



West Virginia's fire towers always took the high ground. This is Huff Knob, near Flat Top in Mercer County. Photographer and date unknown.

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# Fire Towers

## "Pop" Wriston Built the Big Ones

Compiled by Robert Beanblossom

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For more than 70 years, forest fire towers have played an important part in the control of ruinous wildfires in West Virginia. Now their role is fading. Aerial surveillance and modern communications have replaced fire towers as the forester's major detection tools. At one time more than 100 of these towers dotted the state's highest peaks; only 30 or so remain today.

But years ago, these towers were vital. Roads were poor and telephone service nonexistent in most rural areas. Fires could not be reported quickly and then hours and hours were spent in traveling

to reach them. A detection system of fire towers was started, and it soon became apparent to all concerned what a difficult and arduous task building the towers would be. For the most part, steel and other construction materials had to be skidded up steep hills by mules and horses. Snow storms, rattlesnakes and loneliness were among the hazards to be faced. Once a tower was completed, telephone lines and observers' quarters had to be built and local manpower recruited to fight the fires that were bound to occur.

The development of this fire tower sys-

tem in West Virginia was a direct result of the disastrous fires that swept the state following the cutting of virgin timber around the turn of the century. In the aftermath of cutting, fires raced unchecked in the heavy logging debris left behind. One report indicated that a fire which started one May was still going strong in July. The magnitude of destruction was staggering. In places, the very earth seemed to burn.

Stripped of the protective canopy of vegetation, mountain slopes were unable to absorb rainfall. As a consequence,





Forester Emory N. "Pop" Wriston was southern West Virginia's fire tower expert. His tower-climbing days were over by the time this photograph was made in 1956. Photographer unknown.

floods followed fires. Heavy spring rains resulted in a particularly devastating flood in the Monongahela River basin in March 1907. This flood, coupled with stirring conservation sentiment across the nation, moved Congress to act. The Weeks Act of 1911 provided federal funds for the first time to assist the states with fire protection. It also provided for the establishment of national forests in the East.

In 1909, the state Game, Fish and Forestry Commission had been created. The West Virginia Forest Fire Protective Association, a group of landowners, was

also organized, and fire control work began in earnest.

Later, in 1917, a man by the name of Emory Nelson Wriston joined this small band in their eager crusade to stop fire. "Pop," as he later affectionately came to be called, became one of the most popular men to wear the forestry uniform.

Wriston loved the forests, and had no patience with those who wantonly destroyed them. He was born at Kincaid, Fayette County, in 1882 and later moved to Scarbro, where he lived until his death in 1966. Before joining the Game, Fish and Forestry Commission, he studied

bookkeeping at Marshall College (now University) in Huntington for a time, then taught at a one-room school on Paint Creek or Cabin Creek in Kanawha County. For two weeks in his early years he had worked in a coal mine.

Not liking the pay or the confining work, Wriston quit teaching and took a dollar-a-day job on a sawmill. He apparently soon rebelled against the very idea of seeing timber chewed up by a noisy mill. He then sought employment with the fledgling state forestry organization.

Thus began a career that spanned the next 37 years. During this time, Wriston held a variety of positions: builder of fire towers, forest fire towerman, Civilian Conservation Corps foreman in eight camps, forest lecturer and fire fighter. In 1948, shortly before his retirement, "Pop" was asked to write his reminiscences about his early years with the forestry division and in particular the building of the state's first steel towers. What follows is his account, slightly edited for publication.

In 1916 the Southern West Virginia Forest Fire Protective Association was formed. The companies that made up the Association owned approximately 338,000 acres of land.\* The association was formed to cooperate with the U. S. Forest Service and the state, under the authority of the Weeks Act of 1911 which made possible a cooperative forest fire control effort. The Weeks Act provided up to \$10,000 per year in federal matching funds to state fire protection agencies. This money could then be used to match fire control expenditures paid out by local landowners. In those days, fire wardens were paid 35 cents per hour, labor 30 cents, and no provision was made for subsistence or transportation.

The first fire towers in the state were erected in 1916. They were a truncated, pyramid model, a two-story "Jenny Lynn" 10 feet square at the base, seven feet square on the top plate, with a hip roof. The first floor was a living quarters for the observer and the second floor served as an observation room. Ivy Knob tower in Raleigh County went up first. The

\*The Rowland Land Company, Binford Land Company, Paint Creek Coal and Land Company, Pocahontas Land Corporation, and Solvay Collieries were among the first members of the association. - ed.

