

# Clocks in 3D

by Bob Frishman (MA)

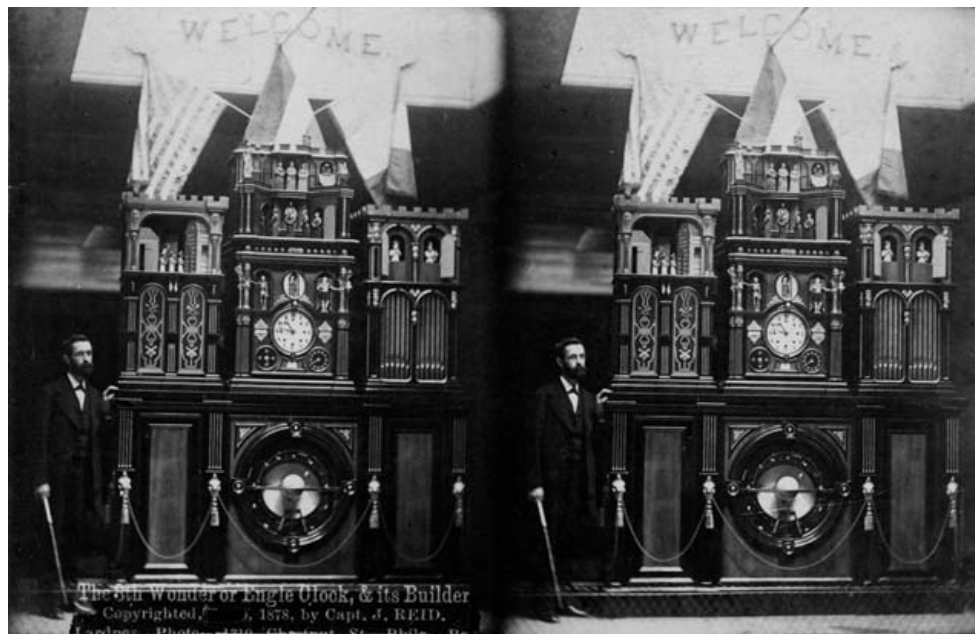


Figure 1. The Engle Clock.

What if you could time-travel back to visit a brand-new Fashion calendar clock on the mantel of its first parlor? Or what if—almost as good—a pair of special binoculars could look back in time to that same 1877 parlor? The first idea is still a collector's dream. The second, using photographic technology widely available since the middle of the nineteenth century, is possible for anyone with a stereoscope and a pile of old views.

Clocks regularly appear in all kinds of vintage photographs, although, of course, the clocks were not antiques then. With stereoviews, once the most common form of published photography, we can enjoy, in their original settings, some of the clocks we find today in museums, on mart tables, and in our own homes. We can see regulators in offices and factories; French marble clocks on Victorian mantles; grandfather clocks announcing the hours to lovers and diners; street clocks on their iron posts adding to the commercial bustle of urban thoroughfares. And because these photos are usually fine-grained and sharply focused, we can study countless period details of decor, dress, and construction when the image is magnified.

The history of 3D photography is fascinating in itself. After Daguerre's announcement in 1839, other photographers applied his discoveries to the research

on three-dimensional vision by Charles Wheatstone. This British scientist, known to us for his early work on electric timekeeping, demonstrated that viewing two slightly different flat images of the same scene—one for each eye—would give “solid” form to the image.

Soon there were two-lens cameras to make simultaneous photographic pairs, with lenses separated by the average distance between our own eyes. Seen through twin-lens viewers, the pictures would spring to life with startling realism. From the Civil War until the 1930s, millions of stereoviews were printed and purchased by nearly every middle class household in America. For “armchair” travel, education, and entertainment, stereoviews presented landscapes, cities, sculptures, international exhibitions, nudes, gags, wars, animals, natives, mills, homesteads, and every other subject people would buy.

