



Colorado Biographies



Fannie Mae Duncan 1918-2005

- Fannie Mae Bragg was born on July 5, 1918 in Luther, Oklahoma. Her parents were cotton farmers on land they rented.
 - After her father died in a car accident, Fannie's family moved to Colorado Springs where Fannie graduated high school in 1938, then married Edward Duncan in 1939.
 - After getting experience working at a soda fountain on Camp Carson (Fort Carson), Fannie opened a USO Concession downtown which welcomed black soldiers. Many businesses did not.
 - In November 1947, Fannie Mae and her husband borrowed money to buy a building for \$25,000 on W. Colorado Ave. and opened Duncan's Café. A few years later, they bought other buildings on the same block and opened other businesses. In 1957, the Duncan's opened the Cotton Club.
 - Performers at the Cotton Club soon included famous black jazz and blues artists such as B.B. King, Louis Armstrong, and Duke Ellington.
 - All people of any skin color, enjoyed the Cotton Club, Fannie Mae Duncan refused to make it a "black only" club. As a result, the socializing of blacks and whites at the club helped in the peaceful desegregation of Colorado Springs.
 - Fannie Mae became known for her generosity, providing money, housing, and college funds for those in need.
 - In the 70's, the neighborhood where the Cotton Club lived became rundown and the club's patrons sometimes became unruly. The city shut it down in 1975. Fannie Mae moved away and died in Denver on Sept. 13, 2005.
- Photo courtesy of Pikes Peak Library District

Great Resources for Fannie Mae Duncan:

Dire, Angela. *Fannie Mae Duncan: Entrepreneur*. Palmer Lake, CO: Filter Press, 2013.

Duncan, Fannie Mae, with Kathleen Esmiol. *Everybody Welcome: A Memoir of Fannie Mae Duncan and the Cotton Club*. Colorado Springs, Colorado: Chiaroscuro Press, 2013 (Note: this book contains mature themes)

Everybody Welcome: The Story of Fannie Mae Duncan and the Cotton Club. Produced by Steve Antonuccio; written by Steve Antonuccio and Mark Bell. Pikes Peak Library District Video Production Center, c2012. (DVD)

