

## Nada Novakovich Aluevich

### At A Glance

**Name:** Nada Novakovich Aluevich

**Born:** Feb. 24, 1924, Wilmington, Calif.

**Maiden name:** Nada Novakovich

**Race:** Serbian

**Married:** Luke Anthony Aluevich, 1962

**Primary residence:** Reno

**Major field of work:** lawyer, businesswoman

**Died:** Oct. 20, 1998



Nada Novakovich Aluevich  
Photo from *and, His Name Was Luke*

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### Controversial lawyer co-starred in historic Reno trial

Nada Novakovich gained local fame as one side of the so-called “Battle of the Petticoats,” a 1952 trial remembered as the first time two women attorneys faced off in a Nevada courtroom. Novakovich, who went by her maiden name in most newspaper accounts during her career, was one of the first woman lawyers in the Silver State and was active in local and state legal organizations. She ran unsuccessfully several times for public office but also was known for entanglements on the wrong side of the law.

Born in Wilmington, Calif., on Feb. 24, 1924, Novakovich was the daughter of Pete and Luba Matijasurck Novakovich. U.S Census records from the 1930s show the family living in Tonopah, Nev., at least until 1935. By 1940, the records show Nada, at age 16, living in Reno and was listed as a niece in the household of Mike Matijasurck.

In 1942, Novakovich graduated from Reno High School. Within a few years, she moved to Washington D.C. to become an executive secretary in the offices of U.S. Senators George W. Malone and Edward P. Carville of Nevada, and to attend George Washington University Law School, where she earned a Bachelor of Laws degree in 1950. She was admitted to the District of Columbia Bar that same year and returned to Reno.

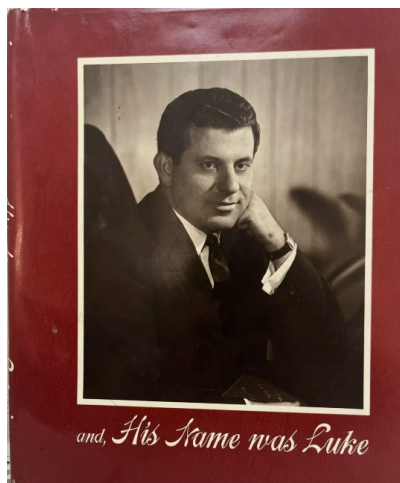
In the “Battle of the Petticoats” trial, she represented Ethel Kaupp in 1952 in a suit filed by Horatio Nelson, a 77-year-old janitor who claimed Kaupp injured him by knocking him off a bar stool. Nelson also retained a woman lawyer, Charlotte Hunter Arley. The court awarded Nelson \$3,000 in damages.

Novakovich ran unsuccessfully for the U.S. Congress as a Democrat in 1956 and 1958. In 1957, she was included in *Who's Who of American Women*, the first edition of the book by the publisher of *Who's Who in America*.

In 1959, Nada accompanied Dawn Wells, "Miss Nevada" to Atlantic City for the "Miss America" contest. Nada was Dawn's chaperone and represented the Soroptimist International Club of Reno which sponsored the 1959 Miss Nevada Pageant.



Nada Novakovich and Dawn Wells. *Reno Gazette-Journal* photographs. Special Collections, University of Nevada, Reno



She married Luke Anthony Aluevich in February 1962, in a Serbian Orthodox ceremony at Trinity Episcopal Church in Reno, Nevada. He was supportive of her working and kept himself busy with three stores in Reno, on Second Street: Luke's Gift Shoppe, Luke's Nevada Photo Service, and Luke's Frame Shoppe. After Luke died in 1971, Nada wrote a memorial book about him titled *and, His Name was Luke*, in 1976.

In the early 1980s, she successfully represented a mother in front of the U.S. Supreme Court after the Nevada Supreme Court terminated the parental rights of a transgender father. In 2000, the Nevada court overturned its earlier ruling.

In 1984, after pumping some \$4.5 million into a downtown Reno emporium called Big Luke's in honor of her late husband, who died in a car accident in 1971. The store was at the corner of Second and Virginia Streets in the second oldest structure in the downtown area, which was originally the Washoe County Bank. Nada was deeply in debt and began drinking. The emporium lost money and Novakovich went bankrupt, owing more than \$3 million to creditors.



Big Luke's opening day.  
*Reno Gazette-Journal*. Photo by Tom Spitz.

In 1990, Novakovich received a five-year suspended sentence and was given five years of probation for embezzling \$11,000 from a client. She was required to reimburse the client, but by then, Nada was an admitted alcoholic and was prohibited from practicing law by the Nevada Bar Association because she was put on medical disability in 1988.

Several other clients claimed she had embezzled money from them as well. Full restitution for her clients was estimated as high as \$200,000. The same newspaper story noted that her troubles had begun before that 1990 case.

During her career, Novakovich was a member of the Nevada State Bar, the American Judiciary Society and the Washoe County Bar Association, where she served as secretary for four years. Her other memberships included the Washoe County Democratic Women's Club, the Soroptimist International Club of Reno, the League of Women Voters, the Twentieth Century Club, Nevada Rebekah Lodge 7, and the Women's Democratic Clubs of Clark County and Lyon County.

She also served on the Governor's Advisory Commission on the Status of Women and the Governor's Fulbright Scholarship Committee. Nada was a member of the Phi Delta Delta legal fraternity and Trinity Episcopal Church.

Nada died October 20, 1998, at her home. She is buried beside her husband Luke in Mountain View Cemetery, Reno, Nevada.



Headstone of Nada and Luke Aluevich.  
Photo added to Find-A-Grave by L. McKeown, 2022.

**Researched by Patti Bernard and written by Susan Skorupa Mullen**

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