



Time Capsules for the Semiquincentennial of the Signing of the Declaration of Independence

October 28, 2026

On July 4, 2026, the United States celebrated the semiquincentennial (250th) anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. As part of the celebration, Congress authorized two time capsules—one for Philadelphia, PA, to be placed near Independence Hall, and one for Washington, DC, to be placed in the U.S. Capitol. In addition to these authorizations, this InFocus also discusses past official time capsules to celebrate milestone anniversaries of the Declaration of Independence.

Over the ages, time capsules have captured the popular mind ... Time capsules are about sending out slices of our time to the future.

All successful time capsules must evoke ... a real sense of immediacy with a given period of historical-cultural space-time, supplied by a wide variety of significant human details, mundane, grandiose or both.

--William E. Jarvis, *Time Capsules: A Cultural History*
(McFarland & Co., 2003), pp. 2, 16.

Semiquincentennial Time Capsules

To celebrate the semiquincentennial anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, Congress authorized two capsules—one in Philadelphia, PA and one in Washington, DC.

Philadelphia Time Capsule

In 2016, Congress authorized the U.S. Semiquincentennial Commission (America 250) to create a time capsule containing “a representative portion of all books, manuscripts, miscellaneous printed matter, memorabilia, relics, and other materials relating to the United States Semiquincentennial,” to be buried on Independence Mall on July 4, 2026, and unearched on the 500th anniversary of the United States on July 4, 2276 (P.L. 114-196, §7(f)).

“America’s Time Capsule” was built by the [National Institute of Standards and Technology](#) (NIST) and was [buried on July 4, 2026](#), at Independence National Historical Park in Philadelphia. The semiquincentennial time capsule [contains submissions from](#) each state, the District of Columbia, and each territory. Other submissions originate from America 250 and its partner organizations, including the International Olympic Committee and NBC’s *TODAY Show*, the [Library of Congress](#), Major League Baseball, the National Basketball Association, the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Football League, the National Hockey League, NIST, the Professional Golfers’ Association (PGA) of America and the PGA Tour, the Smithsonian Institution, and the Supreme Court of the United

States. [Figure 1](#) shows “America’s Time Capsule” at the burial ceremony in Philadelphia, PA.

Figure 1. America’s Time Capsule, Philadelphia



Source: America 250, “America250 Time Capsule,” July 5, 2026.

Congressional Time Capsule

In 2026, Congress authorized the creation of a time capsule and its burial in the U.S. Capitol Visitor Center (P.L. 119-79). The time capsule was [unveiled on June 24, 2026](#), and put on [display in Emancipation Hall](#) (H.Con.Res. 109). At the ceremony, [Speaker of the House Mike Johnson](#) noted that “In many ways, the Congressional Time Capsule is a reflection of our faith in the future of this grand experiment in self-governance, faith that this moment is worth preserving, and faith that the great American story will endure for another 250 years.”

The Congressional Time Capsule’s legislation (P.L. 119-79) specified that the capsule is to include “a single, joint letter” from congressional leadership and any other item that leadership jointly determines appropriate. The Architect of the Capitol issued a series of [Dear Colleague letters](#) about contents of the time capsule. For a list of contributions from congressional delegations, see <https://www.visitthecapitol.gov/tc-kiosk-embed>. Specific burial plans for the Congressional Time Capsule have yet to be announced. The time capsule is scheduled to be opened on July 4, 2276, during the 244th Congress (P.L. 119-79, §2(d)). [Figure 2](#) shows the Congressional Time Capsule on display in Emancipation Hall of the Capitol Visitor Center.

Figure 2. Congressional Time Capsule, U.S. Capitol Visitor Center

Source: U.S. Capitol (@visitthecapitol), X post, July 23, 2026.

Past Anniversary Time Capsules

At least two previous milestone anniversaries of the Declaration of Independence involved time capsules as part of the celebration—for the 1876 centennial and the 1976 bicentennial.

