

# Elizabeth Lowrie

1880-1979



Why this story?

What do you expect ?

# References

- Early Incidents of Washington Township by Elizabeth Lowrie, 1972
- Interview: Fremont Reference M. Marks 1973 (CDB 979.465 ELIZABETH)
- Interview: Elizabeth Lowrie by Robert Fisher, 1971 and March 18, 1973
  - Archive.org, Elizabeth Lowrie
- Philip Holmes files
- Alameda County Library file
- Robert Fisher files, photographs (WTMLH)
- Newspaper articles
- Ancestry.com- census reports, etc.

# 1850s and 1860s



## George Lowrie

B. 1833 D. 1923

1847 from Scotland to Connecticut

1853 Came to Newark

1864 Returned to Newark

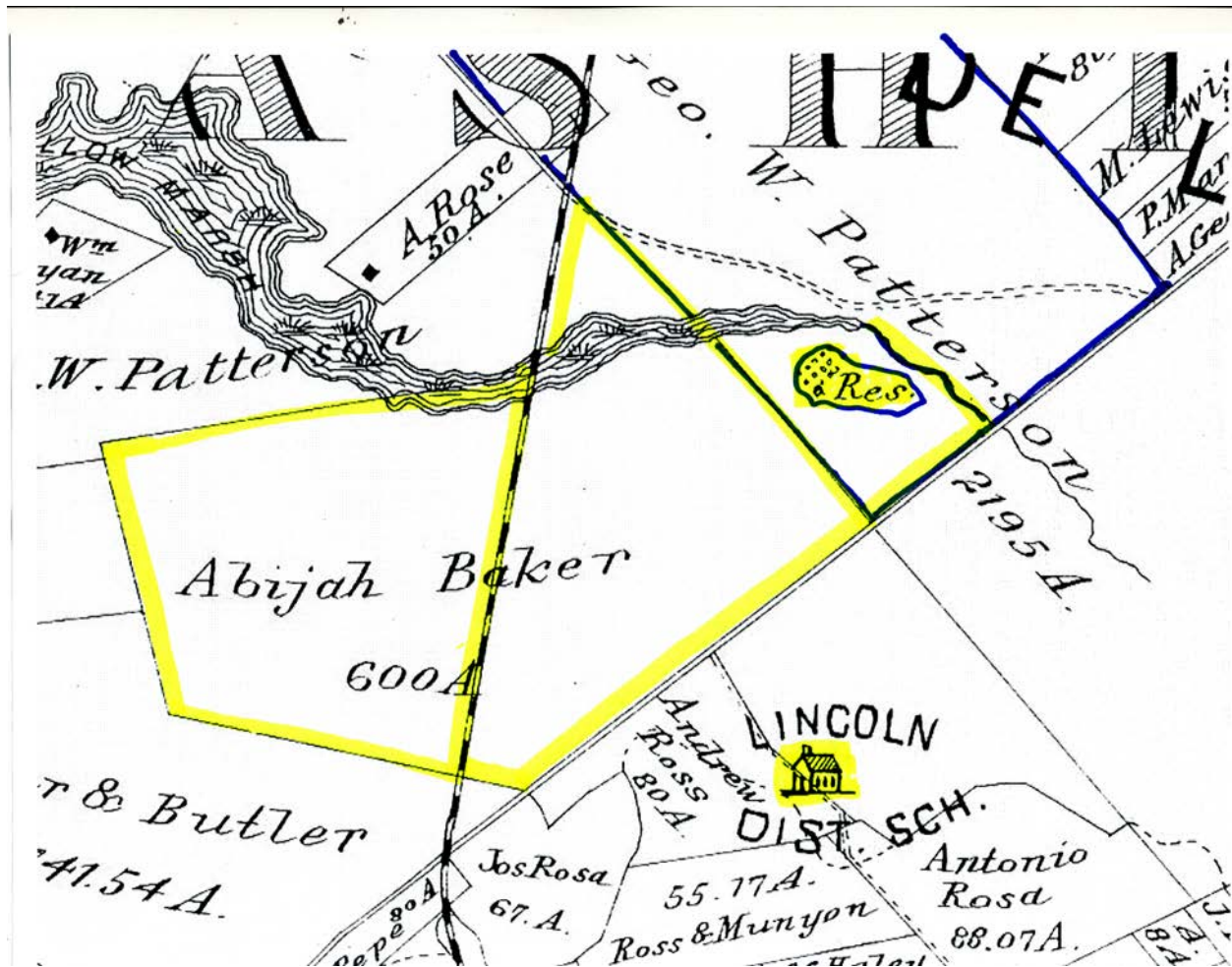
Brother John and nephews Peter and David lived in Alvarado

1870s and 1880s

George marries Harriet Thompson 1871

- Harriet born in New Hampshire in 1848, arrive Alvarado 1868
- 1872-George William Jr d. 1956 (84)
- 1873-Abbie Geninundy d. 1902 (29)
- 1875- David James d. 1952 (77)
- 1876-Phoebe d. 1917 (41)
- 1880-Elizabeth d. 1979 (98)





