

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Warren County Fire Tower

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 4.5 miles south of Warrenton on SR 58 South ☐ N/A not for publication

city or town Liberia ☒ vicinity

state North Carolina code NC county Warren code 185 zip code 27895

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination
☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of
Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property
☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant
☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Jeffrey J. Crow SHPO 1/10/00
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State of Federal agency and bureau _____

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register.
☐ See continuation sheet.
- ☐ determined eligible for the
National Register
☐ See continuation sheet.
- ☐ determined not eligible for the
National Register.
- ☐ removed from the National
Register.
- ☐ other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Warren County Fire Tower

Warren, NC

Name of Property

County and State

5. Classification**Ownership of Property**

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☐ private
☐ public-local
☒ public-State
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- ☐ building(s)
☐ district
☒ site
☒ structure
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing

0

Noncontributing

1

buildings

sites

structures

objects

Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed
in the National Register**

N/A

6. Function or Use**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Government/other: firetower

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Government/education-related

7. Description**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Other

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete

walls Metal: steel

roof Metal: steel

other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☐ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ **B** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C** a birthplace or grave.
- ☐ **D** a cemetery.
- ☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ **F** a commemorative property.
- ☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Conservation

Period of Significance

1932-1950

Significant Dates

1932

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Aermotor, Inc.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey

- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering
Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other

Name of repository:

Warren County Fire Tower

Warren, NC

Name of Property

County and State

10. Geographical DataAcreage of Property 0.1 acres**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	1	7	7	6	1	9	2	0	4	0	2	7	7	3	0
Zone	Easting			Northing											
2															

3															
Zone	Easting			Northing											
4															

☐ See continuation sheet**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared Byname/title Nancy Van Dolsen, Architectural Historianorganization _____ date August 31, 1999street & number P.O. Box 703 telephone 252.746.6058city or town Greenville state NC zip code 27835**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets**Maps**A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.**Photographs**Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.**Additional items**

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name State of North Carolina, EHNR Division of Forest Resourcesstreet & number Post Office Box 29581 telephone 919.733.2162city or town Raleigh, state NC zip code 27626

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Warren County Fire Tower
Warren County, NC

Warren County Fire Tower, 1932. Contributing

The Warren County Fire Tower stands at the crest of a hill in a clearing surrounded by forest land. Approximately 15 feet from the base of the tower stands a small metal communications building for the North Carolina Highway Patrol. Across the road from the tower is the Bessie Haithcock Forestry Headquarters named in honor for Bessie Haithcock who served as the fire tower operator from 1945 to 1962.

The Warren County Fire Tower was constructed in 1932 of structural steel members manufactured by the Aermotor Company of Chicago, Illinois. The tower is a four-sided truss frame with bolted connections that stands 100 feet tall. A staircase of eighty-eight steps leads to an enclosed cab located at the top of the structure. The tower retains integrity and remains virtually unchanged since its construction in 1932.

The tower stands on four tapered concrete footers two feet in height and eighteen inches square at the base. All the structural members above the footings are equal-leg steel angle-sections. The tower is 18'10" on a side at the base, tapering to 7'0" on a side at the base of the cab floor, approximately eighty-feet above the ground. There are twelve evenly-spaced levels up to the cab floor, with a stair landing at each level. At each level, horizontal members span between each leg, creating a square; horizontal steel beams cross the square to support the landings and stair runners. The steps and floors of the landing are wood. The landings are approximately two-and-a-half feet by four feet. The handrails are metal. During the late twentieth century, steel mesh was added to the stair balustrades for safety reasons.

On each face of the tower, diagonal-braces cross from one leg to another. The lowest diagonal-brace spans three levels, the center four diagonal-braces cross two levels, and the top diagonal-brace crosses one level. Six pairs of cross-braces are located on each face of the tower.

At the floor of the cab, the leg members are bent outwards to run vertically to form the corners of the cab. The cab walls and roof are framed into these corner members. The cab is a single room seven feet square with a ceiling height of 6'8". The pyramidal roof is covered with sheet steel. The wooden floor is two layers of tongue-in-groove boards. A carpet covers the wood floor. The lower three feet of the cabin walls are finished on the exterior with sheet steel, and on the interior with replacement wood

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paneling. The ceiling is also replacement wood paneling.¹ The upper walls of the cab are composed of steel frame, nine-light windows. Each wall has one stationary window and one window that pivots which is held open by steel props. The original alidade (a topographic surveying and mapping instrument used for locating fires) and pedestal are still located at the center of the cab.

