

Richard Neutra • Gettysburg, Pennsylvania

2012-08-29



[Richard Neutra](#) designed the [Cyclorama Building](#) at Gettysburg National Military Park near Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Photo: Don Wiles

On August 22, the National Park Service released an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the [Final Disposition of the Gettysburg Cyclorama](#) at Gettysburg National Military Park, in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. The study evaluates three alternatives for the future of the Gettysburg Cyclorama building (1962), which was designed by modernist architect Richard Neutra.

The NPS study was undertaken in response to a March 2010 decision of the United States District Court that directed the agency to undertake a site-specific environmental analysis focused on the demolition of the Cyclorama building, and to consider alternatives to removal of the building, before any action is taken.



A ramp allowed visitors to view the landscape of the Gettysburg Battlefield from atop the [Cyclorama Building's](#) rectangular wing. The building has been closed by the National Park Service and is slated for demolition. Photo: Courtesy University of Minnesota Press

The Cyclorama Building was designed by [Richard Neutra](#) to house an 1883 cyclorama painting of the Battle of Gettysburg. The building was also intended as a visitor information center. The building is composed of a long, rectangular wing of offices and a multi-story cylindrical exhibition space. The two masses, stand along a single north-south axis and are functionally separated by the building's glass-enclosed entry.

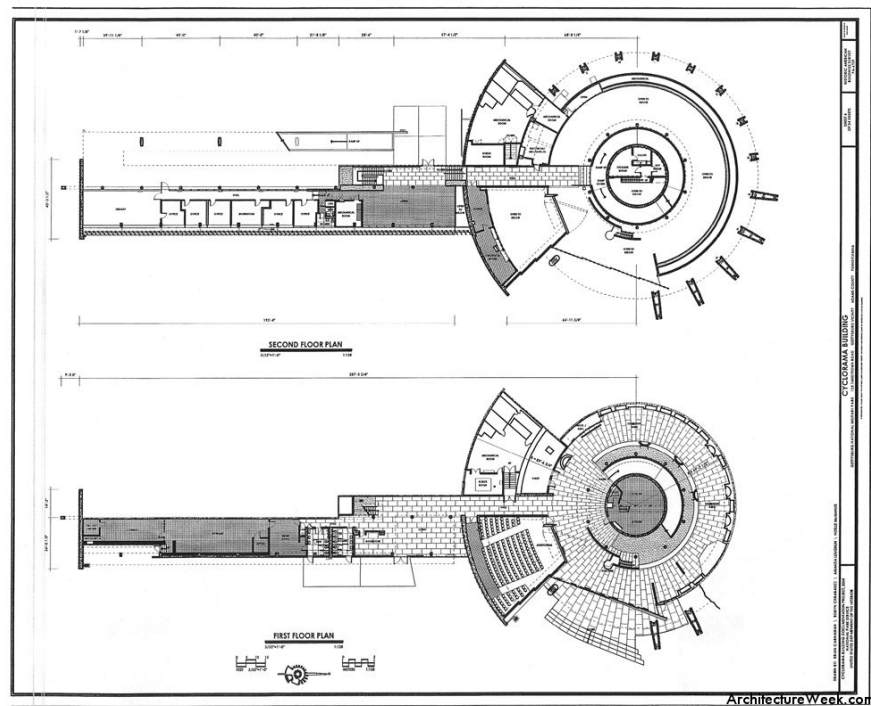
In the years after its construction, the National Park Service gradually minimized the building's use, citing flaws in the building's design. In 1971, the visitor information center functions were transferred to another location. And in 1996, the NPS announced its intent to remove the cyclorama painting and to ultimately demolish Neutra's building.



Decades of deterioration ultimately led the National Park Service to abandon its use of the [Cyclorama Building](#) as a visitor center and even as home to the eponymous painting. Photo: [Leslie Johnston](#)

In 1998, the National Register of Historic Places issued a ruling on the building's eligibility for registration. At that time, the building was determined to be eligible on multiple bases. However, the building was not protected with a listing at that time, based in large part upon the NPS argument against listing.

Since the building's site itself is part of the historic grounds of the Battle of Gettysburg, the NPS determined that the earlier, and greater significance of the battle site trumps that of Neutra's building. The NPS therefore considers restoration of the site's pre-building condition to be the higher act of preservation.

