



COEX 604: Fannie Mae Duncan
Airs November 8 and 15, 2018
Written by: Kate Perdoni

Theme (Controlling Idea)	Civil Rights
Symbolism	Everybody Welcome, social integration through music
Tone / Core Emotions	Fortitude, adversity, glamour, generosity, harmony
Central Plot	The life of Fannie Mae Duncan (1918-2005)
Subplot/s	Racial segregation/integration in Colorado Springs and the nation; The Cotton Club, jazz music and African American entertainers; community activism; generosity and philanthropy.
Conflict	Racism, segregation, social and business evolution, equal rights, women in business, urban renewal/ eminent domain.
Preservation Topics	Fannie Mae's former mansion, now the Duncan-Hart House
Interviewees	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Kathleen Esmiol, Author, <i>Everybody Welcome</i>2. Katherine Scott Sturdevant, History Professor, Pikes Peak Community College3. Leah Davis Witherow, Curator of History, Colorado Springs Pioneers Museum4. Claudine Bragg-Brooks, Niece of Fannie Mae Duncan5. Renee Bragg, Daughter of Fannie Mae Duncan6. James Bragg, Cousin of Fannie Mae Duncan7. Lenora Hendricks, Cotton Club employee8. Clarence Threatt, Cotton Club-goer9. JJ Frazier, Musician and Cotton Club performer10. Shirley Martinez, Colorado Springs Diversity Forum11. Charles Guy, former Cotton Club employee (PPLD Archival Interview)12. Les Franklin, Nephew of Fannie Mae Duncan (PPLD Archival Interview)13. Candice McKnight, African American Historical and Genealogical Society of Colorado Springs14. Fannie Mae Duncan (PPLD Archival Interview)

AUDIO

B-Roll Leah

The Cotton Club is a legend in Colorado Springs.

A-Roll Leah

Everyone has a story associated with the Cotton Club.

Narration

Fannie Mae Duncan's life is an amazing journey from the cotton fields of Alabama, to the Dust Bowl of Oklahoma, to fame and social impact in Colorado Springs. There, she owned and operated a jazz venue called the Cotton Club, where world-class African American entertainers performed for nearly thirty years. The Club's motto, "Everybody Welcome," challenged the era's de facto segregation.

B-Roll Kay

Fannie Mae was the catalyst for the peaceful integration of

A-Roll Kay

Colorado Springs during the very

B-Roll Kay

volatile civil rights movement. During that time in other cities, there was violence and there was bloodshed and there were flaming Molotov cocktails being thrown in streets.

A-Roll Kay

But here in Colorado Springs, Fannie Mae was serving chilled cocktails

B-Roll Kay

to people of every ethnicity who would come in because of their mutual love of the arts, and sit side by side to enjoy the evening.

A-Roll: Fannie Mae

And I said, all I'm looking for is people that, the age — and I'm not looking for color.

Narration

Fannie Mae's alliance with local law enforcement, generosity to her City, and can-do attitude moved mountains.

A-Roll Leah

She was destined.

B-Roll Leah

She was destined to be a visionary. She was destined to be an entrepreneur.

Narration

She was destined to make history.

SHOW OPEN**A-Roll Kay**

Fannie Mae Duncan. How in the world do you describe Fannie Mae Duncan?

B-Roll Kay

She was flamboyant. She was good natured. She had a great sense of humor. She was statuesque. She was 5 foot 7, but she always had on very high heels so she was much taller than that when she looked down upon you.

A-Roll Kay

She was a wonderful human being who never forgot her roots.

B-Roll: Renee

Fannie Mae Duncan achieved a lot in life despite the odds.

A-Roll: Renee

When she was born in 1918, people who looked like her worked for other people. They didn't employ other people. She wasn't supposed to own the real estate that she owned.

B-Roll Renee

She wasn't supposed to drive the cars that she drove. She wasn't supposed to be this vanguard socially progressive influence in Colorado Springs.

B-Roll Kay

Fannie Mae of course was the granddaughter of slaves.

A-Roll Kay

Alabama, as you can imagine, that long ago, at the turn of the century — was very different than it is now.

Narration

Both of Fannie Mae's parents, Mattie Lou Brinson and Herbert Bragg, grew up picking cotton in Alabama. They married in 1909 and remained tenant farmers — unable to own the land they worked.

A-Roll Leah

It's a kind of serfdom that was put in place after the Civil War that barely changed, really, barely changed the lives of African-Americans and kept them impoverished in a ratio of unequal power that they could never escape from.

A-Roll Kay

Probably the family would have remained in Alabama indefinitely as most did, but a tragedy occurred. It was a very serious racial incident. A little boy who was a part of the extended family, he was only four years old, got into an argument with a little white girl.

A-Roll Kay

There was an argument over a toy that actually ironically belonged to the little boy, but when he slapped her to get it back, that was the end of his life for him. He was brutally murdered and it was to teach a lesson, to make a point. Respect was based on fear in those days.

Narration

The Civil War may have ended, but racial violence had not. Fannie Mae's parents fled to Oklahoma. Herbert went first, on foot. Once safety was assured, Mattie followed with their three small children.

