

Keystone View Company

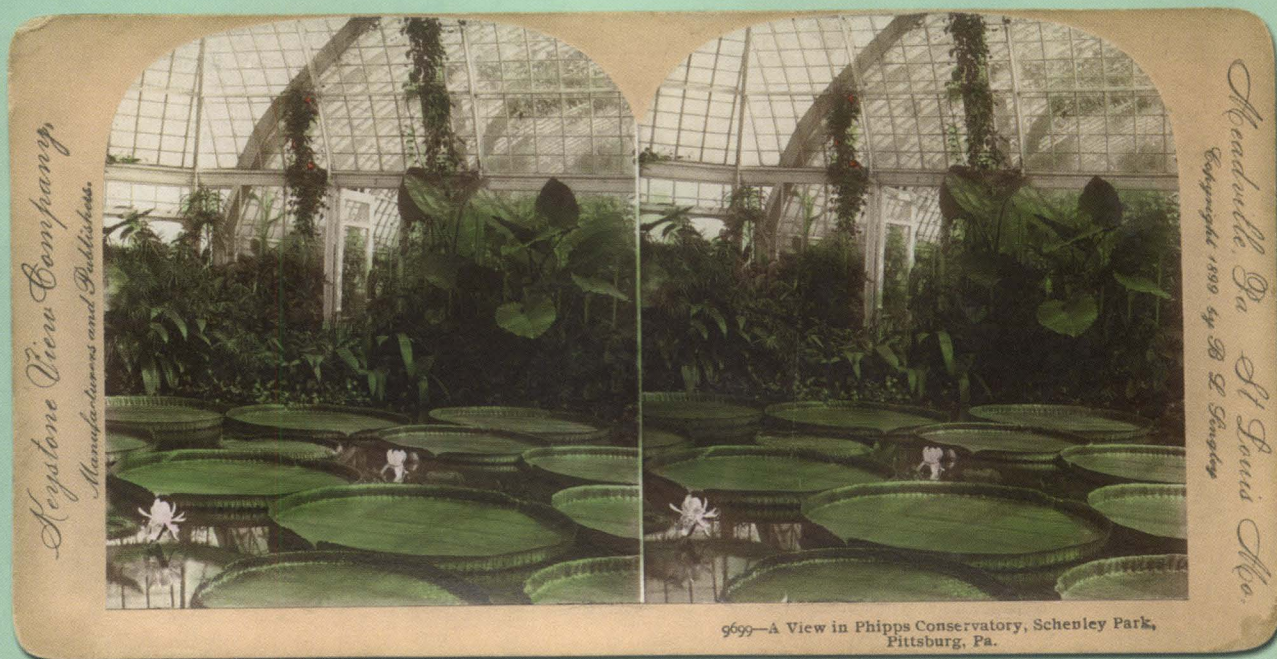


Photo Antiquities Museum of Photographic History



Photo Antiquities Museum of Photographic History



Purveyors of Fine Images

By Cassandra Vivian

One June morning in 1892, the enormous watershed of French Creek near Meadville reached flood stage. An amateur photographer named B. Lloyd Singley grabbed his cameras and headed for the disaster. Then he did something that would soon grow to consume the rest of his life: he sold his images to the public. Keystone View Company was born.

Singley, and dozens of entrepreneurs like him, was entering into a new world, the world of stereoviews: seeing the world in 3-D. Unlike most others, Singley succeeded. Through the development of lantern slides, stereographs, stereoscopes, projection equipment, and accessories, Keystone not only became the largest enterprise of its kind in the world; for decades, it was also the only stereograph establishment in existence.

Keystone was founded near the Singley home on Lincoln Avenue and remained in Meadville throughout its many decades in business. Singley took photos of the hills and woods of Pennsylvania and sold them door to door, eventually hiring salesmen for rural areas. Singley soon entered the stereo business and the company quickly expanded.

Keystone's rise to prominence was not built on Singley's photographic skills, but on his keen business sense and his uncompromising desire to get the best for his company and his customers, even if that meant hiring other photographers more skilled than himself. He acquired preeminent photographers, created superlative equipment, and strove to put the best product on the market for his customers. Singley was constantly looking for the finest quality; between 1892 and 1896, he changed the card mounting on his stereographs at least 10 times in the pursuit of perfection.

By 1905, Keystone was marketing more than 20,000 different images, and educating America through its "visual encyclopaedias." It had numerous departments: educational, woodworking (to make stereoscopes), lens grinding, sales, large photos,

The 1896 copyright notice on this card indicates that not only was it one of the first several thousand cards printed by Keystone, but also that it may be an image taken by B.L. Singley, founder of the company.

