

**Arizona Pioneer Photographer George H. Rothrock**  
by Jeremy Rowe © 2008

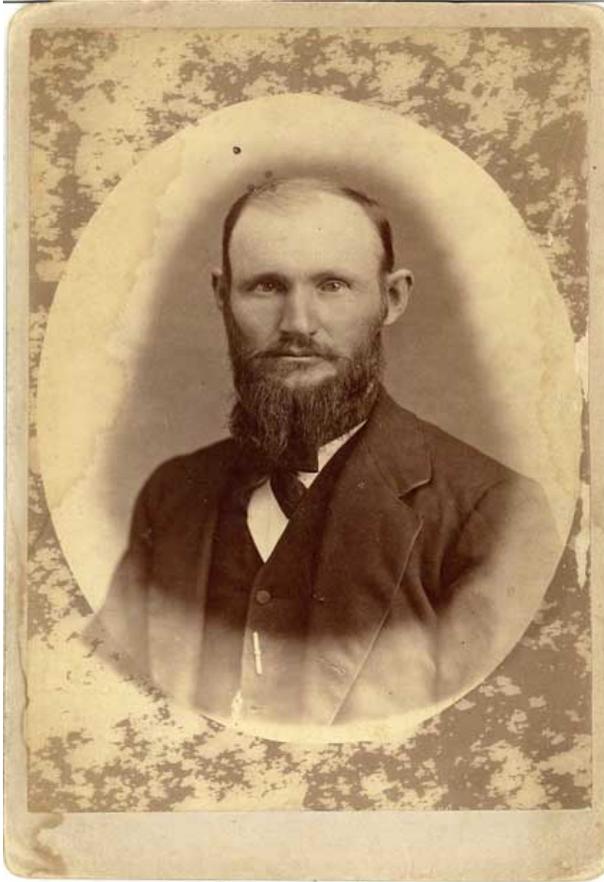


Figure 1. Portrait of George H. Rothrock ca 1880.  
Courtesy of Arizona Historical Foundation

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 25-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 development of the Arizona Territory in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Like most of his peers, his life followed a varied path of travel and careers, adventures and tribulations, and coincidental meetings across California, Arizona and the West that changed and shaped them while they created a photographic legacy of their lives and times.

George H. Rothrock was the eldest son of German emigrants George Rothrock and Louisa Frisch who had settled in Jefferson City Missouri. Born March 31, 1843, George 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<sup>1</sup>. Likely young George and his two younger sisters herd tales of the Arizona Territory from his father as he traveled back and forth to Missouri over the next 5 years.

Though 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 5, he booked passage to California from New York at the then staggering cost of almost \$3,000 on the steamship *George Law* in September 1854<sup>ii</sup>. 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 rebuild and renamed as the *Steamship Central America*. This is the ship that only a few years later in 1857, sunk off Carolinas in a hurricane with 578 passengers and tons of gold ingots, coins, nuggets and dust en route from California to New York. The ship was estimated to have carried 1/3 of

all the gold from the California Gold Rush<sup>iii</sup>. The ship was located and salvaged in the mid 1980s and was documented in the book Ship of Gold in the Deep Blue Sea<sup>iv</sup> and efforts to obtain images to assist in marketing the treasure drove California daguerreotypes to a new high at the Steve Anaya sale at Sotheby's in 2000.

Though not as tragic as the voyage of the Central America, the Rothrock trip continued to be difficult from the overland crossing of Panama where the family was separated and the children 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 finally took a steamer John L. Stevens up the Baja California coast to San Francisco. After a brief stay the Rothrocks took the riverboat to Sacramento, then traveled on the "Governor Dane" to Marysville, where Rothrock's father had purchased a ranch. The family obtained cuttings from General Sutter and started a vineyard and orchard.

When he reached eighteen in 1861, George Rothrock left home and took a job as a ranch hand in nearby Colusa, California. After a few months Rothrock caught the "gold fever" and decided to try his hand at mining in Nevada. En route he changed his mind 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, he decided to move on – first on the 15 mile trip to Stockton "wading knee deep, waist deep, and sometimes swimming ere we got there" and then on to San Francisco by riverboat.

George heard the government was hiring teamster to drive from Los Angeles to Yuma, Arizona Territory. He left San Francisco for Los Angeles on the Steamer Senator on February 1, 1862. After another rough trip from San Francisco to Los Angeles "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."<sup>v</sup> The pilot found safe harbor in Santa Cruz Island while the bulk of the storm blew past, and then continued on to San Pedro.

Soon after landing, George found teamsters were no longer needed and fell in with a young Jewish merchant looking for a partner who spoke some Spanish. They had "several trunks of shoddy goods from San Francisco" which they sold out exceeded all expectations<sup>vi</sup>. After declining an offer for a continued partnership, George walked on to Los Angeles, then only a small settlement of saloons and gambling houses.

Rothrock sidetracked into a new career once again, this time meeting two miners who hired him to work with them in the Soledad Mines on the Santa Clara River. Soon after arriving and dreaming of millions to come, he turned down an offer of \$5,000 for one of his first claims. Rothrock bought a lot and soon built a house in nearby Ravenna City. He explored the area and spent time in other workings in Inyo County and a camp at Laurel Hill in the Mesquite Mining District. After Indians killed two teamsters at nearby Walker Pass and he had a premonition followed by a major cave-in, 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 Walkers 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 led George to the decision to return to California just after the election in November 1864, initially to Sacramento, then on to the Tacuyo ranch in Tejon canyon in Kern County. Rothrock initially hired on as a ranch hand, but was soon elevated to Foreman.

Soon the need to travel struck once again and George followed another lead and headed south to the Cuyama Ranch in San Diego County. Soon after his arrival, his father, asking George to return home so his father could make a trip back to Missouri, contacted him. Eleven days later he was back in Marysville to watch the family ranch.

A few months later his father returned and George left once again, initially for San Francisco. This time he became involved in plans for a cotton farm. He was empowered to hire a crew of “9 Chinamen” and bring them to the farm in Bakersfield. En route Rothrock suffered a tragic accident. He was pulled under the freight wagon carrying their supplies, severely breaking his leg. After the leg was set and he recovered, Rothrock built an adobe house near Fort Tejon, and again shifted from farming to open a store that sold goods to the local farmers and shepherders. His customers included Charles King, who became famous as a “farmer, cattle-breeder, butcher, wool grower, and lumberman,” and later became California Assemblyman from Humboldt County<sup>vii</sup>.

Rothrock received word from home once again, this time news that his father had died. He returned to the family ranch in Marysville to settle the meager estate. While there he had his first exposure to photography, taking lessons in wet plate photography from a one-legged Cherokee Flat photographer named Baker (possibly Edward W. Baker of Placerville)<sup>viii</sup>.

George moved on to Bakersfield and worked as a clerk in George B. Chester’s store. Soon he met and formed a partnership with another photographer, William Houghton. They bought a lot, and built a photographic gallery, which they operated until October 1875. Rothrock had become ill and was advised to recuperate in Tehachapi. He worked briefly as a salesman selling grain for the Kern River Land Company before meeting yet another local photographer, William J. Young.

Young had operated the first Daguerreian galleries in Susanville, California and had subsequently operated galleries in California and Idaho, and as an itinerant photographer during the several decades that followed<sup>ix</sup>. Rothrock and Young first became friends, and then photographic partners. Young had been corresponding with a Mr. Keller from Visalia about opportunities in the nearby Arizona Territory. The three put together some supplies, two wagons added a few other interested locals and left for Los Angeles as a first stop on their way to Yuma.

