

GEORGE ROTHROCK

Arizona Pioneer Photographer

by Jeremy Rowe jrowe@vintagephoto.com

Published in the Journal of Arizona History Winter 2008

Many of the pioneering photographers who worked in Arizona and the West left ephemeral trails of letters, articles, and stories telling the tale of their lives and work. George H. Rothrock came to California as a teenager, later engaging in a twenty-five-year photographic career that produced a body of hundreds of cartes-de-visites, cabinet cards, stereographs, and mounted photographs that document the height of the Apache conflicts and the development of Arizona Territory in the last quarter of the nineteenth-century. His career, like those of most of his peers, followed a varied path of travel, adventures, tribulations, and coincidental meetings across California, Arizona, and the West. These experiences changed and shaped him, as he created a photographic legacy of his life and times.



Portrait of George H. Rothrock ca 1880.
Courtesy of Arizona Historical Foundation

George H. Rothrock was born on March 31, 1843, in Jefferson City, Missouri. The eldest son of German emigrants George Rothrock and Louisa Frisch, he spoke both German and English. When gold fever hit in 1849, Rothrock's father headed west to California. His first trip

was overland on foot, by the southern route through Arizona. The party had all their animals stolen by hostile Indians, but met friendly Pima and Maricopa at the Maricopa Wells stage stop. Likely, young George and his two younger sisters heard tales of the Arizona territory from their father as he traveled back and forth to Missouri over the next five years.

Although George's father had traveled to California twice by land and once by boat out of New Orleans, when he chose to move his family of five, he booked passage to from New York at the then-staggering cost of almost \$3,000 on the steamship *George Law* in September 1854. The first leg of the trip to Panama was brutal and the family and other passengers were constantly seasick. The weather was so rough that the ship was heavily damaged. After limping back to New York, it was rebuilt and renamed the *Central America*. This is the ship that only a few years later, in 1857, sank off the Carolinas in a hurricane, along with 578 passengers and tons of gold ingots, coins, nuggets, and dust en route from California to New York.¹

While not as tragic as the voyage of the *Central America*, the Rothrocks' trip was nonetheless difficult. The family was separated during the overland crossing of Panama and the children were feared lost before a tearful reunion, as the natives carrying the children across the isthmus finally appeared in the middle of the night.

The family regrouped and took the steamer *John L. Stevens* up the Baja California coast to San Francisco. After a brief stay in the Bay City, the Rothrocks continued on the riverboat to Sacramento, then traveled on the *Governor Dane* to Marysville, where George's father had purchased a ranch. The family obtained cuttings from local pioneer John Sutter to start a vineyard and orchard.

At age eighteen, in 1861, George Rothrock left home and took a job as a ranch hand in nearby Colusi, California. After a few months, Rothrock caught the gold fever and decided to try his hand at mining in Nevada. He changed his mind en route, however, and sidetracked to Woodbridge, on the Mocklumne River, where he stopped and took a job-herding hogs. After being inundated in a Christmas flood on the small farm, George decided to move on—first, fifteen miles to Stockton (“wading knee deep, waist deep, and sometimes swimming ere we got there”) and then on to San Francisco by riverboat.

Hearing that the government was hiring teamsters to drive from Los Angeles to Yuma, Rothrock left San Francisco on the steamship *Senator* on February 1, 1862. After another rough trip—“one of the worst experiences I ever had on the ocean . . . the storm destroyed two or three staterooms, tore the pilot house to shreds, leaving only the wheel,” according to George—the pilot found safe harbor at Santa Cruz Island until the bulk of the storm blew past, before continuing on to San Pedro.

Soon after landing, George found that the government no longer needed teamsters. However, he eventually fell in with a young Jewish merchant looking for a partner who spoke some Spanish. The pair

quickly sold out “several trunks of shoddy goods from San Francisco” at a profit that far exceeded their expectations. George declined the offer of a continued partnership and, instead, walked to Los Angeles, which was then only a small settlement consisting mainly of saloons and gambling houses.

Once again, Rothrock sidetracked into a new career, this time hiring on with two miners to help work the Soledad mines on the Santa Clara River. Dreaming of millions to come, George turned down an offer of \$5,000 for one of his first claims. Instead, he bought a lot and built a house in nearby Ravenna City. From there, he explored the surrounding countryside and spent time working other mining claims in Inyo County and at the Laurel Hill camp in the Mesquite Mining District. After Indians killed two teamsters at nearby Walker Pass, and a major mine cave-in of which he had had a premonition, George returned to Ravenna City.

Restless again after almost three years in one place, and abandoning his claims as worthless, Rothrock traveled through Los Angeles and back to the Santa Clara area, where he visited friends living on a ranch on the Cienega. He then continued north and east, back through Walker Pass, to Mono Lake and Aurora, en route to Carson City, Nevada, where he once again worked briefly on a ranch. The cold Nevada winter convinced George to return to California just after the November 1864 elections. He stopped in Sacramento before moving on to the Tacuyo Ranch in Kern County’s Tejon Canyon. Rothrock initially hired on as a ranch hand, but was soon promoted to foreman.

Once again, the need to travel struck George. This time he followed a lead south to the Cuyama Ranch in San Diego County. Soon after his arrival, George’s father contacted him, asking George to return home so that the elder Rothrock could make a trip back to Missouri. Eleven days later, George was in Marysville to watch the family ranch while his father was away.

When his father returned a few months later, George packed up and headed back to San Francisco. This time, he became involved in plans to start a cotton farm in Bakersfield. Dispatched to hire a crew of “9 Chinamen,” Rothrock suffered a tragic accident when he was pulled under the freight wagon carrying supplies, severely breaking his leg. When he had recovered, Rothrock built an adobe house near Fort Tejon, and once again abandoned farming, this time opening a store that sold goods to local farmers and shepherders. His customers included Charles King, who later became famous as a “farmer, cattle-breeder, butcher, wool grower, and lumberman” and was elected to the California Assembly from Humboldt County.²

At about this time, Rothrock received word that his father had died, and returned to the family ranch in Marysville to settle the meager estate. While there, he experienced his first exposure to photography, taking lessons in the wet-plate process from a one-legged Cherokee Flat

photographer named Baker (possibly Edward W. Baker of Placerville).³

George eventually returned to Bakersfield, where he worked as a clerk in George B. Chester's store. Photography, however, remained on his mind and he soon he met and formed a partnership with William Houghton. The pair bought a lot and built a photographic gallery. The business folded in October 1875, when Rothrock became ill and was advised to recuperate in Tehachapi. While working as a grain salesman for the Kern River Land Company, he met yet another local photographer, William J. Young.

