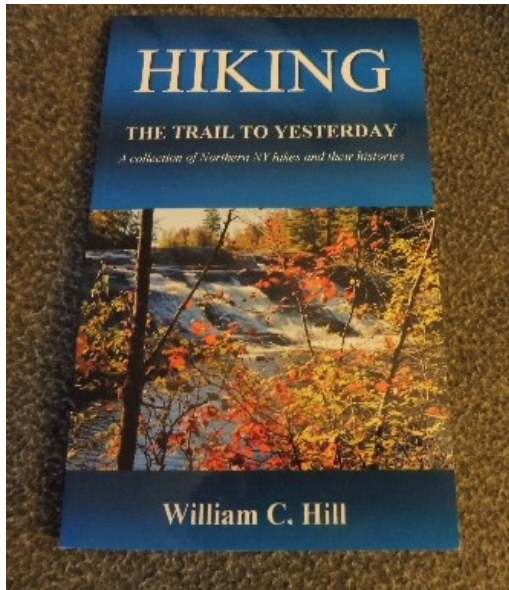




**Forest Fire Lookout Association  
New York State Chapter  
March 2021**

Our Photo Contest Winner this month is Author, Bill Hill! Bill submitted a photo of the Rondaxe Fire Tower, got the most likes on our Facebook page and won! His photo is seen here and it also graces our state chapter Facebook page as our new cover photo for this month. And if you are wondering what Bill wrote about, check out his book, *Hiking the Trail to Yesterday*, which includes several fire tower hikes!



**Around the State**

**Congratulations on your retirement!** A fond farewell to NYSDEC Forest Ranger Scott Vanlaer who is retiring. I saw a message on Facebook from my friend Don McMullen and he put it best: “Scott, what a loss to the High Peaks Region, safety, civility, information, wisdom, support; and no 'rangering by gun and tape measure'. You will be missed in a very big way.” I totally agree Don. Enjoy your new endeavors Scott!

**NYS Burn Ban:** The annual burn ban begins on March 16<sup>th</sup> and runs through May 14<sup>th</sup>. This ban has led to a decline in the number of spring wildfires around the state. Yes, you can still have a campfire or a fire in the backyard, but please do so in a responsible manner. Additional details at <https://www.dec.ny.gov/press/122502.html>

**Parking:** The popularity of outdoor recreation that keeps people safe and healthy does come with some challenges. One major issue at all trailheads, not just fire tower trailheads, is parking. One upstate town has taken it upon themselves to try to resolve their parking problem. Read about it here. <https://www.adirondackdailyenterprise.com/news/local-news/2021/02/town-wrestles-with-parking-problem-at-baker-trailhead>

**Goodnow Fire Tower Campaign Continues:** Check out the details on the National FFLA web page: <http://ffla.org/index.html>

*“March 24, 1971 to All Fire Tower Observers: We plan to open on April 1 the following towers .... We will not be operating the following towers ... All Observers will retain the title but will be hired as temporary personnel and will be paid on a temporary labor payroll at the rate of \$2.79 per hour ... Due to the above changes, our District operation will be, as you can see, somewhat different than previous years. Some of these changes will be to our advantage and some may possibly be to our disadvantage. Kindly let us know by Monday 3/29/71 if you plan to return as Observer this spring ... Our annual meeting of Forest Rangers and Forest Fire Observers will be held on April 1<sup>st</sup>. Rangers are expected to supply transportation to Observers to this meeting”.* It was a challenging year for Fire Tower Observers as some towers were removed from service. You had to wait until just a week before you would normally begin employment to find out if you were going to be working. Many Observers had families to support. Difficult times.

### **The National Picture**

A wonderful article where several different lookouts discuss their experiences including “God Moments in a Fire Tower: <http://www.universitytimes.ie/2021/02/god-moments-in-a-firewatch-tower/>

Shared from our friends at Northern Woodlands is an interesting way to say “Yes we can all get along”:  
<https://vt.audubon.org/news/bird-friendly-paper>

### **Fire Tower Steward Opportunities**

**Hurricane:** I heard from Mary Jean Bland of the 'Friends of Hurricane' group. *“The last four summers the Friends of Hurricane has hired stewards for the mountain. The steward helped us in our mission of “protecting the ecological, scenic, and historical characteristics of the summit and providing a worthwhile educational experience to the public.” Recruiting viable candidates for the position was never an easy endeavor. Unless they had local roots or connections, housing was always an issue. In addition, last summer State funds were not available to help cover the costs of the steward and we had to come up with the funding ourselves.*

*Last fall we approached the Adirondack Mountain Club (ADK) to see if they would be interested in including Hurricane in their Summit Steward Program. We are excited to announce that we will be working with the Mountain Club providing a mix of paid and volunteer stewards this summer and fall on Hurricane.*