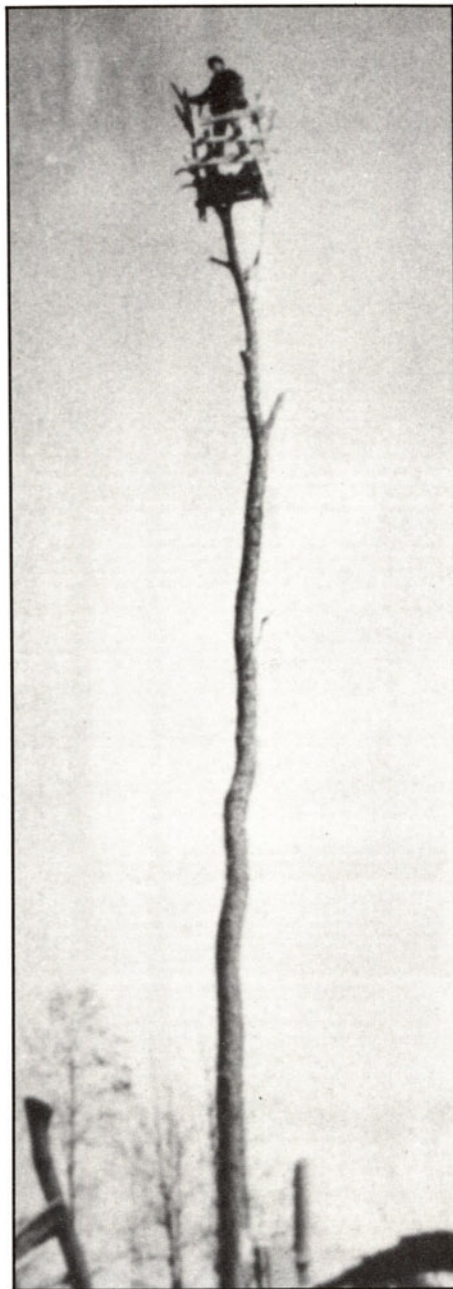


The Elk Knob tree tower took only a day's work and replaced a 30-mile foot patrol. George L. Jarrell, shown here, was one of those who helped Wriston build it in 1920. Photographer unknown.

lumber used in its construction was snaked up Martin's Fork by the "Marrying Rock," then through the divide to the knob by the contractor, S. V. Coon, who later became the first observer. (A turn key job for \$75.) The Lick Knob fire tower went up this same year, with Winfrede Ferrell snaking the lumber up from the Raleigh County side of the mountain. John T. Hundley contracted the erection job. Luther Proffitt was the first observer. A metallic circuit telephone line connected the tower with Solvay Collieries' mine phone at the head house on Jake Ridge.

Ivy Knob's first telephone was a grounded circuit tree line erected on Guyandotte Mountain to Pond Knob, then along Cherry Pond Mountain to "Mountain Perry" Jarrell's residence, then down Spring Branch to Clifford Hunter's house at Munition. Later, it was extended to Pine Knob and then on to John L. Jarrell's residence on Dry Creek. The telephone service in the Ivy Knob unit, with the help of local citizens who contributed their labor and of the association which contributed the wire, eventually was extended to Spring Mountain fire tower in Boone County, to Burning Rock tower in Wyoming County and to Blair Mountain in Logan County. Over 125 miles of wire was used in the system. A six-circuit, knife switching station was operated by Mrs. Ernest Wells, who received \$30 a month for her services during the fire season months.

Back in 1916, to support the only two towers south of the Kanawha River, patrol routes were also established. L. B. Massey of Green Castle patrolled the divide between Armstrong Creek and Paint Creek; Bob Burdette, also of Green Castle, patrolled the ridge separating Paint Creek and Cabin Creek; Cherry Pond Mountain was patrolled by John L. Jarrell of Dry Creek. Jarrell was the only patrolman who rode horseback over his patrol route. The Squealer Knob patrol was covered by George L. Jarrell and it had the best rating since George hired extra labor at his own expense to make it so. It was



also the longest, at 30 miles. Each patrolman always carried a brush hook or axe and improved the trail as he went. Supervision of these patrolmen was handled by regional inspectors of the U. S. Forest Service and by the association's field manager.

On November 4, 1917, I was employed by Walter R. Cook, Chief Deputy Warden, from Rockview, West Virginia, acting for J. A. Viquesney, Chief Warden for the West Virginia Game, Fish and Forestry Commission. My duties were to report and have suppressed all forest fires occurring within a 16-mile radius of Lick Knob fire tower. I received \$3

per work day and was only paid for Sundays when it was necessary to be fighting fires. On November 6th, I was commissioned a warden so as to have authority in the exercise of my duties.