En route Rothrock and Young set up their tent as itinerant photographers in San Juan Capistrano, and San Louis Rey Mission. After arriving in and finding Yuma in a “depressed mood” the two photographers determined to see and explore other parts of Arizona. They set up their photographic tent in Yuma and produced images including several cabinet views of the dirt streets and adobe buildings comprising the little town on the Colorado River.

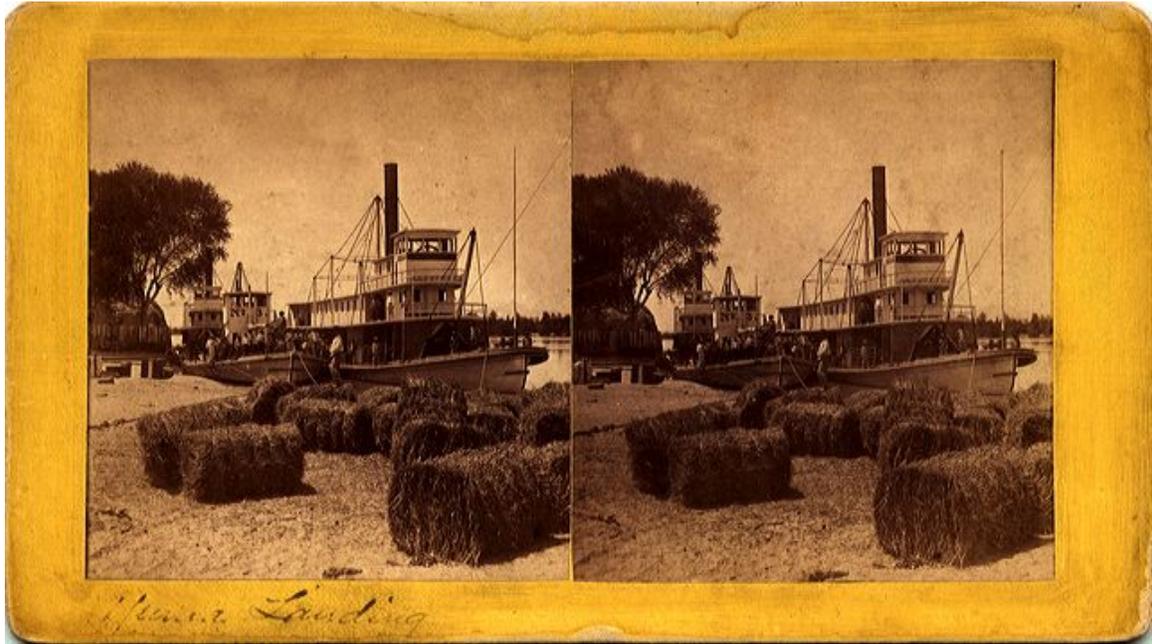


Figure 2. Colorado River Steamboats at Yuma Landing ca 1876  
Collection of the Author

Soon the partners moved a few miles up the river to Ehrenberg. The partners ordered enough additional equipment from San Francisco to have two photographic outfits. Their stock included one tent, 2 - 8 X 10 cameras and a number of lenses and miscellaneous supplies. Rothrock took one outfit and traveled up the Colorado to Fort Mojave where he made stereographs, including one of the new water works. While at the Fort on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, he experienced “the hottest days of my life.”<sup>x</sup>

Private property of W. J. Young	Property of Young & Rothrock	But own 14930
1 Photographic Tent 12-16 40	1 1/2 doz Portrait Lens 35-	1 Bot Ground Glass Substitutes 30
1 Description Marry) original catalogues	1 Box Slides " 20-	1 Collection Vial 1.50
70 Slides for same	1 Field Camera Stand 11.50	60 10-14 Iron Plates 12.00
1 10 inch Burnisher	1 10-12 Rubber Dish 2.25	1 Oz Cotton 1.00
1 8-10 Camera Box, wood	1 Iron Pan 1.50	1 Seal Alcohol 3.00
1 1/2 doz " "	1 Fast Brush 50	1 Oz Iodide Potassium 75
1 View Lens good	2 Baskets 2-	2 Glass Cutters 50
1 8-10 Portrait Lens 50	1 Head Rest 4.00	1/2 lb Paraffine 1.00
1 Small " "	1 8-10 Rubber Bath 6.75	1 Kg. Filter Paper 30
1 Field Camera Stand 11.50	6 8-10 Plat Frames 12-	1 " Joseph 25
1 Tripod " "	10 1/2 doz " 5-	1/2 lb Collodion Chloride 1.50
1 Headrest 4.00	1 Slides Camera Box 10-	4 " Iodine & Acacia 2.20
1 8-10 Bath holder 6.75	1/2 Runn Paper 9.00	10 " Hypo Sulph. Soda 1.50
6 Printing Frames 6.00	3000 Card Mounts 16.75	1/2 " Nitric Acid 30
1 10-12 Rubber Dish 4.50	200 8-10 " 5.00	1/2 " Cyanide Glass 50
1 10-12 " " 2.50	2 1 Oz graduator 1-	1/2 " Sulph " 37
1 Fast Brush 75	6 lb. Oxalic Acid 1.50	Lot of Processors 1.00
4 Rubber Frames	3 doz Alba Plates 4.50	" Malt 3.00
	1 Box Screw Eye 30	3 doz Cases 10.-
	1 Collection Vial 1.25	1/2 " Lockets 4.00
	1 Pair Shears 1.50	1/2 lb. Shutter 50
	148.30	\$193.77

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

Young traveled on to Phoenix where he bought lumber and a lot, then built what may have been the first photographic studio in the growing town. Young saw promise in the new Territory and wrote his wife about the opportunities that he was planning 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 paper<sup>xi</sup>

Rothrock traveled East by freight wagon from Ft. Mojave to the mining town Mineral Park where he stayed until October making a number of stereographs of the emerging town and of the mines and native population of the area. He then moved on the Prescott, stopping briefly to make views of the town, and finally to Phoenix where he reunited with Young. The partners decided that they should make a “tour of Arizona in the photo lines” to document the Forts, mines and growing communities to create a body of work that could be sold to take advantage of the future prosperity that Young predicted for Arizona. Thought Rothrock was “considerably embued (sic) with the wanderlust” he agreed to stay and work with Young on his photographic efforts.

Tragically, Young caught a severe cold while working outdoors improving his ranch. He was susceptible to respiratory problems, his lungs delicate from a history of tuberculosis and respiratory problems. The illness quickly worsened. William Young developed pneumonia and passed away within the week, on November 28, 1876<sup>xii</sup>. Rothrock

corresponded with Young's wife in California, providing her with the story of his time in Arizona, the illness and of his unfortunate demise. The letter also included an inventory of their two photographic outfits and an offer to help her dispose of the gear, and of Young's property interests in Phoenix. Rothrock also mentioned the need to generate funds to pay Young's funeral expenses and other bills:

"I am quite a stranger here myself. When I came here a few weeks ago, we had scarce money enough to pay my freight bill. ...there are some accounts outstanding...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."<sup>xiii</sup>

Rothrock initially tried to sell the lumber left from Young's purchase for the studio to raise funds, but could not find a buyer. He eventually used the lumber to build himself the first wooden (as opposed to the usual adobe) house in Phoenix. The 10' X 12' dwelling was built under Cottonwood trees on the South side of Adams between Center and First Streets.<sup>xiv</sup>



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

Rothrock was determined to complete the photographic tour planned with Young before his untimely death. After settling most of the issues related to Young's estate he began preparing for the expedition/. The first major leg of the trip began in May 1877 as Rothrock traveled from Phoenix through the Pima reservation to Sacaton, then to Florence, and Camp Lowell outside of Tucson.

