Engineering and Building Record*, November 30, 1889, p. 377.

Washburn's private waterworks did not solve all of the water-supply problems for the orphanage. When a separate heating, lighting, and laundry building was constructed in 1896, the board of trustees found their system inadequate. Because water from Minnehaha Creek was not available in the winter months and the artesian well water was not suitable for the new boilers, the board was forced to sink a 520-foot well on the orphanage grounds for heating purposes. Nevertheless, the poor operation and maintenance of Washburn's private system continued to create problems in meeting the orphanage's domestic consumption needs. Finally, in 1901, Washburn and the board of trustees reached a new agreement. "Washburn's proposition for the winter was to turn over to the Home the use of his entire pumping plant — the engine house and dwelling house to be put in comfortable order — and contribute whatever rental he [Washburn] now receives for water furnished outside parties on condition that the Home assumes the cost of pumping[,] i.e.,[,] furnishes a man competent to run the Engine and pumps and keep them in repair — and supplies the necessary fuel." Washburn eventually turned the system over to the orphanage, which in return cancelled his obligation to repay the \$8,500 he had borrowed to construct the waterworks.¹⁴

While the orphanage's water-supply problem was being resolved, a water-quality problem was just beginning to emerge. In November, 1899, use of the water from Minnehaha Creek had to be discontinued, "having become unwholesome owing to drainage from the Sugar Factory." Over the next several years, the board of trustees investigated options of negotiation, acquisition, and legal action to secure pollution abatement of Minnehaha Creek by the Minnesota Sugar Company, a sugar-beet factory located upstream in St. Louis Park. In 1902, architect Harry W. Jones, a park board commissioner, proposed the board write and inquire of the company's plans and intentions regarding the discharge of water



A SUMMERTIME scene on the lawn of the Washburn orphanage, looking northwest, about 1899

and refuse from its factory into Minnehaha Creek. (Jones had moved to Minneapolis in 1883 from Boston, where he was educated. A pioneer settler of Washburn Park in 1887, he built the first nonfarm residence on the southeast corner of 51st Street, also called Elmwood Place, and Nicollet Avenue.)¹⁵

Charles E. Faulkner, superintendent of the orphanage, also spoke to the park board at that meeting, probably expressing concern over the pollution and potential health hazards to the children at the Washburn institution. In the early years of the 20th century, there were periodic epidemics at the orphanage, but no positive link to pollution from the factory could be made. The problem was finally resolved in 1906 when, after a fire, the sugar-beet factory relocated in Chaska.

The first city water main to reach Washburn Park was extended along Lyndale Avenue to 52nd Street in 1904. Four years later a 12-inch line was run out along Nicollet Avenue, and plans were made to connect the orphanage with city water via a 4-inch pipe if pressure proved to be adequate. The test hookup must have proved the pressure inadequate, however, because the orphanage remained without city water for several more years.¹⁶

In 1908, meanwhile, Thorpe Brothers Realty Company purchased a large amount of the remaining undeveloped land in Washburn Park. Some streets were realigned and the land was replatted into smaller lots. Over the next several years, population of the area grew quickly; by 1914, there were nearly 150 houses in the

¹⁴ Board of Trustees, Minutes, October 3, 1896, November 12, 1901, January 10, 1905.

¹⁵ Jones, who served in several governmental and civic capacities in Minneapolis, was a park board commissioner from 1893 to 1905, when many of the city's parks and parkways were acquired. He was also president or director of several art and architecture societies. His magnificently designed churches and private residences are found in numerous midwestern cities; in Minneapolis the most famous structures include Butler Square (1906), the Scottish Rite Temple (1907), Lakewood Cemetery Chapel (1910), and the Washburn water tower. Here and below, see Board of Trustees, Minutes, November 14, 1899, January 14, May 13, October 14, 1902, October 13, 1903, January 27, 1906; Minneapolis Board of Park Commissioners, *Proceedings*, January 18, 1902, p. 7. The sugar company later became part of American Crystal Sugar.

