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PRINCETON UNIVERSITY LIBRARY CHRONICLE • LXVII • NO. 2 • WINTER 2006

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A Stereoscopic View of the American West

MARTHA A. SANDWEISS

LARGE ARCHIVES of historical documents function in multiple ways. Sometimes it is the sheer number of documents that allows a historian to make an argument about the past. Where one postcard, for example, might shed light on the experiences of a single individual or suggest something about the popularity of the site depicted on the card, cartons full of postcards can sustain a much more complex argument about literary letter-writing culture, tourism, or even the economics of the printing business. Conversely, it might be the juxtaposition between a single object and other archival materials that sparks the scholar's imagination. Through comparison, one can determine whether an object is typical or unusual, either unremarkable (or notable) for its commonness or valuable for its rarity. Yet, whether one's concern rests with the individual document as a part of a larger body of material, or focuses on its difference from everything else, any historical inquiry inevitably begins with the thing itself.

The Princeton Collections of Western Americana contain any number of spectacular photographic images and albums, one-of-a-kind objects not found elsewhere. Students and scholars will no doubt come to study the nearly one thousand nineteenth-century Indian portraits compiled in Princeton's set of *Photographs of North American Indians* (ca. 1879), the wonderful collection of photographs made in the New Mexico pueblos around 1900, and the albums of photographic views of early-twentieth-century Alaska. But I focus here on a rather common object in the collection, one that, because of its size and format and its evident traces of commercial production, might be overlooked by those in search of photographs that can sustain historical research or highlight historical problems. My point is simply to illustrate what Alfred Bush so clearly knew even as he began to build Princeton's collection of Western American photographs: in the most common sorts of historical images lie complex and illuminating stories about the past.

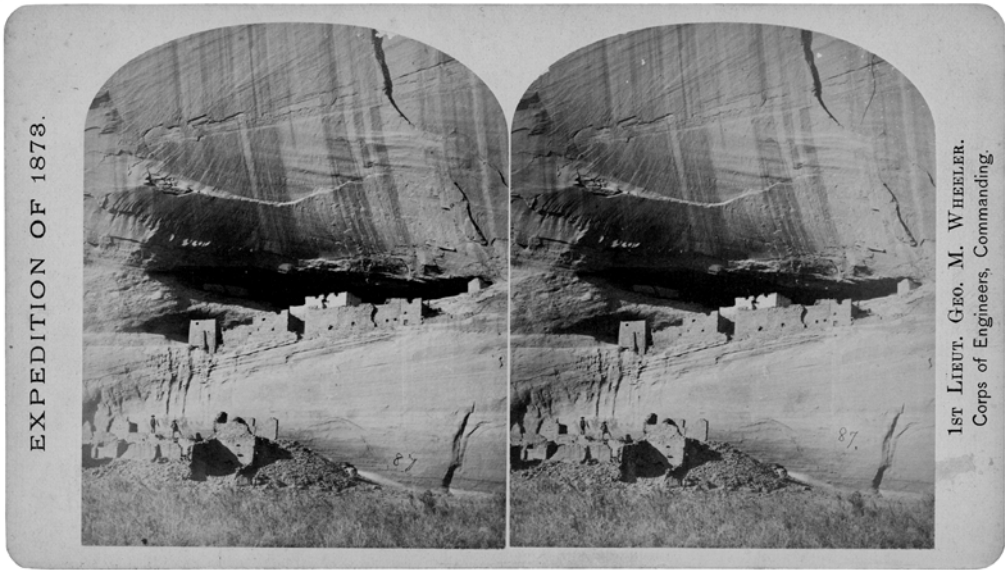
THE OBJECT

Two photographic images are mounted on a bright yellow paper board, 10 centimeters high by 18 centimeters long. The board was specially manufactured for this sort of use, colored, cut with rounded corners, and printed before becoming a mount for the two dome-top photographs pasted side-by-side on its face. The pre-printed legends that run down the far margins of the board, framing the photographs, provide a context for the images, even if they do not actually describe their contents: "Expedition of 1873" reads the caption on the left; "1st Lieut. Geo. M. Wheeler. / Corps of Engineers, Commanding" the right.

At first glance, the two photographic images appear to be identical. The well-preserved ruins of multi-storied stone buildings stretch out across a crevasse high in a stone cliff. On the ground below them, nestled up against the cliff wall, other ruins crumble back into stone and earth, their decay bespeaking the passage of time. The streaked sandstone cliff wall sweeps upward out of the picture plane. The absence of a horizon line and the tight framing of the image makes it hard for the viewer to gauge the size or scale of the ruins. But if one looks very closely, two tiny figures can be seen at the left, standing atop the lower ruins. Likely placed there by the photographer to give a sense of scale to the ruins, they collaborate in the picture-making process, holding still while the cameraman removes the lens of his camera to make the exposure. And from their presence, we gain a better sense of what we are looking at here.