A-Roll Leah

The Bragg family left the deep south Alabama like a lot of other African-Americans did in the early 20th century. They're fleeing violence. They're fleeing terror,

B-Roll Leah

they're fleeing discrimination and outright racial prejudice and they're moving toward some measure of economic, political and social freedom.

A-Roll Kay

The hope was that they would have a chance in life because it was very clear that

B-Roll Kay

in Alabama they were not going to have that opportunity. Oklahoma offered hope.

B-Roll Leah

And they did find a measure of that as did thousands of other African-Americans that were fleeing the south post-Civil War coming north and west looking for opportunities.

B-Roll Kay

Fannie Mae was born shortly thereafter on the Fifth of July.

A-Roll Kay

She missed the Fourth of July by one day, which she let everybody know.

A-Roll Leah

As the first Bragg child born in Oklahoma, she had no memories of what was left behind in Alabama. She had a fresh start if you will.

A-Roll Kay

She didn't feel the threat that her older brothers and sisters

B-Roll Kay

really had internalized.

B-Roll Kay

And from the very beginning she was a free spirit.

B-Roll Kay

Ultimately there were seven children and Fannie Mae was smack dab in the middle as the fourth. But she was definitely the leader of the pack.

B-Roll Kay

Outspoken, gregarious, inventive, a mischief maker.

B-Roll Kay

She became a great problem solver,

A-Roll Kay

and her problem solving skills were as a result of trying to get out of trouble most of the time.

B-Roll Leah

Oklahoma meant Mr. Bragg could own land.

A-Roll Leah

And they had a fruit stand. And they fed their family and they also had enough to sell.

B-Roll Kay

She was also a great little mathematician. She understood numbers and subtraction and addition and what have you from the time she was very young.

A-Roll Kay

And because she understood math, her father let her make change

A-Roll Kay

And that was her introduction to the business world.

A-Roll Leah

And even though they were pretty isolated out on the farm and their mom made their clothes, they still had things like doll buggies at Christmas and they had toys to play with. And they had peppermint candy in Mr. Bragg's pockets when he came back from town.

B-Roll Kay

Her father was very successful. He even bought a piano. He bought a new car. And one day when he was out on the road returning from the general store in Luther,

A-Roll Kay

A storm came up and the roads were very slick and he lost control of the car. Had a one car accident and was badly cut to the point that he was bleeding out on the side of the road. A good Samaritan came along and not knowing what to do, smeared axle grease into the wound, which of course stemmed the bleeding, saved his life but only momentarily of course because without adequate medical attention in that era, gangrene set in.

B-Roll Kay

Tragically, Herbert died at Thanksgiving in 1926 leaving Mama Mattie with seven children.

A-Roll Renee

The only recollections she would share about her time in Oklahoma were just with her father. I think that that was a huge event in her life when her dad died. I believe she was like 8 years old.

Narration

Fannie Mae's older siblings dropped out of school to support the family. Fannie Mae lived with nearby relatives in order to continue her education.

A-Roll Kay

It was very, very difficult for the whole family because as you can imagine they were a very tight knit family.

B-Roll Kay

They lived through the dust bowl, they lived through the Depression, a difficult time and without a father,

A-Roll Kay

almost impossible.

Narration

But hope was on the way. In 1929, Aunt Fang Harris came to visit from Manitou Springs, Colorado. She saw Mattie struggling to make ends meet with seven children, and extended an opportunity for the eldest, Frances, that would change the future of the entire Bragg family. Frances returned to Manitou Springs with her aunt and worked at Bingo Jack's bingo parlor, then for R.P. Aldridge, a mercantile store owner.

A-Roll Kay

And this gave her the opportunity to send money home to mom and the children. Over a period of two years she didn't spend one cent on herself.

B-Roll Fannie Mae

We were all lonesome for Frances. And she was just like a mother to us.

A-Roll Fannie Mae

My mother was there. But we had two mothers, like, she took care of us while Mother was working, And we were always hollering for her. And she was lonesome for us kids. So she sent back and got the rest of us

B-Roll Fannie Mae

from Oklahoma.

A-Roll Kay

Uncle Early volunteered his truck and his son, Lenwood Bragg, to

B-Roll Kay

drive the family all the way from Guthrie, where they were living, to Colorado Springs. Colorado was a long trip, and of course no place to stay along the way.

B-Roll Kay

But at long last they could see the mountains of Colorado and eventually Pike's Peak.

A-Roll Leah

And it's that classic experience that generations of people immigrating West have had. Looking at beautiful Pikes Peak and drawing nearer and nearer to it.

B-Roll Kay

Well, you can imagine, seeing the gigantic mountains.

A-Roll Kay

They'd never seen anything like that before in their lives. They were afraid they'd fall down on them. And of course they were screaming.

B-Roll Kay

But once they got closer to the city and saw the trolley cars and saw the gigantic buildings, the big hotel that looked like a castle to them...

B-Roll Leah

...we had a population of about 30 to 35,000 people at the time, so there are street cars. There are traffic lights, there are big buildings, there's activity along the streets. It would have seemed really exciting

A-Roll Leah

and filled with opportunity.

A-Roll Kay

They were so excited, but most especially Fannie Mae. She found out she was no country girl at heart. The city was definitely for her.

