
Guide to the Keystone-Mast Collection, 1870-1963

Updated by UCR ARTSblock staff, UCR/California Museum of Photography; machine-readable finding aid created by Georg Burwick, 2009. Processed by UCR/California Museum of Photography staff; machine-readable finding aid created by Jennifer Frias, 2003

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Guide to the Keystone-Mast Collection, 1870-1963

UCR/California Museum of Photography University of California, Riverside

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Descriptive Summary

Title: Keystone-Mast Collection,

Date (inclusive): 1870-1963

Collection Number: 1996.0009

Creator: Keystone View Company

Extent: The physical collection consists of 250,000 stereoscopic glass-plate and film negatives and 100,000 vintage prints 42,027 digital items available online

Repository: UCR/California Museum of Photography

Riverside, California 92521

Abstract: UCR-California Museum of Photography faces the challenge of providing ready, useful and intellectual access to a valuable body of cultural and educational resources of interest to the general public and scholars alike. Consisting of 250,000 stereoscopic glass-plate and film negatives and 100,000 vintage prints, UCR-California Museum of Photography's Keystone-Mast Collection is the archive of the Keystone View Company of Meadville, PA (active from 1892-1963). As a collection, it is the world's largest body of original stereoscopic negatives and prints providing an encyclopedic view of global cultural history. Formed over the period of the United States' emergence as a world power, Keystone-Mast not only chronicles an age, it also represents in pictures a dominant point of view about the world during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is an important tool for among others, anthropologists, art historians, cultural studies scholars, historians, political scientists and sociologists.

The **Keystone-Mast Collection Guide 2003** provides online access to approximately twenty percent (approximately 28,872) of the total stereographic collection. To date, it represents content from the following geopolitical subject areas: entries from North America, from Central America, from West Indies (Caribbean Islands), from South America, from Oceania, from Asia, from Africa, and from the Middle East. When finished, the collection guide will consist of well over 100,000 online stereoviews complete with metadata.

UCR/CMP's 2007-2008 Keystone-Mast digitization initiative, which was completed through a National Endowment for the Humanities Preservation and Access grant, has contributed an additional 13,155 stereoscopic views of the Middle East and southern Asia, including views of Algeria, Egypt, India, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Morocco, Pakistan, Syria, Tunisia, and Turkey.

Language: English

 <http://www.oac.cdlib.org/items/ark:/13030/ft1q2n999m>

Access

Original prints and negatives are restricted and may not be viewed unless permission is granted by the museum's Curator of Collections. Images should be requested by their print identification numbers.

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Preferred Citation

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Provenance

Commercial Stereographs by various photographers in the collection of UCR-California Museum of Photography are works made for hire by numerous stereoview publishers. The Keystone-Mast Collection is formerly the Keystone View Company.

Biography

The Keystone View Company was founded by amateur photographer, B. L. Singley of Meadville, Pennsylvania, in 1892. Taking advantage of the public's curiosity in viewing disasters, Singley launched the company into the stereo market with sets of thirty stereo cards that recorded the flooding of the nearby French Creek. The growth of stereo photography, depicting national and international subjects, paralleled the emergence of modern America on the world's stage. Other factors which bolstered stereography's popularity was the novelty of experiencing explicit three-dimensional detail in a stereo card and the potential for card owners to frequently revisit views of world events in private or during social gatherings. Stereographs were to nineteenth century generations, what television and the Internet are to contemporary culture, and enabled armchair observers to have vicarious experiences in faraway places.

Dates attributed to Keystone-Mast images range from late-nineteenth to mid-twentieth century (with the strengths between 1895 and 1928). The collection is a composite of several stereographic publishing companies. By 1920, the Keystone View Company cornered the market by acquiring the negative collections of all major stereograph publishers such as B. W. Kilburn, H. C. White, Underwood and Underwood, and C. H. Graves. In 1939, Keystone View Company was marketing over 40,000 stereoview titles.

A large number of sales were generated through the efforts of door-to-door salesmen, often groups of college students who would canvass entire towns. The stereograph's combination of educational value and entertainment potential appealed to the emerging middle-class families. An excerpt from Keystone sales literature states, "The stereograph gives reality to the World Tour and is exceeded only by the actual experiences of travel." While this assumption is open to criticism, it remains a powerful sales incentive today and is one element in the current popular fascination with the Internet and World Wide Web [Howard Becker, "Stereographs: Local, National, and International Art Worlds," *Points of View: The Stereograph in America, A Cultural History*, Edward W. Earle, ed., Rochester: Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1979, pp. 89-96. Edward W. Earle, "Millennium: The End of the World As We Know It," *SF Camera*, (21:2) Fall/Winter, 1994, pp. 12-19. Edward W. Earle, "Millennium," (an evolving essay on photography, American history, and networked information at http://www.cmp.ucr.edu/collections/whitepapers/1995/edward_earle/millennium/)]

Another sales engine that powered Keystone View Company's success well into the twentieth century was its marketing of educational systems. Schools, libraries, and other educational institutions were provided with boxed sets of stereo cards at competitive prices. In 1922, Keystone boasted that every school district in a city with a population of over 50,000 had the Keystone System for each of its schools. Notable educators, historians, and authors were commissioned as consultants; among the editorial advisors were the poet Carl Sandburg and Ernest Thompson Seton. Keystone engaged the popular travel lecturer, Burton H. Olmes, to author much of the company's literature. Inspired marketing and broad ranges of worldwide imagery perpetuated the stereographs as popular objects for enjoyment and education. Keystone's stereo publishing reign continued through the 1930s.

Finally, production of stereo cards stopped in 1939. The company's production moved from stereographs to producing instructional lantern slides for schools. Sets of these 4x5 inch glass-mounted transparencies were published into the 1950s. The Keystone View Company was sold to the Mast Development Company in 1963. The Keystone division of the Mast Company continued to manufacture stereoscopic viewing devices for vision testing. However, they had no market for the enormous collection of prints, glass and film negatives. In 1977, Mead Kibbey, a businessman from Sacramento, California, successfully negotiated the donation of the Keystone View Company's archive to the University of California. After thirty-eight years of nearly idle storage, family members of the late Gifford Mast of Davenport, Iowa donated the collection intact to UCR/California Museum of Photography. In a tribute to the Mast family, the collection is subsequently known as the Keystone-Mast Collection.

In 1990, the collection was moved from the UC Riverside campus into a state-of-the-art collection room of a renovated 3-story structure, redesigned specifically for UCR-California Museum of Photography. The collection will be moved one final time to the adjacent Art and Barbara Culver Center of the Arts, where the negatives will be stored in new cabinets on seismically isolated bases.
