

The World Trade Center and Me From Camelot to Bin Laden

By Phillip S. Cottone, Esq., SR/WA

It was June 1961, when my involvement with the Twin Towers began. I just graduated from Columbia College in New York City and started work as an administrative trainee at the Port of New York Authority (as it was then known) headquartered in Chelsea, 15th Street and Eighth Ave., in Manhattan. John Kennedy was in the White House, and Camelot was on the horizon. The post war Eisenhower years had just ended and the civil rights struggle, assassinations, Vietnam, Watergate and bin Laden were yet to come. The world was simpler then. • I married my grade school sweetheart and we had three kids while in college. I thought of becoming a teacher and planned to work a year or two to get out of debt, then to go on to get a master's degree in English literature, my college major. But I wasn't really sure what I wanted to do, and the Authority had a wonderful reputation as a first-class training ground for business and public service. More importantly, it was a bi-state agency of New York and New Jersey and operated in the Port District, a 25-mile radius around the Statue of Liberty. I wouldn't have to travel too far from home, which in those days was an apartment in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, on the second floor of a two-family house.

The Authority hired only eight to ten trainees a year as future managers after recruiting at 55 colleges and graduate schools around the country. Incidentally, our starting salary in 1961 was \$5,600 a year (that's right, a year, not a month) and that compared very favorably with starting salaries at the very best companies nationwide. When we started, we went through a six-month program of seven-week work assignments in different departments (mine were in the Director's Office of the Aviation Department—the Authority ran JFK, Newark, La Guardia and Teterboro Airports then, and now; the Real Estate Department, and the Lincoln Tunnel) interspersed with formal classroom work in public administration, transportation economics, sensitivity training, management and decision making. The Authority operated about 25 facilities in the Port District, including the airports, port facilities, bridges, tunnels, truck and bus terminals, and one of the largest office buildings in the world by cubic content at 111 Eighth Ave. At the end of the six months we chose where we wanted to go and the different department heads selected people for permanent assignments. I eventually ended up in the Real Estate Department because the seven-week assignment in acquisition and property management, working for Manager Chick Anton, Esq., had been fun. The head of Real Estate, Robert C. Curtiss, CRE, and Columbia College Class of '27, liked the idea of taking another Columbia man.

The Authority had very ambitious plans for helping the Port District grow and prosper. One of them was to construct a central facility in New York City for international trade—a world trade center. We heard about the plans very early in our career. At that time the facilities for doing overseas trade were spread all over the city, from the consulates on the east side in midtown, to the freight forwarding firms and port facilities scattered throughout the district, to the Customs House downtown in the battery. Authority research concluded that one out of four jobs in the Port District depended upon international trade for its existence, and that improving the process by getting the players under one roof would increase the prosperity of the entire region. It conceived of a \$350 million World Trade Center to be located on the East side of lower Manhattan, a site that included a property known as the Sugar Building at 120 Wall Street, and extended out into the East River. The cost of the project was not inconsiderable and the officials of New Jersey objected to the Authority spending all that money in New York City without any direct benefit to them. The governors of New York and New Jersey have to approve Authority actions and each appoints half of the 12-person Board of Commissioners, which functions as a Board of Directors of a corporation. Controversy surrounded the birth of the WTC and it was to last years after the project was built for a number of different reasons. Little did we know then how all that early controversy and publicity would pale compared to that which accompanied the demise of the Twin Towers about 35 years later.

The Authority encouraged trainees to get involved in its Speakers Bureau, which sent employees to speak about current plans and programs to local Kiwanis, Lions and other groups around the district. At that time, speakers on the WTC were frequently requested because that was in the news, with the governor of New Jersey saying "Never," and the Executive Director of the Authority and New York state officials lobbying in favor. That was when the Twin Towers got personal for me. About once a month I would go out,

usually to a community in New Jersey, and give a talk at lunch or dinner with my slide projector of pretty pictures of the WTC, a project that was to become a significant part of my life in the following ten years, and after.