We can enjoy the same realism today, combined with the eerie sensation of stepping into

lives and surroundings that disappeared more than a century ago. In antique shops and on Internet auctions, you can come across stereoviews by the hundreds as well as period viewers, especially the familiar hooded hand-held type invented in the 1850s by Oliver Wendell Holmes. Harder to find, but worth the search, are beautiful burlwood English and French viewers designed for glass or translucent paper “tissue” slides. Collectors also seek multi-view tabletop viewers and folding graphoscopes that combine stereo lenses with a large, round magnifier for closer study.

My collection of horological stereoviews is a rewarding union of two collecting passions: clocks and 3D photography. (I can report, too, that I often meet other NAWCC members at vintage photo shows.) The following is a small sampling of some stereoviews I have discovered. For the full effect, new plastic “lorgnette” viewers\* can be used to examine the stereo pairs on these pages.

## Clocks as the Subject

The “Eighth Wonder of the World,” our 11-foot-tall Engle clock now at the NAWCC Museum in Columbia,

\*3D viewers and many other materials related to 3D photography can be ordered from Reel 3-D Enterprises, Inc., P.O. Box 2368, Culver City, CA 90231, 310-837-2368, [www.stereoscopy.com](http://www.stereoscopy.com)

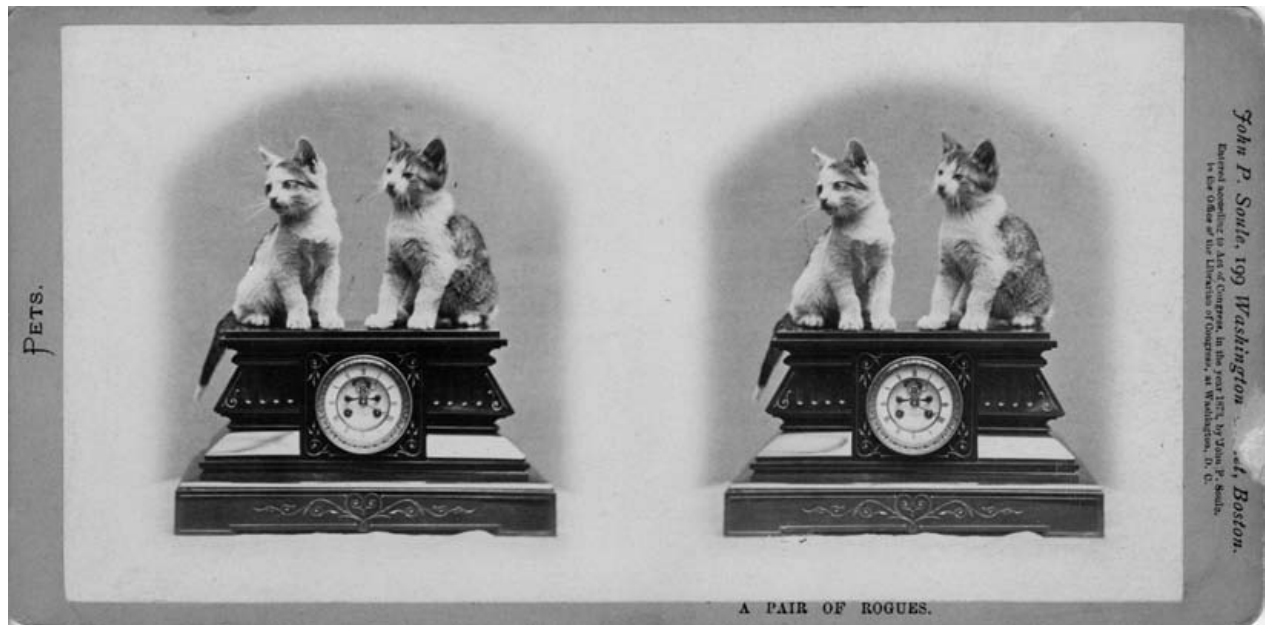


Figure 2. Kittens on French Clock.

