

Two Time Capsules Buried in the Walls of the Current Mother House



Sisters Arlita Matte, Fernande Cantin, Agnes Campbell, Donna Rose and Josephine Badali during the Medals Ceremony – Fall 2012

A time capsule is a method of gathering and preserving artefacts and information in view of evidence for future generations to discover. Time capsules are often buried during ceremonies when a house, church, hospital or any building of importance is being built.

The term “time capsule” began being used at the end of the 1930s, but the idea dates back to the first civilizations of Mesopotamia. In fact, attestation of the existence of the capsule concept is mentioned in the Epic of Gilgamesh,¹ one of the oldest written stories on earth. The story begins with instructions on how to find a copper tablet-box inside one of the bricks of the walls of Uruk. This box would contain a tablet of lapis lazuli on which was inscribed the story of Gilgamesh.

The cornerstone capsule

Closer to us in time, in Montreal on October 11, 1911, a time capsule was buried during the construction of École normale Jacques-Cartier (the current mother house of the Congrégation de Notre-Dame) at 2330 Sherbrooke Street West. To bless and protect the building, a small bottle containing medals of saints was placed in the masonry of the building.²

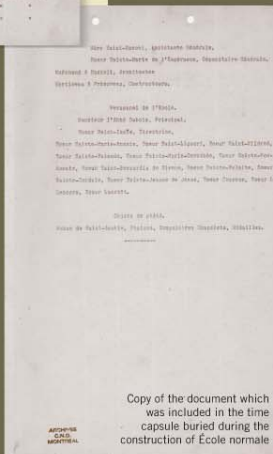
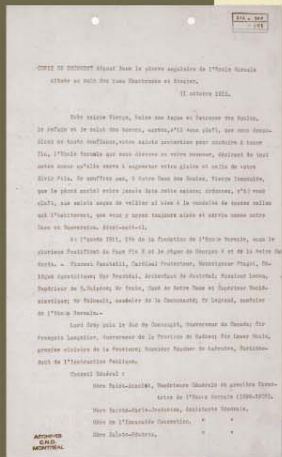
These are the objects of piety contained in that small bottle: Brown and blue scapulars³ of the Sacred Heart; a ribbon of Saint Amabilis;⁴ a crucifix; a statuette of the Blessed Virgin; a statuette of Saint Joseph;⁵ a rosary; medals of Saint John the Baptist, Our Lady of Help Christians, Saint Benedict, Holy Angels, the league of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Saint Gérard Magella, Saint George, Our Lady of the Olives, the Holy Family, Saint Aloysius Gonzaga, Our Lady of the Rosary, Saint Alphonse, Saint Francis of Assisi, the Holy Child Jesus, the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Our Lady of Good Counsel, Our Lady of Good Studies, Saint Joseph, Saint Roch, Jesus the Redeemer and a ribbon of Saint Philomena.⁶

The ceremony was held on October 11, 1911. Archbishop Bruchési, Archbishop of Montreal, and the students and teachers, who had come to the mother house aboard a special streetcar, were present for the ceremony.

Teachers and students gathered in the large staircase in front of the contracts room and over 100 workers stood in the corridor adjoining the Dépôt général. The cornerstone was placed in the grand entranceway where the Archbishop blessed it. He then used a golden trowel to cement the iron plate that sealed the cavity in which was placed the small bottle containing the aforementioned papers and objects.

“I bless not only this stone engraved with the Virgin’s monogram, the Archbishop said, but all the stones and materials that will be used for this construction as well. I also bless all those who contribute to it: architects, contractors, entrepreneurs and workers. Finally, I bless the gentlemen of Saint Sulpice and the sisters of the Congrégation de Notre-Dame.”⁷

“While the Archbishop and the guests signed the minutes, the students intoned the traditional canticle of Our Lady of Schools. Then Reverend Mother had medals and scapulars distributed to the workers as souvenirs for which they were extremely grateful.”⁷



The Elevator Capsule

This time capsule tradition continues today. In fact, even closer in time to us, on Tuesday, November 13, 2012, almost a century after the first capsule was buried, the personnel and sisters of the mother house were invited to a medals ceremony,⁸ following a CND custom that dates back to at least the 19th century. The construction of a new elevator at the mother house was the occasion to pursue this ancient ritual. A glass jar containing a signed message from the sisters of the general administration, a prayer and medals of Saint Marguerite Bourgeoys, the Blessed Virgin and Saint Joseph were placed in a brick in the wall of the elevator shaft. The exterior sides of the brick containing the jar were identified.

¹ The Epic of Gilgamesh is a legendary story from ancient Mesopotamia (approximately where Iraq is today). It is among the earliest surviving works of literature. It was written in Akkadian on clay tablets around the 18th or 17th century BC.
² Similar bottles were found during construction work at Notre-Dame-de-Bon-Secours Chapel and Villa Maria College.
http://www.cnd-m.org/fr/nouvelles/article.php?subaction=showfull&id=1335783194&archive=&start_from=&ucat=5&
³ A scapular (from the Latin scapula, shoulder) refers to two strips of consecrated cloth, at times adorned with images of saints, joined by two ribbons so that they may be worn around the neck.
⁴ Saint Amabilis, who lived during the 5th century, is invoked against fires, mental illness and snake bites.
⁵ It was common to invoke Saint Joseph (Jesus’ father who was a carpenter) for the protection of buildings.
⁶ Annals of École normale Jacques-Cartier, 1910-1926: 312-900.002, 118.
⁷ Ibid. p. 115-116.
⁸ To learn more about the elevator time capsule, go to:
http://www.cnd-m.org/fr/nouvelles/article.php?subaction=showfull&id=1335783194&archive=&start_from=&ucat=5&

Written by: Marie-Josée Morin and Élise Thierry
 Photo search: Samantha Etane, Josée Sarrazin