These ruins were once large, multi-room buildings. Their construction required enormous amounts of labor and stone. How the workers transported that stone up to the crevasse far above the canyon floor remains unclear. Were there footholds in the vertical stone wall? Ladders? Did the buildings down below once reach higher? A means of easy access up and down would be important not just for construction, but for everyday life. Whoever lived here would need to leave the sheltered stone overhang to get food and water. The ruins seem magisterial and serene, magical and puzzling.

The date on the image suggests that the two photographic prints were produced from "wet-plate" or "collodion" negatives, sheets of glass coated with a light-sensitive chemical emulsion just moments be-



Timothy O'Sullivan, "Ruins in Cañon de Chelle, N.M." Albumen print on stereocard. Princeton Collections of Western Americana, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. Purchase, J. Monroe Thorington '15 Fund.

fore being inserted into a plate holder, put into a camera, and exposed to the light. This particular glass plate negative process had begun to replace the older photographic technology of the daguerreotype in the late 1850s, enabling photographers to make a theoretically unlimited number of positive prints on paper from a single negative. Earlier processes, like the daguerreotype, did not involve negatives, and the resulting images were thus unique objects, difficult to copy or circulate for broad distribution. With the invention of glass plate negatives, photography finally realized its potential to become a medium of mass communication.

We might imagine the photographer, then, and not just through the gaze returned by the two men who pose on the crumbling ruin walls. He would be standing on the floor of the canyon with his camera on a tripod; the relatively low light sensitivity of the glass negative and the optics of the lens required an exposure too long for any hand-held camera. Nearby would be a portable dark tent. Inside it would be sheets of clean window glass, fresh water, supplies of collodion—the thick, viscous mixture of gun cotton dissolved in alcohol

and ether with which the photographer would first coat his glass—and the light-sensitive chemical solutions that he would then apply. That top layer of silver nitrate would adhere to the collodion, and the light-sensitive silver iodides would retain the record of the image that appeared before the lens. We can imagine the photographer stepping inside the dark tent to prepare his plate, moving outdoors to expose the image, and then rushing back into the tent to process his negative and assess its success. He would have to process it immediately; wet-plate negatives retained their light sensitivity only so long as they remained damp and tacky. After developing the negative, the photographer might varnish it to protect it from the elements. Then he could pack it away to print later.

The date on the card, the warm brown tone of the two photographic images, and, to the practiced eye, the thin paper on which they are printed confirm that these are albumen prints, the most common material for photographic prints of the 1860s–1880s. We cannot assume the prints were made at the site where the photographer produced his negatives. Indeed, for many reasons, we can know with some certainty that they were not. Sometime later, a photographic journeyman inserted a sheet of specially prepared paper into a printing frame and placed it in contact with the original negative. The photographic paper had a thin, light-sensitive, image-bearing layer that adhered to the fiber base with an intermediary layer of albumen, a clear sticky coating obtained from the whites of chicken eggs. In this pre-electric era, the printing frame would be placed out in the sun, perhaps on the roof of a building where neither passers-by nor trees could cast interfering shadows.

Albumen paper records an image in a “printing out” process, rather than in the “developing out” processes that would characterize most twentieth-century photographic printing technologies. The image would emerge from the action of sunlight alone, without the use of chemical developing agents. The photographic technician could carefully open the frame from time to time, to check whether the print image seemed sufficiently dark. When it appeared just right, he would remove the paper from the frame, process it in chemical solutions that halted the darkening process, and wash it in a gold-chloride solution that gave the print its warm purplish brown tones.

The small size of the photographic card and the printed captions along the right and left borders might suggest the card was somehow

produced casually, in large numbers, without much work. Yet, however much twenty-first-century viewers might regard photography as a medium of mass production, it remained in the late nineteenth century a slow, labor-intensive process. And this photograph, like all nineteenth-century photographs, bears the clues to its own production. It also holds clues that suggest how it was used. The double images on the face of this card identify it as a stereograph, a format for photographic prints particularly popular in the 1860s and 1870s. Stereographs were made to be seen in specially built viewers. One would look through a double-holed viewing frame at a stereo card held up-right in a kind of bracket that could slide back and forth along a simple wooden pole held to the bridge of one's nose. When the card was positioned at just the right distance from one's eyes, the two side-by-side images would merge as one, with an enhanced illusion of three-dimensionality. It mimicked the mechanics of human vision, the ways in which our two eyes each see slightly different images and merge them into a single three-dimensional one.

