



The Battle of Shiloh Cyclorama: A Biased Commemoration

Rachel Stephens

Note: *Montage* articles, and the images contained therein, are for educational use only.

1. The use of the word Northern in this essay will refer geographically to the states that remained in the Union during the Civil War, roughly those areas north of the Mason-Dixon line. Consequently, the South will be used to designate the Confederate States.

In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, cyclorama battle paintings became an enormously popular means of memorializing the American Civil War. Dozens of these monumental works were created and exhibited to thousands of spectators in the nation's Northern and Midwestern cities. In an era before cinema the spectacle and realism of these paintings forced viewers to confront the realities of the war. One such panorama depicting the Battle of Shiloh, one of the war's bloodiest conflicts, exhibited the events of the battle in an especially detailed manner (see fig. 1). Although its cultural value as a work of art was generally ignored by the press and public due to its enormous popular appeal, its visual arrangement actually spoke volumes about regional animosities in the late nineteenth century. In its specific details as well as in a broader historical context, the Shiloh Panorama clearly exhibits a Northern bias and therefore announces that even though America had been legally reunited for twenty years, regional Civil War emotions were still prevalent.

The panorama of the Battle of Shiloh glorifies the Union's victory, and diminishes the Confederate troops' equally important role in the battle. The vast majority, if not all of the Civil War panoramas were partial toward the Union. In addition to the Shiloh Cyclorama, for example, two other major Civil War panoramas depicting the Battles of Gettysburg and Atlanta also demonstrate this trend and all of the major Civil War panoramas depicted battles that were won by the Union. They were also all designed for northern cities—the Shiloh panorama was specifically made for Chicago and subsequently traveled to the nation's capital.¹ The choice to depict the Battle of Shiloh is significant because it represents not only a campaign that the Union won over the Confederate States, but also a decisive encounter in which the South expected to be victorious. In addition to clear visual examples that mark the Shiloh painting as an explicit celebration of a Northern victory, a great deal of political propaganda also supports this notion of bias. Because the North won



Fig. 1: Theophile Poilpot, “Cyclorama of the Battle of Shiloh (detail),” 1885, oil on canvas, 4800 x 700 inches. No longer extant.

the war and thus preserved the Union of the United States, these visual celebrations of the victorious Federals seem logical; however it is surprising that a generation after the war ended, during the cycloramas’ heyday, popular sentiment still appears to have been biased. Because of the popularity of the Shiloh work, a closer look at its imagery reveals that a partiality toward the Northern effort dominated artistic and public taste and the Confederates were frequently denigrated.

Due to their intense use of realistic detail, Civil War panorama paintings have often been seen more as historical documentation than as fine art. In fact, the Shiloh panorama was celebrated in the late nineteenth century expressly for its high degree of realism – rather than as a marvel of artistic creation. For example, an advertisement from the *Chicago Tribune* claimed that it was “the most realistic and truthful battle scene ever exhibited” (see fig 2).² After the 1830s cycloramas often had actual objects placed in front of the painted canvas to further enhance their illusions. For example, in Paul Philippoteaux’s Battle of

2. *Chicago Tribune* Aug 2, 1885.

3. *Boston Journal*, Dec. 1884. A collection of period articles about the Gettysburg cyclorama in Boston are reprinted in Dean S. Thomas, *The Gettysburg Cyclorama: A Portrayal of the High Tide of the Confederacy* (Gettysburg, PA: Thomas Publications, 1989), 21.

4. *Sunday Herald*, Dec 21, 1884, from Thomas, 23.

5. Thomas, 17.

6. For example, the only art historical resource that even mentions the Shiloh panorama is Harold Holzer and Mark Neely's volume, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: The Civil War in Art* (New York: Orion Books, 1993).

