**Lisa Betts, Robert Messenger, Craig Mundle, and Wayne Smith**

**Share Accounts of Fighting the Fire at Thinkers Lodge**

**on August 3, 1996.**

**Robert Messenger, interviewed by Adele Wick, July 10, 2010**

**Lisa Betts, interviewed by Cathy Eaton, July 11, 2010**

**Wayne Smith, interviewed by Cathy Eaton, July 12, 2013**

**Craig Mundle, interviewed by Cathy Eaton, July 19, 2016**

Joanne “Scoop” Mattinson videotaped the fire at Thinkers’ Lodge. Copy of that video is at Thinkers Lodge. On Thinkerslodgehistories.com you can access information and photos about fire.

**Origin of the Fire**

Bob Messanger, who was the fire chief of Pugwash and directed fire fighters, explained that the fire began in an interior wall and was electrical in nature.  He consulted two other fire fighters to mine their memories about how the fire started. He shared theories of how the fire started and stated that arson was definitely not involved.

 - A nail driven into the wall shorted a couple of wires.
 - The short occurred in the electrical box in the basement.
 - The short started in electrical box in the kitchen.
 - After a power surge earlier in morning, an electrical fire started in wires in front room.

Bob suspected that the fire was caused by a nail that had been nailed somewhere in the walls of the house; eventually the nail interacted with insulation and caused the fire.  An inspector ruled that the nail was the cause.  Bob doesn’t remember much about the fire.  The burning insulation caused more of the house to catch on fire.  They used water from harbor to put fire out.

That day Craig was at home at 162 Water Street. He believes it might have been a Sunday, and the family had come home from church.  Someone came to house and reported that the Thinkers Lodge was on fire.  His mother, Norma Mundle, called 911, and Craig rushed to the fire hall on Durham Street where he was the first to arrive.  He got all the trucks running and waited for the call to come in.  The other firefighters always carried fire pagers.  Craig responded with Truck One.

The large siren rang in the town center and villagers would hear the alarm and see four or five trucks heading to the fire.  That captured their attention and they followed the trucks to the Lodge.

He saw a lot of smoke coming out of the eves. Wallace and Oxford Fire Department were called for more manpower and tankers. Wayne Smith went in first with another man while Craig was getting gear on.  Craig entered with Jason Smith through the front door. The fire had made a large gap in the front room which they thought at first was a doorway.

Craig believes the fire started in the front room due to an electrical problem.  He remembers there had been a power surge that morning.  They kept the fire contained in the front room and upstairs above Anne Eaton’s room.  He believes that the tight construction of the historic building kept the fire from spreading and engulfing the house.

He remembers an opening that burnt out near the kitchen.  They worked to extinguish the fire. Crews stayed in about thirty minutes before emerging for relief and air.

Upstairs in the room above Anne Eaton’s room after Wayne Smith used an axe to smash out a window to let smoke and pressure escape, the firefighters used pikes to break through walls and make a large opening facing the salt mines.

**Fire fighters from from Pugwash, Wallace, Oxford, and Shinamacas rush to scene.**

Lisa recalled, “The Wallace Fire Department was just getting started on their annual summer family picnic when pager tones alerted me to a pending message.  We came over here to Thinkers Lodge. The fire seemed to be in this back wall.”

Lisa Betts (in yellow) walked toward the stairs which she climbed to ventilate Thinkers' Lodge during the fire.

**Dangerous Mission**

Wayne Smith recounted his memories of the fire. “We were asked to ventilate this upstairs room, to let enough heat out.” Wayne and his first partner went up the stairs [on the second floor in the East Wing above Anne Eaton’s room, which faces Water Street.] “The first time we came into the house and up the stairs and started to enter the room, the extreme heat pushed us back.  We were down on our hands and knees because the visibility was zero.

Inside, it was too hot for my first partner to carry on, so we backed out and went back outside.”

Wayne explained, “After we made it up to the landing, we did a search pattern. I swept to the right and found the wall and worked my way to the right until I found the window. I broke open one of these tiny windows with a spanner wrench form my pocket. I cleaned out the sharp edges of the window and performed hydraulic ventilation. I opened our nozzle to a fog pattern and ventilated some of the smoke out of the room so we could see if there was actual fire in the room. At the point, we could see a lot better, and we worked our way out.  Another crew relieved us so we could replenish our fluids.”

