



PHOTOGRAPHER: unidentified
SITTER: FRANCISCA BENICIA CARRILLO DE VALLEJO (1815-1891)
DATE: 1850's or early 1860's
FORMAT: photographic reprint
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Francisca Benicia Carrillo de Vallejo was born into a leading Californio family in San Diego in 1815. In 1832 at the age of seventeen she married the recently appointed Commander of the Presidio of San Francisco, Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo. Soon after, they moved to Sonoma to establish a home and to further Mariano's military career. Together Francisca and Mariano had 16 children, 6 of which died in childhood.

Francisca was reputed to have been a very strong and assertive woman. She very well may have been influenced by the power and importance of her mother, Maria Ygnacia Lopez de Carrillo, the owner and supervisor of the 8,885 acre Rancho Cabeza de Santa Rosa which was conferred to her in 1841.

In 1847 Francisca's husband, along with two partners, founded the City of Benicia. General Vallejo originally intended that the city be named "Francisca" after his wife, but he settled on calling it "Benicia," his wife's second name, when the former city of "Yerba Buena" changed its name to "San Francisco." After receiving this honor, Francisca was often referred to as "Doña Benicia."

Similar to the exhibit's portrait of her husband, this portrait of Francisca is casual and personal. She is attired in her work dress, and her hair is restrained with a simple ribbon. Sitting at a small desk and holding a photographic portrait in her left hand, she looks directly at the viewer.

Paula Freund, 2017