

The World Trade Center



When we look back on September 11, 2001, we think mainly of people. We mourn for the victims of the attacks, we empathize with their families, we honor the rescue workers, and we reflect on our own experience. At the same time, we remember all of the technology of that day -- the airplanes that the hijackers used as flying bombs, the buildings they damaged and destroyed, and the heavy equipment used in the massive rescue and then clean-up effort.

The most prominent technology on that day, of course, was the World Trade Center complex. After the attack, the WTC's Twin Towers came to symbolize not only the day itself, but also a collective emotion of people all over the world.

The original idea for a world trade center in New York is generally credited to David Rockefeller, one of industrialist John D. Rockefeller's many grandsons. In fact, the idea was proposed soon after World War II, a decade before Rockefeller ever got involved, but he was the one who actually got the ball rolling.

In the 1950s and '60s, while serving as chairman of Chase Manhattan Bank, Rockefeller was dedicated to revitalizing lower Manhattan. He hoped to energize the area with new construction, in much the same way his father revitalized midtown Manhattan in the 1930s with Rockefeller Center. As part of his plan, David Rockefeller proposed a complex dedicated to international trade, to be constructed at the east end of Wall Street. Rockefeller believed that the trade center, which would include office and hotel space, an exhibit hall, a securities and exchange center and numerous shops, would be just the thing to spur economic growth in the area. By the 1960s, he certainly had something to gain from the WTC project. He had just put up the expensive 60-story Chase Manhattan Bank tower in the financial district, and wanted to increase the value of the bank's investment. But he was also driven by the spirit of international unity. A world trade center would bring together people from all over the globe, a noble ideal in the decades following World War II.

The final complex consisted of seven buildings, dominated by the twin 110-story towers rising more than 1,360 feet (415 meters) above an open plaza. The monumental tower design was innovative, ambitious and deceptively simple.

The World Trade Center complex officially opened its doors on April 4, 1973, to a highly skeptical New York. From its conception all the way through its completion, the WTC project was wildly unpopular with many New Yorkers. Citizens all over the city wondered why the Port Authority was sinking so much money into the project and several prominent architectural critics said the towers were simply too big and ostentatious. The WTC complex had a long road in earning the city's acceptance.

Adapted from Tom Harris's article, source : <http://science.howstuffworks.com/engineering/structural/wtc.htm>