

SOCIETY OF ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIANS

24 February 2004

Fran Mainella, Director
National Park Service
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

re: Appeal of the National Historic Landmark ruling by the National Parks Advisory Board on the Cyclorama Building, Gettysburg National Military Park

Dear Director Mainella,

The Society of Architectural Historians strongly disagrees with the decision of the National Park Service and its National Parks Advisory Board that the Cyclorama Building (1959-61), designed by the firm of Neutra and Alexander, does not meet the criteria for National Historic Landmark status. By this letter and according to regulations set forth under 36 CFR Sec. 65.10, the Society respectfully appeals the denial of the NHL designation for this building.

Scholarly assessment over the past decade it clear that this building ranks among the foremost non-residential designs of Richard Neutra, long internationally renowned as one of the seminal architects of the twentieth century. The building also ranks among the most distinguished modernist design for a public facility in the U.S. during the postwar era. The building further stands as the flagship of the Park Service's Mission 66 program, which was a public works enterprise of major importance to the National Parks. In its original capacity as the visitor center, the building stands as a premier example of a pioneering type in the development of the then nascent field of public history, in which the Park Service played an instrumental role. Finally, and contrary to many accusations, the building is an extremely significant component to the park itself – a personal testament to the ideals of freedom and democracy by a grateful immigrant architect, who conceived it as bringing the lessons of the battle to bear on the cause of world peace at the height of the Cold War era.

In September 1998, the Cyclorama Building was determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Shortly thereafter, the Society prepared a National Historic Landmark (NHL) nomination and submitted it to the Park Service. At a public meeting on 13 December 1999, the National Landmarks Committee of the Park System Advisory Board heard expert testimony on the national significance of the Cyclorama Building. The late J. Carter Brown, then chairman of the Commission of Fine Arts, among others, presented concrete evidence for the landmark designation. After review, the Landmarks Committee recommend the Cyclorama Building be designated a National Historic Landmark, with four votes in favor and one abstention.

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