The tower was designed to be built on site by a small crew that most likely used a hand winch.² Two local men were involved in the building of the tower, Earlie Haithcock (who also leased the land and served as the first tower operator) and Albert Hardy.³

North Carolina Highway Patrol Communications Building, ca. 1970. Noncontributing.

The North Carolina Highway Patrol Communications Building is a small, shallow-gable roof, metal building, covered with 5-V agricultural metal, that stands northwest of the fire tower. The building has a gable entry on the northeast side.

¹ The new wood walls and ceiling were constructed in 1993. See Ricky Bryant, Timeline of the History of the Warren County Fire Tower. Collection of the Division of Forest Resources, Bessie Haithcock Forestry Headquarters, Warren County, NC.

² Conclusion found in a structural analysis of the tower conducted by Atlas Engineering, Inc. See Atlas Engineering, Inc., *Structural Condition Survey & Cost Estimate for Repairs – Warren County Fire Tower* (Raleigh, NC: 1998) 3.

³ Letter from Betty Haithcock Peoples to Keith A. Argow of the National Historic Lookout Register, March 12, 1997.

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Warren County Fire Tower
Warren County, NC

Summary

The Warren County Fire Tower is a well-preserved structure that retains historic integrity. Inside the cab of the tower still contains the original alidade, a surveying and mapping instrument for locating fires, and with the exception of the replacement wall and ceiling paneling, appears as it did when the tower was built in 1932. The tower was operated until 1993 when it became an educational resource for the Bessie Haithcock Forestry Headquarters. The Warren County Fire Tower is locally significant as the only fire tower in Warren County. In a county without any rural fire departments until 1956, the tower was especially important in the detection and suppression of forest fires. During the twentieth century, the lumber and pulpwood industry was a major component of the county's economy, and the fire tower helped to protect those economic interests. The tower is representative of the statewide program to erect fire towers to combat forest fires that developed during the 1920s. The Warren County Fire Tower is eligible for the National Register under Criterion A in the role of local conservation efforts with a period of significance of 1932 to 1950.

Historical Background

In 1932, the State of North Carolina signed a thirty-nine-year lease with Earlie Haithcock for a small tract of land at what was believed to be the highest elevation in Warren County for the construction of a fire tower.⁴ The tract of land was part of Haithcock's family farm. Located on an elevated rise in an isolated, forested area, the site was ideal for the building of the tower.

By August 8, 1932, the structural steel members of the tower had been purchased from the Aermotor Company in Chicago, shipped to the fire tower site, and constructed by Earlie Haithcock and Albert Hardy. Earlie Haithcock was hired to be the first fire tower operator in Warren County.

Haithcock served as the fire tower operator until his death in 1940. During the early years, the job entailed climbing the steps to the cab to scan for fires during the most dangerous fire season of March, April, and May. After World War II, the length of the fire season was expanded and the tower operator worked from September through May. From the top of the Warren County Fire Tower, the operator could see from 20

⁴ Bryant, Timeline. Although it was believed that the Haithcock property was at the highest point in Warren County, it was later discovered that the highest site was in the town of Warrenton. Interview with Richard Hunter and Betty Haithcock Peoples, November 20, 1998.

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Warren County Fire Tower
Warren County, NC

to 30 miles on a clear day. The tower operator would telephone or radio (after 1954) to the fire warden or "smokechaser" the location of any forest fire spotted. The tower operator would be able to locate the fire precisely through the use of the alidade, a topographic surveying and mapping instrument that still stands in the center of the cab. After being given the location of the fire by the tower operator, the fire warden or smokechaser would then call together a group of firefighters, which after 1956 was the volunteer fire department.

