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FROM PANORAMA TO PARKING GARAGE: AN
ARCHITECTURAL AND ARCHIVAL HISTORY OF THE TORONTO
CYCLORAMA

ISABELLE GAPP

JESSICA MACE

This text presents an architectural and archival history of the Toronto Cyclorama, built 1887 and demolished in 1976. Through an examination of its genesis and changing uses over time—as a cyclorama, machine hall, then parking garage—the text unveils its history, situating it within the scope of Toronto’s architectural heritage and North American cyclorama buildings. With this text, the authors also champion the study of all kinds of local art and architecture rather than just those deemed to have superlative qualities, and provide a case study for the value of adaptive reuse and its inclusion in architectural histories.

Ce texte présente une histoire architecturale et archivistique du Cyclorama de Toronto, construit en 1887 et démoli en 1976. À travers un examen de sa genèse et de l’évolution de ses usages au fil du temps - cyclorama, salle des machines, et ensuite stationnement -, le texte dévoile son histoire, le situant dans le cadre du patrimoine architectural de Toronto et des bâtiments de cyclorama nord-américains. Avec ce texte, les auteurs défendent également l’étude de toutes sortes d’art et d’architecture locaux plutôt que ceux réputés avoir des qualités superlatives, et fournissent une étude de cas sur la valeur de la reconversion et son inclusion dans les histoires architecturales



City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 124 - f0124_f0003_id0058

Fig. 1. Parking garage, City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 124, File 3, Item 58, 1976.

In 1976, a parking garage was torn down in Toronto (fig. 1). Unlike most parking facilities, however, this building was nearly a century old at the time of its demolition, predating the widespread use of motor cars or even the need for parking at all. Clearly this was a building with a storied past, but by the 1970s, few would have known it as anything but a garage.

Built in 1887, this large, polygonal brick building near the waterfront was once Toronto's Cyclorama, a purpose-built structure intended for the display of panorama paintings. The building retained its original function for only six years of its existence: the last panorama was shown in 1893, and the building was left vacant until 1903, when it was transformed into a machinery exhibition hall, and then into a parking garage in 1928. The Cyclorama building was thus twice resurrected and adapted to serve a new function.

The short lifespan of the cyclorama speaks to the nature of quickly changing forms of visual-sensorial entertainment in the nineteenth century, but also to an interest in creating a spectacle within the ur-

ban fabric of a city. Strangely, but perhaps unsurprisingly given its changing uses over time, the Toronto Cyclorama has not been written about in any comprehensive manner.¹ It is not mentioned within global studies of the panorama nor in any architectural histories. With this research, drawing on archival materials scattered across the City of Toronto Archives, the Toronto Public Library, and several historic newspapers, we start to piece together the beginnings of a comprehensive archive to tell the architectural history of the Toronto Cyclorama for the first time.

Although contemporary newspaper accounts and ephemera provide much of the context that we draw upon for the building and its use, it is important to note that scant visual material exists from the time that the Cyclorama operated as intended. To gain a fuller picture of the history of the site and to piece together the visual record, we had to turn to the subsequent lives of the building through to the 1970s. Architectural histories typically focus on original design and intent by calling on original drawings, contemporary accounts, statements by the architect, et cetera, often leaving the subsequent lives of a building overlooked. We argue, however, that they can equally provide valuable insight into a place, and in some instances, might in themselves be the best archival documents. This is the case of the Toronto Cyclorama—photographs and ephemera from *later* iterations of the building make up a substantial portion of the archival materials contributing to our understanding of the site and form the bulk of the visual record of the Cyclorama overall. That the building was made to last is a testament to the investment in panoramas across North America nearing the turn of the century and proved by its adaptive reuse over time. Moreover, in the case of cycloramas worldwide, if their reuse is discussed at all, it is simply to note the destruction or loss of the paintings. So, not only is this an interesting case study in adaptive reuse and expanded archival explorations generally, it also contributes to our understanding of cycloramas on a broader scale.

On a local scale, our interest in the Toronto Cyclorama is born out of a need to better understand Toronto's heritage architecture over

time. Architectural history and heritage practices in Toronto, as elsewhere, have typically focused on the biggest, best, most spectacular examples of architecture, stacked against a national or even global standard, and on buildings that retain their original function. Taken together, this neglects most types of buildings and relays only a small fraction of our shared history, impacting subsequent studies and heritage preservation.

Through an examination of the context, architecture and panoramas, we consider the legacy of the Toronto Cyclorama. With respect to architecture, this building reminds us that there is more at stake than the original lifespan of the buildings to better understand the phenomenon of cycloramas writ large. In this instance, the conversion and transformation of the rotunda, though now demolished, has left us with a rich visual record of a cultural history that would have otherwise been forgotten. In short, the Toronto Cyclorama demonstrates that there is often more than meets the eye, and that fascinating, important histories and lessons can emerge, even from a parking garage.

