
Discovery of a Rare Daguerreotype of Frederick Granger Williams Smith, Second Surviving Son of Joseph and Emma Hale Smith

Robert D. Talbot

In June 1994, following the death of my grandmother, Lola Hazel Johnson Howard, my mother, Janice Howard Talbot, received as part of her inheritance, a small, peculiar-looking case containing a beautifully preserved image of a young man seated in a chair next to a table. Part of the picture had been tinted or “colorized.” My mother knew the case and the image was a treasured family heirloom. Not knowing who the young man in the image was, but thinking that it might possibly be her great-great-great grandfather, Hyrum Smith, she decided to send it to the LDS Church Archives in Salt Lake City to see if someone in the department could make a positive identification. She sent it to William (Bill) W. Slaughter, an expert in early Mormon photographs. Sometime later, Bill sent a letter back indicating that the image in the small case was not Hyrum. However, he thought the person might possibly be one of Hyrum or Joseph’s sons, or perhaps some other Smith family member. After receiving the somewhat disappointing news that the person in the image was not that of Hyrum, she placed it in her dresser drawer among her personal things.

In October 2000, my parents moved from Missouri to Arizona to be near our family. A few days after moving them into their new home, I asked my mother what happened to the old photograph that grandmother had left her and that she had xeroxed for me several years earlier. I told her that I would like to see what the whole thing looked like. She led me to her bedroom and opened her drawer and handed me a small, foil-wrapped box that I had seen a few days earlier while unpacking her things. The box had actually fallen

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out of her drawer as we were moving it and I picked it up off the pavement and tossed it back, not even giving it a second thought as to what it might contain.

I unwrapped the foil to discover a beautiful, acorn-pattern, tooled leather box. I proceeded to open the two small latch hooks and was fascinated by the photo that was contained inside. The image was on a polished, silver-finished copper plate. It looked very old, but it was quite well preserved. Some tarnish had occurred around the outside of the subject. I had to tilt the picture to get a clear view of the subject. The photo was encased in a thin, decorative brass frame covered with glass.



*Case containing the Frederick Granger Williams Smith daguerreotype, ca. late 1850s, in the possession of Robert D. Talbot.
Courtesy Robert D. Talbot.*

I told my mother, Janice, that we needed to find out who the person was in the picture and she allowed me to take it. I went to my office and removed the frame from the small box. Next, I carefully removed the image from the frame and glass. I was very careful not to touch the face of the picture. After carefully scanning the image on the computer, I enlarged the photo and began to think of ways to try to determine how old the heirloom was and who might be the person seated in the picture.

Upon close examination of the image, I first thought that it might be Joseph Smith. I noticed that the book held in his right hand looked similar in size and shape to a Book of Mormon. I also noticed the individual was wearing a gold ring with an oval in the center, very similar to one worn by

the Prophet. I even downloaded from the Internet a photo of the Prophet's death mask, then made an enlargement of the unidentified image on a transparency, and laid the two together. They seemed to match quite well which heightened my feeling that the image might be that of Joseph Smith.

Using the Internet, I began looking up sites that could give me information about old photographs. I e-mailed copies and descriptions of the picture to several individuals, asking for their opinion and help. I soon learned that the image was a daguerreotype—the name given to the first ever photographic process. I began to get responses back from experts and the answers were not what I wanted to hear. They were telling me that the clothing did not match the time period of the early 1840s and that the thin tin mat framing the daguerreotype was of a later time period. I also learned that the small stamp in the bottom left-hand corner was a hallmark used around 1848-1850. My hopes of it being Joseph were starting to fade, but I still held to the hope that it might be a Smith family member.

I sent the image to the Daguerien Society and received the following reply: "That is a daguerreotype and, by the case and mat, it's from the early 1850s. I sent a copy on to one of our members who knows clothing to see if he had any thoughts. It is unusual to have a daguerreotype with that amount of tinting but it's not especially well done."¹ Dennis Waters, a daguerreotype expert, replied:

Thanks for sharing your "ancestor" with me. What an intriguing image. I will try to answer most of your questions and maybe add some insight. The image was not made between 1840-44. The hallmark on the plate, of French origin, was one of the most commonly used, beginning no earlier than 1847-48 and not gaining real popularity until 1850. The daguerreotypist was very skillful and the original appearance of this plate would have been spectacular. Nothing can be done, safely, to remove the oxidation. Any attempt would certainly remove the tinting on the jacket, tie and table cloth. I think the garish reds might survive. His flesh tones would also be diminished. . . . The safest path is to use new glass and archival tape to reseal the package and inhibit further oxidation.

Because of the manner that the coat crosses under his hand and book, I think that there was probably a single button that fastened it. Your original portrait was laterally reversed, because when you made the enlargement the fold over in the jacket "reads" correctly. Wedding rings and buttons are two ways to sometimes accurately determine if a plate is laterally reversed. While I don't know an exact percentage, I think it would be safe to guess that at least 90% of all daguerreian portraits are backwards.

