

FAQs on Atlanta History Center's Move of *The Battle of Atlanta* Cyclorama Painting



Why is *The Battle of Atlanta* cyclorama painting moving to Atlanta History Center?

In July 2014, Mayor Kasim Reed announced the relocation and the restoration of this historic Atlanta Cyclorama painting *The Battle of Atlanta* to the History Center, as part of a 75 year license agreement with the City of Atlanta.

Atlanta History Center has the most comprehensive collection of Civil War artifacts at one location in the nation, including the comprehensive exhibition *Turning Point: The American Civil War*, providing the opportunity to make new connections between the Cyclorama and other artifacts, archival records, photographs, rare books, and contemporary research. As new stewards of the painting, Atlanta History Center provides a unique opportunity to renew one of the city's most important cultural and historic artifacts.

Where will the painting and locomotive be located at the History Center?

The Battle of Atlanta painting will be housed in a custom-built, museum-quality environment, in the Lloyd and Mary Ann Whitaker Cyclorama Building, located near the corner of West Paces Ferry Road and Slaton Drive, directly behind Veterans Park, and connected to the Atlanta History Museum atrium through Centennial Olympic Games Museum hallway. The *Texas* locomotive will be displayed in a 2,000-square-foot glass-fronted gallery connecting Atlanta History Museum with the new cyclorama building.

What is the condition of the painting?

"Better than you might think," said Gordon Jones, Atlanta History Center Senior Military Historian and a co-leader of the Cyclorama project team.

Jones points out that the painting has only suffered one major incision, when a 6-foot-wide-by-49-foot-high section, showing Decatur Road (of lesser consequence than any of the battle scenes), was trimmed to make the painting fit when it was moved to its slightly-too-small current facility in Grant Park in 1921. Also, roughly seven feet of sky disappeared off the

top of the painting incrementally during the six moves it has made since 1886.

Yet the painting, even before these missing areas are re created as part of the restoration, is among the best preserved cycloramas, said Jones, pointing out that some cycloramas in Europe were damaged in World War II, others by weather or poor conditions.

Jones credits Gustav Berger, who led a restoration from 1979 to 1982, for stabilizing the Belgian linen surface with a consolidant (a clear acrylic that sandwiched the paint in place) and backing the painting with fiberglass layers; and for the addition of a trolley system that allows the painting to be rotated. Those crucial steps not only saved the painting from collapse at that time, but have made the moving process today easier and safer, Jones said.

What steps were taken to prepare to move the painting from Grant Park to Atlanta History Center?

Nearly all work to date in the Grant Park building has been focused on getting the painting prepared for the move. That includes (in approximate order):

- Complete photo and video documentation of painting and diorama
- 3-D survey of diorama surface and figures
- Removal of diorama and figures
- Measuring, mapping, examining painting and its condition
- Testing and moving trolley system at top rail
- Testing strip-lining concepts, testing canvas in lab
- Applying acrylic resin to reinforce paint layers as needed
- Creating strip-lining; applying strip lining to lower edge
- Construction of two large scaffolding work towers
- Separating painting at two seams
- Testing system for removing upper edge of painting from hanging rail, preparing infrastructure for same
- Applying strip lining to upper edge
- Construction of two steel spools in sections
- Assembly of spools in Grant Park building, securing to scaffolding, preparing infrastructure for scrolling
- Scrolling the painting, securing turnbuckles to keep painting taut

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- Applying protective covers around the scrolls, then covering again with shrink wrap
- Cutting 7-foot-square holes in the Grant Park building's roof

What are the steps involved in moving the painting?

Removal from Grant Park Building, day one:

- Assemble one large and one small crane at back of Cyclorama building
- Hook top of 45-foot-tall scroll to large crane, remove vertically through 7-foot-square hole in roof of Atlanta Cyclorama building
- Lower scroll and hook bottom of scroll to small crane
- Between large and small cranes, lower scroll to horizontal position
- Mount on flatbed truck, secure tarp
- Repeat for second 45-foot-tall scroll
- Trucks drive to Atlanta History Center

Relocation into Lloyd and Mary Ann Whitaker Cyclorama building at Atlanta History Center, day two:

- Assemble one large and one small crane in service driveway behind new Lloyd and Mary Ann Whitaker Cyclorama Building
- Drive in one of the two loaded trucks
- Between large and small cranes, raise scroll to vertical position
- Large crane lowers scroll through 10-foot-square hole in roof of new building
- Secure scroll in vertical position inside new rotunda, attach to upper hanging beam
- Repeat for second scroll

Who are the key collaborators with Atlanta History Center in preparing for the cyclorama move?

- Christian Marty, art conservator and senior consultant from Switzerland, who was in charge of moving the cyclorama in Innsbruck, Austria
- Ulrich "Uli" Weihammer and Thomas Schoeller of Weilhammer & Schoeller Art Conservation, chief conservators from Germany. They are working with three German and four American conservators.

