

A different way to explore the past

JOHN D. WALLER, Staff Writer

Posted: 11/17/2008 12:10:19 PM EST

POWNAL - Ted Atkinson's great uncle was on his way home from courting a young woman when he looked up at Carpenter Hill and saw a farmhouse engulfed in flames.

He immediately changed his course and got his horse and buggy moving at full tilt. It was shortly after midnight in 1911.

By the time he arrived, the farmhouse - owned by Reynolds Carpenter - was a total loss. Only a few items were able to be salvaged - a portrait of Carpenter, one of his wife, some furniture and a pewter candlestick.

On Sunday, Atkinson brought the candlestick to a Pownal Historical Society meeting where residents were encouraged to bring items from Pownal's past for the first time.

"Objects are a good way to stimulate stories and memories," said Ray Rodrigues, a society member. About 20 people, mostly older with deep roots in the Pownal area, attended the meeting at the Solomon Wright Public Library. Two women knitted as people went around the circle sharing items.

Charlotte Comar brought in her late mother's maple leaf sugar molds. Her parents used to have "sugar-on-snow" parties in the summer where guests would snack on the homemade treats.

Comar had a newspaper article from July 15, 1956, detailing one of her parents' parties. Her father used to store snow in the freezer until it was time for the party.

Other residents brought in the top of an iron pot used by patriots on the lookout, a porcelain doll's head from the mid-19th century, a cowbell and a butter dish. Each item sparking stories from Pownal's past.

Fran Lampman told a story about her father's forceps, which he used to pull teeth before the days of Novocain. One day, he was having trouble pulling out a man's tooth. He put his other hand on the man's forehead and pulled with all his might and was finally able to get the tooth out, which had abnormally-long roots.

"I knew you could do it," the man, who had been drinking whiskey, said. "I just came from the dentist, and he couldn't do it."

Francis "Bud" Willette, a gifted storyteller and musician, brought in a photograph of the old covered bridge near the general store in North Pownal. Sam Champney's barber shop, which no longer exists, was in the background.

The 81-year-old went on to tell stories of his musical past from his days playing with Louis Armstrong in New Orleans to his ongoing Saturday night performances at the Williams Inn.

The Pownal Historical Society holds monthly meetings that are open to the public.

Contact John D. Waller at jwaller@benningtonbanner.com