Young had operated the first Daguerreian galleries in Susanville, California, in the 1850s. As an itinerant photographer in the decades that followed, he had opened studios in California and Idaho. Rothrock and Young became friends, and then photographic partners. At the time Young met Rothrock, he had been corresponding with a Mr. Keller from Visalia about opportunities in nearby Arizona Territory. The three gathered some supplies, which they loaded aboard two wagons. Then, with a few other local residents, they left for Los Angeles on their way to Yuma. En route, Rothrock and Young set up their tent as itinerant photographers at San Juan Capistrano and San Louis Rey missions.

Arriving eventually at Yuma virtually penniless and in a "depressed mood," the two photographers determined to explore other parts of Arizona. But first, they set up their photographic tent and produced images that included several cabinet views of the dirt streets and adobe buildings that comprised the little town along the Colorado River.

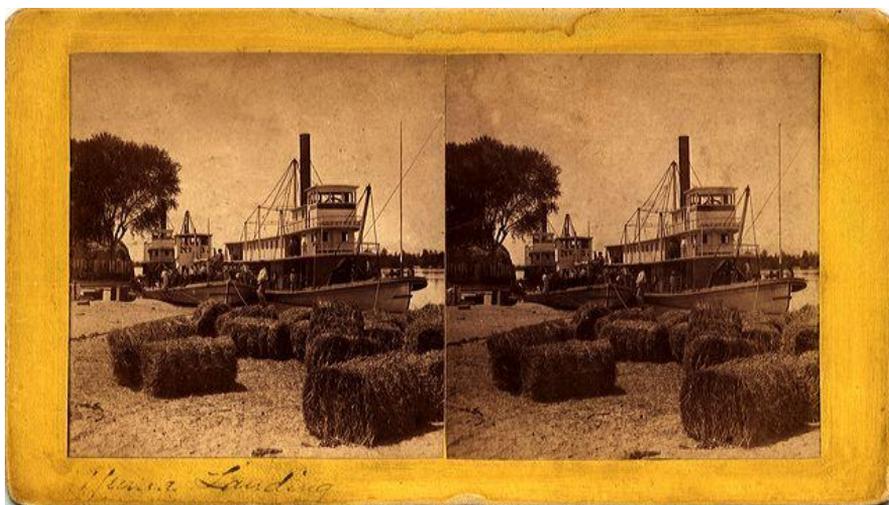


Figure 2. Colorado River Steamboats at Yuma Landing ca 1876

Collection of the Author

Before long, the partners moved a few miles upriver to Ehrenberg. By this time, Rothrock and Young had ordered enough equipment from San Francisco to field two photographic outfits. Their stock included one tent, two 8 x 10 cameras, and a number of lenses and miscellaneous supplies. Rothrock traveled with one outfit up the Colorado to Fort

Mojave, where he made stereographs, including one of the new water works. He described July 4 at the army post as “the hottest day of my life.”⁴

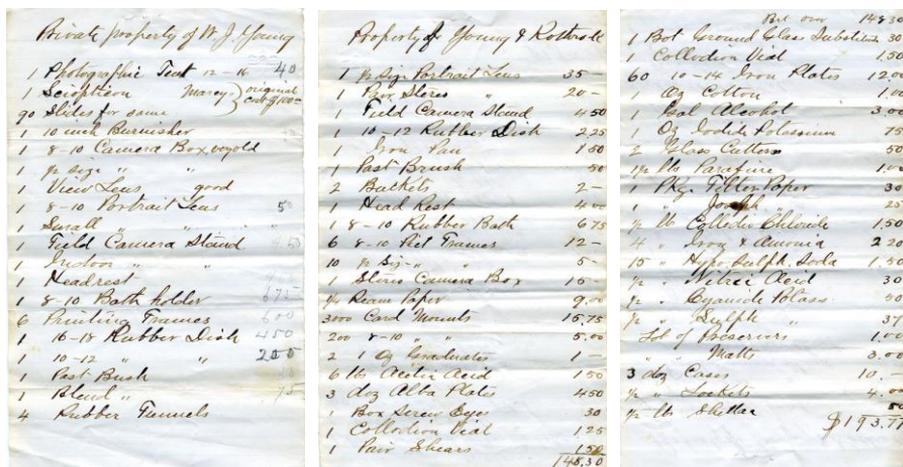


Figure 3. Manuscript inventories of Young and Rothrock photographic equipment ca 1876 Collection of the Author

Young, meanwhile, moved on to Phoenix, where he bought lumber and a lot, and built what may have been the first photographic studio in the growing town. Young saw promise in the new territory and described for his wife the opportunities he planned to pursue:

I think the Mines in this vicinity will beat the Big Bonanzas. I like the prospects here [Arizona] better than expected. Yuma is better for me than any place in Cal. And now I think I like this [Phoenix] better. I see a chance to make a business out of one of the following

- Photo for 3 months a year
- School teacher - \$100 per mo for 8 months
- Soda fountain
- Can start a papers

At the same time, Rothrock continued east by freight wagon from Fort Mojave to the mining town of Mineral Park, where he stayed until October making a number of stereographs of the emerging town and of the area’s mines and native population. He then moved on to Prescott, stopping briefly to make views of the town, before finally reuniting with Young at Phoenix. The partners next proposed to make a “tour of Arizona in the photo lines,” documenting the forts, mines, and growing communities. They hoped to create a body of work that they could sell in the prosperous times Young predicted for Arizona. Although Rothrock was, in his partner’s estimation, “considerably embued [*sic*] with the wanderlust,” he agreed to stay on and work with Young.

Tragically, Young, whose lungs were delicate from a history of

tuberculosis, caught a severe cold while working outdoors improving his ranch. The illness quickly progressed to pneumonia and he passed away within a week, on November 28, 1876. In a letter to Young's wife in California, Rothrock provided the story of William's time in Arizona, his illness, and his unfortunate demise. George also included an inventory of their photographic outfits and offered to help her dispose of the gear, along with William's Phoenix property. Rothrock mentioned the necessity of raising money to pay for Young's funeral expenses and other bills. "I am quite a stranger here myself," he explained. "When I came here a few weeks ago, we had scarce money enough to pay my freight bill. . . . there are some accounts out-standing . . . that he did photo work for a man to do some plowing, another for pigs, another for lumber, tools, etc.—all of which might have been collected and been useful had he lived, but I have not a dollar to pay expenses. I therefore propose to use [the photographic] apparatus & chemicals, stock etc. until I can make enough to buy them as I am dependent upon them for my living, and it is my desire to do as well for you as I can."

