

**Josh Mangelson 00:18**

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**Karin Peter 00:34**

Welcome to Cuppa Joe, where we discuss all things Restoration history, and I'm your host for Cuppa Joe, Karin Peter. Now today is a special edition. I wish you had music for some kind of like CNNish kind of special edition. But we're going to talk about a current happening in church history that's in the news. And that is an image of Joseph Smith Jr. and here to talk about that image is our very own. And this is in capitals, Lach, HISTORY SLUETH EXTRAORDINAIRE, Lach Mackay! So you can add that to your resume when you put all but all your stuff on your business cards. So hi, Lach, thanks for being here.

**Lach Mackay 01:15**

Great to be with you, Karin.

**Karin Peter 01:16**

So before we kind of launch into kind of where this went for you, and in research, let's set the stage kind of about this. So previously, before this happening, what kind of images did we have of Joseph Smith Jr?

**Lach Mackay 01:34**

So from Joseph's lifetime, we had an oil portrait, they're companion portraits of Joseph and Emma. And just in the last 10 or 15 years, the consensus has grown in it in large part on the work of Glenn Leonard to the place where we believe that these are David Rogers, Joseph records sitting for David Rogers, September of 1842. It's been a long debate about what the result was, but that it's pretty clear, these are David Rogers, a Latter Day Saint artists from New York City, visited Nauvoo in again 42. We also have Sutcliffe monthly profiles monthly an English convert, he was disabled and earn a little extra money, he would somehow stand you up and and trace your profile. They're really quite accurate, and then he would fill them in. And he did a number of church leaders and their spouses and their families here during the Nauvoo period. They are not particularly flattering to Joseph, even though I think they're quite accurate. I'm still looking for the source for this, but I've got somebody in Chardon, Ohio that I ran across years ago saying, "Joseph is a fine looking man from the front, not so fine from the side." And these profiles verify that they're also just a few sketches from his lifetime, that almost everything since his death in 1844. is based on either the Rogers portrait in one case, it's a photograph of the Rogers portrait, or in another case, that's the 1879 Carson image. And then there's also an 1885 Carter image in Utah. And that one is based on a daguerreotype of the oil portrait. Images cause great confusion, including at times for Joseph Smith, a third on the daguerreotype of the portrait sometimes he was

confused about whether this was his dad from life or if this is is not so that that made the sleuthing, sleuthing harder.

**Karin Peter 03:36**

Well, yeah, it's like witnesses just something in law, it's your first person or a second person or third person by the time it gets to fourth person, you know, that didn't happen that way.

**Lach Mackay 03:45**

Yeah. Because he makes multiple statements about his dad, having had a daguerreotype made probably by Lucien Foster. At times, he talks about how his sister had one that were had had been given a daguerreotype by Joseph Smith Jr. So Julia had been given it to Garrett type of Joseph by her dad. But that again, it's confusing because clearly, sometimes he's talking about ia daguerreotype of oil portrait and does not realize that it's not really his dad.

**Karin Peter 04:21**

Okay, that's helpful to kind of understand now. So we have a painting, we have photos, if you will, a daguerreotype of paintings, we have photos of a painting of a painting or a daguerreotype of a painting. And we have those wonderful profiles, which are kind of like those paper cut profiles that you see sometimes people have. So okay, so that's what we had, which kind of leads me to my next question on kind of why has this come like exploded in the news? Why is this a big deal?

**Lach Mackay 04:56**

I just think that there has been for decades a desire to know what the man really looked like, you know, we have, particularly this portrait and some other things, but they don't really look like real people. So, so to have this person who clearly is, is a man, just a man, standing there in front of you is for some people wonderful and for some people really unsettling.

**Karin Peter 05:25**

Okay. I'm not, I'm in the not unsettling. I'm more in the "mystery solved" kind of category, but I can understand where other people would be unsettled by this. So you are here talking about this with me, what is your connection to this story?