*If you are interested in participating as a volunteer steward on Hurricane we would be happy to have you. You can do one day or many days and the ADK will train you. If you are interested, please let me know. I will then compile a list and pass it along to the coordinator at the Mountain Club. Also, if you are not local, the ADK will provide space in their campsite for you.*

*I hope you can find time to participate as a steward on Hurricane. It is fun, interesting, great exercise and rewarding.”* You can reach Mary Jean at [mjbland@aol.com](mailto:mjbland@aol.com)

**Catskills:** The Catskill Center has both full time and part time positions with a deadline of 4-30. [https://catskillcenter.org/opportunities?mc\\_cid=e2bdb82db1&mc\\_eid=ba11b17f54](https://catskillcenter.org/opportunities?mc_cid=e2bdb82db1&mc_eid=ba11b17f54)

## Volunteer Fire Tower Stewards

The NYS FFLA Chapter is seeking volunteers to steward at Stillwater and Berry Hill Fire Towers. Please let me know if you are interested.

### Work Projects

We have several work projects coming up in 2021. We will be working on Blue Mt. Fire Tower Observer's cabin, Kane Fire Tower Observer's cabin, Vandewhacker Observer's cabin, and Pillsbury Fire Tower. We will also be painting over graffiti on Ferncliff and any other towers that may need it. COVID-19 safety protocols will be followed on every project including health screening upon arrival, mandatory mask wearing, social distancing, sanitizing hands and equipment. If you would like to lend a hand, please let me know.

Here is another opportunity to put yourself in the shoes of another with an exciting opportunity from years ago. In the book, *Follow My Moccasin's Tracks*, by Ira Gray "Adirondack Ike", on page 44 the chapter entitled *Building a Fire Tower and a Cock Eye*, we find Ike worked as a Forest Ranger. "The state thought that they needed a fire tower on Kane Mountain, so they sent four of us Rangers up to build it. Also, to build a cabin for the Observer to live in and put a telephone up the mountain.

*They had a Ranger from Owl's Head come down to be our boss. His name was Albert Tobeau.*

*The first day he said, "Boys, we are getting \$3.50 per day. Now iron workers get almost that an hour, so we won't work too long hours. We will start up the mountain at 8 am and start back down at 4pm. He said to me, "Do you want to work with me? The others will pull the steel up and we will bolt it together."*

*I said, "I don't know if I can up there 70 feet in the air." He said, Come on, it's easier up there."*

*We got along very nicely. One day we only worked two hours as the wind blew so hard it would blow the plank we stood on right off through the woods. As soon as we got the tower up, Tobeau left us.*

*We built the cabin and old Tom Luff came up to be the Observer. He came from England could not build a thing. So I stayed two days and built him shelves for his dishes and things. I put up a spout so as to catch water for there was no water on the mountain. Helped him cut up some wood and showed him how to use his ax so as not to dull it. How to sharpen it too. He was a very nice man and I enjoyed visiting with him."*



## One Year Ago

In March 2020, I wrote these words *“March 2020 may end up being a very historic month in US History, but how does that affect fire towers? It is hard to say as of this writing. Perhaps it will not have much of an effect. That is my hope.”* Obviously, my hopes were dashed. It has been a year with much sadness, many unknowns, and yet there is a fair amount of hope. We have many who have re-discovered the great outdoors and that has been a real plus for them and for fire towers. We have visitors who are discovering the history and lore of fire towers and want to be involved in restoring and saving them. And that gives me great hope for the future of our fire towers!

## Thirty Years Ago

Our Past FFLA NYS Chapter Director, Fred Knauf has provided us with several bits of information regarding the beginnings of the FFLA. This month, he provides us with the next installment regarding those early years. In it I hear the same hope and enthusiasm as I have for 2021; keeping people involved and excited, and getting new people involved too. Thanks for sharing this great information Fred!

*“Hello again and today’s journey is back 30 years ago to the founding days of the Forest Fire Lookout Association, NY Chapter. This is Part IV of the story, so go back three or four newsletters to read that and pick up the story. I left off in the summer of 1990 just after the 2<sup>nd</sup> Conference.*

*We had a formal name and work began to establish this as a formal Association with tax-exempt status, whose work was going on down in New Jersey where our volunteer lawyer lived. Up in New York State, my role was to spread the news that there was a Forest Fire Lookout Association that formed and solicit membership. Thus, I sat down on my old Zenith PC and typed up a letter for every Regional Office of the Department of Environmental Conservation to receive, and a letter describing the FFLA at that time. In that, I included what the organization was all about, to not appear as a threat to the DEC (who were in the final stages of closing the last five fire towers down). In my letter, I requested that they please forward my information on to others who would contact the State in search of information on the fire towers, and boy did that lead to a lot of my time; both in phone calls and in letter reading & corresponding. I received a few calls directly from the Regional offices!*

