

Canvassed and Delivered: Direct Selling at Keystone View Company, 1898-1910

Leigh Gleason

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Abstract

This thesis addresses an under-studied aspect of the stereoscopic photograph industry: the business and sales practices employed by American stereograph publishers at the dawn of the twentieth century, as exemplified by Keystone View Company. Stereographic sales practices are an essential element in understanding stereoscopy's ubiquity and place in American culture, but have been too frequently oversimplified or wholly overlooked in existing scholarship. Using concepts from business history, this thesis addresses the ways in which Keystone's structure and scale allowed it to function as a national and international entity, and examines the role of communication in the sale of photographs. Keystone's success hinged on the corporate communications between the company and its direct-selling sales agents, communication between sales agents and prospective consumers, and the communication between consumers and the company (both tacitly through purchase and directly through written praise of the products).

Furthermore, this thesis considers the affective qualities and social claims of stereoscopy by proposing the role of aspiration as a motivating factor in the images' consumption. Aspiration was woven into the company's prescribed sales pitch, the character of the sales agents employed by Keystone, and in recommendations and testimonials from Keystone users. Consumers' emotional response to stereography, and especially the way that stereography was sold, served as a significant influence in the sales process.

Successful sales were Keystone's motivation, and its business practices propelled the company's success, especially through corporate communication and framing stereographs aspirationally. This thesis concludes that the role of business practices in stereoscopic production contributes to the understanding of the cultural phenomenon of stereoscopy, and permits a more complete sense of the market in which these photographs circulated.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis uses American stereoscopic publisher Keystone View Company (1892-1963) as a case study for demonstrating the important role that business histories should play in photographic histories. It is well known that Keystone created, marketed, and sold photographs differently than contemporaneous photography businesses, but the company's business practices have not been explored at length. While others have studied stereoscopy *because* of its widespread popularity and role as a mass-media format, my work interrogates *how* it became this way, and specifically, how it continued to find success in the 1890s and early 1900s. Rather than taking stereoscopy's success as a foregone conclusion, presenting the large stereoscopic publishing companies' acknowledged success as a starting point for discussion, I see stereoscopy's success as a process initiated by the stereoscopic company and its business practices and spread to countless living rooms and parlors across the United States as sales agents convinced families that they needed these photographs in their lives. Consequently, this project provides a more complete picture of what made stereoscopy a continued phenomenon in the United States at the end of the nineteenth and the start of the twentieth centuries, and the role of stereoscopy in American consumer culture.

Keystone structured its business and acted differently from other photographic image producers, such as studios. Keystone separated the production of images and sales, so that there was no relationship between the two parts of the company or its workers. It also sold those images nationally and internationally via door-to-door canvassing. To scale photographic distribution successfully to a national level, the company produced photographs that were inherently impersonal, exemplifying Martha Sandweiss's concept of the "public photograph," in which depicted scenes and people of broad interest or visual jokes that

appealed widely and were understood within American culture.¹ These production and distribution methods stood in contrast to the typical model of highly localized photography from studios that produced pictures of local individuals and scenes for sale within the community. Keystone was not the first to sell stereographs through direct sales, but in adopting and fine-tuning its direct-selling method, the company established a means of selling products that brought the large corporation close to the consumers, and required an interaction that was profoundly different from the norm in personal photographic collecting. Keystone's sales methods were inherently different from previous photographic sales practices because it required the creation of an external need. While consumers might feel compelled to have a portrait of themselves or a family member made for posterity, they did not *need* photographs of Niagara Falls or the White House. Keystone, acting through its sales agents, had to create this need and build desire. In doing this successfully, Keystone brought photography into the mass market.

Keystone insisted upon sales through demonstration, selected sales agents that exemplified aspirational figures, and injected its sales pitch with the names and endorsements of other emulative figures to serve as additional intermediaries to the faceless large company. In selling this way, Keystone found a means to connect its broadly appealing photographs to individuals, utilizing agents who forged personal connections with their customers through carefully honed sales pitches and engagement of thoughtfully tailored testimonials and references from upstanding citizens. There are three elements central to the sales practice: the triumvirate of company, worker, and consumer. In unpacking the role of these figures in photographic business, several themes reoccur centered around the emotional appeal of

¹ Martha A. Sandweiss, *Print the Legend: Photography and the American West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 6. Sandweiss further described the "public photograph" as images that "were designed for widespread consumption, and intended to pass before the eyes and into the hands of strangers. Most were made with an awareness of the marketplace, with a calculated attention to what would please a patron or appeal to a prospective buyer or reader." The idea that the photograph was "designed" or "made with an awareness of the marketplace" is essential to my own discussion of Keystone's practices.

photography, especially in the interpersonal relationships between the photographic company and worker, the aspirational role of education as it relates to photography, and consumer motivations in regard to photographic consumption. These largely invisible elements in the history of stereoscopy are made visible through studying Keystone's business practices.

While there is a growing body of literature that engages aspects of the intersection of photography and business practices, the majority of it has different emphasis, including the role of the photographic supplies industry in the spread of photography, and the ways in which photography aided businesses.² For example, David Nye (1985) and Elspeth H. Brown (2008) mined photographs from corporate archives to discuss how corporations used photographic images.³ These studies exemplify a business history centered on the production of images, and address the ways in which photography worked as an aid to big business. However, in both Nye and Brown's studies, photography was a byproduct of business production, not the focus of the business itself. It was an apparatus of expressing business ideals. To them, photography aided business practice. My work shows the inverse: how business practices aided the production of photography. This inversion of Nye and Brown's concerns demands a focus on different aspects of photographic business, specifically the

² For examples of the former, recent interest includes Shannon Perry, "The Eastman Kodak Co. and the Canadian Kodak Co. Ltd: Re-Structuring the Canadian Photographic Industry, C. 1885-1910" (Ph.D. thesis, De Montfort University, 2016); Michael Pritchard, "The Development and Growth of British Photographic Manufacturing and Retailing, 1839-1914" (Ph.D. thesis, De Montfort University, 2010). Reese Jenkins' 1987 Chandlerian study was the forefather to this type of work, but I have dismissed it in my own research, because I see it as a study of a different (but allied) field, the photographic supplies industry. Reese V. Jenkins, *Images and Enterprise: Technology and the American Photographic Industry, 1839-1925* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987). Recent scholarship that is not about technology (or not wholly about technology) includes the entirety of *PhotoResearcher*, no. 25 (2016), as framed by Kelley Wilder, Ulla Fischer-Westhauser, and Uwe Schögl, "Photography in the Marketplace: On the Material History of Business," *PhotoResearcher*, no. 25 (2016): 1-6. These articles, however, as Wilder et al.'s introduction indicates, present a material history, rather than a focus on business practices in the way I have just described.

³ David Nye, *Image Worlds: Corporate Identities at General Electric, 1890-1930* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1985); Elspeth H. Brown, *The Corporate Eye: Photography and the Rationalization of American Commercial Culture, 1884-1929* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

ways in which Keystone View Company attracted consumers and sustained itself, and takes company's image production as subservient to these roles.

The role of attracting consumers and sustaining the photography business is not entirely absent from the history of photography. Anne McCauley's *Industrial Madness* (1994), which charted photography studios in Paris between 1848 and 1871, presented the photographer as a businessman, asking:

If [...] photographers are treated like other small shopkeepers, and their wares either satisfy consumer demand or fail to do so and therefore disappear or are modified, then what becomes of the history of photography and how does our image of the photographer change?⁴

This is a central question in framing a photographic business history. Photographers with commercial operations are inherently businesspeople, and framing them in this way shifts attention away from the image and onto their practices. McCauley's question moves away from the artist's aesthetic skills as a camera operator and the images that resulted, and toward his strengths or failings as an entrepreneur. Keystone, on the other hand, is not an individual entrepreneur of the 1850s; it was an international photographic publishing firm working decades later. Keystone rarely identified individual photographers in favor of publicizing the collective brand. Therefore, my 'photographer' is not a small businessman, but a 'big business' photographic publisher, and the "image of the photographer" is not my concern. Reframing McCauley's question, if one treats a stereoscopic publisher like other national brands, and its wares either satisfy consumer demand or fail to do so and therefore disappear

⁴ Elizabeth Anne McCauley, *Industrial Madness: Commercial Photography in Paris, 1848-1871* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 16. McCauley's fascinating study presented empirical data and rich, previously untold narratives, but did not posit a clear answer to this question. Still, especially in detailing the bankruptcy records of unsuccessful photographers, McCauley revealed a heretofore unconsidered financial network necessary for the photographers to function, which is a significant advancement for photographic business history. Other points addressed by McCauley, such as where one should set up their studio and how to advertise themselves, were concepts taken up by Stephen Monteiro and Anne Verplanck in their studies of individual daguerreotypist studios. Stephen Monteiro, "Veiling the Mechanical Eye: Antoine Claudet and the Spectacle of Photography in Victorian London," *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* 7 (2008): 1–21; Anne Verplanck, "The Business of Daguerreotypy: Strategies for a New Medium," *Enterprise & Society* 16, no. 4 (2015): 889–928.

or are modified, then what becomes of the history of photography and how does the role of the photograph change? This question privileges the social role of photography over the images produced. The decisions of the business and the subsequent reaction of the consumer become centralized in analyzing photographic history. I argue that the role of aspiration was a key factor in creating and satisfying the rampant demand for Keystone's stereographs.

One reason why it is particularly hard to centralize business practices in writing photographic history is that in many cases there is an absence of hard data about photographic producers, such as business and personnel records, despite the abundance of their visual outputs.⁵ In some cases this absence might be more perceptual than actual. Peter Palmquist dedicated his career to discovering obscure and otherwise unknown photographers of the American West and early female photographers by turning to newspapers, city directories, and other large-scale data that tracks and reports on populations as a whole.⁶ Palmquist was generally content to discover and assemble biographies, which was a difficult pursuit that has contributed significantly to the history of photography; however, authors like McCauley, as well as Stephen Monteiro in his study of Antoine Claudet, and Anne Verplanck in her study of T. P. and D. C. Collins have taken that work a step further and questioned what deeper meanings could be ascertained from non-visual sources.⁷ By resisting the urge to privilege the images above all other resources, it is possible to develop a clearer view of the photographic market, allowing space for the existence of photographers whose work has not survived or remains uncredited. This integration of the surviving visual material and textual

⁵ Besides the problem of records not being preserved, Paul Frosh's study of the stock photography industry found complications in addressing questions of production, marketing methods, and consumer culture, because the stock agencies did not grant Frosh access to information about the companies' internal practices. Therefore, issues of archival access may also prevent these studies. Paul Frosh, *The Image Factory: Consumer Culture, Photography and the Visual Content Industry* (Oxford: Berg, 2003).

⁶ Palmquist was prolific, but the works that most significantly exemplify this process were Peter E. Palmquist, *Pioneer Photographers of the Far West: A Biographical Dictionary, 1840-1865* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000); Peter E. Palmquist, *Pioneer Photographers from the Mississippi to the Continental Divide: A Biographical Dictionary, 1839-1865* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005).

⁷ Monteiro, "Veiling the Mechanical Eye: Antoine Claudet and the Spectacle of Photography in Victorian London"; Verplanck, "The Business of Daguerreotypy: Strategies for a New Medium."

references provides a ripe terrain in which one can develop new questions. In this thesis, textual material provided insights to the practices of Keystone's sales agents, who are virtually nonexistent in the visual archive. Shifting away from images as the primary source is essential in writing a photographic business history. Indeed, Keystone is a fruitful case study for examining business practices not because of its particularity, but because more textual materials survive relating to Keystone's business functions than exist about its most similar competitors, such as stereoscopic publishers B. W. Kilburn, Underwood & Underwood, James M. Davis, and H. C. White Company.

It is easy to see why images preoccupy scholars. Museums, archives, and private collections readily collect and preserve photographs, and scholars can find them easily at collecting repositories and online.⁸ The same cannot be said for photographic companies' business records. If they survive, they are often not as accessible and may be separated from the images.⁹ Furthermore, in approaching photography from the images first, scholars do not tend to ask questions that rely on the approach used by McCauley, Monteiro, or Palmquist,

⁸ Steve Lawrence reported in a 2001 *Nature* article that free, unrestricted access to articles online increased papers' impact. While articles largely remain behind paywalls and subscription services, archives have generally digitized their material and served it wholesale for free. American federal grants favor digitizing entire collections, rather than singular objects, so that it is not unusual for archives to upload discrete sections of a large collection or the digitized version of an entire archive, and make it freely available online. Unencumbered by limited access hours or travel expense, free online access to archives democratizes the materials. Unfortunately, it also reduces the researcher's direct access to the reference specialists at the repository, who may help connect the researcher to undigitized materials or tell him or her about other pertinent material held elsewhere. For a consideration of the role of social capital in in-person archival research, see Catherine Johnson and Wendy Duff, "Chatting Up the Archivist: Social Capital and the Archival Researcher," *The American Archivist* 68, no. 1 (2005): 113–29.

⁹ Museums and archives too often value the visual output over any textual material. For example, the Center for Creative Photography (Tucson, Arizona) does not itemize business records of two of its most prominent commercial photographers, Richard Avedon, and Ansel Adams (whose commercial work sustained his landscape photography career). Both finding aids show a series of correspondence, but nothing dedicated specifically to business records. In other cases, records are scattered. The primary sources in Verplanck's article were from libraries in Michigan, Massachusetts, and Connecticut (even though the business was in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), and the surviving daguerreotypes were in Pennsylvania, Missouri, and New York. Verplanck, "The Business of Daguerreotypy: Strategies for a New Medium." The survival of the Collins studio archival materials is unusual enough in early photographic history, but the scattering of this material between different archives is unfortunately common for surviving photographic business records. With Keystone, for example, correspondence between the company and the Barnhart family can be found in two different archives, one in Pennsylvania and one in Virginia, with no acknowledgement of the other in their finding aids and collection descriptions. Yet another Barnhart letter turned up on eBay in 2014, and more still were sold through Cowan's Auctions in 2014.

who utilized city directories, newspapers, and census data. Their projects demonstrate that new questions arise when one traces the photographic industry through the individual. Photographic studies would benefit greatly from addressing the photographic business more broadly, including interrogating how photographers and companies attracted customers and sustained themselves as businesses, as well as the more standard question of what they produced. Doing this would allow a more direct and explicit understanding of the images themselves and why the photographer produced them. Tracing Keystone's sales practices, for example, shows how the company utilized aspiration to attract consumers and harnessed the low overhead costs associated with direct-selling to sustain the business. Understanding these business decisions better contextualizes the photographs that the company produced.

My interest is in the interconnectedness between the functions of attracting consumers, sustaining the business, and producing photographs. Investigating the social role of photography allows these connections to be seen more clearly. When scholars have engaged photography's social role, it is often through the relationship of the production and circulation of photographs, and has most prominently been featured in discussions of photography and the popular and specialized press.¹⁰ However, I am especially interested when these studies involve consumer interaction with the actual photograph, rather than a reproduction, because the physicality of interacting with a 'real' photograph, as opposed to an image in a book or magazine, draws the most direct parallel to how one would interact with a stereographic image. However, as Elizabeth Edwards has pointed out, there are profound

¹⁰ See, for example, James L. Hevia, "The Photography Complex: Exposing Boxer Era China (1900–1901), Making Civilization," in *Photographies East: The Camera and Its Histories in East and Southeast Asia* (Duke University Press, 2009), 79–119; Christopher Pinney, "Photos of the Gods": *The Printed Image and Political Struggle in India* (London: Reaktion, 2004); Jennifer Tucker, "Science Illustrated: Photographic Evidence and Social Practice in England, 1870-1920" (Ph.D. dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 1996); Elizabeth Edwards, *The Camera as Historian: Amateur Photographers and Historical Imagination, 1885-1918* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2012), especially pp. 216-225; Steve Edwards, *The Making of English Photography: Allegories* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), especially pp. 110-116; Cara A. Finnegan, *Making Photography Matter: A Viewer's History from the Civil War to the Great Depression* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2015).

gaps in our ability to trace issues of the social within the realm of production and exchange.¹¹

This is certainly true in Keystone, where one cannot reconstruct data about the demographics of specific consumers, or what views they purchased. Yet, one can trace their collective influence on the company, and also, perhaps, the company's influence on the consumer.

Here, I draw especially from Elizabeth Siegel, who noted in her study on nineteenth century American photograph albums:

[F]amily albums acquired meaning in the context of a reciprocal relationship between the public, commercial sphere and the private, domestic one. [...] [T]he spheres were anything but separate. On the contrary, domestic practices were profoundly shaped by commercial concerns, and the personal habits of consumers could have a tremendous effect on commerce. The many functions of photograph albums – family record, parlor entertainment, social register, national portrait gallery, or advertisement for photography itself – cannot be understood without taking into account this striking reciprocity.¹²

Uniting the commercial and domestic in a study, as Siegel did, allows for a more complete understanding of the photographic album than previously told. The relationship between the commercial and the domestic is equally applicable to studies of stereoscopy. By inserting social aspects into the company's production and sales, one gains a more complete understanding of the stereoscopic industry, and how, or if, it adapted to consumer preference.

Stereoscopic publishers are ripe for consideration as a business, because unlike individual studios, they sought to push photography out of the typical 'local' model that had previously sustained the image-producing industry. They established ambitious programs for photographing more subjects stereoscopically, and relied on new methods for sales and distribution. From a business history standpoint, this marks a major shift in the photographic industry and a moment worthy of examination. Yet photographic scholarship thus far has generally minimized the function of the business, and instead focused on the cultural

¹¹ In another area of engaging with the social and original photographs, Elizabeth Edwards noted the gaps of knowledge in tracing the social through the exhibition of photographs, specifically, that even when attendance data is known, we still lack demographic information about those viewers. Edwards, *The Camera as Historian: Amateur Photographers and Historical Imagination, 1885-1918*, 240.

¹² Elizabeth Siegel, *Galleries of Friendship and Fame: A History of Nineteenth-Century American Photograph Albums* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 2.

implication of the stereoscopic phenomenon, or the mass-produced stereographic images themselves. By examining stereoscopic business practices, my thesis reveals not only a greater contextual understanding to support the cultural and mass-media implications of stereography, and illuminate the relationship between the commercial and the domestic.

Most influential scholarship on stereography is made up of two dominant themes: works concerned with the phenomenon of stereoscopic viewing and the senses, and works concerned with the content of the stereographic images themselves. The former includes many works stemming from or responding to Jonathan Crary's *Techniques of the Observer* (1990), which examined the phenomenology of perception and used historical philosophical and scientific writing on stereoscopy to frame its Victorian users as a new type of visual consumer, an active 'observer.'¹³ Crary, and those who continued in his tradition, investigated what the act of looking through a stereoscope meant to viewers in the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁴ Although this may be an important frame for understanding the stereoviewing public in mid-nineteenth century Europe and America, by the end of the nineteenth century the process no longer sparked the same kind of curiosity.¹⁵ The public found less to

¹³ Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1990). Crary discussed the stereoscope specifically between pp. 116-136. Crary is coming from what Bettina Gockel termed the "October moment": the concept "that photography is a historical construction and does not reveal reality." Bettina Gockel, "Looking Back from the 'October Moment' to the 'FSA Moment' in American Photography," in *American Photography: Local and Global Contexts*, ed. Bettina Gockel (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2012), xvi-xvii. It should also be noted that Crary's 'observer' is at odds with the scientific notion of the observer. See Lorraine Daston and Elizabeth Lunbeck, "Observation Observed," in *Histories of Scientific Observation*, ed. Lorraine Daston and Elizabeth Lunbeck (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 1-9; Peter Burke, *A Social History of Knowledge II: From the Encyclopédie to Wikipedia* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012).

¹⁴ For those following after Crary, see, for example, Britt S. Salvesen, "Selling Sight: Stereoscopy in Mid-Victorian Britain" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1997); Nancy M. West, "Fantasy, Photography, and the Marketplace: Oliver Wendell Holmes and the Stereoscope," *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 19, no. 3 (1996): 231-58. For a subset specifically interested in describing the experience of stereoscopic sight, see Rosalind Krauss, "Photography's Discursive Spaces: Landscape/View," *Art Journal* 42, no. 4 (1982): 311-19; Jib Fowles, "Stereography and the Standardization of Vision," *Journal of American Culture* 17, no. 2 (1994): 89-93; Mary Jane Appel, "Re-Imagining the World: The Historical Implications of the Stereograph" (M.A. thesis, University of New Mexico, 1995); Laura Burd Schiavo, "From Phantom Image to Perfect Vision: Physiological Optics, Commercial Photography, and the Popularization of the Stereoscope," in *New Media, 1740-1915*, ed. Lisa Gitelman and Geoffrey B. Pingree (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2003), 113-37. Of all these works, only Krauss' article predates Crary.

¹⁵ The literature where stereoscopy was a subject of marvel and scientific consideration seems to have fallen away with the first ebb in interest in stereoscopy, around the 1870s. Laura Schiavo argued that intellectual

marvel about in regard to stereoscopic effects by the time Keystone arrived in the market in 1892. Therefore, this frame becomes less critical for my work on Keystone, which scrutinizes why people felt compelled to own stereoscopic photographs, rather than interrogating the act of looking stereoscopically. More relevant to my work, however, are those scholars concerned with stereoscopy and the relationship between vision and touch. These scholars shift the attention of the senses from sense as a phenomenon (Crary's focus) to sense as a holistic experience.¹⁶ In expanding the discussion of the senses, Luisa Calè and Patrizia Di Bello refer to viewers not as Crary's 'observers,' but as "beholders."¹⁷ Di Bello, for example, writing on stereographs of sculpture exhibited at the 1862 London International Exhibition, described the consumer impulse relative to stereo cards acquisition as a "transition from 'flâneur optical' to 'collector tactile' available to even those of modest means."¹⁸ This speaks more broadly to the place of consumer interest and demand, and relates to practices I have found within Keystone. Keystone encouraged its sales agents to engage the haptic in a portion of its sales pitch (addressed in Chapter 3), rendering a similar connection between viewing, feeling, and consuming. This element of stereoscopic viewing, turned experiential

interest in the ocular experience of stereoscopy waned with the introduction of the Brewster stereoscope, which internalized the mechanism of stereoscopic seeing. By the 1890s, the rhetoric had shifted to the educational and entertainment value of the material. This could be likened to shifts in mainstream discourse about more recent new technology, such as the introduction of home internet in the late 1990s, which was addressed as a technological phenomenon in its early years but reframed as a cultural change-agent today. For Schiavo on the Brewster stereoscope and vision, see *Ibid.*, 129–31.

¹⁶ See, for example, John Plunkett, "'Feeling Seeing': Touch, Vision and the Stereoscope," *History of Photography* 37, no. 4 (2013): 389–96; Patrizia Di Bello, "'Multiplying Statues by Machinery': Stereoscopic Photographs of Sculptures at the 1862 International Exhibition," *History of Photography* 37, no. 4 (2013): 412–20. However, works that examine other photographic formats, or visual culture more broadly, are also relevant to considering stereography through this lens. See, for example, Luisa Calè and Patrizia Di Bello, "Introduction: Nineteenth-Century Objects and Beholders," in *Illustrations, Optics and Objects in Nineteenth-Century Literary and Visual Cultures*, ed. Luisa Calè and Patrizia Di Bello (Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 1–21; Patrizia Di Bello, *Women's Albums and Photography in Victorian England: Ladies, Mothers and Flirts* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2007); Elizabeth Edwards, "Thinking Photography Beyond the Visual?," in *Photography: Theoretical Snapshots*, ed. J. J. Long, Andrea Noble, and Edward Welch (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), 31–48.

¹⁷ Calè and Di Bello, "Introduction: Nineteenth-Century Objects and Beholders," 4.

¹⁸ Di Bello, "'Multiplying Statues by Machinery': Stereoscopic Photographs of Sculptures at the 1862 International Exhibition," 419.

and consumable, remained relevant for Keystone's audience and is therefore important to consider in my own work.

Researchers concerned with the images themselves may appear to be more closely aligned with my interest in consumer behaviors; however, these works focus on visual cultures and do not connect consumer demand to business practices.¹⁹ Scholars who address the content of the images have identified several prominent themes including 'otherness,' travel surrogacy, and depictions of war.²⁰ Those working on American stereoscopy typically find themselves researching at the Keystone-Mast Collection at the California Museum of Photography.²¹ The majority of researchers who use the Keystone-Mast Collection work on image-dominant research projects, or perhaps find themselves focused on the images because there is so little textual material exists alongside the images in California.²² Too often, when

¹⁹ My discussion of scholars who focus on image content refers specifically to scholars who are writing about these images as stereographs, such as Melody Davis, Laura Schiavo, or Judith Babbitts, as opposed to the vast number of scholars who use these photographs as historical images, generally ignoring the stereographic format altogether. Examples of the latter include many researchers who select and reproduce only a half of a stereographic photograph in their publications, such as Jon Krampner, *Creamy & Crunchy: An Informal History of Peanut Butter, the All-American Food* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013). These scholars are interested in the content of the image, regardless of its stereoscopic format. (Krampner, in my example, used half of a stereograph of the 1904 St. Louis Louisiana Purchase Exposition to complement the fair's role in his telling of the history of peanut butter.)

²⁰ For work on 'otherness' in stereography, see Judith Babbitts, "Made in America: A Stereoscopic View of the United States," in *American Photographs in Europe*, ed. David E. Nye and Mick Gidley (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1994), 41–56; Judith Ann Babbitts, "'To See Is to Know': Stereographs Educate Americans about East Asia, 1890-1940" (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1987); Marilyn Faye Morton, "The Social Stereoscope: Issues in American Cultural History" (Ph.D. dissertation, Emory University, 1998); Brenton J. Malin, "Looking White and Middle-Class: Stereoscopic Imagery and Technology in the Early Twentieth-Century United States," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 93, no. 4 (November 2007): 403–24; Megan Claire Halsband, "The 'Keystone Tour of the World 400 Series': Stereographic Images of Africa and American Self-Representation" (M.A. thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2008). On travel surrogacy, see Pauline Stakelon, "Travel through the Stereoscope," *Media History* 16, no. 4 (2010): 407–22; Samuel A. Batzli, "The Visual Voice: 'Armchair Tourism,' Cultural Authority, and the Depiction of the United States in Early Twentieth-Century Stereographs" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois, 1997); Appel, "Re-Imagining the World: The Historical Implications of the Stereograph"; Susan Kempler, "America 'Discovers' the World: James Ricalton's 'Travels on Next to Nothing', 1844-1929" (Ph.D. dissertation, Rutgers University, 1991); Paolo Parmeggiani, "From Grand Tour to Virtual Tour: Italy through the Stereoscope in 1900," *Visual Studies* 31, no. 3 (2016): 231–47. On war stereographs, see Hevia, "The Photography Complex: Exposing Boxer Era China (1900–1901), Making Civilization"; Emily Godbey, "'Terrible Fascination': Civil War Stereographs of the Dead," *History of Photography* 36, no. 3 (2012): 265–74; Andrew L. Mendelson and Carolyn Kitch, "Creating a Photographic Record of World War I: 'Real History' and Recuperative Memory in Stereography," *Journalism History* 37, no. 3 (2011): 142–51.

²¹ Every single thesis and dissertation listed in the previous citation credits a visit to the California Museum of Photography; several of the articles and chapters do, as well.

²² I base this statement, and the following, upon my work as the curator of collections at the California Museum of Photography, which includes the Keystone-Mast Collection, the extant negatives and annotated contact prints

these scholars realize that questions about stereoscopic publishers' sales successes had limited answers within the Keystone-Mast Collection or online, they worked only with the materials at hand rather than seeking out answers in archives that reside on the other side of the country or abroad. My approach has been the opposite. I mined the archives in the eastern United States and England, which had strong textual materials pertinent to stereography but far fewer relevant images. Rather than working with the specific images themselves, the underpinnings of the phenomenon implied by Keystone's large archive guided my research. I searched archives for evidence of the company's sales practices, not its photographic output.

That is not to say that the image-centric scholars have always neglected questions of consumption or distribution, but it has been secondary to their study of the content of the images. Melody Davis, Laura Schiavo, and Judith Babbitts touched on distribution and sales, but questions of reception, rather than distribution and sales, were the basis of their arguments.²³ Those who have focused on the image content have generally embraced historiographical and teleological approaches, leading ultimately to the question of why these images matter. These questions do not answer my concern, because these scholars interrogate what the images say, not why consumers wanted them. By focusing instead on stereographic sales methods, my work approaches the same images by viewing them as tools that contributed to stereography's appeal. Rather than genres or discrete subjects of stereographs, I address how sales agents used specific stereographs (and their genres) and their reception by potential customers, in order to place these photographs in people's homes. My interest is in the motivation of the photographic producers, or, more specifically with the large companies

produced by Keystone View Company of its output and that of the companies they absorbed, including Underwood & Underwood, H. C. White, Universal Photo Art Company (C. H. Graves), American Stereoscopic, B.W. Kilburn, and George Rose.

²³ Melody D. Davis, "Doubling the Vision: Women and Narrative Stereography: The United States, 1870-1910" (Ph.D. dissertation, City University of New York, 2004); Melody Davis, *Women's Views: The Narrative Stereograph in Nineteenth-Century America* (Durham, New Hampshire: University of New Hampshire Press, 2015); Laura Schiavo, "'A Collection of Endless Extent and Beauty': Stereographs, Vision, Taste and the American Middle Class, 1850-1880" (Ph.D. dissertation, George Washington University, 2003); Babbitts, "'To See Is to Know': Stereographs Educate Americans about East Asia, 1890-1940."

that oversaw the majority of the production of American stereographs in the 1890s and early 1900s. These companies produced the images *because* the optical experience of stereoscopy interested the American public and because there was demand for a given subject or genre of images. The stereograph publishers were at the root of the cultural phenomenon of stereoscopy. These companies sought to develop – and profit from – publishing the specific images that consumers demanded.

When scholars touch on the functions of stereoscopic business, they often do so by citing two key voices: William Culp Darrah’s two books on stereography, *The World of Stereographs* (1977) and *Stereo Views* (1964), and George Hamilton’s reminiscences on the industry, *Oliver Wendell Holmes: His Pioneer Stereoscope and the Later Industry* (1949).²⁴ Both address the stereographic market directly, but are critically flawed resources. Darrah loaded his books with statistical statements but lacked citation, a point he acknowledged and as an explanation offered, “To document every comment would require several thousand footnotes—an utterly impractical situation.”²⁵ This lack of sources is troubling, especially when many of the sources he must have referenced relative to Keystone and other twentieth century stereoscopic companies have not survived intact in the forty years since Darrah published *The World of Stereographs*.²⁶ Like Darrah, George Hamilton’s 1949 text, based on a lecture to the Newcomen Society of the United States, also suffers from a lack of citation. As the second president of the Keystone View Company, his role in the stereoscopic industry informed his talk. This provided an air of authority to Hamilton’s words, but given that he

²⁴ William C. Darrah, *The World of Stereographs* (Gettysburg, PA: W.C. Darrah, 1977); William C. Darrah, *Stereo Views: A History of Stereographs in America and Their Collection* (Gettysburg, PA: Times and News Publishing Co., 1964); George E. Hamilton, *Oliver Wendell Holmes: His Pioneer Stereoscope and the Later Industry* (New York: The Newcomen Society, 1949).

²⁵ Darrah, *The World of Stereographs*, [iv]. Darrah proclaimed in his preface that he planned to deposit fully annotated copies at the George Eastman Museum’s library and the former library of the National Stereoscopic Association. Representatives from both organizations have told me that this never happened.

²⁶ Darrah, of course, had access to countless private collections, as well as access to the Keystone View Company materials before the University of California, Riverside acquired it. This makes his references especially difficult to trace and re-locate, because textual material pertinent to Keystone did not end up in California.

was born in 1882 and therefore was only ten years old when Keystone was founded, his account of Keystone's early history cannot be considered firsthand experience.²⁷ Despite these flaws, scholars cite them the regularly in reference to stereoscopic business and sales practices.²⁸ Because of the problems in confirming Darrah or Hamilton's claims, and thus without knowing the context from which the original sources made their statements, they are not reliable sources.

Two masters theses have drawn on Darrah's methods and studied large stereoscopic firms. Thomas Southall's study of the Kilburn Brothers (1977) and Robert DeLeskie's study of Underwood & Underwood (2000) attempted to address the companies' business practices and the images they produced, but both works placed a stronger emphasis on images, and did little to situate the materials within a broader context.²⁹ Others have considered the role of stereoscopic sales, but these arguments are statements in support of other issues, rather than a foregrounded focus of the business practices. John Plunkett's article on stereoscopic sales agents in Britain and the United States focused on salesmanship most concretely, but half of the article discussed a different topic, nickel-operated stereoscopic viewing machines.³⁰

Judith Babbitts wrote a brief history of stereographic salesmanship in her dissertation on

²⁷ Hamilton's first experience with stereoscopic sales was eight years after Keystone was founded. The introduction to Hamilton's remembrance noted that he sold stereographs as a college student between 1900 and 1903 for Keystone's competitor James Davis – therefore, his interactions with Keystone began even later. Hamilton, *Oliver Wendell Holmes: His Pioneer Stereoscope and the Later Industry*, 6. Although I find it problematic that he was speaking with firsthand authority for information he could only have procured secondhand, scholars have accepted Hamilton as a reliable source due to his long relationship in stereography, and perhaps because these issues are reflective of the limitations of a typical oral history, as well.

²⁸ As just one prominent example, Howard Becker interwove the history of the development of a national market for stereoscopy and jazz in *Art Worlds*, arguing that small companies needed to diversify to satiate a national market, and that the national market led to a "homogenization of national taste." His arguments are compelling, but in writing about stereography he quoted Darrah and Hamilton extensively and exclusively, which did not strengthen his argument. Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 315–39. An earlier version of Becker's text on stereoscopy was published in Edward W. Earle, ed., *Points of View: The Stereograph in America, A Cultural History* (Rochester, NY: Visual Studies Workshop, 1979).

²⁹ Thomas W. Southall, "The Kilburn Brothers Stereoscopic View Company" (M.A. thesis, University of New Mexico, 1977); Robert DeLeskie, "The Underwood Stereograph Travel System: A Historical and Cultural Analysis" (M.A. thesis, Concordia University, 2000).

³⁰ John Plunkett, "Selling Stereoscopy, 1890–1915: Penny Arcades, Automatic Machines and American Salesmen," *Early Popular Visual Culture* 6, no. 3 (November 2008): 239–55.

stereographic views of East Asia, but primarily mobilized this information to substantiate her arguments regarding stereographs as a prominent part of American visual culture in the early twentieth century, and discussed sales agents primarily to signal that stereographs had wide distribution.³¹

Although scholars like Babbitts engage sales statistics, such as volume or distribution of sales force, to prove the strength of distribution channels, Susan Porter Benson, Alison Clarke, Regina Blaszczyk, Timothy Spears, and Walter Friedman have all demonstrated that examining the sales process, rather than the sheer bulk of the sales force, can provide more revealing insights to an industry.³² Porter Benson's study of department stores, for example, addressed "the three major presences on the selling floor – saleswomen, managers, and customers – and the way in which their patterns of interaction shaped large-scale retailing for a half-century."³³ By looking at the exchange between the business, its employees, and its customers, Porter Benson has inserted the social into a realm of scholarship that otherwise centers around discussions of the ways in which department stores revolutionized American and European shopping.³⁴ In stereoscopic scholarship, scholars like Babbitts have neglected the social in stereographic sales agents. Babbitts saw the agents as merely a point of citation

³¹ Babbitts, "'To See Is to Know': Stereographs Educate Americans about East Asia, 1890-1940." Salvesen and Davis repeated the pattern employed by Babbitts, of briefly introducing and then dismissing the sales agent in favor of a different central argument. Salvesen, "Selling Sight: Stereoscopy in Mid-Victorian Britain"; Schiavo, "'A Collection of Endless Extent and Beauty': Stereographs, Vision, Taste and the American Middle Class, 1850-1880"; Davis, "Doubling the Vision: Women and Narrative Stereography: The United States, 1870-1910"; Davis, *Women's Views: The Narrative Stereograph in Nineteenth-Century America*.

³² Susan Porter Benson, *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890-1940* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1986); Susan Porter Benson, "'The Customers Ain't God': The Work Culture of Department-Store Saleswomen, 1890-1940," in *Working-Class America: Essays on Labor, Community, and American Society*, ed. Michael H. Frisch and Daniel J. Walkowitz (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 185–211; Alison J. Clarke, *Tupperware: The Promise of Plastic in 1950s America* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian, 1999); Regina Lee Blaszczyk, *Imagining Consumers: Design and Innovation from Wedgwood to Corning* (Baltimore Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); Timothy B. Spears, *100 Years on the Road: The Traveling Salesman in American Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); Walter A. Friedman, *Birth of a Salesman: The Transformation of Selling in America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2004).

³³ Benson, *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890-1940*, 2.

³⁴ For an example of a work that underemphasizes the importance of the department store network, see William Lancaster, *The Department Store: A Social History* (London: Leicester University Press, 1995).

in her arguments about stereoscopy as a mass-media tool. By examining key players in stereographic sales, the sales agent and his (or her) relationships take on a far more powerful role. Through the agent's actions, millions of stereographs ended up in American homes, propelling these photographs to the point of ubiquity that made them so interesting to scholars like Babbitts. Babbitts' work examined what happened when these photographs were consumed, but my work takes a different approach and emphasizes stereoscopy as a consumable product.

Earlier I proposed modifying Anne McCauley's business-centric research question to frame stereographs as a product that either satisfied consumer demand or failed and disappeared. Babbitts' assumptions did not consider the possibility of failure, yet any business, including Keystone, regularly evaluated this possibility in its individual products and overall success. Examining the business network illuminates Keystone's actions to satisfy consumer demand, and provides a more complete picture of its widespread success. My work bridges a gap in research between those interested in the act of producing the stereographs (and the significance of their content), and how consumers used them.

Although this thesis examines the exchange that brought these stereographs into American homes, I am not seeking to define the archetypal American home during this time. Keystone encouraged its agents to canvass all houses in their assigned region, whether the grandest on the street or the one in the most disrepair. Therefore, it would be a futile task to try to consider how the stereograph fit into the American home, because their customers' homes were not of a single monolithic meaning.³⁵ Instead, I draw from scholarship regarding

³⁵ The place of the American home did not escape my attention. The three most influential works for me on this topic were Katherine C. Grier, *Culture & Comfort: Parlor Making and Middle-Class Identity, 1850-1930* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian, 1988); Harvey Green, *The Light of the Home: An Intimate View of the Lives of Women in Victorian America* (New York: Pantheon, 1983); Jean Gordon and Jan McArthur, "American Women and Domestic Consumption, 1800-1920: Four Interpretive Themes," in *Making the American Home: Middle-Class Women & Domestic Material Culture 1840-1940*, ed. Marilyn Ferris Motz and Pat Browne (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1988), 27-47.

the construct of consumer culture that developed in the United States during this period, especially products that populated the home.³⁶ I am interested in questions of the ways in which companies create desire for their products, and how consumers responded. This thesis considers Keystone stereographs as a consumable good, and thereby examines how photography fit that pattern. The new element that I am introducing to this framework is the notion of choice. Consumers needed to decide that the stereograph was worthy of their limited time and money over all other possible purchases.³⁷ Considering the influence of choice in consumption practices re-seats photography as consumable product, and insists that the product's success hinges on its consumption. Looking at photographs in this way reframes its content. It is no longer important what the photograph tells the consumer, but why it appeals to the consumer enough for him or her to spend their money on it.

The consumer culture scholarship I have described so far has primarily considered the relationship between the business and the customer, but in direct-sales individual employees play a significant role in encouraging consumption. Here, the work of historical studies of emotions are particularly relevant.³⁸ The history of emotions is a growing field; it argues that “[b]y studying feelings, historians are uncovering the worldviews and the most fundamental

³⁶ Of particular interest in my study of consumer culture were Marina Moskowitz, *Standard of Living: The Measure of the Middle Class in Modern America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004); Blaszczyk, *Imagining Consumers: Design and Innovation from Wedgwood to Corning*; Clarke, *Tupperware: The Promise of Plastic in 1950s America*. Other sources will be discussed in later chapters.

³⁷ In Chapter 5, I will address stereography as a tool of rational recreation, and consider its consumption in that frame. However, most of the literature about consumer culture and durable goods examine kitchen and dining wares. See, for example, *Ibid.*; Blaszczyk, *Imagining Consumers: Design and Innovation from Wedgwood to Corning*; Joy Parr, “Shopping for a Good Stove: A Parable about Gender, Design, and the Market,” in *His and Hers: Gender, Consumption, and Technology*, ed. Roger Horowitz and Arwen Mohun (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 165–88.

³⁸ Thought leaders in “emotional history” include Peter N. Stearns and Susan J. Matt. See, for example, Susan J. Matt, “Current Emotion Research in History: Or, Doing History from the Inside Out,” *Emotion Review* 3, no. 1 (2011): 117–24; Susan J. Matt and Peter N. Stearns, eds., *History of Emotions: Doing Emotions History* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2014). Influential works related to – but perhaps not part of – emotional history include Nicole Woolsey Biggart, *Charismatic Capitalism: Direct Selling Organizations in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Judy Hilkey, *Character Is Capital: Success Manuals and Manhood in Gilded Age America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Jeremy Daniel Kaye, “Between Self-Improvement and Self-Destruction: The Male Conduct Manual in the Consumer Society” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Riverside, 2008).

assumptions about life, culture, and personality that people in the past carried in their heads.”³⁹ Scholars have applied the history of emotions increasingly and convincingly to the consumer market.⁴⁰ Brenton J. Malin has incorporated it into a study of media technology, arguing that the power of the stereoscope “came directly from its capacity to transmit not only images but *feelings*.”⁴¹ However, Malin has not described the emotional and character-driven aspects of stereographic sales. In my thesis, I consider the exchange between the sales agent and prospective consumer through the use of emotions and aspiration, personal character, and the notion of success. By engaging these intangible emotional elements, I am grounding the experience of Keystone’s sales pitch within the linked elements of consumer culture and choice. These concepts work in tandem to explain one another. For example, the presence of the aspirational sales agent figure would have been an influencing character in choosing to purchase a stereograph as opposed to other consumable goods. Making these elements of emotion and aspiration visible elucidates Keystone’s methods and clarifies external forces behind the success of Keystone’s photographs.

To understand Keystone as a business, it is essential to understand it within the context of contemporaneous American business practices. Studying Keystone as a business reemphasizes its *raison d’être*: Keystone intended to make money, and the production and sale of photographs fueled its profits. Examining business practices makes sense with a company like Keystone, especially because the founder B. L. Singley was not a fervent

³⁹ Susan J. Matt and Peter N. Stearns, “Introduction,” in *History of Emotions: Doing Emotions History*, ed. Susan J. Matt and Peter N. Stearns (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 2.

⁴⁰ See Peter N. Stearns, “Consumerism and Childhood: New Targets for American Emotions,” in *An Emotional History of the United States*, ed. Peter N. Stearns and Jan Lewis (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 396–413; Susan J. Matt, “Children’s Envy and the Emergence of the Modern Consumer Ethic, 1890–1930,” *Journal of Social History* 36, no. 2 (2002): 283–302; Susan J. Matt, “Emotions in the Market,” in *A Destiny of Choice?: New Directions in American Consumer History*, ed. David Blanke and David Steigerwald (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2013), 29–42. For a survey of the broader outlook of the history of emotions, see Matt, “Current Emotion Research in History: Or, Doing History from the Inside Out.”

⁴¹ Brenton J. Malin, *Feeling Mediated: A History of Media Technology and Emotion in America* (New York: NYU Press, 2014), 24. Original emphasis. Also relevant to photographic histories of emotion is Elspeth H. Brown and Thy Phu, eds., *Feeling Photography* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014). However, this work does not address photography as a consumer good, as I do in my research.

photographer, but a stereograph salesman who felt he could improve upon the practices of the existing stereographic publishers.⁴² Viewing Keystone within contemporary, non-photographic businesses provides explanations for business decisions that seem unusual within the photographic industry, but make sense within broader business histories. For example, the decision to sell photographs exclusively via direct sales is unusual for the photographic market, but American businesses frequently sold goods in this manner when the product benefited from a sales demonstration.

Photographic studios, firms, and publishers needed to operate as successful businesses in order to survive, and understanding what made a business successful can bring insight into why a particular studio or publisher succeeded or failed. Although Keystone's business decisions are particularly relevant to examine through business history, tracing photographic companies through contemporaneous business practices can provide insight into decisions in management, staffing, and marketing. Regarding photographic employment, for example, Peter Palmquist's examination of early female photographers and photographic industry workers would benefit greatly from understanding what types of work were culturally acceptable for middle-class women in the late nineteenth century.⁴³ Similar to the discussion of choice in consumer culture, it is especially informative to understand the sorts of options that one faced. Despite working for a photographic company, Keystone's sales agents were not career photographers, but men and women interested in engaging in the world of business. How Keystone managed them, therefore, needs to be understood in the context of

⁴² Keystone's history will be discussed in Chapter 2.

⁴³ Palmquist worked extensively on Catharine Weed Barnes Ward, who advocated for this line of women's work, but he did not widely use literature outside of the photographic press. Margaret Denny approached Barnes Ward with a broader historical lens, incorporating key works of women's history. Peter E. Palmquist, *Catharine Weed Barnes Ward: Pioneer Advocate for Women in Photography* (Arcata, CA: Peter E. Palmquist, 1992); Margaret Denny, "Catharine Weed Barnes Ward: Advocate for Victorian Women Photographers," *History of Photography* 36, no. 2 (2012): 156–71. Yet I think both Denny and Palmquist, could benefit greatly from considering the work options that women had outside of photography, especially through the work of Susan Ingalls Lewis, *Unexceptional Women: Female Proprietors in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Albany, New York, 1830-1885* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2009).

their broader options for employment. As with any job, their commitment to Keystone was a choice, weighed against other options available to them.⁴⁴

My focus in relating Keystone to contemporaneous American business history and practices is management, corporate communication, and sales. Studies by key figures such as Alfred P. Chandler, Jr., who sought to understand the systems of business that developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and how they dictated shifts in business practices, have informed my understanding.⁴⁵ Of particular interest was JoAnne Yates' study of the ways in which business communications influenced corporate control through study of Illinois Central Railroad, Scovill Manufacturing Company, and DuPont.⁴⁶ In attempting to understand how Keystone was typical or atypical in American business practices, these broad studies of major companies and industries provided a framework of comparison. Both Chandler and Yates framed their studies through the concept of 'systems,' whereas I am more concerned with the social relationships between company, worker, and consumer. However, Yates and Chandler were addressing the relationships that illustrated shifting concepts in business practices such as supply-chain management and corporate communication. I, too, concern myself with issues of supply chains, corporate communication, and company interaction. However, I connect these business practices back to the product and its

⁴⁴ Most of Keystone's agents were college-aged men. Informing my understanding of young-adult middle-class employment in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were Carolyn M. Moehling, "'She Has Suddenly Become Powerful': Youth Employment and Household Decision Making in the Early Twentieth Century," *Journal of Economic History* 65, no. 2 (2005): 414–38; Irvin G. Wyllie, *The Self-Made Man in America: The Myth of Rags to Riches* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1954); Joseph F. Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America 1790 to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1977); E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993); Angel Kwolek-Folland, *Incorporating Women: A History of Women and Business in the United States* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1998); Kaye, "Between Self-Improvement and Self-Destruction: The Male Conduct Manual in the Consumer Society," 4–17.

⁴⁵ Alfred D. Chandler, *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1977); Alfred D. Chandler, *Strategy and Structure: Chapters in the History of the American Industrial Enterprise* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1962); Alfred D. Chandler, *Scale and Scope: The Dynamics of Industrial Capitalism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990).

⁴⁶ JoAnne Yates, *Control through Communication: The Rise of System in American Management* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).

consumers. I see concepts such as those put forth by Regina Blaszczyk in *Imagining Consumers*, or Alison Clarke in *Tupperware*, where the authors melded studies of sales practices in household goods against consumer behavior and tastes, as models for my own work.⁴⁷

Scholars working on direct-sales companies have been particularly conscious of integrating elements of the company and its sales agents, the product itself, and the consumers who purchase it. Keystone, and the direct-selling stereograph companies before them, sold relatively inexpensive products, and strove for repeat customers. Therefore, three close (if seemingly unlikely) compatriots to the agents working for Keystone were the people who sold for brands like Avon, Fuller Brush, and Tupperware.⁴⁸ These companies were (and, in the case of Avon and Tupperware, still remain) household names, and although the individual companies' specific sales methods varied, there are strains of similarities within all three companies' practices, and the motives and actions of the companies' sales agents. Works by Manko, Friedman, and Clarke have inextricably bound discussions of these companies and their products to their sales practices, whereas Keystone has remained divorced from it.⁴⁹ While Manko, Friedman, and Clarke incorporate other frameworks such as women's studies and design history, they have considered Avon, Tupperware, and Fuller Brush within the construct of a direct-selling concern. These practices brought the brands to the masses; the success of the companies' direct selling propelled them into becoming

⁴⁷ Blaszczyk, *Imagining Consumers: Design and Innovation from Wedgwood to Corning*; Clarke, *Tupperware: The Promise of Plastic in 1950s America*.

⁴⁸ The scholars who have worked on these companies were, respectively, Katina Manko, Walter Friedman, and Alison Clarke. See Katina Lee Manko, "'Ding Dong! Avon Calling!': Gender, Business, and Door-to-Door Selling, 1890-1955" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Delaware, 2001); Walter A. Friedman, "The Peddler's Progress: Salesmanship, Science, and Magic, 1880 to 1940" (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1996); Clarke, *Tupperware: The Promise of Plastic in 1950s America*.

⁴⁹ It should come as little surprise that works that serve as histories of these companies, as well as writings by business historians, emphasize the companies' unique business practices. However, the company's business practices and products remain linked in other works, where Keystone's business practices and products are generally separated. Besides the works named in the previous footnote, Kathy Peiss' *Hope in Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998) is a key example of a work that does not extricate the business from its practice of selling in its discussion of Avon and its products.

national and international brands. Yet in writing about Keystone, and stereography in general, this position is equally true but rarely addressed.

Previously I discussed how scholars like Judith Babbitts used stereoscopic business practices, especially sales and distribution, by framing it in consideration of their main arguments about the images themselves. Most works on stereography are content to cite William Darrah and George Hamilton or ignore issues of the stereographs' distribution altogether in their fixation of discussing the photographs' content. Yet as an incorporated company at the dawn of American big business, business success was Keystone's primary concern. Scholarship in both business history and photographic history has yet to seriously consider stereoscopy as an industry, and fully acknowledge that profit dictated company practices. The majority of previous scholarship has focused too much on the consumption and content of stereographs, and not enough with the companies themselves. My thesis foregrounds the role of the company in its examination of Keystone View Company. Rather than focus my attention on the images as others have done, I have sought to find meaning in the company's business practices by studying Keystone's corporate structure, management, sales methods, agents, and consumers through the lens of American cultural and business history. This framing matters because the stereoscopic photographs would not exist without the company, and thus studying the company is paramount to understanding the photographs.

Methodology and Methods

This thesis utilizes the concepts and concerns of business history and applies it to photographic history. My engagement of business history is akin to what Scranton and Fridenson described in *Reimagining Business History* (2013), "a dialogue with fellow historians [...] in tandem with stepping away from our decades-long reliance on economics,

economic history, and management science.”⁵⁰ Scranton and Fridenson were demanding that business history not be siloed against broader aspects of history, and, indeed, my work synthesizes business history studies against broader social, cultural, and consumer histories, as well as the history of photography.⁵¹

This approach is especially necessary because commercial aspects of photographic history have not been of much interest to photographic historians, despite the fact that the photographic press has always acknowledged (if not also scorned) its presence. Steve Edwards discussed at length Stephen Thompson’s 1862 essay “The Commercial Aspects of Photography” in *The Making of English Photography* (2006), which described midsized and small photographic producers and spoke unfavorably toward exceptionally large photographic enterprises, such as the London Stereoscopic Company and the carte de visite wholesaler Marion and Co.⁵² Edwards concludes his discussion with the following:

Does it need saying that most photographers did not belong to the class of a Sarony or a Silvy? By and large, the owners of photographic studios did not employ well-paid colorists or lavish fortunes on equestrian statues, tapestries from Flanders, or exquisite furnishings. Rather, these were men (and, more rarely, women) who worked alongside one or two assistants. Small property owners dominated the photographic field. Photographers were, for the most part, petit-bourgeois producers. They shared the key structural characteristics of the petite bourgeoisie: unlike workers, they owned some capital, but in distinction to the middle class, they labored in the business. Photographers offer an interesting case study of the petite bourgeoisie, uniting the features of two of its main fractions. On the one hand, they produced commodities, like the masters of small workshops; on the other, they sold their wares from small establishments, like small retailers. Historians of photography may not find it a particularly flattering analogy, but the most direct comparison for this kind of

⁵⁰ Philip Scranton and Patrick Fridenson, *Reimagining Business History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 9.

⁵¹ In business history, broadening the scope of the field has increasingly become a rallying cry, such as in Michael Rowlinson and Agnès Delahaye, “The Cultural Turn in Business History,” *Entreprises et Histoire*, no. 55 (2009): 90–110; Stephanie Decker, Matthias Kipping, and R. Daniel Wadhvani, “New Business Histories! Plurality in Business History Research Methods,” *Business History* 57, no. 1 (2015): 30–40.

⁵² Edwards, *The Making of English Photography: Allegories*, 97–100. Of course, beyond this particular example, countless titles in the photographic press existed to share information with commercial photographers, including *Philadelphia Photographer* (1864–1888), *Photographic Mosaics* (1866–1901), *Photographic Times* (1871–1915), *Wilson’s Photographic Magazine* (1889–1914), *Abel’s Photographic Weekly* (1907–1934) in the United States, as well as the journals of photographic societies and associations, such as the National Photographic Association. These journals existed because of the commercial aspects of photography, and the eagerness of commercial photographers to better their practice.

economic activity is with those manufacturer-retailers who purveyed their commodities from a small outlet, such as tailors or shoemakers, butchers and bakers.⁵³

My own work does not borrow from Edwards' Marxist framework or language, because I see Marxism as inherently too structuralist to consider the lives, ideas, and actions of everyday people. I acknowledge, however, that my thinking owes to this argumentation, and at times runs parallel to it. I have used the lens of business and the history of business studies to propose an alternative way to consider photographic businesses. This alternative is informed by Edwards' rallying cry that photographs were consumer goods, and, even if scholars deign to admit it, must be considered as such. However, my use of "consumer goods," is not the same as Edwards' "commodity," because considering photographs as a "consumer good" allows a more malleable interpretation of a product, its usage, and its cultural understanding.⁵⁴ As discussed earlier in this chapter, there is a tendency for slippage between scholars wanting to discuss stereographs as a mass-culture image, but never focusing attention on who, exactly, would have seen these images. The idea of stereographs as mass media cannot exist without a "mass" of consumers acquiring and utilizing the images, and the notion of "consumer goods" in business history better represents this concept by reintroducing the corporate creator and consumer into the framework.

Returning this view to photographic history resonates with W. J. T. Mitchell's sense that a 'picture' is "the entire situation in which an image has made its appearance."⁵⁵ This is the lens through which I have studied Keystone. Looking at the images produced by Keystone is only one part of the 'picture' in regard to understanding the twentieth century

⁵³ Ibid., 100.

⁵⁴ For a survey of key literature that established this framework, see the introduction to Simon J. Bronner, ed., *Consuming Visions: Accumulation and Display of Goods in America, 1880-1920* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1989). Estelle Blaschke also teases apart this contrast in "The Excess of the Archive," in considering the 'economic value' of a photograph and discussing Corbis' role in "taste in consumer culture." Estelle Blaschke, "The Excess of the Archive," in *Documenting the World: Film, Photography, and the Scientific Record*, ed. Gregg Mitman and Kelley Wilder (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 234, 249.

⁵⁵ W. J. T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), xiv.

resurgence of American stereoscopy and its prevalence in American culture. I argue that looking at how Keystone functioned as a big business and maintained the popularity of stereoscopy clarifies the ‘picture.’ Understanding a given image as a construct of imperialism taught to schoolchildren, or an example of humor meant to comment on American home life (or any theme that can be surmised from Keystone’s thousands of published views) makes Keystone’s stereographs a compelling topic for cultural studies, but understanding the methods of the business that produced and distributed the images speaks to the situation in which the images have made their appearance and by which they became a visual topic worthy of elaboration.

I do not utilize actor-network theory (ANT) in my thesis, but studying the work of Bruno Latour, as well as historians working in ANT such as James Hevia, has informed my work.⁵⁶ I have used ANT-inspired thinking in approaching the ways in which photography was made social through Keystone. By considering the social, this thesis aims to gain new insights in the process of photographic exchange and collection. While it is immediately apparent just how different Keystone’s method of sales and distribution was from a traditional photography studio, considering the social elements broadens the understanding of the motivations behind a consumer’s decision to collect stereographs. This is only possible by

⁵⁶ Of particular influence was Bruno Latour, *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers through Society* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1987); Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Hevia, “The Photography Complex: Exposing Boxer Era China (1900–1901), Making Civilization.” Also useful were works that applied ANT to other aspects of visual histories, such as Albena Yaneva, “Making the Social Hold: Towards an Actor-Network Theory of Design,” *Design and Culture* 1, no. 3 (2009): 273–88; Kjetil Fallan, “Actor-Network Theory,” in *Design History: Understanding Theory and Method* (Oxford: Berg, 2010), 66–78; Ilana Gershon and Joshua Malitsky, “Actor-Network Theory and Documentary Studies,” *Studies in Documentary Film* 4, no. 1 (2010): 65–78, and those who applied it to organizational studies, including Lawrence T. Corrigan and Albert J. Mills, “Men on Board: Actor-Network Theory, Feminism and Gendering the Past,” *Management & Organizational History* 7, no. 3 (2012): 251–65; Gabrielle Durepos, Albert J. Mills, and Terrance G. Weatherbee, “Theorizing the Past: Realism, Relativism, Relationalism and the Reassembly of Weber,” *Management & Organizational History* 7, no. 3 (2012): 267–81; Gabrielle Durepos and Albert J. Mills, “Actor-Network Theory, ANTi-History and Critical Organizational Historiography,” *Organization* 19, no. 6 (2011): 703–21.

addressing the interrelationship between the sales agent, the sales pitch, and consumer culture in American society.