¹⁶ Board of Trustees, Minutes, June 9, 1908; Minneapolis City Council, *Proceedings*, February 11, 1915, p. 16.

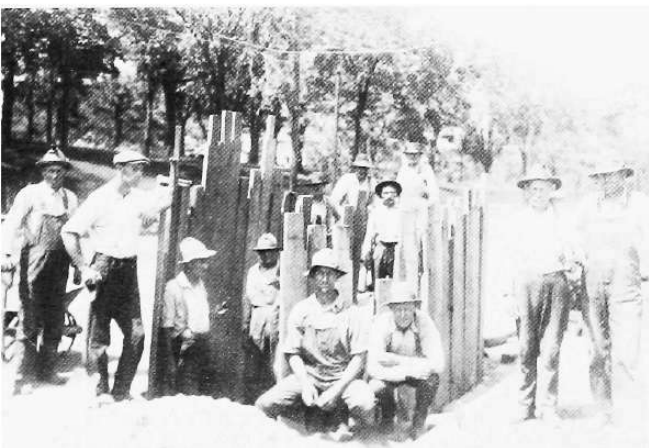
community. Water mains off of Nicollet and Lyndale avenues spread into the neighborhood.¹⁷

SUPPLYING water under adequate pressure to South Minneapolis was becoming difficult for the City Water Works Department by that time. All of the water purification and pumping station facilities were located north of the city in Columbia Heights. With a growing population in South Minneapolis, water pressure was becoming less than adequate, especially in the areas of higher elevation during the summer months. This situation became severe in 1914, and the city council passed a resolution instructing the city engineer to study the problem of the “water famine and shortage [that] exists at this time throughout the entire south part of the City.” The resolution singled out the Washburn Park, Outer Lynnhurst, and Lake Harriet areas as possible sites for locating water towers and auxiliary pumping stations.¹⁸

In February of 1915 the city council authorized the acquisition of the Washburn water tower and the establishment of a pumping station near Lyndale Avenue South. Later that year, the city purchased a pumping-station site at 44th Street and Aldrich Avenue for \$900 and acquired the tower and associated waterworks facilities from the Washburn Orphanage for \$14,000. As a result, both the tower and the orphanage were finally connected to the city system.¹⁹

In 1916 the city extended the height of the Washburn water tower by another 25 feet, presumably to provide for additional pressure and supply in the neighborhood. As the population of the city continued to grow and houses began to fill in the vacant areas of Washburn

WORKMEN paused from their task of extending the city water system to 50th Street and Nicollet Avenue, adjacent to the Washburn home, in 1915.



Park in the 1920s, however, South Minneapolis in general and Washburn Park in particular continued to have water-pressure problems. In 1927, a Fridley filtration and pumping plant, located just north of the Columbia Heights facilities, was added to the city-wide waterworks system. This additional capability allowed the city to discontinue use of the Washburn water tower, which was just not adequate as a source for additional water pressure and supply. In 1929, a newspaper story about a pump breakdown at 44th and Aldrich entitled, “‘Drought’ Hits Many Homes in Washburn Park,” reported that this incident was reminiscent of “summers before 1927 when the hot weather usually brought insufficient water, with the necessity of curtailing sprinkling of lawns during the hours of greatest demand.”²⁰

The Great Depression was a transition era for the original landmarks of Washburn Park. The number of children in the Washburn orphanage had started a long, slow decline shortly after the turn of the century, as foster homes supplanted institutions as the preferred method of caring for orphaned children. Finally in 1929 the board of trustees sold the home and the last five acres of grounds to the Minneapolis Board of Education. The orphanage was torn down that fall, and Ramsey Junior High School was constructed on the same site in 1931. The original Washburn water tower was also torn down in 1931 to make way for a new tower designed to boost the water pressure in the southwest section of the city. During the razing, it was reported that, “Bit by bit the lining of the tower that was built in 1893 . . . has been torn down under the heavy dynamite charges. The workmen have found the job is not so easy. The old tower proved stubborn in leaving its throne atop the knoll.”²¹

The first reference to a new water tower in Washburn Park mentioned a \$2,180,000 proposal for a 50-million-gallon reservoir in southwest Minneapolis and a Washburn Park pressure tower. Beside the benefits to the city waterworks system, this was also seen as an unemployment relief measure. On the next day, another local paper reported on a joint proposal of the city’s ways

¹⁷On this growth see, for example, plates 54 in both the 1903 and 1914 Minneapolis atlases issued by the Real Estate Board.

