

Historical Clippings

Three Lakes Museum

June 2023

Canister Cache Coffin Crate,

Cylinder Drum Pipe Safe,

Strongbox Tube...

Time Capsule

A time capsule, defined as a cache of goods or information, is intended as a method of communication with future people to help future historians. The collection paints a picture of what things looked like at a particular time.

It's unknown when time capsules were first used, but the concept, known by various terms, is fairly simple. The first use could be much older than what we know.

The term "time capsule" was coined for the 1939 New York World's Fair by the Westinghouse Electric Corporation. As part of their marketing exhibit they designed a cylindrical capsule 90 inches long with an interior diameter of 6 1/2 inches made of a complex metal they created. The cylinder weighed in at 800 pounds.

It contained everyday items assembled by a group of all men, a detail only revealed through a press release. Women protested that "men and women together produced our civilization" but the capsule was already sealed and buried. A "Book of Records" was included to explain the contents and how to read the English language.



In 1965 a second capsule was again assembled for the World's Fair. Both Westinghouse time capsules are buried 50 feet below the Fair site and both are meant to be opened in the year 6939. Yes, that's in five thousand years!



Although few buildings in Three Lakes have one, cornerstones became time capsules, especially in public buildings. The hollowed out blocks were filled with important documents and inscribed with the year the structure was built.

This cornerstone is located at the office entrance to the Three Lakes High School. It would be interesting to know if anyone knows if it contains documents and records.



In fourth grade, the year that students in our state study all things Wisconsin, Three Lakes included local history. It became a 4th grade tradition to design a box with the year of their graduation inscribed on it. Near the end of each school year, students fill their boxes with papers, pictures and items they feel represent themselves as 10 year olds. Once sealed, the boxes are brought to the Schoolhouse at the Three Lakes Museum where they are stored in the loft.



These boxes, considered time capsules, were originally opened at class reunions. Recently though, just prior to graduation, seniors are collecting their box and opening it to find all of those things they thought important to their 10 year old selves.



Other variations of local time capsules might be found here in Three Lakes, we just don't know of them yet. Just this past month the Museum received notice that due to changing circumstances, one was available as a donation to the archives. Expecting a simple box with artifacts from the past, it came as a real surprise to find out what this time capsule really was! Bob and Melissa Werner, longtime owners of the Machon Building on Superior Street, had sold the property and wanted its history to be saved for the future. For 73 years documents and artifacts had been collected and placed in the building's safe. And now the safe, used as a time capsule, was moving to the museum. It was a collaboration of volunteers that made the two block move of the 1906 combination lock, 450 pound plus block of iron on wheels possible.

On display in the Museum Visitor Center, everyone is welcome to come in and attempt to open the safe and view the contents. The combination is provided, you don't need safecracker skills, but turning the dial to get the pins to drop isn't as easy as just knowing the numbers.



The safe also puts light on another bit of Superior Street history. In 1908 the two story brick FS Campbell store, which stood where the hardware store rental building is now, was taken down by an incredible explosion. To this day an unsolved mystery, one theory is that robbers over estimated the amount of explosives needed to blow open the safe and took down the entire building. Looking at the small but formidable Machon safe, its size and weight, it's easier to understand the possible mistake.



Thanks again to the Werner's for making more Three Lakes history available to all of us. Come in and check it out! And if you have some Three Lakes history, let us know!

