

Work Underway To Preserve Boston Marathon Memorial

David Wade



BOSTON (CBS) – The emotional impact of the Boston Marathon bombings stretched far beyond the city of Boston. The impromptu memorial at Copley Square became a shrine for people from around the world to express their sadness, and their hope. Extensive work is underway to make sure future generations are able to see and feel how Bostonians tried to come to terms with such an awful day in our history.

The city of Boston's archive facility is filled with items left at the memorial. There is a stuffed animal with a simple note to [Martin Richard](#), the 8-year-old boy killed in the explosion. It was left by two young girls.

A family member of a 9/11 victim wrote a heartfelt note expressing their sadness, and their understanding of being victimized in such a large tragedy.

Soldiers stationed in Afghanistan sent a flag. There are letters and posters from other parts of the world, all expressing grief and support. All of these everyday items are now timeless treasures.

Toni Lansbury of Brookline was one of the people who felt she had to express her sorrow in person. She made a poster and walked to the shrine. "I felt like it was some place you could go and you could feel, almost the emotion of people healing, and of people who cared about us," said Lansbury. In her poster, she declared her love for Boston and stated she is a proud Bostonian. "That expression in Copley Square," said Lansbury, "was really important in everybody's healing, just to know people cared."

The memorial grew, and then grew some more. It became a place of reverence in the Back Bay as people stopped and reflected on the tragedy.

Marta Crilly is one of the city's archivists working on the restoration of the donations. "The size was certainly a surprise to us."

Although the city archive is more accustomed to preserving old records, they quickly started cataloging and inspecting all the donations, including shoes, medals, and paper chains. John McColgan, who is in charge of the archive, believes this work, while different from their usual mission, is very important. "These are sacred objects because they are expressions of people's very deep empathy and emotions," he says.

There is a very exact science to preserving historic artifacts. They have to be professionally dried out and fumigated to eliminate any contaminants. The items must be stored properly, at around 68 degrees and 45% humidity.

All of this became a very emotional assignment. “We are documenting history we personally experienced,” explained Crilly.

And the sheer magnitude of items was overwhelming: 132 boxes of shoes, and 1800 letters, for example. The archive was fortunate to get the donation of professional services. Companies like Polygon, Historic New England, and Iron Mountain all lent a hand for free.

Samantha Joseph of Iron Mountain said her Boston based company made a similar donation of services after the Sandy Hook shootings. “It was really an honor to be able to support the city and to be able to take in this material and to really be the proud keepers of it, and to protect it,” added Joseph.

The goal is to make sure these gifts and tributes become a permanent record of how our city responded during a very dark hour. “Remembering how we came back together, remembering the support we got from people, I think that needs to be preserved,” said Lansbury.

An exhibit with items from the memorial is planned for early April at the Boston Public Library. It will be called “Dear Boston.”

