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*The Historical Society of Southern California QUARTERLY for March, 1957*

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## The Carrillos of San Diego: *A Historic Spanish Family of California*

*By Brian McGinty*

**A**LTA CALIFORNIA HAD BEEN DISCOVERED by Cabrillo in 1542. But it was not until over two hundred years later, in 1769, that the first Spanish settlers arrived. There were Franciscan friars, led by the kind but forceful and zealous Junipero Serra. And there were Spanish soldiers who had come at the order of the Viceroy of Mexico to militarize the then-unknown wilderness province. Together with compatriots who were to follow soon, these men formed the nucleus of the Spanish population. They were only a few hundred at first; and yet, by the year 1848, their numbers had swelled to nearly twelve-thousand.<sup>1</sup> This amazing increase of population was not the result of immigration, but of the very large families of the province — many of which boasted twenty or more children. The founders of these great families were looked upon as patriarchs, — their descendants forming vast, clan-like dynasties.

In the words of Bancroft, the Carrillo family “must be considered in several respects the leading one in California, by reason

of the number and prominence of its members and of their connection by marriage with so many of the best families, both native and pioneer.”<sup>2</sup> It was a large and proud family — but composed of two distinct branches whose direct relationship to this day remains unknown.

A first branch of the family was founded by José Raimundo Carrillo, who had come to the province in 1769 from Loreto, Baja California. Among his descendants were José Antonio Ezequiel Carrillo, prominent leader of the 1830’s, Carlos Antonio de Jesus Carrillo, Governor for a short time in 1837, Pablo de la Guerra, leading citizen of Santa Barbara, and, in the present day, the stage, screen and television actor, Leo Carrillo.

A second branch of the family was founded by Joaquin, also of Baja California, who, as Bancroft says, “was probably a cousin to José Raimundo.”<sup>3</sup> It is with this man, Joaquin, and the most prominent of his descendants in the history of California — a family referred to collectively as “The Carrillos of San Diego” — that this paper is concerned.

## Part I

### *Joaquin Carrillo, Founder of the Family*

**J**OAQUIN CARRILLO LIVED AND WORKED in California for nearly forty years. The son of Magdalena Marron and Joaquin Carrillo (the elder), he was born in the Baja California settlement of San José del Cabo and arrived in Alta California sometime after 1800.<sup>4</sup>

On September 3, 1809, in the Presidial Chapel of San Diego, Joaquin was married to María Ignacia Lopez, daughter of Juan Francisco Lopez and María Feliciana Arballo de Gutierrez.<sup>5</sup>

His wife’s mother, Señora Arballo de Gutierrez, had been a member of the second expedition of Captain Juan Bautista de Anza. It is recorded that on the night of December 17, 1775, she soundly shocked Father Pedro Font, chronicler of the expedition, by singing some flirting and rather ribald songs. Though the *padre* did not mention her by name, he was definitely referring to Señora

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Gutierrez — the only widow of the group — when he wrote: “At night, with the joy at the arrival of all the people, they held a *fandango* here. It was somewhat discordant, and a very bold widow who came with the expedition sang some verses which were not at all nice, applauded by all the crowd. For this reason the man to whom she came attached became angry and punished her.”<sup>6</sup>

Señora Gutierrez was also the mother of María Eustaquia Gutierrez, the wife of José Maria Pico. By this connection, Joaquin Carrillo’s wife, María Ignacia Lopez, was related to the family of Pio, Andres and José Antonio Pico.

In the records of early San Diego is a partial list of the god-children of Joaquin Carrillo, covering the years 1807-1810. With its comments on the professional and marital status of Señor Carrillo, it is an interesting and valuable chronicle of his first years in California.