Rothrock produced a significant series of stereographs of Arizona during this and other his later excursions across the territory. The earliest were on 2 ½ X 7 green mounts. Later he changed to the larger 3 ½ X 7 mount size and used orange, and occasionally gray, yellow or buff mounts with printed imprints and manuscript captions. At least 21 variants of color and mount imprint have been identified to date Though no comprehensive listing exists, projections of caption numbers from extant views identified to date estimate that he produced over 250 individual titles along with unknown hundreds of cabinet cards, and mounted photographs during his 25-year photographic career in Arizona.

Rothrock's first major stop was Florence, where he made images of the town's main street and of the nearby Casa Grande ruins. He notes that his tent was used as a

playground for the children of Florence “in all stages of smallpox, but none fatal until I left there.”<sup>xv</sup>

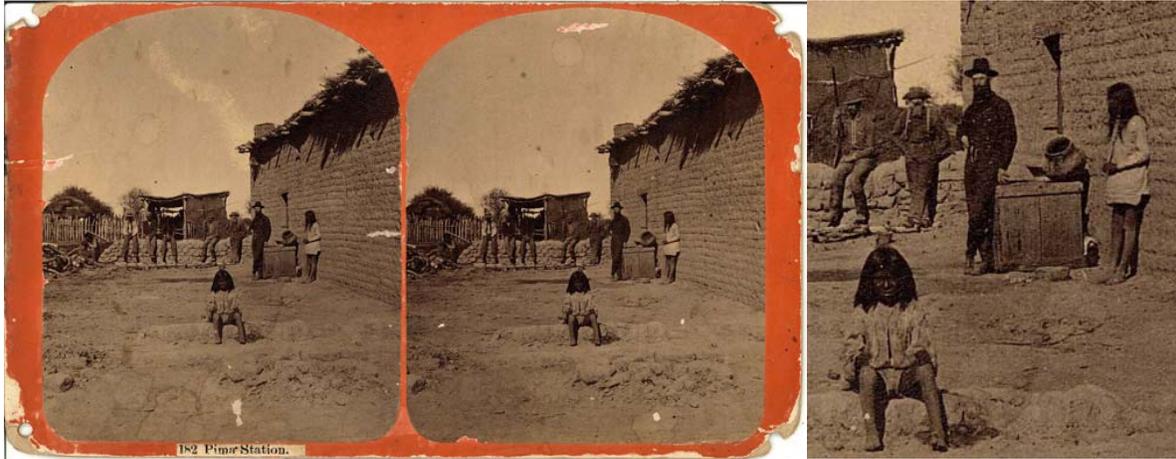


Figure 5. Stereograph of Rothrock at Pima Station with detail showing Rothrock dressed in black at center of image ca 1877  
Courtesy Arizona Historical Foundation

On March 10, 1877 he made his first views of the ruins after camping nearby overnight. At the time he found plenty of wood for camping and saw graffiti signatures of early Arizona pioneers Pauline Weaver (1836) and J. Ross Brown (1853). When he returned years later, in 1891, no wood was to be found, and a Mr. John Jones and Mr. William Williams had written over the pioneer names with their own.<sup>xvi</sup>



Figure 6. Stereograph of Casa Grande Ruins ca 1877  
Collection of the Author

In a letter of March 13 from Florence that was heavily stained with silver nitrate that darkened with exposure to light, Rothrock noted that:

“When I got your letter of the [Feb] 25<sup>th</sup> 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.”

“I will send you [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.”

Also referenced was the ongoing deliberation with Mrs. Young regarding disposition of her husband’s photographic equipment:

“I am sorry that you failed in setting a price on goods [Young’s photographic equipment] 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, ex 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:<sup>xvii</sup>”

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. “

Rothrock’s next stop was Fort McDowell, arriving on April 1. He photographed the Fort and grounds, as well as the officers, wives and pioneering women that braved the dangerous times a while stationed there, including Captain and Mrs. Kendall, Captain and Mrs. Corliss, and Mr. Cunningham and Miss Taylor. Another stereograph shows a picnic with armed soldiers protecting the group at a temporary camp near the Fort with Rothrock’s photographic wagon partially hidden behind a cactus at the right of the image<sup>xviii</sup>. 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 event pre-dates Watkins’ visit to Arizona for the Southern Pacific railroad it was likely

acquired somehow from Rothrock. Despite the inventory indicating that he had a larger format camera, this is a rare example of a larger than stereo image produced during this era, particularly on his excursions.



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

George also made photographs of the famous Giant Saguaro five miles from the Fort. The strange Serious Gigantus were little known outside the Territory and images of large, many armed cacti, and of the 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 over 50 arms or “branches.”

Rothrock returned to Phoenix in late April, photographing other large cactus near the head gates of the Arizona Canal and south of Telegraph Pass while en route from the Fort. His first leg of the trip had been a success, so he bought a team and wagon and prepared for his larger photographic expedition through the Arizona Territory.

Rothrock left Phoenix in late May 1877, and traveled back through Sacaton and Florence to Fort Lowell and Rillito near Tucson, finally camping at the San Xavier mission. There he set up his darkroom behind the altar with the help of the Papago Indians that lived nearby. The Mission was an icon of Arizona and next to cacti and the Grand Canyon, one of its most popular photographic subjects. Rothrock's portfolio of stereographs has San Xavier well represented with a number of interior and exterior views of the mission made on this and later trips.

After leaving the Tucson area, Rothrock went on to Fort Grant. Rothrock's timing was impeccable - arriving in August 1877, the same time William H. Bonney, also known as “Billy the Kid,” was at the Fort. Rothrock met Billy, who shortly after, quickly left for New Mexico after killing his first man, Frank “Windy” Cahill.<sup>xix</sup>

The second half of the 1870s was a treacherous time to explore the Arizona Territory. Apaches and robbers controlled most of the roads. Hold-ups and raids on ranches and mines occurred far too frequently, and reports of the depredations filled local and national newspapers. The Apache under Geronimo had left the reservation and as a result, even everyday travel became a dangerous challenge. Word of the murder of a mail rider near Fort Bowie drew Rothrock to Apache Pass and Fort Bowie to explore and photograph the area. En route to the Fort, he found the wagon of the murdered carrier alongside the road. His stay lasted for three weeks during which he made images of the Fort and grounds, and of the soldiers and scouts in the field.

