

Intimacy and Family in the California Borderlands

The Letters of Josefa del Valle Forster, 1876-1896

ABSTRACT Using personal and family letters written between 1876 and 1896, this article charts the life of a post-conquest Californiana, Josefa del Valle Forster (1861-1943). It argues that the industrial and commercial development that took place in Southern California after 1850 reconfigured family relationships and gender dynamics, shifting understandings of intimacies for del Valle Forster. This discussion of an era and community often overlooked in California history contributes to a fuller picture of how Californianas experienced the late nineteenth century, and it highlights the significance of letters as a historical source for understanding how individuals and families negotiated the transformations wrought by war and conquest. **KEYWORDS** Josefa del Valle, California, letter writing, family, gender roles, development of Los Angeles, travel and mobility

In 1884, on one of her travels through Southern California, Josefa del Valle, a prominent *Californiana*, wrote to John Forster, her friend and soon to be fiancé, discussing her upcoming brief visit with him. “First is business, and later is pleasure. Day after tomorrow, I will be going to San Bernardino and will pass through Los Angeles and would like to see you if only for a minute.”¹ Josefa wrote the letter from Rancho Camulos, her family’s home, an extensive property located fifty miles from Los Angeles in present-day Ventura County. Josefa’s travels often took her throughout Southern California, including Santa Barbara and San Juan Capistrano, with frequent trips to Los Angeles and beyond. She was the eldest daughter of Ygnacio and Ysabel del Valle, a prominent *Californio* couple with deep roots in Los Angeles dating to Spanish settlement of the region. Sometimes with

1. All translations the author’s, with original Spanish in footnotes. “*primero el negocio y despues el placer . . . pasado manana miercoles pasamos para San Bernadino, nos vamos de paso [para] llegar a Los Angeles y talvez me venga tambien de paso asi es que deseamos verlo aunque sea de pasado.*” Josefa del Valle to John Forster, September 24, 1884, Box 5, Forster–del Valle Family Papers, Department of Special Collections, UC Irvine Libraries.

company, but more often alone, Josefa traveled to tend to family affairs and business tasks—a reflection of the social network and economic success her family maintained in post-American conquest (1848) Los Angeles. The arrival of the Southern Pacific Railroad in Los Angeles greatly facilitated Josefa's ability to move about the region, especially since Rancho Camulos enjoyed its own depot. Venturing to San Francisco as well as on two cross-country trips, Josefa also traveled for leisure.

When Josefa was not traveling for business or pleasure, she assisted her mother in managing Rancho Camulos. After her father's death in 1881, she became a *de facto* administrator of the family's estate. Situated on the route from Los Angeles to Santa Barbara, Rancho Camulos had become a thriving economic enterprise ever since the family transitioned the rancho's focus from cattle to agricultural production in the 1870s. Josefa took her obligation seriously and routinely participated in many of the rancho's operations. In her diligently penned letters to family, friends, and later, her husband, John Forster, Josefa shared the details of her daily life as well as her personal sentiments. Charted in letters penned to her husband and mother, Josefa negotiated the political economies of the late nineteenth century that reconfigured family relations, gender roles and expectations, and notions of identity.

I contend that through the management of “intimacies,” Josefa maneuvered through the changes set in motion by the U.S. conquest of California. By intimacies, I mean the close-knit relationships Josefa maintained with her husband and other family members, as well as the sensibilities and sentiments openly confided in the quiet space of her personal correspondence. The framework of intimacies also refers to my use of Josefa's letters as the key text of analysis. Focusing on correspondence, I seize a unique opportunity to examine Josefa's self-understanding and mode of expressing her thoughts and feelings as she experienced the developments of the late nineteenth century. The letters reveal that Josefa's sense of identity and role in her household, community, and the larger region of Southern California were constantly challenged by developments in the social and cultural landscapes. In response to such challenges, Josefa used the notes to craft a sense of self.

The roles taken on by Josefa, like those of many Californianas throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, were constantly in flux. Thus, her experiences add to the scholarship of Miroslava Chávez-García, María Ráquel Casas, Bárbara O. Reyes, and Erika Pérez, whose studies examine the

roles of gender, systems of power, and social structures in shaping women's choices before, during, and after the U.S. conquest.² Josefa's life and experiences, however, extend beyond the moments surrounding U.S. conquest into the late nineteenth century, exposing the long lasting and subtle changes wrought by the Euro-American newcomers to the region. During this time period, rapid industrialization engulfed Southern California. Population in Los Angeles increased by nearly 500 percent, ushering in a swift shift in political power and cultural authority away from the local Californio elite to increasingly white American interests.³ Regional development in commercialization and industries brought the region closer together through markets, communication, and transit lines, particularly the arrival of the various rail projects. Residents of Southern California, men and women alike, could now maintain relationships and networks across the region with increased ease and speed. Josefa came of age in the midst of these transformations and experienced the challenges as well as the promises of such fast-paced development. Such changes placed Josefa and her family on new terrain as she encountered a family life and cultural understanding quite distinct from what was familiar to her and customary to her family.

Further, a closer look at Josefa's record of her choices, thoughts, and actions reminds us of the significance of personal and family letters in understanding the changes in the social, economic, cultural, and political landscape

2. Deena González, *Refusing the Favor: The Spanish-Mexican Women of Santa Fe, 1820–1880* (Oxford University Press, 1999); Antonia I. Castañeda, "Presidarias y pobladoras: Spanish-Mexican Women in Frontier Monterey, Alta California, 1770–1821," (PhD diss., Stanford University 1990); Lisbeth Haas, *Conquests and Historical Identities in California, 1769–1936* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Miroslava Chávez-García, *Negotiating Conquest: Gender and Power in California 1770s–1880s* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2004); María Raquel Casas, *Married to a Daughter of the Land: Spanish-Mexican Women and Interethnic Marriage in California, 1820–1880* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2009); Bárbara O. Reyes, *Private Women, Public Lives: Gender and the Missions of the Californias* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010); Erika Pérez, *Colonial Intimacies: Interethnic Kinship, Sexuality, and Marriage in Southern California, 1769–1885* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press). For the twentieth century, see Vicki Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican American Women in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Emma Pérez, *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).