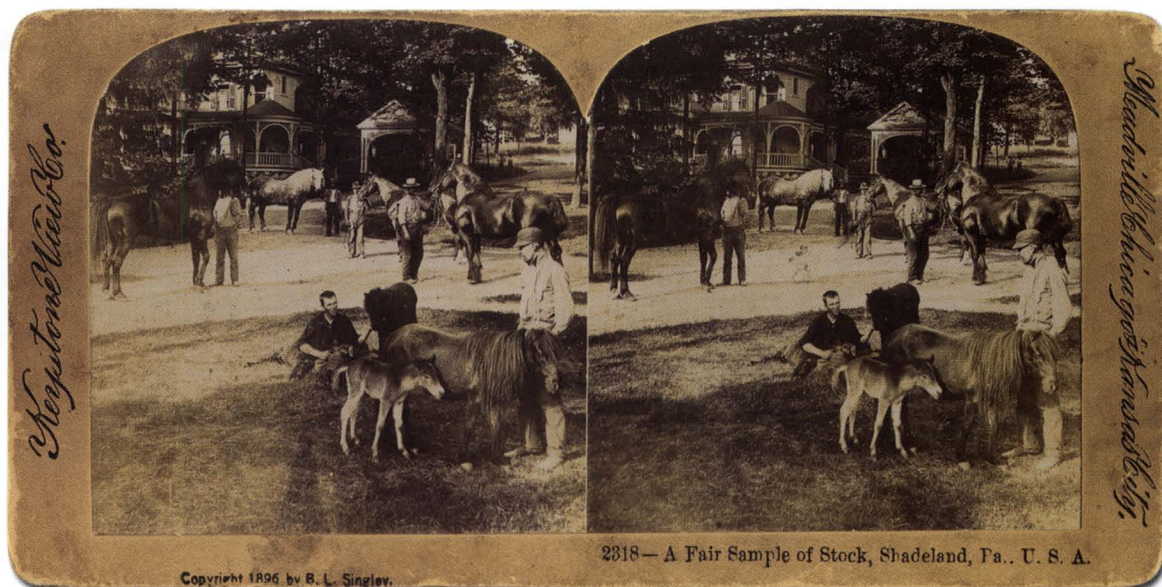
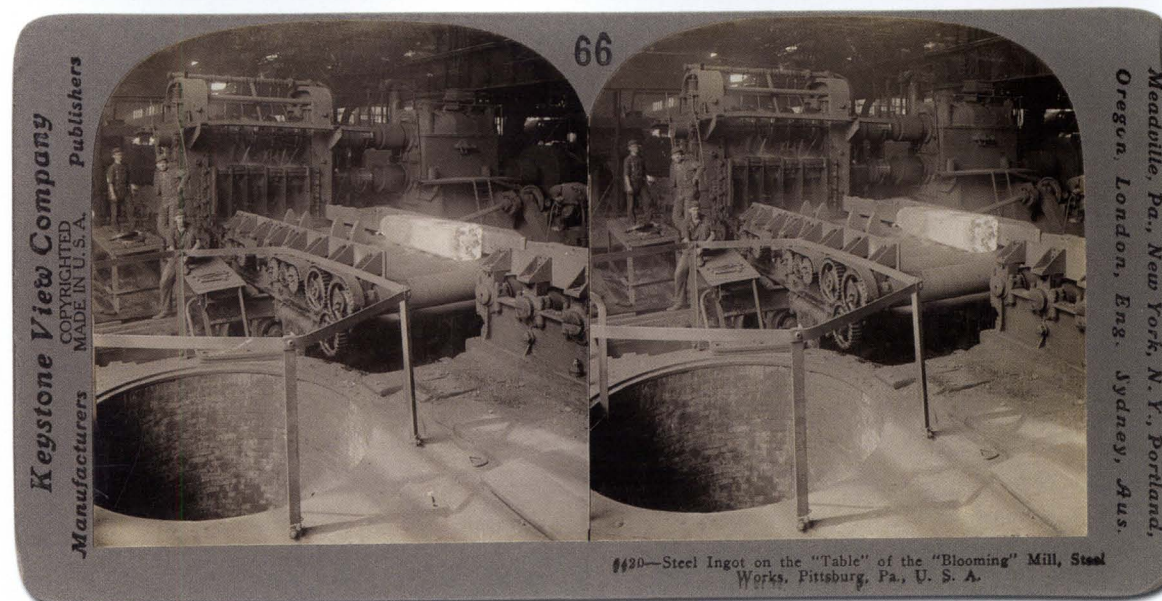


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HSMP Library & Archives stereocard collection



HSMP Library & Archives stereocard collection

and an office employing dozens of young ladies. Keystone opened offices in New York, St. Louis, San Francisco, Portland, Chicago, Toronto, London, Rio de Janeiro, and Tokyo. All were directed by the corporate headquarters in Meadville.

