



**Forest Fire Lookout Association  
New York State Chapter  
April 2018**

Trains were often thought of as the cause of many fires and a big part of the need for fire towers. But trains played another role too. For many years trains were a major form of transportation. In her book "*Nehasane*", Observer Frances Boone Seaman told of walking the track to town, getting her mail out via the train as well as receiving her mail that way, and planning her days off around the train schedule. Louise Flood whose grandfather, John Haynes was the Observer at Gallis Hill from 1927 to 1929 told me that she remembered how the train would discharge passengers as it came out of Kingston in fairly large numbers so that they could visit the fire tower which was a short distance from the track. Their visit was timed so that they could hike the short distance back to the track and return to Kingston on the eastbound train. The Meenagha Fire Tower in Franklin County (private) was erected by a boys school to protect its property, but was used by the Conservation Department for spotting fires in the times of high fire danger. The staff and students from that school came and went by train.

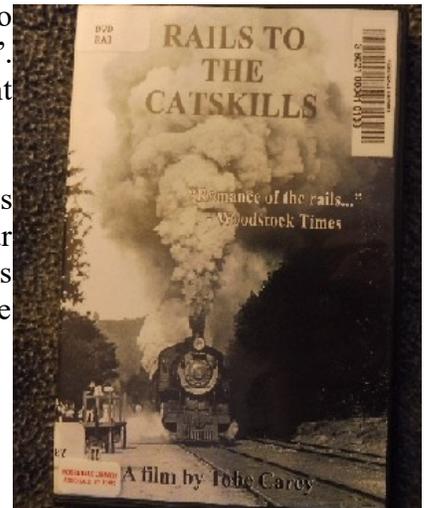
In 1908 there was a fire that devastated the community of Long Lake West. It is believed to have been caused by sparks from the Mohawk and Malone locomotives. Yet trains also carried men to the town to fight that blaze. Beginning in 1923 Railroads were required to attach spark arresters on their stacks.

So the next time you think that trains were a bad thing in relation to fire towers, consider the passengers that may have been on that train. They may have been there to fight the fire or to discharge passengers that were either visiting a fire tower or manning one.

**Book of the Month:** Instead of a book, I am going to encourage you to check out the DVD by Tobe Carey entitled "*Rails to the Catskills*". This DVD illustrates the complexities of train travel with excellent historical photos and film.

**Planning on traveling to the western US this summer?** Don't miss Ray Kresek's fire lookout museum if you go. Make a visit part of your attendance at the FFLA's Western Conference. The conference is tentatively planned for September 14-16. Stay tuned to the next issue of the Lookout Network for more details.

<https://www.inlander.com/spokane/the-spokane-fire-lookout-museum-and-a-u-of-idaho-photo-exhibition-offer-unique-perspectives-on-wildland-firefighting/Content?oid=8684116>



Our thoughts and prayers are with those in the line of fires and those on the fire lines in Oklahoma: <http://www.foxnews.com/us/2018/04/16/oklahoma-wildfires-kill-2-people-threat-continues.html>.

## News and Announcements from Around the State

**March 26, 2018:** While this fire occurred near train tracks, the train was not the cause. <http://newyork.cbslocal.com/2018/03/26/congers-brush-fire/>

**Debar Mountain Wild Forest/Kushaqua Conservation Easement Tract:** Lyme Adirondack Forest Company, the private landowner of the Kushaqua Conservation Easement Tract, is conducting a timber harvest in the area of the Loon Lake Mountain Trail. Be prepared to encounter logging trucks and heavy equipment at any time on the trail and the easement lands in the area during this active harvest operation. Please contact the DEC Ray Brook Office at 518-897-1291 for questions regarding this harvest operation.

**Sterling Forest Fire Tower:** Congratulations to the Friends of Sterling Forest for their perseverance and assistance in getting the Sterling Forest Fire Tower reopened. They are planning on having the fire tower cab and Observer's cabin open on Saturdays, Memorial Day-Labor Day, 10 AM-3 PM. Anyone who is interested in volunteering or anyone who just wants more information about when they are open, how to get there, etc. please contact Susan at [sterlingfiretower01@gmail.com](mailto:sterlingfiretower01@gmail.com).

**The double edged sword of challenges and their popularity:** Many of you, particularly in the Adirondacks are seeing the emergence of hiking challenges that include hikes to your fire tower. A few examples are The Tupper Lake Triad, The Fulton Chain Trifecta, The Adirondack Mountain Club's Fire Tower Challenge and Winter Fire Tower Challenge, The Moriah Challenge and The Saranac 6er. On the one hand, this increase in visitors can offer you an opportunity to showcase your fire tower, recruit new volunteers, and increase donations. On the other hand, these challenges encourage more and more visitors which means more wear and tear on the fire tower, the cabins, privies, trails and parking lots. Perhaps your group should contact the leaders of these hiking challenges and remind them of your work. Perhaps they would consider including something along the lines of the following on their web site and in their literature: *"This trail and fire tower are maintained by the Friends of ..... Please treat the fire towers and trails well and consider supporting their work by joining, volunteering or making a donation. See the Friends web page or fb page."* It can't hurt to try to ask them to help you offset the challenges the additional traffic causes your group to deal with.