**Lach Mackay 05:46**

So my connection to the story. The owner of the daguerreotype is my uncle, my mom's brother, Dan Larsen, the owner, he was given this artifact by his mom, my grandmother, in 1992. So my grandmother was Lois Smith, Larsen, daughter of Frederick Madison Smith, who was a president of the RLDS church. He was the son of Joseph Smith. The third, of course, is the son of Joseph and Emma. And so when Dan was given it in 1992, he was also given Joseph Smith III, one of his pocket watches with Joseph III's monogram on it. So this, this was kind of a collection of family heirlooms, you could open the Joseph III's pocket watch, by pushing the button on the top, this, this object looks just like a pocket

watch when closed. And Dan, and everybody else would assume that's what it was, when he pushed the button to open it, it would not open it was the mechanism a little bent. So he just assumed I've got two pocket watches, put them away, forgot about him for 28 years, and then pulled them out. At the beginning of the pandemic, March of 2020, he kind of ran across them in, got it out in this thing was able to get it open. And it's not a watch.

**Karin Peter 07:12**

So you're telling me that because of the COVID pandemic, he was bored, and he went like, into the boxes to clean out like everybody else did and take stuff to Goodwill? And he found this?

**Lach Mackay 07:25**

Yeah, that's part of it. I think he also was putting some other things away, which caused him a stumble across it.

**Karin Peter 07:33**

Okay. So that kind of answered my next question, which is how did this surface at this point of time, so. So now it surfaces so let's talk about the image a little bit and kind of the process? There's an image Who is it? I mean, you open it up? Who is this person? So what happens now? How do we find out how does it come into your realm as an historian?

**Lach Mackay 07:57**

Dan, and I think this is the same day that he found it, and then maybe it was the next day, emailed me an image of it. And I looked at it and said, "Eh, that's not Joseph." (We have a portrait!) Yeah, I was imprinted like so many on the portrait. But I want to be careful, so I with Dan's permission shared the image. With Ron Romig. Ron and I have spent decades researching Smith family visual materials, including potential daguerreotypes of Joseph. And he just says this vast base of knowledge, but he also is much more visually oriented than I. And Ron looked at and said, yeah, I think that could be I think he said, I think it is. So that started two year process of trying to figure out could this really be Joseph? And we ended up taking a number of steps, which were extraordinarily difficult because these were the early days of the pandemic. And the people that we wanted to talk to, were all locked down. So the museum's, the daguerreotype experts, curate curators, the everybody shut down, not answering their phones because they're not at work. It was just extraordinarily difficult. But a friend works at the Nelson Atkins Museum in Kansas City, the art museum, she was able to connect me to a curator, who then connected me with a private conservator in the area curator in the area, who has significant expertise in the daguerreotype. And we concluded early that maybe one of the first steps was, we should check for maker's marks, or names or dates that might be incited. So let me back up and say what this object is, is something that's sometimes called a watch locket. So from the outside, it looks just like a pocket watch, you open it up, and it's not a watch. In this case, there's one daguerreotype, although this object is, is built for two daguerreotype, one on each side, but there's only one in it. And we wanted to figure out is there something that will help us figure out a date or the provenance. So with the help of the

