

Humboldt water tower home to years of history

by Kevin Gill
Journal staff writer

It's been 84 long years since workers first began construction of the Humboldt water tower, and much has changed in the town since that time.

One thing that has remained constant is the sight of the lighthouse style tower, which remains at its original location to this day.

Sure, it's in rough shape after years of pounding from the elements - pelting rain, piles of thick snow and hot rays from the sun in summertime.

The old building has been getting some attention recently though, as the fate of the tower is in question.

After being ignored since 1977 when Humboldt switched to a new water treatment plant, there are those looking to rid the town

of the building and those looking to preserve it.

Some think of it as a beautiful part of the town that should be fixed up and preserved, while others view it as a dilapidated eyesore that should be torn down or burned to the ground.

Arguments on both sides may be compelling, but a decision does have to be made eventually or it will simply fall down by itself given enough time.

Whatever side you support, one thing cannot be denied - the water tower served an important part in the town's history.

The water tower was given the go-ahead in 1914 against the advice of civil engineer F. McArthur. He advised Town council that the town well would furnish all the water required and that its quality was satisfactory.

Instead, council contacted consulting engineers Chipman and Powers from Toronto, a company with a country-wide reputation in water and sewage works.

The tower Chipman and Powers designed began construction in 1914 and finished the next year.

The cost of the project was about \$300,000.

The same company also designed towers across the country from Halifax to Victoria, including 11 in Saskatchewan.

The tower itself is actually a metal standpipe surrounded by a wooden frame.

The Humboldt water tower remains one of only four towers of its design still standing in Saskatchewan. Coastal lighthouse style towers are also still standing in Weyburn, Kamsack and Kerrobert.

Other towns and cities - Moosomin, Watrous, North Battleford, Canora and Saskatoon - also had similar style towers that no longer exist.

The Humboldt tower's original water source was Stoney Lake.

Unfortunately, the 22-foot deep lake eventually dried up so the source was changed to Burton Lake in 1924.

A brick annex was also constructed beside the tower at the same time to accommodate the filters and pumps.

The daily consumption of water averaged 32,276 gallons in 1924.

Later on, the Town undertook a costly and ultimately unsuccessful venture.

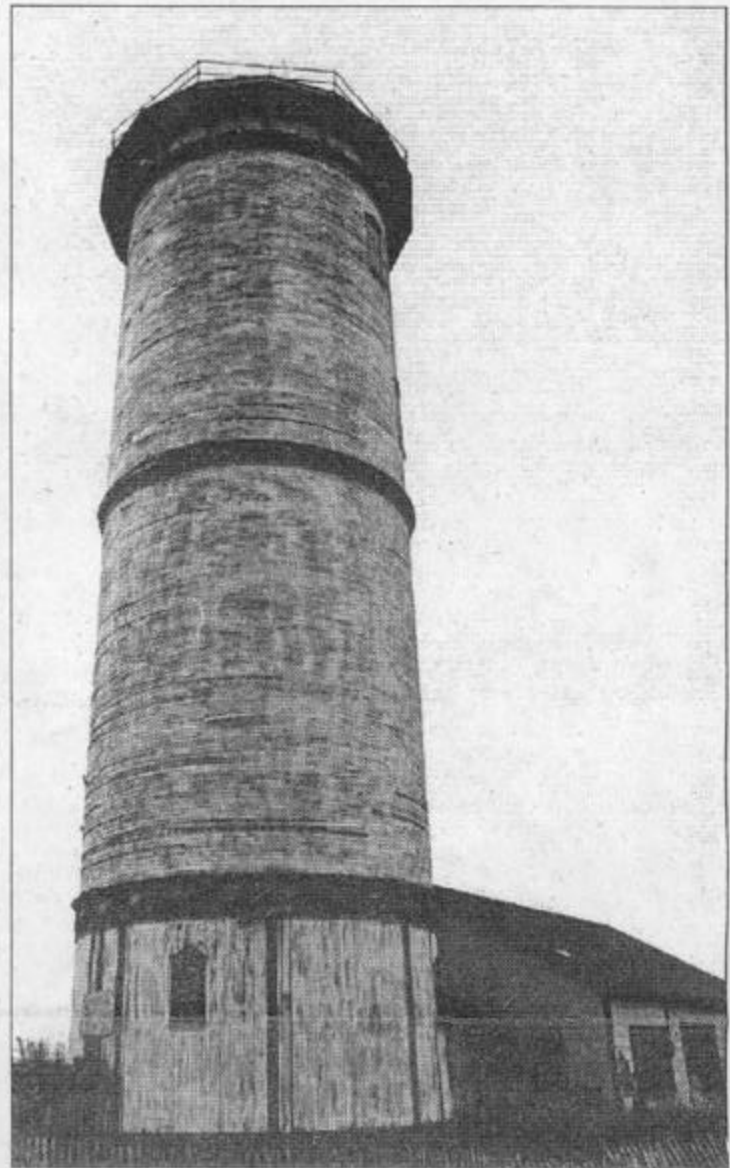
In the late '40s, a water softener plant was constructed adjacent to the water tower, but after just one summer of operation, it was shut down because it was too expensive to maintain.

The water tower finally shut down all operations for good in 1977.

