

Welcome to the Chateau de Morès State Historic Site! The following is a brief perspective of what this site is all about. After viewing this program, please visit our two galleries and our store. During the months of May through September, take a tour through the 26-room hunting cabin built by the Marquis de Morès in 1883, built as a summer residence for he and his wife, Medora, and their many guests from the East Coast and Europe.

Let us take a look at the Marquis' reason for coming out to the Badlands of North Dakota. Our story really begins with the opening of the West and the Lewis and Clark expedition of 1803. It was clear to many that the call "Go West, young man, go West" meant there were fortunes to be made, and soon the Gilded Age was on!

The Marquis joined the multitudes West, but it was not gold or silver that drew him here from France. It was cattle! By the 1880s the Cattle Bonanza was in full swing. Chicago and Kansas City were spearheading the industry. Swift and Armour had made Chicago the meatpacker of the world by solving the problem of how to get affordable fresh beef to the populace. The answer was refrigeration through the use of ice in refrigerated rail cars. However, as the nation moved West, the problem of shipping live beef to the slaughterhouse remained. Damage to the cattle because of stress, overcrowding, and dehydration consumed much of the profits due to the loss of weight. Sometimes, these trips to the market by train were over 1,000 miles long. Also adding to this problem were the depletion of good grazing in the South due to the Civil War and the introduction of Tick Fever and other cattle diseases. The search for new grasslands was turned northward.

To the Marquis de Morès, the promised land was Dakota Territory. The young 24-year-old French nobleman full of optimism, ideas, and with the partnership of his father-in-law, a rich international banker from New York, the Baron von Hoffman, the making of the Little Missouri country the northern beef capital seemed a surefire enterprise.

The Marquis was so confident of success that he brought his young, beautiful bride out with him to establish a residence. Early in April of 1883, he bought the east side of the river and christened that site, Medora, after his wife. Thirteen sections of the Badlands north of here were purchased from the railroad for his ranch, totaling almost nine thousand acres. Within 3 months, a 26-room home was built overlooking his holdings and, within 6 months, the slaughtering and shipping of fresh range beef from his newly constructed abattoir commenced. With all that activity, the little town of Medora began to grow at about 100 people a year.

The house on the hill became known as "the Chateau" to local people. To the family, it was merely a hunting cabin. It was a place to get away from civilization, to "get away from the genteel life," as the Marquis was quoted as saying. It was a place for the Marquise to try out her wings as the mistress of a home all of her own and devote time to her passion: hunting. Her equestrian skills matched her shooting skills and drew kudos from the local cowboys and hunters. The Marquis admitted she was a better shot than he. Her love of the wilderness of the Badlands gave her inspiration to become a renowned hostess at the Chateau. She spoke seven languages, played classical music on the piano, was an accomplished artist with watercolors, and supervised lavish dinners. The guest list included Theodore Roosevelt of New York, Hamilton Fish, also of New York society, the Melons of banking fame, Russian princes, and many more. All coming to do some business, no doubt, but especially to hunt and to experience the true Wild West.

Join us now as we go back to the years 1883 through 1886, as guests of the Marquis and Marquise in their western hunting cabin, now known as the Chateau. After a 4-day trip from the East Coast, guests have arrived at the new town of Medora, Dakota Territory. The views of the Dakota Badlands have already whetted their anticipation for a Wild West adventure! Madame de Morès has arranged to have their baggage delivered to her residence. The excitement increases when their carriage has to ford the Little Missouri River. On their arrival, guests would more than likely be ushered into what is now referred to as the Hunting Room. Hunting guides, cowboys, outfitters, and all other personnel needed for the extended hunting trips would be here to enhance the adventure that was to come. Let us look around for a moment at this room that was added to the original structure in 1885.

Now, it is time to go upstairs to find the sleeping arrangements. There are ten bedrooms up there, two of the bedrooms are for the family's young children and their nurses. Five bedrooms were for the household staff, while the three largest rooms were for the guests. These arrangements were not to be found in the mansions of the East and Europe. But were probably explained to the guests before they arrived. The reason? This was the wild frontier and concessions had to be made.

After settling in, it was time to explore the rest of the house, so it was down the steps to the veranda to view the Marquis' empire. The next stop for the guests was the Living Room, a virtual oasis of Victorian Civilization in the Western wilderness. The room served as a music room, library, and parlor all rolled into one. Madame's box grand piano, brought in from New York, occupied much of this room. Sheet music found in the house included classical, opera, show tunes, and even some banjo music. Who played the banjo? We are not sure. But we are sure that music was a mainstay of the entertainment. Her piano was sent to St. Paul for winter storage and brought back in the Spring.

In this happy place, we also note the extensive library that even young Theodore Roosevelt, their neighbor seven miles to the South not only noted the books but borrowed them.

The Marquis and the Marquise were wonderful hosts and made sure that their guests could experience some elegant living even on the rustic frontier. Meals in this Dining Room were served in courses consisting of fish, roast, wild game, salad, vegetable, fruit, and dessert. Wine was served with the dinner meal, all served by waiter men and a bevy of kitchen servants. With dinner finished, it was time for the gentlemen to enjoy a cordial and a fine cigar. The stage was set for the main form of entertainment: the hunt.

Remember, while visiting the Chateau de Morès State Historic Site, be sure to explore the ruins of the Marquis' abattoir, located in Chimney Park. Chimney Park is easily recognized by the 85-foot-tall smokestack. We invite you to check out the podcast entitled "Footsteps Through Historic Medora." Stop at our visitor center desk and ask how to download that free program. Our Visitor Center is a convenient place to get information on all of the sites and activities that happen in Medora. And, by all means, browse our gift shop. Have a wonderful stay in Medora!