



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

The national news has been dominated by the devastating fires in the state of California. The news stories have been bleak, with numerous videos of totally devastated towns such as Paradise and Pulga, abandoned and burned cars alongside highways, houses gone, and leaping flames blown by strong gusty winds. Many have lost not only their homes, but their lives and many remain missing as I type this. I can only imagine the sorrow, frustration, and fatigue of those fire fighters who have been trying to slow down and extinguish the fires. Please keep everyone in your thoughts and prayers. This site has an updated map of the active fires: <https://sf.curbed.com/maps/california-wildfire-map-2018-fall-camp-fire-november> They note that the 2018 fire season has burned a record number of acres and taken a record number of lives in the state.

Can fire towers/lookouts continue to play an important role? Here is an article that offers some insight: <https://www.marketplace.org/2018/10/26/economy/rekindling-fire-lookout-towers>

Our own Dave Vana was busy recently in Tennessee. It is great to hear about the investment in the historic Tomahawk fire tower, the addition of trails, and the multi use options that will be available when the project is completed, likely in the Spring of 2019. <https://www.thetomahawk.com/featured-news/historic-towers-outlook-is-good/>

If you join FFLA as a plus member, in addition to our quarterly magazine newsletter The Lookout Network, you will also receive the National Woodlands magazine quarterly. The National Woodland Owners' Association has an online weekly newsletter that you may enjoy reading. It includes a variety of tidbits, including helicoptering out mountain goats! See September 2018 Volume 38 for more on that project: <http://woodlandowners.org/wednesday-woodland-word>

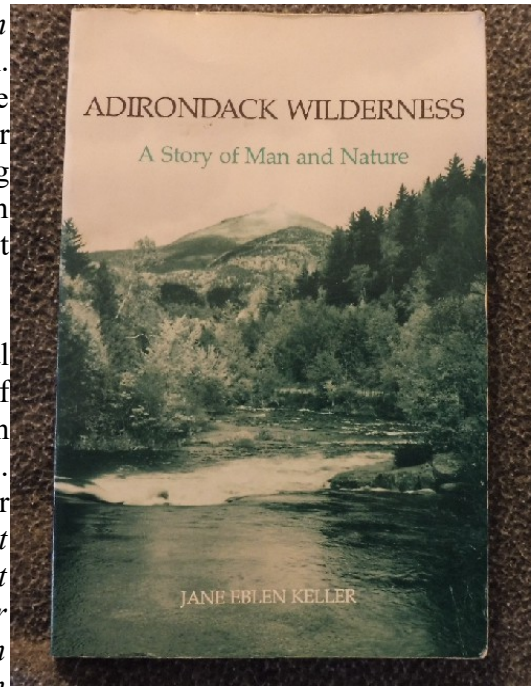
### **New York State November 25, 1950 The Big Blow**

This weather event is well described in our book of the month. Imagine rain for days turning into a deluge where 4 inches of rain fell in an hour and was accompanied by 100 mph southerly winds. In Chapter 20 Keller describes the effects of the weather on the Adirondack Forest - "Along with the trees, 148 miles of telephone lines, dozens of public campsites and private dwellings, and many fire observation towers were knocked down. Most of the 100 miles of Adirondack truck trails, built to accommodate fire engines, were so clogged with huge fallen trees and brush as to be impassable." This link was posted on our Facebook page and garnered a fair bit of discussion, including from someone who was camping at the time. The destruction from the storm was without question, but what to do about all of the damage remained controversial. A nice article here explains: <https://www.adirondackalmanack.com/2010/11/natures-wrath-the-big-blowdown-of-1950.html>

I am also told that Forest Preserve historian Barbara McMartin included a short chapter on the Big Blowdown in her book, *The Great Forest of the Adirondacks*.

**Trivia:** How many fire towers blew down in New York State in the 1950 blowdown? Now that I have given you some clues to where to find the answer, let me know and you can win an FFLA sticker!

**Book of the Month:** *Adirondack Wilderness: A Story of Man and Nature* by Jane Eblen Keller is our book of the month. With a great deal of information on the history of the Adirondacks and the effects of nature and man in their interactions there, this is an enjoyable and thought provoking book. Some great photos are included as well. Written in 1980, it would be interesting to see something similar that covered 1980 to the present.