Since the rising popularity of ANT and everyday history, one of the important aspects has been the recovery of marginalized ‘actors.’ To examine the relationships between the sales agent, sales process, and consumer, I have employed grounded theory by collecting empirical data from archival primary source documents produced by the Keystone View Company and its employees, and competing stereograph publisher Underwood & Underwood.⁵⁷ Through these materials I have identified hundreds of employees forgotten to history, and been able to directly recover, through diaries and published correspondence, the voice of Keystone’s heretofore marginalized sales agents. While the aforementioned lack of a more robust collection of business papers severely limits the company’s written record, my analysis of the surviving materials provides the most thorough analysis of this content to date.

This has not been done before because Keystone’s surviving business records are largely separated from the visual archive. When the Keystone View Company closed in 1963, it sold its assets to Gifford Mast, who was interested in the company’s patents for commercial-grade optical and ophthalmic devices. Beyond the patents, Keystone’s remains lay dormant for fifteen years, until the family offered the photographic archive, now called the Keystone-Mast Collection, to the California Museum of Photography (CMP) at the University of California, Riverside. When the museum acquired Keystone-Mast in 1978, the CMP only collected its visual archive, comprised of hundreds of thousands of glass and film negatives and annotated contact prints. If any business records survived until 1978, they did not come to Riverside, and have not survived intact. What remains of the Keystone View

⁵⁷ Two particularly influential articles that apply grounded theory to aspects of business cultures are Patricia Yancey Martin and Barry A. Turner, “Grounded Theory and Organizational Research,” *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* 22, no. 2 (1986): 141–57; Ken W. Parry, “Grounded Theory and Social Process: A New Direction for Leadership Research,” *Leadership Quarterly* 9, no. 1 (1998): 85–105. Cara Finnegan uses aspects of grounded theory in her analysis on photographic audiences, Finnegan, *Making Photography Matter: A Viewer’s History from the Civil War to the Great Depression*.

Company's records is primarily visual: the negatives and prints that the company produced and sold, as well as negatives they acquired from other companies. Outside of the photographs, Keystone lacks a formal corporate archive. Keystone (or the Mast family, or the University of California, Riverside) did not preserve any records regarding their actual sales data, personnel, or corporate correspondence. Only a residue of this data still exists, scattered in libraries and private collections that span three continents. My research in archives focused especially on collections that had written material, rather than Keystone's photographic output. This led me away from the Keystone-Mast Collection, and instead toward a range of national museums and archives, university collections, small museums, and private/family collections.

Particularly influential to my work was the Library of Congress' run of *Keystone Review*, an employee magazine published by Keystone between 1898 and 1909, and distributed to its sales agents. *Keystone Review* was not completely unknown prior to this thesis, but was grossly underutilized. Judith Babbitts made several references to *Review* in her doctoral dissertation and even made fleeting mentions of points that I have plumbed in my thesis, such as the presence of Keystone's female sales agents.⁵⁸ However, Babbitts' dissertation was focused on how East Asia was represented visually and textually in stereographs, so although she was clearly aware of *Review*, it was of little use as a resource for her topic, and was relegated to a few quotations and footnotes.⁵⁹ The failing of scholars to utilize *Review* is certainly the fault of the Library of Congress, the sole repository where this magazine has been preserved. Its catalog record is old and outdated, and lacks useful subject

⁵⁸ Babbitts, "To See Is to Know': Stereographs Educate Americans about East Asia, 1890-1940," 38.

⁵⁹ Babbitts also cites *Review* in Judith Babbitts, "Stereographs and the Construction of a Visual Culture in the United States," in *Memory Bytes: History, Technology, and Digital Culture*, ed. Lauren Rabinovitz and Abraham Geil (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), 126-49. Here, too, it was addressed minimally.

headings.⁶⁰ The Library of Congress did not list ‘Keystone View Company’ as a subject heading, and only indexed in the publisher information, a field that one cannot search easily in library catalogs. Even its call number situates it oddly, not in photographic periodicals nor books on stereoscopy, but in a section of company catalogs of photographs. At the Library of Congress, its shelf-mates in this call number include eighty other volumes. These titles are mainly catalogs and lists produced by nineteenth- and early twentieth-century photographic studios of their inventories, checklists produced by collectors, and catalogs of institutional collections. The studio-produced inventories may bear a passing likeness to *Review* because they would have aided in the sale of photographs, but they are not about *how* to sell photographs. *Review*, which rarely listed more than a few stereographs by name but regularly focused on sales technique, is a decidedly different breed than the volumes that surround it. In a closed-stacks collection like the Library of Congress, its location on a shelf may not bear much meaning, but to me it reinforces the problem of non-visual photographic archives. The material that survives is so often limited that there does not exist an infrastructure within which it could be placed to be more easily discovered.⁶¹ Even if it were more readily discoverable, I am not sure whether scholars would have used it. Babbitts was aware of it, but only utilized it for a few footnotes and quotations. Perhaps awareness of its presence would have encouraged others to seek answers to questions about the company’s business practices; I suspect scholars did not pursue these questions when they learned that the visual archive (the Keystone-Mast Collection) contains little in the way of business records. Engaging these heretofore underutilized documents allows one to reassess relationships in a way that was not previously possible.

⁶⁰ In the catalog record, its only subject heading is the outdated term, “Stereoscope -- Periodicals.” In Library of Congress Subject Headings, the current term would be “Photography, Stereoscopic -- Periodicals.”

⁶¹ A call number exists in the Library of Congress numbering system for sale of photographs, under a category for the sale of specific products and services, “HF5439.P43”. However, this call number may not have existed until much later. The Library’s cataloging of the volumes was ostensibly closer to their date of publication and receipt, and may have been further restricted by the divisions that existed at that time.

By approaching my study from written documents rather than photographs, and using previously underutilized and unpublished primary sources, my work is very different from previous scholarship on stereography in its attempt to ground Keystone within business history and reconstruct Mitchell's sense of the whole 'picture.' In engaging the social through my primary sources, I am able to extricate a clearer picture of the process that brought stereography into countless American homes. Studying the exchange between sales agent and consumer allows for a new perspective in stereography that conceptualizes the way that stereography became an important form of photographic mass-media.

The mechanisms of the company dictate the arrangement of this thesis. The chapters address the company, sales employee, and consumer, by each examining a relationship between a given pair. In Chapter 2, I present the history of the Keystone View Company and describe its corporate structure within the framework of American 'big business.' In Chapter 3, I examine the role of the Keystone View Company in its corporate communication with sales personnel. This includes the various methods in which Keystone directed the sales process and instructed its agents in the sales process. In my analysis of this material, I argue that Keystone eschewed the educational emphasis that is so often cited in stereograph consumers' motivations, and instead emphasized the aspirational power of its images. In Chapter 4, I address the role of the sales agent and how he (or she) would be interpreted by American consumers. I present the sales agent as an aspirational figure, and argue that the agents' earnestness was a disarming presence among direct-selling agents. Finally, in Chapter 5, I assess how the company used referrals from upstanding consumers to endorse Keystone's products to prospective buyers and encourage consumer demand. Examining the interrelationships between the company, its sales agents, and its consumers reminds oneself that each part contributes to the corporation's overall success. Collectively, these chapters

show that the explanation of Keystone's success is not understood merely by the number of sales agents in the field or the millions of stereographs produced each year, but was built on complex interpersonal relationships and a convincing rhetoric of aspiration at a time when this resonated within the consumer culture.

Chapter 2: Examining the Business Structure of Keystone View Company

When Keystone View Company came on the market in 1892, it did not look like a typical late nineteenth century photographic image-producing firm, such as a photographic studio. For example, the company lacked a storefront, anonymized its photographers, and did not participate in any print marketing, whereas a ‘typical’ photographic concern was a local shop bearing the name of its photographer and advertising heavily in local newspapers and city directories. Most glaringly different was Keystone’s method of distribution, by selling photographs door-to-door rather than through a storefront or catalog. Keystone built a company with a different structure that allowed it to perform nationally and internationally, rather than just locally. Photographic historians generally understand that Keystone utilized a different model in photographic distribution, but they have not questioned what it means to operate an image-producing company on a national level. In this chapter, I contextualize Keystone’s structure within the history of stereoscopic sales, direct selling, and contemporaneous big-business structures. Then, by analyzing data gleaned from employee magazine *Keystone Review*, I examine Keystone’s distribution structure and practices by addressing the company’s early successes in achieving national and international distribution. In addition to offering a more complete business history of Keystone View Company, this chapter establishes details about the company structure and the context in which the company was formed. Understanding the company structure is critical to Keystone’s corporate communication in Chapter 3, and the identity of the ideal Keystone sales agent in Chapter 4. These in turn inform the final chapter, Chapter 5, which studies how aspects of these elements (printed testimonials within the corporate communication and the character of the sales agent) influenced prospective consumers.

A Brief History of Keystone View Company

Direct experience working in the Keystone-Mast Collection has revealed a set of preconceived notions about Keystone that do not stem directly from any single written source, but from generalities passed down about the company, such as the notion that Keystone always existed with an educational mission. These generalities are due especially to the lack of serious writing about the company. All company biographies of Keystone View Company are brief, and the majority were written by the company itself.¹ When scholars address Keystone they rely on the company sources or Darrah's *World of Stereographs* and its aforementioned lack of citations to support the data. Comprehending the company history is crucial for understanding everything about Keystone's practices and production. This section, therefore, establishes a basic history of Keystone View Company that corrects common preconceived notions and establishes a foundation which will be expanded upon throughout this thesis.

To understand Keystone, it is first important to situate the company within the stereoscopic market in which it was founded. Stereoscopy was popular in the United States for decades before Keystone View Company's founding in 1892.² While much of the early history of American stereoscopy was made through small, independent photographers operating a studio, there were several large-scale publishers that preceded Keystone, and several that

¹ An exception to this is the text written by Karen Martin, the librarian of the Johnson-Shaw Stereoscopic Museum in Meadville, Pennsylvania, the ancestral home of Keystone. Martin's text approaches sources thoughtfully and critically, and its largest flaw is that it is not more widely distributed. Martin, however, has not accessed *Keystone Review*, Keystone's employee magazine, which was meant to be an ephemeral source conveying timely information to sales agents, but has proven useful to tracing the company history. My own brief history of Keystone, therefore, is influenced not only by Keystone's biographies and Martin's writing, but supplemented by content in *Review*.

² Oliver Wendell Holmes' oft-quoted articles about stereoscopy for *The Atlantic* were published in the late 1850s and early 1860s, and mark the dawn of a widespread enthusiasm for stereoscopic photographs in the United States. See, for example, Oliver Wendell Holmes, "The Stereoscope and the Stereograph," *The Atlantic*, June 1859, Available online: <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1859/06/the-stereoscope-and-the-stereograph/303361/> Accessed 12 February 2018.

competed directly with it. Several photography firms traveled widely in photographing subjects stereoscopically or acquired the negatives of other sources to build a more diverse image collection. These larger publishers included B. W. Kilburn of the firm Kilburn Brothers (also called B. W. Kilburn Company), which was founded in the 1860s in New Hampshire, T. W. Ingersoll of Minnesota, and J. F. Jarvis of Washington, D.C. The firm E. & H. T. Anthony served as a distributor of some stereographers' work, and sold stereographs by catalog. Anthony famously distributed Mathew Brady's views of the U.S. Civil War, and Kilburn distributed its views through Anthony as well.³ In 1882, Elmer and Bert Underwood founded the firm Underwood & Underwood.⁴ Underwood was the first firm to sell stereographs exclusively via direct-selling. Initially Underwood distributed other photographers' images, including the aforementioned Jarvis, and the work of photographer Charles Bierstadt.⁵ Underwood quickly expanded into producing its own stereographs, as well. One of Underwood's sales agents, James M. Davis, founded a competing stereoscopic distribution company in the late 1880s, and distributed the works of other photographers, including Kilburn. When Keystone came into the field in 1892, the broader market also included many skilled independent photographers, both distributing locally and through sources including the Anthony catalog, but its two most direct competitors were Underwood and Davis because both had become well-established direct-selling stereograph companies by 1892.⁶

³ Linda McShane, *"When I Wanted the Sun to Shine": Kilburn and Other Littleton, New Hampshire Stereographers* (Littleton, NH: Sherwin Dodge, 1993).

⁴ An early history of Underwood & Underwood is presented in "Stereoscopic Views," *Wilson's Photographic Magazine* 31, no. 446 (1894): 66–69. The company's history is also described at length in DeLeskie, "The Underwood Stereograph Travel System: A Historical and Cultural Analysis."

⁵ *Ibid.*, 53. Ingersoll, mentioned previously, ultimately contracted with Sears for widespread distribution of his photography.

⁶ Another competitor, H. C. White Company, was founded seven years after Keystone in 1899.

Keystone View Company was developed out of these existing firms. Davis had worked for Underwood before striking out on his own. B. L. Singley (1864-1938) began his career in stereoscopy by selling for Davis while a student at Allegheny College in Meadville, Pennsylvania, but left the firm to found Keystone View Company in 1892. Singley was a transplant to Meadville in rural northwestern Pennsylvania, where he undertook preparatory coursework at Allegheny, and sold stereographs to afford his tuition and living expenses; he was raised approximately 280 miles away in rural east-central Pennsylvania. Keystone's self-published origin story, written in a 1926 company publication, describes Davis himself showing Singley a view of gray foxes that convinced Singley of the educational value of stereographs.⁷ Yet Keystone was founded modestly, not with an educational focus but by taking advantage of a local newsworthy situation. In 1892, Singley made stereographic photographs of a flood of local interest to the Meadville area and endeavored to sell the images locally.⁸ To distribute his images, Singley adopted the moniker of "Keystone View Company" because Pennsylvania is nicknamed the "Keystone State."⁹ For the next two years, Singley produced between 600 and 900 negatives himself, while apparently also overseeing the direct-selling of the material as the sales region expanded beyond Meadville.¹⁰

Keystone's direct-selling process was based directly on the methods established by Underwood & Underwood (and later Davis). It utilized a two-step canvass and delivery process.

⁷ Keystone View Company, "Hall of Fame Annual" (Meadville, PA: Keystone View Company, 1926), 5. This story is repeated in other sources, including Karen Martin, *A Short History of the Keystone View Company* (Meadville, PA: Johnson-Shaw Stereoscopic Museum, 2006).

⁸ Karen Martin, *A Short History of the Keystone View Company*, Revised ed (Meadville, PA: Johnson-Shaw Stereoscopic Museum, 2017), 4.

⁹ "Keystone" was such a common name for businesses that small Meadville alone also had a Keystone School of Music and a Keystone Candy Company, as listed in Meadville city directories from 1902 and 1904.

¹⁰ Details on company practice during these earliest years are lacking, and while I cannot find any primary sources to verify Singley's roles (because Keystone photographers were generally uncredited), two sources that report a conflicting number of views produced otherwise state these circumstances similarly. See Darrah, *The World of Stereographs*, 49; Martin, *A Short History of the Keystone View Company*, 2017, 4.

Keystone assigned each agent a territory, typically a portion of a county. For the canvass, a sales agent arrived in a town within the assigned region and systematically worked the area by knocking on doors to homes and businesses and offering a demonstration of Keystone's stereoscope and photographs. (The details of Keystone's prescribed sales pitch are addressed in Chapter 3.) If the agent was able to convince the prospective customer of the value of the material, the customer agreed to a purchase of "some" stereographs and optionally also a stereoscope. After canvassing the territory, the agent then placed an order with Keystone based on the amount of interest received or any specific requests that came up during the canvass. Once the materials arrived, he began delivery, where he returned to the customer's home and began another pitch, rapidly showing views of interest, while the customer, looking at the images through a stereoscope, stated which images he or she wished to buy. Keystone and its agents split the proceeds of the sale. For every dozen stereographs sold for \$2.00, Keystone and the agent each made \$1.00.¹¹

With Keystone's early views and a proven sales process, the company grew and expanded. In the second half of the 1890s, Keystone employed photographers and acquired stereoscopic negatives from other sources, rapidly building its holdings. The company also expanded its infrastructure, by building a larger home-office in Meadville and several additional outposts. Infrastructure growth, as well as the successful expansion of sales territory, is described at length later in this chapter. As the company grew, its number of sales agents in the field did, as well. In order to communicate with them more consistently, Keystone began publishing *Keystone*

¹¹ This was based on the standard contract issued by Keystone View Company, as seen in the Keystone View Company collection at Virginia Tech. However, as Keystone expanded the company developed a more complex agent and sub-agent system where commissions varied slightly. For both the sales contract and letters that discuss commission rates, see Keystone View Company Papers, Ms2010-052, Special Collections, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia.

Review, an employee magazine produced for its sales agents. Published between 1898 and 1909, *Review* is the most reliable surviving source for information about the company. I have utilized this source extensively throughout this thesis, but it is especially the focus of Chapter 3.

Keystone sold widely in rural parts of the United States. In 1898 Keystone declared the rural work a “comparatively new field,” but one that garnered “splendid results.”¹² Because of their geographic isolation, rural customers had access to a smaller range of products, but nevertheless had income to spend. In addition to the rural territories, Keystone sold in cities, and the company’s sales manual advised agents on “hints for canvassing business men,” and selling in “high grade residence,” which included advice for dealing with servants obstructing access to their bosses.¹³ In addition to work in the United States, Keystone agents also sold throughout Canada and other countries. International work will be described in detail later in this chapter.

Agents who opted to work for Keystone entered into a contract that assigned specific territories to work. They were required to purchase stereographs and stereoscopes to serve as their “sample outfit” or “canvassing outfit,” meaning the viewer and images used in direct-selling. According to a pamphlet published by Keystone in 1897,

A canvassing outfit consists of a Sample Box made of dark cloth, two dozen carefully selected Retouched Original Views, three Original Hand Painted Views, one of our ‘Paragon’ Polished Sycamore ’Scopes, our ‘Manual of Instruction,’ and Order Sheet. The Sample Outfit is furnished at retail price, \$5.65, no charge being made for sample box and on receipt of orders amounting to \$75.00 or over, we add to the order free, an exact duplicate of above outfit, except box.¹⁴

Although Keystone incentivized agents to sell enough to recoup the expense of the original buy-in by providing a free set that could be sold to customers, agents faced additional expenses

¹² Keystone View Company, *Manual of Instructions from the Keystone View Company for the Use of Their Agents* (Meadville, PA: Keystone View Company, 1898), 17.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 20, 22.

¹⁴ Original capitalization. “Agents Price List of Views, Stereoscopes and Cabinets,” in pamphlet titled *Keystone Cabinet Kuts* (Meadville, PA: Keystone View Company, 1897).

beyond the initial purchase of the sample outfit. Agents had to pre-pay for orders based on their successes in the canvass and assume that they would be able to close the sale (and recoup their expenses) through an equally successful delivery. If they failed to sell on delivery, however, they were not able to return unsold inventory, and were directed to try selling it to other prospective customers. Furthermore, agents were often responsible for shipping expenses to get orders dispatched to them. Writing to sales agent H. G. Barnhart in 1904, a Keystone representative stated, “It is very much against our Company rules to pay transportation [i.e., shipping] charges. When this offer is made [to discount shipping costs], it is to accept express receipts and credit one half charges when sales have reached a certain amount.”¹⁵ Therefore, even when discounting shipping, the cost had to be paid upfront by the agent and reimbursed on future sales orders. Agents were not reimbursed for the cost of travel as they canvassed either. In a section of the sales manual entitled “Reducing Expenses,” Keystone advised that agents procure a bicycle so that they could canvass the countryside faster than walking the far distances between farm houses in order to save time and make more sales. The manual also suggested trading Keystone product for overnight board:

It is not necessary to pay cash for board and room. In places where you have failed to get an order on a cash basis, suggest before leaving that if they can accommodate you over night, you will bring them a glass [stereoscope] if they will take it in exchange for your board and room. Paying your expenses in this way will reduce them to a minimum.¹⁶

Through this advice, agents were made to feel that they needed to spend even more (to acquire a bicycle or potentially pay travel expenses) to find success in their work. At the end of agents’ selling contracts, agents were discouraged from discounting their samples, and were still not allowed to return any inventory. Keystone instead suggested that agents sell the samples to

¹⁵ Letter to H. G. Barnhart, March 1, 1904. Keystone View Company Papers, Ms2010-052, Special Collections, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia.

¹⁶ Keystone View Company, *Manual of Instructions from the Keystone View Company for the Use of Their Agents*, 18–19.

customers or a new sales agent entering the field.¹⁷ In examining these expenses, it is clear that agents shouldered significant risk in working for Keystone. They had to buy the sample outfit, paying full retail cost, on the assumption that they could sell (or otherwise enjoy) the views, needed to pre-pay for orders, including shipping, and had to pay their own travel expenses. Although agents had resources including the sales manual and *Keystone Review* to support their endeavors, even *Review* started charging a subscription beginning in January 1902. For all these expenses borne to the agents, Keystone placed risk squarely upon the shoulders of its sales agents, and minimized the risk to the company.

Keystone relied heavily on college students to sell its products, just as Underwood and Davis did before it. These agents worked during breaks from school, especially in summer and during the Christmas season. Non-student agents supplemented the college students, and allowed the product to be sold year-round. In *Review*, Keystone noted that its greatest volume of sales was in summer, due to the larger workforce. Yet, the company also acknowledged that summer was a less ideal time to sell:

While the summer season has its advantages it also has disadvantages. It comes at a time of year when people of large incomes and even those of modest incomes are away or going away on vacation trips and consequently spending all their spare money on these trips. You either don't find them at home or if you do you find many with their means exhausted or preparations for expenses to equal income or cash on hand. Often shops and factories are closed down for repairs and workmen and clerks are on short hours or laying around idle altogether. There are many things which modify one's success during the summer months which do not affect one's work during the fall.¹⁸

To remedy this problem, Keystone attempted to sway agents to extend their summer breaks and continue selling through Christmas. This, management claimed, was not at the neglect of school, but that a student could find their greatest sales successes by selling throughout the fall and

¹⁷ "Why Not Retire Gracefully?" in *Keystone Review* 10, no. 8 (September 1907): 119.

¹⁸ "The Student's Opportunity," in *Keystone Review* 6, no. 10 (September 1903): 1.

completing a year of college coursework between January and June.¹⁹ It is not known how many agents were willing to adopt this aggressive school-work balance, but through suggestions such as this one, Keystone was actively trying to combat the seasonality of its workforce and improve its overall sales figures. With a country as large as the United States, nationwide market saturation is never possible in a direct-sales company, but the longer employees worked, the more exposure – and sales – a company gained.²⁰ Seasonality, therefore, was not Keystone's intention, but simply a byproduct of its core sales force.

Keystone began by producing individual cards and short sequential narratives, but by 1899 was also publishing sets of images that were preselected and arranged in a given order. The most common early set was the 72-card "tour of the world," which sold for \$12.00, and documented major sites and people from around the world. This set was later expanded to 100, 200, 400, 600, and 1200 cards, each providing more breadth and depth of subject matter. Keystone also produced sets for more focused topics and regions. By 1900, Keystone had at least six others, including "The Holy Land and its Sacred Places," "A Tour of Egypt," "A Trip to the Gold Fields of Alaska," "Travels in Mexico," "Journeys in the West Indies," and "The Spanish-American War."²¹ In 1903, Keystone published notice of a 100-card set focused on Martinique and St. Vincent, which included photographs of the aftermath of the 1902 Mt. Pelée volcanic eruption, and a 72-card set depicting Central America.²² In the Christmas season of 1906, Keystone added an 18 or 24-card set called "Old Mother Earth's Babies," meant for children's consumption and showing other children of the world by looking at cultural and ethnic

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ On the lack of market saturation, see Victor P. Buell, "Door-to-Door Selling," *Harvard Business Review* 32, no. 3 (1954): 119. Buell noted "No door-to-door sales organization has ever saturated its market; no company has ever been able to recruit a sales organization large enough to make regular calls on more than a small percentage of potential users."

²¹ "A Rich Collection of New Subjects for 1900," in *Keystone Review* 2, no. 6 (April 1900): 2.

²² "Martinique and St. Vincent Set," in *Keystone Review* 6, no. 6 (May 1903): 1; "Central America Set" in Ibid., 2.

differences.²³ Other sets mentioned in *Review* include ones that focused on specific industries, including steel, iron, coal, cotton, silk, dairy, and paper. Keystone printed short textual descriptions on the verso of all of the photographs. These texts were tailored for a specific set, so even if there was overlap between sets (an image used both in Egypt and the world tour, for example), the text may vary in content and specificity, and the company revised it regularly.

Keystone's origin story cites an emphasis on the stereo cards' educational value. Because of its reliance on college students and because Keystone focused in later years on sales directly to schools and school districts, it is commonly assumed that this was always the company's method. In Keystone's earliest years, however, this was not the case. In Chapter 3, I examine a Keystone sample canvass from 1898 and show how little it emphasized educational values. Tracing company developments through *Review* shows that there was an understanding of the way in which an educated agent tacitly indicated an educational value, however, it was not until 1903 and 1904 that Keystone truly reified this focus. In 1903 Keystone ran an editorial from an agent named "Ludden" that alleged that those who were unsuccessful in selling for Keystone failed due to a "lack of appreciation of the educational value of the work, and [...] that the lack of appreciation is caused by lack of sufficient knowledge of what the Views really mean, as truthful illustrations of actual existing conditions in various countries."²⁴ Ludden urged:

Stereoscopic Views have been bought in the past principally for their entertaining features; while that feature will always remain, you can safely let it take care of itself. The agent that caters to the thirst for knowledge sweeping over the country will be the one to reach the highest degree of success in the View business.²⁵

²³ "A Substantial Holiday Greeting from the Company," in *Keystone Review* 9, no. 10 (December 1906): 148.

²⁴ Ludden, "Stereographs from an Educational Standpoint," in *Keystone Review* 6, no. 7 (June 1903): 2.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

A shift was in the works, and in 1904 Keystone announced the goal of the company's "new phase": to educate the public.²⁶ In 1905 it founded a special department within the company focused on educational production and sales. From 1905 through its last issues in 1909, *Review* was dotted with mentions of the value of stereographs in education. For example, Keystone boasted in 1907, "our views have been added to the list of school supplies for the New York City schools, and that they have already been adopted in other schools by the hundreds, from North to South, and from East to West."²⁷ *Review* also reprinted several newspaper articles that commented on the use of Keystone stereographs in the various small cities' local schools.²⁸

These early integrations into public schools were simply the start. Keystone's education department established a 600-stereograph set, coupled with matching lantern slides and a teaching manual, which it packaged to sell to schools, and spent decades refining and improving it.²⁹ Keystone did not cease its door-to-door canvassing, but spent the next fifty-eight years increasingly focused on selling directly to schools. Whereas the earliest surviving Keystone sales manual from 1899 featured headings including "Canvassing Farm Houses," "How to Meet Business Men," and tips on ways one could respond to prospective customers saying, "our views are laid away; we never look at them," or that she "cannot order until I see my husband," the last surviving sales manual, dated 1953, featured headings, "Working Boards of Education," "How to Meet the Statement that Teachers Do Not Use Our Equipment," and "What to Say to the Board

²⁶ William Fletcher Walling, "The Rapid and Wonderful Success of the Keystone View Company Explained," in *Keystone Review* 7, no. 8 (August 1904): 116.

²⁷ "The Secret of the View Man's Enthusiasm," in *Keystone Review* 10, no. 2 (February/March 1907): 20.

²⁸ This included Fremont, Nebraska and Brownsville, Pennsylvania, as found in "The Observation Room," in *Keystone Review* 10, no. 2 (February/March 1907): 27-29 (about Fremont) and "New Aid to School Work" in *Keystone Review* 12, no. 2 (March 1909): 24-25 (about Brownsville).

²⁹ A detailed history of the various revisions and publications produced by the department is outlined in Keystone View Company, *Keystone Sales Manual* (Meadville, PA: Keystone View Company, 1953), 1-4.

Member Who Says that the Board is Already Spending Too Much Money on its Schools.”³⁰ The differences in these manuals document the shift in the business’s focus, but also emphasize the ways in which Keystone continued to support sales agents and advise them against common objections from customers, regardless of whether the customer was an individual or a school board.

As other stereographic publishers quit the stereo industry, as Underwood & Underwood did around 1919 to pursue press photography exclusively, Keystone purchased its negatives. In addition to Underwood, Keystone amassed the negatives of H. C. White, James Davis (including Kilburn’s negatives), Universal Photo Art Company, and Australian publisher George Rose. After acquisition, Keystone published these other companies’ works as its own. By the mid-1920s, Keystone billed its output as “the best of a million negatives” in its employee publications.³¹ The company was also known, however, for culling its negatives and destroying images that depicted obsolete subjects.³² Keystone’s founder, B. L. Singley retired in 1936 and died two years later. After Singley’s retirement, Charles Crandall and George Hamilton, both prior members of Keystone’s management team, ran the company. Crandall died in 1956 and Hamilton in 1962. Keystone remained in business until 1963, at which point it sold all its assets to an employee, Gifford Mast, whose name was on several of Keystone’s patents for optometric devices. Mast and a business partner created a company for the continued manufacture of commercial optometric devices, but was not interested in maintaining a photograph-producing company. The material sat relatively untouched in Meadville with an appointed caretaker to

³⁰ Keystone View Company, *Manual of Instructions from the Keystone View Company for the Use of Their Agents*; Keystone View Company, *Keystone Sales Manual*.

³¹ Keystone View Company, “Hall of Fame Annual,” 83.

³² As recalled in Philip Brigandi, “Philip Brigandi,” *CMP Bulletin* 2, no. 3 (1983): 6. Keystone-Mast, the archive of the surviving visual material, is only approximately 200,000 negatives large.

handle licensing requests, until 1978 when the Mast family donated the image archive to the University of California, Riverside's California Museum of Photography. There, the archive is named the Keystone-Mast Collection.

This thesis focuses only on Keystone's earliest years, especially those chronicled in *Keystone Review*, 1898-1909. These early years are important because they otherwise had minimal representation in primary sources, and therefore the least concrete history written about them. (*Review* lay dormant and generally unnoticed by scholars up to this point.) Keystone's early years established the framework for the company's surprisingly long tenure in the stereoscopic industry. The remainder of this chapter addresses Keystone's positioning as a direct-selling firm, the company's infrastructure development, and the geographic spread of its sales agents through 1909.

Shifts in Stereoscopic Sales

Keystone's careful control of its image in corporate publications and press included an origin story about founder B. L. Singley gazing upon a stereograph of a gray fox and realizing the educational value of stereography. The tale is a classic 'inspiration strikes' story, and represents a common trope in corporate histories that privileges the narrative of the founder.³³ One can learn little from the refraining tale of founder Singley, a self-described man of "no exceptional ability save a tremendous energy and the power to do things [requiring] manual skill

³³ Organizational studies scholars Martin, Sitkin, and Boehm observe this in Joanne Martin, Sim B. Sitkin, and Michael Boehm, "Founders and the Elusiveness of a Cultural Legacy," in *Organizational Culture* (Beverly Hills: SAGE Publications, 1985), 100. The fallacy of origin stories is also addressed in Michael Rowlinson and John Hassard, "The Invention of Corporate Culture: A History of the Histories of Cadbury," *Human Relations* 46, no. 3 (1993): 299–326. The founder concept is also applied in Tupperware's dynamic leader (but not its inventor/founder), Brownie Wise, as a figure that other housewife-saleswomen could aspire toward or emulate, as described in Clarke, *Tupperware: The Promise of Plastic in 1950s America*.

and action,” whose hard work built the largest stereoscopic publisher of the twentieth century.³⁴ Instead, this section follows the logic employed by Rowlinson and Hassard in their study of Cadbury by “contesting the basis of the corporate culture in a company where the culture might appear all but incontestable.”³⁵ In this section, I trace Keystone not through its individual corporate history, but through the broader context in which the company developed, examining first the shifting practices in stereographic sales, and in the next section, the place of direct sales in American culture, especially in the realm of educational sales. Taking this broader approach tempers the impulse of origin stories that so frequently influence studies of a corporation, and provides crucial context too frequently overlooked when one historicizes a single corporation, photographic or otherwise.³⁶ By addressing Keystone stereographs as one of countless photographic and educational options available to the consumer, Keystone is more accurately situated within its corporate landscape and the contemporaneous consumer culture by considering the element of consumer choice. This broader view in turn sets the stage for discussing how Keystone functioned as a company and attempted to maintain an edge over its competition, which is addressed in the second half of Chapter 3.

Alan Trachtenberg referred to the period in which Keystone was founded as the ‘incorporation of America,’ the rise of the American big business.³⁷ In the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, big business was nebulously defined, but related

³⁴ The description of Singley is published in “A New Era for Keystone,” in *Keystone Review* 8, no. 10 (November, 1905): 145, although similar statements appeared in “A Man of Action,” in *Keystone Review* 12, no. 5 (June 1909): 66-68; Keystone View Company, “Hall of Fame Annual”; “Building a Business by the Power of Salesmanship,” *Salesmanship* 2, no. 1 (1904): 17–21; Hamilton, *Oliver Wendell Holmes: His Pioneer Stereoscope and the Later Industry*.

³⁵ Rowlinson and Hassard, “The Invention of Corporate Culture: A History of the Histories of Cadbury,” 304.

³⁶ This approach also tempers the concerns raised by Scranton and Fridenson about “privileging the firm.” Scranton and Fridenson, *Reimagining Business History*, 26–29.

³⁷ Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982).

especially to the scale and refinement of the means of production (from craftsman to factory), breadth of product distribution, and a business' status as a corporation.³⁸ With Keystone and its large-scale peers (such as Underwood & Underwood), the scale of producing stereographs consumed full "factories" printing views, compared to smaller setups by more modest studios, although the methods of printing and assembling stereo cards did not change. Keystone incorporated in 1905, a legal process undertaken by large firms that permitted several advantages to the company, including being able to sell shares of stock in the business to raise capital. Incorporation also required oversight by a board of directors rather than the owner-operator structure that was otherwise common to the photographic-imaging industry. In announcing the incorporation, Keystone expressed pride in the strength and value of the company by stating that it had a "paid-up capital stock of \$200,000 – the largest we believe of any view company in existence."³⁹ However, the greatest shift propelling Keystone to a big business, compared to the more typical 'cottage industry' photography studio was the effective and profitable networks it constructed to distribute views via direct sales. In the core framework of its business, Keystone emulated big business models. Whereas previous stereo companies outsourced sales, such as B. W. Kilburn who used James M. Davis and Underwood & Underwood to distribute views, or placed stereo views in stationery shops for distribution, Keystone practiced vertical integration,

³⁸ For broad-stroke studies on the rise of big business in America, see Glenn Porter, *The Rise of Big Business, 1860-1910* (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1973); Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age*; Chandler, *Scale and Scope: The Dynamics of Industrial Capitalism*.

³⁹ "A New Era for Keystone," in *Keystone Review* 8, no. 10 (November 1905): 147. In addition to the citations mentioned in the previous footnote that touch on incorporation in relation to the concept of big business, other works that discuss the expanded management structure of the corporation (as relevant to Keystone View Company's incorporated structure) include Peter F. Drucker, *Concept of the Corporation*, Revised ed (New York: John Day Company, 1972); Peter Dobkin Hall, *The Organization of American Culture, 1700-1900: Private Institutions, Elites, and the Origins of American Nationality* (New York: New York University Press, 1982); Olivier Zunz, *Making America Corporate, 1870-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990). Incorporation was a far more common practice in the photographic supplies industry, and although Reese Jenkins discusses many businesses that operated as corporations, he does not explicitly point to incorporation as a shift from cottage industry to big business practices. Jenkins, *Images and Enterprise: Technology and the American Photographic Industry, 1839-1925*.

which meant it managed multiple aspects of the business process itself rather than hire it out to other firms.⁴⁰ In other words, Keystone dispatched its own photographers, printed the negatives in its Meadville, Pennsylvania, factory (where the company also manufactured its stereoscopes), distributed the images to its own supply depots around the country and world, and utilized its own staff to sell the products directly to consumers. Vertical integration was an increasingly common practice among big businesses, which saw the control of these steps as a competitive advantage.⁴¹ Doing it on a scale such as Keystone employed was still novel to the photograph industry at that time.

The most crucial difference to Keystone's method of running a business stemmed from the company's decision to distribute goods via direct-selling. Keystone employed agents to sell to individuals' homes, door-to-door, throughout the United States, Canada, Europe, and Asia, but most especially in rural America. Keystone was not the first company to sell stereographs in this manner, but it was the first major firm established that both produced and sold its own content from its founding.⁴² In the 1890s and early 1900s, publishers Underwood & Underwood (founded 1882), H. C. White (founded 1899), and Keystone (founded 1892), and distributor James M. Davis (founded mid-1880s) became the four predominant stereograph companies selling by means of direct sales. All four utilized direct sales exclusively, whereas stereographs had traditionally been sold in retail establishments. Keystone's second president George Hamilton later estimated that between the four direct-selling firms there were six thousand sales agents canvassing the United States to sell stereo cards each summer.⁴³ Their collective sales

⁴⁰ See part four, "The Integration of Mass Production with Mass Distribution" in Chandler, *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business*, 285–378.

⁴¹ This was not true of all industries, however. See *Ibid.*, 363–72.

⁴² Earlier publishers attempted selling through outlets other than direct sales, and Underwood & Underwood initially existed to distribute views by Kilburn and others.

⁴³ Hamilton, *Oliver Wendell Holmes: His Pioneer Stereoscope and the Later Industry*, 17.

forces were met with noteworthy success. By 1901, Underwood & Underwood alone estimated that it produced 7.5 million stereo cards per year, which would be analogous to one in ten people in the United States buying an Underwood stereograph in a single year.⁴⁴ When the other three companies' outputs (for which specific statistics about volume do not survive) are figured in, it becomes clear that stereography remained wildly popular at the dawn of the twentieth century.⁴⁵ The success of these four companies marked a shift in distribution compared to the photographers who sold in retail outlets, who generally existed as 'small business,' rather than a 'big business.'

Keystone was not the first stereography company to rely on a robust network for direct-selling, but antecedents relied on other companies, such as the firm of James M. Davis, to sell for them, rather than develop the infrastructure themselves. For example, the firm of Kilburn Brothers (later B. W. Kilburn Company), based in Littleton, New Hampshire, was the nimblest American firm in its experiments in stereographic distribution. Besides selling through photographers' studios and stationery stores, two of the most common traditional venues for stereographic sales, Kilburn sold stereographs on trains that ran on nearby tourist routes, utilized wholesale distributors Joseph Bates in Boston, Scovill Manufacturing Company, and E. & H. T. Anthony Company for widespread distribution through catalogs, and engaged Underwood &

⁴⁴ Elmer Underwood, "An Outline Re: The Firm of Underwood and Underwood" (Unpublished manuscript, Elmer Underwood Papers, Spencer Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS, 1924), 5. My statistic is based on the population of the United States in 1901 of 77.5 million people, but the reality was that individual customers may have bought many dozens each.

⁴⁵ Broad histories of photography, such as Naomi Rosenblum's *World History of Photography*, focus attention on stereoscopy's popularity from Wheatstone's 1838 viewer through the 1870s, and neglect its continued popularity in later years. Robert Hirsch acknowledges later stereo production in *Seizing the Light*, where his text includes a brief history of Underwood & Underwood, Keystone View Company, and the ViewMaster, but his text is the exception, rather than the rule. Histories of stereoscopy are more generous in acknowledging the full breadth of its history, but even the timeline in Ed Earle's *Points of View*, which spans years 1850-1914, places a significant emphasis on stereoscopy through the 1870s, and far less space per year in the 1890s through 1914.

Underwood and James M. Davis to sell its views via direct sales.⁴⁶ Kilburn serves as a progressive example of a stereoscopic company because it was enterprising enough to experiment with selling stereography through new methods of sales and distribution, trying to achieve the greatest success possible selling inexpensive stereographs. The main difference between Kilburn and Keystone is that Keystone focused exclusively on selling through direct sales, and never invested in any other sales method, thus creating a company that acted differently from its predecessors.

Stereographic direct-selling distributors and publishers originally competed primarily against retail establishments that sold stereographs, such as photography studios and stationery shops. These shops typically represented cottage-industry photographic firms: individuals and small companies armed with cameras and generally photographing local scenes. Keystone and its direct-selling competitors were different because of the variety of subjects they produced. These large-scale publishers sent photographers around the world, and purchased the inventory of many small stereographic producers to sell the images as their own. The breadth of subject matter would likely have made the large-scale publishers more appealing because they had local scenes as well as more exotic subjects.

However, before the end of the nineteenth century, stereograph publishers also faced direct competition with mail-order. As early as 1897, stereographs were pervasively accessible through the Sears, Roebuck and Company catalog, and by 1899 Sears had established a dedicated ‘stereopticons’ department.⁴⁷ Like Keystone, Sears did not attribute photographers’

⁴⁶ Kilburn is a compelling example because it was one of the first large American firms focused solely on stereography, as opposed to using it as a side-line to a traditional photographic studio. For more on Kilburn, see Southall, “The Kilburn Brothers Stereoscopic View Company”; McShane, “*When I Wanted the Sun to Shine*”: *Kilburn and Other Littleton, New Hampshire Stereographers*.

⁴⁷ Sears, Roebuck and Company began selling by mail-order catalogs in 1893, and rapidly positioned itself as stiff competition to general stores in rural America. Sears growth was so rapid and successful that between 1902 and 1908 they “circulated more than 24 million catalogs, or one for every three to four people in America.” Offering

and publishers' names in its catalog texts. The catalog text simply stated that the source was "a first-class stereoscopic view artist who does only the best class of work." Sears emphasized the quality of its stereographic products in its 1897 catalog, noting, "[W]e do not list the cheap, trashy printed views, but only those which are printed on regular photographic paper from a negative."⁴⁸ By 1908, however, Sears had changed its strategy. Although photographers remained anonymous (but apparently included well known publishers such as T. W. Ingersoll, among others), Sears had ceased selling original photographs in favor of inexpensive lithographic reproductions.⁴⁹ Its marketing focus had shifted dramatically, as well. Sears began to emphasize the educational value of its images, boasting that its views were "the only line of colored stereoscopic views on the market in which each and every view is accompanied by a full description." Sears touted having 1,260 views, each with a description, including a 100-card set that it branded the "Educational Series." In advertising the series, Sears described:

no matter how perfect [a] picture may be, no matter how natural in appearance it is, no matter how true an idea it gives us of the exact appearance of [its subject], our interest is

lower prices and a breadth of products equivalent to (if not exceeding) major urban department stores' inventory, Sears served as a lifeline for the approximately fifty percent of Americans who lived in rural areas. Regina Lee Blaszczyk, *American Consumer Society, 1865-2005: From Hearth to HDTV* (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 2009); Susan J. Matt, *Keeping Up with the Joneses: Envy in American Consumer Society, 1890-1930* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003). For writing on Sears and the importance of catalogs in American homes, see Boris Emmet and John E. Jeuck, *Catalogues and Counters: A History of Sears, Roebuck and Company* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950); Thomas J. Schlereth, "Mail-Order Catalogs as Resources in American Culture Studies," *Prospects* 7 (1982): 141-61; Thomas J. Schlereth, "Mail-Order Catalogs as Resources in Material Culture Studies," in *Artifacts and the American Past* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1980), 48-65; Kenneth L. Ames, "Trade Catalogues and the Study of History," in *Accumulation and Display: Mass Marketing Household Goods in America, 1880-1920* (Winterthur, Delaware: Winterthur Museum, 1986), 7-14; Thomas J. Schlereth, "Country Stores, County Fairs, and Mail Order Catalogs: Consumerism in Rural America," in *The Consumer Culture and the American Home, 1890-1930: Edited Proceedings from the Second Annual McFaddin-Ward House Museum Conference*, ed. Glenda Dyer and Martha Reed (Beaumont, TX: McFaddin-Ward House, 1989), 27-45.

⁴⁸ Sears Roebuck and Company, *1897 Sears, Roebuck & Co. Catalogue* (Chicago: Sears, 1897), 468.

⁴⁹ Patricia Condon Johnston, "Truman Ingersoll: St. Paul Photographer Pictured the World," *Minnesota History* 47, no. 4 (1980): 122-32; Sears Roebuck and Company, *1908 Catalogue 117: The Great Price Maker*, ed. Joseph J. Schroeder (Chicago: Follett Publishing Company, 1969). In a six page spread of different stereograph sets, all Sears's cards were lithographs, sold at varying rates that ranged from fifty views for thirty-five cents, to its most expensive, 200 color lithographed views for \$2.30. In comparison, Keystone and Underwood both sold views for \$2.00 per dozen.

very greatly increased and the picture assumes a new and greater value when we turn it over and read [the published description] on the back [...]⁵⁰

Keystone, Underwood & Underwood, and several other major publishers had been publishing cards with didactic text printed on the verso for many years. Sears's emphasis on the educational value of stereo cards demonstrated that Keystone's educational emphasis had reached a critical mass. The shift in the way in which stereographs were marketed in mail-order catalogs responded directly to the successes of stereograph distribution through door-to-door sales. What is particularly relevant here is that Sears switched to mass-produced goods (lithographic prints, rather than original photographs), in response to Keystone and its peers' success in selling views that had educational value. This represents a classic response of big business: to cut costs in production lines to remain competitive.⁵¹ In response to Sears's switch, Keystone did not change its product lines, but instead encouraged agents to carry examples of inexpensive lithographic stereographs in their sales kits to show prospective customers why products like the ones produced by Sears were inferior to Keystone's own photographs. Chapter 3 will discuss the way Keystone advised agents to describe images in their sales pitches. While Keystone's early canvasses placed far less emphasis on the educational value than Sears did in its promotional texts, Keystone stereographs were equally educational (even if this point was not always foregrounded), and by carrying examples of lithographic views, Keystone agents could show

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Declining production costs were credited to the rise of mass-production techniques and the 'economies of scale' brought on by technological improvements. See Porter, *The Rise of Big Business, 1860-1910*, 57–59. For Sears, the production costs were lessened when the company transitioned from producing actual photographs to mass-printing lithographic views, which was faster, cheaper, and more consistent in its production. For a discussion of mass photomechanical printing that considers cost, see the first several chapters of Jeffrey L. Meikle, *Postcard America: Curt Teich and the Imaging of a Nation, 1931-1950* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015).

why the product was worth higher prices, because the quality of an original photograph was always better than a lithographic image.⁵²

Contemporaneous Direct Sales Practices in the United States

The stereograph publishers' success with direct-selling stemmed from how common a practice it was in Gilded Age America.⁵³ There had been a long tradition of traveling salesmen in the United States since its founding, but the expanded railway network of postbellum America made the country more accessible for travelers than ever.⁵⁴ Exact figures on the number of traveling salesmen are difficult to compile because it was a short-term job for many, and sales agents were believed to have been misclassified or generically listed as 'salesmen' on the census, and not traveling agents specifically. In 1899, the president of a professional organization for commercial travelers testified that he estimated there were 350,000 traveling salesmen in 1890, a

⁵² Ed Earle described the problem of halftone lithographic stereographs, "image quality suffered and many were too poor to comfortably view under the magnification of the stereoscope." Edward W. Earle, "The Stereograph in America: Pictorial Antecedents and Cultural Perspectives," in *Points of View: The Stereograph in America, A Cultural History*, ed. Edward W. Earle (Rochester, NY: Visual Studies Workshop, 1979), 16.

⁵³ Traveling salesmen sold to stores or individuals, depending on their employer's directive. Because stereograph sales agents sold to individuals and school boards only (rather than to retail establishments), this brief history focuses specifically on salesmen who direct-sold to individuals. For more on drummers and other salesmen selling to retailers, see especially William H. Baldwin, *Travelling Salesmen: Their Opportunities and Their Dangers, an Address Delivered to the Boston Young Men's Christian Union* (Boston: Boston Young Men's Christian Union, 1874); Chandler, *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business*, 218–20; Spears, *100 Years on the Road: The Traveling Salesman in American Culture*; Friedman, *Birth of a Salesman: The Transformation of Selling in America*, 56–88.

⁵⁴ The network of railroad lines saved considerable time and increased access throughout the country. Marguerite S. Shaffer's *See America First* described one example: "The ride from the Missouri River, which marked the edge of eastern settlement, to Denver was now only 'a railroad ride of twenty-four hours.' The 'then long-drawn, tedious endurance of six days and nights running the gauntlet of hostile Indians,' which [journalist Samuel] Bowles withstood in the summer of 1865, 'was now accomplished ... safe in a swiftly-moving train, and in a car that was an elegant drawing room by day and a luxurious bedroom at night.'" Marguerite S. Shaffer, *See America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880-1940* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2001), 9. In addition to significantly reducing travel time and increasing public safety, short-distance trips could be more easily accomplished because of the improved rail infrastructure. Timothy Spears describes ready access to train travel for traveling salesmen in the second half of the nineteenth century in Spears, *100 Years on the Road: The Traveling Salesman in American Culture*, especially pp. 50-111.

year that the federal census accounted for only 60,000.⁵⁵ Enumerating traveling sales agents in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century becomes even more difficult because little care has been made to distinguish between those who sold to businesses and those who sold direct to consumers.⁵⁶ In his memoirs, one longtime commercial traveling salesman noted that the 1870s and 1880s were a fruitful time for the sales agent because there were “so few products available” to the average rural and small-town American, and thus selling to small retailers was lucrative.⁵⁷ The same reasoning made for fruitful times for door-to-door canvassers, who, unlike the commercial traveler, practiced direct-selling by visiting rural Americans at their homes to sell products. The major mail-order houses like Sears did not yet exist, so the traveling sales agent was a lifeline to American citizenry. Sales agents sold a variety of products that included sewing machines, books, toiletries, lightning rods, medicines, plant seeds, hosiery, and housewares. Some borrowed from the earlier traditions of the peddler, who sold a variety of products from different manufacturers, but increasingly at the approach of the twentieth century the sales agents represented a single company and its product line.⁵⁸ Manufacturers “preferred to rely on salesmen whose financial success depended on selling their products and only theirs.”⁵⁹ Indeed,

⁵⁵ Quoted in Susan Strasser, “‘The Smile That Pays’: The Culture of Traveling Salesmen, 1880-1920,” in *The Mythmaking Frame of Mind: Social Imagination in American Culture*, ed. James Gilbert et al. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1993), 157. Victor Buell illustrated that this was an endemic problem to the field in a much later study. Buell, “Door-to-Door Selling,” 118.

⁵⁶ ‘Drummers’ and commercial travelers sold business-to-business, by acting as an agent of a wholesaler or business-supply company and selling to a retailer. The firm of Marshall Field’s, which was later a prominent Chicago department store, started off in this manner, originally serving as a wholesaler who provided goods for general stores. Another example is National Cash Register Company, which used traveling salesmen in the 1890s to convince a generation of retail businesses to adopt the use of cash registers in their establishments. Friedman, *Birth of a Salesman: The Transformation of Selling in America*, 10, 122; Spears, *100 Years on the Road: The Traveling Salesman in American Culture*, 211.

⁵⁷ Edward P. Briggs, *Fifty Years on the Road: The Autobiography of a Traveling Salesman* (Philadelphia, 1911), 32-33, quoted in Timothy B. Spears, “‘All Things to All Men’: The Commercial Traveler and the Rise of Modern Salesmanship,” *American Quarterly* 45, no. 4 (1993): 541.

⁵⁸ Friedman, *Birth of a Salesman: The Transformation of Selling in America*, 19. To distinguish between the various types of sales professionals, the term “sales agent” will be used throughout this thesis to refer to door-to-door canvasser selling for a single company (e.g. Keystone View Company).

⁵⁹ Biggart, *Charismatic Capitalism: Direct Selling Organizations in America*, 22.

Keystone's standard contract included a non-compete clause that stated that the agent could not "purchase nor sell any other goods except those manufactured and published by [Keystone], and [the agent also agreed to] not place the goods in the hands of the trade."⁶⁰ By doing this, Keystone sought to maintain a greater control over its agents, and in return lavished attention upon its agents' work, as will be discussed in Chapter 3.

The history of direct-selling salesmanship leaves behind a diverse body of primary source literature in the way of guidebooks, sample books, advice magazines for agents, and instructional correspondence between individual companies and their agents.⁶¹ The direct-selling field represents a broad array of companies and business models, ranging from independent agents working as peddlers, to large multinational corporations like Tupperware. Because of the myriad products sold directly, agents' roles could vary dramatically, as well. National Cash Register (NCR), for example, sold directly to retail businesses, whereas Fuller Brush Company sold directly to consumers. The secondary literature makes little distinction between direct-to-consumer selling and business-to-business direct-selling. For example, both Timothy Spears and Walter Friedman address both types of companies in their book-length studies of traveling salesmen.⁶² The scale and demand of the products sold by these types of companies differ

⁶⁰ Keystone View Company. Contract, circa 1900. Keystone View Company Papers, Ms2010-052, Special Collections, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia.

⁶¹ Examples I have studied and found to be informative include Baldwin, *Travelling Salesmen: Their Opportunities and Their Dangers, an Address Delivered to the Boston Young Men's Christian Union*; Ebenezer Hannaford, *Success in Canvassing: A Manual of Practical Hints and Instructions Specially Adapted to the Use of Book Canvassers of the Better Class* (San Francisco: A. Roman & Co., 1877); L.C. Schoenewald, "How to Sell the Encyclopaedia Britannica" (New York, 1934); Underwood & Underwood, *Manual of Instruction from Underwood & Underwood* (New York: Underwood & Underwood, 1900); Underwood & Underwood, *Canvass and Delivery: The Underwood Travel System* (New York: Underwood & Underwood, 1909). Correspondence preserved in archives include Keystone's letters to salesmen in the Barnhart family, Keystone View Company Papers, Ms2010-052, Special Collections, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia, and Barnhart letters, Johnson-Shaw Stereoscopic Museum, Meadville, Pennsylvania.

⁶² Spears, *100 Years on the Road: The Traveling Salesman in American Culture*; Friedman, *Birth of a Salesman: The Transformation of Selling in America*. An earlier work, Truman Moore's *The Traveling Man*, does the same. Truman E. Moore, *The Traveling Man: The Story of the American Traveling Salesman* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972).

considerably, however. The cash registers sold by NCR would have been a one-time purchase with limited need for repeat buying. This is often the case with business-to-business direct selling. In direct-to-consumer selling there were certainly products meant to be sold only once. Encyclopedia sets are one key example, as are technological devices such as vacuum cleaners or the Fotron camera, which was sold door-to-door in the United States in the 1960s. Due to their collective educational value, there is an affinity between direct-selling encyclopedia sales and stereo cards. However, these one-time-buys were a wholly different experience than the sales agents I have most carefully considered in my work.

In Chapter 1, I drew a comparison between Keystone and other inexpensive direct-sold products, such as those produced by Avon, Fuller Brush Company, and Tupperware. This was because these products were relatively affordable, and the sales agents strove for repeat customers, unlike agents selling vacuum cleaners or sewing machines. Another similarity is that these companies' products, like Keystone's stereographs, were framed as tools to improve one's life (through beauty treatments, improved cleaning methods, or the reduction of food waste, respectively), but, like Keystone, were not necessities. Consumers had to choose to spend their limited discretionary incomes on a given product, perhaps at the sacrifice of obtaining the others. Yet while this is an important element to the way in which Keystone fits into this field, Keystone was not selling a product that supported home economics like those produced by Avon, Fuller, or Tupperware. Instead, the company framed stereographs as a tool of both education and entertainment, a concept sometimes called 'edutainment' today. In that regard, the area of direct-salesmanship most ripe for comparison to stereograph sales was the field of book canvassing.⁶³ Stereograph and book agents were attempting to sell products that were framed as

⁶³ It is also worth noting that this is the way Bert Underwood, the younger of the two Underwood brothers, had his start in direct selling. Underwood, "An Outline Re: The Firm of Underwood and Underwood," 2.

simultaneously informative and entertaining, and both found most typical success in rural sales over urban. Additionally, both types of agents were selling products that were more expensive than could be purchased through other retail channels (whether shops or mail-order), but touted the exclusivity and careful production of their product. Furthermore, by the nineteenth century, books sold through direct-sales were typically through agents employed by a publisher and assigned a specific region, and this, too, mirrored the structure of stereoscopic direct-sales practices.⁶⁴ In both the content of their products and the administrative framework of the company, these similarities draw parallels worthy of further investigation.

The most prominent form of a book agent in the late nineteenth century were those who pre-sold books by using a prospectus or canvassing book, which contained samples that represented the finished book in terms of its content, quality, and design.⁶⁵ A subscription book agent's job was convincing prospective customers that they needed to buy a specific book, based simply on a few excerpts featured in the canvassing book, a description of the finished product, and the sales agent's pitch. The excerpts were disjointed, meant to tease the reader with thrilling sections, but not provide enough content to satiate their curiosity. A book's size was viewed as a major selling point. The bigger it was, both in dimensions and page count, the more advantageous it was in the rhetoric of the sales agent.⁶⁶ Most subscription book agents' customers were in rural parts of the country who were not served by local bookstores or libraries. Publishing historian John Tebbel argued that the rural population that was "hungry for books"

⁶⁴ Ronald J. Zboray, "Book Distribution and American Culture: A 150-Year Perspective," *Book Research Quarterly* 3, no. 3 (1987): 55.