#### JOAQUIN CARRILLO

February 28, 1807—Godfather of Maria de la Luz Nestora Rios  
*Soldier of said Presidio.*

February 28, 1808—Godfather of Jose Juaquin Nestor Armas  
*Leather-jacket soldier, bachelor.*

May 27, 1808—Godfather of Indian baptized at San Diego Mission  
*Leather-jacket soldier of this Presidio of San Diego.*

September 24, 1808—Godfather of Indian baptized at San Diego Mission.  
*Leather-jacket soldier of the neighboring presidio.*

November 18, 1809—Godfather of Jose Maria de Jesus Cristoso Vejar, baptized at San Diego Mission. *Married to Maria Ygnacia Lopez.*

November 9, 1809—Godfather to Maria Josefa Carlota, *his wife Maria Ygnacia Lopez of the same Presidio.*

April 4, 1810—Godfather to Maria Antonia Theodosia Joaquina Ybarra.<sup>7</sup>

In San Diego, the cradle-city of Spanish California, Joaquin and his family made their permanent home. The *Casa de Carrillo*, one of the largest and grandest “great casas” of the Spanish period, was built between 1810 and 1820 by Comandante Francisco Ruiz of the Presidio of San Diego. At the time of its construction, it was the only private residence standing outside the walls of the Presidio. Surrounding it was the famous Ruiz orchard of pear, olive,

and pomegranate trees, planted in about 1807. Joaquin Carrillo and his family lived in the house for several years in the 1820's and 1830's while it was still the property of the Comandante. And, in 1835, Ruiz deeded the house and orchard to be held for three of the Carrillo children, of whom he was godfather.<sup>8</sup>

As the primary social center of the pueblo of San Diego, the *Casa de Carrillo* saw within its adobe walls festive gatherings of old California's most notable personages. Here, Governor José Echeandia passed enjoyable evenings during his frequent San Diego sojourns of 1825-1833. And from the doors of this house one of the most colorful processions in the history of Spanish and Mexican California — the grand, double wedding party of Augustin Zamorano, Romualdo Pacheco, and their respective brides, Luisa Argüello and Ramona Carrillo — set out in the spring of 1827 for the capital at Monterey.<sup>9</sup>

Joaquin and María Ignacia Carrillo were the parents of five boys and seven girls, all born in San Diego. The girls were: Josefa, Ramona, Francisca Benicia, María de la Luz, Juana de Jesus, Felicidad, and Marta; the boys: Joaquin, José Ramon, Julio, Juan, and Dolores. Many of these children were to be prominent in the subsequent history of California, and their important and interesting stories will be told later in this series of articles.

In the early days of San Diego, the Carrillo family enjoyed an enviable and respected reputation among the aristocratic *gente de razon*. And it is recorded that several colonists of the Hija-Padres expedition of 1834 made grateful mention of the kindness they received in San Diego at the hands of Joaquin Carrillo and his family.<sup>10</sup>

The violin, much like the traditional Spanish guitar, was a universally loved instrument among the Californians. Its plaintive strains, set against the clicking heels of the *fandango* and the melodious singing and laughter of the *fiesta*, were common sounds in Spanish California. Those who could play the instrument were few; but one of them was Joaquin Carrillo who, according to Pio Pico, was a violinist of some accomplishment.<sup>11</sup>

One evening in 1824 — while playing for a ball at the home of Comandante Ruiz — Carrillo was ordered to play a favorite tune

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on his violin. But it seems he took too much time in tuning his instrument; and — though the evening was still young—the impatient Ruiz broke up the party and bruskiy ordered Señor Carrillo to the stocks.<sup>12</sup>

In 1835, Joaquin petitioned to the government for a grant of the then-secularized San Diego Mission estate. And, in the same year, he made an attempt to sell the famous orchard that Comandante Ruiz had given their children. But, here, he met with sudden and decisive failure. On May 19, 1835, his wife petitioned to Governor Figueroa, begging that Joaquin not be allowed to sell the orchard because it was the only means left to support their family. Accordingly, the Governor decreed that the property did not belong to Señor Carrillo and could not be sold by him.<sup>13</sup>

After serving for more than twenty years as a soldier in California, Joaquin Carrillo retired from the army in 1827. And, although the exact date is not known, it is believed that his death occurred in about 1836.<sup>14</sup>

### Part II

## *Josefa Carrillo*



ONE OF THE MOST INTERESTING and beautiful of Joaquin Carrillo's daughters — and one who was to create the greatest stir in provincial society — was Josefa. Born at San Diego on December 29, 1810, Señorita Josefa was given the baptismal names of Miría Antonia Natalia Elijia Carrillo. But, according to a family story, she was called by her familiar name because her godmother had forgotten the others and *guessed* that one of them was Josefa.<sup>15</sup>

The days of the Boston skippers in California — when Spanish hides and tallow were traded at the seashore for American products brought “round the horn”—were days of newness and change for the sleepy Mexican province. Graceful clippers and brigantines, plying Pacific waters, brought peppermint drops, Parisian gowns, and delicately woven lace to the far-off frontier outpost. But, most important of all, they brought a new breed of men—sailors, cap-

tains and deckhands alike—men who infused a reckless, salt-air spirit into the Old World manner of California life.

