



**Forest Fire Lookout Association
New York State Chapter
December 2020**

And the winner is.....Jackie Kline's photo of Hunter Mountain Fire Tower and Observer's cabin taken in December of 2018. Jackie submitted this photo as part of our monthly FFLA NYS Chapter Facebook page photo contest. Jackie and many other's participation makes this a fun event that people look forward to every month. Congratulations Jackie and thank you to all who participate!



Our Facebook page has 746 members as of this writing, a significant increase from 2019 when we ended the year with 471 members! To some this may not seem like a lot, but to us at the FFLA it means a great deal. We have more active people than ever who are participating in not only photo contests, but dialogue, questions, sharing and more via social media. We have past NYS FFLA Director Fred Knauf who writes a weekly Throw Back Thursday column on our Facebook page and contributes here. All of these contributions make the FFLA a stronger organization. This month you can read the third installment of the humble beginnings of the FFLA written by Fred.

“In the January and April newsletters, State Director Laurie Rankin asked me to write some pieces for the newsletter and I chose to write about the first year of the FFLA. If you missed those, you can locate them on the Facebook page in the files section.

Today, I will talk about what happened after the first meeting, which sadly due to weather, I could not attend. That meeting was down in French Creek State Park, between Reading and Valley Forge, and I finally made it down to the site to visit the fire tower, and the observer, Steve Cummings, in the summer of 1991, about 18 months after the meeting.

So, back in January 1990, the fledgling group had a mission to accomplish to get a national organization going. The first activities for all to consider was what name to give the organization. A small group from New Jersey, which included a lawyer, began the task of determining the steps to take an organization to not-for-profit 501c3 status for tax purposes. Each state's attendees were asked to determine who would be their state chairperson, and then, each state chairperson was to make contact with their state's forestry department / conservation department and/or the USDA Forest Service, to begin the tedious process of collecting information on active, and if possible, past fire tower & lookout sites, and to let the agencies know that they would be willing to take the burden of contact on tower sites and questions. The goal was to approach each state with a helpfulness approach rather than an aggressive style of “Save those towers!!!”, hoping that this approach would begin to soften some people's positions of immediate removal. Looking back, history would say that this worked for the most part.

The new “acting chairperson” began to gather information on rules of conduct for organizations and how to run the conference meetings. As all of this occurred before the “You’ve Got Mail” immediacy of the internet, movement to get everything up and running was slow and took all the way into 1994 before the not-for-profit status was applied. Lastly, each of the state’s chairs (soon to be called state directors) was to begin formally soliciting membership for mailing of the newsletters.

The second meeting was held in the summer of 1990 in New Jersey, and right on my family’s vacation time. The organization approved the formal name change from “The Committee to Form A Fire Tower Organization” to “The Forest Fire Lookout Association”. Formal meeting rules were approved on all those ways to do business, i.e., proposals, discussion, voting, and how the national meetings would be planned out for the Saturday business day. At that time, the morning of the conference was slated for FFLA business work and the afternoon session was slated for updates from states, presentations, and sale of items. Evenings were set for more presentations, slide shows and other fire tower / fire lookout talk.

Within New York State, FFLA member #1 was Larry Paul from Long Island. Larry “beat me to the punch” in signing up at the conference so he became the first formal member. Larry knew more about fire towers in the northeast than most of the people at the conference because for the last forty years he had visited over 100 towers from Maine to Maryland, and lucky for him, most were open at that time. He also worked on the Long Island towers and worked with the group protecting the Pine Barrens of Long Island.

Next writing, I’ll discuss the growth of the NY Chapter, the issuance of membership cards, the beginning of the sale of items to fund the organization, and the NY Conference held in Old Forge.”

Here is a photo of the Hunter Mountain Fire Tower with an unknown date, but I believe it was taken about 1995. This photo is from the Mark Haughwout collection. This is a significant collection that was donated to the State Chapter in 2020. I have been busy scanning these photos and all will eventually end up on our State Chapter web page www.nysffla.org. In the meantime, this one fits here as it shows the need for some help for the Hunter Mountain Fire Tower at the time the FFLA was formed. It also includes Larry Paul in the photos. Note the condition of the cab and roof of the fire tower (or lack there of in the case of the roof) and the height of the trees as compared to Jackie's 2018 photo. As Fred described the fledgling organization above, Larry and Mark were out “collecting information”. In the coming years, the Catskill Fire Tower Project was formed and the Friends of Hunter Mountain worked with the FFLA and the NYSDEC to restore the Hunter Fire Tower. The FFLA organization has come a long way due to the generosity of people like Larry, Fred, Mark, Jackie and all the others who contribute each and every day!