If you worked for the Keystone View Company around 1910, you may have walked into the office one day to pick up your assignment and be told you were to photograph all the houses in rural Pennsylvania, or Ohio, or West Virginia. Large format photos of farms and houses was one branch of the company. Those negatives have become a living history of rural life in Pennsylvania.

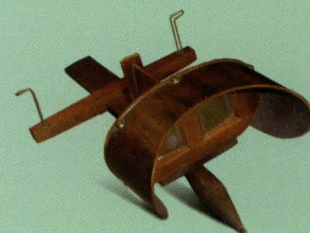
If you wanted a more exotic assignment, you could exchange your mission with a fellow photographer who was leaving for China to photograph the big cities, the little cities, the forbidden cities, the people in the fields, the children at play, the rich, the poor, the missionaries, and the tourists. You could have done the same with Egypt, the Holy Land, England, or Italy. If you wanted to stay in this hemisphere, you could ask to be assigned to film the construction of the Panama Canal. If you preferred to stay in the United States, you could ask for an assignment in the American southwest on a working ranch, in New York City taking photos of immigrants going through Ellis Island, or go south a few miles to Pittsburgh and shoot one of the many companies making steel. Singley's goal and Keystone's mission was that every place and every thing mankind did was to be documented, researched, and presented to the public.

Visually-saturated 21st-century Americans may find the Keystone accomplishment difficult to appreciate. Consider a world not only without digital cameras, videos, and the Internet, but without television or movies. By bringing the world into the living rooms of America, Keystone View Company became a leading innovator in both the educational and entertainment industries. They captured the Alaskan Gold Rush, the Spanish-American War, the Boer War, the Pan-American Exposition, the Boxer Rebellion, and much more.

In a 1905 article, the *Meadville Daily Messenger* recognized the challenges Keystone faced in documenting the world: "The business of collecting stereographic views is an intricate one," it explained, and then wove a tale of photographing wars, finding good foreign correspondents, and anticipating events before they happened so everything could be in place to record the event. "The difficulties of delivering these views in Meadville has been great," it continued, then explained how, for example, negatives from towns in Manchuria were transported to Meadville through a turn-of-the-century version of today's express mail.

Box Sets

Keystone began selling its slides in themed sets. One prominent set was its World War I collection. If photographing foreign places like Manchuria was a problem, photographing the war was almost impossible. Permission was denied until late 1918; once



Stereography

Stereography is viewing still photos in three dimensions, or 3-D, using a stereoscope to view specially-made stereoview cards. The viewers were traditionally made of mahogany, with lenses that adjusted for focusing. The cards, called stereographs, were recognizable by their side-by-side photos.

To make the cards, two photos of the same subject were taken by a special camera with two lenses. The resulting images are near-identical, but of course taken a few inches apart from each other, just as are human eyes. The photos were mounted on a card which was placed into the viewfinder of a stereoscope. A person peered through the eyepiece, protected by a small hood, and into the lives of the subjects. Each card was stamped with a number and a series and the name of the manufacturer. On the back of most cards was a description of the subject.

Many cards are curved top-to-bottom. This is not warpage but rather an intentional manufacturing technique.

Contemporary Stereoviews

By Anne Macaulay
Publications Intern

While the heyday of the stereoview phenomena occurred in the early 1900s, a small community of stereoview fans has held onto this method of creating 3-D images. Since the 1970s, organizations such as the National Stereoscopic Association (NSA) have members who buy, sell, and trade stereoviews. In July 2003, the NSA held its 29th annual National Stereoview Convention in Charleston, South Carolina, where nearly 1,000 enthusiasts gathered for trade shows, workshops, exhibits, and competitions.

Enthusiasts not only collect old stereocards, they also make new ones using the old technique of taking and mounting the photographs as well as adapting modern technologies such as computers and advances in color photography. At trade shows, awards are given for both antique collections and contemporary stereoviews.

The 4,000-member NSA is not the only group for collectors.

- The Photographic Society of America has a stereo division.
- Members of the Stereoscopic Society of America share portfolios via mail.
- The International Stereoscopic Union hosts an International Stereo Congress and has members in 32 counties.

For more information on contemporary stereocards, the people who create them, and links to other stereoview organizations, visit the NSA at www.stereoview.org

granted, the company sent famous photographer Andrew S. Iddings to the front. He shot thousands of images. Keystone joined these views with 1914–1916 views from Underwood & Underwood, another stereo business. Various size sets (30 – 400 cards) were sold from then until 1932.

The sets grew to as large as 1,350 pictures per theme. The need for such a huge inventory demanded more storage; space was leased in the Moore Building in Meadville. In England, it sold its sets under the name of The Fine-Art Photographers Publishers Company. Keystone became the largest business of its kind in the world, selling boxed sets of stereoviews for around \$30 – about \$300 today.