Gettysburg panorama, soil and grass were built up in front of the painting as well as trees, wheat, stone fences, cannons, and various military paraphernalia. The realism of the works not only added entertainment value, but made the fictitious visual message seem like fact to the common viewer. The artists' efforts in combining flat canvas and three-dimensional objects were successful, and the realistic effect of the works was repeatedly noted in the media. For example, the *Boston Journal* announced that, "the atmosphere [was] remarkably like nature...It is quite impossible to distinguish a painted cannon from an actual one...The extreme effect of realism is prominent in the painting of the foreground."³ In other words, the addition of real objects served to enhance the realism of the painting. Another article in the *Chicago Sunday Herald* reported that, "It is difficult, and in some places impossible to tell where the canvas leaves off and the artificial foreground begins."⁴ The artists conducted extensive research and field studies to make their cycloramas appear as naturalistic as possible. Philippoteaux also consulted with Union generals Hancock, Doubleday, Webb, and Howard for their input on the battle, even inviting them back to view it after it was assembled, to enable further revisions to improve its accuracy.⁵

This celebration of naturalistic detail might account for the overt lack of consideration of Civil War panoramas in art historical scholarship.⁶ However, despite its emphasis on realistic documentation, the Shiloh work does function as a history painting on many traditional and non-traditional levels. Most



Fig. 2: *Chicago Tribune* advertisement, "Panorama of the Battle of Shiloh," 1.5 in. x 2 in. August 2, 1885.

obviously, this was a painting on a grand scale. The canvas measured 400 by 50 feet, which was the traditional size for panorama paintings at the time. The work also portrays a significant event in United States history. But most importantly, it has a didactic and propagandistic purpose that is bound up with celebrating the northern victory and dismissing the role played by the Confederate soldiers.

Panoramas in the Late Nineteenth Century

Panoramas were first developed in Europe in the 1780s; the idea was patented in 1787 by Robert Barker, a portrait painter from Edinburgh whose first successful effort was a view of an English fleet. Barker's idea was to attempt to transport the audience to another time or place with a 360 degree view. The first panorama to be seen outside of England or Scotland, a portrayal of London and Westminster by the English Painter William Winstanley, was displayed in New York City in 1795.⁷ Early panoramas often depicted grand landscapes or cityscapes, such as Barker's 1796 view of the city of Edinburgh. Given their grandiose dimensions, however, they were ideal for historical subjects as well. After purchasing a ticket, a visitor to the panorama exhibitions would climb a dark stairwell before walking onto a well-lit platform, elevated twenty feet high, where they were overwhelmed by the huge painting. This lofty viewpoint was meant to locate the viewer's eye level at the painting's horizon line. By assaulting the visual senses, the huge paintings often produced an overwhelming effect in their viewers, inciting one to comment, "it is quite impossible to describe the effect which is received on first coming up out of the little passage into the midst of the picture. In short, one feels quite helpless and wondering in the midst of this new and extraordinary nature."⁸

Cycloramas were huge paintings on a cylindrical canvas displayed in a specially erected rotunda that their exhibition required. One such rotunda, built in Boston in 1884 expressly for the exhibition of one of Philippoteaux's four cycloramas of the Battle of Gettysburg, was so large that a member of the press surmised that it "could readily accommodate 20,000 persons."⁹ Because structures that were large enough to exhibit these enormous paintings were extremely expensive, the moving panorama was created in the 1820s. Rather than requiring a specially constructed building for exhibition, these works were wound from one spindle onto another across a stage so that the painting passed before a stationary audience. This type of panorama could be accommodated in existing town halls and auditoriums.¹⁰

7. Stephan Oettermann, *The Panorama: History of a Mass Medium* (New York: Zone Books, 1997), 313.

8. *Daily Transcript*, Dec 30, 1884. Article reprinted in Thomas, 22.

9. *The Sunday Herald* (Boston), Dec. 21, 1884. Reprinted in Thomas, 21.

10. The word cyclorama was coined in the 1830s to differentiate between the installed panoramas with the 360 degree view and the "moving panoramas." The words panorama and cyclorama may be used interchangeably to refer to the original immobile type, whose popularity re-emerged with the Civil War works of the 1880s.

The Shiloh Panorama

11. One of the others that he did was the Battle of Bull Run. This information on the panorama's history was provided by Holzer and Neely, as well as David Nevin, *The Road to Shiloh* (Alexandria, VA: Time-Life Books, 1983).

