

VALLEJO DE LEESE, MARÍA PAULA ROSALÍA (1811–1889)

“Those hated men inspired me with such a large dose of hate against their race that though twenty-eight years have elapsed since that time, I have not forgotten the insults heaped upon me and not being desirous of coming in contact with them I have abstained from learning their language.”

Born into one of the richest and largest landholding families in Alta California, Vallejo de Leese exemplified the life of an elite young woman of the rancho class. Expected to follow the traditions of her class, the strong-minded Vallejo de Leese stunned society when she secretly married Jacob Primer Leese, an American trader. Her family, particularly her brother, the politically influential Mariano Guadalupe de Vallejo, who had chosen another marriage partner for his sister, never forgave her. Remaining in limited good graces with the family, the couple purchased land and raised a family of their own. Although she had married an American, the occupation of Alta California by the United States exposed Vallejo de Leese to American opportunism, depravity and disregard for native Californian inhabitants. In one incident, Captain John Fremont threatened to burn down the buildings with women inside, forcing Vallejo de Leese to write a letter rejecting Mexican support for Sonoma. In 1865 Leese abandoned the family following a failed land venture and Vallejo and the children moved to her brother's estate in Sonoma, Lachryma Montis. Vallejo died on July 31, 1889, and was buried at Mission San Carlos de Monterey, the same place where she was baptized. Born a Californio elite, Rosalía Vallejo died a reluctant American.