

Neutra Gettysburg Cyclorama Center in Jeopardy!



In September 1998, the Cyclorama Center was DETERMINED ELIGIBLE for the National Register of Historic Places.

In December 1999, the Society of Architectural Historians nominated Neutra's Cyclorama Building as a National Historic Landmark; the highest level a building can achieve!

Yet, in May, 1999, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation recommended to **DEMOLISH THE BUILDING!**

The Richard and Dion Neutra VDL Research House at Silverlake, though owned by Cal Poly University at Pomona, is likewise threatened due to lack of funding, even on the eve of being declared a historic monument by the City of Los Angeles. This honor, unfortunately carries no budget with it for preservation; that is left to others.

With that recommendation, the National Park Service [NPS] is thereby authorized to destroy existing facilities as part of an offer by a developer to build a big shopping/commercial complex on the Civil War battlefield a mile from the town which has developed around the Cyclorama visitor center. Motive: to provide without cost to the government, an up-to-date new Visitor and Cyclorama Center in exchange for the right to build and operate a commercial complex on the battlefield. This in competition with established merchants on the main street of Gettysburg, who worry about being frozen out of the tourist business upon which they depend.

WE HOPE you believe as we do, now joined by major preservationists, that it's worth it for our government to lead the way towards historic preservation of selected worthy buildings of this type. Especially those designed by acknowledged masters of architecture, such as internationally renowned architect Richard Neutra [1892-1970], Gold Medalist of the AIA in 1977. Please consider writing a letter such as the one following, or a version you are free to create from our example. It is said they [NPS] think of this situation a continuation of their plans for public-private partnerships they hope to repeat at other NPS sites as well, which will further jeopardize examples of the unique "Mission 66" projects completed in the 60s for the 50th anniversary of the NPS.

What about our architectural heritage?

Whatever you do, please do this soon! The Park Service is now proceeding with its development plans despite the findings of the Keeper of the National Register. Your letter will make a difference! A constituency for preservation has been built gradually; now we need to act!

Please Participate Now to Save the Cyclorama!

This week, at the 142nd anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg, preservationists are renewing their call for the restoration of the Cyclorama Center, a premiere American modern building that overlooks the famous battlefield and commemorates Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. On June 21, the World Monuments Fund (WMF), the foremost private, non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation of historic art and architecture worldwide, included the imperiled Cyclorama Center at Gettysburg on its biennial Watch List of 100 Most Endangered Sites.

Preservationists have labored for nearly a decade to save this building, one of the first "visitor centers" ever built in the national park system and a landmark in the work of famed architect Richard Neutra. The National Park Service, the primary public agency charged with protecting significant American sites, has so far refused to preserve the structure, one recognized by the U.S. National Register of Historic Places for "its exceptional historic and architectural significance." The Cyclorama Center remains on a short list for demolition; the Gettysburg National Battlefield Museum Foundation, a private partner of the National Park Service and headed by Robert Wilburn, plans to raze the structure.

Brownsville, stands empty and graffiti covered, vulnerable for loss. This last example is even over 50 years old, but no one has stepped forward with the \$500,000 needed to rescue and restore it.

Preservation Component?

Coming back to the Gettysburg situation, if, indeed, there is no way to derail the public-private proposal, how about a preservation component in the contract to commit the developer to work with the NPS to find adaptive reuses for the existing building and a budget to maintain it, in concert with new facilities to be built off site?

I deplore the current state of affairs in our country of no national commitment to preservation of worthy examples of the latter half of the 20th century at a time when so many are disappearing in front of our very eyes!

I'm just now cooperating with L.A.'s Museum of Contemporary Art, which has started work on a massive review exhibition entitled "At the End of the Century: One Hundred Years of Architecture." How many of the examples will it feature that will have to be labeled "Lost through demolition" or "Remodeled beyond recognition"?

I call for allocation of funding on a national level to restore and preserve worthy examples of architecture less than 50 years old!

Dion Neutra is principal of Richard and Dion Neutra, Architects and Associates, the Los Angeles firm founded by Richard Neutra in the early 1920s. He has continued the practice since the death of his father in 1970.

