

**Platt D. Babbitt *Luna Island Indigenous Peoples* (glass stereograph, 19th century).
[Brock Archives & Special Collections, Niagara Falls Stereo Cards RG 599](#)**

Researched by Madeline Corbier



This glass stereograph (Brock University Library Archives & Special Collections, Niagara Falls Stereo Cards RG 599) depicts five Indigenous people looking at the American side of Niagara Falls. Four of the five people are sitting next to each other. One figure is wearing a hat standing beside a tree, looking out over the waterfall.

This was taken by American photographer Platt D. Babbitt, a man who was famous for his photography of the Falls in the 19th century. Babbitt was a savvy businessman. He had a setup along the Falls and capitalised on candids of tourists amazed by the sight. (Hannavy, 2008 105)

This is a glass stereograph, an image made to be viewed through a stereoscope allowing the viewer to experience the scene becoming three dimensional. Arden Reed describes its popularity by saying that “Stereoscopes were as common in 19th century homes as television sets would become in 20th century homes.” (Reed, 2014, 74)

Photography of Indigenous peoples has a history of racial prejudice, with photographers often bringing their ideas of the peoples into their sets. Authenticity and dignity were thrown out in the name of creating the image of an “indian.” As Nicole Dawn Strathman notes, “often it was the photographer who insisted that the Native sitters wear traditional indigenous clothing such as headdresses, breastplates, and leggings, regardless of whether such pieces were relevant to the sitter’s specific tribe.” (Strathman, 2020, 31)

In this stereograph, there is no visible regalia, or visual evidence that the setting has been altered in any way. This is a photo from life of this group, it is unclear if it was with permission. Babbitt was known to wait for a crowd to gather before the falls, take the photo,

then capitalize once it had developed. (Hannavy, 2008 105) A few of his photographs from the Falls are displayed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

References and Further Reading

Babbitt, Platt D. "Glass Stereo Card – Five Indigenous People on Luna Island Looking at American Falls." [Brock University Digital Repository](#).

Hannavy, John. *Encyclopedia of Nineteenth-Century photography*. New York N.Y.: Taylor & Francis Group, 2008.

Reed, Arden. "New Sites for Slowness." *Qui Parle* 22, no. 2 (December 1, 2014): 69–99. <https://doi.org/10.5250/quiparle.22.2.0069>

Strathman, Nicole Dawn. *Through a Native lens: American Indian photography*. University of Oklahoma Press, 2020.