The only paper items he consciously avoided were posters of missing people and items depicting the actual acts of destruction. By collecting ephemera—flyers, programs, brochures, invitations and posters—he was hoping to ensure that the activities of ordinary people, not just those directly connected to the tragedy, would be remembered years from now.

Ragsdale’s ephemera collection is one of a number of memory projects across the United States that have started since the fall of the Twin Towers. The Library of Congress chose 900 of his pieces for its September 11 Digital Archive.

In addition, the Columbia Health Sciences Library has held two exhibitions: one a year ago, consisting of ephemera collected in the immediate wake of the tragedy; the second, held this September, consisting of items collected around or around September 11, 2002. The latter conveyed the sense of the multitude of events that were happening in the immediate aftermath of 9/11. The first was intended to commemorate the tragedy’s first anniversary—educational, religious, artistic and musical—many of which were participatory in nature. For instance, there are posters calling for people to sign memorial books, take part in a mass for those lost and join others in prayer or discussion.

Strikingly, there are only calls for peace and anti-war action, none for retribution—no expressions of anger or injustice. Ragsdale says that the collection reflects faithfully what he found, an overwhelmingly peaceful and tolerance-oriented first anniversary, testifying to the city’s ability to react to tragedy in a measured and creative fashion.