



PHOTOGRAPHER: JOHN QUINCY REED (b. 1841 or 1842, d. 1902)

SITTER: JOHN AUGUSTUS MCNEAR (1832-1918)

DATE: 1877

FORMAT: enlarged reprint of original carte de visite
PETALUMA HISTORICAL LIBRARY & MUSEUM

John Augustus McNear is arguably the most famous and respected of all Petaluma pioneers. He was a man of vision with astonishing energy, brilliance and ambition. Under his influence Petaluma grew from a small riverside frontier town to a thriving center of industry and commerce.

With encouragement from his father-in-law, McNear moved to Petaluma in 1856 with his wife, Clara Williams. He saw that the little town had a bright future, and he immediately invested in a livery stable and hay yard. Trained as a master mariner in his youth, McNear used his profits to create a shipping business on the Petaluma River. He built riverside warehouses where produce, especially wheat and potatoes, could easily be transported via the river's scow schooners, invested to straighten the river's impeding bends, financed a fleet of schooners, built the freight steamer, Josie McNear, and constructed a canal to enable steamships to dock in Petaluma independent of the tides.

Wisely diversifying his interests, McNear founded Petaluma's Bank of Sonoma County and was a backer of local railroad lines. He invested in the Sonoma County & Petaluma Water Company and established a very profitable brick manufacturing facility on Point San Pedro.

Praising John McNear in his 1911 [History of Sonoma County](#), Tom Gregory wrote:

Of all the prominent pioneers of the state there is none more deserving of esteem and good will of the people than John A. McNear, for wherever his name is known it means that he has stamped some indelible action in that locality... He is typically a Californian by adoption, always of the most loyal kind, honorable, upright and a man who has forged his way to the front through the exercise of talents given him by nature, and while doing this there has never been a time that he has neglected the duties of a citizen.

Paula Freund, 2017