

# history

## Marlene Wiley's Mountain-History Archive The History of Burrell School Marlene Wiley

The second school building in the Summit area was Burrell School. Today, the building is a private home and winery, a visual reminder of life in the mountains over a hundred years ago. Lyman Burrell donated an acre of land to build a school named for his family. He could afford it. His homestead covered a thousand acres of the Rancho Soquel Augmentation.

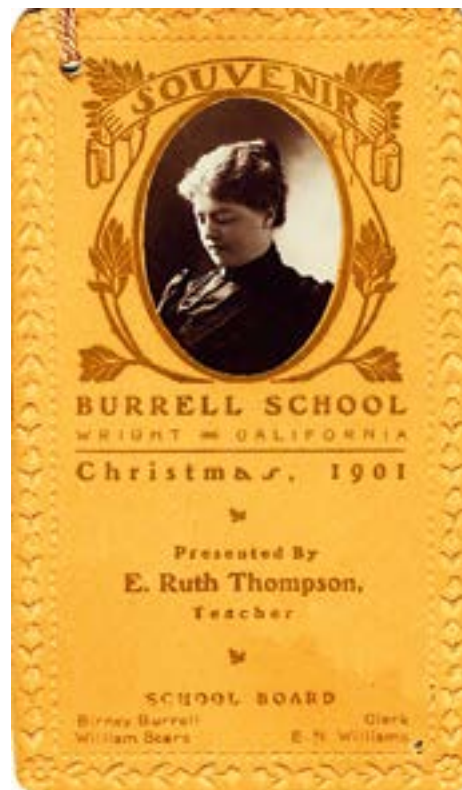
The Burrell School District was formed in 1877. Mary Beattie Smith was the first teacher, and a native of Rhode Island. After the Civil War, she went to the South to teach the freedmen. She married, and then came to California with her husband, who was in the Navy. They had two sons. After her husband died, she supported her family as a teacher. Mrs. Smith taught until about 1883. She was given the affectionate name, "The Mother of the School" because she was the first teacher.

The Burrell School building was a simple, white structure with a cloakroom, two entrances, and a large classroom with blackboards. A grass fire in 1889 burned the building. The community rebuilt a school building on the original foundation, according to the present owner Dave Moulton. He found ashes under the building.

The Burrell School District straddled the county line. With students coming from both Santa Clara and Santa Cruz counties, the teacher reported to the superintendents of both counties. A school that draws students from two counties is known as a joint district.

Unlike the Summit School District that had one teacher, Miss Olga Brecke, for 30 years beginning in 1921, the Burrell School District had many teachers over the years.

The next teacher that I can document after Mrs. Smith was Laura Josephine Berry, who came to the mountains in the summer of 1883 as a newly graduated teacher from San Jose Normal School. Miss Berry rented a room from Reverend and Mrs. Arthur E. Sears, whose home was across the road from the school. At that time, their son Arthur L. Sears was in Missouri. When he came to California, he met and married Miss Berry in 1888. Arthur and Laura each bought mountain property. The parcel on



**As a young girl, Clara Burrell attended Burrell School. One of the mementos she kept was a Christmas card received from her teacher for Christmas in 1901. Clara was in the third grade that year. The card has a photograph of E. Ruth Thompson, the teacher, on the front. The address for Burrell School was Wrights, California. The members of the school board were Birney Burrell (her father), William Sears (brother of Arthur Sears who built Hazelhurst on San Jose-Soquel Road), and E.N. Williams, board clerk.**

which they built their home was named Hazelhurst for the many hazelnut trees on the property. The location was also on the main road (Old San Jose Turnpike from Soquel) to the current Morrell Cut Off, connecting with Summit Road. Their beautiful home still stands today.

A friendly rivalry continued among the mountain schools. Burrell School bragged that they had the first school bell, flagpole, and piano. The local newspaper, *The Mountain Realty* (1903 to 1927), carried a letter in its July 1908 issue about the flagpole. It was made from a twenty-foot long redwood pole that Marvin M. Wilson and Erle T. Smith (son of Mrs. Mary Smith) selected, felled, and hauled to the school ground. The community held a fundraiser to purchase a flag and set a date to celebrate.

On July 4, 1890, a large crowd of people, many from out of the mountains, attended the event. *The Realty* reported that "... Miss Minnie Morrell flung it (the flag) to the breeze while the strains of the *Star Spangled Banner* greeted its unfurling." The patriotic celebration included the Reverend J.R. Wright (for whom Wrights Station was named) and Reverend Arthur E. Sears, who welcomed the crowd and gave the benediction. Someone read the *Declaration of Independence*, and the crowd sang patriotic songs. To further commemorate the day, a photograph was taken of the audience.

Burrell was also the first school to have a piano furnished by the board of trustees.



