



PHOTOGRAPHER: LAFAYETTE T. SHEPPARD,
(1852-1940)

SITTER: JOHN CAVANAUGH (1824 Carlow,
Ireland - 1899 Petaluma, CA)

DATE: 1888

FORMAT: enlarged reprint of original cabinet
card

PRIVATE COLLECTION

In this portrait, John Cavanaugh gazes off into the distance with pride and confidence. Groomed with fashionable muttonchops and dressed in businessman attire, he is crowned with a magnificent top hat. A fashionable mark of distinction, the top hat was a possession of a gentleman. You can see and learn more about John Cavanaugh's top hat and its original storage box by visiting the nearby display case where they are exhibited.

John Cavanaugh was one of Petaluma's early pioneers. Enticed by the gold rush, he immigrated to California from Ireland in 1849. After spending only a few months mining for gold, he opened a grocery business in San Francisco, and in 1857, he moved to Petaluma. He was a very successful businessman and was best known as the founder of Cavanaugh Lumber, which supplied the raw materials for many Sonoma County construction projects. Cavanaugh Lane, named for the Cavanaugh Lumber yard, still exists today off Skillman Lane in northern Petaluma.

Cavanaugh was civic-minded and served in many positions, including city marshal, city recorder and justice of the peace. He was active in many Petaluma fraternal organizations, including the Masons, Knights Templar and the Mutual Relief Association.

During the Civil War he and Captain Thomas Baylis organized Petaluma's Union Militia, known as the Emmett Rifles, which was composed of citizens of Irish descent. In early 1862 the group was mustered into the National Guard of California, with Bayliss serving as Captain and Cavanaugh as Lieutenant.



Emmett Rifles, Petaluma's Union Militia, 1862,
photo courtesy of the Sonoma County Library