**Follow Up and Feedback:** I have corresponded with several people following the book review in last month's newsletter of The Ranger, The Cook, and the Hole in the Sky. One person was a fellow lookout friend from the west, Karl Brauneis. Karl shared several memories with me about the book's author Norman Maclean. Thanks very much for sharing Karl. *"I met Norman in either 1978 or 1979 when I was a smokejumper at Missoula, Montana. Laird Robinson was the smokejumper foreman who was assisting Norman with his book Young Men and Fire. I earned my smokejumper wings in 1977 upon graduation from Colorado State University where I also ran Cross Country and Track for Coach Del Hessel who was also a smokejumper at McCall, Idaho in 1959 - 1961. The background.*

*Norman asked me to go to Mann Gulch with him so they could time me moving up the same gulch that Wag Dodge led his crew in 1949. The reason being my athletic career and smokejumper records. I was young and foolish. I responded No ... I am in the top 10 on the jump list and overtime weekend is coming up and I am going to jump fire, come back to Missoula and drink beer. Norman roared in laughter as it proved the mentality of the smokejumpers that he articulates so well in his book "Young Men and Fire".*

**Help Wanted:** How does the title Project Manager suit you? The NYS Chapter is looking for dedicated individuals who are willing to work on fire towers in 2019. Any person who has a favorite fire tower, is familiar with the area, the businesses located nearby who might make a donation, the tradespeople in the area who may have a special skill, just someone who would like to lend a hand could get that title. It comes with lots of gratitude and a hard hat. Are you associated with a college? I am considering a project where I would like to collaborate with a college. I am looking for connections with an FFLA member. If you are interested in either of these opportunities, please let me know.

### News From Around The State

Most of the fire towers have now been closed for the season as winter seeps its way around the steel. That doesn't mean that fire tower volunteers are idle.

**Sterling Forest:** Susan Serico who heads up the volunteer group at Sterling let me know that they are expanding the hours the tower will be open in 2019. They plan to be open on Saturdays and Sundays from Memorial Day through Columbus Day, 10 AM-3 PM. Please consider contacting Susan and signing up for a day or two at this great tower. For anyone who is interested in volunteering, or anyone who just wants more information about when they are open, how to get there, etc., contact her at [sterlingfiretower01@gmail.com](mailto:sterlingfiretower01@gmail.com).

**Hunter Mountain Fire Tower:** This past summer, the NYSDEC Region 4 Operations staff put a new front porch on the Observer's cabin. In addition, they did some maintenance on the road to the tower. We had the opportunity to see their work on an early fall day.



**Stillwater Fire Tower:** The Friends of Stillwater are busy making plans for next year's centennial on August, 24<sup>th</sup>. They are currently seeking photos of Forest Rangers and Observers who served there. If you have any, please contact Jim at [fsft@frontier.com](mailto:fsft@frontier.com)

**Rock Rift:** It's official! As of November 5<sup>th</sup>, NYS has listed Rock Rift Fire Tower on the National Register of Historic Places. The application has now moved to the federal level and approval is expected there soon. Congratulations to the Town of Tompkins Fire Tower Committee for their efforts on this, particularly Ed Engelman who did the bulk of the application.

**Mount Arab:** The Friends of Mount Arab (FOMA) group has been working with the Town of Piercefild to improve signage near the trailhead parking. As of November 11<sup>th</sup>, new signage has been put in place to indicate the distance to the trailhead and to clearly note the trailhead parking area which some hikers have been known to drive past. Nice collaborative effort!

**Thank You:** The Chapter received a generous donation from Shari and Gary. They were inspired to make inquiries and see what they might do to help following a visit to Owls Head and Pillsbury fire towers. We thank them for this donation and hope that others are inspired to follow your example. We work hard to preserve and protect the fire towers and their history. Donations such as yours go a long way toward that effort.

**Holiday shopping:** Thinking of purchasing some fire tower merchandise for yourself or someone else this holiday season? Please be thoughtful with that purchase if you are also hoping to support a fire tower. A lot of the merchandise that is out there does NOT support fire towers at all, but rather other organizations or businesses. The best way to ensure that your purchase does support a fire tower, is to go directly to a Friends group page (or [www.ffla.org](http://www.ffla.org)) and make your purchase. This photo is just a brief illustration of some patches that are available. Some groups have t-shirts, books, hats and more available as well.





