

AFTER 9/11

CULTURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION IN LOWER MANHATTAN

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Introduction

A number of significant buildings and works of art were damaged in the World Trade Center collapse. Cultural resources conservation has been sustained by existing documentation and local landmark protection. The Lower Manhattan Emergency Preservation Fund was formed to help restore the damaged cultural resources. A number of grants have been made and the work is ongoing. Cultural resources are potentially endangered by the rebuilding process, where expansion of the site, transportation projects, and proposed development call for demolition of historic buildings. Community, arts, and professional groups have joined to make their voices heard in the planning process.

The Neighborhood and the Damage

Lower Manhattan, the location of the World Trade Center site, is the original New York City and has enormous architectural and cultural significance. The WTC neighborhood is primarily commercial, with recent residential conversions and such institutions as churches. The area has been built and rebuilt several times. Dozens of historic 19th century buildings were torn down for the World Trade Center in the early 1970's. The 18th century street grid was also wiped out. The area now principally contains a mix of 19th and 20th century buildings. They include important early skyscrapers, post World War II skyscrapers, 5 to 12 story turn-of-the-20th-century commercial buildings and the late 18th century St. Paul's Chapel. There were hundreds of important works of art, paintings, sculpture, etc. inside and outside the buildings that were destroyed.

The World Trade Center (1972-77, Minoru Yamasaki & Assoc.) and the Marriott Hotel (1981, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill) were completely destroyed. All of the surrounding buildings survived but many were damaged. The two most notable and most damaged landmarks are 90 and 140 West Street. 140 West Street (1923-27, McKenzie, Voorhees & Gmelin), a 32 story Art Deco skyscraper was the first with a stepped back tower. This Verizon telephone headquarters had a huge gash in the façade and severe fires inside. 90 West Street (1905, Cass Gilbert), the beautiful Beaux Art/Gothic 23-story early skyscraper, represents an early example of the use of the Gothic style in a skyscraper, which was fully

realized in the nearby Woolworth Building (1913, Cass Gilbert). This building was severely damaged by fire and its fate is still uncertain. St. Nicholas Church, a vernacular 19th century building with major cultural significance, was completely destroyed. Other significant buildings had varying degrees of damage, ranging from large gashes in the façades, windows blown out, façade and roof damage from flying debris, fire and water damage on the interiors. All are heavily contaminated on the inside from the highly caustic dust and debris.

Documentation and Protection

There was existing documentation in the form of cultural resource surveys by the local Landmarks Preservation Commission as well as less comprehensive state and federal surveys. There is existing protection in the form of local landmarks designation and regulation – this is the strongest protection in the US. There are also buildings listed in the National Register of Historic Places, which offers some protection from government actions. A number of buildings are designated landmarks in the immediate vicinity and there is one large historic district just to the north. Not all of the important individual buildings are protected and the historically important vernacular historic urban fabric in the area to the south has not been recognized, due mainly to the lack of integrity, and it is now in potential danger from the planning process in the rebuilding effort. There was no central listing of artworks but individual owners have records and it is known what was lost.

After 9/11 the area was inaccessible – a frozen zone, but photographs were taken by a variety of public and private photographers. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) took photos and surveyed, with the New York State Historic Preservation Office (NYSHPO), the Frozen Zone (or Secured Zone), which consisted of an approximately 40 block area around the WTC site. Physical assessments began immediately after the collapse, within a week, to determine structural stability. This was done by (FEMA) and by volunteer engineering firms. At the time there were still fires raging in two landmark buildings, 140 West Street and 90 West Street. This was a survey; there was no attempt to document any of the historic sites in detail, as it was too dangerous.

Immediate Response

Immediate response regarding cultural resources conservation has been diverse, involving public and private organizations. The majority of the repair work is private and financed by insurance as well as government grants. The designated NYC landmarks are being repaired under local landmarks regulations.

In addition to government and private building owner financing, a foundation, the Lower Manhattan Emergency Preservation Fund (LMEPF), was created to restore damaged buildings. Other cultural and arts funds set up programs, but this was the only one devoted to historic preservation. Professional groups were formed almost immediately from the design and planning community to offer immediate help and to advise on rebuilding and to facilitate community outreach.

Five preservation organizations created the Lower Manhattan Emergency Preservation Fund. They are the World Monuments Fund, an international organization, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, a national organization, the Preservation League of New York State, a statewide group, the Municipal Art Society and the New York Landmarks Conservancy, two New York City organizations. The two New York City organizations took the lead in administering the program. Each of the organizations donated funds, and money was raised from other private and non-profit sources, with nearly a quarter of a million dollars raised to date.

The goal is to give money to stabilize, repair, renovate, and restore significant structures or works of art of historic significance. Preference is given to nonprofit organizations or to people who are uninsured or underinsured. Few if any owners or leaseholders had enough insurance to cover the damage, as it turned out, and insurance payments have been very slow.

The next step was to let people know about the fund. A web site was set up, www.nycpreservation911.org. This was picked up by other WTC help sites. Press releases publicized the fund. The organizations contributed not only money but also professional expertise with the web site and the publicity.

Few people applied for grants after the fund was created. There were a number of reasons for this. It was chaotic in the WTC area for months, with no work going on except for the cleanup. Most of the owners were private and unaccustomed to applying for grants. Many were waiting for insurance settlements, which were months away.

