



SHIMOOKA RENJO AND THE MYSTERY G.A.B. STEREOVIEW SERIES

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Introduction

The earliest commercial photographs of Japan appeared in stereographic form when photographic and scientific instruments manufacturer, Negretti and Zambra of London, started publishing Pierre Rossier's work in April 1860.¹ Other early stereographic series appeared throughout the 1860s, and most of them have now been identified and studied.² One early set of Japan views, however, has remained a mystery until now. This is the so-called 'G.A.B.' series, which appeared for the first time in 1862 or 1863. The purpose of this article is to show that this rare series is the earliest-known work of the famous Japanese photographer, Shimooka Renjo.

Description of the Photographs

The original set of views appeared on slightly curved yellow card stock, measuring 8.2 x 17cm. Most have a small, pink caption label, with black-printed lettering, pasted on the back of each card. The series is titled 'Japan,' and each view has a short descriptive title with the text: 'Registered. No.

5xxx. (Phot. G.A.B.).² On the face of each photograph the registered or position number is just visible in faint black ink, scratched into the original negative. (Figs. 1 & 2)

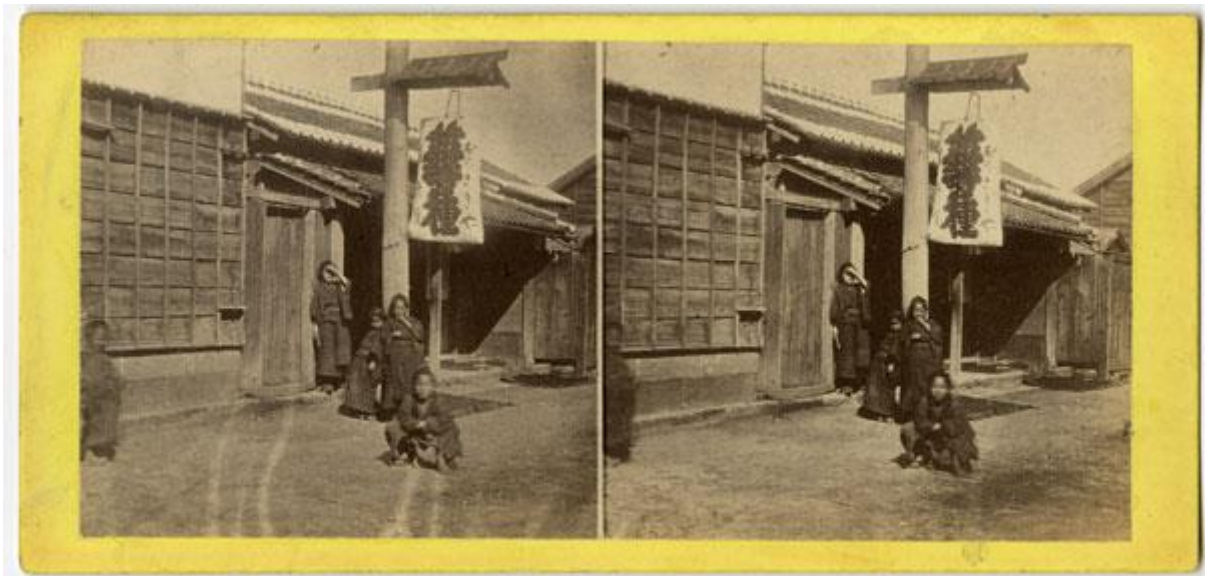


Fig. 1 Typical G.A.B. stereoview, No. 5533 'Shop With Sign'



Fig. 2 Reverse of Fig. 1

The numbers 5498-5535 appear on the reverse of the known cards from this exceptionally rare series.³ This suggests a complete set of around thirty-eight views, of which the authors have seen thirty-six. No complete set is known to exist.

The images themselves include a few studio portraits, but the majority consist of outdoor rural scenes, usually peopled with relaxed-looking Japanese villagers, posed or going about their normal work. We will now consider the identity of the publisher and photographer, and when and where the views were taken.

Publisher of the G.A.B. views

Whenever these G.A.B. views have appeared on the market, their location has always been North America. This would tentatively suggest an American publisher being behind the series. Other factors support this. One of the views shows a Japanese family playing the ancient Japanese board game of *Igo* (Fig. 3). The caption states: 'Mother and Child playing Checkers.' Although the game being played in the photograph is clearly not checkers, the point here is that Europeans would invariably apply the description 'draughts' whereas Americans would use 'checkers.' Another view titled: 'Residence of American Missionaries, Kanagawa,' also suggests an American flavour.



Fig. 3 No. 5510 'Mother and Child playing Checkers'. See also Fig. 10

Enquiries of the copyright experts at the British Library and the Library of Congress established that the 'registration' numbers on the card backs were not recognizable as copyright entries. This leads to the conclusion that the 5498-5535 range of numbers shown are 'position numbers' used by the publisher or photographer to keep track of his portfolio – and probably a large portfolio at that, given the high numbering.

Assuming that the compiler of the G.A.B. series had a commercial interest in seeing them published, it would have been natural at that time to consider the largest distributor of stereoviews in North America, E. Anthony & Co. of New York. By the late 1850s/early 1860s, the firm saw itself as a wholesaler of views, and actively encouraged photographers, worldwide, to submit their stereoview photographs for sale through the firm's extensive distribution network and customer base. An 1859 advertisement, illustrated here, makes clear their interest in this area (Fig. 4).

PHOTOGRAPHIC AND STEREOSCOPIC EMPORIUM.

E. ANTHONY,

308, BROADWAY, NEW YORK,

MANUFACTURER, Importer, and Dealer in every description of Photographic Materials, Stereoscopes, and Views. The only large house in America whose attention is exclusively devoted to this business.

Manufacturer of Daguerreotype Cases of all kinds
" Anthony's celebrated Iodised Collodion.
" Anthony's Dry Collodion.
" Anthony's Diamond Varnish.
" Anthony's Instantaneous Stereoscopic Views.

Agent for C. C. Harrison's Lenses.
" Woodward's Patent Solar Camera.
" Atwood's Patent Alcohol.
" Neff's Patent Melainotype Plates.
" Littlefield, Parsons & Co.'s celebrated Union Cases, the best, most beautiful, and most durable that are made.

Being largely engaged in the Sale of Stereoscopic Views at Wholesale, we request all Stereoscopic Photographers in Europe to send us by Mail Half Views, unmounted, of everything they have to Sell. Each View numbered and named, with lowest price by quantity,

E. ANTHONY, 308, BROADWAY, NEW YORK.

EDWARD ANTHONY, }
HENRY T. ANTHONY, }

Fig. 4 E. Anthony advertisement, 'The Photographic Journal' Dec 15, 1859

Unfortunately, pre-1862 E. Anthony & Co. catalogues are very hard to come by. In a surviving 1862 catalogue, seen by Rob Oechsle and issued around November of that year, the following cryptic advertisement appears:

VIEWS IN JAPAN,

Price \$6 per doz.