Rothrock initially tried to sell the lumber left over from construction of the photographic studio to raise funds. Unable to find a buyer, he eventually used the material to build for himself the first wooden (as opposed to the typical adobe) house in Phoenix. He erected the 10" x 12" dwelling under the shade of Cottonwood trees on the south side of Adams, between Center and First streets.

Rothrock was determined to complete the photographic tour he had planned with Young before his partner's untimely death. After settling most of the issues related to Young's estate, George began preparing for the expedition.

In May of 1877, he set out on the first leg of the trip, traveling from Phoenix, through the Pima reservation, to Sacaton, then on to Florence and to Camp Lowell outside Tucson.

Rothrock produced a significant series of stereograph images of Arizona during this and his later excursions across the territory. The earliest were produced on 2 ½" x 7" green mounts. Later, he switched to the larger 3 ½" x 7" mount size, using orange, and occasionally gray, yellow, or buff mounts with printed imprints and manuscript captions. At



Figure 4. Rothrock house in Phoenix ca 1878.
Courtesy of Arizona Historical Foundation

least twenty-one color and mount imprint variants have been identified to date. Although no comprehensive listing exists, projections of caption numbers from extant views identified to date suggest that Rothrock produced more than 250 individual titles, along with unknown hundreds of cabinet cards and mounted photographs during his twenty-five-year photographic career in Arizona.

Rothrock's first major stop was in Florence, where he photographed the main street. He noted that the children of Florence, "in all stages of smallpox, but none fatal until I left there," used his tent as a playground.

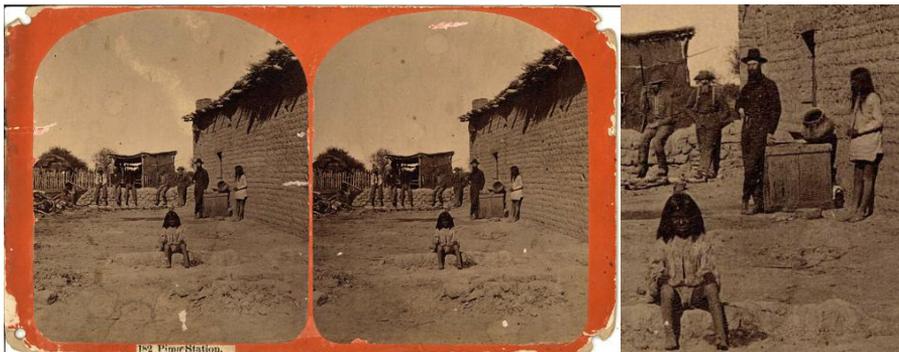


Figure 5. Stereograph of Rothrock at Pima Station with detail showing Rothrock dressed in black at center of image ca 1877

Courtesy Arizona Historical Foundation

After camping nearby overnight, on March 10, 1877, Rothrock made his first views of the Casa Grande ruins. He found plenty of wood to build a campfire and examined the graffiti signatures of early Arizona pioneers Pauline Weaver (1836) and J. Ross Browne (1853). When he returned years later, in 1891, the wood had disappeared and a Mr. John Jones and a Mr. William Williams had inscribed their names over those of Weaver and Brown.

On March 13, Rothrock wrote to Mrs. Young from Florence. In a letter heavily stained with silver nitrate that darkened with exposure to light, he explained: "When I got your letter of the [Feb.] 25th I was again en route on a photographic trip to the noted and before mentioned 'Casa Grande' on the Gila River down river from here." He promised to send her images that, "although not very good specimens of artistic skill—yet as they are of such a rare, curious item they may be of some interest to you."

Rothrock also referred to his ongoing discussion with Mrs. Young regarding disposition of her husband's photographic equipment:

I am sorry that you failed in setting a price on goods and of course I feel a delicacy in setting a price myself. The very reason that I proposed to take it was that it is utterly impossible to sell here as there are but two galleries in the Territory, one in Tucson [Rodrigo/Buehman], another in Prescott [Mitchell, formerly Williscraft/Flanders]. Both of which are more than supplied in apparatus [*sic*]. I

myself could work without them. Some items have been included strictly out of some memory and as a friend, and to send to Cal would cost near as much as could be realized from them. Hence my proposition as I wish to make it the best I can for you. In order to facilitate value [I] will give a brief description of some of the items:

Sciopticon (Marcy's) New
Slides—nearly all good
Tent—very much worn with wind and rain before leaving Phoenix
Headrest—common
8-10 camera Box—cheap—old
1-½ size camera box—cheap—new
View Lens, Globe (Fetz [sic]) good
8-10 portrait lens (Peerless) fair
Small lens—Harrison
Bath glass (German)
Field Stand—common old
8-10 Burnisher

Hope you may be able to set price with this assistance.⁶

Rothrock's next stopped at Fort McDowell. Arriving on April 1, he photographed the fort and grounds, as well as the officers, wives, and pioneering women who braved dangerous times while stationed there. His subjects included Capt. and Mrs. Henry Kendall, Capt. and Mrs. Augustus Corliss, as well as Mr. Cunningham and Miss Taylor. Another stereograph shows a picnic, with armed soldiers protecting the group at a temporary camp near the fort, and Rothrock's photographic wagon partially hidden behind a cactus at the right of the image. Interestingly, a larger format photograph of the same individuals and setting, obviously taken at the same time, was later marketed by noted California photographer Carleton Watkins on a boudoir cabinet mount. Since the subject pre-dates Watkins's 1880 visit to Arizona for the Southern Pacific Railroad, he likely acquired the image from Rothrock. Despite the inventory indicating that Rothrock owned a large-format camera, this is a rare example of a larger-than-stereo image produced during this era, particularly during Rothrock's field excursions.⁷

George also photographed the famous "Giant Saguaro," five miles from Fort McDowell. The strange *Serious Gigantus* were little known outside the territory and images of large, many-armed cacti, and of other unusual regional flora, were the most popular and widely distributed stereo and cabinet photo images of Arizona during this era. The legendary saguaro near the fort was tremendous—between 50 and 60 feet tall, with more than fifty arms or "branches."