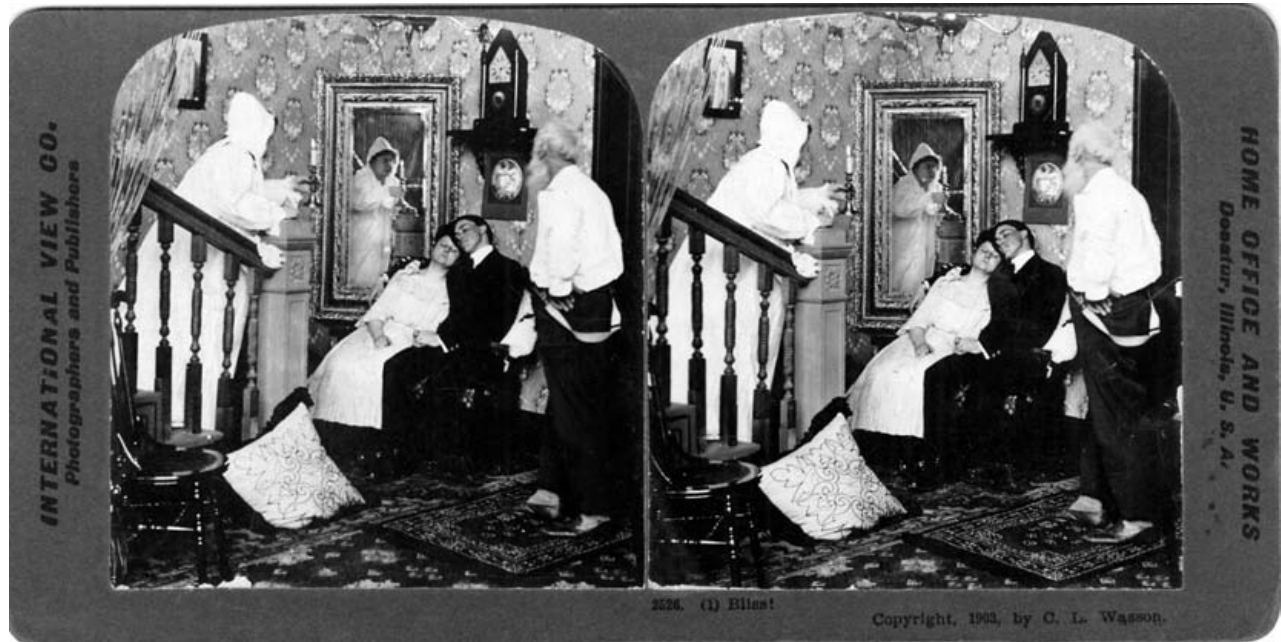


Figure 3. Bliss.

dominates Figure 1. This 1878 photo shows its builder, Stephen Engle, and credits Captain Reid, who transported and exhibited the massive clock throughout the nation. Tom Bartel's article in the February 1990 BULLETIN tells the full story of this amazing machine.

We can debate whether Figure 2 is an 1873 appeal to lovers of cats or clocks, but the large French marble clock certainly is prominent. With its open escapement, contrasting stones, cast bezel, and intricate gilt patterns, the clock is much more than just a seat for the "pair of rogues."

### Clocks in the Story

A clock is always included in the "Bliss" series of cards offered by most stereoview publishers. Figure 3, an example of the first card in the group, shows young lovers discovered by scandalized parents. A fine steeple clock, complete with its ornate shelf, lets us know that the time is past 2:30 A.M. Subsequent cards usually show the lovers' astonished awakening and then the suitor's violent ejection despite the maiden's pleas. Clocks play similar important roles in other such stories of late arrivals, rushed encounters, etc.