3. Glenn Dumke, *Boom of the Eighties* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1944, 1991), 49. On the social and cultural displacement of Spanish-Mexico and Native people in California after 1848, see Chávez-García, *Negotiating Conquest*; Leonard Pitt, *Decline of the Californios: A Social History of the Spanish-Speaking Californians, 1846–1890* (Berkeley: University of California, Press, 1966); David Torres-Rouff, *Before L.A.: Race, Space, and Municipal Power in Los Angeles, 1781–1894* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011); and William F. Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Making of Its Mexican Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

in the wake of the U.S. conquest in 1846. Starting in the 1860s, Josefa took her pen to paper to share her daily activities and concerns with those who meant most to her. Packed with fierce and tender articulations of her daily routines and emotions, Josefa's letters ranged in topics from mundane household work and responsibilities. She also unpacked life-marking experiences and the emotional cost of loneliness, illness, and death. According to David Gerber's study on the personal correspondence of British immigrants, letters function as a text not just charting meaningful moments of individual people's lives but also for "comprehending self-understanding and modes of self-expression." Gerber contends the value of letters as repositories of self-expression rests in the potential to identify not only *what* people experienced but *how* people experienced and responded to particular moments in their lives. Gerber explains, "letters were the mobilization through language of an intense self-awareness of needs generated by those circumstances."⁴ In Josefa's case, those circumstances were a range of experiences including shifts in home life to family separation. Framed by Gerber's assessment of letters, Josefa's correspondence reflects, indeed, a form of self-expression and practiced autobiographical agency that captured the details revealing the range of sentiments generated by the circumstances of her life. The experiences noted in her letters and the meaning engendered offer a glimpse into how she understood the world around her.⁵

The intimacy embedded in Josefa's correspondence is multi-layered. First, the letters provide a window onto how conquest percolated into intimate settings such as in family and couples' relationships. Second, intimacies as a framework functions to better understand the revamping of family life in late nineteenth-century Southern California as charted in Josefa's writings. Absent of interpreters, these letters add a critical, little-explored component to the body of knowledge about late nineteenth-century Spanish Mexican life in California. They help us to answer questions, such as what was the range of struggles, responses, and accommodations made by women and their families during a moment of such dramatic change? In her registry of daily routines and musings, Josefa left behind the intricate details of everyday life that

4. David Gerber, *Authors of Their Lives: The Personal Correspondence of British Immigrants to North America in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 32.

5. Miroslava Chávez-García, "Migrant Longing, Courtship, and Gendered Identity in the US-Mexico Borderlands," *Western Historical Quarterly* 47, no. 2 (May 2016): 137–60; Ana E. Rosas, *Abrazando el Espíritu: Bracero Families Confront the US-Mexico Border* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014).

remind us that the impact of conquest seeped across multiple spaces for Spanish Mexican women.⁶

Josefa came of age in post-1848 Southern California and certainly felt the impact of late nineteenth-century developments in California. Like many of her generation, Josefa experienced a childhood and early adulthood that were greatly shaped by her parents' social world. For Josefa, this social world was centered on the *plaza* (central square) in the heart of Los Angeles and the family's move to Rancho Camulos.⁷ Using family documents, I chart the family's adaptation to the new social and political order of post-conquest Southern California and how they maintained prominence in the region. The letters Josefa wrote to her friend and eventual husband John Forster highlight the activities and sentiments that defined her daily life on the rancho and reveal generational shifts in courtship and family dynamics. Since Josefa and John lived a good distance apart, their courtship evolved through letters. Josefa's letters, in turn, reveal how she confronted the possibility of new gender roles and family life distinct from what she had been accustomed to as a Californiana. With only one extant letter sent from John to Josefa, this study stays focused on correspondence produced by Josefa. This exploration of Josefa's life through her letters concludes with an examination of Josefa's cross-country travels, focusing on her letters from Chicago during the World's Columbia Exposition and the National Catholic Convention in 1893, exploring the ways in which she grappled with popular images of California on display at the world's fair. Josefa's letter voiced frustrations over what she believed were misrepresentations and led her to reaffirm her notions of identity. Together this set of experiences shows the tensions as well as the comforts that Josefa experienced in the span of her life and how she negotiated them. Josefa remained consistent with her Californio upbringing in her crafting of a sense of identity, while embracing an autonomy and new family configurations. Her experiences and the articulations of such experiences reveal a woman constantly engaged with her changing historical circumstances.

6. Genaro Padilla discusses autobiography as a strategic form of writing. Also useful is Rosaura Sánchez's assessment that Hubert Howe Bancroft's testimonies are "mediated" texts that Californios strategically maneuvered to maintain control of their narratives. Genaro Padilla, *My History, Not Yours: The Formation of Mexican Autobiography* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993); Rosaura Sánchez, *Telling Identities: The Californio Testimonios* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

7. Examining bi-ethnic children, María Raquel Casas explains that cultural markers and associations such as religion, language, customs, and traditions were maintained across generations, even after conquest, when Josefa was born. Casas, *Married to a Daughter of the Land*.

A POST-CONQUEST CALIFORNIANA

Although petite in stature, approximately five feet and weighing no more than 100 pounds, Josefa was a force to be taken seriously, as her letters reveal an assertive, humorous, vibrant, and compassionate spirit. She was born in October 1861, well after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848, the document officially ending the U.S.-Mexico War (1846–1848). People of Spanish, Mexican, and indigenous descent across California experienced significant ruptures set in motion by the conquest of California, in particular the social and political displacement of Californios and the further marginalization of indigenous peoples. Just a few months after Josefa's birth, Ygnacio and Ysabel moved permanently from their plaza home to Rancho Camulos. These decisions made by the del Valle family in the period following conquest suggest that the family was compelled to respond to the changes they felt directly or witnessed around them. Josefa came of age during such transformation.

In the aftermath of the conquest, Los Angeles faced a state of economic and social instability that was further complicated by the eventual bust of the Gold Rush of 1849 in north-central California that left large numbers of frustrated migrants with little capital to stimulate the local economy. For roughly two decades, the long standing and newly arrived residents of the still relatively remote and small town of Los Angeles attempted to figure out the new social order of post-conquest California. For the del Valles, conquest unfolded in subtle ways. American holidays, such as the Fourth of July and George Washington's Birthday, marked plaza festivities and events. As the local elite, the del Valles took part in such adjustments, perhaps to acclimate to the new national order and be part of a collective memory. Conquest was also blatant. As traced by Miroslava Chávez-García and David Torres-Rouff, the establishment of a new legal order reshaped definitions of land ownership, civic involvement, and rule of law. Further compounding the changes and challenges of the new legal order, the Central Pacific and Union Pacific Railroads in 1875 connected California to the rest of the United States, facilitating the migration of settlers and development of businesses. Wide-spread advertisements luring Euro-American migrants to the fine weather and "available" land brought an influx of newcomers spawning massive land speculation and occupation.⁸

The del Valle family moved to Camulos amidst these changes. Rancho Camulos was Ygnacio's inherited portion of Rancho San Francisco—the land

8. Ygnacio del Valle to Joseph Lancaster Brent, March 19, 1870, Box 4, Papers of Joseph Lancaster Brent, Huntington Library, San Marino, Calif.; Dumke, *Boom of the Eighties*, 49.