**Answer to last months puzzle** (per the Catskill Mt News solution) : No one sent in an answer, so no FFLA stickers were distributed.

Balsam Lake – Hardenburgh – 3723'

Hunter – Hunter – 4040'

Utsayantha – Stamford – 3209'

Overlook – Woodstock – 3140'

Red Hill – Claryville – 2990'

Tremper – Shandaken – 2740'

**Help Wanted:** The FFLA is looking for volunteers to assist with several work projects around the state. We can use folks who have great skills and those who just wish to lend a hand. As 46er Trailmaster Joe Bogardus says of the volunteer worker: "People sometimes use the excuse that they are not in Olympic-athlete shape and therefore can't do trail work. Those that have gone with us realize that there is always useful work to be done by people of all ages, strengths and abilities." While fire tower work does involve things other than trail work, Joe's words are very true. Some of our work will be on weekdays and some on weekends. Please consider lending a hand. Please let me know if you are interested. Thanks very much from your favorite fire tower!

**Stillwater:** Stillwater Fire Tower is continuing to look for people who are interested in volunteering this summer. Enjoy 4 hrs in Stillwater Fire Tower's cab and meet fun hikers! Contact FSFT on FB or email us: [fsft@frontier.com](mailto:fsft@frontier.com)

**Azure:** Azure Mountain Friends gives out 2 - \$750.00 scholarships to local high school seniors/College students. The deadline to apply is April 30<sup>th</sup>. <http://azuremountain.org/scholarship.htm>

**Speaking of help:** Jackie Jones fire tower got a lot of help this past weekend. Following several discussions with the Park and with our friends at Team Rubicon, April 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> were to be two great weather days to see what could be done to save this structure. We had a wonderful group of 25 turn out for Saturday's perfect weather and 14 for Sunday's brisk temperatures that were about 30 degrees colder! Badly rotted, disintegrating and missing step and landing boards were removed and locally cut locust was put in place. Much of the tower was painted. The cab got a new floor. On our next work date, we hope to complete the repairs with the last two landings scheduled for replacement, some steps, the cab will get more attention including the roof, windows and door and the final piece will be to reinstall the first set of stairs. From the 1931 Conservation Commission Annual Report is the following note: *Operation of Jackie Jones was taken over from PIPC.* There were 20 Observers who served at Jackie Jones from 1931 to 1971. If anyone has any information on the history of this fire tower, the Observer's cabin or any historical photographs we would greatly appreciate it if you could pass them along to us. Little information seems to exist.



## Lost Lookouts

Cross River Fire Tower is no longer standing. Our visit to the site started with a check in at the Ward Pound Ridge Reservation. The Park has a great map that they will give you, well marked roads, parking, picnic facilities and bathrooms. We parked at Kimberly Bridge and walked along the blue trail to the former fire tower site. Our hike took us along parts of the road that once served the fire tower. You will know you have arrived at the site by the signage, the cabin remains, the footings and a unique item. The unique find for us was the water pump that still stands. As we were visiting another hiker came along and she remembered drinking from that pump as a child. Once here you are at 800 feet elevation.

The tower was a 60 foot tall Aeromotor LS 40 that was erected in 1926 according to the Conservation Commission Annual Report. In 1931 operation of Cross River was taken over from the Westchester County Parks Commission. It was then operated by the NYSDEC until 1970.

The visitors center and the relatively easy hike make a visit to this lost lookout a family and kid friendly destination. If you would like to support the return of this lost lookout, check out Ravens Rock Run on Nov 11<sup>th</sup> in our calendar listing. Some additional information may be found here: <https://www.lohud.com/story/tech/science/environment/2014/07/04/fire-tower-ward-pound-ridge/12237393/>. During my research I found this very grainy video on line. Interesting to see the “cabin” and the view: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7A7XoQkmgJ0>



## Calendar Notes

Saturday, April 21<sup>st</sup> and Sunday, April 22<sup>nd</sup>, the Cornell Hill fire tower will be open to the public. It is the Town of Wilton Bicentennial celebration. <http://www.wiltonbicentennial.com/events/bicentennial-historic-celebration-weekend/>

Saturday, April 21<sup>st</sup> at 8:30 am the Friends of Mount Beacon will be doing a spring clean up.

Saturday and Sunday, April 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> – The Hadley Fire Tower Committee will participate in Hadley's "Maple in April Festival". They will have a table with exhibits, patches for sale, etc. They will also be signing up anyone interested in joining a hike led by committee members Steve Mackey and Sue Howard on Sunday, at 10:00 and 12:00.