⁶⁵ Keith Arbour argued that a better term for prospectuses was 'canvassing books' because it provided more clarity. I will refer to them as 'canvassing books' in all future mentions. Keith Arbour, *Canvassing Books, Sample Books, and Subscription Publishers' Ephemera 1833-1951 in the Collection of Michael Zinman* (Ardsley, New York: The Haydn Foundation for the Cultural Arts, 1996), xvi.

⁶⁶ Alice Fahs, "The Market Value of Memory: Popular War Histories and the Northern Literary Market, 1861-1868," *Book History* 1 (1998): 113.

had not yet developed discriminating tastes in neither the content nor design of the book.⁶⁷ These book agents primarily pre-sold nonfiction works, especially histories and memoirs.

Contemporary histories of the United States Civil War and the memoirs of President and Civil War general Ulysses S. Grant were among the popular titles sold via canvassing book.⁶⁸ Perhaps the most notable example of popular fiction sold through subscription book agents was works by Mark Twain. Twain utilized subscription publishing to sell his early works, including *Innocents Abroad* (1869), *The Gilded Age* (1873), and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876).⁶⁹ During this era in the United States, subscription bookselling was so successful that it caused traditional booksellers to question whether they could compete.⁷⁰

The area of book canvassing that can draw the most similar comparison to stereoscopic sales was the practice of canvassing encyclopedias. Like stereographs, door-to-door sales have been a major distribution method for encyclopedias.⁷¹ Both stereographs (especially those with didactic texts on versos, such as Keystone published) and encyclopedias were framed as tools to convey broad knowledge to all people. Furthermore, the sales agents charged with direct-selling both encyclopedias and stereographs were tasked with justifying the considerably higher cost of

⁶⁷ John Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States, Volume II: The Expansion of an Industry, 1865-1919* (New York: R. R. Bowker, 1975), 512.

⁶⁸ Fahs, "The Market Value of Memory: Popular War Histories and the Northern Literary Market, 1861-1868"; Friedman, *Birth of a Salesman: The Transformation of Selling in America*, 34-55.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 43; Robert McParland, *Mark Twain's Audience: A Critical Analysis of Reader Responses to the Writings of Mark Twain* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2014), 46; *Facts, by a Woman* (Oakland, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing House, 1881), 35.

⁷⁰ Amy M. Thomas, "'There Is Nothing So Effective as a Personal Canvass': Revaluing Nineteenth-Century American Subscription Books," *Book History* 1, no. 1 (1998): 141.

⁷¹ A thorough history of the encyclopedia sales agent has yet to be written, but extant ephemera traces their history to at least the 1870s. Arbour, *Canvassing Books, Sample Books, and Subscription Publishers' Ephemera 1833-1951 in the Collection of Michael Zinman*, 124-25. The Zinman collection of book canvassing ephemera contains a broadside canvassing sample for the ninth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* dating from 1874, which had a list of thirty-five subscribers collected by a sales agent. The broadside noted that the ninth edition had new material that "form[ed] more than one half of the work," and texts by "the ablest writers of the times." The Zinman collection also held an 1879 canvassing book for the ninth edition, which contained sample excerpts, a map to demonstrate the quality of their illustrations, binding descriptions, and prices. This more elaborate canvassing book would have allowed agents to better prove the points made by the earlier broadside.

their product compared to those sold by mail-order catalog or in traditional retail storefronts, and convincing prospective customers that the product was a useful tool for the household, worthy of its price.⁷² In price, however, this comparison diverges because the price of an encyclopedia set was exceptionally high compared to stereographs. The broadside for the ninth edition of *Britannica* (circa 1879) noted that the price was \$9 per volume, or \$189 for the entire set. In comparison, a 100-card stereograph set sold by Keystone was \$16.67 in the 1890s and early 1900s. While both products' agents would have represented the items as indispensable tools for one's self-education, the significant difference in price would not have put these products so directly in competition with one another, or, if they were, would have presented the stereograph as a much more affordable option. This is where the similarity between Keystone and the household goods returns: Keystone was selling a product that was as affordable as those sold by Fuller Brush, Avon, or Tupperware, but with a benefit that was comparable to the much-revered but far costlier encyclopedia set. Through this, Keystone filled a very specific niche that permitted a collective and broad appeal. When cast only against other stereoscopic publishers, this context is easily lost, but when viewed against the landscape of the larger direct-sales industry, a clearer context becomes apparent for the place of stereography within consumer and corporate cultures.

Keystone's Distribution Practices, 1898-1909

⁷² Another similarity is that both companies contended with cheap copies. In Keystone's case, Keystone's cards were not frequently pirated, but competitors sold similar subjects for cheaper (e.g. the Sears photolithograph stereo cards). *Britannica*, however, faced several instances of piracy from the late nineteenth century onward, as well as competitors creating extremely similar but cheaper products. See Herman Kogan, *The Great EB: The Story of the Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 65.

While its corporate structure and direct-sales strategy allowed Keystone to be considered as a big business, the company's distribution practices (between Keystone and the agents) allowed it to build a geographically diverse sales force. Contextualized through contemporaneous distribution practices utilized in American big business, Keystone's practices were both successful and generally typical, with two exceptions: where the company sold, and what it was selling. Keystone sold stereo views worldwide, but focused especially on a rural American audience during a time of rural-urban migration. In Keystone's early years as a company, the 1890s and early 1900s, mass-distribution of products was becoming the norm, but this was still unusual for photography, where individual studios tended to distribute photographs to a localized audience only.⁷³ In this section, I have assembled the surviving data about Keystone's distribution practices for the first time and presented it through contemporaneous distribution practices and broader studies of population data.⁷⁴ From this context, I argue that Keystone made perceptive decisions, reflective of broader business practices, in the choices the company made for situating its distribution centers, and the locations it sent its agents to work. These actions enabled Keystone's successful rise to "big business" in its historically "small business" industry.

⁷³ Keystone's competitors in the stereo industry share in this distinction, because they, too, practiced nationwide direct-selling of stereo views. For more on rural-urban migration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Lorraine Garkovich, *Population and Community in Rural America* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), 83–110; Herbert S. Klein, *A Population History of the United States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 107–44. On rural business practices, see, for example, Steven Hahn and Jonathan Prude, eds., *The Countryside in the Age of Capitalist Transformation* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1985); Schlereth, "Country Stores, County Fairs, and Mail Order Catalogs: Consumerism in Rural America."

⁷⁴ Sales data from direct-selling companies is has not often survived (or, in the case of companies that are still in business, are perhaps simply not yet available for research). Instead, scholars have often relied on secondary reports (as I have through *Review*), or other elements of partial information. For example, Katina Manko described the various office locations created to support Avon, but did not quantify how many staff supported each region/state. Manko, "'Ding Dong! Avon Calling!': Gender, Business, and Door-to-Door Selling, 1890-1955," 135–36.

The expansion of railroad infrastructure in the mid-nineteenth century, coupled with the telegraph and steamship, contributed significantly to opening up the country for the mass distribution of goods.⁷⁵ Alfred Chandler described the impact of the infrastructure development on mass-distribution in *The Visible Hand* (1977), but focused on wholesalers and mass-retailers in this era. Chandler described wholesale “jobbers” moving westward in the United States, settling first in cities like Cincinnati, Ohio, and ultimately Chicago and St. Louis, Missouri. From these more centralized geographic locations, companies could distribute goods more readily to the postbellum South and American West. Reese Jenkins (1987) affirmed this trend in the photographic supply industry when he noted that outside of Rochester, New York, the city of St. Louis was a major hub for photographic manufacture and distribution from the 1880s through the start of the twentieth century.⁷⁶ These distribution trends were so typical in American business after the railroads that it did not matter what type of company was involved; business managers understood that to achieve mass-distribution, they needed additional distribution locations to situate themselves along railroad hubs in geographically diverse regions. Consequently, the westward movement of business was reflected in stereoscopic photography production. Although all the major, mass-distributed American stereoscopic firms were based on the East coast, the majority developed satellite offices in Chicago or St. Louis shortly after their founding dates. An 1892 J. F. Jarvis stereo card distributed by Underwood & Underwood, for example, listed

⁷⁵ In 1850 there were 9000 miles of railroad track across the United States. In 1867, the first Transcontinental Railroad was completed, running across the Continental Divide to Sacramento, California. By 1871, there was an estimated 45,000 miles of railroad track laid across the U.S. Between 1871 and 1900, railroad developers had added an additional 170,000 miles of railroad track. In connecting this rail history to business history, Alfred Chandler argued that the availability and speed of national transportation and communication, coupled with a change in the management structure of these businesses is what made possible these shifts in mass-distribution. Chandler, *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business*, 207.

⁷⁶ Jenkins, *Images and Enterprise: Technology and the American Photographic Industry, 1839-1925*, 73–74.

Chicago as one of the several Underwood office locations.⁷⁷ Keystone also followed these practices by rapidly developing a “supply depot” in St. Louis, as well as locations further west. By establishing these offices, Keystone created a more efficient system for distribution, which placed products in the hands of sales agents more quickly.

Keystone’s corporate home in Meadville, Pennsylvania, a small, rural town, of approximately 15,000 residents, located roughly ninety miles from nearby larger cities Pittsburgh or Cleveland, was away from major railroad and postal hubs.⁷⁸ This made the distribution of stereographs and stereoscopes inefficient, and it often took several days to travel a few hundred miles.⁷⁹ Because of this, Keystone quickly expanded its business offices to satellite locations. By 1898, six years after the company’s founding, Keystone had additional offices in St. Louis, Missouri (the “Central” office, in reference to geography only) and Oakland, California (the “Western” office) to accompany the main “Eastern” office in Meadville.⁸⁰ The 1898 sales manual divided the country by states and directed agents where they should send their correspondence. These offices were meant to streamline the sales and distribution practices by reducing time spent waiting for correspondence or product shipments, which would have taken

⁷⁷ “The Globe at Washington Park, Chicago, U.S.A.,” J. F. Jarvis, publishers (Washington, D.C.), sold only by Underwood & Underwood. Author’s collection.

⁷⁸ The company’s location in Meadville was because its founder, B. L. Singley, had made a permanent home for himself in the city. Keystone’s competitor, Underwood & Underwood, was also founded in an out-of-the-way location, Ottawa, Kansas, where the Underwood brothers were living. Like Keystone, the Underwoods quickly established offices in more geographically centralized and accessible locations.

⁷⁹ Correspondence with the Barnharts indicate that the time between an agent placing an order and the receipt of ordered goods was upwards of one week. Orders were mailed by the agent to the local company office, which took approximately three days to receive and process. Then, depending where the agent was working, it took several more days for a response. For one example, an order dated the 19th was acknowledged by Keystone on the 24th. In another case, where the shipment was inexplicably delayed, Keystone noted that an order received and shipped on August 18 had not yet been received by August 23, and the company had to put a tracer on the order. These orders were sent from the Meadville office to rural West Virginia, a distance of approximately 325 miles. Keystone View Company letters to W. W. Barnhart, dated August 21, 23, and 24, 1905, Keystone View Company letter to Walter W. Barnhart, March 27, 1906. Keystone View Company Papers, Ms2010-052, Special Collections, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia.

⁸⁰ Keystone View Company, *Manual of Instructions from the Keystone View Company for the Use of Their Agents*, 31–32.

far longer if all originated out of Meadville. Keystone noted in 1898, “When ordering goods by freight, allow one day for each 100 miles goods must travel, and then add two extra days, one for making up the order and getting the goods to the depot, and another for possible transfers that may be necessary en route.”⁸¹ This meant that if Keystone needed to ship an order to Kansas City, it would have taken approximately nine days to travel by freight from the Meadville office, but less than three from the St. Louis satellite. Especially as agents worked further afield, these offices saved agents significant time by not having to wait as long for an order.

After the addition of the St. Louis and Oakland offices, other satellite offices soon followed. *Review* reported the opening of a Toronto office in May 1901, and noted that the company held additional auxiliary offices in Portland, Oregon (presumably replacing the Oakland location) and London. Keystone referred to these locations as “supply depots and offices,” and stated to its sales agents, “This gives us more offices and better facilities for accommodating our salesmen and the public than is possessed by any other concerns conducting a similar line of business.”⁸² Although this claim was inaccurate because Underwood & Underwood also established several satellite offices for supply and correspondence purposes, this statement demonstrated the degree to which Keystone understood the advantage that these offices gave them.⁸³ As noted in the previous paragraph, products took several days to arrive, even despite these extra offices. However, the sooner agents received the goods and could

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁸² “Our New Toronto Office: Canadian Headquarters Recently Established,” in *Keystone Review* 3, no. 8 (June 1901): 2.

⁸³ The previously cited 1892 Jarvis card distributed by Underwood & Underwood listed locations in Liverpool; New York; Chicago; Toronto; Ottawa, Kansas; and El Paso, Texas. This provided Underwood with offices in major hubs in Canada, England, the American East coast and Midwest, as well as locations connected to the American South and West. However, an 1898 Underwood & Underwood stereo card lists the company’s locations in New York; London; Toronto; and Ottawa, Kansas, indicating some streamlining. This matches Keystone’s 1901 international office locations identically (but precedes them by several years). New York would provide a larger eastern hub, Ottawa, Kansas would have been a smaller location for the West, and Underwood had apparently eliminated the El Paso and Chicago locations.

commence on product delivery, the less work they had to do to remind their buyers why they were excited enough about stereographs to place an order.

The satellite offices were never as prominent as the Meadville main office, because they served a purely administrative function. Meadville was always listed first on the stereo cards, and is the location most associated with the company. Other office locations were typically listed in city directories, but were unnoticed by local newspapers. Others were so briefly operated that they do not appear in print anywhere aside from stereo cards.⁸⁴ The purpose of these offices were not to raise the company's profile directly in other markets, but to allow quicker access to materials for the sales agents. In turn, it was the sales agents' duty to raise the company's profile in other markets as they sold door-to-door. The agents, then, were critical to the geographic spread of stereographic sales.

Because of the limited functions of the satellite offices, the company's success in utilizing these offices was affirmed by the geographic spread of its successful sales agents. With limited surviving data, this can best be achieved by analyzing the geographic locations listed in letters from sales agents published in *Keystone Review*. Ten of the twelve volumes of *Keystone Review* regularly listed sales agents' locations with their letters.⁸⁵ Between 1898 and 1909, *Review* published reports from sales agents at work in forty-two states, Canada, Europe, and Asia. Although the letters published in *Review* presumably give a narrow vision of the full

⁸⁴ This observation about city directories and newspapers is based on searches on Ancestry.com city directories indices and GenealogyBank's historic newspapers. While Keystone's St. Louis and Portland locations were well represented in city directories, these offices never were the subject of news items in the local press. (That is, where local photography studios often received mention in newspapers in thinly veiled advertisements passing as 'news,' Keystone's satellite offices went unmentioned in the press altogether.) Robert Wright describes instances of Keystone cards featuring just Meadville, which he dated from 1892-1896, one with Meadville, Chicago, and Kansas City, which he dated to 1896, and one with Meadville and St. Louis (only), dating from 1897. A final early card listed locations of Meadville, St. Louis, San Francisco, Toronto, New York, and London. The Chicago and Kansas City offices are completely unknown, even to city directories, and unrecorded outside of their mentions on stereo cards. Robert Wright, "Keystone: An Issue of Issues," *Stereo World* 3, no. 2 (1976): 8-10.

⁸⁵ The *Review* letters published the state an agent was working in, but rarely listed cities and towns.

breadth of Keystone agents' geographic locations, it is clear that sales agents were most active in the Mid-Atlantic and East North Central states, although they spread increasingly throughout the South by 1905, and after 1905 had some presence in the West, as well.⁸⁶ By assembling and processing this data, it is possible to reconstruct where Keystone was successful and how the company's sales agents expanded through the country and world during Keystone's first seventeen years in business. Keystone agents' broad geographic reach can be attributed to the strong distribution network that the company had the foresight to establish in its early years. By mimicking practices seen in contemporaneous big business, Keystone developed a supply-chain effective for the distribution of stereographs nationally and internationally. The act of efficiently distributing a good widely separated the cottage industry from the big business, and thus Keystone's strategically located supply houses and geographically diverse sales force allowed the company to ultimately grow into a big business in its field.

Keystone's rapid growth is apparent through charting the geographic locations of the agents in the issues of *Review*. In the first volume of *Keystone Review* (1898-1899), ninety different sales agents' letters were published. Of these, eleven did not list a location, but the remaining 79 were all based in close proximity to the Meadville, Pennsylvania main office (Figure 2.1). Twenty were in Pennsylvania, sixteen in Ohio, and ten were in New York, the two nearest adjacent states to western Pennsylvania. The remaining agents wrote from Michigan (seven), Maine (five), Massachusetts (four), Indiana (four), Vermont (three), Delaware (two),

⁸⁶ These divisions are defined by the U.S. Census Bureau. "Mid-Atlantic" is a subsection of the Northeast, and is defined as New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania. "East North Central" is a subsection of the Midwest, and is comprised of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin. The "South" includes Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Washington D.C., and West Virginia. The "West" includes Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, and Wyoming. Alaska and Hawaii would be considered part of the West, but were not states during this time and were not represented by Keystone sales agents published in *Keystone Review*.

Maryland (two), Virginia (two), West Virginia (two), Connecticut (one), and New Hampshire (one). The first volume of *Review* was the least geographically diverse year out of the twelve volumes of the magazine, with its greatest emphasis on Mid-Atlantic and New England states.⁸⁷

The relatively compressed spread of Keystone's geographic reach in the earliest recorded year reflects the fact that the company was only six years old, and still building its name recognition and its employee and customer base. The company was recruiting closest to Meadville and not sending the agents too far afield, and it may not have yet been fully equipped to support a more widespread geographic range.⁸⁸ Focusing in the states closest to Meadville also indicated that Keystone was using its home base to its advantage. Keystone recruited heavily among college students, and there was a higher concentration of colleges and universities in the states nearest Keystone. For example, in Pennsylvania alone there were over sixty colleges, universities, and seminaries active and established before Keystone's founding, and three more founded between 1892 and 1900. In California, by comparison, there were fewer than half this number of higher education schools, even though California is over three times the size of Pennsylvania.⁸⁹

Therefore, Keystone did not need to recruit further afield because it had so many college students in the company's home and surrounding states.

The following year (1899-1900) showed more variety, but was still centered on geography nearest to Meadville (Figure 2.1). Of the 142 letters, 141 identified agents' locations. Nearly half of these, sixty-eight, were from Pennsylvania, Ohio, or New York State. Twenty-six

⁸⁷ These are also U.S. Census Bureau definitions. Mid-Atlantic was defined previously; "New England" states include Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont. This statement excludes the volumes that did not publish geographic data (Volumes Seven and Twelve) and thus years where the agents' geographic spread is not known, however, based on the surrounding volumes there is no reason to think that volume 7's geographic range would be dissimilar from volumes six or eight, or that volume twelve would be particularly divergent from the data in volume eleven.

⁸⁸ Keystone had opened the St. Louis office in 1898, simultaneous to the first volume, and it may not have been fully operational. Clearly from these statistics, it was not yet well established.

⁸⁹ These numbers were determined by studying founding dates of universities and colleges as listed online.

more were from nearby Michigan and Indiana (thirteen each). Keystone also featured new successes in states where agents were not represented in letters during the previous year, including Iowa (one), Kentucky (four), New Jersey (two), North Carolina (three), Rhode Island (two), South Dakota (one), Tennessee (four), and Wisconsin (three). Kentucky and Tennessee represented Keystone's first known foray into the Southern states, and South Dakota and Iowa showed early successes west of the Mississippi River. This indicates a growing market further afield from the Meadville office, or perhaps more successful recruitment tactics. The St. Louis office had a strong presence in *Review* during the 1899-1900 year; as the increasingly Midwest and Southern statistics indicate, the St. Louis office's influence expanded beyond the pages of *Review* and found sales successes with the agents who reported to the office.

Sales in the Midwestern states continued to expand after 1900, due to the apparent success of the St. Louis office. *Review* did not publish a single letter from an agent in neighboring Illinois until 1900 (Volume Three), when Keystone published one letter. Five Illinois agents' letters were published the following year. Missouri itself did not have significant showings in sales agents' letters until 1906 (Volume Nine), and from that point onward at least six letters from Missouri agents were consistently published in each volume of *Review*. The establishment of the St. Louis office also resulted in greater sales from northern Midwestern states, including Minnesota, which featured 26 letters in 1908 (Volume Eleven) and North Dakota (23 letters between 1905 and 1908). Keystone sales agents were also increasingly successful in the Southern states.⁹⁰ Virginia sales agents represented thirty-nine letters from

⁹⁰ Keystone's sales in the South continued a century-old trend of Northern companies selling through agents in the south. So-called "Yankee peddlers" were a staple of early the nineteenth century Southern market, and were eyed suspiciously by locals, both from their Northern status and reputation for selling fake or shoddy goods. See Joseph T. Rainer, "The 'Sharper' Image: Yankee Peddlers, Southern Consumers, and the Market Revolution," *Business and Economic History* 26, no. 1 (1997): 27-44. In the postbellum period, Chandler described a major shift in the Southern economy, and more retail storefronts. Although he argued that this put an end to the Yankee peddler of the first half of the century, success of other direct-selling companies in the South, such as Madame C. J. Walker

thirty-seven unique agents.⁹¹ Similarly, Tennessee sales agents were represented in thirty-nine letters from thirty-five unique agents. Southern sales agents were especially active between 1905 and 1908, but four successful agents were working in the state as early as 1899 (Volume Two). Kentucky was also well represented, with letters in every volume from 1899 onward from twenty-four different agents. Georgia's sales were represented in sixteen letters from fifteen sales agents, several of whom worked in multiple Southern states. The other Southern states had sales agent presence in *Review* letters, but in relatively low published numbers. Collectively, Keystone's growing number of agents in the Midwest and the South demonstrated its strength in expanding the brand (and its products) to the parts of the country with the largest population.

The Western United States was undeniably the weakest region for Keystone. In the West, the two states with the most presence were Washington (six agents) and Oregon (five), which ostensibly could be attributed to the presence of Keystone's Portland, Oregon office and distribution center. The Western region also contained the only states in the nation that were never represented by a published agent's letter: Arizona, California, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, and New Mexico (Figure 2.2). By 1910, the West was responsible for thirty percent of the national population.⁹² However, the physical area of the West is expansive, and the land was not yet densely populated. In Nevada in 1900, for example, there were 0.4 residents for every square

Manufacturing Co. and book peddlers, show that the market remained active, although the companies supporting the agents had changed and focused their product line, compared to the assorted sundries sold by Yankee peddlers. Chandler, *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business*, 217; Thomas, "There Is Nothing So Effective as a Personal Canvasser": Revaluing Nineteenth-Century American Subscription Books"; Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998).

⁹¹ Keystone's correspondence with the Barnhart family, who were active in Virginia with recruiting new sales agents, also illustrates significant Southern activity. Although I believe one letter published in *Review* is from H. G. Barnhart, the others cannot be definitively matched to the Barnharts or the agents that they recruited, indicating that there were far more active (and successful) agents than those enumerated in *Review*.

⁹² Klein, *A Population History of the United States*, 134.

mile of land.⁹³ In areas with sparse population, it would have been difficult for a sales agent to gain the quantity of sales that would be worth noting in *Review*. Agents, therefore, may have been in these otherwise undocumented states, but simply not experiencing success worthy of publication. Additionally, although no data survives regarding the locations of Underwood & Underwood sales agents, Underwood's original location in eastern Kansas may have allowed them to better capitalize on the growing Western populations. Much as Keystone's sales agents started strongly in adjacent states, it is conceivable that Underwood may have monopolized the West before Keystone was even founded, making it harder to infiltrate an already saturated, if sparsely populated, region.

That is not to say that Keystone avoided working in low population-density areas. Although the majority of Keystone's agents were working in populous states, they were not working aggressively in major cities. At the turn of the twentieth century, populations shifted internally from rural to urban.⁹⁴ In response, Keystone did not send its agents to the swelling urban centers, but repeatedly insisted that the best business could still be done in rural America. *Review* regularly touted 'country territory,' declaring in 1898, "In recent years our men have been operating in rural districts with splendid results. It is comparatively a new field."⁹⁵ It was a strategic move for Keystone to focus on rural populations, even when those numbers were dwindling. While this may seem like a business misstep, because Keystone was not focused on the places where it could achieve the greatest possible market saturation, it was likely a calculated risk taken by management to place the product where it had less competition. In an

⁹³ U.S. Census Bureau, "Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970" (Washington, D.C., 1975), 31.

⁹⁴ For more on rural-urban migration in this era, see Garkovich, *Population and Community in Rural America*, 83–110; Klein, *A Population History of the United States*, 107–44.

⁹⁵ Keystone View Company, *Manual of Instructions from the Keystone View Company for the Use of Their Agents*, 17. For a particularly detailed example of Keystone's emphasis on country work, see "Country Territory," in *Keystone Review* 12, no. 5 (June 1909): 77-78.

urban market, Keystone would have been in competition with large retail centers and entertainment venues (including theaters, and after 1905, the nickelodeon, a five-cent movie theater), which also would have vied for the urban dweller's discretionary income.

In rural communities, Keystone explained, "the people are prosperous but loath to part with their money."⁹⁶ The competition was not against other industries, but rather the allure of a savings account.⁹⁷ Keystone's stereographs, like many products on the consumer marketplace, were not necessities, but framed as durable goods for which one could get ongoing and continual use. Cultural historian Marina Moskowitz, in writing about flatware marketing, described the challenge of trying to determine when the sale of the durable good would not be seen as an "indulgence."⁹⁸ Although stereo views were far less expensive than fine flatware, Keystone faced similar problems in presenting its goods to a frugal audience who might see the purchase as an unnecessary luxury. Keystone needed to frame its product as money well spent, essentially a better use of money than simply saving it. As such, Keystone advised agents how to meet several related objections to the product, including the statement that one couldn't afford Keystone's stereographs, or "they are too dear; can buy them cheaper [at] the store." To the former, Keystone's response included the statement, "Is there another article you can get that is more instructive and entertaining and will give you more genuine, wholesome pleasure than the stereoscope, and yet cost so little?" The agent was then advised to talk about the cost of travel compared to the cost of a stereoscope and views. In response to the argument about the price, agents were directed to acknowledge that Keystone's cards were "not the cheapest; but they are

⁹⁶ "Diary of an Amateur View Salesman," in *Keystone Review* 9, no. 4 (May 1906): 62. Rural Americans would have had at least a few local stores, and, from the 1870s onward, mail-order catalogs by Montgomery Ward's and Sears, but unlike their urban counterparts, a rural dweller would have had fewer opportunities to handle and inspect exotic products in person. Through their canvass, Keystone agents offered this opportunity with their products.

⁹⁷ For more on consumer culture and spending habits, see Daniel Horowitz, *The Morality of Spending: Attitudes toward the Consumer Society in America, 1875-1940* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985).

⁹⁸ Moskowitz, *Standard of Living: The Measure of the Middle Class in Modern America*, 39.

the best,” and alleged that most stereographs sold in stores were copies, rather than original photographs. Agents were also instructed to remind customers that Keystone’s products were not available in stores, giving an air of exclusivity to the product.⁹⁹ By focusing on the value of the product and selling to rural audiences with more limited selection at hand, Keystone deflected a greater need to compare itself against any particular source of entertainment or future purchase that might be more readily available to an urban customer.

Keystone was not the only direct-selling company to focus on a rural audience. The California Perfume Company (later called Avon) had a similar strategy. Through the 1930s, more than eighty-five percent of the California Perfume Company’s sales were in towns with populations under 2,500. This allowed the California Perfume Company “to establish a market for beauty products among rural populations underserved by the growing retail market sector, long before cosmetics and brand-name toiletries became popular there on a mass scale.”¹⁰⁰ Keystone’s repeated refrain to embrace rural work showed that the company understood that the lack of competition was a boon for business. This strategy allowed the product to stand out, rather than compete against a booming retail market and all the products housed therein. Keystone further honed the strategy by focusing on regions that, although rural, still had more population density than developing parts of the country (the West). This further explains Keystone’s strength in East North Central and Mid-Atlantic states. By focusing in this way, Keystone optimized its product’s success in infiltrating the marketplace, and distributing its goods widely, as a photographic big business.

⁹⁹ Keystone View Company, *Manual of Instructions from the Keystone View Company for the Use of Their Agents*, 13–14.

¹⁰⁰ Manko, “‘Ding Dong! Avon Calling!’: Gender, Business, and Door-to-Door Selling, 1890-1955,” 17.

Over the eleven-year span of *Keystone Review*, the published Keystone sales agents maintained the greatest saturation in the states nearest to Meadville and St. Louis (Figures 2.3). Between 1890 and 1910 the population center of the United States was in Indiana, and thus Figure 2.3 translates as a heat map of population density.¹⁰¹ Indiana is roughly half-way between Meadville and St. Louis, thus the company's two main distribution hubs evenly flanked the eastern and western populations. This allowed Keystone's representatives to be well distributed in the region with the greatest population density, both rural and urban. Furthermore, Meadville was relatively well situated to northern distribution points, and St. Louis for southern, allowing a comfortable geographic center for spreading north and south. These office locations were strategically settled for this very purpose. The company readily relocated offices when a location was not flourishing, as it did when moving the Western office from Oakland to Portland, Oregon. By maintaining the central (St. Louis) and eastern (Meadville) offices steadily throughout these formative years, Keystone was signaling that these locations allowed for streamlined business practices for widespread American distribution. These office locations in particular left the company well positioned for its direct-selling distribution practices.

Keystone's sales reach went beyond the United States, and beyond North America. In addition to selling throughout the United States, the company was active in Canada, Europe, China, and India. Canada was the most widely represented in sales agent correspondence, with 93 letters from eight of the ten provinces.¹⁰² England was next most widely represented with seventeen sales agents' letters, followed by France and Germany, each with six; Scotland and India with five; and one each from Bulgaria, China, Italy, Norway, Russia, and Wales. Little is

¹⁰¹ Klein, *A Population History of the United States*, 134.

¹⁰² Saskatchewan and Newfoundland and Labrador were the only two provinces not represented. Additionally, no sales were reported in the northern territories.

known about these most exotic sales agents. In most cases only their initials were provided as signatures to their published sales narratives, and their quoted letters were brief, listing little more than their city and a quantity of views needed for delivery. Therefore, one cannot know precisely who was selling (or buying) these stereo views, although the excerpts allow some insights. An agent in France had a letter published in French accompanied by the editor's translation, and in the same issue a German agent's letter had broken English appended with an editor's postscript, "We understood it all right."¹⁰³ If the agents were bilingual Americans, they would have likely communicated in English, especially because Keystone's European office was based in England. Therefore, some of these agents in more distant locations may have been locals, not Americans. That, however, was not always the case. Perhaps the best documented of Keystone's early sales agents working abroad was a Canadian who sold views in England. Editor W. T. Stead of *The Review of Reviews* described a Canadian relative named David Ross who sold for Keystone in the United Kingdom in 1901 and 1902, when he was nineteen years old. Ross planned to attend McGill University in Toronto, and agreed to be sent overseas to sell for Keystone in the school year prior.¹⁰⁴ Stead's article emphasized how unusual it seemed to have North Americans selling stereographs in Great Britain, and acknowledged these agents' apparent success.

Keystone was not the first American stereoscopic company to sell internationally.

Underwood & Underwood opened an office in Liverpool in 1890, two years before Keystone

¹⁰³ Herbert A. Barnes, "Keystone Abroad" in *Keystone Review* 8, no. 1 (January/February 1905): 8. Barnes was the regional manager based in England; his article included excerpts by several agents.

¹⁰⁴ Stead's article ran in February 1902, and noted that he began work in 1901, canvassed in Liverpool until it became too hot, then went to Keswick, followed by Scotland, before heading south for Christmas. Therefore it seems that Ross began selling in spring or summer, but decided to pass the entire year in the business because of the successes he found. W. T. Stead, "The Methods and Benefits of the American Invasion: The Story of a Canadian Invader," *The Review of Reviews* (London, February 1902), 208.

was founded.¹⁰⁵ Both firms exported North American college students to sell views in England. Published *Review* letters from Keystone agents in England were less detailed than the domestic letters, so it is difficult to gauge how successful agents were in sales volume, compared to those working in the United States. Speaking to demand, the England-based manager Herbert Barnes noted, “[W]ith our but three years’ work here, the 50,000,000 (in round numbers) inhabitants are not all *yet* supplied, and there is a like number on the nearby Continent, awaiting Keystone Views.”¹⁰⁶ Of course, American inhabitants, with a population of eighty-three million in 1905, were also not all yet supplied either, but the appeal of this statement is apparent. England, and all of Europe, was framed as a territory ripe for the adventurous sales agent. In Barnes’ own words, an agent “can literally travel all around the world selling our goods, getting a magnificent holiday thereby and a pretty good-sized nest egg in the bargain.” Barnes himself noted that he sold in the United States, England, South Africa, and “the various islands in the Indian Ocean.”¹⁰⁷

In England, agents emphasized the quality of their products, just as they did in the United States.¹⁰⁸ However, an element implicitly emphasized would have been the novelty of the method of selling, as well as the agents doing the selling. The British were familiar with direct-selling practices, and like their American counterparts, direct-sales agents were typically seen as a less respectable position.¹⁰⁹ Less familiar to them was the concept of a college student or

¹⁰⁵ Plunkett, “Selling Stereoscapy, 1890–1915: Penny Arcades, Automatic Machines and American Salesmen,” 241.

¹⁰⁶ Original emphasis. Barnes, “Keystone Abroad” in *Keystone Review* 8, no. 1 (January/February 1905): 7.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 7–8.

¹⁰⁸ Stead described, “In this, as in most American commodities, the secret of their success is to be found, not in cheapness, but in excellence. They supply the Old World consumer with a better article than he can procure elsewhere[...].” W. T. Stead, “Methods and Benefits of the American Invasion: How American Students Make Their Way,” *The Review of Reviews* (London, April 1902).

¹⁰⁹ Roy Church, as well as Michael French and Andrew Popp, have written brief but thoughtful histories of British direct-selling as a counterpoint to the larger body of literature on American practices. Roy Church, “Salesmen and the Transformation of Selling in Britain and the US in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries,” *The Economic History Review* 61, no. 3 (2008): 695–725; Michael French and Andrew Popp, “Ambassadors of

aspiring college student in need of funds to pay for his tuition. In describing this phenomenon to his British audience, Stead marveled at the novelty by exclaiming, “How many prospective students from Oxford and Cambridge are to be found who are earning their keep in advance by inducing Americans to buy British-made goods?”¹¹⁰ Keystone agents, by means of their youth and respectable goals, were framed as a version of the ‘deserving’ poor, young men of little means, attempting to right their situation with hard work and education. As such, prospective customers sympathized and were willing to give a hearing to their canvass, and potentially buy their wares.

In Britain, the agent’s aspirations were what gave him respectability amid their difficult plight to afford their higher education expenses. As ‘deserving’ poor, the agents would have been seen as worthy of support and patronage. Keystone’s agents were well versed in the ways to promote the benefits of the stereo views for any prospective customer, and found success in their sales pitches enough for at least some agents, like Stead’s cousin, to make a long-term experience of selling in England. The perception of agents working in Britain is markedly different from the way in which American sales agents were received in their home country, but illustrates how Keystone harnessed the perception of its agents in order to present its products advantageously, even in different markets. If Keystone was exporting an ‘American’ concept of direct sales to Britain that hinged on perception, it is critical to understand just what Keystone

Commerce’: The Commercial Traveler in British Culture, 1800-1939,” *The Business History Review* 82, no. 4 (2008): 789–814. What these articles fail to fully consider is a point argued in the same year by Andrew Gordon, which looks at direct-selling practices in Japan and frame it as an American export. Because direct-selling largely developed in the United States, I feel that French & Popp and Church’s arguments might be well reconsidered in light of Gordon’s argument. Andrew Gordon, “Selling the American Way: The Singer Sales System in Japan, 1900–1938,” *The Business History Review* 82, no. 4 (2008): 671–99. The issue of respectability in the salesmanship field is discussed by Mike Huggins. Mike J. Huggins, “More Sinful Pleasures? Leisure, Respectability and the Male Middle Classes in Victorian England,” *Journal of Social History* 33, no. 3 (2000): 585–601. The issue of respectability and the Keystone salesman is discussed at greater length in Chapter 4.

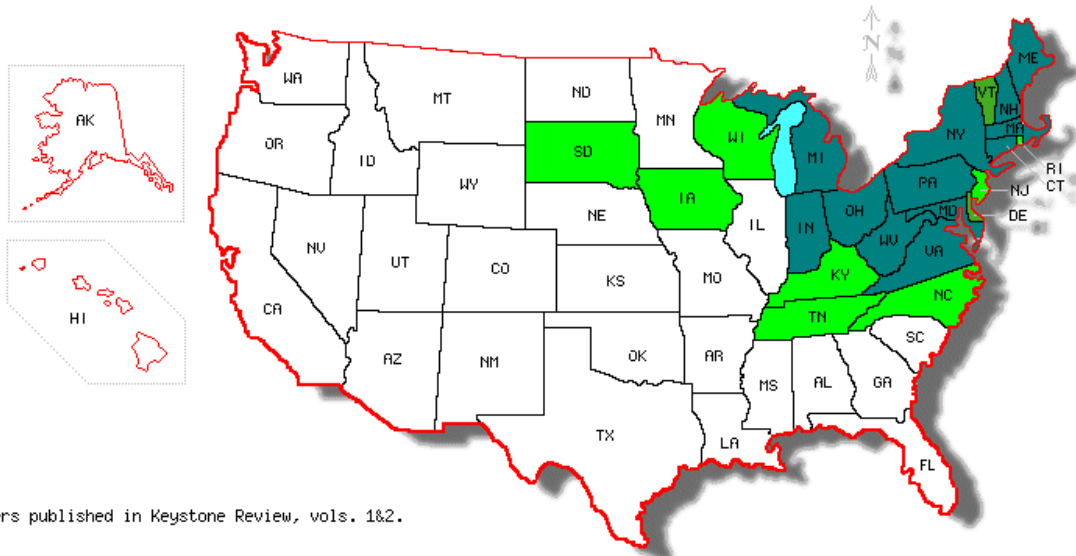
¹¹⁰ Stead, “The Methods and Benefits of the American Invasion: The Story of a Canadian Invader,” 209.

sought to signify in its sales force. The role and public impression of the sales agent is revisited in Chapter 4, which describes the archetypal concept of Keystone's sales agents, the college student. Americans do not share the concept of the 'deserving poor,' but find a close cousin in the notion of the "self-made man," which a Keystone agent also signaled. In Chapters 4 and 5, I argue that to an American audience, Keystone utilized aspirational visions, both in the products and in the social position of the agents themselves, as a means to sell its views successfully to people who would likely never attend college themselves.

The content of this chapter establishes a crucial baseline for my study of Keystone View Company by emphasizing the way Keystone transformed the meaning and structure of a photograph-producing business in order to sell its goods to a national and international audience. Keystone's management envisioned the company as a big business by adopting practices used in other industries to scale a larger company. By controlling the creation, production, and distribution of its products, Keystone practiced vertical integration, and the company managed its supply chain by establishing strategically placed supply depots to reduce shipment time. Utilizing direct-sales methods altered the ways in which Keystone marketed and sold its products. Other types of businesses that produced retail goods harnessed these concepts regularly, but historically the scale of the photographic image-producing industry was much smaller, and such notions had not been necessary previously. The following chapters examine Keystone's business practices in further detail, through the lens of the corporate management, its sales agents, and its customers. Each of these elements are influenced and affected by the overall structure and concept of Keystone, as described in this chapter.

Keystone Salesmen between 1898 and 1901

- - 1898/99 & 1899/1900
- - 1898/99 ONLY
- - 1899/1900 ONLY



Source: diymaps.net [c]

Figure 2.1. Keystone sales agents between 1898 and 1901, as discovered in letters published in *Keystone Review*.

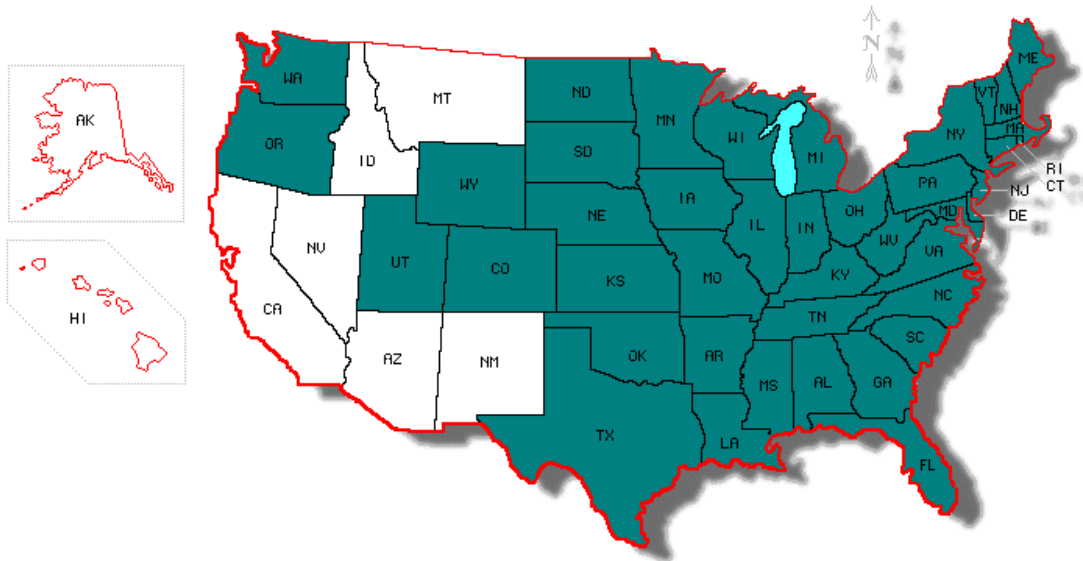
Teal indicates agents published in both volume 1 (1898-1899) and volume 2 (1899-1900).

Dark green (the state of Vermont) indicates agents published in volume 1 only.

Bright green indicates agents published in volume 2 only.

Location of Keystone salesmen, 1898–1909

● - >=1 salesman

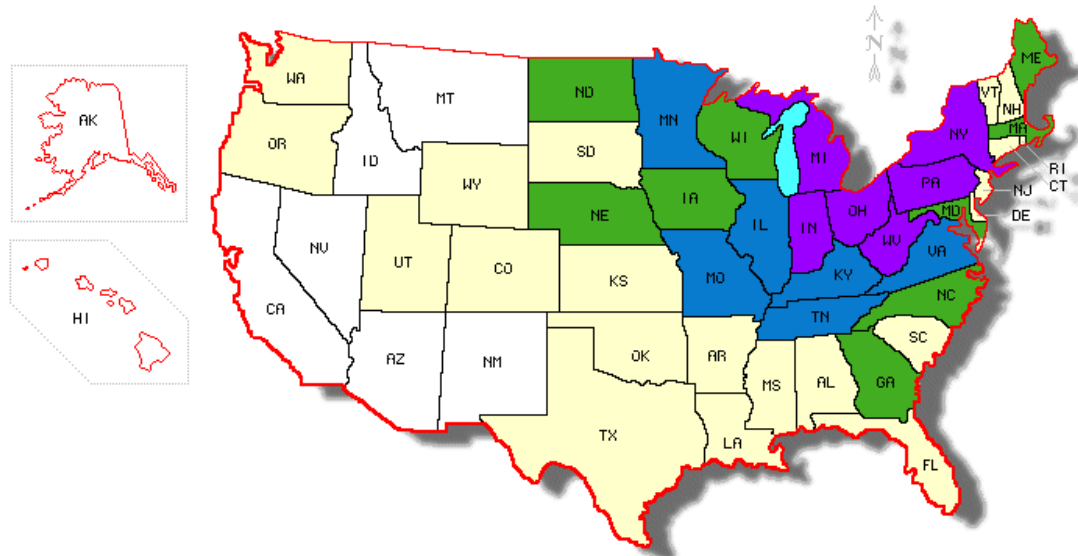


Source: diymaps.net [c]

Figure 2.2. Location of Keystone sales agents between 1898 and 1909, as discovered in letters published in *Keystone Review*.

Presence of Keystone salesmen, 1898-1909

- - 51+ salesmen
- - 25-50 salesmen
- - 11-24 salesmen
- - 1-10 salesmen



Source: diymaps.net [c]

Figure 2.3. Presence of Keystone sales agents, 1898-1909, as discovered in letters published in *Keystone Review*.

Purple indicates more the 51 different sales agents reported in *Review*.

Blue indicates 25-50 sales agents.

Green indicates 11-24 agents.

Buff indicates 1-10 agents.

White indicates zero reported agents.

Chapter 3: “Your Success Is Our Success”: Keystone’s Corporate Communication and Sample Canvass

The quote that opens this chapter title is taken from the concluding paragraph of Keystone View Company’s 1898 *Manual of Instruction* for its sales agents, where the corporate author noted, “[W]e wish to remind you that your success is our success. Our interests are mutual.”¹ This quote underlines the focus of this chapter, the significant emphasis that Keystone placed on the role of salesmanship in the company’s practice. The way Keystone sold photographs represented a major shift in photographic sales practices, and necessitated a completely different structure of business from a typical photographic studio. Returning to the three major functions of a commercial photography firm, attracting customers, sustaining the company, and making images, Keystone’s day-to-day business spent far more time focused on the first two functions, and the actual photographic production occupied far less of the company’s staff time. In most photographic businesses contemporary to Keystone, the opposite was the case because most photographic producers followed a studio model where the photographer endlessly produced portraits and local scenes to meet the demands of local consumers. In Keystone’s business model, widespread sales and distribution was necessary to ensure the company’s success. Keystone created opportunities for mutual success through its methods of communicating with employees and the way that it directed its agents to interact with customers. The ways that the company communicated and the content that it communicated laid the framework that created its success. Keystone coached its employees to keep them motivated

¹ Keystone View Company, *Manual of Instructions from the Keystone View Company for the Use of Their Agents*, 32.

and successful and maintained public interest in the material through its well-honed sales process. Examining these functions is crucial to understanding the ways in which Keystone relied on interpersonal relationships to create a market for photography. Keystone's direct-sales method relied on the social capital of an extensive non-local sales force to sell photographs. In service to this, Keystone created a robust network of training and corporate communication to ensure the continued success of its sales agents in the trenches. Indeed, this success made Keystone successful, and its photographs ubiquitous in American households. Keystone's model removed photographic image sales from the cottage-industry standards in which it usually functioned, to a process that more closely resembles big business practices.

This chapter foregrounds the role of the company, by examining how Keystone engaged its employees and prospective consumers. The chapter is divided into two distinct parts that address the company's corporate communication and the way it directed its employees to communicate with prospective customers. This is an important starting point in examining how Keystone transformed photographic business practices, as these roles were central to Keystone's daily operations, but were virtually nonexistent in most photographic operations. The first part studies Keystone's practices in corporate communication through the company's instruction manual, employee magazine, and individual correspondence, and addresses how Keystone's actions, often borrowed or reinterpreted from other industries' methods, contributed to its rampant success. The second part of the chapter examines Keystone's prescribed sales process, especially the photographs suggested for use in the canvass, and argues that in its early years Keystone was not emphasizing its educational strengths to the degree that is typically assumed, and instead sought to make the photographs 'desirable.'² This chapter embraces elements of the

² The educational strength of stereographs is encapsulated in Keystone's origin story about Singley realizing the educational value of the stereograph. (Singley and Keystone's origin stories were addressed in Chapter 2.) The

study of corporate communication and corporate culture to situate stereography within the larger corporate and consumer landscape.³ Although Keystone's practices were unorthodox for a photographic producer, they were steeped in contemporaneous business traditions, responsive to Keystone's positioning as a photographic big business.

Corporate Communication at Keystone: How the Company Talked to its Employees

By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, stereography sales venues had shifted sharply. While Keystone and its direct selling competitors did not completely eradicate local studios' production of stereographs, small-business production had eroded because the small firms could not compete with large national and international corporations like Keystone and Underwood, and were further undermined by Sears's pricing. The large stereo firms trudged on, competing against one another, selling similar products at identical prices. Each large firm begat the next: Underwood had James M. Davis on its staff until he went into business for himself, and Davis had B. L. Singley on his staff until Singley founded Keystone View

company's emphasis on education was later reified by Darrah, who noted that Keystone founded its "Educational Department" in 1898 and created an educational emphasis with the department's help. This fact is absent from any surviving primary literature, and, indeed is contradicted by my findings in *Review*, but has been perpetuated by the many scholars interested in talking about visual education. While I do not disagree that this was ultimately an interest of Keystone View Company, I contend that the early years did not emphasize this as much as others have alluded. Darrah, *The World of Stereographs*, 49. For work on stereographs and education, see, for example, Meredith A. Bak, "Democracy and Discipline: Object Lessons and the Stereoscope in American Education, 1870 – 1920," *Early Popular Visual Culture* 10, no. 2 (2012): 147–67; Veronica I. Ent, "Twentieth Century Visual Education: Early American Schools and the Stereograph," *Country School Journal* 1 (2013): 53–71; Elizabeth Ann Wiatr, "Seeing American: Visual Education and the Making of Modern Observers, 1900-1935" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Irvine, 2003); Heather A. Weaver, "The Imagined Schoolhouse: A Mass-Cultural History of Education in America" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington, 2009).

³ For more on corporate communication, see James R. Beninger, *The Control Revolution: Technological and Economic Origins of the Information Society* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1986), particularly the introduction, Yates, *Control through Communication: The Rise of System in American Management*; Marina Dossena and Susan M. Fitzmaurice, eds., *Business and Official Correspondence: Historical Investigations* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2006); George H. Douglas, *Studies in the History of Business Writing* (Urbana, Illinois: Association for Business Communication, 1985).

Company. Consequently, the companies' sales practices were similar.⁴ The challenge, therefore, was for Keystone to distinguish itself among its direct-selling, retail, and ultimately catalog-sales stereograph competition. The publishers' power was in the sales force that they each amassed, and especially in the training that their sales teams received. This section addresses the variety of resources that Keystone created in service to selling stereographs. These tools were a major contributor to Keystone's success, and provide concrete evidence of the company's practices. It was through these methods that Keystone became a powerhouse.

Keystone insisted in its contracts that its agents sell exclusively for its company, which prevented them from also selling for competing firms, or acting as a peddler to sell a variety of goods other than stereographs and stereoscopes. This was an increasingly common practice in direct sales, and in exchange for control over sales agents, many direct-selling firms provided more support, such as sales manuals, salesmanship drills, and other aspects of training and coaching. Keystone exemplified these practices, through a mix of sales manuals, the employee magazine, individual correspondence, drills, and collegiate clubs. While little archival evidence remains to describe how the drills or clubs conducted themselves, a study of the printed material (sales manuals, employee magazine, and individual correspondence) is illuminating to Keystone's practices.⁵ Examining these extant materials provides telling evidence in the specific

⁴ A more detailed comparison of Keystone's 1898 sales manual and Underwood's 1900 edition will follow later in this chapter. Underwood's history is most thoroughly recounted in DeLeskie, "The Underwood Stereograph Travel System: A Historical and Cultural Analysis"; Underwood, "An Outline Re: The Firm of Underwood and Underwood."

⁵ Drills are referenced in *Keystone Review* and in the Barnhart correspondence in the Virginia Tech archive. Sales manager Frank Wildman apparently managed the drills, at least for agents in the Eastern United States. Collegiate clubs received a mention in *Review* as well, specifically in regard to the Meadville-based Allegheny College's "Keystone Club." However, this seems to have been an informal, rather than institutionalized, group, because there are not mentions of the club in the college's yearbook, or anywhere else in the Allegheny College archives. I found the same absence from official records when corresponding with the archivists at Wesleyan University. I have in my personal collection a stereograph depicting a 'club' of salesmen from Underwood & Underwood at Wesleyan, but its archivist could not find record of this club's existence.

methods that aided in distributing these photographs, and insight into the company's sense of best practices. In this section I address Keystone's corporate communication in the context of contemporaneous business practices, and argue that the efforts in producing these materials was what propelled Keystone's success.

The most crucial element of Keystone's corporate communication was its manuals of instruction, provided to sales agents. In creating a manual, Keystone was following the tradition of direct-selling book publishers and Underwood & Underwood, which produced its first sales manual in 1887.⁶ While very few survive today, these manuals were presented to every agent along with their sales kit, and agents were directed to study the manual and views carefully. Although I will address the way that Keystone instructed its agents to talk to prospective consumers in the final part of this chapter, it is first important to review how the company talked to its agents. I argue that Keystone's communications were a mix of uplifting and moralizing, and were tied closely to concepts presented in contemporaneous success manuals. These documents institutionalized the practice of selling photographs so that it could be conducted systematically on a national and international scale, which represented a major shift in the reach of a single company in the photographic market. As historical records, the manuals and magazines describe how Keystone thought it could best convince consumers to buy photographs. Keystone's success in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century validate these observations, and illustrate what appealed to photographic consumers during this period. This chapter focuses on the role of the company in photographic sales, however I approach the question of the appeal of photographs through the symbolic visage of the stereographic salesman in Chapter 4, and return more directly to the consumer in Chapter 5. In each of these perspectives, the company

⁶ The date of the first sales manual is noted in Underwood & Underwood, *Manual of Instruction from Underwood & Underwood*, 2.

and its method of communications played a crucial role, and the documents discussed herein frame every aspect of this sales transaction.

After brief sections describing the opportunity and appeal of selling stereographs, and the superior merit of Keystone's products, the manual has a section headed, "Elements essential to success." In this section Keystone espoused that agents must have confidence in themselves, a "thorough understanding and appreciation" of the stereographs, "a dignified and yet conciliatory bearing that is consistent with yourself and occupation," and

an earnestness and enthusiasm that nothing can allay or overcome, that will surmount difficulties rather than be overcome by them. People are won by earnestness more than they are by power. When these principles are thoroughly applied, the minor points being less essential, you will still be able to retain your individuality, yet at the same time will be carrying on your work in a way which will be sure to result in success.⁷

These four elements, Keystone claimed, were the keys to one's success. These points may seem like platitudes; however, they were directly aligned with the content of success manuals. Success manuals were a popular tool for working-class Americans (especially men) between 1870 and 1910. They were a homogenous literary genre that emphasized "the saga of the self-made man who triumphed despite difficulties."⁸ Most significantly, they stressed the power of good character and moral fortitude as the key to success. This is exactly what Keystone was emphasizing in its sales manual's section on success. In almost immediately aligning itself with the rhetoric of success manuals, Keystone framed its treatise as a manual of success, as well. It

⁷ Keystone View Company, *Manual of Instructions from the Keystone View Company for the Use of Their Agents*, 4–5.

⁸ Judy Hilkey described the frequent plagiarism and parroting between different manuals, which contributed to the genre's homogeneity. Hilkey, *Character Is Capital: Success Manuals and Manhood in Gilded Age America*, 49. The same could be argued for the surviving manuals produced by Underwood & Underwood and Keystone. Underwood's 1900 manual notes that the company had received the copyright to Ebenezer Hannaford's *Success in Canvassing: A Manual of Practical Hints and Instructions Specially Adapted to the Use of Book Canvassers of the Better Class*, and the similarities between the two texts are quite apparent. While there is no direct plagiarism between Keystone's 1898 manual and Underwood's 1900 manual (or any subsequent manuals), the nature of the messages is resonant of one another.

spoke a language that was understood by Keystone's agents, and, like the success manuals, positioned itself to give agents the tools that were needed for success.

In addition to the sales manual, Keystone repeatedly encouraged its agents to read a short text by Edward Bok entitled *The Young Man in Business*. Copyrighted in 1900 and frequently reprinted, Bok's book alleged that most young working men were "mere automaton" who plodded through the workday and did not aspire toward greater success. Espousing that "[a] young man makes of a position exactly what he chooses: a millstone around his neck, or a stepping-stone to larger success," Bok argued that one's attitude and work ethic was the difference between success and failure.⁹ Bok, the longtime editor of *Ladies' Home Journal*, had a well-known personal history that resembled a Horatio Alger Jr. story, framing him as a classic example of a self-made man.¹⁰ His heavily aphoristic *The Young Man in Business* was another success manual. Keystone selected this specific book to recommend to its sales staff in the pages of the employee magazine, offered discounts for buying the book through Keystone, and apparently sent it for free to some agents.¹¹ While this is ultimately an indirect form of corporate communication (because Bok was not an employee of Keystone, and did not write this message specifically for the company), Bok's message can be likened to Keystone referring to an external source to reinforce its point. Keystone gave the same messages about attitude and work ethic frequently in its own corporate communications, but perhaps felt that Bok stating it would have a greater impact. The use of Bok's work in Keystone's communication with employees

⁹ Edward W. Bok, *The Young Man in Business* (New York: H. M. Caldwell, 1900), 9.

¹⁰ The theme of the "self-made man" in stereoscopic sales is discussed further in Chapter 4.

¹¹ In the Barnhart letters, Keystone notes they sent Barnhart a book, and in later letters refer to the book and to Bok. Keystone View Company. Letter to W. W. Barnhart, July 14, 1903. Keystone View Company Papers, Ms2010-052, Special Collections, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia. The Bok book was listed repeatedly as an item that could be purchased through an arrangement with *Success* magazine (also published in Meadville), starting in *Keystone Review* 4, no. 2 (December 1901): 3. Bok was also quoted in *Review*'s page of quotations.

demonstrated an awareness of the success manual genre, and a connection to that genre that ran deeper than the one echoed through its own sales manual. Furthermore, by encouraging its agents to buy or read it, Keystone was endorsing it as a message worthy of its agents' time and attention.