WHAT IS A CYCLORAMA?

In North America and during the first half of the nineteenth century, the term “panorama” was typically associated with moving panoramas (where a static audience would be seated in an auditorium as a long roll-painting was moved before them) and not the circular panorama that had achieved great success in the United Kingdom and Europe. In the 1880s, however, there was a revival in interest in the latter. The circular panorama was rebranded the “cyclorama,” with many paintings now addressing topics of particular interest to a North American audience: namely scenes of recent warfare, such as the Battle of Gettysburg and Battle of Atlanta. The history of panoramas worldwide has been well documented, notably, and most recently, in Erkki Huhtamo’s *Illusions in Motion: Media Archaeology of the Moving Panorama and Related Spectacles* (2013), Katie Trumpener and Tim Barringer’s edited collection *On the Viewing Platform: The Panorama between Canvas and Screen* (2020), and Helen

Kingstone's *Panoramas and Compilations in Nineteenth Century Britain: Seeing the Big Picture* (2023).²

To display these massive paintings, large rotundas or what were called cyclorama buildings were erected. The term “cyclorama” often stood as a shorthand for the building type, as well as for the paintings held within. Centralized in plan, the building typology featured a raised platform in the centre, on which the viewers would stand to take in the continuous painting that lined the walls. The platform would be reached by a kind of enclosed tunnel from the exterior entrance. The scenes were lit from above, either by natural daylight—from which the viewers were shielded by draped fabric—or lit by electric lighting, especially at night.

“WHAT IS THAT STRANGE LOOKING BUILDING?”³

The Toronto Cyclorama was built in 1887 at a cost of \$25,000 CAD. Designed by Thomas Kennedy (1849-1916) and William J. Holland (1848-1899), the building caused a stir with its massive size and peculiar appearance. Described as “a high octagonal structure with not a window in its walls,” (“The Amusement World” 3), the Cyclorama was articulated with classical details, like the pilasters framing each corner of the (actually sixteen-sided) polygon, the broad cornice of textured brick patterns below the massive dome topped by a lantern, and the large round-headed entrance arch framed by multiple, stacked orders (figs. 2a and 2b). The use of brick as the main construction material speaks to the intended permanence of this Cyclorama as compared to many of its temporary counterparts.

While few records survive today, the *Toronto World* newspaper provided a remarkably detailed account in August of 1887, a few weeks before the Cyclorama opened. Precise dimensions were provided in the newspaper, which give us a better sense of how it towered over its neighboring buildings “to a giddy height”: “It is 125 feet across inside, its internal circumference is over 400 feet, its walls are 60 feet high, its height to the apex of the roof is 100 feet, to the apex of the dome 126 feet and to the ball on the top of the flagpole 150 feet”



Fig. 2a. Cyclorama and the Walker House Hotel, 1897, City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1268, Series 1317, Item 201. Fig. 2b. Entrance arch of former Cyclorama, September 5, 1976, City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 200, Series 2454, File 48.

(“The Amusement World” 3). The size corresponds to the spectacle within—panorama paintings were massive. For instance, the same article notes that the Toronto canvas of the Battle of Sedan measured “over 50 feet from top to bottom and over 400 feet in length” (“The Amusement World” 3).

Given its size, it is perhaps no surprise that it was built near the Toronto harborfront. Mainly filled with industrial and transportation buildings to this point, there were large plots of available real estate in the area. Additional land had been created during the 1850s as the shoreline was pushed further south by infilling sections of the harbour (McIlwraith 15-33). An esplanade, public parks, the railway, and marine depots all occupied this newly liminal space. But in a quickly growing city,⁴ the potential of this site was also likely clear for an attraction like this. The number of hotels in the area speaks to the potential for out-of-town spectators, lured by the Zoological Gardens, with its “evil-smelling whale,” (“Children of Days Before Movies” 23) on the opposite (northwest) corner of York and Front (figs. 3a and 3b).