Figure 7. May Day Party at Camp near Fort McDowell (note photographer's wagon at right) ca 1877 Collection of the Author

Rothrock returned to Phoenix in late April, photographing other large cacti near the head gates of the Arizona Canal and south of Telegraph Pass while en route from Fort McDowell. The first leg of his trip had been a success, so he bought a team and wagon and prepared to undertake a larger photographic expedition through Arizona Territory. Rothrock left Phoenix in late May 1877, traveling back through Sacaton and Florence to Fort Lowell and Rillito near Tucson, finally camping at the San Xavier mission. Papago (Tohono O'odham) Indians who lived nearby helped him set up his darkroom behind the church altar. San Xavier was an Arizona icon and, next to cacti and the Grand Canyon, one of its most popular photographic subjects. The mission is well-represented in Rothrock's stereographic portfolio, with a number of interior and exterior views made on this and later trips.

From Tucson, Rothrock proceeded to Fort Grant. His timing was impeccable, arriving in August 1877, at the same time that William H. Bonney, also known as Billy the Kid, was at the fort. Rothrock met Billy, who quickly departed for New Mexico after killing his first man, Frank "Windy" Cahill.⁸

The late 1870s were treacherous times to explore the Arizona Territory. Apaches and robbers controlled many of the roads. Hold-ups and raids on ranches and mines occurred far too frequently, with reports of depredations filling local and national newspapers. Apaches under Geronimo had left the reservation and, as a result, even everyday travel posed a dangerous challenge. Word of the murder of a mail rider near Fort Bowie drew Rothrock to explore and photograph the area around Apache Pass. He passed the wagon of the murdered carrier alongside the road. During his three-week stay, he photographed the fort and grounds, as well as soldiers and scouts in the field.

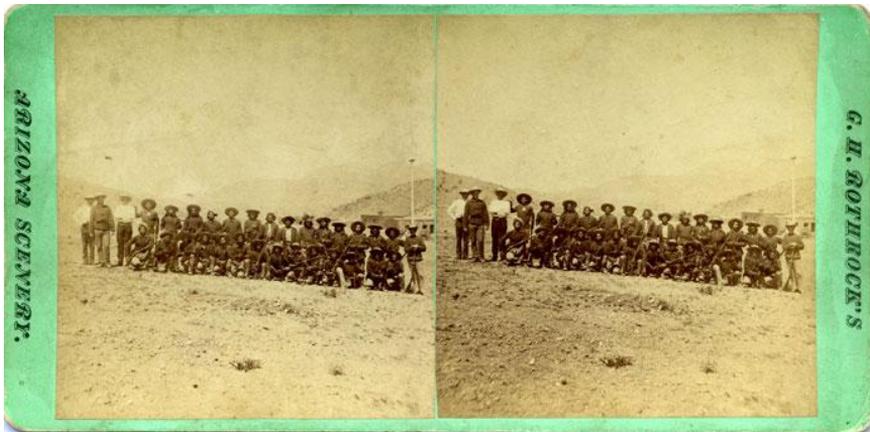


Figure 8. Apache Scouts in parade ground at Fort Bowie in Apache Pass ca 1877
Collection of the Author

Rothrock's next stop was the Mormon community of Solomonville that was forming near the Indian settlement of "Pueblo Viejo" in Graham County. As an example of how small social circles were in the West at the time, one of the few dozen Solomonville residents turned out to be Dan Hughes, a friend of Rothrock's from Bakersfield.

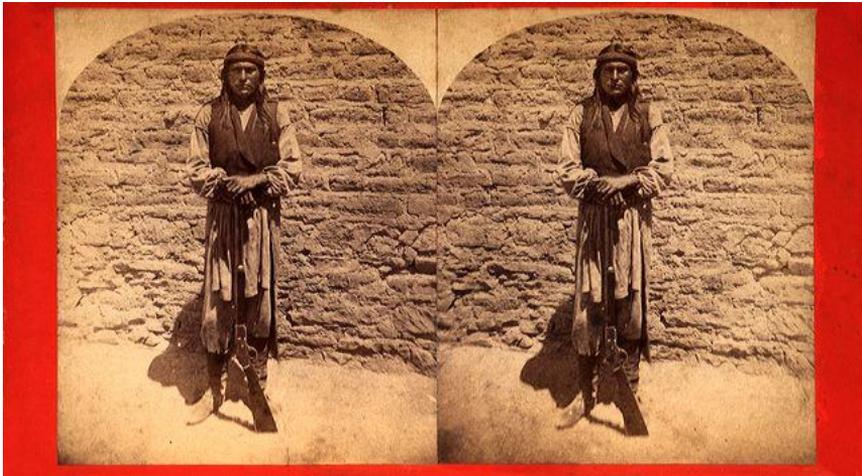


Figure 8. Apache Scouts in parade ground at Fort Bowie in Apache Pass ca 1877
Collection of the Author

After a brief stop, Rothrock continued on to the newly established San Carlos reservation. At the height of the conflict with Geronimo and Chiricahua Apache, he photographed "ration day" for the Indians who remained on the reservation. He also made individual and group portraits of scouts and Apache police, along with many of the important figures at San Carlos.

In particular, he took a stereograph portrait of the Pinal Aravaipa-Pinal Apache chief Eskiminzin, who had survived the infamous Camp

Grant Massacre in 1871. Captured as a renegade after leaving the reservation in 1873, Eskiminzin had visited Washington D.C. earlier in 1877 with Apache agent John Clum. Other images from this visit include portraits of young Chiricahua leader Natchez and individual scouts, including Es-Kin-Al-Ze, Tsin-Sim-A, Cun-Din-E-Yo, and Yaav-A-Ki-Shi. Rothrock also photographed buildings and dwellings on the reservation, along with domestic and farming scenes. That fall, Rothrock paid to have his equipment freighted to Fort Apache. Here, again, he produced views of the fort and vicinity. He also posed impromptu “battle” scenes with scouts in nearby Rucker Canyon.

After a few weeks in the area, Rothrock moved on across northern Arizona, through St. Johns and Pine Springs. He broke a wagon wheel en route, but finally made it to Fort Verde, in the center of the territory and began to explore and photograph the cliff dwellings sprinkled throughout the Verde Valley. At Montezuma’s Castle, Rothrock constructed ladders that enabled him to explore and photograph the site. One testament to how things have changed in the almost century and a half since Rothrock’s visit is the photographer’s inability to photograph the reflection of Montezuma’s Castle in the creek because of beavers continually rippling the water. Now all that remains is the name—Beaver Creek.



