INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW

The Reminiscences of

Ken Lustbader

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Ken Lustbader conducted by Interviewer Sarah Dziedzic on July 30, 2021. This interview is part of the New York Preservation Archive Project's collection of individual oral history interviews.

The reader is asked to bear in mind that they are reading a verbatim transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose. The views expressed in this oral history interview do not necessarily reflect the views of the New York Preservation Archive Project.

Ken Lustbader was the lead consultant of the Lower Manhattan Emergency Preservation Fund (LMEPF), an initiative of five preservation organizations—the New York Landmarks Conservancy, the Municipal Art Society, the Preservation League of New York State, the World Monuments Fund, and the National Trust for Historic Preservation—that came together after the September 11, 2001 attacks to address preservation issues in the vicinity of the World Trade Center. The LMPEF Initially focused on the rebuilding efforts of historic buildings that were damaged by the World Trade Center collapse, which they identified in various Corridors of Concern. As it became clear that there were elements of the Ground Zero site itself that were worth preserving, the LMEPF expanded its scope to also advocate for the protection of *in situ* elements of the World Trade Center and the post-9/11 recovery period in the context of the area's redevelopment, and in the design of the National 9/11 Museum & Memorial.

In this interview, Lustbader describes working with the organizations that constituted the LMEPF, and navigating the Section 106 review in the context of redevelopment efforts driven by the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation. He also describes how the Ground Zero site stimulated discussion around the process of determining eligibility for preservation and the potential for using preserved physical remnants in the site's interpretation.

Lustbader has an additional oral history interview in the New York Preservation Archive Project's "Roots of LGBTQ Historic Preservation" collection that was conducted in 2019.

Transcriptionist: Matthew Geesey	Session: 2
Interviewee: Ken Lustbader	Location: video call
Interviewer: Sarah Dziedzic	Date: July 30, 2021

Q: Today is July 30, 2021 and this is Sarah Dziedzic interviewing Ken Lustbader for the New York Preservation Archive Project and we're doing this interview remotely via video call. And because I don't have a signed consent form from you yet, do I have your consent to record this interview?

Lustbader: Yes, you do. Thank you.

Q: Thank you. So can you start by saying your name and giving yourself a brief introduction?

Lustbader: Sure, my name is Ken Lustbader. I'm a historic preservationist and I'm a graduate of the Columbia Historic Preservation program in 1993. I'm a New Yorker, raised in nearby Long Island, but have been in New York City for my adult life, post-college. And that is about it.

Q: Thanks. So since we have another interview with you in our collection about the NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project, where you've spoken about your background, including grad school, I want to jump into the focus of this interview today which is preservation efforts related to September 11, 2001 in downtown New York City and also Ground Zero. But if there's anything from that part of your life that applies here, please feel free to bring that into the conversation.

Lustbader: Sure.

Q: So I want to ask about that day, September 11, 2001. You're a New Yorker, so if you can explain where you lived, where you were that morning, and how that day unfolded for you.

Lustbader: Sure. Well, as I mentioned, I grew up on Long Island, and nearby Long Island, in Valley Stream, which is about twenty-two miles from downtown to where the Trade Center is. As a kid, I always knew I wanted to live in Manhattan and from the third floor of my English class in eleventh grade, I remember seeing the Twin Towers from my classroom, thinking I'm going to live there one day. So, they were always landmarks to me as a kid and they were iconic because that's where I knew I was going to be heading one day, outside of the suburban enclave I was raised in. I was always going back and forth to New York City, but knew that would be home one day.

So that said, on the morning of September 11, 2001, I was living in Greenwich Village, on 12th Street and 6th Avenue, and happened to be uptown before work—early—and was coming down and got out of the R train at 22nd Street, or something on 5th Avenue, and walking down 5th Avenue towards where I was working at the Landmarks Conservancy at 141 5th Avenue. And I remember as I got closer to the building, I heard people pointing and looking downtown and running and screaming that there's a plane or something that happened at the towers. I remember seeing in the distance fire coming out of one of the towers and turning around and doubling back up to the offices of Landmarks Conservancy, and hearing a woman say, "Oh, my God, it's like a

movie," realizing it was not a movie and then going into the offices and everybody slowly entering in and feeling a sense of confusion, and unsure of what was actually going on. My boss, who's still there, Peg Breen, I remember us convening in her office and I remember looking up from her office windows, which was at the corner—I think we were at 21st and 5th—looking at the Empire State Building and getting very nervous.

At that point, we knew that a plane had hit the towers and, if that was hit, would they be looking at the Empire State Building as a target? And we were awfully close [to the Empire State Building]. Going into my office and just having another colleague run in and saying that one of the towers collapsed. So this was over a period of time. I'm trying to grapple with all of this and calling my brother who worked downtown, near City Hall, and telling him to get out of the building there, and him telling me they would, they're evacuating. And then just going home, walking home, and getting to my apartment and speaking to my now-husband about what to do.

And I don't know how long you want me to go on about this, but just living below 14th Street and seeing the towers from my building—we lived on the seventeenth floor of the John Adams at 101 West 12th Street—and looking out the window throughout that morning and sort of being perplexed because you could see the smoke rising. And then going out, actually to donate blood, to St. Vincent's [Hospital] because we thought that would be happening.

So my husband went grocery shopping and I went to donate blood and I remember standing there [at St. Vincent's Hospital]—and no one came. And then the doctor is standing outside. The whole medical team is outside. No one came. There was a huge line of people there to donate

blood and then just going home and just realizing [the magnitude of the day], being fixated on the television.

So that was sort of the initial impact of that day and riding in the elevator and hearing a woman, whose husband was a physician, saying, "they're really concerned about anthrax as well." That just really put me over the edge of, wow, we are in deep territory here. So that was the initial moments, putting aside the horror of it, the calamity, and seeing what was going on, and then living with that. Seeing all the posters in the neighborhood the following day that were on St. Vincent's [Hospital] or at Ray's Pizza on 11th and 6th Avenue that were plastered all over and so forth.