These are the first views of that interesting country that have ever reached the civilized world, and are published by our house in advance of their appearance in Europe.

Could these be the G.A.B. views? They could alternatively be the series photographed by the American, John Wilson, who was attached to the 1860-61 Prussian diplomatic mission to China and Japan and who had returned to America by September 1862 at the latest, keen to promote his Japanese photography. ⁴

The only two other possibilities are the 1861-62 series of *China and Japan* taken by Milton Miller which Anthony & Co. made available around this time, and the Pierre Rossier Views of Japan which were published by Negretti and Zambra, but also issued under licence, by a number of other distributors.

On the face of it, we can discount the Miller series since there were only six or seven Japan views included, not 'dozens.' As for Negretti and Zambra, it is perhaps unlikely that they would allow their Japan views to appear in America under the Anthony banner before publishing the series themselves in Europe. In fact, we know that N & Z did publish these views in London from April 1860 and in set form in November 1861 – apparently a year before the Anthony advertisement. However, without ready access to earlier Anthony catalogues, we have to consider the possibility that the circa November 1862 advertisement was repeating wording from earlier issues. For example, one

advertisement in the same catalogue, unrelated to Japan, speaks of some glass views which: “We have just received (Nov. 1860)...”

At this stage, therefore, it is difficult to relate the Japan views advertisement to G.A.B. or any particular series. It has also not been possible to locate any other Anthony catalogues between the years 1860 and 1867, and the G.A.B. series did not appear in the firm’s 1868 catalogue. In 1870, however, W.S. Clark published his *Illustrated History* which included numerous stereoscopic views, all published by E. & H. T. Anthony & Co.⁵ One of these was a view of ‘Simonoseki’ from the G.A.B. series with a position number of 5529. This shows that E. & H. T. Anthony & Co. (the firm by now had taken on other family members) did publish the G.A.B. series. The high position numbers in the 5,000s also neatly fills a gap in other known number sequences of Anthony’s views; and the form of back-labelling is consistent with other contemporary Anthony sets of views.⁶

When and where in Japan were the photographs taken?

The images have a definite early '1860s feel' and one of the views, as mentioned earlier, is captioned: ‘Residence of American Missionaries, Kanagawa.’ Ostensibly, this helps with the dating, since the last American missionaries left Kanagawa (following pressure from the Japanese authorities) on 1st June 1863. Therefore, the very latest date for the G.A.B. photographs is May 1863, and the earliest conceivable date is October 1859, when the first American missionaries arrived in Kanagawa. For reasons mentioned later in this article, however, the authors believe the views to date from the period 1862-63.

We now turn to a curious but very significant feature of the views. As mentioned, most of them are scenic. Just seven of them name a location – Kanagawa (4) or Simonoseki (3) [Shimonoseki]. However, following recent investigations it is clear that the captions are wrong. Why they were mislabelled is unclear. The stated views were actually taken in Shimoda, located at the southern tip of the Izu peninsula. Shimoda was where Commodore Perry arrived in 1854 and successfully forced a treaty on the reluctant Japanese. It is also famous for being the home of the first American consulate in Japan and the place where the Treaty of Amity and Commerce between America and Japan was signed in 1858. Significantly, Shimoda was also the hometown of the Japanese photographer, Shimooka Renjo.

Who was the photographer?

The back of each stereoscopic view indicates the photographer as ‘G.A.B.’ It would be easy to take this at face value, and we will return to these curious initials later. First, we might ask a slightly different question: was the photographer Japanese or Western?

There is not the space here to outline in detail the social and political background of Japan in the early 1860s. What we can say, however, is that the arrival and residence of foreign merchants, diplomats, missionaries and military personnel in the designated treaty ports of Yokohama, Nagasaki and Hakodate was not generally welcomed - at least not by the ruling classes. Anti-foreign feeling was rife and a number of foreigners were assassinated. The country was entering a period of

significant social, economic and political upheaval and the ruling Tokugawa regime, which had been in power for some 250 years, was feeling increasingly threatened – from without and within. Uncertainty, xenophobia and revolution were in the air. Foreigners were prohibited from travelling outside the strictly defined geographic limits of the treaty ports, unless they had permission from their consuls and a passport counter-signed by the Japanese authorities. Such permission was not freely given. Towns like Shimoda were outside these limits, and were foreigners ever to find themselves in such places, they would almost certainly be armed or accompanied by a Japanese escort.

The pictures in the G.A.B. series show Japanese looking relaxed and very much at ease with the photographer. In several views they are shown smiling. It is almost inconceivable that a foreign photographer, even with the help of Japanese assistants, could have orchestrated such tension-free poses. The presence alone of a foreigner would have probably prevented these seemingly carefree compositions. The G.A.B. series is therefore likely to be the work of a Japanese photographer.

Shimooka Renjo (1823-1914)

(i) Introduction

We now need to consider the prime suspect for authorship of the G.A.B. series - Shimooka Renjo. His is the name that most Japanese would mention in relation to the history of photography in their country. He was one of the earliest Japanese photographers, and opened his first studio in Yokohama in 1862. However, there is still considerable uncertainty over the details of Shimooka's life and, in particular, how and when he came to learn the techniques of photography.

We do know, however, that although his first years as a commercial photographer were not particularly easy, by 1865 his business had prospered and he had moved into larger premises in Benten-Dori – a prestigious and central location in Yokohama. A number of students were taken on, some of whom later became well-known photographers in their own right. These included Yokoyama Matsusaburo, Usui Shusaburo, Esaki Reiji and Suzuki Shinichi I and II.

Within a few years, Shimooka felt secure enough to diversify into other business areas. He invested money in a dairy and operated a horse-drawn carriage service between Tokyo and Yokohama. However, these businesses were not successful. The energetic Shimooka also seems to have learnt the principles of lithography, and to have had some involvement in the controversy surrounding the invention of the jinrikisha. Another American missionary and friend of Shimooka's, Jonathan Goble,



Fig. 5 Portrait of Shimooka Renjo

is credited by some authorities as having invented this two-wheeled, man-drawn carriage, which was to become omnipresent from around 1869 onwards. Others credit Shimooka himself, although this is unlikely.

Shimooka can certainly be credited with opening the first Japanese commercial photo studio in Yokohama. He also has a strong claim to being the first Japanese oil painter and lithographer. As far as his photographic work is concerned, more than 150 *cartes de visite* have now been positively attributed to his studio. However, his larger-format work remains elusive, with just a handful of images having been identified. As a result, it is still too early to provide a reliable critique and assessment of his work. The stereoview series under discussion in this article adds a significant number of images to his oeuvre.

