

Dear Mr. Pelka and Staff:

I first became engaged with California history in 1985, when I became acquainted with Juana Briones y Tapia de Miranda, who happened to be about ten years old in 1812 when she moved with her family to a place then known as Polin Spring and later as Tennessee Hollow, and recently known as a very impressive archaeological finding, overseen by Dr. Barbara Voss, that is almost certainly Juana's childhood home there, the home of her father, Marcos Briones.

Juana Briones also engaged the brilliant attorney who later became Lincoln's Chief of Staff, Henry Wager Halleck, to certify that she and her children did indeed own the land which now forms an indentation in the otherwise straight border of the Presidio, along Lyon Street, at the end of Green Street. Such information as this began my decade and more of study that will result in a biography of Juana Briones that will be published by the University of Arizona Press next year. Few places, I have found, have as intriguing a history as California, and especially the San Francisco Bay Area, and especially the Presidio, and the Peninsula, where Juana moved when she was in her 40s, to a place that became Palo Alto after she died.

The Presidio of San Francisco has been one of my major inspirations throughout my study, and more so because the history is not hidden but seems to spring forth, like Polin Spring, that still delivers an incredible amount of water daily. One day, in the company of a docent, she pointed out to me and we watched together as several hummingbirds stood in line, in the air, each taking a sip of the water and then moving out for the next in line to have a turn. The more buildings you put on that land, the fewer hummingbirds and the less water. I mention that day and those hummingbirds in my book-to-be, Juana Briones of 19th Century California.

A good history museum there is vital. A good art collection could well be donated to the structures recently constructed by the Lombard Street entrance. Or the owner could donate a large sum to the Museum of Modern Art, which has a fine location in a busy part of town. Or add a wing to the Palace. So many inventive solutions could be found to keep the Presidio as a land and history treasure from being diminished bit by bit.

I truly love the Presidio, I love the studies I have undertaken, I go every year to the Founders' Day event and have gone to many other events and also for no particular reason at all, just to feel the dynamics of the place. Many years ago, when there was an Army Museum at the Presidio, I went with others to install a Juana Briones exhibit. It is hard ever to forget any visit to the Presidio of San Francisco. Your organization is called a Trust, and that means we, the public, have entrusted to you the care of an irreplaceable resource. There is no other place like it in the world. Don't change that. Educate other people about that with a History Center.