

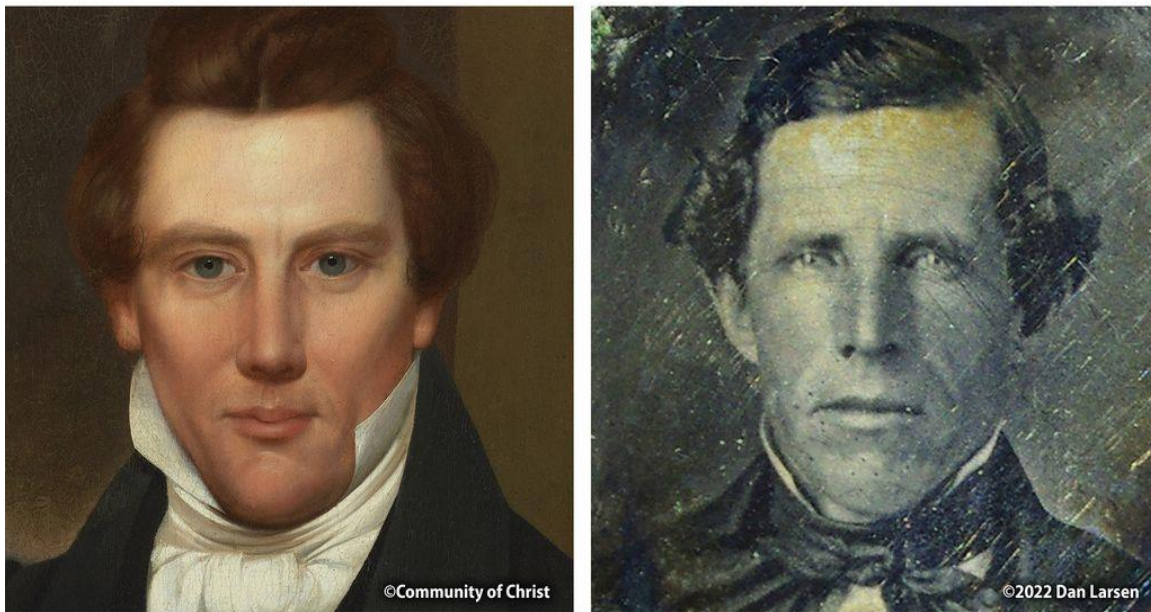
# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

## At Long Last, a Photo of Mormon Founder Joseph Smith Emerges

PEGGY FLETCHER STACK

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**Treasured daguerreotype was found in a descendant's locket. Utah-based LDS Church welcomes the news but urges caution until the image can be further authenticated.**



(Portrait via Community of Christ. Daguerreotype photo by Jim Mathis, via Daniel Larsen) This side-by-side comparison shows the Joseph Smith Jr. oil portrait, circa 1842, attributed to David Rogers, and the recently discovered Smith/Larsen daguerreotype.

The historian's first impression was that the man staring at him from the 1844 metal daguerreotype was not Mormonism's founder, Joseph Smith.

To [Lachlan Mackay](#), an apostle with the Community of Christ (formerly the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints) and Smith's great-great-grandson, the

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image did not seem to match the view of the Mormon prophet depicted in an 1842 oil portrait that had been circulating since the 19th century. The eyes were more sunken than in the painting. The eyebrows were more rounded and the lips less full.

After an exhaustive 18 months of research and analysis, however, Mackay is convinced it is the first known picture of the man who said he saw [God and Jesus in a New York woods as a boy](#) and launched a global movement, including both Mackay's church and the larger, Salt Lake City-based Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

"This isn't surprising since [Emma Smith](#) herself [Smith's wife] didn't think the portrait was a good likeness of her husband," Mackay said in an interview from his home in Nauvoo, Ill., "and that a good portrait of him couldn't be painted because his countenance was changing all the time."

Today that daguerreotype and the story of its discovery by another Smith direct descendant, Daniel Larsen, are being published and explained in an extensive article in the John Whitmer Historical Association Journal. It is titled ["Hidden Things Shall Come to Light: The Visual Image of Joseph Smith Jr."](#)

Larsen, who joined the Utah-based church in the past decade, believed the photo was his great-great-grandfather the instant he saw it, peeking out from a locket that had been passed down to him from his great-grandfather, Joseph Smith III, a son of Mormonism's originator, who helped found what is now the Community of Christ and became its first president.