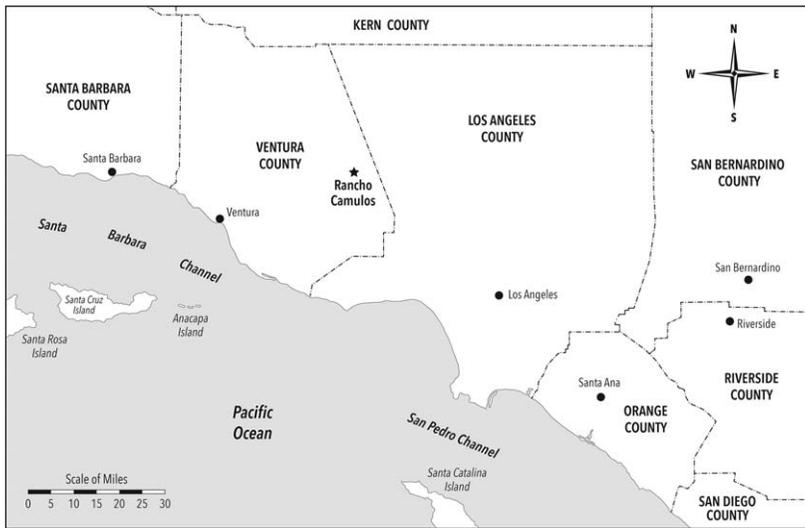


FIGURE 1. Rancho Camulos was located about forty-seven miles northwest of the Los Angeles Plaza. *Source:* Map by Kelly Donovan.

holding granted to Ygnacio's father, Antonio del Valle (d. 1839), by Mexican authorities in 1839. Ygnacio submitted his own petition in 1841 to formalize his ownership of Camulos and another land grant of Rancho Tejón. The arrival of land-hungry American settlers and speculators and their efforts to seize what they perceived as available land placed existing land holdings in a vulnerable state. Many Californios had to go before the U.S. Land Commission to prove their ownership against squatters and competing land claims. Antonio del Valle's descendants contracted Joseph Lancaster Brent, a lawyer, to defend their titles. Ygnacio del Valle fought his own title for his rightful inheritance of Rancho Camulos against a competing claimant, Pedro Carrillo, owner of neighboring Rancho Sespe. The U.S. Land Commission concluded that Rancho Camulos was indeed part of Rancho San Francisco and Ygnacio del Valle the rightful owner.⁹

Prior to the family's move to Camulos, Ygnacio del Valle made various improvements to the rancho to optimize its production of cattle and other

9. Wallace Smith, *This Land Is Ours: The del Valles and Camulos* (Ventura, Cal.: Ventura Historical Society, 1978), 99–100; Receipt of payment to Joseph Lancaster Brent, January 6, 1858, d. 710, Box 4, del Valle Family Papers, Seaver Center for Western History Research, Natural History Museum Los Angeles County (NHMLAC); Certified copy of the diseno of Rancho San Francisco and Expediente, March 5, 1854, d. 1510a, Box 4, del Valle Family Papers, Seaver Center; Letter from AP Crittenden to Ygnacio del Valle, d. 804, Box 3, del Valle Family Papers, Seaver Center.

livestock. He built a corral, an adobe dwelling for the *mayordomo* (manager), and entrusted his team of laborers to tend to the rancho. The rancho was also the home and workplace of vaqueros of mostly Native and mestizo background. Whether by paternalism, force, or necessity, these residents continued to be employed by the del Valle family to work the land of Camulos.¹⁰ Ygnacio remained in his home on the plaza of Los Angeles and took part in local civic affairs, serving in various political roles as the region transitioned from a Mexican pueblo to an American outpost. However, shifts in the plaza and threats to the land holdings led the rest of the del Valles to relocate to Camulos—including Ygnacio’s wife Ysabel Varela del Valle, their two children, Reginaldo and Josefa, and Ysabel’s mother and grandmother. For Ysabel, the move to Camulos must have been a difficult sell. Her social and family life thrived in the plaza area, where she was constantly surrounded by family and friends. Her mother, Concepción Avila Varela, and her grandparents (Antonio Ygnacio Avila and Rosa Ruiz) resided with the del Valles on the plaza. We can assume that Ysabel most likely requested that the rancho include the cultural and physical amenities that she lived near in the plaza, making the move amenable.¹¹ To prepare Camulos as the family’s new home, the small adobe was extended to multiple rooms that would accommodate the extended family, with a wraparound veranda, including an outdoor kitchen and a chapel.

In addition to the new features, the del Valle family developed a variety of agricultural ventures, including citrus—the first in Ventura County—wine, wheat, beans, almonds, and wool, to name a few. Ygnacio del Valle had been quite savvy with an eye on rising markets in California. He sold portions of other lands inherited from Rancho San Francisco to invest in Camulos. Most significantly, the del Valle family retained access to water from both the Piru Creek and Santa Clara River. With their constant access to water and the labor of local indigenous and Mexican migrants, the del Valles were successful in sustaining Rancho Camulos. Ygnacio seized on the rising demand of agricultural goods as an opportunity to shift the focus of

10. Douglas Monroy, *Thrown among Strangers: The Making of Mexican Culture in Frontier California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 100. For paternalism and the rise of the citrus industry, see Douglas C. Sackman, *Orange Empire: California and the Fruits of Eden* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 174.

11. Francisco García to Ygnacio del Valle, November 23, 1858, d. 1503, Box 4, del Valle Family Papers, Seaver Center; Smith, *This Land Is Ours*, 103.

