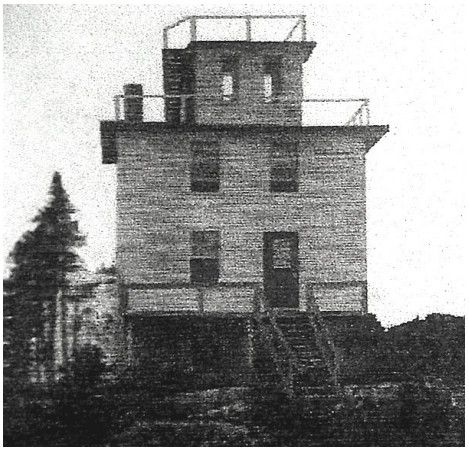
Eyrie House Ruins Tour

Mount Tom State Reservation

SELF-GUIDED WALKING TOUR



The early Eyrie House hotel in 1861.

Welcome

Where do you go to get away from it all? Visitors back in the day came to Mount Nonotuck's 821-foot summit, perhaps for some of the same reasons you are here now. Folks in the 1800s spent a summer's day or week at The Eyrie House hotel, enjoying popular pastimes. Explore the hotel's scant, mysterious ruins with this guide. Envision the hotel's grand scale. Imagine enjoying the activities that guests experienced long ago; some of them may surprise you!

About the Trail

Start at the **Stone House Visitor Center** parking lot. A parking fee may be charged weekends or daily late-May through mid-October. To reach the Eyrie House tour trailhead, hike or bike on Mount Nonotuck Road (closed to autos) for 1.2 miles to the parking lot at end of the road (see map). The **walking tour is a half-mile**. **Total round-trip distance is almost 3 miles**; **about 2.5 hours.** Difficulty is **easy to moderate**. Scenic views are better in spring or fall, but this hike may be done year-round; be prepared for weather and trail conditions. If you hike beyond this trail pick up a Mount Tom State Reservation Trail Map at a park kiosk, or click this **link** for a trail map.

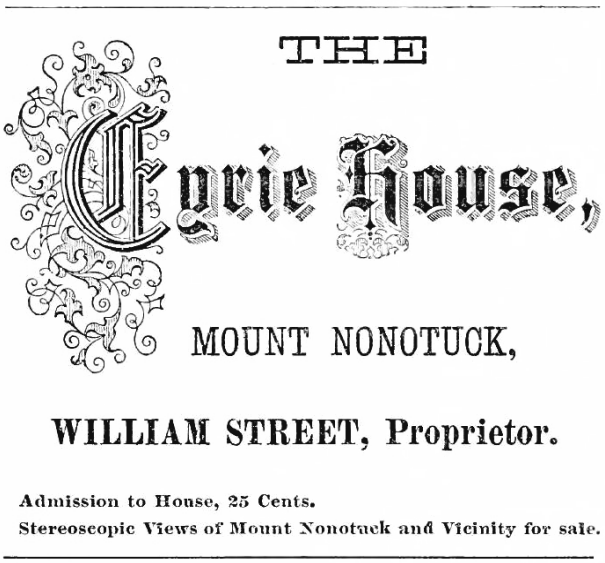
Visitor Guidelines

- The Eyrie House site trails may be uneven and rocky. Wear comfortable, sturdy walking shoes, bring a snack and water, binoculars.
- Carry-in, carry-out all trash and belongings. Leave only footprints. Take only pictures.
- Bicycles are permitted on paved surfaces in the Reservation, including Mount Nonotuck Road, but NOT on the Eyrie House Ruins Tour trail or any foot trails. Please park your bike and walk.
- Please help PRESERVE the historic Eyrie House ruins for everyone and your safety; avoid climbing on the foundation structures. Please don't deface rock surfaces.

A Mountain House Boom!

Summit house popularity soared in New England during the mid to late 1800s. Many visitors travelled to mountaintops during warmer months to relax and escape the heat. Mount Nonotuck's spectacular view attracted visitors from all over.

Holyoke entrepreneur William Street and a partner capitalized on this scenic site. They built a three-story



1871 advertisement for the Eyrie House.

12-room hotel with five guestrooms in the spring of 1861. It opened on July 4. Called The Eyrie House, it looked like its namesake "eyrie" — an eagle nest perched high on a remote, commanding place.