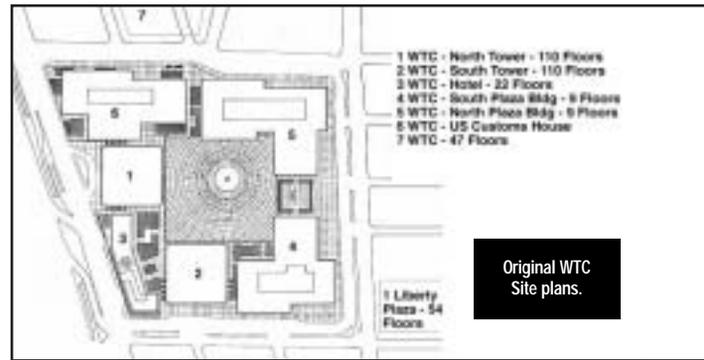
Meanwhile my career in the real estate department as a junior administrative assistant to the manager was underway, working on sale of the property remnants left over from the George Washington Bridge second deck acquisition in the late 1950s; securing rights for lighting runway obstructions in Rockaway Beach near JFK Airport; doing property research in Staten Island, NY, in connection with expansion of the bridge crossings to New Jersey; and researching ownerships on the East side of Manhattan where the WTC was to be located if approval to build it was obtained. While the Authority had a number of projects in progress or in the planning stages in the early 1960s, the WTC was clearly the most ambitious. And it was stalled until an agency official had the bright idea to relocate it to the West side of lower Manhattan and combine it with acquisition and rehabilitation of the Hudson & Manhattan tubes, a subway built at the turn of the century to bring New Jersey commuters to Manhattan. The system opened in 1908, and was privately owned and in disrepair.

The main stop for the tubes in lower Manhattan was the Hudson Terminal at 30-50 Church Street, two 22-story office buildings that sat atop a railroad terminal. The clever idea to move the WTC site to that location, now known as “ground zero,” broke the political deadlock with New Jersey politicians; the Authority agreed to acquire and rehabilitate the old H & M Railroad at an estimated cost of about \$70 million, in exchange for agreement to construct the WTC on the West side of lower Manhattan. As part of the quid pro quo, the New Jersey politicians also got agreement for the Authority to build the Journal Square Transportation Center, which would rehabilitate 7.5 acres of downtown Jersey City, NJ, with a train and bus terminal, and office building complex as part of the H & M project.

From 1961 to 1965 I was learning about business, real estate, management and public administration. I was working with lawyers a good deal, and realized there was quite a bit I didn't know about contracts, torts, insurance and the laws that govern our lives. So in 1962 I started New York University School of Law, Evening Division with a full tuition grant from the Authority while I worked in the real estate department during the day learning about appraisal, management, leasing, property records, abstracting title, and such. I took the Appraisal Institute courses and also became familiar with the American Right of Way Association, as the International Right of Way Association was then called. I became a member in 1963 when my boss, Chick Anton, was going through the elective offices of New York Chapter 18 and needed help with all the back up work. In those early years, I found out how to arrange meetings, contact speakers, write newsletters, take minutes and prepare treasury reports. It was an intense learning period for me, and one of real growth and development in many areas. I was introduced to the WTC site by going to the courthouse to search titles to determine who owned and occupied the 13-square block area we targeted for construction. Initially I was part of a top-secret group that was developing information on the site quietly without letting the City of New York administration or the neighborhood occupants know what was being done.

The site is familiar to most of the world now. Thirteen square blocks which extend from Barclay Street on the North to West Street on the Hudson River—excluding the NY Telephone Company building (now the Verizon building) that still exists on the corner of West and Barclay that took such a hit on September 11— to Church Street on the East, then anchored by the Hudson Terminal Buildings, and Liberty Street on the south; about 15 acres of what would be the largest assembly of property in the city up until that time. My recollection is that there were 560 tenants— residential, retail, office and some light industrial— that had to be relocated, and 143 fee claimants or real property owners, together with over 100 owners of compensable trade fixtures who had to be paid just compensation for their property. I didn't realize then that I would be personally responsible for that acquisition, management and relocation program in just a couple of years.

