

RUIZ, BERNARDA (1802–1880)

The historical records confirm the Treaty of Cahuenga in 1847 ended the U.S.-Mexico War in California stipulating settlement terms, and full civil and property rights to those residing in the territory under the U.S. occupation. Few records indicate, however, that the accord was born of conversations between the American invader, Frémont, and the Californiana, Bernarda Ruiz. Born in a humble abode in the Santa Barbara Presidio, Ruiz was related to many of California's most important citizens. Married at fifteen, and widowed as a young mother with four sons, the family operated an express mail service between Santa Barbara and Mexico City. Like many Californio families, they had much to lose in a long, drawn out war with the U.S. When the war broke out in 1846, Ruiz quietly arranged to meet with Frémont and articulated her ideas for a peaceful resolution to the invasion. Ruiz arranged a meeting between the American and Mexican leaders to hammer out the articles of capitulation, and ultimately served as a witness when the representatives of both nations signed the treaty. Ruiz is recognized today for her initiative and support of property and civil rights.