Camulos from cattle ranching to agriculture production.¹² Within a short period, the Rancho Camulos of the late nineteenth century looked quite different from its earlier life as a cattle ranch. In 1875 Ygnacio wrote his *compadre*, Joseph Lancaster Brent, “there is a lot of difference on this ranch from the time that you were here with me . . . even though I’m not an active man . . . we’ve had to live here permanently, it’s been necessary to make some improvements.”¹³ Centrally located on the road connecting Santa Barbara to Los Angeles, Camulos became well known in the region. In fact, Camulos became a model for agricultural development in Ventura County. The *Ventura Weekly Press* profiled Rancho Camulos giving credit to the “industrious hands and wise heads [that] have aided in the developing of so much wealth and such fine improvements.”¹⁴

Camulos’s nascent phase in agricultural development required labor and materials to maintain an efficient system for producing multiple crops. With the family now residing at the rancho, Camulos produced subsistence goods as well as a market surplus.¹⁵ Dispersed across the rancho, near the Santa Clara River and in the hills, were the homes for workers with families. In exchange for their labor, the del Valle family, in particular Ygnacio, apparently provided them with shelter, provisions, and equipment. The forty pairs of men’s shoes, twelve pairs of scissors, twelve razors, two-dozen overalls, fifty-two calico shirts, and thirty-six undershirts listed in Ygnacio’s account book suggest that the items went to the men tending the orchards and fields and shearing sheep’s wool. Entire families were included in the laboring community at Camulos. Along with men’s items, Ygnacio paid for twenty-one pairs of women’s shoes, sixteen pairs of girls’ shoes, four-dozen thimbles,

12. The del Valle property fluctuated between the two names of Rancho Camulos and Rancho San Francisco. As time progressed, Rancho San Francisco was sold off, and Camulos became the central site for the del Valles’ residence and production. For discussion of changes in land use and production, and the loss among Californios, see Robert Glass Cleland, *History of California, the American Period* (New York: Macmillan, 1922); Pitt, *Decline of the Californios*; Monroy, *Thrown among Strangers*; Norris Hundley, *The Great Thirst: Californians and Water, a History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001, rev. ed); and David Igler, *Industrial Cowboys: Miller and Lux and the Transformation of the Far West, 1850 to 1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005, rev. ed).

13. “*hay mucha diferencia en este rancho del tiempo que estubo con migo aqui y ahora . . . aunque no soy un hombre activo pero teniendo que vivir permanente aqui ha sido preciso hacer algunos adelantos.*” Ygnacio del Valle to Joseph Lancaster Brent, January 15, 1875, Box 3, Papers of Joseph Lancaster Brent, Huntington Library.

14. Newspaper clipping, January 15, 1875, Box 3, Papers of Joseph Lancaster Brent.

15. Mark A. Burkholder and Lyman L. Johnson, *Colonial Latin America*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 193.



FIGURE 2. Josefa del Valle, age fifteen, before she enrolled at the Daughters of Charity School. *Courtesy of Seaver Center for Western History Research, Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History.*

218 ½ yards of *manta blanca* or white cotton and 903 yards of calico.¹⁶ With Camulos's shift in production from the raising of cattle to growing new crops, the family relied even more heavily on laboring forces of indigenous and landless Californians and Mexicans in the late nineteenth century,

16. Clipping, *American Agriculturalist*, c. 1870s, Box 6, del Valle Family Papers, Seaver Center; List of property of Rancho San Francisco, c. 1868, Box 6, del Valle Family Papers, Seaver Center; d. 324e Leatherbound account book, 1871–1875, d. 324e, Box 8, del Valle Family Papers, Seaver Center.

making possible the family's economically and socially stable footing in 1880s Southern California.

Josefa's letter writing traces back to when she left home to study at the Daughters of Charity School for Girls located in Los Angeles.¹⁷ Her early correspondence shows the close bond she maintained with her home Camulos while at school, where she attended classes along with other elite girls, both American and Californio.¹⁸ Josefa's letters reported her progress in school where she studied English, French, embroidery, and religion and took part in service and philanthropic projects. They also reflect a growing independence, as her social world broadened and she learned to circulate in Los Angeles social circles. She shared her exchanges with familiar faces—such as merchants who worked with her father and schoolmates of her brother. Josefa regularly received visits from aunts and uncles. Her letters also show the close bond she had for family in Camulos, as revealed in this particularly lengthy closing to her mother: "Please receive regards from the Sisters, especially Sister Josefina, Mary, and our other family and friends. . . . Please do me the favor of giving my regards to my father, grandmother, aunts, uncles, compadres, and the rest of the family."¹⁹

Equipped with a formal education and quite comfortable in the social network spanning across Los Angeles, Josefa returned to Rancho Camulos with more responsibilities, as both her mother and father relied on her for a variety of tasks. For example, on May 17, 1879, Ygnacio dictated a letter to Josefa addressed to her brother Reginaldo communicating various business decisions. Unbeknownst to her father, Josefa took the liberty of including a postscript to Reginaldo, "Dear Brother, Everyday my father is worse and he doesn't want to tell anyone but in the end I feel obligated to let you know."²⁰ Josefa's decision to reveal her father's ailing health against his will reflected her independent and responsible nature. The tone of the letter also hints at her sense that her father would not be with them much longer.

17. Letter from Tomas J. Scully to Juan Abila, May 17, 1858, d. 808, Box 4, del Valle Family Papers, Seaver Center.

18. Sister Scholastica to Ysabel del Valle, January 26, 1870, d. 814, del Valle Family Papers, Seaver Center; Casas, *Married to a Daughter of the Land*, 59.

19. Josefa del Valle to her mother, June 5, 1876, d. 1676, Box 8, del Valle Family Papers, Seaver Center.

20. "Querido hermano, Mi Papa cada día sigue peor, y no quiere hacerle a nadie creo que al fin me vere obligado a avisarle a mi mama yo estoy maliciando como se enojara cuando lo sepa, pero no he podido hacerlo porque mi Papa no quiere que sepa pero tendra que saberlo Josefa." Ygnacio del Valle to Reginaldo del Valle, May 17, 1879, d. 1637, Box 8, del Valle Family Papers, Seaver Center.

