

December 14, 1999

Ms. Carol Shull, Director
National Historic Landmarks Program
1849 C Street, N.W., NC-400
Washington, D.C. 20240

Robert A.M. Stern Architects

Dear Ms. Shull:

I am writing to lend a strong voice of support to the proposed designation of the Gettysburg National Military Park Visitor Center, also known as the Gettysburg Cyclorama Building (1962), as a National Historic Landmark. This building is a difficult one to like now--but it is, in its way, a great building. Fashions in taste have to be put aside if we are to act responsibly by saving the best of American architecture for future generations to use, debate, learn from, and enjoy. While not everyone is currently able to appreciate the Gettysburg Cyclorama's merits, the building, built by the federal government to serve the public, was designed by an undeniably great and influential architect, Richard Neutra, whose work was seminal in the introduction, interpretation, and popularization of International Style Modernism in America. Neutra's work has been equaled perhaps only by that of Frank Lloyd Wright, his mentor and one-time employer, in its contribution toward elevating the status of American architecture on the world stage. Interestingly, like Wright's late work, the building, though unabashedly Modernist, resonates with history. Just as Wright's Guggenheim Museum echoes and reinterprets the Pantheon in Rome, so too does the Gettysburg Cyclorama, whose main interior space, using a cylindrical form to create a spatially impressive room, is also a modern-day Pantheon dedicated to the interpretation of one of the most significant events in our nation's history.

The central idea of the Gettysburg National Military Park is preservation--to protect and present a fragment of history in a compelling and broadly comprehensible manner, so that we, as a nation, might better understand where we came from and where we are going. To contemplate the destruction of Neutra's building, as some do, is to fly in the face of the essential mission of our military parks: to preserve and commemorate. We cannot thoughtlessly throw away a well-considered and well-realized part of the Gettysburg park, simply because a particular architectural style is out of fashion at the moment. With the proper care, this building can no doubt be adapted to function effectively far into the future. I urge that this nomination be accepted and that the Gettysburg Cyclorama Building be protected as the landmark that it most certainly is.

Sincerely,



Robert A.M. Stern