

Forest Fire Lookout Association New York State Chapter September 2017 Newsletter

“In all those visits to the top of Hunter Mountain, the tower was, of course, the goal. However, it is the men and women who staffed this tower that are the main reason for treasured memories. Rustics though some may have been, they excelled at public relations far better than all the overpaid, college-educated, politically-motivated spokespersons who now front for the government in Albany and elsewhere. One could always count on the observer for a smile and a hearty welcome to his or her mountain top, a good story or two, a lesson in how to treat the high country, and the plants and animals that made it alive.” These words were from Norm Van Valkenburgh, Director of NYSDEC Lands & Forest retired, as written in the forward to Marty Podskoch's book, *Fire Towers of the Catskills: Their History and Lore*. A reminder of these words came from Diann Terns-Thorpe, retired Observer (1973) who was present at the Centennial Celebration for Hunter Mountain Fire Tower on August 19th. A photo of Diann and her son holding her Dad's photo in the cab and the historical plaque that was unveiled is here, courtesy of Herb Terns. All 22 of the Observers who served on Hunter were honored on the plaque.

Many thanks to Gordon Hoekstra, the Volunteer Coordinator at the Hunter Mountain Fire Tower (part of the Catskill Fire Tower Project) who put together this special event.

We also thank the NYSDEC Region 4 staff who secured a \$48,000 Adventure NY grant to spruce up the tower for its centennial. The tower got a new roof, windows, and a fresh coat of paint prior to the celebration.



The Hunter Mt Fire Tower remains open on weekends through Columbus Day thanks to numerous volunteers. Stop by and see the improvements and catch the fall foliage!

Nationally there has been little cause for celebration in the last month. Fires are burning in several states in the northwest. We hope all remain safe and some rains fall on the areas affected very soon. A few articles that are examples of the difficulties: http://missoulian.com/news/local/hideous-brown-spiral-of-misery-and-despair---aka/article_7d5269c2-82af-582f-9dea-f9da4d7001af.html and http://missoulian.com/news/state-and-regional/no-rest-for-firefighters-as-winds-precede-approaching-rain/article_900c33f7-26b7-594c-a2dd-70bb17c79f91.html



As I have done for the last several years, I was honored to participate in a special event in September called Flags on the 48. <http://www.flagsonthe48.org/>. From their web site is the following description: *On September 11th, 2001 the consciousness of United States of America was undeniably altered by overwhelming and devastating acts of terrorism, so far reaching in their intensity that our country will forever carry the scars. Thousands of lives were lost in a fleeting moment, immeasurable families shattered and countless hearts broken. We in the hiking community continue to honor the deceased with a tribute: flying the American flag atop all 48 four-thousand foot and higher mountains in New Hampshire on Sunday, September 11. By demonstrating our steadfast unity in this challenging endeavor, we also hope to express our unwavering support to the families, friends and communities whose losses are beyond comprehension and whose suffering we remember in our hearts.* I would love to see the NYS Fire Towers consider doing something similar in the future. Would anyone be interested in either participating or in organizing such an event here? If so, please do let me know.



The Fourth Annual Lighting of the Fire Towers in the Catskills occurred on the evening of September 2nd from 9 to 9:30 pm just before the rains began. Some other towers chose to participate this year, with Stillwater and St. Regis joining the 5 Catskill towers. Thanks to all who took the time to volunteer to do this. This event helps connect communities to the historic fire towers by directing people to look up and remember the towers and the men and women in them who watched over their lands for years. Perhaps we should make this an annual statewide event? Would anyone be interested in either participating or in organizing such an event next year? If interested, please do let me know. What a great way to tie all of our historic fire towers together statewide. Photo courtesy of C. Lutomski - Overlook

Journey to the Fire Tower unveiled. The Friends of Grafton Lakes State Park have an invitation for you: “Please join us for the ribbon cutting ceremony for the official opening of the Journey to the Fire Tower grant project on Saturday, September 30th at 9:00 am.” The grant project that we undertook consists of a kiosk at the trail head and a series of interpretive panels placed along the hiking route to the newly rehabilitated Dickinson Hill Fire Tower. The opening will be held at 9am at the parking lot at the end of North Long Pond Road. Refreshments will be served. After the ceremony we will be hiking to the fire tower at 10:30 AM. Please bring hiking shoes if you would like to join us for the hike. Please RSVP by emailing the Friends. Refreshments will be served after the ceremony. <https://www.friendsofgraftonlakes.org>

Trivia Question for August: Standard equipment for an observation station included what? I suggested it included 4 items. I was referring to a NYSCC memo that stated “Standard Equipment – as a result of experiences in the operation of observation stations.....standard equipment has been adopted. Tower, Table, Maps and Telephones” were listed. I received two answers from former Rangers that were almost correct; “binocs, alidade, phone and map”, and “Map table, alidade, binoculars and a telephone”. Both missed the most obvious equipment, the tower itself. I admit to being surprised that binoculars were not mentioned as standard equipment. Sorry – no stickers, but it does beg the question, does anyone have any documentation about binoculars and their use?

