

# Back to the Future: Socorro's Time Capsule

## Socorro 6th Graders Bury Time Capsule

Buried April 14, 1965  
To be Opened April 14, 2065

by Paul Harden

In the 1960s, life was changing rapidly in the United States, generating a fever of burying time capsules to preserve the times for future generations. In early 1965, two teachers at Garfield Elementary, Mrs. Roy Brown and Mrs. B. A. Justice, collaborated to propose a time capsule for Socorro. Presenting the plan to their respective classes of 6th graders, the students evidently embraced the idea enthusiastically. However, this was not simply to be a grade school project, but the official and legal time capsule for Socorro.

In early March, Mrs. Brown and Justice presented the idea to the City of Socorro. The City Council, and Mayor Holm Bursum Jr., approved the plan to allow the time capsule to be buried at the plaza and to provide a legal marker. Mayor Bursum asked City Clerk Ray Senn to oversee and help coordinate the activities. Mr. Senn went right to work. Meeting with the teachers and students, they insisted on the date April 14, 1965 for the capsule to be buried. Mr. Senn checked the survey maps and chose a suitable location near the center of the plaza that was free of utility lines or other obstructions. The Socorro Electric Cooperative was contacted and agreed to donate their services to dig the hole for the time capsule.

In the meantime, back at Garfield Elementary School, the 6th graders went to work as well. It was decided the students in one class would write letters to the students in the other class. In these letters, the students described themselves, their families, their homes, where they lived, things they felt important to them, and what they wanted to be when they grew up.

*Original article published April 2, 2005  
in the Socorro El Defensor Chiftain*



Photograph from the April 15, 1965 *Socorro El Defensor Chieftain* showing the ceremony at the Socorro Plaza when the time capsule was buried.

### THE HISTORY-MAKING STUDENTS

The students of Mrs. Brown's and Mrs. Justice's 6th grade classes became the "Class of 71," graduating from Socorro High School in May, 1971. Over one-third of these students still live in and around Socorro. Reading

through the list of students below, you will no doubt know many of them. It will be their grandchildren, or even great grandchildren, that will open the Socorro Time Capsule on April 14, 2065. How interesting it will be for these people in 2065 to read the letters of their great grandparents.

#### **Mrs. Brown's 6th Grade Class**

Tarn Benjamin  
Manek Bhappu  
Susan Dillon  
Theda Espinosa  
Greg Friberg  
Karen Gilbert  
Bobby Hudgens  
Susan Hughes  
Nick Lopez

Bob Markland  
Bo McDaniel  
Randall Morrow  
John Naranjo  
Selfa Naranjo  
Ruth Otero  
Diana Parsons  
D. Pate  
Sammy Pino

Tony Robles  
Ross Sanford  
Irene Sarate  
Priscilla Sarate  
Ruben Sedillo  
David Self  
Rick Shaw  
Rose Mary Silva

#### **Mrs. Justice' 6th Grade Class**

Diana Baca  
Wendy Bertholf  
Candace Brower  
Jack Castle  
John Chavez  
Janie Clough  
Art Colgate  
Marilyn Combs  
Jane Coulson  
Janet Cuellar

Anastacio Garza  
Terry Gonzales  
Mike Hefner  
Johnny Jojola  
Margie Jojola  
Lynne Kroggel  
Willie Lucero  
Michael Millis  
David Moore  
Peter Romero

Daniel Saavedra  
Concie Sanchez  
Diane Sanchez  
Susan Smith  
Gustavo Soto  
Burt Taylor  
Gilbert Warner  
Connie Weatherly

## PREPARING THE CAPSULE

While the students were busy authoring their letters, the teachers, with the help of several parents, began collecting the other items chosen for the time capsule. This included magazines covering the assassination of President John F. Kennedy to political items of the last national and local elections.

The first article on the time capsule appeared in the March 23, 1965 El Defensor Chieftain. That issue, incidentally, was included in the capsule.

