



Old Safe Reveals Historical Relics Of Women's Suffrage Group

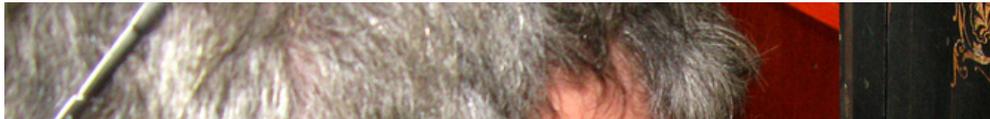
by MARGOT ADLER

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Started in 1888 by suffragettes like Susan B. Anthony, the National Council of Women of the United States still exists today in a small office near the United Nations.

On the organization's 125th anniversary, it teamed up with the University of Rochester to open an old safe painted with the words "Woman Suffrage Party." No one knew what was in the safe or when it had last been opened.

On the website of the University of Rochester's Susan B. Anthony Center, people were speculating all week about what might be in the safe. Would it be lists of secret members? Organizing strategies and protest plans? Or perhaps the original copy of the 19th Amendment that gave women the right to vote? Perhaps love letters, perhaps photographs?

Perhaps nothing, and that's exactly what safe cracker Elaad Israeli said. Most times when he opens safes there's not much, just "rubber bands, paper clips [and] pens."

Israeli worked the combination lock while people crowded into a tiny room. "I don't want to sound rude, but I really need quiet to be able to concentrate," he said.

Suddenly, he was done, and Mary Singletary, the president of the National Council of Women, pulled open the safe to reveal a cache of items.

First there was a change purse filled with coins from France, Mexico and various other countries. There was also a box with a Smithsonian replica of the gavel originally used by Susan B. Anthony, as well as an envelope with a 1999 stamp that revealed the safe had been opened within the past 14 years.

The safe also held medals, a silver broach, a wooden stamp, a corporate seal, a paper of incorporation dating back to 1931. Other documents included federal tax exemption papers from 1957 and an IRS letter from 1940. They didn't open the documents and letters because archivists suggested they handle them with care and many

may later be digitized.

Perhaps the loveliest items were six small panels, replicas of huge wall murals of women that were commissioned for the Chicago World's Fair in 1933. Catherine Cerulli, the director of the Susan B. Anthony Center, pointed out that one woman is clearly a Red Cross worker.

"They're historical pictures of women, women caring for others," she says. "Perhaps these are historical figures."

Why was the safe not opened for a long time? Singletary said the hundreds of dollars needed to hire a locksmith was just too much for an organization struggling to survive with multiple projects.

"I had to make a choice of raising money for my programs or raising money to pay this gentleman," she said.

She chose the programs until the University of Rochester joined the effort. One thing they also found was a candy box filled with keys, one going to a storage room in the basement. So who knows, there may be more discoveries.