



Courtesy Deseret News Company

FIG. 1. Brigham Young and an unidentified wife. Copy print of photograph of a daguerreotype, ca. 1850–54, attributed to Marsena Cannon. Although a 1965 artifact record in the Museum of Church History and Art clearly describes this image, the image itself had disappeared until this year, when this copy was found in the collections of the *Deseret News*.

A Mysterious Image

Brigham Young with an Unknown Wife

Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Robert F. Schwartz

Of the hundreds of images of Brigham Young, until recently only two were known that show Brigham posing with one of his wives. While rumors of a third such image have existed for some time, no one could find a copy of it until this year. What we found was a photograph of the original daguerreotype (fig. 1); the original itself, printed on a small copier plate, is still missing. This rumored image was mysterious not only because it had disappeared but also because the wife's face on the daguerreotype had been completely obliterated. Unanswered questions regarding its damage make this image intrinsically interesting. In addition, finding the copy, determining the daguerreotype's creation date, and trying to identify the wife have presented investigative challenges almost as intriguing as the image itself.

General Context of the Image

From 1994 to 1999, Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and R. Q. Shupe gathered all the known images of Brigham Young produced during his lifetime. Published in *Brigham Young: Images of a Mormon Prophet* (2000), the collection came to include hundreds of images, including daguerreotypes, tinctypes, ambrotypes, paintings, woodcuts, engravings, and pencil sketches. In addition to publishing these images of the Prophet Brigham, Holzapfel and Shupe attempted to provide dates, background information, and detailed descriptions for each image. However, determining the correct information was often difficult and sometimes impossible. In the introduction to their book, the authors note that “virtually all publications reproducing visual images of Brigham Young contain flaws in date iden-



Courtesy Richard M. Young

FIG. 2. Brigham Young and Margaret Peirce Young. Daguerreotype, ca. 1852–53, $2\frac{3}{8}$ " x $2\frac{3}{4}$ " (6 cm x 7 cm), attributed to Marsena Cannon (detail). This is one of only two known photographs of Brigham posing alone with an identified wife.

tification. . . . Dating photographs and identifying photographers can be challenging, particularly when the only surviving image is a copy of a copy.”¹

While researching their book, Holzapfel and Shupe came across only two photographs of Brigham posing with individual wives. The first is a 6 cm x 7 cm daguerreotype of Brigham and Margaret Peirce Young² (fig. 2). The second is a portrait of Brigham and Amelia Folsom Young, taken in 1863—the year they were married.³ However, Holzapfel and Shupe heard from a number of Young family members, image collectors, and archivists about a third image of Brigham with a wife, an unidentified woman whose face on the daguerreotype had been completely smeared or scratched away. Unfortunately, Holzapfel and Shupe were unable to locate the image in time for their volume. However, a copy of the picture, owned by the Deseret News Company, was rediscovered just this year. Following a lead from Joseph M. Bauman, a collector and writer at the *Deseret News*,

Holzapfel's student research assistant Marc Bohn spent two days in the newspaper's library before he found this copy of the image. Librarians there had not been aware that they had a copy of this rare print.

Image History

The daguerreotype belonged to a collection that today is housed in the Museum of Church History and Art of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Although a record of this image has existed in the Church's artifact catalog since July 7, 1965, the image itself is missing from the museum's collection. The Church's artifact record H2623 contains the following description:

One photograph of Brigham Young and a wife encased in a leather case. The case has red velvet cushion with design and glass with gold trim to keep picture clean. Face of wife has been smeared away. Finishing on photograph in gold and pink. The case has a design and two hooks to hold together when closed; dark brown in color.⁴

The only other information the catalog entry gives that would help to identify the image is the date 1849; no donor is named.⁵

Before it arrived at the museum, during the latter 1960s and through the 1970s, the collection containing the picture of Brigham and his mystery wife was stored in various places on Temple Square, including the basements of the North Visitors' Center and the Tabernacle. This situation continued until May 1984, when the Church dedicated its new Museum of Church History and Art and relocated the collection to the museum. However, when they tried to match all objects with their record numbers in 1992, the curators never located item H2623 and declared it "unavailable," its position "unknown."⁶ Thus, all that can be said of the daguerreotype's disappearance is that it occurred sometime between July 7, 1965, and 1992.

