

**Forest Fire Lookout Association
New York Chapter
February 2017**

As snow blankets our state and rime ice covers our fire towers, it is nice to be inside and think about what a Fire Tower Observer would do in the winter. The job was seasonal so generally from November 1st until April 1st, they were unemployed. I know my Dad loved to go “check” on the tower during these months. He combined the trip with his love of white rabbit hunting and often went with Retired Observer Gus Stewart and his dog Trixie. But he also had a family to support, so his “off season” was spent either working on Ski Patrol at Belleayre Ski Center or on the local town highway department. Back then, one stood in the back of the truck and hand shoveled off the sand. He preferred being on the tower. Would anyone else care to share a memory of the off-season?

Trivia Question from January: Who were Jones and Laughlin and why would their names be imprinted on a piece of steel? Lots of answers came in for this one. I may have to check my sticker supply! Correct answers came from several members; Tom F., Jim F., Richard B., Paul H., and Warren J. all sent in the correct answer - The J & L Plant that was located in Star Lake in St. Lawrence County. The iron ore came from the Benson Mines. Both places were major employers in the area and when they went out of business there was a void left that had a ripple effect throughout the town. Did you ever consider the economic role that fire towers played in a community before? Thank you to all for participating.

Trivia Question for February: A real need was felt for a fire fighting apparatus that could be carried conveniently anywhere in the woods by one man and that could be operated by the man as he walked along. A new type of French pump was obtained and supplied to the District Rangers for testing. Can anyone name the year these were supplied and used for testing? And can anyone name the pump itself? FFLA stickers to the winner!

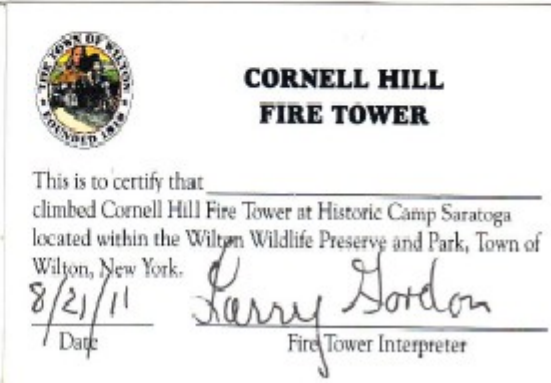
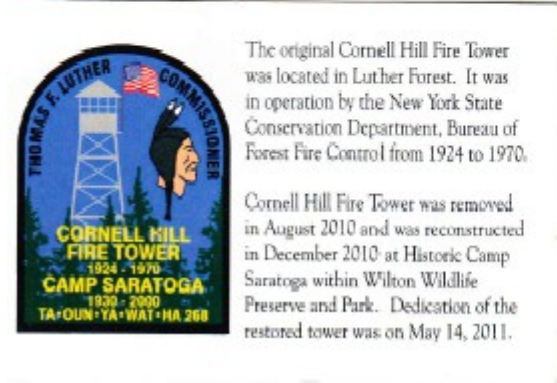
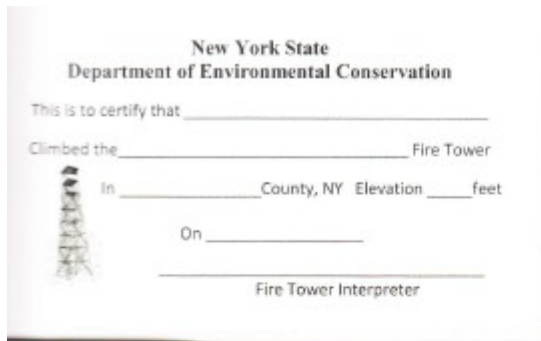
Tower Closures: Both Wakely Mountain and Sterling Forest Fire Towers are currently closed to the public. Wakely has been listed by the NYSDEC as “found to be structurally unsound and has been closed to the public until further notice.” Sterling Forest Fire Tower has also been closed. The FFLA is actively working on trying to reverse both of these closures. More on Sterling Forest under the Help Wanted section below.