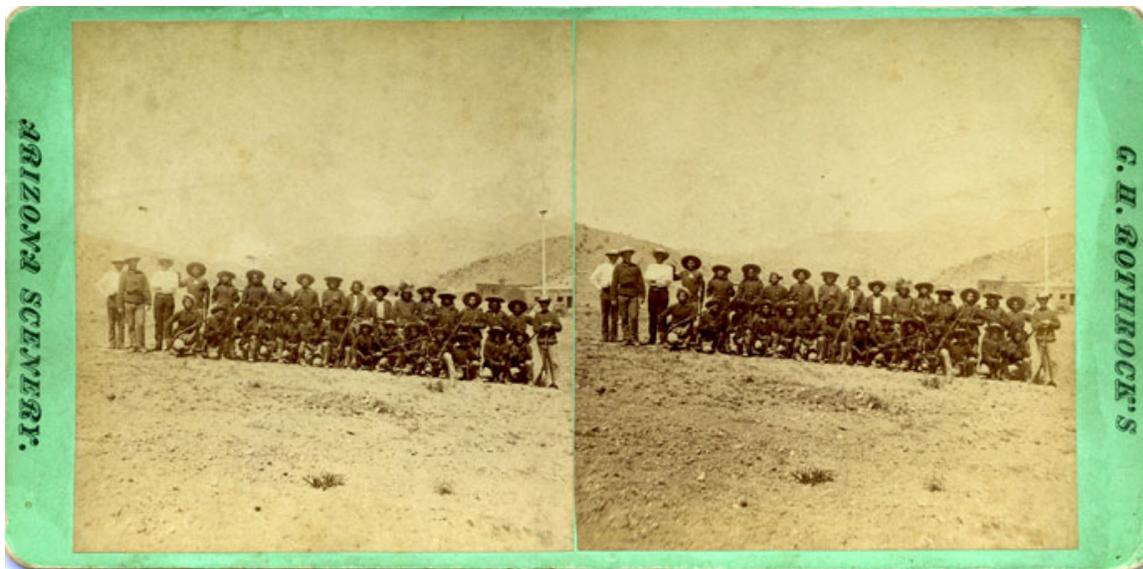


Figure 8. Apache Scouts in parade ground at Fort Bowie in Apache Pass ca 1877  
Collection of the Author

The Mormon community of Solomonville that was forming near the Indian settlement of "Pueblo Viejo" in Graham County was his next stop. An example of how small the circles were in the West during this time, of the few dozen people in Solomonville, one turned out to be Dan Hughes, a friend of Rothrock's from Bakersfield.<sup>xx</sup>

After a brief stop, Rothrock went on to the newly established San Carlos reservation during the height of the conflict with Geronimo and Chiricahua Apache where he photographed distribution of food to the Apache on the reservation on "ration day." He also made individual and group portraits of the scouts and Apache Police working out of the reservation, and of many of the important figures on the reservation. He made stereographs of Pinal Apache chief Eskiminzin, a survivor of the infamous Camp Grant Massacre in 1871. Though captured as a renegade after leaving the reservation in 1873, Eskiminzin 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 such as Es-Kin-Al-Ze, Tsin-Sim-A, Cun-Din-E-Yo and Yaav-A-Ki-Shi in addition to the buildings and dwellings on the reservation, and of Indian domestic and farming scenes.

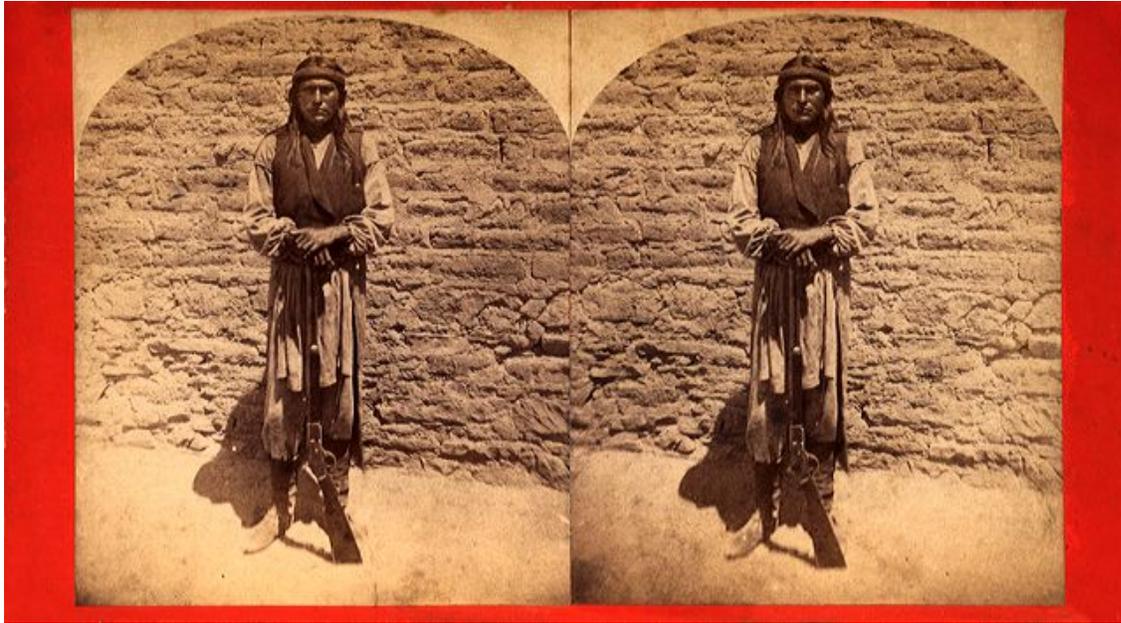


Figure 9. Apache Leader Natchez at San Carlos ca 1877  
Collection of the Author

Rothrock paid to have his equipment freighted to Fort Apache that fall. He produced views of the Fort and vicinity, and posed impromptu “battle” scenes with scouts in nearby Ruckers Canyon. After a few weeks in the area, Rothrock moved on across Northern Arizona through St. Johns Sunset crossing, and Pine Springs where he broke a wagon wheel. He finally made it to Fort Verde in the center of the Territory where he explored and photographed the Cliff Dwellings and ruins that were sprinkled throughout the Verde Valley. At Montezuma’s Castle, he built ladders to explore and photograph the site. One testament to how things have changed is that his attempts to photograph the reflections of Montezuma’s Castle in the creek were unsuccessful due to activity of beavers in the creek continually rippling the water. Now all that remains is the name - Beaver Creek.

Rothrock also visited Montezuma’s Well, producing a number of images of the ruins and caves within the site, and of the spring from the well 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 nearby at Fort Verde Rothrock lent his team of horses to acquaintance from his recent visit to Fort McDowell, Mrs. Beck, so she could visit her husband at the Beck Mine in the nearby Bradshaw Mountains. Unfortunately for Rothrock, Mrs. Beck drove the team so hard she killed his best horse. The Becks plead poverty and George had to absorb the loss and limp on to with only a partial team.<sup>xxi</sup> En route back to Phoenix, George stopped briefly in Prescott. Deferring to the established local photographer Daniel F. Mitchell, Rothrock operated only as an itinerant making images of the town and region, but leaving the rest of the commercial market to Mitchell.<sup>xxii</sup>



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

After returning to Phoenix in the fall of 1877, Rothrock built a new photo studio on the South East 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.

Rothrock settled down, working at the gallery and store, and ended his single life - marrying Lottie Woods, daughter of a local Justice of the Peace. George became active in local politics, becoming involved in incorporating the City of Phoenix in 1881. He also sat on the Board of Elections, and was recorder of the first City Council meeting. George served one term as a City Council member from the Third Ward,<sup>xxiii</sup> and was listed in the 1881 Phoenix City Directory as serving a term as a Justice of the Peace.

