

HISTORIAN'S CORNER

Summer 2010

By: **Bob Spear**

"Saving the past for the future"

The January 2001 "National Meeting", as it was now being referred to, took place in Helena, Arkansas, hosted by Director and Historian Michael "Smoke" Pfeiffer. Among other ideas discussed was a written motion submitted for a "Restoration Program" to be developed so our association could start doing more than putting out our newsletter and brochures. In the months that followed, the kinks of it were worked out and the FFLA fund for helping to "jump start" lookout restorations was underway. Temperatures hovering at only about 10 degrees above zero didn't prevent an intrepid group of fire tower enthusiasts from covering a lot of ground in Arkansas, Mississippi, Tennessee and Louisiana.

In June 2001, the Western Conference took place in beautiful Flagstaff, Arizona. Dave and Judy Lorenz hosted the event at the Town Hall. Equipment displays were outside in the parking lot. The weather was windy and dry and fires were popping up all over the Coconino National Forest. Flagstaff has some 5,000 acres of forest within its own city limits and seven hundred year old Douglas firs abound. Elden Lookout (left) high up on the bluff overlooking the city was one of many lookouts visited. Up top, the cables of the CL-100 tower were "singing" in a steady forty-six mile an hour wind. Staffer Gary McElfresh welcomed the group and expounded on the many military aircraft crashes that are found on nearby Mount Kendrick, snow capped at 12,500-foot elevation in the San Francisco Peaks. The conference was memorable, with side trips to Bill Williams Lookout and the Grand Canyon. Highlights included stopping at Gary's hot dog stand on historic Route 66 and a return trip through the Tonto National Forest to Phoenix. It was at Flagstaff that Keith Argow and Ray Kresek discussed the possibility of once again producing an Osborne-type firefinder for restored lookouts.

In August, a small group gathered at the Lance Perry estate in Canton, Connecticut. No business was discussed, but it sufficed for our Eastern Conference this year. It was organized by Henry Isenberg who with our host, Mr. Perry, provided a great old house to "board up in" for the event and a visit to Lance's own "western-style" fire lookout he had built on a nearby elevation on his property called Mount Rusham. Complete with hand crank Anderson windows and highly varnished interior, it only lacked a fire finder. We spotted a smoke column to the west in the hills. Most don't realize that Connecticut still has a sizable Forestry Department and a system of fire wardens, and once had a number of fire towers. The others took a drive to Hartford's Traveler's Insurance building that once was used to spot fires, while Larry Paul and I enjoyed a hike through the Connecticut woods. Later the group drove to Beebe Hill Fire Tower in Austerlitz, New York, to check on progress there. Ray Grimes and I visited Ninham Fire Tower in Kent, New York, on our return home.

January 2002 was, for me, a nostalgic return to the Norfolk, Virginia area and Virginia Beach. It was my homeport when I was in the Navy many years before and nothing looked the same! What had been two-lane roads were now four-lane traffic-clogged highways. The USS Kennedy battle group was pulling into the Naval base at Norfolk and the air squadrons from the ship were screaming over Virginia Beach to land at Oceana Naval Air Station. It brought back many memories. Our meeting, organized by Henry and Mark, took place in a large hotel on Atlantic Avenue with our accommodations there also; because of the time of year, everything was at cheaper winter rates. One of the main topics was a "Challenge Cost-Share" presentation. Kris Komar, John Henshaw and Kathy Ball gave the particulars of the discussion. A late evening business session finally concluded at 9 p.m. and outside, a gale wind and driving rain made us run across the street to a waiting restaurant. The weather cleared the next day and we visited a number of fire towers in Virginia and nearby North Carolina's Piedmont region.

The 35th meeting of the Association was held at Fox Forest State Park in Henneker, New Hampshire, hosted by Chris Hartz and Iris Baird of the Chapter. The first order of business was a silent observance, a "Last Alarm" for Dave Hilton, Maine director and author of an extensive book on Maine fire towers. The new "Article of Purpose" discussed at Virginia Beach was re-read by Keith Argow; the old article was universally agreed to be the best choice, so the motion was dropped. There were questions about rentals of lookouts and a Maine update about Harris Mountain Lookout possibly being removed to Pennsylvania where it originally came from. Considering the extremes of our other business sessions, we concluded this one at 12:45 p.m., which was a welcome reprieve for everyone!

The 36th conference was held at Winthrop, Washington, in the late summer and my trek across the country by Greyhound bus was a memorable adventure. I had arrived at the bus depot in Spokane at 12:35 a.m. and Ray Kresek was there to meet me. We journeyed another two hundred miles to Winthrop in the next couple days in Ray's venerable Chevy pickup with Rita and Ray's USFS guard dawg in the camper. One hundred ten people attended and while there, we all got the depressing news that South Mount Hawkins lookout was lost in the Curve Fire in southern California. Ray Grimes Jr. and I made a three day whirlwind tour through the state to the Olympic Peninsula, staying a night at Port Angeles, then going on to Ruby Beach on the Pacific shore, Mount St. Helens, Mt Rainier, and returning to Spokane. I visited in Minnesota on my return and Dave Quam and I hunted down old fire tower sites in Paul Bunyan's woods there. The 37th FFLA meeting would take place at Moorehead, Kentucky in January 2003.

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