

Miss Irene A. Burns

Placer County's first woman elected official and Superintendent of Schools, 1914-1926

IRENE A. BURNS was born in Placer County, Ca. in 1872. She began her career teaching in local schools, later served as the Placer County Superintendent of Schools, being elected multiple times to that position.



Born in Auburn, Miss Burns was the daughter of Robert N. and Elizabeth (Conklin) Burns, the former a native of Philadelphia and the latter of Boston. The father came to California in 1852, and the mother a few months later, both making the journey by way of the Isthmus of Panama. Robert N. Burns died in 1884 at his residence in Michigan Bluff, Placer County. Elizabeth died in 1913.

Irene A. Burns, on completing her elementary courses in the public schools, continued her studies, and on examination obtained a certificate to teach. She then immediately began her school work, in which she has since been so successful.

In the meantime she supplemented her studies by courses at Curtiss and Patchett's private normal school in San Francisco, as well as by summer courses at the University of California. She has all her life been active in educational work.

Her first experience as a teacher was obtained in the school of Deadwood, in the mountains of Placer County, with an attendance of seven pupils. This school was located seven miles over a mountain trail from the family home at Michigan Bluff, and the young "schoolma'm" rode horseback to and from her school across the mountain trails at each weeks end. She also taught in the schools at Forest Hill, Lone Star, and Blue Canyon, and then taught for sixteen years in various grades in the Auburn schools.

Miss Burns was the first woman elected to a county office in Placer County. Her first election took place in 1914; and she was reelected in 1918 and 1922. She was very successful in her career as superintendent of schools, and brought the school system of the county to a high state of efficiency. The years she spent in acquiring the practical foundation of experience and formal education proved of inestimable value to her.

Miss Burns held membership in the State Teachers' Association and National Educational Association. She served as a member of the County Board of Education before her election to superintendent. She was a member of the Woman's Improvement Club of Auburn, and belonged to the Rebekahs, Women of Woodcraft, and Pythian

Sisters. During World War I she was the head of the Junior Red Cross drives in the county.

Throughout her long residence she proven herself of the right metal, a loyal citizen of the Golden State, and one worthy of emulation. Irene Burns died in 1962. Her home in Auburn has been designated a National Historical Site.

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Irene A. Burns fifth grade class at Auburn Grammer School. Her first class taught at Auburn (60 fifth graders), Auburn Journal Dec. 15, 1965, p. A9

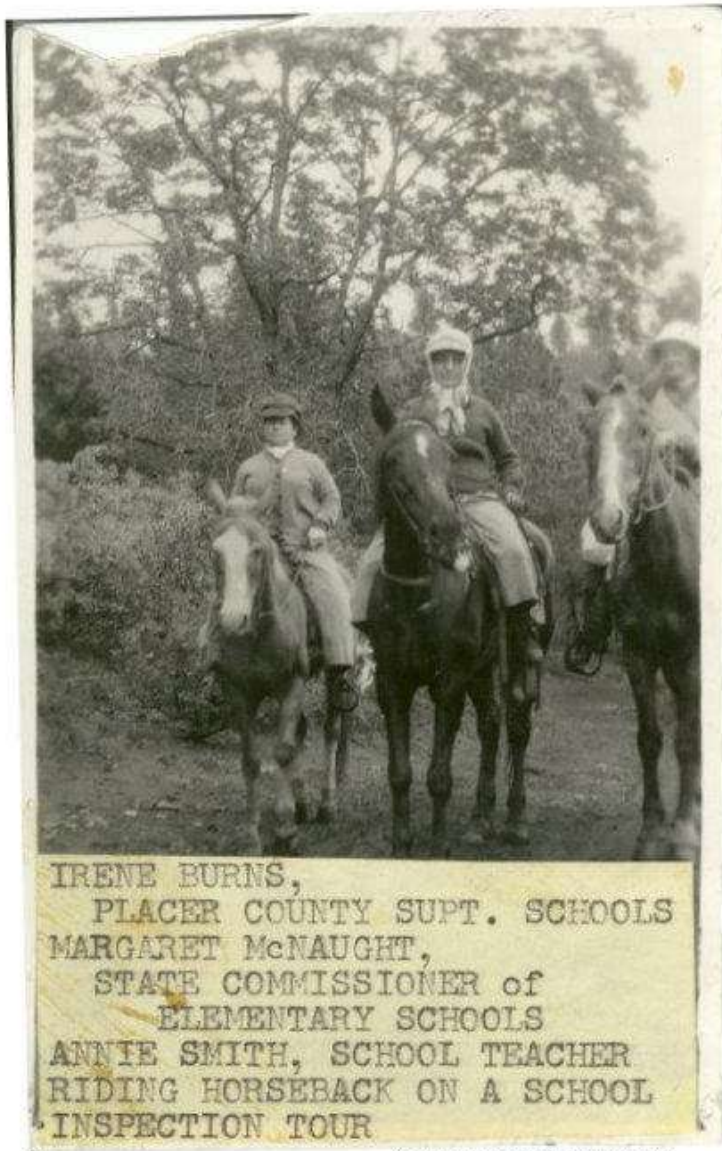


Courtesy of Placer County Museums

Dr. Margaret E. Schallenberger-McNaught visits Miss Burns and Rock Creek School



Courtesy of Placer County Museums



Irene Burns (left), Placer County Superintendent of Schools, joins Margaret S. McNaught (center), State Commissioner of Elementary Schools, and Annie Smith, an elementary school teacher, riding on school inspection tour in Placer County, circa 1916. According to the report there were only two "insanitary" toilets found in the 54 county school districts.

Courtesy of Placer County Museums



Irene Burns Home

The Irene Burns home, 405 Linden Ave., is the newest Auburn listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The Burns-Howell Home is the city's first owner-occupied listing by the National Parks Service. The home is owned by Donna Howell, a past president of the Placer County Historical Society, author and one of the area's most interesting historians. Look for a plaque unveiling soon.