MSS0461. Stereograph card collection finding aid

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Stereograph card collection

Title: Stereograph card collection
Collection No: MSS.461
Extent: 1 cubic foot
Inclusive Dates: 1874-1905, 1977

Abstract: The collection comprises stereograph cards and a stereoscope. The cards, predominantly from the United States, are of scenic and historic places, historic events, and for entertainment.

Access: Open to all researchers.
Language: English, German
Preferred Citation: Stereograph card collection, Special Collections Department, University Libraries, University of Memphis.

Publication date: 2021 July
Administrative history

Stereographs, an early form of three-dimensional photograph, were a major vehicle for popular education and entertainment in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Stereographs were also used for journalistic reporting on many of the current events of the period: parades, disasters, and political events. The Civil War and the Spanish-American War are also documented on stereocards with textual commentary. The stereograph, otherwise known as the stereogram, stereoptican, or stereo view, were two almost identical photographs placed on cardboard side by side, to be viewed with a stereoscope. When viewed through a stereoscope, the photograph appeared three-dimensional. The author Oliver Wendell Holmes invented an affordable stereo viewer for the American market.

Stereography, from the outset, was a commercial success. Entrepreneurs often re-used images without giving proper credit to the photographer. The cards were in such demand that many believed libraries devoted exclusively to stereographic images would have to be constructed. It was a democratic invention because the photographs reached across class lines, and were affordable even to the poor and lower middle class. Many displayed views of far-away lands, making the travel experience, through photography, available to the general population. Its affordability and availability made stereography a widespread phenomenon spanning over sixty years. They became a popular photographic medium in Europe in the mid-1800s, and through mass production methods became widely distributed in the United States by the 1880s. By the latter half of the 19th century, many towns had their own resident stereograph photographer, which means there were plenty of local subjects available for people with stereoscopes to go with their more exotic images. Stereographs reached their peak of popular distribution in the years 1902-1935 through the business efforts of such companies as the Keystone View Company and Underwood & Underwood.

Underwood & Underwood was established at Ottawa, Kansas in 1882. They eventually moved to New York City in 1891. They originally operated as distributors of stereocards of Eastern views to new markets in the West. In 1895 they began producing packaged sets of views with descriptions earmarked for the education market. The Keystone View Co. was formed in 1892 in Meadville, Penn. by B.L. Singley, a former salesman at Underwood & Underwood. This company became the major publisher of stereographs in the world after 1920. In 1898 they organized their highly successful Education Department which produced boxed sets for school instruction of images and descriptive text illustrating culture, industry, commerce and politics world-wide. Although the company hired its own professional photographers, they also purchased rights to other negatives including several series of Underwood and Underwood negatives in 1912. Orders for Keystone sets continued to be filled by the company as late as 1970.
Scope and contents

The collection comprises stereograph cards and a stereoscope. The cards are of scenic and historic places from all over the United States, including New York City, Niagara Falls, the White House and the mausoleum of President McKinley. They include photographs of the military parade which took place in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1887 to celebrate the centennial of the U.S. constitution (for information on the celebration see https://archive.org/stream/historyofcelebra02carsrich#page/n347/mode/2up). One interesting group is of Hot Springs, Arkansas, taken in 1886, while another documents the Mississippi River near Memphis around 1880. There are also cards which were produced for entertainment, either showing comic scenes or melodramas.

Subject terms

Hot Springs (Ark.)--Photographs.
Memphis (Tenn.)—Photographs.
Memphis Industrial Exposition—Photographs.
Niagara Falls (N.Y. and Ont.)--Photographs.
Philadelphia (Pa.)--History—19th century--Photographs.
Stereographs--1850-1910.
Waterfronts--Tennessee—Memphis—Photographs.
White House (Washington, D.C.)—Photographs.

Inventory

Box 1

Folder

Stereograph cards:

1 American Views: New York City:
   The Tombs
   Court House
American Views: Central Park, N.Y.: Oak Bridge.
Central Park, N.Y.: Arch Over Walk.
Standard Series, American Scenery: Residence of the Late A.T. Stewart (Cnr. 34th Street & 5th Avenue), New York.

Centennial Views: Philadelphia, PA.:
   Belmount Avenue looking North.
   Pump Annex, Machinery Hall.


Davis, Table Rock, Niagara Falls, Canada West.

New H Series: American Views:
   View at Niagara.
   Niagara in Winter.

Falls in winter. Possibly Niagara Falls.


Views of St. Louis & Vicinity: 76. Interior of Great Republic (Mississippi River steamer). Photographer: Boehl & Koenig, 104 North Fourth Street, St. Louis, Mo.

Views of Shaw’s Missouri Botanical Garden (tinted). Photographer: Boehl & Koenig, 104 North Fourth Street, St. Louis, Mo.:
   7. Residence of Mr. Henry Shaw.


