

**SARANN
CHILDS
KNIGHT-PREDDY
1920-2014**



**LAS
VEGAS
GAMING
PIONEER**

Sarann Knight-Preddy broke racial barriers in the male-dominated Las Vegas gaming industry. She became a civil rights icon and key player in the attempted revitalization of the historic Moulin Rouge Hotel-Casino.

Sarann Childs was born in Eufaula in June 1920. She married Luther Walker after high school graduation in Okmulgee and moved to segregated Las Vegas in 1942. Finding few work opportunities, Sarann attended business school in Los Angeles.

When she returned, she divorced her husband and began working at the Cotton Club. When her new husband William Scruggs got a job at the ammunition depot in Hawthorne, they moved north. She borrowed \$600 from her father to buy the Lincoln Bar, renaming it Club Tonga.

At age thirty, Sarann made Nevada history becoming the first African-American woman to receive a state gaming license. She operated Club Tango until the ammunition depot closed in 1957. Returning to Las Vegas, she became a dealer at several clubs, until a 1958 city ordinance banned black women dealers.

The NAACP was trying to integrate casinos. If they could find an experienced woman, Jerry's Nugget would hire a black dealer. While operating a dry cleaners and dress shop, she agreed to a six-month trial – and stayed seven years. Sarann left in 1979 to run for City Council, becoming the first black to win a primary but finally losing by 72 votes. After the loss, she ran People's Choice Casino.

Back in 1955, Moulin Rouge made Las Vegas history as an interracial gambling-entertainment hotel-casino thriving in the shadow of established casinos, gracing the cover of Life Magazine and attracting entertainers like Frank Sinatra and Harry Belafonte. Six months after opening, the authorities suddenly shut it down after Dunes and other hotels complained about Moulin Rouge taking their customers. In 1960, it gained lasting historical significance as the site of the signing that abolished segregation policies on the Strip.

Sarann and her husband Joe Knight-Preddy leased Moulin Rouge in 1985, though few thought the dilapidated landmark could be saved. They finally secured liquor and gaming licenses in 1990, with live entertainment and Cajun/American fare. In 1992, it was placed on the National Register of Historic Places, but like many previous owners, they failed to overcome insurmountable odds and their dream died in 1997. A fire destroyed the interior in 2003 and a second one destroyed the entire structure in 2009 before it was demolished in 2010.

For her efforts in revitalizing West Las Vegas, Knight-Preddy received an honorary doctorate from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. She was awarded the Racial Harmony Hall of Fame Lifetime Achievement Award in 2011 and was featured in two documentaries: "The Gaming Queen" (2012) and "MAKERS: Women in Nevada History" (2014).

Knight-Preddy published her autobiography "72 Years in Las Vegas" shortly before her death in December 2014 at age 94. She was described as a stylish, hard-working, gracious, opinionated African-American woman who grew up in a difficult time and built a life of great significance.