1878 atlas



1901 Assessor map







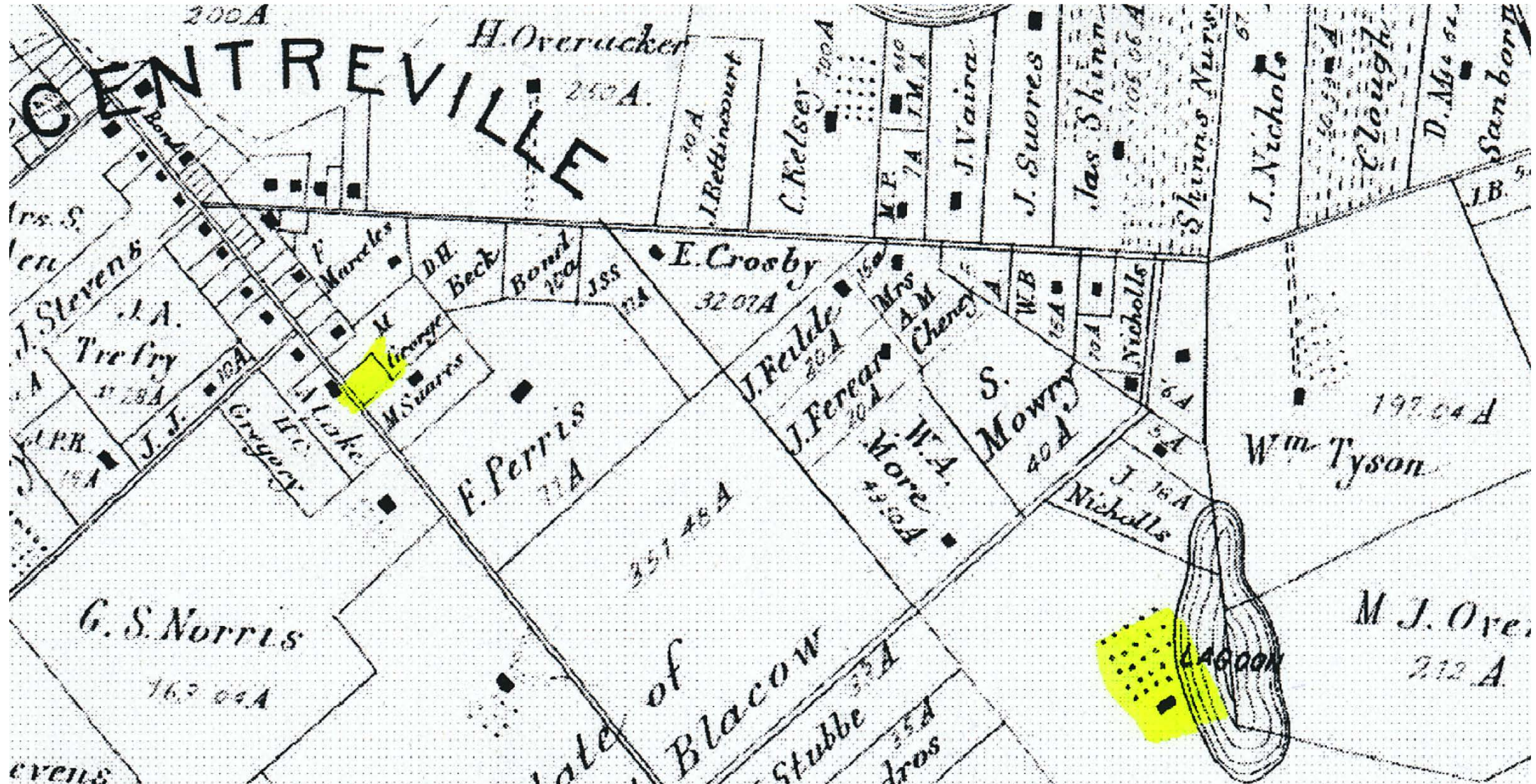






1885

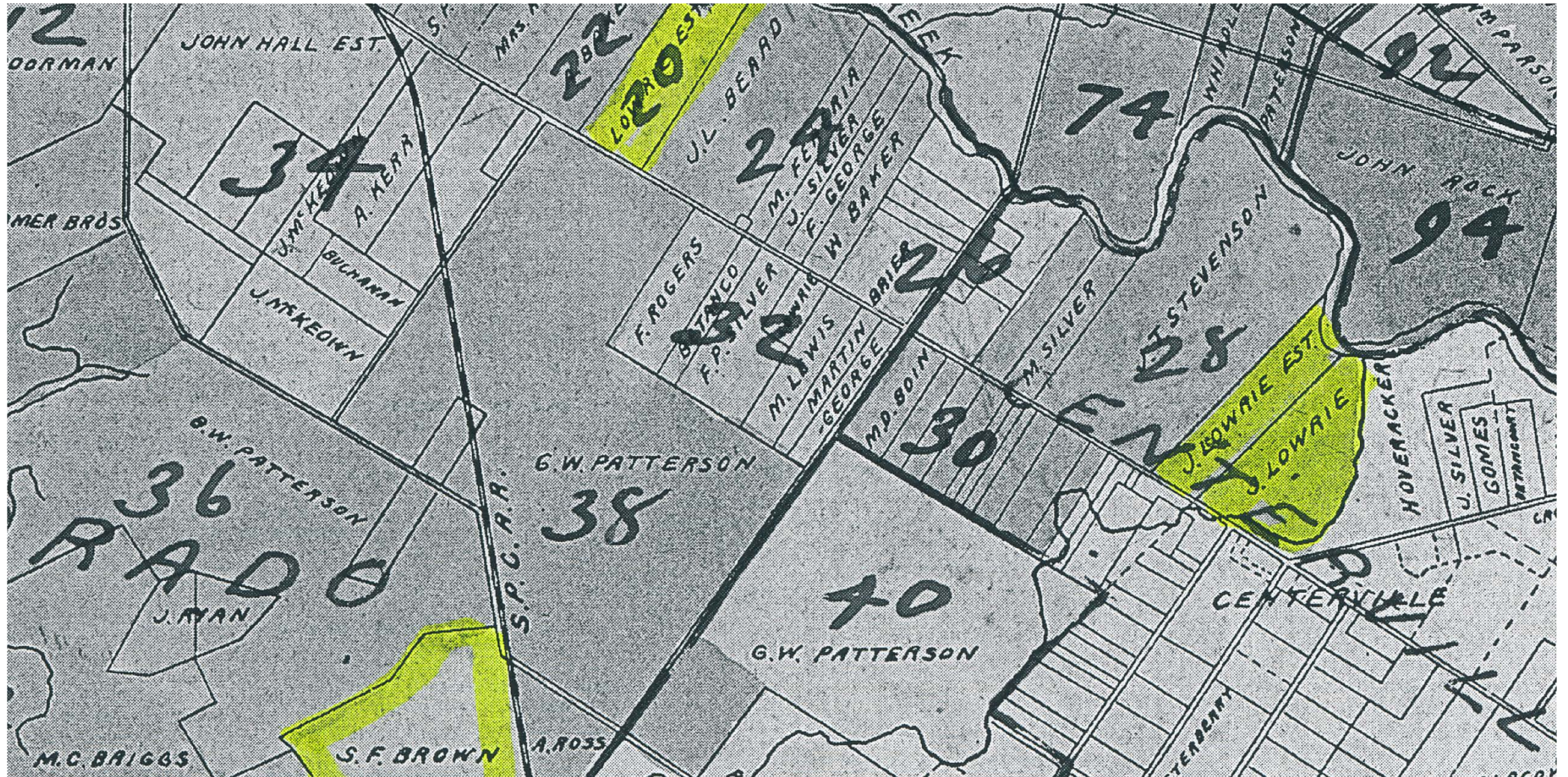