conservator, we found a miniaturist who could disassemble it. And unfortunately, we found no maker's marks, no dates, no names. And it, it's not like 18 karat gold, 24 karat gold, it's, it's gold plated. And it's kind of just as close as you could get to mass producing in the 1840s. That's what this is. So and we took it apart, didn't find anything, then we decided to do things like facial recognition software, which also was very difficult to find somebody to work with this, because most of them are huge companies that are focused on Defense Department contracts, and security, you know, walking down the street, the police zoom in and know who this person is, which is very uncomfortable. But that's the kind of stuff people are doing with facial recognition. They of course, wouldn't talk to us because we had this, just this picture somebody that we were eventually able to find a company out of New Hampshire, that didn't do this kind of project and hired them to do that. Facial recognition software works best when you're comparing potential photograph of a person with multiple known photographs of a person. We don't have that we've got an unknown daguerreotype plus a portrait plus a death mask. So this is this is on the edge of what facial can do. And we recognize that this is part, this is a piece of the puzzle. It's not the key, but we ran it and it came back with 19 of 21 points within the 5% proportion that you would expect to find. And that's a moderate positive outcome, which in the realm of facial recognition is a positive outcome. Again, that's not saying "Yep, it's him." No, it's perfect. That's not the way it works. We also said that's an objective way of using algorithms to do this. But we also decided to try things more subjective. So found a forensics artists with 40+ years of experience, who did things like cutaways, so the daguerreotype face death mask half the face. Same with the daguerreotype and the portrait, overlay overlays with different transparency levels. percentages, like lining them up side by side to the eyes line up does the nose line up does the mouth? Ee knew going in that the death mask doesn't match the portrait in a few ways. One of them is that the portrait painter painted the nose longer than it really was. He did the same to Emma. And that's typical for the period it's becoming increasingly clear that portrait painters wanted to make you look very refined. So they lengthen your nose they made your mouth smaller than made your lips smaller. They straightened your hair they made your skin perfect, so we knew that there would be a few ways it didn't match and and

### **Karin Peter 13:51**

So this is like Instagram where you apply all the filters before you throw your photo up there that's the kind of portrait we've got.

### **Lach Mackay 13:57**

It is exactly in this morning I was on a zoom call and I realized I have a filter on it it's kind of soft, it's the exact same thing. So those those things are matching pretty well. It really quite well for me one that that for some reason we didn't put in the paper but in hindsight I wish I would have really pretty compelling and I know this is subjective but the artist traced very carefully you know the the nostrils the mouth, the eyes, the jawline, and he then he put that red line tracing on top of the death mask and then he the same degree rotate tracing on top of the portrait and and they're really surprisingly good matches again, the portrait the nose, then some features in the mouth. Those are going to be different because the portrait does math match the depth mask in those places, but the daguerreotype to death mask is a really

pretty compelling match. And in many ways, the daguerreotype to portrait is a pretty compelling match. We also wanted to work on the the artifact itself, meaning that this, this kind of watch locket exist in the 1840s. So because they're not high end items, collectors haven't spent a huge amount of time trying to understand them. So they're pretty hard to date. But everything we're seeing is consistent with the 1840s. The plate that the daguerreotype is on, so daguerreotype are, it's kind of a mirror like finish on a metal plate, you have to hold them just right to see the image. And the plate itself is consistent with the 1840s. The clothing is consistent, the hairstyle is consistent. Neck wear is consistent. So everything we're learning from the artifact is, it fits for the period, one that I thought was really fun. We found in The Prophet, which is a church newspaper published in New York City, in May of 1844. There are two advertisements for daguerreotype, daguerreotype, lessons, equipment. And these people were shipping equipment all across the country. And one of the things in their advertisement is daguerrean lockets. So daguerrean lockets are being advertised in a church newspaper, may have 44 Lucian Foster is the branch president in New York City where the paper was published, he had moved to Nauvoo arriving April 27, of 44. So Foster is the best candidate for having taken this image. We're not certain there are other candidates though. Isaac Sheen, one who most people don't know about, but he had learned the art of daguerreotype in Philadelphia in 1840. moves to Nauvoo and 42. And then I think in 43, moves out into the county. But he later is the first editor of the Saints Herald, the church newspaper. So there are other other people with with that skill that might have been the photographer. So everything we're finding on the artifact itself fits. And of course, then maybe most importantly, people wondered about the provenance, the history of ownership, as well as you know, how was it stored? So the fact that it was, was acquired with and stored with other pretty clear Smith family objects like Joseph III's monogram pocket watch. That's very positive. We, we were looking for written references, and we have them but again, sometimes it's not clear when Joseph says, My father had a daguerreotype made by I think by Foster. Sometimes again, he's talking about this, the daguerreotype of the portrait, but they, I don't know that he's always doing that, you know, he talks about his sister being given by her father at the daguerreotype of him. Why would Joseph give Julia daguerreotype of the portrait if you could give her the daguerreotype of him? (Right.) But it's, that's that's part of the mystery. And that's still not all cleared up.