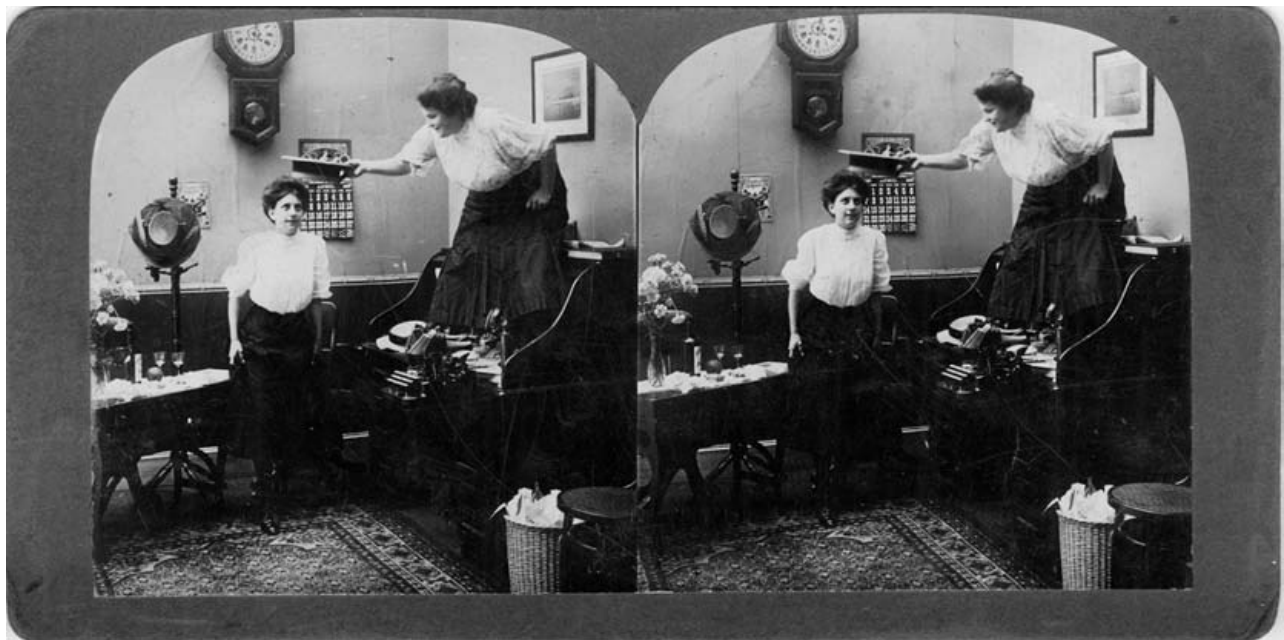


Figure 4. Secretaries' Lunch.



Figure 5. Who Hollered Fire?

### Clocks in the Room

In many interior scenes, a clock greets us from the wall or mantel. Humorous situations again are captured in my next two examples. Figure 4 shows two office workers enjoying a lively lunch hour — the long-drop calendar clock shows 12:30. Sharp-eyed readers will note the April 1907 wall calendar and an early typewriter. In Figure 5, we can only hope that the man rushing from this 1899 risqué encounter has removed the pendulum from the Doric shelf clock under his arm. Figure 6, a serious photo of the Mechanics Mill Engine Room, reveals a Howard banjo dwarfed by the massive flywheel.

### Public Clocks

We know that outdoor timepieces were vital to the public in earlier days. Figure 7 is an early and rare view of a Newton railroad station. The bearded traveler sees that it is 9:22 on the oversized hanging pocket watch with the dial marked “Macomber.” Figure 8 takes us to Greenwich, England, with its 24-hour “chronometer” and time ball clearly visible. The reverse side of this 1907 card features detailed text about the subject, reprinted here below the image, typical of stereoviews from the mammoth Keystone View Company.