**Burrell School reunion**

**Front row, left to right: Dick Lake, 1942 graduate; Susan (Pfefferle) Radonich, 1950-1951; Rosemary (Hughes) Auwbrej; Shirley (Lynch) Loman; Nancy (Radonich) Campi, 1950 graduate; Pat (Lawn) Mortensen, 1947 graduate; and Warren Davis, 1946 graduate.**

**Back row, left to right: Jack Ferguson, Jr., 1933-1934; Charles Barnett; Dorothy (Williams) Seuss, 1941 graduate; Don Wilson, 1942 graduate; Bill Radonich, 1934-1942; Roger Williams, 1943 graduate; Bob Wilson, 1943 graduate; Andy Radonich, 1932-1940; Earl Montgomery, 1943; Barbara (Wilson) Yeager, 1944 graduate; Dorothy E (Mansfield) Ward, 1933-1936; John Hurney; and Elaine (Walters) Mollenberg.**

Some people thought each school should have a piano, and that schoolteachers should be able to play and teach the piano. The school bell, which was very loud, was used by the teacher to announce the beginning of school so that the children would come into the building.

Mixed in with the happy times was a tragic death. In 1908, Miss Ruth Hall, a teenage Burrell student, was killed by a trolley in San Jose. She was a wonderful pianist who had earned a scholarship to continue her music studies.

Until the late 1950s, when the fruit was ripe, mountain schools closed so that the children could help with harvest. The norm seemed to be one week off, but Burrell closed for three weeks in September 1911, so that students could pick prunes.

In 1911, former students of Burrell School organized an alumni organization. Burrell alumni held reunion picnics that were expanded to include former Summit, Highland, and Hester Creek alumni.

In the early years, a young woman teacher had to be single or a widow. Once a teacher married, she had to resign her teaching position. Some of the young women who came to a mountain school met a nice young mountain man, and they married. Some of the Burrell teachers who married and stayed in the mountains were Laura (Berry) Sears, Ella (Johnson) Lindsay, and

Frances (Green) Lindsay.

Two sisters who were students at Burrell later became Burrell teachers. They were Lucy and Kay Papac who lived on San Jose-Soquel Road. Lucy Papac also taught at Los Gatos Elementary School. The last teacher at Burrell was Mrs. Robert (Eleanor) Bruce. Six of her students graduated as the last class in 1951.

The Radonich family of Highland Way have lived in the mountains since 1919. The four Radonich children—Peter, Andy, Bill, and Nancy—went to Burrell School.

Juanita Goldmann graduated from Burrell School in 1889. She was a community volunteer and served as a Burrell School trustee. Shortly before the district consolidated, Miss Goldmann was honored with a fifty-year pin at the 1949 graduation ceremony.

After the consolidation, the Burrell School building was used for storage before it was sold at auction in late 1954 to Rudolph Hirsch, husband of Clara Burrell. Hirsch leased the building to the Loma Prieta Club for meetings and parties. The property passed to Mrs. Hedy Novotny, a niece by marriage to Hirsch. She sold ten acres of the property to Dave and Anne Moulton in 1973. The site is known today as Burrell School Vineyards and Winery.

**From Marlene Wiley's  
Mountain-History Archive  
A Handwritten "Fake News" Letter  
From a Burrell School Graduate  
Unsigned**

*Twenty years had passed since I had graduated from the Burrell School. I had been a teacher in the primary grades of one of the large schools in New York, so had lost track of my old school mates.*

*Tonight as I sat before the open fire, my thoughts went back to the little school and the children who went there with me.*

*I was the king of the children who went there. I was thinking of first one and then another when I heard a shrill voice behind me. I saw Dame Fortune standing there. She asked if there was anything I wanted to know.*

*I had just been thinking of Earl Hannaford, so I asked about him.*

*She said, "He is a policeman in Manila, and catches the half-clothed little Philipino wretches and takes them off to the guard house."*

*Then Dame Fortune went on without any questions from me.*

*"Mabel Johnson is an artist of great skill and is an active member of the New York Art League, so you will see her soon if you are living in the same city.*

*"Her sister, Pauline, took to studying on leaving school and would have made a fine scholar if her health had not broken down and left her a mere shadow.*

*"Ruth Hall, who was studying music at the time of our graduation, is still pursuing her favorite study when last heard of, war in Europe.*

*"Carl Johnson, a famous inventor, has just invented an airship, which carried him across the ocean to Japan. While he was crossing, Commodore Lamar Smith, onboard a United States vessel, tried to fire a cannon so as to hit Carl's wonderful invention, but failed.*

*"A member of the troupe of the Ringling Brothers is Sidney Simpson, the world-famous clown, who sings the crying babies to sleep and scares the little girls.*

*"Hall Schrader took an engineering course and is now working for the Southern Pacific Company as boss on a handcar.*

*"Herman Johnson has just put up the first automobile plant in Burrell and seems to be the only one who went to school at the time of the graduation who has settled down in the mountain town.*

*"Hattie Williams went to Stanford but is now contented with being a farmer. She raises prunes. Her new process for curing them is fast taking the place of the old.*

*"Ruby Hannaford passed the law examination and is now Justice of the Peace in Milpitas.*

*"Hazel Lindsay has the largest millinery store in San Francisco.*

*"The Williams brothers have a large stock ranch in Texas. Their brand of cattle is known the world over."*

*Then I woke. I had fallen asleep thinking of the days when we were ending yet beginning.*