He seems to have ceased being active in photography from around the early to mid-1870s, leaving his studios in the hands of his assistants. Increasingly, he returned to his old love of painting. Although it seems that his various business activities did not make him particularly wealthy, he lived a long and active life, finally passing away at the age of ninety-one.

(ii) Early Attempts at Photography

Born in Shimoda, the son of a samurai shipping agent to the ruling Tokugawa family, Shimooka, being the third son, followed the not uncommon Japanese tradition of being adopted into another family. Showing artistic promise, he attempted to become an artist at the age of thirteen and went to study in Edo (Tokyo), whilst also being employed as an apprentice to a local merchant. He was not successful in his artistic studies and in 1843 was one of a number of samurai ordered to serve at the Shimoda artillery battery. Whilst there he met the famous artist, Kano Tosen, and became one of his students. A year later Shimooka's time at the battery expired. He returned to Edo with the intention of continuing his artistic studies. It was there that he apparently saw a Dutch daguerreotype in the house of one of the members of the Tokugawa clan. Fascinated, he resolved to find a way of making photographs. Knowing that in order to do this he would need to converse with foreigners, he managed to get employment as a draughtsman at the coast guard office in Uraga, Kanagawa Prefecture. Whenever the occasional foreign vessel came into the port, he would attempt to find out something about photography. However, he failed to make any progress until the American, Henry Heusken, arrived in Japan in 1856.

Heusken had been appointed as secretary to the first American consul, Townsend Harris, then based in Shimoda. Shimooka apparently obtained the rudiments of photography from Heusken who, without the advantage of readily available equipment, simply described the main principles and improvised by substituting some twigs for a tripod, folded paper in the shape of a box for a camera, and a piece of glass in lieu of a lens.

When the government decided to open the port of Yokohama in July 1859, Shimooka decided to move there to improve his chances of studying photography. There he met an American merchant, Raphael Schoyer, whose wife, a talented artist, taught him Western-style painting. Around this time, Shimooka also met an American friend of Schoyer's, John Wilson, who had been hired as the official photographer to the 1860-61 Prussian Expedition to Japan.² Following the conclusion of the treaty, Wilson decided to stay on in Japan. He took a number of photographs, in and around Edo, and

these were used by Shimooka and other Japanese artists who were commissioned by Wilson (with the possible financial involvement of Schoyer) to create a giant panoramic painted scroll.

At the end of 1861, Wilson decided to exhibit the scroll in America and Europe and by way of compensation gave Shimooka his stereo camera, photographic equipment, and some chemicals. Wilson left Japan on 2 January 1862 and it seems that he did not spend sufficient time explaining the techniques of photography to Shimooka, who struggled to achieve any degree of competency. A visiting American missionary, Thomas C. Pitkin, wrote in his travel notebook: ‘The arrival of a photographer caused no slight excitement in Yokohama. The result of his efforts appears in many beautiful views of the country including some of the finest in Yedo, which are for sale in London and perhaps also in New York. He left his instrument and chemicals behind which an enterprising native whose gallery I visited was endeavouring to use with no very good success.’⁸ Pitkin stayed in Japan from approximately November 1861 and was still in Japan in the middle of February, since Samuel Brown wrote to the Rev. Peltz on 26 February 1862: ‘...I was at Yedo about ten days ago, with the Rev. Dr. Pitkin, Rector of St. Peter’s Ch. Albany.’⁹ Pitkin arrived back in the United States on the 18 August 1862.¹⁰

Pitkin was undoubtedly referring to John Wilson and Shimooka Renjo. We can assume that by early 1862 Shimooka was still struggling to master photography.

(iii) Early Teachers

It is likely that Shimooka owed his eventual proficiency in photography to more than one teacher. We saw earlier that he received some rudimentary instruction from Henry Heusken in Shimoda. It has also been suggested that he improved his technique with the help of the American missionary and amateur photographer, Samuel Robbins Brown (1810-1880), and his daughter Julia.¹¹ These claims were considered in a recent article which suggested that the amateur American photographer and missionary, John Gulick, was actually Shimooka’s most influential teacher.¹² In order to deepen the connection between the G.A.B. stereoviews and Shimooka Renjo, we now need to consider something of the photographic activities of John Gulick, who was in Yokohama from 24 April 1862 until 26 October 1863. This was undoubtedly a crucial period in the development of Shimooka’s skill as a photographer.

John Thomas Gulick (1832-1923)

In 1862 the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions received an application from John Gulick, the son of missionary parents, for a missionary post in Japan. At that time the organization’s funds were stretched, due to the American Civil War, and the request was refused. Gulick nevertheless decided to proceed to Japan, despite having no guarantee of employment there. Thinking that he might be able to earn some money as a photographer he purchased a stereo camera and in February 1862 took photography lessons in San Francisco from the noted American photographer, Carlton E. Watkins. On the 15 March 1862, he left for Japan. Upon arrival he stayed with the missionary Dr. Samuel Robbins Brown, to whom he had been recommended. Writing years later in a manuscript entitled ‘Outline of My Life,’ (undated but approximately 1912 and held by

Hawaiian Mission Children's Society Library), Gulick explained how he had supported himself whilst in Japan:

‘During the 18 months that I remained in Japan I was supporting myself partly by tutoring in Dr. Brown's family and partly by taking stereoscopic photographs with a small camera that I had brought with me from San Francisco...’

At the time of Gulick's arrival, Brown himself had yet to master photography, although he was in possession of chemicals and equipment which had been donated by members of his Church back in America. This is made clear from an entry in a journal kept by Gulick for several months in 1862, also held by the Hawaiian Mission:

2 May 1862 ‘At noon experimented with some of Mr Brown's photograph chemicals which Miss [Julia] Brown supposed were out of order; succeeded in taking a poor picture. Changed some of the materials and after dinner took my first portrait. It was an ambrotype of Mr Louder [sic – Lowder, John Frederick (1843-1902) a language student at the British Legation who married Julia Brown in August 1862]. It was taken when the sun was behind the hill and is therefore lacking in contrast of shades. Mr. Ostrom of the Dutch Reformed Mission at Amoy has arrived this evening with his family, and they have taken the room which I have occupied the past week, and I have a room adjoining Mr. Brown's study in Sokoje [Sokoji Temple, Kanagawa].’

