Nevada's First Female Public School Administrator?
By Guy Rocha, former Nevada State Archivist

Well meaning claims of a "first" for people are made all the time in the name of legacy. The claimants in all likelihood believe the claims to be true.

However, more times than not, the claims have not been researched, are not true, and overshadow the legacy of the people who really were first.

Take, for example, the claim of who was Nevada's first female school administrator. A paid newspaper obituary in the
Reno Gazette Journal
, written by a private party, noted that "Rose M. Bullis, Nevada's first female school administrator, passed away on January 19, 2009, in Reno."

In chronicling Mrs. Bullis' distinguished career in Nevada education, the obituary said her career in school administration began in the 1950s and continued until her retirement in 1979.

The obituary, for its purposes, defined school administrators as positions above principals but not including principals.

It is true Rose Bullis was among the first female public school administrators when the occupation was dominated by men. The obituary states that Bullis was the first Curriculum and Instruction Coordinator. Yet, Maude Frazier became a female public school administrator in 1921 when she was appointed a deputy superintendent in the State Department of Education.

Born and raised in Wisconsin, Frazier arrived in Nevada in 1906 to take a job as teacher/principal in Genoa. Before she became a public school administrator, she also taught in Lovelock, Seven Troughs, Beatty, Goldfield and Sparks. The job as a deputy superintendent headquartered in Las Vegas involved her supervising all public schools in Clark, Lincoln, Esmeralda, and Nye counties.

"Four men had given up on that particular territory," Frazier wrote, "saying nobody on earth could get over that desert country."

In 1927, Frazier took the job of superintendent of the Las Vegas Union School District and principal of the high school. She persuaded the voters to support a bond issue for a new high school. Las Vegas High School (now Las Vegas Academy) was built in 1931 and is on the National Register of Historic Places.

Frazier retired from the school district in 1946. She ran unsuccessfully for the State Assembly in 1948, but won a seat in 1950 that she held for twelve years.

In 1955, Frazier convinced her fellow legislators to support a university campus in southern Nevada.

The first building on the Nevada Southern University (UNLV) campus in 1957 was named Maude Frazier Hall (it was razed the weekend of January 24-25, 2009).

In 1962, when Lt. Governor Rex Bell--a former cowboy film star--died while campaigning for governor, Governor Grant Sawyer appointed the 81-year-old Frazier as Bell's replacement. She was the first woman in Nevada to hold a constitutional office and served six months.

In poor health, Frazier had no interest in being elected lieutenant governor for a full term and died in her sleep in 1963.

Like Rose Bullis, Maude Frazier was an extraordinary woman in a male-dominated society.

Frazier's contribution to education in Nevada can be summed up in her own words:

"Our schools tend too much to conformity. We turn out people who know the same things, do the same things, think the same way. Yes, it has been the nonconformists, the people who dared to be different . . . who have contributed most to the world-the Edisons, the Wrights, the Marconis.

Instead of trying to make people fit into a certain mold, we should encourage them to furnish their own mold."

Photo credit: Lt. Governor Maude Frazier, 1962. L-R: Governor Grant Sawyer, Secretary of State John Koontz, and 2 unknown state officers. John Nulty photo collection, NUL-1239,

courtesy of Nevada State Archives.

The Historical Myths of the Month are published in the *Reno Gazette-Journal*; the *Sierra Sage*, Carson City/Carson Valley;
Humboldt Sun
;
Battle Mountain Bugle
;
Lovelock Review-Miner
, and
Nevada Observer
(online version).