"I just knew it was Joseph," Larsen said this week. "I looked at it for an hour or so with my wife. It was an emotional moment."

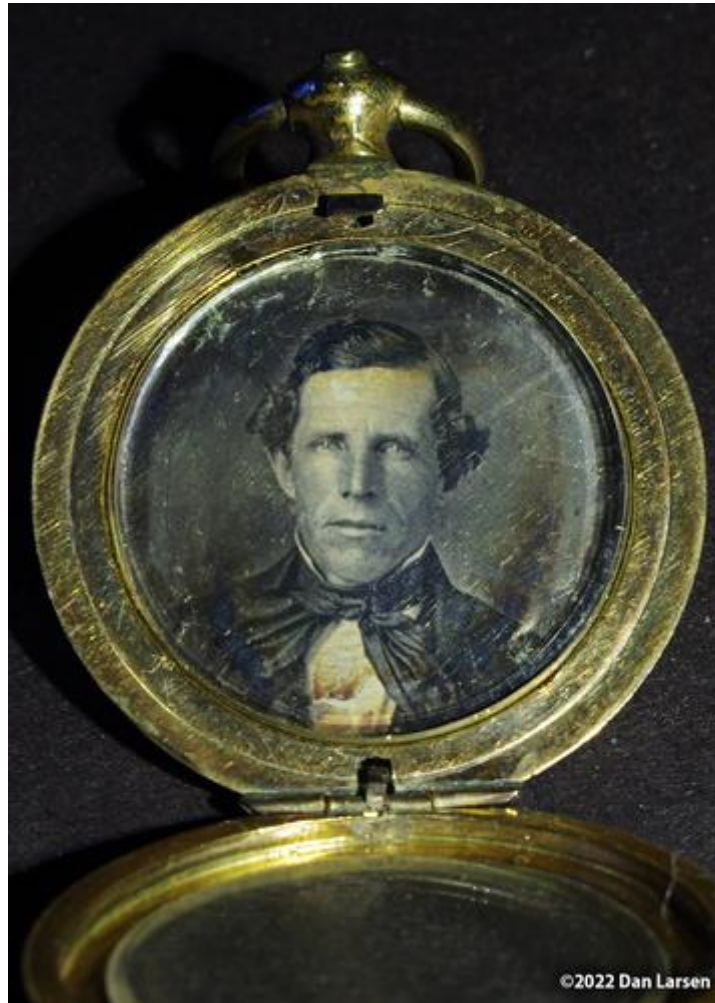
It was also a "spiritual confirmation" of a mystical experience Larsen said he had in the [Kirtland Temple](#) shortly before converting from the Community of Christ to the LDS Church.

"I knew Joseph was with me, I felt his spirit," he said. "I saw him."

Larsen believes the "timing" is right for this photo to be published, he said, "and I believe Joseph knows that, too."

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## Finding the treasured daguerreotype



(Courtesy of Daniel Larsen | photo by Jim Mathis) This recently discovered daguerreotype shows church founder Joseph Smith.

Based on 19th-century newspaper quotes and correspondence between LDS and RLDS members, historians and Smith family members long believed that there was a photograph of Smith before his [June 27, 1844, slaying](#).

But none had ever been found — until 2020.

That was when Larsen dug into a trunk of artifacts he had inherited from his mother, Lois Smith Larsen, Joseph Smith III's granddaughter, after her death in 1992.

At that time, he tried to open what he thought was a pocket watch but the release mechanism was bent, and he didn't want to harm it by prying it open, so he stowed it away and forgot about it for 28 years.

