

Mementos of life in 1930 emerge from time capsule

It was buried at the old Woman's Medical College.

By Edward Colimore
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At first, no one was sure what to make of the find.

Inside a wall next to the 1929 cornerstone of the former Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania in East Falls was a narrow, lead box.

It had been uncovered in April by construction workers installing utility lines in a Falls Center building being converted into Philadelphia University student housing.

What was inside?

One of the building's owners, Jason E. Friedland, director of investments for Iron Stone Real Estate, recently laid out the venerable haul on a long table.

Before him was a fascinating snapshot of life on June 11, 1930, the day



RON TARVER / Staff Photographer

Photographs show the signing of papers that established the original building of the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania. The photos were in a time capsule found inside a wall next to the building's 1929 cornerstone.

the time capsule was sealed.

Philadelphia newspapers, the Saturday Evening Post, photographs, and pamphlets detailed the history of the college while giving a flavor of the times.

Aviator Charles Lindbergh and his wife were expecting a baby. A \$55,000 reward was being offered for the apprehension of the gangsters who killed a Chicago Tribune reporter.

And two ships collided near Boston, killing 59 people.

Ads offered tropical worsted suits for \$14 and summer dresses for \$9.75. Cars were similarly priced: A new Dodge was advertised for \$875 and the Reo Flying Cloud went for \$1,625.

"What's the chance of finding a time capsule?" Friedland asked. "I was extremely excited. It's an interest-

See **CAPSULE** on B8



Jason E. Friedland, an owner of the building where the time capsule was found, looks over the materials it held. He said it would be given to an archive at Drexel's College of Medicine.



A small gold coin was among the trove in the time capsule, sealed on June 11, 1930. It was uncovered in April by construction workers installing utility lines.

Capsule

Continued from B1
ing link to the past.”
The box and its contents were left there more than 80 years ago by the last graduating class of the downtown location of the college, 2121 N. College Ave.

Besides the papers, there were documents dating to the 1870s and a decorative brass box containing cards with the names of contributors to the medical college project.

Gregory Peltzer, the building operations manager, was moving boxes from the room where workers were installing lines in the wall when he spotted the heavy, gray box.

“It was sitting behind the cornerstone,” he said. “That’s where you’d put a time capsule, but I was very surprised to see it.”

Inside were tightly packed and apparently fragile documents, so Peltzer waited for Friedland to open the box.

“I love history. I came over immediately,” Friedland said, adding that the contents will be donated to Drexel University’s College of Medicine Legacy Center, which has an ar-



The lead box held copies of five Philadelphia newspapers. Ads offered suits for \$14.

chive on the Woman’s Medical College.

Much of the find “is documented in other places, but the assemblage — the items that they chose to put in there — makes it significant,” said Margaret Graham, an archivist at the Legacy Center. “It’s a reflection

of their choices.”

Archivists weren’t surprised by the discovery, Graham said. “We knew there was a time capsule there.

“It’s still exciting and significant to us,” she said. “As a community focal point, Woman’s Medical College was a key part of the East Falls com-

munity.”

The women of the college were pioneers in medicine and showed support for women’s rights by including a gold Susan B. Anthony coin in the time capsule as a way of honoring the suffragette, said Joanne Murray, historian of the Drexel University College

of Medicine and director of the Legacy Center.

“We’re coming up on the centennial of the 19th amendment, which granted women the right to vote in 1920,” Murray said. “When they put this time capsule together, it had only been 10 years that women were allowed the vote.

“It’s important that people so long ago recognized this was a unique and important place,” she said. “That continues to be on the mind of the successor institution, Drexel University College of Medicine.”

Woman’s Medical College, along the 3300 block of Henry Avenue, became the Medical College of Pennsylvania in 1970 and affiliated with Allegheny Health Services in 1987.

The 12½-acre site was closed in 2005 and vacant the next year, when Friedland’s Iron Stone Real Estate began developing it.

The time capsule was found in April in the original college building, with its elegant columned portico and entry hall. It is one of five buildings at the Falls Center campus, which is nearly filled with educational and medical tenants.

Walking out to the front of

the building, Friedland pointed out the 1929 cornerstone.

“Maybe they hoped [the time capsule] would never be discovered,” he mused. “If it was, it would mean the end of Woman’s Medical College.”

Inside the building, with the contents spread out on a table, Friedland could read about airlines announcing fares rising by 7 cents a mile, and Detroit becoming the nation’s fourth-most-populous city after Philadelphia.

There were copies of The Inquirer, Public Ledger, Evening Ledger, Evening Bulletin, and Philadelphia Record.

And there were pamphlets with inspiring histories of the college, of women who overcame overwhelming obstacles to become doctors and “six courageous men who not only dared violent public criticism but actual financial ruin” to become the first faculty.

“It’s bittersweet,” Friedland said as he looked back in time. “It’s not every day you find something like this.”

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