

## Learning about the Past

There are many ways that we can learn about the past. One of the most common ways to learn about the way things used to be is to read books about history. But there are other ways that we can get information about history. We can look at photographs, interview people who have lived through events, read documents that were written at the time (such as newspapers or diaries), and look at objects. Objects are sometimes called “artifacts,” and studying artifacts is one of the best ways that historians and archaeologists have of learning about what life in the past was like.

Sometimes we find artifacts by luck, and sometimes artifacts are saved so that people from the future will be able to use them to learn about the past. For example, when a ship sinks the objects on board sink with it. They might later be found by an underwater archaeologist and studied to get a glimpse of what life was like in the year the ship went down. That happened in the case of the Titanic, one of the most famous shipwrecks of all time. The Titanic hit an iceberg and sank in 1912, but the wreck of the massive ship was not discovered until 1985. When divers were finally able to bring up some of the artifacts from the shipwreck, they told a story of what life was like for people two generations before.

In some cases, people save objects just because they are important to them personally or because they believe they are important to the community. Some of these objects will end up in a museum to help people in the future to understand the past. Museums take care of artifacts from the past, keeping them in good condition so that they can serve as examples of what it was like to live at a certain time in the past. For example, if you come to The History Museum *At the Castle*, you can see a Model T Ford automobile from 1926. Looking at this car will help you to understand what kinds of transportation were available to people eighty years ago.

Other times, people specifically leave behind artifacts for others from the future to find. In doing this, it is like they are sending a message to people of the future saying “this is what it is like to be alive today.” This is the case when people create a “time capsule.” A time capsule is a collection of objects set aside in the present to be retrieved or opened at a specific time in the future.

Although there is no certain definition of what is in a time capsule, a few things should be kept in mind:

- 1) Time capsules usually contain objects.
- 2) Time capsules are put together on purpose by people who have something they want to say to the future.
- 3) By deciding what to include and what not to include in a time capsule, the person or people putting it together make a statement about how they view their life or society at the present time.