Centennial (1876)

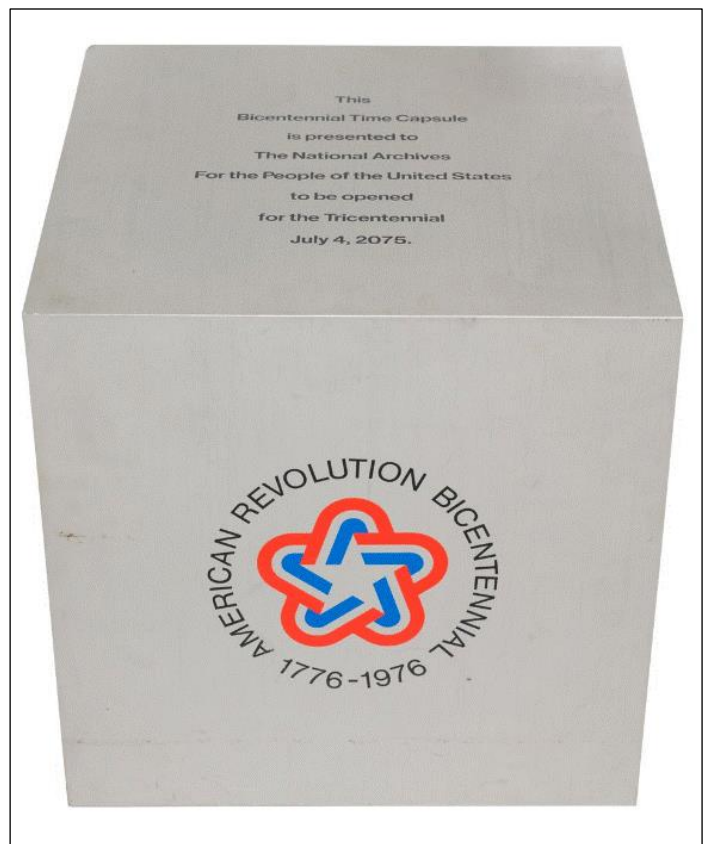
In 1876, Philadelphia hosted the Centennial Exhibition to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. For the 1876 Centennial Exposition, Mrs. Anna Deihm, widow of Civil War veteran Charles F. Deihm, facilitated the creation of a safe to be filled with memorabilia from the centennial celebrations. In 1879, Deihm offered the safe as a gift to the United States, with the expectation that it would be opened in 1976 by the President of the United States. In February 1879, Congress held a [ceremony in the Capitol to formally close the safe](#). On January 19, 1976, at the beginning of the 2nd session of the 94th Congress (1975-1976), Representatives and Senators attended a ceremony to open the outer doors of the safe, which was then put on display for public viewing. [Figure 3](#) shows the Centennial Safe as opened by President Ford in 1976.

Figure 3. Centennial Safe

Source: Warren K. Leffler, *Mrs. Charles F. Deihm's "Centennial Safe" Kept at the U.S. Capitol and Opened by President Gerald Ford as Part of the United States Bicentennial*, photograph, Library of Congress, June 23, 1976.

Bicentennial (1976)

For the bicentennial anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the congressionally authorized American Revolution Bicentennial Administration (P.L. 93-179) created the National Bicentennial Time Capsule “as a [bicentennial gift to the United States](#).” The National Bicentennial Time Capsule was 1 of 56 time capsules made by the Reynolds Metals Company, which, [according to media reports](#), gave one to each state and territory. The National Bicentennial Time Capsule is [stored by the National Archives and Records Administration](#) and is scheduled to be opened on July 4, 2075. [Figure 4](#) shows the National Bicentennial Time Capsule.

Figure 4. National Bicentennial Time Capsule

Source: American Revolution Bicentennial Administration, “[National Bicentennial Time Capsule](#),” National Archives and Records Administration, 1976.

For more information on congressional celebrations of milestone anniversaries of the Declaration of Independence, see CRS Report R48473, *Congressional Involvement in the Celebration of Anniversaries of the Declaration of Independence*, by Jacob R. Straus.

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