by Guy Rocha, former Nevada State Archivist

In reading the Winter 2005 issue of *Central Nevada's Glorious Past*, I was struck by the statement that popular, long-time public educator Rita Agnes Cannan was "the first women principal in Nevada." The short biography in the Central Nevada Historical Society publication noted that Cannan had moved from Goldfield to Reno in 1930 and taught at Mary S. Doten elementary school. The following year she was appointed the school's principal and held the position for twenty-seven years.

While I didn't know who the first female principal in a Nevada public school was, I did know that it wasn't Rita Cannan. Education was one of the few occupations that allowed women to become administrators at the turn of the 20th century. For example, Maude Frazier, a long-time state legislator and Nevada's first female lieutenant governor in 1962, was an elementary school principal in Goldfield in 1918, then became the Sparks High School principal, and in 1921 became the Nevada deputy superintendent of the fifth supervision district.

Rita Cannan, in fact, replaced a female principal, Miss Opal Martyn, at the Doten school in 1931. A check of school records found at least ten female principals in Washoe County in that year. Cannan surely would have known that she was not the first female public school principal in Nevada.

Trying to find the first female principal in Nevada would be a monumental task because of the paucity of public school records for early Nevada. We know that Hannah Keziah Clapp was the principal of the private Sierra Seminary in Carson City beginning in the 1860s. The *Educational Directory* for 1901 first lists public school principals in Nevada and there were at least seven female principals.

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