



## SYNOPSIS and HISTORY

**The John Brown Photo Chronology is the classification, annotation, and interpretation of sixteen photo portraits of John Brown the abolitionist (1800-1859). Most—possibly all—of the original photographs were daguerreotypes, a direct positive process that produces a highly detailed image on a sheet of copper plated with silver without a negative. The photographed image is reverse to life, or in mirror orientation. A daguerreotype is not reproducible except by rephotographing.**

**The period of original portrait sittings is 1847 to 1859. The five known extant original daguerreotypes from photo portrait sittings of John Brown are all owned by museums and historical societies. A copy daguerreotype of an unknown portrait ca. 1850 surfaced in New York about 2005. Identity as John Brown was put aside by the owner (who has asked to remain anonymous) because the subject had dark side whiskers and no beard. The previously unknown sitting is a copy daguerreotype because it is in life view rather than mirrored, or reverse. The studio imprint on the copy was the president of the Daguerre Society, Martin M. Lawrence in New York City. He would make the only photograph of John Brown with full beard growth in 1858. It is confirmed as authentic of Lawrence's 1851 embossed gilt overlay protectors and leather case. Libby was asked in 2013 to identify if the subject was John Brown after the private owner came across her publishing website, Allies for Freedom.org In consultation with archivists and authors the subject identification as John Brown is tentatively confirmed.**

High-resolution digital and print images in the Chronology are made from the closest available source to the original daguerreotype by the curator/author Jean Libby. These copies include tintypes, cartes-de-visite, cabinet cards, albumen prints, lithographs, and engravings which are in museums, archives and private collections. This is the first collection of its kind since Boyd Stutler envisioned a classified listing of photographs, paintings, and graphic reproductions of John Brown in the 1940s. His massive collection acquired by the West Virginia State Archives is accessible online, but he did not arrange the classifications or timeline as planned. This is now the lifetime goal of public historian Jean Libby.

The photo portraits of John Brown fall into three distinct time periods in which the nation escalated into Civil War. The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 provided that people who aided escape from bondage anywhere in the country could be arrested at their homes and the freedom-seekers claimed with the assistance of courts. Brown is active with Underground Railroad business and armed defense among African Americans in the North. Six of the known portrait sittings occur between 1847 and 1855.

“Smithsonian scores photo of John Brown; Gallery pays record \$129,000 for original of abolitionist,” headlined across the nation in December 1996. The long-lost daguerreotype found in Pittsburgh revitalized many genre. Certainly African American studies—the photographer was African American Augustus Washington of Hartford, an organizer of the Underground Railroad with Frederick Douglass—and interest in historic photographic technology. New biographies of John Brown were spun, and reprints of classic works such as the 1909 biography by W. E. B. Du Bois wore the image on their covers.

Deborah Willis, historian of African American photographers and photography, featured the work in *Reflections in Black, A History of Black Photographers 1840 to the Present* (2000). Willis portrays it again, this time citing Augustus Washington’s decision, despairing of unending racism in America, to emigrate to Liberia in 1852 in *Envisioning Emancipation; Black Americans and the End of Slavery* with Barbara Krauthamer (2013). The National Portrait Gallery created a remarkable exhibition of Augustus Washington’s work researched and found in Liberia along with the recovered John Brown daguerreotype published in Anne Shumard, *Durable Memento: Portraits by Augustus Washington, African American Daguerreotypist* (2000).

Brown and the abolitionists who commissioned the sittings were eager to adopt new technology of negatives and prints as it occurred during the 1850s. Alison Nordstrom of Eastman House states: “Photographs are agents of change...the inventions of mass printing shaped our culture.” The chronology of the photograph portraits of John Brown is the direct application of this historical concept.

Throughout her independent research and publications since 1976 Jean Libby photographed and digitized the photo portraits of John Brown as encountered at archives and museums. The complete John Brown Photo Chronology began in 2002 when digital files of fourteen of the base images were presented by Libby to the American Studies Association and Civil War Round Tables. In 2003 the scans were examined by Dr. Eileen Barrow of the FACES (Forensic Anthropology Computer Enhancement Services) Laboratory at Louisiana State University. Dr. Barrow contributed her opinions to the study because of its public history methodology of inquiry. In 2004 The Daguerreian Society published Libby’s “The John Brown Daguerreotypes; a leader uses his likeness in remembrance and promotion” in the *Daguerreian Annual 2002-2003*.