The LMEPF hired a preservation consultant, the author, to conduct a needs survey and then work with building owners. The February, 2002 needs survey, (one was already done by ICR for Trinity Church Parish) was by necessity exterior and anecdotal only. It showed that all of the buildings and artworks needed cleaning, the dust being extremely damaging to the predominant limestone and other masonry surfaces,

as well as metal and paint. There was structural damage from the earthquake effect and cracks appeared in a number of basements and on facades. New cracks (in addition to the old ones) were discovered in the foundations of the 1830's Federal Hall after 9/11, for example. The holes and gashes in the buildings needed to be repaired, windows needed to be repaired, windows needed to be replaced, the several murals in the area needed to be cleaned, graffiti needed to be cleaned. The graffiti — fire department markings and signs for emergency services like food and washing, as well as signs for the makeshift morgues, are historic but hard to live with and are being documented but not saved. As a historian I am sorry about this as they are very powerful symbols of the event, but as a resident, I don't know if I want to see them every day.

Since this was a finite area, the building owners were actually contacted individually where possible, by visiting the building, by telephone, and through flyers. The buildings targeted were those on or determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register criteria are the standard in the US for identifying significant properties. The LMEPF was listed on additional WTC help websites, with downtown and government organizations offering help, and with such organizations as the Better Business Bureau and the Real Estate Board. Architects and engineers known to be working in the area were also contacted. All of these methods elicited responses.

Although suggestions were made by the consultant, the building owners came up with applications with much more imagination. The first grant given was \$10,000 to the South Street Seaport Museum to pay for specialized cleaning to remove abrasive ash and soot from the rigging and sails of its historic ships.

The second grant, for \$6,800, funded an inspection of the terra cotta façade of 55 Liberty Street (Henry Ives Cobb, 1909-10). Mountain climbing techniques were used by Vertical Access, the contractor, to rappel down the façade with video cameras looking for cracks and other damage (which there were). This avoided costly scaffolding.

There are two mural cleaning grants, one for cleaning the Art Deco murals at 140 West Street, the Verizon telephone building, and the other to clean the murals depicting the New York Harbor at the former East River Savings Bank (1934, Walker & Gillette), now a department store. Both murals were covered in caustic dust.

Pending grants include cleaning, repainting and recaulking 75 Murray Street, an 1857 former commercial building with an early Venetian Gothic style cast-iron façade. The façade was damaged by wind blown debris and the paint and caulk was being eaten away by the caustic dust. 120 Greenwich Street, an early 20th century Beaux Arts style warehouse, now residence, was blasted by the debris. A grant is pending to repair and restore the sheet metal cornice and window

spandrels. A decision has not been made yet on the application to repair the 1940s George's Luncheonette neon sign. This would light up the still depressed area south of the WTC.

The grants are administered by the New York Landmarks Conservancy, which has an existing NYC grant program. The applicants must specify the work to be done, so far no drawings are necessary and the applications are two pages long. Applicants must specify the contractor to be used, and they must have experience in conservation. This goes a long way to ensure quality work. The New York Landmarks Conservancy has maintained a contractors list for years and this valuable tool has been used in this project. The work on the local landmarks is regulated by the NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission, but not all of these buildings are landmarks. LMEPF grant work is inspected in process and upon completion.

All of the grants have been under \$15,000 so far. This has been one of the reasons applications have been scarce. Each building owner is faced with millions of dollars of repair work and is reluctant to apply for this size grant. The applications are very simple, though, and when explained, the owners usually become enthusiastic. It has taken much more time than anticipated to give this money away. When faced with a catastrophe of this magnitude, it is not possible to move quickly. It was not possible to do any work at all in the immediate area for at least four to six months and longer. I don't know that there is any solution for this. Planning and work did commence and the funds were just as desperately needed at that time.

Cultural Resources Conservation and the Planning and Rebuilding Process

Conservation was not an issue much discussed for the first several months after 9/11. Planning took precedence, as it seemed to be a rebuilding issue. This is not the case and historic buildings are in danger from old style planning ideas harking back to urban renewal and dubious government sponsored development. For conservationists the issues now are the preservation of 90 West Street, which is in danger, and the planning process that calls for expanding the site and demolishing historic buildings. While not as significant as 90 West, these buildings are part of the city's historic fabric. Plans also call for creating a transportation hub on historic Broadway and for developing the area south of the WTC site, which contains many historic buildings.

There has been community outreach, as recommended in the ICOMOS Historic Towns Charter, but decisions appear to be made by small groups of elected and appointed officials. New York State created the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation (LMDC) to handle Lower Manhattan renewal. The LMDC formed community advisory committees made up of some residents and professionals and a number of political appointees.

In the design community, several groups were formed very soon after 9/11 to bring community ideas into the process. The Civic Alliance was formed by the Regional Planning Association and is an umbrella organization of arts and planning groups. They sponsored *Listening to the City*, the two very large events where people came to present their views on redevelopment. Imagine New York, formed by the Municipal Art Society, similarly sponsored hundreds of events to allow people to express their views about rebuilding. New York/New Visions was created by the design community, primarily architects, landscape architects and designers, to address the immediate and long term issues of rebuilding. They have come out with several position papers. RDot is the local group of downtown residents and business. The concept of restoring the street grid came out of all of these processes.

It remains to be seen whether cultural resources conservation becomes a significant part of the rebuilding process and whether the major asset of Lower Manhattan, its tangible and intangible history, is recognized and celebrated.

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