

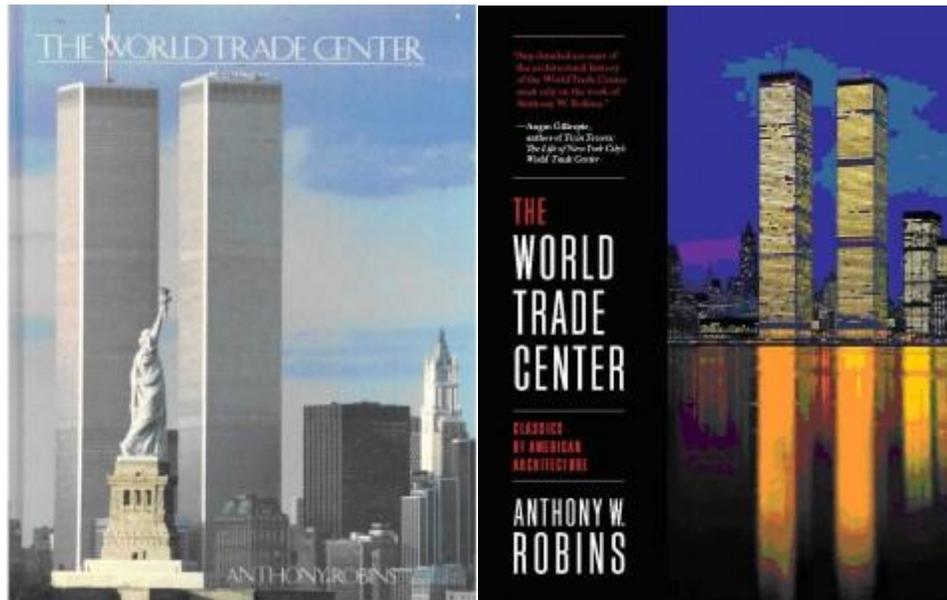
Tracked Down the Port Authority Library: What's Next?

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Readers of the SLA-NY blog may recall the article [Tracking Down the Contents of the Port Authority Library](#) in which historian Anthony W. Robins recounted his efforts – aided by SLA members – to discover the fate of the archives of the Port Authority, which were indeed lost in the disaster of September 11th. He wrote at the time that he planned to organize the copies of the archive's documents still in his own files and “to scan and include as many of them as possible in an appendix in the new edition of the book.” Here's what happened next:

With the 10th anniversary of 9/11 past, I have completed the revised version of my book on the World Trade Center, and included in it an appendix – slightly longer than the original book – with some of the documents from my files on which the book was based, documents which may exist elsewhere but only if somebody else retained copies, as I did. Deciding what to include, however, turned out not to be so easy.



What belongs in a book?

My first impulse was, simply, to include everything – transcripts of interviews, internal correspondence, press releases, promotional brochures, the report of the architect search committee, typescript statements by the architect, technical specs – excluding only periodical clippings (because of copyright issues). But it quickly became apparent that the question of what documents to include in a book is not the same question as what documents to preserve in an archive. Including everything would have added more than 500 pages to a 64-page book. And how much would have been interesting to general readers? So began the culling.

Easy calls: technical specifications, floor plans and the like. Harder calls: interview transcripts. At first, these seemed like excellent candidates for inclusion. Then I re-read them. They're certainly interesting documents, but they're awfully long – 40 pages in some cases. And the best parts of them are already in the book. I left them out.

What about newsletters and press releases? They include useful information, but again, much of that information is summarized or discussed in the book itself. And there was another consideration: these are not originals, they are 25-year-old copies, and not in the best of shape. So those were out too.

The document that got my architectural-historian's heart racing was the Port Authority's evaluation of the seven architectural firms originally considered for the commission. Each of the architects wrote a letter to the Authority; the Authority's team then interviewed the architects and evaluated their existing work, finally selecting Minoru Yamasaki. Fabulous material – but some 200 pages, and, again, summarized in the book. And, again, an old copy, not an original.

