

## LOOKING BACK . . . IN THE WORDS OF THE DAKOTA REPUBLICAN

# A Look Back At The Market Street Water Tower's Construction

For more than one hundred twenty years a water tower has stood in downtown Vermillion on the NE corner of Market and Bloomingdale streets.

Originally built as an elevated wooden water tank by the Michigan Pipe Co. in 1892, it burst once in 1902, but was replaced with a new wooden one. That water tank started leaking in 1903, was condemned in 1908, and was torn down in 1909.

The wooden water tank was replaced by the current steel water tower in 1912.

While in the process of securing the new water tower, the city also voted in 1911 to take over the water plant that had been previously owned by the Michigan Pipe Co. and to replace all of the mains throughout the city with new ones.

The water tower is scheduled to be torn down this week, after more than one hundred years of service to the community.

### Tank Takes a Tumble

FEBRUARY 27, 1902

Just after the force in The Republican office had finished mailing the last paper of its edition on Thursday afternoon last — to be more exact, it was half-past three — the elevated tank that supplies the mains of the city waterworks, burst without a moment's warning, and sticks and timbers and water left their aerial perch together and tumbled to the ground. The bursting of the tank was witnessed by a few who heard the noise caused by the sudden breaking of the bands and looked up in time to see a mass of timbers and water take a shoot downward. It was all over in a minute, and in less time than it takes to tell it a crowd had gathered at the scene of the wreck to view what was left of the structure and to see what damage had been done by the fall.

Investigation showed that the tank had burst in the middle, and that the bottom part of the staves were still clinging to the top of the superstructure. The bands which bound the tank at its centre had given away and the force of the water in the tank had caused the spreading of the staves at the middle, — hence the peculiar manner in which the mammoth tub went to pieces. The bursting occurred at a time when there was no one in the immediate vicinity of the tank, and as a consequence no one was hurt. The timbers flew in all directions. A good share of them fell to the west and smashed a shed at the rear of the kitchen of the house occupied by P.F. Gallagher. One piece of one of the heavy staves smashed through the roof of the kitchen. Considerable water got into the Gallagher home and did not a little damage to furniture. This was the only loss suffered by anybody outside of the Waterworks Company, as they owned the house in which Mr. Gallagher lives. Had the bursting occurred a few minutes later, Sup't Stanley of the Waterworks Co. might have been badly hurt if not fatally injured. A few days ago the gauge wire that is attached to the gauge in the tank was broken, and Mr. Stanley was just getting ready to go up to the top of the tower and repair it, when he was apprised of what had happened, and he is rejoicing that the break happened when it did instead of at a later time.

The tank held about 60,000 gallons, and it was nearly full at the time of the explosion. The engineer at the pumping station was filling it up preparatory to shutting down the engines for the night when he was told what had happened. The engines were shut down for a few minutes until Mr. Stanley could disconnect the pipes which fed the tank, and then they were started up again and water was pumped into the mains and since the explosion the town has been supplied with water by direct pressure on the mains.

That the bands which held the tank in the middle were in bad shape is beyond a doubt. They seemed all right when last examined, but now it is supposed that the stroke of lightning that damaged the tower last summer had some effect on the bands and that they had weakened and stretched. Anyway, the bursting was caused by their failing to hold together.

As soon as possible after the accident a telegram was sent to the Michigan Pipe Co. at Bay City, Mich., who are the chief stockholders in the concern, acquainting them with the damage that had been done, and asking them what to do in the matter. The tank will be rebuilt on the same superstructure as soon as possible. Then, also, there is another possibility that in the near future the whole tank structure will be replaced with a new steel standpipe. Let us all hope that the latter will prove true. This bursting of tanks is not what it is "cracked up" to be.

JUNE 18, 1908

The big tank of the waterworks system has shown signs of weakening for several weeks. Last Saturday it was found to be way out of plumb, and evidently dangerous. Danger signs were posted on the Bloomingdale St. and traffic on that part of the street near the tank was suspended. The attention of the water company being brought to the condition of the tank, they at once sent for an expert in such matters to come to Vermillion and inspect it. He arrived Tuesday evening, and declared the structure unsafe. No water has been pumped into the tank since, and service is now had by direct pressure on the mains. We understand that steps will be taken at once to replace the old structure with a new one.