# Moved to Marshal Farm





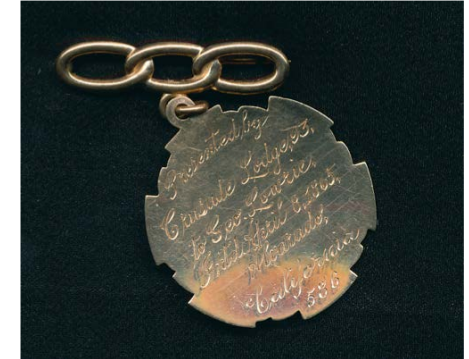
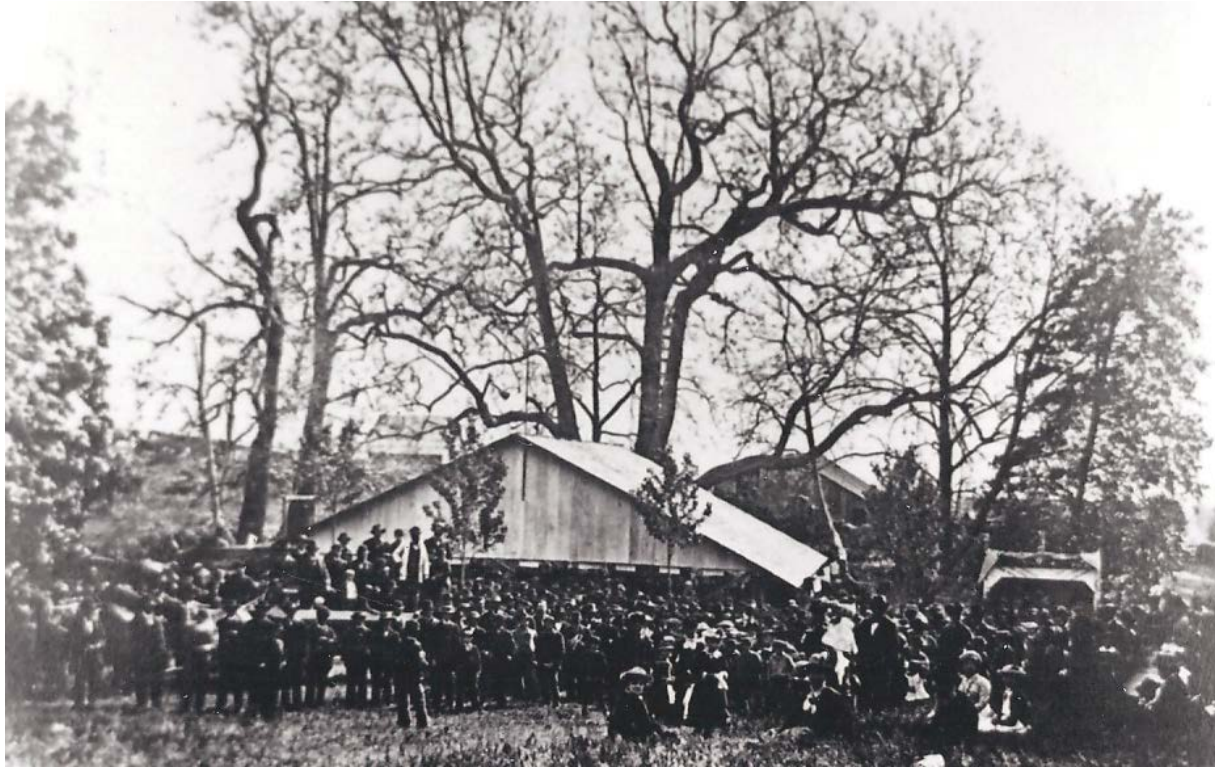
- 1888