Figure 10. Montezuma’s Well ca 1877
Collection of the Author

Rothrock also produced a number of images of the ruins and caves at Montezuma’s Well, as well as the spring that feeds Beaver Creek. On a later trip, Rothrock followed in the footsteps of travelers at Casa Grande and left graffiti advertising his services and photographic gallery in Phoenix. His marks remain to this day on the wall of the lower cave, just above the water level.

While staying at nearby Fort Verde, Rothrock lent his team of horses to Mrs. Beck, an acquaintance from his recent visit to Fort

McDowell, so that she could visit her husband at the Beck Mine in the nearby Bradshaw Mountains. Unfortunately for Rothrock, Mrs. Beck drove the team so hard that she killed his best horse. The Becks pled poverty and George had to absorb the loss, limping along now with only a partial team. On his way back to Phoenix, Rothrock stopped briefly in Prescott. In deference to the established local photographer, Daniel F. Mitchell, he operated only as an itinerant, making images of the town and region but leaving the rest of the commercial market to Mitchell.⁹

Upon his return to Phoenix in the fall of 1877, Rothrock built a new photo studio on the southeast corner of First and Jefferson, where he lived and worked for several years. Phoenix was growing rapidly, from a population of 240 in 1870 to about 1,500 by the time Rothrock opened his photographic business.

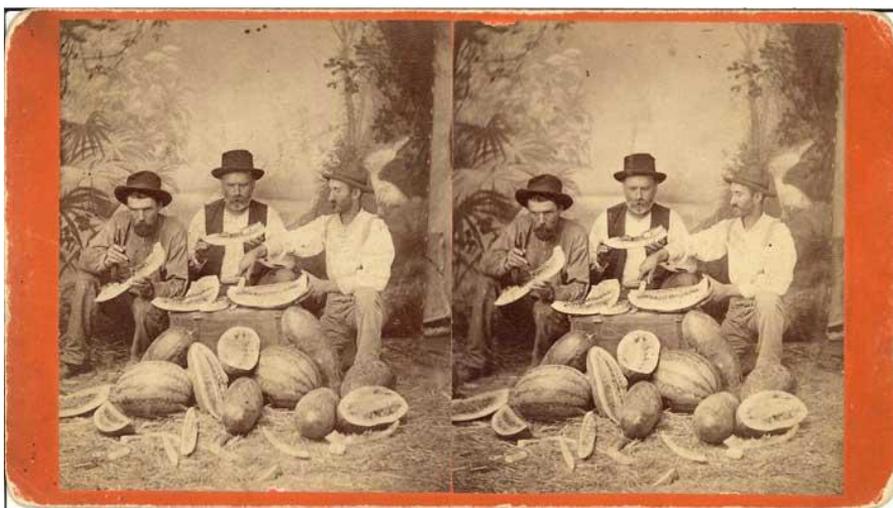


Figure 11. “A Melon-colie Scene” Studio portrait of (R to L) George Rothrock, Father-in-law Wilson T. Woods, and brother-in-law Will Woods ca Fall 1881 after returning from trip to Fort Apache
Courtesy of Arizona Historical Foundation

In the midst of these boom times, Rothrock settled down, working at the gallery and store, and ended his single life—marrying Lottie Woods, the daughter of a local justice of the peace. George also became active in local politics, helping incorporate the City of Phoenix in 1881. He sat on the board of elections, and was recorder of the first city council meeting. Rothrock served one term on the city council, from the Third Ward, and is listed in the *1881 Phoenix City Directory* as filling a term as a justice of the peace.¹⁰

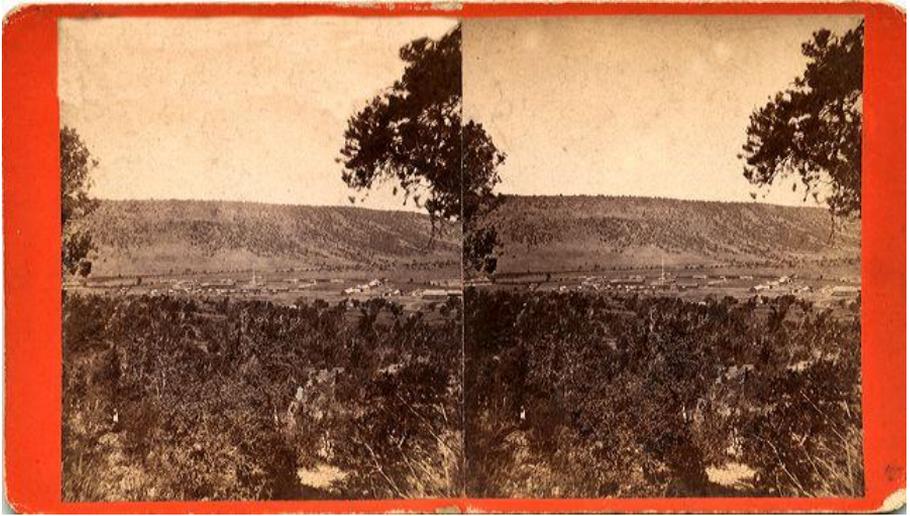


Figure 12. Overview of Camp Apache ca 1878
Collection of the Author

About this time Rothrock acquired another in his series of short-term partners—C. W. Catton. A year older than George, Catton had been born in Canada in 1843. Little biographical information has surfaced to date, other than a note that Catton had worked as a photographer in Coffeerville, Kansas, around 1875. The 1880 census lists Rothrock and Catton as photographers sharing the same Phoenix address. Catton also worked as a photographer in his own right. Rothrock and Catton eventually moved the wooden portion of their studio to a lot behind the post office on Washington, between Center and First Avenue, where they opened Phoenix's first stationary store, in addition to operating the city's first photographic gallery.

Their partnership appears to have lasted into 1881, when Rothrock is listed in the *City Directory*, with Catton, as a "Landscape and Portrait Photographer." But the collaboration ended, apparently under less-than-ideal circumstances, soon after. A number of extant cabinet and boudoir card mounts show Catton's name abraded from the mount, likely by Rothrock after the partnership failed. As late as 1888, Catton was operating on his own in Phoenix. He appears to have moved west soon after, working as a photographer in Tacoma, Washington, by about 1891.¹¹

Apparently, Rothrock's wanderlust never left him. During the spring of 1881, he and his new brother-in-law, Will Woods, prepared for a trip to Fort Apache during another high point in the Chiricahua uprising. It was just a few months before Geronimo and his band left the San Carlos reservation in September, setting in motion the final surge of the Apache wars in Arizona.

