

Guide to the Ruby Duncan Photograph Collection on Operation Life

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Summary Information

Repository:	University of Nevada, Las Vegas. University Libraries. Special Collections and Archives.
Creator:	Duncan, Ruby
Title:	Ruby Duncan Photograph Collection on Operation Life
ID:	PH-00323
Date [inclusive]:	1970s-1980s
Physical Description:	0.22 Cubic Feet (1 shared box and 2 hanging folders)
Physical Description:	0.30 Linear Feet
Language of the Material:	English
Abstract:	The Ruby Duncan Photograph Collection on Operation Life (1970s-1980s) is comprised primarily of photographic prints with some corresponding 35 mm negatives of Ruby Duncan and other Operation Life organizers, as well as important organization buildings. Materials include photographs of Ruby Duncan, Aldine Weems, Renee Diamond, and Jack Anderson in the original Operation Life Las Vegas, Nevada Operation Life headquarters and the regional office in San Francisco, California. Also pictured are other employees and beneficiaries of the organization at a Christmas Party.

Preferred Citation

Ruby Duncan Photograph Collection on Operation Life, 1970s-1980s. PH-00323. Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Las Vegas, Nevada.

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Biographical Note

Ruby Duncan was born in Tallulah, Louisiana on June 7, 1932. Her parents passed away when Duncan was three years old and she spent the remainder of her youth living with various relatives in and around Tallulah. Duncan started work at the Ivory Plantation at an early age, only going to school part-time. She quit school to work full-time as a waitress and later a barmaid. Duncan left Tallulah for Las Vegas, Nevada in 1952 to live with her aunt near Henderson, Nevada.

Duncan's early years in Las Vegas were spent as a maid, nanny, and kitchen worker in private homes and Las Vegas resorts and casinos including the Stardust, Flamingo, and Sahara. Her experience in these various positions, and being forced on-and-off welfare, led her to speak out against working conditions for those in

similar positions. After a 1971 welfare cut for women with children in Nevada, Duncan's social activism became a driving force in her life and led to the organization of public demonstrations, including two marches down the Las Vegas Strip that drew over six thousand people including celebrities such as Jane Fonda, Sammy Davis Jr., and the Rev. Ralph Abernathy. Duncan co-founded the organization Operation Life in 1972 to promote welfare reform, and to improve the lives of those who lived in West Las Vegas. Beginning with a library in West Las Vegas, their services grew to include promoting economic, housing, and job development, as well as operating a medical center and administering the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program and the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) certified home counseling program.

Duncan went on to serve in the Clark County Welfare Rights Organization, and her work and community activism is recognized by various awards and the naming of a North Las Vegas school in her in honor.

Sources:

Duncan, Ruby. Interview, , 2017 February 13 and March 2. African Americans in Las Vegas: A Collaborative Oral History Project. OH-00501. Transcript. Oral History Research Center, Special Collection and Archives, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Las Vegas, Nevada. Accessed June 2019. <http://d.library.unlv.edu/digital/collection/ohr/id/737>

"Ruby Duncan." *Women in Nevada History: A Legacy Digital History Project*. Accessed June 2019. <https://womennvhistory.com/portfolio/ruby-duncan/>

White, Claytee D. "Ruby Duncan (1932-)." *BlackPast*, November 6, 2007. (Accessed June 2019). https://www.blackpast.org/aaw/vignette_aahw/duncan-ruby-1932/

Wanser, Brooke, "Pioneering Las Vegas activist Ruby Duncan, 5 others to be honored." *Review-Journal*, February 3, 2017. (Accessed June 2019). <https://www.reviewjournal.com/local/local-las-vegas/pioneering-las-vegas-activist-ruby-duncan-5-others-to-be-honored/>

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Scope and Contents Note

The Ruby Duncan Photograph Collection on Operation Life (1970s-1980s) is comprised primarily of photographic prints with some corresponding 35 mm negatives of Ruby Duncan and other Operation Life organizers, as well as important organization buildings. Materials include photographs of Ruby Duncan, Aldine Weems, Renee Diamond, and Jack Anderson in the original Operation Life Las Vegas, Nevada headquarters and the regional office in San Francisco, California. Also pictured are other employees and beneficiaries of the organization at a Christmas Party.