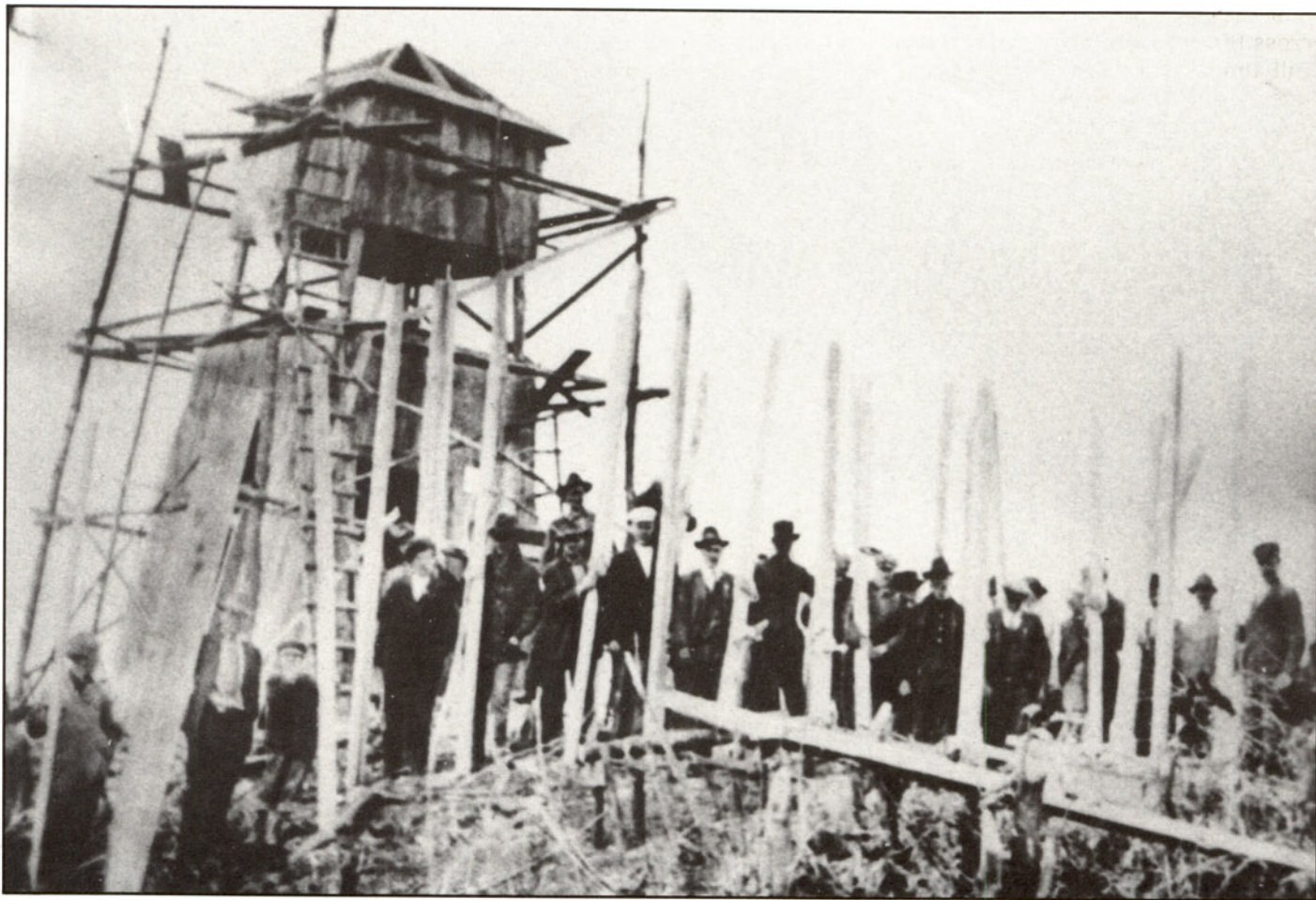
On my first day at Lick Knob, I left the tower early in the evening and met the late Austin Carey, regional inspector for the U. S. Forest Service, who was to coach me in my new assignment. He spent the next two days helping me. Together with F. H. Morton, superintendent of Solvay Collieries, we traveled the area of rugged hills that I was now responsible for.

My first real brainstorm was to dismantle Lick Knob fire tower and to rebuild it with contributions from several cooperators — \$10 from J. W. Lambert of the New River Company, and another \$10 from A. A. Gallagher of the Milburn By-Products Coal Company. This gave us money for new windows and roofing. Solvay Collieries had lumber sawed and stored to dry for us and the coal company at Krebs supplied the ceiling for the inside of the tower. While waiting for the lumber to season, I covered the unit's 140,000 acres on foot, recruiting and organizing local fire wardens. This was the "good old days" when you either walked or rode a mule.