In this location, near the southwest corner of York and Front Streets, the Cyclorama could capitalize not only on the proximity to two local originally horse-drawn streetcar lines (Fortin and Ettinger), but also on visitors arriving by rail to Union Station—the first iteration

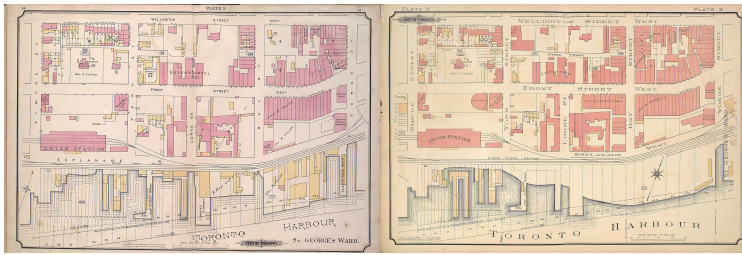


Fig. 3a. Goad's fire insurance map of 1884 showing the plot of land prior to the construction of the Cyclorama. Charles E. Goad, *Atlas of the city of Toronto and suburbs from special survey and registered plans showing all buildings and lot numbers*, Toronto: Chas. E Goad, Ltd., 1884. Courtesy of the Toronto Public Library.

Fig. 3b. Goad's fire insurance map of 1890 with the Cyclorama in place. Charles E. Goad, *Atlas of the city of Toronto and vicinity from special survey founded on registered plans and showing all building and lot numbers*, Toronto: Chas. E Goad, Ltd., 1890. Courtesy of the Toronto Public Library.

of which was on the same block as the Cyclorama. Both trains and streetcars can be seen in a small lithograph from the time, emphasizing the modernity of the spectacle (fig. 4).

Such was the allure of the Toronto Cyclorama that newspapers in towns across southern Ontario advertised the exhibitions,⁵ and special excursion rates were offered by the Grand Trunk Railway in partnership with the Cyclorama management. For instance, the *Toronto Globe* eagerly reported on a large group of visitors from out of town in late 1887:

"Three hundred residents of Stratford, Guelph, Berlin [Kitchener], and Waterloo took advantage of the cheap rates offered by the G.T.R. and visited the battle fields [sic] of Sedan yesterday. This was the first of the Cyclorama excursions, and judging from the liberal patronage the management will continue them throughout the winter. All who visited were pleased." ("Cyclorama" [Globe] 8)



Fig. 4. "Cyclorama." Toronto illustrated, 1893: its growth, resources, commerce, manufacturing interests, financial institutions, educational advantages and prospects : also sketches of the leading business concerns which contribute to the city's progress and prosperity : a brief history of the city from foundation to the present time. Toronto : Consolidated Illustrating Co., 1893, p.171.

The Barrie-based newspaper *The Northern Advance* further wrote of the Toronto Cyclorama that “our country cousins cannot afford to leave the city until they have at least seen [The Battle of Sedan] once” (“The Battle of Sedan” 1).

It is important to remember that the railway network was much more extensive then than it is today, with connections throughout the province, as well as into Quebec and the United States. That there

were close ties between the railway and the Cyclorama for tourism purposes is reinforced by an advertisement for the Grand Trunk Railway in the commemorative program for Toronto's *Battle of Gettysburg* cyclorama guide.

While it is long gone, we can read the impact of the Cyclorama on the current fabric of the city, having helped to set the precedent for large, blockbuster buildings and entertainment in this part of the city. The area continues to thrive as a tourist hotspot today, playing host to the CN Tower, the Rogers Centre, the Scotiabank Arena, and Ripley's Aquarium, to name but a few major attractions. As hordes were flocking to lose themselves in the panoramic experience, the city began to extend the land even further south, infilling sections of the harbour to create more streets and plots for building. It is possible that the Cyclorama's crowds and popularity may well have helped with this decision.

In any case, the siting and the ties to the railway are similar to cyclorama buildings in other cities in North America. The *Cincinnati Gazette*, for example, reported in 1885 that: "The great [Cincinnati] panorama is worthy to be widely known as one of the attractions of the city. If its merit was understood throughout the cities of Ohio, Indiana and Kentucky, and in all the metropolitan and railway districts, excursion trains to see it would be in demand" (*Cincinnati Gazette*). As in many other locations worldwide, the Toronto Cyclorama was seen as encouraging local travel to experience something global.

With the ideal site selected, it would have been a matter of management—originally C.A. Shaw (who also ran the Toronto Opera House)—finding the right architects to complete their vision (Walden 401). We have been unable to, as yet, locate any records for the architectural commission, and so it is unclear as to why the firm of Kennedy and Holland was hired. To this point, they had only completed a few commissions in Toronto. Based in Barrie, Ontario—home of *The Northern Advance* and roughly 68 miles north of Toronto—the firm opened a satellite office on York Street in 1882 (the same street on which the Cyclorama would stand), and worked with a variety of different building typologies, from residences and

schools to churches and masonic halls (Hill). While the firm had never built a cyclorama building, the basic requirements were likely familiar to them.

