

They moved the battle

Largest military diorama in the U.S. moved to Gettysburg

By JOHN CHRISTOPHER FINE

The Battle of Gettysburg is displayed on a field in miniature scale with precision and accuracy. It is the largest military diorama in the United States.

"There are 20,000 hand-painted soldiers, horses, artillery pieces, farm houses. The Borough of Gettysburg is topographically and geographically correct," Jim Kralik explained. Jim and his partners, Todd Mickley and Craig Redding, moved the diorama from its former location at the Artillery Ridge Campgrounds on Taneytown Road a mile into town.

Its new home is in a building located at 241 Steinwehr Avenue at Queen Street, a block west of the National Cemetery and adjacent to the American Civil War Wax Museum. The Diorama will occupy 800 square feet on a 40-foot by 22-foot specially designed platform on the first floor.

"It's coming along. Soon as the platform is finished I can start the wiring," Jack Powell, a Gettysburg master craftsman and woodworker, said, as the project was underway. Mike Nicholson, who worked on setting the diorama in place when it first came to Artillery Ridge, was prying at seams hoping to keep the displays as intact as possible to make it easier to rebuild.

The overall diorama room is 2,465 square feet. Vignettes of different scenes have already been installed in niches in the walls. Michelle Kralik, Jim's wife, completed painting and restoration work on many of the vignettes. It is a difficult task since they had to be turned upside down to glue scenery and figures into place.

MAKING THE MOVE

"The Diorama gives you an overview of all three days of the battle through an exciting light and sound show," Jim said. Moving the battle was a massive undertaking. When the original panels were bought from Jim Dougherty in Three Rivers, Michigan, a specially configured semi-trailer was used to transport it. That was 14 years ago. Since then one third more has been added to the diorama and the scenes have been enhanced. Each building, each sequence of battle, as it unfolded on July 1-3, 1863, is lighted by a computer-controlled system as the narrative unfolds.

Jack Powell had to cut thousands of electrical wires under the original installation so that the panels could be separated. It was not an easy task to disassemble the diorama. Each panel is connected to others by scenery and action on the field making it seamless. Railings and foundations had to be removed or sawed through. More than once Jack had to skid along on an auto mechanic's creeper to use his Sawsall to get the right cut so as not to damage buildings.

"You're right at the church in Gettysburg," Ray Starner, Artillery Ridge Manager, would caution. Jack would push a plastic marker up through the Diorama from the bottom. "You knocked over the schoolhouse," Ray called under the display and leaned far over to pick it up.

THE DIORAMA'S NEW HOME

The new location on Steinwehr Ave-



SCALED SCENE: A new vignette of an encampment that accompanies the Gettysburg diorama. MYRIAM MORAN

nue served Gettysburg as the Prince of Peace religious museum then as the Colt Firearms Museum and, finally, before the partners bought it, the building was used as Patriot Point. It is the office of the Association of Licensed Battlefield Guides. With massive wooden girders peaking up at the entrance, the building dominates the landscape.

"We believe this is going to be a very important addition to Steinwehr Avenue. It will have the ability to provide knowledge of the battle, a learning experience. In the near future we plan a family entertainment center in the basement," Jim said. Jim has been a licensed Battlefield Guide for almost 25 years.

Todd and Craig grew up and went to school in Gettysburg. They were friends in school, graduating from Gettysburg High together in 1990. "I've had a tax number since I was 12 years old," Todd said, smiling. He was moving sections of railing into the diorama room through their souvenir shop.

"When we became partners I was about 16," Craig Redding said. The two young entrepreneurs operated sports memorabilia stores in Gettysburg.

"We had as many as five stores at one time," Todd said. "That's how we met Jim. He would come into our store and buy baseball cards," he added.

Their enthusiasm was catching. It is a family undertaking. Todd's parents work for them. His daughter is coming on board. Michelle Kralik is doing the art restoration. With it all, a labor of love is bringing an overview of the three-day battle closer to

where people will start their journey of discovery.

"This will be one of the first things people that come to Gettysburg will visit to get an overview of the battlefield," Craig said.

The project is located perfectly to fit in with many improvements that are planned for the area. Nov. 19, Remembrance Day in Gettysburg, will mark a major rejuvenation of Steinwehr Avenue. Todd is President of the Steinwehr Business Association.

"We formed a Business Improvement District on Steinwehr Avenue. The goal is to bring more business to this street. We are forming a website and we are going to advertise," said Todd. "The Improvement District has \$110,000 from assessments and just received a \$2.5 million dollar grant from PENN-DOT for street improvement and Street Scapes. The street improvement work will start right after Remembrance Day this year," he explained.

MAKING HISTORY FUN

"We are going to make it stimulating. It will be a joy to look at this place. In the lobby we'll have a cavalry horse and cavalryman. People will want to come in and enjoy the setting," Jim said.

"People are going to enjoy learning. A lot of school groups find history boring. We want to bring an exciting aspect to history. We will have a party room downstairs with miniature golf. It will be a nighttime activity in summer," Todd said. "One of our businesses organizes ghost tours. Thousands of people come through and take ghost tours in town. There is a need for more

nighttime activity apart from going to the movies. The entertainment center downstairs will offer families something to do at night." Todd was enthusiastic.

It is a major undertaking. Each detailed panel in HO scale (popular model train scale in which 0.14 inch represents one actual foot) is crowded with armies on the field and artillery pieces lined up at fence posts and behind rocks. It is a miniature rendition of the Bat-

tle of Gettysburg in minute detail. Taking it apart, restoring and refurbishing it was painstaking and time consuming.

Everyone concerned with the project was enthusiastic knowing that the new setting will offer visitors to Gettysburg a new opportunity to participate in history that changed the fate of the United States and, thus, the world.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: To



SETTLING IN: The diorama's new home at 241 Steinwehr Avenue at Queen Street is near the National Cemetery and the Civil War Wax Museum in Gettysburg. MYRIAM MORAN



WHERE TO PUT THE TREES? Michele Kralik puts finishing touches on a vignette of the Gettysburg diorama. MYRIAM MORAN

receive free information, brochures, and booklets about Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, contact their visitors bureau at 1-800-337-5015, or on the web at www.gettysburgtravel.com. To receive information about the Gettysburg Diorama call 717-334-6408 or visit their website at www.gettysburgdiorama.com

Dr. John Christopher Fine is the author of 24 books on a variety of subjects. His articles and photography appear in major magazines and newspapers in the U.S. and Europe.



THE GETTYSBURG DIORAMA: A scene from the old diorama before the move began. MYRIAM MORAN



WITH THE GREATEST CARE: Ray Starner and Jack Powell work carefully to dismantle the diorama. MYRIAM MORAN

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Quiz #271

BIG CITY, SMALL NATIONS: New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg runs a city of approximately eight million people. There are 93 nations with a population of more than eight million—and more than 100 with less than eight million. From the list below, which nations have more than eight million people, and which fewer?

Argentina	Honduras	Paraguay
Australia	New Zealand	Sweden
Guatemala	Norway	Switzerland

Read The Epoch Times next week for the answer!

Answer for Quiz #270

LARGE LAKES: Name the state in which each of the following lakes are located.

Great Salt Lake, UTAH;	Mille Lacs Lake, MINNESOTA;
Lake Okeechobee, FLORIDA;	Salton Sea, CALIFORNIA
Lake Pontchartrain, LOUISIANA;	