

VISITOR ATTRACTION CASE STUDY

CYCLORAMA EXHIBIT - ATLANTA HISTORY CENTER

ATLANTA, GA





DIGITAL PROJECTION BRINGS THE PAST TO LIFE AT ATLANTA HISTORY CENTER

For historians, researching the past and finding ties to the present is a cherished hobby, job, and duty. This is especially important when dealing with one-of-a-kind artifacts from critical moments in history. For the proud city of Atlanta, understanding and experiencing its past is not just for tourism; it is an integral part of the city's identity and community. So, when the Atlanta History Center sought to create an engaging, larger-than-life experience for their gigantic Cyclorama exhibit, they relied on Digital Projection to tell the story of this precious painting and lead visitors on a journey back through time.

Founded in 1926 to preserve and study the history of the city, the Atlanta Historical Society has spent decades collecting, researching, and publishing information about Atlanta and the surrounding areas. What began as a small, archival-focused group of historians, has now grown into one of the largest local history museums in the country; the Atlanta History Center – hosting exhibitions on the Civil War, Civil Rights Movement, literary masterpieces from Atlanta-born authors, and Native American culture. With four historic houses, 33 acres of curated gardens, and a multitude of wide-ranging programs and displays, it is one of the must-see tourist destinations in Atlanta. One of their key exhibits is the enormous and jaw-dropping Cyclorama.



A HISTORIC MOMENT ON A MASSIVE SCALE

Originally created in 1886, the 49ft tall by 371ft wide panoramic painting depicts the famous Battle of Atlanta; a critical moment in the Civil War. Complete with lifelike 3-dimensional statues and elements, the full-color illusion is designed to transport the viewer onto the historic battlefield. Over its 133-year lifespan, the colossal painting has gone through revisions to the canvas' content (since restored) and multiple display venues before finally coming to rest in the Atlanta History Center. With such a storied past, the AHC wanted to create an exhibit that would not only tell the story of the painting and how it became an artifact, but also the 'big picture' of the Atlanta Campaign and its importance in both local and national history.



“The painting depicts an important moment in the context of American history. Had the South won at Atlanta, Lincoln could have lost his reelection – the nation’s appetite for the war was dwindling, and this moment could have ended the war in a stalemate. We wanted to portray that importance on a scale that would complement the piece.”

- Jackson McQuigg, Vice President of Properties, Atlanta History Center

To put this painting into the broader perspective of American history, the AHC developed a companion exhibition – complete with related historical pieces, and a large-scale film by Cortina Productions that tells stories of people impacted by the battle. To implement the film, they reached out to the Atlanta-based AV design specialists at CEI.



A COMPLEX DESIGN FOR A ONE-OF-A-KIND EXPERIENCE

Known for being an excellent design-build AV integrator and contractor at the national level, CEI strove to bring premier level quality to this hometown venue. Val Dempsey, President of CEI, describes this project in saying, "When we first saw the size and scale of the painting, we knew this was a one-of-a-kind project. Then, when the AHC explained that it was important that we use Atlanta-based companies, we started thinking of ways to make the experience truly unique and memorable."

CEI's design called for a seamless, 160-degree display projected directly onto the canvas. This would allow the final solution to balance the sheer size of the painting, while fitting the projected content into one field of view that visitors could easily enjoy. Dempsey explains this challenge in stating, "This design called for a complex 5 projector image displaying on a surface that curves in 2 directions, with no 2 distances from the lenses exactly the same." To accomplish this task, CEI integrated Digital Projection's popular HIGHlite LASER II projectors.

"We needed projectors that were bright enough to overcome the painted elements, but also with exceptional warp and edge-blending capabilities to get this right. We felt that Digital Projection would have the best product and the best support. DP's engineers were instrumental in helping with the design, testing, and implementation."

- Val Dempsey, President of CEI





TAKING VISITORS BACK THROUGH TIME

Augmented by 16.1 channel surround sound performance grade audio, multi-level lighting, and A/V control systems, the HIGHlite LASER II projectors transform the 133-year-old painting into a vibrant and engaging 12-minute show. Using historical imagery and re-enacted battle sequences, the movie guides visitors through the remarkable story of the painting, the fleeting entertainment sensation of cycloramas, and examines the role movies and visual entertainment have had on shaping perspectives, memory, myth, and interpretations of the Civil War. Following each show, the HIGHlite units project modern day locations onto the landscape of the battle – offering guests an intimate perspective of how this event resonates with present-day Atlanta. “I’ve seen people gasp when they realize that the battle was fought right in the middle of the city, often at places they’ve been to. They see important landmarks for the city and really get a sense of wonder at what it would have been like”, says McQuigg.

The reaction to the new Cyclorama experience has been overwhelmingly positive for both the AHC and their guests. “The show and painting blend together seamlessly – the projectors really add to the importance and effect of the artifact. It’s quite a moving experience,” says McQuigg. Dempsey echoes this statement in saying, “The feedback we’ve gotten has been exceptional with everyone being blown away by the presentation. It’s truly an awesome AV experience.” With only 4 Cycloramas still in existence in the western hemisphere, this exhibit is truly one-of-a-kind, and an important piece of cultural history for the city of Atlanta.



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You can get a detailed look at all of the Atlanta History Center's exhibits and programs at their website: www.atlantahistorycenter.com
See more information on CEI's impressive installations and services at their website: www.ceiav.com