



PHOTOGRAPHER: Unidentified
SITTER: **GEORGE BAILEY WILLIAMS** (1809-1899)
FORMAT: reprint of a copy of the portrait originally from the collection of Ed Mannion



PHOTOGRAPHER: Unidentified
SITTER: **MEHETABEL LILLY WILLIAMS** (1807-1899)
FORMAT: reprint of a copy of the portrait originally from the collection of Ed Mannion

George and Mehetabel Williams were stellar examples of the pioneer spirit of hard work and determination. After testing his luck searching for gold, George sailed up the Petaluma River in 1851 in search for a location to build a family home, and in 1855 he convinced his wife and children to join him. In a strange twist of fate, Mehetabel and the children journeyed west while George was journeying east to fetch them. They eventually rendezvoused in Petaluma in August of 1855.

George was an enterprising developer and community builder. He constructed two of Petaluma's earliest hotels, the American Hotel in 1852 and the Washington Hotel in 1856, and he was instrumental in constructing one of Petaluma's first public schools and many of its private homes.

The full story of the adventures of George and Mehetabel is long and intriguing. Portions of their story are recounted in the memoirs of their son, George Roscoe Williams, and a thorough discussion is provided in Adair Lara's definitive [History of Petaluma, A California River Town](#). Both are available on the reading table in the center of the gallery.

Adair Lara succinctly summed up George Williams' legacy when she wrote, "It is ironic that Williams is remembered most in Petaluma history not for his ambitious hotel schemes, his land dealings, or his civic contributions, but for that idle moment early in 1856 when, out of longing to see his daughter again, or perhaps simply on impulse, he drew a rough sketch of Petaluma Creek and sent it off to John A. McNear, a young cousin who had married his daughter, Clara... In that moment, he changed Petaluma forever."



The Williams in later life, photo courtesy of the McNear Family

You can find portraits of John and Clara McNear and read a brief discussion of their importance to Petaluma history on the opposite panel of this display wall.

Paula Freund, 2017