

FFLA Newsletter, New York Chapter

January 2016

Happy New Year to everyone! A bit unusual for a January in New York in terms of weather, but winter is slowly seeping in between the cracks. Perhaps by the end of the month, all of our towers will be draped in a snowy coat. The cabins will have a toasty warm fire in the stove – oh wait that would not be likely in 2016 would it? Perhaps 1916? What year do you believe those first cabins were built in New York State? An FFLA decal goes to the first person with the correct answer!!!

I hope that question will be the beginning of a new trivia question section in the newsletter. I intend it to be a question to encourage thoughtfulness on the history of fire towers and the persons who manned them in our fine state. I will try to offer more in depth information the following month to those questions.

Ed Engelman put together the attached document with some great information regarding the number of fires in the state. I came across this historical (and scary) link recently regarding the fires of 1903 – a bit lengthy, but a good read: <http://www.adirondackalmanack.com/2012/04/lost-brook-dispatches-the-fires-of-1903.html>. Ed's document also gives great information on how to do additional research as well. Thanks so much for all of the time you spent on this Ed!

I also hope during these quieter winter months to focus on a few other very important items while restoration projects and visits to fire towers are fewer. The first item is the one that I believe is perhaps the most important one. A “trendy” sort of thing called Keeping It Local.

While it sounds trendy, I think it is the heart and soul of the fire towers in New York State. We are a pretty big state. According to US50.com, New York ranks 30th among the United States in size with 47,214 square miles. No matter how much one loves fire towers, that is a lot of miles. What does one do who loves fire towers and wants to visit them, help out with restoration, do research regarding how they came to be where they are? One starts locally. Yes, there are numerous internet sites where one can get information, including our very own www.firelookout.org. But to really get to the heart of those towers and the people who manned them, cared for them and continue to do so, one must look locally.

Locally is where you will find retired Observers, Forest Rangers and their families. These folks made their living on the tower, often raised their families there or close by, and knew every tree and rock en route. Locally is where you will find folks who remember the first time they climbed that tower, saw a wild animal while hiking there, the story the Observer told about the fire they spotted, when they stopped manning the tower, when the tower came down, and when the tower was restored! That is the heart and soul of fire towers. Visit those towns and you will hear lots of local “lore” over lunch.

Keeping it local means taking a closer look at that local community closest to the fire tower. Go to the local school and you will hear references to towers – Margaretville Central School, my alma mater, has “with towers reaching toward the blue” in its school song lyrics. Visit Heart Lake and see the Three Seasons Adirondack Mountain Club program. This past year that program led 261 students up nearby Mt. Jo (a non fire tower peak), but the program has also given each of those children and their families the brochures for the ADK Fire Tower Challenge to inspire them to go explore further. For more information about the ADK Fire Tower Challenge: <http://www.adk-gfs.org/firetower.challenge.php>. The challenge is sponsored by the Adirondack Mountain Club's Glens Falls Saratoga Chapter.

There is this challenge to visit the 5 fire towers in Hamilton County:

<http://www.adirondackexperience.com/recreation/hiking/fire-tower-hikes-challenge>. Tupper Lake has a new challenge that includes a fire tower: <http://www.tupperlake.com/blog/2015/12/triad-challenge-this-holiday-season>. These programs encourage people to visit the fire towers, to learn more of their history, to participate in the restoration of them and to encourage others to do so as well.

The local voices that were raised to keep Hurricane Mt and St. Regis Mountain fire towers were loud! In 2001, the towers were slated to be taken down. A loud public campaign began that lasted several years until a historic decision was made in 2010 to reclassify the lands the towers were on. Those local Friends groups then organized themselves into work crews and in 2015 those towers were restored! You can climb Hurricane at this writing, but have to wait just a bit to have access to St. Regis as the tower needs a bit more steel. A local success! <http://www.hurricanefiretower.org/> and <http://www.friendsofstregis.org/> will give you more information and ways in which you can help.

Keeping it local means knowing that the local hardware store will have the fencing needed to complete your restoration project. Yes, the local Friends group working on the Hurricane tower knew right where to go when they realized they needed that fencing, not exactly a short walk off the mountain to get that or a short hike back up with the wire, but they knew about that local resource!

Keeping it local means partnering with other organizations as you need assistance with restoration projects or with saving historical information, e.g. AARCH, NYSDEC, SCA, CCCD to name a few.

Keeping it local might mean working with local businesses to assist in fund raising. This could mean anything from making t-shirts, mugs, and patches to having a place to sell them. It may mean a local brewery will donate \$1 for every beer they sell on a Friday night. It might mean space for a local Friends group to meet free of charge.

What about local grants? One that I saw recently that might apply to the Catskill region is this grant: http://www.cwconline.org/education_program.html and one that could apply to either the Catskill or the Adirondack regions is this grant: <http://www.adkhighpeaksfoundation.org/adkhpf/main.html>.

In the next couple of months, I would like to write more about the importance of Keeping It Local as you organize a Friends Group, enhance an existing one, or plan for that fire tower anniversary party! A Friends Group requires friends from all walks of life; those who are good at construction, organizing, web site designs, fund raising, grabbing a saw, providing snacks, gathering historical background, the list goes on.

SAVE THE DATE

The weekend of September 17th and 18th 2016 the NYS Chapter of the FFLA will be hosting the Northeastern Conference in the Adirondacks. More details are being worked out regarding location, fire tower visits, programs, etc., so stay tuned for more details and keep that weekend open! If you have a suggestion or would like to help out, please let me know.

Updates and Help Needed, Resources, and A Bit of History are all contained above in a slightly different format than I usually do. Your feedback is always encouraged and welcomed! Remember keeping it local means being certain your NYS FFLA Annual membership dues are paid! Stay warm and safe!

Laurie Rankin, Director NYS FFLA