

Review from *Stereo World*, November-December 2012, by John Dennis

The Hart of Railroad Stereography

Sometimes the most amazing books appear suddenly from the most unexpected sources. Such is the case with *Waiting for the Cars: Alfred A. Hart's Stereoscopic Views of the Central Pacific Railroad*. Partly in observance of the coming 150th anniversary of the start of construction on the Central Pacific Railroad in 1863, and partly because expanding a web-based 3-D gallery of Hart images "soon became a quest bordering on an obsession" for Wendell W. Huffman of the Nevada State Railroad Museum and University of Nevada Photography Professor Howard Goldbaum, this 480 page book was published by the above Museum in Carson City.

Many of the Alfred Hart stereoviews for the book were provided by NSA member Mead Kibby, who also wrote a biography of Hart for the book. It was Kibby who wrote the first published book on Hart, *The Railroad Photographs of Alfred A. Hart, Artist* (1996), reviewed in *Stereo World* Vol. 22 No. 5 page 18. While exhaustive in both railroad as well as photographic historical detail, its inclusion of 364 Hart railroad views (there may be nearly 500 total) was of value mainly for reference, as they were reproduced at barely over three inches wide. This made freeviewing easy, but image details were lost and there was no attempt at image restoration where needed.

Waiting for the Cars takes a different approach. By selecting 218 views, it was possible to reproduce each as both a full stereoview (one on each text page at six inches wide), and as an enlarged anaglyph on the facing pages. In the process of creating the anaglyphs, digital restoration was done to fix tears, foxing, marks and other distortions. Some window and foreground cropping was done on a few images, but a quick glance at the view on the facing page reveals that nothing of significance was removed and that the adjustments were for the sake of more easily viewed anaglyphs. In cases of views lacking any depth, whether by mounting accident or otherwise, conversion was added to the digital restoration efforts in the anaglyphs and noted as such in the accompanying text.

In the vast majority of the anaglyphs the restoration efforts were an impressive success, and more often than not I found myself primarily studying the anaglyph page for image details and an immersive effect. The problem of ghosting interferes with this in relatively few cases despite the high contrast of many scenes, sending the reader back to the original view. As always, a good desk lamp is important to do justice to Mr. Goldbaum's efforts. The anaglyphs are all presented against a black border, which provides a dramatic, movie screen sort of effect and removes the problem some people have with looking at a white page through the opposing anaglyphic filters .

The extensively researched texts for each view explain the activity or location recorded by Hart in as much detail as practical, covering railroad history as well as

geographic and photographic topics. The views follow the construction of the Central Pacific from west to east, providing the reader a sort of 3-D rail journey from Sacramento to Ogden—a trip that took from 1863 to 1869. Hart's several images of the iconic meeting of the Central Pacific and Union Pacific at Promontory Summit are of course included, as are some rarely seen later interior views taken in a Central Pacific dining car and two sleeping cars.

The original view reproductions on the text pages could easily have fit at a full seven inch width on the nine inch wide pages, better overcoming the half-tone dots for those using any type of magnifying stereo- scope. (At the six inch width, the views are easy to freeview. No lorgnette viewer is included to go with the anaglyphic glasses pocketed inside the front cover.)

The book's title comes from an 1867 account in the *Sacramento Bee*. A young boy looking at California views through a stereoscope was asked why he spent so long on one of Hart's views of tracks in Bloomer Cut, about 33 miles east of Sacramento. He answered, "I am waiting for the cars to come along." Three views of that very deep and steep-sided cut are included in the book.

Whether your passion is railroad history or stereography, *Waiting for the Cars* provides a rich abundance of both. Nearly every text page includes fascinating details about both the construction of the Central Pacific and Hart's work (both on his own and directly for the railroad) documenting it in dramatic stereos. Few railroad (or any other) construction projects have been so completely covered in stereoviews from beginning to end, from the tops of engine cabs, box cars, water flumes, embankments and snowdrifts. Sample pages can be seen at <http://waitingforthecars.com> where clicking on a view brings up the anaglyphic version. A dozen views not included in the book are also available on the site.