

## Time Capsules

In July 2019 and October 2020, High Point Museum staff helped open two time capsules: at the High Point Chamber of Commerce (2019) and the High Point YWCA (2020). Though the capsules were of a similar age, they were placed in very different locations within their buildings and had vastly different preservation outcomes.

The Chamber's time capsule was buried in 1969, under the concrete slab in a utility room. The exact location had been lost over the years and it took a lot of research and a lucky guess to find the time capsule. It was a large copper box, soldered along the edges, but some of the soldering failed, allowing water inside. By the time it was opened, the water was long gone, but the damage had been done. There was a strong odor of mildew, which had ruined boxes of slide images. A stack of photographs, stored in a manila envelope, were stuck together. Most of the remaining contents were paper and, other than the smell, they were stable.

The YWCA's time capsule was organized in 1961 and, instead of being buried, it was put in the building's cornerstone. This kept the box away from moisture and even excessive heat, as the cornerstone was in a shaded location. This time capsule was smaller, but also made of copper with soldered seams. The contents were loosely packed, allowing for air flow, but the seams had not been compromised. The materials appeared brand new, even newspaper clippings.

Based on these experiences, we can make recommendations for the creation of new time capsules. Clearly, burying is problematic, but so is any location that isn't visible. The YWCA had also lost track of the time capsule's location and had to do some research to find it. Consider putting a time capsule on display in a locked case or built into a wall. Don't assume that someone 50 years in the future will even know that a time capsule exists.

If you must bury or hide your time capsule, make note of the location in multiple places – meeting minutes, newsletters, newspaper articles, etc. Put an inventory of the contents in the box and in meeting minutes or organizational records. Include a variety of objects and materials and store them in separate enclosures; photographs should be in individual sleeves. Unique items like future projections written by board members or community members are a lot of fun to read. Try to imagine what might make the opening of the time capsule exciting, poignant, or amusing. Have fun with it and make preservation a key consideration!