And, indeed, the two images of a stereograph are not precisely the same, any more than the images seen from our right and left eyes are identical. Stereoscopic cameras have two lenses, about the same distance apart as the eyes on a human face. Take a close look at the number "87," visible at the lower right of each of the two images on this stereograph of the ruins. It is in a slightly different position on the two prints, affirmation that they come from two different negatives, exposed together in a stereo camera.

A stereographic image conveys a three-dimensional effect most dramatically when it contains objects arranged in receding visual planes. The photographer here knew what he was doing. He placed his camera just far enough away to capture the entire length of the building complex tucked into the crevasse of the cliff wall, and tilted the camera to capture the ruins in the foreground. Seen through a stereo viewer, those ruins in the foreground seem to pop forward and enhance the illusion of physical depth in the picture, while the gaping black slash of the crevasse draws the viewer's eye into the depths of the rock.

In an article from 1859 that marked the stereograph's arrival as a staple of middle-class culture, the essayist Oliver Wendell Holmes remarked that the medium's seeming three-dimensionality conveyed an "appearance of reality" that "cheats the sense with its seeming

truth.”¹ In parlors across America, viewers would turn to stereographs as a kind of after-dinner entertainment, a form of amusement allied with a means of self-education. From the comfort of home, they would imaginatively venture around the world.

Turning over the photographic card, we learn a bit more about the image glued to its face. The back of the card is a soft sand color, less insistent than the bright yellow that sets off the photographs on the other side. A logo printed in deep maroon-colored ink marks the card as a product of the War Department, more particularly of the Corps of Engineers, U.S. Army. Beneath it, a printed title proclaims: “Geographical and Geological Explorations and Surveys West of the 100th Meridian.” Identical printed logos and captions appear on the verso of fifteen other stereographs in Princeton’s Western Americana archives. We can deduce that the cards were pre-printed and designed as part of a larger series of stereoscopic photographs that one could study through a viewer, either for entertainment or perhaps to acquire “geographical and geological” knowledge about the westernmost United States.

Large numbers of these mounts could be cut and pre-printed; different photographs could then be glued to the face of the supports and identifying labels affixed to the backs. The rose-colored paper label glued to the back of this particular card, just beneath the printed title, gives it an identity different from the others in the series. Printed on the label in black ink are the words: “No. 12. Ruins in Cañon de Chelle, N. M., in a cavity in the wall, 60 feet above present bed of cañon. Height of walls about 700 feet. The present race of Indians know nothing of the age of these buildings or who occupied them. (For details, see forthcoming report of Lieutenant Wheeler on ‘Ancient Ruins.’)” We know, finally, where we are, what ruins these must be: a site now known as “White House Ruins.” And we know that this photograph was published as the twelfth in a series of related views. At the lower right of the glued-on label is the printed identification of the photographer: “T. H. O’Sullivan, Phot.”

A close examination of the material object, then, launches us into a number of historical stories: about a place and its material artifacts, about a photographer and the technology of nineteenth-century pho-

¹ Oliver Wendell Holmes, “The Stereoscope and the Stereograph,” *Atlantic Monthly* 3 (June 1859), 742.

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Geographical and Geological

EXPLORATIONS and SURVEYS WEST of the 100th MERIDIAN.

No. 12.

Ruins in Cañon de Chelle, N. M., in a cavity in the wall, 60 feet above present bed of cañon. Height of walls about 700 feet. The present race of Indians know nothing of the age of these buildings or who occupied them. (For details, see forthcoming report of Lieutenant Wheeler on "Ancient Ruins.")
(F. 87.)

T. H. O'SULLIVAN, Phot.

Verso of Timothy O'Sullivan, "Ruins in Cañon de Chelle, N.M." Princeton Collections of Western Americana, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. Purchase, J. Monroe Thorington '15 Fund.

tography, about an expedition and its leader, and, finally, about the ways in which images of that expedition circulated more widely, informing and shaping American thought about a remote and little-seen part of the nation.

THE PLACE

For some two thousand years, people have occupied Canyon de Chelly in the northeastern part of present-day Arizona. The first permanent residents of Canyon de Chelly and its tributary canyon, Canyon del Muerto, were the so-called Basketmaker II people, whose distinctive material culture led southwestern archaeologists to give them a name they themselves would not have known. These early occupants of the canyon began building pithouses in the area between 300 and 420 C.E. Later, during the Pueblo period (after 700 C.E.), the canyon's residents began constructing above-ground masonry structures and farming more intensively along the canyon floor. Between around 1050 and 1150, the population of the canyon increased dramatically, as residents began to construct and occupy more elaborate village complexes, like White House, being built into the caves and

crevasses of the canyon walls. And around 1150, the plateau dwellers began to abandon their villages for these cliff dwellings.

