



PHOTOGRAPHER: **BRYAN R. JOHNSON** (1834 New York State; active Petaluma c. 1863- 1867)

SITTER: “Seated Stoic Woman”

DATE: between 1863 & 1867

PHOTOGRAPHIC FORMAT: enlarged reprint of original carte de visite

IMPRINT: “From B. R. Johnson’s Photographic Establishment, Doyle’s Building, Main Street, Petaluma”

PRIVATE COLLECTION

In this portrait, the stark contrast between the sitter and background is jarring. The woman is rigid, formally posed, somber and unadorned; the backdrop is a free-flowing, lush and elaborate landscape. This juxtaposition invites the viewer to carefully inspect the image and serves to heighten awareness of the sitter’s attributes.

This unidentified woman sits with presence and poise, wearing a simple, dignified dress, which is a rustic attempt to emulate current fashion. Her full skirt, supported by numerous petticoats, is tightly cinched at her waist by a simple belt. She wears a busked corset which shapes her torso, encourages her upright posture and flattens her bosom. The dress fabric is drawn over the corset in a fan front style meant to minimize the waistline. The loose bishop sleeves narrow at her wrists and end in wide, crisp, white cuffs. The color and texture of the cuffs are repeated in her angled collar. The sitter’s hair has been parted in the center and drawn back into a coronet of braid at the back of the crown.

This sitter’s face and hands tell the story of a woman accustomed to hard work, and her demeanor portrays a soul of quiet resignation and stoic dignity. She probably journeyed to California by wagon train, and although we do not know her story, we do have the overland diaries of two Petaluma women. They are available to you and located on the reading table in the center of the gallery.

Paula Freund, 2017