



**Forest Fire Lookout Association  
New York State Chapter  
September 2019**

The changing of the seasons has begun. We are seeing temperatures dip to near freezing and darkness comes earlier each day. It stays longer too. September signaled an increase in vigilance at fire towers throughout New York State for many years. Often dry conditions mixed with the falling leaves. Fire danger crept higher and higher. We are seeing those same dry conditions currently and must remain vigilant. At the same time, we are also seeing greater visitor numbers as fall leaf peeping season approaches. The greater number of visitors gives all of us an opportunity to educate about the history of fire towers, their development, their demise and their restorations. If you get a chance to get out there and take a hike to one or if you are lucky enough to be a steward at one, take the opportunity to inform the public about tower history please!

Changes are discussed here in an excellent NPR article. Though not in NYS, it could be. <https://www.npr.org/2019/09/15/749547034/a-fire-lookout-on-whats-lost-in-a-transition-to-technology>

One way that the FFLA has been involved informing the public about fire towers was through the Lighting of the Fire Tower event. Credit goes to Doug Hamilton of Red Hill who began this event, but it also goes to all who took part in making this year the best event yet with 20 fire towers participating! We saw the clearest skies ever state wide this year. Reports came in from the Illuminators or groups at Red Hill, Snowy, BLM, Randall, Stissing, Sterling, Hurricane, Stillwater, Woodhull, Bald, St. Regis, Blue, and Cathedral Rock. We are very grateful to those who sacrificed part of their holiday weekend to be involved. We loved the camaraderie and teamwork that this event evoked including recreating Woodhull, Stillwater, and Bald signaling one another and



having retired rangers and current rangers on the same crew. We always learn something new so if you have anything in particular you would like to suggest for next year, please let me know. We will likely tweak our guidelines a bit to continue to make the event successful and safe. Due to space, we will feature additional lighting photos in the next few issues. Blue Mt fire tower photo courtesy of Forest Ranger Jay Scott. We hope this will be a reminder for people to consider joining us next year! <https://www.adirondackalmanack.com/2018/08/fire-tower-lightings-planned-for-saturday.html>

The New York State wildland crew continues to be assigned to the Walker Fire on the Plumas National Forest near Taylorville, CA. The fire is 54,518 acres in size with 68% containment. The crew has been working night operations and is assisting fire suppression efforts by holding the fireline and attacking spot fires. Additional info on the Walker Fire may be found at: <https://inciweb.nwcg.gov/incident/6568/> From NYSDEC report 9-17-19.

## Around the State

**Stillwater:** We were pleased to attend the wonderful Stillwater Centennial celebration on August 24<sup>th</sup>. The Friends of Stillwater did a fantastic job of putting together an event that included anonymously donated hotdogs served on [Stewart's Shops](#) hotdog buns, numerous displays, Author and friend Bill Hill was there autographing books of *Hiking the Trail to Yesterday*, a huge raffle with amazing prizes donated by many, and Smokey Bear!



**St. Regis:** Here is a work force to contend with! Friends of St. Regis Mt Fire Tower have not let up for a moment since the summer season began. They had a work plan that needed to be carried out and carry it out they did (in more ways than one). From Doug Fitzgerald, "I thought you might like to know that we are planning to repair the footings on Monday. We decided to carry the materials and tools to the summit instead of waiting indefinitely for a flight. The contractor (Stender Masonry) is splitting the materials into packages that can be carried in packs. We will get water from the stream halfway up the mountain near the site of the former Observer's cabin. We have volunteers lined up and are planning to use boats to access the Lake trail and cut some of the hiking distance down. Rich LaBombard hopes to begin some paint priming under the pressure treated steps while we have a crew up there. Also, board member Jack Burke hopes to take mock ups of the panoramic panels to the summit on Monday to push that project forward. I am excited to get the footings squared away. Two big projects in one season! At this point I think we will likely put off painting the entire tower until next year. Plenty of puttering to do in the meantime." Wow – so much was accomplished (carrying lots of stuff, including water and concrete and tools) and even when the weather was not good. And all the while, they remember to give a shout out to YOU for your donations to make this happen. Today, a shout out to all of the Friends there who made this all happen - THANK YOU!!!

**Kane:** On our way back from the Stillwater celebration we stopped at Kane to take care of some graffiti that had recently occurred. We were pleased to note the DEC had completed the work on upgrading the short access road to the trailhead parking at Green Lakes Road and the parking lot as well. Included in this upgrade was a new privy. We thank the DEC for this work and hope everyone takes good care of the privy. Next up, the cabin.

**Rescues:** The NYS Ranger report continues to have on average, one rescue per week at a fire tower. Azure Mountain and St. Regis both had rescues this past month.