Such a man was Captain Henry D. Fitch, a Massachusetts-born American who had arrived in California in 1826. Fitch, master of the Mexican brig, *María Ester*, was an adventurous, romantic youth, and soon found himself in love with the charming Señorita Josefa Carrillo. In 1827 he gave her a written promise of marriage. And, although the captain was a foreigner, the señorita's parents gave their prompt approval to the match.<sup>16</sup>

Padre Menendez of San Diego consented to perform the ceremony. On April 14, 1829, he baptized Fitch in the Presidial Chapel of San Diego. With his name Latinized to the very auspicious *Enrique Domingo Fitch*,—Alferez Domingo Carrillo, son of the aforementioned José Raimundo, was named as his godfather.<sup>17</sup>

The priest had promised to marry the couple the next day, and preparations for the ceremony were carefully made. On April 15, members of the immediate family — together with Captain Richard Barry, Máximo Beristain, and Pio Pico— assembled late in the evening at the *Casa de Carrillo*. All was ready, and the *padre* had begun the ceremony when, suddenly, Domingo Carrillo —this time appearing as aide to Governor Echeandia—broke in and forbade the marriage in the governor's name.<sup>18</sup> It is very probable that the motive of this action was jealousy, as it seems the fair Josefa had not shown due appreciation of the governor's attentions. Nevertheless, neither the angry ravings of the indignant *novio* nor the tears and entreaties of his heart-broken *novia* were of avail. The ceremony could not proceed. But the *padre* reminded Fitch that there were other countries where laws were less exacting. And he even offered to go in person and marry the couple anywhere beyond the boundaries of California.<sup>19</sup>

"Why don't you carry me off, Don Enrique?" Señorita Josefa asked innocently. The scheme was a wild one, but Captain Barry approved of it, and so did the lady's cousin, Pio Pico. And although Fitch had established business relations on the coast and was somewhat cautious about his future, he was not a man to require urging.

The next night, without consulting the señorita's parents, Pico mounted his best horse and, taking his cousin up on the saddle,