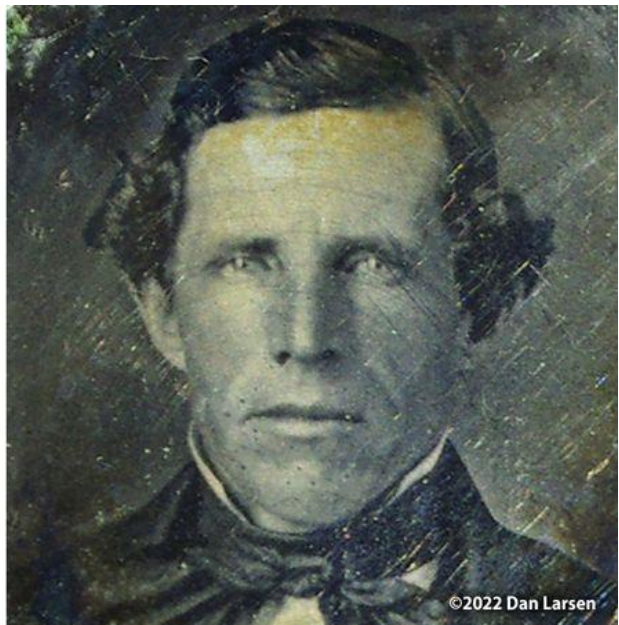
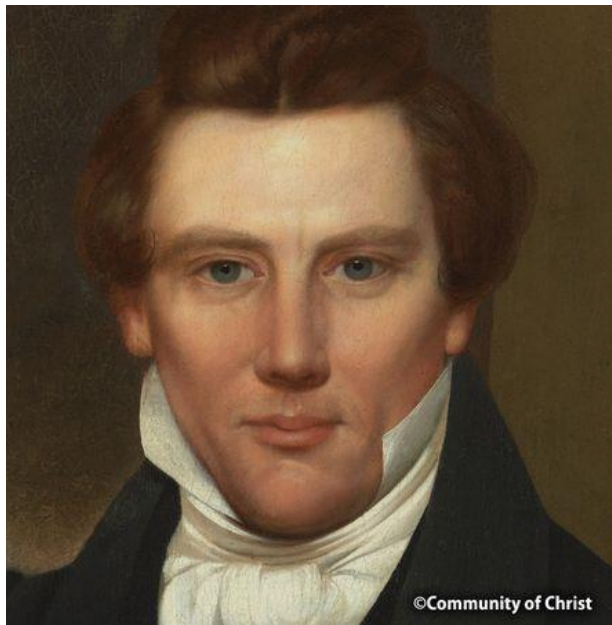
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During the COVID-19 pandemic, Larsen's father-in-law died, so he decided to review all the treasures he had. This time he was able to open the trinket, he said, and discovered it was not a watch but a locket.

Because it held a daguerreotype, which is printed on metal, not paper, the visage wasn't immediately obvious until he shined a penlight on its middle.

"When I did that, the image popped up," he said. "It was as sharp as could be."

## Assessing its authenticity



(Portrait is courtesy of Community of Christ | Daguerreotype is courtesy of Daniel Larsen, photo by Jim Mathis) This side-by-side comparison shows the Joseph Smith Jr. oil portrait, circa 1842, attributed to David Rogers, and the recently discovered Smith/Larsen daguerreotype.

Larsen reached out to Mackay, his nephew, who oversees the Joseph Smith Historic Site in Nauvoo, and the two then enlisted the help of Ronald Romig, who has spent three decades studying Smith family visual materials.

Together, they examined the photograph, using facial recognition software to compare it to the 1842 portrait by David Rogers, along with [Smith's death mask](#).

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A rendition of an 1842 oil painting of Joseph Smith by David Rogers.  
(Salt Lake Tribune archives)

Thinking it could be a different Smith relative — Joseph's brother Hyrum, for instance, who was gunned down the same day as the church founder — or some other member of the extended clan, the team looked for photographic evidence of any other potential candidates, Mackay said, but found none that fit the time frame.

They came across a May 1844 advertisement in a Latter-day Saint newspaper for lockets that included daguerreotypes, according to the [newly published journal article](#), and multiple photos of prominent Smith women wearing what appears to be the locket.

Those helped answer the key question (that was missing or deceptive in [Mark Hofmann's murderous forgery case](#)): provenance or a record of ownership.

To Mackay's wife, Christin Mackay, president of the John Whitmer Historical Association who was tasked with looking for those photos, the role of women proved significant.

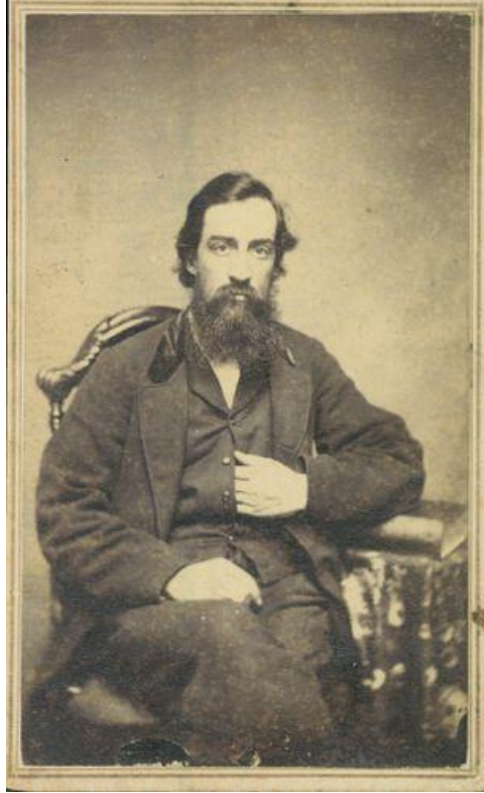
"What makes the locket compelling to me is that it was apparently passed down through the women in the family," she said. "Emma was incredibly protective of Joseph's image and not wanting it to be associated with [polygamy](#). When someone asked to copy the