In addition to the sales manual and Bok's book, Keystone had a major source of mass-communication with its sales force through the company's employee magazine.¹² Keystone's employee magazine, *Keystone Review*, was published irregularly (at minimum, five issues per year, at maximum, monthly) between 1898 and 1909, and communicated advice and product updates to the sales staff. The magazine had a straightforward pattern to its four pages of content.¹³ The first page was typically a single article headlined with a sermonizing title, such as "You Certainly Are Cheating Yourself When You Do Poor Work." The second page highlighted moralizing quotes and descriptions of new stereographs available for sale. The third page featured specific sales advice, such as selling despite poor weather, or suggesting Keystone stereographs as a gift item. The final page quoted letters from agents, sharing stories of their successes and profits, typically signed only by their initials.¹⁴

¹² Called employee magazines, company magazines, corporate magazines, house magazines, or house organs by various scholars and publications, I have chosen to refer to *Keystone Review* and the publication genre as 'employee magazines,' which is most clearly indicative of their function: an internal publication produced by the company and distributed to its employees, either in total or in segment. (*Review* is an example of the latter; Keystone's sales agents were its only recipients, not its photographers, management, or staff overseeing order fulfillment.) As noted by Sam G. Riley, 'corporate magazines' may have had public distribution, and thus would include works like Underwood & Underwood's *The Stereoscopic Photograph*, which later became *The Traveller*, an item the company sold along with stereographs. Sam G. Riley, ed., *Corporate Magazines of the United States* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), ix. The term 'house magazine' or 'house organ' reads ambiguously, especially in light of the home-centric magazine genre that produced popular mainstream publications like *Ladies' Home Journal* (first published in 1883) and *Better Homes and Gardens* (first published in 1922).

¹³ Keystone initially distributed *Review* free to all its sales agents, although beginning in 1902 the company charged a subscription fee and soon after increased issues' length.

¹⁴ This practice was relatively common in employee magazines. Katina Manko suggested that companies were worried that rivals might attempt to poach agents if their full names were published. Manko, "'Ding Dong! Avon Calling!': Gender, Business, and Door-to-Door Selling, 1890-1955," 83.

The agents' letters published in *Review* are generally very boastful of successes. During the magazine's tenure *Review* ran two regular features that were clearly works of fiction (which will be discussed shortly). Therefore, it is easy to question whether letters were fabrications, as well; however, I believe they are authentic. In *Review*'s early years, Keystone occasionally published sales agents' full names and work locations, making it possible to spot-check against census records.¹⁵ This, too, is complicated. The U.S. federal census is taken every ten years. The early issues of *Review* were published in the late 1890s, and thus the 1900 census is particularly useful. However, if an agent graduated college and went on to a new career between his letter in 1898 and the 1900 census, it poses an inconclusive verification because the census only collects data about current employment and student status. Female agents may have married in the intervening years and changed their last names, making them more difficult to trace, as well, because the census does not record maiden names. Some agents had names possessed by multiple individuals at the time, making identity verifications difficult. However, some agents could be located conclusively in the census. For example, Don C. Churchill of Pennsylvania was published in *Review* in three issues between 1898 and 1899. Given the proximity of his working dates to the 1900 federal census and the fact that neither his first nor last name were particularly common in the United States, Churchill was an excellent candidate for verification. A search of the census roster revealed that he declared his occupation as "salesman - views," while living with his grandparents and father in northern Pennsylvania.¹⁶ Another sales agent, F. A. Wildman,

¹⁵ Because the sales agents' letters came from where they were based rather than lived, cities named in *Review* letters can often be disregarded in this research. In the example that follows, Don C. Churchill's letter was from Dunlo, Pennsylvania, but his family lived in Eldred, approximately 150 miles away. Some sales agents worked out-of-state (or abroad), but a match to a man's full name and approximate location remains convincing, especially when the salesmen searched had unusual names, or there does not appear to be records of anyone else bearing a similar name and age at that time.

¹⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, *1900 U.S. Census, Eldred, Warren, Pennsylvania*, roll 1492, page 14A, enumeration district 0135.

was listed in the 1900 census as “field manager, Keystone.”¹⁷ According to *Review*, Wildman traveled throughout Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Ohio as a sales agent. Wildman also appears in the Barnhart letters, showing that by 1903 he still worked for Keystone and served in a managerial capacity.¹⁸ Agents who could be convincingly located in the census were listed as career salesmen or as students during the times that they purportedly worked for Keystone. This is in keeping with Keystone’s method of recruiting among students and supplementing the student-agents with year-round workers. In several examples, agents specified their sales industry, as well.

Beyond the census, other genealogical and historical resources prove only partially useful in verifying agents. City directories often identified a possible agent as a student, but did not list any reference to work as a sales agent. College yearbooks occasionally matched to names, such as a study of the yearbooks for Meadville’s Allegheny College, which was fertile recruiting grounds for Keystone’s college-age salesmen. An 1899 yearbook for Allegheny cross-indexes many figures published in issues of *Review*, including Charles A. Richmire, Andrew A. Culbertson, and Addison Clark Waid, who were all Allegheny College sophomores in 1899.¹⁹ Because city directory and yearbook references only confirm that the person was a student, not also a sales agent, it does not affirm that they were Keystone agents. Although these resources lack the details that directly affirms that they were Keystone agents, they do verify that the

¹⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, *1900 U.S. Census, Meadville Ward 1, Crawford, Pennsylvania*, roll 1399, page 23B, enumeration district 0025.

¹⁸ Keystone View Company to H. G. Barnhart, November 3, 1903. Keystone Company View Papers, Ms2010-052, Special Collections, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia.

¹⁹ C. A. Richmire, in “Dispatches from the Front, Artillery Division,” *Keystone Review* 3, no. 6 (April 1901), p. 4; “C. A. R.,” in “Latest Dispatches from the Front,” *Keystone Review* 4, no. 3-4 (January-February 1902), p. 4. A. A. Culbertson, in “Echoes from the Field,” *Keystone Review* 1, no. 9 (July 1899), p. 3; A. A. Culbertson, in “Echoes from the Field,” *Keystone Review* 1, no. 11 (September 1899), p. 4. A. C. Waid, in “Echoes from the Field,” *Keystone Review* 1, no. 9 (July 1899), p. 3; A. C. Waid, in “Echoes from the Field,” *Keystone Review* 1, no. 10 (August 1899), p. 2.

names were not fabrications, and that these names, by virtue of being students, match a demographic that Keystone often employed. Between the successful census spot checks and additional names discovered in directories and yearbooks, several salesmen's personages can be confirmed, and it becomes plausible that all letters excerpted in *Review*, even those that identify agents only by initials, are legitimate. Throughout this thesis, I therefore mine the letters in *Review* operating under the assumption that the only fictional elements are the serialized letters and diaries discussed shortly.

Returning now to the function of the employee magazine, Keystone's use of employee magazines to communicate with its staff was representative of a growing trend in American business practice. As big businesses developed and spread, management practices changed to handle expanding staff. Ever-growing companies attempted to instill a corporate culture upon its increasingly anonymized employees to counteract the changing scale of business. Beginning around the 1880s, employee magazines became an important mechanism for companies to use as they grew larger and more impersonal, and subsequently had trouble communicating one-on-one with employees. Roland Marchand positioned employee magazines as a tool that contributed to giving a "corporate soul" to American big business because it was one of the many strategies employed by companies (also including national advertising and public relations gestures) that assisted in giving a gentler view of corporations to a country that saw them as faceless and monolithic. Marchand's notion of the "corporate soul" has been echoed by other scholars working on employee magazines, but *Keystone Review* is at odds with this conception.²⁰

Marchand saw employee magazines as a significant element in reframing the sense of 'family'

²⁰ For one key example of Marchand's argument extending to other employee magazine analyses, Simon Phillips argued that the employee magazines produced by Boots The Chemist were integral in giving a corporate soul to the British corporation. Simon Phillips, "'Chemists to the Nation': House Magazines, Locality and Health at Boots The Chemists 1919-1939," *Management & Organizational History* 3, no. 3-4 (2008): 239-55.

within corporations that no longer personally knew every employee. In examples drawn from the magazines produced by companies including National Cash Register, Ford, and General Electric, Marchand argued that “employee magazines sought to enhance workers’ morale by bolstering their sense of place within their own extensive factory and within the corporation as a whole.”²¹ *Review*, in contrast, was more often patronizing than paternal.

In Marchand’s discussion of employee magazines, companies may have been spread between distant locales, but were still embedded within a factory or office, not traveling agents working alone in the field. Perhaps because of this difference, Marchand’s analysis of the core function of employee magazines differs from the intent I read into *Keystone Review*. Where many employee magazines described by Marchand focused on human-interest stories, *Review* served in lieu of sales meetings, and featured short texts on new inventory, sales techniques, tips, and advice.²² Marchand’s employee magazines concretely located individual employees within the corporate family, but *Keystone* agents were obscured, rarely listed by name, or otherwise explicitly identified. *Review* may have reminded agents that they were not alone despite their relative isolation while traveling in the field, but did not emphasize a sense of connectedness, as other magazines seemed to do. Agents were part of a legion of ‘Keystone men,’ but were more likely to feel castigated for not selling as well as a new recruit than to feel a greater sense of community in reading the magazine.

²¹ Roland Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul: The Rise of Public Relations and Corporate Imagery in American Big Business* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 110.

²² One of the most curious aspects in the way that *Review* differed from ‘typical’ employee magazines, as described by Marchand, is *Keystone*’s lack of illustrations in the *Review*. Illustrations were used in other employee magazines to combat against corporate ‘facelessness,’ and featured pictures of company offices and factories, as well as individual employees. *Keystone* was in the business of producing images, yet for most of *Review*’s run, the magazine was wholly unillustrated. Howard Cox, and especially David Nye and Elspeth Brown, discuss the use of photographs in employee magazines. Howard Cox, “Shaping a Corporate Identity from Below: The Role of the BAT Bulletin,” *Management & Organizational History* 3, no. 3–4 (2008): 197–215; Nye, *Image Worlds: Corporate Identities at General Electric, 1890-1930*; Brown, *The Corporate Eye: Photography and the Rationalization of American Commercial Culture, 1884-1929*.

Review's tone differed significantly from other employee magazines, as well. Historian JoAnne Yates, citing the writing of business leaders in the early twentieth century, described the general practice of "sugar coat[ing]" instructional attempts, and balancing them with personal notes, jokes, and cartoons, which kept employee magazines light and readable. This, it was believed, allowed the educational message to come through while keeping readership levels high.²³ *Review* did not 'sugar coat.' Although meant to support the agents, *Review* did not uplift, but guided with a direct purpose. Its perpetual message was straightforward and tied to the success manual ideal: an agent would only be successful if he put in the hours needed to study his product and gain comfort in selling. *Review* acted in opposition to giving Keystone a corporate soul. Instead, it sermonized blindly, not knowing whether a given reader needed the specific guidance offered (or if he understood the lecture at all) and anonymized the community. Keystone was more coldly corporate – more soulless – and its agents more generic and replaceable because of *Review*. By being more pointed in its directions, Keystone's lack of 'sugar coating' placed it at odds with the way most scholars have classified other employee magazines. *Review* was different, both in the industry it served, and in magazine's focus. Because the photographic-imaging industry did not have many other large-scale producers, there had not been a need for employee magazines within this industry, and Keystone's staff may have lacked familiarity with the nuances of what these sorts of publications should look like.²⁴ However, the audience Keystone addressed in *Review* was a small population that shared the same job, and, as I will discuss in Chapter 4, were generally well educated. While the sales force may have appreciated a more 'sugar coated' delivery than the content they found in the pages of

²³ Yates, *Control through Communication: The Rise of System in American Management*, 76–77.

²⁴ I have not found any evidence that the management staff during the years of *Review* had any prior corporate experience that would have made them familiar with employee magazines, and the company's provincial location in rural western Pennsylvania would have further limited employees' direct exposure to such companies.

Review, the format of the magazine served the staff's interest in personal and professional development, which resonated with its educated readership.

Within the genre of employee magazines, I have found a limited body of literature looking at employee magazines focused at sales personnel. The scholars working on these magazines also describe publications that are similar to the employee-coaching content in *Review*. Michael Heller described Prudential's employee magazine as being a "key training medium" for the insurance company's large sales force, both envisioned by the corporation and acknowledged by the employees as serving a heuristic function.²⁵ Evan Roberts noted that American employee magazines "were less commonly used to deliver sales training," compared to the human-interest content that Marchand described, but found that New Zealand magazines for department-store employees "regularly featured advice on sales technique."²⁶ *Keystone* was one of several companies that used the employee magazine as an organ to communicate training and tips with its distant sales staff. Occasional letters written by agents and published in *Review* expressed thankfulness for the tips, or stressed the fact that they have followed the advice provided in the magazine. Heller's Prudential sales agents felt similarly about their magazine's benefit. Thus, these magazines may have collectively contributed to a sense of 'corporate soullessness,' compared to their human-interest-focused counterparts, but this does not mean that *Review*, or publications like it, were unwelcome with their readership. Rather than contributing to corporate welfare or public relations, as others have argued, I see employee magazines like *Review* and similarly pragmatic publications as an early contribution to corporate professional

²⁵ Michael Heller, "British Company Magazines, 1878-1939: The Origins and Functions of House Journals in Large-Scale Organisations," *Media History* 15, no. 2 (2009): 157.

²⁶ It should be noted that Roberts is describing magazines published decades later than *Keystone Review*, ranging from the 1920s through the 1950s. However, his findings both verify the relative unusualness of an employee magazine that focused on sales, and demonstrated other examples where the magazine was seen as a useful tool to communicate sales practices to diverse staff. Evan Roberts, "'Don't Sell Things, Sell Effects': Overseas Influences in New Zealand Department Stores, 1909-1956," *The Business History Review* 77, no. 2 (2003): 274.

development. Especially in the case of Keystone and Prudential, as the workforce became increasingly well educated, these employee magazines sated agents' thirst for autodidacticism. Secondary school- and university-educated employees knew a world of education and learning from texts, and, ostensibly, enjoyed that method of learning. *Review* and other publications like it may have been harnessing this fact in its training methods.

Instead of the corporate welfare concept in which employee magazines are typically framed, *Keystone Review* was a tool that served to elucidate the idealized corporate culture of the company. Michael Heller noted, "The magazines acted as important mediums of communication, which enabled the large-scale corporation to talk to itself."²⁷ Especially with a company with staff as widespread as Keystone, and which did not have strong day-to-day management of its sales force, communication was the magazine's essential function. Because *Review* was wholly concerned with employee conducts and practices, it "creat[ed] discourses which establishes norms, belief and sanctified forms of behaviour."²⁸ *Review* advised agents on the ways in which they could be their best version of a 'Keystone man,' modeled through articles about studying the stereographs in one's downtime or working despite poor weather, and in the examples provided through each issue's published letters from successful agents. In its attempts to enforce a sense of diligence, *Review* shaped the culture of earnestness that Keystone wanted to instill into the company. Yet, much in the same way that verifying actual readership is a lacuna in the study of employee magazines, agents' actual behavior in response to the advice of *Review* is also generally unknown and untraceable.²⁹ *Review*, therefore, presents an 'idealized' corporate

²⁷ Michael Heller, "Company Magazines 1880-1940: An Overview," *Management & Organizational History* 3, no. 3-4 (2008): 187.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 188.

²⁹ For more on the challenge of assessing actual readership versus circulation, see Heller, "British Company Magazines, 1878-1939: The Origins and Functions of House Journals in Large-Scale Organisations," 148. For a more specific example, Johansen discussed the employee magazine in a time of a company strike. This would be a prime example of when the corporate culture presented in the magazine and reality did not mesh. Peter Johansen,

culture: *Review* offered guidelines and prescribed behavior, but reality may have had more variants. The culture imbued in the press may have been subverted or ignored in life.³⁰ Hence, the text written by Keystone management in *Review* should be considered only as evidence of the company's message and priorities, and not employee actions.

Despite *Review*'s generally proselytizing ways, one way that it attempted a more human, personal touch was by conveying tips to its agents through fictionalized narratives, which were contrived text based on real advice and experiences. These were manifested through two recurring features, one titled "Letters from Jim, Who Didn't Get Back to College, to his Chum, Who Did," and the other, "Diary of an Amateur View Salesman." "Letters from Jim" was published first, and in them Keystone sales agent "Jim" jocularly addressed a man identified only as "Ted," who had sold Keystone views with Jim over the summer. In his first letter, he describes selling a set of 600 stereographs to a woman, and closed by noting, "Am glad now that I stuck it out instead of going back to college on borrowed funds and a guilty conscience."³¹ The next month, "Jim" was published again, this time describing the great benefit he found in meeting with a Keystone sales manager.³² In his third letter, "Jim" directs Ted to mentor some recruits

"For Better, Higher and Nobler Things': Massey's Pioneering Employee Publication," *Journalism History* 27, no. 3 (2001): 94–104. Johansen discussed more recent readership survey practices in Peter Johansen, "Where's the Meaning and the Hope?: Trends in Employee Publications," *Journal of Popular Culture* 29, no. 3 (1995): 133. For more on the problems and challenges of writing about corporate culture, see, for example, Rowlinson and Hassard, "The Invention of Corporate Culture: A History of the Histories of Cadbury"; Rowlinson and Delahaye, "The Cultural Turn in Business History."

³⁰ Too often in discussions of corporate culture, divergences are neglected. Historian Clark Davis described "tensions" in corporate culture that came from job-hopping (meaning that the employee was not 'the company'), but others, especially Marchand, seem to ignore this point altogether. In the following chapters I discuss some hypothesized and known divergences from Keystone's typical advice, which further supports my argument that *Review* cannot be read to as a tool to understand how the Keystone employee acted, simply how the company thought. For Davis' observations about job-hopping, see Clark Davis, *Company Men: White-Collar Life and Corporate Cultures in Los Angeles, 1892-1941* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 68–69.

³¹ "Letters from Jim, Who Didn't Get Back to College, to his Chum, Who Did," in *Keystone Review* 8, no. 8 (September 1905): 123-125.

³² "Letters from Jim, Who Didn't Get Back to College, to his Chum, Who Did," in *Keystone Review* 8, no. 9 (October 1905): 135-136.

who will be selling Keystone stereographs over the Christmas holiday. In his final entry, “Jim” describes the ease at which he sells sets in advance of Christmas. He details new specific images (“Extracting Milk from the Butter”) and updates to a specific set (“The Wedding Set”), and proclaimed, “Altogether, the view business was never a more exciting game than it is just now, and I am confident that the new fellows will easily make a touch-down the first thing.”³³ This heavy-handed prose was replaced in 1906 by the “Diary,” which even more informally emphasized Keystone’s talking points. In the first series of entries, for example, the unnamed diarist declared Keystone’s *Manual of Instruction* to be “rather dry,” and that he “prefer[red] to use [his] own tact and natural business ability as a guide in [his] work.” After five days of attempting to sell without success, he spent a day in “meditation and study,” and gained confidence in the sales process.³⁴ In the next issue, the diarist continued to try to sell to upstanding businessmen to no avail, before proclaiming, “It seems that a new fellow should begin among the common people in a residence district, or even the country.” The first time he tried selling to ‘the common people,’ he made a sale, followed by three more. The next day, after netting five sales, the diarist ran into customer objections he had not prepared for. After losing the sale, he made note of the problem and began studying how to counteract these issues. He also was distracted by friends and gave up selling on a Saturday, which was typically seen as a prime day for canvassing.³⁵ The diary continues in great detail over the next several issues. The hero transferred himself to “Ruralville” because Keystone advised that he would be more successful working away from home (and the social obligations therein). He described the process of a successful canvass and delivery in the country, flourished in Ruralville, and kept his

³³ “Letters from Jim, Who Didn’t Get Back to College, to his Chum, Who Did,” in *Keystone Review* 8, no. 11 (December 1905): 168.

³⁴ “Diary of an Amateur View Salesman,” in *Keystone Review* 9, no. 1 (January 1906): 5-8.

³⁵ “Diary of an Amateur View Salesman,” in *Keystone Review* 9, no. 2 (February-March 1906): 26-28.

extracurricular activities restricted to Sundays. The diarist, therefore, exemplified the perfect sales agent. While he began the endeavor convinced that he would have natural success for salesmanship, it was not until he followed Keystone's advice and studied the stereographs that he began making sales. These narrative interventions were clearly works of fiction, but attempted to inject another voice into Keystone's managerial lectures. This is similar to Keystone's use of Edward Bok's book to reinforce the company's nearly identical message. Mimicking the potential thoughts of a sales agent allowed reinforcement of Keystone's notions, and in these accounts, the company could state these concepts more directly and informally. By engaging a narrative tone, agents may have felt more entertained or open to the suggestions, compared to the lecture-like posture of most *Review* articles.

As one final method of corporate communication, Keystone staff corresponded regularly with sales agents. It had been known for centuries that, "no far-flung company could succeed without a strong flow of correspondence between the far outposts and the company directors at home," and Keystone's practices were no different.³⁶ Keystone's incoming correspondence from sales agents were not preserved, and the only surviving outgoing correspondence are letters from Keystone to the Barnhart family of sales agents (a father and two sons), who sold for Keystone between 1902 and 1908.³⁷ Although scant compared to the vast quantity of correspondence that must have been produced, the Barnhart letters provide a sense of the way that the company interacted with its employees. The correspondence compensated for the lack of 'corporate soul'

³⁶ Douglas, *Studies in the History of Business Writing*, vi. For a specific historical case study on a 'far-flung company,' see Kitty O. Locker, "The Earliest Correspondence of the British East India Company (1600-19)," in *Studies in the History of Business Writing* (Urbana, Illinois: Association for Business Communication, 1985), 69–86. This is also addressed by JoAnne Yates in Yates, *Control through Communication: The Rise of System in American Management*.

³⁷ The Barnhart letters are housed at the Johnson-Shaw Stereoscopic Museum and the Virginia Tech Special Collections. An additional single letter was sold on eBay within the past several years, and in 2014 Cowan's Auctions sold a set of letters to a private collector. I have been able to review all except the letters sold by Cowan's.

in the company's mass communication, and provided more personalized coaching and camaraderie than the stern urgings published in *Review*. The letters also make apparent the significant amount of time and energy that must have been put into maintaining regular correspondence with the many thousands of agents working at any given time, and therefore illustrate how Keystone's day-to-day business functions were vastly different from other photographic imaging companies and studios.

According to the company contract, Keystone expected weekly reports from its agents, which was a formulated list of questions requiring responses (Figure 3.1), and typically included an order for merchandise. A representative of the company wrote back to these reports, providing updates, advice, and commentary that was typically conversational and responsive to topics reported in the sales agent's letter. The corporate representative typically signed with only his or her initials, and generally maintained a cordial, upbeat attitude in the letters. This may have varied with agents whose performance was weaker than that of the Barnharts, as the Barnhart family was apparently inexhaustibly motivated to maintain active business with the company.³⁸ With that concern in mind, the examples of letters written to a single family may not be wholly representative of the company's correspondence with the many thousands of agents who sold for Keystone at any given time. However, these letters illustrate a contrast in communication style compared to *Review*, and functioned with a greater sense of immediacy and connectedness than the magazine provided. By varying its style of communication, Keystone fostered a greater sense of engagement with its employees, compelling them, perhaps, to sell more stereographs.

³⁸ There were a few brief exceptions to this. Walter Barnhart apparently cited reasons in his letters that inhibited his sales, including illness and an eye injury, and the corporation responded sympathetically and encouragingly. This is a contrast to the typical scolding admonishments evidenced in *Review* in response to the general concept of an agent who avoids selling.

Except for three letters, all the surviving Barnhart letters were written directly to its recipient and seemed to respond directly to correspondence that the Barnharts had sent. Those more generic letters began with the salutation “Dear Friend,” rather than being addressed to “Mr. Barnhart.” The first example is a solicitation letter, meant to introduce a prospective agent to the company. The letter describes previous sales to prominent individuals, the variety of views they sell, and their educational value, and declare that these materials “make failure an impossibility.” The second was a letter sent with an enclosed copy of a Keystone employee magazine. This letter encourages the recipient to read specific articles carefully, and is peppered with aphoristic statements like, “No one can put a limit on you but yourself,” and “Aim higher, there is much in the aim.” The third, a letter dated mid-August 1905, encouraged agents to continue their work with Keystone rather than return to school.³⁹ These three were pitches from the company to the agent, imploring that they join the firm, continue to improve, and ultimately continue their work with Keystone. Had more correspondence looked like this, the letters would not have fulfilled a different purpose than the magazine or the sales manual. Because the rest of the letters were tailored, personalized, and conversational, they played a significant role in managing Keystone’s sales force.

The arc of the correspondence with the Barnharts gives hints about how the company developed these relationships over time. The earliest surviving letters give fairly general advice and coaching. The July 12, 1902 letter, for example, explained why sales agents needed to over-order for delivery:

In other words, the customer says he will take perhaps six views, and the salesman when delivering takes four or five hundred views along and has the customer look at the views through the ‘scope and lay aside the ones which they wish and they will select several

³⁹ These three letters are the July 1903 “Dear Friend” letter, and letters dated June 26, 1905, and August 10, 1905, all in Keystone View Company Papers, Ms2010-052, Special Collections, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia.

times more views than they thought they would when you made the canvass. You see if you went to the house with the six views and delivered them, you would have no chance to increase the sale. By doing the other way, you have a good sized collection and can increase your sale. One of our men took an order for just one view and when he went to deliver he sold twelve views. Our salesmen do not have trouble about having views left over. If they are not able to dispose of all in one delivery, they use them in the next and by careful planning they are able to come out even at the close of the season.⁴⁰

Such advice continued the following year, when Keystone suggested Barnhart use the “French Cook” comic views in his sales kit, noting, “You will deliver a collection with almost every order. One of our boys has just written that while he has not tried especially with this set he has taken orders for 18 of them.”⁴¹ This advice may have been quoted to countless agents, but I presume that the “French Cook” advice would not have been sent to the agent who sold eighteen without trying, and was instead tailored in response to agents’ orders and output. These examples were likely dispensed to Barnhart in response to a modest order or a lack of orders for popular subjects. These tips were not given in *Review* or the *Manual of Instruction*, and are therefore more personal and connected to the agent and his most pressing needs. In doing this, Keystone maintained a sense of connectedness, even if advice was reused and recycled among agents.

The correspondence with the Barnharts showed a focus on very current news, as well as an increasingly personal relationship as the agents’ time working with the company continued. On October 5, 1903, Keystone sent samples of stereographs made in Rome less than three months prior, showing the immediate aftermath of the death of Pope Leo XIII. “Use these views to freshen up your stock,” the company representative advised. Aside from a single line proclaiming “the views of the obsequies of Pope Leo XIII are ready,” these views were not discussed in *Review*, yet in the Barnhart letters they described the ballot process necessary for the

⁴⁰ July 12, 1902 letter to Walter W. Barnhart, collection of Johnson-Shaw Stereoscopic Museum, Meadville, Pennsylvania.

⁴¹ August 1, 1903 letter to Walter W. Barnhart, Keystone View Company Papers, Ms2010-052, Special Collections, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia.

election of a new pope, and note that this would be of interest to the public. Keystone's management knew, perhaps, that these subjects would have limited shelf-life, and needed the flexibility of the letter to convey this message, compared to the magazine which may have been assembled weeks or months in advance. Similarly, on February 20, 1904, a Keystone representative reported of the Great Baltimore Fire two weeks earlier, "We have dispatched photographer to Baltimore and will have views from this scene of disaster. Hope to have them [here] in the course of perhaps, a few days."⁴² By March 1 the company was arranging to send samples of these images to Barnhart for use in his canvassing. In late April, a company representative mentioned sending these views to another agent that the senior Barnhart had recruited, and noted of the Baltimore images, "These are proving great leaders and are going like 'hot cakes.'"⁴³ In *Review*, Keystone's rapid response to the Baltimore fire went unmentioned, save a single advertisement in its March issue that listed several titles produced shortly after the disaster. The ad implored, "Salesmen should order views of the Baltimore Fire. They are fast sellers at this time."⁴⁴ The *Review* advertisement did not emphasize the company's quick dispatch of a photographer, nor encourage agents to use them as 'leaders' in their sales pitches. Similarly, a May 3, 1906 letter from Keystone to Gray Barnhart (Walter's brother) noted of the San Francisco earthquake fifteen days earlier, "You will be interested to learn that we have views of San Francisco disaster [...]. No pains or expense will be spared to furnish full list of these subjects." On May 25, the company added,

This subject is one of universal interest and the views will be new in every territory. We are prepared to furnish a collection of thirty subjects that we advise being handled as

⁴² February 20, 1904 letter to H. G. Barnhart, Keystone View Company Papers, Ms2010-052, Special Collections, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia. The Great Baltimore Fire destroyed the central business district of Baltimore, including over 1500 buildings, and at the time it occurred was second only to the Great Chicago Fire of 1871 in fire damage to an American city.

⁴³ April 27, 1904 letter to H. G. Barnhart, Keystone View Company Papers, Ms2010-052, Special Collections, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia.

⁴⁴ *Keystone Review* 8, no. 4 (March 1904): 58.

complete set. This will mean a neat \$5.00 sale and can be delivered in Gem Case #1. The subject is of historic interest and the views will have increasing value. Emphasize the fact that our Photographer was on the scene immediately after the eruption and we are able to show everything of interest including scenes of refugees, destruction, etc.

In this correspondence, Keystone staff provided several talking points about the value, packaging, and content of the earthquake images. The San Francisco earthquake was significant enough to be mentioned in an article entitled “Fresh Ammunition,” published in the June 1906 issue of *Review*. The article highlighted new content, and in discussing the earthquake wreckage it stated,

What do you think of Keystone’s speed in getting out the San Francisco Earthquake and Fire Views? Most of you have received samples long since, and many of you have already made some good sales with them. The set we have made up of these intensely interesting views contains 31 subjects and should be sold as a whole. You do not need to be reminded here that this ‘ill wind’ for San Francisco bodes a great increase in the harvest for Keystone salesmen, and that you should help it work for good to the greatest possible extent.⁴⁵

Aside from a slight change in the quantity (thirty-one views instead of thirty), this brief mention contains no new information for a sales agent, and decidedly less useful detail to provide ‘fresh ammunition’ to an agent’s sales pitch, when compared to the content of the Barnhart letter.

These examples clarify the distinct purposes provided by the magazine and sales manual, compared to the individual correspondence. The magazine and manual served a starkly monolithic purpose. Even though most corporations saw employee magazines as temporal devices meant to be supplanted by the next issue, Keystone saw them as broad reference tools that were relatively timeless. An agent should, according to Keystone, continuously study his or her instruction manual and issues of *Review*. The letters, in contrast, were the more reactive and responsive tools which reflected on a sales agent’s single week’s sales report, or more carefully introduced new products.

⁴⁵ “Fresh Ammunition,” in *Keystone Review* 9, no. 5 (June 1906): 66-67.

Additionally, these letters fostered a sense of connection, and even the concept of the ‘corporate soul’ absent from *Review*, between the company and its distant sales agents. The Keystone letters were predominantly focused on business topics, but the constant back-and-forth correspondence built a sense of camaraderie and kinship. In the 1914-1915 diaries of J. C. Shaw, a Keystone sales agent, he mentioned corresponding with Keystone second in frequency only to the letters he wrote to the woman he would later marry. The constant interaction was dictated by the corporate demand for weekly reports and the need to place orders regularly, but Keystone used it advantageously to build the trust and loyalty of its agents. In the Barnhart letters, communications were friendly, even-keeled, and patient even when the agent was unable to work as contracted.⁴⁶ In Keystone’s letter to Henry Barnhart, the writer noted that Walter, Henry’s son, had recently sent a photograph of himself and several classmates who were also contracted to sell Keystone views. In writing to the father, the Keystone representative requested a larger photograph of only Walter. This exchange was apparently one-sided; the letter writers never mentioned sending photographs of themselves or a group photograph of the office staff. Yet, this request of a photograph built a sense of friendship. Indeed, although the Keystone letters were signed only by initials, agents apparently knew who they were writing to, and felt a connection with their correspondents. In a letter from August 1904, for example, F. A. Wildman, a regional manager who visited with the Barnharts personally, wrote to Walter Barnhart instead of the

⁴⁶ Walter Barnhart was briefly ill in August 1903, and in response a letter dated August 21, 1903 described the success of one of his sub-agents and noted, “we hope this cheering bit of news will soothe your suffering and that you may soon be in the field again with your old time interest and enthusiasm.” Keystone’s May 3, 1906 and July 10, 1908 letters to Gray Barnhart expressed sympathy to his own recent illnesses. Most elaborately, Walter Barnhart apparently described an eye ailment for which his doctor suggested seeing a specialist, which was addressed sympathetically in Keystone’s letters dated August 3, 1905 and August 4, 1905. A follow up letter dated August 8, 1905 responded to his improved health, noting “It is also good news that your eye is better. We were just about to suggest a home remedy which is most excellent for taking out the inflammation. This is white of egg beaten and pulverized alum wrapped in a cloth bound on while you sleep. However, as it is getting better perhaps bathing [sic] in cold water and Witch Hazel will relieve you of all trouble.” Keystone View Company Papers, Ms2010-052, Special Collections, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia.

company's typical correspondent, explaining, "Miss Wentz is at home today. Her mother died yesterday at three o'clock. I write you thus as we know you as we do and know that you and your people can appreciate what this means."⁴⁷ This message implies a certain level of intimacy between the entire Barnhart family and Anna Wentz, their main contact at Keystone, despite the focus on business topics and her initials-only signature of "A. L. W."

As one final example, in one particularly unfortunate case Keystone developed a sense of personal connections by expressing a shared ideology. In 1908, Henry Barnhart's younger son Gray spent the summer away from the family's Virginia home, and sold stereographs instead in upstate New York. En route to New York, Gray visited the company's Meadville office to make his acquaintance in person, which was acknowledged in a letter. Barnhart used his time in New York to explore, and letters reference to a visit to Niagara Falls, and discuss the possibility of a visit to New York City. In one letter, Keystone staff member Frank M. Walrath, later the vice president of the company, included this convoluted paragraph which responded to three distinct points from a prior letter written by Gray:

Glad to learn that you are finding the New York territory a good field. We cannot blame you for not being willing to dine with a negro. We feel very much as you do about this. Evidently, Mr. Barnhart, you have slightly misunderstood our intentions in sending statement concerning the letter heads. The ruling has been made by the firm that all letter heads going out to agents must be paid for at cost price. The prices we quoted you are such as we feel pays us for actual expense we go to. Since this is a ruling we are compelled to treat all men alike.⁴⁸

Because the only letters that survive come from Keystone, it is sometimes hard to understand what prompted a given statement, as is the case here. Keystone's staff had the opportunity to

⁴⁷ August 2, 1904 letter to Walter W. Barnhart, Keystone View Company Papers, Ms2010-052, Special Collections, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia. In other cases, as well, Keystone apprised the Barnharts of staff absences and the reasons for them. F. A. Wildman suffered an illness in June 1904, which was the subject of multiple letters. The same Miss Wentz took a "much needed vacation" in 1905. See mentions in Virginia Tech letters dated June 24, 1904, June 28, 1904, and August 26, 1905.

⁴⁸ July 17, 1908 letter to G. Gray Barnhart, Keystone View Company Papers, Ms2010-052, Special Collections, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia.

ignore the racist sentiment that Barnhart must have expressed, but instead chose not only to acknowledge it, but to commiserate, as well. In voicing agreement with Barnhart's racism, Keystone built a *simpatico* relationship, which had the potential to make Barnhart feel that his Southern views were equally welcome in the Northern United States, and agreeable in the eyes of his employer. This may have come from actual agreement, or from a calculated decision that ideological alignment gained more for the company than silence would have.⁴⁹ Indeed, Walrath did not seem to have any sense of irony in the way that he empathized with the racist beliefs but took grave issue with the apparent cost of letterhead for sales agents and his compulsion to "treat all men alike."

Collectively, the Barnhart letters give a sense of the ways that Keystone staff used their regular correspondence to mentor the agents, as well as develop strong relationships with them. Both aspects of these letters played a significant role in Keystone's business dealings. By coaching its agents based on their weekly reports or the content of their product orders, the company could provide one-on-one support that developed the agents professionally and, if that advice led to greater success by the agent, also increased the company's profits. In building a friendly relationship with the agents, the company fostered a sense of fraternity that did not exist organically when agents were geographically dispersed. These actions built up the agent's loyalty toward Keystone View Company, and encouraged the agent to greater successes. The letters gave Keystone a 'soul,' by giving the corporation a human voice. While that sense of a 'corporate soul' was more typically left to employee magazines in other contemporaneous corporations, Keystone used *Review* to be 'bad cop' to the personalized letters' 'good cop.'

⁴⁹ Keystone produced stereographs that have strong racist undertones, but were less overtly racist than many other of the American publishers, such as H. C. White Company, who produced a series of stereographs collectively referred to as the "Coon Series." For a discussion of that work, see Shola Lynch, "The Coon Series Stereographs & the H. C. White Company: Stereotypes, 'Facts,' and Perceptions" (M.A. thesis, University of California, Riverside, 1995).

Review gave the tough love – work despite poor weather, study your manual, try harder – and delivered messages that needed to be said. The letters referred to the magazine, but provided a gentler approach to the agent – get well soon, try this instead, keep going! – lifting the agent’s spirits while still pointing him toward the sterner resource. Through this approach, staff could admonish an agent without making him or her feel singled out or persecuted, and more gently contribute to the agent’s success.⁵⁰ This method was at odds with the typical “sugar coat[ed]” instructions in employee magazines, as described by JoAnne Yates, but still produced the same collective effect of improved morale and educated workers.

Never before had the photographic industry required such complex corporate systems of communication to sell photographs, but this was made entirely necessary because of Keystone’s size and business model. In physically separating the act of taking photographs from that of selling them, and especially in having agents scattered throughout the country and world, Keystone needed to create tools that were new to the industry in order to ensure successful sales. Agents all received Keystone’s *Manual of Instruction* that coached them how to dress, what to say, and how to respond to customer objections. As ongoing professional development, Keystone staff informed agents of the goings-on of the staff photographers, described the newest views available, and provided them with guidance to help them improve their sales techniques. Amalgamating methods from other big businesses, Keystone practiced corporate communication methods that were common in other industries, including producing an employee magazine and mandating a weekly reporting structure. Instead of investing significant staff time in producing

⁵⁰ Without an example of an admonishing personal letter it is impossible to know how Keystone communicated with agents who did not succeed as the Barnharts did. However, the magazine alone, peppered with its scolding articles and letters recounting successes, would make an unsuccessful agent feel like a personal failure, rather than infer that the direct-selling system was failing him or her.

and marketing photographs, Keystone's corporate staff was concerned with directing thousands of sales agents, who in turn could each sell hundreds of photographs each week.

These agents were well equipped to sell photographs because of the communication provided by the company, and, in turn, Keystone's success was due to the company's relationship-building between agents and corporate staff. The relationships that the corporate staff built with the sales agents fostered feelings of goodwill toward the company, despite the 'tough love' dispatched in the employee magazine. As will be discussed in the next chapter, most of the agents were working professionally for the very first time, and thus that sense of encouragement may have motivated inexperienced agents to persevere despite the challenges inherent to direct-selling. It also helped cultivate longer-term relationships than what were typical in the direct-sales industry. The Barnhart family, whose collective tenure with Keystone spanned six years, was one example of this. Although corporate communications functions may seem exceptionally far removed from the production and sale of photographs, this process was the most time-consuming aspect of Keystone's work, involving far more time and commitment than the actual creation and production of photographs. This infrastructure was necessary because Keystone needed to trust in the quality of its agents working in the field because they were not managing them at close range. In service to this, the company wrote regularly to agents with personalized letters that not only addressed sales concerns, but discussed medical ailments and personal beliefs, among countless non-photographic topics. Maintaining these relationships aimed to bring longevity to its sales force, so that the company could ensure the volume of sales necessary to succeed. Keystone made money and distributed its photographs widely because of the success of its agents, but the company's involvement, through exhaustive communication and distance-based management, worked to guarantee this success.

Selling by Demonstration

Examining Keystone's system of communication between its corporate office and sales agents is critical to understanding the relationship between the company and its employees. In this section, the focus will shift away from the professional development aspects of Keystone's communication and towards its broader vision of the way in which the company sold photographs. Addressing the specific ways Keystone instructed its agents to conduct their direct-sales practices illustrates the relationships between Keystone and its consumers. This section examines what is gained in selling by demonstration, especially regarding stereographs. Finally, it surveys the photographs that Keystone highlighted in its sales manual as examples of a sample canvass. I argue that in the company's early years Keystone's sales techniques relied more on the charisma of its sales agents than on the educational content of its images. In later years, Keystone undoubtedly emphasized the educational value as the company touted its well-known committees of educated advisors who contributed texts for the stereo cards and published supplemental materials. However, the oft-mentioned notion that Keystone *always* focused on education is at odds with the messages found in its early scripted sales pitch. In the 1890s and early 1900s, agents' instruction focused not on what could be learned from the photographs, but in the aesthetic and entertainment values of the images.

Business historian Mansel G. Blackford described the "love-hate affair" between Americans and big business in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries:

Most Americans associated big business with material abundance, efficiency in production methods, and a rising standard of living. Nonetheless, many Americans [...] also continued to have a sentimental attraction to small business, to the 'little guy.' The

development of big business was so sudden and so disruptive of traditional ways of work and life that most Americans looked on with anxiety.⁵¹

While Keystone's business practices were firmly entrenched in methods of big business, its decision to sell by demonstration connoted to the consumer a small-business sentiment. Through direct-sales demonstration, the face of Keystone was most typically an enterprising young person, which garnered more appeal than the faceless corporation itself. This allowed Keystone's representation of itself as a big business to appear gentler and more appealing to the general public. However, Keystone likely sought demonstration for a more straightforward reason, as well: the quality of its stereoscopic effect was essential in justifying the cost of its product. Therefore, one needed a demonstration of the product in order to understand its quality. This was in keeping with direct-selling business practices. Companies opted for direct-sales as their method of distribution when they felt that their products required more attention, explanation, or firsthand experience than they might receive in a store.⁵² Regardless of what they were selling, traveling salesmen's samples were the key to their success. Timothy Spears noted that "a complete knowledge of the product line gave salesmen something to talk about, yet even the most eloquent speeches could fail without a visual presentation of the wares."⁵³ The experiential nature of stereographs was a prime reason for their sale via demonstration, but the company's

⁵¹ Mansel G. Blackford, *A History of Small Business in America* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1991), 31.

⁵² Although describing a later period of retail shopping, Alison Clarke's description of Tupperware's brief foray in department store sales illustrates the problem with in-store demonstration. In 1947, Tupperware dispatched "demonstration teams" to engage customers in a manner similar to the way they would in the Home Party Plan. Customers were invited by the demonstrators to "yank it, bang on it, jump on it." However, "this interactive form of advertising and sales demonstration proved prohibitively costly, labor intensive, and time consuming." In this example, Tupperware dispatched its own representatives to make sure that the product was actively introduced and demonstrated. In most retail situations, a salesperson overseeing an entire department would be expected to answer questions about a product, but generally not promote one line as assertively as in the Tupperware example. Tupperware famously opted to have a cadre of "Tupperware ladies" doing in-home demonstrations for groups of women, and stop selling in retail establishments altogether. Similar patterns were adopted earlier by companies such as Avon, and Fuller Brush. See Clarke, *Tupperware: The Promise of Plastic in 1950s America*, 79–80; Manko, "'Ding Dong! Avon Calling!': Gender, Business, and Door-to-Door Selling, 1890-1955"; Friedman, *Birth of a Salesman: The Transformation of Selling in America*, 205–6.

⁵³ Spears, *100 Years on the Road: The Traveling Salesman in American Culture*, 89.

carefully honed sales advice also relied on the character and charisma of sales agents to aid in selling views, and upset the typical methods in which photographs had been sold.

If the opportunity to show a product was the motivator of selling by demonstration, then the product being sold is a paramount topic for examination. Samples were varied, and were made up of the actual products sold, scaled-down miniatures for large items, or canvassing books for yet-unpublished books. In other cases, salesmen carried photographs to give a sense of the actual product. Paul Christ and Rolph Anderson cite usage as early as 1854 of stereoscopic photographs to give a prospective customer a three-dimensional sense of a product too difficult to show the customer directly.⁵⁴ This practice continued for a century. Christ and Anderson described a pen company using stereographs as a salesman's tool in 1953, and a public collection and a private dealer both hold sets of Keystone-produced views of gravestones that was prepared for a stonemason salesman's sample case.⁵⁵ Professional literature regularly stressed that sales agents make a careful study of their samples, so that they would be well prepared to sell their products, and to take care of the material so that they would represent the products well. Samples were such an essential part of the agent's pitch that they were often cited as a reason for a sales agent's failure as well. Keystone regularly scolded its agents within the pages of *Keystone Review* that an agent who failed to make sales needed to make a more careful examination of their stereographs so that they could expound on them more knowledgeably.

⁵⁴ Paul Christ and Rolph Anderson, "The Impact of Technology on Evolving Roles of Salespeople," *Journal of Historical Research in Marketing* 3, no. 2 (2011): 182.

⁵⁵ Ibid. The gravestone set is in the collection of the California Museum of Photography, University of California, Riverside. A second (not fully identical) set is in the possession of photography dealer Jeffrey Kraus of New York. A third copy of this set was listed on eBay in April 2017. In one final example, photographs and stereo views were used as a marketing scheme. Stereographs of Reed & Barton's silverplate display at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia were sent to wholesalers as a marketing tool, along with photographs of products. Like many companies, its catalogs were otherwise merely illustrated with line engravings, and the photographs were meant to be more impressive to the late 1870s audience. Moskowitz, *Standard of Living: The Measure of the Middle Class in Modern America*, 42.

Selling by demonstration allowed prospective consumers to examine a product in the comfort of their own home before buying it. With some products, such as Tupperware, the sales agent created a fun environment that also proved the stability and utility of the product. However, more typically, the agent provided a rather whirlwind experience of the product, with the notion that a quick experience would build desire, and too prolonged of exposure might satiate a customer so that they no longer would want to buy the item. In bookselling, for example, if an agent was selling a completed book rather than using a sample canvassing book, there was concern described in book agents' sales manuals that the prospective customer could "thumb through the volume and see the whole of its contents," and thus no longer want to own the book itself.⁵⁶ Sales agents were urged to keep control of the book, only show parts, and build a desire for it. They were encouraged to have made a careful study of the tome, and know what key points to highlight, both within the text and in the book's presentation and design. This draws a direct parallel to stereographic direct-sales practices, where agents were directed to flip through views quickly, so that the stereographs did not fully satiate prospective customers, and left them wanting more.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Friedman, *Birth of a Salesman: The Transformation of Selling in America*, 40. One manual suggested to show only six to eight passages of no more than 300 words each, lest the sales agent otherwise give away too much. Hannaford, *Success in Canvassing: A Manual of Practical Hints and Instructions Specially Adapted to the Use of Book Canvassers of the Better Class*, 2–3.

⁵⁷ The blocking maneuvers described in book-selling is known because many different salesman's manuals for book agents have survived, and provide insight into the sales process. Typically written as heuristic tools for troubleshooting specific responses from prospective customers, manuals gave sample dialogs, advice on interactions and decorum, and directions on the order in which one should canvass a street of houses. Friedman, *Birth of a Salesman: The Transformation of Selling in America*, 42. Although some were written as guides for a specific book, such as Grant's memoirs, they were often kept generic enough to be applicable to any book being canvassed. One popular manual was Ebenezer Hannaford's *Success in Canvassing: A Manual of Practical Hints and Instructions, Specially Adapted to the Use of Book Canvassers of the Better Class* (1875), a twenty-four-page manual that advised agents on all aspects of the trade, including advice specific for selling in urban, rural, and factory environments, and responses to give to prospects who were declining to purchase the item. The book was written as a series of drills and utilized a military-like vocabulary, referring to the canvassing plan as "the campaign," sales as "victory," and trying to convince customers as "wringing victory from defeat." Hannaford, *Success in Canvassing: A Manual of Practical Hints and Instructions Specially Adapted to the Use of Book Canvassers of the Better Class*. Generally, the book agents' manuals were very similar to stereograph sales manuals. In fact, it is noted on the title page of an early Underwood & Underwood salesman's manual that the text is adapted from Hannaford's *Success in Canvassing*.

With Keystone, agents ordered a sample case of stereoscopes and stereographs when they enlisted with the company, and they could supplement their samples with any views they felt would aid in their selling. As noted previously, Keystone provided additional samples of recent events for free when the company believed that the agent having a given view on hand would encourage sales. Accordingly, it is unlikely that any two sales agents' cases were identical, nor would the views they selected for sales demonstrations remain fixed. However, Keystone provided several examples of stereographs to highlight and sample remarks for agents' canvasses. These examples provide insight not only into what Keystone considered useful views for selling (and, as they put it, "creating a desire"), but also insight into the views that the average consumer was likely to have been shown.

Keystone employee J. E. Thompson's description of a "model canvass for views" defines the process:

First, know the views of your outfit thoroughly and be able to tell what you know, that is, know the histories on the backs of the views and anything else that you can find out about them. Second, call attention to the marvelous realness of the perfect stereoscopic view. It is more than a picture, it is the real scene brought out in perspective before the eyes. Third, call out the fine and striking things in your views, at the same time pointing them out with your finger. Fourth, quote what people have said about individual views as you are showing them. Fifth, in all the above be brief and move quickly and with nervous energy, taking care to get and to keep your customer's attention as you move along.⁵⁸

In the 1898 sales manual, the company prescribed that a sales agent should "give the title of each view verbatim just as they are going to look at it, followed by a few interesting remarks." The manual elaborated that the text on the cards' versos will help agents with their remarks, but that they should have "special remarks studied up to make in connection with certain views that you

Underwood & Underwood stated that the copyright to Hannaford's manual was "assigned to" the stereograph firm in 1892. Underwood & Underwood, *Manual of Instruction from Underwood & Underwood*, 1.

⁵⁸ J. E. Thompson, "Outline of Steps in a Model Canvass for Views," in *Keystone Review* 7, no. 9 (September 1904): 135.

can describe them more in harmony with your patrons' impressions as they see them."⁵⁹

Keystone provided a series of examples of this, which provide telling context for the company's own visioning of a "model canvass."

The first image listed in the manual was "Orange Blossoms and Fruit." The suggested remarks were, "This shows you the oranges as they grow in California; they look delicious." This likely referred to Keystone stereograph number 4300, a close-up shot of oranges on the tree with a copyright date of 1897 (Figure 3.2). This view is perhaps most notable from a technical standpoint: the photographer overcame the chromatic challenge of represented orange fruit so that they did not appear dark like cannonballs on the print.⁶⁰ While this would have been a positive talking point that emphasized Keystone's quality compared to competitors, the suggested dialog instead emphasizes content more readily understood by anyone: the sensorial appeal of fresh fruit growing on a tree. That Keystone emphasized this with a relatively exotic American crop, as opposed to apples (for example) would have been part of the appeal.

Next Keystone used the example of "Waiting for the Command," an 1895 stereograph depicting two English setter hunting dogs with their master in the middle of a hunt (Figure 3.3).

The text on the back of the stereograph states:

The pleasure of the hunt for feathered game is doubly enhanced when the sportsman is accompanied by well-trained setters. Their wonderful instinct is a source of constant interest to him, and their gentleness and affection for their master is remarkable. The natural instinct to crouch at the scent of a bird, has been cultivated and they have been taught also to raise the foot and point, holding the position until bidden by their master to "hie on and fetch." A curious fact about these dogs is that when one scents a bird that the other have not discovered, the whole number are sometimes seen to take and hold the

⁵⁹ Keystone View Company, *Manual of Instructions from the Keystone View Company for the Use of Their Agents*, 9.

⁶⁰ Working with photography collections in the American birthplace of the citrus industry, I have observed countless prints of oranges made from pre-panchromatic film from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that represent the orange as a very dark-colored object, due to how orange was interpreted on the negative. See, for example, the photograph collections in the Riverside Metropolitan Museum, or a C. R. Webster stereograph of oranges in the collection of the California Museum of Photography.

same point in sympathy with the first. A well-trained English setter is valued at from \$100 to \$300.

The manual suggests that an agent remark, “Notice how natural are the foot marks on the snow; and the dogs – you can almost hear them breathe.” The observations take a different approach from the text published on the card. Instead of stating facts that customers could later read for themselves, the emphasis is placed on the content of the images and the precision of the view made possible through stereoscopic detail.

The third example is a pair of stereographs from 1896, titled “Before Marriage” and “After Marriage” (Figures 3.4 and 3.5). “Before Marriage” shows a happy couple sitting together under a shared parasol, or, as the manual suggested an agent describe it, “They appear very happy; all seems sunshine.” In contrast, “After Marriage” shows the same couple, seated back to back, sheltered by separate umbrellas. The woman sulked while the man smoked, and the agent described, “From this you notice that changes in life are very uncertain. They seem to have forgotten the past.” The prescribed text does not emphasize the visual gag, but instead explains the narrative directly, as if it, too, were a photograph documenting the world, like the oranges on the tree or the hunting scene suggested previously.

Keystone next suggested a view of Horseshoe Falls at Niagara Falls, with the observation, “This is claimed to be the finest instantaneous view of the falls ever made.” It is difficult to know which photograph of Niagara an agent would have used because this was the first topic among Keystone’s suggestions that had multiple visages of the same subject matter. Furthermore, because of the popularity of Niagara Falls, this was a view most likely to be similar to other companies’ offerings. Yet, in Keystone’s dialog the company did not make any quantifiable distinction to the superiority of its goods, and instead made a claim that would surely register as puffery in the minds of many consumers.

Next, Keystone proposed an 1893 view of lilies, “Consider the Lilies how they grow” (Figure 3.6). This stereograph is extremely similar to the oranges image because it depicts a close-up botanical view. Even though the card was titled with a biblical verse (Luke 12:27), lilies’ symbolic reference in Christianity was not a suggested topic of discussion. The remark suggested to the agent instead emphasized the haptic, “Notice how clearly the lilies stand out in relief. They look as if you could almost pick them up.” Like the observation about how the oranges “look delicious,” or the described sensations as if one were physically present in the hunting scene, the suggested description of the lilies emphasized their physical realism. The agent was not ordered to state it directly, but these haptic sensations would have been amplified when viewed through a stereoscope.⁶¹ Instead, the descriptions were kept simple, understandable, and straightforward.

A more direct discussion of the haptic in stereoscopic viewing was saved for instances when the agent was attempting to sell a stereoscope in addition to views. Keystone suggested showing “White Coral,” an 1897 still life of a piece of coral (Figure 3.7), and directed the agent to emphasize the flatness of the photograph itself when viewed outside of the stereoscope. After viewing the image on its own, the agent placed it in a stereoscope and narrated a contrast to the dimensionality visible through the stereoscope: “Notice how perfectly the ’scope shows each branch and leaf, and you can also see to the very heart of it.” As a subject, the coral was not very different from the close-up botanicals of the oranges and lilies, but Keystone envisioned a different use for this view than the prosaic observations applied to the other images. This image, more than the botanicals, allowed the best presentation of the stereoscope, because the

⁶¹ For discussions of the haptic and stereoscopy, see Di Bello, “‘Multiplying Statues by Machinery’: Stereoscopic Photographs of Sculptures at the 1862 International Exhibition”; Plunkett, “‘Feeling Seeing’: Touch, Vision and the Stereoscope”; Douglas Klahr, “The Radically Subversive Narrative of Stereoscopic Photography,” *Kunsttexte.de*, no. 1 (2013): 1–14.

stereoscopic effect was so surprising, and the haptic elements so alluring. Keystone's prescribed text was still descriptive, but this was the first example where the dimensionality was so pointedly emphasized. However, the coral image was only suggested when the agent was attempting to sell a stereoscope in addition to stereographs. If a prospective customer already had a stereoscope, the agent would only attempt to sell views. In these circumstances, the agent was directed to show an "attractive childhood scene," one that the agent personally admires, and end with the observation, "How is that for perfect work?" As a sales close, this is far less impactful than the coral, and maintained the same level of conventional descriptions throughout the process, without ever emphasizing stereoscopic vision in a meaningful way.

Collectively, these suggested remarks contribute very little to the sales experience. Except in a vague, blustery statement and a single nod to the haptic in an optionally selected view, they do not acknowledge the technical masteries through which these photographs were produced, nor do they act in demonstration of the photographs' educational value. More broadly, the Keystone agent was advised to "make the first dozen views you show as interesting as you can, for now is your opportunity." The text reminded the agent that their job was to "*create a desire*; therefore, do not allow your patron to look longer at each view than the time necessary to create that desire, taking it out while they are still desirous of looking at it. By handling the views in that way, it leaves your patron anxious of seeing more of your views."⁶² This provides an important explanation of the nature of agents' remarks and observations. If they were moving quickly through the views, they needed to avoid remarks that could have been too distracting in their complexity or level of interest. Had the agent remarked, for example, that in 1890 that Riverside, California, had the highest per capita income of any city in America because of the

⁶² Original emphasis. Keystone View Company, *Manual of Instructions from the Keystone View Company for the Use of Their Agents*, 9.

orange industry, the statement, while true, may give someone pause and want to question whether this was truly the case. (One might wonder how citrus could lead to more wealth than steel, for example.) Therefore, an important function of the remarks, as Keystone demonstrated in its manual, was keeping it light and approachable, and not weighed down by trivia or technical statements. This also applied to talking about stereoscopic effect overall. In Keystone's script, the emphasis on stereoscopic effect was only important when demonstrating power of the stereoscope, not in talking about the general content of the photographs. Furthermore, when the stereoscopic effect was discussed, it was not in a technical explanation of stereopsis, but simply by crafting a visual comparison between the image outside of the stereoscope and viewed through it.