Saturday, May 5<sup>th</sup> – Love My Park Day. Would you like to participate? <https://www.ptny.org/events/i-love-my-park-day/about>

Saturday, May 12<sup>th</sup> – The Hadley Fire Tower Committee will be holding a wildflower walk.

Saturday, May 19<sup>th</sup> – The Hadley Fire Tower Committee will be doing trail work starting at 8:30. Check out their Facebook page for more details.

Saturday, May 26<sup>th</sup> - Save the Date: Grafton Lakes State Park's new visitor center, natural play ground and fire tower will be holding a grand opening! Stay tuned for details.

Saturday, June 2<sup>nd</sup> is National Trails Day. Decide within your group or by working with the DEC or your municipality if you would like to participate. It is a great way to showcase your fire tower and to get some assistance in sprucing up or repairing the trail to your tower.

Saturday, July 28, 2018 at 2:00 pm I will be doing a family friendly presentation at the Thompson Park Zoo.

Sunday, July 29, 2018 will be the Azure Mountain Centennial Anniversary Celebration. <http://azuremountain.org/>

Tuesday, August 7, 2018 Marty Podskoch and I will be presenting a program on Swede Mt. Fire Tower at 7pm at the Horicon Town Hall in Brant Lake. Marty Podskoch is doing a book signing of his Adirondack Fire Tower Book and they are having a presentation for the 100th anniversary Swede Mt Fire Tower. Refreshments will be served. Sponsored by the Horicon Historical Society.

Saturday, September 1<sup>st</sup> from 9-9:30 pm will be the Annual Lighting of the Fire Towers. Can your group participate? Rain date will be Sunday the 2<sup>nd</sup>.

September 2018 – The 19<sup>th</sup> Annual Hudson Valley River Ramble – registration is not open yet, but start thinking about this one. Check the website for information.

October 21<sup>st</sup>- The 26<sup>th</sup> annual Ridge Walk and Run will be taking place. Several of the routes pass by the Alma fire tower and Observer's cabins which are on private property. This may be your only chance to get a photo! Some IT issues have delayed the registration process, but they expect to have that open by May 1<sup>st</sup>. [www.ridgewalk.com](http://www.ridgewalk.com).

Sunday, November 11<sup>th</sup> – Ravens Rock Run to bring back the [Cross River Mountain Fire Tower at Ward Pound Ridge Reservation](http://ravenrocksrn.org/) at its former site in the park. <http://ravenrocksrn.org/>

**Go Climb a Fire Tower**  
**by David Beetle**  
**Part 1**

Article courtesy of Observer, Rick Miller

*It is very much in the romantic tradition to picture a Fire Tower Observer as a solitary figure atop a lonely mountain picking up a few crumbs of the outside world by radio, yet for the most part only communing with chipmunks.*

*And in New York State this is a pretty accurate picture except.....yes except for the fact that in 1939 these Observers had 77,364 visitors. (The 1940 ones are still being counted). In 1929 the figure was only 36,040.*

*The State Conservation Department reports laconically that “more people visit fire towers every year”, but doesn't seem to know why. Maybe it is just that if you hang out a sign “Forest Fire Observatory; Public Welcome”, and keep it out long enough, the public will respond. Maybe people are more athletic than they used to be. Or maybe they are just plain interested in fire towers.*

*Visiting fire towers doesn't take any particularly large amount of preliminary training. All that is needed is a knowledge of where the trail starts, a willingness to put one foot ahead of the other for an hour or two, and a determination to keep going even after the trail starts abruptly to ascend.*

*Some 9,692 people fulfilled those requirements on Rondaxe (Bald) Mountain, on Third Lake, in 1939, to set what was probably an all-time state record for fire tower visiting. The trail starts appropriately opposite the road to the Bald Mountain house, and gets you on top inside a half hour if your lungs hold out. A ladder or two makes the climb sporty – particularly sporty if you are a girl wearing French heels.*

*A long rocky ridge affords a splendid view of the Fulton Chain, and the tower itself adds so little that one wonders with some justice why it is there. An extra fillip [ed: sic], the state employs as Observer the only woman fire spotter. In 1939 she spotted 15 fires which was just about tops for any central Adirondack Observer.*

*For those with any Plymouth Rock or covered wagon blood in their veins, the fire towers that attract the fewest are the most challenging. In 1939 that was Wakely Mountain, which played host to only 19 stray soles as compared with Rondaxe's 9,000 odd. Wakely's unpopularity doubtless springs from a disinclination on the part of motorists to travel over 15 miles of dirt road rather than from any remoter cause. (To be continued next month)*

Membership dues and Centennial Patches are our only source of income. Please take a look at our web page and consider joining or ordering a patch! [www.ffla.org](http://www.ffla.org).

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