Another thought about the hand-coloring. The piping on the jacket, red on the tie and gold on the fellow's ring are all a different type of raised pigment. The ordinary style of coloring an image is revealed in the clothing, flesh tones and on the tablecloth. I surmise that the colorist wasn't as skilled using the raised paints and that indeed, all the tint was applied originally.

The weird pattern of tarnish under the mat doesn't indicate to me that any-



Daguerreotype plate showing the image of Frederick Granger Williams Smith, ca. late 1850s. Courtesy Robert D. Talbot.

thing was changed. In fact Robert, the mat style and the case also both suggest that the piece was made circa 1848–50. If you examine your image very carefully, I don't think that oval pattern that is plainly visible was made by a contemporary mat, per se. Look how wide opened it is. Then look into the four corners of the plate. Notice how much darker those areas are. I suspect that the oval shape represents a pattern left from a plate holder used during the fuming or development process. I have seen this shape (and many others) on naked plates. I hope that all this is helpful.²

I eventually received a letter containing the findings by Bill Slaughter. He indicat-

ed that his staff determined that it was not Joseph Smith Jr., but that it possibly was a member of the Smith family. Bill told me to contact Ronald E. Romig, archivist of the Community of Christ (formerly RLDS) in Independence, Missouri.³ I contacted Ron on the phone. He was more than willing to help in determining whom the individual in the daguerreotype was. I e-mailed him a copy so he could compare with others that he might have in his collection. At this point, I did not have the slightest idea what any of Joseph Smith's children looked like. On 26 April 2001, Ron e-mailed me the following:

Congratulations! I think you have a daguerrian image of Frederick Granger Williams Smith, second son of Joseph and Emma, b. 20 June 1836, Kirtland, Ohio, m. Annie Maria Jones, 13 September 1857, Nauvoo, Illinois, farmer, mercantile business, D. 13 April 1862, buried in Smith Family Cemetery near the Homestead, Nauvoo, Illinois.

I insert an image of FGW Smith, that I estimate was shot around 1855 at Nauvoo. It is part of the familiar grouping with Lewis Crum Bidamon and the four



Emma Smith's sons and her second husband, ca 1860.

Sitting left to right: "Major" Lewis C. Bidamon, Frederick Granger Williams Smith, and Joseph Smith, III. Standing left to right: David Hyrum Smith and Alexander Hale Smith.

Courtesy of Community of Christ Archives, Independence, Missouri.

Smith sons Joseph III, Frederick GW, Alexander Hale, David Hyrum. The image I am forwarding has been retouched somewhat (he is actually wearing a hat in the original), but I think you will see that the similarity is striking. I believe you can even see the ring. I think this image was shot about the same time as yours. We have the original daguerreotype in our collection and—(upon inspection I found) it has the same plate service mark as yours.

This image would have been a valued family treasure, especially since FGW died very early. I can easily understand why it was passed carefully down through Hyrum Smith descendants to you. Daguerreotypes were in standard use through the 1860s. It sounds like the advice you received is probably correct; the plate was probably manufactured around 1850. I'll try to check on that further. Your image is perhaps a bit later than ours, judging from the clothing. As you see in our image, through the early 1850s, a proper gentleman always wore a vest (waist coat) and an outer coat. Your image seems to be minus the vest (late 1850s).

I think this is a remarkable find, as images of Frederick are quite limited. In fact very little is known about his life. We have one other portrait image of him in our collection, wearing a hat. It also appears to confirm the identification of your image. I suspect the historical community would be interested in your discovery. Lachlan Mackay the director at the Kirtland Temple in Kirtland would be interested.⁴

I immediately wrote Lachlan Mackay, Historic Sites Coordinator for the

Community of Christ, informing him of the discovery and he sent the following reply:

What a wonderful find! The only images of Frederick I have seen previously come from the RLDS Archives. One of the images is reproduced in *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith* by Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippetts Avery. Upon comparing your image with the published photo, I am also convinced that your daguerreotype is of Frederick. What line do you descend through? It would be interesting to try and figure out if one of the cousins stopped in Nauvoo on a mission and was given the daguerreotype.⁵

Following Ron Romig's positive identification that the daguerreotype was that of Frederick G. W. Smith, I continued to receive replies from other experts whom I had consulted. David Lindsley, a well-known portrait artist sent the following response:

Sorry to inform you, but the daguerreotype is not Joseph. The clothing and hair style are from a much later period in time. The hair style is called the "western" style and was seen in mid- to late-fifties. The coat and collar are also from the fifties. Men didn't start turning their collars down until late 40s, early 50s. Joseph wore his ring on the ring finger and not the pinky. Joseph never had his hair this long according to all the sketches and paintings done of him from life. Nobody had hair this style in the early or mid forties. Besides the fact that one eye has a trauma to it, that eye and eyebrow are much higher than the other. Joseph's eyes were not as mismatched. His nose appears to be shorter and flatter than Joseph's. The number 40 on the plate is not the year it was made, but refers to the ratio of copper to silver on the plate. 40 means that 1/40 of the thickness is silver, and 39/40 is copper. The crescent design and any initials or names next to the 40 indicate what manufacturer made the plate. The plates were made either in France or in New England and most of them didn't stay in business very long. Many daguerreotypes are dated by checking when the manufacturer made the plates. (At least they can figure that the picture wasn't taken before the plate was made!) My guess is that this is one of Hyrum's sons.⁶

