

VALLEJO, EPIFANIA DE GUADALUPE (1835–1905)

Epifania Guadalupe de Vallejo would have made history even if she had not been the first Latina photographer. She was the third of sixteen children born to Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo and Francisca Benicia Carillo, an influential founding Sonoma Alta California family. Raised on the family estate, Lachryma Montis, on an expansive ranch of some 175,000 acres, Epifania (Fanny) was heir to a rich cultural tradition, social standing, and a classical education within the academic and scholarly ambiance of the home. She lived through transformative historical events from the heyday of Mexican power to the era of American control and the decline of the ruling Californio class. Epifania's artistic pursuits led to early experimentation with the daguerreotype process initially documented in California through images produced by Epifania de Guadalupe Vallejo. In the period after the 1840s Epifania obtained access to a daguerreotype camera and began producing images while still only between the ages of twelve and fourteen. Vallejo family photographic collections and early documents provide indications that she mastered the art of photography and the daguerreotype process in the period before 1849. One of Epifania's images found its way into the mounting of a finger ring with photo of her mother's locket worn by General Mariano Vallejo himself. Epifania married Captain John Blackman Frisbe in 1851. Ten years later, the couple numbered among the guests at President Lincoln's inaugural ball. The couple ultimately moved to Mexico where they prospered and raised twelve children. On February 14, 1905, Epifania de Guadalupe Vallejo succumbed to pneumonia and died in Cuautla, Mexico. Her work stands as a historical benchmark for the introduction of photography to California and the American West.