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Arrangement

Materials remain as they were received.

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Administrative Information

Access Note

Collection is open for research.

Publication Rights

Materials in this collection may be protected by copyrights and other rights. See [Reproductions and Use](#) on the UNLV Special Collections and Archives website for more information about reproductions and permissions to publish.

Acquisition Note

Materials were donated by Ruby Duncan in 1996; accession number 1996-008B.

Processing Note

Materials were initially processed by Special Collections staff. In 2019, as part of an archival backlog elimination project, Billy Marino wrote the finding aid and entered the data into ArchivesSpace.

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Related Materials

Related Collections

The following resources may provide additional information related to the materials in this collection:

Ruby Duncan Papers on Operation Life, 1972-1992. MS-00367. Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Las Vegas, Nevada.

Duncan, Ruby. Interview, 2007 February 13. OH-00501. Oral History Research Center, Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Las Vegas, Nevada.

Renee Diamond Papers, 1972-2000. MS-00377. Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Las Vegas, Nevada.

Jack Anderson Professional Papers on Operation Life, 1969-1989. MS-00795. Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Las Vegas, Nevada.

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Names and Subjects

- Photographs
- Community organization -- United States
- Women -- Political activity
- Office buildings
- Las Vegas (Nev.)
- San Francisco Bay Area (Calif.)
- Photography -- Negatives
- Political activists

Collection Inventory

Title/Description	Containers
Operation Life: Buildings and People	
Cove Hotel, original headquarters for Operation Life. The building to the right was also owned by Operation Life and became the West Las Vegas Library, 1970s (0323_0001)	folder 01
Back of new Operation Life Building, 600 West Owens Avenue, Las Vegas, Nevada, 1980s (0323_0002)	folder 01
Aldine Weems, administrator of Operation Life, 1970s (0323_0003)	folder 01
Aldine Weems, 1978 May (0323_0004)	folder 01
HUD Regional Office, San Francisco, California: Grant Work for Operation Life	
HUD regional office, San Francisco. Signing paperwork for the grant for Ruby Duncan Manor in Las Vegas, Nevada (housing for the elderly and the handicapped, funded under Sec. 202 of HUD). Ruby Duncan (right), executive director; Renee Diamond (left) board member for Operation Life, 1980s (0323_0005)	folder 01
Negative: HUD regional office, San Francisco. Signing paperwork for the grant for Ruby Duncan Manor in Las Vegas, Nevada (housing for the elderly and the handicapped, funded under Sec. 202 of HUD). Ruby Duncan (right), executive director; Renee Diamond (left) board member for Operation Life, 1980s (0323_0005)	box SH-033
Left to right (L-R): Aldine Weems; Marty Makower, National Economic Development and Law Center, Berkeley, California; Renee Diamond; unidentified	folder 01

federal employee; Ruby Duncan, executive director of Operation Life. HUD regional office, San Francisco, 1980s (0323_0006)

