The Friday Networking Meeting

March 7, 2025

The Networking Meeting at Denny’s restaurant on Greenback Lane in Sacramento was, once again, a marvelous opportunity to meet new people and listen to a fabulous presentation by one of our own, Jenifer Rowe.

Jenifer shared her knowledge of Marie Suize, a historical, if not legendary, figure of the California Gold Rush who came to be known as Madam Pantaloons. Pantaloons, during the time of the Gold Rush, was another name for men’s trousers. Wearing trousers came to be one of the ways Marie Suize distinguished herself during a time when women were oppressed in America’s male dominated society.

As a single 22-year-old French immigrant who spoke little English she embarked on a trip to the California gold fields, by crossing the oceans and traveling around the Horn of South America until she reached San Francisco. The fact that she took this trip was an indication of the bold personality she had. In those days, women rarely traveled alone. Indeed, the rights of women were secondary to those of men. At the time of the gold rush, women couldn’t vote, be politically active, work outside of the house unless they were a teacher, own property if they were married, and were limited by so many “man” made rules. It is extraordinary that she was so successful given all the limitations she had to navigate.

From San Francisco, she took a steamboat to Sacramento where she rode a mule to take her to the gold country. She never married and was able to enter into business relationships and acquire land. She purchased mining rights and began to sell and manage mining claims. Ultimately, after significant success in mining for gold, (rumors were that she herself mined a square meter of gold) and managing mining claims, she ended up purchasing 800 acres East of Jackson where she planted a vineyard, started a winery and sold wines and brandy.

It was when she was working in the mine fields that she started wearing pants. Wearing a dress while in the water and muck just wasn’t tenable. Everyone in the mining camps understood her desire to wear pantaloons, but when she went to Virginia City and San Francisco to promote her business ventures, she was actually fined and had to go to court because she dressed like a man.

Her propensity to take risks got the best of her as she grew older. She gambled away her fortune and died penniless in 1892. She is buried in St. Patrick’s Cemetery in Jackson. Her exact grave site is unknown, but in 2004 a headstone was erected to honor her. Of significance is that her head stone contains a replica of her signature taken from a time when women weren’t allowed to sign contracts. She was truly a trail blazer for women’s rights.

Jenifer captures the extraordinary life of Marie Suize in her book Madam Pantaloons: Gold Rush Pioneer. Jenifer geared the book for children 8 to 11 years old as an introduction to how women have overcome challenges throughout history. It is available on Amazon at: [Madam Pantaloons: Gold Rush Pioneer: Rowe, Jenifer E: 9781736088043: Amazon.com: Books](https://www.amazon.com/Madam-Pantaloons-Gold-Rush-Pioneer/dp/1736088041)

Respectfully submitted by

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