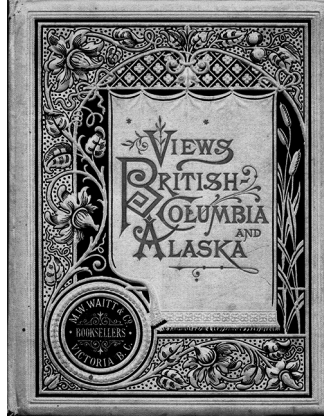


# Unfolding the Past

The history of a 19th-century Leporello album by Victoria printer Marshal Wilder Waitt reveals a unique printing technique.

RESEARCHING EARLY ART in Vancouver, I recently came across a blog titled *Vancouver As It Was: A Photo-Historical Journey* (vanasitwas.wordpress.com) where an image of the first Vancouver train station was posted. It wasn't a photograph. It looked like a wood engraving because it was perfectly detailed and composed. It turned out to be one of a number of images published in Victoria by M.W. Waitt in a view book titled *Views: British Columbia and Alaska*.

Although the publisher is named on the front cover, there's no mention of a publication date. There's no information about the artist or who took the photos that served as the basis for the images. The quality of the images was such that I was intrigued and wanted to know more about the publication. I looked online and to my surprise found an original copy for sale just up the Fraser Valley at Murdoch's Bookshope in Mission. I ordered it and waited impatiently until it arrived in the mail, researching early B.C. engravers while I waited.

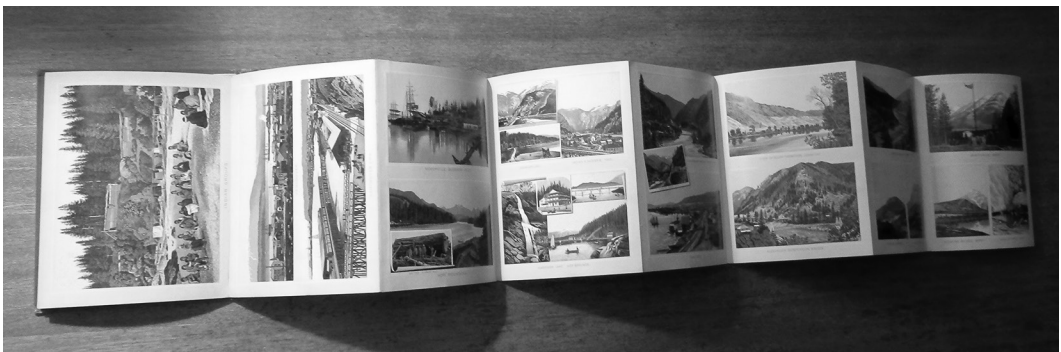


Cover of *Views: British Columbia and Alaska*.

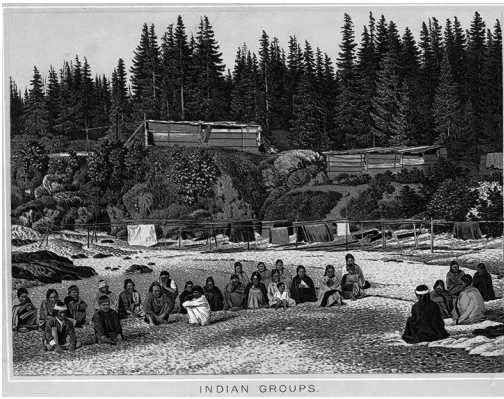
When it arrived, I carefully removed a number of protective layers and held in my hand a lovely little book, about 5¾ × 7¼ inches. Two hard boards, loosely bound, allow for an accordion fold of black and white "views" to spill out between the covers. There are 24 "pages" in the accordion that unfold to just over 11 feet long. Many pages have multiple images printed on them, for a total of 64 views. The views are printed on strips of paper that are 26 inches long (five leaves), glued together end-to-end with a half-inch tab.