Archaeologists debate whether the move reflected a response to hostile incursions or floods, a desire to save the more arable land for farming or to construct better shelters to keep foodstuffs dry. In any case, the spectacular cliff dwellings like White House were not occupied for long. By the late thirteenth century, in a move that mirrors events in Mesa Verde and elsewhere throughout the Four Corners region of the Southwest, the Ancestral Puebloan people abandoned the cliff dwellings. The reasons for this mass exodus—a prolonged drought, perhaps, or the arrival of an enemy whose traces have not been found—remain one of the great unanswered questions of southwestern archaeology. Archaeologists largely agree, however, that the cliff dwellers moved east, forming pueblo communities along the Rio Grande.²

The Navajos, a nomadic Apachean people whose language resembles other Athapaskan tongues spoken in northwest Canada and Alaska, migrated south into the region of Canyon de Chelly around 1600–1700, not long before the first European explorers set foot in the canyon. A variation of the name “Chelle,” a hispanicized version of the Navajo word *tseyi*, meaning “among the rocks” or “canyon,” first appears in the 1770s on maps drawn by Don Bernardo de Miera y Pacheco, likely derived from information obtained through Spanish military operations against the Navajo. In the colonial period, this land first belonged to Spain. Later, from 1821 to 1849, the newly independent nation of Mexico claimed it as a part of its far northern frontier. Following the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which ended the Mexican-American War, the land passed into American control. Throughout the centuries, however, it remained a Navajo stronghold, part of a homeland to be defended against Indian, European, and American invaders alike.

Any photograph of the ruins in the canyon intrinsically speaks to the changing populations of this place and the shifting systems of political control that have governed it. Today, Canyon de Chelly is part of a national monument administered by the National Park Service, an agency of the federal government. But it remains under the owner-

² For a general overview of the pre-contact history of Canyon de Chelly, see David Noble, ed., *Houses beneath the Rock: The Anasazi of Canyon de Chelly and Navajo National Monument* (Santa Fe: Ancient City Press, 1992).

ship of the Navajo Nation, a rare form of political power-sharing that has proven challenging and difficult on both sides.³

The first extensive writings about the canyon by Euro-Americans take particular note of the spectacular ruins depicted in Timothy O'Sullivan's stereograph. In 1849, Lieutenant James Simpson, a member of Colonel John D. Washington's exploratory expedition, recorded his impressions of the White House site:

These ruins are on the left or north side of the cañon, a portion of them being situated at the foot of the escarpment wall, and the other portion upon a shelf in the wall immediately back of the other portion, some fifty feet above the bed of the cañon. The wall in front of this latter portion being vertical, access to it could only have been obtained by means of ladders. The front of these ruins measures one hundred and forty five feet and their depth forty five. The style of structure is similar to that of the pueblos found on the Chaco—the building material being of small, thin sandstones, from two to four inches thick, imbedded in mud mortar, and chinked in the facade with smaller stones. The present height of its walls is about eighteen feet. Its rooms are exceedingly small, and the windows only a foot square.⁴

The Navajos living in the canyon, Simpson reported, knew nothing about the origin of the structures. He and his colleagues, including the artist Richard Kern, whose illustration in the expedition report would be the first published view of White House, were in search of a large military fort that the Navajos were rumored to have constructed in defense against the American invaders. Although the fort proved a myth, the steep canyon walls and spectacular ruins were a surprise. On a single page of his report, Simpson resorted four times to the most apt description: “stupendous.”⁵

³For an overview of the history of the canyon from Spanish contact to the present, with a particular emphasis on the evolving relationship between the Navajo Nation and the National Park Service, see David M. Brugge and Raymond Wilson, *Administrative History: Canyon de Chelly National Monument, Arizona* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1976).

⁴*Reports of the Secretary of War, with Reconnaissances of Routes from San Antonio to El Paso ... and the Report of Lieut. J. H. Simpson of an Expedition into Navajo Country ...*, 31st Cong., 1st sess., Senate Ex. Doc. 64 (Washington, D.C.: Union Office, 1850), 104.

⁵*Reports of the Secretary of War*, 103. The Simpson report was later reprinted as J. H. Simpson, *Journal of a Military Reconnaissance from Santa Fe, New Mexico, to the Navajo Country ...* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo and Co., 1852).



