

BRIONES, MARÍA JUANA (1802?–1889)

María Juana Briones y Tapia de Miranda was born in Villa de Branciforte, or present-day Santa Cruz, California. In 1820, Briones married Apolinario Miranda and they lived in El Rancho de Ojo de Agua de Figueroa. During this time she helped mistreated young sailors, who were at times virtually enslaved by their captains. Miranda became abusive toward his wife, causing Briones to pack up their children and belongings. In 1836 Briones received a land grant called Yerba Buena, now known as Washington Square in San Francisco. Briones supported her eight children in a number of ways, including raising cattle, selling and trading hides and tallow, selling milk, growing and selling vegetables, and working as a seamstress. As single head of a large household, she also adopted an orphan girl, and was known for her skills as a *curandera* (healer) and *partera* (midwife). In 1844, Briones paid \$300 for 4,438 acres of land in former Mayfield and moved there in 1847. A witness to the early history of the region, Briones observed the changes that took place in San Francisco as the presidio grew from a wide open space with few inhabitants to a very crowded city. She lived through the gold rush and the changes it caused in the land and its people. On October 5, 1997, María Juana Briones' contributions to early California were recognized when a monument was erected in her honor in San Francisco's Washington Square, not far from where her Yerba Buena house stood nearly 150 years earlier.