¹⁸Minneapolis City Council, *Proceedings*, July 10, 1914, p. 836.

¹⁹The Washburn water tower was served by the pumping station at 44th and Aldrich until it was replaced in 1968 by a larger, modern station at 40th and France. Minneapolis City Council, *Proceedings*, February 11, 1915, p. 116; Board of Trustees, *Minutes*, May 11, June 18, September 14, 1915.

²⁰Engineering drawings, 1916, and “Water — Your City Department and You!” Minneapolis Water Works Department; *Minneapolis Journal*, June 7, 1929, p. 1.

²¹Newspaper clipping, stamped July 5, 1931, in MHC.



THIS VIEW from about 1929 shows the relation of the old water tower and the orphanage, both soon to be demolished, to downtown Minneapolis; the newly built Foshay Tower is barely visible on the horizon (upper right).

and means, public welfare, and waterworks committees for four new water tanks in the Washburn Park district to cost a total of \$85,000. Two weeks later the single-tower plan received a preliminary go-ahead from the city waterworks committee and tentatively called for construction of a 95-foot-high tower with a storage capacity of 1,500,000 gallons. It was described in a newspaper article as a concrete structure with a brick facing and red tile roof.²²

The preliminary and final designs for the Washburn water tower were prepared in 1931 by Harry Jones. The city council in April, 1931, appropriated \$1,000 for an engineer to work with Jones, designing and supervising

construction. It was at this time that William S. Hewett was hired. Final design specifications were settled on during the next three months and bore little resemblance to the simple red-roofed structure of earlier plans. In July, the city council authorized \$85,000 for the cost of the tower and another \$1,800 for sculptures.²³

Born in Maine in 1864, Hewett had moved to Minneapolis in 1887 to work in his uncle's bridge-building company. He formed a company of his own 10 years later and, over the next several decades, built numerous highway bridges throughout Minnesota, Iowa, the Dakotas, and Montana. He was considered a pioneer in reinforced-concrete bridge construction.²⁴

After World War I, Hewett became interested in water-tank construction, and in 1919 he was awarded a contract to build a tower at Brainerd. He followed all the accepted engineering principles of reinforced-concrete construction, and yet the completed structure leaked, requiring costly waterproofing to make it tight. During this period, Hewett followed the progress of experiments in concrete shrinkage conducted by University of Minnesota professor Franklin R. McMillan, whose research explained the difficulties encountered in the Brainerd tank. This led to the development of the "Hewett System" of prestressed concrete tank construction in the early 1920s.

From the engineering drawings for the new Wash-

²² *Minneapolis Journal*, March 12, p. 6, March 13, p. 9, both 1931; *Minneapolis Tribune*, March 27, 1931, p. 19.