Some witnesses claim to have seen the original daguerreotype after 1965. For instance, Nyal Anderson, manager of Beehive Collector's Gallery in Salt Lake City, says that sometime in the early to mid-1980s, a collector approached him seeking a price appraisal of a daguerreotype showing Brigham Young with a wife whose face had been scratched out. Although interested in the daguerreotype's worth, the collector remained unwilling to sell the image.⁷

More concrete evidence of the missing daguerreotype appeared on February 24, 1971, when the *Deseret News* ran an article regarding a diary of Brigham Young.⁸ The article included a small photograph showing only Brigham Young's face and neckerchief; however, the article's view of Brigham was merely part of a larger photograph that the Deseret News Company

had in its possession (fig. 1).⁹ The newly found complete photograph shows a nail-mounted daguerreotype of Brigham with his arm around a wife whose face is smeared away. Apparently the photograph shows H2623 removed from the leather and velvet casing described in the museum record. The photograph was evidently taken before the daguerreotype entered the Church collection.

Although this photograph of the daguerreotype clearly matches the museum's description of their missing artifact, the newspaper's information conflicts with the museum's record. The *Deseret News* article claims that the image shows Brigham "at about the time [the] diary was written."¹⁰ President Young dictated the diary from May 27, 1857, to September 21 of the same year, while the museum archive record dates the daguerreotype to 1849. Adding to the confusion about dates, pencil handwriting on the back of the *Deseret News* Company's copy reads simply, "Brigham Young in the early 60's," and the *Deseret News* library contains no documentation of its acquisition of the photograph. In view of such confusing or incomplete documentation, we turn to the image itself, which reveals that it was probably taken in the early 1850s.

Details That Help Determine the Date

Even in frontier Utah, fashions in dress and grooming changed frequently, following trends elsewhere. Thus details of styles shown in the photograph present clues to the time of its creation. By comparing the photograph with fashion trends and with other photographs of Brigham, we can place the image in the early 1850s.

H2623 cannot have been taken later than 1860 because it shows President Young before he wore a beard, which appears in other photographs beginning in 1861. Moreover, the Brigham we see in H2623 looks significantly younger than the Brigham who appears in two photographs from the 1857 period suggested by the diary.¹¹

In H2623, Brigham is wearing a silk neckerchief with a floral pattern (fig. 3). This is significant because the same neckerchief appears in several images from the early 1850s. We first see the neckerchief in



FIG. 3. Detailed view of Brigham Young from figure 1. The lack of a beard and the youthfulness of his appearance suggest that the daguerreotype could have been taken as early as 1850. His neckerchief also provides clues to the daguerreotype's date.



FIG. 4. Brigham Young. Detail from daguerreotype, December 12, 1850, 5" x 4" (13 cm x 10 cm), Marsena Cannon. This is the first dated photo of Brigham wearing his floral neckerchief. © Intellectual Reserve, Inc. Courtesy Museum of Church History and Art, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

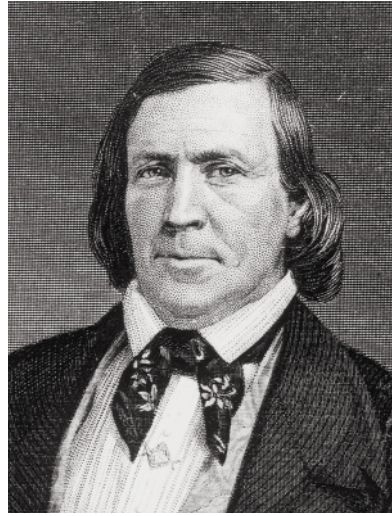


FIG. 5. Brigham Young. Detail from steel engraving, January 1853, 3¾" x 2¾" (9.5 cm x 7 cm), Frederick H. Piercy. This engraving is based on one of the 1851–52 daguerreotypes taken by Marsena Cannon. The clarity of detail here makes it easy to identify the neckerchief as the same one he was wearing in figure 1. Courtesy Museum of Church History and Art.

a daguerreotype taken December 12, 1850, by Marsena Cannon¹² (fig. 4). It shows up again in two daguerreotypes also taken by Cannon sometime in 1851 or 1852¹³ (fig. 5). The neckerchief appears a fourth time in the 1852/53 daguerreotype of Brigham with Margaret Peirce (fig. 2) and then finally in two images thought to have been taken sometime in 1853 or 1854¹⁴ (see fig. 6 for one of the images from this pair). The neckerchief appears in all but one of the known photographs taken in the 1850–54 period, but it never appears again in any known photograph after 1854. This evidence suggests that H2623 was taken sometime before 1854, perhaps as early as 1850.

