

CARRILLO DE FITCH, JOSEFA (1810–1893)

María Antonia Natalia Elija Carrillo was affectionately called Josefa in honor of her godmother. The Carrillos were an influential and socially well connected family with relatives through blood or marriage scattered throughout the various presidios and settlements in California. She had little formal education but became adept at the female skills of sewing, cooking, cleaning, raising children, and ordering Indian servants; in short, she acquired the necessary skills for maintaining a rancho household. Young Californianas were expected and pressured to marry early. Rather than marrying a fellow Californio, Carrillo fell in love with an American merchant seaman, who formally presented a written marriage request to her parents in 1827. On April 15, 1829, the wedding ceremony was in progress, but was stopped by order of the governor. Carrillo believed “that the governor’s persecution of herself and her husband was . . . prompted by the hatred which possessed his soul when he realized that she preferred a rival whom he detested.” The governor declared the couple’s marriage illegal, imprisoned the husband, and placed Carrillo in deposito, the practice of separating eloped couples in order to ascertain whether the young woman had consented of her own volition. The marriage was deemed valid and Josefa and her husband had eleven children.