And I don't think we went into work the next day. I think we took off. We didn't go into the offices. But that somber feeling of acknowledgement with everybody on the street—I remember going to the gym later in the week and everyone was sort of just acknowledging each other, but in a very different way.

Dziedzic: Yes, thank you. I was interested in your response as a New Yorker and someone who lives downtown so thank you for outlining some of those things. What were the early calls to be involved as the, I guess, threat over subsequent attack or additional attacks kind of dissipated, whether it was neighborhood calls or with the Landmarks Conservancy—

Lustbader: Yes, I was working at the Conservancy. This was September of 2001. I was the director of the Sacred Sites Program at that point. That was my main focus. That's what I was

working on at the Conservancy. I wasn't tracking that much regarding the attack or what was happening. I was really focusing on my job.

In May of 2002, I left the Conservancy and then took off time, dealt with some family issues—my father had passed away. And then, if I fast forward to how I got involved in the Ground Zero/Lower Manhattan efforts, is that I got a call from Peg, who said—and this is probably September/October or October/November of 2002—what are you doing? My father had just passed away and I was like, well, dealing with that, but what's up?

She explained that there were five preservation organizations that banded together. They were the New York Landmarks Conservancy, the Municipal Art Society [MAS], the Preservation League of New York State, the World Monuments Fund, and the National Trust [for Historic Preservation], to create an initiative called the Lower Manhattan Emergency Preservation Fund [LMEPF], and would I like to act as the lead consultant to deal with these five preservation organizations who felt that it was going to be more effective to speak in one voice for preservation efforts that were initially focused on the rebuilding efforts around Ground Zero. And I met with everybody and subsequently said, okay, I'll sign on to that. That was my initial involvement with anything related to downtown and the rebuilding efforts. I could tell you more about what I remember as the history of the formation of the LMEPF—

Q: Yes, that would be great. Yes, thanks, Ken.

Lustbader: So to the best of my knowledge, the five preservation organizations got together

realizing that there was going to be this incredible rebuilding downtown because of the destruction of the Trade Center site itself and the amount of federal funding coming into Lower Manhattan for rebuilding and vitalization efforts. So, they initially looked at what was the impact of the attack on historic properties—buildings—and I believe they thought there were going to be more dramatic impacts from the destruction of the Trade Center itself and how it impacted buildings down there.

I believe the money was initially seeded with funds from Tiffany & Co., the Tiffany Foundation, which I think they got about $70,000–$75,000. The LMEPF retained Mary Dierickx, the preservation consultant, or Missy Dierickx as I refer to her sometimes, and they publicized grant opportunities for buildings that were impacted by the collapse. And I believe they granted $68,000 to maybe six or seven or eight buildings—or owners—ranging from, say, a facade painting or a restoring of a building on Murray Street to, I believe, St. Peter's Church had a little damage, and some other sites. But again, these were not—no facades had collapsed. I think they gave some funding to the Verizon Building for murals on the inside and so forth.

Ninety West Street, which was one of the buildings that got dramatically impacted, was another story that sort of dealt with its own historic restoration, pre- and post- 9/11. So, there wasn't this outpouring of need [to be addressed]. And then Missy, I believe, segued out and I was brought in. And Missy is another person who was living downtown. She lived on Cedar Street with her husband and they were dramatically impacted and had to leave the building, their residence, for a number of years. But I was brought in basically to deal with the rebuilding efforts around the areas [outside of the Ground Zero itself]. And had to grapple with these powerful forces, the

Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, the various transportation pushes for what was going on down there—there were these huge incentives to sort of fix things down there.

The first effort for me was to look at what's going to be the impact [on the surrounding areas], and I worked directly with representatives from each group [within the LMEPF]. So, for me, it was a wonderful experience. For example, at that time, Frank Sanchis was working at the Municipal Art Society. He provided design content. Peg had the political background. I was dealing with Betsy Merritt [an attorney] from the National Trust and so forth. And what we decided to do was look at what we called Corridors of Concern. Where is the development money going to be poured into? And what's the impact going to be on historic structures? So we looked at the Fulton Street corridor from Broadway to the [East] River. We looked at Greenwich Street from the Trade Center down to the Battery. And, basically, created a map that was called Corridors of Concern, where we identified, on a map, all the historic structures, whether they're New York City landmarks or National Register-eligible or listed on the State and National Registers in those areas, and we color-coded it.

We went out one day, Judith Saltzman and myself, plus Roz Lee, whose firm was also retained to assist me in developing this map. December of 2002, we went around right after Christmas taking photographs and, by late January or February, we had this map that we put together, that we then sent to all elected officials and stakeholders and the organizations that were involved with this effort to say there are historic structures there. These are what's important and we want a voice at the table.

That's basically why the LMEPF had created this singular voice. So, preservation efforts weren't diluted with any kind of confusion that here's the World Monuments Fund coming in or Preservation League of New York State or the Landmarks Conservancy or so forth, the National Trust. So, everybody knew, I was speaking on behalf of the group. And as a model it worked really well because I was able to herd the cats—that's not in a pejorative way—but just keep everybody informed, have me be the spokesperson, and the public then knowing that this group is representing the preservation interests of downtown. And we also then became part of what was already an existing organization called the Civic Alliance, and I came late to the game because they were already in existence. And the Civic Alliance was a group of ninety stakeholders that were interested in the urban civic rebirth of Lower Manhattan. That included the AIA [American Institute of Architects] or the South Street Seaport people, museum groups, stakeholders, residential, some co-ops and so forth. So, it was a real organization.