Further evidence of the daguerreotype's time period can be seen in other articles of clothing that appear in H2623, including Brigham's trousers, his vest, and his jacket. Brigham's plaid trousers and vest (fig. 1) indicate the late 1840s, when plaid was popular:

By 1845, the reign of Queen Victoria, which reflected her preference for all things Scottish, created a rush of fabrics on the market and plaid



FIG. 6. Brigham Young. Detail from copy print of a daguerreotype, ca. 1853–54, $4\frac{1}{3}$ " x $3\frac{1}{2}$ " (11 cm x 9 cm), attributed to Marsena Cannon. In this later photo, Brigham again wears his floral neckerchief. Courtesy Museum of Church History and Art.

designs of all kinds. There was a massive increase in . . . woolen plaids and checkers for cloaks and trousers seen all over the English world.¹⁵

This “English world” definitely included Mormon pioneers of the 1840s, many of whom were English and Scottish immigrants. We have evidence of plaid and Scots traditions in Utah in 1848: “On the twenty-fourth of July, 1848, there were some Scots in Salt Lake City who did have plaids, and . . . dancing Scottish reels became standard for celebrations.”¹⁶ The preponderance of plaid in this image suggests that the daguerreotype was probably taken in the late 1840s or early 1850s¹⁷ (fig. 1).

The jacket that Brigham is wearing in H2623 also indicates the early 1850s because it

matches the jacket in another photograph whose date we know. The jacket in H2623 bears a striking resemblance to, and is probably the same as, the jacket that appears in the 1852–53 daguerreotype taken with Margaret Peirce (figs. 2, 3). Both jackets have double-breasted, “M-cut” lapels, and both were tailored without the fullness at the top of the sleeves that was characteristic of jackets in the early to mid-1840s.¹⁸

The similar jackets, coupled with the neckerchief in both images, the rarity of photographs showing Brigham with a wife, and the fact that both daguerreotypes appear to have been taken near the same time, make it valuable to compare H2623 more closely with the photograph of Margaret Peirce Young. In H2623, the wife wears a striped dress that was most likely made from a fine wool (fig. 7). Above the shirring at the waist, we see a gathered point in the bodice, a detail popular from 1838 into the 1840s. The dress’s snugly fitting sleeves with white cuffs also mark it as being of 1840s vintage.¹⁹ These features do not match the dress worn by Margaret Peirce Young in the Marsena Cannon image of 1852–53 (fig. 2). Margaret’s dress is

somewhat looser in the bodice, and it has pagoda sleeves, which became popular in the 1850s.²⁰

There were many styles of sleeves during the [eighteen] fifties from flared to straight. One of the most notable and characteristic was the pagoda sleeve. This sleeve retained the shape of the upper arm and then flared into a wide open sleeve in the area of the elbow. Often a full or bloused undersleeve, usually gathered into a wristband, was worn beneath the pagoda sleeve.²¹

Such undersleeves visibly extend from under Margaret's pagoda sleeves, reaching down to her wrists.²²

The fact that Margaret Peirce appears in her daguerreotype in a dress that can clearly be dated to the 1850s while the wife of H2623 appears in an 1840s dress suggests that H2623 was taken before the image of Margaret and Brigham. If this were so, H2623 would stand as the earliest known image of Brigham posing with a wife. Still, the evidence is sketchy. Comparing Brigham's appearance in the two images reveals only that his hair is shorter in the Margaret Peirce image and seems thinner there than in H2623. While somewhat compelling, these differences might be merely the result of a haircut and the impression of a recently removed hat in the Peirce image. Brigham's face appears almost identical in the two images.

In summary, our examination of details points to a conclusion that the daguerreotype was made sometime in the early 1850s, the neckerchief placing it possibly as late as 1854. Still, although the date is important, perhaps the most important missing fact is the identity of the wife. By 1854, President Young had already been plurally married to forty-eight different women, making the task of identifying the wife in H2623 very difficult.²³ However, what remains of the wife's image can help us guess who she might be. Particularly remarkable are her beaded bracelets (fig. 7), which appear by their distinctive patterns to be Native American in origin. The



FIG. 7. Detailed view of wife's clothing from figure 1. Her distinctive bracelets, which appear to be Native American in style, suggest that this wife is one of three wives known to have had close associations with Native Americans.

Native American design is notable because a few of Brigham's wives had considerable contact with Native Americans indigenous to the western United States. Lucy Ann Decker Young, Brigham's first plural wife, adopted a Native American girl named Sally in 1847.²⁴ We also know that Mary Ann Angell Young and Augusta Adams Cobb Young took an active role in the Indian Relief Societies of the 1850s.²⁵ While the bracelets constitute evidence that is circumstantial at best, they might point toward Angell, Decker, or Cobb as the wife in H2623.

Conclusion

While we have narrowed the possibilities for the date of this image and for the identity of the wife shown in it, we may never identify her with certainty because it was the original image that was damaged. Daguerreotypes were never produced in multiple copies as we often print photographs now, so no undamaged copy exists. Nor is the identity of the wife the only question about this image we may never answer. For example, where is the original daguerreotype? Who damaged the daguerreotype, and why? Was this damage an accident or a deliberate attempt to obliterate the face?

