

October 18, 2016

Crediting Carvalho: setting the record straight
by Dale Rosengarten

After the publication of *By Dawn's Early Light*,¹ we were alerted by gallery owner Anthony Christensen and curator Brett LeVitre of Anthony's Fine Art and Antiques in Salt Lake City, Utah, that two paintings pictured in the book were mis-attributed. The portrait of Brigham Young owned by the Church History Museum and attributed to Solomon Nunes Carvalho is identical to a painting owned by the gallery and inscribed on the back, "Painted by E. W. Perry, 1864" (see below, left). Historian Ronald J. Fox, in his essay "Enoch Wood Perry in Utah," reports that Perry painted twenty portraits of leaders of the Mormon Church, including four of Brigham Young.² Comparing the painting signed by Perry with the Church History Museum's canvas, currently located in the Beehive House in Salt Lake City, there is no doubt the two were painted by the same hand. The attribution to Carvalho was made in the 1970s, during the time his great-great-granddaughter Joan Sturhahn was researching her biography of the artist. She argued for Carvalho mainly on the basis of stylistic traits, but notes in her book that Church Historian Cathy Gilmore strongly demurred. After "a thorough inspection," Gilmore wrote to Sturhahn, "I feel sure that it was painted by Enoch Wood Perry, Jr." Sturhahn claims her own opinion was verified when the initials "S.N.C." appeared in the lower right hand corner after the canvas was cleaned.³



Left: E. W. Perry, *Brigham Young*, 1865. Collection of Anthony's Art & Antiques. Right: William W. Major, *Brigham Young*, 1852. Gift of Maria Young Dougall, October 8, 1908. Pioneer Memorial Museum, Salt Lake City.

There is strong internal evidence for attributing the Young portrait to Perry. Brett LeVitre pointed out that Young, first governor of the Utah Territory, began sporting the fashionable chinstrap beard seen in the painting years after Carvalho visited Salt Lake City. Carvalho's portraits of the Mormon leader—in his *Incidents of Travel and Adventure in the Far West* he says he painted two⁴—date from the winter and spring of 1854, ten years before Perry's work.

So where are the “real” Carvalhos? Christensen and LeVitre believe that a portrait of Brigham Young held at the Pioneer Memorial Museum in Salt Lake City and attributed to William Warner Major (1804–1854) is actually by Carvalho (above, right). Linda Jones Gibbs, a specialist in Utah art history, concurs.⁵ Again, there is persuasive internal evidence: the red drapery and chair upholstery behind the governor recall the background of Carvalho's portrait of his wife, Sarah Solis Carvalho. The iconic view out the window—the arid bluffs and mountains of Utah—mirror the symbolic almshouse in Carvalho's portrait of philanthropist Judah Touro and the Capitol dome behind Diogenes in his portrait of Abraham Lincoln. Gibbs also points out that the Pioneer Museum's portrait “does not resemble in any way the only known surviving Major painting of Brigham Young,”⁶ pictured on the next page. On the other hand, the museum regards the attribution to Major as “pretty solid,” since it came from the donor, who was a daughter of Brigham Young.⁷



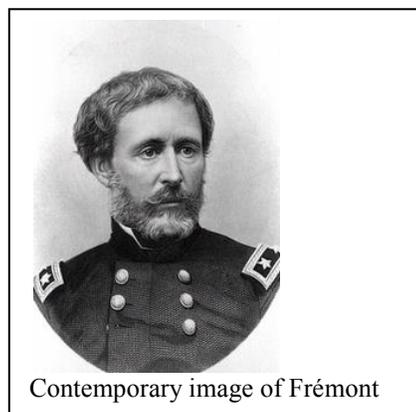
Clockwise from upper left: Solomon Nunes Carvalho, *Sarah Miriam Solis Carvalho*, ca. 1845–50. Oil on canvas. Yeshiva University Museum. Gift of Daniel Friedenberg; Solomon Nunes Carvalho, *Judah Touro*, 1861. Touro Infirmary Archives, New Orleans; William W. Major, *James Ferguson (1828–1863)*, 1847[?]. Pioneer Memorial Museum, Salt Lake City; Solomon Nunes Carvalho, *Abraham Lincoln and Diogenes*, 1865. Oil on canvas. Collection of the Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University. Gift of John J. and Celia Mack, Maurice and Rose Turner, Justin G. and Gertrude Turner, 1958.

