

1990's article adapted to New Jersey's forest fire lookouts

Above: Map table in the cab
100' up.

Above right: foundations of the earlier tower
Right: old dial telephone inside

Because of the design of the tower it is assumed it was a Blaw-Knox style and if so, perhaps is one of the few 100- 120 of that type remaining. No name plate was found on it. The "stairway within the tower" is thought to be added at a later date as the Story article's B&W picture shows a verticle ladder on the tower- a small section still remained on the upper level. Old Sentinel was a "private" fire tower and is doubtful if it every worked with any State fire towers; however exact history sometimes was never officially documented.

Old Sentinel Tower; Livingston NJ

This 100 ft Blaw-Knox style fire tower Was built by Forester Roper on the East Orange Watershed. The first fire tower Built here was in 1909, this was a smaller Tower of which 3 of the cement footings Still can be found beneath the larger one. The fourth footing was believed to have Been removed in order to erect this larger Steel tower at an unknown exact date. But probably in the 1920's. At the time Of this visit, the cab was still intact, an Inside or "tower within a tower" set of Heavy steel stairs was part of the structure The remains of the original vertical rung Ladder still was on the top outside level. Apparently this had at first been the way The tower was climbed, later, the inside Stairs were built. Inside the observation Cab which was open there was an old dial Type telephone, heavy electric cabling which Is thought to have operated a fire siren, and A small wood top table on the West wall of The cab. The view in the 1920's would have Been of the 2,000 acre East Orange watershed Lands, which were heavily forested, and Looked after by Mr. Roper and his staff as One of the earliest private Conservation Projects in Northern New Jersey. Mr. Roper Was educated in Forestry in France and Brought the principals he learned here to East Orange. A dwelling at the bottom of

The tower was the domicile of a Mr. Plant Who was the operator of the tower for the Watershed. At the time of our visit, his son Still lived in the house.

We learned that the highly motivated Mr. Roper also had organized a Watershed Fire Department complete with Brush truck, A 1927 Chevrolet pickup outfitted with fire Fighting gear and kept at the Watershed Garage.

It is unknown today if this tower still

Northfield Avenue in Orange, New Jersey.

The curious extended platform seen in the photo may have been utilized during World War 2's years for aircraft spotting according to the younger Mr. Plant.

This is the only known Blaw-Knox type fire tower erected in New Jersey and by far also one of the few one hundred foot Models ever constructed. This immense structure is so well hidden in the trees that it is impossible to see it until one drives in the short roadway from the main road between two brick columns. As you come out from under the hanging tree limbs, suddenly you Are confronted by the bulk of this imposing old lookout tower.

There had been talk of using it for paging system equipment at that time. We first learned of this tower by now Section firewarden, Kevin Drake who had spotted it from a fire truck one day coming back from a parade in East Orange. Bob Wolff and I later visited the site and I climbed the hundred foot tower to the cab and took photos. Later Mark Haughwout, Scott Ritter, Roy Schweiker and I visited on a tour of New Jersey fire towers.

See "*New Jersey's Forest Fire Lookouts*" for more information on Forester Roper and the Old Sentinel fire tower.

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In the 1920's, a good deal of what is now heavily built up and industrilized New Jersey still remained rural farming areas and there were assigned "District fire wardens" to them. It's ever bit possible that at some point perhaps the elder Mr. Plant also maintained a title as a State District firewarden and if so in that way, the tower at Old Sentinel could have been utiized by phone communications with more distant lookouts in the north areas of New Jersey.

Bob Spear, Historian FFLA

Stands as the area is heavily built up

An innovative counterweight tube which

But a few years ago, a grand colonnade of
Evergreen trees still lined this section of

helped to open the heavy trap door in the
cab aloft. Tower: 100' cab 7'X7'