**United States Bullion Depository**

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

[Coordinates](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geographic_coordinate_system): [37°52′59″N 85°57′54″W﻿ / ﻿37.882983°N 85.965099°W﻿ / 37.882983; -85.965099](http://toolserver.org/~geohack/geohack.php?pagename=United_States_Bullion_Depository&params=37.882983_N_85.965099_W_scale:10000)

The United States Bullion Depository

The U.S. Gold Bullion Depository.

The **United States Bullion Depository**, often known as **Fort Knox**, is a fortified [vault](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bank_vault) building located adjacent to [Fort Knox](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fort_Knox), [Kentucky](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kentucky), used to store a large portion of United States [official gold reserves](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Official_gold_reserves) and occasionally other precious items belonging or entrusted to the [federal government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federal_government_of_the_United_States).

The United States Bullion Depository holds 4,577 metric tons (5046 tons) of [gold bullion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gold_bullion) (147.2 million [oz. troy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Troy_ounces)). This is roughly 2.5% of all the [gold](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gold) ever refined throughout human history. Even so, the depository is second in the United States to the [Federal Reserve Bank of New York](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federal_Reserve_Bank_of_New_York)'s underground vault in [Manhattan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manhattan), which holds 7,000 metric tons (7716 tons) of gold bullion (225.1 million oz. troy), some of it in trust for foreign nations, central banks and official international organizations.

**History**

Seal of the U.S. Mint

In 1933, U.S. President [Franklin D. Roosevelt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franklin_D._Roosevelt) issued [Executive Order 6102](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Executive_Order_6102), which outlawed the private ownership of gold coins, [gold bullion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gold_bullion), and [gold certificates](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gold_certificate) by American citizens, forcing them to sell these to the [Federal Reserve](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/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. This left the [federal government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federal_government_of_the_United_States) with a large gold reserve and no place to store it. In 1936, the [U.S. Treasury Department](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Department_of_the_Treasury) began construction of the United States Bullion Depository at Fort Knox, [Kentucky](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kentucky), on land transferred from the [military](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Army). The Gold Vault was completed in December 1936 for US $560,000, or $8.5 million in 2009 dollars. The site is located on what is now Bullion Boulevard at the intersection of Gold Vault Road.

The first gold shipments were made from January to July 1937. The majority of the United States' [gold reserves](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Official_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](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Postal_Inspection_Service).

During World War II, the repository held the original [U.S. Declaration of Independence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Declaration_of_Independence) and [U.S. Constitution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Constitution). It held the reserves of [European countries](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_European_countries_and_territories) and key documents from Western history; for example, it held the [Crown of St. Stephen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crown_of_St._Stephen), part of the [Hungarian crown jewels](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holy_Crown_of_Hungary), given to American soldiers to prevent them from falling into [Soviet](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_Union) hands. The repository held one of four copies (exemplifications) of the [Magna Carta](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magna_Carta), which had been sent for display at the [1939 New York World's Fair](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1939_New_York_World%27s_Fair), and which, when war broke out, was kept in America for the duration.

During World War II and into the [Cold War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/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.

**Construction and security**

Below the fortress-like structure lies the gold [vault](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bank_vault) lined with [granite](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/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. According to a [Mosler Safe Company](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/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."

The facility is ringed with fences and is guarded by the [United States Mint Police](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/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, armed guards, and the Army units based at Fort Knox, including [Apache](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AH-64_Apache) helicopter gunships of [8/229 Aviation](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=8/229_Aviation&action=edit&redlink=1) based at [Godman Army Airfield](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Godman_Army_Airfield), the [16th Cavalry Regiment](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/16th_Cavalry_Regiment_%28United_States%29), the [19th Engineer Battalion](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=19th_Engineer_Battalion&action=edit&redlink=1), formerly training battalions of the [United States Army Armor School](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Army_Armor_School), and the [3rd Brigade Combat Team](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/3rd_Brigade_Combat_Team%2C_1st_Infantry_Division_%28United_States%29) of the [1st Infantry Division](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1st_Infantry_Division_%28United_States%29), totaling 30,000 soldiers, with associated tanks, [armored personnel carriers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armored_personnel_carrier), attack helicopters, and artillery.

