Article Title: A Preponderance of Evidence: The 1852 Omaha Indian Delegation Daguerreotypes

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Article Summary: The author describes the research process that helped her to identify two Indian daguerreotypes. She studied details of clothing and accessories, previously identified photographs, newspapers, and a diary in order to name some of the Indians pictured and determine locations where such images might have been made.

Cataloging Information:


Members of the Omaha Delegation: Yellow Smoke, Garner Wood (“Chief”), White Buffalo, Great Traveler, Great Master of All Animals, Life Guard, Tireless Man, Fearless Warrior, Mountain Bear, One Who Dies for a Friend, White Blanket, Roman Nose, White Swan, Mountain Dove, Moon Returning, Flower of the Plain, Louis Sanssouci (interpreter)

Place Names: Rochester, New York; Council Bluffs, Iowa; Washington, D.C.

Keywords: daguerreotype, Yellow Smoke, Garner Wood (“Chief”), Louis Sanssouci

Photographs / Images: (Fig 1) seven Indians including Yellow Smoke and Garner Wood; (Fig 2) handwritten inscription on verso of Fig 1, “Indians from Council Bluffs”; (Fig 3) six Indians and interpreter Louis Sanssouci; (Fig 4) manufacturer’s impression on recto of Fig 3, “Scovill MFG Co EXTRA”; (Fig 5) Yellow Smoke; (Fig 6) Garner Wood; (Fig 7) photograph with hand-written names Louis Sanssouci, No Knife, Joe La Flesh (LaFlesche)
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Fig. 1 Rochester Museum & Science Center, Rochester, New York

Fig. 2 Rochester Museum & Science Center, Rochester, New York

Fig. 3 Rochester Museum & Science Center, Rochester, New York

Fig. 4 Rochester Museum & Science Center, Rochester, New York
This band, however, signed another treaty in 1846 ceding all their Iowa landholdings and began their migration to a reservation in Kansas. Several of the individuals in the daguerreotypes wear turbans, which were common men’s headgear among the Potawatomi, Chippewa, and Ottawa during this period. Additional research, comparing the individuals to other available portraits of men of those tribes, failed to reveal any positive identifications.

The focus of the research then shifted from the Council Bluffs band to the Omaha, Pawnee, and Oto. The Omaha, a tribe speaking a Siouan language, resided near the old Council Bluffs Agency at Bellevue between about 1847 and 1855, when they began the move to their new agency. By comparing the daguerreotypes to photographs of Pawnee, Omaha, and Oto delegations to Washington in the late 1860s and 1870s, I was able to identify several of the individuals as Omahas.

Based on the dating of the daguerreotype plate, I began checking newspapers, as well as records in the National Archives, and discovered that an unofficial Omaha delegation left Council Bluffs, Iowa, in September 1851 to visit Washington, D.C. The delegation was sponsored by Joseph Ellis Johnson, Henry W. Miller, and Francis J. Wheeling, all of whom were Mormons. The delegation traveled to Washington as two companies, one group with Miller and Wheeling, the other with Johnson.

The delegation had two main purposes. The first was to request the federal government’s protection from depredations. The Omaha were suffering losses inflicted by the Sioux, Pawnee, Kansa, Oto, and Osage, as well as by California-bound emigrants trekking through their territory. The second was to request assistance in agriculture and related technologies. Both companies of the delegation supported themselves during their travels by putting on performances in various cities.

The delegation traveled overland from Council Bluffs, Iowa, into Illinois and crossed the Mississippi at Rock Island. The journey to Chicago was by wagon, and from there by rail. The companies were mentioned as being in Chicago, November 1–8, 1851, in Detroit (dates not given), and in Cleveland, November 20–22, 1851. The Cleveland Daily Plain Dealer reported that the Omahas, under the leadership of Wheeler, Miller, and Johnson, “will be exhibited this evening at Firemen’s Hall . . . [and] will give specimens of their dancing, singing and feats of agility. The Chicago papers represent the scenes in their exhibitions as [of] the wildest and most captivating nature.”

Next the delegation went to Rochester, New York, December 12–13, and was in Syracuse from December 25 through January 1, 1852. They are also known to have stopped two days in Owego, New York, to visit Charles P. Avery, but the exact dates of the visit are not known. Early in January the delegation presented exhibitions in Susquehanna, Pennsylvania; in Binghamton, Hancock, Port Jervis, Otisville, Middletown, Albany, and Goshen (all in New York); and in Patterson, Passaic, and Newark, New Jersey.