**Karin Peter** 18:24

Because they don't say daguerreotype in a small gold docket.

**Lach Mackay** 18:28

Right, exactly. Yeah. So and then there are references to an important watch in the family. Well, is that just short for watch locket? Or did they? If it wasn't opened? Did they think it was a watch? So for example, Emma, on the day she marries Louis Bidamon is described as wearing a watch on a gold chain, a pocket watch and a gold chain. And that is exactly how the later Smith women wore it on a large heavy gold chain. So you know it could that be the same object? I know it's kind of fun to speculate that Emma might have been wearing a daguerreotype of Joseph as she's marrying Louis on Joseph's birthday, apparently.

**Karin Peter 19:16**

Oh, what a web? Yes, okay.

**Lach Mackay 19:19**

There is a Sutcliffe monthly profile of Emma with her son Alexander. And she is wearing on a ribbon around her neck and tucked into a pocket of a dress what is either a watch or the watch locket. Then I start feeling better about seeing this object turning up on photographs of Smith women? It's hard to tell in the painting. And as Christin, my wife, first ran across a picture of Emma Josefa Smith where Emma and Joseph, I'm never quite sure how to say that, who was Joseph III's first child. Joseph in Emma's first grandchild and Emma had given Emma J the gold bead necklace that she's always seen wearing prior to me Emma J's wedding. And it seems that that she must have also given her then this locket because Emma J is seen wearing it at least three times over a period of 35 years. The first few times on a heavy gold chain. By 1910 she's moved it to a thinner chain around her neck like a regular kind of necklace looking thing. But that is we also worked back we found a picture of Bertha Madison Smith, Joseph III's wife, who is the stepmother of Emma J. wearing the same object. And we can tell it's the same because there's a pin knife on the chain as well with tiny little life that you chirpin pins with. And the little bar there's little rectangular bar that would attach the chain in the locket to your dress. So if you leaned over, it's not dangling, it's not swinging around. It's it's holding it in place. We see those in photographs, both on Bertha and on Emma J. So, and I think that's kind of significant that that Bertha is wearing it, and then Emma J's wearing it. And an Emma J's mother was Emmeline, died. And then Joseph III remarries and he marries Bertha. So so it's unlikely in my mind that Bertha would pass a treasured Madison object to Emma J, who is not a Madison, if that makes sense. I think that's yet another piece of evidence that this is important Smith object, Smith family object. So it seems it's not, it's not "Oh, there's no question that this is the object." We can't quite pull out enough detail on the photographs of the of the locket these women are wearing to say unquestionably this is it, but's pretty compelling. It looks very much like it. I think I see some of the similar detail, particularly the scrolling around the edge of the locket, and a few more details. There's more to do. There's a lot more to do. Ron's daughter, Ron Romig, who is my again, he wrote it with me, and he's extraordinarily gifted, but his daughter, Renee is a physician. And this was so secret that, that even close family members in many cases didn't know. But now that Renee knows, she noted that maybe another way to try and get a better sense of the size of the locket on these women. Because it's hard to figure out the scale that people's eyeballs, not the the eye that you can see when it's open, but the eyeball is on average one inch and it's pretty consistent. Doesn't change male to female doesn't change based on race. Pretty, pretty consistent. On average, one inch on the eyeball. This locket is an inch and a half. So while we need to do more work, there's we just started thinking about this. But is there some way to get a pretty good sense of how big this locket is, you know, if it's three inches, that probably not the same thing. But if it's, you know, close to an inch and a half and just initial comparisons, it looks pretty good. Seems to be the right size. Lots of lots of little things like that. And based on the life experiences of people who now we're able to talk to and and work on this together. It's

clear that people bring different gifts, and they see it through different lenses, which are going to be incredibly helpful. In this case with Renee the lens of a doctor who studied anatomy, so.