B-Roll Leah

Colorado Springs is interesting in that it's founded by a Civil War general

A-Roll Leah

who happens to be an abolitionist, a Hicksite Quaker, who believes really deeply that all people are equal in the eyes of God.

A-Roll Kathy

One way that William Jackson Palmer brought with him his background of integrity was on the issue of race.

B-Roll Kathy

He was someone who broke with his church's belief in pacifism in order to fight in the Civil War.

A-Roll Kathy

While he was not someone who would celebrate diversity the way that many of us do today, he did embrace it for people of his time. He modeled it for people of his time.

A-Roll Leah

But when people come here they bring their cultural biases, their prejudices with them.

B-Roll Leah

Racism takes a foothold here just as it does in other places.

B-Roll Leah

Where they could work, where they could live was limited. Not by any kind of Jim Crow law but by custom, de facto discrimination.

A-Roll Leah

But there was also a flourishing African-American community life here that must have felt invigorating for a family like the Braggs when they came in the 30s.

A-Roll Fannie Mae

We lived next door to Spanish people. And on one side was black, and the other was Spanish. And on the corner was white. So we began to all just play together. And it was just a different atmosphere.

Narration

Fannie Mae spent her first summer in Colorado Springs washing dishes at a Bar-B-Q and handing out soap and towels to tuberculosis patients at the Manitou Spa. Throughout her teenage years, she held after-school jobs, including waitressing and housekeeping.

Schools in Colorado Springs were integrated, and as an organized and popular social butterfly, Fannie Mae was High School Class Treasurer. It was her basketball prowess that caught the eye of one of her classmate's older brothers. Edward Roy Duncan was six years older... and he already knew: he wanted to marry Fannie Mae.

B-Roll Kay

She graduated from Colorado Springs High School, the first in her family to graduate from high school in 1938,

A-Roll Kay

and was disgusted to find that with a high school diploma she could not get a job any better than the ones she had already had. So she worked again as a domestic or a maid.

A-Roll Leah

But she's not satisfied. She wants more.

B-Roll Kay

Ed in the meantime pointed out to her that if she would just marry him, they would have two incomes to put away.

A-Roll Kay

And she finally gave in on October 9, 1939 and married Ed Duncan and became Fannie Mae Duncan.

A-Roll Fannie Mae

I couldn't make up my mind what wanted to be and what I wanted to do. Ed was the type that, anything I wanted to do, it was alright with him. Just do it. He didn't try to hold me back. That's one thing I appreciated about him. He worked with me.

Narration

Ed encouraged Fannie Mae to apply to run the Haven Club, a soda fountain for black soldiers at segregated Army Camp Carson. She interviewed, and got the job.

A-Roll Fannie Mae

It was a very good job because I was behind the cash register and then I was on the soda fountain, and I learned to make banana splits, just everything on the soda fountain. I went from there and I worked into being one of the assistant managers. And I loved that.

A-Roll Kay

She developed tremendous sympathy for the military and for people who were willing to give their life in service of their country. She did very, very well.

A-Roll Fannie Mae

Then I decided, well if I can make this kind of money for the government, I should be able to make it for myself! (Laughs.)

A-Roll Fannie Mae

There was a place in town they called the Service Club, and it had a soda fountain on it, and it would seat about, I'd say, fifty people, including the counter and all. So I told Ed that this was what I wanted to do and he said, Well how are you going to do that? And I said well you can quit the railroad station, and you'll cook, and I'll wait tables.

A-Roll Kay

She talked Ed into giving up his job. He was now working at a really good job with a pension at the railroad. But Fannie Mae didn't cook

B-Roll Kay

... and she needed a cook that she didn't have to pay.

A-Roll Fannie Mae

And he said, well, if that's what you want to do, I'll do it.

A-Roll Kay

They didn't own the building but all the profits would be theirs.

B-Roll Kay

The only problem she could see was in this case, because she would be running a concession, she was going to have to have a business license.

A-Roll Kay

In the beginning, Earl Mosley, who was the City Manager, took one look at her, 26-years-old, a woman, and black at that and decided she did not have the credentials to run a U.S.O. concession.

He turned her down repeatedly. But she was far more persistent than he was patient. And so he gave in, thinking okay, it'll just be a trial run. She'll make it a couple weeks, maybe a month at best, and then I'll be through with her.

A-Roll Fannie Mae

He said, this is what I'm going to do. I'm going to let you have the place on a six-month trial, and you can go in, and I want to see what you can do, and in six months I'll have a report.

A-Roll Kay

Immediate success. Because

B Roll Kay

The blacks in the city who worked downtown had a place they could go and sit down, be treated with respect and dignity and be welcome.

A-Roll Fannie Mae

Before six months, I got a letter. I thought, oh, is he going to tell me to get out of here. My heart went... and it was to congratulate me. He said that he'd had a whole lot of people come in and tell him what a wonderful job I could do, and he said keep the work up, and forget about what I said, and I'm sorry, I should have let you have it a year ago.

A-Roll Leah

She's the one who would say let's take the next step and take the next step. She had this drive inside of her. And she never stopped.