### Water Tank Demolished

MAY 13, 1909

For a number of months it has been known that the elevated tank that furnished the pressure for the city waterworks system has been in a dangerous condition, and that it was not a ques-

tion of time when it would fall of its own accord. The big timbers that served as braces for the support had become bent in and broken on the east side, and it seemed that the tank might fall at any moment. The Waterworks Company decided that it would be on the safe side by having the big tank and substructure leveled to the ground. So they engaged the services of Contractor Nysten to do the job of razing.

Last Friday morning Mr. Nysten with plenty of help set out to tease the structure down. It looked like an easy task, but the first attempt to loosen timbers by pulling them out with ropes proved a failure.

In the afternoon it was decided to witness the felling of the structure. But they all kept at a safe distance. After loosening the piers, some of the workmen were busy at the base of the tower, when a crackling above gave the warning alarm that the big tank was coming down. They immediately turned and ran for a place of safety, and they were none too soon, for the substructure sagged in the centre, the big timbers flew to the southwest, and the tank came toppling down to the northeast. The whole was a mess of wreckage, but it was down, and those who lived in the vicinity or had business interests there, breathed easier than they had for some time. Contractor Nysten did a good job in bringing the heavy and lofty structure down, and is to be congratulated that the work was accomplished so easily and without accident.

Water service is now being rendered by direct pressure, the gasoline engine being kept going all day with everything in readiness to put on all the pressure available in case of fire.

It is very likely that the negotiations now pending between the city and the water company relative to the sale of the plant to the city, will result in the city's taking over the plant. However, proceeding on the theory that such will be the case, the city will erect a new tank, one entire of steel, substructure and all.

AUGUST 17, 1911

At the adjourned meeting of the city commission last evening the city auditor was instructed to advertise for bids for a water tank. The new tank is to be of the hopper-bottom variety, of 110,000 gallon capacity, and is to be on a 100-foot tower. The matter of locations was also gone over, but nothing definite was done. The commission then took up the proposition made by the Vermillion Electric Co. for the pumping of the water, and the engineer in charge of the work was instructed to make investigations as to the feasibility of the plan and to report at a later meeting. The Electric Co. has made a proposition to do the pumping for the city for \$1,500 per year, and this plans to also include the work of collecting the water rentals. If the company will be in a position to guarantee that a required amount of water is kept in reserve in the tank at all times, then the scheme would be a practical one and the plan will be a matter of economy for the city. But the commission will make a thorough investigation before arriving at a decision.

### Option Secured on New Tank Site

AUGUST 24, 1911

Last week the members of the city commission talked over among themselves the project of a site for the new water tank. The engineer of construction in looking over the proposed site at the foot of Market Street made the remark that the lots back of the Chandler House would make the best site that could possibly be secured for the new tank, and Commissioner Harris at once took the matter up with Mr.