There is some confusion as to who built the actual time capsule and what it was made of. Some recall an Army ammo box being used. Others, including Mr. Senn, remembers it being modeled after an ammo box, but built of wood with a hinged top. To this day, he still recalls the exact dimensions of the box: 10 inches by 20 inches long and 16 inches wide. He recalls wondering at the time how it would be found in 100 years, since it was made of wood, and locating it with a metal detector would be impossible. As a result, Mr. Senn, who also owned Socorro Engineering, later surveyed the burial spot.

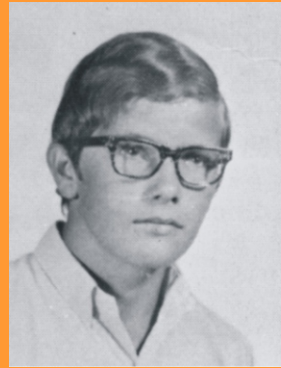
On Monday, April 12, the Socorro Electric Cooperative dug the hole on the plaza for the time capsule. Pete Silva, who operated the auger, drilled a 16-inch diameter hole to a depth of 7 feet, based on the 16 inch width of the box. The following day, Mrs. Brown's and Justice's classes merged to wrap and catalog the items, carefully placing them into the time capsule. Also that day, the local newspaper contained another front page article updating the story of the time capsule and inviting the public to the ceremonies the following day. This April 13 issue of the El Defensor Chieftain was the last item packed into the time capsule. By prior arrangement, Mrs. Brown delivered the time capsule to New Mexico Tech to be professionally sealed.

## TIME CAPSULE CEREMONY

Wednesday, April 14, 1965, was an exciting day for the students of Garfield Elementary School, especially for the 6th grade classes of Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Justice. By mid-morning, New Mexico Tech returned the time capsule to the students, sealed in several thick layers of fiberglass. Everything was ready.

The ceremonies began at 2 p.m. City Councilman Harold Olsen was the master of ceremonies. He began by thanking the teachers and students of the 6th grade class for being "optimistic

## Some of the 6th grade students today . . .



1969 SHS Yearbook



Photo: Paul Harden

**Mike Hefner, like most of the 6th grade students, remembers writing the letters for the time capsule**



1969 SHS Yearbook



Photo: Paul Harden

**Irene Sarate-Duran now lives in Odessa, Texas**

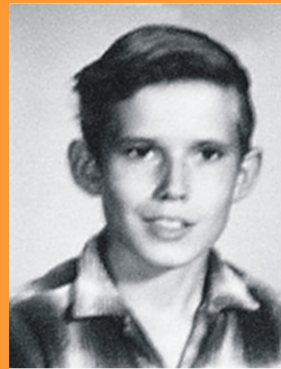


Photo: Burt Taylor



Photo: Paul Harden

**Burt Taylor of Mrs. Brown's class lives in Socorro**



enough to believe that a free people will dig up the capsule in 100 years. Those people will say, "they (the pupils) had faith." He also told the pupils, "You are burying your hope with this capsule that this nation, this state, and this city will endure."

As the Garfield students and the 75 others in attendance looked on, Mrs. Brown handed the time capsule to City Clerk Ray Senn. The April 15, 1965 El Defensor Chieftain described the burial of the time capsule as follows: "After the speaking was over, City Clerk Raymond L. Senn lowered the capsule into the hole, and put in the first shovelful of earth. Olsen threw in the second shovelful, Mrs. Brown the third, and Mrs. Justice the fourth. The



**The Socorro Time Capsule is buried east-northeast from the center of the plaza.**



**Ray Senn placed the time capsule into the burial hole during the 1965 ceremonies. Senn's survey, and sharp memory, was invaluable in relocating the capsule in 2005.**

pupils in the two classes then formed a semicircle around the capsule's burial place and the chunk of Jumbo, and each shoveled in the earth on top of their project on which they had spent many hours."

### THE REST OF THE STORY

Witnesses in attendance at the ceremony report there was a little more to the story than officially reported above.