Another popular set was the World Tour series. A 300-card set was on the market by 1924, a 400-card set by 1925, a 1000-card set in 1930, and a 1,200-card set by 1931. Again, smaller sets were also available. The advisory board for this series included Carl Sandburg, and the series guidebook was written by travel lecturer Burton Holmes.

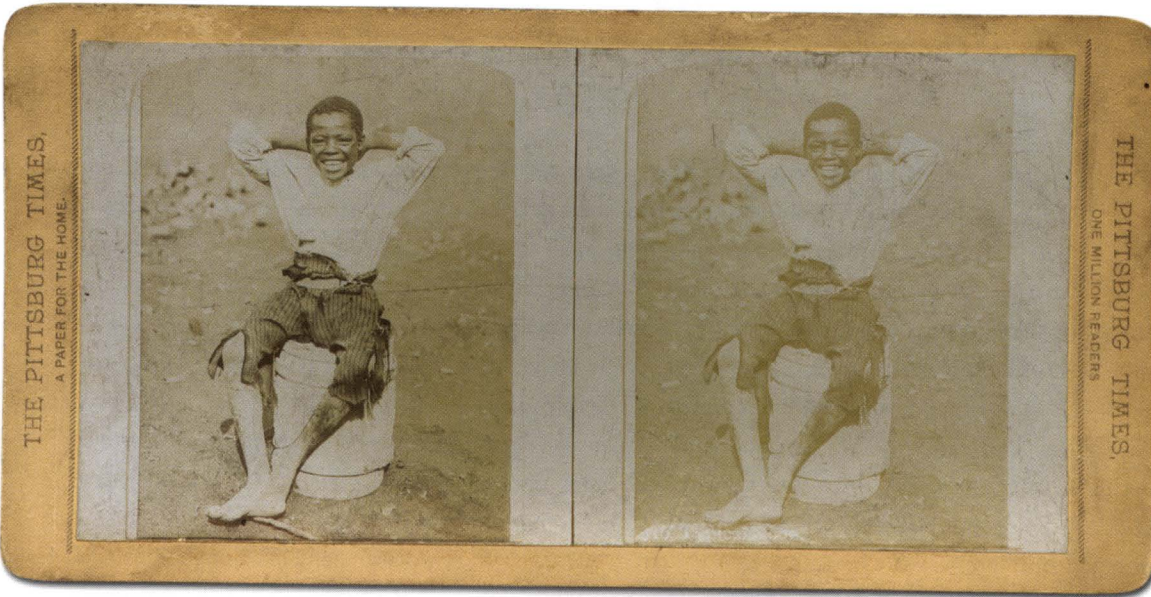
The Educational Department distributed its wares to school districts throughout the country. Keystone claimed that by 1922, its educational cards were in high schools in every American city with a population over 50,000. The sets covered almost every subject imaginable, including geography, technology, and history. Keystone also developed sets of 600 educational cards called the Keystone 600 which were put together by leading educators. The cards were accompanied by a book called the *Stereoscopic Encyclopedia*. The Keystone 600 grew into the Keystone 1000 by 1924.

In 1929, the company converted the former Meadville high school on Market Street to accommodate its entire operation. Other aspects of the company were prospering, too. Its reputation for fine optics created a new market. In the early 1930s, a stereophthalmic department was created.

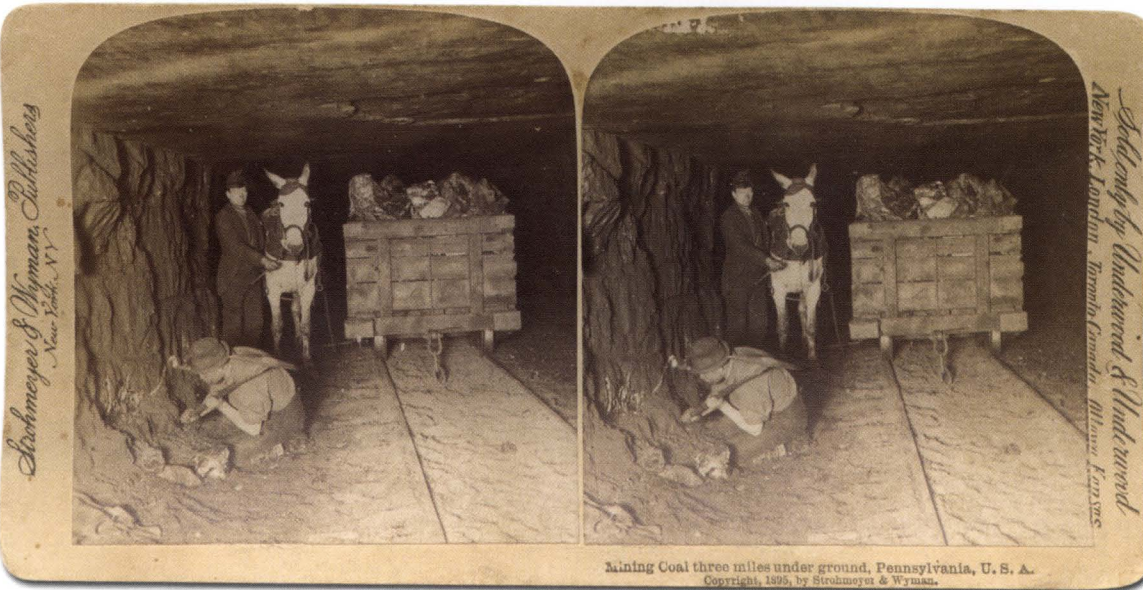
Keystone was not alone in the stereoscope business, but one by one, Keystone felled its competitors. It bought the negatives of other stereographers including H.C. White; James M. Davis; Berry, Kelly & Chadwick; and Graves. In 1910, Keystone and Underwood & Underwood of Ottawa, Kansas, were the sole survivors in the market. By 1920, Keystone made Underwood an offer it could not refuse and became the sole purveyor of stereographic magic. But its dominance would be short-lived.

