

United States Bullion Depository

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The **United States Bullion Depository**, often known as **Fort Knox**, is a fortified vault building located adjacent to Fort Knox, Kentucky, used to store a large portion of United States official gold reserves and occasionally other precious items belonging or entrusted to the federal government.

The United States Bullion Depository holds 4,578 metric tons (5,046.3 short tons) of gold bullion (147.2 million oz. troy). This is roughly 3 percent of all the gold ever refined throughout human history. Even so, the depository is second in the United States to the Federal Reserve Bank of New York's underground vault in Manhattan, which holds 7,000 metric tons (7,716 tons) of gold bullion (225.1 million oz. troy), some of it in trust for foreign nations, central banks and official international organizations.

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US Bullion Depository, Fort Knox, Kentucky

U.S. National Register of Historic Places



The United States Bullion Depository

Location:	Gold Vault Rd. and Bullion Blvd., Fort Knox, Kentucky
Area:	42 acres (17 ha)
Built by:	Great Lakes Construction Co.
Architect:	Louis A. Simon
Architectural style:	Classical Revival
Governing body:	Federal
NRHP Reference#:	88000056 ^[1]
Added to NRHP:	February 18, 1988

History

In 1933, U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order 6102, which outlawed the private ownership of gold coins, gold bullion, and gold certificates by American citizens, forcing them to sell these to the Federal Reserve. As a result, the value of the gold held by the Federal Reserve increased from \$4 billion to \$12 billion between 1933 and 1937.^[2] This left the federal government with a large gold reserve and no place to store it. In 1936, the U.S. Treasury Department began construction of the United States Bullion Depository at Fort Knox, Kentucky, on land transferred from the military. The Gold Vault was completed in December 1936 for US \$560,000 (this would cost \$9,264,844 today). The site is located on what is now Bullion Boulevard at the intersection of Gold Vault Road. The building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1988, in recognition of its significance in the economic history of the United States and its status as a well-known landmark.^[3]

The first gold shipments were made from January to July 1937. The majority of the United States' gold reserves were gradually shipped to the site, including old bullion and newly made bars made from melted gold coins. Some intact coins were stored. The transfer used 500 rail cars and was sent by registered mail, protected by the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, and the U.S. Treasury Department agents.^[*citation needed*]

During World War II, the depository held the original U.S. Declaration of Independence and U.S. Constitution. It held the reserves of European countries and key documents from Western history; for example, it held the Crown of St. Stephen, part of the Hungarian crown jewels, given to American soldiers to prevent them from falling into Soviet hands. The repository held one of four copies (exemplifications) of the Magna Carta, which had been sent for display at the 1939 New York World's Fair, and which, when war broke out, was kept in the United States for the duration.

During World War II and into the Cold War, until the invention of synthetic painkillers, a supply of processed morphine and opium was kept in the Depository as a hedge against the United States being cut off from the sources of supply of raw opium.^[4]



Seal of the U.S. Mint

Construction and security

Below the fortress-like structure lies the gold vault lined with granite walls and protected by a blast-proof door weighing 22 tons. Members of the Depository staff must dial separate combinations known only to them. Beyond the main vault door, smaller compartments provide further protection.^[5] According to a Mosler Safe Company brochure:

"The most famous, if not the largest, vault door order came from the Federal government in 1935 for the newly-constructed gold depository at Fort Knox, Kentucky. Both the vault door and emergency door were 21-inches thick and made of the latest torch- and drill-resistant material. The main vault door weighed 20 tons and the vault casing was 25-inches thick."^[6]

The facility is ringed with fences and is guarded by the United States Mint Police. The Depository premises are within the site of Fort Knox, a United States Army post, allowing the Army to provide additional protection. The Depository is protected by layers of physical security, alarms, video cameras, mine fields, barbed razor wire, electric fences, heavily armed guards, and the Army units based at Fort Knox, including unmarked Apache helicopter gunships of 8/229 Aviation based at Godman Army Airfield, the 16th Cavalry Regiment, the 19th Engineer Battalion, formerly training battalions of the United States Army Armor School, and the 3rd Brigade Combat Team of the 1st Infantry Division, totaling 30,000 soldiers, with associated tanks, armored personnel carriers, attack helicopters, and artillery.