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Gettysburg Visitor Center: Too Old to Be Chic; Too Young to Be Revered

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To be considered worthy of preservation, it seems, a building must have been built prior to the mid-20th-century mark, or, at least, so say most agencies charged with this determination, like the National Trust for Historic Preservation and many state preservation organizations. This leaves a great number of worthy buildings vulnerable to destruction simply because they are too young at the moment they are threatened.

The state of our own practice, which started in 1926 in Los Angeles, illustrates the problem. Most of the significant works produced by my father, Richard Neutra, in his partnership with Robert Alexander of the 1950s, and later by the father-son firm of Richard and Dion Neutra have suffered injurious alterations, demolition, and other undignified treatment. The same is true of the work of other modernists, for example, as has been reported in the recent press.

The Gettysburg Visitor Center and Cyclorama Building, by master architect Richard Neutra, is in danger of becoming the next "disappearing icon" from the firm's dwindling body of work. Architects can join a letter-writing campaign to help preserve it.

An article in last June's [1997] issue of *Preservation News* sparked my current focus on these matters yet again. In it was reported the threat of demolition by the National Park Service (NPS) of two Mission 66 visitor centers, one by Romaldo Giurgola, FAIA (see June, page 12), the other by the Neutra firm. Both represent mature works by AIA Gold Medalists. Because of an initial outcry by the AIA and other interested parties, the matter seemed to have been referred to a study that is due in 2000. A recent piece in the January *Preservation News*, however, indicates the Gettysburg Visitor Center has been given accelerated treatment, with impending demolition seemingly accepted by all with nary a mention of any historic value to the aging center or intent to preserve it. In the words of the NPS at the conclusion of a 60-page report: "The Gettysburg Visitor Center and Cyclorama Building, though the work of a master architect, cannot be considered to be an exceptionally significant example of Neutra's work and therefore is not eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places."

The implication at that point in time was that the NPS, blaming inadequate maintenance and operation budgets, gave itself permission to off this building in favor of a new, privately built speculative visitor's center with accompanying commercial strip mall and motels, etc., blighting at least seven acres of pristine and hallowed Civil War verdure. To justify this position, the park service badmouths the existing facilities as outmoded and unsuitable.

Disappearing Icons

If an agency of our national government has this little regard for a piece of our national heritage, who would assume this mandate? What other owner is more likely to look with reverence at a piece of worthy architecture? While it is true that there are about eight other examples of our work in the eastern part of this country, most are private residences subject to the whims of their current owners, and some have already suffered major remodels. While three are in the hands of public organizations, who knows the extent of their commitment to the integrity of their "Neutra icons"?

This past July, we witnessed the loss through demolition of our fine arts building at Cal State University at Northridge, the victim of the earthquake and politics. The quake claimed two other Neutra structures. In 1972, the famed steel residence for Josef von Sternberg, not far away, was bulldozed because it was in the middle of a tract needed for spec houses. Hundreds of units of military housing at Lemoore, Calif., are being considered for demolition because of intractable foundation problems. The only Neutra House remaining in Texas, at

The Recent Past Preservation Network (RPPN), a non-profit, volunteer organization, nominated the Cyclorama Center for inclusion on the World Monuments Watch List, supported by preservation groups, such as DOCOMOMO and Preservation Pennsylvania, as well as Dion Neutra, project architect for the Cyclorama and head of the Neutra design firm, which celebrates its eightieth year of service in 2006. Architectural historian Christine Madrid French, president of RPPN and a Neutra scholar, hailed the Cyclorama Center's listing as a major victory in the group's campaign to save the building and raise public awareness for the preservation of postwar American architecture. "We applaud the World Monuments Fund for recognizing the significance of this building and highlighting the threat posed to it by the National Park Service. In this case, we cannot cross our fingers and hope for the best. The building needs strong advocates and public support. With this listing in hand, we will urge the President and the U.S. Congress to act in time to save this unique structure."

Please visit <http://www.neutra.org/gettysburg.html> for more information and links to the online petition.

Cyclorama Petition Quotes

Examples of recent petition signatures 2006/2007

Dear Sirs, I remember seeing this building when I was 9 years old. Not only did it make a great impact on me as piece of art, but it was also an important part of my Gettysburg experience. I will never forget it. Please don't let it be torn down. It would cost so much to replace as a building. And it is irreplaceable as a piece of art. Joe Ansolabehere.

