

Forest Fire Lookout Association New York Chapter December 2016 Newsletter

Winter officially arrives in New York on December 21st at 5:44 am. Yet, as I type this today, the fire towers across the state are “singing” with cold temperatures and strong winds buffeting them. I would not recommend braving the weather to climb any of the structures today, yet that music made by those winds is an exhilarating sound that my Dad and I used to love. He said it always made the fire inside warmer. And those lovely, feathery patterns formed by the wind moving that moisture past the steel is something I still find amazing.



Tennessee Wildfires: Wild fires are just that, wild. They have a mind all their own. Fanned by extremely dry conditions, terrain, and winds, they took off in Tennessee last month and the results were devastating. The fast moving blaze burned more than 150,000 acres, killed 14 people and damaged 2,400 structures in Gatlinburg and Sevier County. Below is an interesting and hair raising timeline of the fires. The maps, radio calls, and film of the fire as it was fueled by winds as strong as 87 mph and with dense smoke hiding what was happening, truly shows the wild nature of the fire. Another item of note when I read this was the communication system failures and successes. Here in New York we can understand the rural nature of the systems they were dealing with in Tennessee and how difficult it is to sometimes use common communication tools. By the way, there are still fires burning there as of this writing: <http://wate.com/2016/12/13/timeline-gatlinburg-wildfires>.

Team Rubicon: One organization that is responding in the area is Team Rubicon. Operation Blue Smoke is currently underway. <http://www.local8now.com/content/news/Veteran-led-Team-Rubicon-to-assist-with-wildfire-recovery-405743345.html>. Keep this organization in mind. These proud, hard working volunteers are always ready to respond to an emergency. In quiet times, they need worthy projects to keep their skills sharp and keep themselves ready to respond efficiently at a moment's notice. I am currently working with this group in New York State to see if they can help with rehabilitating a fire tower. Keep them in mind, not only if there is a disaster in your community, but also if you think they could help with a community project.

Trivia Question from November: Too easy – that Fred Knauf beat everyone to the buzzer again with a correct answer of “\$9.95 plus \$2.00 shipping and handling” for “how much is a copy of 'I Remember When' by FFLA Member Randy Kneer”? This and many other titles found at the FFLA web page's store will make great Christmas gifts for you or someone on your list. There are still a few days left to order.

Trivia Question for December: What currently standing fire towers in NY State will turn 100 in 2017?

Corrections: Thank you to all for the feedback on my errors in November. While I try to be accurate, it is important to let me know when I am not.

Doug Randall got in touch with me to let me know his tower is in Cortland, not Madison county. Please let me know if you would like to visit the old Swancott Hill tower and I'll connect you with Doug.

David Thomas-Train of Poke O Moonshine clarified the dates for their upcoming 100th Anniversary celebration in 2017. The art exhibit will open on the 28th of July, and will run for a month, and the hike and other events will be on the 30th.

I also left out all of the photo credits last month and sincerely apologize to Dick Eckler who took the photo of Swancott Hill in 1974. The photos of Swancott Hill and Moosehead, (photographer unknown), are courtesy of the Paul Hartmann collection. The current photo of the Brooklyn Tower was from Dave Vana. If you have photos or recollections that you would like to share, please let me know. I would be happy to include them in a future newsletter.

It's a small world out there: David Thomas-Train also told me that he had shared the homing pigeon release photos with a friend. It turns out that friend had worked with Nathan, Mac and the birds at the Ute Mountain fire tower in Utah! She was thrilled at the small-world connection and so are we!

Mainstream Media/Sellers and Fire Towers: Being released today is FireWatch, a new computer game that according to the seller is “a mystery set in the Wyoming wilderness, where your only emotional lifeline is the person on the other end of a handheld radio”. You can see the trailer here: <http://www.firewatchgame.com/>

Last minute shopping: St. Regis folks reminded us on facebook that patches and stickers make great stocking stuffers. You can help out Santa and a fire tower of your choice.

End of year giving: Speaking of helping out, as you consider your end of the year donations, please keep in mind that favorite fire tower of yours. Most have no dedicated budget, but rather depend on donations to support their ongoing restoration, education, and maintenance work.

100 Years of Service Patches: I have found a supplier for the patches that were made to celebrate the centennial of New York State Fire Towers back in 2009. I have had a few people request more of these patches. If you have not already gotten in touch with me and wish to have some of these, please let me know soon, so that I can place an order. You can see the patch on our FFLA web page: <http://www.firelookout.org/lookout-store---patches.html>.

Harriman fire update: The two fires that were burning in mid November in Harriman State Park burned a combined 1,100 acres over the course of a week. The fire would have affected the Tom Jones fire tower if it were still standing. Tom Jones was a wooden tower that was placed on the summit in 1923. There were and still are other fire towers nearby that may have been very helpful in both spotting and working these fires – Jackie Jones and Sterling Forest to name two. <http://www.lohud.com/story/news/local/rockland/2016/11/14/harriman-state-park-fires/93790612/>.

Planning ahead for 2017: Work Projects, recruiting new volunteers, fund raising, educational pieces, how to connect with the media, and so much more can and will fill those cold winter days. I have gotten started with a few items already. On May 17th, I will be doing a slide show for the Adirondack Mountain Club Glens Falls Chapter monthly meeting at the Crandall library in Glens Falls. This chapter is the one who offers the Adirondack Fire Tower Challenge, both summer and winter. I will be covering the history of wildfires and NYS fire towers.

I did the ADK fire tower challenge a number of years ago, but not in winter.....perhaps this winter? How about you? I also have to get some volunteers organized for the newly approved work at Sterling Forest and Lyon Mountain Fire Towers for 2017. I need to continue to support all of you that are already involved in a fire tower project. Once refurbished, those fire towers still need love in terms of fund raising, maintenance, education and more. Our work does not end once they are reopened. Some that were refurbished close to 20 years ago are in need of new boards or a coat of paint. We need to plan ahead for some birthday parties for fire towers and volunteer groups next year too.

As you wrap up 2016, please take a few moments to reflect back on all that each of you has done in 2016 to support your local fire tower, its history and preservation, brainstorming new ideas for educating the public who visit, ideas for fund raising, getting press coverage via facebook, the local paper, and so many more behind the scenes moments. You all deserve a hearty round of applause for all that you accomplished in 2016. I look forward to supporting you in any way I can in 2017 and sincerely hope it is a healthy, prosperous, and peaceful year for each of you.

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