Lisa Betts explained, “They tried to ventilate it from the outside first. It was very dark and it was extraordinarily hot.  I said, ‘It’s going to flash! Let’s get out of here!’  We agreed.  We backed down the stairs. We weren’t inside a long time.  We had a hose line with us. There was very little flame, mostly heat and smoke.  There was a tremendous amount of heat.”

**Villagers work together to salvage the contents of Thinkers Lodge.**

Lisa said, “Outside there was a lot of activity going on. I remember looking down at the hooked rugs and thinking ‘We have to get these things gathered up because of dirty old boots going through here.

Craig Mundle remembered how hard the fireman worked to remove pictures off the wall and how they grabbed furniture and handed everything out the front and side door. The fireman carried everything outside so that the villagers (not allowed in the burning building) could transport the treasures to safety. Craig remembers that nothing was stolen.

“I remember clearly thinking about how great it was that the villagers pulled together at such a time. People who had never been on the property before, let alone inside the building, worked together to pass belongings from the north side, around the house to the west and then to the Dining Hall.  I also remember, somewhat cynically, thinking I hope someone is supervising this salvage effort and that the end of this line is going to the lobster factory, not a U-Haul truck headed for who-knows-where!”

Terry Smith, a beloved history teacher remembered, " A very large crowd had gathered outside.  When you think of all the artifacts that were here – all taken out and handled reverently.  Nothing was lost.  It showed a real reverence for this building and what it stands for."

Everything was carried to the Dining Hall.  Villagers started cleaning off the furniture that very day. Later, Mary Jamieson’s husband, Ron, reupholstered many of the chairs and couches.

**Additional Information about the Firefighters**

Lisa Betts is the event coordinator of the Gathering of the Clans in the Village of Pugwash. She attended Dalhousie University. Lisa is the clerk treasurer of Pugwash. She is an Instructor, Level II, and has been a firefighter from April 1995 until the present – over 23 years. Her father was in the same fire department as she was.

Wayne recalled, "I was a member of the Youth Peace Conference in the summer of 1985 after I graduated from Pugwash High. We had youth from all over Canada.  It was through the United Church. We discussed peace options. I had grown up listening to stories about the historic conference and the contribution that Cyrus Eaton made to the community.”  Wayne toured the Thinkers Lodge on his visit on July 12, 2013.  This was the first time he had been in the Lodge since he helped to save it.  He was impressed with the renovations and please to hear about the continuation of the conferences.

Craig remembers conference attendees from France staying in their home during one of the conferences. He remembered how nice the couple were and that the woman spoke better English than her husband. July 19, 2016 was first time Craig Mundle had been in Thinkers Lodge since August 3, 1996.  He had graduated from high school and was driving a truck for a living.  Like now, he was a volunteer fireman.

Bob was fire chief for 22 years and part time fire worker for 37 years; Bob was an Industrial arts teacher. When the fire alert rang, Bob left his class rooms to head over to fire station while principal or other teachers would come take over his class. Bob’s uncle was a banker in Pugwash who worked with Grampa; Bob shook hands with Grampa at one point.

When Bob was 26 years old, the drug store caught on fire; only the fire chief and one other fire fighter showed up; they only had a half tank full of water: So afterwards there was a big meeting; 56 people came, but only a few volunteered; Bob was one of the few volunteers; At first he was the deputy chief because he knew how to drive a truck; They were able to persuade an ex firefighter to return to organize them and for 8 years he was chief.  Together they took courses.

Now they have a state of the art fire department that is unrivaled.  They have 30 fire fighters, all part time; 4 are women; women began coming 6 or 7 years ago; in the old days the town fire alarm rang; now they all have pagers: For car accidents fire department shows up and can help because of their expertise, strength, and training.

Typically, they bring trucks full of water; then if need be they use harbor water and will call in a crew with a tanker truck.  They have also installed dry hydrants, which are pipes full of water

**Gratitude goes out to all the**

**firefighters and Pugwash Villagers**

**who saved Thinkers Lodge.**