Indeed, Ygnacio's health ailed and he passed away in 1880, leaving Ysabel to become the rancho's administrator. With guidance from family members and friends (including Josefa's future husband John Forster), she made the decisions regarding the rancho's business ventures while Juventino, Josefa's half brother, saw to the daily operations of the rancho. As a result of California's adoption of portions of Spanish civil law that allowed women in California the right to community property (goods and interests acquired during marriage) as well as separate property (goods and interests women acquired prior to marriage), Josefa and Ysabel were well accustomed to women serving as property owners and administrators, and they took the lead on the range of activities that took place at Camulos.²¹

Josefa's letters to John trace the range of the new responsibilities around Camulos, showing that they required her to adjust and to learn new tasks quite swiftly. One detailed note, written on February 26, 1885, provides a window into not only the tasks she took on at Camulos, but also how she processed those experiences. She recounted, "the day you left I didn't have time to miss the morning despite my tiredness because we began packing boxes of oranges and that is how I spent the day." Groups of laborers and family members regularly assembled to pack the fruit grown at Camulos. Josefa often took part in peeling almonds, sorting walnuts, and packing oranges. Further on in her correspondence, Josefa explained an errand on which her mother had dispatched her: "I just arrived on horse from a visit with a sick woman that mama sent me to see . . . even though I have little to no experience with illnesses, it seems I left the woman healed. . . . I rode about twelve miles and arrived pretty tired since I haven't had time to ride."²² This particular experience highlights how Josefa assumed her mother's responsibilities. Since the family's move to the rancho, Ysabel served as the local healer and midwife for the area surrounding Camulos.²³ She created her own remedies and tended to the sick and ailing. Josefa's confession that she had "no experience" suggests she never received training

21. The U.S. conquest and subsequent establishment of U.S. property law placed women at a great disadvantage and had a major impact on diminishing the legal and property rights of women property owners, since U.S. law did not recognize women as property owners. Chávez-García, *Negotiating Conquest*.

22. "El día que salieron no tuve tiempo de extrañar la mañaniada, a pesar del sueño que tenía, porque luego nos pusimos a empacar cajones de naranjas y así me paso el día." Josefa del Valle to John Forster, February 26, 1885; Box 3, Forster-del Valle Family Papers, UC Irvine Special Collections.

23. Polasky and Goodwin to Ygnacio del Valle, May 11, 1876, d. 1651, del Valle Family Papers, Seaver Center; Smith, *This Land Is Ours*.

and it is possible that neither she (nor Ysabel) ever expected for Josefa to take on these types of responsibilities. However, the mother and daughter duo adjusted to the continuing and new demands of the rancho.

When her mother was away, Josefa also often seamlessly assumed the role of head of household at Rancho Camulos. According to family correspondence, Ysabel traveled throughout Southern California to see her other children and family members. During these instances, Josefa wrote her mother reporting the latest developments at Camulos. While Ysabel was away in June 1884, Josefa, for instance, wrote to her mother with an update on the rancho's workers and residents, saying "Everyone here is fine and doing well . . . the people have been very productive."²⁴ Two weeks later in a subsequent letter to her mother, she explained, "Please relax and do not worry and rush, we are fine with plenty of beans, corn, cactus and sheep."²⁵ Given her bond to Camulos and her family, it is no surprise that Josefa's world circulated around Camulos and the family's social network in Los Angeles. Josefa spent her early twenties assisting her mother and ensuring that Camulos continued to thrive. It was then, in 1884, that she began corresponding with John Forster, a family friend, and developed a relationship that grew from friendship to courtship to their marriage in the fall of 1885. That marriage, as she would soon learn, would test Josefa's connection and role at Camulos.

DEFINING FAMILY AND GENDER THROUGH LETTERS

Josefa's letters addressed to John Forster not only trace the trajectory of the couple's relationship but also the impact of social and economic shifts of the late nineteenth century on the del Valle family's dynamics.²⁶ The development of Southern California and the strategic location of Camulos along a railway allowed Josefa to receive and send mail on a daily basis, facilitating the growth of their relationship across the region. While Josefa spent her time

24. "*Todos aquí estan bien y de buenas . . . la gente muy industriosa.*" Josefa del Valle to Ysabel del Valle, June 5, 1884, d. 1976, Box 9, del Valle Family Papers, Seaver Center.

25. "*Esta tranquila y no se apure nosotros estamos bien con bastante frijol y maíz y muchas cactus y borregos*" Josefa del Valle to Ysabel del Valle, 6/14/1884, d. 1977, Box 9, del Valle Family Papers, Seaver Center.

26. John Forster was the son of Englishman-turned-Californio (also known as "Juan") and married Ysidora Pico, the sister of Andrés and Pio Pico, once politically powerful men in California. He also served as administrator of San Juan Capistrano Mission, his family resided at the mission, and they also owned the title for Rancho Santa Margarita.

at Camulos, John split his residence between Los Angeles and San Juan Capistrano. As a result, they spent considerable amount of time apart and the letters exchanged held great significance because they represented an encounter, a connection, and Josefa expected the same effort and level of intimacy from John as she would in a face-to-face conversation with him. Letters composed during their engagement, for instance, evidence romance and the longing of a newly engaged couple separated by distance. Josefa wrote on June 2, 1885, “I received the box of chocolates and the little package of fruit you sent me with so much care and with much enjoyment I am eating them here as I wait for your arrival. Even though I am enjoying what you sent me, it doesn’t make the time to wait for you less but that is the way it is and I am satisfied.”²⁷

Josefa clearly marked the stages of her relationship with John in her letters. Exchanged while they were just friends, her earliest letters address John in a rather formal way and consistently open with an “Estimado John” and close with an amiable “Su Amiga.” The terminology grew more intimate as time went by. In June 1885, Josefa was closing letters with “de su Chiquita que desea verlo pronto” (from your little one who desires to see you soon) and “recibe un abrazo y besote” (receive a hug and big kiss). Finally, as a married couple Josefa addressed her husband as “Querido” (my love) and “Mi Amado John” (John, my loved one). Historian Karen Lystra has described the writing and reading of love letters, or letters written during courtship, as cultural acts that reflected “the verbal intimacy of being alone together.”²⁸ Josefa saw her letters as a safe place to share her thoughts and feelings, expressing in a letter to John “[I]t would be sad to not find someone to ‘vent’ with . . . because truly it’s comforting to have someone to share all that one feels.”²⁹

Josefa also held expectations for the level of intimacy and detail that should be included in each letter. In correspondence written during their courtship and discussing a visit she planned to make to San Juan Capistrano, Josefa reprimanded John for writing a “mediocre” letter that lacked the level

27. “Recibí la suya, la cajita de dulces, y hoy el cajonsito de fruta que con tanto cariño me mando, y con gusto estoy comiendo mientras se llega el tiempo en que venga, aunque a pesar de pasarlo comiendo lo que me mando, no por eso deja de hacerseme menos largo pero es preciso que así sea y estoy conforme.” Josefa del Valle to John Forster, June 2, 1885, Box 3, Forster–del Valle Family Papers, UC Irvine Special Collections.

28. Karen Lystra, *Searching the Heart: Women, Men, and Romantic Love in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 4.