R. H. Kern del.

P. S. Duval & Steam Lith. Press Phil.

RUINS OF AN OLD PUEBLO
in the Cañon of Chelly - Sept. 8th

Richard Kern, "Ruins of an Old Pueblo in the Cañon of Chelly—Sept. 8th." Lithograph in J. H. Simpson, *Journal of a Military Reconnaissance from Santa Fe, New Mexico, to the Navajo Country* ... (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo and Co., 1852), following page 74. Princeton Collections of Western Americana, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. Gift of Philip Ashton Rolins, Class of 1889.

Kit Carson, who led an American military invasion of the canyon in 1864, was less admiring of the scenic attractions. He and his troops killed at least fourteen Navajos and forced most of the canyon's surviving residents into surrender. The so-called Long Walk that followed took some eight thousand starving, defeated Navajos three hundred miles east across the New Mexico plains to a relocation camp at Fort Sumner. Hundreds died on the winter march. Others perished at the ill-equipped camp that proved an utter failure as a federal experiment in relocation. In 1868, with a treaty that granted them sovereignty over a diminished portion of their homeland, the Navajo walked back west to reoccupy Canyon de Chelly.

THE EXPEDITION

Lieutenant George M. Wheeler passed through Canyon de Chelly in 1873, just five years after the Navajo returned from Fort Sumner. The sight of Wheeler's troops likely unnerved the wary Navajo. But Wheeler's expedition, the Geographical and Geological Explorations and Surveys West of the 100th Meridian, was essentially a scientific enterprise, one of four competing surveys of the West organized in the aftermath of the Civil War to evaluate the region's topography and natural resources with an eye toward increasing American knowledge and eventual use of this least explored and understood part of the nation. For the Navajo, the canyon was a hard-won home; for Wheeler and his government sponsors, it was a potential resource.

Wheeler operated under the jurisdiction of the Department of War, as did the civilian scientist Clarence King, who led the U.S. Geological Exploration of the Fortieth Parallel. Under the aegis of the Department of the Interior, Ferdinand Vandiveer Hayden headed the U.S. Geological and Geographical Survey of the Territories across Colorado and Wyoming, while John Wesley Powell directed the U.S. Geographical and Geological Survey of the Rocky Mountain Region, focusing mainly on the Grand Canyon and the plateau country of Arizona and Utah. The survey teams included topographers, geologists, and naturalists. And along with the sketch artists, who had been a staple of American exploring expeditions since the 1840s, they included photographers.⁶

⁶For a general overview of the surveys, see Richard A. Bartlett, *Great Surveys of the American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962), and William H.

As an army man, Wheeler was a bitter rival of the three civilian scientists who led the other surveys. The scientists' maps were "controlled by the theoretical considerations of the geologists," he later claimed, whereas his survey and maps would be more practical and emphasize "astronomical, geodetic, and topographic observations. . . ." ⁷ Likewise, his reports would focus on useful information for the establishment of still more roads and rail routes, and they would examine in detail the potential economic resources of the country "to meet the needs of those who at some future period may occupy or traverse this portion of our territory." ⁸ The attention Wheeler paid to the habits and customs of the Indians he encountered derived less from a keen ethnographic interest than from a desire to reassure prospective immigrants that the natives posed no threat to settlement.

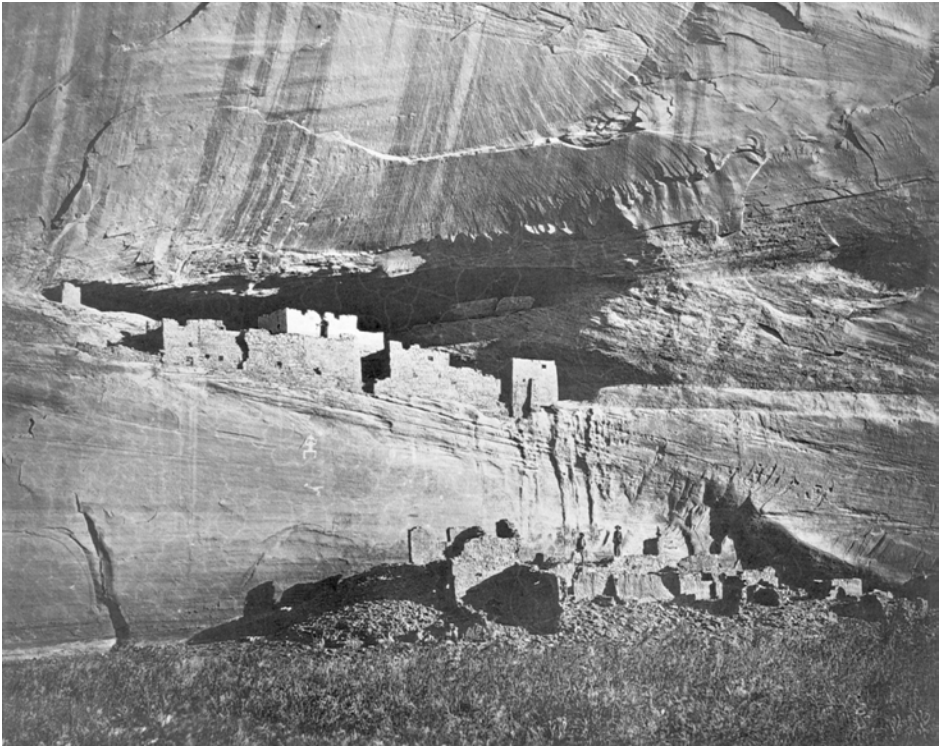
Wheeler first led his survey team into the field in the summer of 1869, exploring southeastern Nevada and western Utah, and he returned to the West every year from 1871 to 1879. For the field season of 1873, he set his sites on the Four Corners region of New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, and Utah. In his published reports, he gave but brief notice to the White House ruins in Canyon de Chelly, simply quoting Simpson's earlier description of the site and reiterating that "[t]he Navajos who now inhabit the valley do not have any traditions relating to the former inhabitants or builders of these ancient places, all of which have long been in ruins." But he included a spectacular heliotype reproduction of a photograph of the ruins that O'Sullivan had made with his larger view camera. ⁹ The ruins might not serve Wheeler's practical ambitions for the Southwest, but he likely thought an image of them would pique the interest of his readers, and per-