This strategy was markedly different from the examples set forth in Underwood & Underwood's 1900 sales manual. Prefacing the "samples of remarks" section, the manual stated,

As Dr. [Oliver Wendell] Holmes says, this is no *toy*, but rather a divine gift, which can thus bring us into the very presence of the most important people and the most interesting places the world over. So try to comprehend and feel the deep significance of such remarks as the following when you make them. They are true, but they will be like sounding brass unless you *realize* how much they stand for.⁶³

Underwood provided eighteen examples, including views of a banana plantation in Hawaii, an interior of the Royal Palace in Stockholm, Loch Katrine in Scotland, a street in Osaka, the library of the Vatican, and a home in Palestine. In addition to these scenes, a portrait of President William McKinley, then the sitting president, and several comic views were also offered as examples. Many of Underwood's remarks are more detailed than the stereographs' written descriptions. For a photograph titled "The Czar of Russia and the French President Laying the Cornerstone of the Troitzky [sic] Bridge, St. Petersburg, Russia," the remark stated,

⁶³ Original emphasis. Underwood & Underwood, *Manual of Instruction from Underwood & Underwood*, 11.

That is indeed a distinguished gathering. You see we are in an excellent position to study the faces before us, and it is a group well worth studying. The Czar stands a very little to your right, with President Faure, wearing a white vest, almost touching his right arm. Both are listening attentively to a prelate of the Greek Church, the Metropolitan of St. Petersburg. There are many notable people here, and you will find that the closer you study them the more interested you become. See the men on the outside of the group craning their necks to see the Czar.⁶⁴

With this example, the agent states far more than the photograph's caption described, including the name of the French president, and other key figures unnamed in the stereograph's title. The scene may reinforce recent news, or reflect an increased interest in Faure, who died the year before Underwood published this manual. Significantly, the remarks force careful examination that goes beyond simply 'creating a desire,' as Keystone had emphasized. Underwood's demonstration was not the rapid-fire selection of images that Keystone suggested. The images carried significantly more gravitas and were less light-hearted than the Keystone examples. Remarks were more lecture-like and informative, rather than short and generally descriptive. Indeed, where Keystone espoused creating desire, Underwood's manual states that its goal was to arouse one's "interest." Trivia about the citrus industry, or the technical challenges of photographing the color orange, would mesh well with Underwood's methods, but not with Keystone's prescribed practices.

Another key difference was that the theme running through Underwood's sample remarks was the quality of the imagery presented to the customer. Nearly every example includes a remark about the image's realism or quality. Declarations included, "Just as real as if you were looking at the actual scene itself," "Only a photographer can fully appreciate how much it means to make a photograph like this," "It is one of the nicest scenes I ever saw," and "But, seriously, isn't that a fine picture?" Underwood also used accolades to justify the quality, such as noting an

⁶⁴ Ibid., 12–13.

image was made by Niagara-based photographer George Barker, “whose fame as an artist is world-wide. He secured eleven first-prize medals, including the highest award of the Paris Exposition.” These statements of quality were variously drawn from ‘personal’ opinion (as stated by the company), general exclamation, technical prowess, and tangible accolades. They provided some variety in the way in which an agent could repeatedly state the same point about the admirable quality of these photographs. In that variety, an agent could simply memorize the lines, rather than personalize his own observations.

Underwood’s sample canvass may seem more verbose, but Underwood, like Keystone, intended stereo cards to be viewed in rapid succession. The 1900 manual described the rapid switching of views thusly:

Put each succeeding view into the ’scope before taking the preceding one away, which keeps a person looking at a view constantly, and holds the attention better than to take one out and put another in separately, leaving nothing in the ’scope while changing. Allow only enough time for the person looking to appreciate the view before him: then before he has looked to his full satisfaction, remove it and introduce the one behind it, thus leaving him with a desire to see more of each view.⁶⁵

Keystone elaborated more on the stereograph-flipping technique, “When showing views, always place them in the ’scope behind the one at which your customer is looking, changing them with the thumb and index finger. Each succeeding view should be in the ’scope before you take out the preceding one.”⁶⁶ The manual described the same rapid flipping of images and intent to arouse desire. The main difference between Keystone and Underwood’s approach is the subject matter of their suggested images, and the companies’ notions of what an agent should say. Keystone’s suggested approach was broadly accessible, whereas Underwood’s was included more challenging examples in both subject and topic. Underwood tempered this in recognizable

⁶⁵ Ibid., 11.

⁶⁶ Keystone View Company, *Manual of Instructions from the Keystone View Company for the Use of Their Agents*, 8.

subjects, such as the then-sitting president William McKinley, and comic views, but overall the company's subjects and commentary emphasized worldliness in a way that made its approach less manifestly relatable than Keystone's.

Keystone's suggestions were simply a sample, not a required script. In suggesting images of oranges, hunting, comic subjects, Niagara Falls, flowers, and a coral, Keystone's recommendations focused on subjects that were broadly recognizable, relatable, and visually appealing regardless of the age, gender, educational, or religious background of the prospective customer. Keystone's six examples were so unified in their straightforward imagery and simplistic statements that agents would likely have been compelled to utilize similar ilk, rather than the headier Underwood topics, when creating their own improvisations from their own sales kits. In the Barnhart letters, Keystone suggests using another comic set (the French cook sequence), a world's fair (Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis), and recent well-known disasters (Baltimore fire and San Francisco earthquake) as supplements to their canvass. The world's fair and disaster topics were so widely known that, like the Niagara view, it was unlikely that a prospective customer would be unaware of the event. (Compare this to Underwood's relatively esoteric example of the cornerstone laying at Troitsky Bridge.) Therefore, it appears that Keystone was universally consistent in emphasizing approachable topics when coaching its sales agents on successful canvasses.

Yet, there were other benefits to Keystone's suggestions. Unlike the lush landscapes of places like Loch Katrine or the rich architectural details in the Vatican's library, as seen in two Underwood examples, there was far less to continue attracting the eye in Keystone's various botanicals and comic images than in most other stereoscopic subjects. The straightforwardness of Keystone's subjects permitted agents to emphasize implicitly the strength of the images' three-

dimensional effects without the potential for ‘losing’ a client in an image. The selection of Niagara Falls suits this framework well. The speed of the falls resulted in a loss of detail, but not a loss of the impressive sense of stereoscopic depth.⁶⁷ Were Keystone to suggest a more exotic site, it could potentially prove more intimidating to the prospective customer, or more difficult for the agent to continue propelling the sales pitch.

This is not to say that Keystone agents did not incorporate esoteric examples in their canvass, or incorporate the imprinted educational texts printed on stereographs’ versos as an additional selling point. Surely this would have happened, after agents built that initial sense of desire, or when they returned on delivery and needed to reaffirm the value of the items so that customers would be compelled to pay Keystone’s relatively high prices. What Keystone provided in its sample pitch was a fertile ground on which agents could begin to ‘create a desire,’ and ultimately cultivate a sale. Keystone’s philosophy was that an agent should have a solid, straightforward initial sales pitch, what one might think of as an ‘elevator pitch’ today, and that by having a foundation that would not need to be tweaked or altered, a brand-new agent and a seasoned salesman alike could approach any prospective customer with confidence. This allowed Keystone to reap the benefits of its sales-by-demonstration. In featuring straightforward images that emphasized stereoscopic effect and remained approachable in subject to all clients, agents were able to capture the attention of the broadest possible audience and create rampant desire. This was the very reason Keystone invested such significant time into its creation of sales-training materials and individual correspondence with agents. The company believed that an unimposing introduction to its product was a crucial first step to sales. In the next chapter I

⁶⁷ It is impossible to know what “instantaneous view” of Horseshoe Falls Keystone was suggesting in its canvass, but this statement is broadly applicable to late nineteenth century photographs of Niagara. See, for example, Anthony Bannon and C. Robert McElroy, *The Taking of Niagara: A History of the Falls in Photography* (Buffalo, NY: Media Study, 1982).

will address the character of the Keystone sales agent at length, and in doing so will interrogate the more precise ways in which the company emphasized educational aspiration. However, in the context of the ways in which Keystone encouraged its agents to present themselves in the sales pitch, it is clear that the company saw affability as a more important quality than academic grandstanding.

Keystone's corporate communications posed a new method of management in the photographic industry in order to support its alternative sales method. Direct-sales upset the typical methods in which photographs had been sold, but the experiential nature of stereographs was well-suited for sales via demonstration. For Keystone, demonstration was the company's most important form of advertisement. This was the sole way that Keystone placed its products in front of prospective customers, and the only way that it secured sales. Therefore, Keystone's business decisions, the way it sold, how it coached and communicated with its employees, and how it instructed its agents to talk to customers enabled the company's success. Keystone's carefully honed sales advice coached its sales force, and placed emphasis on agents' agreeable character as the ultimate key to their success. Keystone's communication with its staff was repetitive and stiff when communicating with the entire sales force, but its one-on-one correspondence softened the corporate 'soullessness' otherwise present. Corporate communication was a problem that was new and foreign to the photographic imaging industry, but these gentler communications reflected the approach of other industries grappling with the same problem as Keystone: the challenge of managing a large and often distant team of employees. Through these communications, Keystone more closely modeled broader corporate trends in business cultures and corporate relationships, and brought a big-business approach to an industry that was typically localized and small.

Finally, the tone that Keystone struck in its sample canvass photographs provides a telling visioning of Keystone's company-consumer relationship. Keystone let its photographs speak for themselves, and urged agents to keep their monologues brief and accessible. In doing this, Keystone emphasized the visual appeal of the photographs over its educational content. By comparing Keystone's sample canvass against competitor Underwood's examples, it is clear that the straightforward, prosaic descriptions were an intentional decision on the part of Keystone management. Keystone sought to keep the sales process light, interesting, and not overwhelming to the prospective consumer. Instead of emphasizing education in the canvass, Keystone imbued this through many of its agents. The next chapter will continue on this point, by looking at the sales agent and his (or her) aspirational role in the sales transaction.

SALESMAN'S WEEKLY REPORT.

KEYSTONE VIEW COMPANY,

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Gentlemen:—Following is a complete report of my work for week ending _____

	No. of Hours Worked	No. of Orders for Scopes and Views	No. of Orders for Views Only	No. of Orders Delivered	Receipts for the Day
MONDAY,					\$
TUESDAY,					
WEDNESDAY,					
THURSDAY,					
FRIDAY,					
SATURDAY,					
TOTAL,					

- 1 My delivery begins
- 2 Are you working in city or country territory?
- 3 If city territory, are you working business or residence districts, or both?
- 4 Are you calling on everyone, or only those you think will buy?
- 5 About how many persons do you canvass each day?
- 6 If in country work, do you canvass every road, or just the main roads?
- 7 If in country work, have you mastered "Special Instructions on Country Work"?
- 8 Do you succeed in showing to everyone?..... If not, why?.....
- 9 Do you fail to *interest* any to whom you show?..... If so, why?.....
- 10 When you fail to get an order, do you always know why?.....
- 11 Do you ask at once if party has 'scope, and then make a definite canvass either for 'scope or views (accordingly)?.....
- 12 In a general way, how many views do you show before approaching for orders?.....
- 13 Do you try for an order just as soon as your party is thoroughly interested?.....
- 14 Do you always insist on a positive order?.....
- 15 After order is secured, do you try to prepare customer for large delivery by calling attention to Tour of the World, and other sets? (See note page 70, regular Manual)
- 16 Do you use our Gem Cases?.....
- 17 Do you try to enlarge each and every small delivery by the use of these Gem Cases?.....
- 18 After you have sold and collected for as many original photos as possible, then do you bring out your Hand Paints and sell from 25 cents to \$3.00 worth in addition?.....
- 19 Do you carry one of our sets as large as the Seventy-two World Tour, and try faithfully to deliver it to each possible customer?.....
- 20 Are you "dead earnest" in every canvass and delivery?.....
- 21 Do you study your Manual every day, and do you feel the truth of the first four sections?.....
- 22 What are some of the chief objections from those from whom you did not receive orders?.....
- 23 What was your total expense for this week? Living, \$..... Car fare, \$.....
- 24 Do you give views in exchange for board and other expenses?.....
- 25 If present delivery completes a certain field, whether a township, town or city, kindly state total amount of goods delivered at wholesale rate.....
- 26 In what way can we assist you more in your work?.....

Salesman's Name.....

Address

P. S.—Kindly fill out Report carefully, as suggested on opposite side hereof.

Figure 3.1. Salesman's weekly report (recto) in Keystone View Company Papers, Ms2010-052, Special Collections, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia.



Figure 3.2. “4300 – Orange Blossoms and Fruit, Los Angeles, Cal., U.S.A.” Collection of the New York Public Library.



Figure 3.3. “583 – Waiting for the Command.”



Figure 3.4. “2346 – Before Marriage.”



Figure 3.5. “2347 – After Marriage.”



Figure 3.6. “348 – ‘Consider the Lilies how they grow, they toil not; they spin not, and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these.’”

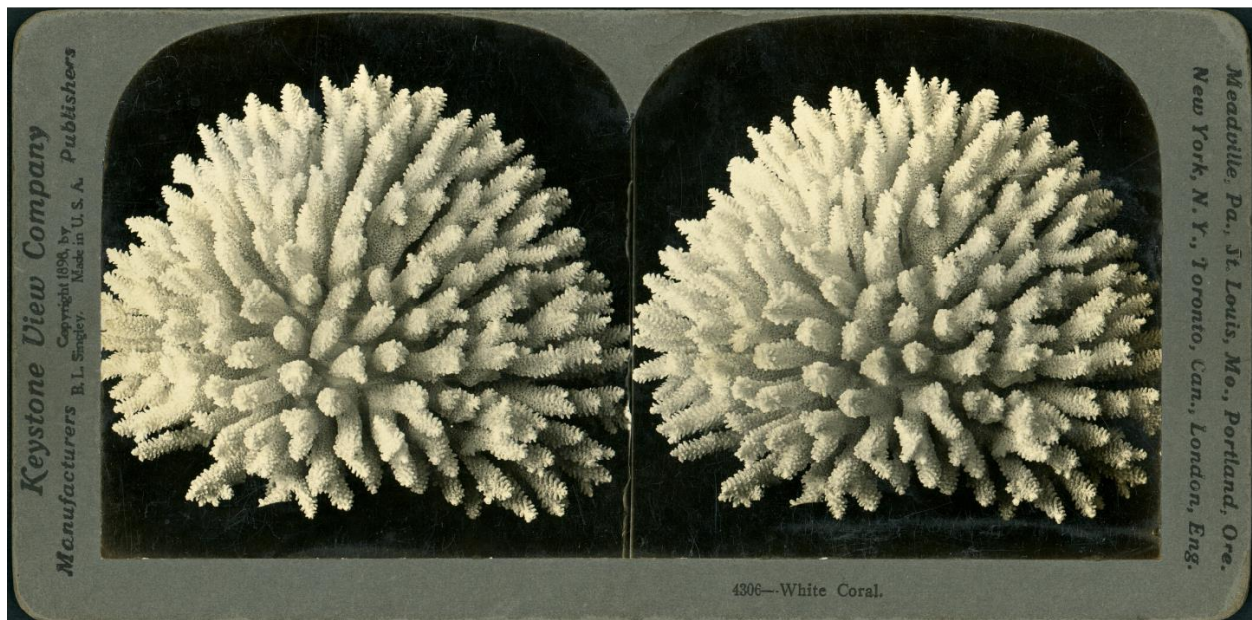


Figure 3.7. “4306 – White Coral,” 1898.

Chapter 4: “Echoes from the Field”: Age and Gender Diversity in Keystone View Company’s Sales Force

Keystone Review typically titled the selection of letters published in each issue “Echoes from the Field.” As discussed in Chapter 3, there is a very limited amount of surviving data about the sales agents, and because of this, “echoes” is a particularly appropriate term with which to think about the agents themselves. The data in this chapter is virtually all from a secondary source, like an echo, drawing primarily from letters that Keystone published, purportedly as written by the agents themselves. By calling their voices an “echo,” Keystone was indicating that these letters were reflective of the field. Although they are representative of only the successful agents rather than the entire field, these ‘echoes’ provide a significant, unique source of data for studying these agents.

The last chapter addressed the role of the company, specifically how Keystone saw and spoke to its agents, and how the company directed its agents to speak to prospective customers. To complete the examination of Keystone and its agents, this chapter turns from the company’s relationship with its agents from the company’s viewpoint, to the agents themselves. In this chapter, I examine the employee, by assembling demographic data about Keystone’s sales agents, and addressing how these agents may have been understood by their customers. The “Echoes from the Field” letters have not been used as a source of such information to this extent in earlier scholarship.¹ Keystone’s “Echoes” feature was not unique to the genre of sales-oriented employee magazines, which often featured agent success stories. However, the frequency and

¹ Judith Babbitts cited from selected parts of *Keystone Review*, but paid little attention to the content of the “Echoes” letters. John Plunkett wrote about Underwood sales agents, but utilized sales manuals and a series of articles by W. T. Stead as his source. Babbitts, ““To See Is to Know”: Stereographs Educate Americans about East Asia, 1890-1940”; Plunkett, “Selling Stereoscopy, 1890–1915: Penny Arcades, Automatic Machines and American Salesmen.”

volume of Keystone's publication of "Echoes" was perhaps more significant than other sales firms.² *Review* dedicated at least one-quarter of its magazine content to sales agents' letters by publishing at least one page of this content when the issue was four pages long, and several pages when the magazine expanded its issue size. By publishing so many letters, the 'echoes' become powerful. The 'echoes' provide a different perspective than the way traveling salesmanship has been approached in other literature, which is primarily focused on the culture of the profession.³ While "Echoes," when read collectively, speaks to the corporate culture at Keystone, by analyzing the individual letters for personal information, the 'echoes' resonate more broadly about the character of the individuals. From these findings, I argue that Keystone decision to send well-educated young people into rural America to sell tacitly educational stereographs was a calculated move to evoke prospective customers' emulative and aspirational desires. Keystone's stereo views sold due to the sales agents' earnestness, especially in contrast to the unsavory reputation of the typical sales agent. Using sincere figures endorsing the stereographs by selling them connected to American consumers' emulative urges, and proved to be an incredibly effective way of selling the views. By looking at the people who sold the stereo views, one gains a better understanding of why these views were so successfully and widely distributed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

² In other studies of traveling sales agents, agents from a given company have not been mapped or otherwise statistically assessed. This data often does not survive, or is somewhat encrypted (as is also the case with Keystone agents, where specific cities and towns are almost never listed), or exists only as partial or regional data. More often, agents' geographic locales or demographics are assessed at the individual level, through careful reads of personal memoirs. For this kind of assessment, see, for example Spears, *100 Years on the Road: The Traveling Salesman in American Culture*.

³ For cultural studies of salesmanship, see Strasser, "'The Smile That Pays': The Culture of Traveling Salesmen, 1880-1920"; Spears, "'All Things to All Men': The Commercial Traveler and the Rise of Modern Salesmanship"; Friedman, *Birth of a Salesman: The Transformation of Selling in America*.

The Sales Agent in Context

Chapter 3 addressed the history of direct-selling in the United States. This chapter focuses on the personnel by discussing the direct-selling sales agent. Keystone upset the norms of the perception of sales agents by hiring aspirational, upwardly mobile college students as agents. This notion of ‘perception’ of the sales agent is a complex one, because the American sales agent has too often been painted with a broad brushstroke, when the reality was far more nuanced. This section will address the American sales agent, both generally and in Keystone, including all its messy contradictions. Looking broadly at direct-selling sales agents first shows the ways in which Keystone was different, not only as a photographic company (as already described in Chapters 2 and 3), but also among industries that relied on direct-selling. Starting with an overview of the direct-selling sales agent additionally illuminates the agent-customer relationship, and demonstrates the role of aspiration in Keystone sales. Collectively this gives concreteness to general notions of the meanings and visage of the Keystone agent, and better situates the agent’s role against customer perception.

Illustrated popular magazines and popular literature in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century characterized American traveling sales agent as male, middle-aged, brash, untrustworthy, and driven by various vices (most commonly drinking or womanizing).⁴ A popular tell-all account of agents’ schemes and swindles further raised cultural suspicion toward the traveling salesman.⁵ Karen Halttunen’s 1982 study of confidence men and other unsavory figures in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century only tangentially addressed

⁴ As inventoried in Spears, *100 Years on the Road: The Traveling Salesman in American Culture*.

⁵ Bates Harrington, *How ‘Tis Done: A Thorough Ventilation of the Numerous Schemes Conducted by Wandering Canvassers* (Chicago: Fidelity, 1879), analyzed in Friedman, *Birth of a Salesman: The Transformation of Selling in America*, 53–55.

salesmanship, implying that they were not the most extreme examples of charlatans.⁶ However, both Timothy Spears and Walter Freidman's books about traveling sales agents cite Halttunen's study, showing that the sales agent was more easily positioned against 'con men' than upstanding society. These stereotypes were not one-sided. There was an entire genre of sales agents' joke books and braggartly memoirs that further perpetuated these conceptions.⁷ Despite contemporaneous and secondary analyses that generalize agents as unsavory figures, for every encyclopedia salesman (which Truman Moore described as "the bad boys of the consumer movement"), there was an "Avon lady," selling camaraderie and self-care along with her beauty products.⁸ Too often this diversity in gender and in character has been neglected by scholarship on salesmanship. As a result, Keystone's young, earnest, and generally well-educated agents are too often contrasted against the most extreme examples of untrustworthy sales agents. This distinct polarity is more extreme than reality, and to understand that, one needs to examine the field as a whole, as well as contradictions to the characterization of traveling stereoscopic sales agents.

Chapter 2 addressed the impression that Keystone's agents made when selling in the United Kingdom, that the young agents were wholesome college men who resembled the British notion of the 'deserving poor.' However, stereograph publishers produced a 'comic' image that actively undermined this notion. Photographic historian Melody Davis described a modest category of views titled "An Optical Delusion," "Things Seen and Not Seen," or "The Fresh View Agent," wherein the view agent is embracing the woman of the house while her husband is

⁶ Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).

⁷ This genre of books is described in Spears, *100 Years on the Road: The Traveling Salesman in American Culture*, 106-110.

⁸ Moore, *The Traveling Man: The Story of the American Traveling Salesman*, 169; Manko, "'Ding Dong! Avon Calling!': Gender, Business, and Door-to-Door Selling, 1890-1955."

distracted by looking through a stereoscope (Figure 4.1). This topic originated in British stereographs from the 1860s and 1870s, but were perpetuated by American companies through the 1890s and early 1900s.⁹ Interestingly, although some of these views were made by companies that distributed by means other than direct-sales, publishers who created their own version included Webster & Albee, Universal Photo Art Co., and Strohmeyer & Wyman. All three of these publishers sold via direct sales, and Strohmeyer & Wyman used Underwood & Underwood as its sole distributor. While sales agents' manuals for Webster & Albee and Universal Photo Art Co. do not survive, surviving Underwood sales manuals show that Underwood agents were instructed to conduct themselves with the same decorum as Keystone agents.¹⁰ The "Optical Delusion" images, therefore, pose a view that contradicted the vision that both Keystone and Underwood were attempting to perpetuate, and the fact that Underwood distributed a version of the image showed the company's hypocrisy. Addressing how "Optical Delusion" images may have been presented, Davis noted:

Surely this type of view was not one of the first to be pulled out in a canvass but held in reserve for the sort who would appreciate a deviation from the marital norm. For the right customer, the stereographic companies could jest about themselves, all the while using the staple of the tricked husband to encourage a response that served their own interests – love your agent.¹¹

Davis' observations provide a possible theory of these views' origins and successes in selling, but the problem is complex. These images are awkward self-deprecation that would rarely be suitable for a prospective buyer of either gender. It would be difficult to suggest the purchase to a male buyer without slyly suggesting that he could be so easily cuckolded by the very man selling

⁹ For an index of known variants of this title, refer to the appendix of Davis, "Doubling the Vision: Women and Narrative Stereography: The United States, 1870-1910."

¹⁰ See, for example, section headed "Your Bearing," describing an Underwood man's demeanor, in Underwood & Underwood, *Manual of Instruction from Underwood & Underwood*, 25.

¹¹ Davis, *Women's Views: The Narrative Stereograph in Nineteenth-Century America*, 79.

the picture, and a young man's ability to read that in his customer seems unlikely. Conversely, selling the image to a woman would likely imply a come-on.

The views survive in multiple versions, which speaks to the fact that they must have been sold successfully, and surely with the right bravado, an agent would have had no trouble placing them in homes. *Keystone Review* regularly noted that the comic views about men in extramarital relationships, such as a dalliance with the cook, were popular sellers. Yet the "Optical Delusion" image are more troubling to a prospective customer. It would be more difficult for a male customer to project himself favorably into this narrative, and although a female customer might find it titillating, propriety may have prevented her from purchasing the image. I posit that the intended market for this stereograph was not the client "who would appreciate a deviation from the marital norm," as Davis proposed, but the stereograph agent himself. Whether the "Optical Delusion" narrative was based upon reality or fiction, by projecting the agent as the intended audience, the viewer reprises the vicarious viewing that he would have in other stereographs about romance and affairs.¹² In one version of this image that I have collected, the card bears a handwritten inscription on the verso, "Knock round the back entrance," emphasizing the image's role as a joke for salesmen or servicemen, rather than the man of the house.¹³

¹² Two publishers produced a follow-up image to "Optical Delusion," where the sales agent is being kicked out by the man of the house. This scene of requital mirrors many of the other narratives about extramarital affairs. (For example, the husband and the cook are caught by the wife.) However, the only two publishers known to have made this secondary image were Universal Photo Art Co. and C. L. Wasson, not Strohmeyer & Wyman, Webster & Albee, or the several unknown and British publishers who produced a version of "Optical Delusion." Images of the husband and cook were not published (or distributed) without views of him being caught, so the fact that the follow-up image to "Optical Delusion" were rare and not a requisite image makes it different than other images of extramarital dalliances. While this second image may expand its audience in a way that the "Optical Delusion" image alone does not, it could also be seen as a moralizing view for the college student agent who might consider such actions in the course of his job.

¹³ Lest it seem that these cards were produced for an extremely limited audience, note that Keystone frequently produced views for a local audience, and later produced a stereo card for the children of view salesmen (during a time when the company still employed many college students who would not have been parents). That card is discussed later in this chapter, and is illustrated in Figure 4.6.

“Optical Delusion” cast aspersions on the assertion that a stereographic view agent was different than a typical sales agent because it portrays the stereotype that traveling agents were womanizers. The presence of the imagery does not mean that stereographic sales agents certainly acted the way that they were portrayed in “Optical Delusion,” no more than ownership of a “French cook” sequence meant a man was having an affair with his cook. Whether “Optical Delusion” held truth for some agents or portrayed the wishful fantasy of a young adult, it was a contradiction to the respectability that Keystone tried to cultivate in its description and guidance for its agents. It should be noted, however, that while Keystone published many comic views, including narratives about affairs (including the “French cook”), the company apparently never published this topic as a stereograph, even though direct competitors, including Universal Photo Art Co., Webster & Albee, and Strohmeyer & Wyman, produced versions of “Optical Delusion.” It was typical for the various competing publishers to release their own version of a popular image, so that Keystone, Underwood, Kilburn, and many others would each have a variant of a theme. For example, Keystone, Underwood, H. C. White, and several other prolific stereograph publishers all created their own version of the “French cook” (or, alternatively, “French maid”) narrative.¹⁴ A survey of the Keystone-Mast Collection’s comic views (which comprises several hundred published and unpublished images) did not turn up any version of this image.¹⁵ By not publishing it, despite publishing other ‘titillating’ comic views, Keystone may have been saying that it did not believe the image would be marketable, or thought that its message would tarnish the company’s reputation. Keystone did not participate in the joke. Corporate non-participation

¹⁴ See discussion in David Tank, “The Mystery of the Undressed Biddy: Stereos of a Stereotype,” *Stereo World* 40, no. 4 (2014): 20–26; Davis, *Women’s Views: The Narrative Stereograph in Nineteenth-Century America*. Melody Davis’ catalog of narrative views, included in an appendix to her Ph.D. dissertation, identifies examples of Keystone, Underwood, White views, as well as ones by Rau and Berry, Kelley & Chadwick. Davis, “Doubling the Vision: Women and Narrative Stereography: The United States, 1870-1910.”

¹⁵ Interestingly, Universal Photo Art Company’s negatives are part of Keystone-Mast, but Universal’s version of this image was not retained when Keystone acquired the Universal archive.

in the joke does not mean that agents always acted properly, and the presence of so many iterations of this image calls into question the wholesomeness of the stereo sales agent and reveals the possibility that they all may not have been as well-behaved as the company narrative implied.

“Optical Delusion” illustrates one possible threat that a consumer may have projected on a sales agent, but the more overwhelming perceived threat was not infidelity but the fear of being cheated financially. Regardless of the character of the agent or the product that he or she was selling, agents were typically greeted with immediate animosity that they had to overcome in their sales pitch and product demonstrations. In 1889, clergyman and author Francis E. Clark wrote, “Next to the long-suffering mother-in-law, the book agent probably is made a target for more cheap wit of the average newspaper variety, than any other modern mortal.”¹⁶ Sales agents’ jokes, described especially by Spears, often position the agent and prospective customer as sparring partners, eager to outwit the other. Truman Moore described the hostility and distrust between the sales agent and the farmer: “They were opposite forces; common horse sense pitted against brass and cheek -- the city slicker and the rube.”¹⁷ Indeed, agents had to disarm any sense of distrust and instill a sense of sincerity in their approach, at a time when it was not culturally expected to lavish kindnesses on a stranger appearing on one’s doorstep.¹⁸ Keystone agents were encouraged to find friendly footing with a prospect simply by addressing them by name and

¹⁶ Francis E. Clark, *The Mossback Correspondence* (Boston: D. Lothrop, 1889), 117, quoted in Friedman, *Birth of a Salesman: The Transformation of Selling in America*, 37.

¹⁷ Moore, *The Traveling Man: The Story of the American Traveling Salesman*, 53.

¹⁸ See Karen Halttunen’s *Confidence Men and Painted Women*, which addresses the role of sincerity in American culture. For a discussion of manners in American culture, see John F. Kasson, *Rudeness & Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990), especially pp. 137-146.

demonstrating that they intended to do “straight business.”¹⁹ At this point, sales agents followed their instincts, or the directions provided to them by their employers, and hoped for the best.

Sociologist Nicole Biggart identified the role of charisma in direct selling, and certainly this is a characteristic that separates the active sales agent from the passive advertisement.²⁰ While charisma is helpful in contributing toward a salesman’s success, during Keystone’s tenure character-building, rather than charisma, was the buzzword.²¹ Here, Keystone’s agents were a perfect fit. While most success manuals of the era spoke in favor of experience and hard work (rather than a formal education) as the best way to shape one’s character, Keystone’s sales agents were actively pursuing both work and school. Earnestness, therefore, was a significant trait in Keystone’s agents. That earnestness was important in the way in which Keystone’s agents presented their wares. Respectable sales agents believed in the product they were selling. Therefore, by electing to sell a particular product, the sales agent provided a de facto endorsement.²² Book historian Amy Thomas argued that the agent’s “personal investment” in a product would make others who saw themselves as part of the same community wish to own the product. In Thomas’ case-study the product was a book about the Confederate army’s campaigns in the U.S. Civil War. The widowed wife of a Southern general was selling the book, and other Southerners would “feel compelled to honor their history.”²³ Thomas does not frame it as an act of emulation, but the motivation seems likely. The Southern general’s wife felt this book paid appropriate tribute to her esteemed late husband. By selling it, she tacitly indicated that others

¹⁹ Keystone View Company, *Manual of Instructions from the Keystone View Company for the Use of Their Agents*, 21.

²⁰ Biggart, *Charismatic Capitalism: Direct Selling Organizations in America*.

²¹ Hilkey, *Character Is Capital: Success Manuals and Manhood in Gilded Age America*; Kaye, “Between Self-Improvement and Self-Destruction: The Male Conduct Manual in the Consumer Society.”

²² Amy Thomas made this argument in her analysis of book agents. Thomas, ““There Is Nothing So Effective as a Personal Canvass’: Revaluing Nineteenth-Century American Subscription Books,” 144.

²³ *Ibid.*, 146.

should find the history equally meaningful when relating the events to their own lives and families. Thomas' case study showed the close relationships between endorsement and emulation in sales practices in the 1870s, but this same sensibility was harnessed by Keystone sales agents in the 1890s and the early twentieth century.²⁴ In Keystone agents' prescribed sales pitch, when a neatly dressed and well-educated young man showed up at the front door to sell a (generally) wholesome, entertaining visual apparatus, it was likely also seen as an act of endorsement. Because college students were a rarified population, they presented a model to be emulated by their prospective customers. In choosing to earn their income by selling stereo views, they were providing an endorsement of the worthwhile nature of these stereo cards. Well-educated sales agents were effectively supporting the worthy quality of the entertainment and educational value of the cards, and allowing an easy and relatively inexpensive way for a family to emulate the college sales agent standing before them.

The College Student as Sales Agent

Keystone did not rely exclusively on college students for their sales agents, but much of the literature and imagery that the company produced implied that they did (see, for example, Keystone's only published stereo card depicting a sales agent, Figure 4.2).²⁵ As Keystone's second president George Hamilton reminisced in 1949 about the company's early years, "Salesmen were recruited primarily from colleges and universities. Most of these men worked

²⁴ My discussion about emulation and aspiration in American culture is greatly influenced by Matt, *Keeping Up with the Joneses: Envy in American Consumer Society, 1890-1930*.

²⁵ See, for example, Hamilton, *Oliver Wendell Holmes: His Pioneer Stereoscope and the Later Industry*; Harold F. Jenkins, *Two Points of View: The History of the Parlor Stereoscope* (Elmira, NY: World in Color Productions, 1957); Darrah, *The World of Stereographs*; Earle, *Points of View: The Stereograph in America, A Cultural History*. This notion has been perpetuated by more recent scholars, including DeLeskie, "The Underwood Stereograph Travel System: A Historical and Cultural Analysis," 60; Plunkett, "Selling Stereoscopes, 1890–1915: Penny Arcades, Automatic Machines and American Salesmen," 201.

only during the three months of the [s]ummer vacation, and frequently were able to earn enough money within that time to pay their entire college expenses for the year.”²⁶ This section will analyze why selling Keystone stereoscopic photographs was appealing for the American college student, and conversely, why the college student was an ideal archetypal sales agent for Keystone. Later sections will address populations of sales agents that were different, and address how these figures, too, suited the Keystone brand, even if they did not match the corporate archetype.

For a prospective Keystone agent, affording tuition costs was an important motivation because American colleges and universities were not simply a tool of the elite. From the mid-1850s, a growing percentage of college students came from rural towns and humble upbringings, who, in a period of national economic hardship, sought college educations as a means to better their families’ situations.²⁷ By the time Keystone was recruiting sales agents from colleges in the 1890s and the early twentieth century, the college population was economically and geographically diverse. The expense of college remained a difficult venture for families, but a cost that was endured because college was, as described by Burton J. Bledstein, “an instrument of ambition and a vehicle to status in the occupational world.”²⁸

The tuition costs that Keystone agents were attempting to earn varied greatly across institutions, dictated in part by whether the college was subsidized by the state government or was a private entity. For one example, the University of Pennsylvania, a private institution, charged \$150 per year for tuition in 1900. Room and board varied between \$185 and \$250, and

²⁶ Hamilton, *Oliver Wendell Holmes: His Pioneer Stereoscope and the Later Industry*, 17.

²⁷ David F. Allmendinger, *Paupers and Scholars: The Transformation of Student Life in Nineteenth Century New England* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1975), 4.

²⁸ Burton J. Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Class and the Development of Higher Education in America* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1976), 34.

the annual cost of textbooks fell between \$10 and \$50.²⁹ The average income of an urban family was \$651 in 1901, which meant that tuition expenses were an intimidating proposition to a family of average or poorer means.³⁰ Families prepared for this by often sending only the child with the greatest aptitude and potential to college. John R. Thelin described the example of Alexander Meiklejohn, the youngest of eight sons, who was the only one in his family to attend college while his brothers worked in mills.³¹ Such stories are not unusual in American family lore. Families looked upon these sacrifices as worthwhile because it allowed them a greater combined success. If a student could pay his way through employment with a company like Keystone, it might enable another family member to afford college, or reduce the hardship on the family.

Because of the exorbitant cost of college for the typical family, many students needed to be self-supporting, and worked to afford their college tuition. Although there are not any national statistics about the percentage of college students who worked at the turn of the twentieth century, university administrator Charles Eliot noted in 1908 that “a considerable proportion of undergraduates must be self-supporting, or must earn a part of their expenses.”³² Working

²⁹ Mark Frazier Lloyd, “Tuition and Mandated Fees, Room and Board and Other Educational Costs at Penn: 1900-1909.” Available online: <http://www.archives.upenn.edu/histy/features/tuition/main.html> Accessed 23 September 2015. In present-day dollars, Penn’s tuition would be equivalent to approximately \$10,000 to \$13,000. Present-day dollars estimated via Samuel H. Williamson, “Seven Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a U.S. Dollar Amount, 1774 to present,” *MeasuringWorth*, 2015. Thelin describes the cost of Brown University, another prestigious private East coast institution, as being close to Penn’s total expenses. Brown cost \$393 per year including tuition, room and board, books, and incidentals. John R. Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 170. A compilation of tuition costs was aggregated by Durbin and Kent in their study on women in postsecondary education in 1900 America, which better illuminates the range of tuition costs, including normal schools versus universities. However, even their survey noted issues locating data on tuition costs in 1900. Nancy E. Durbin and Lori Kent, “Postsecondary Education of White Women in 1900,” *Sociology of Education* 62, no. 1 (1989): 4.

³⁰ U.S. Census Bureau, “Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970,” 321.

³¹ Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 169.

³² Charles W. Eliot, *University Administration* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1908), 249. Eliot served as Harvard University’s president from 1869-1909, and published the book in 1908, making this some of the most reliable, albeit anecdotal, contemporaneous data about working students. The earliest statistics date from 1940, and note that “between one-third and one-half of all students in the nation were pursuing some form of part-time employment,” and that “between 10 and 20 per cent of them managed in this way to earn all of their college expenses.” John S.

students were a necessity, yet also posed a paradoxical problem: working took away from the student's ability to participate in the college experience. During this era, a popular expression around American college campuses was "don't let your studies interfere with your education."³³ Clubs, fraternities, and athletics were emphasized as a central part of the college experience, seen as a "laboratory for nascent practical and vocational interests."³⁴ Students who found themselves working during the school year and unable to participate would have had a decidedly less social college experience than those who could afford the leisure time.

Keystone offered a solution that would have enabled students to have it all. By selling stereo views only in the summer, they could afford the expense of college without interfering with their extracurricular activities. Keystone even encouraged the formation of campus clubs for its agents, enabling them to participate in a social group while on campus where they could drill each other's sales pitches and discuss the sales experience while maintaining the social camaraderie of the college experience.³⁵ R. H. Young, a manager for Keystone, noted that short-term clerical work was hard to come by, and that the other option that would permit summer-only employment for students was farm work. With farming, Young described, many students had "come from the farm, and have never known anything else. Of course, the wages for such work are small and they cannot expect large returns for the time they have to invest."³⁶ For rural students with college aspirations, "the driving ambition in going to college was to acquire credentials that would enable them to escape the farm."³⁷ For those who had achieved their goal

Brubacher and Willis Rudy, *Higher Education in Transition: A History of American Colleges and Universities*, Fourth ed. (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1997), 340.

³³ Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 163.

³⁴ Frederick Rudolph, *Curriculum: A History of the American Undergraduate Course of Study Since 1636* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1981), 13.

³⁵ "To the New Recruits," *Keystone Review* 11, no. 2 (April 1908): 22.

³⁶ R. H. Young, "The Value of View Work to Students and Others," *Keystone Review* 10, no. 1 (January 1907): 5.

³⁷ Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 78.

of attending college, spending summers doing the very work that they were trying to escape would be unappealing. Keystone sales, therefore, offered an interesting proposition to college students.

In its literature, Keystone argued that the stereograph was “something [that] can sell in all fields, something which will interest all conditions of mankind whether rich or poor, white or black, wise or otherwise.” Keystone reasoned that selling its views would prove more applicable to a college-educated student than other areas of salesmanship because students had been “learning about these very scenes and already knows many points of interest about them.”³⁸ Keystone saw itself as being able to supplement the college education. The company maintained that it was distinct from other direct-sales ventures because familiarizing oneself with the company’s diverse stereo view topics would give the agent “a pretty wide knowledge of the world,” whereas selling a book the agent might only glean one or two new useful facts. Keystone promoted its stereo views as a good assimilation of the knowledge a student already had and that which he might hope to gain, but they also appealed to the practical business experience that the college student sought. A Keystone manager described the college student’s sales experience as a chance to “knock up against the practical, and find out that everything is not theory but hard facts. [The college sales agent] will learn how to meet those facts, and how to win people and influence them to his way of thinking.”³⁹ This statement pre-dated Dale Carnegie’s famous self-help manual, but the power of influence is well represented in the self-help and success manuals of the time.⁴⁰ Because success manuals so often emphasized the need to hone one’s skills of influence, and the upwardly-aspirational were a major audience for this genre of literature,

³⁸ Young, “The Value of View Work to Students and Others,” 6.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴⁰ See Hilkey, *Character Is Capital: Success Manuals and Manhood in Gilded Age America*.

Keystone's prospective agents would have been aware of this social need. Therefore, Keystone's rhetoric made a persuasive argument to prospective sales agents by framing how the work might benefit them in the professional world after college.

Students' main motivation for attending college was to make a success of themselves, and Keystone, through its literature, offered compelling arguments for why this job could be lucrative for them. The student sales agent's profit was his to control, and seemingly limitless considering the potentially broad appeal of the stereo cards. Keystone claimed student sales agents would be able to apply the facts they learned in college, and gain new skills that would provide useful work-experience for their futures. In the eyes of the agents, perhaps the best feature was that they could sell during their time off from school, on summer vacations and winter holidays, and not have their work distract from their college experience. It is therefore clear why Keystone appealed to some college students.

From the company's perspective, college students, despite their limited availability and lack of experience, also had broad appeal for Keystone. One reason for this was the phenomenon that John Thelin described, that "between 1890 and 1910 [...] the American public became fascinated with undergraduate collegiate life."⁴¹ While elite, American colleges were not attended by the upper-class exclusively, and college students were a rarity in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century. College and university enrollment crept from 1.1% of the 18-24-year-old population in 1870 to 2.9% of the 18-24-year-old population in 1910.⁴² These percentages emphasize the fact that post-secondary educations were undertaken by a very small portion of the overall population. College was a meaningful investment in one's future, "a passport into a professional group, an American middle class." However, an increasing

⁴¹ Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 157.

⁴² U.S. Census Bureau, "Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970," 383.

percentage of college students were from working-class families, who hoped to advance their family's prospects.⁴³ Through this understanding of American collegiate life, Keystone's sales agents would have been perceived as intelligent and upwardly mobile. College may have been out of reach to many of the families that Keystone agents visited, but the dream of it was worthy of emulation and aspiration. Keystone stereo views would have been presented as an affordable means by which the masses could begin to achieve this goal.

These aspirations were especially meaningful in the rural areas where Keystone focused its sales, where the dream of college meant a life away from the farm. Historian Susan Matt described that envy was a driving force in American culture that was "at least as prevalent among country folk as city folks," but that rural Americans found less ability to emulate and change their living conditions.⁴⁴ In isolated farming communities, a college-educated Keystone agent selling stereo views would have been viewed as a worldly figure tasked with giving families a tool to enable their children to understand a bigger world than they could see from their farms, and a means for all ages to connect with urban life by being able to study it from their armchairs.⁴⁵ Keystone cards would allow viewers to see the world, and potentially gain knowledge that might better qualify young adults for college admittance, or assist older adults in feeling more worldly, and closer akin to the college-educated.

In selling stereo cards during their summer breaks, Keystone sales agents were sending their customers another message: that they were self-made men. These were not students

⁴³ Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 108.

⁴⁴ Matt, *Keeping Up with the Joneses: Envy in American Consumer Society, 1890-1930*, 96.

⁴⁵ Keystone was not the first company to emphasize this in rural America. A generation prior, book agents selling success manuals found, as Judy Hilkey quoted, that rural farmers and mechanics were "good pay and ambitious for their children." Hilkey, *Character Is Capital: Success Manuals and Manhood in Gilded Age America*, 106. Hilkey does not cite this quote. Furthermore, while historian David O. Levine describes the interwar period as a time where college inspired a "culture of aspiration," his introduction represents a fuzzier – and earlier – starting point to this mindset. David O. Levine, *The American College and the Culture of Aspiration, 1915-1940* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986).

supported by their family's largess, but men who were selling in summer to be able to afford the expense of their college study. The self-made man is a core figure in American capitalist biography, and leaders of industry including John D. Rockefeller, Andrew Carnegie, Henry Ford, and Thomas Edison are often listed among those that exemplified the concept.⁴⁶ The popular press framed these men and others like them as aspirational figures in American society, and some famous 'self-made' figures controlled the press. Cyrus H. K. Curtis, the publisher of *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Saturday Evening Post*, and other popular publications, emphasized in an interview in *Colliers* that ambition was key, stating, "If a lad goes into a sawmill for his first job he should do so with the idea that one day he will own that sawmill."⁴⁷ Fiction also expounded on this notion. Young-adult author Horatio Alger Jr.'s popular rags-to-riches stories of hard work, wit, and perseverance were published widely and serialized in magazines popular with boys and in those geared for families, which reinforced the narrative of self-made men.⁴⁸ Keystone's agents tapped into this narrative, by presenting themselves as Alger-esque characters, young adults who were midway through their own nascent success stories. Keystone bolstered this framework by publishing letters from former agents who had found professional success, and attributed it, at least in part, to Keystone. For example, *Review* published a letter from G. M. McDowell of Bay City, Michigan, a former agent, now a doctor, who noted that he is happy to meet with Keystone agents, "as it was largely due to [Keystone] that the degree of M. D. was

⁴⁶ Matt, *Keeping Up with the Joneses: Envy in American Consumer Society, 1890-1930*, 75, 83. Pamela Laird uses Andrew Carnegie as a particularly relevant case-study in the first chapter of Pamela Walker Laird, *Pull: Networking and Success since Benjamin Franklin* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006).

⁴⁷John B. Kennedy, "Go Fast, Young Man, Go Fast: An Interview with Cyrus H. K. Curtis," *Colliers* 76 (November 21, 1925): 24, quoted in Matt, *Keeping Up with the Joneses: Envy in American Consumer Society, 1890-1930*, 82.

⁴⁸ For more on Horatio Alger stories and its application to turn-of-the-century businessmen, see the description and analysis in Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870*, 198–205.

made possible for me.”⁴⁹ Because a college education was still an elite path, Irvin Wyllie noted that in the late nineteenth century most Americans were content with “school training, a business apprenticeship, and a program of self-culture” in developing their own narratives of enrichment and self-improvement.⁵⁰ Thus, Keystone’s agents and products straddled these two worlds. Utilizing the sense of sales-as-endorsement that was discussed previously, agents provided a vision of an achievable self-made man to which a customer could aspire. The agent’s offered stereo cards would serve to enforce one’s “program of self-culture” through the autodidactic nature of the photographs and their accompanying text, as an easier and affordable model of emulation.

Demanding their role as aspirational figures, Keystone coached its sales agents to be polite models of decorum, including advising its agents to “attend church and Sunday school regularly.”⁵¹ While images like “Optical Delusion” (Figure 4.1) call into question the moral underpinnings of Keystone agents, there is some proof that the wholesomeness that Keystone attempted to cultivate with their agents was reflective of the actual sales population. The diaries of John C. Shaw, who began selling for Keystone in the summer immediately after graduating college with a teaching degree, demonstrated his diffident demeanor throughout his sales practice, an attitude that contrasted the stereotypical self-assured salesman. Shaw’s diaries described his modest success and frustration at selling stereo views, but were peppered with self-critique of his personality and how it could be improved, which he saw as an apparent direct reflection on his selling experiences. Approximately five weeks into selling for Keystone, Shaw

⁴⁹ G. M. McDowell, “Another Keystone Professional Man,” in *Keystone Review* 11, no. 3 (September/October 1908): 103.

⁵⁰ Wyllie, *The Self-Made Man in America: The Myth of Rags to Riches*, 95.

⁵¹ Keystone View Company, *Manual of Instructions from the Keystone View Company for the Use of Their Agents*, 6. Keystone framed its churchgoing advice as a way to bring comfort, but this use of an agent’s time also exuded wholesomeness and represented Christian decorum.

wrote, “I must be more cordial with people, speak out to them directly and genially, and aim to put them at ease.”⁵² Three weeks later, “I must be more affable and friendly with people. I must be more sympathetic and at the same time less serious. I must seek to put people at ease in my presence. I must practice daily exercises which will make me more graceful.”⁵³ Shaw never associated these desired attributes as tools necessary for success with Keystone specifically, although these traits would likely have contributed to greater success as a direct-selling agent. Three months into selling for Keystone, Shaw wrote, “I must be more sociable with everyone I meet. I must seek to get into conversation with strangers so I may become a good mixer.”⁵⁴ Shaw was motivated to improve himself not to increase his income as a sales agent, but to develop a more genial character for all social settings. Confessing these concerns privately to his diary not only demonstrated his earnestness, but showed that his experiences selling for Keystone was perceived as a tool of self-discovery and a pathway to practice self-improvement.

When Keystone marketed sales agent jobs to college students, the company emphasized one’s ability to develop the very characteristics and skills that Shaw coveted. In an article published in *Keystone Review*, which was excerpted from a talk given at Keystone’s field managers’ convention, a sales manager asserted that selling stereo views:

[D]evelops an independent spirit in contrast to that reserved and backward manner which once hindered [a sales agent]. It developes [sic] his conversational powers – a rare talent. It makes business openings never dreamed of. It prepares the would-be physician to conduct his business affairs with intelligence; the lawyer to sway men; the minister to successfully cope with the problems of good and evil. No matter what the student’s chosen profession, the View business will better fit him for it. It will give him that self-confidence which will enable him to initiate movements and forge ahead of the crowd.⁵⁵

⁵² John C. Shaw, *Diary of J. C. Shaw*, June 1914 through July 1915. Entry dated July 7, 1914. Collection of Laura Amarys.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, entry dated July 26, 1914.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, entry dated September 24, 1914.

⁵⁵ F. M. W. [presumed to be Frank Wildman], “View Selling – Its Benefits to Students and Others,” in *Keystone Review* 8, no. 1 (January/February 1905): 6-7.

With this type of prose frequently refrained by the company, one can see how self-conscious Shaw would have been intrigued by the possibilities of selling for Keystone. Whether aspiring to be a lawyer, doctor, minister, or any other esteemed field, Keystone sought to cast a broad appeal to the future professional, and provide the agent the experience to improve himself. Claiming that its company would provide benefit for virtually any profession enabled Keystone to develop the largest possible sales force from the student population, as opposed to focusing on students within one particular field of study, such as only those studying business. Keystone regularly featured testimonies from former salesmen that further emphasized the variety of vocations its agents later pursued successfully, such as Dr. G. M. McDowell's letter, discussed previously. Former sales agents went on to become lawyers and doctors, and other testimonials included a missionary, school superintendent, and a college professor.⁵⁶ Touting agents' professional successes in fields that were particularly elite or esteemed (including doctors, lawyers, ministers, and educators) meant that Keystone was especially signaling to students with those personal aspirations, or, in other words, they were trying to attract the best-of-the-best students.

Knowing that its college student sales agents were members of a rarified group, Keystone management understood the psychological role of aspiration and emulation would play to prospective customers during the agent's sales pitch. A Keystone sales agent was expected to speak intelligently about views from anywhere in the world. His self-made successes and display

⁵⁶ Keystone published at least four testimonials from doctors, including E. V. Call, "How Another M.D. Secured his Diploma," in *Keystone Review* 10, no. 9 (October-November 1907): 133; five from attorneys, such as M. Earle Morgan, "A Loyal Letter Which Explains Itself" in *Keystone Review* 12, no. 1 (January-February 1909): 11; one missionary, R. S. Holding, in "Other and Greater Compensations," *Keystone Review* 4, no. 5 (March 1902): 4; one school superintendent, Arthur E. Summers, in "Two Old Friends Heard From," *Keystone Review* 11, no. 3 (May 1908): 44; and one college professor, "R. H. H.," "A College Professor who has Sold Keystone Views and Knows Whereof He Speaks," in *Keystone Review* 9, no. 1 (January 1906): 9. All had sold for Keystone during their college years and their letters spoke effusively about how the experience bettered them as professional men.

of knowledge would have impelled many consumers to buy views, for either their own lifelong learning pursuits or to provide a useful tool for their children. In using college students as its agents, Keystone developed a mutually beneficial relationship. Keystone's college student agents lent credibility to the products, they represented symbols of emulation for the customers, and the agents' earnest demeanors would have been a refreshing change from the typical sales agent of the era. The student sales agents benefitted by being better able to self-fund their educations without their work getting in the way of their academic and extracurricular successes, and they gained work experience that had the potential to be more beneficial to them than other employment opportunities. Thus, working for Keystone was an appealing prospect to self-funded college students, and conversely, college-student agents became a meaningful shorthand for Keystone to describe its employee base.

Broadening the Sales Agents' Demographics, 1898-1909

Although Keystone touted its college-student sales agents, others also found success selling its product. Keystone's decision to generalize its sales agent population came from an understanding of the perfect marriage between the college student demographic and the product, but it also represented the trend of using shorthand in the sales field. Friedman (2004) and Clarke (1999) has shown that in the United States, the "Fuller Brush Man" and the "Tupperware Lady" were both standard shorthand for sales representatives of these companies, and, at least for an American audience, call to mind a specific age (middle-aged) and ethnicity (white) of sales agent along with the stated gender, even though Fuller Brush also had saleswomen, and Tupperware also had salesmen, and populations of both grew increasingly diverse.⁵⁷ Keystone, too, had a

⁵⁷ Fuller hired women "only out of necessity," such as in periods of wartime when many men were otherwise disposed. Friedman, *Birth of a Salesman: The Transformation of Selling in America*, 203. Conversely, even when an

more diverse group of sales agents than its shorthand description implied. From Keystone's earliest years, the sales force included secondary-school-aged children, women (both married and single), many year-round workers, and whole families working together to sell Keystone views.⁵⁸

The population most like Keystone's college-student agents were secondary-school and teenage sales agents. These agents represented many of the same ideals as their college-student counterparts, but were even more novel because of the way in which challenged the stereotype of the typical door-to-door agent. More atypical as direct-sellers in the first decade of the twentieth century, Keystone had a cadre of successful female sales agents. These agents' successes defy typical sales figures, and I argue that it was likely that they used female networks in shrewd ways that drove their success. A final population that differed from Keystone's college-student

entire family was active in selling Tupperware, "the company firmly acknowledged the primacy of the woman." Clarke, *Tupperware: The Promise of Plastic in 1950s America*, 123. There was less gender cross-over in the cosmetic direct-selling field. Men selling for the California Perfume Company (later Avon), for example, comprised at least 4% of the known sales force between 1906 and 1910, despite the company literature being tailored toward female agents. Katina Lee Manko, "Ding Dong! Avon Calling!": Gender, Business, and Door-to-Door Selling, 1890-1955" (PhD dissertation, University of Delaware, 2001), 85. "Avon men" remain a novelty, and were profiled in a 2006 *New York Times* article. Kayleen Schaefer, "Knock, Knock. Who's There? Avon Man." *New York Times*, June 29, 2006. Available online at <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/29/fashion/thursdaystyles/29skin.html?n=Top%2FReference%2FTimes%20Topic%2FSubjects%2FM%2FMen> Accessed 1 November 2015.

⁵⁸ Absent from this discussion about Keystone's agents' demographics is a discussion about the ethnic composition of the Keystone sales force. Looking at the field broadly, Walter Friedman addresses the issue of race and direct-selling and finds that it was overwhelmingly Caucasian in this time period. Friedman, "The Peddler's Progress: Salesmanship, Science, and Magic, 1880 to 1940," 201-4. While it is very likely that most of Keystone's agents were white, American-born, and of European descent, based largely upon college student demographics at the time, it is impossible to re-create this data because *Review* letters primarily published agents' initials, rather than full names, and never once made reference to agents' ethnicities or one's race. Of the agents whose full names I could reliably locate in U.S. census data, all were American-born, with parents who were either European immigrants or were also American-born. However, the Barnhart letters make one fleeting reference to a "Mr. Yanagiwara," who Walter Barnhart attempted to recruit as a sales agent in 1906. (The letter indicates that Yanagiwara agreed to begin work with Keystone, but went into "church work" instead.) While a search on Ancestry.com does not definitively locate a Mr. Yanagiwara of Virginia, it affirms that this last name is Japanese, and identifies several Yanagiwaras born in Japan in the late nineteenth century who immigrated to the United States in the early 1900s. The reference to Mr. Yanagiwara shows that Keystone did not find the prospect of a Japanese-American unusual or unwelcome within the company's sales force. However, due especially to Keystone's tendency to mask sales agents' names, this is the only reference that hints at ethnic diversity within the employees. Keystone View Company letter to Walter W. Barnhart, March 27, 1906. Keystone View Company Papers, Ms2010-052, Special Collections, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia.

generalization was a demographic more typical to the broader direct-selling field: adult men, many without post-secondary degrees. These agents looked the most like the average direct-selling salesmen of this era, but were unusual for stereo view sales agents. I argue that these agents upheld the same earnest personal character as their younger counterparts, but contributed to the company's sales volume both in their need for a greater income, and in their ability to work year-round. Collectively, the successes of these various agents demonstrated that Keystone understood how to best represent the brand, but also that the company knew it needed more than just college students to be successful. In utilizing a more diverse sales staff, Keystone was able to engage broader and additional audiences than its college students alone would have managed.