## STRIKING, DETAILED IMAGES

This type of view book is known as a Leporello album, a nod to Don Giovanni's manservant in Mozart's opera of the same name. The servant kept a diary of his master's conquests that he called *Madamina*, but he had to keep adding pages due to all the amorous activity. Photographers and tourists, making a record of their own conquests, embraced the format and it quickly became a staple of souvenir shops. One view book from



*The Leporello album unfolded.*



*Image of Indigenous people (top)  
and detail of print (bottom).*

Texas unfolds to 20 feet long, although most people will be more familiar with the smaller albums of postcards that reached a modern climax in the 1950s and '60s.

The images in Waitt's album are striking. There are a lot of railway bridges, buildings, sailing ships, rivers, forests, mountains and clouds illustrated in minute and perfect detail. Although they look photographically printed, and the darker parts of the scene have a black gloss, the whole image is not glossy. Each image is impressed into the page, with an embossed decorative border.

No text is printed inside the book other than image titles. The 128-year history of my copy is evident inside: a former owner, a lieutenant in the navy, inscribed his name. The volume was later acquired by the library of the provincial government's Heritage Conservation Branch in Victoria, but it's now stamped DISCARDED, call slip and pocket included.

Since one of the views is of the Vancouver train station, the book had to have been published after May 1886. Another view is of the steamship



*Detail of Victoria print,  
with Glaser signature on lower right.*

*Beaver*, at anchor prior to its being wrecked on Prospect Point July 26, 1889. A publication date of 1889 or 1890 therefore seems reasonable.

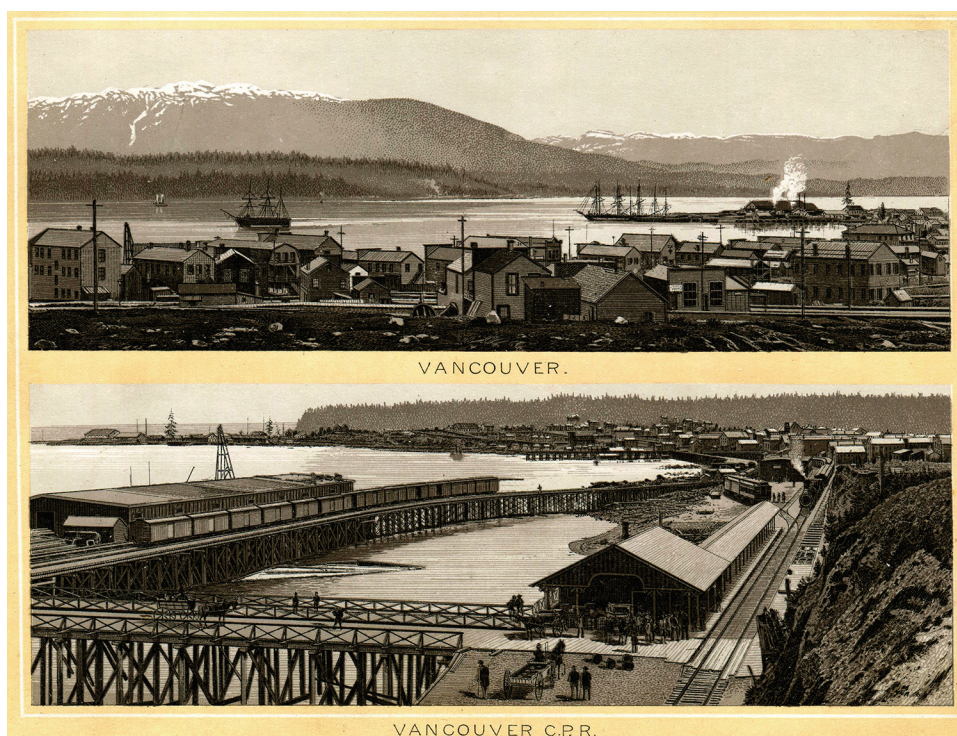
But who was the publisher, and how was *Views* produced? I discovered that Marshall Wilder Waitt was a member of the Masonic order who was born in Maine in 1842. About 1860 he went to California, and two years later, in 1862, he moved to Victoria. Here, Waitt went into the “commissions and produce” business. By 1870 he was chief clerk at stationers T.N. Hibbens & Co. By 1878, Waitt had struck out on his own, opening a book and stationery store. The later addition of a music store added to his business interests. Both were located on Government Street. He published an early bird's-eye view map of Victoria in 1878 and *Views* in about 1889–90. His death from smallpox in 1892 cut short his career as a publisher. He was laid to rest in Ross Bay Cemetery, Victoria.