12. Nevin, 131.

13. *Ibid.*

14. After his death, Bennett's family donated most of his photographs to the Wisconsin Historical Society in Madison. The Shiloh pictures and glass plate negative are held in their archives. For further reading on Bennett see Betsy Reese, *The Bennett Story: The Life and Work of Henry Hamilton Bennett* (Wisconsin Dells: H.H. Bennett Studio, 1975). There is also a full-color chromolithograph located in the Chicago Historical Society taken directly from portions of the painting

The colossal Shiloh panorama was painted in 1885 by a fashionable French artist, Théophile Poilpot (1848-1915) along with twelve assistants. Poilpot specialized in panorama paintings of battles and had worked in Europe before coming to the United States, where he executed at least three realistic Civil War panoramas including the Shiloh work.¹¹ Poilpot went to great lengths to ensure the accuracy and realism of his work. First, he and his team traveled to Shiloh to photograph the battlefield. There he also researched period weapons and uniforms and interviewed hundreds of Shiloh veterans. Within the finished painting are the portraits of more than 2,000 actual Shiloh participants, copied from period *carte de visite* photographs.¹² Poilpot created the enormous painting on movable scaffolds in a studio before moving it to a specially constructed building on Michigan Avenue in Chicago. Like other panoramas, three dimensional objects were added to increase the realistic effect of the work. A plaster imitation of the Tennessee terrain was built up from the base of the canvas and lined with weapons, uniforms, shrubs and trees.¹³

The Civil War panorama painting industry was a lucrative operation and in 1887 Wisconsin photographer and Civil War veteran, H.H. Bennett, traveled to Chicago to photograph the Shiloh panorama, intending to sell copies of the pictures from his studio in the Wisconsin Dells. This was fortuitous because although hundreds of panoramas were created in the nineteenth century throughout the United States, only a small number have survived today because of their cumbersome size and fall from popularity in the early twentieth century. Unfortunately Poilpot's Shiloh Cyclorama was one of the many casualties. At some point after being exhibited in Chicago and Washington, D.C., the painting disappeared. Bennett's 4 x 4 inch stereographic black and white photographs are the only actual views of it that remain.¹⁴

The details in the cyclorama as glimpsed in Bennett's photos are incredibly naturalistic. Many of the soldiers are not engaged in hand to hand combat, but rather the majority of them are grouped in a front line that generally moves horizontally across the work, and they are poised and ready for battle. For the most part, the foreground of the painting depicts a barren landscape scattered with rocks or tree branches but surprisingly few dead or wounded troops. Throughout the middle ground are lines of men engaged in a variety of battle actions, more often holding their guns in both hands than actually firing. The men are almost portrait-like and the artist has included many distinctive details to differentiate them, thereby adding a humane element to

the realistic painting. For example, one man can be seen reaching into his pouch to pull out additional ammunition. The men's clothing and battle accoutrements are easily read, as seen in the canteens that swing from each soldier's neck. The background is as clearly detailed as the foreground, although the proportions are realistic, with larger figures appearing in the front. Throughout the background battles rage, men maneuver rows of cannons, and carriage ambulances remove the wounded from the field. Even though this is a wooded landscape, the area had been logged and stumps litter the scene.¹⁵ Both in the painting and the actual battle the activity of the battle stretched out for miles over the rolling Tennessee landscape that was variously covered by fields and wooded areas.

The Battle of Shiloh

By late 1861, the Civil War weighed heavily on the minds of Northerners and Southerners alike. The nations' citizens began realizing that the conflict between the Union and the Confederate states would be lengthy. In November, Federal forces began a large-scale invasion of the Southern Confederate-held railroad hub towns on the Cumberland, Tennessee, and Mississippi rivers that were seen as major keys to control of the South and West. In their attempt to gain control of Tennessee, General Ulysses S. Grant and his forces used the river systems as transportation for their flotilla of warfare. In this, the first year of the war, the climactic Federal campaign to control one such rail hub at Corinth, Mississippi brought Grant and his troops to the banks of the Tennessee River and resulted in the bloody battle of Shiloh in April 1862.