The Eyrie House already had nearby competition, The Prospect House, across the Connecticut River on Mount Holyoke. The rivalry for customers became fierce! Mr. Street had to innovate.

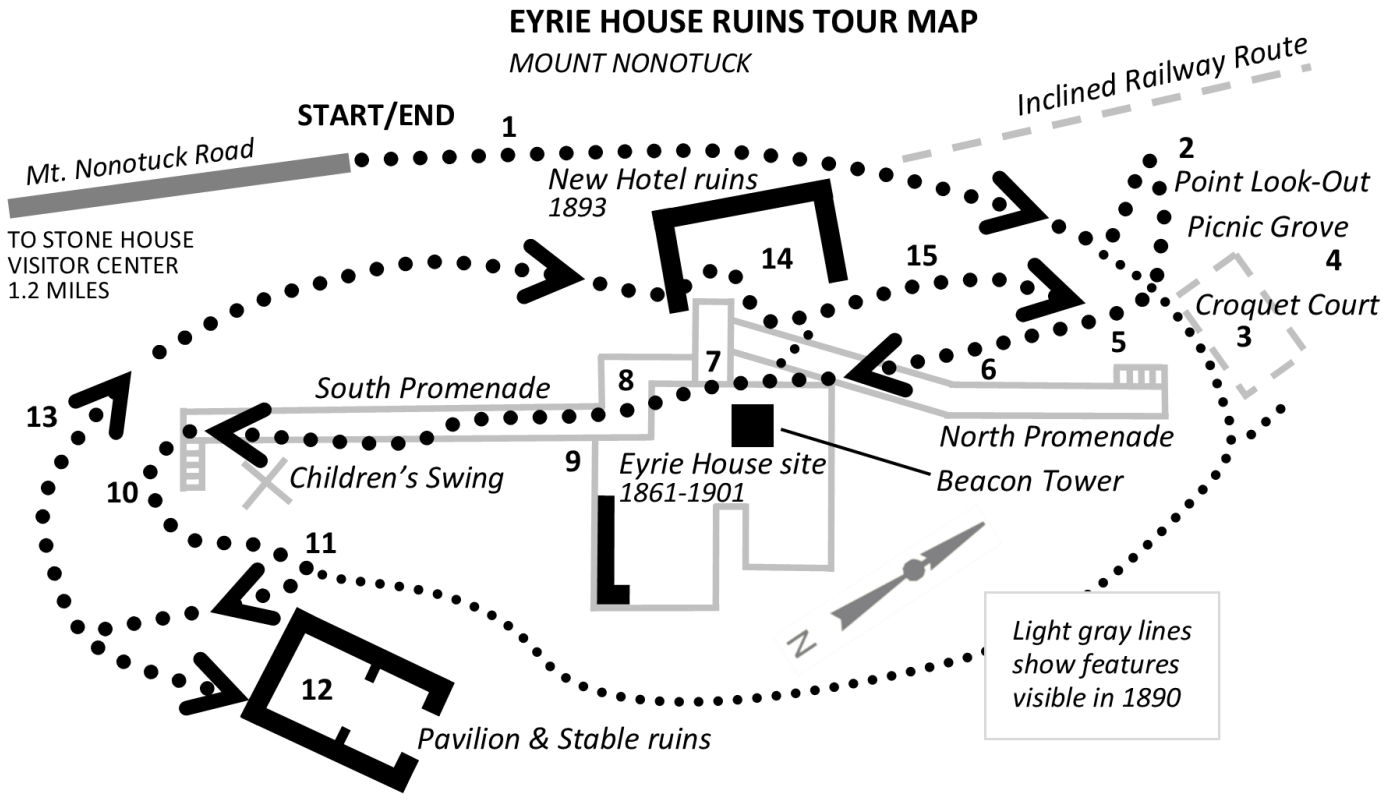
Street bought more land to expand the resort. He attracted more customers with popular pastimes. The hotel grounds featured a picnic grove, croquet court, pavilion for large festive parties, concerts and roller skating! Visitors along the main path saw a curious collection of live and taxidermy animals. Around the outside of the hotel, "promenades," long elevated wooden walkways, enhanced views of the valley below. The hotel grew and grew! By 1882 the hotel had 30 guestrooms, dining rooms, and separate men's and women's parlors.