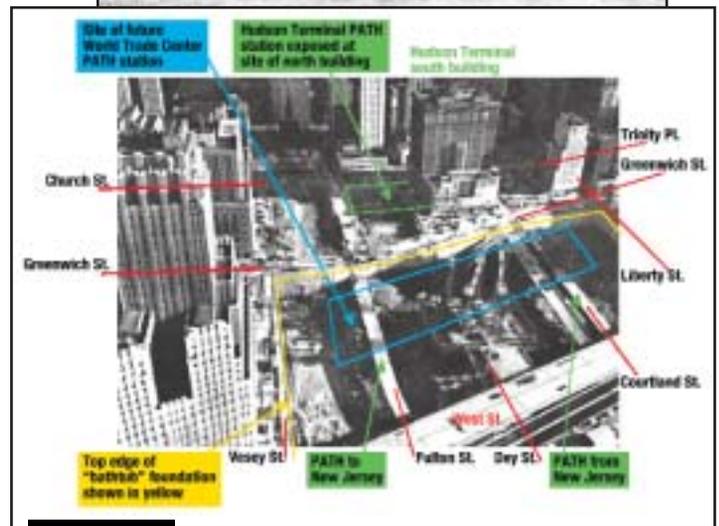
Lower Manhattan in those days was a financial services back office and insurance center which had not seen a new office building since David Rockefeller had the courage to build the 60-story Chase Manhattan Plaza



Hudson Terminal.



Hudson Terminal along 600.



Hudson Terminal being replaced.



Hudson Terminal Tube construction.

building in the late 1950s. People thought Rockefeller was crazy at the time, and once the Authority announced its plans a few years later, many thought it was crazy too for planning a major office development in a part of Manhattan that was not considered prime office territory.

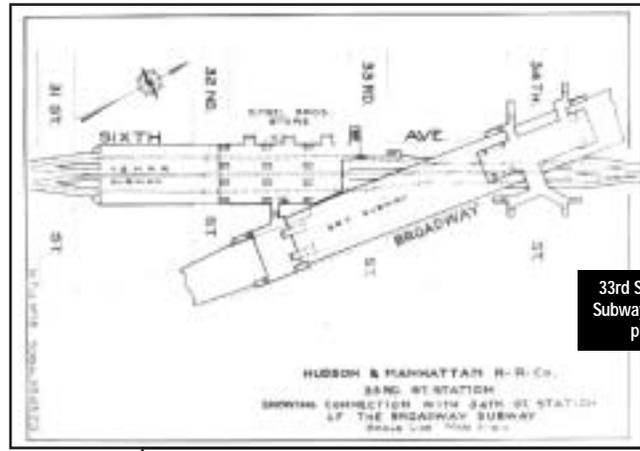
The WTC site was immediately south of an area known as the Washington Markets where produce was sold early every morning to the city's stores and restaurants. Plans were underway then to relocate that market to the Hunts Point section in the Bronx, and it eventually did move. The WTC site consisted of the old H & M Terminal Buildings, and about 140 other structures, mostly three- to five-story lofts built around the turn of the century, with electronics stores on the first floor and largely vacant upper floors. It was called "Radio Row" and had quite a following for those interested in radio, TV and electronics, or looking to purchase second hand or off-price equipment.

Bi-state legislation authorizing the WTC construction and the H & M Railroad acquisition was passed in 1962. The Authority announced its plans for the project, as we know it in 1964 (but the final City approval wasn't obtained until 1966).

The Authority hired Minoru Yamasaki of Birmingham, Mich., as the lead design architect, and Emery Roth & Sons of New York. A plan for the tallest buildings in the world, consisting of 110 stories and ten million net rentable square feet, evolved, and there was an uproar. Architectural critics denounced the pedestrian design; building owners decried the Authority getting in the real estate business, depriving them of profits by glutting the market with space, and depriving the city of tax ratables (the Authority made "in lieu of tax" payments to municipalities based upon the assessments in place at the time of acquisition). Empire State Building owner Larry Wein formed what he called "The Committee for a Reasonable World Trade Center" and brought one of many lawsuits against the Authority; and the site owners themselves organized a group called the "Downtown West Small Business Survival Committee" and brought suits questioning the "public use" and featuring civil liberties lawyers and other names. This was New York, after all, so it wasn't going to be easy. In the *Courtesy Sandwich* case—named for the lead plaintiff, one of the site tenants—the court eventually upheld the enabling legislation.

