

Madam Pauline

Historians love facts. We delight in census records, probate files and death certificates, but sometimes we find an interesting story that we can't back up with many facts and we just have to make some conclusions. Here is one such story.

While doing some biographical research on an early Auburnite that was involved in bringing domestic water into town, Stephen Woodin, I came across several references to his wife Pauline. What piqued my interest was that before she married Woodin, she ran a business on her own in early Auburn and she was from Chile.

Many readers do not realize that when the Gold Rush began, it was those who were close by that began the Rush. Men from Oregon were among the very first, as were Mexican miners, Hawaiians made an early appearance as did Chileans. The reason for this is the proximity to trade routes that had already been established before the Gold Rush. The port of Valparaiso Chile was a huge, bustling, international port as it was located on a natural stop over for repairs and provisions for ships plying the trade route between the Pacific and the Atlantic Oceans around Cape Horn.

*Abraham Nasitar, Chileans in California in the Gold Rush- jstor.org*

After James Marshall's gold discovery in January 1848, by August 1848, ships leaving Valparaiso were filled to capacity heading to San Francisco. The first contingent were the international businessmen who quickly loaded up merchandise to sell, another contingent were Chilean miners, skilled in their trade, another group were women hoping to find opportunity in a new land.

*Nasitar*

Was Pauline Zunigz Woodin one of these women? We know that she was in California, in Auburn in 1852 from census records. Her last name is mangled by record keepers, showing up as Sevenger or Levenger or Livenger. (We will use the name Zunigz as found in a family tree for her in this article.) She is 27 years old and listed as born in France and recently come from Ohio. She is in the same household as William Redman, 20 years old, a bartender and Sophie Bishop age 20, no occupation and Caroline Thompson age 18, no occupation. The women were possible just workers at the saloon, as cooks or some such, but it is far more likely that they were prostitutes. Perhaps, Pauline, as the "older woman" was running the show.

*Downs-Call Family Tree – Ancestry.com, 1852 Census*

In 1853 Pauline bought a lot of land and probably The Palace Hotel from Stephen Woodin for \$440.00. He owned a store on Court and Commercial Streets, next to the "Palace House."

*Deed Book A pg. 358, Deed Book A pg. 220*

By 1855, Pauline seems to have done well in town; she was the listed owner of the Palace Hotel and Saloon. The assessment record shows her as "Madame Pauline", whether that is a reference to her one time claim of being born in France is left to the reader to decide. The liquor license she applies for in 1855 is done under the name "Miss Pauline". In that same year, Pauline bought a house and lot from Martin McFallen on the Auburn to Illinoistown Road for \$200.00. Not a small sum in those days.

*License Register 1855, Assessments 1855, deed Book B pg. 186*

There is very good reason to suspect that Pauline was intertwined with Stephen Woodin and the Palace Hotel as Pauline bought the property from Woodin and paid the taxes on it, But the ownership is sketchy. For later in that same year, it is Woodin who sells The Palace to attorneys Mills and Anderson. It was on the site of the present- day lawyer's row building.

*Deed Book B. pg. 186*

From 1855 to 1859, Woodin was busy with his partner E. G. Smith laying water pipes into town for the first delivery of domestic water.

*1856 Assessment, Placer Herald 5-21-1859*

The next evidence found of Pauline's whereabouts comes from the slightly confusing 1860 census. She is listed as Pauline Zunigz, she is the head of the household, her real estate is worth \$500 and her personal worth is \$100. With her are three children, Albert Henry age 4, Mary age 2 and Magdalen age 10 mos. The last name of the children is "Woodin."

*1860 Census*

The census taker placed Stephen Woodin living right next door with the Roussin family and his occupation was list as County Supervisor. His location may be a mistake on the part of the census taker; there is just no way to tell what is happening.

*1860 census*

Adding to the confusion is a sale of property that Pauline was listed as selling in 1862 to Hall and Allen. Is this the same property she bought from Woodin earlier? The record is unclear. In 1863 there is another sale of property that references Pauline's property on Commercial Street and notes that it was owned by "Madame Pauline."

*Deed Book H 6-2-1862 & Deed Book I pg. 458*

By 1870, things seem more resolved, the census for that year shows the entire family in the same household. Pauline and Stephen Woodin with children Henry 14, Mary 12 and Magdalen age 10.

*1870 Census*

Something has happened to the family by 1873 as Stephen sold a large home next to the Catholic Church for \$2,000. We next find Pauline listed in the City Directory of San Jose, living on Santa Clara Street in 1874. She is listed as Mrs. Pauline Woodin.

*Placer Herald 6-21-1873, San Jose City Directory 1874*

The year 1875 finds Stephen Woodin living with merchant George Willment with neither property nor personal worth listed in the assessment books

*1875 Assessment & 1875 Directory.*

It was Woodin's friend Willment who reported to the local newspaper that Woodin had gone back to New York, his birthplace, seeking treatment for "a cancer in the breast. He was disappointed in obtaining a cure..." He died in New York in April of 1878.

*Placer Herald 5-4-1878*

Pauline seems to have followed her daughter Mary, who married Samuel Downs and they were all living in Vallejo In the 1880's. Pauline died in Vallejo in January of 1891.

*Downs-Call, Ancestry.com*

So was Pauline a prostitute from Chile who made her way up through society as the madam of a brothel who eventually married a County Supervisor? Or in passing herself off as being born in France, as many Latinos who were bilingual did to avoid discrimination, did she run a respectable hotel and the moniker "madam" was a formality not a label. Without more evidence, we will not know all the answers to this fascinating story. The research will continue.

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