Appendix – the final cut

In the end, I went for brochures and documents 1) of which I had originals, 2) which included images, and 3) whose language and presentation carried the flavor of the 1970s. Two copies of typescripts, without images, did make the cut: first, excerpts from the architect evaluation committee's report including its cover page, Yamasaki's letter to the committee, and the committee's evaluation of his work; and, second, a two-page typescript of Yamasaki's explanation of his design intentions. But the rest came from printed materials. The contents:

- “Lower Manhattan: Major Improvements”: Excerpt from a study by the Downtown-Lower Manhattan Association recommending construction of a World Trade Center on the west side. *“The Trade Center will be a comprehensive and modern complex, providing import and export facilities for the world’s greatest port.”*
- “World Trade Center: Evaluation of Architectural Firms”: Excerpt from Yamasaki's initial proposal of 1962 and the Port Authority's evaluation of his work. *“For consideration as the World Trade Center architect: Recommended: Minoru Yamasaki.”*
- “Statement by Minoru Yamasaki of Minoru Yamasaki and Associates”: A statement by Yamasaki of his intentions for the project. *“Paramount in importance is the relation of world trade to world peace.”*
- “The World Trade Center Today... Key to World Trade Center Construction Activity”: Brochure. *“The entire World Trade Center will be completed late in 1973, but the doors of the Center will be opened to international businessmen in December 1970.”*
- “WTC IS NOW!”: Brochure published while the project was still in construction, but after some tenants had already moved in. *“By the end of 1974, when the project will be completed, hundreds more will make it their international business home.”*
- “The World Trade Center: A Building Project Like No Other”: Retrospective brochure explaining *“stage by stage, this engineering accomplishment.”*
- “The Top Is Just the Tip”: Brochure. *“Shopping. Dining. Sightseeing. Views. Events. The World Trade Center.”*
- “The Closest Some of Us Will Ever Get to Heaven”: Guide to the views from the World Trade Center observation deck, and other WTC attractions. *“And in the evening, please don’t touch the stars.”*

- “It’s Hard to Be down When You’re Up”: Observation deck brochure. *“It’s the up-est place anywhere.”*
- “The World Trade Center in the Port of New York”: Brochure for the original 1964 project (superceded by a 1966 redesign). *“Sheltered archways will form galleries around all four sides of the Plaza.”*

What these all have in common is their intrinsic interest and their 1970s flavor, especially the longest one, “WTC IS NOW!” reprinted in its entirety: a 28-page-long full-color originally spiral-bound booklet that is classic in its language, photos, and graphic design.

The possibility of a virtual archive

What I discovered in this process is that original documents are fascinating, and need to be available, but in libraries or archives, not in books. So what I hope to do – sometime in the coming year – is scan as much as I can and gradually put it up on a web site, sort of a virtual archive (the Port Authority has given its permission).

Publishing choices

This new edition is an exercise in self-publishing. I don’t know how librarians look at self-published works – probably askance. But self-publishing gave me the freedom to pick and choose what I wanted to include in the appendix. I have no idea what a traditional publisher might have chosen – or not have chosen – to include.

Self-publishing can be print or digital. My printer – [Lightning Source](#) – is owned by Engram, and will soon list a Print-on-Demand soft-cover version on amazon.com and barnesandnoble.com. The first digital version – via Adobe Digital Editions – is now carried in several e-bookstores. Next will come the pad, Nook and Kindle versions. Will any library acquire the self-published print edition? Or make a digital version available? I’ll find out. Meantime, I’m sending anyone who asks to a web page with [ordering information](#). It’s been a slog, with a steep learning curve, but the book is finally back in print (which clearly no longer means just “in print”), including what I hope is interesting material in the appendix, some of which can be seen in the [sample pages](#) I’ve put up on a web site.

Thanks again to all the SLA members who helped me track down the fate of the Port Authority’s archives and encouraged me in this project.