

## **Mrs. Marie Touya Lamotte**

(Row D, Grave 45)

Life's journey of ninety-nine years ended on February 8, 1976 for Mrs. Marie Touya Lamotte. She died alone in Manzanita Manor convalescent Hospital in Cloverdale, California. With no money or family there to claim her remains, she was buried in a pauper's grave in the County of Sonoma Indigent Cemetery and forgotten—until now.

Marie's story began on April 24, 1877 in Meracq, Pyrenees Atlantiques, France, where she was born. In 1893, at the age of just 16 years, she left her family and country, where times were hard, to courageously immigrate to the United States to start a new life. When she arrived in San Francisco, she found employment in a French Laundry. Laundries of this era provided emigrants with a job, room and board, the chance to learn English, and instruction on how to become a United States citizen. It was there that Marie met Louis Lamotte, a young French Belgium man, a laundry worker himself, who would become the love of her life—or so she thought.

On October 5, 1895, Marie and Louis were married, and according to the 1900 census, they lived together in San Francisco and attended laundry picnics through 1902.

Prior to 1906, Louis and Marie had moved to El Verano, California, and were running the El Verano Villa there, which was one of many family resorts that welcomed Bay Area vacationers. The Villa was known for good fishing and hunting, and was located near hot mineral baths. It was also known for having the best minstrel shows and a fine orchestra that played for dancers on a dance floor that was described as among the finest in the Valley.

A July 19, 1911, article in the Press Democrat newspaper reported that the 122<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of the Bastille was celebrated at the Villa on July 10<sup>th</sup> and that Louis and Marie were the “ideal host and hostess.” That evening, Marie introduced a novel feature. The “little hostess” as she was referred to in the article, stationed three volunteers on the roof of the pavilion, one at each of three ventilators about ten feet apart, one with red confetti, one with white, and one with blue, and they provided what Marie called “a Franco-American snow storm.” Unfortunately, a different type of storm was brewing.

In 1920, Marie's story turned into a tragedy. Louis accused “the little hostess” of being mentally ill right from the day he married her. He procured Letters of Guardianship and had her committed to Napa State Psychiatric Hospital. In 1923, Louis had their marriage annulled after surprising testimony was presented in court that Marie was “a lunatic, and incapable of contracting a marriage, and had been ever since insane.” This was a cruel accusation, considering that Marie had stood by him and helped him to become a successful businessman.

Apparently Marie's court appointed guardian did little to challenge her husband's accusation, so the marriage was annulled.

And according to the 1920, 1930 and 1940 censuses, Marie spent the next thirty years incarcerated in Napa State Psychiatric Hospital.

It is hard to imagine that the savvy Louis would have married a "lunatic." He was way too smart for that. So why, after 27 years of marriage, would he make such an accusation? Could there have been another woman he had his sights on, so to end his marriage, he simply accused Marie of being mentally ill, sent her away, and had their marriage annulled? What we do know is that with Marie out of the way, Louis wasted no time marrying a woman 21 years his junior.

Around 1968, Marie's story changes from a tragedy to a mystery. Records show Marie as a patient at Manzanita Manor at 300 Cherry Creek Road in Cloverdale, California, which is where she lived out the remainder of her life. But how she ended up a Manzanita Manor is a mystery. Unfortunately, the chain of events that led her there are shrouded by the fog of time.

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On February 8, 1976, Marie's ninety-nine-year life's journey ended when she died of bronchial pneumonia. She had lived a long life filled with more than her share of tragedy. An autopsy was performed, and another mystery surfaced. The autopsy revealed that Marie had no ovaries or uterus—she had undergone a hysterectomy. But when, and where? Did she have a hysterectomy when she was married to Louis or while she was incarcerated in Napa State Hospital? We may never know.

What we do know is that Marie weighed only 80 pounds when her remains were placed into a cardboard coffin and lowered into a pauper's grave in Row D, Grave 45, in the County of Sonoma Indigent Cemetery. She left an estate of just \$284.40, which reverted to the County of Sonoma.

If only all of Marie's ninety-nine years could have been happy. If only . . .