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

Since the opening of the depository, the Federal government has disclosed very little information about the security systems and technologies used. What is generally known about the security systems at the Gold Depository mostly dates from the late 1930s. For example, the small turret-like structures at the corners of the building are firing positions for guards with [Thompson submachine guns](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thompson_submachine_gun), the standard longarm of the Mint Police when the Depository was built. It is rumored that everything from minefields, to ground-sweeping radars, to body capacitance wires, to automated machine guns triggered by interrupting laser beams are emplaced to guard the building and its approaches. It is rumored that, like the French national bank in Paris, the vaults can be filled with water. The Federal government will neither confirm nor deny the rumors. Employees are sworn to secrecy and cannot divulge information about the vault's security.

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](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Congress) and the [news media](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/News_media) on September 23, 1974 led by then [Director of the United States Mint](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Director_of_the_United_States_Mint) [Mary Brooks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Brooks).

**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](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Troy_ounce) (12.4 kg or 27.4 lb. avoirdupois) gold bars. At August 22, 2011 rates of $1890.04 an ounce it is worth $278.3 billion, while the World War II total of 649.6 million oz. troy would be worth $909 billion. The depository also holds monetary gold coins. The [1933 Double Eagle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1933_Double_Eagle) was also a temporary resident after transfer from [7 World Trade Center](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/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](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bullion_coin) 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](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/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 tons) is about 40 times greater, so the facility alone holds about 2.5% of all gold ever refined.

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.

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

**Cinema**

* The [1937](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1937_in_film) [RKO](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RKO) [Lee Tracy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/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](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1951_in_film) [Bud Abbott](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bud_Abbott) & [Lou Costello](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lou_Costello) film [*Comin' Round the Mountain*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comin%27_Round_the_Mountain) has the [two](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abbott_and_Costello) 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](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1951_in_film) [Warner Bros.](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Warner_Bros.) short [*14 Carrot Rabbit*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/14_Carrot_Rabbit) featuring [Bugs Bunny](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bugs_Bunny) and [Yosemite Sam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/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](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1959_in_film) [Ian Fleming](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ian_Fleming)-written [James Bond](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Bond) novel [*Goldfinger*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goldfinger_%28novel%29)*,* and the [1964 movie of the same name](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goldfinger_%28film%29), are about a criminal plot called "Operation Grand Slam" to break into the U.S. Bullion Depository. In the book, [Auric Goldfinger](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/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](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuclear_device), crippling the economy and driving up the price of the gold Goldfinger already has. The movie was set before the [U.S. dollar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_dollar) ceased to be backed by [gold](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gold_standard) in 1971.
* The facility is referenced in the [1995](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1995_in_film) film [*Die Hard with a Vengeance*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Die_Hard_with_a_Vengeance) as "for tourists" compared to the target of the film—the [Federal Reserve Bank of New York](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federal_Reserve_Bank_of_New_York), which they claim holds "ten times what's in [Kentucky](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kentucky)".
* In the 2000 film [*Battlefield Earth*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battlefield_Earth_%28film%29), a group of humans, enslaved by an alien race called the [Psychlos](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battlefield_Earth_%28novel%29), trick them into thinking they're "mining" for gold by breaking into the Bullion Depository and delivering them the gold that's stored there.

**See also**

* [Federal Reserve System](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federal_Reserve_System)
* [Federal Reserve Bank of New York](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federal_Reserve_Bank_of_New_York)
* [List of attractions and events in Louisville, Kentucky](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_attractions_and_events_in_Louisville%2C_Kentucky)
* [Gold reserve](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gold_reserve)
* [Nixon Shock](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nixon_Shock)—U.S. President Richard Nixon took the United States off the [gold standard](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gold_standard), stopping the direct convertibility of United States dollars to gold.

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