Goetzmann, *Exploration and Empire: The Explorer and the Scientist in the Winning of the American West* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966). For an overview of photography in the American West, including the ways in which it was used in conjunction with these surveys, see Martha A. Sandweiss, *Print the Legend: Photography and the American West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

⁷ George M. Wheeler, *Report upon the Third International Geographical Congress and Exhibition at Venice, Italy, 1881*, 48th Cong., 2d sess., House Ex. Doc. 270 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1885), 84.

⁸ General A. A. Humphreys to Wheeler, cited in Bartlett, *Great Surveys*, 339.

⁹ *Report upon United States Geographical Surveys West of the One Hundredth Meridian . . .*, vol. 7, *Archaeology* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1879), 372–73 and plate xx.



The heliotype reproduction of Timothy O'Sullivan's "Ruins in the Cañon de Chelle, New Mexico," laterally reverses the original photograph. See George Wheeler's *Report upon United States Geographical Surveys West of the One Hundredth Meridian ...*, vol. 7, *Archaeology* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1879), opposite 372. Princeton Collections of Western Americana, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. Gift of Leo Lesquereux.

haps engage popular support for his explorations. O'Sullivan's photographs of White House might offer little in the way of science, but they held value as instruments of public relations.

THE PHOTOGRAPHER

Born in 1840, by varying accounts on Staten Island or in Ireland, Timothy O'Sullivan was by 1873 among the most experienced and accomplished landscape photographers in the United States, a man who knew how to cope with the uncertain weather, the scant water supplies, and the astonishing scale of the deserts and canyons of the

Southwest. In the mid-1850s, he was an apprentice in the Washington, D.C., studio of the celebrated Mathew Brady, learning the techniques of wet-plate photography as he assisted in Brady's portrait business. Later, first under Brady and then under the direction of Alexander Gardner, O'Sullivan ventured out of doors to photograph the operations of the Union Army during the Civil War. Awkward equipment and slow exposure times made it all but impossible to capture the troops in action, but O'Sullivan's photographs of the aftermath of battle, particularly his chilling pictures of the dead at Antietam and Gettysburg, stunned the American public. With his potent photographs, O'Sullivan brought the unimaginably faraway into the parlors of middle-class America.¹⁰

It is thus not surprising that the geologist Clarence King would hire O'Sullivan in 1867 to accompany his Fortieth Parallel Survey in its explorations between the Rockies and the Sierra Nevada. The photographer's war experiences prepared him well for the vicissitudes of field photography in the Far West—the sudden storms and blustery winds, the blowing sand and harsh light. For three field seasons, O'Sullivan worked with King, making photographs in Nevada, California, and along the Snake River in Idaho, then on into Utah and Wyoming. In 1870, he accompanied a U.S. Navy expedition to Panama, where the dense jungle foliage proved frustrating to a photographer accustomed to the wide horizon lines of the arid West.

O'Sullivan returned in relief to the West in 1871, this time in the employ of Lieutenant Wheeler. King reclaimed the photographer for the 1872 season; Wheeler hired him back the next year. In the summer of 1873, at a salary of \$175 per month, O'Sullivan set out for the Southwest on the trip that would take him to Canyon de Chelly. He made his final trip west, with Wheeler, the following year. O'Sullivan then settled in Washington, where he printed up the survey photographs, pursued various independent jobs, and searched for other employment on the government payroll. He died of tuberculosis in January 1882 at the age of forty-two.

