

Stereo World

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James F. Gibson Out from the Shadows

By Thomas Waldsmith

Of the approximately three hundred photographers who participated in documenting the American Civil War, only a handful are readily remembered and accepted as legitimate contributors to the large number of war photos. Until just recently, even the well known photographers such as Mathew Brady, the Gardners and to a lesser extent Timothy O'Sullivan and George N. Barnard have been re-evaluated and placed into proper perspective. The rest, for the most part, have been destined to be lost in the shadows of historical writings, recognized usually only by their name on a credit line. One such obscure but interesting, and at times excellent, photographer was James F. Gibson.

James F. Gibson was born in Scotland in 1828 or 1829, interestingly the same country in which Alexander Gardner originally resided. Little is known of Gibson's early life until 1860, when his name appeared with his wife Elizabeth also from Scotland, in the census records for Wash-

ington, D.C. Apparently no children were born from this union. According to the 1860 City directory for Washington, Gibson and his wife resided at 357 18th St., N.W. and in the same year he was under the employ of the master image maker Mathew Brady. Because of the lack of information regarding Gibson, it is only through speculation that one can attempt to answer the question of how Gibson happened to emigrate from Scotland and end up in the Brady studio. It seems probable that since Alexander Gardner was in charge of operating Brady's Washington Gallery, he may have brought Gibson over with him or at least may have had a direct influence on his decision.

When the Civil War broke out in April 1861, Brady's cameramen prepared to take to the field. The start of Gibson's official work however apparently began in March 1862. From the beginning of the war until November 1862, Gibson worked for the Brady studio. In this time span all of his published photographs were issued with the

title of "Brady's Album Gallery," and under this label is where most of Gibson's work will be found. Views labeled as such are very rare with only a few known to exist.

In March 1862, Gibson began to record army installations and war destruction. Sharing the credit line with George Barnard, probably due to using the same photographic wagon, he made a series of at least eight published large folio size prints of Centreville, Va. and its fortifications. A series, credited to Barnard alone in stereo of Centreville, was accomplished at the same time. Gibson, to my knowledge, took no stereos of this area. They also, in the same month, photographed the ruins of Bull Run as well as the fortifications at Manassas.

In May 1862, Gibson took a long series of photographs using the large plate and stereo cameras of McCiellan's Peninsula Campaign which included the Yorktown area. Several photographs are of the Batteries one and four at Yorktown. The large plate photos are credited to

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Entered according to the Act of Congress, in the year 1862, by Gardner & Gibson, in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the District of Columbia.

"Benson's Battery of Horse Artillery, near Fair Oaks, June, 1862," No. 641 from Gardner's "Photographic Incidents of the War," by James F. Gibson. (A. Verner Conover Collection.)

Hyperspace

A COMMENT

By Paul Wing

As a modern stereographer as well as a collector I was very, very interested to find an article on hyper stereo in Stereo World. Mr. Chandler's enthusiasm is easy for me to understand but there are a few important questions of accuracy on which I would like to comment.

First of all, there are literally thousands of fine early hyper stereos. Not only that, many of the best known early photographers were well acquainted with the basic theory and somewhere in my archives I have a magazine article in the 1860's describing the value of a wide base for scenic photography and giving a table of camera separation vs. mean distance to the center of interest.

Many of early stereo photos were made with a cumbersome single camera. One shot was made and the camera moved over for the other eye! The tendency was to move the camera too far thus producing unintentional and often poor quality wide base stereo. On sunny days the sun's shadow moved and of course people, horses and buggies and the like might even disappear from sight in one view. I would estimate that there were more of these crude wide base views among the early French and Italian efforts than there were "normal" stereos.

Not all of these early efforts were accidental however. Francis Frith's views of Egypt taken in the late 1850's were done with wide base on a calculated basis. He planned to bring out detail in the large ruins.

The majority of the famous London Stereoscopic 1859 series taken in the United States are also instantaneous hypers. Another fine worker in hypers was the Frenchman, E. Lamy. He used a variety of techniques for obtaining wide base views for distant scenics and reverted to normal eye spacing for medium and close shots.

It is true that the technique was not often employed by the early U.S. photographers. The cameras they used most often had more than normal eye separation but generally not more than 3½ inches (85mm) using 5" x 8" plates, but one must remember that there was almost always stereoscopic distortion in viewing because the old stereoscopes generally had a much longer focal length than the taking camera. Most collectors have never had the opportunity of viewing a fine old slide in a viewer equipped with quality achromatic lenses of the same focal length as the camera. It is an experience! This kind of talk can easily get us pretty deeply involved. I would be glad to continue if you want to drop me a line or better still stop off for a visit.