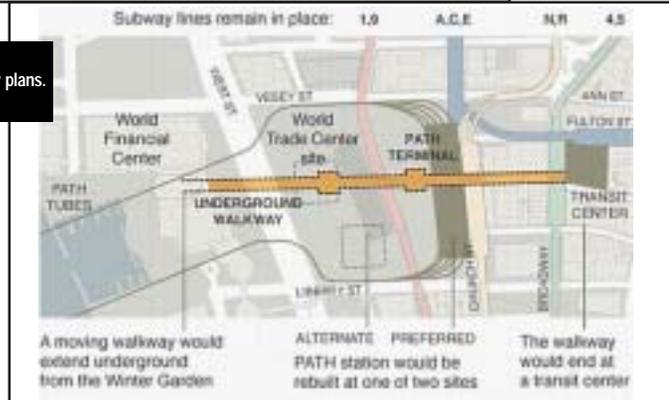
Meanwhile I was promoted to increasingly responsible jobs from real estate representative, to real estate agent, then senior real estate agent. In December of 1965 the Authority vested title in condemnation to the WTC site by virtue of filing a plat with a perimeter description pursuant to the eminent domain statutes of New York state. I was the principal witness on property matters in the proceeding and the WTC, from a property point of view, had become my baby. The following year when I graduated from law school and was admitted to the bar, I succeeded Anton as division head, in charge of all of it— acquisition, interim leasing, management, tenant relocation and property engineering. At age 26, I was the youngest manager in the history of the Authority, but I was aging fast now that I had a division of more than 100 people to run and projects with budget responsibility exceeding \$100 million. Anton had trained me well in IRWA work too, and in 1970, I was elected president of ARWA New York Chapter 18. (Incidentally, the change in the Association's name to the International Right of Way Association didn't take place until ten years later, by which time I was serving in the sixth year of my first term as International General Counsel. I was pleased to have presided over the member vote and to prepare the implementing documents to modify the Articles of Incorporation to change the name.)

Our first official contact with WTC site owners and neighbors resulted from the need to obtain rock-anchor-tie-back-tendon easements from a few property owners so a test slurry wall could be built, a portion of the bathtub to keep the sea water out when the towers were erected. The original water line for the Hudson River was along Greenwich Street, running North-South in about the middle of the site, almost two blocks east of West Street, the current westerly boundary. That meant much of the site was on landfill and the water table was high. The anchors had to tie to bedrock under properties adjacent to the site, about 70 feet down. When the tower floors were in, the concrete was pored and steel was in place, the rock anchors



33rd St. Station Subway Terminal plans.

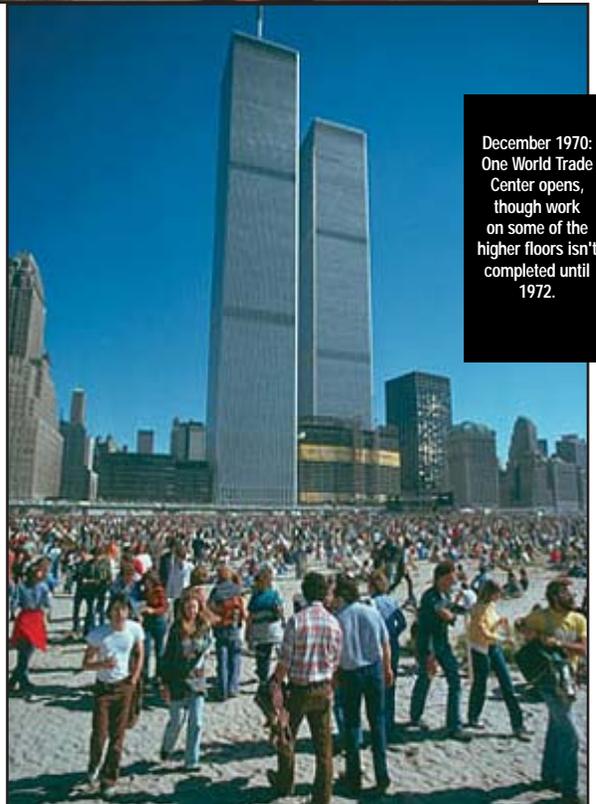
WTC subway plans.



Subway lines remain in place: 1, 9, A, C, E, 3, 4, 5. A moving walkway would extend underground from the Winter Garden. ALTERNATE PATH station would be rebuilt at one of two sites. The walkway would end at a transit center.



