

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Florence Ladd

---

## 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>	Ladd, Florence
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Florence Ladd,
<b>Dates:</b>	April 11, 2003
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2003
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:48:03).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Fiction writer and academic administrator Florence Ladd (1932 - ) is a former dean at Harvard University and MIT. She is author of the novel, "Sarah's Psalm." Ladd was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 11, 2003, in Cambridge, Massachusetts. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2003_076
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

---

## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Florence Ladd was born June 16, 1932, in Washington, D.C., to parents who were educators. Ladd attended public schools in Washington, D.C., before earning a B.S. in psychology in 1953 from Howard University and a Ph.D. in social psychology in 1958 from the University of Rochester in New York.

Ladd first taught at Simmons College. She then traveled to Istanbul, Turkey, where she taught until 1964. In 1965, she returned to Boston and began teaching at Harvard University's Graduate School of Education, as well as at the Graduate School of Design. Teaching at both schools allowed her to simultaneously pursue her interest in psychology and environmental studies. In 1977, Ladd left Harvard University and the classroom and teaching for the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and administration, rising at M.I.T. to associate dean.

In 1979, Ladd was hired by Wellesley College, where she worked as dean of students at Wellesley College until 1984. She was then hired as a research consultant with the Institute of International Education's South African Education Program. A year later, she went to Oxfam America and served as a liaison to the United Nations. In 1989, Ladd returned to academia as to a unique multi-disciplinary center of advanced studies for women, the Bunting Institute at Radcliffe College. Ladd retired from the Bunting Institute in 1997.

Ladd is active in other fields as well. In 1996, she published her first novel, *Sarah's Psalm*, to critical acclaim. Currently, she is the overseer of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, as well as a member of the Board of Trustees of Hampshire College. Previously, she served on the board of the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston.

---

## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Florence Ladd was conducted by Larry Crowe on April 11, 2003, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Fiction writer and academic

administrator Florence Ladd (1932 - ) is a former dean at Harvard University and MIT. She is author of the novel, "Sarah's Psalm."

---

# 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®.

---

# 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.

---

# Controlled Access Terms

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

## Persons:

Ladd, Florence

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Ladd, Florence --Interviews

---

# Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

---

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

---

# Occupations:

Fiction Writer

---

## HistoryMakers® Category:

ArtMakers

---

## 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 Florence Ladd, April 11, 2003. 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).

---

## 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.

---

## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Florence Ladd, Section A2003\_076\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:10 ?

Florence Ladd was born on July 16, 1932 in Washington, D.C. to Eleanor Willis Cawthorne and William Cawthorne, Jr. Ladd's maternal grandfather, Henry Willis was born on Portsmouth Island in 1875. Her maternal grandmother, Florence Wood Willis was of Cherokee and African or African American descent. Ladd's paternal grandparents were born in Virginia. William Cawthorne, Sr. was born in 1869. He migrated to Washington, D.C. as a child and worked as a printer's assistant. Ladd's father was born in 1900 and worked as a clerk messenger for the D.C. State Board of Education. He had an affinity for mechanical repairs and also made cabinets. Ladd's mother was born in New Bern, North Carolina in 1906. She was a teacher who studied at Winston-Salem Normal School in North Carolina and D.C. Teachers College in Washington, D.C. before graduating from Howard University with a bachelor's degree. As a young girl, Ladd's father treated her like a son until her mother intervened. Ladd

describes how her relationship with her father changed after her mother forced her to be more feminine.

Video Oral History Interview with Florence Ladd, Section A2003\_076\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:26 ?

Florence Ladd regularly visited the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. with her mother and sister to enjoy the Gallery's air conditioning and non-segregated restaurant. Ladd describes the sights, sounds, and smells, of her childhood neighborhood. She remembers the ability of the black middle class to lead an insulated life in segregated Washington, D.C. as well as the disenfranchised citizens of the nation's capital. Ladd attended nursery school at Margaret Murray Washington School at the age of two. She went on to Slater-Langston Elementary School, Cook Elementary School, Shaw Junior High School, and Dunbar High School. Ladd and her classmates were instructed by highly educated teachers with PhDs who were unable to find work at the university level due to racial discrimination. Ladd describes influential teachers and the rigorous environment of Dunbar High School. She also talks about the formation of her interest in psychology and her social life in high school. Ladd graduated from Dunbar High School in 1949.

Video Oral History Interview with Florence Ladd, Section A2003\_076\_001\_003, TRT: 0:30:00 ?

Florence Ladd recounts her social activities and her first experience of racial discrimination while a student at Dunbar High School in Washington, D.C. Her parents influenced her decision to enroll at Howard University in Washington, D.C. as a psychology major in 1949. At Howard, Ladd took a creative writing class from Sterling Brown; one of her classmates was Toni Morrison. While at Howard University, Ladd received a travel fellowship to Europe. She visited Switzerland, Italy, and England, but spent most of her time in Paris, France where she was mentored by a professor of psychology at the Sorbonne. In Paris, Ladd had limited interactions with American expatriates although she went to Gordon Heath's nightclub and heard Mahalia Jackson perform. Ladd graduated from Howard University in 1953. Her younger sister, Ethel, died soon thereafter of cancer. Ladd then went to the University of Rochester in New York on a full tuition scholarship. She talks about her experience at Rochester, her relationship with composer Noel DaCosta, and her dissertation. After graduating in 1958, Ladd started working at the Age Center of New England.

Video Oral History Interview with Florence Ladd, Section A2003\_076\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:35 ?

Florence Ladd married Ulysses Grant Shelton, Jr. in 1959. In 1961, Shelton was awarded a Fulbright Fellowship to teach in Turkey. Ladd describes the experience of living and working in Turkey. Ladd and Shelton divorced after they returned from Turkey and she took a post-doctoral position at Harvard Medical School in Cambridge, Massachusetts where she became interested in city planning. Ladd was then hired as a researcher and lecturer at the Harvard Graduate School of Education where she contributed to the book "Different Strokes". In 1967, Ladd met archaeologist John Ladd while on vacation in Mexico. The two married in 1969, but John Ladd passed away soon after in 1971 from a heart attack. After her husband's death, Ladd continued as a fellow at Radcliffe College's Bunting Institute before becoming an academic administrator at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Boston where she was mentored by Bill Porter. Ladd also talks about her marriage to Bill Harris. She became the Dean of Students at Wellesley College in 1979 and went on to work with the South African Education Program and Oxfam America.

Video Oral History Interview with Florence Ladd, Section A2003\_076\_001\_005, TRT: 0:29:56 ?

Florence Ladd was appointed director of the Bunting Institute at Radcliffe College in 1989. Notable fellows in the Bunting Fellowship Program during her

tenure included Anna Deavere Smith, Maxine Yalovitz-Blankenship, Marilène Phipps, Mary Karr, Lucy Grealy, and Paula Vogel. While at the Bunting Institute, Ladd spent her summers writing her first novel, “Sarah’s Psalm”. Published in 1996, the novel won the Black Caucus of the American Library Association’s fiction category. Ladd retired from the Bunting Institute in 1997 and continues to work on other writing projects including a collection of poems; a novel, “The Spirit of Josephine” inspired by Josephine Baker; and a study of mothers of biracial children with Marion Kilson, author of “Claiming Place”. Ladd also reflects upon her legacy and her hopes and concerns for the African American community.

Video Oral History Interview with Florence Ladd, Section A2003\_076\_001\_006, TRT: 0:19:56 ?  
Florence Ladd describes how she would like to be remembered. She also talks about The HistoryMakers project. Ladd closes by narrating her photographs.