Another in Rothrock's series of short-term partners was C. W. Catton. Catton was a year older than Rothrock, born in Canada in 1843.<sup>xxiv</sup> Little has surfaced to date other than note of his activity as a photographer in Coffeerville, Kansas ca 1875.<sup>xxv</sup> In the 1880 Census, the two listed their occupation as photographers and shared the same address. Catton operated as a photographer in his own right, but it is not yet known whether he learned from his partner Rothrock, or had already known and practiced the craft elsewhere. Rothrock and Catton moved the wooden portion of their studio to a lot behind the Post Office on Washington between Center and First Avenue where Rothrock opened the first stationary store in Phoenix with Catton in addition to operating its 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 soon after, apparently under less than ideal circumstances. A number of extant cabinet and boudoir card mounts have Catton's name abraded from the mount, likely by Rothrock after the partnership failed. Catton operated on his own in Phoenix, advertising independently of Rothrock, such as in the 1888 City directory. Catton appears to have moved west soon after, working as a photographer in Tacoma Washington ca 1891.<sup>xxvi</sup>

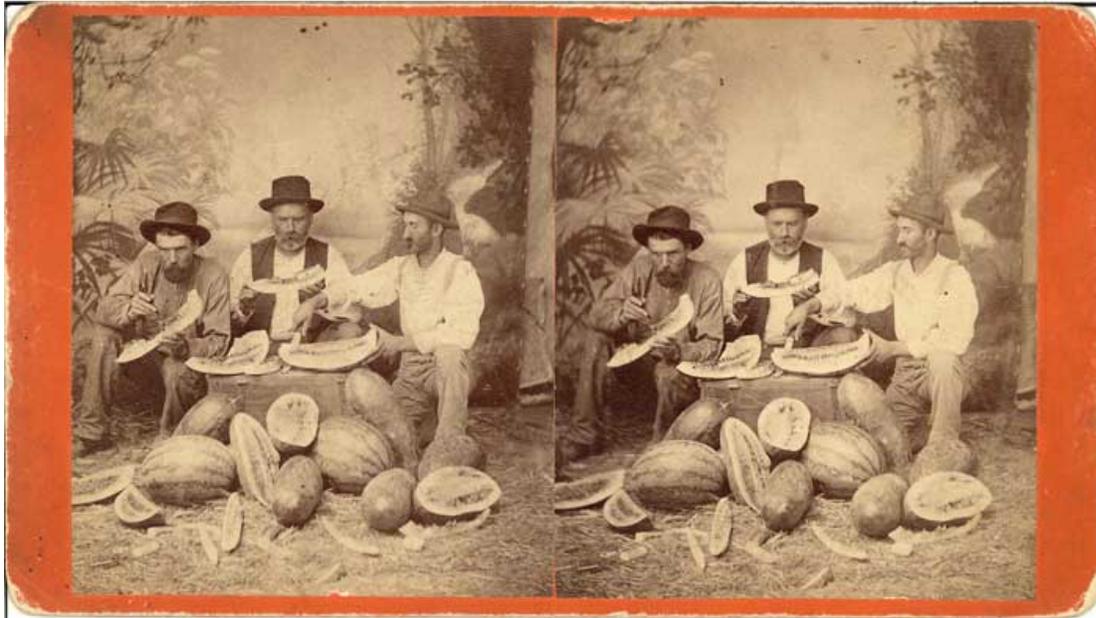


Figure 11. "A Melon-colie Scene" Studio portrait of (R to L) George Rothrock, Father-in-law Wilson T. Woods, and brother-in-law Will Woods ca Fall 1881 after returning from trip to Fort Apache  
Courtesy of Arizona Historical Foundation

During Spring of 1881, Rothrock's old wader lust once again grew beyond his control. He and his new brother-in-law Will Woods prepared for a trip back to Fort Apache during another high point in the Chiricahua uprising. They would leave just a few months before Geronimo and his band left the San Carlos reservation once again in September in the final surge of the Apache Wars in Arizona.



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

George and Will left Phoenix on June 15 traveling light in a “spring wagon” photographing en route 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 to explore and photograph the bridge, making images along the creek beneath the bridge. The partners then went through Pine, Strawberry and to the top of Baker’s Butte and General Springs through Showlow to Fort Apache. They arrived in the midst of “serious Indian trouble” involving a renegade Medicine Man stirring up trouble by claiming that a dead popular chief could be resurrected only after the whites were driven out. Even the Apache scouts were reacting to tension growing between the two communities.

The Government ordered General Carr, and Captains Cramer (F Troop) and Hentig (D Troop) of the 6<sup>th</sup> Cavalry to arrest the Medicine Man at Cibious (sic) Creek about 30 miles from the Fort. Soon after arresting the Medicine Man, the Scouts mutinied and fired into the soldier’s camp, killing 6 privates and Captain Hentig. Apache soon attacked the Fort and Rothrock and Woods decided to escape before they were pressed into service so quickly left for Fort Thomas on the Gila. They traveled just ahead of the action, camping briefly at Turkey Creek and getting reports from the couriers that were passing of the skirmishes and numbers of soldiers killed. They were encouraged to return to Ft. Apache but pressed on to San Carlos, hoping to get there before word and the uprising spread.

George and Will just made it across the Black River ahead of the Apache. Three civilians that they had met the day before and the soldiers that had helped them across the river were found dead the following day. Their burned wagon was mistaken for Rothrock’s and word mistakenly was sent back to Phoenix that Rothrock and Wills had been killed.<sup>xxvii</sup>

The Gila River crossing was flooded so the partners had to go overland “along a cow trail to reach Fort Thomas.” When they arrived and learned that they had been reported killed, they sent a telegram to Rothrock’s then partner Catton in Phoenix “Got through by the skin of my teeth” to correct the miss-impression.<sup>xxviii</sup>

Soon after their arrival at Fort Thomas the situation escalated further as Geronimo and 80 Apache left San Carlos, attacking a freight train and killing 5 at Cedar Springs.

Luckily, Rothrock and Woods were too slow in packing their photographic gear to make the first Government escort from the Fort. It was attacked and all were killed. The partners took the second escort of “nine empty wagons driven by Mexicans” and three scouts. The party soon arrived at the site of the massacre. Rothrock was

“...so extremely anxious to take some photos of [the massacre], but as dry plates were little known then, and I could only use dry 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, then snuck through Dragon at night. They finally reached Benson regrouped, then traveled North through Tucson, Florence and finally back to Phoenix.

In April of that year he formed a partnership with George E. Loring, a Phoenix businessman who had arrived in 1876 and grew from a watch repairer to a dealer in general merchandise on property purchased from the Bichard family as they closed out their dealings in the Territory<sup>xxxix</sup>. Rothrock established his photographic studio first at the News Depot, then at Lorings Bazaar and Wells Fargo Agency on Washington Street.

George continued to travel throughout the Territory, finding events and interesting locations to add to his stereographic portfolio. For example, in 1881 he visited the southeast corner of the Territory and photographed a memorial parade for assassinated president Garfield in Bisbee's Tombstone Canyon.

Next in the line of serial photographic partners was Charles W. Barnett.<sup>xxx</sup> Barnett was 15 years younger than Rothrock, born in San Bernardino, California on September 29, 1858. The relationship began ca 1882 and lasted for several years. Though the specific roles of each partner is unclear, photographic mounts of cartes-de-visites, cabinet, and boudoir cards, and in local newspaper advertisements always gave Rothrock top billing, listing the business as "Rothrock & Barnett." This partnership appeared more stable than his previous efforts and lasted until the early 1890s. Theirs was the premier photographic studio in Phoenix, and produced hundreds of portraits of Arizona pioneers and their families, and documented the ranches and businesses that were starting to flourish as the town grew in the Salt River Valley.