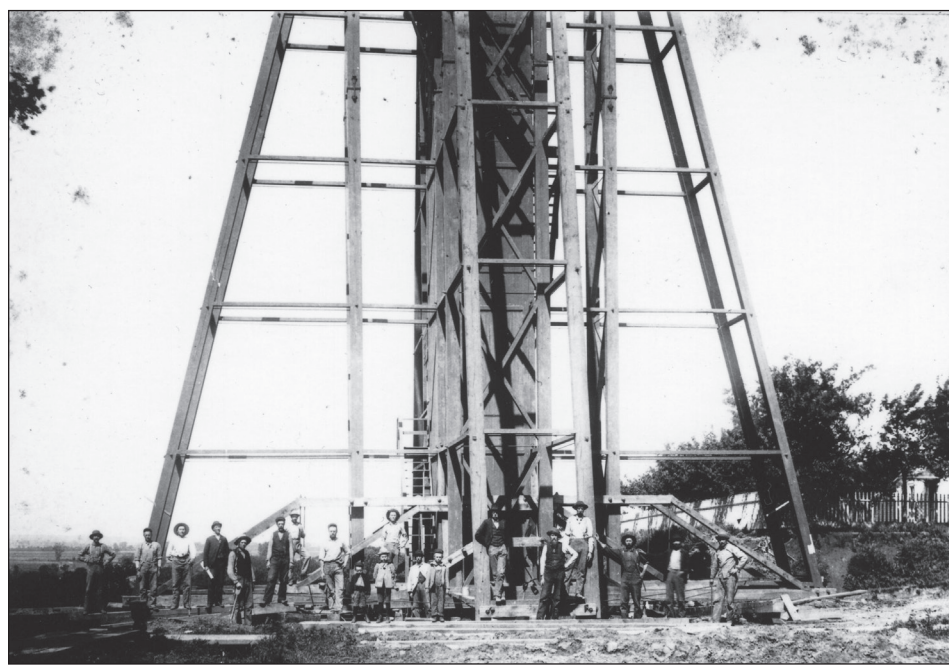


PHOTO COURTESY OF THE CLAY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

### Construction of the Market Street Watertower, circa 1911.

Abell, the owner of the property. At the meeting of the commission on Monday evening of this week, Mr. Abell appeared before the members and offered to sell a portion of his property for the purpose of the erection of the tank and location of the same. It was figured that a space 50 x 20 feet would be required for the tank and Mr. Abell offered this to the city for \$500. The proposal looked good to the members of the commission, and the city attorney was instructed to at once prepare the papers for the option. This location is much preferable to the one at the foot of Market Street, and the commissioners are lucky to be able to secure it as the site for the new tank.

### Contract Let For Water Tank

SEPTEMBER 14, 1911

The meeting of the city commission on Monday evening was a busy one in more ways than one. Aside from the proposition of the electric pumping power, which was summarily disposed of by a motion of rejection, the commission had before it the work of letting the contract for the erection of the tower and tank for the new water works plant. There were five bids for the work. Most of the bids were divided between the proposition of erecting the tank and foundations separately, and the proposition for the foundation and tank and tower complete. On the matter of the foundations and tank and tower complete, the bids were as follows:

Des Moines Steel Machinery Co., \$6,915 Cook Construction Co., Chicago, \$7,200  
W.D. Lovell Co., of Minneapolis, \$7,155 Des Moines Bridge & Iron Co., \$6,788

Chris Grosse also had two bids for the construction of the foundations, each on a different basis, and the price for each was \$455. After considering the matter for some time, the commission awarded the contract to the Des Moines Bridge & Iron Co., and fixed the time limit for completion at seventy-five days from date. The contract was fixed up and signed that evening.

John E. Hirt appeared before the commission in the matter of the location of the tank, and threatened suit if the commission persisted in erecting it on the Chandler House property as

they had intended, claiming that its erection on that site would greatly damage the value of his adjoining residence property. The mayor and Commissioner Harris were appointed as a committee to confer with the parties interested in the matter, and to make a report at the meeting of the commission on Tuesday evening.

The committee appointed on the matter of the tank location, reported that they were unable to make satisfactory arrangements for the purchase of the Chandler House property as intended. Negotiations had been carried on during the day for the purchase of the old Hart property where the old tank formerly stood. The property had been offered to the city at a reasonable figure, and the commission considered that it was the best site available, and ordered the city attorney to proceed at once to conclude the purchase. The deal was closed yesterday, and the new tank will be erected in the site of the old one. This will save the expenditure of money for new piping and connections, as the site is already provided with the necessary pipes, and it will greatly lessen the time and labor required in complete running order.

### Cavanaugh Gets Contract

OCTOBER 26, 1911

At the adjourned regular meeting of the city commissioners held on Thursday evening of last week, the contract for the furnishing of the pumps and engines for the new waterworks system, and for the installation of the same was awarded to P.F. Cavanaugh. His bid was \$5,997, and this also includes the repairs on the reservoir. The engines will be of the Fairbanks-Morse distillate type, and Gould's triplex pumps will be used. Two 40-horsepower engines will be installed, and also two sets of pumps, giving two complete pumping units. On Tuesday of last week Commissioners Harris and Gilbertson went on a tour of inspection of places where these engines and pumps were in use. They went to Sioux City and visited the pumping station out at Leeds and also at the Armour packing plant. They then went to LeMars and Merrill, Iowa, and from there to Marion Junction and Alcester, SD. An adjourned regular meeting of

the commission was held on Thursday evening of last week, when all bids then on file were rejected, and new bids ordered to be opened at eight o'clock that evening. All parties having previously had bids on the work, handed in new bids, and the result was that the contract was awarded to Mr. Cavanaugh as above stated.