In March 1918, C. W. Bradon of Philippi succeeded J. A. Viquesney as Chief Warden, and appointed L. H. Rogers of Charleston as his special deputy and inspector. It was this same year that I dismantled the tower at Lick Knob, which was only two years old, and moved into temporary quarters, a wigwam built entirely of chestnut poles and weather-boarded with the composition roofing taken from the old tower. This was to house my equipment and be my living quarters for the next two years. But I was sure we could build a better tower.

Four fire seasons elapsed before the new tower at Lick was completed, and even then it could not have been completed had it not been for the local citizens coming to my rescue by helping carry material to the top of the mountain. One Sunday morning 54 people assembled and each one carried a plank up the mountain to the tower site. This was





Ingenuity was called for in rebuilding Fayette County's Lick Knob tower in 1920. Local residents, recruited by Wriston, each carried a plank to the remote site. Photographer unknown.

an especially strenuous task for the Kingston school teachers, who were not used to such hard work but joined the procession up the mountain anyway. There were some sore ankles in Kingston the next day but no one complained as they were all happy to assist with this worthy endeavor. For lunch that day we barbecued \$26.80 worth of round steak over a bed of hot coals prepared in advance of the event.

In 1920, the late A. B. Brooks, then head of the Game, Fish and Forestry Commission, began to assign me to inspection and supervisory duties down Johnson Knob way and over in the Ivy Knob unit. The sportsman's rebellion over having to pay a dollar for a hunting and fishing license was dying and we began to accumulate some revenue for conservation work.

About that time a 59-foot locust pole tower was built at Johnson Knob. Eight locust trees were used in the Johnson Knob tower — four set square on the inside and the other

four forming a larger square around them. A 10 X 10 observation room sat on top of the eight poles that one entered through a trap door in the floor. These tall locust trees were nearby and available at no cost except for their cutting. The Paint Creek Coal Company supplied us with plenty of mules and a good driver, Pat Alexander, to haul them to the tower site for us. They also supplied the lumber for the observation room.

Telephone service was by means of a connection to the Paint Creek Coal Company's line at Whittaker and then on to their PBX board at Gallagher, which gave the tower a connection with the commercial lines at East Bank. In 1928, J. J. Goulden, the new district forester, and I salvaged this tower and erected a 90-foot International Derrick steel tower on the same site. John Hammond and Pat W. Kirk assisted us.

Somewhere around 1920, with George L. Jarrell, the Squealer Knob patrolman, and Mr. Coffey, the su-

perintendent of the C&O mines at Eunice, assisting me, we gave the state the Elk Knob tree tower in one day. Using drift bolts for the pole steps and axe-made lumber for the "crow's nest," this simple tower was an improvement over the 30-mile Squealer Knob patrol.

In another day's work, we strung a grounded circuit telephone line from a box at the base of the tree to Eunice. Our next improvement was to extend this line to connect it with the river circuit.

Later on, during the heyday of the Civilian Conservation Corps program, a 50-foot steel tower replaced this tree tower. Then because of a mine break\* during the time D. B. Griffin was State Forester, this steel tower was moved south to a knob overlooking the main haul\* above the Eunice mine; and in 1946 again moved to a new location on Bacon

\*A shift in the earth due to the collapse of an underground mine. - ed.



Knob, a 500 foot higher elevation across the river. In the fall of '46, we built almost two miles of road to that tower, using nothing but hand tools.

Around 1922, Phillip M. Browning of New York was employed as the Chief Forest Warden and equipped with the state's first car, a T-model Ford roadster. Division headquarters was established at Buckhannon, only to be lost to the State Capitol in Charleston in 1927, the fourth location of the Division of Forestry headquarters.

It was also around this time the Commission acquired Watoga State Forest (now Watoga State Park), which was a fitting memorial to our late A.B. Brooks. I was assigned as the district ranger in charge of fire control work in the Kanawha District. The four counties that comprised the district were Kanawha, Fayette, Raleigh and Boone. Owen O. Nutter, with headquarters in Buckhannon, was in charge of fire control in Greenbrier County and all counties north of it west of the Alleghenies. That was when Arthur Wood and his helper east of the Alleghenies wondered who the other two rangers were west of the mountains in West Virginia. Mainly to protect lands owned by the Pocahontas Land Corporation, the Pocahontas District was established at Bluefield with J. W. Karr assigned as the district ranger.

In 1922 the Game, Fish and Forestry Commission purchased six steel fire towers from the Blaw Knox Steel Company in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania — two 30-foot and four 45-foot towers. The first steel tower in the state was erected on Backbone Mountain in Tucker County during the winter of 1922-23. This job was assigned to me and I remember spending the Christmas holiday alone with my camera in a "Jenny Lynn" cabin sheltered between two massive sandstone rocks atop Backbone Mountain. The next steel tower to be built went up in March 1923 on Bald Knob in Pocahontas County. It was a 45-foot tower. From atop it, a person is higher in elevation than at Spruce Knob, the state's highest point. Owen Nutter helped me erect that one and neither of us will ever forget the terrible snow blizzard that trapped us on that mountain a month

in order to get a week's worth of work done.