A-Roll Les

She also had a lot of family support that helped her with her overhead. She had a husband, Ed Duncan, who was a great handyman. I mean they were a great team. He could do all the fix-it stuff, they didn't have to hire a plumber, didn't have to hire an electrician. All she had to do was turn around and whisper to her husband, honey I need this fixed, and he did it.

A-Roll Kay

At this point, Fannie Mae became pregnant, and it would have been a beautiful story to tell, but tragically, her baby girl, Yvonne Delores, died at birth. Fannie Mae, of course, was bereft, but she handled stress very differently than most people. She immersed herself with more visions, more ideas, more work.

A-Roll Leah

And then when the opportunity came open to purchase Douglas Hall and the Father Divine Restaurant, she jumped at it.

Narration

The building for sale was just across the street from where Fannie Mae and Ed were working. Envisioning a larger operation — one she owned herself — Fannie Mae called in a favor. She contacted Mrs. D. Arthur Jones, an elderly woman for whom Ed had chauffeured and worked for in the Broadmoor neighborhood.

A-Roll Kay

She suggested that they go down and ask Mrs. D. Arthur Jones in the Broadmoor for the money they needed.

A-Roll Fannie Mae

Interviewer: Could we ask you what the total price of the building was when you bought it? FMD: I believe it was \$25,000. Interviewer: And were you a little bit afraid to take on the responsibility? FMD: Yes I was, yes! Because I cried many a day (laughs) many a day, because it took all my money, you know?

A-Roll Kay

They opened a cafe and bar, Duncan's Cafe and Bar.

A-Roll Fannie Mae

And the night it opened, you couldn't get in the place. And I haven't looked back since.

Narration

It was 1946. A world war had ended. Fannie Mae was 28 years old, and Duncan's Cafe and Bar was a newfound success in downtown Colorado Springs. Fannie Mae and Ed did not stop there.

A-Roll Kay

On weekends they would go up to Denver's Five Points, which is often called the Harlem of the West. And there were very established and polished businesses there. One nightclub in particular, the Rossonian, was the place to be seen, in a Cadillac, if you had one.

B-Roll Kay

Ed took Fannie Mae, you know, just as a break from all their hard work. Ed thought they were sitting there relaxing and enjoying the entertainment,

A-Roll Kay

not realizing that Fannie Mae was sitting there sizing up the place, how it operated, the patterns that the waitresses made as they walked through this little club, the way the singers and the vocalists presented themselves.

Narration

Fannie Mae's younger sister Selena was a vocalist, eventually singing and touring with Lionel Hampton. When Hampton played the Rossonian, Fannie Mae had an idea.

A-Roll Kay

She realized that if, when they booked them in Denver, they could probably get anybody if she could offer a second gig down here.

B-Roll Kay

She bought a sign some 20 to 30 feet, flamingo pink neon, that announced, "Cotton Club," and that there would be two shows nightly and there would be dining and there would be dancing.

A-Roll James

When you walked into the front door from Colorado Avenue,

on the right side of the club there was these big, beautiful, leather red booths and I mean you could maybe six or seven people in a booth because they were huge. And the booths were always full in there, and the jazz band was going.

B-Roll Kay

But not just anybody. She booked what became a music hall of fame.

Montage of artists

A-Roll Fannie Mae

Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Horace Henderson, Fats Domino, there's a number of them, so many I can't even think of.

A-Roll Leah

All of the greats played in Colorado Springs.

B-Roll Leah

She wanted to rival clubs in Denver, Kansas City and New York City.

A-Roll Leah

It meant that people in Colorado Springs were seeing cutting edge music that otherwise would have been unavailable.

A-Roll Charles

She used to have big entertainers from all over the country who came here like Cab Calloway. And Flip Wilson got his start there.

A-Roll Kay

Because these were black entertainers and they were not welcome in this unusually semi segregated society. They were not welcome to entertain at the Antlers, or the Broadmoor, or the major facilities. So if you wanted to see these amazing talents, the Cotton Club was the only place in town to do that.

B-Roll Kay

Well the complaints kept piling up and so Dad Bruce, as he was called, the Chief of Police, called her in and said he heard she was mixing colors and she couldn't be doing that.

A-Roll Fannie Mae

He said, you got white people, you got Mexicans, you got black people, you got everything in the rainbow in there! I said I have? And he said yes. He said, you cannot do that here! I said, you didn't tell me you sold me some black license. I said you charged me as much for my license as Stan at the Manhattan. Well he said, Yes, and I said, Well, the color? You didn't tell me to check for color. And he said, no I didn't, but I tell you, you're not going to have all them white people in there, and you're not going to have all the white people in there mixing, they will not mix! I said, they're in there, mixing, and they're happy, I said, I didn't tell them to come in there. They came in on their own. He said, I tell you what, you go in there, and you tell all those people who are not black that you can't serve them.

A-Roll Kay

It was quite a session because she spoke up immediately; something he was not considered appropriate, and he'd never really had that experience, because he's a pretty tough guy.

A-Roll Fannie Mae

And I said, all I am looking for is people that, the age, and I'm not looking for color.

B-Roll Fannie Mae

So I said, if someone sues me because I refuse to serve them because of their color.