The Rotunda in Leicester Square in London, England of 1793, designed by Robert Mitchell for Robert Barker's panorama, was the first purpose-built structure for the exhibition of panoramas, and was well known, as its design was published in 1801 (Mitchell). From there, both permanent and temporary structures of similar design were built throughout the century, including for world's fairs and local industrial expositions. Even closer in date and availability, the design for a cyclorama rotunda was published and described in *The Scientific American* in 1886, which is a likely source for the architects north of the border ("The Cyclorama" [*Scientific American*] 296). It is also possible that they visited nearby American cyclorama buildings, for instance in Boston (1884) or those that formed part of the same circuit of traveling panoramas, like Cincinnati (1885), Cleveland (1886), Buffalo (1888), and Montreal (1888), which was moved to Ste-Anne-de-Beaupré, Quebec (1889). While panoramic paintings might be put in conversation with other forms of visual culture and mass visuality, such as billboards and advertising, our analysis of the Cyclorama is not one of mass media but rather "mass" geography—a phenomenon that reshaped the North American cityscape during the space of a decade.⁶ By the end of the nineteenth century, they were relatively commonplace in the Western world. In short, it would have been easy for the Toronto architects to find precedent for the design of their cyclorama.

THE SPECTACLE OF THE PANORAMA

Cycloramas, like arcades, as Walter Benjamin argued in his unfinished manuscript, existed as "a phantasmagoria which a person enters in order to be distracted" (7). Vance Byrd further considers how "Panoramas belonged to the genealogy of department stores, arcades, and world exhibitions" (12). The cyclorama allowed the viewer to vicariously travel through both time and space. David Spurgeon writing for *The Globe and Mail* in 1954 went so far

as to compare the effect of the Toronto Cyclorama to that of H.G. Wells' time machine (13). It also offered a totalizing experience of the panoramic painting, through lighting, sound effects and narration, three-dimensional set design, keepsakes, and ephemera. Such was the impact of the Toronto Cyclorama that *The Globe* reported that, "The optical illusion is complete. Many persons suppose that this [totalizing] effect and the admirable areal [sic] prospectus are produced by skilful arrangements of magnifying glasses from above. But this is not so" ("Battle of Sedan" 10). The architecture of the panoramic display achieved what Vanessa Schwartz describes as "the project of verisimilitude," offering an immersive realism from a central point of view (154). That is, the sensorial experience of the panorama often extended beyond the canvas. At the Gettysburg Cyclorama in New York City (at City Hall Square) in 1886, *Scientific American* described how: "Earth and sod covered the boards. Real trees, evergreens and others, with shrubbery, portions of fences, and the like are set about, and tufts of grass, wheat, and similar things, lend their aid to fill up the scene" (296). Such effects were known to have been incorporated into the Toronto Cyclorama, making use of many of the latest tricks and technologies into the rotunda's design and panoramic display, to heighten the viewers' experience. When viewing the *Battle of Sedan*, for instance, it was reported in the *Globe* that "on looking down the spectator cannot tell where the ridges of real turf, the banks of real red and brown earth, the shattered roofs of real buildings mingled with and emerged into similar features in the painted scenery" (10). Other features like actors, sounds, and smoke would have enhanced the effect of a fully immersive atmosphere, in which the viewer could feel like they were actually on site, magically transported to another time and place. Not limited simply to the realm of architecture or painting, this demonstrates that cycloramas can be considered as part of the larger body of visual culture in Toronto, building on and serving as a complement to existing studies of photography, exhibition, and display culture in the city.⁷

In terms of lighting the grand space, while mirrors, achieving a similar effect to magnifying glasses, were later used in the display of sev-

eral other panoramas (Gapp 161), it seems that, at least initially, the Toronto spectacle relied largely on natural light during the daytime:

“The light comes indeed from the roof of the brick edifice, but it passes through plain, clear glass only, and is modified when too strong or too weak by moveable screens of white cotton, so that to the artists’ skill alone are due the remarkable effects of light and shadow of distance that, on a canvas only thirty feet from the spectator present him with a landscape perfect in detail as in its ensemble [...]” (“Battle of Sedan” 10)

A later photograph reveals the clerestory windows circling the dome (fig. 5); the means by which the panoramas were lit by day. But, as contemporary accounts report, “at night it is furnished by a score of electric lights” (“Battle of Sedan” 10). Electricity first came to Toronto in the 1880s, spreading slowly, so the electric lighting of a large building such as this would have still been fairly novel by 1887. It is unclear how exactly the electric lighting worked, but perhaps like the Boston rotunda, electric lights hung from the domed ceiling (Barber 107).



City of Toronto Archives, Series 393 f1548_s0393_it20964

Fig. 5. Cyclorama Building, December 6, 1926, City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1548, Series 393, Item 20964.