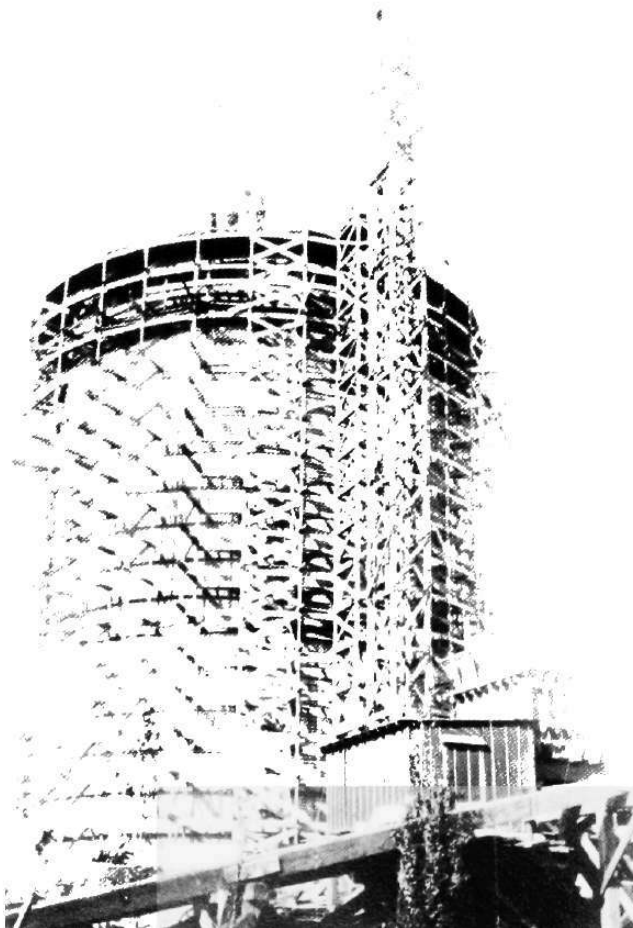
²³ Minneapolis City Council, *Proceedings*, April 10, p. 1218, July 10, p. 50, 51, both 1931.

²⁴ Harry Jones designed a house for William Hewett at 4602 (now 4600) Dupont Avenue South where he lived from 1906 to 1924, when he moved to Chicago. He returned to Minneapolis in 1928 and took up residence just south of Washburn Park. It is quite likely that Jones suggested to the city that it retain Hewett as engineer for the project. Here and below, see Maurice W. Hewett, "William Sherman Hewett: A Biography," 1-4, unpublished paper in Minnesota Historical Society reference library; *Minneapolis City Directories*, 1906-1932; Minneapolis Building Permit files, in Department of Inspections, Minneapolis.



ARCHITECT Harry W. Jones, early neighborhood resident and designer of the second water tower

THE NEW Washburn water tower under wraps



burn water tower (which, technically, is also a stand-pipe), it appears that the Hewett system was followed closely. When construction was completed in the summer of 1932, the architectural adornments on the Washburn water tower included the eight ribs or pilasters extending from ground level to the top of the dome, a circumferential band at the base of the dome, the dome itself with a radius of approximately 30 feet, eight 16-foot-tall guardian-of-health figures mounted on the pilasters part way up the tower, and eight eagles, each measuring eight feet in height, mounted on the band at the base of the dome.²⁵

The figures were designed and executed full size from plaster casts made by John K. Daniels, a Norwegian-born sculptor and resident of Washburn Park. City water department crews actually did the work on site, using Daniels' casts. Each guardian of health was cast in four pieces and weighed eight tons when put together. The eagles were cast in one piece; each weighed five tons.²⁶

	Original Tower*	New Tower
Capacity	175,000 gallons	1,350,000 gallons
Tower height	70 feet	110 feet
Water tank height	63 feet	75 feet
Water tank diameter	22 feet	58 feet
Wall thickness at base	36 inches	24 inches
Wall thickness half- way up the tower	22 inches	18 inches

* Includes the 25-foot height extension by the city in 1916.

²⁵ *Minneapolis Journal*, June 1, 1932, p. 13; see also five engineering drawings, dated 1932, in Minneapolis Water Works Department.