We met with the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation. Then we subsequently did a more in-depth documentation of buildings on Fulton Street and on Greenwich Street and the LMEPF, we retained Michael Caratzas, who now works at the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission [LPC]. He had just graduated from Columbia and he, I remember, basically did documentation on all the buildings that were on the [Corridors of Concern] map and basically created a primer of sorts: here's a photograph, here's the baseline information, any sort of relevant ephemera from newspaper articles. So, there was this legitimate documentation of what's significant in those areas. And Michael was great because he was so thorough and we had these now "tomes" of information.

So that was a lot of what was going on off-site. There were federal buildings on Greenwich Street—and again, I'm sort of compressing this into one huge narrative—but we dealt with these federal buildings that were on Greenwich Street. We dealt with the [Robert and Anne] Dickey House that was owned by a family for many generations, I believe. It had this sort of elliptical-shaped dining room in the rear and it was next to the Syms [Clothing Store] building. It was a development site and we were trying to convince them [the owners] not to knock it down and so forth. So, there were these kinds of efforts.

We also looked at the Keuffel & Esser Building on Fulton Street. So, it [the focus of the LMEPF] became multi-faceted. And then we got very involved in the Fulton Street Transit Center. I shouldn't say "and then," it was simultaneous with this, there was the Corbin Building on Broadway and John Street, which was threatened. And that was very early effort to protect that and landmark that and make sure it wasn't demolished because the Fulton Street Transit Center was proposed as this huge transit intervention with so much federal money that the entire block was [going to be] taken.

And we fought to have the Corbin Building, which was one of the key buildings, and it was built as an early proto-skyscraper with cast iron supports. At the time it was completed, it was the tallest building on Broadway, [and you could see it when] looking up [Broadway] to the north. It had incredible terra cotta, so forth and so on. That was a really early effort. Working with Peg, we were able to have an interview with the editorial board of *The* [*New York*] *Times*. We got an editorial in *The Times*. They wrote about it; we didn't do an op-ed [which at one point we thought about writing]. They actually had an editorial in *The Times* to save the Corbin Building

and that was a great effort. We then met with the institution that owned the building.

So, the building was saved and then it became part of the development of the transit center. We worked with the architects. It became [part of] a Section 106 review because it was on the National Register or eligible for [listing on] the Register. I can't remember if we subsequently got it listed, officially listed. But it was part of a Section 106 review that went on for a long, long time, and again, throughout all of this, it was a lot more complicated. I tapped into the expertise of all the organizations. So having these five organizations backing this one effort to save the Corbin Building gave it a lot of legitimacy. At the same time, throughout the Section 106 review, Frank Sanchis, for example, he would be at all the meetings. Frank, who has this wonderful expertise in architectural design, historic preservation design, was providing his knowledge and really mitigating the impact of what the [proposed] design was. We were working hand in hand with the State Historic Preservation Office. The LPC was at those meetings and all the documents that were created, the memorandum of agreement or understanding, Betsy Merritt was involved [with that part of the project].

So, it was like full-stop shop of preservation expertise that was focused on the Corbin Building and the transit center initiative as well as these other efforts. But it was really, in some ways, this unspoken or unknown model of preservation initiative that was successful in a very, very, very profound way. People don't really know about it, right? It's twenty years later and people are not that aware of how that actually worked and how that succeeded. So, I think I'm covering everything that was off-site.

Q: Yes, I actually would like to hear a little bit more about that, what you just mentioned about this model that was kind of unprecedented. Why do you think that it is not as typical for these different organizations to come together?

Lustbader: Well, we've got—and then they were also successful, I should add, in sustaining the project. I mean, I was brought on in 2002 and I think it officially ended in 2006/2007. It had that official seed money from Tiffany and then it got additional money. They all kicked in. If they wanted to sustain it, for example, I remember in 2004, it was running out of money and the only money that was used was to pay my consulting fee or for some special projects. For example, we got a rendering done through SHoP [Architects] of the Fulton Street Transit Center when SHoP was just sort of coming out, being a new architectural firm. They did a rendering for us.

So, there were very limited expenses and they kicked in money, saying yes, let's put in another $25,000. This will sustain us for another x number of months or a year or whatever it was. We'll see then where we're at, if we need to disband or not. I mean, New York City has a lot of historic properties. It's got a lot of geography. And I think each of the organizations that's a member—the National Trust is a national organization, they have this huge other mandate. The World Monuments Fund has a much broader mandate dealing a lot with cities, but also with ancient sites. The Conservancy has this background in advocacy, technical assistance, citywide as well as the Sacred Sites program [which is state-wide]. And then the League is state-wide. Who am I forgetting now? [laughs]

Q: MAS.

Lustbader: MAS. And MAS obviously has this pedigree of institution established in the late nineteenth century—I think it was 1898—and comes to the table with that expertise as well as its resources from planning to preservation to mapping. I was dealing with the mapping person there as well.

So, they all are busy and doing this kind of full-press advocacy for a national disaster and terrorist attack, first ever since 1941. It prompted everybody to get together and for that need. I think it was such a massive unknown at the time also. I think it was beneficial to all those groups to have one person filtering the information sort of as my own blog to them. I would update them and write letters on LMEPF letterhead.

So, it really became a mini project within all those organizations and I think perhaps—because I had been around for a bit as a preservationist, working at the Landmarks Conservancy starting in ’94—people knew who I was. So, there was a level of comfort in knowing that I could be this hub. I had some experience. People knew who I was, so I could sift through the jargon. I knew personalities and could actually, then say here’s what we’re doing and work towards a means, the end of it, which was great. I was really lucky to work with all these people directly. Again, I can’t stress enough, as a professional experience, to tap into the expertise of all those people and those organizations at such a high level and for such an important topic. The results are in the proof of what we accomplished down the road.