Hudson River Ramble hikes: The Hudson River Ramble is an excellent opportunity to showcase your fire towers work and to recruit new volunteers. It will be held every weekend in September this year. To register a hike event, you can complete an on line application beginning in late April with a mid June deadline, so give some thought to this now. <http://www.hudsonrivervalleyramble.com/ramble>.

Annual Calendar: It occurs to me that it may be helpful to have an annual calendar. Sometimes time flies by us all and a reminder of things to do and things to plan for may be a good idea. For example, the Hudson River Ramble hikes mentioned in this newsletter seem to have become an annual event. However, you can't wait until September to plan for them. A calendar with a reminder to do so in March may be helpful? The same with a first day hike. A first day hike is a great idea, but one you may want to begin planning for in October. Any thoughts? I would love to hear them.

For Sale: The Adirondack Mountain Club has fire tower t-shirts, hats and several patches for sale: <https://www.adk.org/product-category/clothing/>.

Climbing Cards: "Squirrel Cards" were issued to the visiting public at USFS towers as part of the fire prevention program in the 1940's. An article regarding our neighbors to the east is found here: <https://www.outdoors.org/articles/amc-outdoors/preventing-forest-fires/>. New York State offered something similar. I am including the climbing cards that are currently used at both the Cornell Hill and Catskill Fire Towers here. If you would like these outlines or something similar to pass out to visitors at your tower, please let me know. I can connect you with our members who have the specs.



Picnic: The NY FFLA will not be hosting the Northeastern Conference of the FFLA in 2017 as we did last year. However, It is always good to meet like minded people and simply have conversations with others who truly understand what you are doing. To that end, I would be very happy to organize a dish to pass type picnic in a central location sometime in 2017 if there is enough interest for same. Please give me some feedback and I will start putting some plans together.

Corrections: None? Not to worry, I have made plenty of errors on Facebook this month! Not a member of the Facebook group? You may wish to join and see all of the conversations: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1736798186564272/> We have 88 members, let's get to 100!

Birthday celebrations or fund raising ideas: Hold a scrabble tournament where at least 2 words must be fire tower related, something like a Turkey Trot or 5K run, some other type of trail run, a litter pick

up challenge where the most weight wins? And here is one from our Friends in the NW Montana FFLA Chapter: Community Tap Night – every Wednesday night 75 cents of every pint sold benefits a local cause – Fire towers can be one! Tamarack Brewing Company supports this great community idea!

HELP WANTED

Friends of Stillwater Wanted Poster: FSFT is working on a new brochure. They would like to see winter photos of Stillwater Fire Tower. Please e-mail to fsft@frontier.com. If they use your photo, you'll get photo credit and a FSFT patch.

Friends of Bald Mountain: They write, “FoBM committee is very much in need of more volunteers to help us on our spring and fall workdays. Several of our original members are not able to work anymore due to health issues. You don't need to live here in Old Forge to volunteer. A simple form needs to be filled out and filed with the DEC office in Herkimer to be covered by workman's comp. Send us a note and we'll provide the form and details and notify you of scheduled workdays. If necessary, we'll find you accommodations with a committee person here in Town and reimburse you for your travel expenses. We would love to find a volunteer willing to put up and maintain a Facebook page for us to network and share stories with other hikers”.

Friends of Sterling Forest: The FFLA is working with the Friends of Sterling Forest, the Sterling Forest State Park, and Team Rubicon to restore and reopen the historic Sterling Forest Fire Tower. A work plan is ready and waiting for volunteers to help us out. We have made plans for work to occur on the weekend of May 13th and 14th. If we should have a real wash out weather wise, we would move our work to the weekend of June 17th and 18th. Thank you for considering! If you would be interested in helping out, please let me know.