Turning to the roof itself, it was singled out as the most notable architectural feature of the Cyclorama building and as a marvel of engineering:

“It is circular and its weight is so arranged as not to give the slightest chance of shoving the walls outwards, because of the many strong iron girders which run from each principal and meet in the centre. It fits on the walls like the lid of a teapot; or, as the architects, Messrs. Kennedy & Holland, express the idea, it is like a large umbrella without a handle” (“The Amusement World” 3).

Clearly, this remained an impressive feature well into the twentieth century as shown by the photograph of the unaltered dome taken by a local photographer in 1926, decades after the building had changed functions.

THE EXHIBITIONS

During its roughly six years of operation, the Toronto Cyclorama played host to three panoramic scenes: the Battle of Sedan (a scene from the Franco-Prussian war) opened in 1887; the Battle of Gettysburg opened in 1889; and lastly Jerusalem on the Day of the Crucifixion opened in 1893.

Months after it opened, the *Battle of Sedan* cyclorama in Toronto still remained popular:

“Since its opening day in September, the Battle of Sedan has enjoyed a large patronage, and has pleased and instructed nearly 40,000 people. To-day an extra inducement in the shape of handsome and costly souvenirs, is offered to all who attend. People who have formed or conceived peculiar ideas as to what a “Cyclorama” is, should visit this place to-day and be surprised. It is an exhibition that leaves an everlasting impression upon your memory—a work of science and art, that is instructively witnessed. Men die, nations change, but art is immortal” (“Musical and Dramatic” 2)

Having been shown in Cincinnati the year prior, among other locations, the realism of the *Battle of Sedan* and the impression it made on Torontonians was arguably long lasting. Such was the authority and credibility of the cyclorama that advertisements in the *Toronto World* “invited spectators to an ‘actual battlefield’ to view ‘the most realistic war scenes ever exhibited’” (Watts 965). A sheet of printed ephemera further advertised “A Novel Entertainment” of “Brilliant and Interesting Lectures Descriptive of this Famous Battle” that accompanied the panorama and were delivered every half hour. They were “New, Novel and Instructive.”

Meanwhile, the final panorama to open at the Toronto Cyclorama in 1893 was *Jerusalem: On the Day of the Crucifixion*. While an archival record in the Library and Archives Canada suggests that this is the same painting that is still on display in Ste-Anne-de-Beaupré, Quebec (“Cyclorama of the Holy Land”), an article from Toronto-based newspaper *The Globe* in 1901 noted that “The [Toronto] board [of Control] approved the sale of Cyclorama picture, ‘Jerusalem on the Day of the Crucifixion,’ to Mr. McConnell of Ludlow, Ky., for \$500” (“Pin-holes in Cedar Blocks” 18). Such confusion is not surprising given that so few extant examples exist, having rapidly deteriorated as they were moved from city to city. Trumpener and Barringer claim that “Cyclorama closures or reuses often damaged, or even doomed, canvases” (37). As previously mentioned, the adaptive reuse of cyclorama buildings is typically seen only as impacting the lasting archive of the artwork and not the architecture itself. As we continue our research into the Toronto Cyclorama, it is likely that there are even more archival materials out there that might illuminate its visual and architectural histories. However, without any literature or scholarship to frame the significance of the Toronto Cyclorama, how these archives are labeled, handled, and managed are likely restricted.

THE AFTERLIVES OF THE TORONTO CYCLORAMA

The popularity of Toronto’s Cyclorama did not last. The precipitous decline of the cyclorama as a medium has often been attributed to the invention of the cinematograph, Kineto-

scope, Eidoloscope, and other similar technologies that were developed to record and publicly display motion pictures.⁸ Yet, the decline of the cyclorama predated the advent of cinema. As Caroline E. Janney writes, with more than forty cycloramas opening across the U.S. over the course of a decade, the oversaturation of the market and the familiarity with the panoramas traveling the circuits resulted in an inevitable loss of interest (Janney 238-255). Attendance figures and profits already marked a dwindling popularity, in Toronto as elsewhere, by the 1890s. The first signs of trouble for the Toronto Cyclorama came in 1891 when it fell behind on city taxes against both the property and the expensive panorama painting. At this time, *The Battle of Gettysburg* panorama painting and the building were opened to bids and purchased by a Mr. Harton Walker “understood to be buying for parties in Detroit.”⁹ Regardless, the rotunda continued to operate as a Cyclorama until 1893, when *Jerusalem: On the Day of the Crucifixion* was displayed.

