

HISTORIAN'S CORNER

Autumn 2010

By: Bob Spear

"Saving the past for the future"

The January 2003 board meeting took place in Morehead, Kentucky, hosted by the Route 377 Volunteer Fire Department. Clear cold temperatures of 5 degrees didn't hamper the spirits of the forty-one attendees. The deed to the Hickory Flats Fire Tower was given to the Department. The Summer Eastern Conference was held in the Adirondacks at Newcomb, New York, hikes to nearby standing fire towers were accomplished by those that attended.

The Western Conference that year was held at the High Desert Museum in Bend, Oregon. Oregon Director Howard Verschoor hosted the conference and remembrances for Ron Johnson and Doug Newman were held. Odell Butte was one of several lookouts that were visited.

In January 2004, Pennsylvania's Penn State campus at Mont Alto was again the scene of the Winter National Conference. Blizzard conditions made for a small turn out, but needed work was transacted. Cold temperatures also put a damper on trips to fire towers. On Sunday, the weather cleared a bit and a trip to Clear Spring, Maryland was accomplished to visit the site of the intended eastern summer meeting. The 110' ex-Brandywine lookout tower there was shrouded in misty rain clouds.

That summer, the FFLA returned to Clear Spring for its Eastern Conference, attended by the Maryland State Forester and others. Side trips were taken to the Town Hill Fire Tower and into northern West Virginia to explore lookout sites there, where this writer's father had visited in 1926. Truckee, California, near Lake Tahoe, was the site of the Western Conference in October; the 42nd meeting of the Association. Sunsets were enjoyed from Martis Peak and Calpine lookouts.

The January 2005 National Board Meeting was held at Roanoke, Virginia at the National Forest headquarters building with Glen Stapleton hosting. We toured into West Virginia to Hanging Rock Lookout and the backcountry of that region. The next couple of days saw visits to Grassy Hill, Deerhead and other fire towers.

The 2005 Eastern Conference was arranged by Henry Isenberg at West Greenwich Volunteer Fire Department in the northern part of Rhode Island, an area that surprised many of us for the brushy terrain and high fire danger landscapes where some tall fire towers are still used. We visited several unique standing towers in the state and had a great "steak-fry" hosted by the fire department. Later the NHLR certificate was presented for the Nooseneck Fire Tower, that stands out behind the engine house. This 50-foot tower

originally had been the Wicaboxett Hill Fire Tower, several miles south. Accompanied by Ray Bombino of New York and Ronda Ward of New Jersey, I made the one-day trip.

McCall, Idaho was the site of the September 2005 Western Conference, held at a Boy Scout camp north of the main part of town near Payette Lake. A large assembly of folks from all over our Western States arrived. Some of the lookouts visited were Brundage Mountain, No Business, Smith Knob (removed now), War Eagle, and Carey Dome. Later, travelling back to Priest Lake with Gary Weber, we visited Salmo Mountain Lookout in the Colville National Forest, and Hughes Ridge, Gisborne, Indian Mountain and Sundance lookouts at Priest Lake. The stay in Idaho was cut short as Gary's Forest Service incident management team was called up for duty in the Hurricane Katrina area so I boarded a bus back to northern Minnesota. Arriving there, Dave Quam and I explored nearly lost and forgotten standing fire towers in the Bemidji area and discovered a heretofore unknown tree lookout still intact with a large Osprey nest on it near Itasca State Park on Cuba Hill close to the headwaters of the Mississippi River.

The January 2006 national board meeting was held in Wilsonville, Oregon, where the annual FFLA budget was finalized and visits to the Magnus Tree Farm Lookout and the Tillamook Forest Center took place. In August of 2006, the Eastern Conference was held at the New Jersey Forest Fire Service Division A Headquarters in Andover, New Jersey. The State Firewarden and Division staff and the State Forester attended and tower visits were made to Budd Lake, Ramapo, where an active fire was being worked, and Bearfort. The day ended with a fire call at the Delaware Water Gap where Section 3 firefighters responded to what became the "Spider Mountain Fire". The Western Conference that year was held at Big Bear Discovery Center in California and the January 2007 board meeting was held at the Forest History Society in Durham, North Carolina. Seeley Lake, Montana was the location of the 2007 Western Conference, June 29 - July 1, organized by Gary Weber. October 5th through the 7th, an Eastern Conference was held in Fayetteville, Pennsylvania with a joint meeting of the FFLA and the PA Forest Fire Museum Association.

2008 saw the January board meeting back in Oregon, at the Tillamook Forest Center. The Western Conference was also held in Oregon, September 19-21st at the Douglas County Museum in Roseburg, hosted by Director Howard Verschoor. The group heard about the cameras being installed in the area and visited several lookouts, including Pickett Butte. There was no Eastern Conference that year.

The 2009 January annual board meeting was held on the warm west coast of Florida, in Bradenton, near Tampa. New Eastern Deputy Chairman Peter Barr hosted the Eastern Conference in Asheville, North Carolina in July. The

Western Conference in September took place at Snohomish, Washington on the west side of the Cascades. The January 2010 National Meeting was hosted by the San Diego-Riverside Chapter in Southern California at Ramona. The 2010 regional conferences were both held in June, the eastern in Moultonborough, New Hampshire and the western in Grangeville, Idaho.

This has been a quick final run through of the FFLA Conferences in this series of "Historian Corner" articles, not to slight the importance of any of them, but rather to complete the Chronology of the Association. A more detailed telling of these final meetings from 2003 to the present is underway and hopefully will be available in PDF format on CD in the future. Contact the Historian at lookout18@juno.com if interested.

"Thanks all and happy lookout searching!"

Bob Spear, Historian FFLA