*In discussions with Captains of the DEC, of which I spoke to several closely, they confided in me that the fire towers “were through”, much to the great disappointment of many in the organization. They also told me that the State budget was a “double-edged sword” in that the budget killed the last 30 or so towers from ’88 to ’90, but it also was leaving them standing because no money was available for removal. That would change when the State’s budget finances were corrected and the hope (from Albany) was that all the towers would be down by the end of 1994. So, having a new Association was hoped by some in the Regions to soften the wishes of some in HQ on complete removal.*

*By early 1991, there were roughly 10 members in the Chapter, of which three are still members today, I believe (other than myself). Ed Engelman was one of the earliest members who had been working on the Page Pond Tower for the Girl Scout Camp property it was on, and Tom Vroman was a past fire observer who both heard about the FFLA through Region 4’s office, and early member Rick Miller, who worked as observer on Kane Mtn. prior to its closing.*

*As the Association grew, and people started sending in checks for payment for copying and mailing the newsletters, a problem arose in the form of having a bank account and a formal treasurer. I was asked to pick up treasurer responsibilities ahead of the upcoming summer conference which was to be held in Old Forge, NY at the Northern Loggers Association offices on Route 28. Out in the western States, they had artistically developed a tee-shirt for sale at their first conference to cover the costs of their conference, and did quite well, so in the spring of 1991, I designed a tee-shirt for sale at the August conference, and would personally up-front the money to cover the expenditures (as was done out west by Ron Johnson). I also went to a printer to have a few hundred membership cards printed and began mailing them back to those members who had signed on and paid. I can't seem to find my card now, so if you received one and have it still, I'd love to see a scan of one of those.*



*The last steps ahead of the conference were to reserve a place for a dinner, obtain hotel and camping locations, provide directions for those who might attend, and lastly, develop an agenda for the conference which was done in unison with Steve Cummings, the Chairperson. What today could have been done in a few days with a Zoom meeting or two took about a month of phone calls and letters. Pony Express type days, I guess.*

*Next time, I'll talk about the Conference and provide some pictures from it." Is this from the 1991 Conference? Can anyone identify the folks in the picture?*

**Women's History Month:** Our friend John Sasso posted the following on our Facebook page: Harriet "Hattie" Rega (1894-1984), the first woman fire observer in New York State. She first served on Mt. Electra from 1924 to 1930, then on Bald (Rondaxe) Mountain from 1933 to 1936. The following is taken from the Friends of Bald Mountain:

*"Recently, I discovered these NYS employment cards on the internet for one of our former summit observers. Hattie was born on December 12, 1894 in Rostock, Germany, and immigrated to Pennsylvania in 1909. A few years later she moved with her mother to Rochester, NY. In 1917, she came to Old Forge for her health but returned to a job as a printer at Litho Works. She became good friends with a fellow worker who also lived at the same boarding house, Emily Scribner. In 1918, they built a camp on Garmon Ave. in Old Forge on a lot they had purchased the previous year. Several years later, Emily married Charles Ellerby of Beaver River. Hattie decided to stay year-round and made a living trapping as she was well acquainted with the woods and skillful with a rifle. But in 1924, she was offered a dream job that suited her perfectly, working as a seasonal fire tower observer on Mount Electra on Dr. Webb's estate Ne-Ha-Sa-Ne.*

*According to Bill Starr, a fire tower historian and former observer on Pillsbury Mt., Harriet Rega served on Mount Electra (Rock Lk Mtn) from 4/28/1924 until 4/24/1930 before transferring to Rondaxe (Bald) Mtn where she served as the observer from 5/1/1930 - 10/31/1936. That made her the first woman observer in New York State .*

*Emily's marriage did not work out and by 1930, she moved back to Old Forge to their camp on Garmon Ave. That summer she took Hattie's former job on Mount Electra. Hattie continued to trap coons, minks and muskrats during the winter months. Emily invested in several rental properties which she managed until the late 1940's when both decided they wanted to move to the west coast. Harriet Rega died in Granite Falls, Washington in June 1982. Emily, her friend for nearly six decades was at her side. She died two years later in July 1984."*

I will leave you with some hopeful Spring Garden photos from long ago. A vegetable garden was often a very important thing to an Observer, providing fresh vegetables for him or her, and sometimes their family too. Do you know where these garden photos were taken? Or the year of the photo?



Our webmaster, Tom has been busy populating our website with more of these wonderful historic pictures. If you have some you would like to share or if you know someone who does, please let us know. We will do our best to get them out there. If you have already shared and not seen your photos on the web page yet, please be patient we are gaining on the project!

Laurie Rankin, Director  
New York State Chapter  
Forest Fire Lookout Association  
[www.ffla.org](http://www.ffla.org)