Brown himself acknowledges Gulick's help in a letter he wrote home to the Rev. Philip Feltz of the Dutch Reformed Church: [↗](#)

25 October 1862 [Kanagawa] ‘By the bearer, Mr. T. Hart Hyatt, I send you 42 large photographs of Japanese scenes, marked, & in parcels, to be sent to the following churches, seven to each... All these Churches contributed to purchase the apparatus & chemicals for my use. I promised them pictures from Japan, expecting Dr. Simmons to make them. But as he did not, I bought last year \$45 worth & sent home by a Capt. Jones, who writes me that he expressed them to Auburn as directed, but they have never been heard of since. Now to keep my promise I have learned by books, mostly, enough to take pictures myself, & here are some of the results. I have sold enough here to buy additional material at San Francisco, & so keep my stock good, & have procured the same. A brother of Dr. Gulick of the Micronesian Mission, has spent the summer here, & aided me in learning the art.’

Other key photographic references appeared in Gulick's 1862 journal:

3 May 1862 (Saturday) ‘The children do not recite lessons on Saturday; accordingly I have determined to make that my day for photographic operations. I have to-day unpacked my instrument & chemicals. I have the use of Mr. Brown's Daguerian [sic] Room. He has two cameras & a large supply of chemicals belonging to the mission; [Julia] is desirous that they should be made of some avail.’

17 May 1862 ‘I have been considerably occupied with photograph[y] the past week. I have been testing the chemicals belonging to Mr. Brown. The old collodion that he brought out with him & that obtained from Capt. [John] Wilson are alike but little avail, but some new

collodion that I manufactured works successfully. Mr Brown and Mr Ostrom are both enthusiastically engaged.'

4 June 1862 '...The Arrival left for San Francisco. All Wednesday I was engaged in printing photographs to send. ... Wednesday night I sat up writing to Mr. Cox, Mr. Shew & Mr. Watkins. I sent a large sized photograph to Mrs. Lacy, another to Mr. Cox & a third to Mr. Benchley. To Mr. Town, Mr. Perkins & Mr. Francis I sent each a stereoscopic view, to Mr. Alden likeness of a Japanese girl, & a Japanese coin. Also to Mr. Douglass, to Mr. Hamilton & to Mr. Fisher & to Mrs. Stiles each a coin. To Mrs. Pierson I sent a likeness of the Japanese girl.... I am this week resting from my photographic labors & am giving more attention to the Japanese Language.'

15 June 1862 'Mr Brown and Mr Ostrom, who arrived recently from Amoy, have spent several days this week in the fields taking photographic plates while I stayed at home fixing the chemicals and printing photographs from the plates. The most interesting views have been taken at Bokinji [Bugenji, Kanagawa], a large temple or rather a cluster of temples and houses, the residences of the priests, which are shaded by noble trees. Yesterday morning I took my horse & went out to help them on for an hour or so. They returned in the evening, very tired but rejoicing in their success.'

27 June 1862 '...Mr. Brown and I have been out on a ride over the Yokohama bluffs. We have selected some points from which good views of the town can be taken. A week or two since Mr. Brown sent to Mr. Pruyn two of our photographs as samples of what we can do. Mr. P. writes that he has given them to the chief of the ambassadors that visited the U.S. and that he has obtained permission for him to come & take pictures in Yeddo [Tokyo].'

In an undated manuscript titled *How I reached Japan and my Experiences there Before 1880*, written in Gulick's hand and held by the Hawaiian Mission Library, the following reference appears:

'Under my teaching a Japanese learned to take photographs; and, when I left Japan in 1863, I passed my camera & photographic material to him; and he became one of the first to spread the knowledge of that kind of picture taking among his countrymen.'

When Gulick died, the following appeared in an obituary in the May 1923 issue of *The Friend*:

'...He earned his way at first as a tutor and incidentally made the first photographs ever taken in Japan and taught photography to the first Japanese to learn it.'

In his 1902 work, *A Maker of the New Orient*, William Griffis, when writing about Samuel Brown stated: 'He was thus one of the very first to photograph Japanese costumes, works of art, and varied human characters. One result was the instruction of Renjio Shimooka, still living at the age of over four score years, the first native of Japan to learn the fascinating art of photography, in which so many of his countrymen now excel.' In Saito Takio's 'Shimooka Renjo (1823-1914),' reference is made to Shimooka's receiving photographic help from Brown's daughter, Julia.

It is possible that Julia Brown had independently reached some degree of competency in photography and imparted that knowledge to Shimooka. After all, her American merchant friend and

amateur photographer, Francis Hall, then residing at Yokohama, had been using a camera there since May 1860. ¹⁴ Julia herself became an active amateur at some stage, as recorded in F. Notehelfer's *Japan Through American Eyes* (1992, p.161-2n.40). It would also explain why she was able to conclude that her father's chemicals were defective. However, it seems less likely that her father, who according to Griffis maintained a long friendship with Shimooka, was the Japanese photographer's main teacher. Brown does not seem to have become proficient in photography until May 1862, although he may have been able to provide photographic support to Shimooka in some way after that date. Gulick, with his greater understanding of the art, was clearly in the best position to instruct Shimooka.

The main purpose in outlining above the close relationship between Gulick and Brown, and their connections with Shimooka, is to suggest a solution to the mystery of the G.A.B. initials printed on the backs of the stereo series.

The Mystery Behind the G.A.B. initials

We have seen that Gulick and Brown practiced photography together and that both of them were motivated, for different reasons, to raise money by selling some of the product of their labours. There is very strong evidence to show that Shimooka Renjo was the author of the G.A.B. series and that he was friendly with both Americans. The series was published by the New York-based stereographic firm, E. Anthony & Co. in either 1862 or 1863.

It seems possible that the initials could correspond to **Gulick And Brown**. This would signify some financial collaboration between the two Americans. The negatives could have been a gift from Shimooka, or payment for photography lessons, or even Gulick's camera. Alternatively, Gulick alone may have taken the initiative in sending the photographs to New York. In that case the initials might possibly signify **Gulick American Board**. It is also worth mentioning that Shimooka was friendly with another American missionary, Jonathan Goble of the American Baptist Church. Although there is no record of Goble's taking an active interest in photography, it is conceivable that he persuaded Shimooka to produce photographs which could be sent on to New York for sale. The initials might then be rendered as **Goble American Baptists**. However, these suggestions can only be taken as speculation at this stage.

Aimé Humbert (1819-1900)

Aimé Humbert, who arrived in Japan in April 1863 as head of an official Swiss government trade delegation, plays an important part in enabling us to assert Shimooka's authorship of this series. After concluding a trade and friendship treaty, he left Japan in February 1864 and returned to Switzerland where he wrote about his travels in Japan.

Humbert was independently wealthy and a connoisseur of fine art. During his time in Japan he accumulated many Japanese art works and photographs and became friendly with the English resident, Charles Wirgman, an artist and correspondent for the *Illustrated London News*. Humbert was very interested in photography and sought out the best examples he could find. Wirgman must

have introduced him to his friend, Felice Beato, who had only just arrived in the country and, almost certainly, Shimooka Renjo whom Wirgman also knew well.

