

Book Review

## Itinerant photographer captured far-flung wonders

By Michael Upchurch

*Seattle Times book critic*

**"Burton Holmes: Travelogues," edited by Genoa Caldwell Taschen, 368 pp., \$49.99**

He visited Morocco in 1894. Australia in 1917. Peru in 1935. He landed in Naples the very week a highly photogenic Mount Vesuvius started erupting in April 1906, and in the 1890s he shot the first motion-picture footage ever filmed in China, Korea, Japan and the Philippines.

He brought home images of manmade marvels (London's Crystal Palace, the Panama Canal under construction) and manmade miseries (World War I ruins and battlefield debris in France in 1918-1919). He photographed mighty monuments (the Eiffel Tower, the Taj Mahal) and ordinary street scenes (market vendors, kids romping around or gazing into the camera, an astonishingly dense horse-drawn-cab traffic jam in 1897 London).

His name was Burton Holmes, he lived from 1870 to 1958, and in this beautifully assembled survey of his 60-year career, Seattle-based editor Genoa Caldwell does full justice to a man who, she says, is "believed to have seen and chronicled more of this earth over a longer period of time than anyone before or since."

### Editor appearance

**Genoa Caldwell** will discuss "Burton Holmes: Travelogues," 7 p.m. Tuesday at University Book Store, 4326 University Way N.E., Seattle (206-634-3400 or [www.ubookstore.com](http://www.ubookstore.com))

"performances" must have been. But these rigorously rehearsed presentations were polished affairs.



Jungfrau, Switzerland, 1904. "The Jungfrau was first climbed about a hundred years ago. It is now climbed every year and every year the Jungfrau claims her victims. The very day I came, two men died there amid the snows. They were skilled climbers, but they were not able to cope with storm and chance ... " Many of Burton Holmes' turn-of-the-century photographs were colorized by painters.



Burton Holmes visited nearly 40 countries.

"Burton Holmes: Travelogues" — subtitled "The Greatest Traveler of His Time, 1892-1952" — is a hefty, handsome coffee-table book, documenting Holmes' travels through nearly 40 countries. All the photographs he took were fodder for the slideshow lectures he gave all around the country and in Europe. The word he and his producer coined for these lectures, "travelogue," is now so much a part of our vocabulary that it can't quite conjure how marvelous his

"I insisted on dispensing with signals," Hoimes later recalled. "No clickers, no pounding on the stage with a pointer, no flash of light from a little lamp nor tinkle of bell to mar my show and warn the public that it was time to change the picture on the screen."

Instead, his stereopticon projectionist took his cue from underlined words and phrases from the text Holmes was delivering, which signaled when it was "time to 'turn the chromo' in the magic lantern."

Some of that text is included in "Burton Holmes: Travelogues." Images of streets in Naples deep in volcanic ash are accompanied by Holmes' description of trying to get around the city during Vesuvius' eruption: "like driving through a blackish blizzard of heavy, clinging, penetrating, dirty, dried-up snow."

Holmes also expresses his delight in "the funny, pretty food" of Japan, and his ecstasy upon seeing the Great Pyramid in Egypt ("this stone mountain made with hands — this Matterhorn of masonry").

Many of the photographs were colorized by painters who, Caldwell tells us, used single-hair ermine brushes to achieve "results nearly as accurate as modern color film." One advertising brochure dubs these images "travelogue pen-pictures."

Holmes presented his "pen-pictures" and short films in major venues all over the world, including Carnegie Hall — where his appearances prompted the installation of the concert hall's first movie screen.

Caldwell, along with her elegant, humorous introduction, supplies an account of how she first heard of the Burton Holmes collection in 1970s Los Angeles, and then became its curator. But she gives the last word to Holmes himself, in the form of a lecture-program cover from his 1931-1932 tour.

"Burton Holmes," it reads, "looks at the world from many angles and finds it well worth your attention."



Giza, Egypt, 1906. "Never to be forgotten is the moment when we first behold the outlines of those solid shapes, gigantic and triangular that stand for all the glory and the dignity of the Egypt of the past. We murmur, 'The Pyramids' ... All history is breathed in that one word."