



By Franklin Crawford

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Ithaca, NY, 2006 – Morgan Smiley Baldwin, Cornell Class of 1915, is buried in France where he died from wounds received during the Battle of the Hindenburg Line, the last major offensive of World War I.

Baldwin, who was killed about a month before the war ended, was a member of Delta Phi fraternity, and his fraternity pin and ribbon were among the items discovered Sept. 26 in a sealed copper box nested in the base of a pier on the parapet of the Baldwin Memorial Stairway on University Avenue just below Delta Phi's Gothic fraternity (Llenroc).

On Nov. 11, 2006, at 1 p.m., Baldwin's Delta Phi effects and other Cornell memorabilia from the box -- as well as some new items -- will be re-interred during a Veterans Day ceremony with full military honors, held at the site. The event is an 81-year-old echo of the original placement ceremony that occurred on Armistice Day, Nov. 11, 1925, the year the stairway was erected.

It's no secret that the Baldwin Memorial Stairway is a monument to one of Cornell's fallen sons. But institutional memory needs repeated prodding: In 2006, no living person was aware that a time capsule lay within its stoneworks. In September of that year, Cornell masons replacing and repairing the shale stone on the stairway's overlook tapped into what at first appeared to be tin flashing or a hidden drain. Worked stopped. After some effort, a metal box was removed. So began a series of excited calls to supervisors, facilities managers and university librarians.

At 1:30 p.m. that Sept. 26 afternoon, a Cornell tinsmith from the Humphreys Service Building carefully unsealed open the well-soldered container. As the Cornell alma mater tolled from McGraw Tower (mere coincidence, but a nice touch), a group of university staff, including librarians, trades people and administrators, stood witness.

Elaine Engst, university archivist, then removed each item from the metal coffin, exposing them to the light of day for the first time in 80-plus years. Inside were perfectly preserved copies of the Cornell Daily Sun, Nov. 10, 1925; a copy of The Ithaca Journal; original blueprints of the stairway designed by Bryant Fleming, Cornell Class of 1901; pictures of the construction; a Freshman Handbook, 1925; Cornell Class of 1892, 33rd anniversary class book; lists of Cornellians killed during WWI (265; Cornell had provided 4,598 commissioned officers, more than West Point) and Tompkins County war dead; Baldwin's Delta Phi pin, fraternity ribbon and a directory; memorial programs; and other items.

The stairway was a gift to Cornell from a grieving father, Arthur J. Baldwin, Class of 1892, to memorialize his son. Donald R. Baldwin, Class of 1916, Morgan's brother, helped to lay the stairway cornerstone. The box was placed by George S. Tarbell, president of Delta Phi fraternity, of which all the Baldwins were members.

Engst said all the university's older buildings contain cornerstone boxes with similar materials to those found in the stairway -- and these are indicated in the building plans. A container was found when Roberts Hall was demolished in the late 1980s and another when Sage Hall was renovated (1996-98). But the Baldwin time capsule was lost to memory.

A new box made of stainless steel has replaced the container. Among the items in it: More recent letters from the Baldwin family and a copy of the Cornell Chronicle bearing this story and photographs.

Photo: Frankie14850 stood on the Baldwin Parapet's Southwest Corner to take the above

From 2006: On Our Iconic "Tiny Town" Image with story about where it was taken

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image. It was later "tilt-shifted" using a Photoshop editing tool, by tinytowntimes.com co-founder, Rigel Stuhmiller, a.k.a. Belinda Cho.