

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Mayme Clayton

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Clayton, Mayme A.
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Mayme Clayton,
Dates:	October 7, 2004
Bulk Dates:	2004
Physical Description:	4 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:56:48).
Abstract:	Curator and librarian Mayme Clayton (1923 - 2006) was the collector and founder of the Mayme Clayton Library and Museum, which houses an extensive collection of African American literature, music and other cultural artifacts that she amassed over four decades. Clayton was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on October 7, 2004, in Los Angeles, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2004_196
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Curator and librarian Mayme A. Clayton was born to Mary Dorothy Knight Agnew and Jerry Modique Agnew in Van Buren, Arkansas on August 4, 1923 . She graduated high school at the age of sixteen, and moved to Los Angeles, California in 1946. She earned her B.A. degree from the University of California-Berkeley. She earned her master's of library science degree from Goddard College via correspondence to their Vermont campus and a Ph.D. degree from Sierra University in Los Angeles.

Clayton began her career as a librarian in 1952, working at the Doheny Library at the University of Southern California. In 1957, she left the University of Southern California to become a law librarian at the University of California, Los Angeles, and also served as a consultant and founding member of the Afro-American Studies Center Library. After working at University of California Los Angeles for fifteen years, Clayton took a position at Universal Books in Hollywood, California. When the store closed, the partners in the store divided the remaining volumes between themselves. Clayton received all of the books that pertained to Black society and culture – more than 4,000 volumes. Clayton's collection of African American ephemera has continued to grow; it now contains more than 20,000 pieces, including films, books, magazines, music and advertisements. Some of the items in this collection include signed first editions of works by Zora Neale Hurston, handwritten correspondence from George Washington Carver, as well as a rare signed copy of Phyllis Wheatley's *Poems on Various Subjects Religious and Moral* . Currently, the collection resides in the Mayme A. Clayton Library and Museum in Culver City, California. Clayton served as the president of the center.

Clayton was the founder of the Black American Cinema Society, which awards scholarships and hosts film festivals. She was the recipient of numerous awards, including the Phoenix Award and the Paul Robeson Award.

Clayton passed away on October 13, 2006 at the age of 83.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Mayme Clayton was conducted by Larry Crowe on October 7, 2004, in Los Angeles, California, and was recorded on 4 Betacame SP videocassettes. Curator and librarian Mayme Clayton (1923 - 2006) was the collector and founder of the Mayme Clayton Library and Museum, which houses an extensive collection of African American literature, music and other cultural artifacts that she amassed over four decades.

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:

Clayton, Mayme A.

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Clayton, Mayme A.--Interviews

African American librarians.

African American archivists

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Western States Black Research Center.

Occupations:

Archivist

HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

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 Mayme Clayton, October 7, 2004. 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 Mayme Clayton, Section A2004_196_001_001, TRT: 0:29:48 ?

Mayme Clayton was born in Van Buren, Arkansas on August 8, 1923, the youngest of three children. Her mother, Mary Knight Agnew, was born in the 1890s in Van Buren. Clayton's maternal grandfather, the son of a Texan plantation owner, met and married Clayton's grandmother, a Creek Indian, in Oklahoma. The two migrated to Arkansas to farm. As a child, Clayton picked strawberries on the farm and watched her grandfather prepare cotton for sale. Clayton's father, Jerry Agnew was born around Alma, Arkansas and was of French and Cherokee Indian descent. After graduating from Arkansas Baptist College in Little Rock, Arkansas, he opened a grocery store in Van Buren where he was the only black business owner. She attended Frederick Douglass School where she played the saxophone and met comedian Bob Burns, the town's most notable star at the time. Clayton realized early that her school's library lacked books about black people. Clayton also attended local carnivals featuring black entertainers on her father's land.

African American families--Arkansas--Van Buren.

Arkansas Baptist College.

African American businesspeople--Arkansas.

Discrimination in public accommodations--Arkansas--Van Buren.

African American children--Education (Elementary)--Arkansas.

African American children--Social life and customs.

Video Oral History Interview with Mayme Clayton, Section A2004_196_001_002, TRT: 0:29:13 ?

Mayme Clayton was an athletic tomboy who enjoyed basketball as well as math and reading in her childhood. She attended New Hope Baptist Church in Van Buren, Arkansas. After graduating from Frederick Douglass School, Clayton attended Arkansas Baptist College in Little Rock for a year before transferring to Lincoln University in Jefferson City, Missouri. While attending Lincoln University during World War II, Clayton met Jackie Robinson during his time in the U.S. military. To her parents' dismay, Clayton chose to leave Lincoln University without graduating to work as a photographer in Baltimore, Maryland and then New York City. Clayton worked near notable black establishments such as Smalls' Paradise where she encountered Bill Robinson and other black performers. She visited the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. Although Clayton did not meet many famous black artists in New York City, she recalls the impact of seeing notable African Americans during childhood trips around Arkansas.

African American children--Social life and customs.

Sex discrimination in sports--Arkansas.

Arkansas Baptist College.

World War, 1939-1945--Participation, African American.

Bethune, Mary McLeod, 1875-1955.

Lincoln University (Jefferson City, Mo.).

Robinson, Jackie, 1919-1972.

Video Oral History Interview with Mayme Clayton, Section A2004_196_001_003, TRT: 0:30:13 ?

Mayme Clayton married barber Andrew Lee Clayton in 1946 and subsequently moved to California. Clayton's interest in black history and books grew while working at the University of Southern California's library and then the University of California at Los Angeles's law library. She completed her undergraduate studies at the University of California Berkeley during the 1970s and obtained her Master's in Library Science from Goddard College and her

Ph.D. from Sierra University in Santa Monica. In 1972, Clayton began working at Universal Books in Hollywood, California, which enabled her to substantially increase her book collection. Clayton was a member of the NAACP, Iota Phi Lambda Sorority, and Our Author's Book Club. In 1975 Clayton developed her collection into the Western States Black Research Center, which holds films, photographs and priceless original copies of books by Phillis Wheatley, Oscar Micheaux, Langston Hughes, and Paul Robeson. Clayton's son Avery Clayton now presides over the collection.

African American librarians--California.

University of Southern California--Employees.

University of California, Los Angeles--Employees.

African Americans--History--Archival resources.

African Americans--Archival materials.

Wheatley, Phillis, 1753-1784. Works.

Hughes, Langston, 1902-1967.

Micheaux, Oscar, 1884-1951.

Video Oral History Interview with Mayme Clayton, Section A2004_196_001_004, TRT: 0:27:34 ?

Mayme Clayton significantly expanded her collection when Universal Books closed and she took its entire African American collection for payment owed. Clayton founded the Black American Cinema Society, which began giving grants and awards in the 1980s to student filmmakers and the Black Talkies on Parade Film Festival. Clayton hopes to expand the Western States Black Research Center by housing other similar notable collections and building it into an institution that could award degrees in African American Studies. Clayton describes her hopes for the African American Community and how she would like to be remembered. She reflects upon her legacy and the historical significance of the Western States Black Research Center. She concludes by narrating her photographs.

African American film festivals.

Blockson, Charles L.

Western States Black Research Center.

African American communities.

Archival resources--California

African Americans--History--Archival resources.