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Lois Foster might not have actually hollered "Eureka!" like the ancient Greek mathematician Archimedes did as he leapt from his bath and ran naked through the streets when he discovered a way to determine the purity of gold. But Foster remembers startling a group of researchers inside the Land Registry Office in Belleville in 1981 as she exclaimed loudly on finding the information proving the ownership of the home of one of Belleville's most prominent early citizens, Billa Flint.

"I can remember the day I found it. It was so exciting to find this building. There were these people in the room — title searchers and other people that worked there and I said loudly, 'Oh, guess what I found. This building was built by Billa Flint in 1835,'" she says, laughing as she recalls herself getting up from her seat immediately and running across to the counter to show her friend her discovery of the record of the deed for the building on 180 Coleman St.

Foster, a long-time member of the Hastings County Historical Society, received her 25-year volunteer pin in November 2002, for her work delving into local history. She admits that her discovery of the Flint home was the highlight of her efforts over the years.

"I often did lots of research at the Registry Office. Finding the Flint house was very exciting when I found the deed. It said exactly when it was built. They wanted to describe the lot beside it that he was selling, such as so many feet from the then newly constructed building. I knew which lot it was because it was named. Once I got going there it was not so difficult to find the owner and builder of that brick building," she says.

Billa Flint, one of Belleville's pioneers, was a wealthy businessman and politician in the 19th century. He built the grand house on Coleman Street in 1835 to accommodate his widowed mother-in-law, three of her daughters and son who had come from

Brockville to live with Flint and his wife, Phoebe, the year before.

In 1861, he and his family moved to their new home at the corner of Bridge Street East and Ann Street. An apartment building now stands in its place.

Born in Brockville in 1805, Flint began helping in the family store when he was just 11. When he arrived in Belleville in 1829, he set up his first business — a general store on Front Street. Then branching out as a miller and a lumberman, he soon had hundreds of employees working for him throughout the Hastings County. The centre of his lumbering operations was in Bridgewater (Actinolite) township of Elzevir, north of Belleville. Later, he became the

Reeve of Elzevir for 21 years.

Even as he became an outstanding businessman, Flint continued to forge his identity through another field — positions in public offices. He was the first president (mayor) of the Board of Police in Belleville in 1836. Thirty years later he became the Mayor of Belleville and was called to the Senate in May, 1867. His contributions to the community also included his involvement with the organization of Belleville Board of Trade, which was renamed the Belleville Chamber of Commerce in 1919.

The significance of the find was not lost on the company, International Hardware Company, which occupied the building at



Billa Flint and his wife, Phoebe, were one of the most prominent Belleville citizens in the 19th century.

the time. The company paid to have a plaque put on it, says Foster. Restoration work began on the building soon after Brian Magee, a Toronto developer and president of the Teddington Ltd., bought the building in 1988.

"It was a very important find. It could have been destroyed like the others. I haven't seen the inside after the restoration but the (Teddington) company restored it very well on the outside. The brick wall was fixed up. The building looks very good," says Foster.

Foster no longer haunts the local land registry office these days but she says she still has her fingers on local history research projects by helping those who come to her seeking to dig through her vast collection of information.

You can reach Benzie Sangma at bsangma@cogeco.ca with comments on or story ideas for Remember When.