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A Rocky Mountain Book Store Savage and Ottinger of Utah

MADELEINE B. STERN*

A previously uncharted bypath in Western Americana leads directly to a nineteenth-century Salt Lake City business partnership. The firm, which gave an impetus to the development of Western art and photography, was known as A ROCKY MOUNTAIN BOOK STORE. In its history three protagonists were involved.

Charles R. Savage,¹ destined to become one of the most outstanding photographers of the West, was born in Southampton, England, in 1832. Converted to Mormonism by a missionary, he ventured to New York during his twenties. From there, having decided to become a photographer, he journeyed west and practiced his trade supplied with a camera, a grey blanket which he used for background and a large tea chest that he converted into a darkroom. In June of 1860 he crossed the plains to Salt Lake City, where sagebrush grew high in the streets and prairie schooners carried their cargoes. He was equipped with an observant eye and a camera, a faith in Mormonism, and a background of Rocky Mountain scenery. All he needed was a partner.

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¹Edward H. Anderson, "Events and Comments," *The Improvement Era* XII, 406; Kate B. Carter, *Heart Throbs of the West* (Salt Lake City, 1943-1948), V, 54, IX, 107-110, 115-119; Information from Mr. Harold B. Kelly, Western Americana, University of Utah Libraries; Robert Taft, *Photography and the American Scene* (New York, 1938), p. 272.

This need the second protagonist filled. George M. Ottinger,² soon to become a pioneer artist of the West, had been born a year later than Savage, in Springfield Township, Pennsylvania, the descendant of German Quakers who had immigrated to America. His youth was varied and colorful, including some formal schooling, much daubing in water colors, and a three-year voyage before the mast when as a sailor he shipped to Panama and China, India and Africa. Tinting photographs to earn money, he subsequently made the westward journey; and, having adopted the Mormon faith, Ottinger arrived by oxteam in the valley of the Great Salt Lake just a year after Charles R. Savage.

The two men complemented each other. While Savage took photographs, Ottinger colored them. The art work that resulted could be exchanged for molasses, wheat, and provisions, and so the partnership of Savage and Ottinger prospered. Ottinger was promised the job of scene painting for the new Salt Lake Theater and was soon able to purchase a home lot from Brigham Young. By 1863, the Deseret Academy of Arts was organized. The territory developed a taste for Rocky Mountain scenery that could be photographed by one partner and tinted by the other. As they advertised in the *Deseret News* of December 9, 1863:

PHOTOGRAPHS.

MESSRS. SAVAGE & OTTINGER take pleasure in announcing that they have OPENED their new **PHOTOGRAPHIC GALLERY**, 1st door South of the Council House, where they are prepared to furnish the public with the following styles of portraiture:

- Ambrotypes, Photographs, Plain.
- Melainotypes, Photographs, in Oil.
- Locket Pictures, Photographs, in India Ink.
- Stereoscopes, Photographs, in Water Color.
- Cartes de visite, Photographs, in Crayon.
- Ivorytypes.

Anything from the Ring Miniature to the Life Size Portrait. Views of City, Mountain and Lake Scenery constantly on hand. Orders by mail promptly filled. Perfect satisfaction guaranteed. 21-3

²Kate B. Carter, *Heart Throbs of the West* (Salt Lake City, 1943-1948), II, 3-4; H. L. A. Culmer, "Art and Artists in Utah," *Tullidge's Quarterly Magazine* (January 1881) pp. 217-220; Frank Esshom, *Pioneers and Prominent Men of Utah* (Salt Lake City, 1966), p. 1080; Alice Merrill Horne, *Devotees and Their Shrines: A Hand Book of Utah Art* (Salt Lake City, 1914), pp. 24-27, 115; Information from Mr. Harold B. Kelly, Western Americana, University of Utah Libraries; Heber G. Richards, "George M. Ottinger, Pioneer Artist of Utah," *The Western Humanities Review* III:3 (July 1949), pp. 209-218; Robert Taft, *Artists and Illustrators of the Old West 1850-1900* (New York, 1953), p. 323.