The Shiloh panorama attempted to realistically capture the unfolding of an important historical event, and the Battle of Shiloh marked a decisive moment in the Civil War.¹⁶ According to Captain L.B. Crooker of the 55th Illinois infantry, after the Battle of Shiloh, "all sentimental talk of an easy conquest ceased upon all sides."¹⁷ In March of 1862, after an important Union victory at Fort Donelson on the Cumberland River, Grant and his forces began a move toward Corinth, Mississippi to try to capture the town. In the third week of March, Grant halted his troops at Pittsburgh Landing in southwest Tennessee, twenty-two miles northeast and upstream from Corinth to await the arrival of 55,000 of Don Carlos Buell's troops, who had occupied Nashville and were marching the one hundred twenty-two miles to Pittsburgh Landing to join Grant's troops before advancing toward Corinth to battle with the Confederates. Grant and his second in command, General William Tecumseh Sherman, had

15. Jay Luvaas, Stephen Bowman, and Leonard Fullenkamp, eds. *Guide to the Battle of Shiloh* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1996).

16. There is an indefatigable amount of information available about the Battle of Shiloh. Many sources have been consulted to create this distilled recounting of the battle, in addition to the volume edited by Luvaas, Bowman and Fullenkamp and that of Nevin, including: *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, vol 1 (New York: The Century Co, 1884), Joseph W. Rich, *The Battle of Shiloh* (Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1911), James Arnold, *Shiloh 1862: The Death of Innocence* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004).

17. Lucien B. Crooker, *Manual of the Panorama of battle of Shiloh, Michigan Avenue, Between Madison and Monroe Streets, Chicago* (Chicago: A.T. Andreas, 1885), 8.

18. Nevin, 147.

chosen to halt at Pittsburgh Landing—a high, rough plateau that overlooked the Tennessee River—because they saw it as an easily defensible position. Grant and Sherman did not anticipate a Confederate attack before they reached Corinth and had taken very few defensive precautions as they camped by the river; their regiments sprawled across the plateau for several miles awaiting Buell's reinforcements.

After hearing of Grant's position at Pittsburgh landing, Confederate general, Albert Sydney Johnston, began organizing 40,000 troops at Corinth to advance upon the Federals from behind before their reinforcements could join them, knowing that once Buell's troops arrived from Nashville, the Confederate troops would be outnumbered two to one. However, their progress into Tennessee was slowed by two days of torrential rain. Finally, at dawn on Sunday, April 6, 1862 the Federals found themselves under a large-scale surprise attack and in a vulnerable defensive position. All day the long battle raged, with Confederates charging and the Federalists trying to hold their ground. Because of their position, the Confederates had a clear advantage and backed the Union troops up to the Tennessee River, but due to their poor organization and strategy, the Yankees held them off longer than expected.

By afternoon on the first day of battle, the Union soldiers were nearly surrounded by the Confederates. By dusk the Confederates were on the verge of total victory and after more than twelve long hours of fighting, General P.T. Beauregard, who had taken Southern command after Johnston's death, paused the Confederate attack. He sent a wire message to Confederate president, Jefferson Davis, announcing a complete victory, saying that he intended to "finish [Grant] up in the morning."¹⁸ The bloodied landscape was littered with dead, dying, and wounded soldiers who had been left behind as troops continued fighting. As scores of wounded men dragged themselves to a nearby pond to drink and clean their faces, their blood turned the water red and the pond was subsequently named Bloody Pond.

As anguished men lay abandoned, many taken for dead, Grant's depleted army began secretly receiving thousands of fresh, much-needed reinforcements from Nashville throughout the night. Union soldiers filed onto Pittsburgh Landing and prepared to attack the Confederates. Anticipating an easy victory, few of the Southern brigades were even organized for battle the next day, and the tide of the battle quickly turned. Grant's replenished army now doubled the worn-out Southern soldiers in numbers and made quick work of victory the following day. The rebels retreated to Corinth with their wounded in tow. In all, the U.S. government estimated that approximately 24,000 troops were killed in the Battle of Shiloh.

