

Seasons Greetings

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Children at Christmas

By John Waldsmith

Last year, at this time, we devoted our front page to Santa Claus. This year it is reserved for the children for whom Christmas is a very special occasion.

For the stereo view collector, the subject becomes almost limitless. Children have been appearing on stereographs and have been a favorite subject almost since the beginning of stereoscopy. Children first appeared on stereo daguerreotypes and became popular subjects for the makers of sentimental views in the 1850's and 1860's. Their relationship to the Christmas season depicts them sleeping snug in their beds with visions of Christmas morning soon to arrive. Several views, es-

pecially those published by B.W. Kilburn, show children with Santa Claus.

There is a wide variety of later views depicting children at Christmas time, usually showing them with the Christmas tree or with newly acquired gifts. Nearly all the major producers published views with Christmas themes including a number of views by Weller, Littleton View Co., Griffith & Griffith, Underwood & Underwood and Keystone View Co. Some of the lesser known and less common views were published by Kelley & Chadwick and Whiting View Co.

Also of interest are the many finely decorated late Victorian interiors with draped fireplaces, overstuffed chairs and the Christmas tree, lit by candles and decorated with wooden or glass

ornaments.

Basically the scene has changed very little. The children still wait in expectation for the arrival of Christmas and Santa Claus. Most of us still select and decorate a tree. There is the preparation of a special meal and it is a festive occasion. In those by-gone days our great-grandparents placed a stereoscope and a stack of views under the tree. Maybe a GAF talking-viewmaster has taken its place for the youngster of today. It was a special time many years ago and for us today it is still a time set aside for the happy faces of little children. The spirit is still there, just waiting for us to carry on the traditions which were so vividly depicted in the stereoscopes of our Victorian ancestors.



"Going to Grandma's. Christmas Morning," No. 2756 by Whiting View Co. from the "Twentieth Century Series." Copyrighted 1900 by the Whiting Bros., Cincinnati, O. (John Waldsmith Collection).

The Vision Of Hyperspace

By Arthur Chandler

From the Renaissance down to the twentieth century, artists have tended to confirm our vision of reality. Though the painter might paint angels and saints, he always placed them in a highly systematized, "realistic" (to our eyes) pictorial space. This rendition of space was so convincing that, from the quattrocento onward, it became the universal canon for Western artists. No matter what the subject, or from what vantage point it was perceived, the laws of perspective and foreshortening had to be obeyed. A man might paint his mistress as the Virgin, or render his ugly patron as a paragon of Grecian beauty; but he could never violate the perfect geometry of the vanishing point. Space was real and uniformly orderly, and could therefore be represented in one and only one way.

Photographers inherited this system of Cartesian space from the painters, who had themselves used the *camera obscura* for centuries. When lens and shutter and film plate were designed, they were all directed toward producing the image of reality already established by centuries of painting—or, in the case of stereo photography, of bas relief. Thus, when photography was first developed, it was hailed as *plus realiste que le roi*—more realistic than even the master art of painting that had fathered it. Daumier might grumble that "photography describes everything and explains nothing"; but his dyspeptic remarks were inaudible in the cheering that hailed the advent of the newest art.

When Oliver Wendell Holmes exclaimed over the miracle of stereography, he revealed his—and his era's—real criterion for art: to freeze one moment in one place, and to describe that moment with scrupulously detailed realism. But even as Holmes wrote his *Atlantic Monthly* essays on stereographic art, traditional art itself was undergoing a deep transformation. "Impressionism," Oswald Spengler remarked, "is atheism in colors." The rules for proper coloration, modeling, and even perspective were altering drastically, and the alteration was almost uniformly anti-realistic. At the core of this new pictorial feeling was not just a texturing of the picture plane with wild impastos, but a restructuring of pictorial space itself.