There is an escape tunnel from the lower level of the vault to be used by someone accidentally locked in.^[7]

For security reasons, no visitors are allowed inside the depository grounds. This policy has been enforced ever since the vault opened and the only exception was an inspection by members of the United States Congress and the news media on September 23, 1974 led by then Director of the United States Mint Mary Brooks.^[7]

Gold

Gold holdings peaked during World War II at 20,205 metric tons (649.6 million oz. troy). Today, holdings are 4,578 metric tons (147.2 million oz. troy) in 368,000 standard, 400 oz. troy (12.4 kg or 27.4 lb avoirdupois) gold bars. At the June 17, 2012 rate of \$1,618.82 an ounce^[8] it is worth \$238.290 billion, while the World War II total of 649.6 million oz. troy would be worth \$1.051 trillion. The depository also holds monetary gold coins. The 1933 Double Eagle was also a temporary resident after transfer from 7 World Trade Center in July 2001, until its sale in July 2002 for \$7.59 million. Sometime in 2004, 10 additional allegedly stolen 1933 Double Eagles were transported to Fort Knox for safekeeping.

Not all the gold bars held in the depository are of exactly the same composition. The mint gold bars are nearly pure gold. Bars made from melted gold coins, however, called "coin bars", are the same composition as the original coins, which is only 90% gold. Unlike many .999 fine gold bullion coins minted in modern times for holding-purposes today, the coin alloy for pre-1933 U.S. coins, which were intended for circulation, was a much tougher and wear-resistant .900 fine alloy (balance copper) used for all U.S. gold coins since 1837. (See crown gold for further gold coin alloy history.)

All of the gold in the depository, if pure, could form a cube 20.3 feet (6.19 m) on a side—a volume of 237 m³. In comparison, all the gold ever refined in history (an estimated 165,000 tonnes) is about 40 times greater, so the facility alone holds about 2.5% of all gold ever refined.^[9]

The United States holds more gold bullion than any other country, with about 2.39 times that of the next leading country, Germany.

Popular culture

The bullion depository has become a symbol of an impregnable vault, leading to phrases such as "locked up tighter than Fort Knox" or "safer than Fort Knox". Many businesses in the surrounding areas are references to the bullion depository.

Cinema

- The 1937 RKO Lee Tracy film *Behind the Headlines* climaxes in a plan to steal gold bars en route from Washington, D.C. to Fort Knox.
- The 1951 Bud Abbott & Lou Costello film *Comin' Round the Mountain* has the two using a treasure map to find a stash of gold. When they finally reach the gold at the end of the film, they find themselves in the middle of Fort Knox and are immediately arrested.

- The 1951 Warner Bros. short *14 Carrot Rabbit* featuring Bugs Bunny and Yosemite Sam follows a similar routine, with Sam being led away by guards at the end. Bugs is also under suspicion, but slips away on a large boat.
- The popular 1959 Ian Fleming-written James Bond novel *Goldfinger*, and the 1964 movie of the same name, are about a criminal plot called "Operation Grand Slam" to break into the U.S. Bullion Depository. In the book, Auric Goldfinger's plan is to steal the gold. In the movie, the audience is initially led to believe Goldfinger is going to steal the gold, but the real plot is to render the gold contained in the Depository radioactive and useless with a nuclear device, crippling the economy and driving up the price of the gold Goldfinger already has.^[10]
- The facility is referenced in the 1995 film *Die Hard with a Vengeance* as "for tourists" compared to the target of the film—the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, which they claim holds "ten times what's in Kentucky".
- In the 2000 film *Battlefield Earth*, a group of humans, enslaved by an alien race called the Psychlos, trick them into thinking they're "mining" for gold by breaking into the Bullion Depository and delivering them the gold that's stored there.



The Meade County Bank in Muldraugh, KY resembles the bullion depository's exterior design.