— Brian McGinty Collection

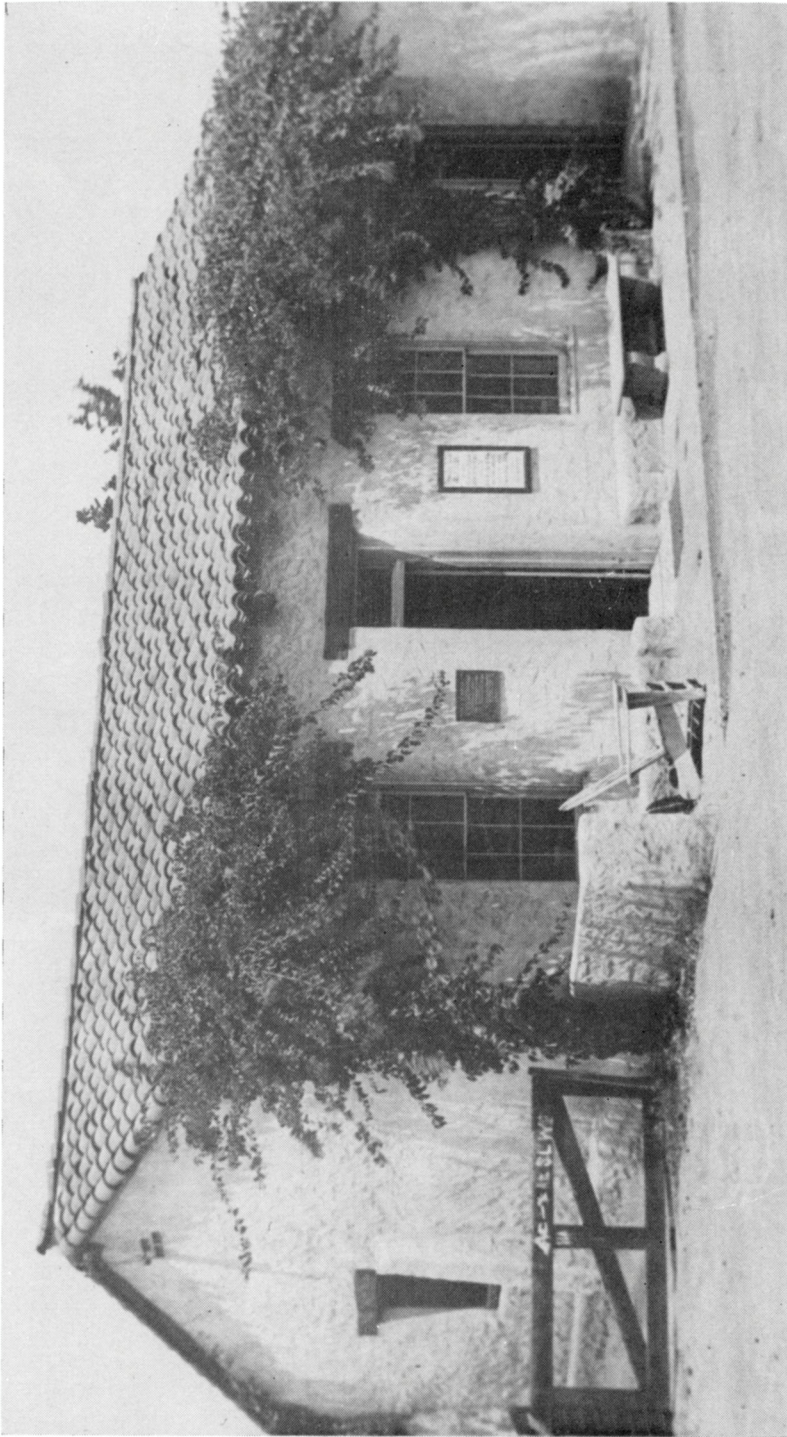
**JOSEFA CARRILLO DE FITCH**  
*Eloped to Valparaiso, Chile, to  
become the bride of Captain  
Enrique Domingo Fitch*



— Title Insurance and Trust Company Collection

**CAPTAIN HENRY D. FITCH**  
*Baptised under the Latinized name of  
Enrique Domingo Fitch*





— Title Insurance and Trust Company Collection

**CASA DE CARRILLO, SAN DIEGO**

*Birthplace of Josefa Carrillo that was built sometime between 1810 and 1820 by Comandante Francisco Ruiz. In the 1840s Casa de Carrillo became known as Fitch House.*

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rode swiftly to a spot on the San Diego Bay shore where a ship was waiting. He escorted her safely on board and, turning to leave, salved his conscience by cautioning Fitch not to give Josefa any reason to regret her decision.<sup>20</sup>

Thereupon the ship drew anchor. And, by morning, the lovers were far out on the Pacific.

Their marriage took place on July 3, at Valparaiso, Chile.<sup>21</sup> And for a time afterward they lived in the South American cities of Lima and Callao. But, back in California, the population buzzed with excitement, and rumors were current that Señorita Josefa had been forcibly kidnapped. Then, one year later, when Captain Fitch made an unexpected appearance in California aboard the brig, *Leonor*,—bringing with him his wife and an infant son—there was astonishment throughout the province.

In July, 1830, Fitch touched at San Diego, where he went ashore to obtain official permission for the trading of his cargo in California ports. Here, Señora Carrillo came on board the ship to see her daughter. She said that Don Joaquin was so disturbed about his daughter's elopement that he had threatened to kill her on sight.<sup>22</sup> But Josefa preferred death to her father's displeasure, and so hurried ashore, leaving her baby with one of her sisters.

When she arrived at the *Casa de Carrillo*, she found her father seated at a writing desk with a pistol by his side.

"Father," she pleaded. "I have returned to San Diego to ask thy pardon."

Her father did not reply. Josefa knelt by the door and sobbingly implored him to believe that she had left California only to escape the tyranny of Echeandia. Still her father maintained a stern silence; but his eyes no longer rested on the gun. Josefa dragged herself forward, pleading with him. And when she had come to "within six varas" of his chair, he suddenly rushed forward and caught her in his arms.

"I forgive thee, daughter," he said, "for it is not thy fault that our governors are despots!"