A-Roll Fannie Mae

Will you stand behind it?

A-Roll Kay

And he angrily told her, yes he most certainly would. Serve only blacks, keep it black." Well she was not only angry as all get out, she stormed out.

A-Roll Fannie Mae

So I said alright, thank you sir. So Ed and I got up and walked out of the place.

Narration

Word of the order for segregation of the Cotton Club traveled like wildfire. The police station received so many calls of protest from the Club's affluent white clientele that Chief Bruce was forced to reverse his decision.

A-Roll Fannie Mae

He says, "I'm telling you one thing. If anybody come down there, I don't care if they're black, white, purple, or yellow. As long as they're 21 years old, you serve them. And I was wrong." He said, "You go, and run the place, and I'll help you stay there." He said, "Because you're doing a great job." And I had no more problem.

A-Roll Kay

Well it was a huge victory. The first truly integrated major business in Colorado Springs because of Fannie Mae Duncan.

B-Roll Kathy

It certainly isn't known across the nation or in the history books. But taking him on, ironically, for the issue that she wasn't allowed to integrate white people with black people in her own club based on Harlem's Cotton Club where the fanciest white folks from New York City went all the time to hear black musicians.

Narration

The multi-ethnic wait staff of the Cotton Club now openly served an integrated clientele. This was a first in Colorado Springs history. And, soldiers returning from deployment who brought foreign wives home also now had a place to go for a night on the town.

From the segregated south to the dusty plains of Oklahoma, to owning the first integrated night club in the City, Fannie Mae Duncan took a persistent stand for civil rights. Her generous spirit grew to echo well beyond Pikes Peak — the mountain that had awed a family driving toward hope... Fannie Mae would sustain her extraordinary journey for many years to come.

A-Roll James

I don't care who you were, you were welcome at the Cotton Club.

A-Roll Kay

The soldiers of course had a place where they could be comfortable bringing in their wives from other cultures.

A-Roll JJ

It was off limits to soldiers for a time. But the reputation was so great, they couldn't keep them away.

A-Roll Clarence

And you know, when you have a place that's off limits, that's where everybody wants to go.

B-Roll Fannie Mae

Fort Carson was the cause of me being able to survive.

The white boys from out there, and the Chicanos, and everybody else, they came in. They used to come by, the white boys would want to come in, and they'd peep in, everybody else would want to come in, they would peep in,

A-Roll Fannie Mae

Of course they ran me crazy on the phone, wanting to come, and wanting to know if they was welcome.

A-Roll Kay

She wanted to make sure that everybody understood that they could come in now, that there were no barriers whatsoever.

A-Roll Fannie Mae

So I cleaned out the whole window, where I had an advertisement, then I cleaned it all out. And I went to the Out West and I got a great big sign, one of those cardboard signs. And I just put on there, Everybody Welcome, and put a big spotlight on it. Wasn't a thing in the window but that. And the people passing by could see it, and business started booming.

A-Roll Kay

People of every persuasion were there. It was a wonderful place, a hopping place, but Fannie Mae didn't stop there.

B-Roll Kay

She had a barber shop and then there was a beauty shop. Then they added a record shop and a gift shop. And there was a pool hall.

A-Roll Kay

And in the back, because teenagers, black teenagers, did not have a place to go to really enjoy themselves and be entertained — but without alcohol — she opened the Cherry Pit Barbecue. Of course, a lot of adults went, too, because — good food!

A-Roll Les

I saw a lot of happiness, I saw a lot of fun. I saw the kids that came in from all over the country, and were welcome in an environment that was not anti anybody. And that's what she was. She was the first one that really showed me that you got to care about all people.

A-Roll JJ

I don't care who it was that walked in. They were able to come to her sit next to her on the bar converse with her. She welcomed everybody in she truly believed in that and it didn't matter what race or color or your stature she welcomed everyone.

B-Roll JJ

Fannie Mae would sit at the end of the bar and she had these gorgeous knit suits that would have the fox collars, she had the diamonds and her hair was all ways, always, coifed.

B-Roll Leah

She once said that she needed to dress the part.

A-Roll Leah

She loved designer clothing. She went to all the elite clothing stores in town, like Gray Rose and Rae's Dress Shop in the Broadmoor, Hibbard's and Giddings.

B-Roll Leah

She loved big hats, colorful clothing, gold jewelry, furs, the more the better. And she felt like she had an image to maintain. And she did.

A-Roll Leah

I mean when Fannie Mae Duncan walked into a room, everybody knew it.

A-Roll Kay

When she walked into a room you could hear people whisper, "Fannie Mae Duncan is here, Fannie Mae Duncan is here. It's Fannie Mae!"

A-Roll Leah

While some people might have been envious of her,

B-Roll Leah

She had a really open, generous heart, and I think that people responded to that.

Leah

...she had a mansion.

A-Roll Kay

I am sitting in her mansion. Forty-four rooms, if you count the enclosed porches, 8,000 square feet, two stories high, grounds that mama filled with flowers and gardens and vegetables. There's a story behind this house. Want to hear it?

A-Roll Kathy

So most people don't realize how difficult it was to simply travel if you were African-American. And to even understand from one place to the next what the attitudes might be.