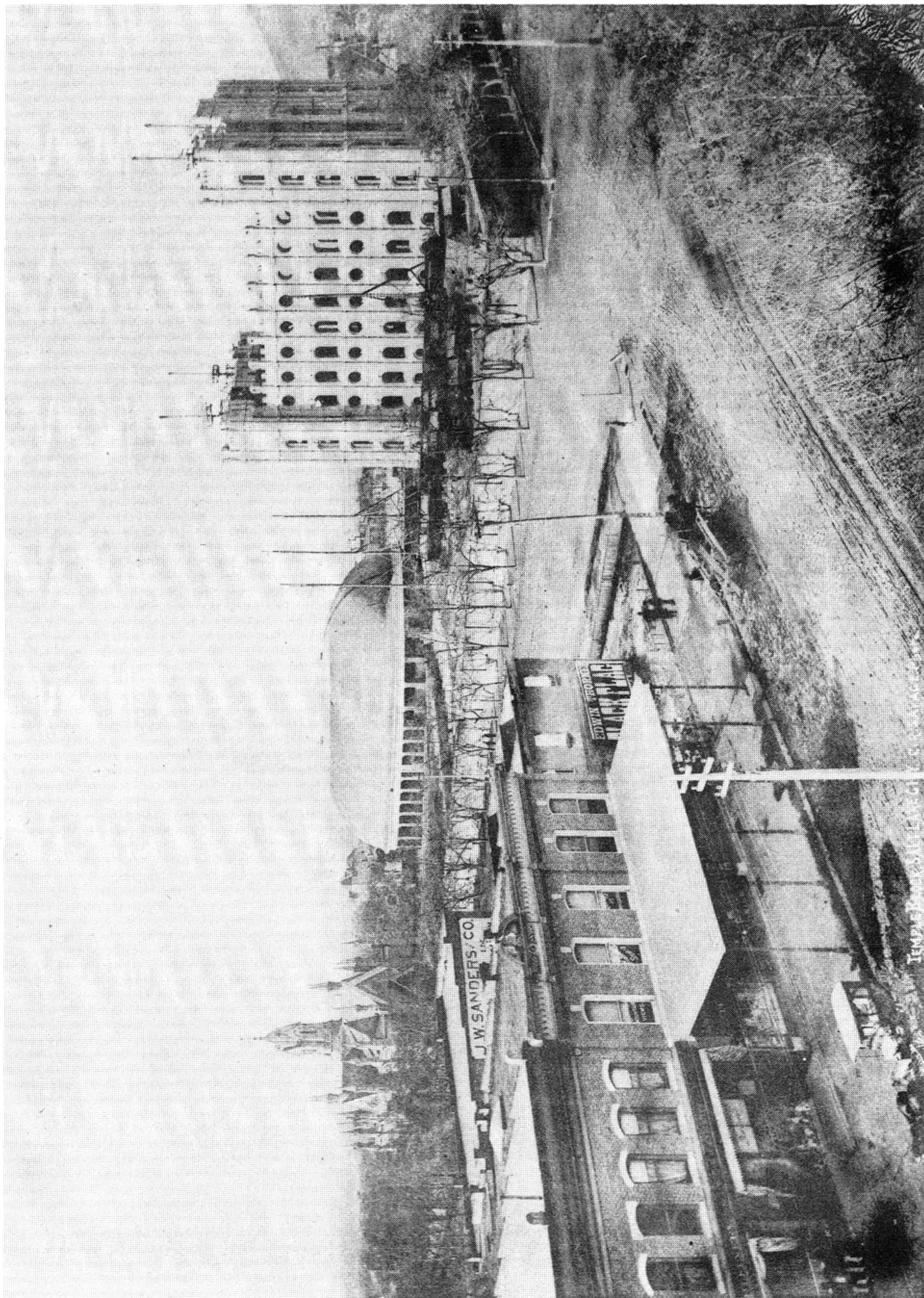
In 1866, when the Civil War was over, Charles Savage, who did most of the field work for the firm, went east to augment his stock of photographic materials. It was doubtlessly at that time that he met the third protagonist in the story of A ROCKY MOUNTAIN BOOK STORE, Samuel R. Wells.