But it certainly doesn’t preclude something like this happening again. God forbid there be

another need like this, but it certainly showed that these groups love New York and that's their mission. [They put aside] individual fundraising [needs], where they have to compete with each other, it didn't really matter. Or individual credit of who accomplished what, no one took credit individually. It was the collective that did the work. So that was really important.

Q: And looking back over the, I guess, some explanations of the formation of the group, I came across a couple times that the impetus for the group is also because preservation has been left out of the discussion of the redevelopment of downtown. Why do you think that happened? Can you talk about that a little bit? You mentioned the Civic Alliance. I know that that was another voice at the table.

Lustbader: I came late to the table in the end of 2002 and rebuilding efforts launched immediately after 9/11. Those other groups were formed soon after because there were so many stakeholders that knew, with the amount of money being poured into the area, they needed to have a voice at the table. And just again, from my own recollection, this was not firsthand, that these [areas surrounding Ground Zero] weren't historic districts. In many cases, there were no [definitive protections]—there may have been some landmarks in the area, but as in anything in New York, with redevelopment, preservation is often seen as an obstacle rather than a benefit or an incentive, and ancillary way to look at urban redevelopment. So, I just don't think anyone wanted to deal with the historic preservation aspects of Ground Zero, outside of in that area. It's like oh, we've got all this money. Let's create a plan, now's the opportunity.

I think there was fear that this was going to be an opportunity to cast aside the historic buildings

that are incredibly important to the character of downtown, Fulton Street, for example, as well as Greenwich Street. Greenwich Street is much different now than it looked after 9/11. Fulton Street, I think, retains a lot of its character. But those efforts—we did tours, we got newspaper press, we got television. We're part of a documentary. So, we really wanted people to understand that in the ashes of the Trade Center itself, that the surrounding area had value and you don't want to obliterate that value at the expense of losing [historic] buildings that will forever change the landscape of Lower Manhattan, without evaluating them properly.

Q: Can you go into a little bit more detail about the public education and advocacy work that you were doing?

Lustbader: We were part of these civic groups and stakeholder groups. So, we did that. We sent the Corridors of Concern map, with a listing of important sites, to all the City Council members, to all the elected officials that would have any influence there to make sure that they were aware of these efforts downtown and at Ground Zero. Again, for the Fulton Street Transit Center, people said, oh, you can't save the Corbin Building and build this thing. You're going to make it a mess. We can't do what we want to do. That's when we retained SHoP to do a quick rendering to show that you can actually integrate a historic structure—that would take up say, maybe one-fifth of the site, with this other new building, that it's doable with good design. That was really our point. You can do this [historic preservation] with good design.

So, we sent out press releases. We privately cultivated the editorial. We did a walking tour to inform the public of what was downtown. So, there were various ways to do it and people

worked the phones too. We worked the phones calling [stakeholders and interested parties]. Peg, I remember, would call elected officials and [on behalf of the] LMEPF and we cultivated a better relationship with them. The sort of bag of tricks, we knew how to use them. That was really—the [surrounding area] off-site of Ground Zero—was the focus initially. We were not looking at Ground Zero at all.

Q: Yes, let's transition into that phase. When did there start to be discussion and maybe curiosity or opening up that vision to what is at Ground Zero? What kind of efforts could be—how could your efforts be utilized there?

Lustbader: I was in the offices of the Landmarks Conservancy as a consultant and I got a call from—well, I may have gotten an email, but subsequently spoke to—Anthony Gardner, who lost his brother. And he started explaining to me [what he was calling about], and asking what are we doing? He knew who I was from the various meetings, [and asked] what are we doing about Ground Zero? Did I know that the box columns and other elements from the Trade Center are *in situ*. And again, it was a little confusing because I didn't understand what box columns were at the time. He sent me a PDF of a map that the fire department did that showed the box columns [outlining the footprints of Towers One and Two] with what they found as organic body material and body parts at Ground Zero. It was overlaid over the box columns. He said, you know, this is a sacred site. This is what we know is there and those box columns are still there, and so are x, y, and z [remnants of the original Towers] and all these things. We knew the slurry wall was there.

Then we were sort of weighing in—I should preface this—we <u>were</u> looking at Ground Zero

[redevelopment] because, I remember, in December of 2002, I went to the Winter Garden at Brookfield Place where they did the huge announcement of the five finalists for the rebuilding—who got what. This was—again, I'm forgetting now, that was in December of 2002. We were looking at the Libeskind design and he was talking about the slurry wall. Then as a group, we were evaluating that from a civic [redevelopment] thing, but we were never looking at per se [as a] preservation effort. We were looking at what do the various designs [do architecturally], how are they, and who's the best design and who's going to get it and what did we think about it as a civic engagement [redevelopment project]. There were issues of Cortlandt Street, which had been closed up, [and the need for] reopening it, cutting through to make interconnections from east of the site of Ground Zero toward north, not wanting to cut off this. Are they going to keep it lower or raise it? All those design issues, but not from a preservation per se effort.

It wasn't until Anthony gave me this information—and I don't recall when it was, I know it was in 2002. Sometime in 2003, I went to Peg and said, "Oh, my God, we've got an issue. We've got to deal with this. Let me educate myself more, but here's what's going on." And there's this Survivors' Staircase and there are all these elements. We, then again, corralled the troops and got everybody up to speed on what those issues were. That's really when the LMEPF started focusing <u>on</u> Ground Zero, which took sort of over much of the energy and much of the push for advocacy. Because at that point, we had a handle on what was going on in the redevelopment of Greenwich Street and Fulton Street. And we started going to these meetings at the LMDC, Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, that had all the stakeholders.