A-Roll Kay

The city still had the major hotels sticking to their segregated ideas.

A-Roll James

The Antlers hotel was across the street, but we weren't able to book into that establishment at that time. So it was a hard place and a hard time for when she was bringing world-class entertainment and couldn't get them places to stay.

A-Roll Fannie Mae

I was so ashamed, I didn't know what to do. They couldn't stay at the Broadmoor, they couldn't find no place to stay in town, what could they do? And even these little places out small, all of them just refused them. So they had to come to Denver.

A-Roll Kathy

Denver had a strong enough black community in Five Points that there were places for folks to stay.

Narration

Fannie called up Chief Bruce, who, after her first confrontation with the law over segregating her club, had since become an avid supporter.

A-Roll Fannie Mae

And I went up to Chief Bruce and I told him what was happening, and he says, I understand that, he says, this is a shame. He says I just don't know what to do.

B-Roll Kathy

She decided to buy a mansion that she knew was for sale.

A-Roll Kathy

And she was going to convert it into a hostelry, a boarding house, a hotel for those wonderful people.

A-Roll Kathy

And thank goodness she did because Colorado Springs might not have seen them continue to come. They're historic presences in our community's history.

A-Roll Kay

Not only all the black entertainers, but many dignitaries stayed here. One being Medgar Evers.

B-Roll Kay

He was invited in 1963, I believe it was, to speak at the Air Force Academy to the black cadets

A-Roll Kay

and he stayed an extra day just for mama's collard greens. Tragically, when he returned home, because of his activism and high profile in society, he was murdered.

B-Roll Kay

It was a terribly distressing situation for Fannie Mae because we lost many people. We lost Dr. Martin Luther King. We lost President Kennedy.

Narration

In the aftermath of national tragedy, Fannie Mae searched for ways to support her community.

B-Roll Kay

They began the 400 Club.

A-Roll Leah

Their goal was to get 400 individuals who would donate generously and widely.

B-Roll Leah

They provided aid to people that were ill or injured or in the hospital.

A-Roll Leah

For African-Americans, for white residents, for anyone.

A-Roll Lenora

Every Christmas, and every Thanksgiving, they gave out baskets. And you would just see them, her and her Cadillac, riding up and down that side of town — which was what we call the North Side — giving different families baskets for different holidays.

A-Roll Leah

Instead of complaining about something, she did something about it. When she saw people in need she stepped forward. When she saw something that could be fixed, she stepped out and she stepped up.

A-Roll Leah

She was so generous in an era when redlining was prevalent, when African-Americans couldn't get loans at banks; they turned to her.

A-Roll Clarence

I've asked her for loans a lot of time -- money, you know, and whatnot.

B-Roll Leah

You know, she joked about being

A-Roll Leah

Bragg-Duncan Savings and Loan, because she offered small loans and large loans to people who needed it. She could always be counted on to support others.

A-Roll James

There's not a family member that I know of that did not get touched by her love.

A-Roll Iaudéan

At some point, you know, all of us kids were able to have little jobs doing different things down where Aunt Fannie owned. So they kind of taught us how to work.

A-Roll Les

She provided employment for an awful lot of my family, and she certainly provided employment for my mother, who was my sole source of support. We lived in her house from the time I was eight years old. So I have to say that she was very important to the family, not only to me but to many others. Not only to me, but there were many family members that were under the roof of her various real estate holdings. In the case of my mother, every time Fannie bought herself a new car, she gave my mother the old car. So the car just kept staying in the family. And then when that car got used up and she got another she gave it to her brother Cornelius. So cars just rolled right down the hill. And when they were all used up, I usually got a hold of one of them. And then there are many other family members who got money, that she was providing for them.

A-Roll Renee

Fannie Mae Duncan was my father, Cornelius Bragg's, sister, so she was my aunt. Neither of my parents was really able to be present fully in my life,

B-Roll Renee

so she kind of just stepped into that role and functioned as both mom and dad for me.

A-Roll Renee

Education was incredibly important to mom. She not only encouraged education for me and made it a priority for me — she encouraged everyone who was in her orbit.

A-Roll Charles

She was always interested in helping people who were trying to do something. And if you told her you were trying to get an education, she'd go 200 miles to assist you. So she knew I was going to Colorado College at that time, during the 50s, so I used to tend bar, clean up in the club, and any other activities that she wanted me to perform that I could that didn't interfere with my education, I undertook that. So I owe a great deal to her, as far as helping me get through those very difficult years when students are trying to combine work and finishing an education. She did a great deal for me and many, many other individuals who were seeking education, or people in the business world.

A-Roll Leah

We know she put at least six students through college, paid every year of their tuition. But a few dozen more, she paid a little bit at a time, or when they came to her in need. She gave generously, not seeking recognition or anything in return.

A-Roll Renee

Mom was a feminist in all but name. I don't think she would ever label herself a feminist, but she really believed in self-agency and educating yourself as much as possible.

A-Roll Les

I used to stand there and watch her, how she dealt with men, in a time when women didn't have a lot of clout with men. But things I heard her say to vendors when they were trying to force product on her, I heard her shut them down and shut them off, and sometimes I would cringe! But, she did it. And she got away with it. And it was because she was right.