Upon hearing this, the ladies of the town entered the house to congratulate Doña Josefa; and the day ended happily with a "ball and illumination."<sup>23</sup>

But the troubles of Doña Josefa and her husband were by no means over. Later in July, Fitch sailed up the coast for San Pedro. And as soon as he landed there he was served with a summons from Padre Sanchez, vicar and ecclesiastical judge of the territory, ordering him to present himself for trial on most serious charges. Calmly ignoring this summons, the captain sent his marriage certificate for the vicar's inspection and sailed up the coast for Monterey. Arriving there toward the end of August, he was at once arrested and ordered sent to San Gabriel where, with his wife, he was to be tried before an ecclesiastical court.<sup>24</sup>

Legal proceedings were begun in December of 1830, with José Palomares in charge. Many witnesses were examined and learned opinions expressed. Then, on December 28, the vicar rendered his decision:

*Christie nominie invocato!* The accusations against Doña Josefa and her husband, he said, had not been substantiated. Though the marriage at Valparaiso took place under conditions not totally legitimate, it was nevertheless valid. And he decided that the couple should be released and the next Sunday act as *velados*, receiving the sacraments that ought to have preceded their marriage ceremony. But the vicar added this:

"Considering the great scandal which Don Enrique has caused in this province, I condemn him to give as a penance and reparation a bell of at least fifty pounds in weight, for the church at Los Angeles, which barely has a borrowed one!"<sup>25</sup> And, in accordance with this directive, a bell made by G. H. Holbrook of Massachusetts was placed in the church by Captain Fitch, where it still hangs today—an eloquent reminder of old California's most fabulous romance.

Four daughters and seven sons were born to Doña Josefa and Captain Fitch. They were, with the dates of their births: Enrique Eduardo, June 23, 1830; Frederico, June 28, 1832; Guillermo, November 7, 1834; José, March 19, 1836; Josefa, November 2, 1837; Juan, April 6, 1839; Isabella, August 24, 1840; Carlos, September 1, 1842; Miguel, November 13, 1844; María Antonia Natalia, September 19, 1846; and Anita, April 13, 1848. Two of the daughters died in 1850 and 1854. Josefa, the eldest girl, married John

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Balash (also spelled *Bailhache*) in 1856 and lived for almost fifty year on the Russian River at Healdsburg. Another daughter, Anita, became the wife of John Grant.<sup>26</sup>

In later years, Captain Fitch and Doña Josefa resided in San Diego, making their home in the historic *Casa de Carrillo* which, during the 1840's, became known as the "*Fitch House*." But the interests of this couple were by no means confined to San Diego.

As early as 1832—even before the founding of the first pueblo north of San Francisco Bay—Fitch applied to the government for lands in that region. And, on September 28, 1841, he was granted the *Rancho Sotoyome*, a tract of eleven square leagues on the banks of the Russian River.<sup>27</sup> This property was placed by Fitch in the care of Cyrus Alexander, who managed the rancho for several years in the 1840's.<sup>28</sup>

On July 24, 1846, Captain Fitch was granted a tract of land south of the Presidio in San Francisco on which Golden Gate Park stands today. The property was known as *Paraje del Arroyo*. Thomas Larkin mentions in his memoirs that Fitch came to San Francisco in 1847 to "take up his land" there; and the San Francisco *Californian* of October 20, 1847, reports that, after having been in San Francisco for several days, Captain Fitch had left for San Diego to attend to his official duties as Judge; but, according to the article, he was "expected back soon" to assume his residence in the northern city.<sup>29</sup> Whether or not Fitch and Doña Josefa actually lived in San Francisco is not known. But by January of 1849 they were in San Diego; for it is recorded that on the 14th of that month the Captain died at the "Fitch House" and was given the last white man's burial on Presidio Hill.<sup>30</sup>

In 1850, Doña Josefa continued the management of her husband's business in San Diego. But, soon afterward, she moved north to the *Sotoyome* rancho where she and her children occupied the large, two-story adobe that had been built there a few years before. On a part of the rancho purchased from Señora Fitch soon after her arrival in the north, Harmon G. Heald laid out the town of Healdsburg in 1856.<sup>31</sup>

In 1874, while traveling in Southern California, Josefa made a last visit to the pueblo of San Diego and the old *Casa de Carrillo*.