Ten years later Mr. Street started two new ambitious projects to attract more customers; a larger stone hotel to replace the aging Eyrie House, and then an inclined railway to improve visitor access from below. Competition from Mount Holyoke's Prospect House, Mountain Park amusement park, and the grand Mount Tom summit pavilion with its new inclined railroad drew customers away. An economic depression ate into his income and his ability to make any more improvements.

For almost 40 years Eyrie House enjoyed success. It all came to a sudden end on an early spring day in 1901. Mr. Street discovered several of his horses had died. Unable to dig on the rocky summit, he cremated them. The fire died down and he retired for the evening. He was later awakened by a roar. Wind had re-ignited the fire! The flames had already consumed the pavilion and now spread to the hotel. The great Eyrie House burned to the ground! A total loss.

Unfortunately, Mr. Street was underinsured. Of the $10,000 in losses, he collected only $2,000, not enough to rebuild Eyrie House or complete the new hotel and inclined railway. He still owned this mountain site, but abandoned any new hotel construction.

In 1903, Mount Tom State Reservation was created. The Reservation Commissioners wanted to include Mr. Street's land. Mr. Street asked for $25,000 for his property, but was only offered $5,000. After years of debate the Commissioners deposited the $5,000 into a bank account for Street and took the land by eminent domain. Bitter until his death in 1918, Mr. Street never accepted the state's money!



The Walking Tour

Begin the tour at the "Eyrie Ruins" sign, rear of the Mount Nonotuck Road parking lot.

1) Cart Path - Guests first arrived at Mount Nonotuck's base, then slowly climbed this steep mountain path to The Eyrie House by carriage or wagon. Quite a trip back then!

2) Point Lookout - Near the top of the path, bear left onto Point Lookout. Benches on this rocky spot allowed guests to relax and enjoy the sights. This splendid view of the Connecticut River and the Oxbow has not changed much in 150 years, aside from the hum of Interstate 91 below.



*Riding the **cart path** to Eyrie House, circa 1895.*

3) Croquet Court - Leave Point Lookout and bear left onto a flat area, now overgrown. Visitors played croquet here on a grass lawn. Imagine wearing long sleeves and high collars as your mallets send balls through wickets. Fancy a game?

4) Picnic Grove - Look downward from the croquet court to the former picnic area. Over 100 years ago, hundreds of people gathered here for huge picnics in this tree-shaded grove.

5) The Eyrie House site - Leave the croquet area and take the well-worn upper path. It leads past a beacon tower built by the Federal government in 1944. The original Eyrie House stood here from 1861 until 1901. The beacon sits directly at the center of the former hotel. Look around, you might find traces indicating the hotel's size.

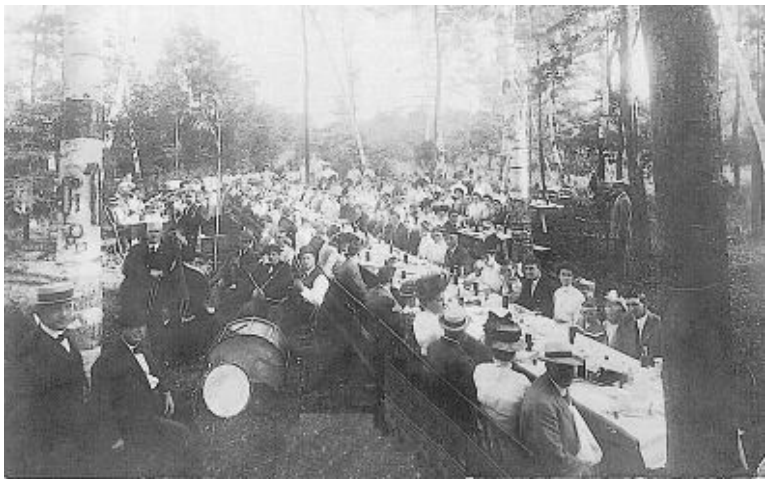
6) North Promenade - Face the beacon building. To the left, an elevated walk once towered above - the North Promenade.

7) Front Promenade - was on top of the rocks, behind you and overhead.

