

**Forest Fire Lookout Association  
New York Chapter  
January 2017 Newsletter**

2017 is going to be a special year in New York State. I am excited to be looking forward to the centennial celebration of several fire towers as well as restoration and maintenance work on many others. It will be difficult to exceed all that occurred in 2016, but let's give it a shot!

I was pleased to participate in the FFLA annual meeting via conference call this past weekend and to hear all of the exciting news across our country regarding fire towers. I was also reminded of all of the hours that this special group of people devote to fire towers. Our Chairman of the Board, Keith Argow led the call and was a bit delayed at one point with a response because (and I'll paraphrase here) he still "gets excited with the news that a lookout has been saved." His continued passion and excitement is an amazing example for us all to emulate. Gary Weber is our Treasurer, but in addition to that job he is also our Membership chair handling dues for the nearly 1300 members nationwide last year and he is the Editor for our newsletter. That newsletter is more commonly known as the Lookout Network, a full color magazine filled with all the news nationwide, including lots of New York news! And Gary also participates in and generally wins the "visiting the most fire towers each year competition." Bill Cobb is our webmaster, maintaining a pretty extensive web page, and oh by the way, he is also the Maine State Chapter Director and also stepped in to cover the States of Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island. A huge thanks to all of these leaders and more in the Forest Fire Lookout Association. They are the driving force behind our organization and deserve our gratitude.

In 2017 the FFLA will once again be offering restoration grants. We also expect to be getting our new brochures completed and ready for distribution. In the meantime, if you have a need for any brochures, grants, or to place an article on the web page or in the magazine, please let me know. I do have a small supply of the old brochures still available for distribution. One of the items that the FFLA is working on is archiving of documents. If you would like to volunteer to help, please let me know. To see the wrap up of 2016 for the New York State Chapter, please check out our FFLA webpage: <http://www.firelookout.org/chapter-reports.html>.

**National News:** Some very interesting news from our neighbors to the south in Pennsylvania. The State is going to reopen fire towers for fire spotting again, renovating older towers and putting up new ones. [http://www.outdoors.org/articles/amc-outdoors/pennsylvania-reintroduces-fire-towers/?utm\\_campaign=pub-amcoo-010217&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=internal-mem&utm\\_content=cta6&tr=y&auid=17149497](http://www.outdoors.org/articles/amc-outdoors/pennsylvania-reintroduces-fire-towers/?utm_campaign=pub-amcoo-010217&utm_medium=email&utm_source=internal-mem&utm_content=cta6&tr=y&auid=17149497) . Perhaps the study from Penn State played a role as well. This study gives thought to the possibility of more destructive fires in the future. <http://news.psu.edu/story/441686/2016/12/12/devastating-wildfires-eastern-forests-likely-be-repeated-expert-warns>

And speaking of the cost of fires. The terrible fires in North Carolina racked up quite a bill: <http://wjla.com/news/nation-world/north-carolina-wildfire-costs-in-tens-of-millions>

**First Day Hike:** Did anyone do any first day hikes? Perhaps this is something to plan for next year? What a great way to begin the new year by leading a hike to a fire tower or perhaps by just being at the fire tower to greet people when they least expect it. If you have the facilities, how about being there with a cup of hot cocoa and cookies? A great way to begin the new year and promote fire towers!

**Trivia Question from December:** What currently standing fire towers in NY State will turn 100 in 2017? **Answers:** Hadley (a steel LL25 Aeromotor) and 12 other LS-40 Aeromotors towers: Tremper, Hunter, Adams, Belfry, Blue, Loon Lake, Lyon, Poke O Moonshine, Bald (Rondaxe), and Snowy were all erected in 1917. Cat and Catamount were also erected, but are no longer standing

Correct answer of Mount Tremper from Susan Serico of Mount Tremper and Sterling Fire Tower groups! Susan will receive one of those coveted FFLA stickers! Ed Engelman of Rock Rift also answered this one on Facebook. Another sticker winner!

From the 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Report of the Department of Conservation in 1917: **“The total average cost of the towers, including the original purchase price, transportation and expense of erection, exclusive of Ranger labor, was about \$530.00.”**

**January Trivia Question:** Who were Jones and Laughlin and why would their names be imprinted in the steel on a fire tower?

**Plan ahead now:** The colder, darker winter months are a great time to organize your volunteer group and make plans for the year ahead. Working in cooperation with others and delegating can make your project more successful and you less stressed. Reach out to your partners now. Work with local governments, chambers of commerce, the NYSDEC, historical societies, Rotary groups, colleges, Masons, and the local press. One example I recently came across is the town's logo including a fire tower. See Town of Denning where Red Hill Fire Tower is located: <http://www.denning.us/>. What a great idea! As always, remember to communicate well between the different groups, support and enhance one another. Identify any areas of concern and work together to resolve them. Do you need help? Here is a great place to give a shout out, so please just let me know and I will pass your need along. Don't forget every group needs individuals who are good at working with the press, carpentry, organizing, creative design, social media, even doing newsletters!

**Are you planning a centennial celebration?** There are lots of simple things you can do, everything from a birthday cake at the trailhead to having a special photo done, a commemorative stamp, or a party at a local brewery! How about a special one time only patch? A tower climbing card? A contest? There are endless possibilities. Please feel free to share any suggestions you may have. They may be very helpful to another group.