To identify the artist, I began looking for a signature or monogram or initials hidden somewhere in the views, with immediate success. There was a name in the bird's-eye view of Victoria, lower right corner, but too tiny to read with the naked eye. A loupe clearly showed the signature “Louis Glaser, Leipzig.” That surprised me; I'd been thinking that the views were done by a local engraver in either Victoria or Vancouver. I quickly found a vast amount of information about Louis Glaser and his business online. Far from being the work of one artist, the views required a huge team to produce.

#### AN INNOVATIVE PRINTING PROCESS

Glaser was a major German publisher of postcards, posters and view albums in the late





*Views of the Vancouver harbour and train station.*

1800s and early 1900s, in both black and white and colour. He employed over 200 people at one point, a workforce that produced 300 view albums for 200 publishers worldwide between 1868 and 1897. Glaser's other North American view books showed scenes of Minnesota railways, Montreal, San Francisco, and numerous towns in Texas and elsewhere.

Glaser published catalogues or order-books to help publishers select what they wanted in terms of paper, finishes, colours, sizes, and so on. Waitt chose a very ornate, multicolour embossed cover, produced in both red cloth and blue cloth for his *Views*, and possibly other colours too.

What made Glaser's work unique is that he had invented a printing process, named after himself, by which the images were printed from five or more lithographic stones. Each image is broken down into five or more separations based on tonal values. Starting with the lighter tones, each printed impression adds a darker layer, finishing with a black or key layer. The darker inks are shinier than the lighter ones, and the resulting image gives an impression of depth.

The perfection of the printing process makes them look photographic, at least at first glance.

Using multiple litho stones to print variations in tone is a very labour-intensive process. The separation into tonal layers would be done from an original photographic print. Each of these layers would be painted individually by hand, textures built up with lines and dabs from a brush. The images were also "improved" from the photographs used in their creation. Unnoticed features were erased, trees added, removed and resized. Bystanders were placed at appropriate locations; there is a rowboat or canoe on almost every body of water, and a train going by on most tracks. In one scene a bridge is crowded with men looking upriver, and in another a horse and buggy canters by at a good clip, which would have been at best a blur in a contemporary photograph.

Combination page layouts from up to six images would have been assembled into "master" page separations. Ornaments like page curls and drop shadows were hand-drawn, and text was added for the titles. The printed detail is almost microscopic, so there must have been



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*Marshall Wilder Waitt stands in the doorway of his bookstore on Government Street, Victoria, c. 1880s.  
 Photo courtesy of the Royal BC Museum and Archives (A-03473).*

a photographic reduction from the original separations before (or possibly at the time) they were transferred to the lithograph stones. Finally, each stone was etched and cleaned, and then each print was run through the press once for each separation. The registration from stone to stone had to be perfect.

#### QUESTIONS LEFT UNANSWERED

How did the photographer and Waitt produce the *Views*? Did Waitt commission the photographer? Was there more than one photographer involved in the project? Did the photographer approach Waitt, either proposing to take the pictures or having already taken them? Given that Waitt was from the United States, it is possible that he used an American photographer, such as Charles Weidner of San Francisco, with whom he is known to have worked. This could account for the inclusion of Alaska in the book.

However, the Bailey Brothers of Vancouver and Kamloops are also known to have photographed similar scenes, including the Stoney Creek Bridge between Revelstoke and

Golden. The spring 2017 issue of *BC History* published a different image of the bridge with a train on it, which matches this image's point of view exactly, but the *Views* image is cropped and two broken trees are painted out.

Other questions come to mind, such as: how did the pictures get to Leipzig? How much did it cost to make the books, how much to buy one? How many were ordered? It may be impossible to answer these questions about a 128-year-old publication, but it's hard not to be fascinated at the connection between a publisher on the frontier of the Pacific Northwest and workers in the heart of Europe. *Views: British Columbia and Alaska* was a major production effort for its time, a publication that would still be difficult and expensive to produce today. It was a grand vision for a pioneering province, one that after more than 125 years still has stories to tell.

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