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MOVIE REVIEW

Collisions at Ground Zero

'16 Acres,' From Richard Hankin

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Who was going to build what at ground zero, and when, became so convoluted so quickly that a lot of people no doubt gave up trying to follow the machinations years ago. Richard Hankin does a fine job of making it all coherent again in “16 Acres,” a documentary that features forthright interviews with major players and gives a good sense of the infighting and pettiness without getting bogged down in it.

The architecture critic Philip Nobel and Scott Raab, a writer for Esquire, are anchors for the film, contributing insightful commentary on the sometimes comically arcane collision of agencies, architects, survivor groups and political interests. And Mr. Raab inadvertently provides a particularly prescient moment in light of the flooding at the site during Hurricane Sandy.

“Once the site was cleaned up, people expected something to arise magically from the dust,” he says. “ ‘Hey, it’s New York City. Let’s get it done yesterday.’ But I don’t think people get the complexity of the site, especially below grade, and the fact that it’s literally a couple of hundred feet from a big river, and that it ain’t easy to keep that river from pushing through.”