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- Brian Newell, construction superintendent, C.D. Moody Construction
- Bob Goodman and Mike Giannavola, structural engineers, Goodman & Giannavola
- Grant Moseley, Matt Rodie and Paul D’Arconte, architects with MSTSD, who designed the Lloyd and Mary Ann Whitaker Cyclorama Building at Atlanta History Center
- Robert Brown and William Stanfield, architects with R L Brown and Associates, who also designed the new building
- Mack Cain, landscape architect, Travis Pruitt and Associates
- Danny Lundstrom, mechanical, electrical, plumbing, engineering, Salas O’Brien
- Virgil Hammond, diorama surveyor, Watts & Browning Engineers
- Tom Diehl, diorama architect and designer, DCA Architects
- Aram Ebben, lighting designer for new rotunda, Exp U.S. Services
- Bruce Burkhardt and Jack and Peggy Melton, video and still photography
- On the job for days of the move: C.D. Moody Construction, Maxim Crane Works, ATS (Anderson Trucking Service), Georgia Rigging

How did the History Center come up with the idea of rolling the painting onto towering metal scrolls for the move?

When cycloramas were becoming popular in the late 19th century, the paintings were moved from city to city on scrolls constructed of different materials. One account describes one as being constructed of “strips of pine, three inches thick, grooved together”; another was noted as being made of “hollow iron.”

Scrolls have continued to be employed over the decades since, including for the move of a battle-themed cyclorama in Innsbruck, Austria, at the end of the first decade of this century. Atlanta History Center had to commission the manufacture of two scrolls instead of the usual one, because layers of fiberglass lining added to *The Battle of Atlanta* during the 1980s restoration made it too thick to raise and lower through the roofs of the Grant Park and Atlanta History Center buildings on a single scroll.

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The two new scrolls weigh 6,200 pounds each and are five feet in diameter. They were designed by Bob Goodman of Goodman and Giannavola Structural Engineers of Atlanta and fabricated at Rowan Precision Machining, in Rowan County, N.C.

What happens to the painting after the installation at Atlanta History Center?

Install lower hanging beam in new building, install trolleys from old building on upper beam

- Construct scaffolding towers
- Unwrap protective layers from around scrolls
- Prepare infrastructure for unscrolling, rig for adding additional “sky” to the painting
- Unscroll painting and secure top edge to lower hanging beam
- Strip-lining across bottom of painting retained and weights added
- Strip-lining removed from top of painting as additional “sky” added
- Add 6-foot vertical strip, nearly 50 feet tall, to restore missing section (“Decatur Road”) at main seam
- Allow weeks (possibly months) for painting to assume its natural hyperbolic shape
- Make decisions on surface restoration – clouds, sky, overpainted figures, etc.
- Surface restoration to include removal of old varnish, application of new protective surface
- Lighting installation
- Canopy installation
- Construction of diorama surface and restoration of 128 plaster figures
- Completion of platform finishes
- Install exhibitions
- Open full Cyclorama experience Fall 2018

What’s the biggest risk in moving the painting?

“We’re confident,” said Jackson McQuigg, Atlanta History Center Vice President of Properties and co-leader of the Cyclorama project team. “We’ve done the homework and have the right team of contractors, all of whom are very invested in this project. It’s in good hands. And we will be

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hands on to make sure things go well.”

How big is The Battle of Atlanta now, and what will be the dimensions after restoration?

The painting is 42 feet tall with a circumference of 359 feet. It will grow to 49 feet tall with a 371-foot circumference.

Where is the missing piece and are you going to put it back in?

“The last we knew of its existence was 1942,” Jones said. “The son of the Cyclorama contractor remembered it coming home with his dad in 1921 when the painting didn’t fully fit into the building. The contractor had been asked to cut out part of the painting, and he didn’t know what to do with it. He hated to throw it away, so he rolled it up, brought it home and put it in his basement.”

The contractor moved out of the house in 1942, the last time the son recalls seeing the piece from *The Battle of Atlanta*. “The house is no longer there, the section is gone,” Jones said. “But it’s OK because we can re-create it from the 1886 photographs that we have that show that section.”

How is this project being paid for?

Current financial commitments from individuals and foundations to Atlanta History Center, in support of the Cyclorama project, total \$35.2 million. This includes a \$10 million endowment to ensure that the Cyclorama painting and Texas locomotive are properly maintained for the duration of the 75-year agreement, at no cost to taxpayers.

When will it reopen?

Construction continues on the 23,000-square-foot Lloyd and Mary Ann Whitaker Cyclorama Building, though the project has progressed to a stage where the building can accept *The Battle of Atlanta* painting, allowing restoration work to proceed this spring. A fall 2017 opening for the restored Texas locomotive is projected, with *The Battle of Atlanta* painting opening to the public in fall 2018 when the Lloyd and Mary Ann Whitaker Cyclorama Building celebrates its grand opening.

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What will happen to the existing building in Grant Park?

The existing 1921 Cyclorama building in Grant Park will be developed into a premier community event space and will feature a view of Zoo Atlanta's African Savanna exhibit, which is moving as part of upgrades developed by Zoo Atlanta.

Renovations to the building will preserve the historic character and aesthetic appeal of the original facility. Once the renovation is complete, the Zoo will feature a new entryway plaza, an enhanced African elephant exhibit and renovated workspace for administrative staff. The Zoo's redevelopment plan also calls for an environmentally sound underground parking solution to alleviate parking in the neighborhoods and accommodate attendance growth at the Zoo.

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