Negative: (L-R): Aldine Weems; Marty Makower, National Economic Development and Law Center, Berkeley, California; Renee Diamond; unidentified federal employee; Ruby Duncan, executive director of Operation Life. HUD regional office, San Francisco, 1980s (0323_0006)	box SH-033
L-R: Aldine Weems, Ruby Duncan, Tommy Ruggiero (board member, Operation Life). HUD regional office, San Francisco, 1980s (0323_0007)	folder 01
Negative: L-R: Aldine Weems, Ruby Duncan, Tommy Ruggiero (board member, Operation Life). HUD regional office, San Francisco, 1980s (0323_0007)	box SH-033
L-R: Jack Anderson, attorney for Operation Life; Ruby Duncan, Executive Director. HUD regional office, San Francisco, 1980s (0323_0008)	folder 01
Negative: L-R: Jack Anderson, attorney for Operation Life; Ruby Duncan, Executive Director. HUD regional office, San Francisco, 1980s (0323_0008)	box SH-033
L-R: Ruby Duncan and unidentified HUD official. HUD regional office, San Francisco, 1980s (0323_0009)	folder 01
Negative: L-R: Ruby Duncan and unidentified HUD official. HUD regional office, San Francisco, 1980s (0323_0009)	box SH-033
L-R: Renee Diamond and Ruby Duncan. Working on the paperwork for a grant for Operation Life. In HUD regional office, San Francisco, 1980s (0323_0010)	folder 01
Negative: L-R: Renee Diamond and Ruby Duncan. Working on the paperwork for a grant for Operation Life. In HUD regional office, San Francisco, 1980s (0323_0010)	box SH-033
L-R: Unidentified HUD official and Ruby Duncan. HUD regional office, San Francisco, 1980s (0323_0011)	folder 01
Negative: L-R: Unidentified HUD official and Ruby Duncan. HUD regional office, San Francisco, 1980s (0323_0011)	box SH-033
Ruby Duncan (center) with two unidentified HUD officials in the HUD regional office, San Francisco, 1980s (0323_0012)	folder 01
Negative: Ruby Duncan (center) with two unidentified HUD officials in the HUD regional office, San Francisco, 1980s (0323_0012)	box SH-033
L-R: Mahlon Brown (Las Vegas attorney), Ruby Duncan, Jack Anderson (attorney for Operation Life), HUD regional office, San Francisco, 1980s (0323_0013)	folder 01
Negative: L-R: Mahlon Brown (Las Vegas attorney), Ruby Duncan, Jack Anderson (attorney for Operation Life), HUD regional office, San Francisco, 1980s (0323_0013)	box SH-033
Ruby Duncan (seated, center), Jack Anderson (standing with rolled-up paper). HUD regional office, San Francisco, 1980s (0323_0014)	folder 01
Negative: Ruby Duncan (seated, center), Jack Anderson (standing with rolled-up paper). HUD regional office, San Francisco, 1980s (0323_0014)	box SH-033
L-R: Jack Anderson and Mahlon Brown (attorneys). HUD regional office, San Francisco, 1980s (0323_0015)	folder 01

Negative: L-R: Jack Anderson and Mahlon Brown (attorneys). HUD regional office, San Francisco, 1980s (0323_0015)	box SH-033
L-R: Renee Diamond and Ruby Duncan. HUD regional office, San Francisco, 1980s (0323_0016)	folder 01
Negative: L-R: Renee Diamond and Ruby Duncan. HUD regional office, San Francisco, 1980s (0323_0016)	box SH-033
Ruby Duncan (seated, center) with Operation Life staff members and HUD officials; at HUD regional office, San Francisco, 1980s (0323_0017)	folder 01
Negative: Ruby Duncan (seated, center) with Operation Life staff members and HUD officials; at HUD regional office, San Francisco, 1980s (0323_0017)	box SH-033
L-R: Renee Diamond, Jack Anderson, Ruby Duncan, Marty Makower. Marty Makower worked for the National Economic Development and Law Center in Berkeley, California and assisted Operation Life officials in grant writing, 1980s (0323_0018)	folder 01
Negative: L-R: Renee Diamond, Jack Anderson, Ruby Duncan, Marty Makower. Marty Makower worked for the National Economic Development and Law Center in Berkeley, California and assisted Operation Life officials in grant writing, 1980s (0323_0018)	box SH-033
Dinner Celebrating Operation Life's Grant	
Hugo's Cellar (restaurant in Four Queens Hotel, Las Vegas, Nev.). A dinner was held to celebrate Operation Life's grant. L-R: Mahlon Brown, Aldine Weems, Jack Anderson, Ruby Duncan, 1980s (0323_0019)	folder 01
Negative: Hugo's Cellar (restaurant in Four Queens Hotel, Las Vegas, Nev.). A dinner was held to celebrate Operation Life's grant. L-R: Mahlon Brown, Aldine Weems, Jack Anderson, Ruby Duncan, 1980s (0323_0019)	box SH-033
Dinner at Hugo's Cellar (see photo 0323_0019). L-R: Mahlon Brown, Aldine Weems, Jack Anderson, Ruby Duncan, Diane Anderson (Jack's wife), Renee Diamond, 1980s (0323_0020)	folder 01
Negative: Dinner at Hugo's Cellar (see photo 0323_0019). L-R: Mahlon Brown, Aldine Weems, Jack Anderson, Ruby Duncan, Diane Anderson (Jack's wife), Renee Diamond, 1980s (0323_0020)	box SH-033
L-R: Aldine Weems, Mahlon Brown, 1980s (0323_0021)	folder 02
Negative: L-R: Aldine Weems, Mahlon Brown, 1980s (0323_0021)	box SH-033
Operation Life: Christmas Party	
Christmas Party. Operation Life held one annually and invited public officials and community members. Alversa Beals (in blue and white sweater), 1980s (0323_0022)	folder 02
Negative: Christmas Party. Operation Life held one annually and invited public officials and community members. Alversa Beals (in blue and white sweater), 1980s (0323_0022)	box SH-033
Aldine Weems (center) at Operation Life Christmas party, 1980s (0323_0023)	folder 02

