

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Florence Farley

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Farley, Florence, 1928-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Florence Farley,
Dates:	February 10, 2012
Bulk Dates:	2012
Physical Description:	8 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:49:22).
Abstract:	City council member and mayor Florence Farley (1928 - 2022) was the first woman to be elected to a city council seat in Petersburg, Virginia and the first African American woman to become mayor of a Virginian city. Farley was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 10, 2012, in Petersburg, Virginia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2012_019
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

City council member and mayor Florence Saunders Farley was born on May 28, 1928 in Roanoke, Virginia to Neoda and Stacious Saunders. She attended Harrison Elementary School in Roanoke. After graduating as the salutatorian of her class from Lucy Addison High School in 1946, Farley graduated from Virginia State College (now Virginia State University) with her B.S. degree in psychology and her M.S. degree in educational psychology in 1950 and 1954, respectively. In 1951, Farley was commissioned in the United States Women's Army Corps (WAC) as a second lieutenant, and became the first African American female training officer at Fort Lee, Virginia.

Farley served as Chief Psychologist at Central State Hospital in Petersburg, Virginia, and was the first African American clinically licensed, by examination, psychologist in the state of Virginia. Farley then joined the faculty at Virginia State where she taught graduate and undergraduate students for over forty years and also served as the chair of the department of psychology. Farley obtained her Ph.D. degree in psychology in 1977 from Kent State University in Kent, Ohio. Farley also began her political career in 1973 when she was the first woman elected to the Petersburg City Council and became a member of Virginia's first majority black city council. Farley won re-election in 1978 and 1982. In 1984, after the resignation of Mayor R. Wilson Cheely, Farley became the first female mayor of Petersburg and the first African American woman to become mayor of a Virginia city.

From 2002 to 2006, Farley served on the Petersburg School Board and held the post of vice chair during her time on the school board. Farley has also received acclaim as a textile artist, exhibiting her needlework in libraries and museums across the state. In 2010, Farley was recognized by The Library of Virginia as an "African American Trailblazer in Virginia History." Farley maintained an independent psychology practice in Petersburg.

Florence Farley was interviewed was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on February 10, 2012.

Florence Saunders Farley passed away on August 28, 2022 at age 94.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Florence Farley was conducted by Larry Crowe on February 10, 2012, in Petersburg, Virginia, and was recorded on 8 uncompressed MOV digital video files. City council member and mayor Florence Farley (1928 - 2022) was the first woman to be elected to a city council seat in Petersburg, Virginia and the first African American woman to become mayor of a Virginian city.

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:

Farley, Florence, 1928-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Farley, Florence, 1928- --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Virginia State University

Petersburg (Va.)

Occupations:

Mayor

City Council Member

HistoryMakers® Category:

PoliticalMakers

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 Farley, February 10, 2012. 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 Farley, Section A2012_019_001_001, TRT: 1:28:22 ?

Florence Farley was born on May 28, 1928 in Roanoke, Virginia to Neoda Ware Saunders and Stacious Saunders. Her maternal grandmother was originally from Charlotte Court House, Virginia, and relocated to Danville, Virginia, where Farley's mother was born. When her mother was ten years old, Farley's maternal grandmother purchased a home in Roanoke. There, Farley's mother was taught by the respected educator Lucy Addison. She planned to become a teacher, until deciding to elope with Farley's father against the wishes of Farley's maternal grandmother. Farley's father was born in New River, Virginia to Henry Saunders, who worked as a blacksmith on the Norfolk and Western Railway. After marrying, Farley's parents moved to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where her father worked at a steel mill. They returned to Roanoke after a house fire, and moved into a home purchased by Farley's maternal grandmother. Farley also talks about her father's disdain for the prejudicial treatment of African Americans in the South.

Video Oral History Interview with Florence Farley, Section A2012_019_001_002, TRT: 2:32:53 ?

Florence Farley grew up in the Northwest section of Roanoke, Virginia, where she studied piano at the home of her maternal grandmother, Lula Ware. Because of the state's minimum age requirement, Farley was unable to begin school until January of 1935. During the six months prior, she was homeschooled by her mother, Neoda Ware Saunders. Upon entering the Harrison School, Farley was more advanced than her classmates, and soon became their tutor. To earn extra money, she transcribed letters for her older neighbors who were illiterate. She went on to attend Lucy Addison High School, which was named after the school's principal. There, she admired her highly educated female teachers. In her spare time, Farley watched movies like 'Gone with the Wind' at the Roanoke Theatre and Virginia Theatre. She also read newspapers like the Pittsburgh Courier and the Norfolk Journal and Guide with her father, Stacious Saunders. Upon graduating in 1946, Farley enrolled at Virginia State College in Petersburg, Virginia.

Video Oral History Interview with Florence Farley, Section A2012_019_001_003, TRT: 3:29:30 ?