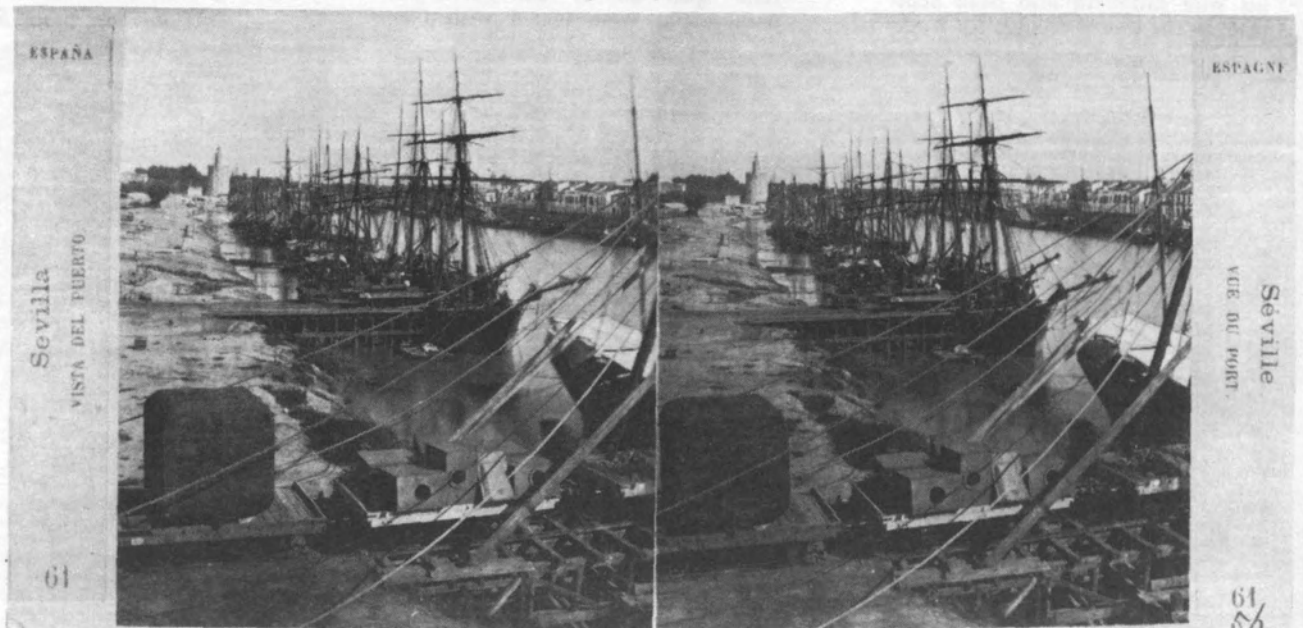
The Keystone Co. after World War I did assemble a hyperstereo camera and many of the views are included in the 100, 300, 600 or 1200 World Tour Sets dating up into the 1930's. They are excellent examples of their kind but in no way do they surpass the best efforts of the old timers.

The shot of lower Manhattan, taken in rapid sequence from a mov-

ing airplane or dirigible is *not* in my opinion a brilliant example of this technique. It has too great a base and the parallax from front to back is so great that it is uncomfortable for many viewers. It's a great subject and they had money enough to hire someone to fly them along that path on a good day, but they did succumb to the temptation of too great a base line, or perhaps they couldn't sequence the camera fast enough. At 100 miles per hour, an interval of one second puts your eyes 150 feet apart. Think that one over! I make these pictures from small and large planes using a ROBOT camera capable of 5 frames per second.

One last comment - hypers aren't for everybody. The miniaturization particularly where people are involved is downright unpleasant to many people. Arguments on this subject have been going on for the last one hundred and twenty five years. Ted Lambert, a five star exhibitor in modern stereo in the Photographic Society of America has made hundreds of marvelous close range instantaneous hypers including a large series of the last New York World's Fair and Barnum and Bailey's big circus. I marvel at them and I am sure Mr. Chandler and Mr. Coll would enjoy them also, but my wife and thousands of other nice people might only look at a few before putting down the viewer.

We are now touching on another facet of this marvelous hobby - stereo perception, but that's a separate, although fascinating, story.



"View of a part of the Maritime portion of the city, Seville, Spain," by E. Lamy, c. 1865. (Paul Wing Collection.)

