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AT A GLANCE...

THE IRISH HUNGER MEMORIAL

LOCATION

The Irish Hunger Memorial (which takes its name from the Irish term for the famine of 1845-52, “An Gorta Mór,” The Great Hunger) stands on a half-acre site at the corner of Vesey Street and North End Avenue in Battery Park City, between the Embassy Suites Hotel and the Hudson River.

MISSION

In March, 2000, under the leadership of Governor George E. Pataki, who worked closely with James F. Gill, chairman of the Hugh L. Carey Battery Park City Authority (BPCA), and Timothy S. Carey, BPCA President and CEO, the Authority commissioned the design of “a contemplative space, devoted to raising public awareness of the events that led to the Great Irish Hunger and Migration of 1845-1852.” The Memorial was intended to serve also as a catalyst for addressing current issues of world hunger.

Battery Park City was chosen as an appropriate location for the Memorial. Winner of the Mayor’s 2002 Doris Freedman Award for Enriching the Public Environment, Battery Park City is home to 13 works of public art and 35 acres of public parks. Among Battery Park City’s cultural amenities are The Museum of Jewish Heritage: A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, and the NYC Police Memorial. Battery Park City is the future home of the Skyscraper Museum and the Museum of Women – The Leadership Center.

ARTIST

Brian Tolle, 38, resident of New York City. A graduate of the Yale School of Art, MFA, Parsons School of Design, BFA, and SUNY at Albany, BA, Mr. Tolle's public commissions include:

- *Waylay*, Whitney Biennial 2002, Central Park, N.Y.
- *Man's Achievements on a Shrinking Globe in an Expanding Universe*, Queens Museum, Flushing Meadow Park, N.Y. 2001
- *Eureka*, S.M.A.K., Ghent, Belgium 2000
- *WitchCatcher*, Public Art Fund Metrotech Center, Brooklyn, NY 1997.

He has presented his work in solo exhibitions in New York, Santa Monica and St. Louis, and in group exhibitions in, New York, Chicago, Cincinnati, Miami, Houston, London, Oslo, Bern, Ghent and Seoul. He is represented by Shoshana Wayne Gallery in Santa Monica, California.

Mr. Tolle's design for the Memorial was chosen after a competition in which he was one of five finalists.

DESIGN CONCEPT

The Memorial represents a rural Irish landscape with an abandoned stone cottage, stone walls, fallow potato fields and the flora of the north Connacht wetlands. It is both a metaphor for the Great Irish Famine and a reminder that hunger today is often the result of lack of access to land. Moving beyond the fixed dates of the Great Irish Famine, the Memorial is a living site. Over time the landscape will change; the texts will be updated; the visitor will be encouraged to become actively engaged in meeting the challenge of world hunger.

ARTIST'S DESIGN TEAM

1100 Architects Founded in 1983, 1100 Architects has received acclaim for arts-related architecture, and awards for Modern work that advocates restrained sensuality. Among noted 1100 Architects projects are the new quarters of The Little Red School House in Greenwich Village, The Museum of Modern Art Design Store, and the headquarters and galleries of the Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation.

Landscape Architect: Gail Wittwer-Laird, ASLA

A 1996 Fellow of the American Academy in Rome, graduate of the Harvard School of Design, and specialist in urban greening, Gail Wittwer-Laird developed the palette and planting scheme of wild Irish Flora that will thrive in lower Manhattan as part of the Memorial.

Consultants. Cornerstone Consulting, Inc., Code Consultants; Lilker Associates, Utility Consultants; Mueser Rutledge Consulting Engineers, Geo-Technical Engineering; Piscatello Design Centre, Graphic Design; John Schwinghammer, Lighting Design; Robert Silman Associates, P.C., Structural Engineer.