By the late 1930s, with the advent of so many other types of visual aids both in entertainment and education, Keystone's market had diminished considerably. The company ceased regular production in the early 1950s but continued to sell its inventory and supply stereoview products to the ophthalmological, military, and drivers ed. industries. In 1963, the bulk of the collection was purchased from the heirs of the Keystone View Company by Glifford Mast of Davenport, Iowa; in 1977, it was donated to the California Museum of Photography at the University of California at Riverside. ☼

Cassandra Vivian is the author of *The National Road in Pennsylvania* and *Monessen: A Typical Steel Country Town* (both Arcadia Publishing), the founder and chairperson of the Greater Monessen Historical Society, a professional photographer, and a historian. She last wrote a two-part history of Italian Christmas food traditions for this magazine.



Views of African Americans, especially candid shots, are rare.



One of many Pennsylvania industries photographed by Keystone.



An image of the Johnstown Flood, 1889.



Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania in stereo

Between 1860 and 1885, there were perhaps thousands of photographers who went into the stereo business by photographing small towns across America. Pittsburgh, oddly, was not well-documented by any of the stereo companies. A photographer named C. Kneeland shot some of the earliest views (1865–1869). W.T. Purviance (1867–1870) recorded bridges and panoramas for the Pennsylvania Central Railroad. W.T. Stieren took some downtown Pittsburgh views in the 1870s. S.V. Albee captured the labor riots of 1877. Underwood (1904–1908) and Keystone (1923) covered the iron and steel industries.

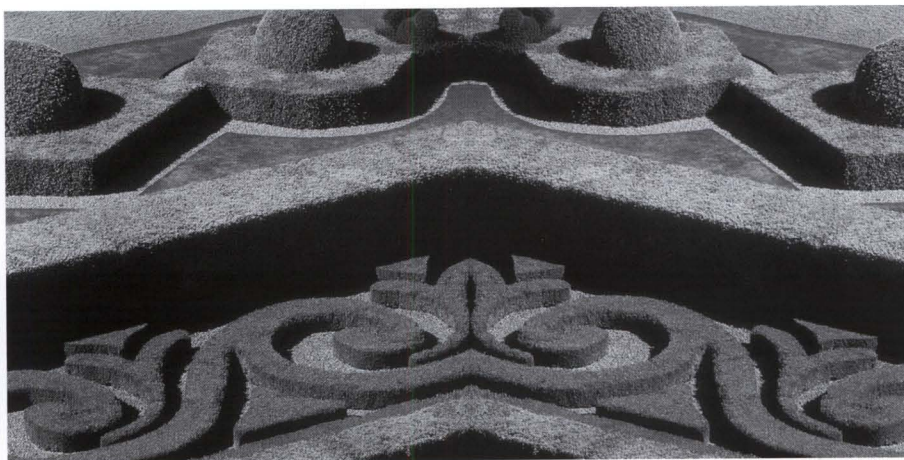
John A. Mather of Titusville, in business 1862 to 1895, photographed oil fields, producing thousands of negatives covering Petroleum Center, Pithole, Pleasantville, Tionesta, and Tidioute. Mather's images covered a 10 year period as the industry grew from infancy. Other photographers, like William H. Tipton, did Gettysburg, Lehigh, Bethlehem, and Philadelphia.

Here are Western Pennsylvania photographers that worked in stereo, as listed in William C. Darrah, *The World of Stereographs* (Gettysburg: W.C. Darrah, 1977).