Despite these mysteries, H2623 provides a significant view of Brigham posing with one of his wives. Although his expression there is very similar to the one we see in the daguerreotype of him and Margaret Peirce, his smile in H2623 is a little broader, his demeanor marginally more self-content and worry free. If H2623 was indeed taken as early as 1850, then it shows us a valuable picture of President Young before he began to shoulder the tremendous burden of being the territorial governor in 1851. Moreover, as mentioned previously, H2623 might be the earliest known picture of Brigham with one of his wives. The possibility that H2623 was taken as early as 1850 is consistent with the visual information that we can glean from the available copy of it, especially when the information is compared to other images from the same time period. Unfortunately, the daguerreotype's origin, including its photographer and original owner, can only be guessed at. H2623 serves as a reminder of the difficulties involved in providing accurate information for any antique image and of the fact that pictures of Brigham are still lost.

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1. Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and R. Q. Shupe, *Brigham Young: Images of a Mormon Prophet* (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2000), 2.

2. Holzapfel and Shupe, *Images of a Mormon Prophet*, 118–19, 121. The image is thought to have been taken sometime in 1852 or 1853, and it is attributed to Marsena Cannon. Although Margaret Peirce's name is often spelled "Pierce" in historical commentary, she and her family members spelled their last name "ei," not "ie." Margaret's immigrant grandfather, George Peirce from England, originally spelled his name "Pearce" but eventually changed the spelling to "Peirce" for reasons not known. For more on this subject, see Earl Harvey Peirce, *Robert and Hannah Harvey Peirce: 1847 Utah Pioneers*, 4th ed. (Provo, Utah: n.p., 1996), particularly page 167.

3. Holzapfel and Shupe, *Images of a Mormon Prophet*, 162–63. The existing photograph of Brigham and Amelia is a copy print from an unknown source that was taken by C. R. Savage. There is a possibility that this copy is a composite, two separate images joined later; see *Images of a Mormon Prophet*, 163.

4. "Brigham Young and Wife," accession no. LDS 65-2623, Museum of Church History and Art, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City. Artifact LDS 65-2623 was originally catalogued as H2623 on July 7, 1965.

5. "Brigham Young and Wife."

6. "Brigham Young and Wife."

7. Nyal Anderson, interview with Robert F. Schwartz, Salt Lake City, June 3, 2002.

8. Maxine Martz, "U. to Receive Rare Diary," *Deseret News*, February 24, 1971, B-1.

9. The marks that appear in fig. 1 above Brigham's head on both sides are crop marks used by photo editors at the *Deseret News*; they are a feature of the copy, not of the original daguerreotype.

10. Martz, "U. to Receive Rare Diary," B-1.

11. Holzapfel and Shupe, *Images of a Mormon Prophet*, 136–37. The image on page 136 shows Brigham in 1857; the image on page 137 dates back to 1858. Holzapfel and Shupe note that "[the 1857 ambrotype] reveals the strain and burden that President Young, governor of the territory of Utah, experienced when the federal government 'invaded' Utah," *Images of a Mormon Prophet*, 136. This strained, burdened President Young is a far cry from the smiling, vibrant Brigham we see in the photograph of H2623.

12. Holzapfel and Shupe, *Images of a Mormon Prophet*, 102–3.

13. Holzapfel and Shupe, *Images of a Mormon Prophet*, 105, 107.

14. Holzapfel and Shupe, *Images of a Mormon Prophet*, 119, 122–23.
15. Carma de Jong Anderson, “A Historical Overview of the Mormons and Their Clothing, 1840–1850” (Ph.D. diss., Brigham Young University, 1992), 37.
16. Anderson, “Mormons and Their Clothing,” 36.
17. Carma de Jong Anderson, interview with Robert F. Schwartz, Provo, Utah, June 19, 2002. Anderson surmises by its workmanship and the visible wear on its bottom hem that Brigham possibly acquired the vest on his 1839–41 mission to Great Britain.
18. Anderson, interview.
19. Anderson, interview.
20. Anderson, interview.
21. Virginia Vogel, “Striped Silk Dress: Sleeve,” <http://www.unr.edusb204/theatre/stp4.html>. Vogel’s credentials are found at <http://www.unr.edu/sb204/theatre/abouttoc.html>.
22. Holzapfel and Shupe, *Images of a Mormon Prophet*, 119.
23. Jeffery O. Johnson, “Wives of Brigham Young,” *Brigham Young’s Homes*, ed. Colleen Whitley (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 2002), appendix B.
24. Johnson, “Wives of Brigham Young,” appendix B (219, 225).
25. Richard L. Jensen, “Forgotten Relief Societies, 1844–67,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 16 (spring 1983): 113.