**Karin Peter 24:01**

Pretty exciting. So it actually gets into this realm of science and technology and all of these other disciplines. And then all of a sudden it's back to anatomy and family story. I mean, it's just this, this wonderful way of trying to collaborate together to verify this. So you're talked a little bit about what you wrote, tell us a little bit about the paper that you wrote, and when and where people will be able to hear it or access it or read it.

**Lach Mackay 24:30**

Yeah. So it was it was embargoed. And we had non disclosure agreements with almost everybody that that we talked to, but it was published this past Thursday in the John Whitmer Historical Association Journal. And folks can find it at JWH.info either in a PDF or an order hard copies and My hardcopy is not here yet, but they are landing out there. So it's pretty exciting after two years of work to see this finally available to the broader public and, and really just to start the discussion now with with with others to continue to understand this object.

**Karin Peter 25:18**

So folks want to get a look at that object, those photos are in the paper. And so I'm encouraging our listeners to go to JWHA.info because you get to see some of the photos that lead to the verification through provenance through the whole science and technology realm, the overlays you describe and, and as well as the research that you've done. So there's some great photos in there to look at and make your own opinion of what you think about this particular photograph or daguerreotype. I'm still gonna say photo just for shorthand, I'm sure as we talk about it. So so that describes the process a little bit, before we move into some other aspects of it, I just wanted to say who owns the photo, so that people are clear on this.

**Lach Mackay 26:09**

So Dan Larsen is the owner of the daguerreotype. And he also owns the photograph. So the daguerreotype itself would long ago had been in public domain. So none of the images out there are the gara type, they are a photograph the daguerreotype. Now, if you're, if you're scanning a photo, or in many cases, just photographing a photo, that's difficult to copyright, but because of the creative content involved in photographing a shiny mirror, like metal plate, there is, again, creative content, so it is copyrightable. And Dan has a registered copyright on that image. So he owns it.

**Karin Peter 26:56**

All right. And he shared that with you so that it could be published in the paper.

**Lach Mackay 27:00**

Yes, with with his copyright notice on it, which now that it's on social media has has often been cropped off, right, but he owns and controls the image.

**Karin Peter 27:11**

Excellent. Okay. Thank you for that little piece of information there. So now I just want to ask you a couple of the kinds of questions like because when we when we do other interviews, and you've been on Cuppa Joe a million times, I think already, one of the things we want to get to is why is this important to us in kind of what's going on with our own discipleship and spiritual formation. So what do you think you not just as an historian, but as a family member, what do you think when you look at this image?

**Lach Mackay 27:43**

Even though at first glance, I thought that's not Joseph, very quickly, I was captured by the intense gaze of this individual, the piercing gaze, the eyes of this individual, and there's a great quote from Parley P. Pratt, which I'm gonna butcher but he said something about how Joseph could look into your heart and into the eternities. Beyond it's, it's a little dramatic, but when I look into the face and the eyes of the person in the daguerreotype, I think I understand much better the charisma that people repeatedly described Joseph as having. I understand why people would follow him, well, being driven from well, by lawsuits from Ohio, but violently from Missouri twice. And I get it, I think, much better now. Just to see that face to see those eyes. I understand why people would feel compelled by him and his message. Okay.

**Karin Peter 28:52**

So with that kind of in the background, what does this image then contribute to the greater story kind of our restoration history, Community of Christ story?

**Lach Mackay 29:04**

I think it humanizes Joseph, which I love. Because I think it's very unhelpful and unhealthy to have Joseph on a pedestal, which has sometimes happened in our past. Nobody needs to be there. Nobody can survive there. So I think the photo in some ways, takes them off the pedestal and brings them back down where we are, and just make some human, which I think makes the story more believable, not less.

