

2020 Lamplighter Proposal
Santa Rosa DAR
“The Thompsons”

Players:

Mary Holt West (Mother)
Elizabeth Page West Thompson (Daughter)
Mary Nixon West Thompson (Daughter)

Location:

Elizabeth’s Parlor on Cherry Street, Santa Rosa

Time:

Early 1880

Props:

Rocking chair for Mother Mary
Quilt for Mother Mary
Small table with tea set for three
Two chairs – One for daughter Elizabeth and one for daughter Mary

Plot:

Mary Nixon West Thompson, from Palo Alto, is visiting her sister Elizabeth and mother, Mary Holt West in Santa Rosa. Mother Mary is not in the best of health. While sharing an afternoon tea, the three women recount their travel from Norfolk, Virginia to San Francisco in 1860. The conversation quickly turns to the passed-down family stories.

Elizabeth: Mother, are you warm enough? Our Santa Rosa winters are so wet, and the house does get quite damp.

Mother Mary: Yes, Lizzy. The quilt does make a difference. Thank you.

Elizabeth is pouring tea into the 3 cups.

Mother Mary: But the cold we felt when coming to California from Norfolk was so bitter. I will never forget that journey. Do you remember Mary? You were only 17 then.

Mary: Oh yes, and the ship was damp, too. I think Father would have enjoyed that trip. His years at sea and active duty as the commandant of the Norfolk Navy Yard up until his death would have served him well on that 43-day journey. Remember, Lizzy?

Elizabeth: I do remember! It was so exciting to come into the San Francisco Bay that January in 1860. The entire trip was exciting. Sailing through the Isthmus at Panama, observing the jungles as we passed by, and stopping at the exotic ports on the way was all so thrilling.

Mary: Sometimes, I wonder how we managed to make that trip. Mother, you were so brave . . . a widow with two daughters of marriage age traveling from the East coast to the West. And without a male protector. Father didn't leave much.

Mother Mary: We do what we must do. Father's Navy pension is enough. It provided us with the funds to make that trip and keep us safe during the early months in San Francisco. Meeting the Thompson boys provided you both with good futures.

Mary: Indeed, Frank and Robert are good providers. All three brothers, including Thomas, are active community members and newspaper men.

Elizabeth: All newspaper men! Robert and Thomas sure keep the community here in Santa Rosa stirred up with the reporting in their *Sonoma Democrat* newspaper. Their lawyer father, Robert A. Thompson, was sent to California by President Polk to settle a land grant controversy and stayed to settle a great many of the Spanish grant claims with not one of his decisions being reversed.

Mother Mary: Yes, their father was a great man. In fact, coming to Virginia from England before the days of the Revolution and helping to establish this government, the Thompsons have been prominent as congressmen, diplomats and custom house officials . . . including your Frank, Mary.

Mary: Frank is doing very well.

Mother Mary: You both married into an exciting family.

She sips her tea.

Mother Mary: Your family was also important in the time before and during the Revolution. Father didn't talk about his family too often, but you might remember your Grandmother Mary. Lizzy, you were 11 when she passed away. Do you recall her?

Elizabeth is refilling the teacups. And offering cakes.

Elizabeth: Yes, I do remember her. She was very old . . . in her late seventies, wasn't she?

Mother Mary: She was a grand old lady. She married your Grandfather Francis West in 1793 in Pennsylvania and they lived in Philadelphia. He and his brother, John, had a trading business of goods, mostly textiles with voyages to England, Holland, and Europe. As I recall that was the same year as the yellow fever epidemic, and they say that there were more than 5,000 deaths.

Mary: Oh, my goodness.

Mother Mary: Your grandmother Mary met your grandfather Francis through Mary's father, Colonel John Nixon. The Colonel was your great-grandfather. Now there was a man to be proud of and one of the prominent Philadelphians of his day. He was of Irish extraction and was born at Philadelphia in 1738 and died there 31 December 1808. The Colonel was a leading merchant and was distinguished for his patriotic service in the cause of the Revolution. In fact, on July 8, 1776 he publicly read and proclaimed for the first time the Declaration of Independence from the steps of the Pennsylvania State House.

Elizabeth: I seem to remember this story. Didn't he also serve under General George Washington?

Mother Mary: Yes, he did. And he was married to an Elizabeth. Seems like the Elizabeth's and Mary's prevail in this family.