Rothrock was particularly proud of his stereo work, entering them in the Arizona Industrial Exposition of 1884 and winning the First Premium Award in photography. Thereafter he proudly added notice of this award to his stereograph imprints, offering both views from his earlier expeditions and additions from subsequent travels. Interestingly, it appears that Rothrock 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 used advertising to promote sale of his stereographs. Several of his mounts carry the tantalizing note that "A Complete Assortment of Stereoscopic Arizona Scenery Constantly on Hand, Catalog Free," as well as "circulars" noting the titles available for sale.<sup>xxxi</sup> Unfortunately no copies of the catalog or circulars have been located to date and the companion listing of titles of Rothrock's stereographs has been compiled from examples found in surveys of private and public collections.

Rothrock continued to add to his photographic portfolio, occasionally revisiting his earlier haunts. Included are cabinet and boudoir cards and stereo images of ruins at Casa Grande, Camp Verde and the Verde Valley, San Carlos, and Montezuma well and Castle. In addition he added many of the emerging camps and towns to his portfolio.

It appears that in response to difficulties that he had in using wet plate gear such as the images lost when time was not available to set-up the dark tent and equipment in the field, Rothrock became familiar with Dry Plates soon after they became available so he wouldn't lose another opportunity to photograph under pressure.

On a second trip to the Natural Bridge years after his first visit, this time using Dry Plates, Rothrock traveled with another brother-in-law, Henry Woods. Heavy rain and deep mud once

again challenged the travelers. They were blocked from crossings at Reno Pass and Florence so finally returned to Phoenix and tried the Black Canyon road to Fort Verde. They were successful and went west to photograph Jerome briefly. They took their spring wagon on 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."



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

In 1891 Rothrock briefly moved his photographic business to Tempe. George continued to explore new photographic technologies, this time using the new hand camera with flexible roll film. His experimentation included new modes of transportation as well, adding a safety bicycle to his horse and wagon. Other photographers had located in Phoenix, such as Frank Hartwell and Catton had become competition. Examples of the increasingly competitive atmosphere are images of the winter flood of the Salt River that year. Views of men posed on the end of the railroad bridge that had been washed out by the flooding taken from virtually identical locations appear on both Hartwell and Rothrock mounts.



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

The roll film cameras were also popular with amateurs furthering competition. Unfortunately Rothrock "...soon found times too hard to continue on the photo business." Though it appears that he continued to make photographs, he moved to a ranch northeast of Phoenix where he raised strawberries.

After a few months George acquired another plot of land near Alhambra where <sup>xxxii</sup>he lived for the next 8 years. Interestingly, the 1898 Phoenix Directory lists a Miss Lillie Rothrock living ½ mile S on 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue but has no listing for George. In 1899, Rothrock moved once again, this time to watch his brother-in-law and earlier collaborator Will Woods' home in the Evergreen area, and to also temporarily cover his job during a brief trip back to California. Will stayed on in California and George spent the next 13 years working for the Arizona Canal Company, soon rising into management and eventually running the company.

After several months working at the edge of Phoenix rebuilding the canals in 1901, Rothrock returned to find a letter from Mrs. Young asking for help once again clarifying potential assets in Phoenix from her husband William's estate. In his reply of February 3<sup>rd</sup>, Rothrock informed her that despite her hopes, there was no value in the remaining water rights and no other property remaining to be dealt with. In that letter, he notes his final bow to the photographic business:

"I am now and have been at work on the Ariz. Canal as zanjiro (sic) for some months, I cold no longer make a living for family in the Photo business so I had to quit it."<sup>xxxiii</sup>

A group of boudoir photographs of canal construction and clearing the old Hohokam channels may be the last commercial photographs made by Rothrock.

On November 26, 1905 while working for the Canal Company after a severe storm and subsequent flooding of the irrigation system, Rothrock and his son were managing gates when he slipped and fell. George was crushed beneath a heavy gate control lever, severely breaking his hip. He apparently never fully recovered, complaining 18 years later that was "still in the same condition."<sup>xxxiv</sup>

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

Rothrock produced a significant body of work, documenting the Territory at the end of the Indian Wars. His cartes-de-visites and cabinet cards document both the elite and working class of Phoenix during the era, and are still found in albums, trunks and family collections. George had a penchant for photographing firsts – including the first church, first school, and first trolley on the Phoenix Street Railway as well as the parades, events, and environment that defined the young capital of the Territory.

George Rothrock's stereographs are on a par with the work Dudley Flanders produced on his "Trip to Arizona" in 1874, and compare favorably with his peer in Tucson during this era, Henry Buehman. His best works are masterpieces of stereo composition and environmental portraiture,

truly amazing products given the difficult wet plate process used, primitive conditions, and the dangerous environment in which they were made.

Sadly, like many of the pioneer photographers of his era, Rothrock's contributions have rarely been recognized as his work has been published to illustrate 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

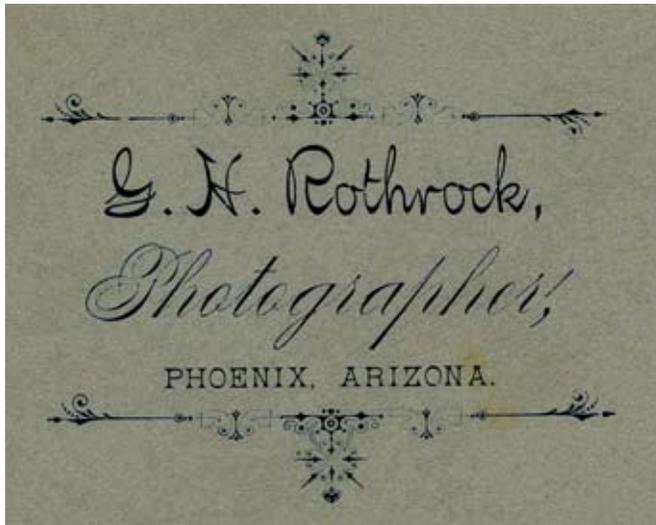
**Un-Numbered Rothrock Titles**

- [?] 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)

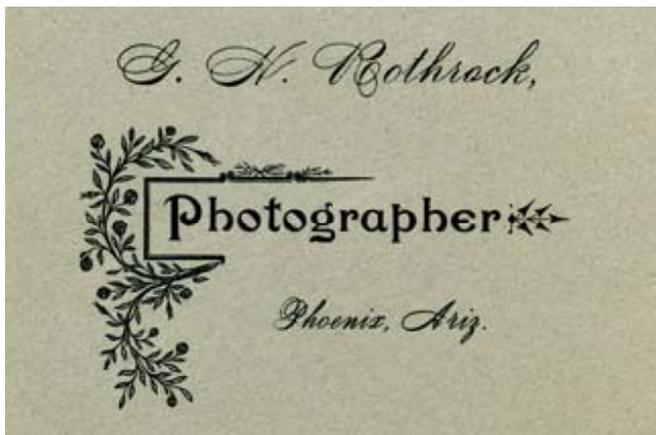
Examples of Rothrock Photographic Imprints



