

## **“Breaking Through the Glass Ceiling”:**

### **The Annie Martin Story**

**By Hal V. Dunn**

**#CM-0005**

On August 6, 1921, Annie Hudnall Martin, became the Assayer in Charge of the United States Assay Office at Carson City; the first woman to be in charge of a United States Treasury Department facility. That memorable day was approximately 13 years before the much celebrated appointment in 1933 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt of Nellie Tayloe Ross, the ex-Governor of Wyoming, as Director of the United States Mint. Annie Martin was a former school teacher, newspaper owner and editor, retail store manager, former employee of the United States Branch Mint at Carson City, and in 1913 Chief Clerk of that institution after



Annie Hudnell Martin  
*Courtesy of the Nevada Historical Society*

it was designated an Assay Office. Since Annie Martin “broke through the glass ceiling,” two other Nevada women have held top positions at the Treasury Department, Directors of the Mint Eva Adams, a native of Wonder, and Hennerita Holesman Fore, of Henderson.

Annie was born on February 1, 1857, at Memphis, Missouri, the only child of Ann Maria Knott Hudnall (1836-1857)

and John Randolph Hudnall (1834-1918). Six days later Ann died. John arranged with his sister Mary Hudnall Martin and her husband Charles, to take Annie and raise her. She was christened Annie Martin Hudnall. Later in life she simply reversed the usage of her middle name and surname. According to her own account, her name was never legally changed. Although not adopted by Mary and Charles Martin, she was always considered to be their own child, the “elder sibling” of their own children.

Her uncle was James Proctor Knott (1830-1911), one time attorney general of Missouri, and later a congressman and Governor of Kentucky. In 1863 James Knott and the Martin family left Missouri, traveling in opposite directions. The Martin family crossed the plains in four months by a horse drawn wagon, in contrast to the more conventional oxen drawn conveyance. Years later the most notable events of that journey she could recall were that there was a constant fear of hostile Indians: arriving in Salt Lake City with its beautiful stores, clean streets and trees; and then, the final part of the journey – sagebrush and sand – described in her words as “more sordid than the first part,” and arriving at Fort Churchill. They arrived in Virginia City, Nevada Territory, in August 1863. As a child of six years, she had imagined Silver City “to be a city with silver-paved streets” and Gold Hill to be a “sugar-loaf mountain of pure gold.”

In October 1863, they moved to Carson City, the place where Annie Martin would live the rest of her life. The family lived in two rooms in a house owned by the Corbett Brothers on the southwest corner of what was later the Arlington Block, one block south of the future site of the U.S. Mint. Annie thought the rent of twenty dollars per month was exorbitant by Missouri standards. Her father became the Deputy Secretary of the Nevada Territory under Orion Clemens, the older brother

of Sam, better known as Mark Twain. Charles and Orion were old friends from Missouri. The Orion Clemens family lived next door to J. Neely Johnson, an ex-Governor of California and in 1864 the president of the Nevada Constitutional Convention. He would later become a justice of the Nevada Supreme Court. After statehood Charles Martin served many years as Deputy Secretary of State and in 1869 served approximately seven months as the elected superintendent of schools of Ormsby County, before resigning. The state library of approximately 200 volumes was housed in the secretary's office. By her account Annie had read, or at least looked at most of the volumes in the collection.

Annie's playmates were Bessie Johnson, the daughter of the former Governor, and Jennie Clemens, Orion's daughter, who died at the age of ten in 1864. Both were three years older than Annie. Jennie was described by Annie as "a remarkably sweet and obedient child, devoted to her church . . . ." After her death the money she had been saving was used to purchase the pulpit Bible for the First Presbyterian Church. Today, that Bible is a great treasure of the church. It was at this church that Annie would serve as the organist for forty years (1888-1928).

Educated in the public schools of Carson City, she excelled in her studies. In 1877 she became a beloved teacher in those schools for the next thirteen years. First she taught kindergarten and later primary grades, which were more to her liking. Many of Nevada's future prominent citizens passed through her classroom.

