

A Time Capsule – Literally

And while I'm on the subject of time capsules, the following article about hidden history really caught my eye:

(CNN) by Kelly Marshall – A long-hidden message has been discovered inside Abraham Lincoln's pocket watch, the Smithsonian's Museum of American History announced Tuesday.

Watchmaker Jonathan Dillon was repairing Lincoln's watch in April 1861 when he heard about the attack on Fort Sumter, South Carolina, and wrote a short message on the metal inside the watch, the Smithsonian said.

There it remained, unseen for almost 150 years, it said.

In a 1906 interview with The New York Times, Dillon reported that as soon as he heard the news about the first shots of the Civil War, he unscrewed the dial of the watch and wrote on the metal, "The first gun is fired. Slavery is dead. Thank God we have a President who at least will try."

The actual message that the museum found differs from the watchmaker's recollection. It says, "Jonathan Dillon, April 13-1861, Fort Sumpter [sic] was attacked by the rebels on the above date J Dillon, April 13-1861, Washington, thank God we have a government, Jonth Dillon."

According to the Smithsonian, it was not unusual for professional watchmakers to record their work inside a watch.

"Lincoln never knew of the message he carried in his pocket," said Brent D. Glass, director of the National Museum of American History.

The museum decided to open the watch after being contacted by the watchmaker's great-great-grandson, Doug Stiles, who had heard about the message Dillon said he had inscribed and wanted to see if it was really there.

I think it's really cool that this window into history was only recently discovered. If we had known about it all along, I don't think the message would carry as much significance. The fact that the message's existence was the subject of a family legend only adds to the mystique, and it's a good thing the museum decided to follow up on the great-great-grandson's tip!

Buried Treasure

In our local newspaper lately, there's been multiple stories covering the demolition of an old high school in the county. The demolition uncovered a few surprises; one was a time capsule, placed in the brick walls by students and faculty in 1922 when the high school was built. I found it really neat that no one knew the time capsule was there until a few weeks ago when a bulldozer found the vintage peanut butter can filled with letters from students and other 1922 memorabilia.

The high school was finally knocked down, but construction crews are still deconstructing the foundation of the old building. In the newspaper the other day was an item about another buried treasure. It seems the school was built with a long-forgotten swimming pool, whose existence was uncovered after many weeks of demolition. Upon further investigation and interviews with surviving former students, it was discovered that the former swimming pool did actually exist but was never actually used since it was contaminated with raw sewage (eww!) shortly after it was built. They filled in the swimming pool with clay and built over it, and it was forgotten about until the school's demolition all these years later in 2009.

The story of the legendary swimming pool was of particular interest to me because at my own high school (located in suburban Chicago, far away from the rural Ohio area where we now reside), there was always a rumor of an ill-fated swimming pool. Our gym's floor sounded hollow, and there was always chatter about the existence of a secret covered-up swimming pool underneath the gym floor. I never did find out if there was any truth to the rumors, and I wonder if students attending that high school today talk of the same legend?