

COSMOPOLITAN CHRONICLE

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Refugio's Refuge.

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“She ably seconded her talented husband in dispensing princely hospitality to all strangers within their gates, of whatever nation or party” was the tribute in the *Los Angeles Times* obituary for Refugio Argüello de Bandini. Refugio (1817-1891) was Juan Bandini's second wife. His first wife, María de los Dolores Estudillo (1805-1833), died shortly after giving birth to her sixth child.

While Juan Bandini had allied himself with the prominent Estudillo family of San Diego, he now found himself a widower with young children and an elderly father. Perhaps his brother-in-law's wife, Victoria Dominguez de Estudillo, helped out. But the Estudillo family was rapidly expanding. So Juan Bandini married Refugio Argüello in February 1835 at the San Diego Presidio Chapel.

Refugio came from a large and prominent family. Her father was Santiago Argüello, commandant of the presidio. Her mother, Pilar Ortega, was also from a very well established political family. Most unusual for those times, Pilar could read and write and undoubtedly she taught her daughter well. So the talented

Refugio became mother to the six Bandini children: Josefa, Alejandro, Arcadia, Ysidora, José María, and Juan Bautista. She and Juan added five more children to the family: Dolores, Margarita, Juan de la Cruz, Alfredo, and Arturo.

These children grew up in the Casa de Bandini and at the various family ranchos. Daughters Dolores and Ysidora were even married in the *sala* (living room) of the Casa de Bandini in January and April, 1851, respectively. In later years Refugio fondly recalled the social events and festivities that were held in her home. “How often did we spend half the night, at a *tertulia*—till 2 o'clock in the morning—in the most agreeable and distinguished society. Our house would be full of company; thirty or forty persons at the table; it would have to be set twice.”

While it is somewhat difficult to learn details of Señora Bandini's life, we have glimpses of her role. We know that during the U.S.-Mexican War, the Bandini home became Commodore Robert F. Stockton's headquarters. One account related how Edward F. Beale, who was sent as one of three messengers to Stockton after the battle at San Pasqual, made his way to San Diego through enemy lines and rolled

down a cactus canyon. The night of Beale's arrival, the Bandini family spent the night pulling cactus thorns out of his body. We can visualize Doña Refugio coming to his aid.

In July 1847, when Company B of the Mormon Battalion was to be sent to Los Angeles to be discharged, the people of Old Town were so pleased with the help they had received from the Mormons (wells dug and walled with brick, sidewalks laid, chimneys built, buildings and fences repaired and whitewashed) that they brought refreshments to the plaza and Mrs. Refugio Bandini gave a speech asking Company B to stay. She wanted to present them with the plaza flag.

And, of course, there is the famous story (with many variations) of how Doña Refugio and her daughters supposedly sewed, using their petticoats for fabric, the first U.S. flag made in California.

In later years, after her husband's death, Refugio lived at Los Coyotes near Los Angeles. Coming full circle, we see the name Refugio Argüello de Bandini in the *Cosmopolitan Register* for July 5, 1873, as a guest in her former home, which was then Albert Seeley's hotel and stage stop.