29. “seria triste no encontrar una persona con quien desabogar porque en verdada es un consuelo tener una persona a quien manifestar los que uno siente.” Josefa del Valle to John Forster, March 2, 1885, Box 3, Forster–del Valle Family Papers, UC Irvine Special Collections.



FIGURE 3. Josefa del Valle married John Forster at Rancho Camulos in 1885. *Courtesy of Seaver Center for Western Research, Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History.*

of detail she added to her letters, “I should complain about you, when I share news I tell you everything, I don’t leave with any doubt or need to investigate . . . but you don’t tell me any details . . . don’t be lazy you should be ready to write about the visit.”³⁰

30. “*Yo me debia quejar de U. yo cuando le doy nuevas le digo todo no lo dejo en dudas y averigue—U. me dice de San Juan—y que me esperan . . . pero no me dice quienes ni me da pormenores—para saber*”

The high standards and expectations Josefa assigned to letters of courtship extended to her outlook on marriage, as she articulated the ideals she had for her relationship with John. Josefa believed marriage functioned as a partnership in which the couple cared for one another, listened to each other, and supported one another as life partners.³¹ One letter Josefa wrote to John in June of 1885 closed with these sentiments. After sharing an update on some sad family news, she expressed, “sad ideas kill me but I get happy thinking of how we will be happy and how we will take care of each other and also take care of my mother, that is my most important obligation, don’t you agree?”³² In addition to laying out the happiness she gained from the relationship, Josefa repeatedly referenced the need to be candid and honest. Given her age at marriage, Josefa approached becoming a wife as one option in a broad scope of life choices. At twenty-four years old and much older than married women of her and the previous generation, Josefa most likely entered the relationship of her own free will and did not settle on any match for the sake of marriage. According to her letters, she had found in John a partner to share her life, feelings, and romantic love. Examining intermarriage and Californians’ selection of marriage partners, Casas frames matrimony as not relegated to a negotiation between fathers and husbands but rather a forum where women exercised choice and agency. Further, sociologist Zsuzsa Berend contends that these ideals of love and marriage reflected a woman’s “concept of self and society . . . an ethos, an underlying attitude towards [her] world,” beyond the role of a wife.³³

Despite their shared affection, the couple maintained independent lives after they married in the fall of 1885. Josefa’s correspondence reveals her

como remediarlos o prepararme cuando las veo—no sea flojo—ya ha de estar bueno para escribir de la vista.” Josefa del Valle to John Forster, January 12, 1885, Forster–del Valle Family Papers, UC Irvine Special Collections.

31. On romantic love, marriage, courtship, and family, see Lystra *Searching the Heart*; Ellen K. Rothman, *Hands and Hearts: A History of Courtship in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1984); John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (Chicago: Harper and Row, 1997); Elaine Tyler May, *Great Expectations: Marriage and Divorce in Post-Victorian America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); and Martha Hodes, *Sea Captain’s Wife: Love, Race, and War in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Norton, 2006).

32. “*me mata un poco las ideas tristes, y me pongo contenta en pensar que seremos felices, y nos cuidaremos uno al otro y los dos a mi Mama, que es la unica obligacion que encuentro para mi mas grande, No piensa be Ud asi?*” Josefa del Valle to John Forster, September 14, 1885, Box 3, Forster-del Valle Family Papers, UC Irvine Special Collections, Irvine, California.

33. Zsuzsa Berend, “The Best or None! Spinsterhood in Nineteenth-Century New England” *Journal of Social History*, 33 no. 4 (2000): 936.

independence, a result of both her concept of self as well of circumstance. She was dedicated to staying in Camulos with her mother while the booming real estate market of the region kept John busy working in downtown Los Angeles and traveling to San Diego, San Juan Capistrano, and sometimes San Francisco. He stayed at the couple's home on Grand Avenue in Los Angeles while Josefa continued to stay at Camulos to assist in family and business affairs at the rancho, especially since her mother was advancing in age. Josefa initially reconciled their situation by accepting the demands of her husband's work and her focus and commitment to Camulos. She wrote John and explained, "Considering that your business is a matter of time, we'll make the sacrifice to be separated the time necessary . . . if things turn out fine I'll have to stay here until about three months pass."³⁴

The separation the couple accepted was sustainable because of the rapid urbanization and industrialization of the region. Improved transportation made it possible for John to come and go for brief-but-frequent trips to Camulos. In fact, in 1886 the Southern Pacific Railroad debuted a depot at Camulos and John must have been among the first passengers, riding from Los Angeles to the newly minted stop at Camulos.³⁵ Such family and household dynamics are what historian John Modell characterizes as "restructuring of social space within cities" unfolding as a result of early urban and suburbanization.³⁶ Rancho Camulos developed alongside the growth of Los Angeles. In fact, much of the rancho's growth could be attributed to the enormous economic activity and demographic growth of Southern California. Although Camulos looked nothing like the suburban developments of the U.S. northeast, the household and Josefa's family life at the rancho shared similar patterns that redefined how late nineteenth-century suburban families interacted. The economic order of late nineteenth-century Southern California worked for Josefa's independent spirit and dedication to maintain her leadership at Camulos, yet at the same time it worked against her attempts to build a type of family life that she had as a child and that she perhaps desired to have with her husband.

34. "Considero que tu negocio es cuestion de tiempo . . . hacemos el sacrificio de estar separados el tiempo que sea necesario . . . si sale bien tendre que quedarme aqui hasta que pasen siquiera tres meses." Josefa del Valle to John Forster, November 17, 1886. Box 3, Forster-del Valle Family Papers, UC Irvine Special Collections.

35. Train ticket, November 27, 1886, del Valle Family Papers, Seaver Center

36. John Modell, "Suburbanization and Change in the American Family," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, no. 9 (1979).

As time went by, her correspondence reflected a shift from an independent tone of being in charge to one hinted with anxiety and loneliness. On one occasion she explained to John, "I'm not sure why I've been feeling so sad and heartache, I think because the season[s] will be changing. Remember the short time one lives and there should be nothing more than to spend it together."³⁷ While she managed successfully on her own, the letters trace a shift toward a desire to nurture their marriage and to do so as a priority. The toll of these dynamics surfaced as the young couple sought to have children. Over the years, Josefa confessed to yearning for a child yet they were only able to conceive their first offspring after eleven years of marriage. Discussing her sister's newborn child, she reflected: "we have been so taken up with the baby that I, too got envious, and after being married for twelve years, lost one last [December]. . . . the first and I suppose the last for I am getting old and so is John."³⁸ Clearly Josefa desired a family and the loss of a pregnancy weighed on her. Her letters mentioned an increasing loneliness along with a resolve to accept the distance, as she articulated in an emotional tone to John. "I'm not sure why, but while you are in LA I don't feel like you are very far but when you go a little farther I find myself lonely and the time seems longer and later. I'm not in peace until I know you are to return."³⁹ Perhaps the promise of mobility and a dependable schedule of the train offered an outlet to Josefa as a way to cope with distance and loneliness yet their separation brought her sadness.