On both the Backbone and Bald Knob jobs, I checked both my tools and my blankets in on the train as baggage. Railroads and log trains were our only means of transportation. On the Backbone job, the train took me as far as the logging town of Hambleton on the Dry Fork River and from there I walked on to the tower site atop Backbone Mountain. At Bald Knob, my ticket called for Cass. From Cass, I caught a log train to the town of Spruce and then walked on to Bald Knob.

In addition to Nutter, we had a lumber camp cook by the name of Greathouse who helped us with the Bald Knob tower. We repaired the strung telephone line as we went in,

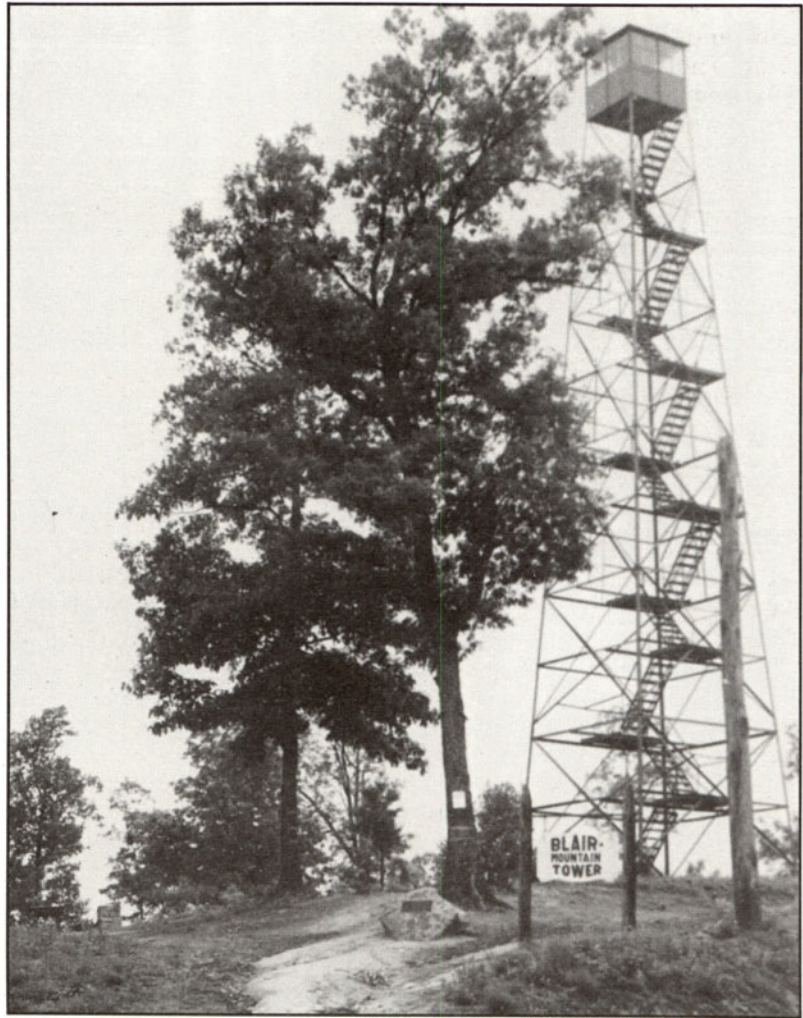
so we had a telephone connection to the log camp at Spruce while we were snow bound. The spring which we were to use was under a 15-foot snow drift, so we melted snow to get water. The West Virginia Pulp and Paper Company officials were most cooperative and, a couple of times during the blizzard, sent a big Swede with a horse to haul in wood and drag a log up and back over the trail to open it up in the event we needed to use it. Someday, I hope to find the copy of the poem that Owen and I wrote on Bald Knob. It included Owen's comment, "the bed it had a center slant, while one of us sleeps, the other one can't." We put a red spruce pole lengthwise under the springs to remedy this impossible pose.

With the 1923 spring fire season

Wriston's real love was steel towers, and he put up the state's first at Backbone Mountain in Tucker County. He spent Christmas 1922 alone on this job, in a "cabin sheltered between two massive sandstone rocks." The 30-foot tower was manufactured by the Blaw Knox Steel Company.







Left: Supplies came to tower sites the hard way, as these unidentified workers demonstrate at Spring Mountain on the Boone-Logan line. The prefabricated observer's cabin in the background is of the sort denounced by Mr. Wriston as "not livable in winter or summer." Photographer and date unknown.