A-Roll James

I mean, she'd listen, but believe me, the last line was hers.

A-Roll JJ

And she was fortunate during that era to have the local D.A., to have Chief of Police as friends, and they assured that she, as an African-American woman, would have a successful establishment in the city of Colorado Springs. Today, I don't think I'd see that.

Narration

Colorado Springs Police Chief Irvin Bruce had reversed his order of segregation at the Cotton Club, and went on to become an early supporter of Fannie Mae. He used his influence to help her, in one case, when a local linen service refused to wash the Club's towels.

A-Roll Fannie Mae

He told me, "We don't have a place that's separate to wash them." I said what do you mean, wash them. He said, "We don't have a place to wash the black towels." I said, "The towels you wash any place around here, the help in the kitchen is black!" He said, "That's right isn't it," and he said, "but I had orders from the boss not to serve you." I said, "All right." I went right out of that place and I went right down to the jailhouse looking for Chief Bruce. (Giggles) So he says, "What?" I said, "I have to take my towels home and wash them at night!" And it was hard on me, and I was losing weight because I was working around the clock. So he said, "That's not going to happen," he said, "You can get as many towels as you want, as many aprons as you want, as many caps as you want." He said, "You get on back over there." He called them up and said, "If you want to stay in business, you give her what she asked for, and I mean now."

A-Roll Kay

It's an amazing story that only happened here. A black female nightclub owner and a police chief working together to make it work.

A-Roll Leah

It's a signal that things can be different. They can be better and they could be more equal.

A-Roll Lenora

The police would come in; they would do their rounds. They would go out. Then they may go home and get dressed and come back to the Cotton Club, you know.

B-Roll Lenora

Oh it was fun, it was fun. And the bands were really, really good.

A-Roll James

The house band was Jimmy Jules and he was a great, great musician, and he would have you laughing, but he'd have you rocking more than anything.

B-Roll JJ

And I was hired to perform at the Cotton Club three days a week, three sets a night, three songs per set.

B-Roll JJ

Fannie Mae paid me 75 dollars per week.

A-Roll JJ Frazier

The stage was very small and we had 4 band members. I remember Jimmy Jules would be on the B-3 Organ, Horace Butler would be on lead guitar,

B-Roll JJ

Mickey White would be on the bass guitar, and Jimmy Jones was our drummer and I would have to fit in front of them onto that small stage and plus move around.

A-Roll JJ

So we had some good times at the Cotton Club. I consider Fannie Mae Duncan or a modern-day entrepreneur. She knew what it took to get people in the door, keep people in the door, and prevent them from going out the door. She had something for everyone.

A-Roll Fannie Mae

So on the cards, I always had on there, 'Easy to find, hard to leave.' (Giggles)

A-Roll Kay

They were extremely successful and you would think that life would have evened out for them.

B-Roll Kay

But Ed because of the easy access to alcohol, he had become very, very alcoholic. He died of alcohol in January of 1955.

A-Roll Kay

Again life changed dramatically for her.

A-Roll Lenora

She kept her husband's Cadillac up in an enclosure in her yard. His first Cadillac in the yard for many, many years and as a young person, I thought, "Why didn't she get rid of that piece of junk?" But I think it was a memory of her husband.

A-Roll Leah

Many, many family members were brought in to help operate the business. And they all deserve an enormous amount of credit for keeping that business open and operating and so successful.

Narration

Fannie Mae's younger sister Selena was a pillar of support. Along with the extended family, the two sisters stuck together to keep the Cotton Club on track.

B-Roll Leah

Through the late 1960s, Colorado Springs and other cities across the country are getting rougher.

A-Roll Leah

The crime rate's up. Buildings are being vacated downtown, people are moving to the suburbs.

B-Roll Leah

And as a result, the core of the city, the downtown, is less attractive, it's less vibrant.

A-Roll Kay

During this decline, the city decided that the area where she had her club really was becoming seedy. And they didn't want people coming into the city with the Antlers and all the important businessmen and the money coming into the city getting the wrong impression.

B-Roll Kay

So by 1975, imminent domain was the decision by the city

A-Roll Kay

to get rid of the club and tear down the buildings in that area.

A-Roll Leah

Colorado Springs Urban Renewal Effort took out about four blocks of downtown.

Narration

The power of imminent domain is typically used by governments to acquire land for *public* projects. When the two buildings housing Fannie Mae's businesses were torn down by the City, the area was rebuilt for commercial business use.

A-Roll Clarence

The City was growing and we -- this is what I'm saying they were thinking. We're tired of this and we're going to get rid of this.

B-Roll James

It was a part of her demise, and it was systemically done.

A-Roll James

And it was just sad, and she was sad. She was very broken-hearted behind the Urban Renewal.

A-Roll James Bragg

I can remember her being down in her spirits because they were literally taking her property away from her.

A-Roll Leah

She tried to fight it. She hired lawyers. And eventually she gave in. Her building was purchased, her business was purchased for about \$168,000 and torn down in 1975.

B-Roll Lenora

She was very hurt that they took... I mean because she got hardly anything out of it. Those were her words to my mother.

A-Roll Lenora

They did a closing of the Cotton Club.

