



PHOTOGRAPHER: **LEWIS DOWE** (b. 1838, active in Petaluma 1877 to 1881)

SITTERS: **ELIZABETH (BETSY) BAILEY WILLIAMS** (born 1792 Woolwich, Maine; died 1882 Petaluma, CA) & **CLARA McNEAR** (married name, **LEPPA**, born Petaluma, CA 1881; died Tiburon, CA 1979)

DATE: 1881

PHOTOGRAPHIC FORMAT: enlarged reprint of original cabinet card

PETALUMA HISTORICAL LIBRARY & MUSEUM

This elderly woman and the baby she holds represent two of Petaluma's earliest, prominent pioneer families. Elizabeth Bailey Williams, shown here holding her great-great-granddaughter with gentle firmness, was the mother of George Bailey Williams, a man instrumental in the early development and construction of Petaluma hotels, homes and its first school. It is not known when Elizabeth traveled to Petaluma from her home in Maine, but she died in Petaluma in 1882. George can be credited with bringing the esteemed McNear family to Petaluma when in 1856 he encouraged his daughter, Clara Williams McNear, and her husband, John A. McNear, to join him in Petaluma. Clara Williams McNear died at age 29, and the baby portrayed here is her namesake granddaughter. Clara senior's only child to survive to adulthood, George Plummer McNear named his first child in honor of his mother.

This portrait was a fortunate coincidence: it was created in the year the photographer departed Petaluma, two years before Elizabeth's death, and five months after Clara's birth. In both its content and composition, this is a masterpiece of portrait photography. The juxtaposition of old and young, dark and light, bold and fragile attracts and delights the eye. There are no peripheral objects to distract the viewer, and the arched mat adds to the dignity of the scene. The photographer has skillfully isolated and captured a moment of calm repose possessed simultaneously by both sitters. It represents a precious moment in time and a significant relationship in Petaluma history.

Paula Freund, 2017