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The Tower on Fox Hill

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Tower on Fox Hill or the memorial tower is a building located at the summit of Fox Hill in Rockville, Connecticut.

History

In earlier times, when Native Americans still lived in the area, the hill was used as a lookout for the Podunk tribe. Three tribes converged on Mischenipsit lake; Podunks, Nipmucks, and Mohegans. Possibly, this gave the Podunks an advantage.

Fox Hill commands a broad view of the Connecticut River Valley. Weather permitting, Mount Tom, Mount Holyoke and Talcott Mountain may be seen by the naked eye. At the time, the hill was without trees and growth. Each year, the Podunks burned the undergrowth as part of the normal 'forest management' that they practiced. Also, wood was used for heating purposes and the settlers cut down any large trees for firewood. The cleared land would then be used as pastureland. The early pictures of Fox Hill show only some small trees on the summit.

In the first issue of the 'Rockville High School Magazine', which preceded the 'Banner', published in 1877, an editorial appeared which expressed the students' hope that a tower would be built on Fox Hill.

Finally, in 1878 a Mr. Jeffrey of Meriden erected a wooden observation tower. The tower was twenty square feet (2 m^2) at the base and extended sixty feet (18 m) upwards up to a ten foot square (1 m^2) platform at the top. The walls of the ground floor were enclosed and ice cream and refreshments were sold. The upper platforms were open. A telescope was available and a 15¢ admission charge was collected for the opportunity to climb the tower and use the 'spy glass.'

It seems the Jeffrey's Tower was very popular although short-lived. On February 3, 1880, a severe blizzard destroyed the structure. It was not rebuilt and the broken timbers became tangled with vines and bushes. The first floor remained standing. Charles Ethan Porter, brother-in-law of Jeffrey used it as his studio. He painted still life paintings here during the winter or when it rained.

After Mr. Porter died, the small structure fell into disrepair and eventually disappeared. During the next 60 years two homes were built on the south side of the summit but the tower was not rebuilt.

The Memorial Tower was completed in 1939, having started two years earlier. The tower is dedicated to the Veterans of all wars from the Town of Vernon. The dedication

took place on Saturday, August 5, 1939.

The building itself cost approximately $75,000. The Work Projects Administration supplied the labor and materials. The town, city, and individuals contributed the rest.

The War Memorial Tower is 72 feet (22 m) high, has a promenade 220 feet (67 m) long and its foundation rests on solid rock. The tower itself is made of native stone. There is an observation platform near the top of the tower. Bronze tablets bearing the names and inscriptions of three branches of the service, Army, Navy and Marine Corps appear on the walls.

The tower is now considered part of Henry Park which is maintained by the Vernon-Rockville Parks and Recreation Department.

Original wooden tower

Statistics

20 feet square at the base

60 feet (18 m) high

The bottom was enclosed with a south side window and door. The top was not enclosed.

Builder

Mr. Jeffrey

Original owner

Mr. Jeffrey

Original use

Used as viewing platform and refreshment stand; later, after the tower was destroyed, the ground floor was used as an art studio by Charles Ethan Porter.

Memorial Tower

Statistics

72 feet (22 m) high

observation platform at the top

structure entirely enclosed

220 foot (67 m) promenade

Builder

Work Projects Administration?

Original owner

E. Stevens Henry, bequethed to the city

Original Use

veteran's memorial

Current use

veteran's memorial

Important dates

1877 Students of Rockville High School's hope for a tower published in the Rockville High School Magazine

1878 Original wooden tower erected

1880 Original wooden tower destroyed in blizzard

1889 Sometime after, the surviving ground floor is used by Charles Ethan Porter as a studio

1923 The structure 'disappears'

1937 Start of construction for the Memorial Tower

1939 Memorial Tower completed and dedicated

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