Between 1940 and 1945, Lawrence Robertson served as tower operator.⁵ In 1944, Bessie Haithcock, the widow of Earlie, trained to be a tower operator, receiving her certification in 1945. In that year, she began work at the Warren County Fire Tower, and became the first woman fire tower operator in North Carolina. During her first year on the job, she spotted one of the most disastrous forest fires in the history of Warren County. The fire, near Vaughn, destroyed hundreds of acres of valuable pulpwood and timber. Without the early detection by Bessie Haithcock, the fire would have destroyed additional hundreds of acres of forest.⁶

During her seventeen-year tenure as fire tower operator, Bessie Haithcock was helped in her duties by her children, including her son Earl and her daughter Betty. Both children would help her in spotting fires and were trained as radio operators. In addition, they would act as messengers and couriers to whoever was working as operator.⁷

Bessie Haithcock retired in 1962. In 1970 the 1,453 square-foot tract surrounding the tower was sold by the Haithcock heirs to the Division of Forest Resources. The tower remained an integral part of the fire-fighting system for Warren County until Spring 1993. The tower now serves an educational purpose as an exhibit on the history of firefighting in Warren County run by the Bessie Haithcock Forestry Headquarters.

In 1997 the Warren County Fire Tower was placed on the National Historic Lookout Register, kept by the American Resources Group. The Warren County Fire Tower was the first state-owned tower to be placed on the NHL Register.

⁵ Peoples, Interview, November 20, 1998.

⁶ Charles Crockett, "Mrs. Haithcock Believed to be Only Towerlady in the State," *The Warren Record* (Warren, NC) 3 March 1950: 4.

⁷ Interview with Betty Haithcock Peoples, 20 November 1998. Crockett, 4.

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Warren County Fire Tower
Warren County, NC

Conservation Context

During the opening decades of the twentieth century, the lumber and pulpwood industry became an increasingly significant component of North Carolina's economy. During the 1920s, North Carolina, as well as other state governments, began a program to protect valuable timber and pulpwood from destruction by fire. Fire towers were an important part of the campaign to suppress forest fires and to help protect the lumber industry's economic interests. The period from 1910 to 1929 has been described as a time in the history of firefighting that was concerned primarily with the economics of forestry, the development of a governmental administration, and a codification of methods to combat forest fires.⁸

In North Carolina, a legislative act of 1915 provided the state with its first position of State Forester and charged the State Geological Board with the responsibility for the prevention and control of forest fires.⁹ The state legislature passed an act in 1921 that created a system "to develop as nearly as possible an efficient organization for statewide forest protection, based upon the county as a unit."¹⁰ By 1922, some counties (but not Warren) already had hired their first forest warden and the first manual for forest wardens had been compiled and printed. In 1925, the State of North Carolina created the Department of Conservation and Development.

By 1927, discussion of the "prevention and suppression of fires" took up almost three-quarters of the North Carolina *Manual of Instructions for Forest Wardens*.¹¹ According to the 1927 *Manual*, the state was in the initial stages of their program to erect "lookout towers." The *Manual* noted that

The service has now begun using lookout towers for detection of fires. The State needs many lookout towers to properly conduct the work. As funds become available yearly, towers will be built and lookout men placed on duty during the fire season.¹²

⁸ Pyne, Stephen J. *Fire in America: A Cultural History of Wildland and Rural Fire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1982) 261.

⁹ "Division of Forest Resources Has Rich History, Tradition," *The Warren Record* (Warren, NC) 22 May 1996: 2C.

¹⁰ North Carolina Geological and Economic Survey. (*Forest Warden's Manual*. Raleigh, NC: 1922) 3. The state survey was authorized by Chapter 26 of Public Laws of 1921.

¹¹ Department of Conservation & Development. *Manual of Instructions for Forest Wardens* (Raleigh, NC: Capital Printing Company, State Printers, 1927).

¹² *Manual*, 1927: 42. The manual did not state where the first tower was to be constructed.

