

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Sarann Knight Preddy

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## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Preddy, Sarann Knight
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Sarann Knight Preddy,
<b>Dates:</b>	April 4, 2007
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2007
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:53:25).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Gaming entrepreneur Sarann Knight Preddy (1920 - 2014 ) was the first African American woman to own a gaming license in Nevada, and dedicated the latter part of her career to trying to preserve the historic Las Vegas establishment, the Moulin Rouge. Preddy was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 4, 2007, in Las Vegas, Nevada. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2007_121
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Sarann Knight Preddy was born on July 27, 1920, in the small town of Eufaula, Oklahoma, to Carl and Hattie Chiles. Knight Preddy married her first husband, Luther Walker, just out of high school. In 1942, she and her family moved to Las Vegas, Nevada, settling in the black community on the West Side. Preddy took her first job at the Cotton Club as a Keno writer and later became a dealer.

In 1950, Preddy moved to Hawthorne, Nevada, where she was offered the opportunity to purchase her own gambling establishment; her purchase made her the first African American woman to own a gaming license in Nevada. Preddy then purchased the Lincoln Bar, which she later renamed the Tonga Club; the club was successful in the small booming town, and she operated the establishment until her return to Las Vegas in 1957.

Preddy then worked as a dealer until a new ordinance prohibited women from being employed as dealers. During that time, Preddy operated several businesses including a dry cleaner, a dress shop, and a lounge. Once the ordinance was repealed, Preddy returned to work as a dealer at Jerry's Nugget where she remained for seven years.

In 1990, Preddy turned her focus to restoring the previous glamour of Las Vegas' first integrated casino; she and her third husband, Joe Preddy, purchased the Moulin Rouge. Despite their best efforts, they were unable to secure the financing needed and eventually sold the Moulin Rouge to a developer. Preddy made many contributions to the state of Nevada through her involvement with the NAACP; she also worked to preserve the history of Las Vegas through her efforts to place the Moulin Rouge on the National Register of Historic Places.

Preddy passed away on December 22, 2014 at the age of 94.

Sarann Knight Preddy was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April 4, 2007.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Sarann Knight Preddy was conducted by Denise Gines on April 4, 2007, in Las Vegas, Nevada, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Gaming entrepreneur Sarann Knight Preddy (1920 - 2014 ) was the first African American woman to own a gaming license in Nevada, and dedicated the latter part of her career to trying to preserve the historic Las Vegas establishment, the Moulin Rouge.

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## Restrictions

### Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

### Restrictions on Use

All use of materials and use credits must be pre-approved by The HistoryMakers®. Appropriate credit must be given. Copyright is held by The HistoryMakers®.

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## Related Material

Information about the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview, as well as correspondence with the interview subject is stored electronically both on The HistoryMakers® server and in two databases maintained by The HistoryMakers®, though this information is not included in this finding aid.

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## Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

### Persons:

Preddy, Sarann Knight

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Preddy, Sarann Knight--Interviews

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African American businesspeople--Interviews

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## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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## Occupations:

Gaming Entrepreneur

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

BusinessMakers

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## Administrative Information

### Custodial History

Interview footage was recorded by The HistoryMakers®. All rights to the interview have been transferred to The HistoryMakers® by the interview subject through a signed interview release form. Signed interview release forms have been deposited with Jenner & Block, LLP, Chicago.

### Preferred Citation

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Sarann Knight Preddy, April 4, 2007. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

### Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 5/30/2023 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

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## Other Finding Aid

A Microsoft Access contact database and a FileMaker Pro tracking database, both maintained by The HistoryMakers®, keep track of the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Sarann Knight Preddy, Section A2007\_121\_001\_001, TRT: 0:28:32 ?

Sarann Knight Preddy was born on July 27, 1920 in Eufaula, Oklahoma, to Hattie Crabtree Chiles and Carl Chiles. Her maternal great-grandparents, Joe Hutton and Louisa Hutton, owned land in Huttonville, Oklahoma. Knight Preddy's maternal grandfather, George Crabtree, was Creek; and her maternal

grandmother, Tooker Hutton Crabtree, had both African American and Native American ancestry. She died when Knight Preddy's mother was five years old, and her mother was thereafter raised by Knight Preddy's maternal great-grandparents. Knight Preddy's paternal grandfather, Eufaula Mayor Harmon Chiles, was born to a white father; and married Eva Chiles, who had Spanish ancestry. Knight Preddy's father was born in Texas, and moved to Oklahoma, where her parents met and eloped in 1917, as her maternal grandfather disapproved of their relationship. Her father was a musician and builder, and owned a restaurant and meat market, as well as a farm in Eufaula, where Knight Preddy and her brother, Clarence Chiles, were raised.