**St. Regis:** After fund raising, researching vendors who could do the work, the actual fabrication, and bundling the loads, the new cross braces for St. Regis Mt. Fire Tower were scheduled to be flown to the summit on October 29th in cooperation with the NYSP and the NYSDEC. In the words of Friends member, Doug Fitzgerald, “The weather prevented the event, but we prepared the materials to go, hoping that Tuesday would be better. Tuesday, the forecast looked good, but the actual conditions did not. Four FOSRMFT volunteers crossed the lake in the dark to hike the shorter trail to the summit to receive the helicopter loads. Two DEC personnel were already hiking on the main trail to meet us at the top. Visibility at the summit did not look promising. After waiting four hours in the cold wind on the summit for the conditions to improve, the mission was scrubbed for the day. On Wednesday, as I was starting my day at home, I heard the helicopter overhead. I grabbed my camera and headed to the landing zone. One load was already gone, and the groundman was preparing to hook up the braces. We chatted for awhile and the ship appeared. In the photo, the groundman is under the ship hooking up the load. The braces flew as straight as an arrow. Everything is now up top. The next day Friends of St. Regis hiked up to secure the load. We were pleased to see that the NYSP/DEC had placed the loads close to the tower. That was true precision flying and we appreciated it. Mission accomplished. Due to unfavorable weather conditions the brace replacement project has been suspended until May.” Photos courtesy of FOSRMFT.



## Centennials

At the beginning of the year, we had all of the fire towers that were turning 100 years old listed in the newsletter. At some point during the year we have discussed all of the centennial towers except for Vandewhacker. Perhaps we were simply going in alphabetical order? Not to be left out, a few bits of history. In 1911, the Conservation Commission put up the first tower on the summit, a wooden one. The Observer was very effective in spotting fires from this exceptional location. In 1918, the tower was replaced with the current steel tower. The following year, a cabin was added for the Observer. There were two different trails to the fire tower over the years. The sign in the photo dated 1930's may have

been at the Newcomb trailhead, which is no longer in use. Eventually, the current trail as we know it from 28N became the standard route, and in the 1950's, a new cabin was built. The tower was decommissioned in 1988. There is a wealth of stories about the Observers who served there in Marty Podskoch's book, *Adirondack Fire Towers Their History and Lore The Northern District*.



In 2000 a local group began a restoration effort. Following much effort from a number of different people in 2004, the tower was officially reopened. Since that time, the Observer's cabin has been vandalized and it is now in a state of disrepair. We have been discussing the concerns about the cabin with the NYSDEC and are working with them toward an effort to save the cabin. If you are interested in assisting with this, please let me know.

### Calendar

Thursday, November 29, 2018, Marty Podskoch will be the guest lecturer at Fort Montgomery State Historic Site. He will be discussing the Civilian Conservation Corp and Fire Towers in the Hudson Valley at 7:00 pm. Seating is by reservation only. Call (845) 446-2134 to Register. Suggested Donation.

Tuesday, January 1, 2019, First Day hikes at various locations around the state, for details, see <http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/112174.html>

Saturday, January 26, 2019, The Friends of Poke O Moonshine will be hosting Mammal Tracking with Elizabeth Lee. Meet at 9:30 at the Observer's trailhead. Held in cooperation with CATS (Champlain Area Trails).

Saturday, February 2, 2019, Friends of Poke O Moonshine will be hosting a back country ski trip. Meet at the Observer's trailhead at 9:30 to explore.

Friday, June 7 through Sunday, June 9 will be the Northeastern Conference of the FFLA.

Saturday, August 24, 2019, The Friends of Stillwater Fire Tower will be holding their centennial celebration.

As we enter into the Thanksgiving Holiday, I am so thankful for the fire tower family here in New York State. There are so many of you who give of what is deemed a human being's most precious commodity, time. The hours and days one has on this planet are numbered. To give so much of your time to the fire towers is remarkable. My sincere gratitude to each of you for your time and dedication. I hope your Holiday is shared with family and friends.

Laurie Rankin, Director, New York State Chapter, Forest Fire Lookout Association  
[lauriejrankin@gmail.com](mailto:lauriejrankin@gmail.com) <http://www.ffla.org>