B-Roll Lenora

People came from Denver to Pueblo...

B-Roll Lenora

People were crying, because we had no place to go.

A-Roll Lenora

I remember Fannie Mae coming through and she says, "I'm sorry."

B-Roll Lenora

You know when she got up and made her announcement she just said, "I'm sorry. There was nothing I could do."

A-Roll Kay

And Fannie Mae lost her ability to earn at that level, to pay for a mansion this size, and things were very bleak.

A-Roll Les

As a family, those of us that are closest to her were quite bitter about the way that she was treated and mistreated. A lady that gave so much, and was always there, the first to be counted on, to give, and to make donation to worthy causes. Not many people really understand.

A-Roll Renee

The closure of the Cotton Club was highly traumatic for her.

A-Roll Fannie Mae

I regret that they closed the Cotton Club down because it was my idea to pass it down to the family, after I'm gone, it would still be there to go down to my family. This is what I had in mind.

A-Roll Leah

So she was encouraged to open up another business at a different location off of South Hancock. She named it after her mother; she thought that would bring her good luck.

B-Roll Lenora

But her new endeavor didn't work out really well.

A-Roll Lenora

You know, after you close something major, something minor will not take over.

A-Roll Les

She was always there for whoever needed her. Unfortunately, when things got tough, there were very few who were available to help her when she needed them most. Part of it may have been because of her pride, she didn't reach out and ask. The other part would be is that some of us were just not perceptive enough to recognize that she was in need.

Narration

Fannie Mae came to Colorado Springs from the fields of Oklahoma, the granddaughter of slaves and the first in her family born outside the south. She worked hard to own her own club, only to have everything she had worked for taken away.

A-Roll Kay

By this time, Fannie Mae had lost her sister, Selena, who had become a beloved singer at the Cotton Club and they'd spent wonderful years together.

B-Roll Kay

And she lost her brothers. Ultimately, she lost her mother. It was just a bleak time.

Narration

Fannie Mae and her adopted daughter Renee moved to Connecticut to live with Selena's son Les. It was a chance to reset. After one year, they returned to Colorado.

A-Roll Renee

We settled in southeast Denver.

A-Roll Kay

And Fannie Mae, the first thing she did, she was on a telethon for the United Negro College Fund. She was very actively involved in Denver to the point that she could

B-Roll Kay

and she gave her talent and her services and organizational skills to Excelsior, a school for troubled girls.

A-Roll Renee

She helped the girls manage a little thrift store that they had on the campus. And they came in and did shifts and worked with her and she was able to teach them how to run a business.

Narration

In 1993, a play was created about Fannie Mae's life, and was performed in Colorado Springs and Denver. Fannie Mae worked with instructor Kay Esmiol and students to tell her life story.

A-Roll Kay

It was a beautiful collaboration between an aging woman and young kids realizing that they were making life better for somebody else; something she'd done her entire life, of course.

A-Roll Renee

But gradually over time she slowed down. She stopped going to

her volunteer job.

B-Roll Renee

And then at the age of 84, she suffered a fall. And because of that that fall she required 24-hour care. And she remained in care until her death.

Narration

On Tuesday, September 13, 2005, Fannie Mae Bragg Duncan died in Denver at the age of 87.

A-Roll Renee

The day Mom died was probably the worst day of my life. You know we all knew that the end was coming but you know it was still quite a shock when it did.

Narration

In her lifetime, Fannie Mae was honored by the American Business Women's Association. Posthumously, she was inducted into the Colorado Women's Hall of Fame. The Colorado Springs Diversity Forum pays tribute to Fannie Mae with a festival in her honor.

A-Roll Shirley

It reflects 'Everybody Welcome' it reflects about the inclusiveness of our community and that we still continue to move forward.

B-Roll Shirley

I think as a new generations come on board, as new people come into the city, you know they may not recognize that this is what made Colorado Springs what it is.

A-Roll Leah

The fact that we keep talking about her shows that she has left a profound impact on us. We need to continue to use her as a model of how we can solve problems and how we can come together. How we can be bold.

Narration

A bronze statue of Fannie Mae Duncan is planned for the entrance of the Pikes Peak Center for the Performing Arts, just a stone's throw from where the Cotton Club was torn down in 1975.

A-Roll Clarence

When they put the statue up, maybe -- there'll be people coming from all different parts of the country and standing there taking pictures. So, we'll see. If I'm still around, I'll probably be one of 'em! (Chuckles)

A-Roll Candice

In the world of history, you're always going to find something, or somebody, that really honestly intrigues your interest.

A-Roll James

Out of oppression came this woman to establish her own empire within a little small town, a military town, where there were no black establishments whatsoever. What a feat.

A-Roll Kathy

There's another piece in there about opening doors. Opening new doors in society, maybe for everyone, maybe for women in particular. She certainly did that. And when she opened that door, there was a sign that said, Everybody Welcome."

A-Roll Leah

I hope she took solace in the fact that she's a legendary figure in Colorado Springs. That she's someone that changed this place for the better, left a lasting mark, changed the shape of our community, the feel of our community, the way that we interacted as community members. She had a profound impact on the city of Colorado Springs and our entire community that is still remembered.