The photographs in the Humbert collection in the Musée d' ethnographie, Neuchâtel, Switzerland consist of approximately fifty large-format early Beato photographs and around 100 *cartes de visite* most of which, if not all, are from the Shimooka studio. Furthermore, a number of them bear the same props and carpet illustrated in the studio portrait views in the G.A.B. series. See Claude Estebe, *Le premier âge d'or de la photographie au Japon, 1848-1883* (2006). In this work, Estebe illustrates a number of Shimooka photographs which match the G.A.B. stereo series and demonstrates a strong connection with the Humbert collection. It seems from the collection in Neuchatel that Humbert employed just two photographers – Beato and Shimooka. One interesting letter written by Humbert following his return to Switzerland seems to confirm this. It is dated 7 June, 1865 and was sent to Humbert's friend in Yokohama, the Swiss merchant François Perregaux :

Mon cher Monsieur Perregaux,

‘ ...Je vous prie d'aller chez le photographe japonais qui demeure dans une rue près de Benton* ; de lui demander de vous faire voir tout ce qu'il a fait depuis le printemps de 1864, et de choisir, pour mon compte, ce que vous trouverez de mieux. J'ai déjà de lui deux femmes assises, l'une ayant la pipe à la main, une femme nue appuyée sur un monument, et quelques yacounines. Prenez tout ce qu'il aura de nouveau en fait de types de femmes surtout des types de femmes, et aussi d'artisans ; quant aux yacounines et gens de la douane, j'en ai assez. Je n'ai pas besoin non plus de vues de Yokohama. Veuillez avoir l'obligeance de m'expédier cette commande par le retour de la malle, en me disant chez qui je dois vous en rembourser le montant.

J'ai traité à Paris avec la librairie L. Hachette et Cie pour la publication d'un volume illustré sur le Japon, et l'on commencera à en donner des extraits dans le journal illustré *Le Tour du Monde*, dès le mois de novembre.’

Aimé Humbert

* J'ai donné une commission analogue à M. de Polsbroek pour Beato, parce qu'il connaît déjà ce que celui-ci m'a livré. Mais s'il était absent ou empêché, veuillez y pourvoir pour le mieux, dans le même sens.

This can be translated as :

‘I ask you to go to the Japanese photographer who remains in a street close to Benton * [Shimooka had his studio in Benten-Dori at this time.] to ask him to show to you all that he has done since the spring of 1864, and to choose, for my account, the best examples. I already have from him an image of two women sitting, one with a pipe in her hand, a naked woman supported by a monument, and some yacunins [Japanese officials]. Take all that he has of various types of women, and of artisans; as for the yacunins and people of the customs, I have enough of them. I do not need any views of Yokohama. Please be kind enough to dispatch this order by return and do let me know how much I should reimburse you. I have contracted in Paris with the bookshop L. Hachette and Co for the publication of a volume illustrated on Japan, and they will

start to give extracts in the illustrated newspaper *Le Tour De Monde*, as of November.’

*I gave a similar commission to Mr. Polsbroek for Beato, because he already knows what this photographer has delivered to me. But if he is absent or unable to assist, please provide a similar service for me in this respect.’ ¹⁵

Studio Portraits from the G.A.B. Series

We will shortly show that all of the outside views from this series seem to have been taken in Shimoda, and not in Shimonoseki or Kanagawa as indicated on the printed captions appearing on the reverse of the stereo cards. Before doing so, we can now connect the studio portraits to Shimooka.

Although the series consists of perhaps thirty-eight stereoviews, only three of those known have been taken inside a studio. The three views are as follows, and will each be considered in turn:

- 5501 Children Playing Baby-house
- 5510 Mother and Child playing Checkers
- 5527 Girl with Pipe and Fire-box

The image entitled ‘Children Playing Baby-house’ (Fig. 6), includes studio props which can be seen in other known early Shimooka images. The floral carpet and the screen resting against the backdrop are features that are present in (Fig. 7), a Shimooka *carte de visite* forming part of the Tom Burnett collection and which is also depicted as an engraving in Aimé Humbert’s *Japan and the Japanese Illustrated* (1874, p.14). (Fig. 8)

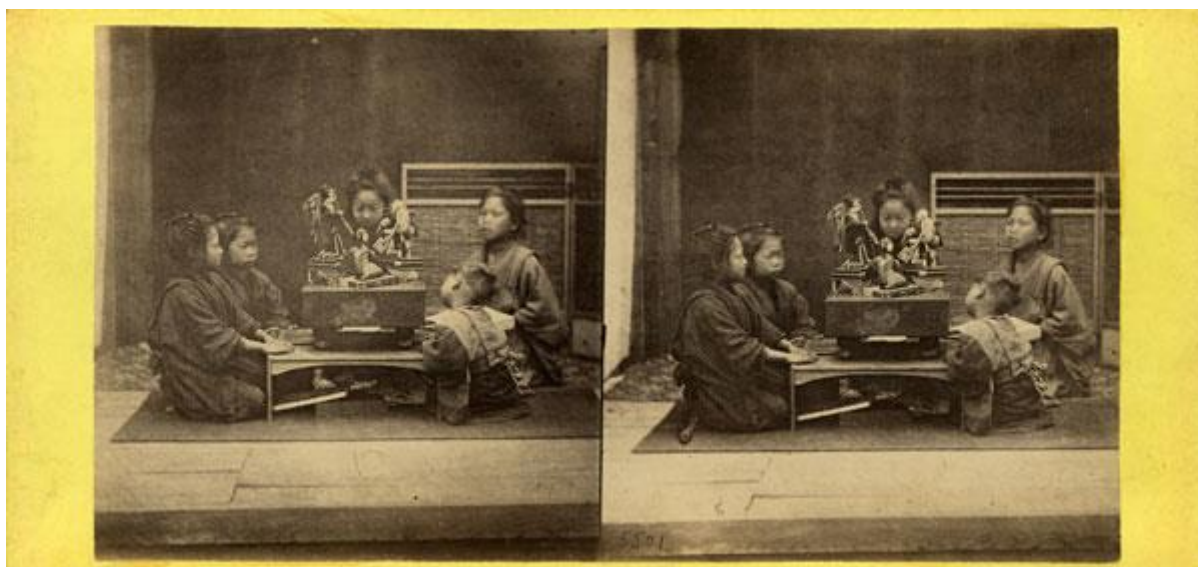


Fig. 6 No. 5501 'Children Playing Baby-house'



Fig. 8 Engraving from Humbert's 'Japan and the Japanese Illustrated' (1874, p.14)

