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There is simply no explaining the hows and wherefores of this local resident's tale of an encounter that saw her bring home an object found in an unknown antique store during a one-time vacation trip to Victoria, B.C., some 50 years ago. The object, to her delight, was the ceremonial trowel that was used to lay the cornerstone of the Tabernacle United Church once located on Church Street since 1877.

Orma Slack loved to travel to destinations across Canada for her annual vacations and her fondness for antiques always led her to explore local stores hunting for a find. It was on one of these trips to an antique store in Victoria that she discovered the trowel.

"It wasn't on display. Besides, I was looking for something else. I might have mentioned to the woman at the store that I was from Belleville, Ont., and she went to the back of the store and came back out with this trowel, which had an inscription on it indicating that it was used in laying the cornerstone of the Tabernacle Church in Belleville. I couldn't believe my eyes. I mean, what were the chances of that happening that I would find something significant to Belleville's history so far from home," recalled Slack.

Slack does not remember how much she bought it for but thought it was not very highly priced.

"The cost was not really an issue for me at the time. I just felt strongly that it had to come home, that I had to bring it back to Belleville and that's what I did."

Slack, at the time a member of the Bridge Street United Church, donated her find to the Tabernacle United Church at a later date.



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"I was not interested in selling it. I was just interested in preserving a memento of that church's history. I am happy to note that the congregation continues to preserve it well at their new church today," said Slack.

The trowel, which is today prominently displayed at the entrance-way of the St. Matthew's United Church at Holloway Street in Belleville, renamed when the two congregations of Tabernacle United Church and the Holloway Street United Church amalgamated in 1995, still serves to remind its members of its historic past in the city.

For many families of the new congregation at St. Matthew's United, the Tabernacle United Church used to be the Sunday morning destination for generations since 1877. Throughout the decades, it served as their spiritual home.

Today, the red brick structure that measured 78 by 80 feet with 36 foot walls and a surface area of 6,240 sq.ft., a proud heritage that, from its vantage position on Church Street, once spoke of an aspect of Belleville's history that no longer exists. In 1996, the century old building, observed to be considerably aging structurally, was brought down by the wrecker's ball, striking at the heart of its members with each blow rendering it to a mere memory.



This is the ceremonial trowel to mark the laying of the cornerstone of the former Tabernacle United Church.

The end came for this church barely two decades after it

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