Joseph M. Ansolabehere, CA

The US has always been a place of innovation and freedom, be it artistic expression, avant garde design, or the basic freedom to choose the life one wants to live. Neutra's Cyclorama is the very artifact of the culminated freedoms found only within this great country. As generations upon generations grow up in this country, Neutra's work should be standing alongside the very future generations it was intended for in order to reinforce the idea of innovation, individuality, and expression that is America.

Isaac Smith, IL

Its unfortunate that at an increasingly rapid pace the US is morphing into one huge eyesore of a strip mall...the world already equates the states with walmart, preserving some semblance of character and originality in your architecture could stop that perception from becoming a complete reality!

Melodie Kline

Thank you for doing everything you can to save this building. As a resident of Pennsylvania, I find this building to represent an important part of building culture in America

Kristien Ring, PA

This work of architecture should be cherished by our society, not demolished by our government

Marisa Zappala, NY

Please help this organization save and maintain this architecturally significant structure and promote historic preservation in this country. Although a somewhat daunting task, this project is so important to our history, our culture and our future. We must stop viewing buildings as "throw away" and start viewing them as valuable resources that can be functionally and culturally significant through many generations.

Bill Davenport, WA

I am an architecture student concerned with historic preservation. Please do not erase the course of history via the demolition of Neutra's Cyclorama. It is an important part of the built environment, which tells the story of how history is viewed in Pennsylvania. The building itself has become a key part of the historical fabric that should not be forgotten.

Joanna Beres, PA

The presence of a work of architecture by one of the giants of modern architecture, Richard Neutra, underscores the importance of as well as "frames" the experience of viewing Gettysburg. It adds another tourism attraction to this historic, but otherwise unimpressive piece of landscape. The Park Services mission would be well served to promote the Neutra structure as an added experience of visiting the park, instead of tearing it down and replacing it with a non-descript kiosk by some no name government builder!

Sandy Bleifer, CA

I have visited this remarkable building and it is a wonder which must be preserved for our heritage.

Polsky, F.A.I.A., NE

As a concerned preservationist, I am distressed that the national administration, Pennsylvania elected officials, the Secretary of Interior, the National Park Service Director, and other officials have signed onto the program of demolition of the 1961 Richard Neutra-designed Cyclorama Building at Gettysburg National Military Park at the high point of the battlefield site in Pennsylvania.

Kenneth (Tobias) FIFIELD, CA

I remember only two aspects of a trip I took to Gettysburg 20 years ago - Devil's Den, and the Cyclorama. The building and its observation deck created a space strong enough to convey the history of the place - something the empty fields and farm buildings failed to prove on their own.

Chris Pryslopski, NY

GETTYSBURG NATIONAL MILITARY PARK AND ITS MONUMENTS

Dedicated July 1, 1869.

These are just a few of the hundreds of monuments that dot the battlefield, some as tall as five stories (like the Penna monument, below).



Our monument blends into the trees. Note how others stand out in stark contrast to the naked fields. Does anyone propose to remove these?



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United States Senator Robert P. Casey
555 Walnut Street, First Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17101

Re: Gettysburg National Park/Neutra Cyclorama Center

Dear Senator Casey: Congratulations on your election! I like to think my contributions may have played a part!

This letter addresses the plans of the National Park Service to remove the historic Cyclorama Center from the Gettysburg National Park in Pennsylvania. The NPS created plans to demolish the Cyclorama Center without fully complying with federal environmental and historic preservation laws and regulations. I respectfully request your assistance in inquiring into the scheme of the NPS to demolish the Cyclorama Center, and also request your assistance in preserving this historic building for future generations of Americans.

The Cyclorama Center was designed by my father and architectural partner, the preeminent Gold Medalist architect Richard Neutra. I was the Project Architect of the Cyclorama Center. In 1998, the Cyclorama Center was determined to be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. In 2005, the World Monument Fund listed the Cyclorama Center - along with cultural heritage sites in Iraq, among 100 others - as one of the most endangered sites in the world. Despite these honors, certain NPS administrators in partnership with a private developer, which started under the previous administration, are proposing to remove the Cyclorama Center in conjunction with plans to build an enormous new visitor center not far from our site on previously undisturbed battlefield land.