Although Poilpot's panorama of the Battle of Shiloh follows these accounts, it deemphasizes the actual horrors experienced by the battle's participants. In two days of battle the Confederates lost 27 percent of their men on the field and the reinforced Federalists lost 21 percent. However, in the cyclorama the majority of the soldiers are still alive, with very few fallen men actually depicted. Those that have lost their life do not appear gruesomely injured but rather peacefully sleeping. Sometimes the dead are even heroically depicted, particularly those of the Union. For example, in figure one a dead Union soldier appears in the glorified pose of a crucified man. This idea contrasts the gruesome battle stories that emerged from survivors of the Shiloh campaign. Perhaps the typical visitor to the exhibition was not prepared to face the actual gore of battle, or perhaps such horrific scenes had no place in this heroic depiction.

19. Dean, 24.

20. *Ibid.*, 22.

Although it is unknown if the press commented on the lack of gore in the Shiloh work, critics did notice the idealization of battle horrors in Philippoteaux's Gettysburg cyclorama. One writer noted, "it is restrained, moderate, and in really good taste, and therefore the expectation of possible horror and disgust with which many enter the building is quickly changed to a grave consideration of the nobler characteristics of a great battle."¹⁹ He went on to say, "the result [is] that the painting is truly valuable, not only as a means of amusement, but as a most instructive lesson with regard to a great battle."²⁰ Northern viewers of the Shiloh work probably also saw it as a "great battle" with many "noble characteristics," and even more so because the painting commemorated their own soldiers.

While Poilpot's cyclorama only hints at the actual horrors of the war, it does include some very touching moments and humane deeds. Certain portions seem more focused on the aid of fellow humans than the advance of battle. In one particular stretch of the painting, battle activity has been halted altogether and the scene is rich with people helping each other. This may be a more realistic portrayal of the day's battle than one might immediately realize because throughout the first long day activity was halted periodically to regroup and strategize. One scene shows two men supporting the weight of a third, potentially risking their lives to help him to safety. As a touching addition, four innocent drummer boys join a soldier checking on a fallen comrade. Several wagons drive off into the background, presumably taking the wounded to the field hospital. The battlefield was so littered with injured men that on the second day a tent hospital was set up directly on the field. In fact, this was the first American medical facility ever established on a field of war and set a major precedent for the future of dealing with the injured in

21. Nevin, 155..

combat.²¹ These scenes provide a visual moment of pause in the painting, and showing the men coming to each other's aid helps to further emphasize the humane aspects of the soldiers.

Although the panorama showed action from both the Federal and Confederate viewpoints, the aesthetic bias towards the Northern lines is notable. This is evident in the marked difference in the depiction of each unit's soldiers. The faces of the Union are usually visible and they appear controlled and alert or pensive and frightened. At the same time many of them also look staged or posed. The Confederate faces, on the other hand, are rarely visible, often looking down or overshadowed by their hats. Those that are shown are quite stylized with not nearly the amount of detail as the Union soldiers. This is generally the case unless the Confederate soldiers are lying dead, face up on the ground, in which case their faces are usually clear. This difference serves to personalize the Union soldier, while the Confederates seem unorganized and anonymous, unworthy of having their portraits painted, unless they are dead

Another difference between the depictions of the two sides can be demonstrated in the discrepancy in the numbers of horses of each side. The Confederates are rarely shown with mounted leaders. Throughout the panorama, riderless Confederate horses are shown wildly escaping the battle. In fact, there are no identifiable Confederate generals in the entire painting. Many more horses are pictured in the Union portions of the panorama; at least two or three are in every scene. Atop these horses, heroic and identifiable generals charge into battle, lead their troops, or talk strategy. In one scene, the Union leader, Captain Ramsey, rides triumphantly in from the right carrying important orders to two more mounted generals in the left of the scene. Another scene shows General Grant directing mounted leaders while the battle rages around them even though according to period battle descriptions his proximity to the actual battle was exaggerated, further glorifying his heroics. The inclusion of so many Union generals on horseback engaging in battlefield activity further serves to memorialize their battle heroics (no matter how far from the truth this actually was), and underscores the panorama's purpose of commemorating the Union leaders.

