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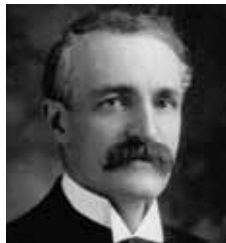
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# Restoration of the Stone Tower at Fort Mountain State Park



There was a time when fire towers served as the guardians of the forest. In the early twentieth century, lookouts stationed in the towers scanned the land below and had the critical role of reporting forest fires. The history of fire towers even predates the 1905 founding of the current United States Forest Service. Gifford Pinchot, the first Chief or Forester of the Forest Service, generally regarded as the "Father" of American Conservation, was extremely concerned about the adverse impacts of forest fires. Pinchot wrote in his 1905 publication *A Primer on Forestry*, "Of all the foes which attack the woodlands of North America, no other is so terrible as fire."

Pinchot's concern about forest fires was reinforced nationally with The Great Fire of 1910, also known as the Big Blowup, which burned 3,000,000 acres across Washington, Idaho, and Montana and resulted in 85 deaths. It is still arguably the largest forest fire in recorded history. The fire itself and the devastation it left behind is largely responsible for the fire rules, organizations, and policies that exist today. One of the rules as a result of the 1910 fire stated "all fires must be extinguished by 10 a.m. the following morning."



Gifford Pinchot

Soon thereafter early fire detection and suppression became a Forest Service priority and towers were built across the country. By 1911 permanent cabins and cupolas were being constructed on mountaintops. These building efforts were further aided during the 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). At one time over 8,000 fire lookouts stood in 49 states, many constructed by the CCC. Today fewer than 2,000 lookouts remain due to improved fire patrolling techniques driven by technology and the Forest Service's change of approach from "fire control" to "fire management," acknowledging that some fires are indeed healthy for an ecosystem. As a result, these silent sentinels of the mountains had become largely obsolete.

**The historic Fort Mountain State Park Fire Tower in Murray County in North Georgia is an outstanding example of the finely crafted fire towers built by the CCC.** Completed in 1935, it was used as a fire tower until the early 1960s when it was replaced by a modern steel tower built nearby. In 1971 the top of the tower was severely damaged by a fire and the stone foundation has stood as a ruin for over forty years.

Through the leadership of The Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and its Parks, Recreation, and Historic Sites Division, the project to restore the tower was initiated in 2013 and completed in the fall of 2015. The Georgia DNR Engineering and Construction Division served as the Project Manager. Freedman Engineering Group of Marietta, Georgia, was hired to prepare the construction documents for the \$225,000 restoration project. The design team included: Architect Barbara Kovacs Black of Atlanta; Structural Engineer Smith Associates of Gainesville; Landscape Architect Root Design Studio of Tucker; and Masonry Consultant IFACS of Atlanta. The General Contractor was Peachtree Construction Services of Decatur, and interpretive design and fabrication was provided by the State Parks Interpretive Unit and Deem Loureiro, Inc. The project restored the tower to its original appearance and now allows visitors to experience the architectural distinction and fire-fighting purposefulness of the tower.

## History Restored

The historically accurate restoration was facilitated by historic photographs that showed the upper level heavy timber structure that had since been destroyed. Historic photos allowed replication of the pyramidal wood shake roof with its gentle curve at the eave and decorative copper element at the peak. The proportion and configuration of the original casement windows and the wood panels were carefully replicated. Wood plank doors and casement windows were constructed to fit the original masonry openings. The exterior stair was reconstructed turning the corner of the stone foundation and providing an overhang above the entry door at grade. The grade level interior room retains its original stone floor and new windows





Historic Photo



Pre-restoration



Exterior Completion

were installed at the existing masonry openings. The new wood structure's dark stain matches the original appearance.

Original structural ties remained embedded in the stone at the top of the tower giving clues into how the original upper heavy timber structure was anchored. The new heavy timber design was configured in a similar manner while also being engineered to meet current codes.

Original ties and structural markings on the interior stone walls indicated the configuration of the original interior stair. The new stair is actually a structural steel stair that has been clad in wood to give the appearance of the original. The stair newel and picket design echoes other CCC fire towers constructed in the region at the same time. The original CCC construction drawings for the Wayah Bald Observation Tower in North Carolina were available and were used as a guide for the interior character of the Fort Mountain Tower as historic research revealed numerous photos of the interior upper level of fire towers in use.

The site was enhanced with a distinct and separate small circular stone plaza with low wall seating. Stone for the plaza was gathered from the mountain just like the stone for the tower was gathered in the 1930s. The new low wall stone cap is patterned slightly differently to assure that the new stone plaza area looks distinct from the stone on the historic tower.

In order to communicate the importance of the tower and its significant role in the history of Fort Mountain State Park, interpretive panels were developed to tell the story of the area's history and explain the details of the tower's restoration. Part of the

park's interpretation of the tower also includes the use of a donated Osborne Fire Finder and a lightning stool. The park plans to offer guided hikes to the tower and open vistas from which visitors to the top of the tower can see first-hand the view rangers saw when the tower was in use from the 1930s to the 1960s. Park interpreters will also discuss the important work of rangers, CCC workers, and the development of modern forest fire detection and fire-fighting techniques.



The **Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC)** was a public work relief program that operated from 1933 to 1942 in the United States for unemployed, unmarried men from relief families as part of the New Deal.

### Love Story

An interesting side note on the tower construction involves a love story featuring local CCC stone mason Arnold Bailey. Working on February 14th, Valentine's Day, Bailey was moved to do something special for his sweetheart. Above one of the windows he was working on, he placed a heart shaped stone to signify his love for her. The two were later married and had children. For many years before and after Mr. Bailey's death his wife and children would visit the tower to see the tribute of love set in stone.

Fully restored, the Fort Mountain Fire Tower again showcases the well-crafted architectural character of a Civilian Conservation Corps structure and contributes to the legacy of twentieth-century efforts to fight forest fires. The tower's reopening was celebrated with a dedication ceremony including DNR officials, the local community, and members of stone mason Arnold Bailey's family. Thanks to the conservation ethic of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, the Fort Mountain Tower one again stands as a great silent sentinel of the North Georgia Mountains. ■



## DIVERSIONS

### Father of Invention

In 1978, Gary Thuerk, marketing manager of the now defunct Digital Equipment Corporation, sent out a mass email to around 400 people on ARPANET - an early version of the internet. He was trying to get people interested in a new computer model, but, instead, he ticked people off. Today he is considered the Father of Spam.