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STEREO WORLD



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NATIONAL STEREOSCOPIC ASSOCIATION

NEW BOOK ON CARBUTT WINS TWO BIG YES VOTES

JOHN CARBUTT ON THE FRONTIERS OF PHOTOGRAPHY By William Brey; 218 pp., 140 illustrations, softbound 7" x 9"; \$19.95, Willowdale Press, Box 3655, Cherry Hill, N.J. 08034.

It is probably fair to say that to most stereo collectors, John Carbutt is remembered as an early Chicago photographer who produced excellent views of the city and the area to the northwest. Railroad buffs will recall his series of stereos taken just after the Civil War, documenting excursions of bigwigs along the line of the Union Pacific Railroad. Then, just as stereographs were getting to be popular, he dropped from sight; his production of them hardly spanned a decade.

But as important as Carbutt was as a pioneering stereo photographer, this was only one of his photographic achievements. This delightful volume documents the stereographic aspects of his career, and equally important, the remainder of his long and productive life which spanned the whole rapidly-developing field of photography. There is a crying need for biographies of the great photographers, portraying them as human beings and businessmen as well as artists. Brey's well-researched, well-written, and well-produced volume could serve as a model for studies of this sort.

Carbutt was not without fame in his own lifetime, however. He early became friends with E. L. Wilson, publisher of *THE PHILADELPHIA PHOTOGRAPHER*, the most influential photographic periodical in the country. Through its columns he received generous coverage, which was especially important as he moved from one photo enterprise to another. He often provided Wilson with thousands of copies of a print, to be tipped into the publication, and these examples of his work doubtless spread the knowledge of his abilities as much or more than formal advertising.

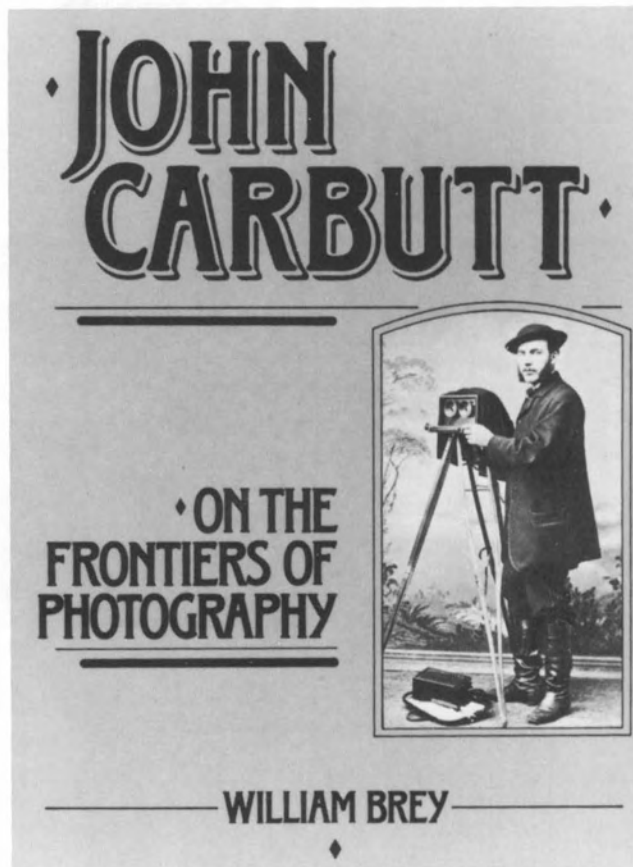
No doubt these mass production chores were what led him to become the first practitioner in the U. S. of the Woodburytype photo-mechanical reproduction process. He began using this technique in 1870, and the collotype process a few years later.

Carbutt was also a leader in replacing the troublesome wet collodion plate with a much more convenient dry one. Dry plates had been experimented with as early as the mid-1850s; indeed, Carbutt himself had produced some (unsuccessfully) in 1864. Not until 1879, however, did his plates gain wide acceptance, and they continued in production through the end of the century.

One of Carbutt's last developments was accompanied by tragedy. Following the discovery in 1895 of X-rays, he began developing a film specifically for use with them. In a few months, he was able to reduce the time of exposure from an hour to a few seconds, and the use of X-rays in medicine followed quickly. Unfortunately, the massive exposures to the radiation led to radiation burns, and, after repeated exposures, to cancers and tumors especially among the technicians.

John Carbutt died at 75, not only successful financially, but the recipient of many awards for his skill and innovations. Brey makes this life come alive; this is certainly the definitive work about a man who was one of the top photographers of his generation, and a leader in photo

technology as well. This book will be of great interest not only to stereo collectors, but to everyone interested in the history of photography. —T.K. Treadwell



William Brey's book, "John Carbutt on the Frontiers of Photography," reminds us right away how much our country's industry and arts owe to energetic immigrants who came from Europe in the mid-19th Century. Carbutt, born in Sheffield, England in 1832, first arrived in the United States in 1858 or 1859 via Canada, and by 1861 had established himself in Chicago as a master photographer, specializing in cartes de visite and city views. By 1864, he had gained national attention for his stereographs and was already moving into the area of supplying materials for other photographers, notably his own formulation for gold-toning prints. Carbutt also, like many others, experimented with dry plates in the hope of inventing a dry emulsion of reasonably long life and equivalent to the wet plate in performance. Eventually, after a false start, Carbutt perfected an excellent "gelatine-bromide" dry plate which such famous stereographers as William H. Jackson and F. Jay Haynes found superior to their old wet plates. Widespread popularity of the plates enabled Carbutt to construct a factory for their manufacture on a large scale, located at Wayne Junction, Philadelphia, Pa.

What brought him to Philadelphia in 1870, and caused him to give up his very profitable studio in Chicago, was an opportunity to join long time friends in the photographic world of Philadelphia in a venture for producing images on a mass production basis by the Woodburytype process. Although this process yielded beautiful prints very close to actual photographs, it did not prove a commercial success, and after six years Carbutt lost much of his money in the venture.

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