CONSTRUCTION SCHEDULE

Groundbreaking: March 15, 2001
Scheduled dedication: March 15, 2002
Dedication (delayed by 9/11) July 16, 2002

CONSTRUCTION DETAILS

Concrete: 1,832 cubic yards
Cantilever re-bar: 230,000 pounds
Kilkenny limestone façade: 4,050 sq. ft.
Glass panels for text: 3,700 linear ft.
Stones and boulders: 350,000 pounds

DESIGN ELEMENTS

The 96' x 170' Memorial, which contains stones from each of Ireland's 32 counties, is elevated on a limestone plinth. Along the base are bands of texts separated by layers of imported Kilkenny limestone. The limestone is more than 300 million years old and contains fossils from the ancient Irish seabed. The text, which combines the history of the Great Famine with contemporary reports on world hunger, is cast as shadow onto illuminated frosted glass panels. From its eastern approach the Memorial appears as a sloping landscape with a pathway inviting visitors walk upward past a ruined fieldstone cottage and stone walls toward a pilgrim's standing stone. At the western end of the Memorial, 25 feet above the pavement, a cantilevered overlook offers views of the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island, emblems of America's welcome to the Irish and to all immigrant people.

From the western or river end, the visitor approaches the Memorial through a formal ceremonial entrance that recalls the court cairn or graves of the Irish Neolithic period that are found in the Irish northwest. The ramped passageway ends inside the ruined fieldstone cottage that was brought to New York from the townland of Carradoogan near Attymass, County Mayo.

The size of the cultivated area of the Memorial, one-quarter of an acre, is significant. In 1847, Sir William Gregory proposed an additional clause to the Irish Poor Law stipulating that no person occupying land of more than one-quarter acre was eligible for any relief. This law had a devastating effect and contributed to the suffering. The unroofed abandoned cottage reminds the visitor of the stark choice between survival and holding home and hearth.

TEXT

Nearly two miles of text have been installed in illuminated bands that wrap around the base of the Memorial. The text includes some 110 quotations, including autobiographies, letters, oral traditions, parliamentary reports, poems, recipes, songs and statistics. Backlit text panels are installed behind frosted glass sections that appear to the visitor as shadows. At night the light will function as a beacon to those on the river. The texts merge past and present accounts of famine and can be updated to respond to new hunger crises.

AUDIO

The audio installation in the passage provides another dimension to the Memorial as living site. The audio will be a medium for contemporary writers and musicians who have responded to the meaning of the Great Irish Famine and the challenge of hunger in the world today. The audio will capture the response of visitors to the Memorial, and will provide updated information about famine sites and conditions.

THE LANDSCAPE

The landscape conveys the sense of a rural, abandoned countryside in the west of Ireland. It is not manicured like a park or garden. Planted with some 62 species of Irish plants and grasses, many grown from Irish seeds, the landscape will change with the seasons and the years and with its encounter with the local environment.

Irish folklore attributes special values to some of the plants that grow in the Memorial. Buttercup (Cam an ime) (*Ranunculus sp.*) was rubbed on cows' udders on May Day. Foxglove (Lus mór) (*Digitalis purpurea*) was a remedy for weak hearts, lumps, fleas, and fairy-struck children. Blackthorn (Draighean) (*Prunus spinosa*) was believed to overcome evil spirits. Iris (Feileastrom), used for bedding and thatching, was placed outside the door on the feast of Corpus Christi.

THE COTTAGE

Area: 16' x 46' = 736 sq. ft.

Height: 14' 6"

The cottage that forms the centerpiece of the Memorial is a gift from Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Slack, and Mr. and Mrs. Chris Slack, relatives of the artist's partner, Brian Clyne. The cottage is a generous gesture between two families and a poignant gift between two nations.

The Slack family's occupancy of the cottage can be traced to 1820 when Slacks lived as tenant farmers on the land. The cottage was just one room through the famine years. In 1891, the Congested District Board provided support for upgrading rural housing. By 2001, the cottage had been abandoned. It was being

used as a cow pen and was considered unsafe.

The cottage was disassembled in Ireland and rebuilt in New York in accordance with guidelines provided by the Irish Historic Trust. Nigel Cosey, a mason trained in traditional stone construction, supervised its reconstruction. Mr. Cosey prepared a traditional lime mortar, imported from France, which is flexible and does not break apart like the more rigid Portland cement.

COST OF THE MEMORIAL

Approximately \$5 million. The Memorial is a capital project of the Battery Park City Authority.

MEMBERS OF THE IRISH HUNGER MEMORIAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

James F. Gill, chairman

Mrs. Margaret Pataki, John Cahill, Paul Curran, Sister Brigid Driscoll, John Feerick, Michael Finnegan, Thomas Moran, William Plunkett, Joseph Seymour, and William Whelan

CHAIRMAN OF THE HONORARY COMMITTEE

John Cardinal O'Connor. In Memoriam

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