Another disparity between the representations of North and South can be seen in the battle flags. While several Union flags fly high throughout the painting, the only clear depiction of a Rebel flag is one that lies limp in the foreground (see fig. 3). This particular design was carried by a Louisiana brigade, one of many battle flags that represented the various Southern regiments. In his biography of his father, Colonel William Preston Johnston wrote, "the Confederates came on in motley garb varying from

the favorite gray and domestic 'butternut' to the blue of certain Louisiana regiments, which paid so dearly the penalty of doubtful colors. Over them were flags and pennons as various as their uniforms."²² Although impossible to tell from the photograph, the Confederate flag may be one of those three-dimensional objects placed in the painting's foreground. Regardless, this lone, limp flag blatantly contrasts the many elevated Union flags that are clearly seen throughout the work, which only helps to emphasize the glory of the North in this panorama and underscores the painting's bias.

Precedents for the political and propagandistic tenor of the Shiloh panorama can be seen in European models of the 1870s. At that time several French artists began producing paintings that commemorated heroic moments of French action in the Franco-Prussian War. Although in reality there had been few successful

22. Crooker, 5.



Fig. 3: Theophile Poilpot, "Cyclorama of the Battle of Shiloh (detail)," 1885, oil on canvas, 4800 x 700 inches. No longer extant (known through period photographs).

23. Robert Wernick, "Getting a glimpse of history from a grandstand seat," *Smithsonian* 16:5 (August 1985): 78.

24. Ralph Hyde, *Panoromania: The Art and Entertainment of the "All-Embracing" View* (London: Barbican Art Gallery, 1988), 169.

25. Wernick, 79.

26. *Ibid.*, 80.

French campaigns during the war, the panorama painters depicted many such moments of chivalry to help heal battered national pride.²³ The Germans soon followed suit, depicting heroic battle scenes of their own on an enormous scale. It was these panorama painters from both the French and German schools that were responsible for the earliest Civil War panoramas in the United States. Henri Félix Emmanuel Philippoteaux was one of these panorama painters working in Paris in the 1860s and 1870s.²⁴ His son Paul followed in his footsteps, and traveled to the United States in 1880 to paint four panoramas of the Battle of Gettysburg, on which his aging father collaborated.²⁵ Although all of the Civil War panoramas were praised for their realistic detail, which many certainly deemed believable, this 'realism' was clearly partial.

Although these details are difficult to see without the actual photographs and a magnifying glass, the chromolithograph based on the cyclorama makes the idea a little clearer (see fig. 4). This 1885 print—produced by the McCormick Harvesting company as an advertisement for their new mechanized harvester—directly copies portions of the painting and combines them into one cohesive scene. The Union forces occupy the right portion of the print, the Confederates the left. The Federals appear larger, more organized, and clearly visible, compared to the scattered chaos of the Confederates. In addition, several of the Union generals are reproduced in the right middle ground, and general Grant's grouping is an exact copy of the cyclorama.

Other Civil War panoramas also displayed their unabashed favor toward the Union. For example, in Paul Philippoteaux's 1884 Battle of Gettysburg panorama, he included a portrait of himself as a Union soldier, thereby making his personal allegiance clear. Although the circumstances surrounding the commission of the Shiloh work or unknown, the Battle of Atlanta cyclorama, which was created by a team of German artists, was originally commissioned to promote Union general, John A. Logan's campaign for the 1884 presidential nomination. In the panorama Logan is shown heroically riding up on a black stallion to replace a wounded Yankee general. Unfortunately he died before the Democratic convention, but the title of the painting remained "Logan's Great Battle."²⁶ In addition, the Battle of Atlanta panorama depicts one of the most dramatic Confederate defeats with 8,500 Southern casualties compared with 3,700 Northern deaths. The trend of showing important Confederate defeats also illustrates the biased predisposition of the paintings.

