

# Maria Platt, Early Iron County Teacher

by Jay M. Jones

“She was so understanding and so willing to give help when needed. She built up within us an ideal and an ambition to reach it at any cost, and we surely did study. She was a wonderful woman and teacher – kind, patient, but very thorough. No lesson ever slipped by her unless she knew we had gotten something out of it.”

These are the words that Maria Platt Munford used to describe her ideal teacher, Mary Page Gunn from Parowan, who taught school in Pinto, southwest of Cedar City. Those same words would be a good description of Maria, who became an outstanding teacher herself.



**Maria Platt Munford. Photo from *A History of Schools in Iron County, 1851-1970*, by Pratt M. Bethers.**

Maria Platt, born 14 March 1876 in Pinto, Washington County, Utah was the eleventh of twelve children born to Benjamin and Mary Greaves Shaw Platt.

She began school at age 6 or 7. She also began working for others at a young age, babysitting during wash days or house cleaning days.

Later, “whenever a new baby came to town,” which was not uncommon, Maria would help in the home with cooking, washing dishes, laundry, scrubbing floors, etc.

Jane Harrison was the local midwife, very particular and clean. One day she said, “Well, Maria, I come and bring the babies, and you come and take care of them. Some day you may be caught, so I am going to tell you what to do.” Maria had the honor of bringing five babies into the world with no complications.

School was a privilege provided only five months a year at best. Maria had to work hard for her learning. She graduated from the eighth grade in March 1894 at the age of 18.

At that time, teachers could be certified by passing a rigorous test conducted over three days. Maria went to St. George to take the examination. After passing this requirement, Maria started her teaching career at Page’s Ranch (also known as Little Pinto). She taught there for two years, with a salary of \$10 per month plus board.

Later teaching jobs included Pinto, Grass Valley, Kanarraville, Cedar City, Sharp (Nye County, Nevada), Enterprise, Newcastle and Beryl. Maria was the first school teacher in Newcastle, and also the first in Beryl.

At Beryl, she encountered students with several different ethnicities and backgrounds. She wrote, “There [were] several varieties of dispositions and intelligences to handle, but I enjoyed them all.”

Maria met Thomas William Munford, who had come to Newcastle to call a square dance. The two were married in 1945. Thomas wrote:

“After I married Maria, we were very happy and there was perfect understanding between us. Our early life’s experiences were so similar. Both came from big families with little income. It taught us the lesson of thrift and economy that I wish more people would practice today.”

Thomas died in 1957. Maria lived to the age of 88 and died in 1964.

(Sources: ***A History of Schools in Iron County, 1851-1970***, by Pratt M. Bethers and ***The Munford History***, by David Munford.)



**Page's Ranch, 2018. Maria Platt began her teaching career here. Photo by Jay Jones.**