Moved to Alvarado





# Dry Creek May Day Picnics and Pioneer Society Gatherings





Dry Creek

Meyers House

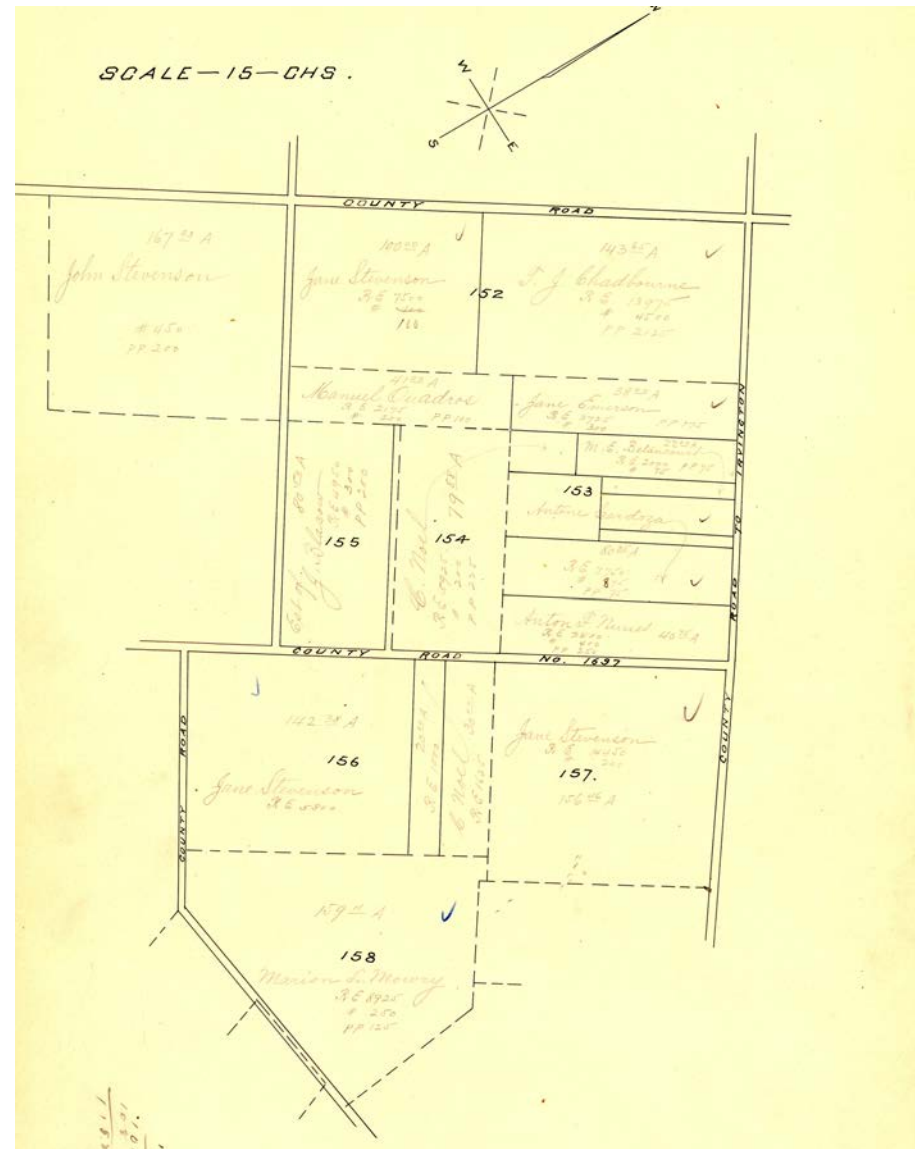


# Lowry (Lowrie) Family Connections

- David and Peter Lowrie (cousins to George) started a fleet business between Alvarado and Centerville.
- Lowry road is named uncle John. There were three houses there, her father's two cousins and his nephew lived there.
- They owned Central Market and ran two covered wagons through the district. (in the 1900s)
- When Phoebe was sick they always came with a nice thick beef steak.

1890s

Moved to Irvington 1891



# Irvington grammar school



Irvington Grammar school



Class of 1889/90 with Abbie Lowrie



- 1891, Irvington school, Elizabeth is 11 years old



## 1900s/ Census

## Living and Growing in Irvington

Family lives on Mowry ranch near what is now Irvington high school

- George Sr. 67
- Harriet 54
- George William Jr 28
- Abbie Geninundy 27 d. 1902 (29)
- David James 25
- Phoebe School teacher 23
- Elizabeth 20

1888-1900

## **Phoebe Lowrie**

“In the early 1900s my sister Phoebe came home from Arizona. The doctor had advised her to go to school there. He didn't tell her she had a spot on her lungs. She taught school 2 years in Arizona. She over did. She was teaching and keeping house and going to the university taking Spanish and economics. She had a break down and returned home.”