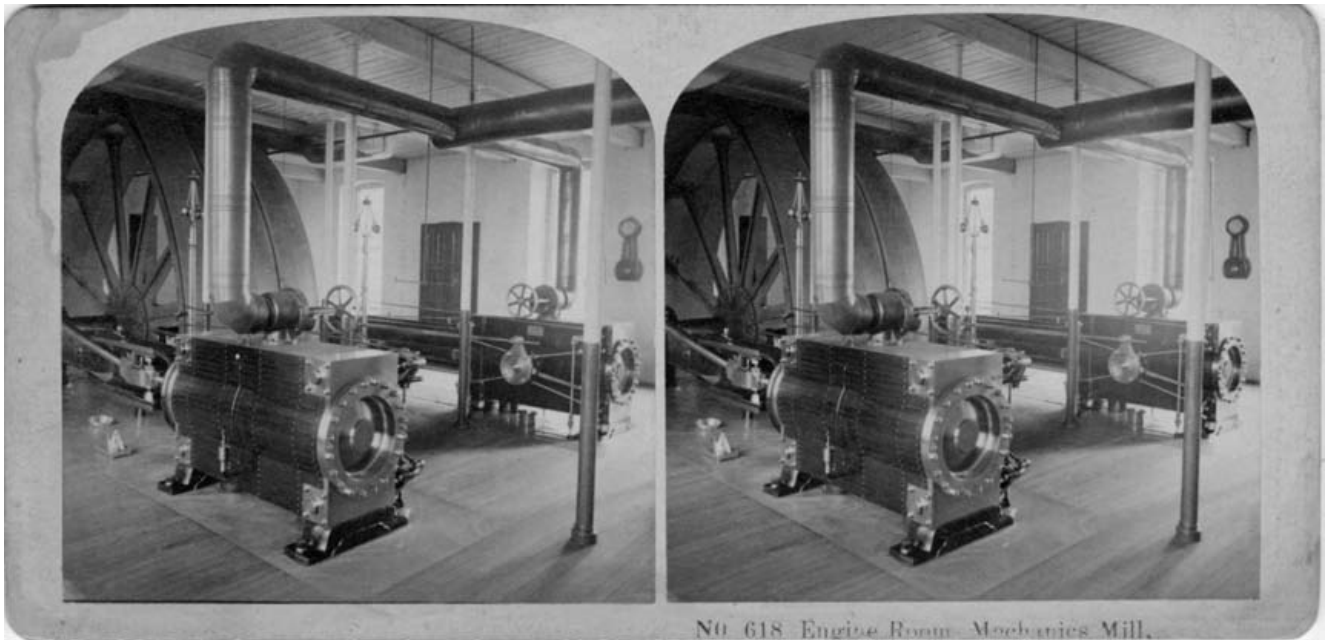


Figure 6. Engine Room.