I mean Anthony and [Robert] "Bob" Kornfeld [Jr.] are really the ones who should be credited

with acknowledging the value of what was onsite and [recognize the foresight] that Davis Brody Bond [and the Port Authority] had already worked with LMDC to take artifacts off-site that were stored at Hangar 17, this huge hangar [at JFK Airport] for these items. But Anthony was the one, with Bob, who said, there are *in situ* elements that are, what I would say now, archaeological elements that are *in situ* that should be recognized and should be part of the rebuilding effort. That was complex because most preservationists in New York don't deal with archaeological ruins, let alone archaeological ruins that date from the late 1960s to the early 1970s. So, ultimately it was a creative way to deal with preservation that was unique in New York, but not unique, in the sense of when you look around the world, how other cities [around the world incorporate ruins]—and even the subway system [in New York City] has dealt with reinterpreting old subway lines. So, we took that as our mission to really look at that.

Then there was the push to get it [the World Trade Center site] listed as eligible on the National Register, which was a huge push because it didn't meet the time requirements [of fifty years], but if you look at the eligibility statement, it's because this [the attack] is such a unique and of national significance. And it was Bob who had already identified so many of the *in situ* elements that are now part of that National Register eligibility statement from the box columns to the elevator pits to the slurry wall, and the E train subway passage.

So, everything that was called out [in the National Register eligibility statement]—and it was a big complicated mess of meetings [that followed]. It was traumatic. You had stakeholders who were neighbors. You had family members who lost loved ones. You had survivors at these meetings. So, the stakeholder meetings had ninety to one hundred people there. They were

incredibly emotional. And then you had elected official representatives, then you had the SHPO representatives, architects, the LMDC. There was a lot of mistrust, there was a lot of anger. There was a lot of sadness, there was a lot of misunderstanding about what we [the preservationists] were doing, what everyone wanted from the preservation world. We were looked at as stopping redevelopment and from some family members, they didn't want anything to be remembered [that would slow down rebuilding efforts]. They thought this was frivolous. The LMDC was, I think, livid that we could actually get this thing listed and have to deal with the Section 106 review because it just put a wrench in all the plans. Then it required everybody to then deal with mitigating the impact of a rebuilding effort, which was billions of dollars and a huge amount of investment and money. [For example], the PATH station, how do you interpret––the train that is going to go over x number of box columns, what do we do?

It was incredibly complicated and gratifying in the end because, by and large, it was a successful effort as a Section 106 review. But I think everybody—again, going down to the pit one day where you could see the box columns and standing there with the map that Anthony had originally sent me, where you see where the box columns are and then you see where body parts were found, or organic matter was found, was incredibly moving and incredibly poignant and incredibly important knowing that. If I keep going, part of the museum redevelopment—no one wanted this [to deal with these remnants]. I think the angle we took was, look, if you're building a museum, because you're saying it's at the authentic site, and you're going to be below grade and you've got these elements that are there, how can you not take—I don't want to use the word because it sounds disrespectful to the tragedy of the day—advantage and exploit, for the authentic sake of that experience, that visceral connection? How could you not preserve those

box columns as the only remnants of the original building?

People didn't understand. What does it matter? What are you going to do? It's not the real thing. They're already cut off. They've been altered. Same thing with the slurry wall, it's not meant to really do anything now because it can't. How is it going to work? There will be humidity issues, so forth and so on. Let alone the Survivors' Staircase; that was a whole other focus. But it was a huge process. It was a huge Section 106 review. It was fraught with so many problems. It was emotional, as I said. But it was ultimately successful.

And the same thing with the Survivors' Staircase, which we did another rendering of showing that we wanted to have it preserved *in situ*, which was above grade, where it was [originally] connecting to the sort of plaza level of the building. And it looked like it was in disrepair because it had begun to become dismantled [as part of the redevelopment work]. So that was its own issue because people said, well, oh, look what happened during the attacks. We said no, it was being dismantled. Well, then, is it authentic from the period of significance? Well, it's still the only thing above ground that's left of Ground Zero. There was no will to save that whatsoever. There were issues of security because if it's going to be in the footprint of a [proposed new] building site, it could become a target. We had a rendering done where it was sort of encased within the building. It couldn't be saved for engineering reasons, blah, blah, blah, blah.

Then they said okay. Down the road, a couple of things changed, where state leadership changed the relationship with the LMEPF and LMDC, where Avi Schick became head of—I think it was the Empire State [Development Corporation] but basically overseeing the LMDC. And Avi

Schick listened and Peg had a relationship with him just in terms of just speaking to him and explaining what the issues were. And the other issue that changed was that Alice Greenwald became in charge of the museum. And Avi understood the Survivors' Staircase and said, we'll move it. Before that, there was a whole issue of [the LMDC and Port Authority stating that] you can't move it. You can't possibly move it, engineering-wise. Again, this is sort of disjointed, but we were at a meeting and, [Robert] "Bob" Silman, the engineer who passed away a few years ago, was at the meeting and basically said, look—he drew up a sketch and said, "You can move it. This is how you do it." He basically said, "Look, if there was a political will, you'd move it. But there's no political will right now and if there was, I could show you how to move it. It wouldn't be a problem whatsoever."

And that basically, without sounding disrespectful to the people in the room, was egg in their face because it mitigated and countered the argument that you can't do it. Here we had one of the foremost preservation engineers in the world at the table saying you can move it. Don't tell me you can't move it because you can move it. And that was great. I mean, that changed everything. And Bob was so soft-spoken, so real, that it was just a wonderful thing. He wasn't shaming anyone. He said, "Look, if there was a political will, you'd move it." That was the end of the story.

Then with Alice, Alice really then understood what they can do with the elements that were *in situ* and how they could be interpreted. She had come from the [United States] Holocaust [Memorial] Museum in [Washington] DC and brought this sensibility of how do you connect emotionally. I'm putting words in her mouth, but she was able to see that you could emotionally

connect to these elements as part of the interpretation and part of the museum presentation. So, between the Survivors' Staircase and the box columns and the slurry wall, which were three of the main elements that were part of this experience, they became integrated into it [the museum] and really wonderful.

