

This is an article printed in the Butte County Edition of the San Francisco Journal of Commerce, 1887:

"I, John William Bowers, son of William and Catherine Grove (Bowers), was born May 29, 1828 and was raised on my father's Virginia farm and in '49 when I heard of the California gold excitement, I thought it a fine opening for a young man. So I crossed the plains in that year with a company of eighty-five others, principally from Jefferson and Berkeley Counties, Virginia and a few from Frederick and adjoining counties in Maryland. My companions were the very flower of the county. All young men, some of them married, some only a few days, leaving their newly-made wives behind. The president of our company was B. F. Washington, a relative of George Washington, and who was editor of the Examiner for many years. I celebrated my twenty-first year on the plains. We first camped on the American River about three or four miles north of Sacramento which then had only one house on it, Sam Brannan's which was not quite done and fifteen and twenty tents. Our party sold all our property off at auction, wagons, mules, etc. The proceeds netted us about \$300.00 each. Seven of us then went up to Weaver Creek, El Dorado County and went to mining there remaining together the first winter. The first year, I made probably \$2,000 or \$3,000. I remained in that vicinity till '54 when I went back to the States to see the folks and remained about six months. I then came back to Diamond Springs in the vicinity of Weaver creek and went to mining again.

I got married about a year afterwards to Miss Catherine Van Fossen, a seventeen year old Ohio girl. My wife had been in California two or three years. After my marriage I left the mines and went to farming on the Feather River ten or twelve miles below Oroville. I rented about three hundred acres from James Henshaw who furnished teams, seed and his own sacks and I farmed and thrashed the grain for half profits. I kept this up for two and a half years and then went to Colusa County six miles above Colusa. I rented a quarter section furnishing everything myself and gave one fourth of the crop for rent. The next year I came to Grizzly Bend this county (Butte County) four miles below my present home where I rented 300 acres on similar terms for the first year. I afterwards bought 300 acres adjoining and remained on the property five years. At the expiration of that time I lost it on account of its having been granted-land, a part of the Llano Seco Grant, now owned by the Parrot Estate. I then took my family east with the calculation of remaining there. While on the last mentioned ranch I made about \$12,000 taking fully \$15,000 East with me. Remaining east about nine months, I came back and bought my present home-ranch in sections. The first piece of 1800 acres, I bought of David M. Reavis for about \$6,000. I then bought 400 acres adjoining from Lindsey Williams for \$2,500. On account of the property having been included in the Gerke or Farwell Grant, I have had to pay for it no less than three times. My land is divided into four fields. There is some farming and some brush land in all four fields. I have about 400 acres in wheat, five in alfalfa. Most of the cultivated land is in summer fallow (plowed but unseeded). The uncultivated land is covered in wild grapes. There are wagon loads of them. My hogs keep fat on them. I have the best barn in the country, the timbers being mortised together. Its entire length is 112 feet. The main building being 30 feet wide and 18 foot sheds, it has a capacity of over 100 tons. My brick residence, I built in 1881. It's dimensions are 40 by 50 feet and two stories in height. It is built on a concrete foundation and is furnished with all the modern improvements, including hot and cold water in every bedroom. There are ten rooms besides the kitchen. My land averages about 20 bushels of wheat to the acre. I have seventy head of stock cattle including

calves and milk cows, about 200 head of hogs, thirty head of mules and horses and a few sheep. The Sacramento River forms the western boundary line of my land."

John William Bowers commented about his journey westward in various letters: "The seventy-five 49er's started from Charleston, Virginia on March 27, 1849 and went by special train from Charleston to Harper's Ferry on the B. & O. Railroad to Cumberland, Maryland. Benjamin Franklin Washington was their president. They chartered nine stage coaches to cross the Allegheny Mountains and on to the Ohio River where they boarded the Niagara boat for Cincinnati, Ohio." "They changed boats and continued down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers to St. Louis, Missouri. They remained there for three days and then changed boats to the Embassy on the Missouri River for St. Joseph, Missouri, arriving there on April 19, 1849. On the second day out on the Missouri River, Thomas Washington died from Asiatic Cholera." "They bought 16 wagons and 100 horses and mules, and remained in St. Joseph until May 12th breaking (?) the mules and horses. They also waited for the grass to grow to give sufficient forage for the animals as they did not carry feed for them.

In preparation for the trip to California, each man was to have the following: 8 shirts 1 pair drawers 8 pair wool socks 4 towels 2 pair boots or shoes 1 vest 1 coat 1 hat Gloves Blankets 4 undershirts 2 pair of trousers 1 gum overcoat oilcloth cap with cape combs soap rubber knapsack

"Each member was to have a pair of revolving pistols at \$20 per pair." "They purchased 30 rifles and 40 double barreled shot guns, some costing \$40 a piece, in Baltimore, Maryland.

They left St. Joseph on May 12, 1849. In St. Joseph they secured the services of Frank Smith as guide. Dr. Wakeman Bryarly was their surgeon from Maryland. The first day out of St. Joseph, the company only made eight miles. They were bothered by bugs and diarrhea. On May 22, Joseph C. Young died of typhoid fever. On June 3rd they killed their first buffalo and June 4th they met with representatives of about 1,500 Sioux Indians, trading some mules for ponies. The farther the company went the more Indians and more plentiful the game. Eight days out from St. Joseph they realized they were overloaded and began throwing away horseshoes, lard, flour, bacon, picks, etc. On July 9th, Taliaferro Milton was crowned in the Bear River.

On August 8th James Davison accidentally shot himself and died. On August 17 the Sierra Nevada Mountains were sighted. The mules and horses were growing weaker each day and they dreaded the mountains. August 29th, the company finally reached their diggings above Sacramento, California."

Some of the names in the John Williams Bowers wagon train - according to a Missouri newspaper account:

Benjamin Franklin Washington, Robert H. Keeling, Smith Crane, Joseph E. N. Lewis, Dr. Wakerman Bryarly, Edward M. Aisquith, John T. Boley, John Williams Bowers, Thorton C. Braoely, Walter J. Burwell, Asa Clevinger, Hugh Conway, Joseph C. Davis, Jacob H. Engle, Daniel Fagan, Milton Ferrill, John W. Gallagher, John H. Garnhart, Vincent E.

Geiger, Edwin A. Riley, Charles F. Stagle, John C. Walpert, Henry H. Moore John T. Roland Charles A. Hayden Edward Hooper John M. Lupton Hamilton C. Harrison Elisha Rohrer, Newton Tavener, Thomas C. Moore, Elisha Lock, Charles G. Thomas, Taliaferro Milton, Joseph C. Young, Francis R. Simpson, John H. Murphy, J. Thomas Humphries, Jesse A. Strider, John S. Showers, Isaac Keys Strider.

John William Bowers, died from chronic nephritis (renal failure) November 18, 1899 in Marysville, California. At the time, his residence was at 3rd and Hazel Street, Chico, California.

Biography Contributed by: [Gerald Lively](#) April 2004

**Lively Roots**