

The Day the Tower Came Down: June 13, 2017

By Dave Noel

What can I say...the iconic Indian Lake Fire Tower is gone! Erected in 1936, the tower stood the test of time and hundreds of kids, families, and storms for over 80 years. I first climbed the tower when I was 16 and a visitor to the nearby Tower Ranch girl's camp while visiting my sister, who was a camper. It was a traditional rite of passage for the campers to steel their nerve and climb the tower each summer. The tower has seen its share of visitors from the nearby community, runners trying to get a workout by running the steps, and of course there's those late night teenage parties. It's even recorded as a national Geocache location. So many stories....

The Department of Natural Resources decided to decommission their fire towers a year and a half ago - but who thought it would really happen? The Indian Lake tower was sold immediately, and evidently was one of the first to be removed. Purchased by the LaVenture family of New Richmond, WI for \$130, they plan to re-erect it on their family property in New Richmond, and expect it to last another 80 years. It goes without saying that they benefited from the fact that the family owns a large crane and rigging company. It was interesting to note that the LaVenture family chose this tower over the other 72 towers that the DNR listed for sale because of the stairs. Evidently most of the DNR towers have somewhat scary ladders for reaching the look-out cabin.

Third generation crane operators and riggers, the LaVenture brothers made the 2-day removal and loading process look fairly effortless. After rigging the top of the tower to their 200' crane boom, they unbolted the top 2/3 of the structure and then slowly lifted the entire 12,000 pound section off and set it upright in the middle of the road. Then, after some calculated re-rigging, they slowly lowered the entire 100' section down and onto a flat-bed truck for transport back to New Richmond. The lower section was then marked, disassembled, and the various beams and cross members were loaded onto the same truck for transport to its new home. Their plan is to reassemble the lower section exactly as the original tower, and then use the crane to reattach the top section.

We all remember stories and pictures taken from the top of the fire tower, but it will take a long time for that hole left in the Indian Lake skyline to be filled-in.