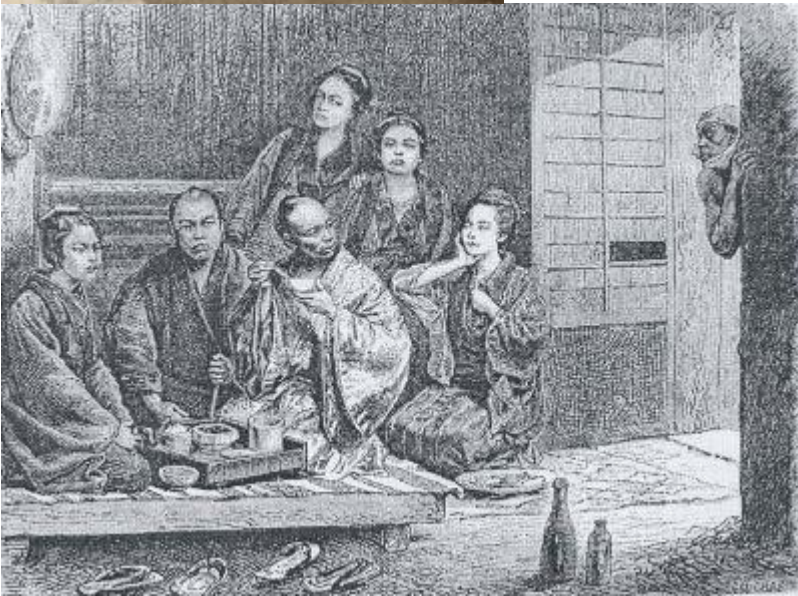


Fig. 7 Shimooka Renjo, carte de visite, c.1862

The second image, 'Mother and Child playing Checkers,' shown in (Fig. 3) has the same carpet as in the previous view. The aspidistra plant and pot are also known props in early Shimooka *cartes de visite*. For example, see illustrations numbered 47 and 129 in Ishiguro Keisho's *Shimooka Renjô*

Shashinshû (1999), and page 103 of Terry Bennett's *Early Japanese Images* (1996) (Fig. 9). Finally, it is worth noting that a variant of this G.A.B. stereoview appeared as an engraved illustration on the title page of Humbert's book, and is shown here as (Fig. 10).



Fig. 9 Shimooka Renjo carte de visite, c.1862

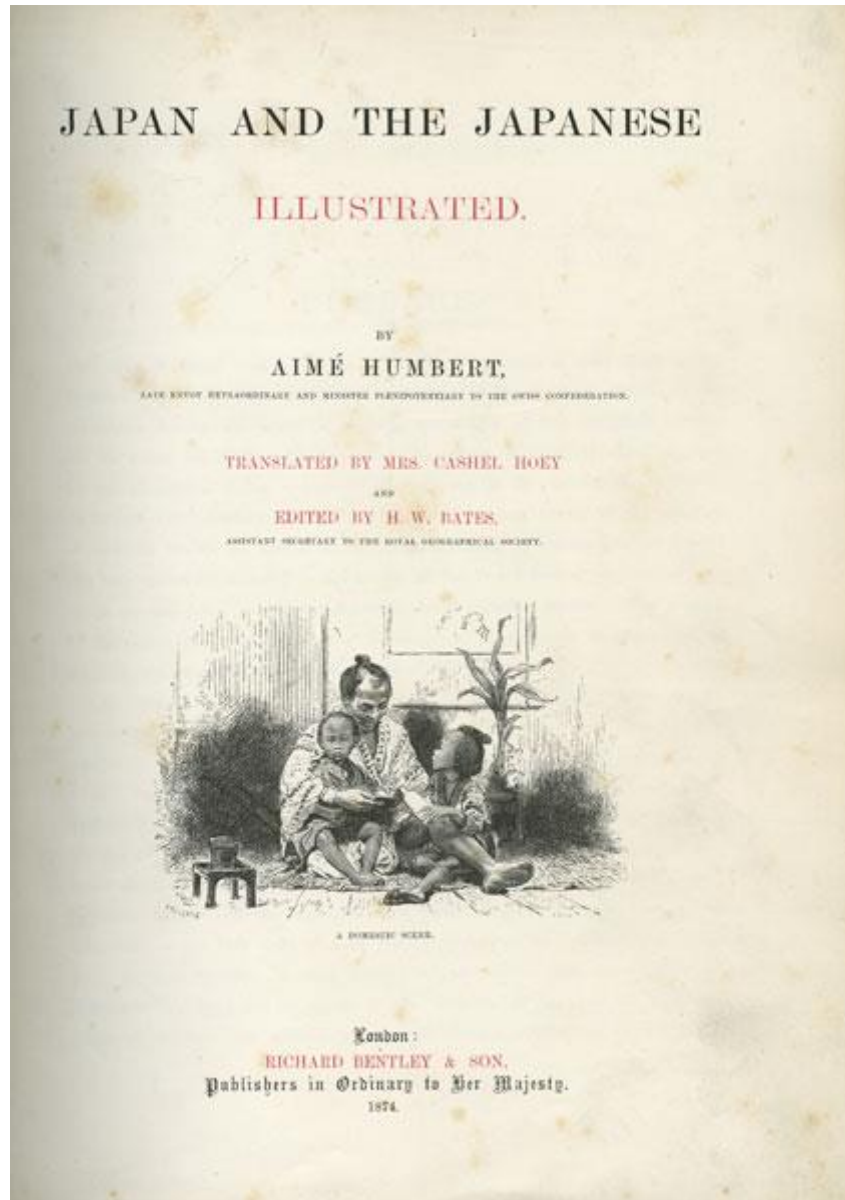


Fig. 10 Title page from Humbert's 1874 work. Compare illustration with Fig. 3

The third and last G.A.B. studio portrait to be considered is entitled 'Girl with Pipe and Fire-box.' (Fig. 11) Once again, we see the Shimooka trademark carpet. Whether these studios shots were taken in Shimoda, or in Shimooka's Yokohama studio, is not currently known.



Fig. 11 No. 5527 'Girl with Pipe and Fire-box'

Outdoor views from the G.A.B. Series

For some years, the authors of this article had harboured suspicions that the three views in the series labelled Simonoseki were actually taken in Shimoda. Furthermore, the four labelled Kanagawa were also not convincing. In 2006 Rob Oechsle made two trips to Shimoda to verify the outdoor locations of the G.A.B. views. His preliminary conclusions were published in his 'Stereoviews -Index of Japan-Related Stereoview Photographers and Publishers, 1859-1912' in Terry Bennett's *Old Japanese Photographs* (2006, pp.180-3). His updated notes, which follow, show that a number of the photographs can be directly linked with Shimoda:

The G.A.B. Series

- 5498 Mill (worked by hand) Hulling Rice.
- 5499 Rice Mill (worked by foot) for Hulling Rice.
- 5500 Mode of Winnowing Grain.
- 5501 Children playing Baby-house.
- 5502 House with thatched Roof several feet thick.