School Boys as Sales Agents

Young men the age of secondary school students may not seem particularly different from the college students who sold for Keystone, but their motives and how customers understood them differed from their slightly older peers. Teenage school boys represented a small but notable demographic identified in *Keystone Review*. The boys' work for Keystone represented their first foray into the world of employed adulthood, and their first opportunity to contribute to the family's income through a wage-earning position.

The company's successful and published agents included four who identified themselves as high school students, and an additional six who were identified as sixteen or seventeen years of age. This was within the widespread American employment standards of the era. In fact, through the 1930s the U.S. Census only separately enumerated workers aged ten to fifteen, and its statistics did not start separating out the teenage workforce from adult workers until the

1940s.⁵⁹ In the direct-sales field, some companies recruited young men, especially farm boys, but found that they required extensive instruction in “city manners.”⁶⁰ However, because Keystone focused aggressively in rural America, this may not have been a major concern for its personnel. Indeed, almost all the youngest men published in the *Review* hailed from Midwestern and Mid-Atlantic states, which have large agricultural industries and rural regions.

Although young people working was not uncommon in this period, historian Susan Matt noted that it was not encouraged among all classes.⁶¹ Employed children were a mark of the working class, and an act that middle-class (or aspiring middle-class) Americans were eager to avoid. However, some middle-class children found the allure of work tantalizing because it allowed them greater opportunity to purchase items they coveted. Matt described how the burgeoning consumer culture in the United States influenced children, and working children had more spending money than those who came from affluent households. Children who dreamed of owning more tangible goods found this appealing, but it undermined their parents’ sense of class. The fact that they were working children, and that their employment was as sales agents would imply that Keystone’s youngest agents were members of the working class, but some had ambition beyond these apparent means. At least two of Keystone’s young employees saw selling stereo views as a means to afford college in future years. The *Review* editor noted of Edward C. Tracy of Maine that he began selling views in November 1898 at the age of 16, aiming to “[earn] money to complete his education,” and that he had “sold \$500.68 worth of ’scopes and views” in

⁵⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, “Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970,” 134.

⁶⁰ Biggart, *Charismatic Capitalism: Direct Selling Organizations in America*, 23.

⁶¹ Matt, *Keeping Up with the Joneses: Envy in American Consumer Society, 1890-1930*, 148–81. Additionally, the role of a working child in household family dynamics (economic and otherwise) are discussed in Moehling, “‘She Has Suddenly Become Powerful’: Youth Employment and Household Decision Making in the Early Twentieth Century.”

his first five months of work.⁶² “C. J. W. R.” a high school student in Missouri “took twenty-nine orders in thirty-four hours” in his first canvass.⁶³ After his first delivery, the St. Louis office reported: “[...] this morning [C. J. W. R.] walked into the office with a self-satisfied air, saying he had delivered \$81.42 worth of goods and could have delivered more had he but had them with him. We think he will be able to go to University next year, as he desires to do.” The report went on to describe that “C. J. W. R.” sold a 72 World Tour set because he had run out of miscellaneous views and suggested it to his customer for fear that he would otherwise lose his sale. *Review* often ran short articles pushing the sales force to try selling the large sets like the 72-card “World Tour.” Based on the articles, it was apparent that many agents considered such sales out of their reach. “C. J. W. R.’s” success gave him confidence that he could continue to sell the illustrious set. Later in the same month, it was reported that in two days he took five orders which amounted to \$51.00 in deliveries, an impressive average.⁶⁴

Other young men found themselves pleased with their first forays into the professional world. “L. W.” in Indiana, an eighteen-year-old high school student, canvassed for fifteen hours and netted eighteen stereoscope orders and ten view orders. It noted that this canvass was his “first experience in soliciting work.”⁶⁵ Seventeen-year-old “F. W.” of Missouri reported in his “first experience in business of any kind,” having received forty-three orders in one week, of which thirty-two included stereoscope orders.⁶⁶ “C. R. E.,” writing from North Carolina was first published in the *Review* by noting, “This is the first time I have ever been in such a business, at

⁶² W. W. Kincaid, in “Echoes from the Field,” *Keystone Review* 1, no. 6 (April 1899): 3. MeasuringWorth.com estimates that the historic standard of living value of \$500.68 is \$14,900.00 in 2017 dollars. MeasuringWorth.com Accessed 14 November 2017.

⁶³ C. J. W. R., in “First Canvass Reports,” *Keystone Review* 11, no. 6 (August 1908): 95.

⁶⁴ C. J. W. R., in “Reports from the St. Louis Office,” *Keystone Review* 11, no. 7 (September-October 1908): 108-109.

⁶⁵ L. W., in “Meadville Office Reports,” *Keystone Review* 10, no. 6 (July 1907): 89.

⁶⁶ F. W. in “The Latest News from the Field,” *Keystone Review* 9, no. 8 (September 1906): 124.

least the first time I have worked for myself being at present only sixteen years old, and about one hundred miles from home.” His report continued, “Yesterday I began actual work. Took seventeen ’scope orders and three for views alone, having made twenty-six calls.”⁶⁷ The following issue published a report which stated that in seventeen hours’ work he took thirty-nine ’scope and nine view orders, showing that he exceeded the target of one sale per hour.⁶⁸

While “C. R. E.’s” letter proved that young sales agents were sent on the road just like their older colleagues, at least some of the young men found a school/work balance that their college counterparts often did not. Whereas many college men felt they could either sell or work, but not do both, ergo Keystone’s largely summer employment, at least two of Keystone’s high school-aged teenagers juggled both simultaneously. Frank G. Otstot described, “I have had remarkably good success, considering that I only have about two and one-half hours per day for canvassing during the week, and all day Saturday, for I am now completing my last year in High School.”⁶⁹ Sixteen-year-old “H. H.” of Pennsylvania averaged over two dollars per hour in his first delivery, double the output that Keystone considered typical.⁷⁰ The editors of *Review* noted that sixteen-year-old “F. H. B.” was “[spending] his spare time to the view business, building up a nice paying business. During his vacations he is devoting the greater part of his time to our work and is certainly meeting with fine success.”⁷¹ These examples, like most letters published in *Review*, reflected resounding successes, but some hinted at challenges, as well. A seventeen-year-old man bearing the same initials as previously-quoted teenager Edward C. Tracy, this time writing from Virginia, reported a small order for “\$22.85 worth of goods, being the result of

⁶⁷ C. R. E., in “Echoes from the Field,” *Keystone Review* 2, no. 7 (May 1900): 4.

⁶⁸ C. R. E., in “Echoes from the Field,” *Keystone Review* 2, no. 8 (June 1900): 4.

⁶⁹ Frank G. Otstot, in “What Others are Doing,” *Keystone Review* 1, no. 2 (December 1898): 3.

⁷⁰ H. H., in “Echoes from the Field,” *Keystone Review* 6, no. 1 (November 1902): 4.

⁷¹ F. H. B., in “Echoes from the Field,” *Keystone Review* 7, no. 8 (August 1904): 127.

three and one-half days canvassing, also being only three or four days behind an agent for another view firm.”⁷² It is not clear whether “E. C. T.” is Tracy, but this letter showed that young sales agents faced difficult sales areas like any other agent from Keystone.

Although “E. C. T.” managed to succeed despite the challenge, this was the last letter Keystone printed from him. The 1900 census, which would have been taken around the time his last letter was published, listed Edward C. Tracy of Maine as a canvasser. By the 1910 census, he was working as a superintendent in another sales-driven business, life insurance, the industry where he remained in management until his death in 1947.⁷³ Most of Keystone’s sales personnel saw their work with the company as temporary, rather than a permanent career move.⁷⁴ Tracy’s trajectory is reflective of the then-developing trend described by historian Joseph Kett of having a career, rather than merely a job.

Industrialization impacted the young-adult worker severely, in a way that would have made Keystone an increasingly attractive business venture. Apprenticeships as a means to enter the workforce ceased. Simultaneously the secondary school system formalized age-grading, which in turn emphasized and standardized the amount of time a student should spend in school. Kett noted that officials encouraged boys to stay in school until at least age sixteen because they were more likely to avoid “dead-end” jobs with more education; instead, they could have careers. Furthermore, new, attractive white-collar jobs expected young men to have had a formal

⁷² E. C. T., in “Echoes from the Field,” *Keystone Review* 2, no. 5 (March 1900): 4.

⁷³ U.S. Census Bureau, *1910 U.S. Census, Lewiston Ward 1, Androscoggin, Maine*, roll T624_536, page 13A, enumeration district 0016; U.S. Census Bureau, *1940 U.S. Census, Bangor, Penobscot, Maine*, Roll T627_1486, page 14A, enumeration district 10-24.

⁷⁴ Before the Industrial Revolution, a man’s job and salary remained steady throughout his career. After industrialization, there developed a greater expectation to find advancement during one’s working life. Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America 1790 to the Present*, 151.

education until at least age sixteen, if not eighteen.⁷⁵ The downside was that the child was typically unable to contribute to the family's income while in school. Working for Keystone did not signal that they were on their way to dead-end jobs, because selling for Keystone was so typically a liminal phase. Much like the appeal of Keystone to the college student, by selling stereo views a young man had the ability to attend school while still assisting in the family's finances and gaining professional experience.

These young sales agents provided endorsement drawn from the concept that E. Anthony Rotundo referred to as the "boy culture" they found in youth and adolescence.⁷⁶ Rotundo's "boy culture" married the wilds of juvenile entertainment and games against that of a public education. In selling Keystone stereo views, these young agents were presenting that same combination of education and play. Just as college students' decision to sell Keystone served as endorsement of the value of the views, these young adults whose lives more frequently centered on play were endorsing a broader sense of Keystone's value to its customers by declaring that stereographs were not only aspirational and potentially educational, but they were fun, too. Simultaneously, the boy sales agents were bucking their "boy culture" and experimenting with the adult world of business. In this sense, they were presenting themselves as upstanding and noble young men, motivated by an interest in getting ahead, either for their own benefit, or that of their families. They upheld the "virtue, character, and stamina" that comprised the meat of Gilded Age success manuals, and by being young and intrepid they opposed the guise of the stereotypical sales agent.⁷⁷ They were model citizens, not necessarily as academically ambitious

⁷⁵ Ibid., 127, 150–51. For more on young-adult employment choices, see Ileen A. DeVault, "'Give the Boys a Trade': Gender and Job Choice in the 1890s," in *Work Engendered: Toward a New History of American Labor*, ed. Ava Baron (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 191–215.

⁷⁶ E. Anthony Rotundo, "Boy Culture: Middle Class Boyhood in Nineteenth-Century America," in *Meanings for Manhood: Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America*, ed. Mark C. Carnes and Clyde Griffen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 15–36.

⁷⁷ Hilkey, *Character Is Capital: Success Manuals and Manhood in Gilded Age America*, 106.

as their college-aged counterparts, but still the sort of young men that parents wanted their own children to emulate.

Keystone provided its youngest employees with coveted spending money or helped support their families without forcing them to give up school. It gave them an opportunity to get a head start on their career, without locking themselves into a permanent position that might become a dead-end job. It presented them as upstanding citizens, ready to abandon the juvenile ways of boyhood and “boy culture,” which would have impressed their customers and encouraged sales. In turn, Keystone benefited through these young boys’ first-hand endorsements-through-selling. The younger agents meshed well with the brand because they could assert the enjoyment and benefit of the product firsthand, and their youthful exuberance still exemplified the message that Keystone was trying to uphold through its sales force. Keystone’s young-adult agents were essentially a more relatable and attainable aspirational figure for the company’s customers than its college-student sales force.

Keystone’s Female Sales Agents

This section examines the use of women in salesmanship, addresses the complicated push and pull of women sales agents for Keystone, and posits the ways women modified Keystone’s typical sales practices for the mutual benefit of the agents and the company. Despite not aligning with the typical description of a Keystone agent, women proved to be exceptionally successful sales agents for the company, irrespective of their educational experience and marital status. Exploring the context in which saleswomen worked in the early twentieth century and studying Keystone female sales agents’ results, it is apparent that diversity in Keystone agents’

demographics served them well, and that women sales agents helped the company reach their audiences more efficiently and successfully.

Women working in direct-selling have been treated as uncommon in the secondary literature, generally written off as an obscure rarity, with far more attention paid to their department store saleswomen counterparts. Walter Friedman mentioned a “small tradition of female book agents,” but did not expand on this further in his study of salesmanship, and noted that through the 1920s, “most bureaucratic sales organizations [...] would not hire [female sales agents].”⁷⁸ Timothy Spears similarly nodded toward female sales agents in the preface to his history of traveling salesmen, but never elaborated further on the topic.⁷⁹ Women agents are barely a footnote in the broad histories of direct-salesmanship and the book trade.⁸⁰ The primary

⁷⁸ Friedman, *Birth of a Salesman: The Transformation of Selling in America*, 202. This proved true in many companies, such as insurance sales where female employees were more frequently clerks than saleswomen. Tracey M. Wilson described women’s work at Travelers Insurance. When women worked their way up with Travelers, it was through better secretarial jobs, rather than on the insurance side of the business. Others “began as a clerk [...] and retired as a clerk.” Tracey M. Wilson, “Success and the Travelers Insurance Woman, 1920-1950,” in *Work, Recreation, and Culture: Essays in American Labor History*, ed. Marin Henry Blatt and Martha K. Norkunas (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), 3.

⁷⁹ In another work, Spears claimed that women working in direct-sales accounted for only one percent of the entire population of “commercial travelers” in 1900. Spears, “‘All Things to All Men’: The Commercial Traveler and the Rise of Modern Salesmanship,” 553. However, in looking at the history of female employment under-enumeration in the United States Census and Victor Buell and Susan Strasser’s discussions of the lack of good data about direct-salesmanship populations due to its temporal nature and high turnover rate, I am convinced that Spears’ statistics are much lower than reality. For discussion on under-enumeration specifically within the direct-sales field, see Buell, “Door-to-Door Selling,” 117; Strasser, “‘The Smile That Pays’: The Culture of Traveling Salesmen, 1880-1920,” 157. Strasser’s argument is especially compelling because she cites an 1899 leader for the Commercial Travelers’ National League who argued that census data under-enumerated and grouped traveling agents with retail sales staff. Nicole Biggart also discusses census under-enumeration. Biggart, *Charismatic Capitalism: Direct Selling Organizations in America*, 29–30.

⁸⁰ Friedman, *Birth of a Salesman: The Transformation of Selling in America*, 6; Spears, *100 Years on the Road: The Traveling Salesman in American Culture*. (As of 2017, even Manko, who completed her Ph.D. on Avon saleswomen in 2001, has not published further on Avon women.) The major histories of the book trade and book publishing in America discuss various methods of book salesmanship and canvassing, but none mention the presence of female workers. See, for example, Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States, Volume II: The Expansion of an Industry, 1865-1919*. Another work, Scott E. Casper et al., eds., *The Industrial Book 1840-1880* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 221, nods to Annie Nelles Dumond, who will be discussed shortly, but makes only a passing mention of her or her peers.

studies of female sales agents have been in female-dominated sales enterprises, specifically, Avon and Tupperware.⁸¹

Studying women sales agents only in the parts of the field where they dominated perpetuates the notion that they were an obscurity in other aspects of direct salesmanship. However, this was not the case, and women direct-sellers were working for decades before Keystone's founding. E. L. Godkin, a critic writing in the 1860s, sardonically described the make-up of book agents as "a one-legged soldier, a widow, a young lady supporting her only mother, or a superannuated clergyman."⁸² One female book agent who considered her experiences noteworthy enough to warrant two memoirs of her time selling found her first job in an 1860s classified advertisement placed in the *Chicago Tribune* which called for "Agents, both Ladies and Gentlemen."⁸³ Thus, if women were included twice among the pathetic lot that Godkin described as book canvassers, and were addressed specifically in a classified advertisement from the *Chicago Tribune*, their numbers do not appear to have been low, and their place in salesmanship, even canvassing and door-to-door sales, must not have been particularly unusual. More contemporaneous to Keystone, surveying the 1904 volume of *Salesmanship*, a magazine that billed itself as equally relevant to "road salesmanship" as "store salesmanship," reveals seven articles on department-store saleswomen, and one on a direct-sales

⁸¹ Manko, "'Ding Dong! Avon Calling!': Gender, Business, and Door-to-Door Selling, 1890-1955"; Katina Manko, "'Now You Are in Business for Yourself': The Independent Contractors of the California Perfume Company, 1886-1938," *Business and Economic History* 26, no. 1 (1997): 5-26; Clarke, *Tupperware: The Promise of Plastic in 1950s America*.

⁸² E. L. Godkin, *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette*, 15 February 1865, as quoted in Fahs, "The Market Value of Memory: Popular War Histories and the Northern Literary Market, 1861-1868," 130.

⁸³ Annie Nelles Dumond, *Annie Nelles, Or, The Life of a Book Agent: An Autobiography* (Cincinnati: Dumond, 1868). The sequel, Dumond's *Happy at Last: A Sequel to Life of a Book Agent* (St. Louis, Dumond, 1881), was purportedly entirely lost in a fire at her publisher and no copies survive. James L. Murphy, "From Atlanta to Alberta: The 'Unbelievable' Odyssey of Annie Nelles Dumond; A Minor Literary Mystery Solved," *Ohio Genealogical Society Quarterly* 50, no. 4 (2010): 185. Murphy's article also defended and attempted to prove the veracity of Dumond's memoir, which, he explained, booksellers had questioned through the years. The reference to the *Tribune* classified ad is in *Annie Nelles*, 242.

saleswoman who dealt in sewing machines.⁸⁴ Its description of the sewing machine sales agent was equally accepting to that of the department-store women, indicating that the editors saw nothing shocking or unusual about direct-selling women. It is possible that the ratio of articles about retail saleswomen to that of direct-sales may have been indicative of the demographics overall.

According to the 1900 United States Census, 228,000 women worked in sales, which was 17,000 more women than were employed as clerical workers, a field that was increasingly seen as feminine.⁸⁵ Seventeen percent of the entire American sales force were women, although the clear majority worked in shop-based retail sales, rather than in direct-sales positions.⁸⁶ In the history of women's salesmanship, there is an abundance of literature addressing female department store workers, which was an area of salesmanship that embraced women for their workforce.⁸⁷ The position of a department-store salesclerk was a respectable white-collar post

⁸⁴ *Salesmanship* 2-3 (1904). Available online: <http://books.google.com/books?id=nljOAAAAMAAJ> Accessed 15 October 2014.

⁸⁵ In the United States, women began to enter office work by the 1860s. See Margery W. Davies, *Woman's Place Is at the Typewriter: Office Work and Office Workers, 1870-1930* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982); DeVault, "'Give the Boys a Trade': Gender and Job Choice in the 1890s"; Angel Kwolek-Folland, *Engendering Business: Men and Women in the Corporate Office, 1870-1930* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994). Saleswomen, on the other hand, represented 4.2 percent of the total female workforce in 1900. U.S. Census Bureau, "Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970," 140. These statistics describe only those who were enumerated in the census. Lois Scharf, Lisa Geib-Gundersen, and Alice Kessler-Harris make compelling arguments for the under-enumeration of female workers. Alice Kessler-Harris argues most extensively about these gaps in census data, such as how women who kept boarders were not counted as working. Lois Scharf, *To Work and to Wed: Female Employment, Feminism, and the Great Depression* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), xi; Lisa Geib-Gundersen, *Uncovering the Hidden Work of Women in Family Businesses: A History of Census Underenumeration* (New York: Garland, 1998), 5; Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 125.

⁸⁶ Benson, *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890-1940*, 181.

⁸⁷ See, for example, Benson, *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890-1940*; Susan Porter Benson, "'The Adamless Eden': The World of the Department Store," in *The Consumer Culture and the American Home, 1890-1930: Edited Proceedings from the Second Annual McFaddin-Ward House Museum Conference*, ed. Glenda Dyer and Martha Reed (Beaumont, TX: McFaddin-Ward House, 1989), 19-25; Benson, "'The Customers Ain't God': The Work Culture of Department-Store Saleswomen, 1890-1940"; Sarah S. Malino, "Behind the Scenes in the Big Store: Reassessing Women's Employment in American Department Stores, 1870-1920," in *Work, Recreation, and Culture: Essays in American Labor History*, ed. Martin Henry Blatt and Martha K. Norkunas (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), 17-38; Mica Nava, "Modernity's

with opportunity for promotion and growth. At the same time, with stores embracing the notion that ‘the customer is always right,’ saleswomen in department stores could be dismissed without warning for being rude to a customer. Hours were long, and women were expected to stand the entire duration of their shift. With these contrasts to the respectability of the position, the director of the Research Bureau for Retail Training referred to department store retail work as “the Cinderella of occupations,” due to the polarities it provided, which Susan Porter Benson characterized as “toil, tedium, and poverty, [countered by] glamour, fulfillment, and financial security.”⁸⁸ Department stores had more influence and respectability than other retail establishments that hired women, such as five-and-ten-cent stores, popularly called dime stores.⁸⁹ Regina Blaszczyk noted that the positions at dime stores dealt in volume, and the women working there were expected to focus primarily on ringing up and bagging purchases, rather than serving as experts over a department.⁹⁰ As a result, they were paid less and the workers were generally younger and extremely short-term.⁹¹ Less has been written about women working in dime stores, but this contrast in perceived influence and respectability starts to indicate a problem that has not been fully resolved by scholars of retail salespeople and direct-salesmanship, especially with regard to women. The role of dime store saleswomen is more reflective of the general demographic for Keystone sales agents than department store saleswomen, however a direct-selling woman was an even lower social standing than retail

Disavowal: Women, the City and the Department Store,” in *The Shopping Experience*, ed. Pasi Falk and Colin Campbell (London: SAGE Publications, 1997), 56–91.

⁸⁸ Benson, *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890-1940*, 181. Other “Cinderella” aspects of this work are discussed in Kwolek-Folland, *Incorporating Women: A History of Women and Business in the United States*, 108.

⁸⁹ The history of dime stores is addressed in Alan R. Raucher, “Dime Store Chains: The Making of Organization Men, 1880-1940,” *The Business History Review* 65, no. 1 (1991): 130–63. Dime stores are also discussed in chapter three of Blaszczyk, *Imagining Consumers: Design and Innovation from Wedgwood to Corning*.

⁹⁰ Blaszczyk, *American Consumer Society, 1865-2005: From Hearth to HDTV*.

⁹¹ Benson, *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890-1940*, 183.

women working indoors.⁹² Respectability is virtually absent from direct-selling literature, because the works that focus on female direct-selling sales agents examine companies that empowered women and ostensibly removed this stigma. Keystone's female sales agents would not have been so empowered, because they were working in a male-dominated sector of the industry. Direct-selling women traveled from house-to-house, lugging their samples to prospective customers, and potentially interrupting customers' lives. This role was more assertive than the subservient position of a retail salesclerk, and at odds with the contemporaneous vision of a respectable woman.

Because of these gaps in the scholarship, the fact that Keystone View Company had any female agents in the 1890s-1900s would strike most historians of direct-selling as remarkable enough, but it is apparent that they had more than just a few. Keystone support for these sales agents was complicated, at times addressing them directly and other times neglecting them. Female agents were relatively abundant, especially in the earliest years of *Review* (1898-1903). An early issue of *Review* admonished female agents when they did not make their gender or appropriate honorifics clear, proclaiming:

Ladies should also be particular to state whether Miss or Mrs. A lady should never sign simply her initials. Always give your first name in full or prefix Miss or Mrs., so we will know how to address you without spending valuable time in consulting our records to find out. Signing your name on all reports, orders and letters exactly as you did on the contract. Some married ladies will sign their own name on the contract and then use their husband's name or initials, or vice versa, when writing us. Single ladies will often use their full name in one letter and initials only in another.⁹³

⁹² Ileen DeVault argued that between sales and clerical work, clerical work was the only truly respectable women's work because it "was the only occupation that not only held out the potential for meeting appropriate partners but also might actually increase a woman's social status." DeVault, "'Give the Boys a Trade': Gender and Job Choice in the 1890s," 212. With DeVault's extreme vision of the respectability argument, it becomes clear that 'outdoor work' like direct selling would not be as respectable.

⁹³ "Give Your Exact Location on the Globe," in *Keystone Review* 1, no. 3 (December 1898): 2.

This makes it clear that women were not hiding their gender to work for Keystone. In fact, Keystone actively recruited them. A 1901 classified advertisement in the Evansville, Indiana *Courier and Press* newspaper solicited both “salesladies and gentlemen” for “traveling and local work” for Keystone View Company.⁹⁴ Three years later, *Review* touted that the work was challenging but also “admirably adapted to ladies,”:

[the work] being of an artistic character, and the samples to be carried and shown being neither cumbersome nor heavy. But one cannot hope to succeed with this or any other work without effort. We would not seek the services of the maid, neither to milk nor sell views, who, with pail in hand, went to the pasture and seated herself upon the stool waiting for the cow to sidle up to her to be milked.⁹⁵

When singled out by Keystone, women were scolded for wasting company time in correspondence, and compared to milkmaids. While this potentially reflects the ‘tough love’ element of *Review* discussed in Chapter 3, the company never made comparable male-only chastisements or appeals, and, as such, treated female agents differently than their male counterparts.

This practice manifested in other aspects of Keystone’s communication. In Keystone’s sales agent’s manual, the advice is heavily male-gendered, suggesting, for example, that an agent “wear a business suit of clothes, and spotlessly clean linen,” without offering any advice for women’s clothing.⁹⁶ While the same manual suggests that agents conduct themselves in ways “which becomes a lady or gentleman,” a later *Review* article Keystone proclaimed “we employ only gentlemen,” without making reference to the class of women also in its employ.⁹⁷ These

⁹⁴ “Wanted: Female Help,” *Evansville Courier and Press*, January 15, 1901, 6. This advertisement was likely placed by a Keystone agent hoping to enlist sub-agents. In the agent/sub-agent arrangement, the agent earned commission on the sub-agent’s success. The Barnharts’ recruitment role was for sub-agents, and more on this arrangement is detailed in their letters.

⁹⁵ *Keystone Review* 7, no. 8 (August 1904): 120.

⁹⁶ Keystone View Company, *Manual of Instructions from the Keystone View Company for the Use of Their Agents*, 6. In contrast, Katina Manko discusses in her dissertation how Avon tailored its manuals to women’s sensibilities, including how they address issues of money and propriety. Manko, “‘Ding Dong! Avon Calling!’: Gender, Business, and Door-to-Door Selling, 1890-1955,” 76.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 3; “Views Best of all Canvassing Lines,” in *Keystone Review* 10, no. 8 (September 1907): 122.

omissions show that women received less support and reassurances from Keystone than their male counterparts.

Despite Keystone's lack of attention and support for its female sales agents, Keystone may have had ulterior motives in their recruitment of women. A friend of Keystone agent Walter Barnhart, G. H. Overholt, declined to sell for Keystone because his insurance sales work was too lucrative. Overholt wrote, "However, I may order a sample outfit shortly as my wife wants to engage in some out of door work and I think that would be a good line for a woman to sell." After Barnhart passed this information on to Keystone, the company confided to him that they had written back to Overholt, "recommending Mrs. Overholt to take up the work and hope that we may soon have order for outfit. We feel confident that if Mrs. Overholt enters upon the work, her husband will become interested and it will not be long before both are in the field."⁹⁸ In this case, Keystone made it clear that while it was not opposed to a woman working, the company hoped that through the woman, they could recruit the talents of her husband as well.

Despite this tepid support, Keystone regularly printed letters from female agents. Based solely on honorifics and gendered given names published in the *Review*, Keystone had at least forty-four successful female sales agents between 1898 and 1906.⁹⁹ Twenty-four of these women were unmarried and went by "Miss." Thirteen were "Mrs.," indicating that they were married or widowed, and seven were listed with their names only. All women were based in the eastern United States, with the greatest number in Ohio (nine), Pennsylvania (eight), Maine (five), and West Virginia (four). By analyzing the letters reproduced by these women, one can better

⁹⁸ Letter from Overholt to W. W. Barnhart, August 7, 1905 and letter from Keystone View Company to W. W. Barnhart, August 18, 1905. Keystone View Company Papers, Ms2010-052, Special Collections, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia.

⁹⁹ Keystone's notice reminding women to use their honorifics and full name is likely an indicator that some agents may not have been doing so. Therefore, additional female sales agents may have been hidden behind their initials alone.

understand the experience of Keystone's female sales agents, and ultimately what these women provided Keystone that the men did not.

Only one woman, identified as Miss "S. B.," described her motivations for selling with Keystone, which was dictated by her need to work and to guard her health. In describing her somewhat sluggish sales, she wrote:

To deal frankly with you I will tell you why I did not work more steadily. My health gave out when I was in college and about a year ago when I was teaching, I thought of taking up the View work and my physician advised that if I didn't work too hard it might not be detrimental to my health, as it would be out-of-door work. When I am interviewing a prospective customer I work earnestly, but I work only a couple of days each week. I am very much interested in the views and like the work much better than I anticipated. I prefer this work in every way to school teaching. It is more instructive and gives broader ideas.¹⁰⁰

While her health may have set her apart from her male counterparts, "S. B.'s" letter also made clear that she was college-educated and had professional work experience, which may have allowed her to portray the same aspirational figure role as the male sales agents. She proved that her health was not a detriment, because Keystone noted her success in a post-script observing that Miss "S. B.'s" first two deliveries totaled \$159.38, despite her limited time commitment.

Keystone's female sales agents were often as successful as their male counterparts, if not more successful. A letter by Mrs. M. A. Van Dyne of New York was published which reported her second delivery. "One woman took Views to the amount of \$5.00. The first delivery she only took \$1.00 worth. Pretty good for doing my own house work too I think." The *Review* editor noted that Mrs. Van Dyne's first month's work amounted to \$113.20 "worth of 'Scopes and Views besides doing her own house work, as she is a married lady."¹⁰¹ The editor followed Van

¹⁰⁰ S. B., in "Among our Salesmen," *Keystone Review* 8, no. 2 (March 1905): 28.

¹⁰¹ Mrs. M. A. Van Dyne, in "What Others are Doing," *Keystone Review* 1, no. 2 (December 1898): 3. Mrs. M. A. Van Dyne is likely Mrs. Martin A. (Helen) Van Dyne, of Manchester, New York. Helen Van Dyne was an Irish immigrant who became a United States citizen in 1873. She was about 43 years old at the time of her letter to *Review*. Although the 1900 U.S. Census does not list an occupation for her, her husband Martin worked as a laborer,

Dyne's letter with two more from women, who both happened to declare their work as "splendid": "I have done splendid so far. Have sold at nearly every house on this street" and, "I think that I have had splendid luck, considering the hard times in this place."¹⁰² Although the details of these women's "splendid" work were not elaborated in dollars, Mrs. Van Dyne's sales figures rivaled that of the male sales agents published in the same issue of *Review*. Van Dyne's sales represented the second largest numbers published that month.

The typical letter from a sales agent published in *Review* indicated that men averaged one successful canvass per hour, and that an agent considered himself accomplished if deliveries netted an average of one dollar per hour.¹⁰³ The women, on the other hand, seemed to experience a much higher number of sales, and often a higher volume of items sold, as well. Several women described sales conditions that were completely typical. Miss M. F. Sanford canvassed door-to-door in rural Rhode Island, and stated that in three miles of country roads she "sold 12 'scope and took 14 view orders in 16 hours."¹⁰⁴ Serious commitment led to success for Miss "A. P." in Kentucky, who wrote, "I like country work fine. I canvassed 16 hours today and took 11 orders. Yesterday canvassed 14 hours and took 11 orders. It pays to go off the main roads. I have two and probably three 72 World Tour sales in view."¹⁰⁵ Agents were wary of trying to sell the expensive \$12.00 seventy-two card sets, and based on *Review*'s articles on the subject, many

indicating that his professional stature may have dictated the need for her to find employment. U.S. Census Bureau, *1900 U.S. Census, Manchester, Ontario, New York*, roll 1139, page 15A, enumeration district 0070.

¹⁰² Lottie Curtis, New York, in "What Others are Doing," *Keystone Review* 1, no. 2 (December 1898): 3; Clara McLaughlin, Maine, *ibid.*

¹⁰³ I presume this figure to refer to an agent's profits, but *Review* was often ambiguous in distinguishing between retail and wholesale values. By the company's typical contract, agents and company evenly split the amount collected, so if the dollar per hour figure refers to the customer's price, it would mean income of fifty cents for the agent. However, Keystone also utilized subagents whose profits may have been slightly less because the agent working above them also received a commission. This is likely the reason for Keystone's ambiguity. In the magazine, it manifested itself by practices such as referring to products in terms such as "\$60 worth of goods," without clarifying whether it was a \$60 agent order (which would be \$120 retail), or if the \$60 figure was the customer's price.

¹⁰⁴ M. F. Sanford, in "Echoes from the Field," *Keystone Review* 2, no. 1 (November 1899): 4.

¹⁰⁵ A. P., in "The Latest News from the Field," *Keystone Review*, 9, no. 7 (August 1906): 109.

agents did not even attempt to sell them. For “A. P.,” however, motivation and long hours allowed her to build sales numbers she described, including those coveted “World Tours.”

Other female sales agents reported numbers that seem to defy the successes of the typical door-to-door agent. Miss Bessie Palmer, a seventeen-year-old from Connecticut, reported selling an average of \$12.00 per day.¹⁰⁶ The following year she had another letter in *Review* describing that she had “canvassed about twenty hours and taken orders for \$60 worth of goods,” thus indicating even greater successes than the previous year.¹⁰⁷ Miss Henrietta Rowe of Maine stated, “I have taken 78 ’scope and view orders as a result of my first sixteen hours of work.”¹⁰⁸ Miss “J. L.” of Pennsylvania “worked five days [in a] week, and took ninety-two orders,” and Miss “M. S.” of Kentucky turned in sixty-eight orders on a weekly report. Another woman, Miss “H. D.” of Pennsylvania “worked three days [in a week] and took forty-five orders.” She wrote, “I have my morning’s work to do, so do not get out as soon as you think I ought.”¹⁰⁹ Miss “M. A. D.” of London, Wisconsin, was published in *Review* twice. A letter from October 1901 reported collecting \$112.31 in five days of deliveries.¹¹⁰ In March 1902, she wrote again with an elaborate testimonial about her work in summer 1901. “I worked forty-seven days in all last summer, and delivered ’scopes and views amounting to \$463.19.”¹¹¹

These women all averaged significantly higher than one sale per hour. It is clear from the previously quoted Miss “A. P.,” who worked fourteen- and sixteen-hour days, that at least some women were willing to put in very long hours to succeed in their work, while others, such as

¹⁰⁶ Bessie Palmer, in “Echoes from the Field,” *Keystone Review* 1, no. 6, (April 1899): 3.

¹⁰⁷ Palmer, in “Echoes from the Field,” *Keystone Review* 2, no. 12 (October 1900): 4.

¹⁰⁸ Henrietta Rowe, in “Echoes from the Field,” *Keystone Review* 1, no. 6 (April 1899): 3.

¹⁰⁹ J. L., in “Echoes from the Field,” *Keystone Review* 3, no. 2 (December 1900): 4; M. S., *ibid.*; H. D., *ibid.*

¹¹⁰ M. A. D., in “Does the View Business Pay the Salesman of Average Ability?,” *Keystone Review* 4, no. 6-7 (April/May 1902): 4.

¹¹¹ M. A. D., in “Does the View Business Pay the Salesman?,” in *Keystone Review* 4, no. 5 (March 1902): 4.

Miss “H. D.,” cited having housework to do and shorter hours within which to work.¹¹²

Therefore it is hard to gauge the number of sales per hour that Keystone’s women netted, because their workdays were not equal. The only agent who broke down the numbers into hours was Henrietta Rowe, who averaged 4.875 sales per hour, on what she stated were her very first hours of working for Keystone. This is a remarkably high output. Given that the sales pitch involved explaining several views and describing the value of the materials for sale, it would be hard to follow the script hastily and manage to make at least five pitches in an hour, especially for a novice. Something had to be different in the way that women conducted their sales.

Keystone sales agents were coached to show as few views as possible to make the sale.¹¹³ They were trained to start with a dozen views shown quickly, to create a sense of desire, and warned that showing too many views warped the sales pitch into a social visit.¹¹⁴ To achieve Henrietta Rowe’s sales average of 4.875 sales per hour, she would have had to manage her demonstration and sales pitch in ten minutes, allowing a few minutes to pack up her samples and get to the next house between sales. Although this may have been possible, it seems unlikely that an agent would achieve such efficiency. Social customs dictated that sales agents would find themselves invited to stay for a meal or tea, and that to do their jobs well, they often had to spend more time with a prospective customer than the time needed for the canvass alone.¹¹⁵ It seems unlikely that a woman could avoid these customs so consistently.

¹¹² The length of the workday was not yet formally established in the United States, although the standard Keystone contract demanded that agents work “an average of seven hours each day and six days each week.”

¹¹³ In “Keystone Mottoes,” *Keystone Review* 8, no. 7 (August 1905): 108, motto number fifteen is “don’t show all our 40,000 subjects at a canvass.” In “How to Use the 1908 Outfit,” *Keystone Review* 11, no. 3 (May 1908): 37, the instructions stress, “The order should be secured by showing just as few views as possible.”

¹¹⁴ Keystone View Company, *Manual of Instructions from the Keystone View Company for the Use of Their Agents*, 9–11.

¹¹⁵ “Diary of an Amateur View Agent,” *Keystone Review* 9, no. 3 (April 1906): 39.

The women's letters in *Keystone Review* provided no hints as to what they may have been doing differently than their male counterparts. It is clear, however, that to get numbers like those listed by Henrietta Rowe, female sales agents must have been altering how they managed their direct sales, and technically were not following Keystone's traditional door-to-door canvass. Although they do not explain it in their brief letters, these women may have utilized the already established social networks of their community and executed group pitches that increased their averages. If this was how Keystone's female agents fulfilled their impressive sales figures, they were harnessing the female-gendered version of the mechanisms of social capital, a practice regularly utilized by men of this era to advance in the business world.¹¹⁶ Social activities were a major form of recreation and entertainment for women who did not work outside of the home. Urban ladies "joined clubs where they read papers, listened to speakers, held spelling contests, and debated," as well as took lessons and attended religious Chautauquas, which were affordable educational leisure camps and resorts. Small-town women engaged in more informal versions of these activities, and rural women were more inclined to go out visiting with their families.¹¹⁷ By speaking to church groups, sewing circles, women's clubs, or other communal gatherings, an agent would have had the ability to make the pitch once but potentially secure multiple sales from it. The social capital women carried in these organizations would have

¹¹⁶ Although Pamela Walker Laird's arguments in the first chapter of *Pull* about the relationship of social capital and success focus exclusively on male business advancement, it is apparent how the women's organizations would have been recognized and utilized by women for self-advancement. Laird's discussion of "background networks" is particularly pertinent. Laird, *Pull: Networking and Success since Benjamin Franklin*, 11–50.

¹¹⁷ Dorothy Schneider and Carl J. Schneider, *American Women in the Progressive Era, 1900-1920* (New York: Facts on File, 1993), 43–44. Alice Kessler-Harris described how these gatherings helped to "[overcome] some of the isolation of middle-class homes." Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States*, 114. Most directly, Anne Ruggles Gere addresses women's clubs' role in women's intellectual life and American cultural history in Anne Ruggles Gere, *Intimate Practices: Literacy and Cultural Work in U.S. Women's Clubs, 1880-1920* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1997). Cindy Aron described the role of the chautauqua in middle-class and aspiring middle-class culture in Cindy S. Aron, *Working At Play: A History of Vacations in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 111–26.

been inaccessible to men who would have been seen outsiders and not readily welcomed into the female-based groups.

Although the concept of a group sales pitch was not taught in stereoscopic salesmanship manuals (and, in fact, Keystone actively discouraged it), it was utilized by traveling agents long before the advent of Tupperware. The notion of “hostess parties,” where home products were demonstrated to prospective female buyers in a party-like setting, was formally devised in the 1920s by Wearever Aluminum Cooking Products.¹¹⁸ Decades before, Annie Dumond described using this method in the 1860s for selling books. After her first successful morning on the job, Dumond recounted selling several copies of the book she was peddling to a group of women from her boarding house while they were socializing in the parlor. Dumond portrayed this group pitch as a method that allowed her a “profitable combination of business and pleasure.”¹¹⁹ She neither touted this notion as especially innovative, nor described another incident of selling to a group again; it was simply framed more as an example of her exhaustive efforts to sell copies of the book. Dumond’s group sales pitch in the boarding house parlor was very similar to the work of contemporaneous traveling salesmen working in sample rooms, with the product introduced within a feminized social setting.¹²⁰ If a group presentation in a social setting came so naturally to Dumond that it did not seem especially novel, it is possible that Keystone’s female sales agents also embraced a similar method. Keystone women may have followed a similar pattern to Dumond by mixing door-to-door work with social group visits that included sales pitches. If the

¹¹⁸ Clarke, *Tupperware: The Promise of Plastic in 1950s America*, 82.

¹¹⁹ Keystone View Company, *Manual of Instructions from the Keystone View Company for the Use of Their Agents*, 17; Dumond, *Annie Nelles, Or, The Life of a Book Agent: An Autobiography*, 260.

¹²⁰ For more on the “drummer,” who sold via sample rooms, see Spears, *100 Years on the Road: The Traveling Salesman in American Culture*, 91.

numbers reported in *Review* are accurate, this is the most plausible explanation for the women regularly exceeding the output of their male counterparts.

Despite Keystone female agents' resounding successes, it was hinted that canvassing stereo views was not always easy. Miss "C. E. P." of New Hampshire implied another woman's apparent failures when she wrote that she "purchased [the sales agent's sample] outfit of Miss F." to begin her work with Keystone.¹²¹ Given that "Miss F.'s" sales were never successful enough to warrant a letter published in *Review*, her role as a Keystone sales agent would have been completely unknown were it not for "C. E. P.'s" mention of her sales kit. Other women faced difficulty head on, and described how they persevered against rejected sales pitches. Miss Mary A. Davis of Ohio, for example, wrote, "When some think they can't buy at all because they cost so much, I try to get them to take a 'Scope and ½ dozen or even 3 Views and tell them that they can get a few more Views the next time I order. I have sold over \$6.00 worth to one family and \$7.00 worth to another this way."¹²² This strategy echoed the advice of Keystone, which encouraged pushing smaller sales that could be built up later when it looked like a prospective buyer was on the verge of declining a purchase outright.

Like their male counterparts, Keystone women also faced stiff competition from stereo sales agents working for other companies. In submitting a \$49.00 order, Miss "F. M." of Ohio reported, "There is a man from another firm here selling views, but I think when I get started I will give him a hard chase."¹²³ Keystone sales agents were trained to emphasize why their product was superior against their competition, and the women argued these points ably. Miss "W. Mc." of Pennsylvania reported along with her thirty-one orders, "I did not visit one person

¹²¹ C. E. P., in "Echoes from the Field," *Keystone Review* 2, no. 7 (May 1900): 4

¹²² Mary A. Davis, in "What Others are Doing," *Keystone Review* 1, no. 2 (December 1898): 3.

¹²³ F. M., in "Echoes from the Field," *Keystone Review* 6, no. 1 (November 1902): 4.

yet who did not plainly see that your views and 'scopes were the best that are made and that they are worth the price."¹²⁴ Miss "M. A. D." of London, Wisconsin, considered it "good luck" to be on the trail of a competing company's stereo sales agent. In the three towns she canvassed, she "had no trouble in selling the Keystone goods, these goods being superior to any others on the market. [...] I found the work very pleasant and easy. The goods talk for themselves."¹²⁵

While *Review* did hint at adversity, it was always in Keystone's best interest to highlight the success stories. To this point, Mrs. "R. N." of West Virginia wrote, "I like this work and never handled anything that is so much in demand. I mean to handle it as a side line, but find it will keep me busy to deliver the Scopes and views for which I get orders."¹²⁶ Miss "A. P.," writing from Nashville, Tennessee, but presumed to be the same "A. P." who previously wrote from Kentucky, noted,

I have spent two vacations in selling your views. I think it would be difficult to find a more pleasant occupation and one which would be of greater educational value. I believe that I can safely say I would not give my experience in view work in exchange for two years of schooling. It gives one not only the advantages of home and foreign travel, but also a knowledge of humanity which one seldom gets in any other vocation.¹²⁷

Miss P.'s 1906 missive was the last letter by a female sales agent that Keystone published in *Review*.

Miss "A. P." may not have been Keystone's last female agent. Agents were not identified by gendered honorifics in the tenth through twelfth volumes of *Keystone Review*. It is unclear whether Keystone had fewer successful female agents during these years or omitted gendered honorifics altogether. Later photographs of Keystone sales agents at sales conventions in the 1920s appear to indicate that female agents were among the sales force. In some photographs, it

¹²⁴ W. Mc., in "Echoes from the Field," *Keystone Review* 2, no. 12 (October 1900): 4.

¹²⁵ M. A. D., in "Does the View Business Pay the Salesman?," *Keystone Review* 4, no. 5 (March 1902): 4.

¹²⁶ R. N., in "Echoes from the Field," *Keystone Review* 6, no. 10 (September 1903): 4.

¹²⁷ A. P., in "Season Reports for 1906," *Keystone Review* 9, no. 10 (December 1906): 160.

is apparent that the women are simply enjoying the trip alongside their agent husbands, but several women bear the ribbon ostensibly worn by Keystone's successful agents (Figures 4.3-4.5). Although no information remains regarding the presence or success of female agents in Keystone's sales force after 1906, these photographs provide compelling evidence that Keystone continued to utilize women in its sales team.

It is not surprising that Keystone omitted women from its descriptions of sales personnel. The role of a woman in sales was a complicated one. The concept of a woman traveling from house to house, selling items to strangers, would be especially unglamorous and potentially not respectable. If Keystone sales agents were selling the aspirational idea of themselves along with the stereo views, many of the female agents would not have been an idealized enough figure to warrant notions of emulation. What the female agents contributed to Keystone instead was access to female social networks, which would have proved more difficult for men to infiltrate as successfully. Within these groups, the female sales agent's pitch was an endorsement as a friend and homemaker. They were affirming that the product was worthy of the expense. This appeal carried significant value, whereas male strangers' sales pitches may have been unconvincing to a group of female prospects. If Keystone wanted to completely bury the use of female sales agents it could have, but instead Keystone accepted the women's presence by virtue of publishing their letters. In *Keystone Review*, the company could have chosen either to omit the women completely, or utilize initials without honorifics, which would have obliterated public knowledge of their existence. By making their presence known, and by excerpting communiqué that made clear that the female agents were selling more quickly than their male counterparts, Keystone showed that it accepted these deviations from the prescribed vision of agents (young, male) and methods (one-on-one sale). This seems to imply, therefore, that Keystone's use of women was

understood by the company as a means to reach a group of consumers more effectively than the “college man” alone could.

‘Older’ Agents in the View Business

From *Review*, it is apparent that Keystone employed men who were older than college-aged. These were not men who had sold for Keystone throughout college and continued to sell for the company upon graduation, but adults who established themselves in the work as either a temporary or permanent position. These men are different from Keystone’s other male sales agents because they did not stand as aspirational figures in a liminal position between youth and professional adulthood, but instead appeared more like the stereotypical visage of the traveling sales agent, due to their age and gender. Their function did not support the brand through imbued meaning. While their character was similar to that of the college student agents, the cultural sense of their respectability was more questionable. More practically, the agents were important to the company because many had the ability to sell the product year-round while college students were engaged in their coursework and fewer sales agents were working in the field.

Some of this population of agents were significantly older than Keystone’s college student sales agents, and sold for the company full-time. “J. A. E.” of Ontario wrote in 1906, “Have taught school for 20 years. Last term I spent a few of my Saturdays selling Keystone views, and found that I could make more money in one day selling Keystone goods than I could teaching the other five.” The editor of *Review* postscripted the letter to state, “Mr. J. A. E. has now given up teaching and signed a contract to work for Keystone until January, 1907.”¹²⁸ A letter from March 1900 from “J. W. R.” of Ohio described canvassing twenty-two houses in

¹²⁸ “J. A. E.” in “Among our Salesmen,” in *Keystone Review* 9, no. 2 (February/March 1906): 29.

fifteen hours, and making sales at every house. “A younger man than 63 might have done better,” he facetiously noted, and in the next issue *Review* praised him for having ordered over \$100 in wholesale goods in less than a month, despite it being his first time selling stereographs.¹²⁹ These two agents, “J. A. E.” and “J. W. R.” would appear markedly different from Keystone’s archetypal college student agent, but they still represented the educated and eager qualities of their younger counterparts. This is an important aspect of Keystone’s non-student agents. There is no evidence in the pages of *Review* that in its formational years Keystone hired any career traveling salesmen to sell for the company. These agents, therefore, still represented the values of the company without outwardly representing the archetypal age and demeanor of a stereograph sales agent.

Some older agents used Keystone as an adjunct to their regular work. Several teachers and educators, for example, sold during the summer, in the same manner college students did.¹³⁰ In *Review*, Keystone acknowledged this population of sales agents in an article entitled, “Just the Thing for the Teachers’ Vacation,” which was meant to recruit additional teachers as sales agents. Describing the appeal of this work, Keystone wrote,

It has been our custom to devote much of the space in our little magazine to the work of our student force, although we have many salesmen not of this class. For most of the same reasons that the view business is adapted to the use of college students, it is also popular with school teachers and college professors. There are many persons in these vocations who find their long and enforced summer vacations irksome, and because they take the profits off the year’s income, quite undesirable. Unfortunately, too, the vacations come at such times that most avenues of business are closed to them, these being considered the ‘dull seasons’ of the year. Most teachers feel that three weeks of rest out of the year is quite all they can afford, or, in fact, really need; so the burning question with them is how to spend the balance of three months’ vacation profitably.”¹³¹

¹²⁹ “J. W. R.,” in “Echoes from the Field,” in *Keystone Review* 2, no. 5 (March 1900): 4; J. W. R., in “Echoes from the Field,” in *Keystone Review* 2, no. 6 (April 1900): 4.

¹³⁰ I have found one example of an agent selling during the school year. “H. W. M.” of Maine noted in a letter, “These orders were taken while I was teaching and after school hours.” “H. W. M.” in “Among our Salesmen,” *Keystone Review* 9, no. 2 (February/March 1906): 29.

¹³¹ “Just the Thing for the Teachers’ Vacation,” *Keystone Review* 10, no. 6 (July 1907): 86.

The article continued at length, citing several teacher-cum-agents' sales successes, and discussing Keystone's emphasis on sets that allow agents to present a more educational focus from their materials, which, the company assured, would appeal to the way teachers think. In addition to the sales agents' letters quoted in this article, *Review* published letters from teachers in several other issues. An example is a letter from C. G. Titus, a principal of schools from Londonderry, Nova Scotia, who wrote in 1905 that he "found the work instructive, pleasant and paying. In seven weeks [he] cleared over \$175.00, and had a good deal of pleasant work besides."¹³² Although Titus was not quoted in *Review* again, his letter assured the company that he would sell in the 1906 summer, as well. This article and the published letters represented Keystone's usual rhetoric of combining a sense of the mutual benefits of a certain population working for the company along with a steady stream of success stories that validated its claims. Teachers, who by this point were formally educated with collegiate degrees, and had chosen to dedicate their lives to educating others, would certainly have resonated with aspirational ideals in American culture. Furthermore, as Keystone increasingly aligned its products as educational tools, an educator's decision to sell would be a personal endorsement, and would affirm to prospective customers that the educational content was both current and meaningful.¹³³ Teachers

¹³² C. G. Titus, "How Our Work Strikes the School Teacher," in *Keystone Review* 8, no. 9 (October 1905): 134.

¹³³ *Review*'s "Just the Thing for the Teachers' Vacation" article described Keystone's shift toward "classification" as a key to the company's educational focus: "We have carefully arranged sets of views which conform to the most approved methods of teaching many different branches of study as well as the sciences." "Just the Thing for the Teachers' Vacation," *Keystone Review* 10, no. 6 (July 1907): 88. While it is widely discussed how Keystone targeted school audiences in the twentieth century, this article gives an early hint of this transition. Unfortunately, too, because the only Keystone sales manuals date from 1898, 1941, and 1953, there is a significant gap in one's ability to trace changes in the company's sales philosophy and approach. For some who have traced the shift toward stereographs as educational tools (rather than the company's process behind this increased focus) see Bak, "Democracy and Discipline: Object Lessons and the Stereoscope in American Education, 1870 – 1920"; Wiatr, "Seeing American: Visual Education and the Making of Modern Observers, 1900-1935"; Ent, "Twentieth Century Visual Education: Early American Schools and the Stereograph."

working as sales agents represented aspirational figures for customers interested in their own self-education or that of their children.

Other agents sold for Keystone full-time. Robert Morrow Comings was an adult non-student agent featured three times in the final volume of the magazine.¹³⁴ In his first mention, he was the subject of an article entitled “The Keystone Prize Baby,” where Comings described celebrating his son Edward’s first birthday “by an early start and late finish, with a tremendous effort to take more orders than I have ever taken.” The article quoted from a follow-up letter that noted he was successful and received twenty-one orders from thirty-six canvasses, and his customers included “the county judge, sheriff and treasurer,” as well as “eleven prominent business men,” and a woman who was “the head of the largest estate in the country.”¹³⁵ In 1909, the year in which Comings’ letters were published, he was thirty-five years old and married, and was ensconced in a career selling stereographs that spanned over a decade. In 1905, Comings was already a stereograph sales agent, per the New York State census. In the 1910 federal census, Comings was recorded as a traveling salesman of “pictures,” and by 1917, his draft registration card noted that he was a superintendent for Underwood & Underwood. While the draft card clarifies the fact that he changed employers during his tenure, a career in stereograph sales lasting twelve or more years was unusual for an industry whose agents tended to serve less than a combined twelve months.

¹³⁴ Review identified Comings by his initials, but identifying characteristics mentioned in his letters about his son’s birthday and name allowed Robert Comings’ name to be traced through census data.

¹³⁵ Robert Morrow Comings, “The Keystone Prize Baby,” in *Keystone Review* 12, no. 3 (April 1909): 40. Comings’ letters did not state how many hours he worked in the day, but it should be noted that this volume far exceeds the average pace represented in *Review* and discussed in the section on female agents. In another entry, *Review* reported that Comings (again listed as R. M. C.) averaged “better than two orders per hour.” “An Unusual Record in Taking Orders,” in *Keystone Review* 12, no. 4 (May 1909): 61. As always, the company did not offer an explanation as to why his statistics were exceptional.

Comings was the only agent directly identified by *Review* as a parent, although six years later in 1915 Keystone published a stereo card entitled, “Now may be Daddie’ll take me along” (Figure 4.6) which featured a baby sitting in a salesman’s traveling case. Beginning and ending with singsong rhymes, the text on the verso elaborated:

This little baby’s papa is a salesman. [...] He goes on long journeys too. He sells KEYSTONE Views and Stereoscopes so that little girls and boys, as well as grownups, can see just what kind of place this old world of ours is. He earns money to buy dresses and other things for his baby. [...] We all think this little baby needs a dress. It is not because he has no dresses that he looks this way. His mamma does not know he is here. The baby’s papa is just ready to go on a journey and has left his traveling bag on the veranda just outside of the door. Baby crept from inside of the house and climbed into the bag. He looks so very, very wise that we are sure if he could talk he would say, ‘Now maybe Daddie’ll take me along.’

The card was not included in published sets, and the text is written very simplistically. The intended audience of this image was likely sales agents’ children. The production of this card, therefore, would indicate a growing population of sales agents with young children at home. Surely the longevity of Comings’ career would have been attractive to a company like Keystone that was so accustomed to employee turnover. Perhaps, too, the company developed a cadre of agents who started as college student workers, but continued working for Keystone after college while starting a family. Whatever the reason, six years after Comings’ reports in *Review*, Keystone apparently had enough parents of young children on its staff that the company felt it profitable or useful for employee morale to produce a stereo card made exclusively for this audience.¹³⁶ Clearly the company did not see this population as being at odds with its vision of its sales agents, despite having omitted them in the company’s shorthand descriptions of its sales force.

¹³⁶ In later years, as agents’ ages skewed older, Keystone sales agents who happened to be fathers became increasingly common. Several children are pictured in the 1927 sales convention photograph and the undated image at Yerkes Observatory (Figures 4.3 and 4.4), including a baby in the arms of its sales agent father.

For non-college students, the challenge of selling Keystone would have been in maintaining profits. Agents sold stereographs for sixteen and two-thirds cents each (\$2.00 per dozen). The typical contract dictated that the wholesale cost was fifty percent of this price, and agents could keep the other half as income. Therefore, selling twelve stereographs netted proceeds of one dollar. As noted previously, the average income of an urban family was \$651 in 1901, and therefore an agent would have needed to sell 7,812 stereographs per year to earn an average income. Agents' sales were supplemented by the sale of stereoscopes and cases for stereographs. These items netted more profit per unit, but also had less demand, because they were durable goods. A customer may buy many stereographs but would have less need for many stereoscopes, nor would they require many boxes for the photographs' storage. Selling through the year to maintain a livable wage would require consistently high-volume sales, an influx of new views if re-canvassing the same territory, and regular successes tantamount to those lauded as exceptional in the pages of *Review*. This is perhaps the best indicator why Keystone salesmanship was most ideally suited to college agents. Their expenses and financial needs were less, and they could maintain their motivation for their short selling seasons. It became less sustainable to support one's family on eight-and-one-third cents for every stereograph sold.