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Warren County Fire Tower
Warren County, NC

The *Manual* also described the lookout towers. The towers were to be of both wood and steel construction—like the Warren County Fire Tower—and would have an eight foot square “house” on top. The *Manual* then provided a description of the map that accompanied the alidade:

... in the house will be a map of the surrounding country, properly oriented and marked off with one mile circles. On the extreme outer line of sight there will be a graduated circle marked off in degrees, running from 0 degrees to 360 degrees. As the towers are constructed and manned special instructions will be issued the lookout men covering the work.¹³

According to the 1927 *Manual*, nominations of proposed sites for new lookout towers were to be submitted by County Forest Wardens to the District Forester. County Forest Wardens were also to “cooperate in securing deeds to suitable sites, after such sites have been approved by his District Forester and funds allotted for the construction of a tower.”¹⁴

In Warren County, the County Forest Warden, E.H. Pinnell, must have selected the site of the Haithcock Farm and had the site approved by the District Forester. With funds available, the site was leased and the tower erected in 1932.

By 1936, the Warren County Fire Tower was one of seventy-one state-owned towers in North Carolina.¹⁵ The Department of Conservation and Development believed that many more towers were needed, and that more would be constructed as funds permitted.

By the 1950s, the manual for forest wardens no longer included a section solely on lookout towers, but they did note that there were “firetowers and fire lookouts throughout the State.”¹⁶

¹³ *Manual*, 1927: 43.

¹⁴ *Manual*, 1927: 43.

¹⁵ Department of Conservation & Development. *Manual of Instructions for Forest Wardens* (Raleigh, NC: Capital Printing Company, State Printers, 1936) 52.

¹⁶ Department of Conservation & Development. *Forest Wardens Handbook* (Raleigh, NC: 1954) 25.

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Warren County Fire Tower
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By the 1990s the State was discontinuing the use of firetowers. The Warren County Fire Tower was last used as a lookout in spring 1993.

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Warren County, NC

Bibliography

Atlas Engineering, Inc. See Atlas Engineering, Inc., *Structural Condition Survey & Cost Estimate for Repairs – Warren County Fire Tower*. Raleigh, NC: 1998.

Bryant, Ricky. Timeline of the History of the Warren County Fire Tower. Collection of the Division of Forest Resources, Bessie Haithcock Forestry Headquarters. Warren County, NC.

Crockett, Charles. "Mrs. Haithcock Believed to be Only Towerlady in the State." *The Warren Record* (Warren, NC) 3 March 1950: 4.

Department of Conservation & Development. *Forest Wardens Handbook*. Raleigh, NC: 1954. Collection of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Raleigh, NC.

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Department of Conservation & Development. *Manual of Instructions for Forest Wardens*. Raleigh, NC: Capital Printing Company, State Printers, 1936. Collection of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Raleigh, NC.

"Division of Forest Resources Has Rich History, Tradition," *The Warren Record* (Warren, NC) 22 May 1996: 2C.

Hunter, Richard. Interview with Nancy Van Dolsen, 20 November 1998.

North Carolina Geological and Economic Survey. *Forest Warden's Manual*. Raleigh, NC: 1922. Collection of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Raleigh, NC.

Pyne, Stephen J. *Fire in America: A Cultural History of Wildland and Rural Fire*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982.

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Warren County Fire Tower
Warren County, NC

Warren County Land Records, Warren County Court House, Warrenton, North Carolina.

"Woman Fire Tower Operator Had Highest Job In Warren." *The Warren Record*
(Warren, NC) 22 May 1996: 2C.

Peoples, Betty Haithcock. Interview with Nancy Van Dolsen, 20 November 1998.

Peoples, Betty Haithcock. Letter to Keith A. Argow of the National Historic Lookout Register, March 12, 1997.

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Warren County Fire Tower
Warren County, NC

Verbal Boundary

The historic boundary corresponds to the present tax parcel, G8-94.

Boundary Justification

The historic boundary corresponds to the 1453 square foot tract that was leased by Earlie Haithcock to North Carolina for the construction of the firetower in 1932, and sold by the Haithcock heirs to the Division of Forest Resources in 1970. The tract includes the tower and a noncontributing building, a small metal N.C. Highway Patrol communications building.

5356 NW
(WARRENTON)

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

WR 310 (SL)

78°07'30"
36°22'30"

759000m E.

WARRENTON 2.5 MI.

5356
(MA)

4029000m N.

LIBERIA VIC.
WARREN Co.
FIRE TOWER
INEZ QUAD
SL



