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Pieces of Atlantic City's past come to life in recovered 1936 time capsule

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With video & photo gallery

ATLANTIC CITY — The old copper box that doubled as a time capsule is a bit battered and sports a green patina from decades of oxidation. Inside, though, the contents remained remarkably well-preserved, even after 74 years.

Giving an intriguing glimpse of Atlantic City's precasino past — when the tourist town was in its glory as the “Queen of Resorts” — officials showed off items Tuesday from the time capsule, which was buried in 1936 and recently unearthed from the demolished remains of the old post office.

[Click here for the photo gallery.](#)

One of the most striking artifacts found inside was a yellowed photograph of the city's first letter carrier, John Harrold Jr., lugging a bulging sack of mail on his back, ready to make his rounds.

Hired in 1887, Harrold was still a postal worker on April 4, 1936, when the time capsule was tucked inside the cornerstone for the then-brand new post office building, at the corner of Pacific Avenue and Illinois Avenue, now known as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard.

“When you think of him delivering mail to the whole city, it was a big job,” Heather Perez, an archivist for the Atlantic City Free Public Library, marveled of Harrold.

[Click here for more details of the capsule opening.](#)

Also discovered in the time capsule were old newspapers, documents, letters from dignitaries and a souvenir program of Atlantic City's semi-centennial celebration of 1904. Some items are in near-pristine condition. It took a half-hour of careful drilling from a grinding tool to finally pry open the copper box on June 30.

"It was well-sealed and that's why everything is in such good condition," Perez explained.

The state Casino Reinvestment Development Authority will place the contents of the time capsule in the care of the Atlantic City library, which is making plans for a public exhibit of some of the items. In the meantime, scans of some of the artifacts, photos and video of the time capsule opening will be displayed on the authority's website at www.njcrda.com.

Copies of newspapers from those days, the Atlantic City Press and Atlantic City Evening Union, told of the execution of Bruno Hauptmann, the man convicted of killing famed aviator Charles Lindbergh's baby boy.

"Hauptmann dies with his lips sealed," the Atlantic City Evening Union proclaimed in a headline about how the convicted kidnapper went quietly to the electric chair at a New Jersey prison.

Both the Atlantic City Press, the predecessor to The Press of Atlantic City, and the old Atlantic City Evening Union sold then for 2 cents per copy. Perez noted that in 1936, a first-class letter cost 2 cents for in-town deliveries and 3 cents if mailed outside Atlantic City.

Of local interest in one paper was a 1936 story about an Atlantic City commissioner who faced allegations that he pocketed state funds. The commissioner denied the allegations, saying the state never sent him any money.

The time capsule also included a listing of property deeds dating from 1874. One deed entry from 1909 was from then-Sheriff Enoch L. "Nucky" Johnson, whose famously corrupt career as Atlantic City's political boss was chronicled in the book "Boardwalk Empire" by Atlantic County Superior Court Judge Nelson Johnson and will be featured this fall in an HBO series of the same title.

Also found in the time capsule were 14 congratulatory letters written by city officials, lawmakers, the post office architect, U.S. Postmaster James Farley and New Jersey Supreme Court Justice Joseph B. Perskie, the grandfather of Steven P. Perskie, the recently retired Superior Court judge and a former state senator.

One letter, from the city's Public Works Commissioner William Casey to city Postmaster Thomas C. Stewart, spoke of how the post office would be a "new modern building" that would serve as a model of efficiency and better technology.

However, the post office finally met its demise this year, when the Casino Reinvestment Development Authority demolished it to make room for the widening of a narrow stretch of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard, between Atlantic and Pacific avenues.

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