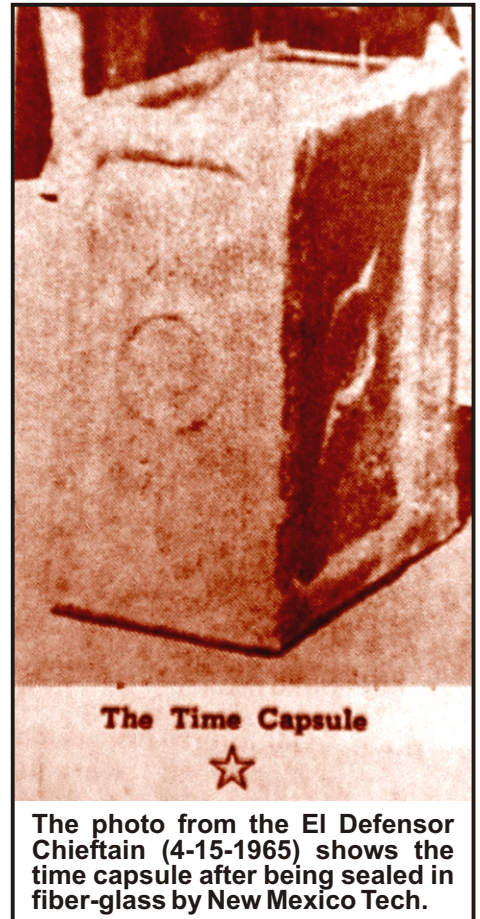
As Mr. Senn officially placed the time capsule into the hole, the box didn't fit! Remember Mr. Senn's 16-inch width measurement of the box? And, Mr. Silva's 16-inch augered hole? What wasn't taken into account was the thickness of fiberglass added during the sealing process by New Mexico Tech, making the time capsule box now about a half-inch wider than the hole. Quickly thinking, Mr. Senn whispered something into Mrs. Brown's ear, who returned to the podium and re-addressed the crowd. Once the students attention was diverted back to the podium, Mr. Senn, and City Counselor Harold Olsen, kicked and stomped the box into the hole, being careful the pupils didn't see. Coercing the box about two feet deep, they finally hit softer, sandy soil. The time capsule then dropped to the bottom of the hole. Once Mr. Senn gave the thumbs up to Mrs. Brown, the teachers and students once again returned to the hole and ceremoniously took turns shoveling dirt into the hole, just as the El Defensor Chieftain article reported.

### WHY APRIL 14th?

April 14th was chosen as the date to bury the Socorro Time Capsule as it was the 100th anniversary of the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln. On Good Friday, April 14, 1865, President Lincoln was shot at Ford's Theatre in Washinton, D.C. by John Wilkes Booth, a southern sympathizer. Booth was pursued by Union soldiers and found sleeping in a barn on the morning of April 26, 1865 near Bowling Green, Virginia. Refusing to surrender, the soldiers set the barn ablaze to force out Booth and his companion. Still refusing to surrender, Booth was shot and dragged to safety. Unfortunately, the shot severed his spinal cord and Booth died shortly thereafter.

In 1965, many Americans saw parallels between the assassination of Presidents Abraham Lincoln and John F. Kennedy. In both cases, a man named Johnson became the next president; the suspected killers had three names, John Wilkes Booth and Lee Harvey Oswald, and both were killed before being interrogated, to name a few. As a result, it was never ascertained why these men killed the president, who hired them, or, if they were in fact the actual assassins, leading to conspiracy theories that persist to this day. Even in the case of President Lincoln, there are many who believe the man killed at Bowling Green was not actually John Wilkes Booth. As recently as 1992, the Booth family made another plea to have the body exhumed for DNA testing to verify the body is, indeed, that of John Wilkes Booth. That motion was denied by the U.S. Supreme Court.

Abraham Lincoln is generally

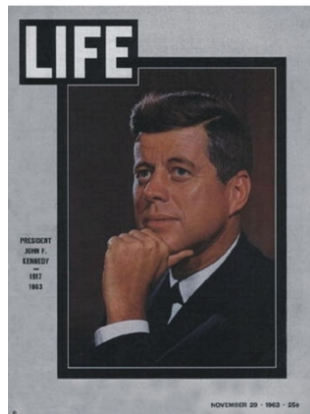


**The photo from the El Defensor Chieftain (4-15-1965) shows the time capsule after being sealed in fiber-glass by New Mexico Tech.**

considered one of our greatest Presidents. He united a torn country and solidified the meaning of freedom to millions of previously disenfranchised peoples. It was with these virtues the students of 1965 chose April 14 to bury their time capsule, and with the hope these values are still firmly in place on April 14, 2065.