At that time the house was occupied by the well-known chronicler of Southern California history, Judge Benjamin Hayes. The Judge writes in his *Emigrant Notes* that Señora Fitch pointed out to him the exact spot in the house that had been occupied fifty years before by the bed of Comandante Ruiz. And, in the old garden, she saw and easily recognized the same pear, olive, and pomegranate trees from which she had picked fruit as a child.<sup>32</sup>

On November 26, 1875, Enrique Cerruti, a researcher for Hubert H. Bancroft, visited Doña Josefa at Healdsburg and obtained from her the *Narracion de la Sra. Viuda del Captain Enrique D. Fitch* (Narrative of the Widow Fitch). At the same time he was given a valuable collection of original documents, including Doña Josefa's famed marriage certificate and the naturalization papers of her husband.<sup>33</sup>

In his *Historia de California*, Juan Bautista Alvarado makes an interesting comment on Señora Fitch as she was in her last years: "Mrs. Fitch has always been generous to the needy, the sick, and to works of public utility—in fact, to all but the Church. She believed that the *Padre Presidente* prompted Echeandia in his persecution of her and her husband. I have tried to convince her to the contrary; but of course it is impossible to convince an old lady that she has lived forty years under an erroneous impression."<sup>34</sup>

Josefa Carrillo de Fitch was a Spanish Californian to the core:—in appearance, proud and aristocratic; in spirit, warm and generous. In her lifetime she made more than just a passing contribution to the history of her native state. And today she deserves recognition as one of early California's most colorful and influential pioneers.

Her death occurred on January 26, 1893.

#### NOTES

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1. Many and varied estimates of the population have been made; authority for this figure is John S. McGroarty, *California* (Los Angeles, 1911), p. 280.
2. H. H. Bancroft, *History of California*, (San Francisco, 1884-90), Vol. II p. 746.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 744.
4. San Diego Mission Records, Entry 948.
5. *Ibid.*

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6. Helen Tyler, "The Family of Pico," *Historical Society of Southern California Quarterly* (Sept., 1953), p. 333.
7. Collection of San Diego Historical Society.
8. R. W. Brackett, *History of the Ranchos of San Diego* (San Diego, 1939), p. 21.
9. Mildred Hoover and Hero Rensch, *Historic Spots in California* (Stanford, 1948), p. 49.
10. Notes for *Pioneer Register*, M. S. Bancroft Library.
11. Pio Pico, *Historia de California*, p. 185, M. S. Bancroft Library.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Notes for *Pioneer Register*; Benjamin Hayes, *Notes*, 24; M. S. Bancroft Library.
14. Bancroft, *op. cit.*, says Joaquin died sometime before 1840. In annals of Sonoma County there are numerous references to his widow, Maria Ignacia Carrillo, and her children as having been in Sonoma County as early as 1836. Carrillo's death probably took place before this time.
15. H. H. Bancroft, *History of California* (San Francisco, 1884-90), Vol. III, p. 740.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 140.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 141.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*
20. Nellie Sanchez, *Spanish Arcadia* (Los Angeles, 1929), p. 151.
21. Bancroft, *op. cit.*, p. 142.
22. Josefa Carrillo de Fitch, *Narracion*, p. 153 of *Pioneer Sketches*; M. S. Bancroft Library.
23. *Ibid.*
24. Z. S. Eldredge, *History of California* (New York, n. d.), p. 471.
25. Bancroft, *op. cit.*, p. 144.
26. Notes of *Pioneer Register*, M. S. Bancroft Library.
27. Mildred Hoover and Hero Rensch, *Historic Spots in California* (Stanford, 1948), p. 375.
28. *Ibid.*
29. Thomas O. Larkin, *Documents*, Vol. V., p. 253; M. S. Bancroft Library.
30. Bancroft, *op. cit.*, p. 740.
31. R. A. Thompson, *Historical and Descriptive Sketch of Sonoma County* (Philadelphia, 1877), p. 89.
32. Benjamin Hayes, *Emigrant Notes*, Vol. 4, p. 721; M. S. Bancroft Library.
33. Bancroft, *op. cit.*, p. 140.
34. Juan B. Alvarado, *Historia de California*, Vol. II, pp. 140-5; M. S. Bancroft Library.