A portrait of James Ferguson (above, lower right), also owned by the Pioneer Memorial Museum and attributed to Major, bears hallmarks of Carvalho’s work, not only in its background elements and composition—though without a symbolic view out the window—but in the stiffness of the figure and the awkward anatomy, especially of the hands. Again, we know Carvalho painted Ferguson—he lists “General Ferguson” as one of his sitters while in Salt Lake City⁸—but whether this is the canvas he painted in 1854 or a youthful (19-year-old) Ferguson painted in 1847 by Major requires further investigation.

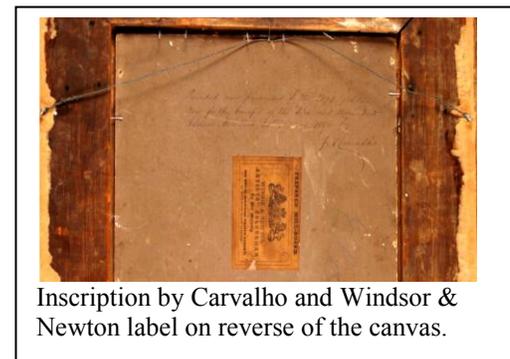


William W. Major, *Brigham Young and His Family*, oil on board, 28 x 36 in. (71.1 cm x 92.4 cm), ca. 1845/51. Church History Museum, Salt Lake City.

Christensen and LeVitre revealed a second “smoking gun,” throwing the authorship of another alleged Carvalho into doubt. Anthony’s gallery recently sold a portrait of John C. Frémont, signed by S. N. Carvalho and dated 1864 in the lower left corner (below, left). The inscription on the back, in the artist’s own hand, informs us he presented it to “the Metropolitan Fair for the benefit of the Sick and Wounded Soldiers” in New York on March 21, 1864⁹—consistent with the artist’s allegiance to the Union and his enduring reverence for the Great Pathfinder, ten years after their fateful expedition.



Contemporary image of Frémont



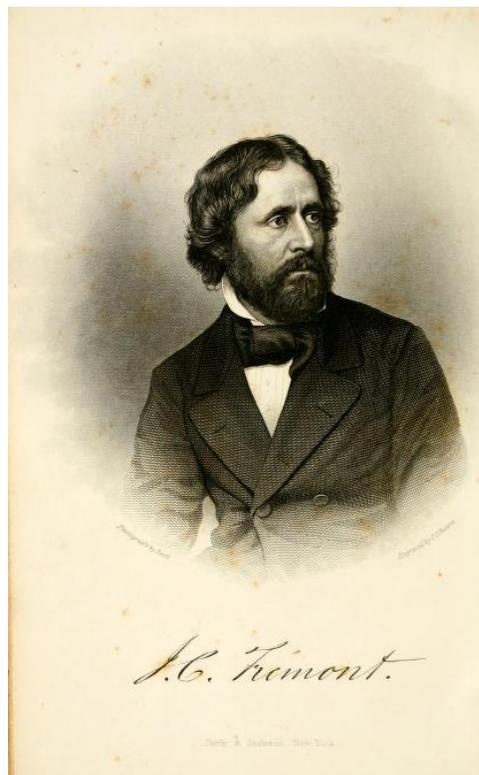
Inscription by Carvalho and Windsor & Newton label on reverse of the canvas.

Left: Solomon Nunes Carvalho (1815–1897), *John Charles Frémont (1813–1890)*, 1864.
Collection of Roger and Kathy Carter.

The portrait's discovery (or should we say recovery?) casts doubt on the authorship of a painting of Frémont now in the collection of The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and featured in *By Dawn's Early Light*. Attributed at one time to Thomas Sully, the Academy's painting was reattributed to Carvalho in 1979 under the influence of Joan Sturhahn. She knew Carvalho had painted a portrait of "his intrepid leader, which he donated to a Sanitary Fair auction in New York in 1865 [*sic*]." ¹⁰ She recognized the portrait held by PAFA was modeled on an 1856 engraving by J. C. Buttré after a photograph by Mathew Brady. Noting that "the painting bears all the stylistic qualities of a Carvalho portrait c. 1856–59, painted from a photograph, rather than from life," she assured PAFA's Assistant Registrar Elizabeth Bailey in 1972 that she had "no doubts as to the painter of the Fremont portrait." "Pending further study of the work in color," she declared, "it is safe to attribute this painting to Carvalho." ¹¹ In 1979, PAFA curator Frank H. Goodyear, Jr., signed an official "Change of Attribution," citing Sturhahn's publication as the reason for the change. ¹²

It is possible, even likely, that Carvalho painted more than one portrait of Frémont. The sitter was a media darling of his day—one of the most widely pictured men in America—and Carvalho had ample resources to draw upon. But the question confronts us: could the man who painted the rigid visage and uniformed torso of the Major General for a Union fund raiser also have painted the romantic, pensive Frémont of the Academy's portrait (below, left)? If the answer is no, it remains to be determined who painted the more expressive Frémont. The engraving on which it

is based appeared as the frontispiece of a campaign biography of Frémont published by John Bigelow in 1856 to boost the candidate's chances of winning the presidential election; it was reproduced again and again. A prime example of the free exchange of images in an era when painters copied print makers who copied photographers, the likeness was available to anyone who looked.