²⁶ *Minneapolis Journal*, June 1, 1932, p. 13. Daniels, who emigrated to the Minneapolis-St. Paul area in 1884, was "known for his versatility, working in stone, metals or in wood. The spirituality of his work is especially pronounced"; Sam H. Kaufman, "Among Those We Know," in *Golfer and Sportsman*, March, 1938, p. 21. Daniels' works include "The Pioneers," a monument in Pioneer Square at Main Street and 6th Avenue Northeast; statues of flour millers atop three columns on the old General Mills Utility Building; sculptures of Leif Ericson, Knute Nelson, and "Earthbound" on the grounds of the state capitol, and bronze statues of General John B. Sanborn, Colonel Alexander Wilkin, and a bust of Governor Lucius F. Hubbard in the niches of the capitol rotunda; a granite bison in front of the North American Casualty Building on Hennepin Avenue just southwest of downtown Minneapolis; and Minnesota memorials at six southern Civil War battlegrounds. Daniels was also famous for butter sculptures at the Minnesota State Fair. He received numerous gold medals and awards at local, national, and international fairs and exhibitions.



SCULPTOR John K. Daniels put the finishing touches on a model for his statue of Leif Ericson.

No doubt intrigued by the artwork, local newspapers sought the origins of these figures. One article, entitled "Pioneer Recalls Early Washburn Park Days," recounted Harry Jones's story about building his house in 1887: "when the work of clearing out the underbrush began, the workman [sic] were attacked by a huge eagle; after a struggle, his wing was maimed, he was caught, and measuring seven feet from tip to tip, he was taken to town, where he attracted great interest.

"In later years, as Mr. Jones was designing the new Washburn Park Water Tower, he immortalized this eagle and his struggle with the first settlers by crowning the tower with sculptured eagles, so perched as to keep their eyes on their early home."²⁷

As for the guardians of health, it was likely that the sculptures were prompted by past outbreaks of typhoid

²⁷ *Minneapolis Herald*, October 26, 1933, p. 1.

²⁸ Frank J. Corbett, "The Water Supply of Minneapolis," reprinted from *Journal of the Association of Engineering Societies*, vol. 33 (December, 1904); *Minneapolis Journal*, September 27, 1908, second sec., p. 10; "Report of the Pure Water Commission to the Common Council of the City of Minneapolis," 1909, "The Filtration Plant of the City of Minneapolis," May, 1924, and Frank H. Castner and James H. Duryea, "The Question of Pure Water," n.d. — all filed under Water Supply, Minneapolis, in MHC.

²⁹ *Minneapolis Journal*, June 1, 1932, p. 13.

fever, occasional malodorous and bad-tasting water, and the recurrent controversy over whether artesian wells or the Mississippi River should supply the city. Geologists had been disagreeing for decades over whether the artesian water basin underlying the Twin Cities was an adequate source.²⁸

One local newspaper article remarked on the symbolism that the figures added to the tower: "Romance is being put into the water business. The rather prosaic job of chasing microbes out of river water with chlorine and filters, which goes on daily in the filtration plants in northeast Minneapolis, is being portrayed in sculpture in the opposite corner of the city. 'The Guardians of Health' are being placed on the buttresses of the tower, but instead of wearing laboratory aprons and bearing test tubes, the figures are armored and helmeted and clasp huge swords."²⁹



THE CAPACITY of the Washburn water tower, often listed as 1,500,000 gallons, is actually 1,350,000 because of a tube, three feet in diameter, that runs up the center of the tower to provide access to the top and a drain for overflow water when the level exceeds 75 feet. It is drained every fall and then filled again in the spring.

To provide adequate water pressure and supply in the summer months, the waterworks department keeps the level in the tower between 65 and 70 feet. The tower has been known, however, to overflow. One incident happened just before the city changed pumping stations in 1968, when a pump switch malfunctioned at the 44th and Aldrich plant. The pump kept filling the tower with water which, in the middle of the night, overflowed, running down the center tube. A misplaced paint-can lid was partially covering the tower's floor drain, so the water began flowing out the tunnel door and down the hill, flooding basements of the houses immediately to the west. The police were called and evacuated some houses, thinking that the tower was on the verge of col-

lapsing or breaking apart. Order was restored a short time later when the pump was shut off.³⁰