1888-1900

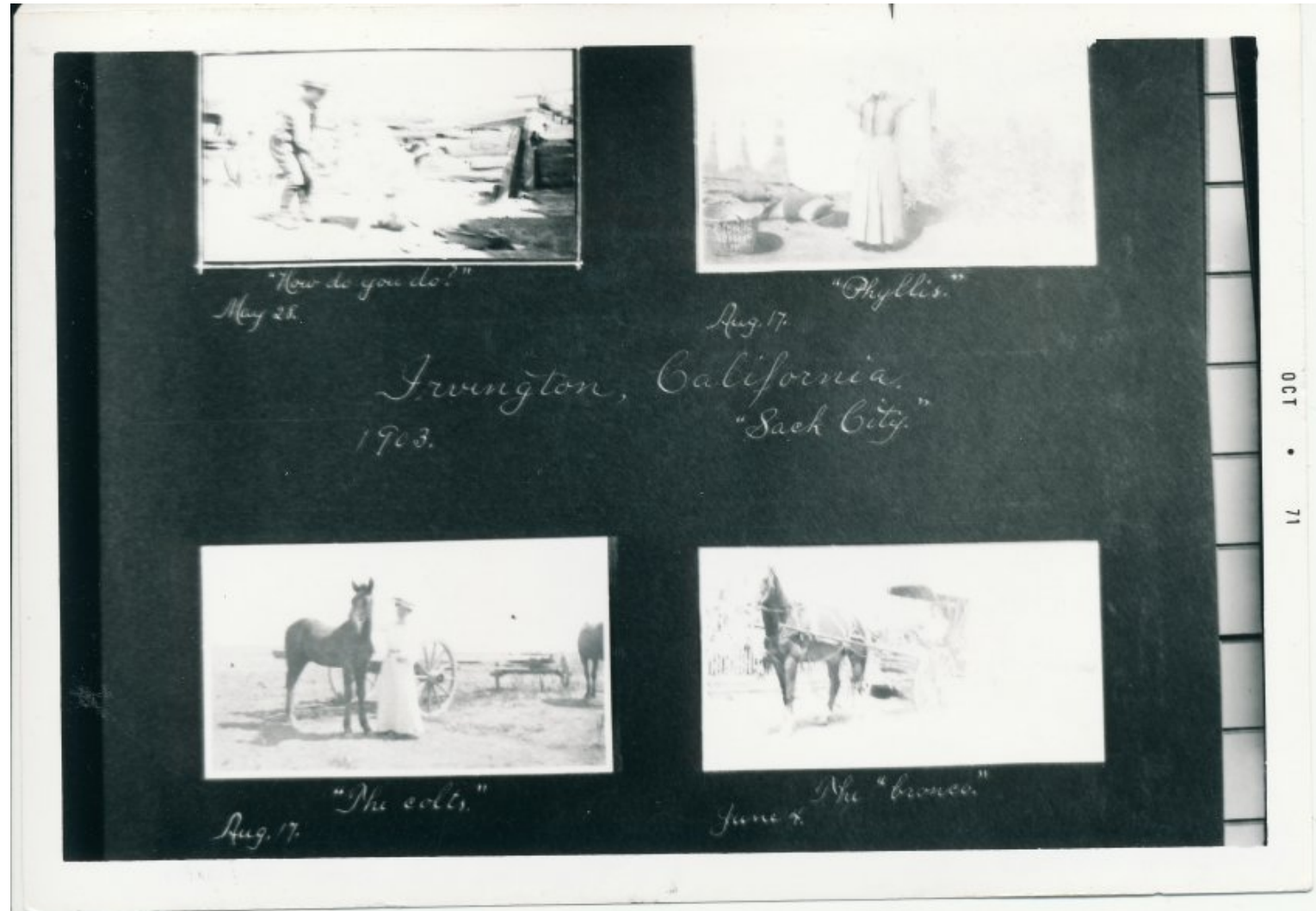
## Phoebe Lowrie

- “In the 1890s each church had its Christian endeavor society, young people, they formed a union.
- Just before Phoebe went to Arizona she was president of it. They had rallies occasionally. They were interesting. It was an old time get together, a convention.
- Everyone went and took their lunch and a sack of hay for the horse. They stayed all day.”



1903

Irvington "Sack City"



# Mission Peak Outing



1904

# Harvest time on the Ranch - Irvington



1905

Fairview in Alvarado -

John Lowrie home





1905



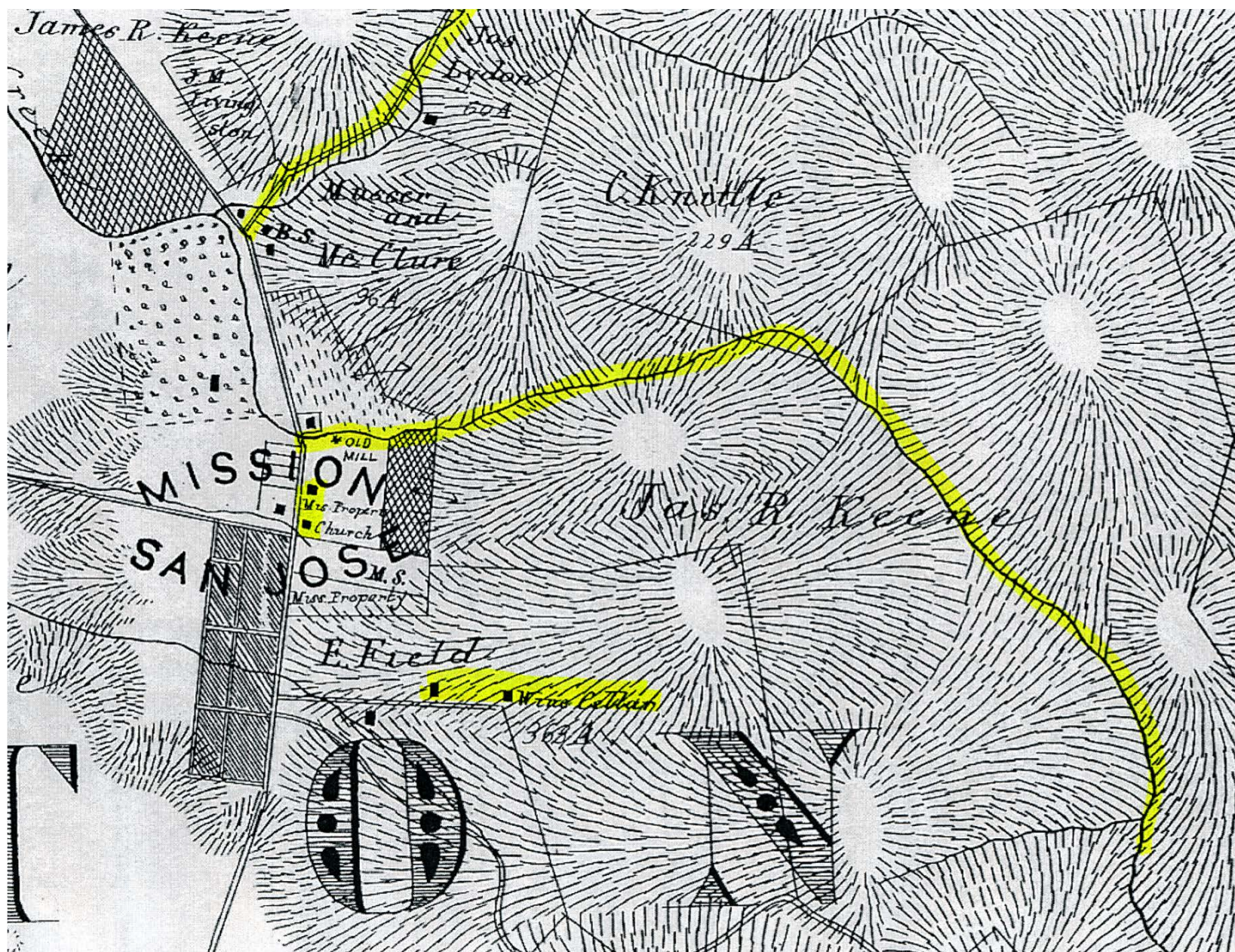
Fairview in Alvarado













# Linda Vista Ranch



Linda Vista Ranch



Sept 1907/ Feb 1908

Building the cabin





Looking down the canyon



*Looking down the canyon.*

## Collecting and raising butterflies and moths



# Tolyte lowriei



Sold to William Barnes in 1910 and later donated to the Smithsonian institute. Barnes writes:

This species was bred by Miss Elizabeth Lowrie and her sister from eggs laid by a captured [moth], taken at Mt. Hermon in the Santa Cruz ....