Cartes-de-visite imprint ca 1876

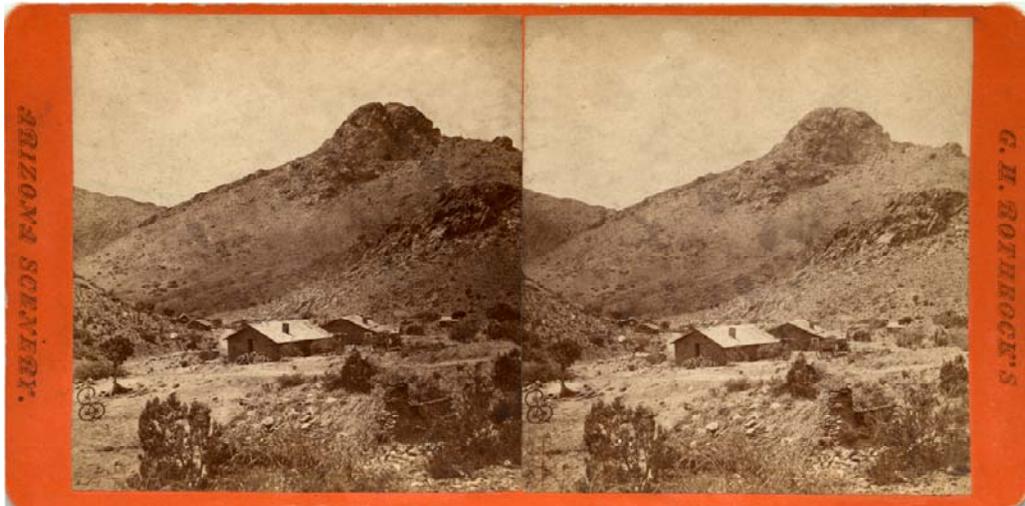


Boudoir cabinet card imprint ca 1880



Boudoir cabinet card imprint ca 1880

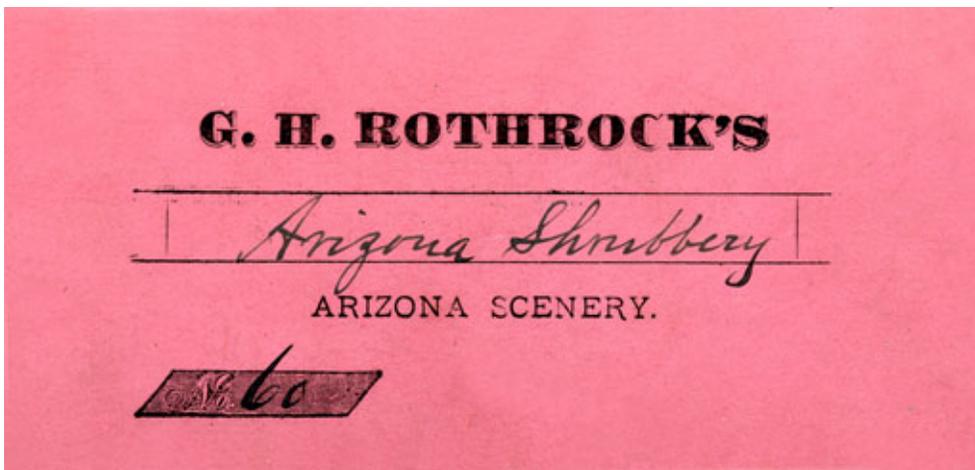
**Rothrock Stereo Imprints**



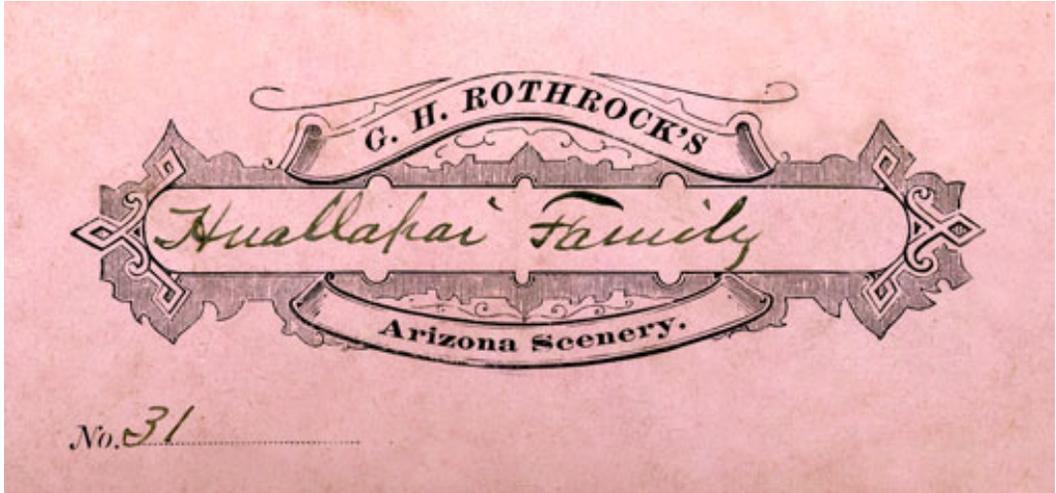
ca 1876



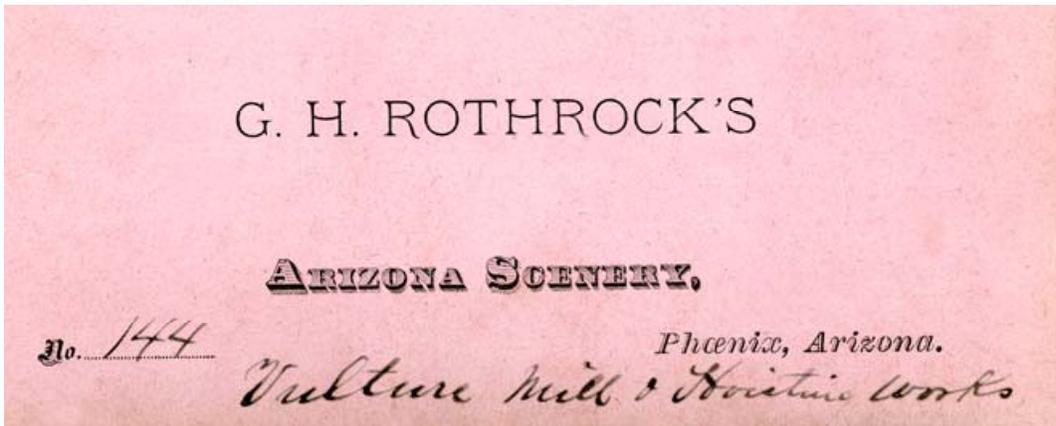
ca 1876



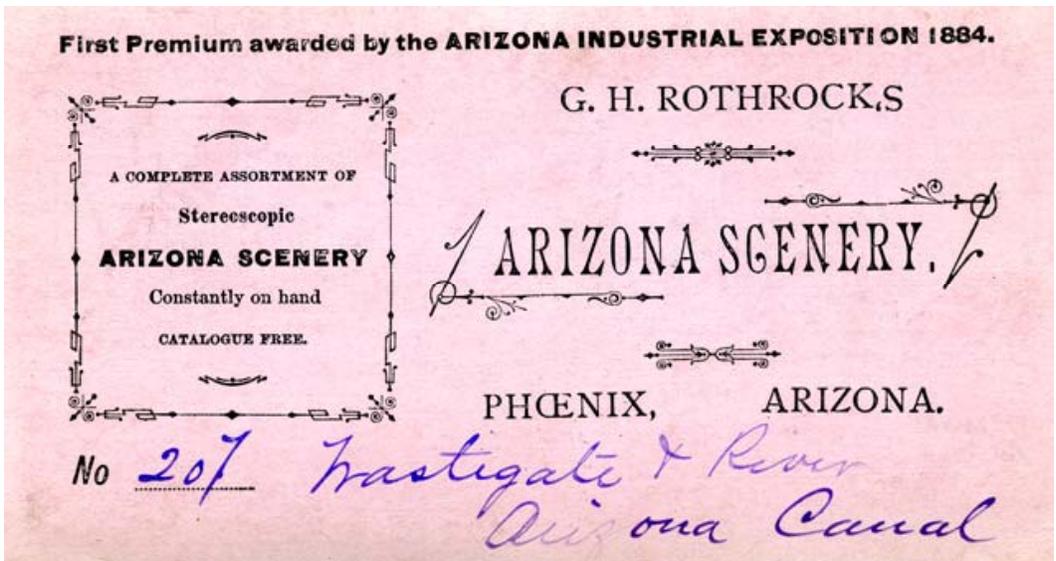
ca 1878



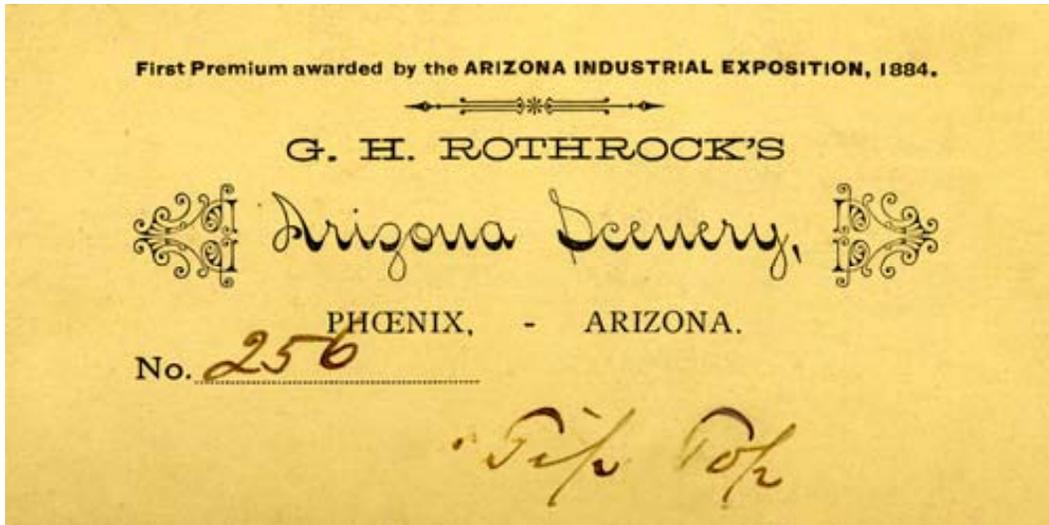
ca 1878



ca 1880

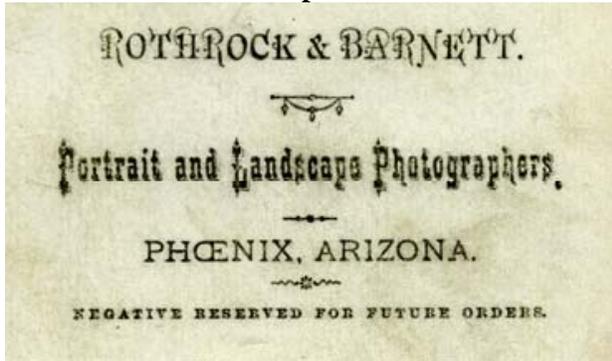


ca 1885

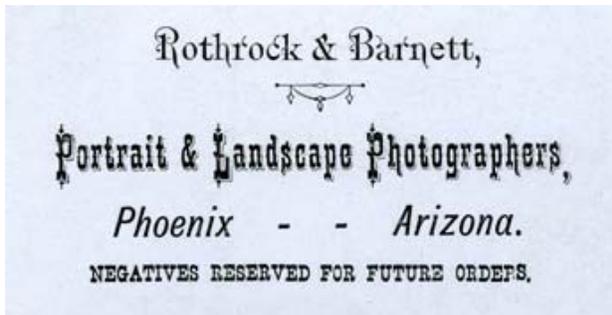


ca 1885

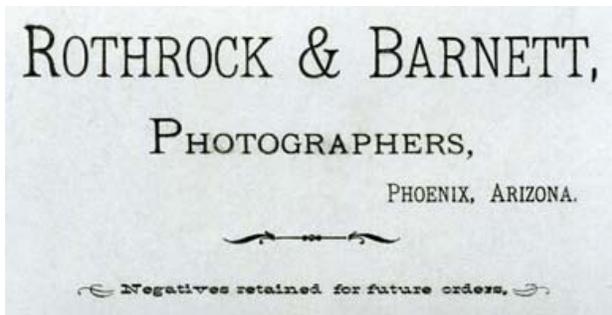
### Rothrock & Barnett Imprints



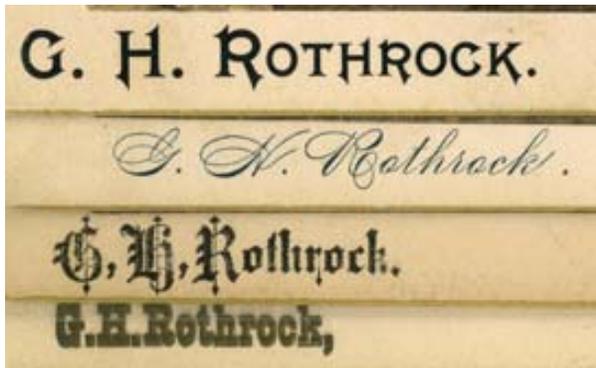
Cartes-de-visite imprint ca 1880



Cartes-de-visite imprint ca 1880



Cartes-de-visite imprint ca 1880



Rothrock Boudoir card imprints ca 1890

## Footnotes

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- i The Life History of George Rothrock, autobiographical remembrance, August 24, 1924
- ii Ibid
- iii Wikipedia
- iv Kinder, Gary, Ship of Gold and the Deep Blue Sea, Atlantic Monthly Press, 1998.
- v The Life History of George Rothrock, autobiographical remembrance, August 24, 1924
- vi Ibid