Following this, it ceased operations as a cyclorama and the building saw various lease proposals: in 1895, an indoor cycling track was proposed (“By the Way” 8)—which would have given a fun, new meaning to the word “cyclorama”—and in 1900, the Crescent Athletic Club sought to lease the space for prize fights and other athletic events (“He Clings” 10; “Water Famine” 7), but these uses were rejected by the city. In 1901, the building was approved for rental for one year by the Electric Cab Company for \$60 per month (“Bold Charge” 7), but ultimately, this offer was withdrawn by Toronto’s Board of Control (“Will Discuss” 12). It was first proposed in 1902 that the space be rented for manufacturing purposes (“Will Ask” 12), and it was leased in that same year to H.W. Petrie for \$2,000 per year plus taxes (“Opposed to Monopoly” 7).

Interestingly, its new life as a machinery exhibition hall, as opened in 1903, was not too far removed from its initial function. The new owner, H.W. Petrie, Limited, intended the building to continue to serve as an attraction: “It is commodious, well lighted, easy of access, and affords splendid facilities for the inspection of machinery. Day and night its doors are open from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m., and somebody is al-

ways on hand to receive visitors” (“H. W. Petrie Machinery Exhibit” 7).

It was at this time that three galleries were built inside the space: this is shown in a rare interior photograph of the building (fig. 6). The massive scale of the open rotunda is provided by the men, hardly visible, posing with the machinery. This is the only interior photograph that we were able to find from any period in the building’s history. It is a rare survival that was tucked away on a microfilm of old lantern slides of various scenes in and around Toronto. While we have not yet found (and may never find) an interior photograph of the Cyclorama in use, this later photograph attests to the impressive size of the viewing space and just how immersive the spectacle of the panorama would have been.

The building remained a machine hall until 1927, at which time the Petrie company applied to the Board of Control to convert the space into a parking garage (“Children of Days Before” 23). The interior was then subdivided into multiple concrete storeys connected by ramps (fig. 7), the walls were perforated with windows, and the

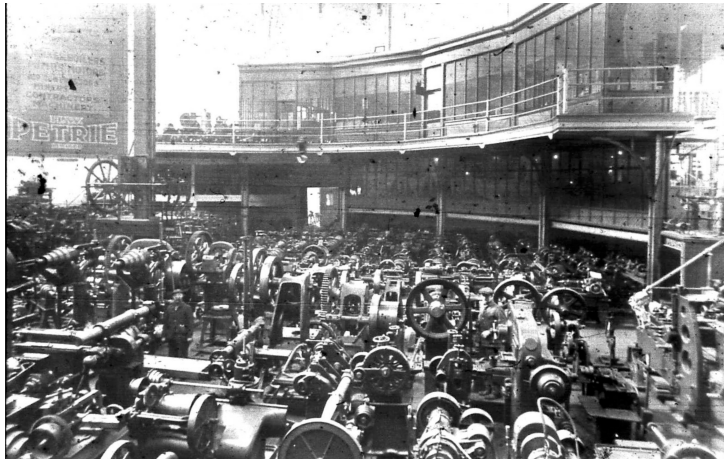


Fig. 6. Interior of Cyclorama as H.W. Petrie Limited Machinery Hall, City of Toronto Archives, “H.W. Petrie, Front St. Machines.” Fonds 1244, Series 2119, Item 55.3.

24 THE GLOBE, TORONTO, MONDAY, APRIL 30, 1928

FAMOUS OLD CYCLORAMA — Is Now — PETRIE'S PARKING PLACE

On Front Street, Near York, With Entrances
on Both Station Street and Front Street

*City's Newest and Most Modern Parking and Service Garage
Built to Meet the Growing Needs of Downtown Toronto*

The Famous Overhead Doors
Graham-Roberts & Company
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**Just a Stone's Throw From
Petrie's Parking Place**
And only a few steps from
New Union Station

**WALKER
HOUSE**
"House of Plenty"

Plans and Specifications for this
Unique Building were
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James, Proctor & Redfern
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— Close to the City Hall, City Hall Square, and the City Hall.
— Close to the City Hall, City Hall Square, and the City Hall.

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Level

A Building
Within
a Building

CLEARVISION
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Air Compressors
Air Stations
Grease Guns

by
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GASOLINE
ENGINES**

**EXTRA QUALITY
EXTRA SERVICE
NO EXTRA COST**

The British American Oil Co., Limited

**Autolene
ENGINE
Oil**

A Grade for Every Make and Size of Engine
**Light, Medium, Heavy,
Special Heavy, Extra Heavy**

Fig. 7. "Famous Old Cyclorama is now Petrie's Parking Place," The Globe, Apr 30, 1928, p. 14.

domed roof was removed at a total cost of \$125,000 ("Construct New Ramp" 7; "Famous Old Cyclorama" 14).