Wells, proprietor of the New York City firm of phrenologist-publishers, Fowler and Wells, had an understandable interest in art and photography. Besides publishing and selling books on phrenology—the science, or pseudoscience, of the mind—and giving phrenological examinations based either upon heads or accurate photographs of heads, he operated a cabinet at 389 Broadway. In the galleries of that Golgotha of Gotham, visitors found much of interest, from skulls and mummies to busts, engravings, and paintings. The latest techniques in making plaster casts, new developments in photography, and modern styles in painting had a fascination for Wells who, in addition, was an enthusiastic traveler to the West. He was well equipped to guide Charles Savage in photographic purchases. At all events, on the return trip Savage fitted up a supply wagon from which he did photography en route; and once back in Salt Lake City he sent to Samuel R. Wells a photograph of Brigham Young which duly appeared in *The Illustrated Annual of Phrenology and Physiognomy*, “through the politeness of Mr. C. R. Savage, photographic artist of Salt Lake City.”³

As the 1860's rushed to their completion, so, too, did the great Overland Railroad, and the firm of Savage and Ottinger found a ready market for “views of the Overland Route and of all places of interest in Utah and Montana.” They supplied for *The Salt Lake City Directory* a huge folding plate of the town, advertising their “photographs taken in the best style of the art.”⁴ In his celebrated lecture on Mormonism, the humorist Artemus Ward used a series of painted panoramas based upon photographs by Savage. In time the Union Pacific and the Central Pacific met at Promontory Point, Utah, on May 10, 1869; the thrilling ceremony was captured by Charles R. Savage in a scene to be reproduced in most of the history textbooks of the country.

³S. R. Wells, *The Illustrated Annuals of Phrenology and Physiognomy for the Years 1865-1873* (New York [1873]), p. 38 of *Annual* for 1866.

⁴E. L. Sloan, *The Salt Lake City Directory and Business Guide. For 1869* (Salt Lake City 1869).



A Charles Savage picture of Temple Square.

Meanwhile, however, the firm had received most desirable publicity at the hands of Samuel R. Wells, and a business arrangement had been entered into by which Savage and Ottinger sold the Wells publications while Wells sold the handiwork of Savage and Ottinger. It was through this arrangement that Savage and Ottinger were spurred on to greater artistic achievements.

The picture of a ROCKY MOUNTAIN BOOK STORE appeared in the May 1868 issue of the *American Phrenological Journal*, a long-lived periodical edited by Samuel R. Wells. Beneath the picture was the following announcement:⁵

The above engraving represents the book store and photographic art emporium of Messrs. Savage & Ottinger, in Great Salt Lake City, Utah Territory. Besides supplying the "Saints" and the "Gentiles" with the best literature of the Old World and the New, they produce good pictures—we may safely say some of the best we have ever seen. Portraits of the "saints" and "sinners" . . . Indians, pictures of trees, mountains, water-falls . . . and some of the most sublime scenery in the world.

These gentlemen are artists! They combine business with art, and supply school books, phrenological books, and every variety of *useful* books.

. . . Here is a store, . . . three thousand miles west from New York, in the center of a vast Territory teeming with life, enterprise, education, and MORMONISM! A hundred thousand hardy people now have their homes in these mountains; . . . Look now on one of its first book stores.

After an apostrophe to the "grandest portion of the American continent," Wells concluded by quoting a paragraph from the *Salt Lake Daily News*:

Books.—The attention of our readers is directed to the advertisement of Messrs. Savage & Ottinger. They are the agents for several valuable publications, including those of Mr. Samuel R. Wells, of New York, of which we can not speak too highly. Visitors from our Territory to that establishment speak very highly of the courtesies extended to them. The house certainly deserves credit for the number of progressive works it publishes. We are glad to learn that they have an extended circulation among us.

After this burst of mutual esteem, George M. Ottinger apparently sent to the head of Fowler and Wells one or more

⁵*American Phrenological Journal* 47:5 (May 1868), p. 195.

of his paintings, among them a picture of the great creek that ran through Brigham Young's premises, entitled "City Creek Falls." This Wells had no difficulty in disposing of. Its purchaser was none other than Schuyler Colfax,⁶ who in 1865 had visited Salt Lake City with Samuel Bowles, editor of the *Springfield Republican*, and who by 1868 had been elected vice-president of the United States.

