

Rosa María Bezerra Nieto

ca. 1697 - October 4, 1760



Rosa was a “criolla,” or American-born child of Spanish parents. She was born at the Presidio of Janos to Antonio Bezerra Nieto, the presidial captain, and Gregoria Catalina Gómez de Silva. Literally nothing is known of her childhood beyond the fact that she lived at one of Spain’s most dangerous northern frontier outposts.

In 1722, she married a young widower, Juan Bautista de Anza and became stepmother to his two daughters. The two would have four more children, including well-known Juan Bautista de Anza II, who led the expedition to found San Francisco in 1776.

Rosa would be left a widow and single mother in 1740. She cared for not only the six children, but the family’s ranch and mine holdings. This she performed with resolve, determination, and a keen business acumen. She hired numerous Yaqui, O’odham and Ópata vaqueros and maintained foremen at several distant properties.

By the end, she ran the largest ranching enterprise in the Pimería Alta, all without attending a single day of school or knowing how to read or write.

Doña Rosa now rests at Tumacácori National Historical Park, beneath the steps to the sanctuary at the Guevavi Mission.



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