Leaving teaching in May 1892, she purchased the *Carson Daily Morning News*, and was the sole proprietor and editor. She was the first woman to own a newspaper in the state of Nevada. The May 15<sup>th</sup> edition carried her "salutatory." In part she wrote, "From the position of school teacher, with rattan and chalk as emblems of trade to the editorial

chair with its accompanying pen and scissors is but a step, but it is a long step in many ways, and the event is an important one in a mortal's life. Since this mortal is of the weaker sex, it is with no little trepidation that I take up the new work. . . . Newspaper business is entirely to my liking and I hope to succeed by patient work and unfailing energy. . . . The politics will be thoroughly and distinctly Republican and the paper will support the Hon. H. F. Bartine through thick and thin. . . .” Horace F. Bartine was a Republican and Nevada's lone Congressman. She opposed Francis Newlands, in his rise in politics, and early on was with Senator John P. Jones (of 20-cent coin fame) and Senator William Morris Stewart “the grand old man of Nevada.” Within two years she had cooled on Stewart. She had many disagreements with Sam Davis, the editor of the *Carson Appeal*.

She did not follow the politics of her uncle J. Proctor Knott, recently Governor of Kentucky, a Democrat. Her Republican party affiliation would serve her well over a quarter of a century later. She defied her critics who thought she would only last a month, or perhaps at most a few months; she stayed for three and one-half years. She opposed the rise of the Silver Party and after it came to power in Nevada, she no longer had the political connections she felt necessary for a newspaper to survive. She sold the paper in October 1895 to the firm of H. C. Dunn and H. A. Lemons, printers. She became the manager of the F. W. Day dry goods store for the next four years. Then for three years she managed a stationary store. Returning to the *Carson Daily Morning News* in 1902, she worked for the next several years as the city editor and bookkeeper.

In 1908 she competed against sixteen other applicants for a position as clerk at the United States Assay Office at Carson, attaining the highest score on the test. Assayer in charge Roswell K. Colcord appointed her

clerk. After thirty-eight years she had returned to the institution where as a very young lady she had been employed by Abraham Curry when he was the first superintendent of the facility when it was the United States Branch Mint. It should be noted that in those early years child labor laws were non-existent.

After the resignation of the Chief Clerk in 1913 she was promoted to that position by Andrew Maute, Assayer in Charge. On July 1, 1921, Maute, retired. A former state senator from Nye County, and elected superintendent of state printing, Maute had served ten years at the Assay Office.

On July 7<sup>th</sup> Annie Martin was nominated as Assayer in Charge and became the acting Assayer in Charge during the interim. She took office on August 6, 1921, and held that position until her death in 1928. She had become the highest ranking woman in the history of the Bureau of the Mint. Her years as Assayer in Charge were relatively uneventful. There were only three employees. Purchased bullion was sent elsewhere, as all minting operations had ceased almost thirty years before. Her reports to Washington and Philadelphia were very accurate and well received. In a little over five years after her passing, the Assay Office would close forever as a Federal facility.

She journeyed annually to the Nevada picnics at Moswood Park in Oakland, California. It was here she socialized with Nevadans and former Nevadans. Returning home she wrote an account of each event for publication. Once she rode from Carson City to Glenbrook and back on the shotgun seat next to the legendary Hank Monk, the driver who brought Horace Greely from Carson City to Placerville, California, in the record breaking run of twelve hours. Annie Martin arranged musical entertainment for the inmates of the Nevada State Prison, and

performed in the Carson Opera Company. She was a fan of the “silver screen” and enjoyed amateur theatricals. In the early 1920’s she taught her grandnephew Kenneth Plummer, then living with her, how to hunt and fish. She was a poet and a photographer, and brought these two talents together on a postcard entitled “Sagebrush Wireless,” published circa 1924 by Pacific Novelty Company. She was an occasional correspondent to the Reno newspapers. Annie never married.

At age seventy-one years, nineteen days, Annie Hudnall Martin died of an apoplectic stroke on Monday, February 20, 1928. She had been ill less than a day. Her funeral was held at the First Presbyterian Church of Carson City, where she had been a member most of her life. Out of respect, the organ which she had played for forty years was silent. The *Carson Daily Appeal*, on February 22<sup>nd</sup> referred to her as “one of the most beloved women in this state.” Flags at the U.S. Assay Office and throughout the city flew at half-mast. The public schools of Carson City closed the day of her funeral. Her pallbearers were selected from her former students; gentlemen who had risen to prominence in the city and the state. Her grave in the Lone Mountain Cemetery is only a few yards distant from that of Jennie Clemens, Annie’s playmate who died over six decades before. Inscribed on her grave marker are these words: *“Annie H. Martin, 1857 to 1928, Dedicated to the memory of Annie H. Martin by her bereaved students and classmates, in loving remembrance of her great devotion, unfailing kindness, unselfish service and sterling womanhood.”*

She wrote at least two narratives of her life. Both are drafts, typewritten, double spaced, with handwritten corrections or additional text, and each is undated. One is ten pages, and refers only to her early childhood and events in Carson City. From the text it is not possible to date that narrative. The second was written in the closing years of her life,



possibly in 1927, specifically referring to her appointment as Assayer in Charge by President Warren G. Harding. Annie was interviewed circa 1926 by Leonard D. Gifford, a Carson City High School student, for an essay project. His essay was entitled *An Old Settler's Story*. This four page work concentrates on the very early years of Carson City, mostly the territorial years.