Left: Attributed first to Thomas Sully, then to Solomon Nunes Carvalho, *John Charles Frémont*, ca. 1856. Oil on canvas. Collection of The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia. Gift of Mrs. John Frederick Lewis (The John Frederick Lewis Memorial Collection). Right: J. C. Frémont. Engraving by J. C. Buttré. Photograph by Brady. Frontispiece of John Bigelow's *Memoir of the Life and Public Services of John Charles Fremont* (New York: Derby & Jackson, 1856).

Neither the portrait of Frémont signed by Carvalho nor the portraits of Brigham Young and James Ferguson attributed to Major were known to Sturhahn at the time she was combing the field, and surely we can empathize with her desire to discover some of the canvases painted by her great-great-grandfather she knew were missing. Carvalho described painting many portraits in Utah—where are they all? We should be grateful to local curators, historians, and gallery owners who know the terrain, have the connections, and provide boots on the ground in the search for M.I.A.'s. The confusion is a cautionary tale, reminding us how tricky it is to attribute old paintings, even works that are signed, and how important it is to be vigilant at all times.

¹ *By Dawn's Early Light: Jewish Contributions to American Culture from the Nation's Founding to the Civil War*, ed. Adam D. Mendelsohn (Princeton: Princeton University Library, 2016).

² *Enoch Wood Perry in Utah: Four rediscovered portraits of early Church leaders*, July 24–October 1, 2015. Draft of catalog (Anthony's Fine Art & Antiques, 2015), 15–17, 21–22.

³ Unpublished letters from Cathy Gilmore, The Church of the Latter-Day Saints, Salt Lake City, June 26, 1972, and from Donald T. Schmidt, The Church of the Latter-Day Saints, Salt Lake City, June 26, 1972, quoted in Joan Sturhahn, *Carvalho: Artist, Photographer, Adventurer, Patriot: Portrait of a Forgotten American* (Merrick, NY: Richwood Publishing Co., 1976), 102–103.

⁴ Solomon Nunes Carvalho, *Incidents of Travel and Adventure in the Far West*, edited and with an introduction by Bertram Wallace Korn (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1954), 247.

⁵ Linda Jones Gibbs, Ph.D., is an independent art historian and former art curator of the Latter-day Saints (LDS) Museum of History and Art (now called the Church History Museum), who has published widely on Utah art history, particularly of the 19th and early 20th century. Her master's thesis, "Enoch Wood Perry, Jr.: A Biography and Analysis of His Thematic and Stylistic Development" (University of Utah, 1981), is the definitive study of the artist who painted numerous portraits of LDS church leaders in Salt Lake City in 1865–66.

⁶ Email from Linda Jones Gibbs to Dale Rosengarten, October 13, 2016.

⁷ Email from Kari Main, Artifacts Office, Pioneer Memorial Museum, to Dale Rosengarten, October 5, 2016. Ms. Main reports: "We pulled the old original accession book for the paintings and found where the Brigham Young was initially accepted into the collection. It was October 8, 1908, and was given by Brigham Young's daughter, Maria Young Dougall. It says in the original entry that the portrait was painted by William Major in 1852. She provided us with that information, which seems pretty solid from our end."

⁸ Carvalho, *Incidents of Travel and Adventure*, 247.

⁹ S. N. Carvalho's Maj.-Gen. Fremont is listed as No. 267 in *Catalogue of the Art Exhibition at the Metropolitan Fair, In Aid of the U.S. Sanitary Commission* (New York: J. F. Trow, 1864), 15.

¹⁰ Sturhahn, *Carvalho*, 134–136.

¹¹ Letter from Joan Sturhahn McNutt to Elizabeth Bailey, Assistant Registrar, December 28, 1972. Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (PAFA) archives.

¹² "Change of Attribution," signed by Frank H. Goodyear, Jr., Curator, 8/22/79. PAFA archives.