The following letter, written by Ottinger to Wells from Salt Lake City on November 6, 1868,⁷ refers not only to "City Creek," but to Wells' part in publicizing the artist's work:

Salt Lake City, Utah
Nov 6, 1868

Mr Wells
Dear Sir

Your letter of the 22d ult recd and I assure you it is no small gratification to me to hear you are so well pleased with the picture. Not only a gratification & satisfaction to feel that so small a gift has been appreciated & accepted in return for the many - many kindnesses you have extended to S. & O but it is also with no little satisfaction I hear that yourself & friends have discovered some merit in my work, enough indeed to place it among your other gems. Now Mr Wells the only part of the business I'm not satisfied with is your placing \$50 to our credit *We will not stand that.* We have been more than doubly paid for that picture. It is a free gift fresh from the hearts of the givers as a slight token of their esteem and friendship, and as such you must accept it. We will not have it otherwise.

In a few days I shall send you another Cañon View as good as the one you have. I send it to you to sell for us and if successful I shall send you more and allow any commission you think proper.

I have been for years struggling and studying with brush & palette to gain or at least approximate to that point of fame, so coveted by all artists. The little picture I sent you has broken the ice - (in New York, the great center of American art) and its success emboldens me to venture another. Your influence judgement, and facilities for Exhibiting pictures in your rooms until my name has become known in the art world would be a kindness extended to me of more value than a thousand pictures like City Creek.

⁶See *American Phrenological Journal* 49:3 (March 1869), p. 110.

⁷The original is among the Fowler Family Papers, Collection of Regional History, Cornell University Library, and is reproduced by courtesy of Mr. Herbert Finch, Curator and University Archivist.

I shall send you another picture take your choice, sell one keep the other, sell it for \$25 - 50 or \$100 sell it for what it will bring and place to our credit of course deducting your commission cost of frame & stretcher & c. The CP.RR is drawing close to our doors and in a few months we shall be linked to civilization. Then Mr Savage & I shall look for you and do our best to show you the wild & Rocky beauties of Utah. And until that renewal of our friendship & better acquaintance believe me

Yours truly
G. M. Ottinger

To S. R. Wells Esq.
New York City

P.S. If you can advance my name or add to my reputation by exhibiting my pictures at the National Academy I would be very thankful Use your own good judgement about it—

A PHRENOLOGIST DESCRIBES OTTINGER

A few months after he had received Ottinger's letter, Wells struck out once again in behalf of the Mormon painter. He devoted several columns of the March 1869 issue of his *American Phrenological Journal* to the phrenology, portrait, and biography of George M. Ottinger, "The Utah Artist."⁸

Here is a full-sized brain; a tough, flexible, and enduring body, made up of the motive, mental, and vital temperaments fairly blended. It is comparatively easy for such an organization to work hard, . . . The head is high and long, rather than low and broad. Benevolence is the largest of the moral organs, and Destructiveness is among the smaller of the propensities. . . . Approbativeness, Conscientiousness, and Firmness are large; while Self-Esteem and Concentrativeness are less fully developed. He will be ambitious to excel; honorable and honest in his transactions with others. Acquisitiveness and Secretiveness are small, and his love of money is limited by his necessities. . . . The social feelings are fully indicated in the chin and lips. There is large Imitation and full Constructiveness. He can copy nature, and would be expert in the use of tools.

The intellect, as a whole, is above the average. He is both a correct observer and a clear thinker. There is enough Ideality to give taste, refinement, and love for the beautiful; but not enough to make him a wild, imaginative romancer. He will work with nature in her calm and quiet aspects, rather than in her wild and tempestuous moods.

⁸*American Phrenological Journal* 49:3 (March 1869), pp. 109-110.

Still, there must be an ardent love for her hills, her forests, and her plains, . . . We know our subject to be an artist, and claim nothing for Phrenology in this delineation. But he is more than an artist,—he is a fully fledged man—a matured human being. . . .