Television

- In Season 4 of *The Andy Griffith Show*, "A Black Day for Mayberry", Barney lets slip that an armored truck filled with gold will be passing through Mayberry on its way to Ft. Knox.
- In Season 3, Episode 12 ("The Two Bartlets") of the American television show *The West Wing*, a meeting takes place between a senior white house staff member and a UFO conspiracy theorist. The meeting was called in order to secure an audit of the Bullion Depository, as the theorist alleged that it was being used to store wreckage of an alien spacecraft rather than gold.
- In the *Star Trek: Voyager* season 5 episode "Dark Frontier", Captain Kathryn Janeway hatches a plan to steal a transwarp coil from a Borg ship, calling it Operation Fort Knox. The episode explains the depository's history, and that in the 22nd century, the Fort Knox facility was converted into a museum when a new world economy took shape.
- In Season 1, Episode 1 ("Wanted: The Super Friends") of the American Cartoon show *Challenge of the Super Friends*, Superman falls under hypnosis by the Legion of Doom's Dream Machine and unknowing breaks in and robs the Depository. He later claims he dreamed of the robbery until his friends reveal that the robbery actually happened.
- In an early episode of *Pinky and the Brain* (then part of the animated television series *Animaniacs*) titled "Opportunity Knox", Pinky and the Brain attempt to take over the world by breaking into Fort Knox and seizing its gold reserves. They manage to get into the vault by subduing the guards with a strong allergenic pollen. However, their plan is ultimately foiled when they attempt to lift a single gold bar and, being mice, are crushed under its weight.
- In Episodes 1 and 2 of *Electra Woman and Dyna Girl* entitled "The Sorcerer's Golden Trick," The Sorcerer is released from prison and plans to rob Fort Knox.

Video games

- *Borderlands* features a villain named General Knoxx, whose job is to keep the protagonist from entering a secret armory named Fort Knoxx, with an extremely large cache of weapons located inside. When he is defeated the player acquires his pistol "Knoxx's Gold."

See also

- Federal Reserve System
- Federal Reserve Bank of New York
- List of attractions and events in Louisville, Kentucky
- Gold reserve
- Vaulted gold
- Nixon Shock—U.S. President Richard Nixon took the United States off the gold standard, stopping the direct convertibility of United States dollars to gold.
- Fort Knox

References

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- ↑ Ahamed, Liaquat (2009). *Lords of Finance: The Bankers who Broke the World*. London: Penguin Books. p. 474. ISBN 978-1-59420-182-0.
- ↑ "National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form: U.S. Bullion Depository, Fort Knox, Kentucky" (<http://pdfhost.focus.nps.gov/docs/NRHP/Text/88000056.pdf>). October 20, 1987. Retrieved 2013-01-20.
- ↑ "Fort Knox: Secrets Revealed". H2 History Channel. 2007.
- ↑ U.S. Treasury - Fact Sheet on the Fort Knox Bullion Depository (<http://web.archive.org/web/20080201051024/http://www.ustreas.gov/education/fact-sheets/currency/fort-knox.html>)
- ↑ *A History of Mosler*. Mosler, Inc., Form 9983-5M-1099. 1999.
- ↑ ^{***a***} ^{***b***} "Gold all there when Ft. Knox opened doors" (http://www.numismaticnews.net/article/Gold_all_there_when_Ft_Knox_opened_doors). Numismatic News. Retrieved December 21, 2011.
- ↑ "Historical Gold Charts and Data - New York Fix" (<http://www.kitco.com/charts/historicalgold.html>). Retrieved June 13, 2012.
- ↑ World Gold Council -FAQs (<http://www.gold.org/faq/>)
- ↑ *Goldfinger* (1964) (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0058150/>) at the Internet Movie Database

External links

Media related to United States Bullion Depository at Wikimedia Commons

- Satellite photo of the Fort Knox Bullion Depository, click to enlarge (<http://msrmaps.com/image.aspx?T=1&S=12&Z=16&X=738&Y=5241&W=1&qs=%7Cfort%20knox%7Ckentucky%7C,>)
- An article about the Bullion Depository (<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/facility/fort-knox-depository.htm>)
- "Steel and Stone Fortress to Guard Our Gold" *Popular Mechanics*, December 1935 (http://books.google.com/books?id=x98DAAAAMBAJ&pg=PA837&dq=Popular+Science+1933+plane+%22Popular+Mechanics%22&hl=en&ei=T4wiTpSVB4bnsQLQ5ujWAw&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=9&ved=0CEkQ6AEwCDgK#v=onepage&q&f=true)

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National Register of Historic Places in Kentucky | Classical Revival architecture in Kentucky | Hardin County, Kentucky

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