Architectural drawings do still exist for this conversion and are held at the City of Toronto Archives ("Parking Garage for H.W. Petrie").



Fig. 8. Elgin Motors in the former Cyclorama Building, 1953. James V. Salmon. Courtesy of the Toronto Public Library.

Unfortunately, however, they are in poor condition and not accessible at the time of writing. Similar to the earlier iterations of the building, it seems as though the owners were keen to capitalize on its novelty, boasting not just its convenient location, but the fact that it was an adapted historic building or “a building within a building,” as noted in the advertisement. The building continued to serve as a parking garage—later under the ownership of Elgin Motors (fig. 8)—until its demolition in 1976 as the area was further developed, and as new, modern parking amenities were built.

While it might seem odd to us today that the Toronto Cyclorama was converted and reconverted again over time, other North American cycloramas had similarly long and eventful lives. To date, these parallel instances of adaptive reuse have only served a footnote in the global history of cycloramas and yet help elucidate local architectural and social histories (Trumpener and Barringer 37).

Already in the 1840s, the first Philadelphia Cyclorama building (pre-1847) was turned into a Horse & Carriage Bazaar, later known as The Herkness Bazaar.¹⁰ The Cincinnati Cyclorama of 1885 was only

ever intended as a temporary structure, having been constructed out of wood clad in iron (Leonard 19). Despite its popularity, it was demolished in March 1889. The Cleveland Cyclorama of 1886, by contrast, was constructed out of brick and was built within a pre-existing structure. This became known as the Lennox Building and housed a variety of goods, services, apartments, and for a while the cyclorama. However, by 1896, according to a Sanborn Fire Insurance map, the cyclorama had been repurposed as a “Bicycle Riding School,” and by the time the Lennox Building was demolished in 1921, the cyclorama had already been removed. Meanwhile, in Buffalo, the cyclorama of 1888 was similarly constructed out of brick, but unlike many of the others remains standing today. After being acquired by the City of Buffalo in 1910, the cyclorama played host to a livery, a taxi garage, and a roller-skating rink. Between 1942 and 1963 it was a library, resplendent with a reading room and lecture halls. After decades of being vacant, the building, now divided into separate floors, has for the past almost forty years housed a local construction company.

The longevity of these buildings has contributed to our understanding of the typology of cyclorama buildings worldwide, and now with the Toronto Cyclorama, we may also begin to tease out some new and exciting pieces of this history. For instance, having a nearly complete visual record of the exterior through its later iterations might help us better understand subsequently built rotundas, like the Buffalo Cyclorama of 1888, or the Montreal Cyclorama of 1888, which was shipped to, rebuilt, and later re-clad in Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré. We might ask: did the design of the Toronto Cyclorama influence these later ones? What other connections might exist between these buildings? And in turn, what might a close study of Buffalo and Ste-Anne-de-Beaupré teach us about the missing information of the Toronto Cyclorama?

Beyond architectural history, we might also better understand the dissemination of cyclorama canvases and how the circuit operated across North America. Not only this, but if Toronto had a Cyclorama that was lost to time and left out of the global literature, what other cities might have had a rotunda that played an important role in its

time? While many questions remain, and much work has yet to be done, we now have the foundations for future study and scholarship.

CONCLUSION

While most of the literature on panoramas and cycloramas simply discusses the paintings and the end of this trendy medium, the Toronto Cyclorama proves that there is a greater story to tell. It reveals a complex network of ideas across the continent and how these correspond to changes made to the built fabric of a city. Its longevity and changing uses speak to the value and potential of these large buildings over time. To posterity, it also provides a historic case study of the adaptive reuse of a heritage building and the need to study local buildings of all stripes.

In the context of Toronto's architectural history and heritage, unfortunately, this is not the only significant space that has been forgotten. At a time when our built heritage is constantly threatened by development pressures given the rapid growth of the population in a dense urban core, or risks being destroyed or left to fall into disrepair due to lack of funding, researching buildings like the Toronto Cyclorama highlights the need to study and record local architecture—typically under-researched and undervalued in Canada—and contextualize it within the broader built environment of North America. Overall, our immediate hope is that this study of the Toronto Cyclorama might provide a platform for future exploration into the many overlooked histories that might be told about the city's built environment and architectural heritage.

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IMAGE NOTES

Fig. 1. Parking garage, City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 124, File 3, Item 58, 1976.

Fig. 2a. Entrance arch of former Cyclorama, September 5, 1976, City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 200, Series 2454, File 48.