In 1894, the tone of Josefa's letters shifted once again, as she embarked with John on another cross-country trip, revealing her excitement and energy that came with travel.⁴⁰ We can speculate that the trip served to distract the couple from the strain of commuting and constant separation. Her letters to

37. "No se porque he estado tan triste y mala del corazón, yo creo que es porque va cambiar el tiempo? Acuérdate lo poco que uno vive y no hay mas que pasarlo juntos." Josefa del Valle-Forster to John Forster, November 17, 1886, Box 3, Forster-del Valle Family Papers, UC Irvine Special Collections.

38. Josefa (del Valle) to JLB May 13, 1898, Box 4, BT 285 Forster, Papers of Joseph Lancaster Brent, Huntington Library.

39. "No se porque meintrás esta en Los Angeles, no se me figura que esta lejos, pero luego que sales mas lejos, me encuentro sola, y se me hace el tiempo mas largo de los días que tarda en otra parte, no estoy en paz hasta que se que estas de vuelta." Josefa del Valle-Forster to John Forster, August 13, 1885, Box 3, Forster-del Valle Family Papers, UC Irvine Special Collections.

40. "Dice que yo no puedo saber el gusto que le da entregar me la a mi para acompañar la muchachita. Esta creciedo buena y muy interesante, y con dos años de convento se que se perfeccionara demas . . .yo estoy muy contenta de llevarla." Josefa del Valle-Forster to Ysabel Varela del Valle, August 23, 1893, Box 5, Forster-del Valle Family Papers, UC Irvine Special Collections.

her mother also detailed the luxuries she encountered, including turtle soup and lobster dinner at the Palmer Hotel as well as evenings of theater and wine at the Grand Central Hotel Bar in New York City.⁴¹ The couple's travels took them to New York, Baltimore, New Orleans, and other cities, yet their stop in Chicago in the September of 1893 clearly represents how Josefa gave meaning to the various elements of her life. When Josefa arrived in Chicago two major events were taking place, the World's Columbia Exposition of 1893 and the Annual Catholic Congress.

Because of the magnitude of these festivities, Chicago received scores of visitors from across the nation and globe, including Californians, specifically Californios. Indeed, Californios were no exception among those interested in seeing the technological advancements, cultural displays, and regional exhibits of the fair. In fact, Josefa mentioned in her letters that Arcadia Bandini de Baker, a prominent Angeleno, was staying at the same hotel, Palmer House, also with plans to see the Columbia Exposition. According to Josefa, other Californios such as Mariana and Antonio Francisco Coronel, politically prominent Angelenos, were among the visitors from the West. In a letter to her sister, Ysabela, Josefa shared how she attended the fair with Doña Arcadia, with the intention of finding postcards to send back to California. On that particular occasion, both women were surprised with sentiments of remembering family and friends "back home" because they came across a "*banda mejicana*" (a Mexican musical band). With no mention of whether the band originated from Mexico or California, Josefa explained that they got so involved with the band that, "we started making requests for certain songs, and they [the band] were so happy because we spoke to them in Spanish." According to Josefa, the *banda mejicana* and the exhibit on California were not enough to hold Don Antonio and Doña Mariana Coronel's interest in Chicago. She explained to her sister, Ysabela that "they could only last one week here before becoming homesick."⁴²

Naturally, many factors distinguished Los Angeles from Chicago that resulted in homesickness to people like the Coronels. However, Josefa felt an extra boost of energy with the unexpected cultural encounters and connections with her compatriots (as with the *banda mejicana*). The World's

41. Sunday dinner menu from the Palmer Hotel, Chicago, October 18, 1885, Box 9, del Valle Family Papers, Seaver Center; Bill from Keefer's Grand Central Hotel, New York, to JF Forster and Wife, October 28, 1885, Box 9, del Valle Family Papers, Seaver Center.

42. Josefa del Valle to Ysabel del Valle, September 25, 1893, Box 5, Forster-del Valle Family Papers, UC Irvine Special Collections.

Fair in many ways put California on display for the rest of the country and included many items and references familiar to Josefa, making her feel at ease, at least temporarily, while she was hundreds of miles away from home. For example, the Santa Barbara Olive Oil Tower, the Ventura Bean Pagoda, and the Los Angeles Globe of Orange exhibitions at the World Fair must have all been familiar to Josefa. Displays were not limited to agricultural goods, as the exposition also featured photographs of Governor Pío Pico and an original manuscript of Padre Junípero Serra, the famed missionary, sent by Don Marco Forster, Josefa's brother-in-law. Other Californios sent items such as Spanish mantilla, Mexican pottery, and paintings of "typical Spanish homes in Southern California . . . owned by loyal residents."⁴³ While the World's Fair offered a great deal to tourists, the *Congreso Catolico* took up most of Josefa's interest and time while she was in Chicago.⁴⁴

According to Josefa, the Congreso was an event not to miss, possibly for religious reasons, as she was a devout Catholic. In a letter to her mother, she hoped that "perhaps I'll see somebody I know from back home." According to her letters, Josefa also enjoyed attending lectures and discussions held at the Congreso on different subjects and by different priests, who according to Josefa, came from all regions of the United States and across the world. In the same letter to her mother, she expressed her pride on one occasion when she attended a talk by Monsignor Satalli who "spoke in Italian so clearly I understood everything."⁴⁵

The Congreso must have been meaningful to Josefa, since she detailed the event in her letters home. The event, while affirming her Catholic faith and her proficiency in Italian, also incited some discomfort expressed in her letters. Recapping the speakers at the Congreso, Josefa wrote a letter to her mother and declared, "I have heard all the major archbishops speak and many seem to have big heads and knowledge. So many dioceses are represented from across all the United States . . . except for ours like in the style of [Bishop] Mora and that has made me feel bad. It's not right . . . everyone believes that over there [in California] there isn't more but *indios* . . . why

43. AJ Johnston, Supt. "California at the World's Fair, 1893," *Final Report of the California's World's Fair Commission* (Sacramento: State Printing, 1894).

