



*Charles Henry Burke*

## *Dakota Images*

Charles Henry Burke was born near Batavia, New York, on 1 April 1861. He attended the New York public schools and worked on the family farm until he was twenty-one years old. He taught one term of school before traveling west to Moorhead, Minnesota, where he worked briefly as a carpenter. In 1882, he moved to Beadle County, Dakota Territory, to homestead. The following year, he relocated to Blunt and went into partnership with a Huron land and real estate enterprise.

In his spare time, Burke studied law and, in 1886, was admitted to the Dakota bar. In 1887, he moved to Pierre, where he worked in real estate investment and became interested in state government. He became a member of the 1890 Pierre Capital Committee and, as secretary of that organization, was influential in the ultimate location of the state capital at Pierre. Burke also served two terms (1894, 1896) in the South Dakota House of Representatives.

From 1898 to 1905, he won four consecutive elections to the U.S. House, but in 1906, the stalwart Burke was defeated by the insurgent candidate. In 1908, he again returned to Congress and served three more terms. While in Congress, Burke was a member of the House Committee of Indian Affairs, eventually becoming chairman of the committee in 1909. One of the many bills he sponsored during his tenure in the House was the 1906 Burke Act, an amendment to the Dawes Act, that was designed to help protect Indian land rights during the twenty-five years that allotments were held in trust by the government.

In 1914, Burke ran for the Senate, defeating the incumbent progressive Coe I. Crawford in the Republican primary but falling to the Democrat Edwin S. Johnson in the general elections. Returning to Pierre after his defeat, he continued in the real estate and investment business and did war-relief work during WWI. At least partly because of Burke's congressional record, Warren G. Harding appointed him as commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1921. Burke held that position until he resigned in 1929.

After 1929, Burke engaged in his Pierre business and periodically traveled to Washington, D.C., to work in the interests of Indians. He died in Washington on 7 April 1944 and is buried in Pierre.

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