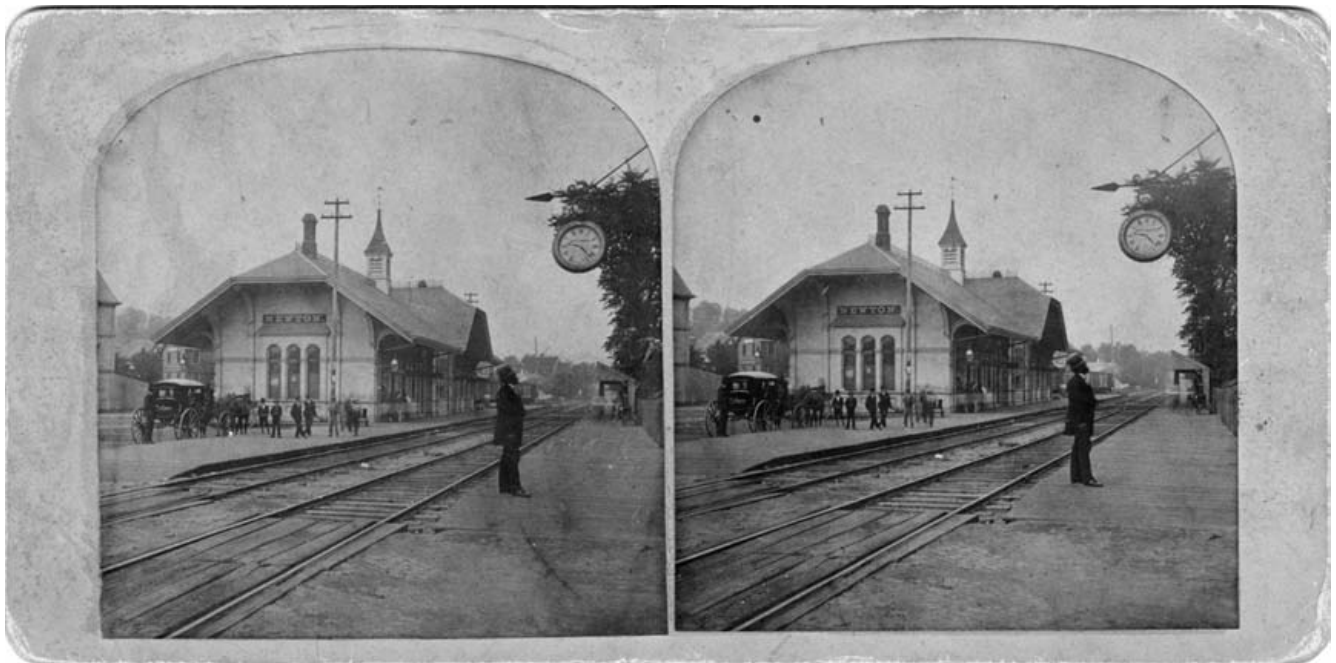


Figure 7. Newton Railroad Station.

### Clockmakers

The most coveted views for my kind of collector may be photographs of horologists and their establishments. The final illustration, Figure 9, introduces us to Jacob Skillman's shop. The location is not indicated, and I am hoping that a reader may know where this store stood. His windows are full of rows of brand-new clocks and watches and a sign promising "a good reliable solid silver hunting case watch" for just \$10. In this rare photograph, the proud proprietors pose outside, welcoming us to the time when our clocks and watches were awaiting their first owners.

### About the Author

Bob Frishman, President of New England Chapter 8, owns Bell-Time Clocks in Andover, Massachusetts. He has repaired, restored, and sold antique clocks since 1980. He worked for 10 years in the U.S. House of Representatives as a speechwriter, legislative assistant, and press secretary. For another 10 years, he ran his family's furniture manufacturing company in Lawrence, Massachusetts. In addition to clocks and watches, he collects 3D photos, cameras, and viewers.



Figure 8a, above. Greenwich, England view. Figure 8b, below. Text on back of card 8a.

**Chronometer by Which the World's Time is Measured, Greenwich, England.**

Here we have a picture of one of the buildings of the celebrated Royal Observatory. It stands on a hill 180 feet high, and in the center of a park 174 acres in extent. This park is a popular holiday resort for Londoners. The terrace in front of the Observatory, a part of which may be seen in the picture, faces north towards the Thames River. It commands a fine view of the bristling masts of ships all the way to London.

The large dial beside the main entrance of this building is the face of the world's standard clock. It has the hours numbered from 1 to 24 and other standard measurements marked. It is placed in this conspicuous place for the benefit of the public. The Observatory con-

tains some fine astronomical apparatus, including a 28-inch refracting telescope and a 26-inch photographic telescope. Every year great numbers of chronometers are tested here. There is a large colored ball on top of the building shown in our view. This ball drops from above at exactly 1 o'clock daily, when the correct time is telegraphed to all the important towns throughout the United Kingdom.

The world-renowned borough of Greenwich is five miles down the Thames River from London Bridge. It is noted for the Greenwich Hospital and Royal Naval College, but is best known for the Observatory. The meridian from which most of the world's time is reckoned passes through this Observatory. Greenwich was a royal residence for several centuries, and was the birthplace of King Henry VII, Queen Mary, and Queen Elizabeth.

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Figure 9. Jacob Skillman Shop.