- vii <http://www.mchsmuseum.com/kingcity.html>
- viii Biographies of Western Photographers, p 78
- ix Palmquist, Peter, western photographers p 610
- x Ibid
- xi July 28, 1876 Letter from Wm Young to Mrs. Young
- xii Letter in collection of the author
- xiii Ibid
- xiv Ibid
- xv Letter in collection of the author
- xvi Ibid
- xvii Letter in collection of the author
- xviii Stereograph in collection of Author
- xix <http://www.aboutbillythekid.com/chronology.htm>
- xx Ibid
- xxi The Life History of George Rothrock, autobiographical remembrance, August 24, 1924
- xxii Arizona Miner May 31, 1878
- xxiii Ibid
- xxiv 1880 Maricopa county Census records
- xxv Mautz, Biographies of Western Photographers p 246
- xxvi Mautz, Biographies of Western Photographers p 496
- xxvii Ibid
- xxviii Ibid
- xxix Farish, Thomas, History of Arizona Vol. VI., Filmer Brothers Electrotype Company, San Francisco, 1918 p 176,177
- xxx McKenney's Business Directory 1882-8, p277
- xxxi Stereo Imprint
- xxxii Letter in collection of the author
- xxxiii February 3, 1901 Letter in collection of the author
- xxxiv The Life History of George Rothrock, autobiographical remembrance, August 24, 1924