



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

“Volunteers are not paid - not because they are worthless, but because they are priceless.” Sherry Anderson

There are many, many volunteers who work tirelessly behind the scenes to save, restore and man fire towers. They do not do so because of fame and fortune, but just to be able to stand back and see the fire tower standing tall and proud for all to enjoy. Such a person was George Elias. From Doug Hamilton, Red Hill Chair, “We are sad to report the passing of George Elias, half of the whole behind the restoration of Red Hill Fire Tower. George and his beloved wife Helen (the other half) spearheaded the effort to save the Red Hill Fire Tower. This was an effort that eventually became the Catskill Fire Tower Project and ultimately saved 5 towers, not just Red Hill. George's passion for the outdoors ran deep. In the late 1990's, his and Helen's interests in hiking and history prompted them to coordinate the restoration of the Red Hill Fire Tower and Observer's Cabin. They could see tower from their home. George assisted Helen, Chairman of the Red Hill Fire Tower Committee, for 12 years, in every aspect of the restoration from trail maintenance to painting the roof of the Fire Tower. George left small, but meticulous notes on tools and supplies for volunteers in case they weren't sure how to use these things. George was a kind, quiet and generous man with a great sense of humor who will be deeply missed by all who knew him. His spirit and presence will live on at the Red Hill Tower”. Our condolences to Helen and our thanks to George who we know has the ultimate view from the top now.

<https://www.heinzfh.com/notices/George-Elias>

A Return to the Burn: This was a very interesting article about one of the more significant and recent fires in New York State (1999). I have been fortunate to walk through this burn area a few times and to see the changes that are occurring in the aftermath of the fire. On my first visit, ash was still present underfoot and dead and burnt trees stood alongside the trail. Signage was in place that reminded hikers that trees could fall at any time, even when there was no wind, and the ash could be slippery. On my next visit it was more difficult to see the burnt trees due to significant regrowth of birch trees in the area. And on my last visit, as I tried to describe this burn to fellow hikers, there were few examples to show what had happened here, such is the recovery at this point.



<https://www.adirondackexplorer.org/stories/1999-noonmark-fire-20-years-later>

Team Rubicon: Our friends at Team Rubicon continue to work hard as volunteers throughout the country responding to natural disasters. They also are involved in fire prevention in other ways. Read about their latest efforts here: <https://teamrubiconusa.org/blog/fire-on-the-mountain-or-not>

Around the State



Mount Beacon: After a brief hiatus to move, I finally found some time to get back to a fire tower visit recently. Mount Beacon was the destination. The tower is a 60' Aeromotor LS 40 tower that was lovingly restored and is listed on the National Historic Lookout Register. Dave Rocco spearheaded the effort to restore the structure. Today, the views from the tower include the NYC skyline, the Hudson River, Catskills, and more. One difficulty the group has is with graffiti at this location both on the tower and along the surrounding rock ledges. We were lucky to have snow and ice covering most of it during our most recent visit. Perhaps we can get together a group to help paint over this graffiti in 2020? Would you like to lend a hand? Please let us know.

<https://beaconfiretower.weebly.com/the-restoration.html>

Mount Morris: I always read anything I see about the Mount Morris Fire Tower on Big Tupper. This Aeromotor LS 40 22' tower was placed there in 1919. Many may be unaware that the historic fire tower still stands. Currently the tower is not open to the public and while still standing, it is encumbered by a great deal of electronic equipment. As the surrounding property has been in flux for a number of years now, I continue to keep an eye on what is happening in hopes that the fire tower can be saved and perhaps opened to the public again at some point. This is the latest I have heard.

<https://www.adirondackexplorer.org/stories/adirondack-club-foreclosure>



Hunting Season Closures: Thank you all for respecting the Hunting season closures that were in place at some fire towers. Stillwater Fire Tower will reopen December 21st. Spruce Fire Tower has reopened.

Trivia Question for November: We had a few different folks who chimed in about this question "What is the height of the highest standing publicly accessible tower in NYS?" The correct answer is Nimham at 82' 6" tall. The correct answer was sent in by Lori Ann. This is the second month in a row that she has won an FFLA Centennial Patch! Lori Ann is a great supporter of fire towers and she tells me this patch will be re-gifted to a person when the time is right. Thanks for playing along and re-gifting Lori Ann!

Trivia Question for December: In 1941 a fire swept over what NYS tower site, destroying the Observer's cabin and burning the first three wooden landings and stairs? An FFLA centennial patch goes to the winner!