¹⁰ On O'Sullivan, see Rick Dingus, *The Photographic Artifacts of Timothy O'Sullivan* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982), and Joel Snyder, *American Frontiers: The Photographs of Timothy H. O'Sullivan, 1867–1874* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1981). See also Robin Earle Kelsey, "Photography in the Field: Timothy O'Sullivan and the Wheeler Survey, 1871–1874" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2000).

Wheeler struggled to publish O'Sullivan's images, but the federal appropriations for his survey did not stretch far enough. He had included a photographer on his expeditions in 1871 and 1872, he complained, but at the close of those seasons only "speciman copies" of his "valuable suite of landscape and stereoscopic negatives" had been published. He advised the government to make some provision for broader circulation of the images, "because of the professional interest attached, and also on account of the general interest in everything that furnishes reliable knowledge, in any form, of our western country."¹¹ In October 1873, with O'Sullivan still at work in the vicinity of the Colorado River under strict orders from Wheeler to operate with "utmost economy," Wheeler received a set of field negatives at his office in Washington. Immediately, he sent them on to Lewis Walker, photographer at the Treasury Department, asking Walker to make duplicate copies of each to return to him "to the end that their values may be determined &c."¹²

Throughout that fall, as Wheeler waited to see what sorts of images he would glean from the 1873 season, he negotiated for the publication of the earlier survey photographs. Anticipating but "meagre sales," the commercial firm of E. and H. T. Anthony agreed to print the 1871 and 1872 stereographs for a pre-established royalty fee of \$5 per gross, but had no interest in the landscapes O'Sullivan had made with his larger view camera. Wheeler hoped that if he could sell enough stereos this way, he could raise sufficient funds to print the images he owed the War Department; it had sponsored his trip, but failed to give him the wherewithal to publish all his findings. That no one wanted to print the larger images, even for scientific purposes,

¹¹ George Montague Wheeler, *Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers to the Sec'y of War, Appendix EE "Photographs,"* 9; clipping pasted onto page 139 of "Copies of Letters Sent by George M. Wheeler ... 1873, 1878" (hereafter Wheeler letterbook), box 4, Geographical Surveys West of the 100th Meridian Papers, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

¹² Wheeler to Timothy O'Sullivan, September 1, 1873, Wheeler to Chief of Engineers, October 10, 1873, George M. Lockwood to Mr. Walker, October 21, 1873, Wheeler letterbook, pp. 129, 148, 165.

seemed a disappointment. "Good use could be made of the various classes of these views by the draughtsmen studying mountain and other forms; and by the examiners in Geological and Natural History branches, in connection with the work of the Survey," he wrote to his superior, the army's Chief of Engineers.¹³

A letterbook of Wheeler's outgoing correspondence records his increasing frustration over the government's unwillingness to extend further appropriations for the publication of the photographs. Still, convinced that the photographs would somehow demonstrate the success of his expeditions, Wheeler went ahead on his own to put them before the public eye. He negotiated with Anthony & Co. for publication of the 1871 and 1872 stereographic views, and hired Walker at Treasury to print between fifty and one hundred copies of the forty-nine best stereo negatives from the 1873 season.¹⁴ He himself ordered some 2,500 printed stereo cards from the firm of A. M. Collins & Son in Washington, along with 5,000 larger mounts, confident that he would find a way to make the photographic prints to glue to their faces.¹⁵ And he arranged for the lithographer Julius Bien to print the title sheets and help prepare proof albums of the larger views, arranged precisely as Wheeler specified.¹⁶

In the end, Wheeler managed to publish at least six different albums of the larger views: three in editions of four copies or fewer, largely as proof albums or special sets made for display at expositions; and three in editions ranging in size from fifty to three hundred copies.¹⁷ In an album of twenty-five larger prints covering the years 1871–1874, and published in an edition of two hundred in 1875–1876 in collaboration with Bien, Wheeler included lengthy "descriptive legends" for each of the views. The large album format allowed him to employ more words than could fit comfortably on the back of a stereo card, and here Wheeler allowed himself to be a bit more

¹³Wheeler to E. and H. T. Anthony & Co., November 6, 1873, Wheeler to Brig. Gen. A. A. Humphreys, November 6, 1873, Wheeler letterbook, pp. 191–92.

¹⁴Wheeler to Anthony & Co., November 28, 1873, Wheeler letterbook, pp. 242–43.

¹⁵Wheeler to A. M. Collins & Son, November 12, 1873, Wheeler letterbook, p. 205.

