

Rockford Water Tower, 1901
Rockford Park
Wilmington
New Castle County
Delaware

HAER DE-16

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
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HAER, DEL 12-WILM 36-

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

Rockford Water Tower
HAER DE-16

Location: In Rockford Park, Wilmington, Newcastle
County, Delaware.
UTM: 18.450760.4401880
Quad: Wilmington North

Date of Construction: 1901

Present Owner: City of Wilmington

Present Use: Still a part of Wilmington's water
supply system.

Significance: The Rockford Water Tower was a part
of Wilmington's attempt at the turn
of the century to upgrade its water
service.

Historian: Data provided by Christopher Derganc
1976.

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Just after 1900, Wilmington, Delaware significantly improved its water service. The city laid new mains and built a pumping station, reservoir, and sand filter plant. It also constructed Rockford Water Tower, completed in 1901.

Wilmington had grown outward since the completion of its Cool Spring Reservoir in circa 1877. At the turn of the century, the gravitational flow from Cool Spring provided inadequate service to the extreme western side of the city. Wilmington built Rockford Tower to alleviate this problem. It pumped water from Cool Spring up and into the tower. The head presented by this elevated reservoir was then sufficient to distribute water to western Wilmington.

The 1901 tower encloses a steel tank 40 feet in diameter and 60 feet high, fabricated by the Edge Moor Iron Company in Wilmington. [See Photos DE-16-1 to 9] It has a capacity of 500,000 gallons and weighs 6,000 tons empty. The bottom of the tank consists of 6 riveted 5/8-inch steel plates. The sides are constructed of tiers of 6-1/4-inch steel plates measuring 5 feet high and 21 feet long. The side plates were fastened, end to end, with a double row of rivets, driven by a pneumatic riveter.

Enclosing the tank is a stone masonry shell constructed of Brandywine granite from Rockford Park, "laid underpointed so that the tower. . .[looks] like a pile of rocks that has stood for centuries." The interior surface of the shell is lined with white enamelled brick, and between it and the tank is a steel staircase with masonry overlay that provides access to an observation platform above the tank. The tower was still in use in 1976.

SOURCES

- Hofflecker, Carol. Unpublished, untitled paper at Eleutherian Mills Historical Library. Concerns the Wilmington water supply in historical perspective.
- Original drawings. Rockford Water Tower. Wilmington Water Department.
- Wilmington Board of Trade Journal, April, 1900.