

Voices from the past: Port Nelson United Church time capsules offer a link to our history



(Left to right) Parishioners Nicolaas Van Gemert, Anneka Van Gemert, Margaret McMulkin, Jim Parker and Rev. Dr. Michael Brooks display mementos drawn from two time capsules opened at Port Nelson United Church this spring. Photo courtesy Port Nelson United Church.

It was a ceremony more than 50 years in the making.

Port Nelson United Church recently opened two time capsules, each commemorating an important date in the church's history. One of these artifacts dates back to opening Port Nelson's Lloyd Auditorium in the 1950s, while the other represents the opening of the church's sanctuary almost 10 years later.

"We are very lucky to have these links to the very foundation of Port Nelson," said the Rev. Dr. Michael Brooks, minister at the church in Burlington's Roseland neighbourhood. "We enlisted children from the congregation to help us open the time capsules in front of our entire church community, linking past, present and future."

Each capsule was a metal box, sealed shut to withstand decades of cold Canadian winters and blazing Burlington summers. Inside, the congregation found remnants from our shared past: coins and photographs, dedication programs and newspapers.

While the contents showed their age after years lying in wait, the effort involved in finding these treasures was worthy of the greatest treasure hunt stories.

Port Nelson parishioner Jean Redgrave made the first discovery, finding photos from 1953 – the day the corner stone was laid for Port Nelson’s Lloyd Auditorium.

“I was going through the archives, looking for material to write a piece for The Post when I came across beautiful newspaper pictures of the placing of the time capsule,” Redgrave said. “Nobody had even known there was a time capsule.”

Using these photos to estimate where the time capsule had been buried, Port Nelson parishioners quickly arrived with tools and safety equipment to find this unknown treasure.

With members of the congregation poised with cameras, they finally came across a container – a plastic Tupperware container which, admittedly, seemed very forward-thinking for 1953. Alas, what they had hoped to be a connection to the past turned out to be supplies buried by a local Scouts troop.

Undeterred, the search continued. The next time they found a container, it wasn’t made of plastic. This time, they unearthed a metal container. This contained memorabilia from that wonderful day, when Port Nelson United Church christened its new auditorium.

That left one time capsule still to be found – this one from 1961. This time capsule commemorated the laying of the corner stone for the sanctuary at Port Nelson.

With no photos to work from, the assumption was that this more recent artifact would be in the same area. In the meantime, Port Nelson’s renovation and reconstruction program, dubbed [Rekindle](#), continued apace.

It was the construction crew who found the second time capsule during demolition.

“We are very grateful. They found it when they were tearing down the older building and they understood what they had in their hands.”



Contents from two time capsules are displayed at Port Nelson United Church, including a letter from long-time Port Nelson minister, Rev. Jewitt Parr. Other unearthed treasures include documents from the beginning of Port Nelson United Church, newspaper clippings, a coin and a bible. Photo courtesy Port Nelson United Church.

Perhaps the most important thing drawn from the time capsule is a letter from Rev. Jewitt Parr, long-time minister at Port Nelson.

In part, the letter read: "This building was built to the glory of God by the congregation. The congregation provided the funds but its creation is due to the untiring zeal of Mr. Ken Morris, Chairman of the building committee and the following members: Roy Pennington, Elwood Middleton, Gordon Pilkey, Mrs. Cece Farmar, Mrs. Lorne Livingston, Rev. M. J. Parr and our architect Mr. Robert Yamamoto, a member of the congregation."

Out of the land came memories from the very genesis of Port Nelson United Church in 1953. From the rubble came another reminder of the church's rich history in Burlington.

Indeed, what the construction crew had in their hands was a link to our shared history.