N.H. and E.K. Abrams	Brownsville
F. Aeberli	Allegheny
S. Albee	Pittsburgh
J.S. Aunspach	Uniontown
J.F. Barker	Petroleum Center
W.M. Bashline	Titusville
J.L. Bowman	Mahanoy City
Bradley and Meacham	Greenville
R.M. Cargo	Allegheny
W.H. Cook	Greensburg
Copeland and Fleming	Pithole
T.W. Cowey	Canonsburg
Deming	Oil City
E.D. Evans	Titusville
S.M. Gillespie	Butler, New Castle
J.C. Goetschius	Titusville
G.M. Greene	Johnstown
S.S. Hall	Carbondale
W. Hile	Greensburg
O. Jarecki	Erie
N.G. Johnson	Erie
C. Kneeland	Pittsburgh
F.M. Lewis	Clarion
C.F. Lufkin	Titusville
J.C. Macurdy	Oil City
T.T. Mahan	Pittsburgh
J.A. Mather	Titusville
McClurg and Robinson	Pittsburgh
J.G. McPherson	McKeesport
J.P. Neiler	Sharon
A.W. Phipps	New Castle
W.T. Purviance	Pittsburgh
F. Robbins	Oil City
S.G. and T.W. Rogers	Carmichaels
S.W. Rothwell	Washington
T.D. Rust	Meadville
C.C. Schadle	Kittanning
B.L. Singley	Meadville
S.D. Wager	Erie
Weber Brothers	Erie
Young and Rogers	Washington

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THE RAILROAD WAR

—A T—
Pittsburgh, July 21-22, 1877.

The following list of Stereographs gives a complete View and History of the grounds burnt over:

- No. 1. Denny's Curve, opposite 33d street, outer end of the Fire.
- " 2. Opposite 32d and 31st street, looking down.
- " 3. " 30th " "
- " 4. " 29th " "
- " 5. Hill Side, opposite 28th street, where Citizens were shot.
- " 6. 28th street, and Upper Round House; Citizens shot here.
- " 7, 8 and 9. Interiors of Upper Round House.
- " 10. Lower Round House, bet. 26th & 27th sts., where Troops were besieged.
- " 11. Looking down Liberty Avenue, from 27th street; most of the fighting was done here on Saturday night.
- " 12 and 13. Views of Machine Shop, opposite 29th street, burning cars run in front of this to burn the Round House.
- " 14. Looking up 26th st., showing Gate where the Gatling Guns were placed.
- " 15. Yard occupied by Troops, between Round House and Paint Shop, looking down 26th street.
- " 16, 17 and 18. Interior of Lower Round House, where Troops were besieged.
- " 19. Interior of Paint Shop.
- " 20. Exterior and Interior of Carpenter Shop, showing retreat of Troops.
- " 21. Looking up the Track, opposite 25th street.
- " 22. Opposite 24th street, looking up towards Carpenter Shop.
- " 23. " 23d " " " "
- " 24. " 22d " " " up the track towards Transfer Depot.
- " 25. " 21st " " " " Water Tank.
- " 26. " 20th " " " " "
- " 27. " 17th " " " to 20th street.
- " 28. " 16th " " " "
- " 29. " 15th " " " "
- " 30. " 14th " " " "
- " 31. " 13th " " " "
- " 32. " 12th " " down the track switches, connecting with Pan-Handle R. R.
- " 33. Rear of Union Depot extended to this point.
- " 34. Opposite 12th street, looking up, ruins of Passenger Cars in Union Depot.
- " 35. Rear of Union Depot, with ruins of Gen'l. Sup't. Gardiner's Palace Car in the foreground.
- " 36. Union Depot, from 11th street, looking up.
- " 37. Elevator, cor. Liberty and Grant Streets, Pan-Handle Machine Shop in the rear.
- " 38. From Pan-Handle R. R., showing Washington street Bridge, Elevator and Union Depot.
- " 39. Pan-Handle Tunnel and rear of Office.
- " 40. " " R. R. Office on Seventh Avenue. Fire ended here.
- " 41. Cannon shot fired through stove pipe into locomotive, near sand box.
- " 42. Interior of upper Round House.
- " 43. The "Ham" that was stolen.
- " 44.

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Often a stereograph, such as the one above, will have printed information on the back, ranging from a list of cards in that set to detailed information about the picture on the front.

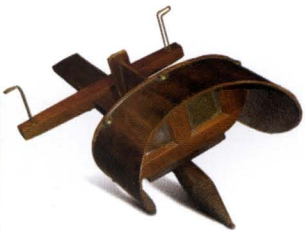


Photo Antiquities Museum

Photo Antiquities on Pittsburgh's North Side has thousands of stereocards; about 3,000 on display, others archived, and some for sale. Also on display are photographic viewing devices, including original stereocard viewers that can be used, and vintage cameras in a three-story atrium. They offer tours, educational programs for schools, presentations for civic groups, and Saturday programs for Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts to help them earn their photography badge. Their collection includes a Tour of the World 1,200-card set, a World War I set, and a hand-colored Butterfly set. Photo Antiquities, 531 East Ohio Street, is open 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday – Saturday.