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[Rogers] portrait of Joseph, she declined and kept the portrait in her bedroom out of public view.”

The historian believes Emma handed down the daguerreotype through the women “because they wouldn’t be asked about it,” Christin Mackay said, while “Joseph III and his brothers would be.”

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Joseph Smith III, son of Joseph and Emma Smith. He became the first president of what is now the Community of Christ. This photograph was taken in 1864, so he would have been about 32 years old.

(Courtesy of the Community of Christ Archives)

For generations, the Smith women “hid the locket in plain sight,” she said. “Frederick Madison Smith had only daughters, which may be why one of them [Lois] ended up with the locket.”

Still, Latter-day Saint officials urge caution.

“Every few years, potential donors bring artifacts to the Church History Library for review, including alleged photographs of the prophet Joseph Smith,” church spokesperson Kelly Smoot said Thursday. “Such artifacts are, of course, of great interest to the church.”

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Though it was not mentioned specifically in the journal article, Latter-day Saint “historians, archivists and artifact experts were provided — by the item’s owner and the article’s authors — the opportunity to analyze the locket and photo and to review their findings prior to publication,” Smoot said in an emailed statement. “We concur that the daguerreotype and locket were created of the materials and methods appropriate to the 1840s. However, as nothing is definitively known about the locket’s history before 1992, we cannot draw a conclusion about who is pictured in the daguerreotype.”

The church welcomes “the recent publication of the image,” she added, and hopes “it will prompt the discovery of additional information helpful to determining its authenticity.”

## Portrait versus photograph



A statue of Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum outside Carthage Jail.  
(The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints)

For most of the 20th century, the 1842 portrait was the closest most believers had to being able to conjure up a picture of Smith. But it was still an artist’s interpretation, not a realistic portrayal.

“I was talking to a retired plastic surgeon who told me nobody looks like that portrait,” Mackay said. “It just doesn’t look like a real person.”

The daguerreotype, on the other hand, captured Smith in a matter of minutes.

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It likely was taken by Mormon convert Lucian Foster, who was the church's branch president in New York City before moving to Nauvoo just two months before Smith was killed in the [Carthage Jail](#).

Sometime later, Foster took out an ad in the Nauvoo Neighbor in which he boasted of "skill in the science of making 'miniatures,'" the [journal article](#) reported. "He affirmed he could make 'an image of the person, as exact as that formed by the mirror, that is transferred to, and permanently fixed upon a highly polished silver plate, through the agency of an optical instrument. Only two or three minutes are required for the operation.'"

The tiny daguerreotype was inserted into the locket, probably before Smith's June 27 death, Mackay said, which then was kept by Emma Smith and subsequently remained in Joseph Smith III's family.

## What happens now?



Emma and Joseph Smith.  
(The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints)

"I have a lot of family heirlooms," Larsen said, "but this one needs to be out there in public for everybody to see."

He is friends with senior Latter-day Saint apostle [M. Russell Ballard](#), a great-great-grandson of Hyrum Smith, and has been to Utah many times.

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“My ultimate goal is to see that the daguerreotype,” Larsen said, “ends up in the [LDS] [church’s history museum](#)” in downtown Salt Lake City.

Larsen, who lives in Kansas City, Mo., pointed to statements made in 2020 by LeGrand R. Curtis Jr, the LDS Church’s historian and recorder, when he opened a [capstone capsule from the Salt Lake Temple](#) during the iconic structure’s renovation work.

Many historians had hoped they would find a photo of the founder in the box but walked away disappointed.

“There are no known photographs of Joseph Smith,” Curtis told the [Church News](#). “If there really was a photograph of Joseph Smith, that would be a find.”

Indeed, Larsen said, it is.

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