At the regular meeting of the city commission on Monday evening of this week, Floyd Culbertson was appointed as city engineer, and will qualify and file his bond at once. The contract for the digging of the wells which had previously been awarded to J.H. Janssen of Woonsocket, was approved and signed.

NOVEMBER 23, 1911

The piping for the new city wells arrived the first of the week, and Contractor Janssen and his force of workmen commenced yesterday in the putting down of the wells. Contractor Nysten will have the foundation of the new pump house completed this week, and all ready for the erection of the superstructure as soon as the wells are finished. The new tank was shipped from Pittsburg on Nov. 11, the same day as the piping for the wells, and is expected here at any time now. Workmen will be here to erect the tank as soon as the material arrives, and it will be but the work of a short time to erect the tower and tank. It looks now as though everything would sail smoothly from now on.

FEBRUARY 8, 1912

A piece of news which will be welcomed by all property owners in this city: We were informed yesterday by the foreman of the construction gang on the city's new water tank that it would require only about twelve days more for its completion. By that time Contractor Cavanaugh hopes to have all the missing parts of the two engines here and in place and it will be but a short time thereafter before the plant in its entirety will be turned over to city authorities. The test made of the two new tubular wells gave sufficient proof that they will furnish ample water for all uses, something the city could not say for the past two years.

FEBRUARY 22, 1912

The new tank for the city waterworks system is nearly completed and ready for service.

Foreman Eugene Sherin, who has had charge of the construction work, has received orders to ship his tools to Kennebec, out west of the river, where his company and has the contract for the erection of another large tank for waterworks purposes. He will take with him the force of men he has employed in the building of the tank in this city.

Now that the new waterworks tank is nearing completion, the suggestion that a large arc light be placed at the top of it has been made. The suggestion is a timely one, and should meet with due consideration. The tank is erected at a point where a light at the top would be seen from a long distance, and would also serve to lighten up the "dang bottom" where light is much needed. Along with the above suggestion come a counter thought that it would be a good plan to have an intermittent light spelling out the word "Vermillion." The latter would serve as a bit of advertising, for it would be seen by passengers on all night trains. But "more light" seems to be the prevalent idea, and in the event that either suggestion arrived at the stage of realization, it would be a welcome matter.

### New Water Tank in Commission

FEBRUARY 29, 1912

The surprise of the users of city water may well be imagined, when they happened to go to their hydrants after the usual hours on Tuesday night and found that there was good pressure of water, much greater than that which has existed at any period since the old tank was torn down. And then, too, they were surprised that they were able to get any water at all. It was the first time in many, many moons that we have had an all night water service.

And it all came about on account of the fact that the new steel tank was put into commission on Tuesday. The construction crew had carried the work to a point where the connections had been made with the mains, and where water could be pumped into the tank. The tank was filled on Tuesday for a test, and was found to be working in fine shape. The new pumping apparatus was called into play and water from the new wells was put into the tank and the mains have since been supplying water from the new wells to the consumer.

It is now with a feeling of greater security that the citizens of Vermillion retire at night. For they know that there is at least some immediate protection at hand if a fire should happen to break out. And then to think that the house is supplied with water for domestic uses is very gratifying to the housewife who has often found the premises without water to prepare the morning's kettles and pans before retiring on the night before.

MARCH 6, 1913

The top of the city water tank has been decorated with an electric light, and the immediate vicinity of the tank has been made much more like daylight in consequence. The light serves as a beacon for those who are making their way towards Vermillion by night, as it can be seen for a long distance out in the country.

INFORMATION COMPILED BY TOM THADEN PAST PRESIDENT, CLAY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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