**Book Section:** I thought I would try adding this section to the newsletter and you could let me know about a good fire tower related book. I'll start with *Nehasane Fire Observer: An Adirondack Woman's Summer of 42*, by Frances Boone Seaman. This book is a quick and delightful read of this young woman's job as the Observer on Mount Electra fire tower. She writes well and the reader is transported back to the heart of the Adirondacks and the private lands of the Webb's. This was an unusual agreement where the State of New York paid part of the salary and the Webb's the other. Her journey is one I would love to have had. Follow along with her in this book.

**Smart Growth Grants:** <http://www.watershedpost.com/pressreleases/2017/governor-cuomo-announces-800000-smart-growth-grants-adirondack-park-and-catskill> Would any of these be something your group could use?

**Corrections:** ???None???

**Membership:** Please join! It's easy at <http://www.firelookout.org/index.html>.

**Centennial Celebrations:** Each month we are going to feature one of the fire towers that is turning 100 years old. We will also feature this same fire tower on our Facebook page for those who follow social media. This month we will feature **Poke O Moonshine**.

Poke O Moonshine fire tower was erected in 1917. The Friends of Poke O Moonshine formed in 1997 to restore the tower. Thus, they are celebrating both a 20 year and a 100 year birthday in 2017!

A wooden fire tower was placed on the summit in 1912 and manned through 1915. Then in 1917, a 35 foot Aeromotor LS 40 steel tower was placed on the 2180' summit. In 1917 Earl Conger of Keesville was the first Fire Tower Observer to serve in the new steel tower. He worked through the fire season in the fall of 1925 for a salary of \$90.20 per month. The last Observer was Kathy Blaise of Keesville who worked from April through November of 1988. 16 other Observers served in between. Three different cabins graced the mountain. One from 1913, one from 1925, and in 1974 the one whose chimney continues to stand. It was one of only 4 cabins built with a chimney rather than a wood stove. The tower was decommissioned in 1988 and slated for removal. Poke O Moonshine is listed on the NHLR NY#20, US# 265.



Credits for Observer's cabin photos: 1) 1913 photographer unknown, 2) 1925 photographer unknown, 3) 8-31-77 by Bob Eckler, all photos from the Paul Hartmann collection.

In a shining example of working with local municipalities and organizations, the Town of Chesterfield, AARCH, ADK, the DEC, the NYSP and the Friends of Poke O Moonshine joined forces to save the tower. The restoration effort involved some serious collaboration including the replacement of the diagonal braces. Gary Friedrich, a Ranger who was part of the original Friends group formed in 1997, spoke of the cross brace replacement in a newspaper article. "As the state police helicopter lifted off, the pilot started getting a pendulum in the load of cross braces. He was in fear of the load swinging up and hitting the rotor blades and punched the load. The following fall the ranger using GPS coordinates from the pilot went looking and found the cross braces. Using a canoe and come along he was able to retrieve them from the icy water of a nearby pond. That same Ranger says he probably had the most fun of his career painting that fire tower roof. Driving by the next morning the sun was coming up and hitting that new silver roof just right. It looked like a lighthouse on top of the mountain."



Photo from the NYSDEC Archives, painting the tower in 2003

Two trails now reach the summit, the Observer's trail and the steep Ranger's trail. Extensive work was done on both thanks to the friends group. The new trail and parking area was built in 2011 utilizing the old jeep road. The friends most recent campaign "Summit up for Poke-O" set an amazing goal of raising \$250,000.00 and has nearly reached that amount! The Ranger's trail is an Interpretive trail with a guide and 11 stops en route to the summit and is in the process of extensive renovation. The tower is staffed in the summer. The interior of the cab has an alidade map and panoramas. Protection of the alpine vegetation occurs with signage and the fire tower steward educating visitors about staying off the fragile vegetation. In 2016, the kiosk was updated.

In a wonderful local collaboration, Friends of Poke O Moonshine's David Thomas-Train created a wonderful educational program in collaboration with the Adirondack History Museum just a few miles from the fire tower. David offers this program to area school groups and the community and includes a trip to the fire tower as well.



Never ones to sit still, Friends of Poke O Moonshine has events going on this winter you may wish to check out:

On 1-21-2017 A Mammal Tracking hike will take place and on 2-4-17 back country ski explorations will occur. Call David Thomas-Train for details at 518-576-4592.

To celebrate the centennial, the Friends of Poke O have made some plans. The weekend of July 28<sup>th</sup>, an art exhibit will open at the 1719 Block Gallery in Keeseville. The art show will run for a month. On Sunday, July 30<sup>th</sup>, there will be a hike and mountain celebration at mid-day, with a party afterward at the Ausable Brewery. Save the dates!!!

Congratulations and thank you to Friends of Poke O Moonshine for taking a 20 year run and making it successful each and every year, for taking such great care of the fire tower and the lands that surround the fire tower, for educating the hiking public and the local community on so many issues, for being amazing fund raisers, for preserving history, and for continuing to plan ahead with vision and a smile!

Happy 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday to Poke O Moonshine!

Laurie Rankin, Director  
New York State Chapter  
Forest Fire Lookout Association  
845-926-2182  
[lauriejrankin@gmail.com](mailto:lauriejrankin@gmail.com)  
<http://ffla.org>