August 5, 1966: Ground is broken on the construction of the Twin Towers.



December 1970: One World Trade Center opens, though work on some of the higher floors isn't completed until 1972.

could be and were released. The Authority recently put new rock anchor tendons in place, as there has been concern about the stability of the bathtub walls without the towers to secure them.

The WTC project was fascinating, and whether you liked the architecture or not (I did not), and whether you thought the Authority should be in the business of building office space or not (again, I didn't) made no difference because the scale of it was breathtaking! The price tag kept going up, from \$350 to \$500 million, and it ended up costing over \$1 billion. Elevators had to be rethought and for the first time a large tower was conceived as three, one on top of the other, with an express-local elevator system to avoid all the dead space that usually accompanies elevator shafts in large buildings. New procedures and technologies in HVAC and lighting systems were pioneered. Curtain wall construction was employed, with the exterior walls supporting the steel to allow column free space on the interior. They were built to withstand an accidental crash from a jet (in those days a 707), without collapsing, but this construction technique, I understand, indirectly caused the towers to buckle in the great heat of the fires after the airplane collisions on September 11. The excavation from the WTC provided the landfill for the World Financial Center and Battery Park City, and helped turn lower Manhattan into a 24-hour community. The initial lease-up was difficult, however, because the enabling legislation specified conditions for rental that required prospective tenants to be in international trade or a related business and, in addition, the office market softened in the economic slowdown of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Occupancy was helped considerably by agencies of New York state which took the bulk of one tower— some said because then Governor Nelson Rockefeller wanted to help out his brother David in reviving downtown. Nonetheless, before too long, the WTC was prime space, and it sparked a lower Manhattan building boom that hadn't been seen since the early years of the 20th century.

The real estate department had three major condemnation trials underway. One involved the valuation of the H & M Tubes, the railroad we had acquired and renamed PATH, Port Authority Trans-Hudson Corporation; the second involved the valuation of the real property and trade fixtures within the WTC site; and the third, the Journal Square Transportation Center proceeding in Jersey City, New Jersey, another acquisition and tenant relocation program. On the New York cases, I worked very closely with Milton Pachter, Esq., a young lawyer and friend who is now Senior Litigation Counsel at the Authority. At the time of the September 11 tragedy, Pachter was the longest-term Authority employee at 46 years. Art Morr, SR/WA, assisted Milton throughout the WTC trial. After its completion he came to work with me in the real estate department where he earned his Senior Right of Way Agent designation and went on to become president of ARWA New York Chapter 18 in 1977. After he retired from the Authority in 1994, I worked with Morr on several projects for Universal Field Service, Inc., in the Northeast. Another IRWA chapter president who worked with us on the WTC acquisition was Marv Davidson, who led New Jersey Chapter 15 in 1965 when he was working at the Authority.

During the hectic years of 1966 to 1972 we had a number of other substantial real estate programs in progress. They included the Bus Terminal expansion at Times Square in mid-Manhattan, the expansion of Port Newark-Port Elizabeth in New Jersey, the upgrading of Newark, JFK and La Guardia Airports, the New Jersey Turnpike widening, which required new connections with Authority bridges, and the sale of the old Authority headquarters building at 111 Eighth Ave., consisting of 38 million cubic feet.

By far my biggest project was the Twin Towers. It dictated my life, and happily, over about three years we negotiated the settlement on a voluntary basis of more than half of the fee claims by purchasing assignments of rights to the condemnation awards (my recollection is we bought 75 percent by voluntary acquisition, but Attorney Pachter recalls it was closer to 50 percent), and probably 90 percent of the fixture claims. The total project cost including the H&M Railroad was almost \$100 million, just under budget. We relocated all the tenants without a single eviction (but came close on a couple) and



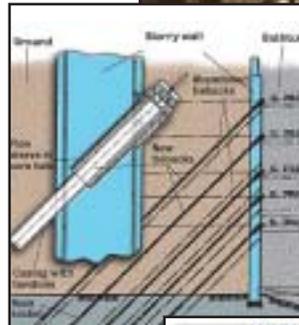
December 1975: The Observation Deck opens to the public. In less than a year, it is visited by one million people.

