



## Recovery: The World Trade Center Recovery Operation at Fresh Kills

For ten months, hundreds of investigators, forensic experts, counselors, and museum professionals worked at the overwhelming task of searching, sorting and documenting the remains of the WTC and the nearly 3,000 office and rescue workers lost in its collapse. Panoramic photographs, such as the WTC Vehicle Recovery Fields, provide viewers with a sense of how much space the debris actually occupies. The salvaged items, which cannot be connected to any individual, form the New York State Museum's considerable collection of WTC 9/11 objects and is the

came from the WTC observatory, is a fitting symbol of the incomprehensible enormity of the destruction. These artifacts raise the broader question about the role museums play in determining what we save and how we remember. They ask us to ponder: What is it that we collect? Why do we collect? What will the collection say to people now? How does the collection influence the way in which we think about ourselves? What might future generations think about it?

Due to Western New York's proximity to New York City, a number of

By Robert Hirsch

When most Western New Yorker's think of the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society, which has been serv-

math of the devastating destruction of the World Trade Center (WTC) on 9/11. Created through the persistence of the New York State Museum staff in Albany, Curator Craig Williams and Director of



ing the area since 1862, they tend to think of the far-off past. The current exhibition, *Recovery: The World Trade Center Recovery Operation at Fresh Kills*, reminds us that history is always in the making and is open to a wide variety of interpretation.

Now on national tour, *Recovery* documents the extraordinary effort of government agencies and individuals to locate human remains, crime scene evidence, and personal belongings in the after-

Exhibitions, Mark Schaming spent forty days at the landfill taking photographs, conducting oral histories, and collecting thirty tons of material. Through a distillation of 65 photographs and 50 objects recovered from Ground Zero, the exhibit tells the story of the recovery operation of sorting through almost 2 million tons of debris that was trucked and ferried from lower Manhattan to the Fresh Kills ("fresh stream") landfill on Staten Island.

basis for the traveling exhibit now at the Historical Society as well as a permanent exhibit at the Museum in Albany.

The exhibit approach is low-key and non-sensational. The majority of the objects are vernacular, such as the elevator plaque from the 78th floor of the WTC, a public telephone, or a bent BMW steering wheel. Even an airliner fuselage fragment appears more as a subtle reminder of the horror. A tiny souvenir pin of the Twin Towers, which

professional investigators, rescue workers, journalists, and counselors from Western New York traveled to Ground Zero, and in some cases to Fresh Kills, to assist with the daunting tasks. Some of these experiences have been presented in a series of special Historical Society programs. The final program is a screening of a new documentary on the WTC recovery effort, "Images of Remembrance, Images of Recovery" and takes place on Wednesday, November 10



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at 7pm. University at Buffalo Professors Bruce Jackson and Diane Christian, known for moderating the Buffalo Film Seminar Series, will discuss the documentary, and share their own work photographing the memorials and missing person posters that blanketed lower Manhattan following 9/11. Admission for the general public is \$10 per person and for Historical Society members, \$8.

The Historical Society has expanded the exhibit by displaying works of Western New Yorkers in response to 9/11. Particularly striking is a photographic quilt made by Linda Hunter of Pendleton, NY. A professor and quilt maker, Ms. Hunter responded to the painful events by photographing the spontaneous patriotic 9/11 memorials that sprang up around town. Next she transferred 54 of these photographs onto fabric squares and then pieced them together in an "attic window" patterned quilt.

The Historical Society's participatory projects for young people are also intriguing additions. One is an "Investigation Station," a small room constructed out

of 2 x 4s and clear heavy plastic, containing various personal objects and has been designed to engage children's investigative skills. The kids wear protective eye goggles and latex gloves, sit on buckets and retrieve "items" from a makeshift conveyor belt. They must follow the investigative practice by organizing, making observations, and identifications. Then they write up their results on a log sheet and form conclusions of whom this person might be and what he or she liked to do. The Historical Society's Anne Conable observed: "The children see the challenge as solving a puzzle." The other addition is an "Occupation Station" that contains fire fighting clothes and equipment. In the "try-on" area children try and "suit up" in less than one minute. This simulates the actual experience of how quickly rescue personnel must respond, what it is like to do a job that puts your life on the line with all the necessary gear, and reflects on the firefighters lost in the 9/11 attack.

Regardless of how old we are, history is essential to our understanding of the

present. History is about how we connect the dots of life. We must honestly ask ourselves where do the 9/11 dots take us? Is it Iraq or is it elsewhere? The consequences of flawed analysis and judgment can have monstrous consequences. Unless we are conscious of how we arrive at decisions as a people, we will not be able to properly plan for a flourishing present and the future. The upcoming presidential election is our opportunity to decide whether or not we NOW think that the actions of the current administration deserve to be continued as the guiding force of America's internal and external outlook for generations to come. An apt way for citizens to honor 9/11 is to become more broadly informed about national and world events and exercise the hard fought right to VOTE.

The exhibit is on view through Nov. 28. For more info call 873-9644 or visit [www.bechs.org](http://www.bechs.org).

Photos courtesy of NYS Museum:

Top left - (Travel Sorters) After the World Trade Center debris was sepa-

rated by size, NYPD detectives could inspect the material as it went by on the conveyor belts. April 2002.

(Panoramic) WTC Vehicle Recovery Fields at Fresh Kills, January, 2002.



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