Above: The 63-foot Blair Mountain tower went up in 1926. The site was near a machine gun nest used during the Battle of Blair Mountain, five years before. Photographer and date unknown.

behind us and with the Gauley Mountain Coal Company at Ansted joining the association, we erected one of the 45-foot Blaw Knox towers on Gauley Mountain in Fayette County. Mr. George Spencer, who was hired to help build it, remained on to become the first observer. Before the fall fire season was upon us, we built another tower on Stop Knob near Powellton and J. H. Andrews of Elk Ridge was hired as the first observer there. Andrews was soon employed by the Game Division and it has been said of him that he had all of the game violators in his area so afraid that they would not even as much as oil their shotguns out of season. The Stop Knob tower was later

smoked out by the Alloy plant and was moved to Peters Mountain in Monroe County in the fall of 1946.

It was also in 1923 that I first met Lloyd H. Ellison of Kayford, who was to become my right-hand man on all future tower erection and phone line construction jobs.

J. W. Karr, the Pocahontas District Forester down in Bluefield, had one of those 45-foot Blaw Knox towers to erect on Shawnee Mountain in McDowell County. So Lloyd and I got train tickets to Northfork, still checking our tools in as baggage, and, with J. W.'s help, soon had Shawnee tower bolted together. About the time we were at Shawnee Mountain, Owen Nutter and Brown Miller were erect-

ing the sixth and last of the Blaw Knox towers on Michael Mountain in Pocahontas County. It was destined to be later dismantled when CCC boys from Camp Seneca built a more modern 50-foot McClintic Marshall tower on Thorny Mountain in the middle of Seneca State Forest.

In 1924, the Commission purchased a number of additional fire towers. The Kanawha District got two of these — one was assigned to Ivy Knob and the other one to Williams Hill. The Ivy Knob tower was delivered to Munion by rail and from there Perry Jarrell contracted for its delivery on to Ivy Knob. First, he moved it by sled two miles to his place at Jarrell Fields. From there, it



was a six-mile sled trip via Indian Gap and Pond Mountain to Ivy Knob. The half soles of his sled lasted only one trip. The first work at Ivy was the erection of a 10 X 12 observer's cabin to house the crew. Next, we built a sand pit and screen frame and put two of Perry's boys to sledging rock and screening sand for the concrete piers. It required seven yards of concrete to anchor a steel tower. We had to sled water from a spring on Crane Branch in a flour barrel. With the foundations in at both Ivy and Williams Hill, we were ready to assemble the two steel towers.

So with the observer's cabin ready to move in at Ivy Knob, Lloyd Ellison brought along his wife Ethel to cook for the crew while the steel for the tower was being assembled. The crew consisted of Lloyd, "Mountain Perry" Jarrell, and Sil Coon and myself. Ivy Knob went up one week and Williams Hill the next.

In 1925 the village of Hernshaw joined our force under the leadership of Pat Kirk, Lawn Prince and Jessie Hughie. With this extra help, fire protection in Kanawha County began to be county-wide instead of being confined mostly to the Cabin Creek area.

The Commission purchased two additional 60-foot, Type LS-40 Aermotors. It was decided that one of these would be assigned to Bee Mountain in Kanawha County and the other to Spring Mountain on the Boone-Logan County line near the extreme head of Buffalo Creek. About that time, Ritter Lumber Company was operating band mills at Barrett and at Rock Lick. I went down to meet their forest engineer, H. W. Shawhan, because we needed help in laying out a road to Spring Mountain. I also got acquainted with the late J. W. Bradley of Madison, who was the representative for the Mellon holdings on Pond Fork. He in turn introduced me to men like "Big Frank" Perry, Berlin Price and his brother Hobert — strong mountain men who could take punishment and like it. Hobert Price could throw a half-mile coil of iron 'phone wire around his neck and pay it off single-handed faster than the lineman could handle it. C. H. Workman also joined our force then and there.

Steel for the Bee Mountain fire tow-

er was delivered to the knob late in the fall of 1925 and we poured the concrete piers in a blinding snow storm with a huge bonfire built between the forms to prevent the concrete from freezing while it was being mixed and placed. When we finished, a foot of snow covered the ground, and we buried the freshly poured piers in snow to keep the concrete from freezing. With our "Hernshaw crew" doing the labor, Bee Mountain went up early in 1926. Jesse Hughey became the first observer — a most efficient one, at that. He was also as good a camp cook as he was an observer.

The Spring Mountain fire tower went up in the summer of 1926. Big Frank Perry, who had earlier joined our crew, became the first observer. Spring Mountain is the site where a wind and rain storm blew our lean-to away in the middle of the night, leaving us exposed to the elements. It is also where Frank went to bed one night when we were all sleeping on the ground. Frank could not get in a comfortable position so he got a mattock and started to grub out an "ivy stool;" when he finished, we all could get some rest. I well remember the outside position that I had on the ground, facing the rattlesnakes that might decide to visit our camp.