From opening day in the beginning of August 1885, the Shiloh Cyclorama's pro-Union allegiances were clear.²⁷ For a fifty



Fig. 4: McCormick Harvester Company, “Chromolithograph of the Battle of Shiloh Cyclorama,” 1886, oil on paper, 11 in. x 14 in. Chicago Historical Society, Chicago, IL.

cent admission price, visitors could be visually transported back to the Battle of Shiloh while hearing the battle described by a Union hero at Shiloh, Brigadier General Benjamin M. Prentiss. The Shiloh Panorama was especially politically charged, whether purposeful or coincidental, as the painting opened to the public a mere week after the death of General Grant. After a life lived in service to the nation, the impact of Grant’s death on the public was immense, and they read every imaginable detail surrounding his death, concerning everything from his last words and burial procession to his enduring legacy. Newspapers and magazines were saturated with the latest report on Grant for weeks before and after his death. The passing of this Civil War hero reinvigorated a sense of patriotic fervor for Americans and the Shiloh cyclorama offered a special tribute to Grant’s heroics in battle. In the painting, Grant is shown in the midst of the battlefield confidently directing his men. The press capitalized on the popularity of Grant’s name and used his heroics in the Battle of Shiloh as an advertising tool for the panorama. A line from the *Chicago*

27. Even though the generally held belief that it opened in July, based on my findings in the *Chicago Tribune*, I believe it opened on August 1.

28. Dean, 23.

29. *Chicago Tribune*, August 8, 1885.

30. Crooker, 9.

Tribune notes that “The battle of Shiloh panorama brings one into the very presence of Gen. Grant, his staff, and different parts of the field, such of his officers as McPherson, Rawlins, Prentiss, and Hurlbut.”²⁸ Another front-page advertisement describes the panorama as “General Grant’s First Great Battle in the Field.”²⁹ The ad was surrounded by a proliferation of articles about Grant, even including a route map of his funeral procession. This newspaper from more than two weeks after Grant’s death helps to illustrate how deeply the nation felt his passing. In addition, the front cover of the exhibition manual pictured the scene of General Grant and his staff. In light of the timing of the first exhibition of the Shiloh work, the understanding of the work as an overtly Northern memorial is made clear.

Interestingly, the manual that accompanied the exhibition of the Shiloh cyclorama did not give any attention to visual description of the actual panorama, seeming only to be interested in a “direct” reconstruction of the battle. In fact, it gave no information about the creation of the panorama at all, no mention of artists’ names or circumstances surrounding the creation of the impressive painting. Like all of the paintings’ visual details, which have already been discussed, this written recounting of the battle is also clearly biased toward the Union. The manual, like the panorama itself seems exclusively interested in historical reconstruction of the battle. For example it stated that “no adequate understanding of this battle can be had without an allusion to the topography of the field.”³⁰ This gives credence to the idea that the panorama functioned merely as a tool of historical understanding. The booklet included several advertisements and a lengthy and biased description of the actual battle written expressly for that purpose by Lucien B. Crooker, a captain of the 55th Illinois infantry at Shiloh. In the manual, he makes no attempt to hide his allegiance to the Union. In addition, when speaking of General Grant he says his “transcendent military genius finally led us to victory.” The number of casualties of Union troops is both exaggerated and lamented with no mention of Confederate losses, which makes it clear that this was a Northern painting, intended probably as a memorial to the heroics of the Union soldiers.

However, the Battle of Shiloh panorama denied the South any closure or commemoration of their soldiers and their deaths, while simultaneously heroicizing the Union’s efforts. It served to all but ignore the efforts of the Confederate soldiers even though, according to General Johnston’s son, “everyone who witnessed the Battle of Shiloh testified to the splendid valor of the Confederate army there, rarely equaled, never surpassed, on any field of war.”³¹ And while such an overt pictorial celebration of

the Confederacy would not have been prudent at a time when the United States was still trying to emotionally reunite, this explicit glorification of a victorious north probably did nothing to heal Southern wounds that in 1885 still ran very deep.

31. Johnston, 556.