...we take much pleasure in naming it after the collectors who have been instrumental in supplying many an interesting specimen to our collection.

1909

On the Old Trail



## 1910-1930 Census

Newath ? Rd.(1910) /Washington Township

- George Sr. 67/77/87      retired 1919      d. 1923
- Harriet 63/73/83      d. 1931
  
- George William Jr    mechanic 58
- David James    35 blacksmith/ 45 farm laborer/ builder 56
- Phoebe 33 teacher      d. 1917
- Elizabeth    30 in mountains- /39 milliner / milliner 50



1920s 1930s



Harriet Lowrie on  
right- d. 1931



George Lowrie at Fairview – George retired in 1919  
d. 1923



Lowrie home on San Jose Ave.

c.1915-c. 1935

## Millinery Business

- “Mother always bought hats in Irvington. I went to Oakland to take a course, then bought the millinery store. When the Portuguese celebration was on, everyone bought hats. I hired a girl to speak Portuguese.”
- “I closed the store and after mother’s death, Then I worked at the library.” c





# 1935-1962 (27 years)

# Librarian

The library was in the old Mack building. There was a screen door and a space between the screen door and the glass door.



The library opened at 2 o'clock. It was badly run down when I took it over. Miss Barbie was librarian. A lot of youngsters came. They had good children's books. I worked 15 years in the Mack building- where the bank is now.

The Mack building was very old. Then we moved into the old antique shop. The floor shook. It too was an old building. The county gave us a book drop. We lost books through that drop.



1956-1962



Then we moved to an antique store, a very old building. (? 1950-1962)

Finally we moved to Washington Blvd. I worked there until I was 82 (1962)





# Church Affiliations   Played piano and organ



Miss Elizabeth Lowrie, member of the Newark Presbyterian church and her 1933 (1926) Model T have been inseparable companions in church attire. Dr. J. H. Durham of Irvington examines the ancient vehicle. Oakland Tribune 1944

Music with Mary Durham  
Dr. Fleisner at Anderson  
Academy  
Curtner Academy

Organist at Newark then  
Centerville Presbyterian  
churches. Then moved to  
Mt. Eden church.

1926-1951

Model T

- Bought it for \$300 and sold it for \$25.  
(owned it for 25 years)
- It was loud and noisy. You could hear it  
come to the library.



1959

# She's A Pint-Size Dynamo

By GLADYS WILLIAMSON

FREMONT, Nov. 11 — Fremont's butterfly lady, Miss Elizabeth Annie Lowrie of the Irvington District, could just as well be called Miss Buttons, the book lady, or a half dozen other titles equally applicable to this pint-size dynamo.

Although she never married, nobody would ever think of calling Miss Lowrie an old maid. She just hasn't had time for matrimony — considering several members of her family who successively claimed her attentions when they were ill, the butterflies she and her sister raised on the Overacker ranch at Mission San Jose, the short stories and the poems she is still selling, the several thousands of buttons she has collected and exhibited at Bay Area events and her job — branch librarian at Irvington for 21 years.

## DOESN'T LOOK IT

Her once red hair is silver and she doesn't always hear everything but aside from this partial handicap, you could easily doubt her reluctant admission that she will be 80 years old on March 22.

Elizabeth Annie Lowrie is a native of Washington Township and spent much of her childhood on a part of the Stivers ranch which her father farmed. At seven she fell into the lagoon, the same one that is in the news of late, as a suggested site for a civic center and remembers one time—before 1900—that the lagoon froze over, enough for skating.

(Other old timers have photographs of Alameda Creek frozen over about 1926.)

As a small child she loved poetry. Today, she sells her

verses. One of the latest appeared in "The Instructor," a school magazine published in New York.

The poem, "Toad Neighbors," reads in part: "A toad lives in our garden. He has a smooth, round space beneath the tall syringa bush—a cool and quiet place . . . and he is just the color of the crumbly garden ground. . . . He is a helpful neighbor. He eats the flies and ants, the bugs and slugs and crawling things that like to eat our plants."

And for this one, she won a watch: "They say a mountain sheep can do its forty miles,

and how! It sure would take a lamb like that to follow Mary now."

One of her early-day schoolmates was the late Judge Ezra Decoto, "a sort of cousin."

## STUDIED MUSIC

She studied music with Miss Mary Durham, sister of the late Irvington dentist, Dr. J. H. Durham, and later at Curtner Seminary, a "young ladies' school" which was one of the successors to the historic Washington College at Irvington. Still later she studied with Prof. Otto Fleisner at the Anderson Academy, the last

of the Washington College successors.

She has been organist at both the Newark and the Centerville Presbyterian Churches.

When her sister contracted tuberculosis, Elizabeth Annie and Phoebe moved in to a cabin below Mission Peak and raised butterflies. "The little cats (caterpillars) eat pine needles and lupin and willow," she explained. They sold the butterflies to Dr. William Barnes of Decatur, Ill., who had the largest private collection in the United States, she relates. He later gave his collection to the Smithsonian Institute. He named one butterfly "Tolype Lowriei," in her honor.

In 1938, she became librarian at Irvington—for 30 cents an hour. The janitor got 75. She wondered if she should have swapped jobs.

## 13,285 BOOKS

During the year 1957-58, she distributed 13,285 books, without help. Now she has a part-time assistant.

From 1926 to 1951, Miss Lowrie was a familiar sight, put-putting her way around the township in her Model T. She had bought it for \$300, turning in an "open car" model. She sold it to a local automobile salesman for \$25.

She frankly doesn't like to talk about her birthdays. Besides, 80 isn't anything "to get excited about." Her father lived past 90; an aunt, to 98.

The buttons? . . . One of her collections is a whole history of the area, told in the buttons from the dresses worn by the ladies in by-gone days to events which make up the chronicle of what is now Fremont.





