

July 26, 2011

Workers find 100-year-old time capsule inside monument

By MARGIE TRAX - mtrax@starbeacon.com [Star Beacon](#)

GENEVA — For a century the Soldiers and Sailors Monument in Geneva has held a secret deep in the heart of its stone body, one perhaps nobody ever was meant to uncover.

Luck, fate, destiny and chance led Geneva officials to the glass jar of treasure and three pennies — an undocumented and possibly homespun time capsule inside the structure — a treasure long guarded by the soldier and sailor in bronze who call the monument home.

The time capsule was found by Ameriseal and Restoration workers last week as they moved the three stone bases of the monument, Geneva City Manager Jim Pearson said.

“Ever since people knew we were going to move the monument, they said to be on the lookout for a time capsule,” he said. “As we prepared for the move, we did some probing but didn’t find anything. When we held the preconstruction meeting with Ameriseal managers, we said there could be another capsule.”

Workers quickly uncovered the well-marked time capsule buried at the base of the monument in the 1980s, Pearson said. Then, as workers moved the resting stone under the bronze sailor, they found a small cavity in the concrete pad under the monument. Inside was a clear glass jar filled with newspapers. Three 1903-08 Indian head pennies rested on top of the jar.

“When they lifted the stone, there it was,” Pearson said of the jar. “It was like it was waiting there for us.”

The jar, which has a distinct pressed pattern on the glass, had not been protected perfectly inside the monument. The metal handle is well rusted, and though the seal is worn, it is still intact.

“This time capsule is exactly 100 years old,” Pearson said. “It is 100 years old exactly when we found it — just that age by chance. We could have moved this monument two years ago or two years from now, but fate had us do it in the summer of 2011.”

The monument was dedicated Aug. 4, 1880, an event that featured U.S. presidents James A. Garfield, Benjamin Harrison and William McKinley as honored speakers.

As automobiles became more popular, Geneva moved the monument in 1911 to ease traffic in the downtown



square. The monument was moved to South Eagle and Park streets with Geneva Elementary and its playground in the background.

The discovery of the time capsule has brought up more questions: Who put it in the monument and why? What is inside? What is the significance of the pennies atop the jar? Was this a city-sponsored project or a quick decision by the bricklayers who moved the statue 100 years ago?

“We hope the answers are inside,” Pearson said. “There could be letters, newspapers, documents or little objects that will tell us more.”

Words printed on sepia-colored newsprint are blurred by cloudy glass, teasing even the closest onlooker, but Pearson said the city will open the jar only when the time and conditions are right.

“We are working with the Ohio Historical Society to find a room or a controlled environment to open this jar in,” he said. “We want to open (it) properly. We aren’t even cleaning the dirt off of it.”

Responsible treasure hunting aside, Pearson said the romantic nature of the find is made even more fantastic by the many ways the jar could have remained hidden.

“That is the true beauty of this time capsule,” he said. “Literally, nobody knew or would ever have known this was in that monument. There are so many little things that could have happened differently that would have kept this secret for another 100 years or maybe forever.”

City Council opened three bids to move the monument from its remote spot on Park Street to become the centerpiece of a new city-owned park just down the street. Two of those bids proposed moving the monument in pieces, but one contractor wanted to move the monument in one piece.

“If we had gone with that contractor, if they had come in with the lowest bid, the capsule would have been moved along with the monument, never to be found,” Pearson said.

City officials recorded the removal of the jar from the base of the monument. The 30-second video is available on the city’s Facebook page, which is linked through the city’s website (www.genevaohio.com).

“We want to share every part of this discovery with the citizens of Geneva,” Pearson said. “This is one of those special things, one of those things that would happen only in a special place like Geneva.”