Amanda Duryak Gillen

Kennywood Park

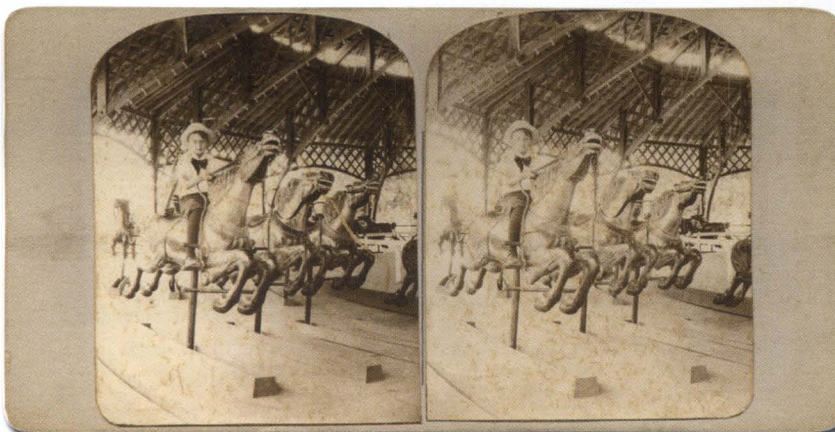


Photo Antiquities Museum of Photographic History

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3-D



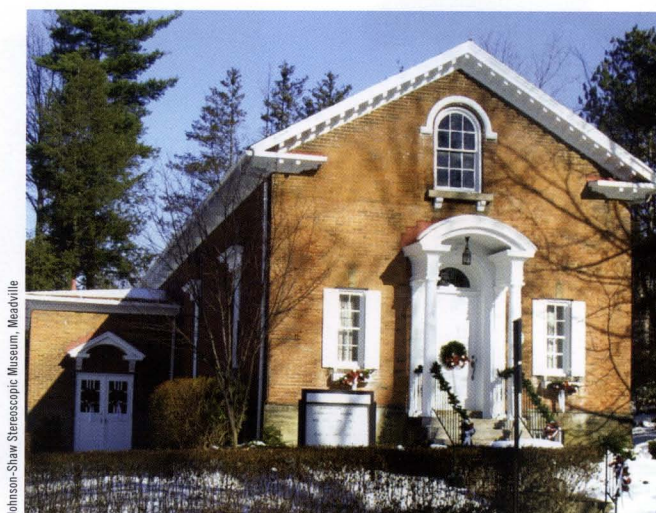
This hand-held lorgnette stereoscope with prismatic lenses is great for viewing both full-sized and reduced stereoview cards.

Pick up a viewer for \$3.50 in person at the History Center's Museum Shop or order from the Johnson-Shaw Stereoscopic Museum, 423 Chestnut Street, Meadville, PA 16335, (814) 333-4326 (add \$1 shipping).

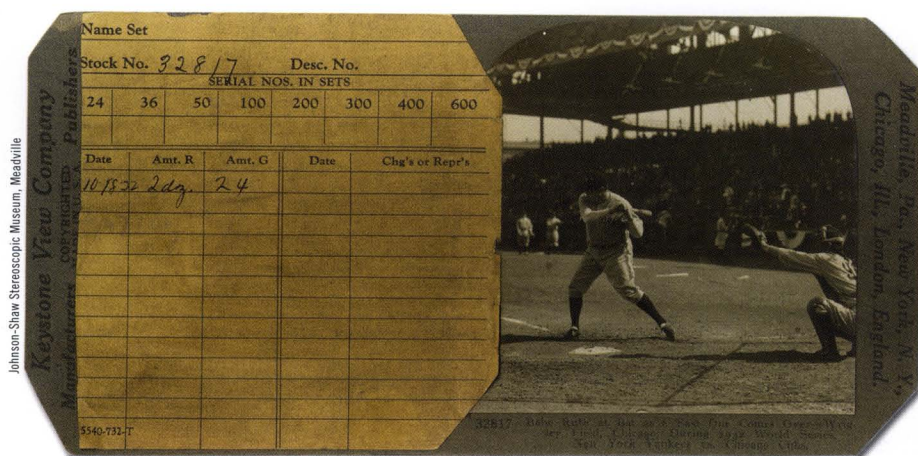
Johnson-Shaw Stereoscopic Museum

The Johnson-Shaw Stereoscopic Museum in Meadville explores the history and products of the Keystone View Company and related companies. The collection is comprised of the remainder of the original Keystone View Company inventory (outside of the glass negatives that went to the California Museum of Photography). It consists of some 100,000 vintage stereoviews and glass lantern slides as well as more than 25,000 publications and company documents. Display cases and a series of tableau scenes recount key elements of the industry. Original furniture from the Keystone factory and vintage clothing enhance the experience.