Negative: Aldine Weems (center) at Operation Life Christmas party, 1980s (0323_0023)	box SH-033
Ruby Duncan and unidentified man. Operation Life Christmas party, 1980s (0323_0024)	folder 02
Negative: Ruby Duncan and unidentified man. Operation Life Christmas party, 1980s (0323_0024)	box SH-033
Barbara McNair and sons Carlton (right) and Terrence (front) at Operation Life Christmas party, 1980s (0323_0025)	folder 02
Negative: Barbara McNair and sons Carlton (right) and Terrence (front) at Operation Life Christmas party, 1980s (0323_0025)	box SH-033
Barbara McNair (in red, at left) at Operation Life's Christmas, party, 1980s (0323_0026)	folder 02
Negative: Barbara McNair (in red, at left) at Operation Life's Christmas, party, 1980s (0323_0026)	box SH-033
Tammy Bass (wearing black jacket) at Operation Life Christmas party. She was a HUD counselor who worked for Operation Life. Ruby Duncan (seated, wearing white) and Renee Diamond (standing, holding cup), 1980s (0323_0027)	folder 02
Negative: Tammy Bass (wearing black jacket) at Operation Life Christmas party. She was a HUD counselor who worked for Operation Life. Ruby Duncan (seated, wearing white) and Renee Diamond (standing, holding cup), 1980s (0323_0027)	box SH-033
Guests at Operation Life's annual Christmas Party. Renee Diamond at far right, 1980s (0323_0028)	folder 02
Negative: Guests at Operation Life's annual Christmas Party. Renee Diamond at far right, 1980s (0323_0028)	box SH-033
L-R (foreground): Ruby Duncan, Dominic Daileda, Renee Diamond. Christmas Party put on by Operation Life, 1980s (0323_0029)	folder 02
Negative: L-R (foreground): Ruby Duncan, Dominic Daileda, Renee Diamond. Christmas Party put on by Operation Life, 1980s (0323_0029)	box SH-033
Renee Diamond (at food table) and Ruby Duncan (in white), Operation Life's annual Christmas party, 1980s (0323_0030)	folder 02
Negative: Renee Diamond (at food table) and Ruby Duncan (in white), Operation Life's annual Christmas party, 1980s (0323_0030)	box SH-033
Aldine Weems sitting at Ruby Duncan's desk in the Operation Life office. It was the annual Christmas party, 1980s (0323_0031)	folder 02
Negative: Aldine Weems sitting at Ruby Duncan's desk in the Operation Life office. It was the annual Christmas party, 1980s (0323_0031)	box SH-033
Ruby Duncan (white dress, center) at the annual Operation Life Christmas party, 1980s (0323_0032)	folder 02
Negative: Ruby Duncan (white dress, center) at the annual Operation Life Christmas party, 1980s (0323_0032)	box SH-033
Renee Diamond (center) and Pat Van Betten at Operation Life's annual Christmas Party, 1980s (0323_0033)	folder 02

Negative: Renee Diamond (center) and Pat Van Betten at Operation Life's annual Christmas Party, 1980s (0323_0033)	box SH-033
Ruby Duncan (left) talking with Renee Diamond and unidentified male guest at Christmas party in Operation Life office, 1980s (0323_0034)	folder 02
Negative: Ruby Duncan (left) talking with Renee Diamond and unidentified male guest at Christmas party in Operation Life office, 1980s (0323_0034)	box SH-033