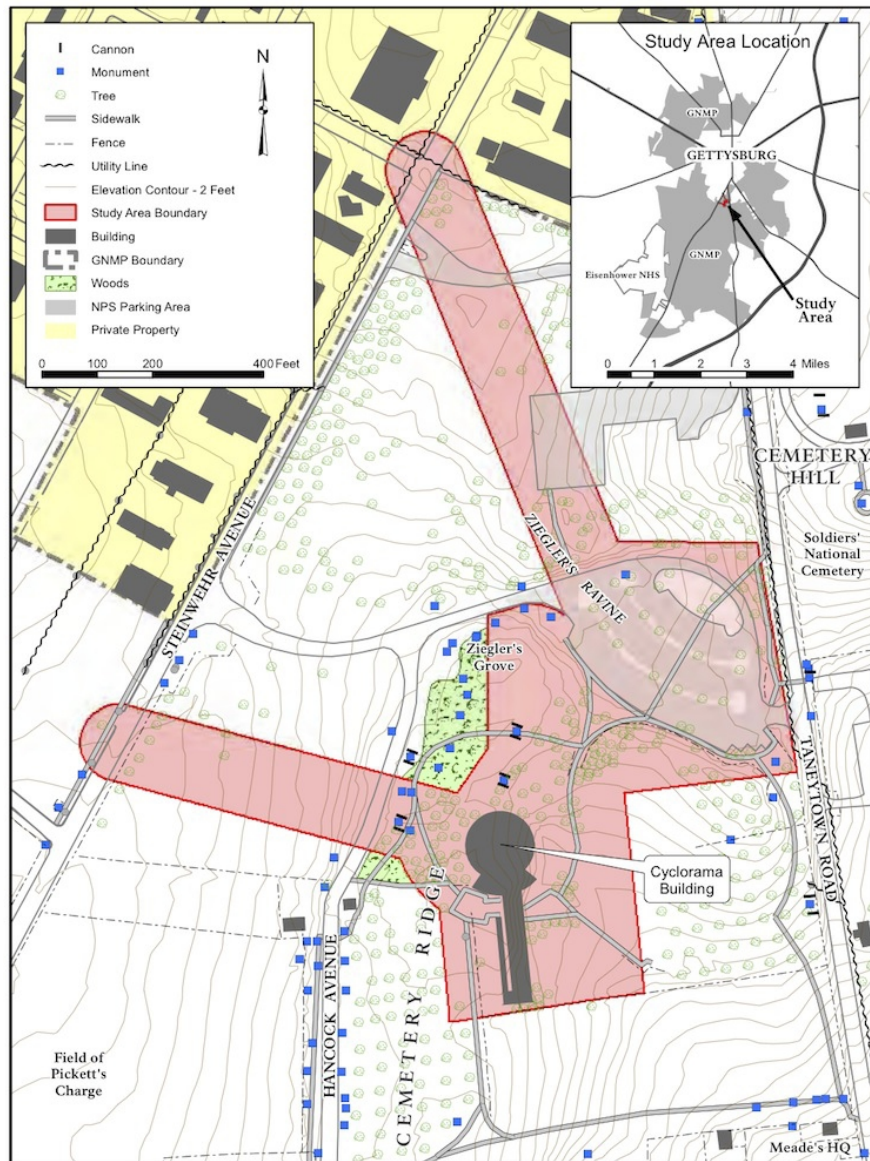


[Cyclorama Building](#) floor plan drawings. Image: Historic American Buildings Survey

With the apparent support of Dion Neutra, AIA, son of Richard Neutra, a group of preservationists and Neutra supporters has been fighting to spare the Cyclorama Building from demolition.

The building was documented in detail by the Historic American Buildings Survey after the NPS announced its intent to demolish the structure.

In 2010 the park hosted two public workshops which encouraged community and public participation in crafting the alternatives for the study.

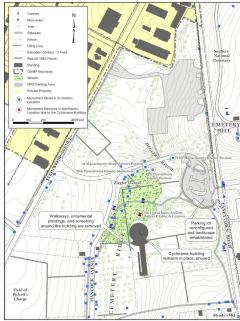


Site plan drawing of the existing [Cyclorama Building](#) study area. Image: National Park Service

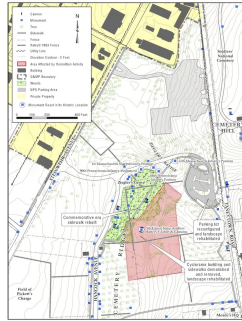
The three alternatives considered by the NPS study were:

- Plan A: No-action - Mothballing of the Cyclorama Building
- Plan B: Demolition of the Cyclorama Building (NPS Preferred)

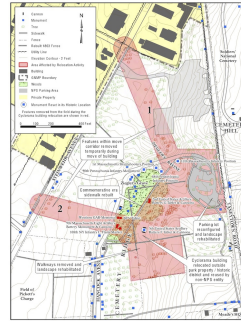
- Plan C: Relocation of the Cyclorama Building Outside the Park by a Non-NPS Entity



Plan A



Plan B



Plan C

A number of additional reuse options were also considered, including several variations on the theme of adaptive reuse, in combination with the three main actions considered by the study. However since any adaptive reuse of the building is at odds with the parks service's goal of rehabilitating the Civil War battlefield, all of these options were categorically rejected without further study.

The park is accepting public comment on the study for a 30-day period ending on September 21, 2012. A public review-and-comment event will be hosted by park staff on September 6.

The topic of the Cyclorama's preservation as weighed against the preservation priorities of the NPS for the Gettysburg battlefield were discussed in [Preserving Cultural Landscapes](#), published in ArchitectureWeek No. 383.