It was then on to Blair Mountain, also in Logan County. Just a few years before this, the notorious mine war, the so-called "Battle of Blair Mountain," took place. I was told by local residents of the area who visited our camp that a machine gun post had occupied the site we had selected for the tower. The Game, Fish and Forestry Commission was purchasing still-higher towers. This time it was a 73-foot Aermotor, built like the others with metal cabs and wood sash.

Thirty-two thousand acres were brought under protection when the Boone County Coal Corporation joined the association. With the help of Col. Willey, their manager at Sharples, and Bruce Mullens, their agent at Sovereign, fire protection began in earnest in Logan County. Here, Walter Smith from up at the mouth of White Oak and Uncle Joe Mullens from up in Adkins Fork joined our force. Uncle Joe reported to work with his rattlesnake-killing

bulldog that later killed four snakes in our camp site. That dog had been bitten so much that he was immune to their poison.

Along with these new steel towers, we also built 16 X 16 steel cabins for the observers' living quarters at Bee, Spring Mountain and Blair Mountain towers. I have stayed in these portable steel cabins when it was so hot that you had to cook the noon meal outside. In the winter the warm upper air would form a dew that would freeze into a shield of ice on the walls. Long since have these cabins been salvaged, as they were not livable in winter or summer.

The Bee Mountain telephone line was easy. We set one mile of poles which the Libby Owens Gas Company provided; C&P installed the wire. Spring Mountain was rougher going, with service to the tower requiring a total of 23 miles of wire extending from the mouth of Lacy Fork down Pond Fork to Rothwell School, to the tower then along the county line to the head of Denison Branch for a telephone for Elbert Bailey, one of our local fire wardens. Then it went down Denison Branch and Spruce Laurel Fork to the mouth of Jerrys Fork where Earl Ferrell, another local warden, lived.

The Blair Mountain line ran out to the head of Beech Fork, then six miles down to Sharples to connect up with the Boone County Coal Corporation's switchboard.

Also during the year 1926, the Commission purchased a Model-T touring car for the Kanawha District which was soon nicknamed the "Green Frog." A trip in it from Madison to Levy Harvey's place at the foot of Lacy Fork on the head of Pond Fork resulted in the car getting washed. There was at the time no highway bridge at Madison, and Col. Willey pretty well summed it up when he said that "the roads were in the creek during the summer and the creek was in the roads during the winter."

Cooperation in fire control matters was not lacking. W. M. Ritter Lumber Company gave \$160 worth of lumber for the Spring Mountain and Blair Mountain towers. Westmoreland Coal Company donated the telephone wire. Boone County Coal Corporation, Kingston-Pocahontas Coal





The ground breaking for Plum Orchard Lake near his Fayette County home brought "Pop" Wriston (right) out of retirement in 1960. Here he stands with former Lick Knob tower observer Isaac Ellison (left) and Conservation Commission Director Warden Lane. Photographer unknown.

Company, and the Pond Fork Timber Landowners Association bought the telephone poles. Rangers were assigned three days' work before the beginning of fire seasons to post 720 posters and distribute 1,000 copies of the *Forest Primer*, supplied without cost by the American Tree Association, to the public schools.

In 1927 the fire control unit in Buckhannon was moved to Charleston and, if I remember right, O. O. Nutter's district headquarters was transferred from there to White Sulphur Springs. Mt. Desert fire tower in Kanawha County was also erected that year.

I was supplied with a 14 X 16 wall tent and I bought a Gold Medal cot to go along with it. The tent was first used on the Mt. Desert job. A bale of hay or straw spread on the ground in the back of the tent was the bed for the crew, who supplied their own

blankets. A tent fly outside was our dining room, and we began having our meals on a table. The crew consisted of Jessie Hughey, who was the cook, Pat Kirk, Lawn Price, Sil Coon, Preacher Polly and his son from down at Sovereign.

The Commission paid the grocery bill which usually ran around a hundred dollars a month for the seven of us. I always had my dutch oven with me and Jessie Hughey could bake a raisin cake in that oven fit for a king. Four of that crew were fairly good singers and the folks from out at Putney would come out to the camp during the evenings with a song book and we would all sing. With Mt. Desert tower and cabin complete, we started the telephone line to Mammoth for a connection to the East Bank exchange. When the line was erected to the foot of the mountain, we moved off to the creek and set up camp there until the line was done to

Mammoth and ready for the coming fall fire season.