In addition to hundreds of wonderful photos from Mark in 2020, we also received the website of Retired Forest Ranger Captain, Paul Hartmann. A wealth of information and work on New York Fire Towers was contained in the website. More has been added to by our Chapter webmaster and Editor of this newsletter, my husband Tom. Again, the strength of the organization is its members.

The people behind the scenes continue to include groups like the one that formed this year to return the Bramley Mountain Fire Tower to its original location. Countless hours have gone into planning as you may remember (see June and September newsletters). From President of the Friends of Bramley Mountain Fire Tower, Ann Roberti, is an update and a request for your assistance please:

“The Friends of Bramley Mountain Fire Tower group formed at the beginning of 2020 to return the historic tower that once stood on the summit of Bramley Mountain, in Delhi NY, back to its former home. You may have read in a previous article that this tower was carefully taken down in 1975 and has been stored in buildings on a nearby farm all these years. The Clarks, that farm family, would like to see the tower returned to the mountain and FOBMFT was formed to do that. We were just gearing up when the coronavirus pandemic put many of our plans on hold, along with much of the rest of the world’s. We have been working quietly in the background during this time –achieving our 501c3 designation from the IRS and conducting an inventory and inspection of the tower components.

*And now, during this season of giving, the Friends of Bramley Mountain Fire Tower have been honored with the gift of a matching challenge grant of \$5000 from a local hiker and Tower Project supporter. Every dollar contributed will be matched with a dollar from the grant, so if you can help, we could double that \$5,000! FOBMFT is an all-volunteer organization, so all donations go right to the tower building effort. *note the challenge grant is available through 1-31-2021.*

Imagine the newly restored fire tower sitting on top of Bramley Mountain with 360° views of the western Catskills. The Bramley Mountain Trail is already one of the most popular in the area, drawing thousands of hikers every year since it opened in 2016, and the fire tower make the trail even more popular. Besides being a great hiking destination right in our backyard, the Fire Tower will help draw thousands of visitors to the Catskills, boosting local businesses in the process and making life for all a bit better.

Won't you help FOBMFT meet this challenge? With your generous donation, we can put \$10,000 towards making the tower a reality. Any donation will be appreciated! And doubled! Together, we can make this happen! To help the Friends of Bramley Mountain Fire Tower move this restoration project forward, just click this link: [Bramley Mountain Fire Tower](#).”

Readers here have heard me express concerns about the number of fire towers that are included in hiking challenges with nothing given back to the fire towers despite the increase in use the challenges cause. This month we heard about something that was being done about that as it relates to the Tupper Lake Triad: <https://www.adirondackalmanack.com/2020/12/tupper-lake-triad-supports-the-friends-of-mount-arab.html#more-174274>. We thank Charlie Hoffer of the Tupper Lake Triad for this generous donation to FOMA and all of the members of the Friends of Mount Arab (FOMA) who have been working since 1997 to keep the tower and trail in great condition!

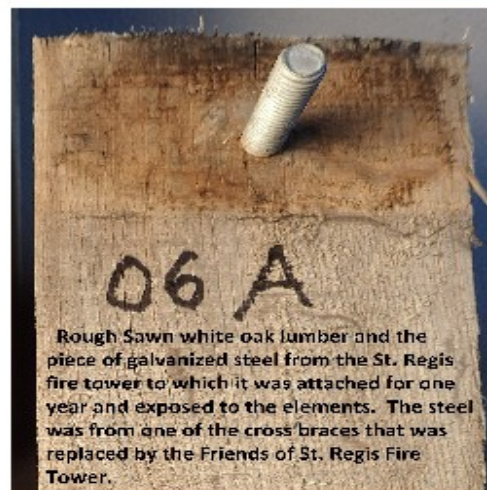
The Preservation League of NYS announced several awards in 2020. One of them went to the Marcus Garvey Fire Watchtower. <https://www.preservenys.org/blog/watchtower-interview>. I have had the opportunity to visit this site while it was being restored. Now thanks to the support of the local community and the generous support of groups like the Preservation League of NYS, this local landmark is once again a landmark for all to see!