Mr. Ottinger has not suffered the grand landscape about the “city of the saints” to remain unappreciated. His pencil and brush have been much employed in transferring to paper and canvas its peculiar features. . . . his productions . . . evince the free touch, originality, and freshness of a sprightly and progressive lover of nature, and point to future achievements of enviable excellence.

Some of his paintings—the most noteworthy—we may mention. “Who Will Care for Mother Now?”—an incident of the battle-field “Independence Rock;” “City Creek Falls,” now in the possession of Mr. Schuyler Colfax; “Overland Pony Express,” engraved and published by *Harper's Weekly*; “The Last of the Aztecs,” a large picture, telling of departed greatness.

Not long after Ottinger's portrait looked out from the pages of the *American Phrenological Journal*, the phrenologist Wells paid a visit to Salt Lake City, finding it regularly laid out in blocks with wide streets and large mansions, the office of Wells Fargo not far from the Salt Lake Hotel. “Utah,” he concluded, “is a great country, and Brigham Young was her prophet.”⁹

Wells' enthusiasm for the city and its artists persisted and was reflected in the pages of his monthly, where in 1870 and 1871 he featured articles on the sociological problems of the Mormons, the Utah Gentiles, and the Mormon question. He was especially interested in “The Utah Reformers, as they styled themselves,” who in November and December 1869 had “made a bold stroke of rebellion against the power of Brigham Young.” This apparent schism in Mormon ideology inspired Wells to make the following interesting comments:

Though we did not lecture or make any professional examinations on our recent visit to Salt Lake City, we have examined the heads of hundreds of the representative men and women of the Mormons, and made ourselves acquainted with the people.

Savage and Ottinger, of the artists, are, . . . one from England, the other from Philadelphia; but Mr. Ottinger

⁹*American Phrenological Journal* 51:6 (December 1870), p. 416.

is an American artist who has settled down and cast his destiny with the Mormons rather than an original Mormon Elder. . . .

Reformers - men of large heads, with the philosophical and idealistic development, and they design to publish an elaborate system of spiritual and moral philosophy, and also a complete system of social science from the standpoint of "Reformed Mormonism." They are . . . universalian in their mental tendencies, and therefore unfit for a theocracy of "chosen people."¹⁰

A feature on "Leaders in the Mormon Reform Movement," with portraits of such "new movers" as Eli B. Kelsey, the iconoclast of Utah Reformers, and Joseph Salisbury, leader of the working classes, continued to be emblazoned in the pages of the *American Phrenological Journal*.¹¹

It was Wells' articles on those Utah Reformers that motivated the following letter from C. R. Savage:¹²

Salt Lake City
June 27th 1871

Friend Wells -

Yours to hand—I am much flattered at your opinion of me. I do not think however that while you represent the great living spirits of the present day that I am entitled to any prominence above my fellows—certainly I have pioneered the interior west photographically moreover I have endeavoured to infuse a love of art among the people and have maintained the only art Gallery in any of the Territories. I have also pulled the sage brush and planted the vine, so have hundreds of others here—

We the Mormons do not realize that the eyes of the world are on us so much; the love of money will make some men do almost any thing, but it was not the love of money that built up our country—it was a higher, loftier, principle and power of action. New Moveism would never have accomplished this much—it lacks the power of concentration—it lacks unity—it lacks faith—for my part my faith in the overruling power of God towards us was never greater than at present.

I notice you give prominence to some of the so called reformers of Utah—*Heaven save the mark* What the Com-

¹⁰*American Phrenological Journal* 52:1 (January 1871), pp. 44-45. See also *Ibid.* 51:5 (November 1871), pp. 328-333.

¹¹*Ibid.* 53:1 (July 1871), pp. 30-40.

¹²The original is among the Fowler Family Papers, Collection of Regional History, Cornell University Library, and is reproduced by courtesy of Mr. Herbert Finch, Curator and University Archivist.

munists were to Paris, so would the *New Movers* be to Utah. They *the Reformers* would pull down and destroy what has taken 22 years to build up—What can they give in return for the faith *once delived* [sic] *to the saints*—*vain philosophy*—wordy *moonshine* of an impracticable character. If I could find one less drunkard a less number of thieves—or *blasphemers* through any of their *reforms* I would thank God for the movement.