Membership: Joining an organization with like minded people for just \$15.00 a month is as simple as one click on our webpage: <http://www.firelookout.org/learn-more--join.html>

Book Section: The FFLA web page has a nice lookout store with tons of books specific to fire towers. It includes several New York titles. The first NY specific book you will see when you scroll down the page is *I Remember When: The Untold Story of Helen Ellett*, by Randy Kneer, one of our members. This is the story of a courageous woman who was the Observer on Dickinson Hill Fire Tower. As more men were called to war, Helen became one of the first women appointed to help with the labor shortage which was affecting the ability to staff towers. For other titles: <http://www.firelookout.org/lookout-store---books.html>.

Outreach: Don't forget to mark your calendars for Wednesday, May 17th when I will be presenting a slide show in Glens Falls at the Crandall Library for the GF-Saratoga ADK Chapter: The ADK Fire Tower Challenge from a Historical Perspective.

Centennial Celebrations: Each month in 2017 we are going to feature one of the fire towers that is turning 100 years old. We will also be featuring this same tower on our Facebook page for those who follow social media. This month we will feature **Bald (Rondaxe)**.

Bald Mountain may be one of the most visited fire tower summits in the Adirondacks. It is not a modern idea to view the Fulton Chain from there. As early as 1870, Verplank Colvin used the summit as a place to conduct some of his survey work. The first fire tower to be constructed there was a 20 foot wooden platform in 1912. The name was also changed by NYS at that time to Rondaxe, a corruption of

Adirondacks to avoid confusion with Bald Mountain in nearby Lewis County. It never totally replaced the more popular name, Bald. The wooden tower was replaced by the current 35 foot steel Aeromotor LS 40 tower in 1917. A popular location with visitors numbering in the thousands even in those early years, Bald became a great place for public relations and story telling along with fire spotting.



Bald had thirty different Observers serve on the tower over the years. Three of them were female Observers; Florence Mykel, Harriet Rega, and Mary Moore. Another had his family with him; Bob and Jennie Evans sometimes startled visitors who realized a family was living there in the small cabin with an infant.

While its popularity as a destination never wavered, its use in spotting fires ended in 1990 when it was officially closed. Left to the elements, it deteriorated and became the concern of many. In 2002, members of the ADK Genesee Valley Chapter organized the Friends of Bald Mountain. Working with the Town of Webb, the NYSDEC, AARCH, and other tower enthusiasts, restoration plans began.

Volunteers and NYSDEC personnel scraped and painted, replaced all of the wooden steps, the cab floor, the safety wire, and the windows. The NYS Police helicoptered in materials. The concrete footings were repaired, the trail was cleaned up, and educational displays were installed. All funds were raised by the Friends of Bald Mountain. By 2004 the fire tower was reopened to visitors! An official dedication ceremony was held on June 18,



2005. You can follow the progress of their work on their website, complete with excellent photos at <http://www.masterpieces.com/bald.htm>.

A note on the webpage from 2016 is a good example to follow for all of us who have a similar concern: *While thousands of visitors respect this beautiful landmark just outside of Old Forge, New York, a handful of thoughtless individuals intentionally continue to mark up the interior with graffiti. In order to do this, these individuals purposely carry up cans of spray paint, markers or sharp objects to deface what most of us feel is a sacred place. It is heartbreaking to those of us who volunteer our time and YOUR donations to keep this tower looking good for all the wonderful folks who do love this fire tower. Violators can be prosecuted for defacing State property. If you see something, say something to these thoughtless people or take a photo of the violators and send it to us and we will forward them to our DEC District Office.*

Thank you to the Friends of Bald Mountain for your dedication to the fire tower since 2002. You have been a leader among the fire tower restoration groups and have set a shining example for others to follow. You deal with perhaps the largest number of visitors to any fire tower and yet manage to protect the historic structure itself and the natural resources that it once watched over. You have our gratitude for the exemplary manner in which you do both. *all photos shared from the Paul Hartmann collection and the Town of Webb.

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