Fig. 2b. Entrance arch of former Cyclorama, September 5, 1976, City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 200, Series 2454, File 48

Fig. 3a. Goad’s fire insurance map of 1884 showing the plot of land prior to the construction of the Cyclorama. Charles E. Goad, *Atlas of the city of Toronto and suburbs from special survey and registered plans showing all buildings and lot numbers*, Toronto: Chas. E Goad, Ltd., 1884. Courtesy of the Toronto Public Library.

Fig. 3b. Goad’s fire insurance map of 1890 with the Cyclorama in place. Charles E. Goad, *Atlas of the city of Toronto and vicinity from special survey founded on registered plans and showing all building and lot numbers*, Toronto: Chas. E Goad, Ltd., 1890. Courtesy of the Toronto Public Library.

Fig. 4. “Cyclorama.” *Toronto illustrated, 1893: its growth, resources, commerce, manufacturing interests, financial institutions, educational advantages and prospects : also sketches of the leading business concerns which contribute to the city’s progress and prosperity : a brief history of the city from foundation to the present time*. Toronto : Consolidated Illustrating Co., 1893, p.171.

Fig. 5. Cyclorama Building, December 6, 1926, City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1548, Series 393, Item 20964.

Fig. 6. Interior of Cyclorama as H.W. Petrie Limited Machinery Hall, City of Toronto Archives, “H.W. Petrie, Front St. Machines.” Fonds 1244, Series 2119, Item 55.3.

Fig. 7. “Famous Old Cyclorama is now Petrie’s Parking Place,” *The Globe*, Apr 30, 1928, p. 14.

Fig. 8. Elgin Motors in the former Cyclorama Building, 1953. James V. Salmon. Courtesy of the Toronto Public Library.

NOTES

1. See Watts, Graham. “‘The Smell O’ These Dead Horses’: The Toronto Cyclorama and the Illusion of Reality.” *University of Toronto Quarterly*, vol. 74, no.4, 2005, pp. 964-970; and Bateman, Chris. “The history of the long lost Cyclorama building in Toronto.” *blogTO*, 6 Jan, 2012, https://www.blogto.com/city/2012/01/a_brief_history_of_the_cyclorama_building_in_toronto/, Accessed 26 June 2024.↵
2. See Hyde, Ralph. *Panoromania! The Art and Entertainment of the ‘All-Embracing’ View*. Trefoil Publications, Barbican Art Gallery, 1988; Huhtamo, Erkki. *Illusions in Motion: Media Archaeology of the Moving Panorama and Related Spectacles*. The MIT Press, 2013; Trumpener, Katie and Tim Barringer, eds., *On the Viewing Platform: The Panorama between Canvas and Screen*. Yale University Press, 2020; Grandjean, Lucie. “Saisir l’horizon: la circulation de l’image panoramique à travers les Etats-Unis au XIXème siècle,” Doctoral thesis. January 2022, Université Paris Nanterre; and Kingstone, Helen. *Panoramas and Compilations in Nineteenth Century Britain: Seeing the Big Picture*. Springer International Publishing, 2023.↵
3. “The Amusement World, The Front-Street Cyclorama To Be Opened on Sept. 1,” *The Toronto World*, 20 Aug. 1887, 3.↵
4. The population of Toronto was 86,400 in 1881 and 181,000 by 1891.↵
5. See, for instance, “A Wonderful Work of Art,” *Canadian Statesman* (Bowmanville), 22 Feb., 1888, 5; “The Battle of Sedan,” *The Northern Advance* (Barrie), 24 May, 1888, 1.↵
6. For more see: Stephan Oettermann, *The Panorama: History of a Mass Medium*. Zone Books, 1997.↵

7. See for instance, Sarah Bassnet's book *Picturing Toronto* (MQUP, 2016); Philip Gordon Mackintosh's *Newspaper City: Toronto's Street Surfaces and the Liberal Press, 1860-1935* (UTP 2017); and Keith Walden's *Becoming Modern in Toronto: The Industrial Exhibition and the Shaping of a Late Victorian Culture* (UTP, 1997).↵
8. See Angela Miller, "The Panorama, the Cinema, and the Emergence of the Spectacular," *Wide Angle* 18, no. 2 (1996): 34-69.[doi:10.1353/wan.1996.0010](https://doi.org/10.1353/wan.1996.0010)↵
9. "The taxes against the battle amounted to \$819, and a further sum of \$1,000 was against the property for rent." — "General News of the City. The Battle of Gettysburg Sold by Auction..." *The Globe*, Feb 17, 1892 p.8.↵
10. Between 1888-1890, another brick cyclorama building was constructed in Philadelphia at the northeast corner of Broad and Cherry Streets.↵