1944

# Button Collection

San Jose Mercury-News  
**Central Coast**  
Sunday, February 22, 1948 15

FROM BIRDS' NESTS TO BUTTONS

## Irvington Woman Shows Collection

By BENNY A. PHILLIPS  
Central Coast Staff

IRVINGTON, Feb. 21.—Miss Elizabeth Lowrie, Irvington librarian for the past 10 years, has taken a crack at collecting everything from butterflies to birds' nests. She is now displaying at the library a set of three books of buttons—a collection she started three years ago.

More than 2000 buttons, one over 100 years old, are sewed in cloth books which she bound herself.

The little white-haired woman, who was born and raised in the Irvington district, explained that she started the collection as a small library display in 1945. When children and adults alike showed enough interest to bring in all sorts of buttons, she decided to make a collection.

Irvington residents dug deep into their attics, basements, and sewing kits for buttons worn by grandparents and even great-grandparents.

One button, which Miss Lowrie believes is of Chinese origin, was sent to her by an Irvington soldier who took it from a Japanese killed in battle in the South Pacific.

Enamel, glass, metal pearl, horn, bone, rubber, silver, and gold buttons are included in the many-paged books. Miss Lowrie is especially proud of a group of picture buttons that were sent to her by a fellow collector in New York.

Miss Lowrie, who lives at 282 San Jose Ave., has exchanged buttons with many Easterners who belong to a button collectors' society.

"Button collecting is something new for me," she said. "I've been collecting things since I was eight years old. My sister and I had an extensive butterfly collection which we sold to a collector who in turn sold it to a national museum in Washington, D.C. We even raised some of the rare butterflies. My sister and I also had quite a stamp collection as well as assorted collections such as birds' eggs, shells, and old money. I traded part of my stamps to a San Jose man for some of my most prized buttons."

She explained that many of the buttons are worth little, being modern ones made of plastic but very attractive because of the unique color designs. She said some of the oldest buttons are worth as much as \$12.

One button which was found in an old sewing table, is a bone button commonly used as an undergarment fastener at the time of the California Gold Rush days. It has five holes.

Button collecting as a hobby is not a new fad, she declared. Many books have been written on the various types of buttons and during the Middle Ages, when a man had to carry all of his valuables with

him, buttons were made from precious stones and were an indication of the wealth of a person—besides if he had to "make a run for it," his jewels were fastened to him—really serving two purposes.

Included in the books is a page of transportation buttons. One, which survived the San Francisco fire of 1906, shows a fire carriage that was used in that city. Another pictures a girl and boy on a bicycle which she said was at least 50 years old.

Buttons from the various military services are also in the collection. Many she got from Irvington men who participated in the last war. Italian, German and Japanese buttons are included as well as insignia emblems of the U.S. armed forces.

Buttons are not used only for utility purposes, Miss Lowrie states. Buttons have been used for ornaments, identification, and even to

leave a good smell. A velvet "perfumer" button was pointed out by the librarian that was in use before the turn of the Century.

In the last page of the set of books is a section devoted to political buttons. Campaign badges used by both Roosevelts, Knox, Landon, Wilkie, are included.

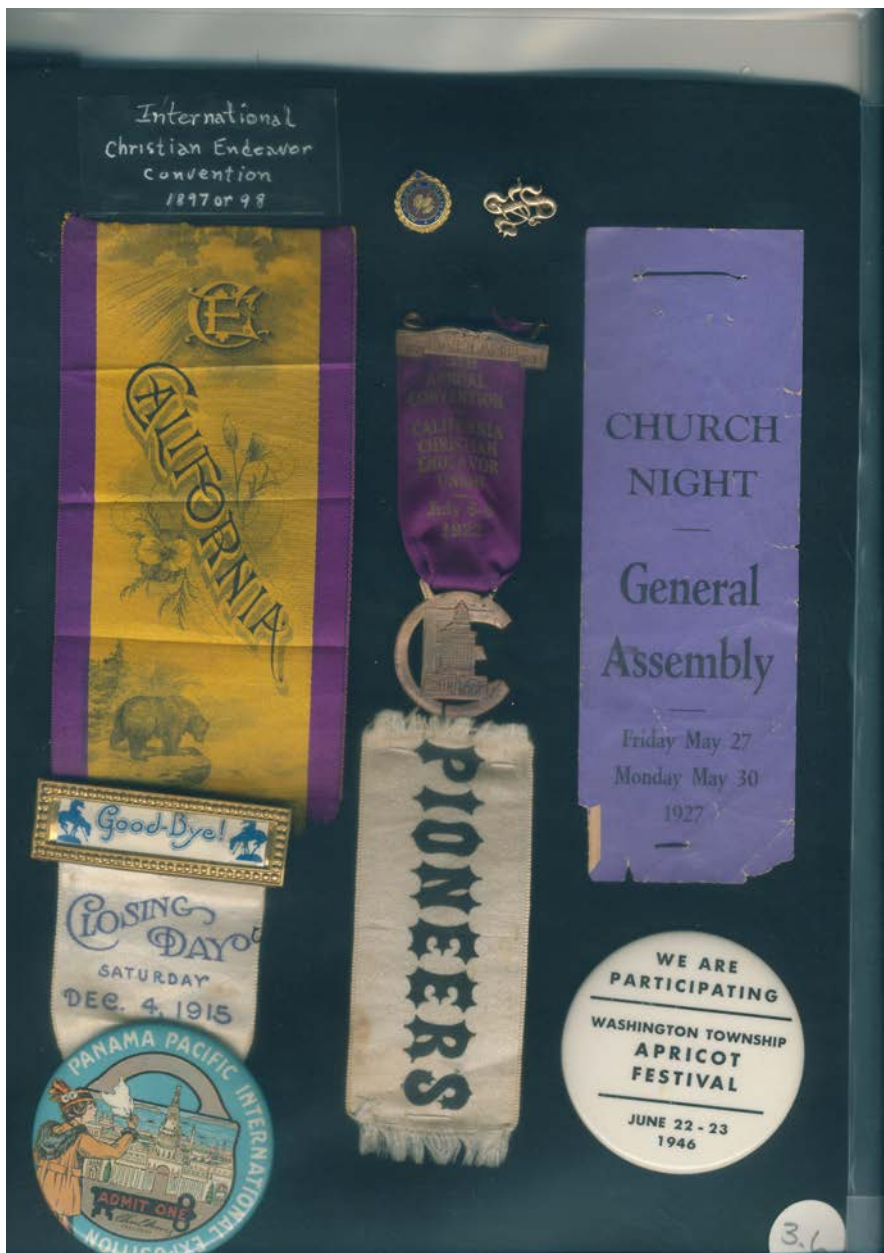
"I intend to enlarge my collection," she stily said, "and might part with some of my birds' eggs, rocks, shells, coral, Indian relics, coins, Confederate bills, stamps, or even my small collection of antique hat pins, for some old buttons. But, I'm going to keep my bird's nest—it's over 40 years old."