George and Will set out from Phoenix on June 15, traveling light, in a "spring wagon," via Fort Verde, south and east to Sunflower,

then up Reno Pass to the Tonto Basin and along the East Verde River to the Natural Bridge. They stopped along the way to explore and photograph the bridge, as well as along the creek beneath the bridge. They then continued on through Pine and Strawberry, to the top of Baker's Butte and General Springs, through Show Low, to Fort Apache. Rothrock and Woods arrived on the reservation in the midst of "serious Indian trouble" involving the medicine man Nock-ay-det-klinne, who was stirring up unrest with his claims that he could resurrect a popular chief who had recently died, once the whites had been driven out. Even the Apache scouts reacted to the growing tension between whites and Indians.

In response, Col. Eugene Carr instructed Captains Adam Kramer and Edmund Hentig, with troops F and D of the Sixth Cavalry to arrest Nock-ay-det-klinne at Cibicue Creek, about 30 miles from Fort Apache. Soon making the arrest, the scouts mutinied and fired into the soldiers' camp, killing six privates and Captain Hentig. The Apaches next attacked the fort, forcing Rothrock and Woods to flee before they were pressed into service. Traveling just ahead of the action, they camped briefly along Turkey Creek, where they received reports from passing couriers of skirmishes between the army and the Apaches and of the number of soldiers killed. Despite advice that they return to Fort Apache, Rothrock and Woods pressed on to San Carlos, hoping to arrive before the uprising spread.

George and Will made it across the Black River just ahead of the Apaches. Three civilians they had met the day before and the soldiers that had helped them cross the river were found dead the following day. Their burned wagon was mistaken for Rothrock's and word reached Phoenix that Rothrock and Woods had been killed.

The Gila River crossing was flooded, forcing the photographers to follow "a cow trail to reach Fort Thomas." When they arrived at the post and learned that they had been reported killed, George and Will sent a telegram to C. W. Catton, Rothrock's partner at the time: "Got through by the skin of my teeth."¹²

Soon after Rothrock and Woods's arrival at Fort Thomas, the Apache situation escalated as Geronimo and eighty followers left the San Carlos reservation, attacking a freight train and killing five men at Cedar Springs. Luckily, Rothrock and Woods were too slow in packing their photographic gear to take advantage of the first army escort leaving the fort. It was attacked and everyone was killed. Instead, George and Will accompanied a second party that consisted of "nine empty wagons driven by Mexicans" and three scouts. As the group passed the site of the massacre, Rothrock became "extremely anxious to take some photos of [it], but as dry plates were little known then, and I could only use wet plates, which required some time to prepare for same, I could not persuade the Mexicans to wait long enough to obtain the views." The two adventurers continued on to Wilcox, snuck through Dragoon at

night, and finally reached Benson, where they regrouped and returned north through Tucson and to Phoenix.

Earlier, in April of 1881, Rothrock had formed a partnership with George E. Loring, who had arrived in Phoenix in 1876 and whose business had grown from watch repair to general merchandise. Rothrock established his photographic studio first at the News Depot, then at Loring's Bazaar and Wells Fargo Agency on Washington Street. He continued to travel throughout the territory, finding events and interesting locations to add to his stereographic portfolio. For example, in 1881 he photographed a memorial parade for assassinated president James Garfield in Bisbee's Tombstone Canyon in southeastern Arizona.¹³

Charles W. Bennett was next in the line of Rothrock's photographic partners. Fifteen years younger than Rothrock, Bennett was born in San Bernardino, California, on September 29, 1858. His relationship with Rothrock began about 1882 and lasted for several years. Although the specific role each partner played in the business is unclear, photographic mounts of cartes-de-visites and cabinet and boudoir cards, as well as local newspaper advertisements, always give Rothrock top billing. This partnership appears to have been more stable than Rothrock's previous ventures, lasting until the early 1890s. Rothrock & Bennett was Phoenix's premier photographic studio, producing hundreds of portraits of Arizona pioneers and their families, and documenting flourishing ranches and businesses in the Salt River Valley.¹⁴

Rothrock was particularly proud of his stereo work, which won the First Premium Award in photography at the 1884 Arizona Industrial Exposition. He proudly advertised the prize on his stereograph imprints, offering both views from his earlier expeditions and additions from subsequent travels. Interestingly, Rothrock apparently retained sole ownership of his stereo work, despite his partnership with Barnett. No jointly labeled stereographs have been identified to date.

Like many photographers of the era, Rothrock advertised to promote sale of his stereographs. Several of his mounts carry the tantalizing note: "A Complete Assortment of Stereoscopic Arizona Scenery Constantly on Hand, Catalog Free." Rothrock also issued "circulars" listing titles for sale. Unfortunately no copies of the catalog or circulars have been located.¹⁵

Rothrock occasionally revisited his earlier haunts in order to add to his photographic portfolio. These later images included new cabinet and boudoir cards and stereo images of ruins at Casa Grande, Camp Verde and the Verde Valley, San Carlos, and Montezuma's Well and Castle. In addition, he photographed many of the emerging camps and towns around the territory, including Gillett, Charleston, and Pinal.

It appears that, in response to difficulties he experienced in using wet plate gear (for example, images lost when he had insufficient time to set up his dark tent and equipment in the field), Rothrock became

familiar with dry plates soon after they became available, so that he would not lose another opportunity to photograph under pressure. On a second trip to the Natural Bridge, years after his first visit (and this time using dry plates), Rothrock and another brother-in-law, Henry Woods, traveled in a spring wagon through heavy rain and deep mud that blocked the crossings at Reno Pass and Florence and forced them to return to Phoenix. They had better luck following the Black Canyon road to Fort Verde, where they turned west to photograph Jerome. After a brief stay in the Central Arizona mining town, they proceeded to Clear Creek, then across Crook's Road and along Fossil Creek to Strawberry, and finally down to the Natural Bridge. "After making the desired [boudoir cabinet card] views, [we] returned via Reno Pass to Phoenix," Rothrock recalled.

