

Stereograph Devotees

These dapper fellows are participating in the equivalent of a *Mad Men* season-premiere party—they're celebrating the stereoscope, a photo viewer, usually handheld. When a horizontal card containing two almost-identical images (a stereograph) is placed in the viewer, the person holding it can look into its lenses and see the two photos create a 3-D image. This was pretty thrilling in the 1890s, when there was no television or movies or high-def video games. Traveling stereograph salesmen would go door-to-door with collections of stereographic cards detailing far-off places, reenactments of historical events, comedic scenes, and even "blue" scenarios. Just as today we invite friends over to watch the latest episode of *True Blood*, in the late 1800s friends gathered to view new additions to someone's stereographic collection.

The stereoscope was invented by Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr. around 1860 in Boston. Go to any antique store and you'll see a collection of stereographic images from around the world.

The backdrop to this group of enthusiasts is the word Keystone and what looks like UM spelled out in stereographic cards. Keystone View Company was a leading distributor of images. Its Education Department introduced a set of stereograph cards as a reference to be used in schools and incorporated into curriculum. Cutting edge! Some examples that these University of Minnesota students might be studying are: "Earth



Photo lovers, probably at the University of Minnesota, about 1890 (MNHS COLLECTIONS)

Neighbors (telescopic photographs of the sun, moon, planets, comets, etc.)," "Farm Crops," "Animal Husbandry," "Hygiene Health Habits," and "Children of the World." Light (needed for seeing the 3-D images) is streaming in from a window, and someone has gone to the trouble of decorating the already wallpapered wall with spare stereographs. A few men appear to be taking notes on the images they're viewing, some are deep in the third dimension, and some are displaying the cards. This image—ironically, not stereographic—seems to be a Keystone promo event.

It's fun to see images of people doing things we never do in the twenty-first century. But if we did, it would be just as enjoyable for us as their afternoon surely was, swapping cards and immersing themselves in a 3-D story.

—Lacey Prpić Hedtke

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