The Omahas reached Washington on January 21, 1852, met with Pres. Millard Fillmore on February 2, and left for home on March 4. Because they were an unofficial delegation and had come on their own initiative, they had difficulty getting paid for their expenses of “near $8,000.” The sum of $2,500 was finally appropriated by Congress to help defray the costs.

Several of the eleven individuals in the daguerreotypes have been almost certainly identified by comparison with other photographs. In figure 1, front row, second from right, is Yellow Smoke, wearing a peace medal and holding out his hand (compare with fig. 5). In the back row, far left, is Gahige-Zige (“Chief”), also known as Garner Wood (compare with fig. 6). The men in the back row wear fingerwoven or cloth turbans. The man in the front row, on the far left, wears an up-right leather headdress and multiple brass neck rings of a type found in an Omaha archaeological site. This is the same man in figure 3, front row, third from left. Note he is wearing two rings on his left hand in the original daguerreotype (fig. 1); the correct orientation in the copy daguerreotype (fig. 3) shows the rings on his right hand.

In figure 3, back row, far left, is Louis Sanssouci or Sansoci, the interpreter (compare with fig. 7). The women are probably two wives of Yellow Smoke. The man seated on the front row, far right, with bare chest, has paint or tattooed lines along his arm and chest. He is also in figure 1, back row, center. His headdress is the same in both images.
The different orientation of the feathers of the headdress is understandable because the original daguerreotype (fig. 1) reversed the image, while the copy daguerreotype (fig. 3) shows the correct orientation. Also in figure 3 the man in the front row, far left, is the same man as in figure 1, back row, far right, as yet unidentified. The men wear cloth shirts and have blankets wrapped around themselves.

From reports, the delegation is known to have included the following Omaha men: Mun-oha-on-a-ba, Two Bears (Maχhú-nąba, Two Grizzly Bears), also known as Yellow Smoke; Gihe-ga, Great Feaster (Gahige-zjga, "Chief"), also known as Garner Wood; Tha-thaugh, White Buffalo (Tie-są); Wash-com-a-ney, Great Traveler (Wasıká-Mą̀j, Hard Walker); Wha-net-wha-ha or Wa-net-wa-ha, Great Master of all Animals (Wañiita-waxe, Lion); An-garho-nę́i or Ag-go-hom-ony, The Life Guard (Agaha-mą́j, Walks Apar); Sha-domine, The Tired Man, (Sédą-mą́j); A-damin-ga (The Fearless Warrior); Tada-nig-augh (Mountain Bear); Sha-do-mau-na (One Who Dies for a Friend); White Blanket, and Roman Nose.20

There were three women in the delegation: Pa-coo-sa, The White Swan (Pąkkaką-są, She is Pale); Mee-chee-noo-kee (Mouniine Dove), according to Johnson, or more likely Mightitoi, Moon Returning, wife of Yellow Smoke;21 and Ta-son-da-bee, Flower of the Plain (Tie-są-da-bi, Buffalo That Flashes Lightning).

The interpreter, Louis Saun-sa-see (Sanssouci or Sansoci) was a mixed-blood Omaha. According to a February 9, 1852, letter by Joseph E. Johnson and J. J. Wheeling to Luke Lea, commissioner of Indian Affairs, there were nineteen in the delegation, probably the sixteen Omahas, including the interpreter, and Johnson, Wheeling, and Miller. Before reaching Washington, Miller left the group and Almon Babbitt took his place.22

Who took the daguerreotypes is not known for sure. The entry in Joseph E. Johnson’s diary for Sunday, February 29, 1852, says, ‘Glorious! The sun shines brightly again—Got two letters from
P.O. from Esther & William—look the Indians up for Daguerrean likeness I sat yesterday myself—pictures brot in this Eve." Thus it would appear that daguerreotypes were definitely made in Washington on February 29, but it is not known whether they included one of those under consideration here.20

Another possibility is that Joseph E. Johnson, who owned a daguerrean studio in Council Bluffs, Iowa, during the early 1850s, could have had the daguerreotypes taken before the delegates began their trip.21 Still another possibility is that the daguerreotypes were made in Cleveland between November 20 and 22, 1851. The Melodeon Gallery, run by Thomas Faris, advertised its daguerreotype portrait business. The Cleveland Daily Plain Dealer also mentioned on November 20 that the Omaha delegation was to "exhibit at the Melodeon."22 Perhaps one of the daguerreotypes was made at that time, although it is less likely because the group traveled in two separate companies. The final question, which still remains unanswered, is who made the copy daguerreotype and why?

