



The Marquis de Mores – Dakota Entrepreneur

Student Reading Overview

Introduction

The Gilded Age (1878-1889) was a time of great economic growth. Railroads stretched across the country, and cities became centers of industry. Capturing the spirit of the times, reformer and author Henry George said, *“Get money, honestly if you can, but at any rate get money!”* Robber barons, such as John D. Rockefeller (oil), Andrew Carnegie (steel), and James J. Hill (railroads), were searching for new schemes which could turn an investment into a fortune in a short time.

The cattle industry became the new “get-rich quick” scheme. Newspapers and magazine articles were telling about the huge sums of money investors were making in the ranching and beef processing industry. Books praising the high plains as the ideal place to raise cattle were sponsored by the railroads to encourage settlers to move west. Western states and territories published official guides boasting of the mild winters, abundant rainfall and bountiful grass. It was this glowing picture that attracted the young Marquis de Mores to Dakota Territory.

The first settlement where the Northern Pacific Railroad would cross the Little Missouri River was a military camp named Cantonment Badlands. Its soldiers provided protection for the railroad building crews from raiding Indians. It was located about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile northwest of the present town of Medora. It was officially closed in March 1883.

The town of Little Missouri was started on the west bank of the Little Missouri River. By the time the Marquis arrived in early April 1883, the town boasted nine buildings. He chose the area at the crossing of the Northern Pacific Railroad with the Little Missouri River because it gave him everything he needed: water for the cattle, ice for the packing plant, abundant grass and shelter for the cattle and direct shipping to market. He bought nearly nine thousand acres of land and established a new town on the east bank of the river. It was named Medora, in honor of his wife.



Little Missouri in 1880, Photograph by F. Jay Haynes
Haynes Foundation Collection Montana Historical

Something to think about:

If you would have had the same information, would you have gone to Dakota Territory as the Marquis did? Why or Why not?



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Medora Packing Plant in 1883 State Historical Society of North Dakota 42-074

The Big Idea

After he moved to New York, the Marquis studied the American west and the cattle industry. He became convinced that it would make him “the greatest financier in the world.” With financial backing from his father-in-law, he started his own company named the Northern Pacific Refrigerator Car Company. He planned to build his own abattoir or packing plant and butcher the cattle where they were raised. He then would ship the beef to the east in refrigerator cars. He also opened butcher shops in the eastern cities. His dream was to have one company that was self-sufficient providing beef “ranch to table.” Construction started in June 1883 and slaughter began in October. The packing plant was made larger in 1884 and the 85’ smokestack finished in 1885. The plant closed in November 1886 due to fierce competition from other packers, the effects of bad weather and drought, and because eastern customers did not like the taste of the range-fed beef. The plant was maintained by the caretakers until it burned in March 1907.

The Marquis started many other businesses besides the packing plant. He ranched, experimented with feeding cattle and tried raising sheep and horses. He started a freight company and stagecoach line from Medora to Deadwood. He never received a mail contract so the route was not profitable. He owned ice houses all along the railroad from Helena, Montana to Duluth, Minnesota. He used his refrigerated cars to also ship salmon from the west coast to markets on the east coast. He tried irrigated farming along the Little Missouri River and also owned land in Bismarck.

Something to think about:

Even though his ideas failed, is there a need for entrepreneurs like the Marquis?



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The Marquis de Mores

Antoine Amedee Marie Vincent Amat Manca de Vallombrosa was born in Paris, France on June 14, 1858. He was the son of a French nobleman with Spanish and Italian heritage. His family received their title and lands as a reward for military service to the king of Spain. Antoine learned French, English, Italian and German by the time he was ten years old. He was a brilliant student with a quick, analytical mind. A devout Catholic, religion had a part in his education and in his personal beliefs. After graduation from college and the military academy, he entered the French army. He resigned his commission in 1881 because he found peacetime too boring. He returned to Paris, where he became the Marquis de Mores, the title which he received when he reached his age of majority. He met and married an American named Medora von Hoffman. They moved to the United States and came to Dakota Territory in 1883.



State Historical Society of North Dakota 0042-078

Something to think about:

Why do you think someone with the Marquis's wealth and background wanted to go to Dakota?

The Chateau de Mores

The Chateau de Mores was built as a hunting lodge for the Marquis's family and his guests. It was much larger and more elegant than anything else in the area. In 1883, it cost \$5,000 to build. Most people who had settled in Dakota Territory at that time lived in log or sod houses, often with only one or two rooms. In cities such as Bismarck, there were some very nice homes; but not out in the Badlands. They entertained often with visitors coming from Europe and the east coast. Wealthy ranchers such as Theodore Roosevelt were also guests. The family stayed from spring until late fall. They would travel back to New York or to Europe for the cold winter months. They left in December 1886 and never returned as a family. The Marquis made two trips back to the area in 1887 and 1889. Medora returned to the Chateau only once, in 1903, after the Marquis's death. She brought her older two children and stayed about six weeks. After that the house was taken care of by the caretakers, who got it ready every summer, but she never returned.



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The Boarding House

After her death in 1921, the caretakers were given permission to use the house as a summer boarding house by the eldest son, Louis. They rented rooms, served meals and gave tours. A newspaper journalist wrote an article called, “A Real Chateau in the Badlands” and the name is still used today. No record has been found that it was ever called a chateau before Medora’s death. The caretakers operated the boarding house for about twelve years. It fell into disrepair and many items were either sold, stolen or broken. Louis closed the boarding house in 1934 because it had developed into a regular trade for the benefit of the caretakers. He felt that the house was losing much of its original character. In 1936 he deeded the house and 125 acres of land to the state of North Dakota. This included the packing plant ruins. The agreement stated that the properties were to be developed and preserved for park and museum purposes. The first restoration was done by the Civilian Conservation Corps from 1937 - 1941. The house was opened to the public on August 7, 1941.