The museum is at 423 Chestnut Street, Meadville, PA 16335. To visit or inquire about volunteer opportunities, call (814) 333-4326 or visit www.johnsonshawmuseum.org for more information.



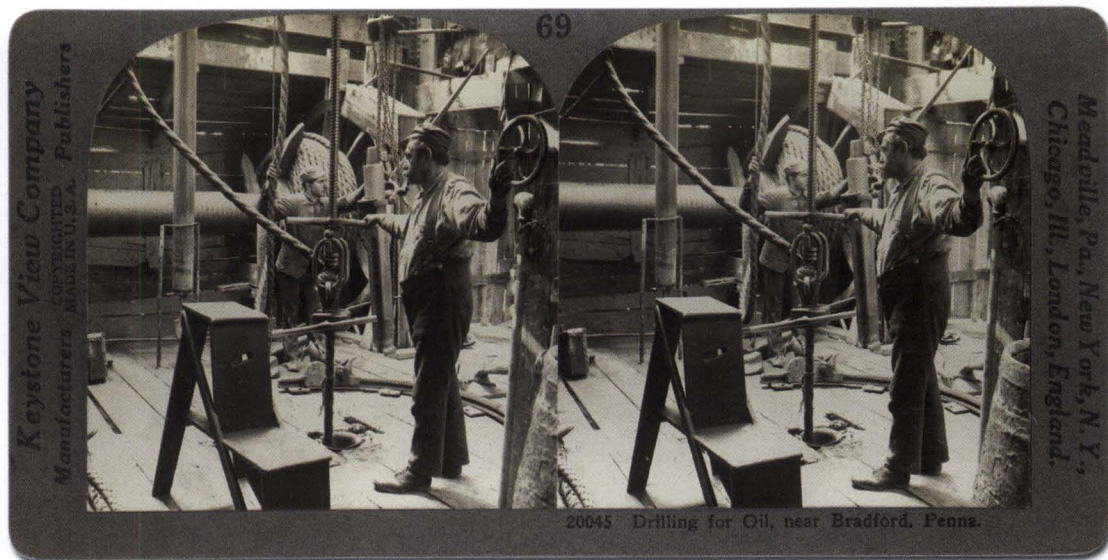
Johnson-Shaw Stereoscopic Museum, Meadville



The inventory slip and clipped corners of this 1922 Babe Ruth image mark it as a Keystone inventory card. The inventory slip indicates that only two dozen cards were printed, making it extremely rare.



The museum features mannequins at its numerous settings, pictured here on a modern stereocard.



Where are they now?

The stereocards of the Keystone View Company were sturdy and built to last. One can find them in almost pristine condition everywhere from eBay to antique shops to library special collections. This is not a comprehensive list, but some of the collections are:

- George Eastman House, an International Museum of Photography and Film created by Kodak, has among its collection of exquisite images a number of stereoviews from a number of companies. Visit www.geh.org/stereo.html or www.geh.org/fm/st08/htmlsrc/keyswwi_sld00001.html for samples of Keystone's World War I stereoviews
- The Library of Congress' American Memory Collections is an excellent place to find images. Visit <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/mdbquery.html> and type in the Keystone View Company or oil region of Pennsylvania and New York (mixed companies).
- The Oliver Wendell Holmes Stereoscopic Research Library of The National Stereoscopic Association has some images by Keystone in addition to other companies. (Oliver Wendell Holmes invented the hand stereoscope.) www.wvii.com/3dLibrary/keystone.htm
- The Cleveland State University Library has collected a number of stereoscopic images of Cleveland. <http://web.ulib.csuohio.edu/SpecColl/stereos/index.html>
- In Meadville, both Allegheny College Special Collections Library and the Crawford County Historical Society www.ccfls.org/historical have holdings related to the Keystone View Company.
- The Drake Well Museum in Titusville holds the John A. Mather Collection of about 1300 stereoviews. Mather also took stills and the museum has thousands of those too. www.drakewell.org
- The biggest stereoview collection can be found in the California Museum of Photography at the University of California, Riverside, which holds the original negatives of the Keystone View Company – over 200,000 different stereographic negatives taken all over the world between 1890 through 1935, and 100,000 black and white stereographic prints. The collection is called the Keystone-Mast Collection. www.cmp.ucr.edu/site/exhibitions/stereo
- If one wants to collect these sets, don't be surprised if the numbering is irregular. According to William C. Darrah's *The World of Stereographs*, the sets varied in content and even the numbers were not necessarily on the same image from set to set.