That's, again, shorthand for how long this took and how many arguments and how many changes and how many meetings and explanations. Again, with other issues such as interpreting the subway passage from the E train to how do you transition—which now, if you go there, you can see what's really left of the Trade Center on the E train or—when you connect: at a certain point I was in the concourse before the pandemic where you can see going from connecting underground where the original nineteenth century walls held back the Hudson and so forth, and other historic things that are interpreted there. They're not hugely marked with flashing lights, but they were interpreted as part of the Section 106 review.

Q: I wanted to ask about that. From talking to Bob Kornfeld, what I understand of the Section 106 process is that there was an initial determination of eligibility that was kind of thrown together and everyone was gathered to review this proposal. So, I was wondering if you remember that. I believe this is also, from what Bob said, again, where he was able to circulate this photo of the footprints, what he had been able to photograph. Do you recall that meeting?

Lustbader: I can't recall the exact meeting, but I can recall—everything seems to be mushed together in my mind—but I do remember how Bob's specificity of each of these items and his soft-spoken calmness presenting the photographs that included all these elements, that in

hindsight, are now are clearly articulated in my mind. But really having to work to understand what these elements were, because you're dealing in some cases with mechanical, structural, or engineering issues [and equipment], that in the room [via a photograph], they don't read as legibly as [traditional architectural elements]—you're not looking at saving a cornice. You're not looking at saving a window enframement. You're looking at elevator pits. You're looking at, again, these box columns and certain elements that were *in situ* [without a lot of context] and [knowing that they] should be preserved, and really having to make the case that these are important.

At the time, I always thought about it when—if we came back in five hundred years, four hundred years, as an archaeologist—we'd be thinking we hit paydirt with what these elements are: "Oh, my God, look at this [significant archaeological element]! We can tease out what was going on here." And that's where I put myself in the future person, looking at these elements that an archaeologist in five hundred years would be preserving because they're so important and they're the only [remaining] elements of this incredible structure that was destroyed in the first terrorist attacks that killed three thousand people in New York City (putting aside 1941 in Hawaii). But this was the largest terrorist attack on mainland USA. So that's why they were important. How they were interpreted, that's fine, but that's another issue. But as a document of the eligibility [for the National Register], they needed to be included. Yes, there was a lot, a lot.

We were being—there was the LMDC folks, the legal team, as well as the president—people were looking at us like we are out of minds, for lack of a better word, or just being a thorn in the side of progress. And I remember—I'm fast-forwarding—to going, I think, it was May, but I

can't ever remember what year the museum opened [2014]—but going on a preliminary tour and Alice Greenwald was there, and basically Alice was like, you must feel very gratified. [She was inferring:] "Look, this is all because of preservation efforts that you have this connection to the authentic space." And it was really wonderful to hear Alice say that because, had it not really been for the change of leadership there or having them put onboard a museum expert, who's going to be responsible—she really made the difference there. And it is satisfying. And I think if I was to look back at my career, preservation-wise, having those elements preserved is one of the most satisfying things I could have done for the legacy of New York City and for these attacks, and for people to really understand the value of historic preservation, archaeology, and the value of individuals coming together to advocate for this because it was so important. And knowing that millions of visitors will see those elements and have a different connection to the museum, than they would have, if those elements weren't there.

[Without its preservation], you'd just be below grade in a box with an exhibit. Here you go down there—and the way they did them, where they excavated below what had been cut off from the stubs—you can see the structures coming up. I was there a couple of years ago for this effort, *Holding Back the Hudson*, which was revisiting the slurry wall [its preservation and on-going conservation] and going down there and seeing what they were: [I felt]: "And oh, my God—people were looking at them!" And watching people view them and view the slurry wall and view the staircase, for me, is incredibly satisfying because they're looking at something that is not just an exhibit. It's an archaeological element of the original Trade Center.

Q: Thank you, Ken. I have a couple more questions about the museum but I need to take a quick

break. Is that all right with you? Just a three-minute break. So I'll be right back and I'm going to pause the recording while I do that.

Lustbader: Okay, terrific.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: So, I wanted to ask about a couple of the elements that you mentioned, the box columns, the footprint, the Survivors' Staircase, and also the slurry wall. As you mentioned, they had all been kind of altered in a way from their original. And I just wanted to ask, did that shift your thinking or the group's thinking about the purpose of preservation in any way, knowing that these things had been moved or altered?

Lustbader: Well, the group was aware of all these issues. And while this was atypical of the standard preservation brief or advocacy effort or interpretation, there is precedent in New York, as I mentioned, in dealing with ruins: [for example,] the Smallpox Hospital on Roosevelt Island or how do you interpret a large subway reinterpretation, or archaeological issues in the city. We did cite examples from around the world of how sites [with ruins and archeological elements] were interpreted—where you could walk over floors and see through what existing conditions were below that. Again, this is going back to tap into the expertise of all of these groups. So, the World Monuments Fund obviously has such vast experience of interpretive issues with sites that are different states from their original integrity.

But I think it was so new, the [Trade Center] site, that you're dealing with a modern ruin, that it didn't shift people's understanding, but it just challenged everybody a little bit more because of the [rebuilding] forces that were against us too, and the billions of dollars that were against us. But certainly, for me, personally and professionally it shifted and educated me quickly on artifacts or *in situ* elements. Steve Weintraub was an archaeologist working as part of the project [his firm Art Preservation Services was retained]. The Port Authority had—I'm forgetting her last name, Jackie [architect Jacqueline Hanley], who—again, these were people who were really sensitive to the archaeological issues. But I don't think anyone on the LMEPF—it didn't change anyone's understanding in a sense [of the value of ruins and artifacts]. It was just another aspect of the value of historic preservation, specifically in an urban setting, and how that could be used to further other preservation efforts down the road by using this now as a model.