In the ten page draft she wrote, "I grew up with the U.S. Mint, the State Capital, the Orphan's Home, the railroad shops, and every timber and stone was a personal friend and playmate." She recalled the torchlight processions celebrating one political victory or another that ended at saloons. With reference to territorial governor James Nye, she could just barely remember him. Curiously missing from any reference in her writings is Richard Parks Bland, the ex-treasurer of Carson County, Utah Territory (before the creation of the Nevada Territory in 1861). He was a prominent attorney in Virginia City before returning to Missouri in 1865. Bland later became a powerful Congressman and a serious contender for the Democratic nomination for President of the United States in 1896. The Bland-Allison Act of February 28, 1878, was authored by Congressman Bland and Senator William Boyd Allison, a Republican of Iowa. It must be assumed that given the status in early Nevada politics of Bland and Annie's father, Charles, that they knew each other, and by extension Annie would have probably at least met Bland.

Annie Hudnall Martin was eighteen years old when Anne Henrietta Martin was born at Empire City, Ormsby County, Nevada. They were not related. The younger Miss Martin became a suffragette and was an unsuccessful independent candidate for the United States Senate in 1918 and 1920. This similarity of names has caused confusion with many historians in researching the lives of these two remarkable women.

Unfortunately today, Annie Martin of the Mint and Assay Office seems to be an obscure footnote in the history of Nevada. She should not be an overlooked participant in the history of this state and the Bureau of the Mint; she is far more important. Rusty Goe is one of the few modern authors to give her proper recognition in his book, *The Mint on Carson Street*. So how did this remarkable woman, once referred to as “one of the most beloved women in this state,” become to most a mere footnote a half century later? Perhaps she was overshadowed by the senatorial candidate with an almost identical name; or perhaps we shall never know.

No. 176

U. S. Mint Service.—Form No. 42 C.  
6-115

MEMORANDUM OF GOLD BULLION deposited at the Assay Office of the United States at CARSON CITY, NEVADA  
 the 22<sup>nd</sup> day of August, 1901, by Edw. J. Sullivan  
 Note.—This Memorandum is for the information of the Depositor, and is of no other value.

DESCRIPTION OF BULLION.	WEIGHT.				PURITY.		VALUE.		FINESSE.		CHARACTER.		NET VALUE.	
	BEFORE MIXING.		AFTER MIXING.		1,000ths.	Dollars.	Cts.	1,000ths.	Dollars.	Cts.	In this Assay and Sampling.		Dollars.	Cts.
	Ounces.	Dec.	Ounces.	Dec.							Infl.	Gr.		
Bar E. J. 72		6.29		6.38	525	70.00	100	14.01				227		69.73
														68.73

I CERTIFY that the net amount of the above Deposit is hundred and twenty nine 7/10 Dollars.  
 Payable at the Assay Office only on presentation of the receipt of a corresponding date and number heretofore issued.

Gold Coin, \$ 68.73  
 Gold Bars, \$ 1.00  
 Silver Coin, \$ 1.00

GOLD VALUE:  
 \$ 11.06 per ounce

*Annie Martin*  
 Assayer in charge.

Memorandum of Gold Bullion deposited at the Carson City Assay Office, signed by Annie Martin for assayer in charge. In 1911 she was a clerk. Documents referring to the facility as an “assay office” are less frequently encountered than those still using the “mint” designation during the 34 years (1899 to 1933) that the institution was officially an assay office. Document is red on ivory paper. (From the author’s collection.)



Sherilyn Cox Bennion authored *Equal to the Occasion: Women Editors of the Nineteenth-Century West*. Annie Martin is included in that monumental work. As we look back on her life, whether as a school teacher, editor, store manager, accomplished organist, or at her tenure first as an employee and later the highest ranking woman in the Bureau of the Mint, she was truly a woman for all seasons; she was “equal to the occasion.”

(Note: For the record, this author is not related to H. C. Dunn, previously mentioned in this article.)

Editor’s note:

In the Summer 2006 issue, there is an omission at the end of the article, “Twice struck at the Carson City Mint.” The last sentence should read “by this author, in the *TAMS Journal*, October, 1876, pages 186-190.”