### TIME CAPSULE CONTENTS

All the items placed into the time capsule were catalogued by the two classes and printed in the April 15, 1965 El Defensor Chieftain.



**Some of the magazines placed into the Socorro Time Capsule**

1. The letters from the students, some photographs, and a class diary were assembled in scrapbook form and the first placed into the time capsule.
2. A city map, marked by the students, showing where they lived
3. Letters from Mayor Holm Bursum Jr., the Socorro City Council, and the Socorro Board of Education.
4. Letters of blessing from Rev. Donald Beam, San Miguel Parish, and Rev. B.A. Justice, St. Paul Methodist Church, and husband to 6th grade teacher Mrs. Justice.
5. Life, Newsweek and Saturday Evening Post magazines that covered the assassination and funeral of President Kennedy, the death of Sir Winston Churchill, the last national election, and the first manned flight of the Gemini space capsule.
6. The March 23 and April 13 issues of El Defensor Chieftain, containing the time capsule articles.
7. Albuquerque Journal on the funeral of Sir Winston Churchill.
8. The El Paso Times on President Kennedy's assassination.
9. A special issue of New Mexico Magazine, showing present day advances in medicine.
10. Some political posters and buttons from the last elections.

The above list clearly shows those events considered important to 1965 Socorroans. The country was stunned when John F. Kennedy was assassinated on November 22, 1963. For those readers under 40 years of age, not alive when Kennedy was assassinated, it was little different than 9-11. It was a punch in the stomach that took a long time to heal. In April 1965, as the Socorro Time Capsule was being prepared, the tragic death of our President was still very fresh on everybody's mind.

On January 24, 1965, another popular world leader died: Sir Winston Churchill. The man who led England through WW2 with the Germans was highly respected in this country as well. In fact, just before his assassination in 1963, President Kennedy had made Churchill an honorary citizen of the United States. The world had lost two great leaders in scarcely a year.

And finally, just two weeks before the Socorro Time Capsule was sealed, American's had joined the space race with the Russians. On March 23, 1965, with astronauts Virgil Grissom and John Young, Gemini 3 became the first manned American spacecraft to orbit the earth. However, during re-entry, NASA lost contact with the space capsule, and it splashed down over 70 miles short of the recovery ships. It took nearly an hour for a Navy helicopter to find Gemini 3 and rescue the battered astronauts, bobbing up and down

helplessly in the heavy seas. It was a proud moment in American history, inspite of the initial fears it had been lost in the Pacific.

Viet Nam was just emerging as a confusing military action in Southeast Asia. Many of Socorro's graduating seniors from 1967 through 1973, including those in Mrs. Brown's and Justice's classes, saw first hand the war in Viet Nam. In 1965, it was just beginning.

What Socorroan's did NOT have forty years ago were color televisions, microwave ovens, VCRs, personal computers or cell-phones. Hard to believe, but people of this era actually dated, and got married, without cell phones or email!

### **HISTORY OF TIME CAPSULES**

While people have buried items of importance for future generations to find for milleniums, the Masons are generally accredit for the tradition. As the Masons built the now famous buildings and churches of early Europe,

they started the building with a special corner stone that contained a secret chamber. In the chamber they would place documents of the building plans, a list of the architect, engineers, masons and others involved in the construction. This was not necessarily to preserve these documents for future generations, but to prove the lineage of the Masons.

This tradition continues to this day as most large buildings contain either a special corner stone or dedication plaque. And, many contain a time capsule.

Interestingly, the term "time capsule" did not appear until 1939. It was this year that Westinghouse built a special container, filling it with items of the era, to be buried in a well publicized ceremony at the 1939 New York World's Fair. It was a large stainless steel cylinder with a bullet end. Laying on it's side for display, many joked that it looked like the "space capsule" in a recent Abbott and Costello movie, and thus given the nickname "time capsule" – the term used to this day.