Florence Farley excelled as a student at Lucy Addison High School in Roanoke, Virginia. She learned about African American history from her teacher, Alice L. Turner, who had studied with Luther Porter Jackson, Sr., a student of Carter G. Woodson. During her senior year, Farley began working after school as a nurse's aide at the Burrell Memorial Hospital to finance her education at Virginia State College in Petersburg, Virginia. She enrolled as a biology major, but changed her focus to psychology after auditing a class taught by Walter Wrigley. Farley was mentored by Wrigley, who studied under famed psychologists Kenneth Clark and Mamie Phipps Clark; and Keturah Whitehurst, who trained with psychologist Edwin Boring at Harvard University. During her undergraduate years, Farley joined the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority and the local branch of the NAACP. After her graduation in 1950, she was unable to find a job in her chosen field, and obtained a temporary teaching license instead.

Video Oral History Interview with Florence Farley, Section A2012_019_001_004, TRT: 4:28:36 ?

Florence Farley graduated in 1950 from Virginia State College in Petersburg, Virginia. She taught a special education class at Bellevue School in Hollins, Virginia until 1951, when she joined the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps. She was commissioned as a second lieutenant, and served as a training officer at Fort Lee, Virginia until resigning in 1953. She then used funds from the G.I. Bill to pursue a master's degree in educational psychology at Virginia State College. There, Farley became reacquainted with her undergraduate mentors, Keturah

Whitehurst and Walter Wrigley. During this time, Farley lived with music teacher Altona Trent Johns and civil rights leader Vernon Johns; and, through this association, became involved in the school desegregation movement. When the State of Virginia shut down the public schools of Prince Edward County to avoid integration in 1959, Farley partnered with Whitehurst to ensure that black students received an education. The schools were reopened and integrated in 1964.

Video Oral History Interview with Florence Farley, Section A2012_019_001_005, TRT: 5:30:01 ?

Florence Farley earned a master's degree in psychology from Virginia State College after completing an internship at the Crownsville State Hospital in Maryland. In 1955, she was hired at the Central State Hospital in Petersburg, Virginia, becoming the first African American psychologist to join the staff. The segregated facility was the only mental hospital for African Americans in the state, and housed over 4,000 patients during Farley's tenure. Farley endured racial discrimination from the administration, and was denied the same privileges as her white peers, such as use of the staff cafeteria and bathroom facilities. She left the hospital in 1962, and went to work as a part time professor and clinical psychologist in student services at Virginia State College. Farley talks about the attempts by Virginia politicians J. Lindsay Almond and Harry F. Byrd, Jr. to stop the integration of the Virginia public schools. She also recalls the founding of the Association of Black Psychologists.

Video Oral History Interview with Florence Farley, Section A2012_019_001_006, TRT: 6:29:14 ?

Florence Farley joined the Association of Black Psychologists shortly after its founding in 1968. She served as the southeast regional coordinator, and organized a meeting in Boston, Massachusetts to address concerns about racially biased student evaluations and unethical experimentation on Africans Americans. She and her husband, Richard Farley, supported the student protests in Petersburg, Virginia, and raised bail money for those who were jailed. Farley also assisted with voter registration, and led marches with the Washington, D.C. chapter of the Black Panther Party. Farley continued to teach at Virginia State College, and was encouraged by her mentor, Keturah Whitehurst, to obtain a doctoral degree at Kent State University in Ohio. She completed the program in two years, and then returned to Virginia. At this point in the interview, Farley talks about the formation of the Petersburg Improvement Association, and the city's first black elected officials, Joseph H. Owens and Hermanze Fauntleroy, Jr.

Video Oral History Interview with Florence Farley, Section A2012_019_001_007, TRT: 7:30:31 ?

Florence Farley became involved in the city government of Petersburg, Virginia after the election of City Councilman Joseph H. Owens and Mayor Hermanze Fauntleroy, Jr. In 1984, Farley was elected mayor of Petersburg, becoming the first African American woman to serve in this position. During her mayoralty, she also upheld her responsibilities as a tenured professor and graduate student advisor at Virginia State University. At this point in the interview, Farley talks about the prevalence of mental illness in the African American community. She also remembers the invention of antipsychotic medications like chlorpromazine and reserpine, and talks about the addictive potential of stimulant drugs like Ritalin. Farley concludes this part of the interview by reflecting upon her life and legacy. She also shares the story of how she learned to knit and cross stitch.

Video Oral History Interview with Florence Farley, Section A2012_019_001_008, TRT: 8:20:15 ?

Florence Farley and her husband, Richard Farley, did not have children; and, after his death, she devoted her time to teaching at Virginia State University in Petersburg, Virginia. There, Farley led the student protests during the 1970s. She

was dismissed her position in reprisal; but, with the help of the American Civil Liberties Union, she was rehired the next day. Farley talks about her international travels to Liechtenstein and Africa. She also explains how the desegregation of Virginia's higher education institutions decreased the funding for historically black colleges like Virginia State University. Farley concludes the interview by narrating her photographs.