



PHOTOGRAPHER: WILLIAM HENRY LENTZ
(active in Petaluma between 1867 and 1870)

SITTER: GELO PARKER (1854 - 1943)

DATE: 1867 to 1870

FORMAT: enlarged reprint of original carte de visite

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We know this portrait of Gelo Parker was taken between 1867 and 1870, because the photographer, William Henry Lentz, was active in Petaluma only during those years. These dates place Gelo between thirteen and sixteen years old when the photo was taken. He sits attentively in a traditional, fringed, studio chair gazing with a neutral facial expression directly toward the viewer. One imagines that Gelo, wanting to be perceived as a young man, not a boy, may have borrowed his brother's suit for this portrait, as the fit is charmingly over-generous.

Gelo's precociouness was clearly documented in the seven volumes of meticulously organized and beautiful scripted writings he left to posterity. Volumes one through five are diaries written between 1868 and 1875. It is curious to observe that he began making diary entries at about the same time this portrait was taken. Those five volumes describe in precious detail his youth growing up in Petaluma on his family's ranch. Volume six, written many years later in 1884, when he was thirty years old, describes his experiences farming, hunting and his later surveying work in Oregon. Volume seven is a letterbook which contains copies of letters he wrote between 1870 and 1879. These seven, precious, primary documents, preserved in the Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, have not been digitized, but excerpts can be found in Adair Lara's, History of Petaluma, A California River Town, pages 65 to 67.