**Makomis Fire Tower:** An oddity? In some respects, yes. It was an early wooden fire tower built on private club lands in the Town of North Hudson in 1911. There is nothing terribly unusual about private clubs building wooden towers to protect their lands from devastating wildfires during this time period. What was odd was the enclosed aspect of this tower. Many wooden towers were simply of a ladder type structure with an observation platform at the top, but Makomis was fully enclosed. In 1916 the wooden tower was replaced by a 40 foot steel tower, an Aeromotor LL25 model, one of the first ten steel towers erected in NYS. These steel towers had an exterior ladder. The inner stairs were added later to help make the structures more sturdy. Only one of ten such towers is a bit odd. Once retrofitted with interior stairs, the tower continued to spot fires until 1970 when it was closed. After 1970, things got a bit odd with what happened to Makomis. In Marty Podskoch's book, Adirondack Fire Towers: The Northern District page 192 he tells how the tower was first sold to Frontier Town. When that deal fell through, the tower went to a commune. Members there actually took the tower down, though the roof was a bit of a problem. The commune was never able to erect the tower. It ended up in the hands of George Barber of Plattsburgh. George always planned to put the tower up on his property. His desire to do so never left him. Though legally blind, he even painted a picture of the tower in the place he hoped to build it in his later years. Another oddity to have a person with limited sight paint such a lovely piece.

George has since passed away, but not his legacy of seeing the tower put back up. Enter Mike Vigeli who wondered where the Makomis fire tower was. Oddly enough, he tracked it down and finding the pieces of the tower to be in good condition, purchased them. Mike's interest in the tower was not an oddity. He has been involved in other fire tower restorations such as Cornell Hill, Ferncliff, and St. Regis. Mike did need a qualified assistant to help with some of the fabrication and he found that in Pat at Pat's Welding in Ausable Forks. Mike is currently in the process of restoring the Makomis Fire Tower and he invited me to see the tower and the progress to date in August. It was amazing to see this



tower so well preserved despite its odd travels and a real joy to talk to Mike and Pat about the puzzles and plans to restore it. Mike is actively seeking a home for the Makomis Tower once fully restored. Stay tuned for more!



**Correction:** Oops. Jim S sent me a note about the August trivia question. He thought he knew the answer but said I had the date wrong. Well he was right on both counts! I was referring to the Loon Lake Mt Fire Tower that fell over and onto the lean-to sometime during the winter of 1927-1928 as reported in The Record Post in Ausable Forks on March 15, 1928. Thank you for the correct answer and the correction in the dates Jim. I will send you a patch for playing along! It is just that easy.

**Sterling:** Susan and her crew have been very busy at Sterling Forest Fire Tower. They held a Smokey Bear 75<sup>th</sup> Birthday Celebration. Susan reported 35 people entered the free raffle to win a stuffed Smokey Bear toy. Susan removed the pile of old lumber from the Observer cabin deck. The Park staff picked up the old lumber and weed whacked around the cabin. Steve Jodry, one of the Fire Tower volunteers, began staining the deck and unpainted areas of the Observer's cabin. The Park staff completed the new window sashes and removed the old windows from the tower cab. The group also participated in the Lighting of the Towers. Susan reported it was an “awesome” evening.

**Book of the Month:** *Forgive Me, Ma'am...Bears Don't Wear Blue* by Larry Weill. Larry, retired Ranger and Observer takes the reader along for numerous adventures in his books. This book has an entire chapter devoted to fire towers entitled Fire Tower Fraternity. An easy and pleasant read as the evenings get longer.

**Trivia Question for July:** (see corrections for the August answer) The July question, the farthest drive to a fire tower, I had a comment that Kempshall might not be considered a drive since part of the “commute” was via boat. Instead, the suggestion was that Salmon Lake may have been the longest. I guess we really need to consider a given year for a commute as well. Some access points certainly changed over the life of a fire tower.

**Trivia Question for September:** So let's move along to another real specific question and put another NYS Centennial Fire Tower Patch up for grabs to the winner. What tower had a spigot near the base of the tower. Pictured here in 2018.



## Calendar

Oct 7<sup>th</sup> – Last day to hike to Stillwater Fire Tower before the Hunting Season Closure goes into effect.

October 11<sup>th</sup> through the 13<sup>th</sup> will be the Western Conference of the FFLA hosted by the California Chapter in San Diego California:  
<https://firelookouthost.org/western-conference-2018/>

Sunday, October 20, 2019 Your chance to visit the Alma fire tower.

Registration for the 27<sup>th</sup> Annual RidgeWalk & Run is open  
<https://runsignup.com/Race/NY/Wellsville/RidgeWalkRun>

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