- 5503 Monument with Japanese Inscription.[This view shows the Kaizenji Temple Grounds in the town of Shimoda. Mt. Shimoda-Fuji can be seen in the background. While the buildings have changed, the monument remains to this day. Interestingly, a variant of this view was published by the Austrian photographer, Wilhelm Burger in 1871 in a portfolio of views entitled *Bilder Aus Japan*. A copy of this publication is held by the British Library (ref: Maps 8.d.24). Burger made a photographic tour of Japan in 1869 but did not visit Shimoda. We do know that he borrowed Shimooka's Yokohama studio (see Terry Bennett's *Photography in Japan* (2006, p.109)) and it now seems clear that he acquired a number of negatives of Shimooka's G.A.B. work at the same time. Some images in the 1871 Burger portfolio should now be attributed to Shimooka. See also notes to 5505,5522 below.]
- 5504 Mode of Carrying Baggage.
- 5505 Simonoseki from the Hill side. [Actually, the town of Shimoda. This forms a panorama together with view #5507. Photographed from halfway up Mt. Nesugata. This same image was published in Wilhem Burger's *Bilder Aus Japan*. See notes to 5503, 5522.]
- 5506 Dipping Water from a Stream.
- 5507 Simonoseki [Actually, the town of Shimoda. Forms a panorama with view #5505. Photographed from halfway up Mt. Nesugata. Clearly seen isolated by the foothills at the upper-left of the view is white-roofed Ryosenji Temple where the Shimoda Treaty was signed in June 1854. The signatories were Commodore Matthew Perry for the United States and Daigaku Hayashi for the Shogunate. This is possibly the earliest extant photograph of this historic site, shown in its relationship to the town. It was around this temple and its grounds in 1854 that Eliphalet Brown Jr. took many Daguerreotype portraits of the local people, later reproduced as lithographs in Francis Hawks' *Narrative of the Expedition* (1856).]
- 5508 Drawing Water from a Well.
- 5509 Winnowing Machine. [There is a Shimooka Renjo album of 24 cartes de visite owned by the New York collector Tom Burnett. The second photograph in the album is of a slightly different scene but is clearly taken in the same location. See the website http://tomburnettcollection.com/gallery/main.php?g2_itemId=365]
- 5510 Mother and Child playing Checkers. [The carpet, screen and flower-pot can be recognised as early Shimooka studio props. Compare with (Fig. 9).
- 5511 Teaching a Child to Write. House with domestic utensils.
- 5512 A Japanese Shop.
- 5513 Kan-go (or palanquin) used by the poorer class. [Note the *Namako Kabe* lattice-like patterning of white mortar and grey tiles – a fire-proof construction design still preserved on many of the older buildings in Shimoda and the Izu Peninsula to this day; see also #5518 below. Of particular significance is the fact that this image is taken in the same place as twenty-third image in the Tom Burnett Shimooka album referred to in 5509 above.]
- 5514 [Unknown View]
- 5515 View in Kanagawa. [Actually the town of Shimoda; small group standing by unknown building; entrance to Hachiman Temple in Distance. Less than ten years earlier, this temple was sketched by William Heine of Perry's Japan Expedition. See also view #5517 below.]

- 5516 Residence of American Missionaries, Kanagawa.[Actually, the town of Shimoda, Toden Temple. The camera was then turned 90 degrees to the right to take view # 5531 below, with the same three models. The same tombs remain even today.]
- 5517 Temple - Stone Lamp-post in the foreground. (Fig. 13) [Town of Shimoda, Hachimanji Temple. Location also confirmed by William Heine's 1854 sketch of the same spot, published as a lithograph in vol. 1 of Francis Hawks' *Narrative of the Expedition* (1856). (Fig. 12) The lanterns and edifices visible in the scene were partly submerged yet unmoved by the destructive tsunami of 1854.]



Fig. 12 (left) Hachimanji Temple, lithograph from Hawks' 'Narrative of the Expedition' (1856)
 Fig. 13 (right) No. 5517 'Temple-Stone Lamp-post in the foreground'

- 5518 Store house.[Note the *Namako Kabe* type constructed storage building.]
- 5519 A Village Street in Japan [Town of Shimoda - street scene looking east with headlands seen across Shimoda Bay.]
- 5520 Stonecutter's House and Workshop.
- 5521 Japanese Pack-Horse.

5522 A Japanese Fisherman. (Fig. 14) [Town of Shimoda - Village of Kaki-Zaki - Benten Island Temple at back. Eastern slope of Mt. Nesugata in distance. Just off scene to right is Gyokusen Temple, site of first American consulate in Japan under Townsend Harris, and location of the tombs of the American sailors seen in the Daguerreotype on pages 32-33 of Terry Bennett's *Photography in Japan* (2006). It is in the hills of this immediate scene that Harris's interpreter, Henry Heusken, clandestinely gave Shimooka Renjo the first rudimentary lessons in the theory of photography (see *Photography in Japan* (p.70), and *Old Japanese Photographs* (p.36). Location also confirmed by William Heine's 1854 sketch of the same temple, published as a woodcut in vol. 1 of Francis Hawks' *Narrative of the Expedition* (1856). See also the present-day scene depicted in (Fig. 15). Also, a variant of this view was published in 1871 by Wilhelm Burger. See notes to 5503, 5505 above.]

