



Women in Union Cemetery: Maggie Akins O'Keefe

Margaret • Akins O'Keefe 1868 – 1943

Buried in Placerville Union Cemetery, Section 31 Block 16 Plot A

Portrayed by Ronnie Duska Fowler, Save the Graves 2022 event

Maggie O'Keefe was born to Franciska Wax Akins and James Akins in Placerville. Her father died shortly after Maggie's birth. Her mother married Michael O'Keefe when Maggie was seven. Michael operated the O'Keefe toll road, which ended on lower Main Street, until 1886.

After the toll roads were made public, Michael O'Keefe got into the furniture business, which back then, included coffins and eventually undertaking. Maggie worked in her stepfather's latter business, O'Keefe Furniture and Undertaking, located in what became the Elder Options building on Lower Main Street.

Maggie was a consummate pianist and an authority on local history, a member of several fraternal and service organizations. She also had musical training in San Francisco and taught piano in Placerville.

Maggie was attracted to the business side of the business, and when Michael died in 1905, she and her half-brother Francis took over O'Keefe Furniture and Undertaking. When Francis died in 1926, Maggie managed the business alone for 17 years with the assistance of Henry Steitz. Like several other local women of her era, she never married.

Maggie O'Keefe slipped into what would probably be diagnosed as a depression when her 26-year-old stepsister Krescencia died suddenly in 1909. She later said that she lost interest in everything and that she was "surrounded by death."

Henry Steitz married shortly after Maggie's death, but then died himself a few years later and was buried adjacent to Maggie. It's not hard to imagine her longtime business partner regretting the fact that he and Maggie spent so many years in such great proximity lacking a more intimate relationship.

Interpretation by Mike Roberts, 2024

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