For example, and this is a digression really, I got a little bit involved in the New York City AIDS Memorial that was built at the former facilities handling site at [the former] St. Vincent's [Hospital] on 12th Street and 7th Avenue and the Rudin family was redeveloping that site and these two young guys [Christopher Tepper and Paul Kelterborn] subsequently had an effort to get a corner location and built the AIDS Memorial. Well, below grade there was this huge area—that was connected to the former St. Vincent's Hospital across the street—and there was this below ground area. They were talking about [including] a museum [at the AIDS Memorial]. I said, "This is a perfect opportunity to use that space even though it's for tragedy because this is where the corpses of all of St. Vincent's got taken out through this building." I brought them to meet with Alice, and again, [it reflected] understanding the value of using sites that are sites of tragedy or loss really is important.

The same thing currently now on Hart Island—the city is proposing to destroy all the above ground buildings, which I don't have all the information about them, but on first blush, it seems like a really missed opportunity to tell the full narrative and history of Hart Island, not just the burial aspect of it.

So, I think the collective group effort [of the LMEPF] was really expanded because of the challenges here and because of we were the thorn in the side that said okay, we're doing this. We're doing this. But I don't know if that exactly answered the question, but it didn't change people's ways [of thinking]. I think it just expanded people's ways of a vision that we actually can do this and how valuable it was, and confirmed people's gut hunches that this is really, really important. And that would be confirmed through the due diligence that Bob [Kornfeld]—he was constantly there. I can't stress how important the specificity of what his voice was, about the significance of the sites. The [imprimatur of the] LMEPF brought to it more of a producer, collective energy, advocacy, political background, design issues, sort of speaking to the various people who are pulling levers. Where Bob—and Anthony—Anthony represented a family member and family groups—and knowing how important that was and his passion. Bob was sort of clinical: this is what needs to happen, this is what's important. And we [the LMEPF] were this sort of like boom, boom, boom, pulling levers to get other people to do things. So, collectively, it was a very successful effort.

Q: And I want to go back to the museum—I guess maybe at the time it would have been the memorial foundation before it was the museum—when you mentioned Alice Greenwald coming

onboard. What was that experience like to—I don't know how to phrase it exactly because I don't know what it was like for you—but in a sense, hand over the interpretation to a different kind of profession that does interpretation, a historical and cultural museum.

Lustbader: Once the LMEPF realized that this review has teeth—a Section 106 review really is important. I had never done one before. I had never participated in one before. This is highly unusual, given the stakes, given the age of the site, given the subject matter, given issues of integrity, given the design challenges, the different groups. You're dealing with the museum. You're dealing with the subway [rebuilding], transportation [systems], PATH, New York City subway, it was crazy. And I remember a colleague from the State Historic Preservation Office saying [at one review session], "Oh, my God, they've never done anything like this before." Because I was like, is this normal [type of review]? Is this how they usually go? So it was amazing.

But when Alice came onboard, I think—and again, I can't remember the dates—it had already been deemed eligible, so we were dealing with that. But there was constant—for lack of a better word—fighting. Issues with how we're going to do what, minimizing certain things. And Alice, from my recollection, came onboard and said—paraphrasing—"I get it, we're going to deal with this." It was just not defensive, which is the way it felt with the LMDC [prior to Alice]. She knew how to handle the emotional content here, knew people's emotions were high, knew that the temperature in the room would go up and down, and really knew how to work to make sure everybody's voices were heard—no one was minimized—but to hear what was going on from the survivors, from the family members, from the preservationists, from the design team, from

the LMDC itself, to the funding issues, how is this going to work. I just breathed a sigh of relief––that even if you disagreed with everything, you were respected. It became a much more even-handed dialog and exchange of ideas that was constructive rather than simply pointing fingers.

And that was similar with Avi Schick coming onboard. Again, I didn't work with him as closely, but just having that change—"let's problem solve"—rather than putting up our hand to say no. There seems to be an agreement: "let's work to resolve this." And understanding, looking back at it, this staircase issue became such a big issue. But also became such an important element [of the current museum], that when you go there now, you traverse next to it on a staircase that you can walk next to it or on the escalator going down. And when you get there, the way they designed it, you're going down the [entry] ramp [into the museum exhibition space] and you look at the slurry wall from a height and you can take it in. Then you go down the staircase and you're adjacent to the staircase. So, these two important elements are what [first] greet people who are visiting there.

So, I'm smiling now because we did it! These are really important elements and, maybe to me they're more important than to other people, but when you go to that museum, those [the preserved historic elements] are some of the initial impressions you get. From the preservation world, it's what preservation is about. It's authentic, it's visceral, it's tangible, and here you are having them interpreted in one of the most important museums in the country that wouldn't have existed had it not been for—I guess I can say—without the LMEPF. They played a role. If we weren't there, I don't know what would have happened, because there were other people, again advocating for it, but I think the LMEPF brought to the table a professional credibility that

legitimized all these efforts—through the efforts of these five major organizations that gave people shorthand to know these people are legitimate [and credible]. They understand the professional, elected, monetary worlds and they're not just enthusiasts. I hate to minimize the enthusiast, but it does—with the stakes at this level, we had so many key players there, [and the LMEPF had gravatas].

And, again, at those meetings, you had the high-level team members from each of the groups often coming and going. You had Peg Breen at the Section 106 or Frank. Betsy Merritt would come in from DC, people from the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation [would also come in from DC]. It was just a high-level investment of time and energy from these individuals and organizations, that helped shape and push forward the advocacy efforts.

Q: And I also want to talk about the Civic Alliance to Rebuild Downtown. I saw that you were on the steering committee and also that there was a series of focus groups about what should the museum be. And I wondered if you could talk about that a little bit, and hearing from the public, with, as you mentioned, these experts—or people with a cumulative amount of experience in this field working professionally. What was that like to hear from these different groups?

