

## History of Massachusetts' Fire Towers

The year is 1888, and for the last few years the southeastern area of Massachusetts had been having a bad problem with forest fires. A meeting of local municipal officials and experts in the forestry field was called to address the ongoing problem. It was decided that the best solution to the fire problem was a quicker response by firefighters and that could only be done if the fires were reported sooner. This was to be done by a new idea of having a person watching for fires from a high vantage point and then report on where the fires were. Since the local area was devoid of any high locations, it was decided that "fire lookout towers" needed to be built and that these towers should overlook each other in order to get as best a location of the fires as possible.

In the winter of 1888 and spring of 1889 two towers were to be built, one in the town of Duxbury and one in the town of Plymouth. It was a great success, and the states of Maine, New Hampshire, New York, Pennsylvania and the federal government all sent representatives to study this new concept.

In these early days of fire detection a conclusion was reached that Fire towers needed to be no more than 20 miles apart from each other and that each tower would be as a spoke on a wheel but also be it's own hub . This was so every part of the state would be seen by at least 2 towers if not more, making triangulation of the fires location much easier, thus increasing response time by firefighters to the fires and decreasing their size.

At the beginning of 1911 there were already 8 permanent state run fire watch lookout stations in operation. These first lookout stations were in, Plymouth atop Billington Hill, Princeton atop Mt. Wachusett, Shelburne atop Mt. Massamet, Milton atop Great Blue hill, Chelmsford atop Robbin hill, Westboro atop Fat Mtn., Holyoke atop Mt. Holyoke and in Adams

atop the highest point in Massachusetts, Mt. Greylock. Of course not all of these lookouts were towers, Princeton and Holyoke were in observation rooms atop mtn. hotels, Milton was at the weather observatory, and Adams was in a tower adjacent to a mountain hotel.

Over the next 3 years 22 new fire lookouts were established across Mass. All but one were built of Iron, the single remaining was built of wood. This brought the state total to 26 stations.

In 1914 the state foresters annual report stated, *Owing to the large number of people visiting our observation stations it has been found advisable, from an educational standpoint, to provide better means for reaching the observation rooms, so that they may be made accessible to women and elderly people. From reports received from our observers it is surprising to note that we have had nearly 3,000 people visit our towers this past season, representing nearly every state in the union and many foreign countries.*

In 1915 the adjacent states were approached by Massachusetts with a proposal to jointly fund the construction and operation of 4 lookout towers along their joint borders. The first station being built in the town of Williamstown, the 2nd being built in the town of Lenox, the 3rd built in the town of Mount Washington, MA. and the 4th was on Mt. Watatic in the town of Ashby.

By 1925 there had been 61 fire lookout towers built across Massachusetts. Of that number only 44 were in operation due to older lower sites being replaced by better ones and by the beginning of the 1930 fire season another 9 fire towers had been added to the states fire detection network, bring the total up to 53 operational stations.

# Red Knights Fire Tower Quest



Join in for the search for Fire Towers during your riding season journeys. No matter where you live and ride, you can search out fire towers earn a Red Knights Fire Tower Quest pin.

Out riding by yourself? Riding a few buddies or with the group? See a fire tower? Stop and get a picture with you and/or your bike with the fire tower and document the when and where on the official Quest application and you can be one of the Red Knights to receive this pin.

To receive a pin you must visit and document six fire towers.



Sponsored by Massachusetts Chapter 2  
of the RKMC

Massachusetts Fire Towers:

- Acushnet - Mendall Hill
- Agawam - Provin Mountain
- Andover - Holt Hill
- Barnstable - Clay Hill
- Bourne - Signal Hill
- Brewster - Deer Park Hill
- Brimfield - Steerage Rock
- Carver - Bare Hill
- Charlton - Little Mugget Hill
- Chelmsford - Robbin Hill
- Chester - Holcomb Hill
- Dennis - Signal Hill
- Dover - Snow Hill
- Fall River - Copicut Hill
- Falmouth - Howlands Park Hill
- Georgetown - Balplate Hill
- Goshen - Moores Hill
- Groton - Gibbet Hill
- Hancock - Brodie Mountain
- Hanson - Bonney Hill
- Harvard - Prospect Hill
- Kingston - Monks Hill
- Lenox - Lenox Mountain
- Ludlow - Minechoag Mountain
- Lynn - Burrill Hill
- Manchester - Morse Hill
- Mendon - Chestnut Hill
- Middleboro - Barden Hill
- Middleboro - Top of Town Hall
- Milton - Great Blue Hill
- Monterey - Mount Wilcox
- North Attleboro - Sunrise Hill
- Norwell - Judges Hill
- Oxford - Goat Hill
- Pelham - Mount Lincoln
- Petersham - Soapstone Hill
- Phillipston - Prospect Hill
- Plymouth - Pine Hill
- Princeton - Wachusett Mountain
- Rehoboth - Long Hill
- Sandwich - Telegraph Hill
- Savoy - Borden Mountain
- Sharon - Moose Hill
- Shelburne - Mount Massaemett
- Sudbury - Nobscott Hill
- Sunderland - Mount Toby
- Waltham - Prospect Hill
- Wareham - Tempest Knob
- Warwick - Mount Grace
- Welfleet - At Brownies
- West Brookfield - Ragged Hill
- West Tisbury - Indian Hill
- Westborough - Fay Mountain
- Westwood - Grossman Camp Hill

## Red Knights Massachusetts Chapter 2 Fire Tower Quest



Submit this application with pictures of you and/or your bike at six (6) different fire towers visited with \$10 per person participating, and receive a Fire Tower Quest commemorative pin.  
*(Group photos are encouraged!)*

Make checks payable RKMC Mass. Chapter 2

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Town: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

<u>Name and Location of Tower</u>	<u>Date of Visit</u>
(1) _____	_____
(2) _____	_____
(3) _____	_____
(4) _____	_____
(5) _____	_____
(6) _____	_____

Red Knights Chapter: \_\_\_\_\_ (Or other motorcycle club)  
Mail completed application, check, **AND** pictures of you and/or your bike  
at each of the fire towers to:

Red Knights—Mass. Chapter 2  
Attn: Robert Laford | P.O. Box 221 | Petersham, MA 01366  
You may also submit your application and pictures electronically to [rflaford@tiac.net](mailto:rflaford@tiac.net)

Fire towers can be visited *anywhere* not just in Massachusetts.