I think, Bro. Wells, you ought to go slow in lending your paper too much to the interests of the so called *liberal party*—did you live here you would pronounce them unmitigated tyrants that same Salisbury was known to utter the following sentiment while denouncing his old faith said he — *damn Jesus Christ*. As the party deny the mission of Christ you can see where they land—but I must stop—I denounce them as a set of humbugs—whose efforts will destroy more than build up—and their counterpart may clearly be seen in the doings of the Communists of Paris—they have refused to celebrate the 4th of July in our Tabernacle because it is devoted to the interests of the Kingdom of God—they have taken sides against the sovereign people here—and look forward to the speedy overthrow of the Mormon Church, & people. They will look in vain—we'll weed them out.

This is the character of the reformer. But I am sorry to say the reverse is the case. Men who under the influence of the old faith left off tobacco—whisky, &c, now think they have the liberty to use the article the reformers can be seen exemplifying their liberty by falling back upon errors they once left—the same Eli B Kelsey you speak of so highly would have cut me off from the Church years ago, for the commission of any act violating the word of wisdom he now struts our streets smoking the biggest cigar he can find. I only mention this to show that their reform is a humbug—no reform will help a people if it does not make them better—What I love in my faith is that it brings to bear upon our every day life a constant controlling power to restrain men in all their actions.

I do not say there are not some good men amongst them, but they are very few. Co-operation that they please to style an oligarchy—is a great success and a godsend to the people.

You must excuse the scrawl I send you I am attending to the counter and trying to write this—the foregoing are my honest sentiments. When you call such men reformers you ought to go slow—

My regards to Mrs Wells—
and best wishes to yourself—

C. R. Savage

When next you dwell upon *Utah* give the men who make the country prominence and not upstarts under the guise of reformers—You may think me severe but I have strong reasons for it.

During the few years still allotted to him Samuel R. Wells dwelt less upon Utah Reformers than upon reforms closer to home. Both Savage and Ottinger, however, continued their work, although their partnership was dissolved. While Ottinger became the spokesman for the glories of Utah art,¹³ Savage opened his own Art Bazaar as "headquarters for views of Rocky Mountain Scenery and Portraits of Utah's Celebrities."¹⁴ At his establishment on Main Street, visitors having sat for their photographic likenesses might purchase not only Mormon publications, books and albums, but a souvenir casket of Great Salt Lake containing a vial of the water and the sand of the shore. Mrs. Frank Leslie, visiting Salt Lake City during the grand transcontinental tour organized by her husband, the newspaper magnate, Frank Leslie, naturally paid a visit to Charles R. Savage, the town's "principal photographer," who "freely admitted himself to be a Mormon, somewhat defiantly stating that he had nailed his colors to the mast."¹⁵ By that time, his erstwhile partner, Ottinger, had painted hundreds of pictures and, when Brigham Young died on August 29, 1877, it was Ottinger who made the cast of his face and took the measurements—a technique which he had perhaps learned from the phrenologist, Samuel R. Wells.

At all events, the trio of Savage, Ottinger, and Wells had learned much from one another, and their relationship, though brief, had been fruitful. The Rocky Mountain Book Store, built up by Savage and Ottinger, specialists in Utah art and photography, had, through Wells' publicity, been made known to the East. With the country's increased awareness of the beauties of Western scenery, a powerful impetus was given to the arts that recorded it.

¹³G. M. Ottinger, "The Salt Lake City," *The Art Journal* XIV (1875), p. 268.

¹⁴C. R. Savage, *Pictorial Reflex of Salt Lake City and Vicinity* (Salt Lake City [1893]); C. R. Savage, *Views of Utah and Tourists' Guide* (Salt Lake City [1887]).

¹⁵Mrs. Frank Leslie, *California A Pleasure Trip from Gotham to the Golden Gate* (New York: Carleton, 1877), pp. 75-77.