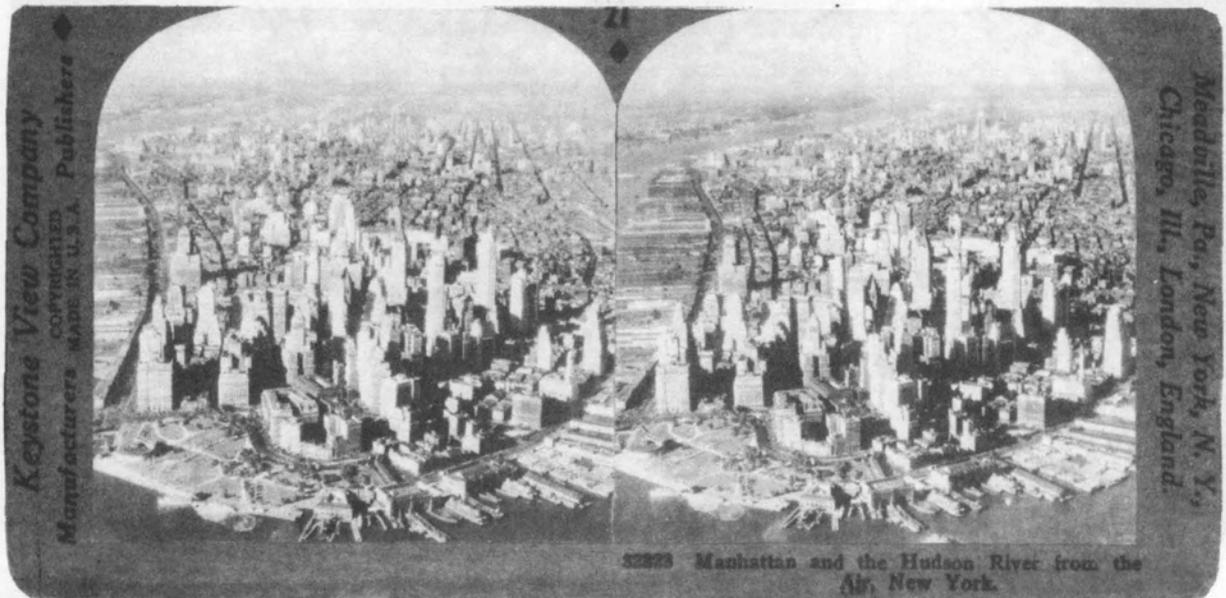
As Impressionism gained force in the art world, flat photography underwent a period of attempting to imitate the softened contours and blurred lines of the Impressionists. But while the Tonalists were simply copying one more painterly fashion, the stereographers were exploring a completely new realm: the dimension of hyperspace. By separating the lenses of the camera (or cameras) wider than the normal 2½ inches, stereographers discovered they could achieve a truly stunning compression of 3-dimensional space. Holmes was impressed by the "magnificent stereograph" of the moon (taken by pairing different positions of the moon to produce a hyperstereoscopic effect). But he does not go on to marvel over just how drastically reality has been altered when a stereograph can make an object thou-

sands of miles across "round itself out so perfectly to the eye that it seems as if we could grasp it like an orange."

Early stereographers only rarely assayed the exacting problems involved in making hyperstereo images. It was the Keystone artists who consistently produced this expanded vision of space in many of their pictures. Not all of them were successful (there is one Keystone hyperstereo of Chicago that is an eye-wrenching monstrosity); but in their best moments they produced a transfigured image of space that the Tonalists of flat photography could not remotely approach.

The Keystone hyperstereo of Manhattan is a brilliant example of the kind of effect achievable by stereo alone. Viewed with one eye shut, or without the aid of the viewer, the Keystone picture is just another aerial photo of Manhattan. But in stereo, the image takes on truly extraordinary dimensions. At first, the scene appears miniaturized, dwarfed. If it were not for other visual cues, we might think we were looking at a model of the city. Buildings stand out in a startling bas relief of an entire urban landscape. The ground plane leaps up to an angle almost parallel to the line of sight, and we find ourselves looking not down, but across the cityscape into the horizon. It is as if we have been suddenly changed into a mile-high giant, with a 250-foot separation between our eyes. The net effect is not only to let us see the three-dimensional spatial relations among the buildings (like a stereoscopic version of Mondrian's *Broad-*

(Cont. on page 3)



"Manhattan and the Hudson River from the Air, New York," No. 32823 by Keystone View Co. (Arthur Chandler Collection).