From the SUNY ESF Alumni newsletter comes a plea for assistance at Goodnow Fire Tower. *“For decades the Goodnow Mountain Fire Tower has been open for unparalleled 360 degree viewing. More than 5000 visitors annually sign into the register. Today, its very existence and the benefits it offers is at risk. After standing for over 98 years, the 60 foot metal structure needs some repair. We are actively fund raising to support this vital restoration. During the month of December if you make a gift in honor of a loved one we will send them a certificate of acknowledgment. Your gift will help ensure that they and others can enjoy the view the next time they visit.”* <https://www.esf.edu/newcomb/donate.htm>

Many of you will note that both the formation of the FFLA itself, the FOBM, FOMA, and the Harlem Community were supported by donations, grants, numerous volunteers and in many cases a National Historic Lookout Designation. This designation comes with certain protections to preserve and restore these beloved landmarks.* This past month there was a threat to this type of restoration when there was a proposal to remove the Debar Lodge located in the Debar Wild Forest in the Adirondacks. The Debar Fire Tower was removed in 1979 as it was a non conforming structure. This new proposal wants to both remove the historic lodge as non conforming then change the designation of the area to intensive use and add new buildings. Information about the lodge and this proposal can be found on AARCH's webpage: <https://www.aarch.org/> Just click on the 'read more' button. Following the APA meeting, a new public comment period has been opened. Those wishing to review the documents and comment should do so by February 12, 2021. <https://www.dec.ny.gov/press/121965.html>

*According to the Fire Tower Study for the Adirondack Park 2010, - The NYSDEC is required by the New York State Historic Preservation Act (SHPA), Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation Law (Article 14) and SEQRA (ECL Article 8) to include cultural resources in the range of environmental values that are managed on public lands. DEC and OPRHP have taken the approach that all fire towers are historic artifacts and should be retained where not in conflict with the APSLMP. Several Adirondack fire towers and some associated observer cabins are listed on both the State and National Registers of Historic Places.

Another wonderful example of an FFLA member who has stepped up is the wonderful body of work recently completed by member Ed Engelman regarding Corrosion. The initial reason that Ed took on this question was his involvement in planning with the Town of Tompkins for the restoration efforts at Rock Rift Fire Tower. Ed embarked on this study to determine what treatment for the steps and landing would work best in the long term for fire tower preservation. As I said to Ed, this is an amazing amount of work, a thoughtful scientific study with illustrations and photographs that I did not wish to edit in any way. Ed has kindly given us permission to place this study on our web page. The link [is here](#). I strongly encourage all of you to read this article and to take note in the future of the type of corrosion you are seeing on a fire tower and the type of materials you may be using in your restoration and maintenance efforts. Thank you Ed for sharing this with all of us!



The Friends of Grafton Lakes State Park recently sent out their November/December Newsletter and annual membership drive. This group takes great care of not one, but two fire towers; Dickinson Hill and the new tower at the Grafton Lakes State Park Visitors Center. The FFLA made their newsletter!

“A special shout out to Laurie Rankin and others from FFLA for painting over the graffiti inside the Dickinson Fire Tower! The fire tower attracts a lot of great visitors, but also some with a desire to make their mark in the world. We appreciate Laurie, her husband Tom, and their friend for their efforts to maintain the appearance of the tower, to everyone’s benefit. Laurie and Tam, from the Park Staff, also helped direct our attention to an annual fire tower lighting event that happens on Labor Day across the state. We’re hoping to join in on that effort this coming year, as combined with a fundraiser to benefit the park. We’re still a long way off, but please look forward to an announcement mid-summer.” It was certainly our pleasure to lend a hand and we are excited to have another fire tower join us for the 2021 Lighting Event!

Open/Closed

Some fire towers and their trails have reopened. Some remain closed. Some seasonal road closures are in effect.

Balsam Lake: Seasonal limited use road closures are in effect for Alder Lake and Southern approaches to the tower.

Berry Hill: Fire Tower and trail remains closed.

Cathedral Rock: Fire Tower and trail remains closed.

Goodnow: Cab remains closed. Trail is open.

Mount Tremper: Seasonal limited use road closure for the Jessup Road approach.

Pillsbury: Perkins Clearing Road will be closed for the season.

Red Hill: Seasonal limited use road closures are in affect for Dinch Road.

Rock Rift: Finger Lakes trail to the tower reopens at the end of hunting season.

Spruce: Tower and trail are now opened.

Stillwater: Will reopen on 12-21. Plan your visit accordingly!

Wakely: Cedar River Road will be closed for the season.

As we approach the end of 2020, I am humbled by the amount of time, effort and money that you have contributed to our NYS Chapter and our National organization in what has been a really crazy, difficult year. I thank you for your generosity and your contributions, whatever they may have been.

As we look ahead to 2021, we realize there will still be challenges to deal with, but there is also a great deal of hope on the horizon. There are numerous plans in the works for fire tower renovations, new fire towers, new access to old fire towers, and several work plans for getting some much needed repairs done on some Observers cabins too. There is much hope that 2021 will be a better year.

I hope you all enjoy the blessings of a happy and safe holiday season surrounded by friends and family or even friends and family via Zoom if that is what is available. Make the best of those blessings we have! Stay safe!

All the best,

Laurie

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