8) South Promenade - was overhead on your right.

9) Eyrie House Ruins - Walk the path a short distance. To your left is a bit of stone foundation - the only remnant of this once splendid hotel.

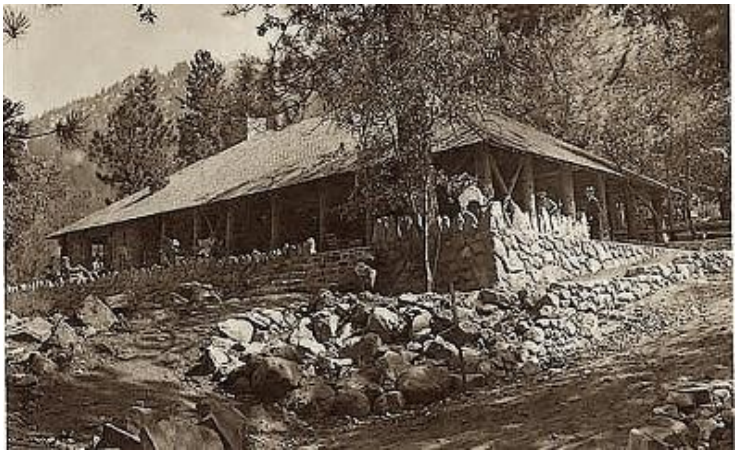
10) Rocky Crest - Continue along the path to Rocky Crest, with a scenic view to the south. The South Promenade towered high overhead. An odd-looking children's swing was anchored to the ledge. This one seat device, mounted on a pole, swung around in a circle; like the flying seats you see at a carnival.



*(**Above**) A clambake in the **Picnic Grove**, circa 1890.*
*(**Below**) **Eyrie House** with front & north promenades.*



11) Pavilion and Stable - Head downhill to the main path. Here you look over the ruins of the 1877 pavilion and horse stable. The pavilion hosted parties, picnics, concerts and briefly roller skating!



*The **Pavilion and Stable.** Where the disastrous fire of 1901 began.*

12) You can continue to the next stop along the main path to your right. Or, for a closer look, a path leads left to the pavilion's stone foundation. A stable beneath the pavilion sheltered horses that brought guests to the hotel. When you are done, head back uphill to continue on the main path.

13) "Menagerie" - Walk the main path following the arrows on the map. Along this path visitors could view many curious displays of animals. Street's "menagerie" included both taxidermy and live animals, even snakes! Collapsed stonework off the path may be a former stairway to an old scenic overlook. Continue, curving around the summit, until you come to a large stone ruin.

14) A New Hotel & Modern Railway - Mr. Street had planned a new, larger, grander hotel. What you see is only its foundation, begun in 1893. Above it, three more stories of stone and one of steel would have replaced the aging, wooden Eyrie House.

Modes of transportation changed over time. Street also planned a new inclined railway to improve travel up and down the mountain. A comfortable rail car would have been able to deliver guests swiftly and directly into the hotel's lowest floor!

These ruins are all that remain of Street's grand improvement plans for a new hotel, when the languishing Eyrie House burned to the ground in 1901.

15) This ends your tour of The Eyrie House hotel ruins. We hope you enjoyed visiting the hotel ruins and experiencing sights and activities from the past. Feel free to explore the summit area paths for different views. To return, take the path you entered, then follow Mount Nonotuck Road back for 1.2 miles to the Stone House Visitor Center.

Eyrie House, Mount Tom Summit House and Mountain Park may just be memories today, you can still visit the historic Prospect House (also known as The Summit House) on Mount Holyoke, across the river at **J.A Skinner State Park**. This former business competitor of The Eyrie House gives you an idea of the size and feel for the old New England mountain houses of the 1800s—once the stylish place to get away from it all!

Mount Tom State Reservation is managed by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR). DCR oversees over 450,000 acres of state parks, forests, beaches, bike trails, parkways, watershed lands, and dams across the Commonwealth. DCR's mission is to: *Protect, promote and enhance our common wealth of natural, cultural and recreational resources for the well-being of all.*

MOUNT TOM STATE RESERVATION
152 Reservation Road, Holyoke, MA 01040
(413) 534-1186

dcr
Massachusetts

Updated 2021