



# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Mary "Betty" Brown

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## 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>	Brown, Mary "Betty"
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Mary "Betty" Brown,
<b>Dates:</b>	January 26, 2006
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2006
<b>Physical Description:</b>	4 Betacam SP videocassettes (1:47:22).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Civic leader, newspaper columnist, and nurse Mary Elizabeth "Betty" Brown (1932 - ) is a noted style maven in Chicago. Brown was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 26, 2006, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2006_008
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Civic leader, newspaper columnist, and nurse Mary Elizabeth “Betty” Brown has been a steady and stylish presence in Chicago and in Elgin, Illinois for more than thirty-five years. From her column, “Steppin Out with Betty Brown,” in the "Elgin Courier" to serving as the first black nurse at Saint Joseph's Hospital in Joliet, Illinois, Brown has always been a trailblazer.

Born in Chicago, but raised in Schaumburg, Illinois on the estate of her father's employer, Brown and her two brothers had to learn to play quietly because the employer did not know his chauffeur's children lived in his coach house. Brown's mother also worked as the family cook, and after saving enough money, Thermon and Margaret Stephens moved their children to Elgin, Illinois. A multi-talented student of voice and dance, Brown was well known at her church, St. James AME Church, Wing Elementary and Elgin High School, but her mother discouraged her from pursuing singing.

Brown's mother was a nurse's aide at Sherman Hospital and Brown decided to apply to the nursing program there, but she was promptly rejected. Disheartened, Brown approached St. Joseph's Hospital and became the first black nursing student in Joliet, Illinois. Not long after graduating, she married her sweetheart, Floyd Brown, who was just beginning to make a name for himself in Chicago radio. Brown served as a wardrobe and makeup consultant to Miss Illinois in the Miss America pageant for four years. She was named one of the One Hundred Women of Destiny selected by Marilyn Miglin & Associates. Brown received numerous awards for her civic work, including HI CHIC Award in Fashion, the Altrusa Outstanding Woman of the Year, Outstanding Woman in Advertising and the YMCA Margaret Henry Award.

Brown and her husband, Floyd Brown, live in Elgin, Illinois. They have two children and several grandchildren. Their son, F. Keith Brown, was the first black judge in the Northwestern Illinois suburbs. Their daughter, Diane

Douglas, works in human resources.

Mary "Betty" Brown was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on January 26, 2006.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Mary "Betty" Brown was conducted by Tracey Lewis on January 26, 2006, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 4 Betacam SP videocassettes. Civic leader, newspaper columnist, and nurse Mary "Betty" Brown (1932 - ) is a noted style maven in Chicago.

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## 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®.

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## 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.

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## Controlled Access Terms

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

### Persons:

Mary "Betty" Brown

Lewis, Tracey (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Mary "Betty" Brown--Interviews

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Socialites--Illionois--Chicago-Interviews

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Chicago (Ill.)--Social life and customs

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African American nurses--Interviews

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African American journalists--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews

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## **Organizations:**

HistoryMakers (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

CivicMakers

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MediaMakers

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MedicalMakers

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## **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 "Betty" Brown, January 26, 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 8/8/2011 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

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## **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, January 26, 2006

Video Oral History Interview with Mary "Betty" Brown, Section A2006\_008\_001\_001, TRT: 0:28:25 2006/01/26

Mary "Betty" Brown discusses her family's background and her birth in Chicago, Illinois, in 1932 at Cook County Hospital. Her father, Thermon Stephens, became the chauffeur for a lawyer named Jennings. The entire family moved to Jennings' estate in Schaumburg, Illinois, in the mid-1930s, and then the family moved to Elgin, Illinois. Brown recalls her childhood as one of the few African American children in Elgin. She was involved in music and dance, including a musical group called the Unisingers. Her mother and grandmother gave her the strength to withstand the racial epithets she encountered. Later, as a teenager, she worked as a nurse's aide at Sherman Hospital in Elgin. Brown applied to their nursing school, but she was denied on racial grounds. Another nursing school—Saint Joseph's Hospital School of Nursing in Joliet, Illinois accepted her and she became the first African American nursing student at their school.

African American nurses--Illinois.

Nursing schools--Students--Illinois.

African Americans--Illinois--Chicago.

African American families--Illinois--Chicago

Video Oral History Interview with Mary "Betty" Brown, Section A2006\_008\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:31 2006/01/26

Mary "Betty" Brown recalls her experiences in nursing school. She worked in a mental hospital in Fergus Falls, Minnesota, treating World War II veterans who called her racial slurs such as "dirty Jap." One of her other assignments was treating the tuberculosis victims on Skid Row in Chicago, Illinois. In 1954, she met her husband Floyd Brown in Elgin, Illinois when he came to work as a radio announcer for radio station WRMN. They married on October 2, 1955 at the First Methodist Church of Elgin. Their first child, F. Keith Brown, was born on August 5, 1956. He is the first African American judge in the northern suburbs of Chicago. Her daughter, Diane was born in 1958 and works in human resources. Brown quit nursing to care for her children and joined organizations like the Junior Service Corp, the Parent Teachers Association (PTA), and American United Nations.

African American nurses.

African American couples--Illinois.

African American radio broadcasters--Illinois.

African American families--Illinois.

Video Oral History Interview with Mary "Betty" Brown, Section A2006\_008\_001\_003, TRT: 0:28:36 2006/01/26

Mary "Betty" Brown returned to nursing and became the supervisor of the obstetrics ward at Sherman Hospital. She later transferred to the pediatric ward. After the emotional distress of treating victims of child abuse, she retired from nursing. Later, she and her husband, Floyd Brown started the magazine "La Petite—Dressing Up and Dining Out." In the 1980s, she became involved with the Miss America pageant, chaperoning Ruth Booker, the first African American Miss Illinois contestant in the 1984 pageant. Newsweek named her

“Mentor of the Year.” She began to work with fashion designers such as Molly Parnis. In the 1980s and 1990s, she taught etiquette classes and became a licensing investigator for the State of Illinois Department of Nursing Homes. Her journalism career started when she became a freelancer writer for NorthShore Magazine. She, later, became the Society Editor for Elgin Courier-News, creating the column “Stepping Out with Betty Brown.”

African American nurses.

African Americans--Publishing--Illinois--Chicago.

African Americans--Beauty Pageants--United States.

Chicago (Ill.)--Social life and customs.

African American journalists--Illinois.

Video Oral History Interview with Mary "Betty" Brown, Section A2006\_008\_001\_004, TRT: 0:20:50 2006/01/26

Mary Brown reviews her life and accomplishments. She expresses her love of helping people, writing, and reporting. Her pride lays in the successes and achievements of her children and her four grandchildren. Improving the condition of her fellow man is her legacy. She hopes to be remembered as a caring person who led a wonderful and full life.

African American journalism.

African American Families--Illinois.

African American women--Social conditions.