

SECRET

ATLANTA

**A GUIDE TO THE WEIRD,
WONDERFUL, AND OBSCURE**

JONAH McDONALD

ATLANTA: THE BIRTHPLACE OF THE TIME CAPSULE?

How Long Do We Have to Wait Before the Crypt of Civilization Is Opened?

In the basement of Phoebe Hearst Memorial Hall at Oglethorpe University is a massive, stainless-steel door that was welded shut in 1940. A sign on the door implores visitors not to open the door until 8113 CE. Behind the door is the so-called Crypt of Civilization, which is thought to be the first modern time capsule. Inside this 200-square-foot room are stacks of books, microfilm, phonograph recordings, seeds, a cash register, unusual bric-a-

brac, and even a specially sealed Budweiser, all dating back to the 1930s. We can marvel at the extensive list of items sealed away: carpet samples, spark plugs, a blotter and inkwell, a Donald Duck toy, a badminton set, Pyrex dishes, a Buddha incense burner, a donut cutter, a bottle of Vaseline, a crochet hook, and four berets.

In the 1930s, Oglethorpe University President Thornwell Jacobs was frustrated by how little information existed about past human cultures. He came up with the idea of a room filled with cultural materials sealed for future

generations. He modeled the Crypt of Civilization after what he imagined archaeologists must have experienced when they first opened the ancient Egyptian pyramids. He calculated that it had

THE CRYPT OF CIVILIZATION

WHAT The first modern time capsule ever created is in the basement of a building at Oglethorpe University.

WHERE Phoebe Hearst Memorial Hall, Oglethorpe University, 4484 Peachtree Rd. NE, Atlanta, GA 30319

COST Free

PRO TIP To visit, email archives@oglethorpe.edu to make an appointment at least 1 week in advance.



Top: The unique architectural style of Oglethorpe University was chosen by the Crypt of Civilization's founder.



Inset: The only way to view of the inside of the Crypt is this historic photo. Photo courtesy of Oglethorpe University.

been 6,177 years since the first fixed date on the Egyptian calendar, so Jacobs decided to lock his for 6,177 years—until 8133 CE.

By 1940 when the Crypt of Civilization was sealed, Jacobs' idea had inspired others. Westinghouse Electric Company created a time capsule as a promotion for the 1939 World's Fair. Many other groups and individuals have followed suit in the years since, but Atlanta's original time capsule is still one of the most extensive and ambitious.

In 1990, the Guinness Book of World Records listed the Crypt of Civilization as “The first successful attempt to bury a record for any future inhabitants (of planet Earth).”