The daguerreotypes are portraits of some of the leaders of the Omaha during a difficult period in their history. The Daily National Intelligencer of Washington reported March 2, 1852, on the final interview of the Omahas with the commissioner of Indian Affairs held the previous day. The following excerpts give a sense of the posturing by both federal officials and Indians that characterized such a visit:

Col. Lea told his red friends that he had sent for them to come and meet him once more before they set out for their distant homes. He was sorry they had been detained in Washington so long . . . . When Indians come to Washington, invited by their Great Father, he has every thing arranged before hand, and then every thing goes on well. But when they come here without his previous notice he is not prepared, and then matters do not go on so well. In their case (the Omahas) the best has been done that the circumstances permitted. . . . They had by their visit enjoyed a good opportunity to see this vast country, the number and strength of the people, and how great their Great Father is. Their Great Father had many chiefs under him to attend to the different affairs of his children; it was the (Col. Lea's) business to look after the interests of his red children . . . . You cannot much longer live as you have been living for the past . . . you must change your manner of living.

Now your condition must continue to get worse and worse unless you devote yourselves, like whitesmen, to cultivate and depend upon the fruits of the earth for subsistence rather than on the results of the chase. This, I am happy to learn, is your wish . . . . But you ought to know, as men of sense . . . . that all this cannot be done in a day, month or even a year.

Yellow Smoke addressed a few words to the Commissioner in reply, acknowledging how greatly his feelings had been changed for the better, and saying that now he had got all he asked for and all he came to Washington to get . . . . Orders were then given that the Indians be forthwith furnished with suitable apparel. . . . The Indians appear quite reconciled and satisfied and to have been relieved from the anxiety which of late seems to have pressed upon them.23

Johnson's diary for that Monday, March 1, 1852, reads: "Weather pleasant. Visited the Commissioner—and got Medals & Clothing for the Indians & was busy all day—Ind dance—wrote letters and Closing business to leave tomorrow."

I have detailed the research process that allowed me to identify two previously unidentified daguerreotypes as representing the Omaha delegation of 1852. Textual information survived, documenting that daguerreotypes were taken of this delegation, but no images were, until now, so identified.

Photographers seem to be primarily interested either in particular photographers, or in the photographic process of image-making. Too frequently the ethnographic subject is virtually ignored. Information on the subject can, however, often be extracted from the image when it is treated as a primary historical document. To do so requires a content analysis of the image, using material culture details to help narrow the identification of the people depicted. By comparison with other photographs, individual identifications can often be made.

Finally, newspaper and textual records can help pinpoint the historical context detailing, in this case, the movement of the Omaha delegation and the locations where daguerreotypes might have been made during their travels. It appears that these two daguerreotypes were made on two different occasions, probably by different photographers, but of the same Omaha group during their 1851-52 journey to Washington, D.C.

I use "preponderance of evidence" literally, because in the final analysis, I take a leap of faith in "positively" identifying these images as the unofficial Omaha delegation of 1852.

Acknowledgments

I was fortunate to find several students/interns who helped dig out many of the details for this project: Elizabeth Nazosky, Rosa Anchondo, and Christian Carstensen. Thanks are also due to several colleagues: Paula Fleming of the Smithsonian Institution, National Anthropological Archives (NAA), kindly lent the newspaper clipping files she has collected on early Indian delegations to Washington, D.C., as well as her valuable listing of daguerreotypes in the capital in 1852. John Carter of the Nebraska State Historical Society suggested early on that I compare existing portraits of Yellow Smoke to the daguerreotypes under study, confirming the Omaha lead. Elisabeth Tooker led me to The Saint Nicholas: A Monthly Magazine (1851), which mentioned the delegation of Omahas as having traveled through New York state in 1851 on their way to Washington. Raymond DeMallie, Indiana State University, read and commented on the paper.

