

A TALE OF THREE TIME CAPSULES – 1861, 1953 AND 2011

The Octagon House, has the distinction of owning three time capsules.

The first time capsule, a round tin cigar can, is one of the Octagon House's most prized possessions. On July 14, 1861, it was deposited by the home's original owners, William and Harriet McElroy, in a wall of the staircase going up to the cupola. In it, the McElroys put an ambrotype (photograph) of their family, a fascinating letter addressed to future ages and an assortment of newspaper clippings with local and national news of the time. The time capsule was discovered by an electrician working on the renovation of the Octagon House in 1953. This discovery was made after the Octagon House was saved by The NSCDA:CA and moved across the street. The contents of the time capsule provided an early history of the builder of the home and its occupants. The Octagon House is now the headquarters of The National Society of The Colonial Dames of America in California.



The second time capsule was placed shortly after the discovery of the first one. It is a large stone marked “THE NATIONAL SOCIETY of COLONIAL DAMES of AMERICA resident in California, April 7, 1953” and is located to the right of the stairs leading to the front porch. This cornerstone holds photos of the McElroy family and the Octagon House before it was moved to its current location; copies of newspaper articles about the house, the McElroy letter and a California Historical Society newsletter; the NSCDA:CA directory for 1949:50; a 1935 booklet entitled “Forty Years of the NSCDA in California”; a 1939 M.H. De Young Memorial Museum exhibition catalogue featuring items from the collection; and a 1951 NSCDA:CA pamphlet, “Early Mexican Ranchos in the San Francisco Bay Region”. The cornerstone was laid on April 7, 1953 in a special dedication ceremony that featured several speeches, prayers by Bishop Parsons of Grace Cathedral and a reception in honor of Misses Edith and Lucy Allyne (the two sisters who donated the land on which the Octagon House and its colonial garden are located).

The third time capsule was dedicated at the Octagon House on July 14, 2011, the 150th anniversary of the original 1861 time capsule. The time capsule was a translucent box. Items included in the time capsule were: a copy of Nancy Weston's book, *The NSCDA in California, 1895:2003*, the *Sulgrave Manor DVD*, the *Antiques Magazine*, as well as articles on the history and anniversary of Octagon House that appeared in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *The Marina Times*, *The Nob Hill Gazette*, *The Quill*, and *the Argonaut*. A program of the gala dinner, celebration and photographs from the ceremony were included. Mr. Charles Fracchia, head of the San Francisco Museum and Historical Society, spoke at the gala dinner held at the St Francis Yacht Club. Two additional receptions were held at the Octagon House to celebrate the 150th anniversary. One was held for the Union Street Merchants Association. The other reception welcomed all the local historical preservation and museum groups to share in the celebration as we move forward together in the future.