

# HISTORIAN'S CORNER

Winter 2008  
By: Bob Spear

## **Spokane, Washington, June 1993 “The first Western Conference”**

1993 was a dynamic year for the Forest Fire Lookout Association. We fielded not just our usual meetings but celebrated the very first “Western Regional Conference”. This was held at Ray Kresek’s home on Westview Drive in Spokane, Washington at the Fire Lookout Museum.

From the East, Steve Cummings, Bob Wolff and Bill Wilmouth attended. For our Western members, this was basically an introduction to the FFLA. What folks in the Eastern part of the country had been up to since the first meeting at Hopewell fire tower, was now open to new ideas from ALL of us in the Association. And to our membership in the Eastern US, it was an introduction to our counterparts in the Western region. After Spokane it was “We”, not just “Them” in the east or the west. Surprisingly, we all found common ground and realized we had the same interests in lookouts, fears of losing those that remained, and a steadfast desire to find out as much about fire towers and fire lookouts as we could no matter where they were located. There is a great deal of thanks to go to Ray Kresek for bringing this together at his home in Spokane and most could not argue that there was not a better place to have it happen.

A “Summary of Purposes and Status” was an early topic, discovering just WHAT the FFLA was and what were the goals. This soon became apparent when a bunch of lookout people got together and the air was “electric” with that energy. State reports and conditions and certain lookouts was discussed. Lookout preservation and restoration was discussed. The “Adaptive Use Project” instituted by Oregon Director Ron Johnson was explained. The National Historic Lookout Register was reported on and the 50th anniversary of Smokey Bear celebrated. A 1994 Conference site was announced for the next western meeting, followed by a “round-table” of suggestions and ideas.

The afternoon was ablaze with the smells of a barbecue, orchestrated by chef Kresek and family. Mount Spokane lookout was dedicated into the NHLR and a lookout touring trip planned for the next day to Idaho’s Priest Lake region where Indian Mountain Lookout was visited and another group photo was taken at South Baldy Lookout. We welcomed new folks from Canada and had regular correspondence with John Evans in Southwestern Australia, and were hearing from lookout people and forest fire agencies from as distant places as Ireland, China, and Ceylon. There was talk of putting fire towers on the NHLR that were being built in the Amazon region of Brazil! I’m sure Steve Cummings must have just been awe-struck that, that first little group of seven, that gathered at his maintenance garage at Hopewell fire tower in Pennsylvania in 1990 would have evolved into what was on the table here in Spokane.

.....to be continued.....

**Bob Spear, National Historian**