Magnolia Blossoms.
P209. P-26391. Boats at the Wharves along the Mississippi River, Memphis, Tenn. Keystone View Company, Meadville, Pa. [The educational information on verso suggests this card was made many years after the original photograph was taken.]

5557a. Blessed Virgin Alter. Easter. St. Vincent’s Church, Los Angeles, Ca., 1903?

Universal Photo Art Co., C.H. Graves, Publisher, Philadelphia, Pa.:
Enfolded in the flag he loved, he lies in dreamless sleep. Interior of President
McKinley’s tomb, Canton, Ohio, May 30, 1902.


Views of Hot Springs, Ark., 1886. Photographer: Clary, Hot Springs:
Jail.
Mud Bath, Magnesia Springs, 1886.
Ozark Bath House
Rockafellow’s Bath House
Corn hole or foot bath
City of Siloam
Birds eye view of the valley
Big Iron Spring
Big Iron Bath House
Old Iron Spring, 1886
Bath Houses
Arsenic Spring
Arsenic Hotel

Military Day, Constitutional Centennial Celebration, Broad Street, Philadelphia, Pa., 1887 September 16 (3).

Unidentified woman.

German stereo cards:
Bilder aus dem Deutschen Leben/ Gems of German Life. Two women at a window.


Mid South Coliseum, Ringling Bros. Circus, 1977 June 22. People at a table selling posters.

Drama:
“Return of the Wanderer.” Man and two women beside gravestones.
“17. A healthy crowd” (tinted). Group of women with man buried in sand on a beach.
“18. The old, old story” (tinted). Man talking to seated woman.
Publisher: Webster & Albee, Rochester, NY:
2. “Bliss.” Couple asleep on couch with another couple in sleepwear
53. “We have both been here before.” Couple kissing on hammock.

14. “Mr. Jones Remove your hat.” Woman in bed speaking to man about to get into the bed.

279. “He won’t know it.” Woman searching trouser pockets while man sleeps.

“6. Hands! Hands! I wonder if …?”, 1901. Woman points to man with handprints on his back.

Publisher: George W. Griffith, Philadelphia, Pa., 1903. Distributed by Griffith & Griffith:

“2492. (4) All alone.” Woman seated on chair.

“2493. (5) Thinking of one far away.” Woman seated on floor leaning on chair with handkerchief.

“2494. (6) Sad news from the battlefield.” Woman seated on chair with newspaper dropped on the floor.

“2495. (7) “For my country I can e’en give up my Jack.”” Woman lying on the floor.

2496. (8) “Oh, Jack, not killed, but only wounded.” Woman reaching out to uniformed man with injured arm.


8 Memphis, Tennessee. Photographer: Bingham and Craver/Bingham and Hilliard:

People relaxing near reservoir with buildings of the waterworks near the Wolf River in background.

Levee view with steamboat “T.E. Eckert”.

Tug on Wolf River.

Steamboat “Rene Macready”.

Memphis riverfront with steamer “Oakland” and St. Louis and Mississippi Valley Transportation Company barges.

Memphis riverfront with steamers including “John Overton”.

Steamer “W.W. O’Neil” and barges.

Tugboat “James O’Connor” and barges, Mississippi River 6 miles above Memphis.

Quarantine station and National Board of Health River Service boat, Presidents Island.

Steamboat and river services barge.

Steamboat docked at quarantine station, Presidents Island.

Interior of Industrial Exposition Hall, Memphis.(2).

9 1. Underwood and Underwood, publishers, Works and Studios, “What a mighty power for good is a united nation” – President McKinley at Memphis, Tenn., 1901 (two versions). McKinley spoke in Court Square on April 30, 1901.


3. “14307. Main Street, Memphis, Tenn.” Photographed and published by B.W. Kilburn,
Littleton, N.H., 1901. On the right can be seen the Armstrong Furniture Company at 306-310 Main Street.

4. “No. 149 (3427) Steamer Thompson Dean at Memphis”. “American Scenery” series, no publisher or date. The Mississippi River side-wheel packet “Thompson Dean”, the second steamer of that name, was built in Cincinnati in 1872. Named for one of the boat’s owners, the “Thompson Dean” cost $180,000 to build and furnish. Considered one of the finest steamboats of its day, it received a gold medal at the Cincinnati Industrial Exposition. During the winter months, the “Thompson Dean” ran between St. Louis and New Orleans, while the rest of the year it traveled between Cincinnati and New Orleans. In 1882, the boat’s cabin and engines were transferred to a new hull, and it became the side-wheel packet “Will S. Hays”.

10 Memphis, Tennessee, 1904, Lynn C. Skeels, 807 Fine Arts Building, Chicago:
   1. “127, Group, Memphis, 1904.” Racetrack.
   3. “140, The levee, Memphis, 1904.”
   4. “142. Front Street, Memphis, 1904.” Looking north with Customs House at left.


Box 2 Holmes stereoscope, Underwood & Underwood, New York, Patented October 11, 1904.