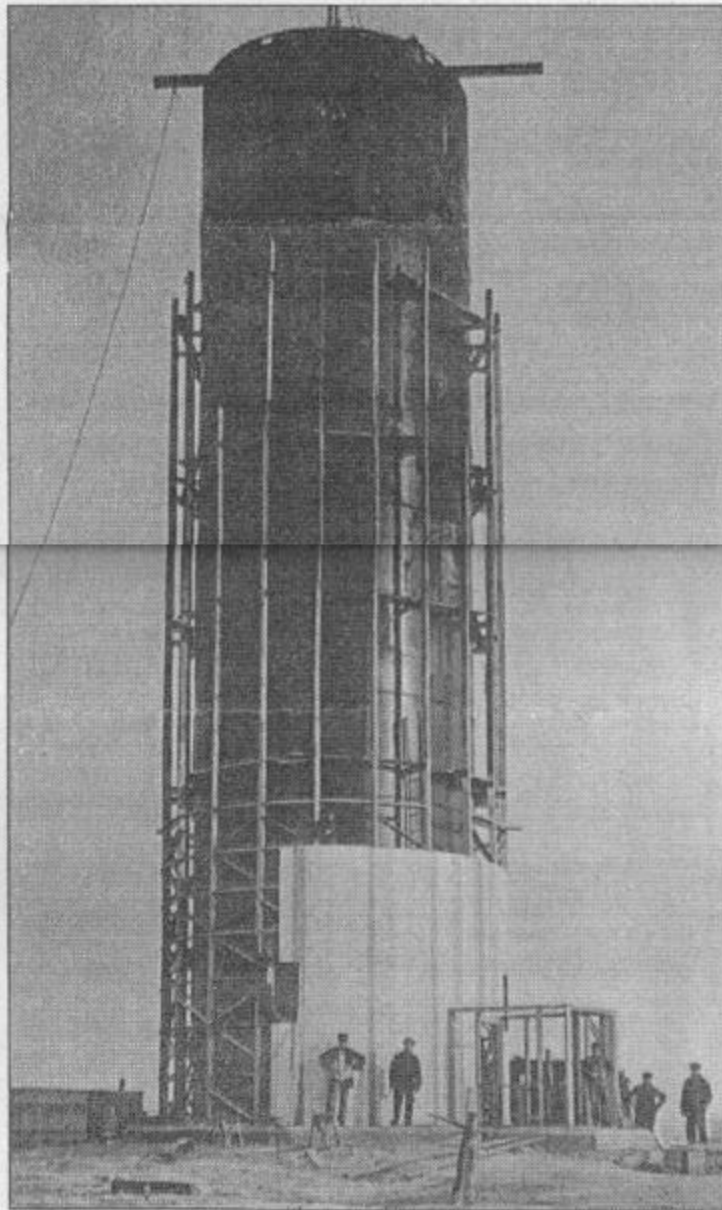
Ever since, the building has stood dormant, showing its age with each passing year of non-use.

Although the tower hasn't been used for more than 20 years, the stories that go along with its active years live on through those who remember the building firsthand.

While the tower served the town for decades, people like Joe Urbanoski and Arnold Brockman remember the



The tower still stands on its original site 84 years after it was built. (Humboldt Journal photo)



A look at the Humboldt water tower when construction started in 1914. (photo courtesy of Humboldt and District Museum and Gallery)

more difficult times surrounding the water tower.

They were two of the people responsible for making sure the tower was doing its job correctly, and it wasn't always smooth sailing.

Brockman and Urbanoski worked together for the town years ago. Brockman was a councillor from 1965-74 and Urbanoski was town foreman from 1968-1979.

Brockman remembers a few occasions when the water in the tower overflowed.

He explained how cold winter weather would often take its toll on the water inside the tank.

"Near the top there would often be an encrustation of ice all the way around as thick as two feet," he said.

When the ice thawed, there couldn't be too much water in the tank already or it would overflow.

On one occasion, after a fluctuation in temperatures,

Urbanoski remembered a mishap at the tower.

After overflowing, the temperature dropped and froze water at the top of the tower. When it warmed up, the ice fell from the tower through the roof of the plant manager's office.

"It landed right on his desk and didn't miss him by much," said Urbanoski.

Brockman said that he encountered about three serious problems with overflow during his time on council.

"You had to control the water level, leave enough space for the ice to melt, and be a weatherman to predict what would happen," Brockman said.

Keeping the water level as high as possible all year round without overflowing the tower was important.

Brockman said that the amount of water pressure to get it out to homes depended

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Tower served town well

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"When the tank was full it had full pressure," he said.

This was important not only to provide water to residents, but to be prepared in case of a fire.

The tank usually took about eight to 10 hours to fill overnight, depending on water usage.

Although keeping the water at a suitable level was often an adventure, it doesn't compare to the oddest story related to the tower.

One time, Brockman and Urbanoski were going to the top of the tower to check things out and make sure everything was working correctly when they stumbled upon an unusual sight.

"We were checking around with a flashlight and Joe

said, 'What the hell's this?'," Brockman said.

They looked and saw a switch lantern, an old coat, some blankets and a box of Ritz crackers.

After going back down, they noticed a window had been broken, and they knew that someone had been in the tower.

"Some guy would crawl up there and sleep," he said.

Although they found the person's belongings, they never discovered the person who was using the tower as a home.

In terms of its real function, providing water to the people of Humboldt, the tower wasn't perfect but Brockman said it did its job.

"It served the town well and paid its debts."