**"AND THESE PEARL BUTTONS"**—Miss Elizabeth Lowrie, Irvington librarian, shows Danny Dilbeck and Dorothy Rogers, grammar school students, part of her 2000 buttons which she has collected in three books. The buttons are on display at the Irvington Library.







1963

Moved to Hayward with cousin Beulah Leach

1970s

Wrote verse, wrote stories, gave interviews



Wrote, "Early day Incidents in Washington Township. 1972

Interviewed 1971- library

Interviewed 1973-  
[museum/archive.org](http://museum/archive.org)



# 1971-1974

## Native of Fremont Remembers Early Days of the Area

By CARMEN AVELAR

She was 91 years old recently and she did the laundry right on schedule, just as she does every Monday. Later there was lunch with a friend by way of celebration. There was no family celebration, no gathering of the clan to commemorate the occasion, for Elizabeth (Bess) Lowrie is the last surviving member of a pioneer Southern Alameda County family.

She says she is, "tougher than a boiled owl," a fact borne out by her ability to do her own housekeeping, shopping, sewing, and cooking.

**ALWAYS A DOER**, she worked in a library until age 82 and augments her income by writing greeting card verses which she sells to a national greeting card company.

For years, she has taken care of others younger than she, taught Sunday school classes, served as church organist, and during her spare time wrote poetry and collected buttons as a hobby.

Miss Lowrie was born in 1880 on the Brown ranch between the Newark and Alvarado districts of Fremont. She was one of five children of

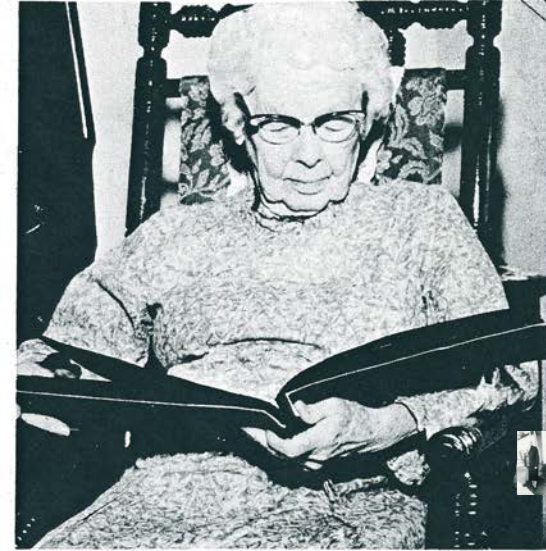
Mr. and Mrs. George Lowrie. Her father was born in Scotland, her mother in New Hampshire.

Neither Miss Lowrie nor her brothers and sisters ever married. Her sister, Phoebe and Abby, contracted tuberculosis and died at an early age. Her brothers, George and David, both lived to "ripe old ages." Miss Lowrie's father died in his 90th year and his father in his 97th. Her only living relative, a cousin in New Hampshire, is 95.

**MISS LOWRIE** suffers from a loss of hearing, but her memory is as keen as it ever was, says her close friend and neighbor, Mrs. Earl Green. She has almost total recall of her early years in Newark, Alvarado, and Centerville. Mrs. Green describes her as an entertaining raconteur who can hold her listeners spell-bound with stories of the past.

Miss Lowrie often talks about her first years in school when she, "walked from the lagoon to Centerville School every day," says Mrs. Green.

When she grew older and her family moved to Irvington, she rode her own horse and buggy four miles to high school. Her formal education



**FREMONT NATIVE STORES MEMORIES OF LONG AGO**  
Elizabeth (Bess) Lowrie

came to an end upon graduation.

**THE ELDERLY WOMAN** studied piano as a child and taught music after she was grown. She was church organist for several local churches during her career.

Her multitude of talents led her into several fields. In 1915, she established a small business in Irvington. When she was 25, Miss

Lowrie and her older sister, Phoebe, to whom she was devoted, went to live in the hills near Mission Peak in hopes that the outdoor life would improve Phoebe's tuberculosis. They remained there 10 years.

The first year the sisters lived in a tent, shooting coyotes and rattlesnakes. Later, their brothers built a small cabin for them. They returned to Irvington around 1914.

**OLD PHOTOGRAPHS** taken of the sisters at that time are still in existence. Miss Lowrie still likes photography and continues to use her 70-year-old Kodak camera.

During those years in the hills, the sisters began the first extensive collection of butterflies and moths native to California. The collection was sold to Dr. William Barnes of Dakota, Illinois, around 1910. Upon his death, the collection went to the Smithsonian Institution where it is still on display.

**ALWAYS A HOBBYIST**, Miss Lowrie has a fine collection of antique buttons. "And she can tell you the name and history of each one of them," says Mrs. Green.

"I always get into something, you know," Miss Lowrie commented recently. Perhaps this is her secret for remaining forever young.



# Elizabeth Lowrie

1880-1979





Visit our  
exhibit at the  
Fremont  
Main Library







Thank  
you for  
the  
exhibits  
Marjory  
Begley  
and  
Kelsey  
Camello