The companion piece by the photographer Augustus Washington, was put into public view by descendants of Annie Brown Adams and auctioned in 2007, acquired by the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City. It was determined by Dr. Barrow and published by Jean Libby that the two daguerreotypes were taken very close in time but not the same sitting. A third dag by Washington with John Brown and Thomas Thomas of Massachusetts holding a banner saying “Subterreanean Passageway” is known anecdotally. All three of the extant daguerreotypes in this time period have surfaced in the past twenty years.

The Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 allowed slavery in U. S. territories where it was previously prohibited and promoted warfare between proslavery and antislavery factions with unenforceable “popular sovereignty” elections for statehood. John Brown came to Kansas in 1855 to join his sons and their families with weapons for defense that were quickly put into action. Two photographs were made in Akron and Hudson, Ohio in 1855 and 1856. One is an extant daguerreotype.

The Daguerreian Society essay published the Boston Atheneum’s cased daguerreotype of John Brown made in the summer of 1856, soon after the Pottawatomie Massacre in which he directed the reprisal killing of five proslavery settlers who had threatened the freestate settlement. It was made soon after the Battle of Black Jack (June 2) when the later Confederate general Jeb Stuart surrendered to John Brown. While Stuart was still in the United States Army he led the assault on the enginehouse at Harpers Ferry that captured John Brown and his liberation army on October 18, 1859.

John Brown traveled often and he traveled fast and seldom in a straight line. He moved in response and to initiate events. Owen Brown (father) died at age 85 on May 8, 1856. Libby believes that Brown, traveling with his sons who had committed the Pottawatomie Creek killings in May and participated in the Battle of Black Jack—two of them injured—came to Ohio after they left Kansas on June 5. Only two returned at the end of August, John Brown and his son Owen. The rest (Oliver, Salmon, and son-in-law Henry Thompson) remained in Akron. Frederick, who also participated in the night massacre by swords, was killed outside their cabin at Osawatomie just as his father and brother returned on August 30. The Battle of Osawatomie occurred on the same day.

Of equal interest to Libby was information that the archivist at the Western Reserve Historical Society in Cleveland, Ann Sindelar, had written to her stating that the portrait was actually made in Hudson at the behest of a newspaper editor, William Ritzel. The question of the identity of the photographer remained when the Hudson connection was published in the *Annual*.

In September 2014 Jean Libby came to Hudson at the invitation of Gwendolyn Mayer, archivist of the Hudson Library and Historical Society, one of the people who confirmed the new daguerreotype. Mayer brought out an album of prints made by John Markillie, a photographer who was also an artist in Hudson. He was an operative of the Underground Railroad, referred to by Lora Case, the lifelong friend of John Brown and head stationmaster. Markillie’s studio background matched the daguerreotype at the Boston Atheneum. Many of his subjects had their arms crossed or folded, just as in the famous “Kansas portrait” now known to be taken in Hudson.

Five more daguerreotype portraits of John Brown were made in four portrait sittings in a period of two months in Boston and Albany, New York in late 1856 early 1857. Two of those portraits have extant daguerreotypes in Boston.

The second original daguerreotype of John Brown owned by the Boston Atheneum has facial distortion that is presented in books whose publishers are critical of Brown as evidence of mental instability. Forensic anthropologist Barrow suggested the possibility of a mild stroke. The National Park Service and Harpers Ferry Historical Association sesquicentennial of the John Brown raid in 2009 provided Libby with an assisted permanent exhibition for the John Brown Photo Chronology and new conversations among authors and researchers. A significant result was observation by Greg Artzner of New York, an author and performer with his wife Terry Leonino of the letters between John and Mary Brown called *Sword of the Spirit*. Artzner recognized that it was Bells Palsy, a temporary facial paralysis in the nervous system.

This was confirmed by Brown's descendant, Alice Keesey Mecoy, and by her father Paul Keesey in California, as a recurring condition in the family. The symptoms of ear pain, headache, fatigue, and dizziness are often recounted by Brown in his letters to Mary and to John Kagi, second in command in the liberation campaign of 1858 and 1859. Alice Mecoy and Jean Libby met in 1976 when Alice's grandmother, Beatrice Keesey, participated in a community quilt-making project that focused on civil liberties. The interview on December 2<sup>nd</sup> revealed Mrs. Keesey's direct memory of her grandmother Annie Brown Adams living in Humboldt County, California. Annie would ask to see the textbooks and turn to the section about John Brown's raid, writing firmly in the margins "THIS IS NOT TRUE."