Lustbader: Again, this is a lot fuzzier for me than the day-to-day efforts. There were a series of meetings. I was honored to be part of that, that I was asked to be a representative for the LMEPF. It was quite the learning experience for me, having been working, dealing with sacred sites at the New York Landmarks Conservancy and here I am dealing with the reinterpretation of a site that has elements and artifacts from the late '60s and '70s, and [knowing] the temperature and the

stakes and the threshold of the significance and how important this was going to be.

But it was sobering to hear everybody's reactions. It was sobering to hear how people wanted to have it interpreted or not have it interpreted. There were issues of "do not mention any of the terrorists at the building, at the museum". And that, I remember, was a big issue. I remember thinking, I didn't have anybody directly impacted from the attack, but would I feel different if I lost a family member? But then, again, in a clinical sense. Now, looking back at it, with the importance of telling full narratives, I remember then feeling that you've got to name the names [of the terrorists]. You've got to name who they are because you can repeat mistakes. But all of those elements of "we don't want to see x, y and z, and so forth," it was challenging, but eye-opening. But similar to as we learned over the years—I mean this started for me in 2002—these were meetings that we basically knew the people [over the number of years of meetings]. We became, "Hey, how are you doing?" It was a small group of individuals that were constantly going to these meetings. So, we knew who they were and you learned how to respect everybody's position. It was sort of like a family. [And at time, we were perceived as:] "There are the crazy preservationists." There's this one, there's that one. Oh, there's this one who's living a stone's throw from the Trade Center and who's concerned about this. So, we all had our roles and we took on these roles as a family. But over the years, everybody knew and respected each other, even if there were some volatile outbreaks and antagonism or what.

I'm not getting at the specificity of the question. I don't remember all the elements other than just the emotion of being there and hearing people's different perspectives, sometimes being shocked and bemused, like really? But other times saying, wow, it's a completely different thing

than I would want or understand, but then understanding their position.

In looking at the museum, I think it does a wonderful job. It's interesting, I have my own sort of proprietary sort of ownership of the museum. When I was there, somewhat recently—I have a friend whose brother died [during the attacks] and I wanted to take a picture [of his brother that was on a wall], and I was yelled at by the security guard. And I remember—I didn't know you couldn't take a picture of the picture—but I sort of wanted to explain to him [the guard], no, no, you don't understand: "I have a deep sensitivity to the site." So, I'm very proud of the efforts of the LMEPF and, professionally, what we accomplished there.

Q: And I think you talked quite a bit about what this experience has—the unique elements of it and taking certain elements away regarding preservation efforts in the city. I wonder, because it involved so many people, what do you take away as a citizen of New York?

Lustbader: Well, it's such an emotional—the attack itself was so big, so dramatic, so awful, so devastating. But I take away, professionally—why am I in historic preservation? I'm in it because I care about the built environment. I care about New York City. I care about civic life. I care about people. And all those elements were demonstrated with a level of grace in these [preservation] efforts. Even though there were fights and battles, there was a level of grace. And I feel really fortunate to have worked with these five organizations and teased out the expertise from all of the groups, to sort of distill them, and sort of metaphysically—like it's alchemy. It created this collective that really played a significant role. I think about it now, with the pandemic where people say, oh, Midtown's done. At the time, downtown was done and New

York was not coming back. I just think, well, there's a lot of people out there. New York is going to come back. And it takes time, but with all the heart and soul that New York has had in all of its history, I'm pretty confident that New York will create another iteration of itself in the various ways it has done over its inception, in time immemorial.

It was a great experience to work on professionally. It was a great experience personally as a New Yorker. And it's great as a legacy, that those elements are part of the museum and will forever be there for people to have that visceral connection to Ground Zero, and what was there and what was lost, and have a sense of authenticity when they go to see it, that they can see the tangible reminders of the Trade Center and that it was real. And that they are on that site specific location where the attacks took place and where all those lives were lost or forever changed, if you were a survivor and lived in the area or survived the attacks.

Q: I think that's a good place to end, Ken.

Lustbader: Great.

Q: Yes. Thank you for summarizing that so eloquently. Thank you for your work on this.

Lustbader: Thanks.

Q: Maybe it was clear to people who were doing the work sooner than it was to the public, which I was part of at the time, that this was going to be okay. But yes, we're so lucky to have those

elements preserved.

Lustbader: Yes, and the one person I didn't mention was Peter Renaldi, who was involved. And he worked with the Port Authority. I mean, the poor guy dealt with us, dealt with Anthony and Bob. He's a really nice guy but poor Pete had to deal with all of us. There's a documentary you can see. You may find it of interest, *Holding Back the Hudson*. It was produced by the museum [and American Express] and I was on a panel discussion with Pete and a museum woman [Harriet F. Senie] who interprets memorials. It was, in this bizarre way, a reunion—like a college reunion, "Hey!" And in the audience was Anthony. Bob was there. But it was like, "Hey, Pete! How are you doing? We really were a pain to you." He's like, well, we worked it out. But he was really important and another key player that I just wanted to acknowledge. He may be a really good person to interview, to have that side of the table as part of that NYPAP dialog. He had to deal with all the constraints and what he was dealing with as an employee of the Port Authority and the engineering issues.

Q: Yes, that's a good point. I saw that documentary and read through the transcript of that event too. It's interesting to see the reflections. It's a really great way to learn about what is a slurry wall [laughs].

Lustbader: Yes, oh, my God, the documentary does it so well.

Q: Thank you so much, Ken.

Lustbader: Sure.

Q: Take care. Enjoy your day. You'll hear from me in a few weeks.

Lustbader: Okay, thanks again. Have a great day.

Q: Bye-bye.

[END OF INTERVIEW]