In September, we loaded our tools and equipment on the Model-T Ford truck and unloaded at the mouth of Coal Fork in the Williams Hill unit in Boone County and built a grounded circuit telephone system on poles from Van to Williams Hill tower and then down to Coal Fork. At the mouth of Coal Fork, we installed a telephone in a box we nailed to a sycamore tree and called it a "ranger station." This gave us 10 miles of telephone line with a ranger on both ends and one in the middle at Williams Hill.

The first frost that fall was on the 20th of September and well do I remember it because that was the night I threw that cot of mine as far as I could throw it because I was freezing to death. I had not learned yet to put paper under the mattress pad. Instead, I took my blankets and shared with the crew the hay bed on the ground in the back of the tent and found out that they had been having a better bed than I all along. Lawn Price took that cot home as it made an alright bed in the summer.

Continuing with the 1927 construction, we installed 11 miles of wire in the Ivy Knob unit, 10 miles in the Johnson Knob unit, extending the metallic circuit from Whittaker to Gallagher. The switchboard at Gallagher had connections onto the East Bank exchange. With the help of the Pocahontas District Ranger, Ivy Knob was connected to the Edwight to Glen Rogers circuit. This 33-mile circuit had a connection to our own switching station at Edwight, which was maintained in Charley Jarrell's store. From it, we also had line connections to Elk Knob, Burning Rock, Spring Mountain and Blair Mountain towers — a total of 125 miles of wire.

Sil Coon, who had helped erect Mt. Desert fire tower, was sent to the Pocahontas District to erect Lambert Knob fire tower and observer's cabin, which was an exact duplicate of the Mt. Desert installation. From there, he went on to Burning Rock to erect a special three-legged Aermotor designed to fit the rock it was built on. Both of these towers are located in Wyoming County.

During the fall fire season of 1927, hunters were responsible for 58.2%



of the total acreage burned and 72% of the suppression costs required to extinguish the blazes. That was when I recommended a \$2 license instead of a dollar, because the honest hunter didn't mind to pay it and the careless hunter ought to be made to pay it. It later went to the \$2 fee.

Also in 1927, Chief Browning had written the scenario for a motion picture entitled "The Careless Smoker" and supplied me with a 35mm DeVry motion picture camera and 1,300 feet of film. This project was a sideline as well as a hobby with me, and in connection with my regular duties, required one year to complete.

In 1928, J. J. Goulden, who was a graduate forester from the state of Pennsylvania, succeeded me as the district ranger of the Kanawha District. The district office, furnished gratis by the Kingston-Pocahontas Coal Company, was moved to Montgomery. Shortly after he hired on, Goulden, John Hammond, Pat Kirk, Wint Lilly and I erected a 60-foot Aermotor tower on Round Knob in Raleigh County. That was the last tower I helped erect until 1934.

The "Green Frog" was traded in at Capitol Motor Sales for a Model-A, three-quarter ton Ford panel body truck. I was boarding at the Ruffner Hotel in Charleston and with my carpenter tools over in the garage of Capitol Motor Sales, I installed a Kohler power plant, a folding bed, tool box, a refrigerator on the running board, and still had room left in the truck to carry a portable tent, two cots, two folding chairs, a two-burner gas cook stove and a gasoline heating stove. This was to become my home for the next four years. Next a trip to Washington with Chief Browning was in order, to choose visual education materials. We chose lantern slides and motion pictures suitable to the forestry education project that I was about to undertake. This conservation education project eventually covered 38 counties and I estimated that I had given over 1,569 talks to over 134,000 individuals during the course of this project.

There was a lull in the Division of Forestry during the Depression, the terrible 1930 drought and the 1932 floods. Setbacks were the order until March 4, 1933, when conservation in



The Blair Mountain tower stands as firmly today as in 1926, a monument to Wriston and the other fire tower pioneers. This picture was made during the snows of last January. Photo by Michael Keller.

this nation was to be advanced a generation in a decade because of the New Deal programs that were to come along in the Roosevelt Administration.

In 1938, Chief Browning resigned and was succeeded by H. S. Newins, who was not to be with us long enough, and he in turn was succeeded by J. W. K. Holliday when Vernon Johnson was chairman of the Conservation Commission. One event that I recall was the fact that one year the fire control section was appeased with an extra \$10,000 appropriation and Mr. Newins and I worked through the night spending

it for fire fighting tools, telephone line materials, telephones which cost \$50 — a princely sum then — and other equipment.

From June 19, 1933, until May 20, 1942, I also worked with the Civilian Conservation Corps. In 1934, I was sent to help erect the Rich Knob fire tower in Randolph County using labor from the CCC camp at Mill Creek. The next fire tower I helped erect after that was the 80-foot Model MC-39 Aermotor on Huff Knob near Flat Top in Mercer County — the highest point south of the Kanawha and New River drainage, at 3,566 feet above sea level. ✱