In 1891, Rothrock briefly moved his photographic business to Tempe. All the while, he continued to explore new photographic technologies, this time using the new hand camera with flexible roll film. He experimented with new modes of transportation as well, adding a safety bicycle to his horse and wagon. Even so, Rothrock struggled to keep up with the changing times. Competition grew as the roll-film cameras became popular with amateurs. Moreover, Frank Hartwell, C. W. Catton, and other photographers had opened galleries in Phoenix. Images of the Salt River winter flood



Figure 13. Cabinet Card of George Rothrock with camera and Bicycle in Tempe ca 1891
Collection of the Author

that year provide examples of the increasingly competitive atmosphere. Views of men posed on the end of the washed-out railroad bridge, taken from virtually identical locations, appear on both Hartwell and Rothrock mounts. Rothrock confessed that he "soon found times too hard to continue on the photo business." Although he appears to have continued making photographs, Rothrock moved to a ranch northeast of Phoenix and raised strawberries.



Figure 14. boudoir Cabinet Card of Salt River Flood ca 1891
Collection of the Author

After a few months, George acquired another plot of land near Alhambra, where he lived for the next eight years. Interestingly, the 1898 *Phoenix Directory* lists a Miss Lillie Rothrock living one-half mile south on Seventh Avenue, but has no listing for George. In 1899, Rothrock moved once again, this time to watch his brother-in-law Will Woods's home in the Evergreen area and to temporarily cover his job while Will made what was supposed to be a brief trip back to California. Ultimately, Woods stayed on in California, and for the next thirteen years, George worked for the Arizona Canal Company, quickly rising into management and eventually running the company.

In 1901, after several months rebuilding the canals at the edge of Phoenix, Rothrock received a letter from Mrs. Young, once again asking for his help in assessing potential assets from her husband William's estate. Rothrock responded that, despite her hopes, William's remaining water rights were worthless and there was no other property left to be dealt with. In passing, he noted the final bow to his photographic business: "I am now and have been at work on the Ariz. Canal as zanjiro [*sic*] for some months, I could no longer make a living for family in the Photo business so I had to quit it." A group of boudoir photographs showing canal construction and clearing of the old Hohokam channels may be Rothrock's last commercial photographs.¹⁶

On November 26, 1905, Rothrock and his son were managing canal gates after a severe storm, when George slipped and fell. He was crushed beneath a heavy gate-control lever, severely breaking his hip. He apparently never fully recovered, complaining eighteen years later that

he was “still in the same condition.”

In 1913, Rothrock moved his family to Lehi, on the south bank of the Salt River just north of Mesa. In 1920, George and his wife moved to San Diego, California, where he lived quietly and relatively unknown until his death on August 17, 1924.

George Rothrock produced a significant body of photographic work documenting Arizona Territory at the end of the Indian wars. His cartes-de-visites and cabinet cards, depicting the elite and working classes of Phoenix, are still found in albums, trunks, and family collections. Rothrock had a penchant for photographing firsts—including Phoenix’s first motorcycle in 1884, first church and first school, and the first trolley on the Phoenix Street Railway—as well as the parades, events, and businesses that defined the young territorial capital.

George Rothrock’s stereographs are on a par with the work Dudley Flanders produced on his “Trip to Arizona” in 1874, and compare with his Tucson contemporary, Henry Buehman. Rothrock’s best works are masterpieces of stereo composition and environmental portraiture; truly amazing products given the difficult wet-plate process, primitive conditions, and dangerous environment in which they were made.

Sadly, like those of many pioneer photographers of his era, Rothrock’s contributions have rarely been recognized even as his images have illustrated histories of Arizona and the West. Hopefully, as more is known about his work, George H. Rothrock will finally gain the larger recognition he deserves as one of the great pioneer western photographers.

George H. Rothrock Stereograph Title Listing
(Spellings transcribed from mounts)

1. Water Works, Camp Mojave
4. Birds eye view of Mineral Park, Mohave Co.
6. "Nigger Head", Mineral Park
19. Hualapai Valley in a Storm
23. Fort Yuma & Ferry
25. Main Street, Phoenix, Ariz.
26. Main Street, Florence
27. Casa Grande
27. Ruins of Casa Grande
28. Sahuaro's – Giant Cactus
29. Indians Scouting (Ruckers and Indian scouts)
29. (alt.) Scouting (Soldier's camp near Ft. McDowell)
30. Gila Monster (studio shot)
31. Hualapai Family (itinerant studio portrait)
33. Officers Quarters, Camp McDowell
36. Camp Life in Arizona (19 soldiers & civilians camping, near Ft. McDowell)
38. Arizona Reptiles and Insects (Studio still life)
41. Cactus - Ocotillo
42. Mission San Xavier, (facade) before restoration
- 43B. San Xavier Mission
44. Quarters, Camp Grant
48. Yuma Belles (itinerant studio portrait)
51. Cu-din-e-yo, Apache Indian (studio portrait)
52. "Es-kun-il-je-ha," Apache Scout
53. Lt. Rucker's Scouts, Fall Dress
54. Lt. Rucker's Scouts, Marching Dress
55. Tsin-Sim-A Apache Indian (studio portrait, standing with bow and arrow)
56. Camp Bowie
58. Inspection of Apache Scouts (at Camp Bowie)
59. Apache Indian Skirmish
60. Arizona Shrubbery (studio still life)
61. Ya-Va-Kis-Shi Apache Chief (studio portrait)
63. Gila Canyon
64. Gila Canyon
65. Natches, Chiricahua Chief (at San Carlos)
66. Group of Apaches, San Carlos (8 scouts including Naichez and Anglo scout)
67. Gila Canyon
67. Indian Police, San Carlos
68. Ration Day (probably San Carlos)
69. Black River
70. Aztec Ruins near the Verde
70. Camp Apache (overview from distance) I
71. White River
72. Rocky Canon (overview of military family outing)