### **Some of the 6th grade students today . . .**



1969 SHS Yearbook



Photo: Paul Harden

**Peter Romero has a vivid memory of the time capsule, excepts disputes it's been over 40 years!**



1969 SHS Yearbook



Photo: Paul Harden

**Sammy Pino is one of the "Class of 71" decorated for his service in Viet Nam**

## LOST TIME CAPSULES

According to the International Time Capsule Society, ITCS, the vast majority of time capsules are never recovered. They are often forgotten, the location can not be found, identifying markers removed, or otherwise destroyed. The ITCS was formed to register time capsules in the hope that more of them can be found and opened when intended.

One of the most famous missing time capsules is that from our nation's bicentennial celebration at Valley Forge. A special time capsule was prepared, containing the signatures of over 22 million Americans, to be opened on the nation's 300th birthday. Shortly

before President Ford was to dedicate the time capsule at the July 4, 1976 celebration, the capsule was stolen from the van that carried it. It has never been found.

In 1793, President George Washington, a Mason, placed a small time capsule in the U.S. Capitol building when he laid the cornerstone. The event was recorded in newspapers at the time. However, in spite of numerous renovations and reconstruction to the Capitol building, Washington's original cornerstone and time capsule have never been found.

Another interesting missing time capsule is that from the hit television show M\*A\*S\*H. In January 1983, following the last episode, some of the crew and actors placed many of the props and costumes into a box and secretly buried it in the 20th Century Fox parking lot. Before anybody had noticed, the studio had sold the property. The Hollywood Marriot Hotel now sits on top of the M\*A\*S\*H time capsule.

## PROTECTING OUR CAPSULE

The point of the large number of unrecovered time capsules is how important it is for Socorroans to guard and protect ours. The Socorro Time Capsule is marked with a small brass marker. However, in researching this article, it could not be found. Several of the 1965 students, such as Selifa



**The original 1965 time capsule documents were quickly found by 2005 Socorro County Clerk Audry Jaramillo (l.) and Deputy Clerk Carmen Gallegos. Hopefully the 2065 clerks will be just as efficient!**

(Naranjo) Lucero, have also noticed the marker was missing.

Contacting the Mayor's office, City Clerk Pat Salome honestly explained that during renovation of the plaza several years ago, when the brick sidewalk and benches were added in the center, the contractor apparently bricked-over the small marker without making notice of it. Since the plaza is city property, the legal survey would be a city document. However, searches of city records and surveys yielded no maps that showed the location of the time capsule. While the City of Socorro is eager to replace the marker, without



**Ignacio Garcia was the Socorro County Clerk in the 1960s and recorded the time capsule documents that are still on file.**

accurate survey information, little can be done. It appeared the city had lost the original documents - and the time capsule.

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In researching this article, the sacred clue came from this inconspicuous statement in the 1965 *El Defensor* Chieftain: "A document on the capsule will be recorded in the *court house*." [Italics added]. Armed with this information, the author asked the Socorro County Clerk's Office if such a document existed. It looked bleak for a moment, as the blood left the faces of County Clerk Audry Jaramillo and Deputy Clerk Carmen Gallegos. However, in less than five minutes, they handed me a copy of the missing document. Let's hope our County Clerks in 2065 are as efficient as Clerks Jaramillo and Gallegos. (In case they are not, the document filing information is included in this article!).

The long-lost document, the original survey performed by Ray Senn 40 years ago, has since been delivered to the city, which turned out was never in their possession to begin with. City Clerk Pat Salome and Mayor Ravi Bhasker have given this project their full support by authorizing a new survey to relocate the time capsule and install a new marker.

Had it not been for the foresight, keen memory and skills of people like Ray Senn, Pete Silva, Audry Jaramillo and Carmen Gallegos, the Socorro Time Capsule may have been lost forever

more. And, while we often hear only the problems and shortcomings of our County or City governments, the support given to preserve the Socorro Time Capsule is proof positive of the sincere desire of our public officials to truly serve the good of the community. Kudos to all.

