



# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Prudence Burrell

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## Overview of the Collection

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| <b>Repository:</b>           | The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616<br>info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com   |
| <b>Creator:</b>              | Prudence Burrell  |
| <b>Title:</b>                | The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Prudence Burrell,  |
| <b>Dates:</b>                | March 7, 2007   |
| <b>Bulk Dates:</b>           | 2007  |
| <b>Physical Description:</b> | 5 Betacam SP videocassettes (2:18:27).  |
| <b>Abstract:</b>             | Nurse Prudence Burrell (1916 - ) attained the rank of first lieutenant of the United States Army Nursing Corps and served during World War II. She also taught mathematics in the Detroit Public Schools and became a health care analyst for the State of Michigan. Burrell was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 7, 2007, in Detroit, Michigan. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview. |
| <b>Identification:</b>       | A2007_077   |
| <b>Language:</b>             | The interview and records are in English.   |

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

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.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Prudence Burrell was conducted by Larry Crowe on March 7, 2007, in Detroit, Michigan, and was recorded on 5 Betacam SP videocassettes. Nurse Prudence Burrell (1916 - ) attained the rank of first lieutenant of the United States Army Nursing Corps and served during World War II. She also taught mathematics in the Detroit Public Schools and became a health care analyst for the State of Michigan.

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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:

Burrell, Prudence Burns, 1917-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Burrell, Prudence Burns, 1917---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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Detroit Public Schools.

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

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 Prudence Burrell, March 7, 2007. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

### Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 8/11/2011 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.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage, March 7, 2007

Video Oral History Interview with Prudence Burrell, Section A2007\_077\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:49  
2007/03/07

Prudence Burrell begins the interview by discussing her family history. She does not know very much about her father, Al Wade. They only briefly met when she was fourteen years old. Burrell remembers more substantial

information about the maternal side of her family. Mary Burns, Burrell's mother, was born in Paducah, Kentucky, and was absent for most of Burrell's life. Due to Burns' absence, Burrell was raised by her grandmother Maggie. Burrell remembers being told as a child that she was born out of wedlock and that her mother was very young when she had her.

African American families--Illinois--Mounds

African American fathers--Attitudes.

Video Oral History Interview with Prudence Burrell, Section A2007\_077\_001\_002, TRT: 0:28:12  
2007/03/07

Prudence Burrell discusses her primary and secondary education in Mounds City, Illinois and Danville, Illinois. She recalls the schools in Danville being integrated while the schools in Mounds City were segregated. Burrell was encouraged by a family friend, Gwendolyn Chamblis, to attend Lovejoy High School in Mounds City, Illinois. There were two events that influenced Burrell to become a nurse, witnessing the embalming of her grandmother and taking care of her grandmother while she was ill. Burrell discusses going to Kansas City, Missouri, in 1934 to become a nurse. Burrell worked as a public health nurse before going to the University of Minnesota, where there were no African Americans, to earn her B.A. degree. Burrell discusses joining the United States Army during World War II to be a nurse.

African American Elementary School Students--Illinois--Mounds City

Segregation in education--Illinois--Mounds City

Career Choice--United States--Personal Narratives.

African American nurses

Video Oral History Interview with Prudence Burrell, Section A2007\_077\_001\_003, TRT: 0:28:16  
2007/03/07

Prudence Burrell goes into further detail about her career as a military nurse. She was stationed in Fort Huachuca, Arizona and assigned to the 268th hospital station. Burrell provides details about the types of diseases that the soldiers at this military base contracted. She does not remember her time at Fort Huachuca fondly due to the constant sexual harassment she endured from a commanding officer. Burrell had a celebrity patient, Fayard Nicholas of the tap dancing troop the Nicholas Brothers. While the army was still segregated, Burrell attained the rank of 1st Lieutenant in the US Army Nurse Corps. Burrell remembers the African American soldiers being treated better by the local residents of the South Pacific than their Caucasian counterparts on the base.

Military nursing--United States--Arizona

Sexual harassment in the military--United States.

Racism in the army

US Army Nurse Corps--1940-1950

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

World War, 1939-1945--Medical Care--United States

Nicholas, Fayard

Video Oral History Interview with Prudence Burrell, Section A2007\_077\_001\_004, TRT: 0:30:02  
2007/03/07

Prudence Burrell admits that, in her old age, she does not remember meeting Mrs. Roosevelt or Mary McCloud Bethune. She discusses President Harry S. Truman rescinding the orders to promote her and some of the other nurses of the 268th hospital station to the rank of Captain. Burrell describes marrying

Lowell Burrell, a medical administrator, in the Philippines. During the wedding ceremony she wore a dress made from a parachute and a ring that only cost fifty-cents. In 1945, Burrell and her husband returned to the United States and relocated to Detroit, Michigan. Burrell was the only African American instructor at Pacific Lutheran University in Thousand Oaks, California. She describes living in Detroit once her husband retired from the service. Once back in Detroit, Burrell became a health care analyst for the state of Michigan, a position she maintained until she retired.

African Americans--Marriage.

Integration in higher education--California

Detroit (Mich.)--Social life and customs.

Public health--Michigan--Detroit.

Video Oral History Interview with Prudence Burrell, Section A2007\_077\_001\_005, TRT: 0:21:08  
2007/03/07

Prudence Burrell describes when she got the idea to write an autobiography, while working as a public health care analyst for Michigan in the 1980s. Some of her job duties as public health care analyst were to visit hospitals, nursing homes, and veteran hospitals across Michigan to review their operating procedures. Burrell's book "Hathaway" is sold across the United States and may be adapted into a movie. Her book was sent to Oprah Winfrey but nothing came of this business venture. Burrell narrates a collection of photographs.

African American public health care analyst--Michigan

Autobiography--African American authors.

Burrell, Prudence Burns 1917-

Public health nursing--United States