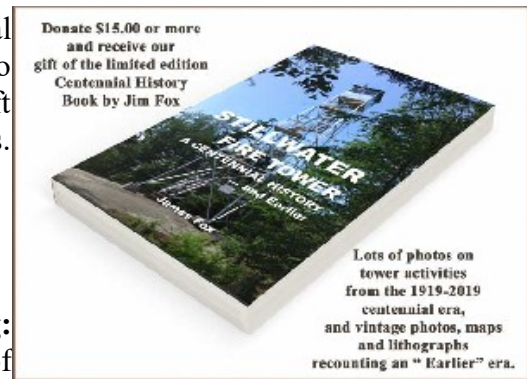
Remembering our History: While this is a statewide newsletter, there is an excellent Adirondack social media group that I would like to share. John Sasso has given me permission to share this information and he has developed an amazing opportunity for those who are interested in Adirondack history. Additional resources that he has put together are comprehensive and user friendly. The Facebook group, "*History and Legends of the Adirondacks*", is the first and most active group in social media geared towards the history of many different aspects of the Adirondacks; mountains, logging, mining, guides, surveyors, hotels and inns, Native Americans, sporting events, and YES, EVEN FIRETOWERS AND THEIR OBSERVERS! Formed almost four years ago, the group includes

many stories of local history from members going back to the 19th century (many of which are unpublished), and THOUSANDS of historical photos, maps, and artwork. This group has seen great success at not only informing the public but also answering people's questions (no matter how obscure). Numerous reference materials, including articles and local historians can be found here. Here are some of his resources:

A Map-Based Guide to Adirondack History Museums & Historical Organizations is available and John is happy to release this platform (goto <http://arcg.is/1b5vqy>)

He has the most complete guide to all museums and permanent exhibits related to Adirondack history (at least 100), as well as the most complete guide to locating county, town, and village historians and historical organizations related to that municipality. You should check this out! Thank you John!

Book of the month: Stillwater Fire Tower A Centennial History.....and earlier by James Fox. Donate \$15 or more to the Friends of Stillwater Fire Tower and you can receive a gift of the limited edition copy of this book in time for Christmas. <https://www.friendsofstillwaterfiretower.com/book.html>



Last minute gift shopping:

There are still plenty of FFLA merchandise items that

can be ordered on our website: www.ffla.org I still have some of the Centennial Fire tower patches and the Balsam Lake Centennial Fire Tower Patches available for \$4.00 each.

**Towerman
by Chris Saunders
from Adirondack Life May/June 1995
part one**

The mountains seemed to be moving, as they often did after I'd spent a long day on the fire tower. Six hours after arriving I was preparing to lock up when I heard the deliberate steps of a child climbing the stairs. A minute later, a little head popped through the hatch.

“Mr. Ranger,” the boy said, peering up from under an oversized baseball cap, “do you come up here every day?”

“Almost,” I said. “Thursday through Sunday, eleven to five.”

“Wow. Did your girlfriend dump you?”

“What?”

“Why else would you work here?”

Actually, the kid was right: the prospect of getting away from women had crossed my mind. (The top of the Blue Mountain fire tower was the farthest point-vertically-I could remove myself from my ex-girlfriend.) Since Blue Mountain is one of the most popular peaks in the Adirondack Park – attracting fifteen thousand climbers a year – encountering other women seemed a real possibility. Well seeing

them, at least.

With the aid of the gigantic pair of military binoculars New York State had provided me, I could examine the hikers as they prepared for the climb at the trailhead on Route 28. And then, based on my keen skills of observation, I would wait for their arrival with either anticipation or dread – usually dread.

I also had a map, a sight for pinpointing fires, and a radio, in case I spotted smoke. Which I never did. It was a wet summer, and, besides, I was too busy with my vital duties: answering the same questions over and over again, giving presentations, playing policeman and taking hundreds of pictures. Photographic skills were not mentioned in my initial job description, but during the summer I used every conceivable model of camera and took 537 pictures of tourists at the top. For some reason, 137 people snapped shots of me in my Smokey the Bear Stetson.

My uniform – consisting of that hat – had been provided by the Blue Mountain Fire Tower Restoration Committee, a group of individuals and organizations that had raised money to restore the tower and pay my salary. The committee included representatives from Hamilton County, the Town of Indian Lake, the Adirondack Museum, the Adirondack Mountain Club and Forest Rangers from the Department of Environmental Conservation. Of course, this meant I had many bosses, but I gave priority to the Rangers because they carried guns. There were many times on that mountain top when I felt I should have been issued one too.

To be continued in January 2020

Calendar

Wednesday, January 1, 2020: Friends of Mount Arab and the NYSDEC will be hosting a First Day Hike at 10am. Location: Mt. Arab Parking Area and Trailhead. or additional information and to register (required): 315-265-3090

Saturday, January 25, 2020: At Poke O Moonshine there will be Snowshoe Mammal Tracking with Elizabeth Lee. Meet at 9:30 AM at the Observer's trailhead. Be ready for 3-4 hours in the cold, following and identifying mammal tracks in the snow. In cooperation with CATS: <http://champlainareatrails.com>. Sign-up required, minimum of 6 participants.

Saturday, February 8, 2020: Try a Poke O Moonshine Back Country Ski Exploration. Meet at the Observer's trailhead at 9:30 to explore roads west of Poke-O. David will lead this trip for skiers with at least intermediate skills, to manage some steep, narrow terrain. Arduous, 3-4 hours. In cooperation with CATS: <http://champlainareatrails.com>

Looking ahead to 2020: We will have a wrap up of all the good work done in 2019 in our January newsletter. We will have some new guest columnists who have agreed to write for us. We will do our very best to get the State web page up and running in 2020.

I would like to close this month's newsletter by wishing all of you a very Merry Christmas! May your holiday season be filled with the joys of family and friends, the peace of the winter woods, and the expansive views from a fire tower.

Laurie Rankin, Director
New York State Chapter of the Forest Fire Lookout Association