

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Prudence Burrell

PERSON

Burrell, Prudence , 1916-

Alternative Names: Burrell, Prudence , 1916-;

Life Dates: March 23, 1916-

Place of Birth: Mounds, Illinois

Residence: Detroit, MI (from ? to ?)

Occupations: Nurse; ;

Biographical Note

Nurse Prudence Hathaway Burns Burrell was born on March 23, 1916, in Mounds, Illinois, to Al Wade and Mary Burns. Burrell was raised in Danville, Illinois by Gwendolyn Chambliss, her caretaker. Growing up in Southern Illinois, she attended Douglas Elementary School in Danville. An outstanding Latin student, Burrell graduated from Elijah P. Lovejoy High School in Mounds in 1934. She attended nursing school at Kansas City's segregated General Hospital No. 2. Burrell passed the Kansas State nursing board certification examination in 1939 as a registered nurse and soon enrolled in the University of Minnesota.

With the onset of World War II, Burrell decided to join the United States Army Nurse Corps at Fort Huachuca, Arizona in 1942. There, she tended to the famed Buffalo Soldiers and met dancer Fayard Nicholas. Although she attained the rank of first lieutenant of the United States Army Nursing Corps, she was not allowed to treat white troops because of her race. In 1943, Burrell was sent to Station Hospital 268 in Sydney, Australia, then to Brisbane, and eventually to Milne Bay, New Guinea in 1944. There, she taught first-aid techniques to other units, treated gun shot and other wounds, and specialized in the treatment of malaria. Transferred to the Philippine Islands in 1945, Burrell met and married Detroit native, Lieutenant Lowell Burrell. After a simple ceremony consisting of a wedding gown made from a parachute and a fifty-cent ring, she was transferred to Germany during the integration of the United States Armed Forces.

Returning to the United States, Burrell taught at Pacific Lutheran Hospital and earned her B.S. degree in public health from the University of Minnesota in 1951. Eventually, she and her husband moved back to Detroit where she taught mathematics in the Detroit Public Schools and became a health care

analyst for the State of Michigan. An active volunteer in Detroit, Burrell delights in sharing her past with school children. Burrell published her life story in a book called "Hathaway" in 1997.

Prudence Burrell was interviewed by "The HistoryMakers" on March 7, 2007.

Related Entries

Wade, Al [CHILD_OF]
Father

Burns, Mary [CHILD_OF]
Mother

Burrell, Lowell [SPOUSE_OF]
Husband

James [SIBLING_OF]
Brother

Hershel [SIBLING_OF]
Brother

Annabelle [SIBLING_OF]
Sister

Lionel [SIBLING_OF]
Brother

Ally [SIBLING_OF]
Sister

Bruce [SIBLING_OF]
Brother

Inez [SIBLING_OF]
Sister

Maggie [GRANDCHILD_OF]
Grandmother

Elijah P. Lovejoy High School [STUDENT_OF]
[from ? to 1934]

Douglas Elementary School [STUDENT_OF]
[from ? to 1934]

The University of Minnesota [STUDENT_OF]
[from ? to 1951]

B.S. in Public Health

United States. Army Nurse Corps [EMPLOYEE_OF]
[from 1942 to ?]

Nurse

Detroit Public Schools [EMPLOYEE_OF]
[from 1945 to 1984]

Teacher

[MEMBEROF]