Other Medora Buildings

Madame de Mores had the small brick church in town built in 1884 as a gift to the community. The home built for Medora’s parents has been restored by the Theodore Roosevelt Medora Foundation. It is open for touring. These are not part of the state historic site.

The Chateau de Mores State Historic Site



Today the Chateau is owned by the state of North Dakota and managed by the State Historical Society as an historic house museum. The historic site also includes the park in Medora named De Mores Park. The statue of the Marquis was donated to the township of Medora in 1926 by Louis and Paul. The township donated the statue

and park to the State of North Dakota in 1937. The generosity of Louis de Vallombrosa in granting these historic sites to the state made possible their development and preservation. Because of their location next to Interstate 94 and Theodore Roosevelt National Park, these areas are enjoyed not only by the people of North Dakota but by great numbers of tourists from all over the world.

Something to think about:

What was the impact of Medora’s founding family on the western Dakota Territory?



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Family Biographies

Antoine Amedee Marie Vincent Amat Manca de Vallombrosa, The Marquis de Mores

Antoine Amedee Marie Vincent Amat Manca de Vallombrosa was born in Paris, France on June 14, 1858. He was the son of a French nobleman with Spanish and Italian heritage. The family divided their time between Paris and the Riviera filling their lives with sport, culture and travel. The Marquis's father helped make the Riviera and the city of Cannes famous by starting the Yacht Club of France and the Society of Racing. He wanted to establish a cattle empire but that dream failed. The Marquis and his family returned to France where he went into politics. Because of his outspoken views he was arrested several times and fought several successful duels. He went to Africa to establish an alliance between the native tribes and France to push England out of North Africa. He was killed by his own guides. His wife always believed that his death was ordered by his political enemies.

Medora, Marquise de Mores

Medora von Hoffman was born on August 21, 1856. Her father was a wealthy New York banker. She was privately schooled as were most wealthy girls at that time. Medora spoke seven languages and was a gifted artist. She also was an excellent horsewoman and a sharpshooter. She was living with her parents at their winter home at Cannes, France when she met the Marquis de Mores. They were married at Cannes on February 15, 1882. They had three children: Athenais and Louis, born in New York, 1883 and 1885, and Paul, born in France, 1890.



As the wife of the Marquis, she was responsible for the management of the household. She brought a staff of 8-10 servants with her from New York to do the work at the Chateau. She would order supplies, pay all of the bills for the household, and make out the menus. One of her responsibilities was also to entertain guests with musical selections. She played the piano very well and loved to play for her guests to dance on the porch. Medora loved to hunt and often organized hunting trips for the guests even if the Marquis could not go. On one of those trips she killed four bears!

After the death of her husband, Madame de Mores lived in Paris and Cannes. In 1903, she brought her older two children back to Medora to see the place she loved so well. During World War I, she used her home as a hospital for wounded soldiers. She became ill from an infection that she caught a long time before while hunting in Nepal. Before she died, she asked her children to never sell her Medora home. She died in France in 1921.

Something to think about:

Why do you think she asked her children to never sell her Medora home?



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Athenais 1883 - 1969

Medora did not come to Dakota Territory until after the birth of their baby daughter. Athenais was just a few months old when she was brought out to the family's new home. She was cared for by a nurse. Athenais was about 3 years old when the family left in 1886. Athenais was married three times but had only one child. Her daughter, Thais, died when she was 10 years old in a horseback riding accident in Switzerland. After living in Argentina during World War II, Athenais returned to France. She died in 1969.

Louis 1885 - 1959

Louis was born in New York in 1885. He also had his own nurse. When the family left in 1886, he was about one and one half years old. Louis and his sister grew up in France and did not return to Medora until 1903. Louis spent only a few days in Medora since he was entering Yale University. He married and had a son Antoine, called Tony, in 1921. Louis retired from the banking business in France and moved to Switzerland in 1936. That year he deeded the Chateau and 125 acres of land to the state of North Dakota. He died in New York in 1959.

Paul 1890 - 1950

A third child was born after the family returned to France in 1887. Paul was only six years old when his father was killed in 1896. He made a visit to Medora in 1913 when he spent about a week in the area taking photos of the Vallombrosa family property. He also worked in banking. Paul was a Lieutenant in the French cavalry from 1914 - 1918. He married but did not have any children. He died in 1950.

Antoine 1921-1982

Louis' son, Antoine or Tony, was born in 1921. As a child, he visited Medora with his father and made several visits in the 1970's and early 1980's. He died in 1982 without having married or had any children so was the last of the direct family line.

Baron Patrick de Ladoucette is the great-great nephew of the Marquis de Mores through the Marquis's sister, Claire.

Chateau du Nozet, the largest and most famous of the Poilly-Fume vineyards has been in the hands of the Comte Lafond and Ladoucette families since 1787. After taking over Ladoucette in 1972, the Baron extended his activities to Sancerre, Chablis, Vouvray and Chinon.

Today, the Baron produces outstanding Loire Valley wines under several different labels. Many of the wines are considered to be the finest examples of their type.