¹⁶Wheeler to Julius Bien, November 12, 24, December 6, 9, 1873, Wheeler letterbook, pp. 206–7, 237–38, 258–59, 261–62.

¹⁷See Snyder, *American Frontiers*, 117.

poetic, adopting a voice calculated to appeal to those whose support for his work might stem from a fascination with the exotic. O'Sullivan's large format photograph of the White House ruins gave him the opportunity to describe the "cave castles," those "ancient ruins of the best type" scattered the length of Canyon de Chelly. They seemed the remnants of a "semi-civilization" similar to the Pueblo Indians of the present day, Wheeler speculated. The Navajos who now dwell in the canyon "look with superstitions upon these broken walls, and are loth to enter their gates, even for an hour of shelter, for they foretell death to him who shall cross those mysterious thresholds." The "remarkable" White House seemed to Wheeler—a military man who might be expected have an eye for such things—to be a fortress, a place to which people retreated in times of danger.¹⁸

Along with the albums, Wheeler published three different sets of stereo cards. In 1874–1875, he finally found the resources to publish the stereographs from the 1871–1873 seasons: a set of one hundred cards in an edition of fifty, and a smaller half-set in an edition of three hundred. In 1875–1876, he published a set of fifty views from the 1871–1874 seasons in an edition of one thousand.

The Princeton University Library's stereograph of White House originally belonged to one of the stereo sets produced in 1874–1875. The larger set of one hundred stereographs includes twenty-three O'Sullivan images from 1871; thirty-nine images from 1872 made from negatives by William Bell, who had replaced O'Sullivan that year as the official expedition photographer; and thirty-eight O'Sullivan images from the 1873 season. At least ten of the 1873 pictures depict scenes in Canyon de Chelly. The first, number 11, provides a kind of establishing shot for the ruins, depicting them from across a wash, "showing their position in the wall and elevation above bed of cañon," the printed caption explains.¹⁹ The next, our number 12, presents the most dramatic shot of the ruins themselves. The

¹⁸ Geographical Surveys West of the 100th Meridian, *Photographs Showing Landscapes, Geological and Other Features of Portions of the Western Territory of the United States* . . . ([Washington, D.C.?], ca. 1874), Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library (Wa MSS S-744, boxes 45–46).

¹⁹ A set of the 100 stereographs from the 1871–1873 field seasons can be found in the Western Americana collections of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; see "Stereographic Views of the Geographical Surveys West of the 100th Meridian Expeditions of 1871–1873" (Zc50 871unb).

following stereographs emphasize the verticality of the canyon walls, depict the explorers' camp, and suggest the life of the Navajos who lived and farmed along the canyon floor. A viewer consulting these stereographs as a set—how they would have been marketed, if not necessarily how they survive in archival collections—would perceive the Navajos as a picturesque curiosity rather than a military threat. The would-be prospector or settler, trader or road builder, would have little to fear from the people they encountered in this corner of the Arizona Territory.

A stereograph of White House Ruins on precisely the same printed mount and with precisely the same printed label appears also in the set of fifty Wheeler survey stereographs published a year later, in 1876. A closer look, though, reveals that the image is just slightly different. Only one figure stands on the foreground ruins, and drawn onto the negative is a spidery “86” rather than an “87,” as appears on the Princeton photograph.²⁰ The most mundane explanation seems the most plausible. Between the printing of the first and second sets of views, negative 87 broke. Fortunately, O’Sullivan had made another stereoscopic glass negative just moments earlier. It would do as a replacement.



The richness of Princeton’s Western Americana photograph collections lies in things common as well as things rare, in those objects small and easily overlooked, as well as those whose size commands instant attention. Where some curators collected western images only for their artistic merit and exhibition value, or because they documented a particular person or event of special interest, Alfred Bush understood from the start that in small things forgotten lie important stories. A photograph is most valuable not when it illustrates what we already know, but when it functions as a primary source, leading us to an understanding of larger stories and issues of central concern in American western history. Such stories are rarely obvious, but they are there. In a single stereograph, there may lie stories about how nineteenth-century photographs were made, how Americans ex-

²⁰ See the set of 50 boxed views included in the Geographical Surveys West of the 100th Meridian Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University (Wa MSS S-744, box 47).

plored the West, how ancient ruins resonated in the American imagination, how government patronage of the arts worked 130 years ago, how images entered the marketplace of ideas and shaped popular opinion about unseen places. In the mass of stereographs, commercial pictures, and vernacular photographs composing the Princeton Collections of Western Americana are thousands of images comparable to the O'Sullivan stereograph of White House Ruins. They await the researchers and students who will ask a few questions.