### **BACK TO THE FUTURE**

This history article is truly unique. While documenting an historical event occurring 40 years ago, it is also to preserve another historic event yet to occur. It is quite possible it will be this issue of the El Defensor Chieftain that tells the story to our descendents, allowing them to locate and unearth the Socorro Time Capsule in 2065. We worked hard to get it to you. For that reason, 2005 Socorro wishes to pass on to our 2065 brethren our love, and hope that you find your Socorro as enduring as ours.

If only we could hear from you!

### **References used in this article:**

*Socorro El Defensor Chieftain, March 23, April 13 and April 15, 1965 issues, 1969 Socorro High School Yearbook, Sophomore Class photos, International Time Capsule Society, Time and Newsweek Magazine online archives, interviews with Ray Senn, Pete Silva, Ignacio Garcia, Irene Sarate-Duran, Priscilla Sarate-Anaya, Selfa Naranjo-Lucero, Sammy Pino, Kay Brower, Mike Hefner, Peter Romero, Burt Taylor, Susan Leviner, Susan Smith, Pat Salome, Audry Jaramillo, Carmen Gallegos and Mayor Ravi Bhasker.*

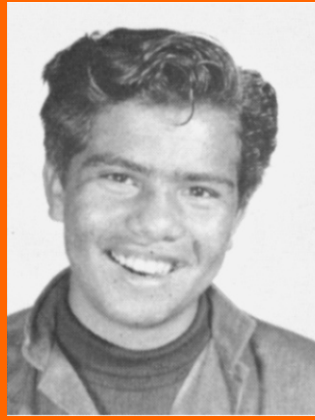
**Photos.** All photos are by Paul Harden or from the author's collection, except where noted.

The original time capsule document filed in 1965 with the Socorro County Clerk's office (Misc. Journal Vol. 263, Page 107). It was located in 2005 by the author.

The survey information is from Ray Senn, who donated the survey in 1965.



### **Some of the 6th Grade Students . . .**



1969 SHS Yearbook, Sophomore Photos

**Willie Lucero (left), of Mrs. Justice' class, met Selfa Naranjo (right) of Mrs. Brown's class while working on the Socorro Time Capsule. They have been Mr. and Mrs. Lucero since high school.**

State of New Mexico } S.S.  
Socorro County }  
This instrument of writing was filed:  
For Record on 2.11.65 at 10:00 A.M. on  
JUN 1 1965  
and duly recorded in Vol. 263  
of Misc. Journals Page 107  
By \_\_\_\_\_ County Clerk  
By \_\_\_\_\_ Deputy

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA )  
STATE OF NEW MEXICO )  
COUNTY OF SOCORRO ) -----  
CITY OF SOCORRO )

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

Now cometh Ruth Brown and Peggy Justice, sixth grade teachers for Socorro Consolidated Schools, District No. 1, Socorro County, Socorro, New Mexico, for and in behalf of the Sixth Grade Class in the Garfield School and members of the 1964-1965 school term, and charge that they are legal representatives of the Sixth Grade Class, and that they are here to present their case:

The students in the Sixth Grade Class this day, April 11, 1965 buried a Time Capsule at a depth of 6 feet under the ground; at a point which bears N 67 degrees 09' E, a distance of 19.9 feet from the geometric center of the Plaza (Kittrell Park); and further described as a point which bears S 78 degrees 32' E, a distance of 563.5 feet from the Southeast Corner of Lot 9 of the Fisher Addition in the City of Socorro.

We, the Sixth Grade Class at Garfield School, in order to let children 100 years from now know what we think is important, what we do, and how we live do hereby bury this TIME CAPSULE, and cause the legal description of its location to be recorded with the records of the Socorro County Clerk, Socorro County, Socorro, New Mexico.

We further recuest that the Citizens of Socorro in the year 2065 will preserve this Time Capsule and the contents thereof in a Socorro City Museum or in a Socorro City Library.

In witness thereof we set out hands this 11th day of April, A.D. 1965.

Garnet Cuellar Class President--Justice's Room  
Gilbert Warner Secretary

David Self Class President--Brown's Room  
Manek Bhappu Secretary