

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Mary Cherry

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Cherry, Mary
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Mary Cherry,
Dates:	October 11, 2006
Bulk Dates:	2006
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:03:20).
Abstract:	Production worker Mary Cherry (1924 - 2021) worked for the Frank Novelty Company in Ossining, New York, where she and her husband's place of trust with owner Al Franken allowed them to employ members of the local African American community. Rose Q. Cherry, Mary Cherry's daughter, wrote the history of her husband's family in 'The Cherry Outlaw Families of Bertie County, North Carolina,' which was published in 2004. Cherry was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on October 11, 2006, in Atlanta, Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2006_113
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Mary Cherry was born Mary Cornelia Kyle on March 18, 1924, in Manteo, Virginia, to Annie Mae Shelton Kyle and Samuel Gibson Kyle. Her mother could trace her family back four generations to Washington Lomax. Her family moved from Virginia to Tarrytown, in upstate New York, in 1926. Cherry's father was sexton for the local Episcopal church, but her family were members of Shiloh Baptist Church in Tarrytown. Cherry attended F.R. Pearson Elementary School, where she was a good student who loved to read. At age 15, while a student at Washington Irving High School, Cherry met her future husband, Lamon Q. Cherry of nearby Ossining, New York. Graduating from high school in 1942, during World War II, Cherry found employment at Eastern Aircraft for two years, then worked briefly for Reader's Digest.

In 1946, Cherry married Lamon and lived for a while in the Bronx, New York. The couple then relocated to Ossining, New York. There, Mary found employment with the Frank Novelty Company, which was owned and operated by recent Jewish immigrant, Al Franken. The company made prayer cards and other paper and plastic products for church use. Soon, her husband became Franken's most trusted employee, and Cherry was able to offer seasonal employment and after school jobs to neighborhood teenagers, especially in the African American community.

Cherry is the mother of Lamon Q. "Quincy" Cherry, Jr., Rose Q. Cherry and Cheryl Cherry Taylor McMillan. She has several grandchildren. Rose Q. Cherry, Mary Cherry's daughter, wrote the history of her husband's family in The Cherry Outlaw Families of Bertie County, North Carolina, which was published in 2004.

A member of the Star of Bethlehem Baptist Church, Cherry lived near her children in Atlanta, Georgia.

Cherry passed away on March 27, 2021.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Mary Cherry was conducted by Larry Crowe on October 11, 2006, in Atlanta, Georgia, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Production worker Mary Cherry (1924 - 2021) worked for the Frank Novelty Company in Ossining, New York, where she and her husband's place of trust with owner Al Franken allowed them to employ members of the local African American community. Rose Q. Cherry, Mary Cherry's daughter, wrote the history of her husband's family in 'The Cherry Outlaw Families of Bertie County, North Carolina,' which was published in 2004.

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:

Cherry, Mary

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Cherry, Mary--Interviews

Older African Americans--New York (State)--Ossining--Interviews

African American women employees--New York (State)--Ossining--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Publisher

HistoryMakers® Category:

MediaMakers

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 Mary Cherry, October 11, 2006. 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 Mary Cherry, Section A2006_113_001_001, TRT: 0:28:30 ?

Mary Cherry was born on March 18, 1924 in Manteo, Virginia to Annie Mae Shelton Kyle and Samuel Kyle. Her maternal great-grandfather, Washington Lomax, was a descendent of slaves and their slaveholders in Buckingham County, Virginia. Lomax had eleven children with Mary Pryor Lomax, many of whom graduated from college. Cherry's mother was born in 1900 in Manteo, and attended its one room school through the sixth grade. There, she met Cherry's father, who left school after third grade to work as a coal miner in West Virginia. Cherry's parents married in Virginia, and settled in Tarrytown, New York, where they raised six children. Her father worked for a sanitation company, and as a church sexton. Cherry's family attended services at Shiloh Baptist Church, where she belonged to the Baptist Young People's Union. When she was fifteen years old, she met her husband, Lamont Cherry, Sr., at Tarrytown's roller rink. He wrote a letter to Cherry, and was invited to her home to meet her parents.

Older African Americans--New York (State)--Ossining--Interviews.

African American women employees--New York (State)--Ossining--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Mary Cherry, Section A2006_113_001_002, TRT: 0:30:30 ?

Mary Cherry grew up in Tarrytown, New York, where she sang in the choir at Shiloh Baptist Church. She also attended the predominantly white F.R. Pierson Grammar School and Washington Irving High School, where she learned typing and shorthand. During high school, Cherry worked at a local hat shop, and as a domestic for a white family, whom her father met at the church where he was a sexton. Cherry also dated Lamont Cherry, Sr., and met his family during the holidays. During World War II, he served overseas in the U.S. Army; and, upon graduating high school in 1942, Cherry worked as a buffer at General Motors' Eastern Aircraft Division plant for two years. When the war ended, she became a typist at Reader's Digest. In 1946, Lamont Cherry returned from U.S. military service. They married, and moved to the Bronx, New York. There, Cherry became the production manager of Frank Novelty Company, which was owned by Alfred Franken, a German Jewish immigrant.

Video Oral History Interview with Mary Cherry, Section A2006_113_001_003, TRT: 0:29:20 ?

Mary Cherry married Lamont Cherry, Sr. in 1946. They settled in the Bronx, New York, where Cherry managed the production of prayer cards and other religious objects at the Frank Novelty Company. Cherry and her husband often visited his relatives in Windsor, North Carolina. There, Cherry befriended her father-in-law, Lamont Bernard Cherry. He owned a gas station and beer garden; employed sharecroppers on his tobacco farm; and sometimes passed for white. In New York, Cherry's husband was mistaken for white while working at a refrigeration company. He was dismissed when his coworkers realized he was black, but Alfred Franken hired him as a printer at Frank Novelty Company. Cherry recalls other occasions when her husband inadvertently passed for white, including at a train station in Richmond, Virginia. In 1952, Cherry and her husband relocated to Ossining, New York, where they raised three children. In 1987, Cherry moved her family to Georgia, where her daughter pursued a master's degree at Atlanta University.

Video Oral History Interview with Mary Cherry, Section A2006_113_001_004, TRT: 0:27:00 ?

Mary Cherry hosted her parents, Annie Mae Shelton Kyle and Samuel Kyle's fiftieth wedding anniversary celebration in 1970. She held a banquet for 420 people at the Teamsters Local 456 Union Hall in Elmsford, New York. However, many of the guests fell ill, and Cherry's cousin was hospitalized. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention investigated the caterers, and found

that the Cornish hens served at the banquet were contaminated with salmonella. In 1987, Cherry and her husband retired, and moved to Atlanta, Georgia. There, she joined Zion Hill Baptist Church, which was led by Reverend Larry H. Williams. In 1994, Williams was succeeded by Reverend Aaron L. Parker, whom Cherry had met years prior, when his choir visited New York. Cherry also describes a trip with her husband to Alabama, where they visited the sites of the Civil Rights Movement, such as the Edmund Pettus Bridge. Cherry reflects upon her life and legacy; her family; and her hopes and concerns for the African American community.

Video Oral History Interview with Mary Cherry, Section A2006_113_001_005, TRT: 0:08:00 ?

Mary Cherry narrates her photographs.