In at least one case, a prospective adult sales agent was concerned with his ability to support his family through his work for Keystone. H. G. Barnhart, the father of a college-aged agent, typically earned his income through farming. Keystone offered him a salaried position that had additional duties beyond typical direct-selling, but assured him a salary of at least \$100 per month, which nearly double the average urban income in 1901 of \$651. To earn this salary, Barnhart traveled to regional schools and recruited the students as sales agents. Barnhart accepted these duties because he argued that he needed this salary guarantee to convince him that

the work would be more lucrative than farming.¹³⁷ It is not possible to know why Keystone entrusted Barnhart with these additional duties when he apparently did not have prior sales experience, but perhaps the company judged his character and potential for success based on the performance of his son, who had already worked two summers for Keystone. When selling Keystone views, Barnhart served as a stand-in for his son's successes. He was a farmer whose son was achieving the 'self-made' successes that made college agents aspirational figures to countless American customers. As a parent to a successful child, his sales pitch for Keystone would have inferred that the products were part of the success formula. Other parents who shared the college dream for their child could easily have attributed Keystone as a product that correlated to success. Furthermore, when recruiting other college students to sell, Barnhart would have been able to speak of his son's successes in selling the products and affording his education. His direct connection and knowledge of his son's financials would have served as an endorsement of one's potential for success in selling for Keystone nearly as much as a college-aged sales agent doing the recruitment himself.

Agents such as the sixty-three-year-old "J. W. R.," Robert Comings, and H. G. Barnhart show that Keystone's sales demographic was always more diverse than the college agents alone. The company's embrace of these men and others like them is apparent in Keystone's use of their narratives within *Review*. While these agents represented a shift in age from the archetype, they did not reflect a shift in the agents' personality. The earnestness and drive represented in Comings and "J. W. R.'s" letters mirrors that of the college agent. The use of teachers to sell, or Barnhart to recruit agents, rather than seasoned salesmen, signaled that Keystone's agents were

¹³⁷ Because the only surviving correspondence are from Keystone to the Barnharts, this has been surmised by a careful read of several letters from early November 1903, written both to H. G. Barnhart, and his son Walter, who was already acting as an agent. Keystone View Company Papers, Ms2010-052, Special Collections, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia.

not the typical traveling salesman rampant in popular culture, but figures more carefully aligned with the brand, and less like the salesmen depicted in the earlier-described “Optical Delusion” stereo cards. A key difference between the adult agents and the archetypal college student sales agent was therefore respectability. A college student selling for Keystone to afford his education represented a burgeoning self-made man, eager to overcome his financial obstacles and achieve the American dream. He needed to raise relatively modest funds, and the company proved repeatedly that school expenses could be paid on a summer break spent selling. A man trying to support his entire family on profits of eight cents for every stereo card sold does not carry the same gravitas, and therefore was not presented by the company as a prominent example of its sales force. While their role in the company was not lauded as much as the college agents, these older agents were clearly essential to sustaining the health of the company because they could sell year-round, had greater financial demands on them that required they sell more stereo cards to support themselves, and, in the case of Barnhart, helped recruit new college student agents.

Due to a lack of company records, this chapter relied on the “echoes” preserved by Keystone View Company in the pages of *Review* to reassemble information about the Keystone sales agent. Although Keystone purportedly employed thousands of agents all summer per the oft-quoted statement by company president George Hamilton, *Review* quotes only from several hundred over an eleven-year period. As simply an “echo” of a robust sales force, one might assume that little can be ‘heard’ from reassembling these voices. That, however, is not the case. Keystone represented its agent through a shorthanded archetype, the male college student who sold stereographs to afford his education. Yet, in publishing letters in *Review* from Keystone’s most accomplished agents and those whose work was worthy of admiration, the letters portray a

gender and age diversity that is a surprising contrast to the company's archetype. Keystone employed women, both married and single, as well as teenage boys, and older men, and openly shared their successes in the pages of *Review*.

This means that the company's description of its agents through the college student archetype was more limited and simplistic than the actual composition of its sales force. It is understandable why Keystone would posit its more limited vision. Keystone petitioned heavily to hire college and preparatory students to work for the company seasonally, and the concept of battalions of educated young men spreading its stereo views married nicely with Keystone's vision of its product. These students, in their earnest attempts to better themselves through education, and their sales agent jobs to afford their education, were a bona fide example of what Keystone's customers might aspire to become. For these student-sales agents, the stereograph was a means to elevate their stature in life, and similarly, the stereograph customer could expect the same through their personal study of their stereo views.

As for why Keystone was more hesitant to frame its agent pool more broadly, such as characterizing the sales force as earnest young people, rather than specifically as educated males, I have speculated that it is because acknowledging these other agents' presence also acknowledged social stigmas associated with the sales industry. Grown men peddling inexpensive novelties were generally looked down upon. Respectable women were expected to remain in the home, or, if working, be relegated to indoor work. Teenage children were increasingly expected to focus on school and not helping to support the family. Keystone's use of these populations as sales personnel contradicted these concepts, and despite their successes, it created a murkier vision of the sales agent than the simplistic clean-cut college man. Yet the company actively sought out these populations of sales people by advertising for them in

newspapers, salesmanship magazines, and in its employee magazine. In doing so, Keystone showed that it understood that the company was most successful when it had a diverse sales corps. Agents of different ages and genders could have more appeal to different populations, and through this diversity the company would have more success in selling photographs. It chose not to acknowledge it in its company myths.

By tracing the ‘echoes’ and resurrecting information about the gender and age diversity in Keystone’s sales force, I have contributed a history of the company’s workers that is more aligned with reality than the generalities made by the company, and scholars who have subsequently utilized those more limiting statements. Considering the cultural understanding of door-to-door sales agents as a whole and the demographic composition of Keystone’s agents demonstrates not only how Keystone fit into the broader market, but how prospective customers may have perceived these agents in light of that market. Keystone’s college student agents reflected aspirational narratives of self-made men, and projected a sense of self that customers may have been keen to emulate through the purchase of stereo cards. The younger agents also represented an earnestness that was aspirational as they turned from “boy culture” to their first professional foray into the adult world. In engaging in direct-selling, women and older male agents may not have signaled the same level of respectability as their young male counterparts, but the agents quoted in *Review* demonstrated a strong personal drive that mirrored that of the archetypal agents. Collectively, these agents, regardless of age and gender, reflected an earnestness in their letters that was unusual to the direct-selling field in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Whether aspirational or earnest, the character and characterization of the agent would have a direct impact on prospective customers. In the next chapter, I shift focus

to the prospective Keystone customer, and look more broadly at the role of aspiration in the sales transaction.



Figure 4.1. Examples of an “Optical Delusion” stereo card from the author’s collection. Top card is uncredited, middle card is Webster & Albee (sold in the U.S. by canvassers), and bottom card is believed to be by Michael Burr.



Figure 4.2. Keystone View Company, "11917 - Still There's No Place Like Home," 1909. Author's collection.

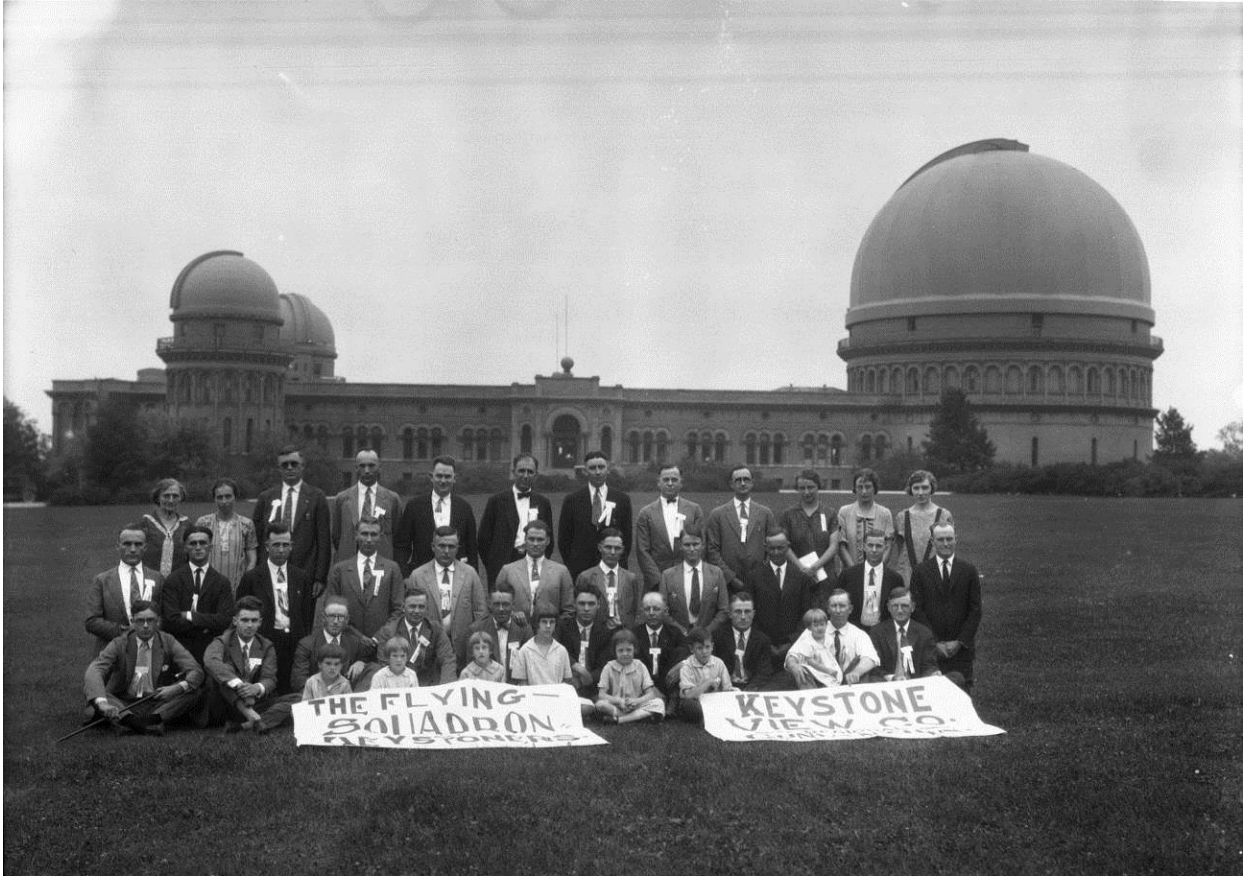


Figure 4.3. Keystone View Company, “The Flying Squadron Keystoners” at Yerkes Observatory, Wisconsin, n.d. Keystone-Mast Collection, UCR/California Museum of Photography [1996.0009.1122].

Note that the woman in the top row, third from the right wears a ribbon like the men in the picture. This may indicate that she was among the sales staff, and not simply a girlfriend, wife, or mother accompanying her salesman relative.



Figure 4.4. Keystone View Company, “Western Field Sales Convention” at Yellowstone National Park, 1927. Keystone-Mast Collection, UCR/California Museum of Photography [1996.0009.1225].

Several of the women in this image, especially those directly behind the banner, wear the same ribbon as their male counterparts. However, the young boy near the banner wears a ribbon as well, which may indicate that the ribbon does not actually distinguish salesmen from family members.

See Figure 4.4A for a detail of this image.

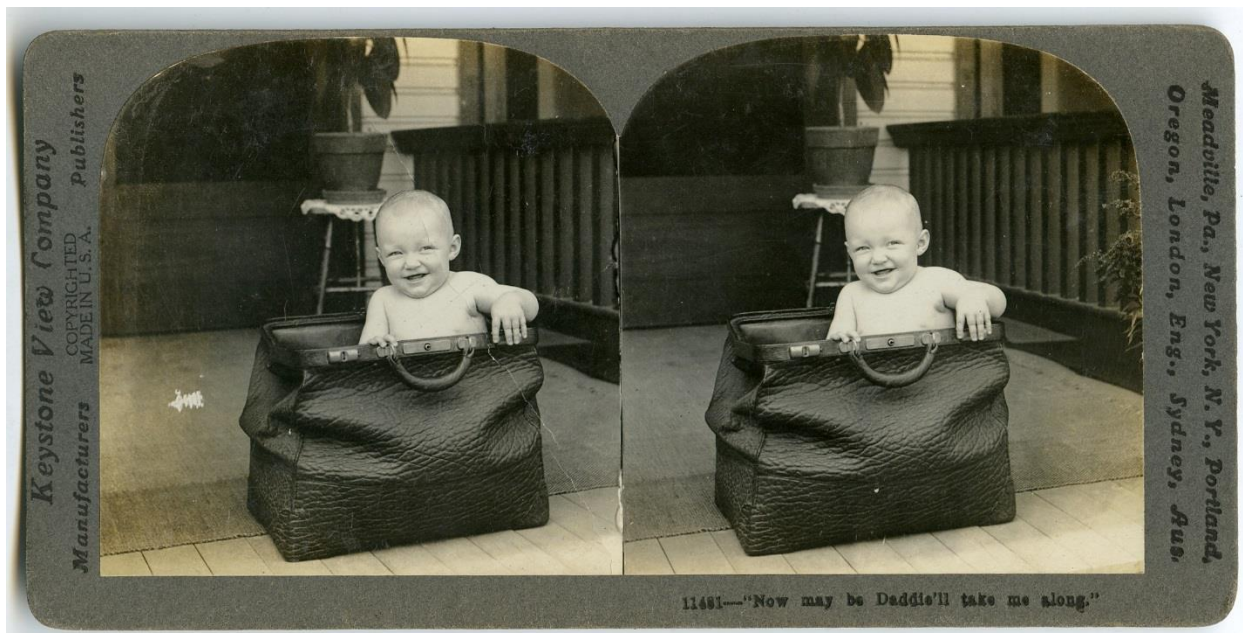


Figure 4.4A: Detail of Figure 4.4 showing women with ribbons. Keystone View Company, “Western Field Sales Convention” at Yellowstone National Park, 1927. Keystone-Mast Collection, UCR/California Museum of Photography [1996.0009.1225].



Figure 4.5. Keystone View Company, "Regional Convention," n.d. Keystone-Mast Collection, UCR/California Museum of Photography [1996.0009.1330].

Note the single female employee, seated second row center. By placement and the lack of family members (wives and children) in this image, it is clear that she is one of the staff.



11481—"Now Maybe Daddie 'll Take Me Along."

"By, Baby Bunting!
 Daddy's gone a' hunting,
 To get a little rabbit skin
 To wrap his Baby Bunting in."

This little baby's papa is a salesman. He is like the baby's papa in the verse. He goes on long journeys too. He sells KEYSTONE Views and Stereoscopes so that little girls and boys, as well as grownups, can see just what kind of a place this old world of ours is. He earns money to buy dresses and other things for his baby. He does not need to go hunting for rabbit skins, for nowadays even little Indian Babies are not often wrapped in skins, unless they live in the far away northland.

We all think this little baby needs a dress. It is not because he has no dresses that he looks this way. His mamma does not know

he is here. The baby's papa is just ready to go on a journey and has left his traveling bag on the veranda just outside of the door. Baby crept from inside of the house and climbed into the bag. He looks so very, very wise that we are sure if he could talk he would say, "Now maybe Daddie 'll take me along".

This little baby cannot talk and we wonder:

"What is the little one thinking about?
 Very wonderful things, no doubt. . . .
 . . . he laughs and cries, and eats and drinks,
 And chuckles and crows, and nods and winks,
 As if his head were as full of kinks
 And curious riddles as any sphinx".

Copyright 1913, by The Keystone View Company.

Figure 4.6. Keystone View Company, "Now may be Daddie'll take me along," recto and verso, from author's collection.

Chapter 5: “Your Views Are Truly What People Want”: Reconstructing Consumer Demand

“Your views are truly what people want,” wrote sales agent Frank G. Otstot to Keystone View Company.¹ It is a quote that sums up the relationship between the company, the agent, and the consumer. To be convinced to make a purchase, the consumer had to be influenced by the sales agent and company’s product and sales process. Keystone encouraged agents to supplement the sales pitch described in Chapter 3 with name-drops and testimonials of prominent people who enjoyed the stereographs, which the company regularly published in *Review*. These testimonials, therefore, become an integral part of creating “what people want,” by acting as an intermediary between the company, sales agent, and consumer. This chapter considers the role of the audience who responded positively to testimonial, name dropping, and endorsement, and uses agents’ reports about customers and agent-gathered customer testimonials to reassemble information about the motivations of Keystone’s consumers. It is often impossible to assess historical consumer behavior, especially regarding small purchases like stereo cards and stereoscopes. Sales agents’ reports and testimonials provide glimpses of this more clearly than any other surviving resources about stereoscopy. The data I am using has not previously been examined, and provides a more complete view of consumer motivations than scholars have previously identified regarding stereoscopic sales. This contributes concrete sources to augment the broad generalizations typically applied to stereograph consumers, specifically the notion that the company concentrated on selling to rural Americans, and emphasized educational armchair

¹ Frank G. Otstot, in “What Others Are Doing,” *Keystone Review* 1, no. 2 (December 1898): 3.

travel.² As discussed in Chapter 2 and Chapter 4, rural Americans were eager consumers of stereographic photographs, but stereograph consumers were more diverse than generalizations indicate. In this chapter, I examine further the idea of the ways in which acquisition of the stereo cards served an aspirational role, akin to Benedict Anderson's concept of an "imagined community."³ I argue that the reports and testimonials that I have discovered illustrate how a concept of the "imagined community" motivated consumers of diverse geographic and economic backgrounds to own (or want to own) Keystone's stereographs.

Whereas the company's sales pitch as discussed in Chapter 3 tells consumers why they should want stereographs, this chapter examines a reversal of the dialog, by looking at texts where customers told the company their reasons for the purchase. Examining the stereo experience from the consumers' side and considering consumers' reception of stereographs allows elements of consumer motivation to be reconstructed. This chapter first presents the consumer's perspective on stereoscopy by examining the role of stereoscopy in American home entertainments and culture, then addresses the content of customers' testimonials, and interrogates their content to question why Keystone felt that a given customer testimonial was worth distributing to sales agents. In asking its agents to quote these testimonials back to customers, Keystone ensured that consumers' endorsements would influence future buyers. Through the movement from customer, through the employee magazine, back to the sales agent and finally ending at other customers, customer testimonials had the potential to cause a ripple

² Darrah asserts this in *World of Stereographs* regarding other direct-selling publishers, noting that the year-round staff was based in big cities where winter travel was less difficult, but the college-aged summer agents focused on the rural United States. Armchair travel is the focus of Batzli, "The Visual Voice: 'Armchair Tourism,' Cultural Authority, and the Depiction of the United States in Early Twentieth-Century Stereographs."

³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised ed (London: Verso, 2006).

effect in influencing customer reception of Keystone stereographs, and offering a sense of connection to an “imagined community.”

The Consumer’s View of Stereoscopy

Considering the consumer’s perspective in stereoscopic consumption through the lens of American consumer behavior and aspirational thinking is necessary for understanding the mindset of the consumer when presented with testimonials. This is necessitated because Keystone did not keep careful records on its clients, and thus very few names of Keystone’s customers survive. Even when customer names exist, nothing was recorded of the exact views that they bought. As a result, Keystone’s consumers cannot be reconstructed concretely. This is a common problem in thinking about photographic consumers because, Cara Finnegan notes, “the act of viewing typically leaves no discursive traces.”⁴ Like Finnegan, my understanding of stereographic consumers comes from their secondary traces, specifically, those reported by sales agents in *Keystone Review*.⁵ This is an admittedly narrow scope of the consumers. Perhaps consumers’ most telling traces are revealed in the fact that so many stereo cards can be found readily at antique shops, estate sales, eBay, and preserved in countless archival collections. This illustrates that stereo cards were not treated as ephemera or toys, discarded after a few uses. Countless consumers preserved stereo cards, and either passed them down through family lines or donated to museums and archives, so that they could be enjoyed by future generations.⁶ Of

⁴ Finnegan, *Making Photography Matter: A Viewer’s History from the Civil War to the Great Depression*, 1.

⁵ Finnegan’s sources for the various photographs analyzed included “responses in newspaper and magazine articles, letters to the editor, trial testimony, books, speeches, photographs, and comment cards left at an exhibit.” Keystone generally stayed out of the popular press (regarding both advertisements, which I discuss later in this chapter, and also reviews), so there is far less variety in sources where the stereographs’ consumers and viewers are apparent. Ibid.

⁶ The ubiquity of these stereo cards calls to mind individuals’ mass-preservation of *National Geographic* magazines, which make another interesting analogue to stereoscopic material. Collins and Lutz address the imagined community of *National Geographic* readers in their study; my former colleague Kimberly Zarate wrote about visual

course, this view of the stereo cards certainly would not have applied to all of Keystone's consumers. Who has not suffered buyer's remorse, or purchased an item they later found little use for? To account for the consumer diversity in the face of variable responses and self-valuation of stereographs, it is useful to consider how consumers classified Keystone's products among possible purchases, and the role of choice in their decision to buy stereographs. Looking at stereograph consumption from this perspective allows a greater latitude in considering consumer views because it permits a broader scope of meaning beyond simply satisfying Keystone's interpretation of "what people want."⁷

The American public at the dawn of the twentieth century saw stereographs as tools of entertainment, and increasingly educational devices, as well. Keystone continued this tradition by its heavy sales of 'comic' views, while also creating and distributing world tour sets that were meant to provide a holistic geographic and cultural education. Keystone's consumers, therefore, may have been interested in stereographs' entertainment value, educational value, or both. Entertainment and education were not always separate spheres. Thomas Schlereth identified "playing" and "striving" as two interdependent impulses in late Victorian American society. Schlereth noted, "many middle-class Americans could play only if persuaded they were improving themselves and not wasting time."⁸ Using college-aged sales agents as aspirational

and conceptual connections between stereographic images in Keystone-Mast and *National Geographic* during her time at the University of California, Riverside. Catherine A. Lutz and Jane L. Collins, *Reading National Geographic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), especially 217-258; Kimberly Zarate, "China Still Rising: Neocolonialism and Cultural Costs of Social Progress in Mass Produced Visual Media," *UCR Undergraduate Research Journal* 4 (2010): 51-57.

⁷ These notions resonate with the ideas presented in *Feeling Photography* in Keystone's interest in provoking feeling. For Keystone this feeling was predominantly desire in a consumer-driven sense. Brown and Phu, *Feeling Photography*. Because the essayists in *Feeling Photography* do not consider photographic feelings in relation to consumerism, my work has been particularly influenced by other scholars of emotions who have written about consumer culture, particularly Susan J. Matt, as in Matt, "Current Emotion Research in History: Or, Doing History from the Inside Out"; Matt, "Emotions in the Market"; Matt, *Keeping Up with the Joneses: Envy in American Consumer Society, 1890-1930*.

⁸ Thomas J. Schlereth, *Victorian America: Transformations in Everyday Life, 1876-1915* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 209.

figures, as discussed in the previous chapter, was especially effective in Keystone's methods because it helped divest the stereographs from any connotation of pure home entertainment and connect them with Keystone's educational focus. Keystone urged agents to "show the sublime and the ridiculous alternately," demonstrating that there was value to both groups of images in a personal collection.⁹ In doing so, the company framed stereographs as a tool of rational recreation.

In thinking about the cultural placement of stereographs, I am especially influenced by the concept of "home entertainments" and rational recreation. William A. Gleason's study of leisure and Melanie Dawson's work on "home entertainments" draw from play theory and Thorstein Veblen's *Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), but look at American literature (Gleason) and instructional manuals (Dawson) to illustrate the manifestations of these concepts within American culture.¹⁰ Neither Gleason nor Dawson discuss stereoscopy in this context. However, stereographs were simply one choice that American consumers could consider when deciding how to spend their leisure time and discretionary income. Therefore, the lack of direct acknowledgement of stereographs is not particularly problematic because it brings light to consumers' choices.¹¹ Looking at stereoscopy as one of various options for their leisure time and entertainment allows a clearer understanding of consumers' personal preferences, desires, and

⁹ Keystone View Company, *Manual of Instructions from the Keystone View Company for the Use of Their Agents*, 5.

¹⁰ William A. Gleason, *The Leisure Ethic: Work and Play in American Literature, 1840-1940* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999); Melanie Dawson, *Laboring to Play: Home Entertainment and the Spectacle of Middle-Class Cultural Life, 1850-1920* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2013).

¹¹ Shirley Wajda wrote on the parlor stereoscope and comic views in a volume on American leisure. Wajda framed the stereoscope as a symbol of "Victorian dedication to self-improvement through didactic pursuits," but in her extended analysis of a T.W. Ingersoll "comic" set of 100 stereographs, she does little to convey a sense of self-improvement through these images. If nothing else, her argument conveys the complicated push and pull of stereographic topics, balanced between views that were purely entertaining and those that were also informative. What it does not do is try to get to the root of the cultural motivations of the stereoscopic consumer. This is where I have focused my efforts. Shirley Wajda, "A Room with a Viewer: The Parlor Stereoscope, Comic Stereographs, and the Psychic Role of Play in Victorian America," in *Hard at Play: Leisure in America, 1840-1940*, ed. Kathryn Grover (Amherst, MA and Rochester, NY: The University of Massachusetts Press and the Strong Museum, 1992), 112-39.

especially, their options. Stereoscopy was one of an increasingly broadening array of consumer goods that Americans could purchase, even if they were located away from the urban commercial districts, due to increases in mail-order businesses and better transnational shipping coordination to small, local storefronts. How stereographs appealed on the market was therefore greatly informed by the way that leisure and entertainment were contemporaneously understood. Leisure contributed to one's sense of selfhood, "the notion that one might shape a satisfying sense of self primarily through one's leisure activities instead of one's job."¹² Home entertainment was a tool of affirming one's social place, and improving oneself. Dawson wrote, "home entertainment provided not only diversion, a relief from ennui, and an occasion for behavioral expansiveness, but it also served as a forum for examining developing middling lifestyles."¹³ Those interested in home entertainments "would have been invested in self-uptift, in the power of culture, and possessed some degree of a disposable income and discretionary free time."¹⁴ This included

upwardly mobile individuals – lower-class workers, moderately affluent turn-of-the-century blacks, and the economically deprived – who attempted to use their cultural experiences to claim middling lifestyles for themselves – and to articulate their social aspirations through discretionary leisure.¹⁵

Sources of home entertainment, which would include stereographic photographs, instilled a sense of cultural belonging.

While there is a significant body of literature beyond Gleason and Dawson that respond to Veblen's critique, I contend that Veblen's core question of conspicuous consumption is quieted when discussing a product intended to be used privately in the home. Stereoscopy in the 1890s and early twentieth century was not an element of conspicuous consumption because that

¹² Gleason, *The Leisure Ethic: Work and Play in American Literature, 1840-1940*, 1.

¹³ Dawson, *Laboring to Play: Home Entertainment and the Spectacle of Middle-Class Cultural Life, 1850-1920*, 1.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

notion of parlor entertainments shifted as the American home transformed its spaces from ‘parlors’ to ‘living rooms.’¹⁶ Unlike Dawson’s emphasis on group activity (play and games), by the 1890s when Keystone began producing views, stereoscopy had been increasingly framed as a tool of self-learning and personal amusement, rather than shared entertainment. Keystone and other stereograph publishers framed stereographs as a form of ‘rational recreation,’ an uplifting, positive, and self-improving way to spend one’s leisure time, whether studying educationally-focused views or those meant purely for entertainment.¹⁷ Tom Gunning saw philosophical toys, such as the zoetrope, as tools of rational amusement.¹⁸ Within photography Elizabeth Edwards framed lantern slide shows as a form of rational entertainment, and John Plunkett asserted that role for the stereoscope, as well.¹⁹ Therefore, it is not new to see stereographs as a tool of rational recreation, but this notion is important when considering how consumers of stereographs chose to spend their time.

To fill their time, American consumers faced a significant amount of choice in the consumer marketplace, and this affected their decision to purchase Keystone stereographs. Choice has been presented as a nebulous topic in business history writing because the will of the

¹⁶ Karen Halttunen, “From Parlor to Living Room: Domestic Space, Interior Decoration, and the Culture of Personality,” in *Consuming Visions: Accumulation and Display of Goods in America, 1880-1920*, ed. Simon J. Bronner (New York: W. W. Norton, 1989), 157–89.

¹⁷ The concept of ‘rational recreation’ and ‘rational entertainment’ exist primarily in scholarship about British culture (see, for example, the work of Hugh Cunningham or Richard D. Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1978)), but are equally applicable to American values. The most appropriate frame for the stereographic market is to approach stereographs as rational entertainment. While there has been a significant body of literature about stereographs as a component of formalized visual education, I am writing about stereographs in the home, rather than in other educational sites such as schools and churches. For works dealing specifically with lantern slides, which Keystone also published widely, see Frank Reiser, “A Lantern-Slide-Inspired Look into Biology Teaching’s Past,” *The American Biology Teacher* 72, no. 9 (2010): 557–61; Artemis Willis, “Between Nonfiction Screen Practice and Nonfiction Peep Practice: The Keystone ‘600 Set’ and the Geographical Mode of Representation,” *Early Popular Visual Culture* 13, no. 4 (2015): 293–312.

¹⁸ Tom Gunning, “Hand and Eye: Excavating a New Technology of the Image in the Victorian Era,” *Victorian Studies* 54, no. 3 (2012): 498–500.

¹⁹ Edwards, *The Camera as Historian: Amateur Photographers and Historical Imagination, 1885-1918*; Plunkett, “Selling Stereoscopy, 1890–1915: Penny Arcades, Automatic Machines and American Salesmen,” 239.

customer is difficult to explain. As Regina Blaszczyk noted, “The type of historical source [to elucidate issues of consumer choice] has much to do with whether scholars can explore the dynamic relationship between consumers and producers, and how much ‘power’ the consumer appears to exert in the marketplace.”²⁰ The corporate side of consumer choice has been characterized by Blaszczyk as “imagining the consumers,” a responsiveness by the company to the demands of the market. Keystone actively imagined its consumers in the various ways discussed in the previous chapters, most notably its fluidity toward creating new subjects of interest, and the ways the company honed the sales pitch to respond to the interests of its heterogeneous consumers.

From the point of view of the consumer, choice is the decision how, where, or whether to spend one’s money in a market that was increasingly diverse and accessible. The role of choice and consumer culture in luxury and non-essential products for the home intersect most readily in literature that examines durable goods, especially design-oriented kitchen and dining wares.²¹ Although these products differ greatly in intent and use when compared to stereography, the observations made about marketing and selling to the growing American middle-class still resonates for the stereographic market.²² Keystone faced competition in the marketplace, not only from other stereographic publishers and sources (competitors included Underwood & Underwood, other large and small publishers, and the Sears catalog’s stereoscope department),

²⁰ Regina Lee Blaszczyk, “Rethinking Fashion,” in *Producing Fashion: Commerce, Culture, and Consumers* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 15.

²¹ See, for example, Clarke, *Tupperware: The Promise of Plastic in 1950s America*; Blaszczyk, *Imagining Consumers: Design and Innovation from Wedgwood to Corning*; Parr, “Shopping for a Good Stove: A Parable about Gender, Design, and the Market.”

²² Marina Moskowitz’s discussion of the marketing of silverware, discussed earlier in this thesis, comes to mind, as does Alison Clarke’s work on Tupperware, Regina Blaszczyk’s book on kitchen and housewares, and Joy Parr’s work on kitchen wares. Moskowitz, *Standard of Living: The Measure of the Middle Class in Modern America*; Clarke, *Tupperware: The Promise of Plastic in 1950s America*; Blaszczyk, *Imagining Consumers: Design and Innovation from Wedgwood to Corning*; Parr, “Shopping for a Good Stove: A Parable about Gender, Design, and the Market.”

but from virtually any other luxury or non-essential good that a consumer may see as beneficial for their home. Like the kitchen and dining ware companies most prevalent in the literature, Keystone faced the same challenge to understand the market for their product within the growing American middle-class and to attempt to carve out a sense of desire. Stimulating this desire was essential to their products' success.

Because of stereographs' low price-point, the consumer did not weigh the choice of buying Keystone's photographs against that of major luxury purchases such as a piano or a set of fine china. However, one may have considered the decision to buy stereographs against the purchase of a book or magazine subscription, because the stereograph industry's most direct competition was other hybrid educationally- and entertainment-oriented products, and price-points were similar.²³ While it would be impossible to consider the use of choice within the broad spectrum of all possible rational recreation devices (and those that represent 'casual leisure,' or non-rational recreation), it is possible, and fruitful, to consider how the role of direct-selling affected choice in these sorts of purchases.²⁴ By selling directly, agents had already eliminated the majority of the choice variables from their customers. In a home-selling situation, the customer has two choices: to buy the product or not buy the product. Agents presented

²³ Keystone's competitor Underwood & Underwood attempted to enter the magazine market with the release of its travel-oriented quarterly magazine, *The Stereoscopic Photograph* in 1901. Renamed *The Traveller* after six issues, the magazine ceased publication after twelve issues. Underwood's magazine apparently included a stereograph free with each issue, although the archives at the Dibner Library at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History and the Library of Congress did not preserve the stereo card with the magazine itself.

²⁴ My previous comparisons to book/encyclopedia selling are particularly pertinent to thinking about direct-sales and rational recreation/home entertainments products. Particularly significant works that provide this comparison and contextualize or analyze the sales process include Friedman, "The Peddler's Progress: Salesmanship, Science, and Magic, 1880 to 1940"; Thomas, "There Is Nothing So Effective as a Personal Canvass': Revaluing Nineteenth-Century American Subscription Books"; Barbara Sicherman, "Reading Middle-Class Identity in Victorian America: Cultural Consumption, Conspicuous and Otherwise," in *Reading Acts: U.S. Readers' Interactions with Literature, 1800-1950*, ed. Barbara Ryan and Amy M. Thomas (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2002), 137-60; Schoenewald, "How to Sell the Encyclopaedia Britannica"; World Book Encyclopedia, *Sales Manual: World Book Encyclopedia* (Chicago: Quarrie Corporation, 1942). As introduced in the previous chapter, I also found Annie Nelles Dumond's memoir to be a useful tool in understanding how an agent might diverge from standard/advised practices. Dumond, *Annie Nelles, Or, The Life of a Book Agent: An Autobiography*.

consumers with a single book, rather than a shelf of selections at a bookstore, or a single model of stereoscope and an assortment of images to accompany it. In direct-sales, consumers could not comparison shop. They could only weigh the value of the product against the choice to decline buying it. Keystone's sales manual shows the ways that the company instructed its agents to sell its products. It should therefore be possible to reconstruct the ways in which sales agents may have approached their customers, and understand the sort of choices the customers faced.²⁵

Returning to Melanie Dawson's argument about leisure time and self-definition, stereoscopy was one possible source of entertainment that consumers could have used to define themselves. Its subjects included both educational material and lowbrow humor, affording a mix of relatable imagery and new material to study. It provided the illusion of travel, when many could not afford the actual experience. Dawson framed home entertainments as depicting "a narrative of an emerging sense of a group identity," and by buying stereographs and partaking in Shirley Wajda's notion of "self-improvement through didactic pursuits," consumers may have found themselves more equipped to relate to a higher-class identity.²⁶ The choice to buy stereographs was one option of many, and fulfilled the sense of self-improvement and social aspiration that was so important to leisure-seekers of their time. This is the crucial point in understanding the consumer's choice to buy stereography, and a point that is under-emphasized in literature that addresses consumer culture.

²⁵ As noted in Buell, studies have shown that if prospective consumers grant sales agents permission to demonstrate their product, they are likely to make the sale. This is why looking at the ways in which companies directed agents to sell the product is so important. Buell, "Door-to-Door Selling."

²⁶ Dawson, *Laboring to Play: Home Entertainment and the Spectacle of Middle-Class Cultural Life, 1850-1920*, 4; Wajda, "A Room with a Viewer: The Parlor Stereoscope, Comic Stereographs, and the Psychic Role of Play in Victorian America," 113.

The Social Power of Name Dropping and Testimonials

Keystone avidly encouraged the use name-dropping and testimonials by suggesting that agents infuse sales pitches with the names and personal statements of prominent or impressive-sounding customers, meant to influence a prospective customer. Using testimonials from a variety of people to appeal to customers, Keystone agents recited a quotation from a satisfied and prominent customer to exert influence over prospective buyers. In doing so, Keystone effectively mined a growing trend in the burgeoning field of modern advertising to influence consumer opinion of its product. By practicing name-dropping and using testimonials, Keystone engaged another aspect of aspirational influence on its consumers (beyond the role of the sales agent discussed in Chapter 4), and even more directly positioned its products in relationship to success, knowledge, and wealth. In doing so, I argue that Keystone sited its photographs as a passport to an ‘imagined community’ populated by upper-class successful Americans. By sharing in Keystone’s photographic media, middle- and lower-class American saw a means of direct access to the upper-class world to which many aspired.

Keystone entered the industry during a time when companies were establishing brand names on a national market, including processed food and condiment company Heinz, soap-maker Sapolio, and flour mill Pillsbury. A key way that these brands established themselves was through print advertising in newspapers and magazines.²⁷ Keystone did not do this, and the company’s nearly complete lack of formal advertising is a seemingly perplexing element of

²⁷ For a discussion of the role of advertising during this era, I have been particularly influenced by Pamela Walker Laird, *Advertising Progress: American Business and the Rise of Consumer Marketing* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998). Mass marketing, which closely relates to advertising, is most thoughtfully addressed in the first chapter of Richard S. Tedlow, *New and Improved: The Story of Mass Marketing in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1990). For work on the development of brand names in America, see Nancy F. Koehn, *Brand New: How Entrepreneurs Earned Consumers’ Trust from Wedgwood to Dell* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2001); Nancy F. Koehn, “Henry Heinz and Brand Creation in the Late Nineteenth Century: Making Markets for Processed Food,” *The Business History Review* 73, no. 3 (1999): 349–93.

Keystone's business practices. A few Keystone agents placed brief text-based advertisements in local newspapers, highlighting new stereograph releases, but the company did not advertise itself through mass media.²⁸ Mail-order concerns placed regular and frequent print advertisements, including Sears's catchy "send no money" appeal. Patent medicine producers also heavily utilized print advertisement, and its wares were frequently sold door-to-door or through mail order. Thus, Keystone's choice to abstain from advertisements did not signal a divide between brick-and-mortar retail and other methods of selling, but rather was due to the company's emphatic belief that its products sold best through demonstration. Because agents were essentially contractors of the company rather than salaried employees, their contracts did not guarantee them a budget or support for local advertisements.²⁹ Furthermore, agents attempted to canvass towns quickly, and an advertisement soliciting demonstrations might interfere with their fast pace. Therefore, the lack of advertisements simply reflected the company's practices. Selling exclusively through direct sales with a finite number of agents, advertisement may have built desire for a product that could have been inaccessible to its audience due to lack of agents in a

²⁸ An exception is advertisements placed to recruit sales agents, which I have located in college yearbooks and local newspapers. However, Keystone placed these ads to attract employees, not customers, and therefore were intended to reach a different audience than an advertisement for Keystone's products. Similarly, Alison Clarke described advertisements for Tupperware that focused on recruiting saleswomen more than speaking to the traits and importance of specific products. Clarke, *Tupperware: The Promise of Plastic in 1950s America*, 113–14. Another exception is described in the Barnhart letters, where H. G. Barnhart apparently sought to create a circular advertising views of Randolph-Macon Academy, the school that his son Walter attended. Barnhart had previously convinced Keystone to produce these views (and dispatched a photographer specifically for this purpose). In a letter from Keystone negotiating an acceptable cost, the company noted, "This is satisfactory to us and we are willing that you go ahead and have the circulars prepared and we will bear the expense of printing. There is a large expense in making local views and that we may come out even and with some profit it is important to push them vigorously. You will appreciate that these views only have local interest and their sale must be very limited as compared with views that are of universal interest." This description demonstrates that the production of a circular was an exception, rather than a rule. Keystone's interest in producing it focused on minimizing financial loss with the venture. Letter to H. G. Barnhart, dated February 3, 1904, Keystone View Company Papers, Ms2010-052, Special Collections, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia.

²⁹ The Barnhart example mentioned in the previous footnote illustrates that an advertising budget could be negotiated, although the tone of Keystone's response indicates that the Randolph-Macon views were an exceptional circumstance, rather than the company's normal operating procedure.

region. Instead the company mimicked many of the traits of print advertisement in its sales pitches, most notably the use of customer testimonials.

In postbellum American door-to-door salesmanship, it was common for the sales agent to provoke status anxiety by telling a prospective customer that a neighbor or other local figure had purchased the item.³⁰ Sales agents selling books collected names and down payments in a roster of buyers, which they ostentatiously showed off to prospective customers.³¹ Stereograph sales agents were also encouraged to use this trick, although they engaged it verbally in their sales pitch. Keystone's 1898 sales manual encouraged agents to sell first to businessmen because they "have more influence than any other class and also more money to spend freely on things they want."³² Underwood's 1900 sales manual was even more direct in its encouragement of agents to "use prominent names" because "local prominent influence of this kind is impossible for anyone to resist entirely."³³ These were name drops, not testimonials, and the companies used them as tools to engage associational value, which was a major driver of consumer behavior in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By listing local customers, agents potentially provoked a prospective customer's sense of status anxiety and social position. Similar actions were common in the silverware industry, where companies created a middle-class desire for products by selling first to large, opulent hotels to generate appeal and a widespread appreciation for their product. Describing this phenomenon, cultural historian Marina Moskowitz noted, "there were two ways in which a company promoted its wares in public spaces: a potential buyer might on the one hand respond to the actual artifact upon seeing it in a public space, and on the other hand

³⁰ An example of this in a sales agent's manual can be found in Hannaford, *Success in Canvassing: A Manual of Practical Hints and Instructions Specially Adapted to the Use of Book Canvassers of the Better Class*, 3–4.

³¹ Friedman, *Birth of a Salesman: The Transformation of Selling in America*, 42.

³² Keystone View Company, *Manual of Instructions from the Keystone View Company for the Use of Their Agents*, 20.

³³ Underwood & Underwood, *Manual of Instruction from Underwood & Underwood*, 21.

might trust the imprimatur of an institutional customer,” and that companies sought “association with well-known public sites” so fervently that they sometimes sold their products at a loss.³⁴

This was because the companies knew that whether used formally in advertisements and press or mentioned informally by sales agents, the associational impact of their products’ use in upscale hotels or restaurants would help create desire and garner sales from middle-class consumers.³⁵ In developing associational relationships between Keystone’s products and the upper-class, educated, and aspirational public figures utilized in name drops, the company was seeking to associate the stereographs with the well-educated and successful.³⁶

This emphasis on associational value and status anxiety were such a prominent point of Keystone’s sales pitch that the company discussed tactics for deploying it at great length in one of its sales agent guidebooks. When met with a customer rejection that claimed, “A rich man can get [stereographs], but I cannot afford them,” Keystone instructed its agents to give the following response:

Did you ever stop to think that over? Shall a man in moderate circumstances, or even a poor man, deny himself every means of self development just because he is not rich? You can get along without these views and you can get along without many things you have in your home, but you will not do so and you would be wrong to do so. A rich man can buy a thousand dollars’ worth of books at once, but that does not prevent you from buying one volume. He can buy 500 views at one time and you will get ten or twenty. Getting a small number at a time, you will make use of them while the rich man may never really study 20 of the views he buys. If these views are a good thing for the rich they are a good thing for you. Rich or poor, we all enjoy seeing places of interest in this old world of ours. The rich man cannot appreciate the beauty and grandeur of Niagara any more than

³⁴ Marina Moskowitz, “Public Exposure: Middle-Class Material Culture at the Turn of the Twentieth Century,” in *The Middling Sorts: Explorations in the History of the American Middle Class*, ed. Burton J. Bledstein and Robert D. Johnston (New York: Routledge, 2001), 170–84.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ There is no evidence that Keystone sold its products at a loss in exchange for the ability to use customers’ names, or solicit written testimonials, but the company otherwise used the same line of thinking that Moskowitz described in the silverware industry. Keystone’s later emphasis on placing stereographs in schools (with much fanfare) perhaps parallels the silverware placement more directly.

you can. If these views are intended for any class of men in particular, it is for men like you and I, who have not money enough to gratify a natural taste for travel.³⁷

It is unlikely that a sales agent recited this text verbatim, but it nonetheless illustrates the key concepts that Keystone wanted its agents to use in encouraging a sale. Keystone emphasized personal pride and self-improvement as a counterpoint to frugality, and incremental accumulation of stereographs in lieu of a one-time purchase of a lavish collection. The script pushed the use value of these objects, and complimented the cognitive skills of the user.

Keystone did not use the salesman's cliché that one 'couldn't afford *not* to buy the product,' but the company encompassed that concept in its emphasis on the value of having and using stereographs, compared to the loss in not having them. The power was not merely in the name drop itself, but the mark of quality that the name, and through it, the stereograph, represented.

Keystone took these notions one step further by publishing customer testimonials for agents to share verbally with their prospective customers. Keystone's agents sought written testimonials from their upper-class customers, which the company then distributed in *Review* and through internal company circulars, and encouraged agents to quote from them. This tactic was not new. Ebenezer Hannaford, in his 1877 manual for book agents, advised securing written testimonials from prominent people, regardless of whether they bought the book. Hannaford advised that agents collect a brief testimonial with "two or three strong, ringing adjectives," and that they be prepared to suggest the wording of a testimonial themselves.³⁸ Underwood & Underwood's sales manual was based on Hannaford's text, although it did not explicitly suggest agents seek out testimonials. Keystone's manual, which was based on Underwood's, also did not

³⁷ Keystone View Company, *Twenty Lessons in Stereograph Selling that are Supplementary to Our Manual Instruction* (Meadville, PA: Keystone, n.d.), 48.

³⁸ Hannaford, *Success in Canvassing: A Manual of Practical Hints and Instructions Specially Adapted to the Use of Book Canvassers of the Better Class*, 4–5.

mention securing them, and neither did *Keystone Review*. Despite this, it is apparent from the pages of *Review* that intrepid agents sought testimonials anyway.

In order to understand the power of testimonials and endorsements utilized by Keystone, it is necessary to examine their complicated early history in advertising and marketing. The earliest examples of endorsement and testimonial advertising date from the 1890s, contemporaneous to Keystone's practices.³⁹ A major early adopter of testimonials was the patent medicine and toiletry industries, and often rightfully these writings were met with skepticism from both consumers and watchdog organizations. Historian Jackson Lears characterized the "evangelical culture" of early patent medicine testimonials, where "the cries of the converted testified to the soul's deliverance from suffering."⁴⁰ While this impassioned response appealed to some customers, careful readers, journalists, and a committee of the American Medical Association were careful to point out contradictions, such as a single person's patent-medicine testimonial and death notice published in the same issue of a newspaper or magazine.⁴¹ Clearly awareness of this would have weakened the impact of their advertisements for some, yet other readers, either unaware of the hypocrisies or still moved by the discourse, found meaning in the problematic endorsements.

Critics and opponents of patent medicines may have approached testimonials dubiously, but other industries utilized testimonials that were tinged with earnestness. Journalist Alva Johnston, writing in 1931 and describing earlier testimonial advertising for a typewriter argued that early testimonials were more authentic than those published in the 1930s. He noted of the

³⁹ A thoughtful survey of 1890s testimonials is discussed in Ray Giles, "Testimonial Technique of Forty Years Ago," *Advertising and Selling* 15, no. 11 (1930): 22–23, 70–71.

⁴⁰ Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 143.

⁴¹ Kerry Segrave, *Endorsements in Advertising: A Social History* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2005), 3–13; Daniel J. Robinson, "Mail-Order Doctors and Market Research, 1890–1930," in *The Rise of Marketing and Market Research*, ed. Hartmut Berghoff, Uwe Spiekermann, and Philip Scranton (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 78.

typewriter ads, “first, they were true; second, they were signed by actual users of the typewriter; third, they were written by those who signed them; fourth, no cash was paid for them.”⁴² In hindsight, Johnston argued that there was a certain class of testimonial advertising that consumers interpreted as sincere and truthful, even in the face of nostrums’ puffery. Early testimonial advertisements classified as truthful by Johnston and Segrave lauded products as varied as the aforementioned typewriters endorsed by prominent authors, fountain pens endorsed by Oliver Wendell Holmes, and car tires endorsed by early auto racer Barney Oldfield.⁴³ These examples reflect Lears’ notion of the evangelical “cries of the converted,” but with a clearer correlation between the endorser and the product, because authors needed typewriters and fountain pens, and race car drivers needed tires.

Based on Johnston’s standards, Keystone’s customer testimonials generally fit among the sincere and truthful endorsements. Several testimonials can be traced back to an agent’s published letter in *Review* that described selling to the prominent figure in the issues prior to the publication of the customer’s text. In fact, several of the testimonials published in *Review* mentioned of the sales agent by name. Therefore, the existence of these testimonials may derive from an intent to praise the sales agent himself, by complimenting him as well as the product, to the company. The successful businessmen providing testimonials may have felt it important to contribute to the success of Keystone’s young businessmen, rather than out of an interest to support the company directly.⁴⁴ This was so common in nineteenth century American business practices that business writing manuals gave advice on writing endorsements of other

⁴² Alva Johnston, “Testimonials, C.O.D.,” *The Outlook*, March 18, 1931, 398.

⁴³ Segrave notes the Oliver Wendell Holmes endorsement in Segrave, *Endorsements in Advertising: A Social History*, 5. The rest were cited in Johnston, “Testimonials, C.O.D.”

⁴⁴ My use of the gendered term “businessmen” is due to the fact that none of the testimonials mention a female agent.

professionals.⁴⁵ In that sense, the testimonials invited agents into the testimonial-givers' rarified 'imagined community' by congratulating the agent's hard work and making sure his employers knew his merits. Furthermore, if the testimonial-giver knew that a company used their statement, Moskowitz and Schweitzer argued further benefits:

such individuals often gain a taste of minor celebrity by seeing their name in picture or print, and by imagining that their success will impress and influence their peers. Testimonials, therefore, both derive from and confer the prestige and authority of those who testify to the worthiness of a brand-name product, service, or experience.⁴⁶

Thus, while the historical record does not make clear whether Keystone's testimonial writers knew that they were going to be used in future sales pitches, they had several possible motivations for their actions. Whether they saw themselves as being polite, helping the sales agents, or standing out in their community, their actions inserted themselves into the company/agent/consumer relationship, and potentially swayed the opinions of consumers in the process.

Although testimonials were widely used in the sales industry during Keystone's early years, there was not yet any market research on the efficacy of these advertising and sales techniques. In the absence of market research during this period, it is impossible to know what percentage of the population were moved positively by testimonial advertisement.⁴⁷ The

⁴⁵ Marina Moskowitz and Marlis Schweitzer, "The Spirit of Emulation," in *Testimonial Advertising in the American Marketplace: Emulation, Identity, Community*, ed. Marlis Schweitzer and Marina Moskowitz (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 5. Moskowitz and Schweitzer cite examples including *Hill's Manual of Social and Business Forms* (1878) and *A New Letter Writer for the Use of Gentlemen* (1877).

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ There does not seem to have been any market research that analyzed the audience reception of testimonial-based advertisements and marketing until the 1920s. Jean Converse, in her study on survey research dates the earliest advertising-focused market research to a University of Minnesota psychology study in 1895. While there may have been other early attempts, both Converse and Daniel Robinson cited market research's serious beginnings in dedicated departments of individual magazine publishers (e.g., Curtis, the publisher of *Ladies Home Journal* and *Saturday Evening Post*) in the 1910s and especially in the founding of the J. Walter Thompson agency in 1920. Jean M. Converse, *Survey Research in the United States: Roots and Emergence, 1890-1960* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 89; Robinson, "Mail-Order Doctors and Market Research, 1890-1930," 87. Keystone and its contemporaries were already using testimonials long before these departments and firms were established. There is no indication that the company actively tested the efficacy of these testimonials.

companies running early testimonials would not have continued had it conclusively tarnished their reputations. Consequently, they must have found positive responses to their testimonials despite some public criticism. Those customers who responded positively to testimonial and endorsement are the focus of this chapter. The relationship of the testimonial to those influenced by it is a unique one. As Marina Moskowitz and Marlis Schweitzer described it, “[t]estimonial advertisements insert into the negotiation between buyer and seller the words of a third party, presented as disinterested in the commercial transaction but in some way knowledgeable about the product at hand and willing to share that knowledge.”⁴⁸ That intervention is an influencer in the situation, giving the prospective consumer more information to consider. He or she may be influenced not only by what the testimonial said, but also the power of the person who said it.

In many testimonials, Keystone’s agents mobilized ‘snob appeal,’ associating the stereographs with highbrow “snobbish” taste, by creating a sense that buying stereographs would place the consumer in kinship with upstanding citizens. Upper-class society figures and successful businessmen attested to the power of Keystone’s images. By doing so, the company hoped that the average citizen would feel influenced to indulge in similar finer things. The purchase of stereographs was framed as an opportunity for entrance into an ‘imagined community,’ where a shared activity or knowledge unites a disparate group who will otherwise “never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”⁴⁹ When viewing Keystone stereographs, viewers would share the same visual knowledge of an image (complemented by any texts on the card’s verso), but the ‘imagined community’ concept transcends shared knowledge, and enters also into the emotive space of associational value. By using the exact same stereographs as aspirational

⁴⁸ Moskowitz and Schweitzer, “The Spirit of Emulation,” 1.

⁴⁹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 26.

figures, the prospective consumer is presented with a means to enter into the testifier's 'imagined community,' where the consumer can share in his or her use and appreciation of the same product.⁵⁰

Through the shared testimonials, Keystone's consumers could project themselves as one with upper-class genteel Americans by purchasing stereographs. This mirrors the enduring argument about the mix of family and aspirational figures in *carte de visite* albums, made most recently by Elizabeth Siegel, who also framed album assemblages as an example of an 'imagined community.'⁵¹ Yet perhaps the 'imagined community' notion reifies the system more than is appropriate. The original testimonial-giver did not care whether he was in communion with a rural farming family. He may have preferred not to be, just as a U.S. Civil War general probably did not care how many of his *carte de visite* portraits Mathew Brady or E. & H. T. Anthony may have sold. At face value, the community is one-sided, allowing a sense of subscription or social climbing to those who could gain from it, but little motivation for those to whom others aspired. This is exactly the sort of 'imagined community' that motivated consumer culture in the early twentieth century. As Judy Hilkey's book on success manuals in the early twentieth century demonstrated, Americans were clamoring for advice on ways to attain higher rungs of society, to which they aspired, or to "hold on to what they had."⁵² Success manuals gave aspirational social climbers a roadmap to further their success, but Keystone testimonials indicated a more direct-access tool. Keystone's customers would share the very images that were meaningful or

⁵⁰ While this has been addressed relative to celebrity culture in an article by Marlis Schweitzer, her focus was on how photographs propelled fame, whereas my work with Keystone looks at how fame propelled photographs. I hope to address this topic in depth at a later time, but for the purpose of this thesis, I simply want to introduce this relationship. Marlis Schweitzer, "Accessible Feelings, Modern Looks: Irene Castle, Ira L. Hill, and Broadway's Affective Economy," in *Feeling Photography*, ed. Elspeth H. Brown and Thy Phu (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 204–36.

⁵¹ Siegel, *Galleries of Friendship and Fame: A History of Nineteenth-Century American Photograph Albums*, 152–53.

⁵² Hilkey, *Character Is Capital: Success Manuals and Manhood in Gilded Age America*, 28.

educational to the upper-class Americans to whom they aspired. By studying the very same photographs, they shared a visual experience, understanding, and vocabulary, provided by Keystone's stereographs and their captions. Keystone's stereographs gave the rural and urban lower- and middle-class alike a means to emulate their genteel, wealthy counterparts by sharing in their sense of wonder – and understanding – of the places depicted in the photographs. In sharing in the same mass media photographs, they were positioning themselves into an imagined community with this shared visual and cultural understanding. This notion of the Keystone-induced imagined community is crucial to understanding the impact of testimonials on its potential consumers. The testimonials' intervention reminded consumers that upstanding citizens believed in Keystone's product, which was more powerful than the word of the company or its agents alone. It invited Keystone's consumers to see how they could rise to a new station in life through this shared space of the imagined community.

In both the act of name-dropping and especially in their quoting from testimonials, Keystone's agents inserted upstanding figures into their interaction with consumers, which they hoped would encourage sales. By deploying testimonials verbally, rather than in print, the testimonials served as a social tool, rather than a polished advertisement. In customers' parlors and living rooms, hearing about well-known locals and figures of widespread renown would have engaged a sense of information conveyed informally, not unlike gossip. Sharing 'gossip' about a public figure's interest in or preference for stereographs would thereby reinforce the imagined community. The very nature of gossiping by making private information public creates the sense that the prospective consumer and the public figure existed within the same sphere.⁵³

⁵³ Kathleen A. Feeley and Jennifer Frost, "Introduction," in *When Private Talk Goes Public: Gossip in American History*, ed. Kathleen A. Feeley and Jennifer Frost (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 1–16. My understanding of the historical construct of gossip has also been informed by the essays in this volume.

This more informal act of testimonial emphasizes the imagined community for consumers motivated by testimonial appeals. The agent demonstrated the stereographs to the consumer, and informed him that an aspirational figure believes in the product. The customers, in turn, buy the product for themselves, in part because the figure's testimonial informs their appreciation for the product. The consumer may envision himself as a member of the same rarefied community as the testimonial giver. Elizabeth Siegel described this one-sided notion of the imagined community in her book, where the act of collecting implies associational value, connecting the two parties.⁵⁴ However, with Keystone's views, the consumer and the aspirational figure now share a set of photographs that educate and inform their worldview, which relates it more directly to Anderson's sense of the 'imagined community.'

Because of the lack of detailed records about the consumers themselves, the testimonial writers become a tool to understand the consumer mentality. Even with the uncertainties about the writers' motivations, they provide a more concrete body of evidence about Keystone consumers' behavior. This, in turn, illuminates why Keystone's consumers were convinced to buy stereo cards, and may speak to broader relationships with consumer urges in the photographic industry.