Since its construction in 1932, the Washburn water tower, with its unique architecture and massive form, has provided a “scene of medieval splendor” in South Minneapolis, as well as lending a certain mystique to the immediate neighborhood: “Tangletown (also known as Washburn Park), an enclave of winding streets around the Washburn Tower, is an ever-so-American community of picturesque, 1920s homes. Because of the steep terrain it is always an attractive neighborhood, but the combination of quiet, secluded streets and a tropical growth of trees and bushes in the summer offer all that a resident could want for an inner city neighborhood. The repetitiveness of the architecture is somewhat mitigated by the winding streets. The old water tower was designed by Harry Jones, who let his nostalgia-seeking imagination loose in a striking rounded tower embellished with stark eagles at its top and at the base a group of medieval knights closely resembling the portal figures of Gothic cathedrals. But whereas the homes in the neighborhood are architecturally rehashes of rehashes — Dutch Colonial, Minnesota Spanish, reworking of Victorian Gothic in the 1920s — Jones’s water tower has a more compelling simplicity.”³¹

Based on the recommendations of the Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Commission (HPC) and broad

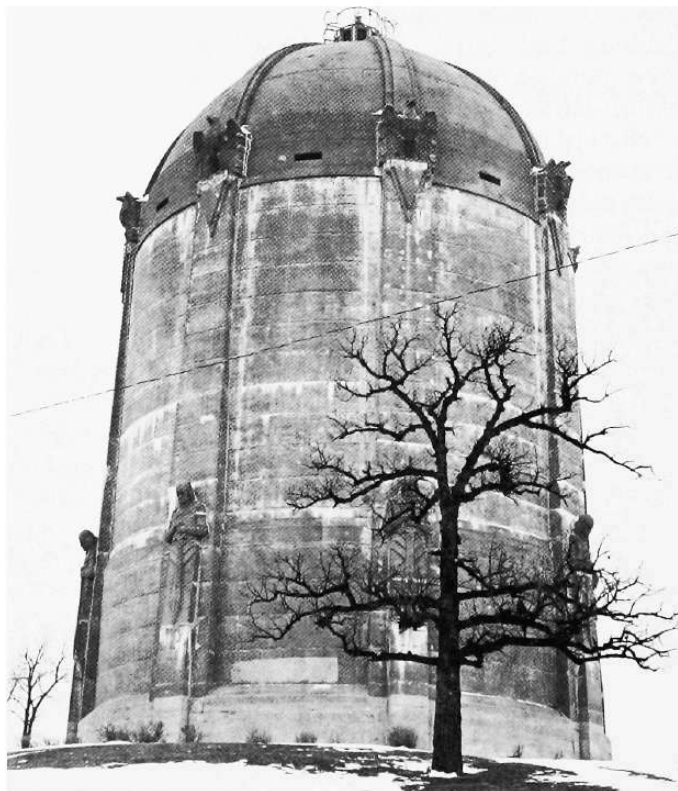
public support, the city council in July, 1980, designated the three remaining water towers in Minneapolis — Washburn, Kenwood, and Prospect Park — city landmarks. As a result, before any change is made to the exterior appearance or function of any of these structures, the proposal would be reviewed by the HPC and subject to public hearing. (Of the three, the Washburn tower is the only one still employed in its original function.)

In October, 1983, the Washburn water tower was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The city landmark thus joined a select group of structures, nationally significant because of historic and architectural value.

³⁰ Interview with Jim Regan, former supervisor of pumping stations for the Minneapolis Water Works, May, 1981, notes in author’s possession.

³¹ *Minneapolis Tribune*, August 7, 1932, picture sec., p. 4; Jean Adams Ervin, *The Twin Cities Perceived: A Study in Words and Drawings*, 51–53 (Minneapolis, 1976).

THE PICTURE on p. 26 is the author’s; those on p. 22 are from Isaac Atwater, *History of Minneapolis*, frontispiece and facing p. 264 (1893); the one on p. 25 is used with permission of the Minneapolis Board of Education; all others are in the MHS audio-visual library. The plat map, p. 21, is in the Minneapolis Public Library’s history collection.





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