



ABOUT THE CONSERVATION OF THE GETTYSBURG CYCLORAMA PAINTING

The colossal circular oil painting, entitled “The Battle of Gettysburg,” depicts the charge of Confederate infantry led by General George Pickett on July 3, 1863. When it was first displayed, the experience was said to be so moving that battle veterans wept. Today, it continues to serve as a vivid monument to the soldiers on both sides who took part in the battle. The painting is one of the most dramatic, and popular, parts of the Gettysburg experience and is central to the park’s educational mission.

Painted in 1883-1884 by French master Paul Philippoteaux and a team of 20 artists, the painting, when displayed as intended in a hyperbolic shape, originally measured 42 feet high with a circumference of 377 feet at top and bottom and 365 feet in the middle. Moisture, rot and fire had taken their toll. Flawed hanging, fluctuations in humidity and temperature, and multiple relocations put added stress on the canvas, created new seams and bends, and caused paint to chip. When the current conservation campaign began, the painting was just 26 feet high and 356 feet around, and was deteriorating rapidly.

The multi-year conservation project is designed to return this historic icon, as closely as possible, to its original state and to ensure its preservation for future generations. It is the largest painting conservation project ever undertaken in North America, and is being directed by the Gettysburg Foundation, in partnership with Gettysburg National Military Park. The Foundation’s \$125 million Campaign to Preserve Gettysburg will build new museum and visitor facilities, rehabilitate portions of the battlefield to their 1863 appearance, and preserve the park’s extensive collection of Civil War-era archival materials, artifacts and objects, including the Cyclorama painting.

Following a detailed study of the Gettysburg Cyclorama painting’s history and conservation needs, the first phase of the project began in November 2003. It included cleaning and consolidation (securing loose and flaking paint); removing overpaint, inserts and grime; removing the lining and wax from the canvas back; and dismantling the canvas.

The second phase is taking place in the new 15,000 square foot Cyclorama Gallery in the new Museum and Visitor Center at Gettysburg National Military Park. The 1884 canvas, the majority of which survives, has been stitched to new fabric to recreate the precise size and shape of the original 14 panels. Each section also has been lined and clamped into a curved steel and oak bracket — a cornice — that is attached to

the circular metal ring from which it now hangs. Once the 14 panels had been hung, they were cinched, returning the painting to its intended hyperbolic shape for the first time in more than a century. Then they were stitched together, painstakingly matching thread to thread.

The conservation project also includes recreation of about 14 feet of sky, a canopy and a three-dimensional diorama, all of which have been missing for more than four decades. The diorama will include a full-scale reproduction cannon, as well as a variety of objects donated to the project by Civil War reenactors.

When the newly conserved Gettysburg Cyclorama painting reopens to visitors September 26, 2008, features of the new experience will include a sound and light show that will bring the painting to life, as well as exhibits on the painting's history and conservation.

Facts at a Glance:

- David Olin of Olin Conservation, Inc., Great Falls, Virginia, is directing the conservation team.
- A team of conservators from Poland, with extensive experience in the conservation of cyclorama and panorama paintings, has been in Gettysburg since early 2007, consulting with Olin and his team on the project. They include Ryszard Wójtowicz, Danuta Drabik-Wójtowicz, Wiktoria Wójtowicz-Janowska and Wiesław Kowalczyk. Their work includes the Raławice Panorama in Wrocław, Poland, the Feszty Panorama in Ópusztaszer-Szeged, Hungary and the Panorama of Lwów in Wrocław, Poland.
- Each of the panels weighs 1,750 pounds: Canvas - 650 pounds. Lining - 300 pounds. Cornice – 800 pounds. Estimated total weight for the whole thing — 12.5 tons.
- Taylor Studios of Rantoul, Illinois, is fabricating the diorama and Donna Lawrence Productions of Louisville, Kentucky is developing the new sound and light program.
- The new fabric to which the old canvas has been attached was custom-made in China, which was one of the few countries able to produce panels in the dimensions needed.
- Nearly two dozen Civil War reenactors — from California, New Jersey, Delaware, Virginia, Maryland, New York, Colorado and Pennsylvania — have donated items to be incorporated into the three-dimensional display. The Regimental Quartermaster of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, supported the project and assisted with distressing other objects for inclusion in the diorama.

- Jeff Stafford of Stafford Wheel & Carriage, Embreeville, Pennsylvania, has donated a full-scale model of a three-inch ordnance rifle — a cannon — for use in the diorama.
- The total cost of the project is \$15 million. This includes not only the conservation of the painting, but also the new hanging system, lighting, the canopy and diorama, and the new sound and light program.