74. Aztec Ruins, Camp Verde
75. Aztec Ruins, Camp Verde
75. Aztec Ruins, Camp Verde
77. Beaver Creek and Cave Dwellings
78. Cliff House on Beaver Creek
79. Aztec Ruins at Montezuma Well
80. Cave Dwellings in Montezuma Well
81. Montezuma Well looking East
82. Montezuma Well looking West
83. Outlet to Montezuma Well
84. Aztec Ruins, Oak Creek (Tuzigoot)
85. Ruins of Aztec Mound, Verde Valley
86. Aztec Ruins on Aztec Mound (Verde Valley)
88. Camp Verde (overview)
89. No caption (Apache scouts and Officers in front of quarters, Camp Verde)
91. Moqui Indian (studio portrait)
92. Prescott in 1864, Painting by Miss Dickason
93. Prescott (overview)
94. Prescott
95. Prescott in 1878
98. School House, Prescott
100. Ft. Whipple looking S.
101. Fort Whipple
102. Bank of Arizona
103. Gurley Street, Prescott (C. P. Read store and stagecoaches)
104. Montezuma Street, West Side
105. Montezuma St. Prescott, East Side
106. Prescott Street scene (Goldwater and J. Howey stores)
108. Court House, Prescott
109. Gillett (overview of Tip Top Mill and settlement)
110. Tip Top Mill, Gillett
111. Tempe and Hayden's Mill
112. Tempe and R.R. Bridge.
115. May Day Party, McDowell
117. Officers Quarters (exterior w/people at Ft. McDowell – tentative IDs Miss Taylor, Mr. Cunningham, Captain Kendall, Mrs. Kendall, Captain Corliss and Miss Corliss)
122. Senator Mill, Hassayampa
- 125A. Group of Sahuaros
126. Rattlesnake
127. Mojave Squaws (standing studio portrait of 2 squaws)
128. Belle of the Maricopas (seated studio portrait)
129. Niush Maricopa Girl
132. Smith Flour Mill, 1st Street & Jefferson
135. Ancient Hieroglyphics, A
136. Hieroglyphics, B
137. Hieroglyphics, C
138. Hieroglyphics, D
- 139 B. Group of Saguaro (unidentified scenic)
140. Pima Village (overview)
144. View of Pima Villages
144. Vulture Mine & Hoisting Works
145. Vulture City (overview)

- 150. General View of Natural Bridge
- 152a. Interior View of Natural Bridge, Tonto Basin
- 153B. Interior of Natural Bridge, Tonto Basin
- 155B. Pine Creek (scenic)
- 156. East Fork, White River
- 157. North Fork of White River
- 159. Es-kin-al-ze, Apache Indian (studio portrait)
- 162. Hospital, Fort Apache
- 164. Apaches Playing Billiards
- 165. Es-Koiw-intate, Apache Indian (studio portrait of armed apache scout)
- 167. Francisca, Mexican Captive (studio portrait, same background as 165)
- 170. Group of Apaches (5 in studio w/painted backdrop)
- 176. Pima Wickiups (overview of Pima Villages)
- 179. School House, Phoenix
- 180. Hole in the Rock (Papago Park) looking South. A few miles from Phoenix.
- 182. Pima Station
- 183. He-Chack, Apache Squaw
- 184. Apache Girl (studio portrait)
- 186. Ni-a-Kutch, Apache Indian (studio Portrait with painted backdrop)
- 192. A Melon-colie Scene (studio shot, 3 men eating watermelon)
- 195. Maids of the Forest (2 Indian maidens in studio)
- 199. (Unidentified pioneer family sitting around large Saguaro)
- 202. (Gila monster lying on rock among desert shrubbery)
- 204. Monroe Str. Phoenix
- 206. Head & Waste gate, Arizona canal
- 207. Waste gate & (Salt) River, Arizona Canal
- 208. Falls of Arizona Canal
- 209. The Cholla
- 213. Benson Smelter
- 213A. Bisbee Smelter
- 217B. Huachuca Hotel
- 219. Bisbee Looking
- 222B. Grant Funeral Procession, Bisbee
- 230. On The Grade (probably at Silver King)
- 232a. Charleston
- 233b. Charleston
- 247. Camp Misfortune, superstition Mountains
- 253. Pinal
- 255. Brays Canyon
- 256. Tip Top

Un-Numbered Rothrock Titles

- [?] No label. Scene marked 1st street & Wash. Street,
- [?] (Old Clark Churchill home, Monroe Street)
- [?] (Portrait of young boy on horseback in front of wooden building)
- [?] CAMP APACHE
- [?] Copeland's Steam Bicycle (studio view)
- [?] Courthouse, Phoenix
- [?] Courthouse, Prescott
- [?] Gila Canyon (overview)
- [?] Gurley Street, Prescott

- [?] House in Phoenix
- [?] Lt. Rucker's with Apache Scouts
- [?] Mineral Park
- [?] Natural Bridge near Payson (with Rothrock and party)
- [?] Odd fellow's parade, Phoenix (1884)
- [?] Old Gubernatorial Mansion, Prescott
- [?] Prescott (Goldwater & Bro. Store)
- [?] Rattlesnake
- [?] Residence of Reverend Blake, Prescott, Prescott
- [?] Residence of A. D. Lawson, Phoenix
- [?] Roberts Ranch on Clear Creek
- [?] Rocky Canyon near Camp Apache
- [?] Saguaro (Man posed in center of Saguaro near Ft. McDowell)
- [?] Street Scene, Phoenix (Ore wagons in front of Assay Office)

NOTES

1. "The Life History of George Rothrock," autobiographical remembrance, August 24, 1924, Arizona Historical Foundation, Tempe. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations and biographical details are from this source. The *Central America* was located and salvaged in the mid-1980s. Gary Kinder, *Ship of Gold and the Deep Blue Sea* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1998). Efforts to obtain images to assist in marketing the treasure drove the price of California daguerreotypes to a new high at the Steve Anaya sale at Sothebys in 2000.
2. <http://www.mchsmuseum.com/kingcity.html>
3. Carl Mautz, *Biographies of Western Photographers, 1840-1900*. 4th edition (Nevada City, Calif.: Carl Mautz Publishing, 1996), p. 78.
4. Peter Palmquist and Thomas Kailbourn, *Pioneer Photographers of the Far West: A Biographical Dictionary, 1840-1865* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 610.
5. William Young to his wife, July 28, 1876, author's collection.
6. Rothrock to Mrs. Young, March 13, 1877, author's collection.
7. Stereograph in author's collection.
8. <http://www.aboutbillythekid.com/chronology.htm>; Jerry Weddle, *Antrim is My Stepfather's Name: The Boyhood of Billy the Kid* (Tucson: Arizona Historical Society, 1993), pp. 39, 42-43.
9. *Arizona Miner* (Prescott), May 31, 1878.
10. *Arizona Miner*, May 31, 1878.
11. Maricopa County Census Records, 1880; Mautz, *Biographies of Western Photographers*, pp. 246, 496.
12. Mautz, *Biographies of Western Photographers*, p. 496; Charles Collins, *Apache Nightmare: The Battle of Cibicue Creek* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), pp. 15-94.
13. Thomas Farish, *History of Arizona* (San Francisco: Filmer Brothers Electrotype Company, 1918), vol. 6, pp. 176-77.
14. *McKenney's Business Directory, 1882-1888*, p. 277.
15. Stereo imprint, author's collection.
16. Rothrock to Mrs. Young, February 3, 1901, author's collection.