

# The North Point Tower

**T**he iconic and beloved North Point Tower, atop the bluff above Lake Michigan at 2288 N. Lake Drive, is symbolic of 140 years of water service provided by the Milwaukee Water Works. Praised for its beauty, the structure is a notable example of the Victorian Gothic style, fanciful and charming.

The tower was designed by architect Charles A. Gombert, and construction was completed in 1873. Four years earlier, William Boyington designed a similar tower in Chicago but that tower is 21 feet shorter than Milwaukee's North Point Tower.

The 175-foot tower design was executed in cream-colored Wauwatosa cut limestone with a Cream City brick exterior trimmed with dressed limestone. The exterior is composed in three stages with a square, buttressed base, a tapered cylindrical tower topped with gabled roofs and finials, and a weather vane-crowned octagonal spire.

*"In an unprecedented fit of municipal whimsy, officials decided to surround the pipe with a fairy-tale stone tower worthy of the Brothers Grimm. The standpipe was capped decades ago, but the North Point Water Tower, minus Rapunzel, remains one of the East Side's most cherished landmarks."*

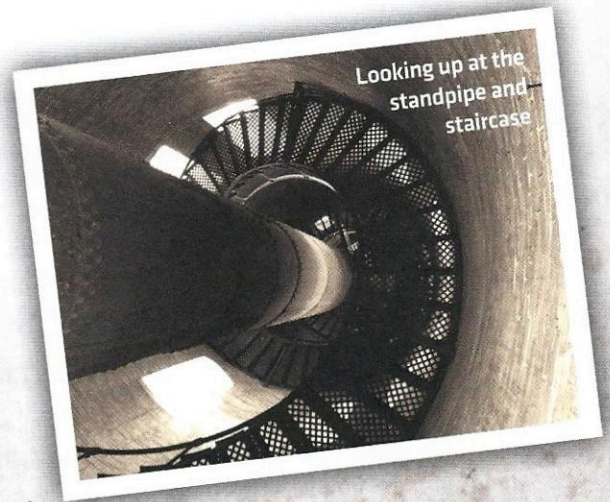
**HISTORIAN JOHN GURDA,  
"THE MAKING OF MILWAUKEE"**

Constructed at a cost of \$50,892, the tower was a principal work in the city's original water supply system. Below the tower stood the North Point Station, where reciprocating steam engines pumped water from Lake Michigan. The tower covers a four-foot diameter, 120-foot tall iron standpipe that absorbed pulsations of water from the steam engines, easing

the strain on the distribution system pipes. The exterior stonework prevented the formation of ice in the standpipe. Some 60 employees manned the steam engines around the clock.

By 1960, the system was becoming too costly to operate. The 86-year-old pump building, refurbished many times, was replaced by a new building and electrical pumps in 1963; the standpipe in the tower was taken out of service in May 1963.

At one time, Milwaukee had two other standpipe towers. Now, only the North Point Tower remains, standing in what was once a cow-grazing pasture at the city's northern limit. It bears landmark designations of city, state, and national historical, architectural, and water works distinction.



*"Younger Milwaukeeans will have a hard time believing this, but about 60 years ago, there were cows in a pasture to the south of the then still new North Point Water Tower."*  
Estella L. Wengler, Haddam, Conn., sent this picture to the Journal.

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