After two decades of deliberation and study, the NPS in the late 1950s decided that the Cyclorama Center would be built at its present location. The NPS then sought out my father -- one of America's most highly regarded architects -- to design the building. My father deeply understood the importance of this obligation and considered it to be the most important project of his life. A veteran of World War I, my dad brought deep respect and empathy to the Gettysburg Battle site. Designed with the centennial anniversary of the Gettysburg Battle in mind, the Cyclorama Center was conceived to commemorate the battle and in particular, President Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address (given only a few yards from our building). My father called the building "The Shrine of Our Nation."

As the NPS's own historical records reflect, great care and thought went into siting, designing and building the Cyclorama Center. The building represented and still represents the best of American architectural thought - respect for the environment, build so as not to disturb natural surroundings, have faith in humankind and its survival.

Now, decades later, the promoters of the new visitor center, to avoid any perceived 'competition' to their new project, plan to eradicate the so called "modern intrusion" (there now for fully 1/3rd the life of the battlefield) under the pretext of returning the site to its "original" form (despite the clear view onto the adjacent highway replete with fast food restaurants and motels). What makes them think they are so much wiser than their predecessors? What an incredibly cavalier attitude to so easily jettison a taxpayer investment worth at least \$10M in today's dollars!

They have failed to consider the viable option of adaptive reuse of the Cyclorama Center or other preservation alternatives. Moreover, the promoters seek to quash an eloquent and modern expression of honor to the battle's war dead and wipe out the only federally-commissioned Neutra building east of the Mississippi River, in contravention of the letter and spirit of national historic preservation laws.

There are several lines of inquiry that should be made: Why hasn't the NPS considered using the Cyclorama Center to the maximum extent possible as required by national historic preservation laws, and why were preservation/reuse alternatives completely ignored in their new planning process? Why did the NPS neglect the building for years and then conveniently blame problems created by non-maintenance on the building's architects?

Why hasn't the NPS created an environmental impact statement (EIS) to analyze the planned removal of the Cyclorama Center, as required by the National Environment Protection Act? Such an EIS should consider the removal of the building to another location as a preservation option or even the preservation and RECYCLING of this unique building! We have great ideas for this! The EIS would also have to consider the propriety of destroying the building in light of continued and growing public support for its preservation. And now, its listing on the World Monument Fund endangered list, plus the voices of thousands who have recently signed petitions to save this building.

Another line of inquiry is financial. The promoters initially told Congress that they would not take federal monies to build the new visitor center and that the project would cost \$25 million. Now the project has been estimated to cost over \$100 million. Is it true that no federal funds are being used to implement the project? Have any funds appropriated for preservation of the Cyclorama painting been funneled into the building project or set aside for the destruction of the Cyclorama Center? What about the state of Pennsylvania, have any public monies been allocated to this so called 'private project' which exempted it from any sort of public participation or review?

Surely, a middle-ground can be found to preserve both the landscape and our heritage as represented by the Cyclorama Center. Hopefully we can now again be responsible enough to question our government about possible impropriety. Our time is limited. The NPS has shuttered the building and is continuing to neglect it in preparation for its demolition. We have filed suit in the hopes of staving off the demolition. **But we need an inquiry by Congress and your support to save the building.** I realize that you must be overwhelmed with priorities which are very urgent, but unfortunately unless we act swiftly it might be too late. Your predecessor scored a big ZERO with us on this!

Given all these complex circumstances we have come up with a plan: Put together a delegation to equest a PRESIDENTIAL PARDON for this building! If a turkey can be pardoned, why not a building? Our thought: As the new senator from the area, you could convene a delegation of congress people who have an interest in such matters to make a presentation to the President, laying on the table the petitions containing the thousands of signatures we have collected. His record in preservation is not stellar; this could be a chance for him to stage a rose garden pronouncement to balance some of his other problems.

A mere \$50M could be earmarked to bring this building back to its former glory, and to assume the role my father conceived for it, in the annual recognition that November 19, should be a day of remembrance of the date of the most important address ever given in the history of our country! Gettysburg Address Day!

I thank you and your staff in advance for your much needed assistance on this matter. Visit our website to view the current status of signature being collected as we speak. Congratulations again on your election; we have great hopes for the future! If possible, could we continue this via Email? There is obviously much more ground to cover here.

Cordially,



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