

Martha Maria Hughes Paul Cannon

July 1, 1857 – July 10, 1932

Martha Maria Hughes Paul Cannon was one of the first female doctors in Utah, the first state senator in the nation and creator of the Utah State Board of Health.

Martha was born to Peter Hughes and Elizabeth Evans near Llandudno, Clwyd, Wales on July 1, 1857. Her nickname was "Mattie". The Hughes family were converts to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints they embarked from Liverpool, England on March 30, 1860 on the ship Underwriter and arrived in New York City, New York on May 1, 1860. The family stayed in New York to earn money to travel the plains to Utah territory. The family arrived in the Salt Lake Valley on September 13, 1861. Three days after they arrived in the Salt Lake Valley Martha's father Peter Hughes died and her mother Elizabeth married James Patten Paul. After Elizabeth's marriage to Paul, Martha, at different times in her life, went by the surnames of both Paul and Hughes. Later in her life Paul encouraged her to follow her dreams of becoming a medical doctor.

At the age of fourteen, Martha taught school for a year, but she quit when she had trouble controlling her larger male students. Martha worked as a typesetter for the Deseret News and for the Women's Exponent which was a women's newspaper in Salt Lake City. While working at the Women's Exponent she met Emmeline B. Wells and Eliza Snow they were her mentors and encouraged Martha in her aspiration to become a doctor.

In 1873 General Conference, Brigham Young encouraged women to enter the medical field and become doctors. In that same year at the age of sixteen, Martha enrolled in the University of Deseret as a pre-med major taking night classes while working as a typesetter during the day. She graduated from the University of Deseret in 1878 with a chemistry degree, in 1878 Martha was one of four women set apart for medical studies and practice by the Mormon Church. In the autumn of 1878 Martha started at the University of Michigan, she graduated July 1, 1880 on her 23rd birthday. For a short period of time she practiced medicine in Algonac, Michigan. In 1881 she moved to Philadelphia to take post graduate course at the Auxiliary Medical Department of the University of Pennsylvania. She was the only women out of 75 students. At the age of 25 Martha had earned four degrees.

Martha returned to Salt Lake City, Utah soon after, in 1882, she was called by the Mormon Church leaders to become the resident physician for the newly founded Deseret Hospital. While working at the hospital, Martha met a polygamist, Angus M. Cannon, who was the superintendent of the new hospital and local official of the LDS Church. Martha married Angus on October 6, 1884 in the Mormon temple becoming the fourth of his six plural wives. The marriage was kept a secret as it was a religious ceremony rather than a legal binding contract. Rumors of her marriage to Angus brought pressure to the Deseret Hospital.

Martha resumed her Salt Lake medical practice and taught nursing courses through a school established at the Hospital. In 1896 a clause in the new state constitution had restored the right for women to vote in Utah. Martha was one of five Democrats running as candidates for state senator from Salt Lake County. Martha's husband Angus was among the Republicans running for the office. On November 3, 1896 Martha became the first woman elected as a state senator in the United States.

After Martha's husband death in 1915 she settled near her son in Los Angeles, California. She died in Los Angeles on July 10, 1932. Her body was laid to rest at the Salt Lake City Cemetery next to her husband.

Her grave location is: **Plat – C, Block – 5, Lot – 14, Grave 5, Tier – E.**

