

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **TITLE:**

**GETTYSBURG'S CYCLORAMA CENTER SELECTED FOR 2006 WORLD MONUMENTS FUND WATCH LIST OF 100 MOST ENDANGERED SITES  
U.S. National Park Service Intends to Demolish Internationally Significant Building**

### **TEXT:**

Gettysburg, Pennsylvania - June 30, 2005

This week, at the 142<sup>nd</sup> 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 headed by Robert A. Kinsley and Robert C. Wilburn, plans to raze the structure.

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 Preservation Pennsylvania and DOCOMOMO-US, 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."

Neutra's Cyclorama has suffered from years of deferred maintenance and benign neglect at the hands of park administrators. Promoters of demolition, led by Gettysburg

Park superintendent John Latschar, argue that the building is a modern intrusion on the historic landscape. Supporters of the building, backed by prominent architects (Frank Gehry, Robert A.M. Stern, Sir Norman Foster), historians (Richard Longstreth, Richard Guy Wilson, William McDonough, Tom Hines), and curators (Terence Riley, the late J. Carter Brown), maintain that the building is an architectural treasure, worthy of preservation and adaptive reuse. They compare the tree-enshrined Cyclorama Center – which Neutra envisioned as a Cold War-era memorial to Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address -- to the many post-Civil War statues and plaques that dot the commemorative landscape.

In 1958, the National Park Service commissioned Richard Neutra (1892–1970) and his partner Robert Alexander, with Dion Neutra, to design a landmark visitor center in preparation for the centennial anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg, an event expected to draw millions of visitors to the site. Neutra shunned convention and envisioned the building as a "place of cultural interchange" that celebrated Lincoln’s concept of reconciliation in a global context; the *New York Times* praised the building as an example of the federal government’s new architectural identity and predicted it would “become one of the showplaces of the National Park System.” Opened in 1961, the Cyclorama Center at Gettysburg was built as part of the Park Service’s “Mission 66” program, a billion-dollar postwar government initiative aimed at improving America’s national parks with the construction of new facilities. Considered among Neutra’s most important public commissions, the Cyclorama Center takes its name from a large-scale, 360-degree panoramic painting by the French artist Paul Philippoteaux, which depicts Pickett’s Charge, the famous last battle of Gettysburg. To house the painting, Neutra designed a cylindrical drum, 109 meters in circumference and eight meters high. Accessed by a monumental ramp, the roof of the Cyclorama Center’s office wing overlooks key points of the battlefield, as seen from the vantage point of the painting, and, for forty-five years now, has been an integral part of the interpretive experience at the park.

Richard Neutra’s buildings stand alongside those of fellow architect and friend Frank Lloyd Wright in the history of American architecture. Featured on the cover of *Time Magazine* in 1949, Neutra’s contributions to American design include some of the greatest works of architecture in this country and, indeed, in the world. Iconic Neutra residential commissions include the Lovell “Health” House (1929) and the VDL House (1932-66) in Los Angeles and the Kaufmann House (1946) in Palm Springs, as well as structures in twenty states, Guam, Indonesia, Pakistan, France, Switzerland, Germany, Venezuela, and Cuba. During his fifty years as a practicing architect, Neutra also designed churches, schools, civic structures, and an observatory, all innovative buildings that have inspired generations of architects. He was the recipient of many architectural awards, including the coveted American Institute of Architects Gold Medal, awarded posthumously in 1977 “in recognition of a significant body of work of lasting influence on the theory and practice of architecture.”

Since its founding in 1965, WMF has helped save more than 430 irreplaceable sites in 83 countries. The World Monuments Watch, a global program launched in 1995, calls attention to imperiled cultural heritage sites around the world. The 2006 Watch list features sites from 55 countries on all seven continents. The Cyclorama Center is one of eight designated in North America this year. A total of nine modern sites are included, reflecting the increasing understanding of the importance of twentieth-century architecture as part of our cultural heritage, and an awareness of its fragile status.

**For photographs, supporting documents, and updates, please visit:**

<http://www.mission66.com/cyclorama>

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

### **Christine Madrid French, Architectural Historian/Preservation Activist**

**[www.mission66.com](http://www.mission66.com)**

Ms. French has a master's degree in architectural history from the University of Virginia. A former historian at the National Park Service, she is a founder of the Recent Past Preservation Network and is involved in historic preservation advocacy nationwide. She currently lives in Charlottesville, Virginia and is completing a book on the national park visitor centers of Mission 66.

### **Recent Past Preservation Network, [www.recentpast.org](http://www.recentpast.org)**

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The Recent Past Preservation Network (RPPN) is an all-volunteer, non-profit organization dedicated to saving structures of the recent past, particularly postwar buildings that are not yet widely recognized as significant. The group promotes preservation education, assistance, and activism to encourage a contextual understanding of our modern built environment. RPPN members and member organizations rally together to develop practical strategies to document, preserve, and re-use historic places of the recent past. The "National Windshield Survey" on the RPPN website contains hundreds of member-submitted photographs as a reference point for preservation projects and scholarly studies.

### **World Monuments Fund, [www.wmf.org](http://www.wmf.org)**

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The World Monuments Fund, founded in 1965, is the foremost private, non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation of historic art and architecture worldwide through fieldwork, advocacy, grantmaking, education, and training. Launched in 1995, the biennial World Monuments Watch, with its list of 100 Most Endangered Sites, is one of the major programs of the World Monuments Fund. An independent panel of international experts reviews the hundreds of nominations received and selects 100 for inclusion on the list based on the significance of the sites, the urgency of the need for support, and the viability of the conservation and/or advocacy plans. Previous lists included sites such as the Taj Mahal, the Great Wall of China, and Pompeii.

### **Preservation Pennsylvania, [www.preservationpa.org](http://www.preservationpa.org)**

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Preservation Pennsylvania is the Commonwealth's only statewide, private non-profit organization dedicated to the protection of historically and architecturally significant properties. The organization, through creative partnerships, targeted educational and advocacy programs, advisory assistance, and special projects, assists Pennsylvania communities to protect and utilize the historic resources they want to preserve for the future. In 1999, Preservation Pennsylvania listed the Cyclorama Center on its annual "Pennsylvania at Risk" list of endangered properties.