WORLD TRADE CENTER HISTORY TIDBIT:

January 1964: Architect Minoru Yamasaki unveils his design for the World Trade Center, a plan originally hatched by Chase Manhattan Bank president David Rockefeller and backed by his brother, Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller. Because of his extreme fear of heights, Yamasaki is an odd choice for the project, but he copes with his vertigo by designing the building so that windows are no more than roughly 20 inches wide—less than the width of his shoulders.



WTC Interior.



"Bathtub" and Slurry Wall diagram of WTC.



"Bathtub" plans.



Phillip S. Cotton's twin sons sitting in front of the original architectural 3-D rendering of the proposed World Trade Center towers.

pioneered implementation of the federal Uniform Relocation Act before it became law. At Journal Square in New Jersey, we conducted a pilot federal program with HUD, the Urban Mass Transportation Administration, and the local Redevelopment Agency.

I left the Authority in 1972, the year the towers were opened. The WTC acquisition was completed, as were all the other major projects that were involved in the Authority's great expansion under visionary Executive Director Austin Tobin, who had retired at the end of 1971. I had done what there was to do from a real estate point of view, and it was time to move on. My youth and many friends were left behind, but a matchless period of personal growth and development while working in public service would not be forgotten. Even so, the towers, the private "Club at the WTC," and Windows on the World restaurant at the top of the North Tower, remained a part of our lives— for parties, dinners, retirements, my oldest son's Columbia College graduation, and countless visits, whenever I was in New York. That is over now, brutally so.

The WTC site is in a third phase in the almost 40 years that I have known it— from radio row, to the towers, to ground zero – and it is a phase I cannot yet bring myself to go see. There are folks in that rubble I knew and with whom I worked, and that is something I share with thousands and thousands of people all over the world. I expect a WTC of sorts and a memorial will rise again on the site, but I fear what it had become, an incomparable symbol of New York and America, eclipsing even the bold dreams of Tobin who just wanted a recognizable image for the Port of New York, will never again be duplicated in our lifetimes. Those quirky towers were, perhaps, the wrong buildings in the wrong place at the wrong time, built by the wrong folks ... but they became everything they were designed to be, and more. They rejuvenated lower Manhattan and helped revive New York City economically and spiritually. They did take on a larger mantle over the years, and came to represent the financial strength, vitality and, yes, audacity of New York and America. Alas, they now have become a permanent symbol of so much that is both good and evil about our world, and all of our thoughts about them, even mine, relate to both unspeakable horrors and unceasing bravery— in short, a national tragedy, the implications of which are still being played out on the world stage.

WORLD TRADE CENTER HISTORICAL TIDBITS:

1976: THE WINDOWS ON THE WORLD RESTAURANT, DESIGNED BY WARREN PLATNER, OPENS AND BECOMES ONE OF THE HIGHEST-GROSSING RESTAURANTS IN THE WORLD.

DECEMBER 1976: THE JEFF BRIDGES-JESSICA LANGE REMAKE OF KING KONG IS RELEASED. IN THIS VERSION, THE APE SCURRIES UP ONE OF THE TWIN TOWERS RATHER THAN THE EMPIRE STATE BUILDING. THE MOVIE POSTER DEPICTS KONG STANDING ATOP THE TRADE CENTER WITH ONE FOOT ON EACH TOWER.

MAY 1977: TOY MAKER GEORGE WILLIG CLIMBS UP THE SIDE OF ONE OF THE TOWERS. AUTHORITIES ARE WAITING AT THE TOP AND ARREST HIM WHEN HE FINISHES THE CLIMB, WHICH TAKES MORE THAN THREE HOURS. THE ASCENT IS BROADCAST ON NEWSCASTS WORLDWIDE.

STRUCTURAL ENGINEERS: SKILLING, HELLE, CHRISTIANSEN, ROBERTSON - NEW YORK

FOUNDATION ENGINEERS: THE PORT AUTHORITY OF NEW YORK AND NEW JERSEY ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT

FLOORS: 110

HEIGHT: 1,353 FEET

ELEVATORS: 99 ELEVATORS, INCLUDING 23 EXPRESS ELEVATORS IN EACH TOWER BUILDING

STEEL: 200,000 TONS

WINDOWS: 43,600 WINDOWS IN THE TWO TOWER BUILDINGS

DEMOLISHED BY TERRORIST ATTACK ON SEPTEMBER 11, 2001