Dee Jay Bawden, a forensic sculptor and artist who has done many works for the LDS Church, made the following statement about the image: "I have examined Talbot's color daguerreotype of Frederick Smith and find it to match the two previously recognized daguerreotypes perfectly. Projecting the facial bone structure to equal size with the other images reveals a perfect match. He seems to be more robust in the younger images, so I believe this colored rendering was most likely taken later when he was ill."⁷

After determining that the daguerreotype was that of Frederick G. W. Smith, the question still remained as to how the image came into the Hyrum Smith family line who were in Utah. The likelihood exists that around 1860, the daguerreotype came into the possession of Jerusha Smith Pierce (born 13 January 1836, Kirtland, Ohio, died 27 June 1912, Brigham City, Utah), daughter of Hyrum and Jerusha Barden Smith. In February 1860, John

Smith, a brother to the younger Jerusha, traveled east where he met his cousins Joseph III, Frederick Granger Williams, Alexander Hale, and David Hyrum Smith in Nauvoo.⁸ On such occasions, it was customary to exchange pictures with family and friends and it was probably at this time that John exchanged photographs with his Illinois cousins of family members living in Utah. Frederick likely gave the daguerreotype of himself to John to give to Jerusha upon his return. As young cousins Jerusha and Frederick were born just five months apart, and as young cousins, the two grew up together and probably spent considerable time with each other as playmates and friends. This might explain why Frederick would have wanted Jerusha to have a picture of him. Regardless, the daguerreotype found its way into the Jerusha Smith Pierce family line. (See Figure 1).



Sutcliffe Maudsley profile portrait of Frederick Granger Williams Smith, ca. 1842. Frederick would have been around six years of age. Courtesy Community of Christ Archives, Independence, Missouri.

For over 140 years, although a treasured family heirloom, the knowledge of this rare daguerreotype of Joseph Smith's second surviving son remained unknown. I am deeply appreciative to many individuals who shared their expertise and provided information and much needed guidance in helping determine the image to be that of Frederick Granger Williams Smith.

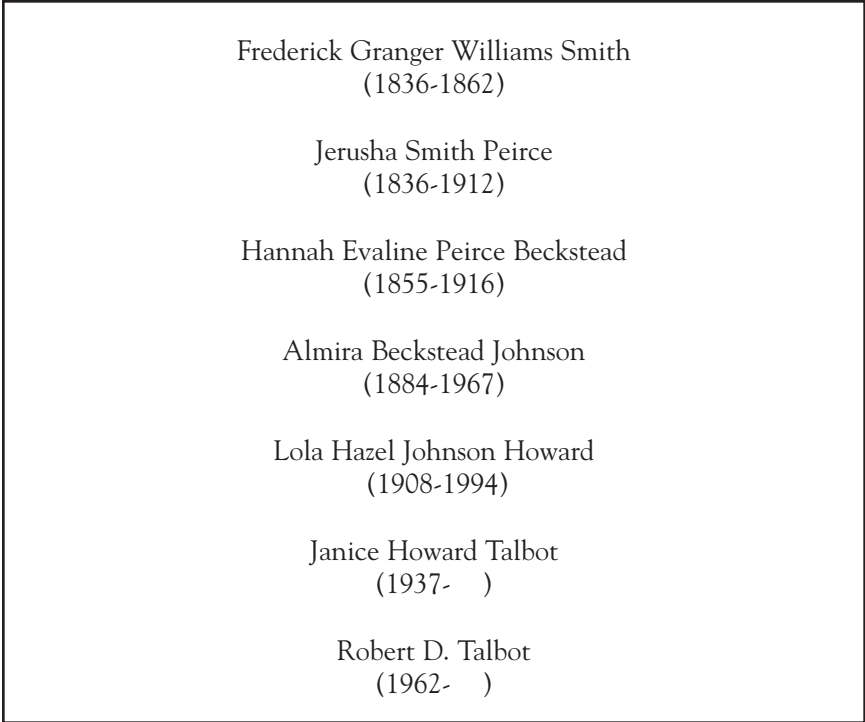


Figure 1. Provenance of the Frederick Granger Williams Smith daguerreotype.

Notes

1. Mark Johnson to Robert D. Talbot, 27 April 2001.
2. Dennis Waters to Robert D. Talbot, 27 April 2001.
3. William W. (Bill) Slaughter to Robert D. Talbot, 26 April 2001.
4. Ronald E. Romig to Robert D. Talbot, 26 April 2001.
5. Lachlan Mackay to Robert D. Talbot, 29 April 2001.
6. David Lindsley to Robert D. Talbot, 2 May 2001.
7. Dee Jay Bawden to Robert D. Talbot, 7 May 2001.
8. See Buddy Youngreen, "Sons of the Martyrs' Nauvoo Reunion—1860," *BYU Studies* 20, no. 4 (Spring 1980): 351-69.