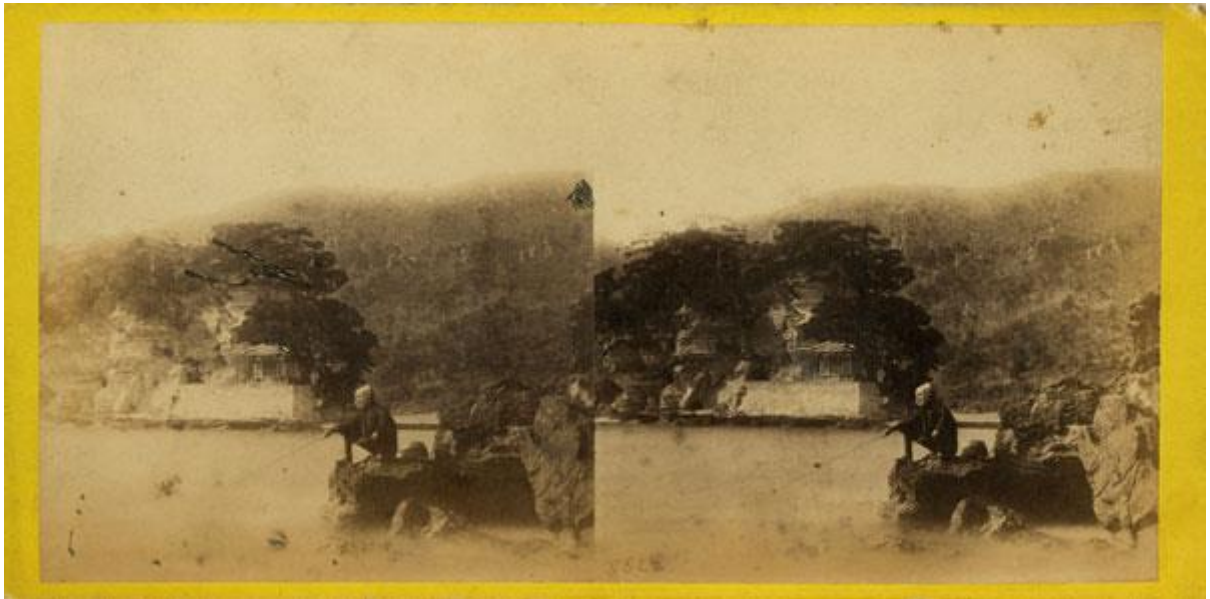


Fig. 14 No. 5522 'A Japanese Fisherman' See present-day scene in Fig. 15



Fig. 15 Rob Oeschle, 2006, Shimoda Harbour with Benten Island Temple.

- 5523 A Japanese Mansion. [Town of Shimoda; possibly Houfuku Temple Gateway.]
- 5524 A Group of Japanese Women at a Well. [Town of Shimoda; large group (mostly children) in tight courtyard enclosure - Mt. Nesugata in distance.]
- 5525 Scene Near Kanagawa. [This appears to be the earliest known Japanese photograph to show a photographer's "dark tent" or "portable darkroom". It is also the first "self-referencing" photographica image taken in Japan, as the wet-plate negative used to take this stereoview would have been both prepared and developed inside that portable darkroom. The geology of the cliffs and boulders is an exact match to that of the coastline on the south side of Shimoda]
- 5526 A Small Japanese Temple. [Possibly Chouraku Temple near 'Perry Road' Shimoda.]
- 5527 A girl with pipe and fire box.
- 5528 Seminary near Kanagawa.[Likely to be Daian Temple in Shimoda.]
- 5529 Simonoseki [Actually, the town of Shimoda. Part of Mt. Nesugata seen on left in distance. It is from the slope of this mountain that views # 5505 and #5507 listed above were taken.]
- 5530 Street in Kanagawa. [Actually, the town of Shimoda. Shows Hiraname River and Bridges on 'Perry Road'.]
- 5531 Grave yard and Entrance to a Temple.[Town of Shimoda, Toden Temple facing back to gate. Same group as in # 5516 above.]
- 5532 [Unknown View]
- 5533 Shop with Sign.
- 5534 Grave Yard and Monuments.[Town of Shimoda. Children among Tombs in Graveyard of Taihei Temple.]
- 5535 Japanese Workmen.

Summary

The G.A.B. series is important on several levels. First, they increase the known Shimooka Renjo photographs by some thirty-eight. Given the current paucity of material attributed to this famous Japanese photographer, this additional group will be greatly welcomed by researchers and photo-historians of early Japanese photography. Furthermore, as the G.A.B. series looks to have been photographed in the 1862-63 period, it represents the earliest-known work by this artist and will contribute greatly to our understanding of the development of early Japanese photographers.

It seems very likely that all of the outdoor scenes were photographed in Shimoda and they give us a detailed view of the town just a few years after it had been devastated by the earthquake and subsequent tsunami of December 1854. Prior to these, only four known surviving photographic images taken in the town, all daguerreotypes, have been recorded. Two of these were produced by the American daguerreotype artist, Eliphalet Brown Jr., during his February-March 1854 visit with the Commodore Perry Expedition: one was taken by the Russian artist Aleksandr Mozhaiskii in April 1854, and one is attributed to the American Edward Edgerton sometime in 1855.

In the past, the task of identifying the location and photographer of these images has been greatly complicated by the erroneous printed captions referring to Kanagawa and Shimonoseki and the photographer as 'G.A.B.' It is still far from clear what caused these geographical errors, and the initials still remain a mystery. Perhaps *Gulick And Brown*, *Gulick American Board* or even *Goble*

American **B**aptists really do provide the answer, but it is at least as likely that we will never know for sure.

Notes

1. Terry Bennett, *Photography in Japan* (2006, pp.47-8)
2. Terry Bennett, *Old Japanese Photographs* (2006, pp.98-109); Rob Oechsle, *Stereoviews - Index of Japan-Related Stereoview Photographers and Publishers* (2006, p.161-222)
3. Stereos from the G.A.B. stereos can be found in the authors' collections and in that of the JCCI Camera Museum, Tokyo
4. For background on John Wilson, see Terry Bennett, *Old Japanese Photographs* (2006, pp.82-4); Sebastian Dobson, *Jon Wiruson –arata-na-shiryō kara kaimyō sareta kare to nakama no shashinka tachi* (2007, pp.5-20); and *Old Japan Catalogue* 34 (August 2007, pp.58-62)
5. W.S.Clark, *Illustrated History* (1870)
6. Treadwell, T.K. *The Stereoscopic Views Issued by the Anthony Company* (2002)
7. Sebastian Dobson, *Photography and the Prussian Expedition to Japan, 1860-61* (2009)
8. Thomas C. Pitkin, manuscript papers, Washington, DC: Library of Congress, Pitkin, folder 2, fragment 14
9. S.R. Brown's Letters (1859-1880), held by the New Brunswick Theological Seminary, New Jersey. Facsimiles are held by the Meiji Gakuin Daigaku, Tokyo
10. New York Passenger Lists 1820-1957, National Archives: Microfilm Serial: M237; Microfilm Roll: M237_222; Line: 11; List Number: 836A
11. Saito Takio, *Shimooka Renjo (1823-1914)* (1997, pp.173-7); Terry Bennett, *Photography in Japan* (1996, pp.69-72); Terry Bennett, *Old Japanese Photographs* (1996, pp.26-37)
12. Terry Bennett, *John Thomas Gulick (1832-1923) - Pioneer Photographer in Japan* (2011)
13. S.R.Brown's Letters (1859-1880)
14. Terry Bennett, *Photography in Japan* (2006, p.57)
15. Archives de l'Etat, Neuchâtel, Fonds Aimé Humbert, Copies de lettres, Volume 8, Pages 467 à 469. The authors would like to thank art historian Ariane Maradan for pointing out this important letter.

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END OF ARTICLE

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