

Guadalupe Briones de Miramontes: Curandera

—Ellen Chiri

Maria Guadalupe Briones was the older sister of the renowned Juana Briones. Guadalupe was born in 1792 at Mission San Antonio, south of present-day King City; Juana was born in 1802 at Villa Branciforte, near Mission Santa Cruz.

Juana's reputation as a ranchera, medical practitioner, and merchant is well-documented, but Guadalupe's story is little known. In early life, Guadalupe worked as a curandera—a healer—at Mission Santa Clara. She later lived at the Presidio of San Francisco, where she continued to practice her medical skills and apply her healing ability.

At the Presidio, Guadalupe met and married Juan José Candelario Miramontes, who was an officer there. The couple were the owners of Rancho Miramontes, known also as Rancho San Benito, and Guadalupe continued to practice her healing art there. (The town that grew on the Miramontes land was called San Benito after the rancho, then later Spanishtown; it is now Half Moon Bay.)

In 1889, William Heath Davis praised Guadalupe's medical ability in *Seventy-five years in California; A History of Events and Life in California*:

“Doña Guadalupe Briones de Miramontes lived formerly at the Presidio of San Francisco... She is now (1889) a resident of Spanishtown... and a very old lady... It was this woman who cured me of a malady and saved me from death years since. I was afflicted with the neuralgia in the head from my youth, and I had been on the point of death, but Doña Guadalupe's simple remedy relieved me of suffering probably to the end of my time”

Davis didn't specify what her “simple remedy” was, but its effectiveness is clear. Guadalupe's story illustrates the importance of women's skills and crafts at a time when they were not widely acknowledged. To this day, curanderas in small communities in Mexico practice natural medicine, much as Guadalupe did.

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