



JUSTIN WAN, JOURNAL STAR

Lincoln Mayor Leirion Gaylor Baird looks at a paper from the Pershing Center time capsule on Tuesday.

64 years of history unveiled

Lincoln city officials revealed time capsule from Pershing Center

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Lincoln Journal Star

The 190-pound steel tube was buried May 4, 1959, as part of the city's centennial celebration, set to be open 100 years later in 2059.

However, when the Lincoln City Council approved a redevelopment plan for the Pershing block in 2021, Lincoln's Urban Development Director Dan Marvin said he knew the capsule would have to be opened early to preserve the history inside.

While groups rallied for the preservation of the auditorium's 38-by-140-foot mural, created by artists Leonard Thiessen and Bill Hammon in the 1950s, Marvin and Mayor Leirion Gaylor Baird looked down at the plaque marking the time capsule's location and started making plans.

Tuesday afternoon, city officials revealed the contents of a time capsule sealed beneath the front entrance of the Pershing Auditorium, about 36 years ahead of schedule.

"We're getting ready to put new housing on this block in partnership with the private sector," Gaylor Baird said. "So we've got to open the time capsule a little earlier than Bennett Martin intended. ... It's an exciting and rare moment to have an extraordinary peek into the past."

While the full 100 years may not have passed, change certainly occurred. In a letter intended for Lincoln's mayor in 2059, Martin wrote that some households in Lincoln were just receiving televisions that projected in color.

"This is an interesting look into the past to see what the people at that time valued and what they thought was interesting to the people of the future," said Anna Holley, History Nebraska's state archivist. "Often we have

items from the past, but they're not really addressed to the people of the future. This is really a direct message to us. We get to see exactly what they wanted to say instead of drawing inferences."

After Marvin broke the seal of the rubber-encased capsule, cranking the lid off the metal tube, Holley snapped on a pair of blue latex gloves and began extracting documents, including a joint centennial newspaper between the Lincoln Journal and Lincoln Star.

When the contents were too deep for Holley to grab, Marvin sprawled on the ground and reached into the 4-foot hole.

Other items included a "Gooch's Best" scrapbook, promotion items from local businesses, photos and drawings of the city, the letter to the mayor of 2059 and a video message from then-Mayor Martin.

"It's pretty special," Gaylor Baird said. "We have this message from people who cared

about our city, who called this city home, who left us little mementos about what they were proud of, what made them proud to call this city home. ... It's nice to see that even though things were different back then, we still share a lot of the same values."

The capsule's contents will be transported to History Nebraska, where they will be inventoried and compared with the current collection.

In preparation for documents potentially being ruined, copies of several documents were sent to the museum early, with the caveat that they not be displayed until 2059, Holley said. Now that the capsule is open, that requirement is void and members of the public will be able to access the collection in History Nebraska's reference room on Friday afternoons.

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