44. ". . . no he ido a la feria porque he estado atendiendo al Congreso." Josefa del Valle to Ysabel Varela del Valle, September 6, 1893, Box 5, Forster-del Valle Family Papers, UC Irvine Special Collections.

45. "Todo clase de gente aquí. A ver si encuentro otro conocido del pueblo. . . ." Josefa del Valle to Ysabel Varela del Valle, September 4, 1893, Box 5, Forster-del Valle Family Papers, UC Irvine Special Collections.

didn't they send a father or some other dignified figure to represent the state . . . but the indio is always considered bad."⁴⁶ There is no evidence of what, specifically, provoked Josefa's commentary. Given its focus on showcasing the achievements of the Catholic Church, the Congreso Católico most likely offered the conversion of California Native Americans and the mission system as the prime example of the church's accomplishments in spreading the faith. By this particular moment, Americans were familiar with "pious friars and humble Indians" frequently featured in the histories of the missions of California. This version of history placed the Catholic Church in good light and tinted California with an amiable European past.⁴⁷ From Josefa's frustrated statement we can gather she felt excluded (there are only indios) from the narratives of California circulating in other parts of the country, since neither she nor any other Californio would consider themselves Indian. Her desire for a more "dignified" representation of California reflected two key points about her sense of identity.

Josefa's critique of the idea that "only indios are over there" also exemplifies her own views toward the racial, ethnic, and class distinctions of nineteenth-century California. Her descendants, she claimed, harkened to Spanish settlement. Despite their mixed racial heritage and lower-class standing in Mexico, they established and claimed a social status above the local natives who were confined to the missions and menial labor in the stratified social structure established in colonial California. Naturally these legacies informed Josefa's opinion of Indians. Indeed, Josefa practiced the social codes of class and race that looked down upon and excluded Native Americans. Josefa's critique not only reflected her own racial and class prejudices toward native Californians but also an anxiety over how her identity as a Californian and Californiana was being represented and interpreted. During her travels to Chicago, she felt at home with a connection to *mejicanos* and dismayed with the indios. She was privy to racial classifications that defined Spanish Mexican California but most likely these identities were one and the same to white Americans.

46. "ya he oido a los principales arzobispos hablar, y no hay duda que algunos de ellos tienen cabeza muy grandes y sabias, todos los Estados Unidos están representados, cuantos diócesis hay, menos la nuestra a la moda de Mora, a mi me ha dado mucha pena eso, no se vale [illegible] creen que por allá no hay mas que indios, . . . porque no mando un padre o particular digno del puesto que lo representarían, pero [illegible] el indio siempre cuenta mal." Josefa del Valle-Forster to Ysabel Varela del Valle, September 6, 1893, Box 5, Forster-del Valle Family Papers, UC Irvine Special Collections.

47. For California missions in public memory, see Phoebe S. Kropp, *California Vieja: Culture and Memory in a Modern Place* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

Symptomatic of the legacies of conquest, control over the telling of California's history and defining the social landscape shifted to the Americans.⁴⁸ Unlike the material impact of skewed historical narratives on Mexican and indigenous people in California, Josefa and other Californios were by no means marginalized by such representations. The encounters and thoughts articulated in her letters from Chicago lead us to ask critical question about identity and Californios in the late nineteenth century. How would they continue to distinguish themselves from Native people and what representations of California did they endorse? How would Josefa del Valle wedge her way into the narrative and claim there was more to California? She never elaborated more on this point nor did she pose any recommendations. Rather, Josefa nonchalantly reported that they had their "noses turned toward" home and were on their return. Apparently, she was ready to be back in California.

After they returned from their cross-country trip, Josefa did not return to the rancho but rather took up permanent residence in Los Angeles. She did so as a result of her mother's ailing health. There, in the City of Angels, Josefa and John were finally able to conceive their first child, and Ygnacio Forster was born in 1899. Two years later, John fell ill and passed away shortly before their second child Juan Francisco's birth in late 1901. Her husband's death was tragic and Josefa felt his absence for the rest of her life. Honoring her husband's death, she wore black every day, symbolic of her Catholic faith to show her state of constant mourning. The gesture was also symbolic of the relationship she had and had lost with John. She lost her friend and confidant. For much of their marriage, John and her letters had served as her listening ear.

After her mother's passing, Josefa assumed the role of matriarch of her household. Financially comfortable from John's estate, Josefa relied on teams of servants to help her care for her sons and the household. She immersed herself in ensuring them an upbringing appropriate to their status in Los Angeles's social hierarchy. They spoke Spanish and they received Catholic instruction at St. Vincent's School for Boys. Josefa's dining table was always set for twenty people and daily evening mass was a must in her home's small chapel. A generous benefactress, according to her granddaughter, Lorenita Weisenberg, Josefa "single handedly help build Loyola University." The priests of St. Vincent's, Lorenita reported, could always find a warm meal,

48. Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe*.

a generous pocket, and swig of wine at Josefa del Valle's home.⁴⁹ While she missed John's emotional companionship and grieved his death both privately and publicly, Josefa also knew how to live without her husband. As her letters reveal, Josefa maneuvered through cultural changes by crafting and recrafting a sense of self. In adjusting to her new environment, the letters indicate she had the ability and extensive practice in remaking the self. Constantly adapting, Josefa, at times held to cultural traditions and practices, while at other times she deployed new strategies to thrive in her new circumstances and environment.

Like the central female character whom historian Martha Hodes writes about in *The Sea Captain's Wife*, Josefa "believed in the life she lived."⁵⁰ She articulated her thoughts, sentiments, and experiences in a most intimate way, through personal correspondence with her husband, family, and friends. Her life—as wife, rancho administrator, and traveler—shows how the dynamics of family formation, gender roles, and personal relationships were shaped by her particular historical moment as a post-conquest Californiana. Josefa's letters stand in contrast to the economic loss and political dislocation often associated with Californios at the turn of the twentieth century. Although impacted by such changes in the economy and polity, Josefa crafted her sense of self as someone who continuously engaged, whether in tension or harmony, with the social, political, economic, and cultural developments of the late nineteenth century.

Through the life of Josefa, we gain a rich understanding of the ways late nineteenth-century elite Californianas merged the particulars of their historical moment with their familiar cultural traditions in order to withstand the greater social, economic, and political shifts and the attendant gender and familial reconfigurations. ■

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49. Oral Interview of Lorenita Weisenberg, conducted by Anita Tapia, Nevada City, California, 2002, UC Irvine Special Collections.

50. Hodes, *Sea Captain's Wife*.