Mary Brown had much influence and participation with the photo portraits of her husband. Three photo portraits of Mary are placed in the full Chronology: a copy at the Library of Congress directly from the daguerreotype with her two daughters Annie and Sarah made in Vernon, Ohio ca. 1852; a cabinet card at the Hudson Library and Historical Society of the daguerreotype made in Boston by John B. Heywood when she was on the journey to visit her husband in prison the day before his execution in Virginia on December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1859—; the photograph by Isaiah Taber in San Francisco ca. 1875 which was used to create charcoal portraits of her parents by Sarah Brown in Saratoga, California, in 1900. The portraits were donated to the Saratoga (California) History Museum by the granddaughter of John Brown (Mary Fablinger) ca. 1960. They were sent for conservation at the Palace of the Legion of Honor in San Francisco by April Halberstadt in 2004. Mary Brown "wife of John Brown of Harpers Ferry" is buried at the Madronia Cemetery in Saratoga with seventeen of her descendants.

Jean Libby took the road to Meadville Pennsylvania in September 2014 to seek Mary's family history and genealogy from her childhood and marriage to John Brown there in 1833. She was guided to the places of John Brown's life in the area that he called home longer than any in his life (1825-1835) by Ed Edinger, Secretary of the John Brown Heritage Association. The tannery that Brown built and employed at least a dozen people has archaeological examination and interpretation. Since 1977 JBHA publishes well-researched articles about Brown's life in Crawford County, where "He was a leader in the frontier community, organizing a post office [appointed by President John Quincy Adams], a school and a church." His first wife, Dianthe Lusk of Hudson, is buried on the property of their home across Route 77 from the tannery, whose present owners maintain it and a small museum for public access. We stopped at the home of Mary's sister Martha Day Delameter, known then as Delameter's Stand, and were allowed to photograph the parlor where John and Mary's wedding reception was held following the ceremony by Rev. George Washington Hampson of Titusville, an organizer of the Underground Railroad in western Pennsylvania. Annette Lynch, archivist at the Crawford County Historical Society in Meadville, made a research foray into local photographer C. J. Dennington and artist Henry Sartorius which is bearing continued collaborative results.

Louis A. DeCaro, Jr., whose Biographer's Blog with archives is the best online source for accurate and complete information, wrote his first book on Brown, *Fire From the Midst of You; a religious life of John Brown* in 2002. DeCaro and Libby have shared ideas and research since meeting at the first academic conference about John Brown in Montalto, Pennsylvania in 1994. De Caro's work on the last days of John Brown in prison in Virginia is forthcoming at Rowman and Littlefield in 2015.

The Kansas Historical Society archives have the most photographs of John Brown, his associates and his family. They share them and their knowledge on the Kansas Memory website. Libby first photographed materials on John Brown in Topeka in 1977, when Pat Michaelis, now the Director at KHS, was the photo archivist. Working with the present photo archivist Nancy Sherbert is always accessible and collaborative.

Essays and books written and edited by Jean Libby make extensive use of rare John Brown portraits. *Black Voices from Harpers Ferry; Osborne Anderson and the John Brown Raid* (1979), with a cover painting by Diego Rivera from "Portrait of America" (no longer extant) was mentored by the African

American community in Jefferson County, West Virginia—the location of the 1859 raid—with the leadership of Rev. Albert Moser of the United Methodist Church, now pastor in Washington, D. C. Meeting John Frye, the archivist of the Western Maryland Room of the Washington County Free Library in Hagerstown, Maryland in 1978 brought new discoveries and insights. Acting on a hunch, Frye examined bound volumes of maps that were destined to be microfilmed and destroyed in Annapolis. He found a hidden Hotel Register which had the original signature of John Brown as “I. Smith & Sons” on June 30, 1859. “Look for me in Hagerstown” Brown had written to Kagi, to ask Mr. Watson [African American Underground Railroad stationmaster in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania] “to make you acquainted with his reliable friends...find out, if he can a trusty man, or men, to stop with at Hagerstown (if any such there be) as Mr. Thomas Henrie [black minister, former enslaved blacksmith] has gone from there.”

Jean and her late husband Ralph Libby a public reference librarian, decided she should complete a university education in midlife, majoring in African American Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. She received a President’s Undergraduate Fellowship in 1986 which was used to create cable classroom presentation *Mean To Be Free: John Brown’s Black Nation Campaign*. Professors Roy Thomas, Margaret Wilkerson, and David Blackweel were Faculty advisers and creators of the program by the UC Berkeley TV and Radio Studio. The performers were her fellow undergraduate classmates.

Libby considers archives around the country, whether public or private, are resources for all. Professor John M. Lawlor of Reading Area Community College in Pennsylvania, a Library of Congress and National Archives scholar, is a significant mentor. Composer Kirke Mechem, born in Kansas when his father was Secretary of the Kansas State Historical Society, regularly shares his long memory from the 1970s to the present as he creates choral music opposing slavery and honoring John Brown.