**Karin Peter 29:36**

Okay. So kind of my last question in this realm, then, do you have or have you thought through any kind of metaphors for discipleship that might have come to you through this process?

**Lach Mackay 29:53**

I've been so busy with all this research and talking to reporters that that I have not, but how about you?



**Karin Peter 30:00**

Well, actually, yes. And I chatted with you a little bit before we began, it was one of those kind of cars all of a sudden that hit me metaphors and I grew up RLDS, which became Community of Christ. And in doing that, I was imprinted as well. You talked about imprinted with knowledge of how somebody, I was imprinted with the story of the church, I was imprinted with this kind of legendary way of looking at it. And, and then, of course, I grew up and I start reading New Mormon History, beginning with Nauvoo kingdom on the Mississippi. It was like, oh, wait a minute, I didn't know anything. It was it was all based on this. I don't want to pretend it was it was based on a pretend story, a sanitized story. To get the real is much more profound, with all of its idiosyncrasies and weirdness and stuff that makes me uncomfortable, it's still spiritually profound. And so the metaphor I have with the with the portrait is like, oh, yeah, I grew up thinking what, what? That's what he looked like, that doesn't match, but okay, that must be so and then to see this new image. It was like, Oh, I had the same disconcerting kind of now that explains some things good and bad about what happened in the story of the church. And especially, like you said, you notice design, I noticed it and went, Okay, I can see, this is an attractive person and kind of a weird frontier hat hair never smile kind of way. Whereas the portrait, not so much. So it made sense to me in a way that it had not made sense to me before. When I think about my own discipleship, it's the same thing. We can do that we think we know everything we need to know we've got it pegged, we have all the answers. And then we turn around and read a scripture one more time, and actually open a commentary and go oh, look at this. Look at everything the the uncomfortable and the spiritually forming, it all shapes us in our discipleship. So kind of went from there it was this was another piece in the enlightening you know, the, the epiphanies that we have periodically in our journey, this photo is like that. It's a it's a what is the hymn? God has yet more light and truth is shed forth,

**Lach Mackay 32:27**

Which daguerreotypes are all about light. (There you go!) Very important, they would then have to get the right north light.

**Karin Peter 32:36**

Perfect. (Yeah.) Perfect to reveal to reveal some new kind of understanding. And I think the human, the humanity of the individual does show through, as you said, all of a sudden, he is more human. He's a person, you could look at that and go, that that person had interesting characteristics and good points and bad points, just like we all do. And so if you're out there and wondering why anybody would be attracted to Mormonism, you can look at this person and go, Okay, what did he have to offer that was so compelling? Yeah. Any last thoughts about this on where this is gonna go? Or what's going to happen? Or how many reporters have you talked to?

**Lach Mackay 33:17**

I'm losing count, but if, if people are at all interested in this topic, and I guess they are if they're listening to this podcast, I would really encourage them to read the John Whitmer article. There's a lot of social

media chatter that's extraordinarily uninformed. And that's always the way it works, but please read the article.

**Karin Peter** 33:41

Yeah, not just the news tribunes commentary on the article, but the actual article. Absolutely.

**Lach Mackay** 33:47

Yeah, to be clear, it's the journal article, a scholarly article.

**Karin Peter** 33:51

The John Whitmer Historical Association article to be found at JWH a dot info. So let's make sure we go to the correct site. And I'm hoping at a later date Lach that we can do a video discussion of this and show all those pictures and how's them on our YouTube channel. So we'll look forward to doing that as well. So thank you so much for chatting with us today about this late breaking news in Mormon circles, in Community of Christ circles and in Restoration history circles. I'm hoping our friends of other denominations who have an interest in restoration history, I get a chance to hear this as well. So this has been Cuppa Joe with I'm Karin Peter, your host. Lach Mackay has been our guest--Super Sleuth Extraordinaire. Thanks so much for listening.

**Josh Mangelson** 34:52

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