African American businesspeople--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Sarann Knight Preddy, Section A2007\_121\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:26 ?

Sarann Knight Preddy grew up in Red Hill, a Native American reservation in Oklahoma, where her family was one of three black households. Her father worked at a rock quarry, and Knight Preddy attended the reservation's school, where she faced racial discrimination. Eventually, her family moved to Hoffman, Oklahoma, where they opened a restaurant; and then to Eufaula, Oklahoma. Knight Preddy boarded in Okmulgee, Oklahoma while attending Dunbar High School, where she danced, played saxophone and excelled in math. She graduated in 1937, and married her first husband, Luther Walker, with whom she had four children. In 1942, she moved with her family to Las Vegas, Nevada, which was strictly segregated. Knight Preddy divorced her first husband, who was abusive, in 1946; and obtained a position as a keno writer, and later a dealer, at the all-black Cotton Club, which was frequented by artists like Sammy Davis, Jr. Knight Preddy also recalls her second husband, Moes Bradford.

Video Oral History Interview with Sarann Knight Preddy, Section A2007\_121\_001\_003, TRT: 0:28:20 ?

Sarann Knight Preddy moved with her family to Las Vegas, Nevada in 1942. There was little housing available, so her father, Carl Chiles, built a home on the city's Westside. There, Knight Preddy worked as a dealer at the all-black Cotton Club, where she met celebrities like Pearl Bailey, Nat King Cole and Eartha Kitt. In 1950, she married her third husband, teacher William Scruggs; and purchased the Tonga Club in segregated Hawthorne, Nevada, becoming the world's first black woman to obtain a nonrestrictive gaming license in a hotel. During this time, Knight Preddy was the president of Hawthorne's NAACP chapter, organized the country's first women's NAACP club and advocated for a consent decree to integrate the City of Las Vegas. The judgment passed after the NAACP threatened to march on the Las Vegas Strip, and the city's first integrated casino opened at the Moulin Rouge Hotel in 1955. Two years later, Knight Preddy divorced her third husband, sold the Tonga Club and returned to Las Vegas.

Video Oral History Interview with Sarann Knight Preddy, Section A2007\_121\_001\_004, TRT: 0:28:28 ?

Sarann Knight Preddy returned to Las Vegas, Nevada in 1957, and worked as a dealer at the Louisiana Club and the Town Tavern. Later, on behalf of the NAACP, she became a dealer at Jerry's Nugget Casino in North Las Vegas, which had never hired a black dealer, and was under pressure from the NAACP to integrate. After seven years, Knight Preddy left to open a dry cleaning business and a dress shop, Sarann's Fashions, in the city's black business district. In 1980, Knight Preddy and her fifth husband, Joe Preddy, opened the

People's Choice Casino on the Westside. She was recruited by the NAACP to run for a city council seat in 1981, and became the first woman to win a primary election in Las Vegas, although she lost the general election by seventy-two votes. In 1985, Knight Preddy purchased the Moulin Rouge Hotel. She also talks about the Westside community; her autobiography, '72 Years in Las Vegas'; and the difference between a keno writer and a dealer.

Video Oral History Interview with Sarann Knight Preddy, Section A2007\_121\_001\_005, TRT: 0:28:14 ?

Sarann Knight Preddy opened Sarann's Fashions and Sarann's Cleaners in the Westside neighborhood of Las Vegas, Nevada. She purchased the Playhouse Lounge in the 1970s; and, in 1980, opened the People's Choice Casino. In 1985, she purchased the Moulin Rouge Hotel; but, due to discrimination from Nevada's gaming regulators, was unable to secure a long-term gaming license. She was called before the Nevada Gaming Control Board after unknowingly selling stolen liquor, and again when the police attempted to frame her for drug trafficking near her property. Later, she was blocked from securing Native American investors for the Moulin Rouge Hotel, which closed in 1997 after Knight Preddy's loan requests were rejected. Knight Preddy recalls the death of her husband, Joe Preddy, and the murders of her granddaughter, Jamey Walker, and daughter, Janice Walker Currie. She also describes her involvement with the NAACP, Las Vegas Historical Society, Las Vegas Walk of Stars and Ebony Fashion Fair.

Video Oral History Interview with Sarann Knight Preddy, Section A2007\_121\_001\_006, TRT: 0:30:25 ?

Sarann Knight Preddy studied at a business school in Los Angeles, California after divorcing her first husband, Luther Walker. She also attended a beauty school and a real estate program, before entering the casino industry in Las Vegas, Nevada. She talks about the development of casino currency, which transitioned from silver dollars to chips during her career; and corruption in the gaming business. She also remembers her fifth husband, Joe Preddy; and reflects upon her life, her advice to future generations and how she would like to be remembered. Knight Preddy concludes the interview by reflecting upon her spirituality.