Collaboration began with historian/author Judy Sweets of Lawrence, Kansas when she wrote about the Underground Railroad and the Kansas Memory portraits for the *John Brown Photo Chronology; catalog of the exhibition at Harpers Ferry in 2009* for the author and curator Jean Libby. More recently Sweets began her own research business, Portals2history. As newspaper OCR searching becomes more useful when done by someone who is skilled, Sweets sends clippings regarding John Brown photographs and we discuss them. “The Last Photograph of Old John Brown” appeared in the *Syracuse Evening Herald* on Feb. 25, 1900. The illustration is the “face behind the beard” commented by Dr. Eileen Barrow in 2003 as distinct and older—perhaps he had shaved it—confirmed it was at least trimmed in illustrations of a short beard at the time of the Harpers Ferry raid. Shown the 16<sup>th</sup> portrait in September 2014, Samuel S. Black, Director of the African American Program at the Heinz History Center in Pittsburgh exclaimed: “This is the way Frederick Douglass saw him at their meeting in Chambersburg in August 1859!”

By far the most examined images are those with John Brown fully bearded. Eileen Barrow’s opinion in 2003 was that there was only one photograph and everything else was versions. The art versions tell the story of John Brown and his legacy of antiracism and citizenship rights. They also tell the stories of rapid development of photographic replication and Brown’s own involvement in the processes, one of which was creating facsimile signatures to be cut and pasted on prints. This story was revealed by art historian Warren Broderick of New York, who found an original print with the Lawrence stamp in the Louis Ransom Collection at the Herkimer County Historical Society. There is a faded penciled inscription on the back which defies transcription except “I would not speak of love” and “no mortal eye can penetrate.” Libby asked Marcel Matley of San Francisco, handwriting expert, to look at samples from Brown’s family. “The culprit,” he said, “is Ruth.” Brendan Mills asked Jean Libby to contribute to the John Brown Farm Newsletter published by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation published in Spring 2013.

Louis Ransom of Utica made the first mural depicting Brown descending the prison steps in Virginia and blessing an enslaved woman and child in 1860. A collector and museum specialist who is a senior attorney for Microsoft Corporation, Michael J. Konowal, studied the documents and revealed that “Your friend, John Brown” was identical on the prints listed as “autographs pasted on.” They were actually facsimile signatures. Some of these albumen prints are on Lawrence-stamped mounts; others are remounted on blank boards. The Curry mural “The Portent,” “The Last Moments of John Brown” by Thomas Hovenden and other art of John Brown with direct connection to the photo portraits are included in the revised John Brown Photo Chronology. Libby found that people frequently turned the discussion to these works at the exhibition that has traveled from Philadelphia to Kansas and three public libraries in California.

The complicated numerical classification is eased with a separate category for vignette portraits which were directed by Brown himself in making a negative “for newspaper presence” by J. W. Black of Boston in May 1859. A recently recovered tintype of an engraving is shared by William Miller of Wadsworth, Ohio in honor of the antiracist ideas of John Brown.

In October 2014 the Chief Curator of the African American Museum and Library at Oakland (California), Rick Moss, hosted the presentation by Libby at the end of her journey to central New York, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. They had worked together in February 2012 in the National Endowment for the Humanities program “Making Sense of the Civil War” at AAMLO, where John Brown and his legacy was an invited topic. Moss is developing the online publication of the John Brown Photo Chronology and concurrent narrative video for the public nonprofit website, Friends of the African American Museum and Library at Oakland.

**Conclusions:** Jean Libby’s revised John Brown Photo Chronology has grown from twelve original portraits to sixteen that are confirmed. Versions of the photo portraits in painted photographs and murals add to the classifications, making the total Chronology more than forty panels which are annotated. The timeline of John Brown’s movements from 1856 – 1859 is subject to new interpretation. Significant discoveries about the photographer of the extant daguerreotype (Boston Atheneum) made in Hudson in 1856 and a new photograph of Mary Brown taken in Boston in November 1859 known previously from the photographer’s statement (John B. Heywood) were found at the Hudson Library and Historical Society in September 2014. Research and documentation that Libby began in 1976 continues.

The development of print photo replication from single-image daguerreotypes was eagerly sought by Brown and his supporters. Association of the photographers of John Brown with the Underground Railroad is a key intersection. The full Chronology is in development with Rick Moss, Chief Curator of the African American Museum and Library at Oakland (California) to be published online with permissions from the archives owners and a video narrative.

Jean Libby  
 Allies for Freedom  
 1222 Fulton St.  
 Palo Alto, CA 94301  
[editor@alliesforfreedom.org](mailto:editor@alliesforfreedom.org)

November 2014