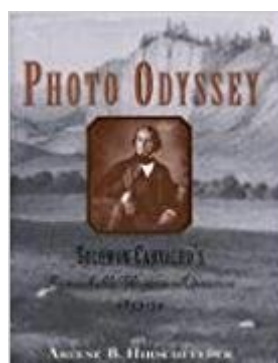


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# Photo Odyssey: Solomon Carvalho's Remarkable Western Adventure 1853-54



## Synopsis

In 1853 explorer Colonel John Charles Fremont invited photographer and fine artist Solomon Nunes Carvalho to accompany his fifth, and final, western expedition. As the official photographer, Carvalho documented the trip from the Mississippi River to Utah with daguerreotypes--a unique and often unwieldy form of photography that produces images on large silver plates. Carvalho was a skilled photographer, but he was a novice on the trail and he battled with the hardships of the journey. He not only was challenged by the physical strain but, as an observant Jew, struggled to maintain his commitment to Judaism, even when observing strict dietary laws meant that he did not eat. Carvalho's own words, from the journal he kept and from letters he wrote home to his wife, provide a vivid firsthand view of his remarkable adventure. With many apt excerpts from his descriptions, author Arlene Hirschfelder has written a detailed account of the life of this little-known, yet widely accomplished, man. EXPEDITION ROSTER, MAP, INDEX.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Hirschfelder (*Native Americans*) focuses this uneven biography on Solomon Carvalho (1815-1897), a daguerreotype photographer recruited by Colonel John Charles Fremont to document a railroad survey expedition. Hirschfelder starts out strong with a preface abundant with engrossing details of Carvalho's life as an observant Jew, implying a unique set of challenges for his experiences on the road; yet she drops this point almost immediately. She then conveys a microcosm of the westward expansion movement, offering concrete examples of the circumstances posed by life and travel in

the great outdoors. For instance, a humorous account of the competition for the Fr?mont expedition between Carvalho and another photographer contrasts the unwieldy daguerreotype process which created a "mirrorlike image" by exposing a silver plate "to iodine vapors in a wooden camera until the silver surface turned a bright golden yellow then [was] treated to mercury fumes heated by flame" with the more modern but lengthier process of producing negatives. However, while Hirschfelder's preface paves the way for a more intimate biography, and the narrative is punctuated by a wealth of excerpts from Carvalho's diary and letters, later chapters often assume a detached tone, which lessens the impact of her subject's connection to people and events. Black-and-white images and maps accompany the text, but readers may well question the absence of the subject's daguerreotypes (readers don't learn until the last chapter that most were lost). While this volume offers an informative snapshot of the West and the accomplishments of a little-known craftsman, it unfortunately may not hold readers' attention. Ages 10-14. (June) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Grade 5-9-A vivid look at John C. Fr mont's last westward adventure, as seen through the eyes of the painter/photographer who accompanied him. Carvalho joined the 1853 expedition that aimed to find the best route for the proposed transcontinental railroad. The treacherous journey involved prairie fires, stolen horses, severe hunger and cold, and the death of a good friend. Less experienced than his well-traveled companions, Carvalho had to lug boxes full of heavy equipment across rivers and over mountain passes, often falling behind the main party by many miles. Hirschfelder quotes frequently from Carvalho's own account of the journey. He clearly admired the leadership qualities of Fr mont, and respected the courage and skills of his companions, many of whom were Delaware guides and hunters. Lighthearted anecdotes balance the drama, as when the artist delighted his companions by preparing an "incomparable blanc mange" with ingredients he secretly saved for the right occasion. Carvalho's own religious practices prevented him from partaking of some of the scarce food the group was forced to eat. He did eat horse meat for survival's sake on occasion, in accordance with the Jewish belief that preserving life can take precedence over most Talmudic laws. Black-and-white photographs and reproductions accompany the text, but unfortunately Carvalho's own work from the expedition has disappeared. The action-packed narrative is enough to fascinate readers, though, offering a lively and immediate look at heroic figures like Fr mont and more ordinary adventurers like the engaging photographer from Baltimore. Steven Engelfried, Deschutes County Library, Bend, OR Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.

The title conjures up images, many photo images, which are far too few from Carvalho and mostly from other sources and of indistinct relationship. The mostly narrative work, leaves the reader to imagine what Carvalho's photos actually look like. Where are they? Why aren't they included. So misleading...

Solomon Carvalho was a remarkable man by any standard. He was an inventor, religious reformer, painter and part-time adventurer. "Photo Odyssey" primarily deals with Carvalho's participation on John Fr  mont's fifth and final expedition to find a route for the transcontinental railroad. Carvalho's role was to document the journey by taking daguerreotypes, an early type of photograph. During the journey, the expedition encountered horrific hardship. Between fires, blizzards, starvation and physical adversity, the fifth expedition is a story that demonstrates the potential of human endurance. "Photo Odyssey" is punctuated with quotes from Carvalho's journal and stock photos that visually accompany the text. Arlene Hirschfelder wrote a good book with two issues. First, there's the Jewish issue. Having a "hey we were there, too" tone, his religious orientation could have been handled more effectively. In the initial section, the author hits the reader over the head with details about the Jewish diet and the ways in which the journey would have been difficult for such a devout Jew. Such a section should have been integrated into the rest of the book or included as an after thought. More over, the religious portrait that Hirschfelder paints earns lukewarm respect; there are times when Carvalho invited starvation by not partaking in available foods (so do we dismiss him as an idiot or praise him as devout?) and other times when he ate food that broke the kashrut (so do we praise his new found pragmatism or condemn him as a hypocrite?). The second issue is that while the subject lived an amazing life, this is not necessarily a feel good story. Indeed, we should not expect any Disney movies to be made about Solomon Carvalho's biography. In the end, his daguerreotypes were lost, people died, Fr  mont's proposed route for the railroad went unadopted and Carvalho never even finished the journey with his employer. Beyond this, the entire story is tainted with a degree of deception. Since Carvalho's publication of the expedition is our only significant account of the journey, we are today grateful. At the time, Carvalho betrayed a promise that he gave Fr  mont to not keep a journal. Hirschfelder glosses over this element and his profiteering from a publication of the journal by explaining that it was in the name of helping his former employer's presidential ambitions. If not an outright theme, the idea that Carvalho was a three dimensional character should have been mentioned. All in all, Arlene Hirschfelder retells the most interesting chapter of an exceptional life in "Photo Odyssey: Solomon Carvalho's Remarkable

## Western Adventure 1853-54."

This book adds almost nothing to the original work: I had hoped to see some of the "views" in this book taken by Carvalho during the expedition, but sadly they were lost. If one is interested in Solomon Cavalho's trek, I suggest reading "Incidents of Travel and Adventure in the Far West With Colonel Fremont's Last Expedition" instead.

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