Notes

1 A daguerreotype is a direct image on a silver-plated copper, recognizable by its brilliance and because it cannot be viewed well from every angle. Daguerreotypes, unless corrected, are also reversed left to right. They are often housed in elaborate cases. Popular in the United States from their inception in 1839, daguerreotypes had no competition until 1854, when the ambrotype (a direct image on glass, viewed as a positive when placed against a dark background) was developed. By 1860 the daguerreotype had become outdated by the wet-plate method of photography, which produced prints on paper and made it easy to duplicate images.

The ethnological collections of Lewis Henry Morgan (1818-1881) are primarily in the Rochester Museum and Science Center. Morgan willed his personal collection of archaeological and ethnological objects (including the daguerreotypes)
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to the University of Rochester, which loaned them to the Rochester Municipal Museum in 1919, which later changed its name.

Some of Morgan's ethnological materials were purchased from the estate of Judge Charles P. Avery (d. 1872). Avery and Joseph E. Johnson knew each other well. Rufus D. Johnson, J.E.J. Trail to Sundown; Cassadaga to Casa Grande, 1817-1882, The Story of a Pioneer, Joseph Ellis Johnson (Salt Lake City: Joseph Ellis Johnson Family Committee, 1951), 166. Evidently Johnson had supplied Avery with Omaha Indian artifacts.

Hiram A. Beebe, "Historical Cabinet," The Saint Nicholas: A Monthly Magazine 1(12) (Feb.-Mar. 1854):115-16. This may suggest the provenance of these daguerreotypes: from Joseph E. Johnson to Charles P. Avery to Lewis H. Morgan to the Rochester Museum and Science Center via the University of Rochester.


6 Johnson, Trail to Sundown, 156-73

7 Ibid., 167.


9 The Daily American (Rochester, N.Y.), Dec. 12, 1851.

10 Johnson, Trail to Sundown, 156-82.

11 Daily Plain Dealer (Cleveland, Ohio), Nov. 20, 1851; see also Chicago Daily Democrat, Nov. 1-6, 1851.

12 The Daily American (Rochester, N.Y.), Dec. 12, 1851: Synopses Daily Standard, Dec. 31, 1851, Jan. 1, 1852; Johnson, Trail to Sundown, 166, 168; Beebe, "Historical Cabinet," 413-20. For Avery's possible connection to the provenance of the daguerreotypes, see note 1.

13 Johnson, Trail to Sundown, 168-73; Joseph Ellis Johnson Diary, 1852, Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City.

14 Johnson, Trail to Sundown, Feb. 4, 1852. "Narrative of the Om-Ma-Ha Indian delegation now in Washington conducted and in part paid by F. J. Wheeling and J. E. Johnson. Company consisting of nineteen. Expenses of transportation from Council Bluffs to Washington [$775.80. Four months victualing on the way [$1355.75. Blankets, clothing and various necessary articles. [$1351.65. Medicine, medical attendance, etc. [$251.50. One months board in Washington. [$420. Paid interpreter for time and service [$100. Six months service of Wheeling and Johnson to the Indian Agency. [$1000. Amount required to return home. [$1105. Total $7959.70."

15 Wheeling and Johnson to the Office of Indian Affairs, Feb. 9, 1852, Microcopy 234, roll 214. "Laisers Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1852-1856, RG 75. Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Archives and Records Administration.


19 John M. O'Shea and John Ludwickson, Archaeology and Ethnography of the Omaha Indians: The Big Village Site (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 190.

20 According to the Daily National Intelligencer, Jan. 30, 1852, the principal chief "Mon-choo-ne-ba is accompanied here by two of his five wives." The Daily American, Rochester, Dec. 12, 1851, noted, "The Head Chief has with him two of his wives, exceedingly pretty squaws seventeen and fifteen years of age."

21 Johnson, Trail to Sundown, 159, 169; Fletcher and La Flesche, "Omaha Tribe," pl. 26, 153, 185.

22 Johnson, Trail to Sundown, 174.

23 There was no city directory for Washington for 1852. Notes supplied by Paula Fleming, Smithsonian Institution, National Anthropological Archives. List the following daguerreotypes and galleries in advertisements and the 1853 city directory:

24 John M. O'Shea and John Ludwickson, Archaeology and Ethnography of the Omaha Indians: The Big Village Site (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 190.

25 Daily Plain Dealer, Nov. 19, 20, 1851.