Examining the Testimonials

Keystone's testimonials helped prospective customers envision membership to upper-class 'imagined communities,' and it is therefore important to understand the sort of 'communities' that Keystone engaged through these texts. Keystone honed its sales pitch from decades of direct-selling experience, and thus one should assume that Keystone saw the

⁵⁴ Siegel, *Galleries of Friendship and Fame: A History of Nineteenth-Century American Photograph Albums*, 152–53.

testimonials as a valid complement to its existing practices. In the text that follows, I have grouped the testimonials into several key themes and topics: educational power, travel surrogacy, snob appeal, and value. While each testimonial writer in these groupings argued their points with different examples, comparisons, and connotations, they collectively served to signal the power of Keystone's products. Furthermore, they serve as examples of the sort of people that consumers found aspirational or motivational, and who consumers may have been seeking to emulate when inspired by the testimonial's content.

Testimonials are inherently an act of endorsement, but it does not mean that people unanimously believed them. A 1920s study by the J. Walter Thompson advertising agency found that female respondents were skeptical of the endorsements of society women, or found their "recommendations irrelevant to the more modest circumstances of their own lives," and questioned whether the endorser actually used the products they endorsed. While this study postdated Keystone's original foray into testimonials, Keystone may have felt this latter issue in its own use of testimonials, because by the 1920s they provided sales agents with copies of checks written to the company by Henry Ford and other prominent businessmen, which often accompanied its testimonial or evidenced the veracity of a name-drop (Figure 5.1). Agents were encouraged to show these checks to prospective customers, which would emphasize not only that a high-profile customer such as Henry Ford patronized Keystone, but that he spent significantly on the products. In early testimonials from the 1890s and early 1900s, Keystone was not fixated on proof, instead focusing primarily on ostentatious titles or well-known public figures.

In its first decade of business, Keystone management was perhaps the proudest to have a testimonial from Professor Philip Van Ness Myers, a historian and author of several history textbooks in the late nineteenth century, who briefly served as the president of the University of

Cincinnati. *Keystone* reprinted and referenced the Myers testimonial more than any other text. *Review* published a letter from Frank A. Wildman, a *Keystone* agent and later its sales manager, that noted that he had received the testimonial, and noted that Myers was “one of the leading educators of the State of Ohio.” In stating this, Wildman made sure that *Keystone*’s staff understood the potential impact of this testimonial.⁵⁵ Myers’ book, *General History* (first published in 1890), as well as texts about ancient and medieval histories, were widely used as textbooks in American high schools and colleges. Citing his name, therefore, would either mean something to a knowledgeable and educated reader, or create a sense of status anxiety or guilt from someone who did not recognize the name. Furthermore, citing his title as “professor” and noting that he was the president of a university, would have imbued significant gravitas in his stature. Sales agents coded Myers as an educational leader whose word was to be trusted. Consequently, when Myers stated, “You have brought within reach of every one [sic] the most important of the advantages of home and foreign travel. To look at these views is to look upon the scenes and subjects themselves,” he was amplifying his worldliness and firsthand personal experiences.⁵⁶ Myers’ testimonial is generic and straightforward enough that it would not overwhelm any prospective customers who had never heard of him, but for anyone who knew he wrote about ancient and early modern history, they might assume he had firsthand experience with seeing many of the sites that *Keystone* photographed personally in his travels.

Academics did not exclusively focus their testimonials on their worldliness. David Ross Boyd, the founding president of Oklahoma University, stated in his testimonial that he owned a collection of *Keystone* stereographs, and that he “regard[ed] them as valuable as a means of entertainment, as well as a means of education. They are very fine in that they represent

⁵⁵ F. A. Wildman, in “Latest Dispatches from the Front,” *Keystone Review* 3, no. 12 (October 1901): 4.

⁵⁶ P. V. N. Myers, in “Worth More than they Cost,” *Keystone Review* 3, no. 12 (October 1901): 3.

faithfully the details of the subjects they present. I am glad to recommend them as worth much more than they cost.”⁵⁷ Boyd reassured consumers when he mentioned that he owned Keystone stereographs, because it emphasized that his testimonial came from direct experience with the product. After affirming the realism of the images, Boyd’s concluding remark about value would resonate widely among careful consumers. Others emphasized the stereograph’s benefit in formal education, rather than its benefit for individual consumers. For example, Rose Bland, a sixth-grade teacher in Normal, Illinois breathlessly described students’ enthusiasm for stereographs. Students, she observed, happily studied stereographs during class breaks, and eagerly showed her details they saw in the images. She concluded in her extensive testimonial:

That the pictures were of real value was shown by the remark heard many times in class: ‘I did not understand what was meant by the book until I looked at the pictures.’ These pictures, better than any others I have used in the school room, help the pupils to get clear images. I heartily recommend them.⁵⁸

Bland’s testimonial was a testament to visual learning. It was most applicable to other teachers and their use in the classroom, and therefore important as Keystone transitioned to a stronger educational emphasis, however, it was also relatable to anyone who sought to educate and inform themselves at home, or parents interested in supplementing the education of children around the same age as Bland’s students.

Collectively, educators may have implied a sense of status anxiety to the generally uneducated public, but Keystone’s use of their messages was approachable and softened this provocation. Their testimonials served to validate the educational value of the material, and others, like Boyd, further validated them as a ‘smart’ investment. By focusing on the images’ realism, value, and content, they addressed the benefit for consumers in gentler, relatable terms.

⁵⁷ David R. Boyd, in *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Rose Bland, in “Some Progressive Schools and Keystone Views,” *Keystone Review* 10, no. 3 (April 1907): 43.

In doing so, these educators served as a polite intermediary between agent and consumer, more graciously offering a sense of endorsement than the agent alone may have provided. The author of textbooks, a university president, and a progressive educator uniformly signaled an unbiased opinion about the value of the product. These endorsements could have counteracted any distrust that the consumer may have had with traveling sales agents, and allowed for a third-party validation of the product at hand. The consumer may not have been as well educated as the sales agent or the testimonial-giver, but the statements quoted invited them into their hallowed imagined community. Invoking the name of “Professor P. V. N. Myers,” the famed author of history textbooks and university president, who stated that the views were tantamount to travel carried more influence than the same statement uttered by a young-adult sales agent. Keystone’s testimonials served, therefore, as an influencer within the sales pitch, and, assuming that the agents correctly remembered the testimonial-giver’s name and general sentiment, served as a more pointed universal endorsement in the canvassing exchange than that of the agent and sales pitch alone.

Myers was not the only testimonial-giver to emphasize the photographs’ relationships to travel. Harvard geology professor T. A. Jaggar, Jr. wrote that Keystone stereographs were “taken under circumstances of extreme difficulty and danger, and represent subjects which are very rare and hard to photograph.”⁵⁹ Another testimonial from the wife of a judge, wrote:

[Keystone stereographs] are the finest in every respect that I have ever seen. I enjoy looking at these scenes in the quiet of my home (reproduced so true to nature as they are), much more than to undergo the fatigue and discomfort attendant upon travel; they also have a refining and ennobling influence. As the stereoscopic views are the truest to nature of any pictures, they should be in any home.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ T. A. Jaggar, Jr., in “What Our Patrons Say,” *Keystone Review* 6, no. 4 (March 1903): 3.

⁶⁰ Mrs. J. H. Holt, in “What Our Customers Say,” *Keystone Review* 3, no. 11 (September 1901): 3.

These testimonials claimed that the images were a successful surrogate for travel, and that assertion gained potency when affirmed by people who could afford the actual experience of travel. Stereographs have been compared frequently to armchair travel, but these testimonial writers took the notion further by likening it to travel directly.⁶¹ For the majority of Americans who could not manage the expense of travel within their own country or abroad, the testimonials assured consumers that the experience of the photographs would be equally educational to the act of traveling, and allowed them entrance into the imagined community of world travelers.⁶² In fact, the judge's wife took this notion a step further by asserting that the views were more delightful than the actual travel experience, emphasizing that the views were potentially even better than travel itself. These testimonials, therefore, minimize one's sense of status anxiety by providing a far more affordable and accessible method of accomplishing the same goal, and emulate the experience that the average consumer could not afford. Travel-focused testimonials would reassure prospective wanderlust customers that they were not missing out in their inability to travel, and thus satiate any envy that they felt toward those who could.

Another Keystone testimonial sounded great, but was from a somewhat unsavory figure.

J. W. Green of Dr. H. H. Green's Sons in Atlanta had a testimonial published twice in *Review*.

Green wrote:

The art cabinet of the world I purchased from your Mr. Grace has given me a new conception of stereoscopic views. I have bought views again and again, but none I have ever had can compare with these in clearness, beauty and realistic effect. I never tire of

⁶¹ For work on the stereoscope as a method of armchair travel see Batzli, "The Visual Voice: 'Armchair Tourism,' Cultural Authority, and the Depiction of the United States in Early Twentieth-Century Stereographs"; Parmeggiani, "From Grand Tour to Virtual Tour: Italy through the Stereoscope in 1900"; Stakelon, "Travel through the Stereoscope"; David E. Haberstick, "American Photographs in Europe and Illusions of Travel," in *American Photographs in Europe*, ed. David E. Nye and Mick Gidley (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1994), 57–75.

⁶² For research on American travel and vacation habits, see Aron, *Working At Play: A History of Vacations in the United States*; Shaffer, *See America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880-1940*; Orvar Löfgren, *On Holiday: A History of Vacationing* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); John A. Jakle, *The Tourist: Travel in Twentieth-Century North America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985). Jakle, in particular, describes a tourist who experienced a place after having studied it in a stereoscope and found it as she expected it (pp. 40-41).

looking at them, but value them more and more after each excursion through the cabinet. As one penetrates into their depths, a keen sense of pleasure steals over him, as though he stood without one particle of fatigue in the midst of the earth's grandeur.⁶³

This lofty praise emphasized the quality of Keystone's views above all else, likened the viewing experience to travel itself, and noted Green's significant collection, through reference to his "cabinet," a system Keystone created to house at least one hundred stereographs. Green's company, however, was a patent medicine business, which claimed to be able to cure edema with "vegetable remedies." Dr. H. H. Green's Sons was a mail order concern that advertised extensively in newspapers. The American Medical Association classified the product as a nostrum, and cited allegations that linked Green's cure to a patient's sudden death.⁶⁴ While these elements may have made the endorsement suspect to the Thompson agency's respondents who cast a critical eye on testimonials, the flashiness of the company name, including the word 'doctor' and 'sons,' may have made it sound like a formidable and longstanding business to the uninitiated. Keystone does not describe Green's product in its publications of the testimonial, and it is not known whether the company was aware that Green's cure was a nostrum. In publishing this testimonial twice, Keystone was likely trying to take advantage of Green's florid words and respectable sounding company name, and either did not know that Green's products were worthless, or assumed that Keystone's customers would not know.⁶⁵ An air of impressiveness drove testimonials, and Green's testimonial represented that sensation, despite his company's questionable product. Thus, even when the testimonial source was involved in

⁶³ J. W. Green, in "What Recent Purchasers Think of Our Goods," *Keystone Review* 4, no. 6-7 (May 1902): 4.

⁶⁴ *Nostrums and Quackery: Articles on the Nostrum Evil, Quackery and Allied Matters Affecting the Public Health; Reprinted, with or Without Modifications, from the Journal of the American Medical Association*, volume 2, ed. Arthur J. Cramp (Chicago: Press of the American Medical Association, 1921), 511-513. Available online: <https://books.google.com/books?id=Ngo2AQAAMAAJ> Accessed 20 September 2016.

⁶⁵ Pamela Laird noted that as early as 1894 critics began attacking patent medicine producers for both the content of their medicine and their advertisements. Laird, *Advertising Progress: American Business and the Rise of Consumer Marketing*, 50. I was not able to locate early criticism of Dr. H. H. Green's Sons' product, however, so it remains unknown when the first problems with it arose.

potential quackery, the content and context of the review instilled with the power that Keystone sought to present in their usage. In testimonials like this one, Keystone was putting itself in a situation where the company may have understood the nature of the testimonial giver, even if the public may not. Dr. Green was playing the role of a high-society figure who was both a doctor and a businessman. His testimonial engaged ‘snob appeal’ by demonstrating that a person of his apparent high status found great benefit in Keystone’s views. However, engaging Dr. Green’s testimonial, perhaps more than the education and travel-oriented ones, had the potential to backfire on the agent, especially if the customer had used Dr. Green’s vegetable remedies and been disappointed. To those customers, Green lacked credibility. His word would have been only as good as his product.

In perhaps the ultimate contrast of ‘snob appeal’ to the Dr. Green testimonial, Keystone also published testimonials from an upper-class man who worked for a legitimate medical company. John Smack of S. S. White Dental Company wrote, “I will make a statement which to some may sound extravagant, still it is true. My art gallery of paintings cost me \$250,000. My family and myself have taken more instruction and real pleasure out of the views than we have from our whole art gallery.”⁶⁶ Whether overblown, like Smack’s review, or subtler, upper-class citizens’ testimonials spoke of their station in life, and the benefit they found in Keystone views. For another example, in 1902, *Review* published a letter from “Mrs. G. A. R. Devereux, Editor Blue Book, etc.” *Review* was erroneous in Devereux’s first initial (her first name was Clara, and her husband was Arthur), and did not explain that her *Blue Book* was a social register of the Cincinnati elite, although its reputation may have preceded it.⁶⁷ Devereux’s husband was an

⁶⁶ John Smack, in “What Our Patrons Say,” *Keystone Review* 6, no. 4 (March 1903): 3.

⁶⁷ *Blue Book* was a long running and relatively well-known publication in the region. An article in *Cincinnati* magazine noted that the *Blue Book* was still printed in 1979.

American Civil War hero and politician. She pursued journalism, writing editorials and a local social column, before publishing the *Blue Book*. As both a socialite and the queen bee of society's who's-who, Devereux's opinion had impact in Cincinnati, and garnered name recognition outside of the city as well.⁶⁸ Her testimonial stated, "They are certainly marvelous and exceed beyond measure anything of a similar sort that I have seen. They are reality itself. They educate the eye as a good book does the mind."⁶⁹ Her claims were short, memorable, and pithy, but especially highlighted that lives of excesses could be further improved by Keystone's photographs.

The high-society testimonials did not allege that Keystone stereographs made people successful, but rather that successful people appreciated Keystone. People who could have objectively afforded any luxury considered Keystone both a good investment and a product that added value to their lives. For customers who had less money to spend and more goods than ever to spend their money on, a testimonial like that was compelling. As an influence on the sales process, testimonial givers like Smack and Devereux assured that Keystone's products were a virtually unrivaled value. Similar to the way in which the travel testimonials allayed one's sense of envy and worry over not being able to travel, these testimonials assured that Keystone's products held up against untold wealth and fancy goods, and allowed a relatively inexpensive opportunity to emulate the lives of the wealthy.

Testimonials from successful (or seemingly successful) citizenry depicted Keystone's stereographs as products that satisfied the discerning tastes of the elite. In turn, they signaled to consumers, who knew that they may never be as rich, famous, or learned as these figures, that

⁶⁸ Mrs. Devereux presented a paper at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, and through her journalism was published more widely than Cincinnati alone.

⁶⁹ Mrs. G. A. R. [sic] Devereux, in letter to Keystone View Company, *Keystone Review* 4, no. 5 (March 1902): 2.

they might inch themselves closer with the relatively affordable stereographs. The testimonials showed ordinary citizens, such as farmers, tradesmen, and their spouses, a way to join the ‘imagined community’ of these elite citizens, sharing in the visual and textual messages of Keystone’s stereographs, and discovering similar appreciation and value for the materials. In the canvass procedure, these testimonials potentially influenced consumers through their endorsement, and assuaged concerns over the investment. Testimonials may not have been influential to all consumers, but the breadth and regularity with which Keystone published it in *Review* demonstrated that it must have been influential to at least some consumers, and a more powerful tool for its agents than any other material they could have printed in the limited space of the magazine.

In addition to the testimonials from upstanding citizens, Keystone also utilized testimonials from more average or typical citizenry, including farmers. This, too, served a crucial function. The same Thompson’s agency study cited previously noted that the women surveyed claimed they “would have preferred instead to learn about the tastes and consumer habits of everyday people” compared to famous or elite citizens.⁷⁰ In using testimonials from average citizens, Keystone was aware that some people responded better to testimonials from people more similar and relatable to themselves. In providing testimonials to Keystone, average citizens would have been made to feel important to the company, and were able to distinguish themselves as people who spent their time well and bought the right sort of products with their discretionary income. In collecting and disseminating these testimonials, Keystone provided more options that agents could use to influence their customers. To prospective consumers, these testimonials may have a more truthful ring to them, because the testimonial givers were more relatable. This

⁷⁰ Quoted in Matt, *Keeping Up with the Joneses: Envy in American Consumer Society, 1890-1930*, 53.

served as further reassurance that their purchase would not be a poor decision, and influenced the sales transaction.

A typical example of an average citizen's testimonial is one by "M. M." of Missouri, who wrote,

One of your representatives has been recently soliciting among the farmers of this community, and has done excellent business. A neighbor, some time ago, bought a dozen views from Sears Roebuck, and was fairly well satisfied with them until he saw Keystone Views, bought from your company, before this young man called. After the man saw Mr. A's views, he said he would give the entire dozen that he got from Sears Roebuck for one Keystone view. He had said this to so many neighbors and it helped your representative so much that he secured an order from almost everyone upon whom he called. Surely your goods are unsurpassed.⁷¹

This testimonial represents the key talking point in all the average citizen testimonials: the overall quality of Keystone's product. This example is perhaps the most useful to address because it speaks in specifics about the sort of population canvassed, and compares Keystone's goods to an alternative, inexpensive source for stereographs.⁷² Yet this testimonial is also unusual because it is secondhand. "M. M." is not the person endorsing Keystone images over those produced by Sears, but simply reporting it. This emphasizes the 'everyman' nature of this sort of testimonial. Neither the newly converted Keystone consumer nor "M. M." are worth identifying by name, as their names would not have any recognition outside of their local farming community. The power in this testimonial becomes the strength of the argument, not the identity of the endorser's voice.

A comparison of patent medicine magnate Green and "M. M.'s" testimonials show deep similarities in their claims. Both described having experienced stereographs produced by other

⁷¹ M. M., "Who Says it is Hard to Meet Competition with the Cheap View Concern," *Keystone Review* 9, no. 9 (October-November 1906): 138.

⁷² Interestingly, Keystone did not publish the names of competing stereograph publishers who sold door-to-door when mentioned in agents' letters. Mentioning Sears by name is therefore unusual. Perhaps Keystone used Sears's name because they did not see them as a direct competitor because their products were different (photolithographic stereographs, compared to Keystone's real photographs).

publishers, but not discovering the thrill of stereography until they gazed upon Keystone views. To both Green and “M. M.’s” neighbor, Keystone’s views were a superior product. For “M. M.,” it was because of quality as a general measure of value. Green, on the other hand, is more specific in his text. He described the product with more florid language the pleasure derived from viewing “earth’s grandeur.” Green’s highbrow description resonates through snob appeal, but “M. M.” was more directly to the point and plain by declaring to Keystone, “Surely your goods are unsurpassed.” For an agent who was able to read prospective customers through their personality and home décor, he could decide whether Green’s snob appeal or “M. M.’s” straight talk would be more appropriate. This allowed more options and flexibility in the way agents could employ testimonials and influence consumers.

In another testimonial, Keystone provided the testimonial giver’s full name, but did not state his occupation. Presumably, therefore, the agents would not have known what he did for a living, and could not have conveyed this to customers. William Lamprecht proclaimed that the concept of a visual world tour, “relieved and embellished by a careful selection of art, humorous and childhood studies,” which could be added to over time and as desired “[left] nothing to be desired.” This was the only testimonial that cited Keystone’s entertaining views, rather than simply their educational world tour images. Mentioning this category of views demonstrated that a consumer need not be ashamed to buy views that were primarily entertaining or sentimental, rather than educational. Lamprecht continued his testimonial by stating to “Mr. Brown,” the agent to whom he addressed the letter, “The fact that I have given you cards of introduction to a number of gentlemen whose friendship I most highly value, is the strongest evidence I can give you of my appreciation of your work.”⁷³ In stating that he has referred Keystone’s agent to his

⁷³ William Lamprecht, in “Dispatches from the Front,” *Keystone Review* 4, no. 2 (December 1901): 4.

friends, he demonstrated that he was contentedly endorsing the product and the sales agent himself to trusted confidants, and is engaging sales agent Brown in the professional networking that Moskowitz and Schweitzer described as a motivator for testimonial writers.⁷⁴ If invoked by an agent to a prospective customer, Lamprecht's decision to provide references would reassure prospective customers of his sincerity, while also inferring the Keystone agent as a respectable businessman.

Like the upper-class testimonial givers, testimonials by everyday people emphasized quality, but rather than compare to art collections or the act of traveling, testimonial writers considered Keystone's products against more affordable lithographic stereographs sold by mail-order catalogs and assessed their entertainment value. These testimonials did not serve an emulative role. Instead, they more clearly illustrate the typical consumer's interest in the product. Careful, budget-conscious consumers were not concerned with whether the stereographs rivaled 'art.' Instead, they wanted assurances about value relative to image quality and content. As Daniel J. Robinson described advertisements featuring testimonials from average citizens, these testimonials served as "a populist affirmation of the sound judgment and good sense of ordinary people."⁷⁵ Moskowitz and Schweitzer described 'average' consumers' testimonials as "implicitly promis[ing] that the consumer will achieve similar success."⁷⁶ In their endorsement of stereoscopic photographs, the 'average' citizens were affirming that anyone else like them would also share this opinion.

⁷⁴ Moskowitz and Schweitzer, "The Spirit of Emulation," 5.

⁷⁵ Robinson, "Mail-Order Doctors and Market Research, 1890–1930," 76.

⁷⁶ Moskowitz and Schweitzer, "The Spirit of Emulation," 3.

Ascribing Meaning to the Testimonials

I do not discount the fact that these testimonials are complicated sources. However, Keystone devoted several pages per year of its four-page magazine to publishing these testimonials, with over 120 different testimonial writers featured over the magazine's twelve-volume tenure. Therefore, the company must have believed them to be impactful. Keystone emphasized this impact in the acclamatory texts that introduced and accompanied them, which encouraged the agents to use and re-use them. In 1902, for example, *Review* noted,

We are giving up the larger part of the March number of the *Review* to testimonials for Keystone views, from various standpoints, as seen by men who are prominent in their special line, and who are regarded as authority on the subject about which they speak. Surely such strong words of commendation coming from these sources cannot help but have weight with those who are less capable of judging in regard to the merits and quality of the work which the Keystone View Company is producing and publishing. No claim of superiority, however strongly put by the firm, could have the weight which words of praise and friendly criticism from these men is bound to carry with them. [...] We would advise every salesman under contract to preserve this copy of the *Review*, and to commit to memory the testimonials from prominent purchasers and educators. These testimonials can be used very effectively in your canvass when you enter the field.⁷⁷

Keystone claimed to have “hundreds” more testimonials than they published, and offered additional examples to its agents upon request.⁷⁸ In descriptions like this one, they prescribed specific usage to the agent – “to commit [the testimonials] to memory” – and described their influence on the consumer – that the testimonials “cannot help but have weight with those less capable of judging.”⁷⁹ In this statement, Keystone made clear that it believed customers would be moved by the opinions of prominent citizens. This directly illustrates that the company was using status anxiety and snob appeal to motivate its customers, and that it understood Moskowitz and Schweitzer's notion of the testimonial-giver acting as a third-party influence in the sales process.

⁷⁷ W. W. Kincaid, editor's note, in *Keystone Review* 4, no. 5 (March 1902): 2.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 2-3. Additionally, *Review* mentioned producing circulars that included testimonials, although none of these publications survive.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

To some extent, this demonstrates that testimonials generally functioned the way that Keystone expected them to. Even if the names of the testimonial-givers or their exact words were misquoted, their intention to the consumer would have remained clear and their essence would have remained intact. A prospective consumer would have understood the meaning of a professor, judge, or socialite's endorsement, even if the agent fumbled their exact name, position, or specific praise of the products. Hence, even more than other possible divergences in the sales process, Keystone's testimonials would carry the same impact, even if the agent could not commit the testimonial to memory as directed.

While it is not possible to measure the use (either correctly or misquoted) of these testimonials, I argue that their impact was clarified by Keystone's statement and apparent tailoring of published testimonials. Through testimonials one can understand Keystone's customers' motivations more clearly, and realize them as less monolithically inclined than scholarship has previously implied. That is, these interests have been too often siloed as focused on armchair travel, education, or amusement, when a combination of all – and then some – become a more accurate rendition of consumer motivation. Contextualized through home entertainments, choice, and emotional applications of consumerism, Keystone crafted “what people want” (as sales agent Frank Otstot described it) by reminding and reassuring consumers of benefits beyond the photographs placed before their eyes and the script recited by its sales agents. The testimonials were intermediaries that informed consumers of an educational value that impressed learned instructors and the well-traveled, and a quality that outshone far more expensive products and consumables. Keystone's testimonials demonstrated the value placed in owning educational stereographs, and the potential role of consumer envy in customer motivation. The testimonials ostensibly show the appeal of Keystone's stereographs to the

people who were influenced the testimonials, but also serve as further evidence of Keystone's consumers' urges for an aspirational and autodidactic quest for knowledge at a time when formal higher education was out of reach for most. In engaging these aspirational, envious, and motivational urges, Keystone affirmed the stereographs' role as an aspirational tool and a portal to an 'imagined community.' Customers were made to feel that by owning stereographs they did not need to aspire toward expensive travel, education, or art collecting, because elites' testimonials assured them that the stereographs alone sufficed. These testimonials served to cast prospective consumers into an 'imagined community' with elite Americans, whereby owning and using Keystone stereographs they shared a common knowledge and visual vocabulary.

As a part of the sales transaction, testimonials were a potentially powerful influencer. As Keystone itself had noted, "No claim of superiority, however strongly put by the firm, could have the weight which words of praise and friendly criticism from these men is bound to carry with them."⁸⁰ Testimonials built upon the rhetoric already being delivered by the agent and the impressiveness of the photographs selected for demonstration. They worked in concert with the company's sales script, the agent's comportment, and the customer's interest to sway public opinions and encourage sales. In doing this, they helped agents more forcefully insist that Keystone's views were "truly what people want," while reminding them of the 'imagined community' they could join and emphasizing the photographs' quality and aspirational strengths. Examining these testimonials, therefore, allows one to reassemble key aspects of customer motivations. Keystone's use of the testimonials shows the company's sense of "what people want," and speaks to its methods of marketing in absence of traditional print advertisement. More broadly, the testimonials speak to the origins of stereographs' continued ubiquity in the

⁸⁰ Ibid.

early twentieth century by further imbuing the photographs with a strong, widespread, and associational appeal.

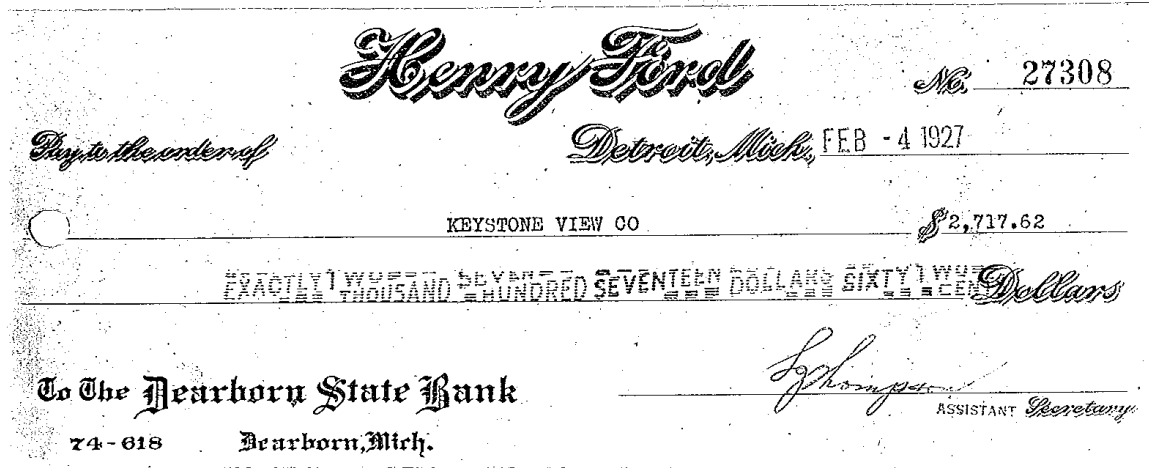


Figure 5.1. This reproduction of Henry Ford's check was included among promotional material sent to sales agents in the late 1920s, and would have been used to show prospective customers, proving that Ford was a major Keystone customer.

Conclusion

The four previous chapters examined the function of Keystone View Company stereo cards through the role of the company, sales agent, and consumer. Studying Keystone from these three perspectives illustrates that Keystone developed a business model that was wholly unlike other photographic imaging companies because its primary focus was sales, rather than the creation of images. Keystone used methods found in other American industries, including vertical integration, employee magazines, and corporate communication practices, to build a company capable of national and international success. In order to have such a powerful reach, Keystone had to hire a large sales force, mobilize thousands of agents at any given time to canvass the country, and demonstrate Keystone's stereographs and images to one household at a time. In addition to presenting themselves as earnest, wholesome figures, Keystone's sales agents utilized testimonials from upstanding citizens to further the products' appeal. The sum of these elements forged an empire. Millions of stereo cards entered American homes entirely due to the ways Keystone and its staff created a desire for these photographs.

Keystone's use of emotional appeals contributed to creating stereoscopic desire. The company built interpersonal relationships akin to Marchand's notion of the 'corporate soul' between its corporate office and employees selling in the field. By creating this kinship, Keystone encouraged employees' investment in the company, while simultaneously building relationships that enabled the management to enforce training on the sales agents in a more effective manner. Those agents, in turn, utilized their own aspirational value when presenting themselves as well-educated, upwardly-mobile entrepreneurs, who simultaneously offered their own endorsements of stereographs by selling them and sharing the endorsements of upstanding

citizens. Keystone understood the appeal of aspiration and utilized it in who the company hired, and the way in which it directed agents to present themselves. Aspiration was also apparent in its decision to publish many testimonials and encourage the sales staff to quote from the texts at length. In absence of traditional print marketing (which increasingly focused on emotional appeals), the agents served as a marketing surrogate.

These methods and relationships amplify the ways in which Keystone was unlike other photographic companies. Keystone invested boundless effort into the act of selling images, at a time when photographic images typically sold themselves. The most common photographic subjects fell into Martha Sandweiss's concept of "private photographs," portraits sold to their sitters; therefore, the need or appeal was already implicit.¹ Keystone, on the other hand, had to make explicit the appealing qualities of its "public photographs," in order to prove the images' worthiness.

The photographs produced by Keystone View Company have been a ripe topic for scholars in part because of the company's predominance in American visual culture. Keystone's ubiquity in the American educational system is illustrated by Darrah's oft-cited statement that by 1922, all American cities with a population of 50,000 or more were using Keystone stereographs in their public schools. Additionally, Keystone's former president George Hamilton asserted that every summer "the nation literally *swarmed* with stereograph salesmen during the [s]ummer months," which figuratively quantified the breadth of its door-to-door direct-selling program.² These statements provide illustrations of the wide reach of Keystone, but most scholarship has been happy to cite these facts, and accept these successes as a foregone conclusion. In my work,

¹ Sandweiss, *Print the Legend: Photography and the American West*, 6. Sandweiss's concept of "public" and "private" photographs will be discussed further later in this conclusion.

² Darrah, *The World of Stereographs*, 50; Hamilton, *Oliver Wendell Holmes: His Pioneer Stereoscope and the Later Industry*, 17. Original emphasis.

I have unpacked these shorthand explanations and challenged accepted orthodoxies by considering the business methods Keystone used to conquer the previously proliferated stereograph market.

In service to this, the first chapter of the thesis surveyed the existing literature on stereography and photographic business history and discussed the serious gap in addressing stereoscopy as a business. The second chapter described Keystone's business practices and how it utilized 'big business' concepts from other industries and applied it to photographic production to create one of the first photographic image-based national brands. The third chapter examined the ways that the company communicated with its employees, and the way in which it directed its employees to communicate with prospective consumers. Collectively these elements showed how the company envisioned itself and exerted its control over its employees, who were working far away from the corporate office in western Pennsylvania. The chapter also broached how customers interacted with stereography by looking at Keystone's example of a sample sales canvass. I argued that Keystone emphasized the visual appeal of the photographs over its educational content, which was a contrast to how competitors presented their work. Keystone's pitch focused on the aspirational, which was the subject of the fourth chapter. In the fourth chapter, I examined the role, characterization, and diversity of the Keystone sales agent. My research revealed that the agents who built Keystone's success were more diverse in age and gender than the company's archetypal description of the college student-turned-sales agent. I argued that Keystone management embraced the staff diversity because they understood that it would allow them to appeal to a broader audience, but that the external description of college students represented the aspirational, educational vision of Keystone's products, and therefore best represented the company mythos. In the final chapter, I address Keystone's consumers, by

attempting to understand their motivation for buying stereographs. While the answer to this question would vary with every customer, I focused on customer testimonials that Keystone supplied to sales agents, to examine what the company felt would appeal to prospective consumers. Broadly speaking, the testimonials represented notions of travel surrogacy, value for one's dollar, and 'snob' appeal; I argued that these various testimonials served as a pathway for consumers to join the 'imagined community' of the upstanding citizens whose endorsements were quoted.

Examining how Keystone sold and who sold for them emphasizes that Keystone was first and foremost a business. Keystone derived its core business model from other stereoscopic companies, but its practices were otherwise unusual in the photographic industry, which was primarily local, and retail shop-based. Keystone's practices were rooted more directly in business practices exemplified by other contemporaneous direct-selling concerns. Keystone represented a photographic industry contributing to what Alan Trachtenberg called the "incorporation of America": the growth of big business following the period of industrialization. Keystone applied photography into economies of scale; it changed how it marketed and sold so that its images could reach a national market. It customized the methods by which it sold its views, and understood the message imbued in the sales agents served as a means to maximize its impact, and thus its profits. It minimized its risk by placing shipping and travel expenses on its agents, so that agent failures did not cost the company money. Keystone understood what it was conveying, not just in the subjects of its photographs, but in its business process as well.

In the introduction to this thesis I posed a question: "If we treat a stereoscopic publisher like other national brands, and its wares either satisfy consumer demand or fail to do so and

therefore disappear or are modified, then what becomes of the history of photography and how does the role of the photograph change?" In the previous four chapters, I addressed how the company modified its practices to function as a national brand and trained its sales agents to create a large consumer demand. In the conclusion, I argue more broadly that introducing business histories into photographic history scholarship allows photography to be better situated within the culture in which it was made and consumed.

Inserting business history into photographic histories is an extension of the work put forth by scholars like Alison Clarke writing on Tupperware, or Regina Lee Blaszczyk writing on tableware and fashion.³ Their works integrate design history with research on companies' business practices, asserting that the design history cannot exist without acknowledging the business and everyday consumers behind the products. Blaszczyk asserted that the focus of fashion scholarship had so far been on

the Champs-Élysées, New Bond Street, or Fifth Avenue. Yet much is missing from the picture: the people on the side streets, dressed in ready-to-wear apparel or home-sewn clothes they believed were stylish; the distant lofts where the clothing was designed; the garment factories where it was made; the stores where it was sold; and the advertising executives, retail managers, market researchers, design-school instructors, magazine editors, and other ingenious entrepreneurs who worked behind the scenes to produce fashion.⁴

Fashion, like photography, has largely been addressed within art historical methods that privilege certain designers and practitioners as 'artists,' and ignores those operating in Blaszczyk's so-called "side streets." Keystone's photographs have not been canonized the way those of Sarony, Silvy, or other prominent nineteenth century commercial studios have been, and the company's presence is scant, if mentioned at all, in photographic history textbooks. Yet like the fashion on

³ Clarke, *Tupperware: The Promise of Plastic in 1950s America*; Blaszczyk, *Imagining Consumers: Design and Innovation from Wedgwood to Corning*; Blaszczyk, "Rethinking Fashion."

⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

the “side streets,” consumers, here thought of as average American citizens, were far more likely to encounter a stereograph by Keystone or one of the other major stereoscopic publishers, than happen upon a Sarony photograph. In my work, especially in Chapters 2 and 4, I have attempted to identify who these figures on the “side streets” were in stereography, by addressing both who sold for Keystone and where they were selling. As temporary sales agents, rather than professional photographers, their role in the photographic industry has been marginalized in histories up to this point, yet they were the people most directly responsible for introducing Keystone’s products into countless American households. Quite literally, with their door-to-door canvassing plans, they sought to bring stereographs not to the side streets alone but to *every* street.

If the stereograph industry in the 1890s and early 1900s is a photographic equivalent of Blaszczyk’s “side streets,” then it must be surprising to many scholars how well-traveled those roads were. There are no surviving accounting books or ledgers that definitively quantify the output of any of the major stereographic publishers, but Elmer Underwood, in his recollections to Robert Taft, supplied a statistic: in 1901, Underwood & Underwood alone produced 7,500,000 stereographs.⁵ Underwood’s competitors, including Keystone, James Davis, and H. C. White Company, were similarly sized, and likely produced in similar volume.⁶ Examining Keystone as a business allows a trend to emerge. It becomes apparent how a few photographic publishers (Keystone, Underwood, White, Davis, etc.) collectively created a resurgence of interest in a photographic format that had first gained popularity in the United States two to three decades

⁵ Underwood, “An Outline Re: The Firm of Underwood and Underwood,” 5.

⁶ Keystone’s last president, George Hamilton, described Underwood, White, Davis, and Keystone as equals in his Newcomen address. Hamilton, *Oliver Wendell Holmes: His Pioneer Stereoscope and the Later Industry*, 17.

earlier.⁷ Keystone and its ilk reinvented the photographic business model by choosing to sell by demonstration, door-to-door to individuals, especially in rural regions. Focused only on this sales method without utilizing any print advertising, the top companies each sold millions of views per year in the 1890s and early 1900s. This was the opposite of the typical photographic image-making model, where studios advertised heavily in local newspapers and through their storefronts in order to maintain business viability, and regularly touted techniques or the use of different photographic processes or papers as new and different from competitors. Keystone's success came without print advertisement, a storefront, or the introduction of any new techniques in its product line.

Although the statistics I have compiled in this thesis are limited to the sales agents mentioned in *Keystone Review*, these numbers are indicative of the significant national and international distribution that Keystone achieved within its first seventeen years of operation. While there is not room in this thesis to scale this data beyond the evidence I have compiled from Keystone's publications, Keystone was only one-fourth of the American stereoscopic publishing market. Each of the major stereoscopic publishing companies satisfied consumer demand and thrived, utilizing nearly identical sales practices, staff, and technique. As I noted in chapter three, there were differences in the ways that Keystone and Underwood directed agents to select and describe views in the sales canvass. Keystone advised agents to show images that were approachable and entertaining, whereas Underwood's selections and suggested dialog was more academic in nature. These differences meant that there were surely cases where a Keystone

⁷ While that, in and of itself, is a feat in a culture where things are often only popular or fashionable for a single season or a short span of time, the question of taste or trends is outside of the realm of this study. However, it was addressed in Laura Schiavo's dissertation, Schiavo, "'A Collection of Endless Extent and Beauty': Stereographs, Vision, Taste and the American Middle Class, 1850-1880." Consumer whims are interpreted in Steve Zdatny, "French Hairstyles and the Elusive Consumer," in *Producing Fashion: Commerce, Culture, and Consumers*, ed. Regina Lee Blaszczyk (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 231-49.

agent's appeal garnered a sale when an Underwood agent's appeal did not, or vice versa.

Revealing these differences shows how each business thought it could develop a competitive advantage. Furthermore, examining these issues illustrates difference in the companies' character that may not be apparent from the images alone. This is only made possible through a careful study of the companies' business practices.

I have argued throughout this thesis that Keystone did not function like a regular image-producing business, a photographic studio. This was especially true in the company's staffing composition. In the 1890s and early 1900s, Keystone had only a few photographers working in the field at any given time, but a few thousand sales agents working every summer.⁸ Keystone built a sales staff that grossly outnumbered the photographers, and invested significant amounts of time managing its sales agents and their daily interactions through corporate communication via personal letter and employee magazines. These practices were borrowed from contemporaneous big business, and proved that image-producing businesses could operate as a big business. Up to Keystone's founding in the 1890s, the only photographic big businesses were camera and film manufacturers; image-production remained a cottage industry.⁹ Keystone's use of contemporary big business practices illustrated that photographic business could be modified to operate as a national brand, by functioning as a business, generally, rather than a photographic business. Keystone's emphasis on sales management through corporate communications and the employee magazine exemplifies this as these practices were unique to photographic industries

⁸ An index of photographer names found in Keystone-Mast is fewer than one hundred credited image-makers over the course of the company's seventy-year tenure. Many photographs are uncredited, however, and it is therefore likely that they had more photographers. However, these numbers are definitely much smaller than the quantity of sales agents in the field at any given time.

⁹ For discussion of camera and film manufacturers, see Jenkins, *Images and Enterprise: Technology and the American Photographic Industry, 1839-1925*; Perry, "The Eastman Kodak Co. and the Canadian Kodak Co. Ltd: Re-Structuring the Canadian Photographic Industry, C. 1885-1910"; Pritchard, "The Development and Growth of British Photographic Manufacturing and Retailing, 1839-1914."

but derived from contemporaneous business practices. In doing so, Keystone reinforced the role of salesmanship in a business's success in a way that it was not emphasized previously in photographic image-making businesses.

Photographic salesmanship has also been underemphasized in scholarly literature where it is frequently approached only obliquely, and completely neglects the role of consumer choice. The daguerreotype, for example, is regularly described as an object that initially only the rich could afford. Of course, poorer people owned objects that were priced more preciously than a daguerreotype, which, at its onset cost the equivalent of a week's salary, but came down in price over the next decade.¹⁰ What is really meant by this narrative is that only a limited number of people, the majority of whom were wealthy, found the purchase of a daguerreotype a worthy expenditure. The rest of the public, those who never had a daguerreotype of themselves made, were not convinced the product was worth the financial sacrifice. The confluence of the consumer's financial choices and behaviors here meets squarely the role (or, perhaps in this case, the failing) of photographic salesmanship, in the photographer's inability to convince more consumers to have their likenesses made at the price that the photographer charged.

The role of salesmanship, therefore, reveals significant aspects of consumer choice, because salesmanship is inherently focused on affecting consumer behaviors. Acknowledging the place of salesmanship illustrates how it is a crucial influence on consumers' choices. Photographic scholarship would benefit from acknowledging this more readily. Instead, photography is too often seen as a product that sold itself. One example of this is narratives describing early visits to Daguerrean photographic studios. These contemporaneous narratives

¹⁰ Bill Jay, "Prices of Photographs: Average Charges for Images in Victorian Photographic Studios, 1841-1891," 3, available online at <http://www.billjayonphotography.com/Prices%20of%20Photographs.pdf> Accessed 20 September 2017.

projected that a sitter had already made up his or her mind about a purchase before entering a photographic studio.¹¹ Yet, even when treated as a pre-determined element, salesmanship imbued the narrative. The photographer had to entice visitors to his (or her) studio by making the business's presence known (an act of marketing), then convince customers that his skills would enable him to make a good picture of the sitter, or that his wares were worthy of the customer's discretionary income (an act of salesmanship). Scholars have pointed to these narratives as examples of consumers' experiences with photography, but such accounts should be seen more broadly as acts of salesmanship and consumer choice. Viewing narratives in this way poses new questions, such as why a sitter chose to have his or her portrait made at all, or why he or she selected a particular studio, especially in cities where one was presented with options. While these questions might not be answerable, an examination through this lens raises questions of consumer behaviors into photographic studies. Especially in a broader market (such as the post-Daguerrean era), consumers faced more options from which to choose. In chapter five, I address choice as an element of photographic salesmanship by looking at consumers' motives for acquiring stereographic images. By the time Keystone was on the market, the choices consumers faced were very different from the daguerreotype era. It was not about being the first on the block to have one's likeness made, or about whatever sense of value or influence may have come with being among the first to experience this new technology. Consumers' choices were made as a result of different sets of meanings and values imbued in the stereographic image as a worthy and uplifting tool for education and entertainment. Keystone's ability to influence in a

¹¹ See, for example, Edmund Saul Dixon's description of a visit to a Parisian female-run itinerant photographic studio in "More Work for the Ladies," published in Charles Dickens's magazine *Household Words*, 18 September 1852, pp. 18-19. In the article, Dixon describes at length the experience of posing and watching the camera operator at work, then simply pays for his photograph, without mention of the price (or any prior discussion of his motivation for choosing this photographer among many in Paris). The focus is on the novelty of the experience, rather than the context that led the narrator to that point.

competitive marketplace was due to the company's skills in salesmanship, which included casting the right (aspirational) sales agents into the field, showing the right (broadly appealing) images, and saying the right things (including mentioning customer testimonials). These points begin to speak to the place of photographic salesmanship, and through it, offer more tangible rationalizations for consumer motivations in relation to photography. Examining photographic salesmanship allows a more critical – and realistic – assessment of consumer choice than the poorly rationalized assessments that have been adopted previously, such as the notion of the daguerreotype as something afforded (rather than desired) only by the elite.

From a business standpoint, Keystone offered a new concept in photographic salesmanship as well. Up to the point of Keystone's founding, the primary place to purchase photographs was at the storefront connected to a photographic studio. In the photographic studio the sales staff was the photographer or staff that worked directly with him or her. Both photographer and staff were directly related to the act of making photographs, were often present when the images were made, and sold the work in the name of the studio's owner.¹² Keystone's sales staff, on the other hand, was geographically and socially divided from the photographers. For the most part, the photographers did not know or interact with the sales staff, and the sales staff were not connected directly with the making of images, and were selling images of places they often had not been. Keystone allowed modern sales techniques to replace the previous expectation of an experiential visit to a studio. This was a new approach for photography, where one's connection to the act of making the images had been a meaningful experience, but this was

¹² In larger studios where several that employed several photographers ("camera operators"), such as the studios of Mathew Brady or Napoleon Sarony, photographs bore the name of the studio's owner, regardless of the camera's operator. Anne McCauley describes this phenomenon in early French studios, as well, noting that the workers (rather than the owners) "are extremely difficult to reconstruct." Elizabeth Anne McCauley, *Industrial Madness: Commercial Photography in Paris, 1848-1871* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 38.

not unusual in other sales professions where there existed a more natural divide between production and distribution. This separation from the process of creation was an emerging shift in photographic sales, soon to be eclipsed by the rise of the photographic postcard and its production.¹³ Keystone's success proved that the charisma of the sales agent was as compelling of a sales driver as the aura of the photographer.

While Keystone ran a different sort of photographic company, the photographs they sold were also different. In *Print the Legend* (2002), Martha Sandweiss makes the distinction between what she terms "private photographs," which were made as "personal mementos," and "public photographs," which "were produced for less personal uses, and intended to be distributed through exhibition, publication, and sale."¹⁴ Up to this point, photography studios frequently produced "public photographs" to complement their primary work of portraiture and "private" images, but still primarily distributed these "public" images locally. Keystone, on the other hand, produced only "public" images, and sold them globally. This shifted emphasis to wholly "public" images is a key aspect of what distinguished Keystone's image production. With a diverse array of "public" images, Keystone's images were universally marketable, and the company capitalized on far-reaching interest in its selection of "public" images. Its sales demonstration exemplified this. By selecting broadly entertaining images, showing subjects of wide renown (such as Niagara Falls), minor amusements (the before and after marriage dichotomy), and attractive botanical views, Keystone's agents closed countless sales. In successfully creating widespread demand for its "public" images, Keystone demonstrated that an

¹³ Jeffrey Meikle provides a thorough description of postcard publishing company Curt Teich's sales process, which involved a salesman canvassing local businesses, making or procuring photographs, and sending them back to a home office in Chicago for airbrushing, retouching, and production. In this case, the Chicago office who created the final image were the ones who had likely never seen the place photographed in person. Meikle, *Postcard America: Curt Teich and the Imaging of a Nation, 1931-1950*.

¹⁴ Sandweiss, *Print the Legend: Photography and the American West*, 6.

image-producing company could operate like any other big business and effectively sell its wares at a national and international level through a diffuse sales force.

Although Keystone based its sales process on those developed by Underwood & Underwood, Keystone maintained traction in direct-selling stereographs longer than any of its competitors. As a corporation beholden to private shareholders, Keystone faced an expectation to remain profitable, so the company remained successful enough to support itself throughout its tenure. Keystone ceased business in 1963.¹⁵ Although direct-selling did not continue as a means to sell photography beyond Keystone's tenure, it does not lessen the impact of what Keystone developed. Through its business practices, Keystone demonstrated that photography could be produced at a different scale than previously encountered. The company created a pathway to broader distribution that was continued – and scaled even larger – by postcard companies, press agencies, stock image distributors, and ultimately, the internet, to provide worldwide access to Sandweiss's notion of “public photographs.”¹⁶ Keystone was among the first photographic companies that figured out how to provide national and international access to its images. These later types of photographic image-producing companies took this notion even further. Door-to-door sales was no longer necessary, because these later companies were not selling directly to consumers as Keystone did, but to even larger networks of retail centers and publications.

¹⁵ Facing decreased profits that were not sustainable, Keystone sold to one of its employees, Gifford Mast, who had designed optical devices for the company. Mast continued Keystone's optical device production, and the Mast family remains active in this field. The Masts, however, were not interested in continued image production, and after sitting dormant in Meadville for fifteen years, decided to donate Keystone's visual archives to the California Museum of Photography in 1978. Their donation is acknowledged in the name of the archive, “Keystone-Mast.”

¹⁶ Beginning in 1896, Underwood & Underwood began selling news photographs, and ultimately closed its stereographic business to focus on its press agency. In the twentieth century, Keystone established a press agency (also called Keystone View Company, run by Bert Garai), on Fleet Street in London. Underwood, “An Outline Re: The Firm of Underwood and Underwood”; Bert Garai, *The Man from Keystone* (London: F. Muller, 1965). For a more serious consideration of a major modern press agency, see Blaschke, “The Excess of the Archive.” For work on distribution practices in the postcard industry see Meikle, *Postcard America: Curt Teich and the Imaging of a Nation, 1931-1950*. For stock agencies see Frosh, *The Image Factory: Consumer Culture, Photography and the Visual Content Industry*.

Keystone represented the first shift toward truly mass-media photographs, with large populations accessing the exact same image; however, later companies were able to reach even further when selling images directly to media sources. Where Keystone once represented big business, its scale and practices today seem almost quaint in our twenty-first century global marketplace. Thus, while no photographic imaging companies followed in Keystone's pattern of building a large, sales-driven direct-selling network, companies were able to scale even larger.

When Keystone is evaluated as a business rather than exclusively as a producer of images, the role of the stereograph is contextualized not only among non-photographic consumable goods, but also situated differently within the photographic image-making industry. Looking at photography as a business has the potential to unify art-historical and media-studies approaches to photography, or, at the very least, add an important layer of context. For photographic historians, taking business at the center of a study contributes a cultural context that is often omitted from photo-history discourses, and provides a foundation for thinking about how photographs are used and engaged in society. For business historians, considering photography as more than just a byproduct of business acknowledges a robust and active marketplace that resonated with consumer society and reflected the growth of business size, as identified in other industries. Keystone is an exciting case-study because of the ways that the company's business practices were atypical to photography, and because of the ubiquity of Keystone's images, which was due to these very practices. However, I believe that this model can be applied to any photographic producer who attempted to make a living through photography. One's success in photography is equal part skills behind the camera and the ability

to market and sell the resulting images.¹⁷ It is time to acknowledge photographic business practices more directly.

This study has sought to contribute to the business history of photography. In my work I have questioned how Keystone's views became so ubiquitous. Piecing together archival evidence of the company's business history develops a concrete understanding of the company's practices, and their *raison d'être*. Perhaps it is too easy to say that Keystone was a business that happened to sell photographs. Yet, with a founder who was not a photographer by trade, this assertion does have value. Keystone was among the first American big businesses that created and sold photographs.¹⁸ By approaching the industry differently than other photographic businesses, Keystone grew a much larger audience than what was otherwise typical for a photographic studio and produced a different body of photographs.

For example, the photograph of oranges discussed in Chapter 3 (Figure 3.2), would have been an unthinkable subject for a photographic studio in Meadville because citrus could not be grown in Pennsylvania or anywhere nearby. By considering the image through its aesthetic and fine art values alone, one can evaluate the photograph in comparison to other botanical images, or in the level of skill in making a panchromatic photograph of a difficult subject or skill in applying hand-coloring to a monochrome image. Considering this image through the company's business practices further reveals Keystone's understanding of the relationship between vision, especially through stereoscopic imagery, and the other senses. Keystone's suggestion that agents

¹⁷ The recent introduction of Vivian Maier into the annals of photographic history is an excellent example of this. Maier was not at all interested in marketing or selling her photographs, so she remained an unknown figure in her lifetime. Her negatives in the hands of a born marketer/salesman/promoter created widespread awareness and adoration of her work.

¹⁸ Creating, rather than simply distributing, its photographs set Keystone apart from other major concerns like E. & H. T. Anthony who were simply distributors.

should comment that the oranges “look delicious” during the canvass process re-enforces the relationship between visual imagery, the physicality of the subject depicted, and the sense of taste. More broadly, considering business decisions relative to the photograph of oranges also introduces questions about the marketability of image subjects. Because Keystone dispatched photographers throughout the world, it was able to make this photograph of oranges and orange blossoms (despite the company location in a region that did not grow citrus), but the company potentially did this at the expense of other subjects. Keystone understood public interest in this still-exotic fruit, believing that this image would be profitable because of a vested interest by the American (and international) public with farming and citrus fruit. Based on how common this view is in institutional collections or for sale on eBay, Keystone clearly found success in selling this subject at 16-2/3 cents each, through knowing its audience and framing the image as a widely appealing and lifelike view.

More complexly, “Still There’s No Place Like Home” (Figure 4.2), depicts a stereograph consumer while emphasizing the ways in which the company understood those consumers. The image represents the stereotypical sales agent’s experience. In it, a clean-cut, college-aged man in a well-pressed suit demonstrated a stereoscope to a family's matriarch while her family also entertained themselves in the parlor. The family’s parlor showed signs of being upscale and technologically advanced. Both an Oriental rug and bearskin rug adorn the floor, and lace curtains trim the window. An electric lamp dangled from the ceiling. The two young children in the picture played with a Meccano set, which embraced the marvels of modern engineering and was a brand-new toy first sold in the United States in the year this photograph was made.¹⁹ The

¹⁹ The American Erector set did not debut until 1913; this was its predecessor. Meccano, “Meccano in the United States,” <http://www.usmeccano.com/> Accessed 6 January 2015. For more on the aspirational role of rugs, lace, and toys, see Susan J. Matt, *Keeping Up with the Joneses: Envy in American Consumer Society, 1890-1930* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

family seems well-dressed. The man of the house wore a suit and tie with cufflinks showing on his sleeves. The couple both hold books on their laps, instilling a sense that they are educated. Importantly, a large set of Keystone stereographs is to the right of the sales agent, with a smaller box, perhaps his sales outfit, sitting on top of the Keystone “cabinet” of views. In this image, Keystone was indicating that views were meant to educate as well as entertain, that stereographs were equal to the books that the couple or an equivalent to the children’s active interaction with the new and also educational Meccano set. All three (the book, the Meccano set, and stereographs) were aids in understanding the workings of the modern world. The fact that the agent was showing stereographs to the oldest person in the room emphasized that Keystone’s stereo views were for all ages, making it even more beneficial than a toy that the children would outgrow. Reading this image carefully shows how Keystone envisioned the stereograph consumer.

However, knowing about the company’s practices adds another element of explanation to the photograph. The card indicates on its obverse that it is the seventy-second image in a sequence. That number was not by chance. Keystone’s earliest world tour set was 72 cards long, and “Still There’s No Place Like Home” was intended as the final card in the series. Understanding the card’s placement in the set changes the meaning of its title. Without knowing this information, the stereograph is simply a nice genre scene of a family at home, but the title and placement at the end of a tour of the world re-casts Keystone’s consumers. The family matriarch looking at the stereographs has now been a figure transported. The narrative shifts to her sensation, and emphasizes a pride of place of the American home, an indication that Keystone’s customers would enjoy seeing the views from around the world, but that one’s own home was the most ideal locale for them. It echoes the sentiments uttered in customer

testimonials, such as Mrs. C. A. R. Devereux's observation that Keystone's stereographs "are reality itself. They educate the eye as a good book does the mind," in equating the books in the scene to the stereograph.²⁰ The image's title directly reflects Mrs. J. H. Holt's testimonial, "I enjoy looking at these scenes in the quiet of my home (reproduced so true to nature as they are), much more than to undergo the fatigue and discomfort attendant upon travel."²¹ When the context of Keystone's business practice is understood, the tranquil genre scene image of a harmonious family in a parlor becomes the embodiment of Keystone's corporate messaging.

Keystone was extremely intentional in its image publishing, hence the lack of an "Optical Delusion" image (Figure 4.1), even when direct competitors published this subject.

Understanding Keystone's business practices, especially the ways in which the company fashioned itself into a big business, communicated with its employees, presented its sales agents, and framed its customer demand, brings additional meaning to Keystone's photographs.

Examining Keystone as a business brings these new meanings to light and demonstrates how these arguments create essential context and meaning to ways in which other scholars have approached Keystone and stereography. This in turn shows the need for increased application of business histories into photographic history studies.

²⁰ Mrs. G. A. R. [sic] Devereux, in letter to Keystone View Company, *Keystone Review* 4, no. 5 (March 1902): 2.

²¹ Mrs. J. H. Holt, in "What Our Customers Say," *Keystone Review* 3, no. 11 (September 1901): 3.

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