Trivia Question for September: Along the same lines of standard equipment – let's talk outhouses? How many fire towers had 2-holers? An FFLA sticker for your bathroom awaits the correct response!

Help Wanted: Instead of asking for help to work on a specific fire tower, perhaps I should ask people to simply get in touch with me about a desire to help out. This way if there is a particular project scheduled for anything from major renovations to a quick paint touch up we can have a list of people to give a shout to. What do you think? Interested? Please let me know.

Rock Rift: I had the pleasure of attending a planning meeting with the Town of Tompkins on August 29th. The Town of Tompkins is now the proud owner of the Rock Rift Fire Tower. The group, including our own FFLA member, Ed Engelman were ready and anxious to make plans for renovations and the future use of the fire tower. If this might be one you would like to help out with, please do let me know. This will be a fun project with an enthusiastic group and you can help in any number of ways.

Sterling Forest, Jackie Jones, Pillsbury and Wakely: All of these towers have a chance of getting some work done before the snow flies depending on a number of factors. The biggest one is having just a handful of people who would be willing to lend a hand. Are you interested in helping?

From the archives: October 21, 1910 “A large force of men are out fighting the forest fire on Phoenicia mountain between Phoenicia and Spruceton, Greene county. The fire fighters are under the personal direction of supt of Fires D Todd and Fire Patrolman J. Simpson and are working day and night. Already several hundred acres have been burned over and the fires are still raging. Supt Todd is of the opinion that if the fires continue unabated it may be necessary to call upon Gov. White to close the forests to hunters and campers. The fire was located from the mountain stations but before the patrol could reach the scene was beyond control.” Catskill Mt News.

Book/Film of the Month: In the slide presentation that I do about fire tower history, I always reference The Big Burn written by Timothy Egan. As many of you may know, it relates the story of the great fire of 1910. It is also a PBS film by Ken Burns. Both are really worth a few moments of your time.

Charcoal – check, burgers – check, rolls – check, tent – check: Sounds like a picnic to me! If you have not already done so, please remember that on September 23rd we will be holding the first FFLA picnic at Grafton Lakes State Park.

FFLA Western Conference: Did any of you get a chance to attend?

A set of stairs for an Aeromotor LS-40: still looking for one! If you know of one, let me know.

Our Centennial Tower of the Month: Tremper Mountain Fire Tower

In 1917, the Tremper Fire Tower was constructed at the summit of Mount Tremper. 930 visitors signed the register book in 1921. In 2016 there were 960 visitors in just 40 days! Observer's William Smith (1917-1930) and Harry Baldwin (1946-1954 & 1959 – 1970) were both dedicated to their jobs. William was known to stay on the mountain for a week at a time. Harry often stayed at night during fire season as well. Three cabins were built on the site; in 1926, 1941, and 1970. The tower was decommissioned in 1971. All are now gone. The foundations remain of all three. Part of the Catskill Fire Tower Project that was formed in 1997, Tremper Mountain Fire Tower took front and center with a work project in the June 1999 Eastern Conference of the FFLA. It was reopened to the public in 2001. Currently under the watchful eye of Volunteer Coordinator, Mark Atchinson the tower cab is open for visitors on weekends from Memorial Day to Labor Day. Thanks to Mark and all of the volunteers!



On Saturday September 23rd, there will be a celebration to mark the centennial achievement of Mount Tremper fire tower. It will include the dedication of the 100th Anniversary Plaque. The plaque honors those individuals who worked as Fire Tower Observers and the tower itself which has stood for 100 years. Please join Mark Atchinson of the Catskill Fire Tower Project at the summit for this occasion. The Dedication will be at noon, there will be snacks and drinks. The fire tower will be open all day.

Laurie Rankin, Director, New York State Chapter, FFLA lauriejrankin@gmail.com www.ffla.org