



# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Sister Mary Alice Chineworth

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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>	Sister Mary Alice Chineworth
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Sister Mary Alice Chineworth,
<b>Dates:</b>	July 12, 2010
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2010
<b>Physical Description:</b>	7 Betacam SP videocassettes (3:06:04).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Nun and teacher Sister Mary Alice Chineworth (1917 - ) is a member and former superior general of the Order of the Oblate Sisters of Providence, the oldest religious order for black women. An educator for more than thirty years, Chineworth was profiled in the book "A Wealth of Wisdom: Legendary African American Elders Speak." Chineworth was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 12, 2010, in Halethorpe, Maryland. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2010_072
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Nun and teacher Sister Mary Alice Chineworth was born on July 16, 1917 in Rock Island, Illinois. Her mother, Victoria, was German-American, while her father, Alexander, was the son of a former slave. A student of St. Joseph's Catholic School in Rock Island from kindergarten through twelfth grade, Chineworth was inspired by the charity of the nuns who taught her. In 1936, after learning that her race prevented her from joining most religious orders, Chineworth took vows with the Order of the Oblate Sisters of Providence, the oldest religious organization for black women in America. Chineworth went on to earn her B.A. degree in English from Mount Mary College in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 1952 as well as her M.A. degree in psychology and her Ph.D. degree in higher education from The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C.

Chineworth has dedicated her adult life to educating young people. For over thirty years, she has taught in schools administered by her order, including St. Frances Academy, the school founded by the first members of the Oblates in 1828. In 1966, she became an administrator at Mount Providence Junior College, an Oblate community college, before serving as president from 1969 until the college closed three years later. In 1973, she began to hold higher-level positions within the Oblate administration, culminating in her appointment in 1989 to the position of superior general. She is a member of the National Black Sisters Conference, an association of African American nuns. In 1996, Chineworth edited "Rise 'n' Shine: Catholic Education and the African-American Community." In 2002, Chineworth was interviewed by Camille Cosby, a former Oblate student, for the National Visionary Leadership Project. Chineworth's story was included in the 2004 book "A Wealth of Wisdom: Legendary African American Elders Speak." In 2005, she accepted a \$2 million donation from Camille Cosby to start a scholarship fund at the school.

Chineworth lives in Halethorpe, Maryland, on the campus of the Oblate Order's motherhouse, and remains involved in St. Frances Academy.

Sister Mary Alice Chineworth was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on July 12, 2010.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Sister Mary Alice Chineworth was conducted by Larry Crowe on July 12, 2010, in Halethorpe, Maryland, and was recorded on 7 Betacam SP videocassettes. Nun and teacher Sister Mary Alice Chineworth (1917 - ) is a member and former superior general of the Order of the Oblate Sisters of Providence, the oldest religious order for black women. An educator for more than thirty years, Chineworth was profiled in the book "A Wealth of Wisdom: Legendary African American Elders Speak."

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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:

Chineworth, Mary Alice

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews.

Chineworth, Mary Alice--Interviews.

African American nuns--Maryland--Baltimore--Interviews.

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African American teachers--Maryland--Baltimore--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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Oblate Sisters of Providence

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

ReligionMakers

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EducationMakers

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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 Sister Mary Alice Chineworth, July 12, 2010. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

### **Processing Information**

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 8/15/2011 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, July 12, 2010

Video Oral History Interview with Sister Mary Alice Chineworth, Section A2010\_072\_001\_001,  
TRT: 0:28:01 2010/07/12

Sister Mary Alice Chineworth shares her family history. Chineworth's grandfather, Joseph Schlicker, married her grandmother, Frances Roiger, in an arranged marriage in Germany before immigrating to the United States in the late nineteenth century. The Schlickers lived briefly in Waseca, Minnesota, where Chineworth's mother, Victoria Schlicker, was born on July 3, 1890. The family later moved to Fremont, Nebraska, where Joseph Schlicker was a co-owner of Hillicker & Schlicker Horses and Cattle. Chineworth's paternal grandfather, Archibald Chineworth, was brought to the Missouri Territory as a slave from Madagascar. Her paternal grandmother, Lucy Branch, was born in the Missouri Territory and may have also been a slave. Chineworth knows little about her grandfather's enslavement since she was forbidden from asking him questions about it. Her father, Alexander Chineworth, was born on February 24, 1888 in the Missouri Territory but moved to Fremont, Nebraska as a young man.

Germans--United States.

Slaves--United States.

Slaves--Madagascar.

Slave trade--America.

African American families--Missouri.

African American families--Nebraska--Fremont.

Video Oral History Interview with Sister Mary Alice Chineworth, Section A2010\_072\_001\_002,  
TRT: 0:27:49 2010/07/12

Sister Mary Alice Chineworth relates the story of how her parents met. After hearing the sound of Alexander Chineworth's voice, Victoria Schlicker, a telephone operator, invited him to a party where they fell in love. Because Nebraska did not allow interracial marriages, they were married in Iowa and moved to Rock Island, Illinois. Chineworth describes her childhood in Rock Island, where factories such as International Harvester, Casey Bicycles and Velie Motors were based. As a kindergartener at St. Joseph's Catholic School, she first realized that she wanted to be a nun like her teacher, Sister Mary Fidelis. Although there were few incidences of prejudice, she was denied her school's scholarship to attend Clarke College because of her race. In high school, Chineworth was devastated to learn that most religious orders did not admit African American women until she learned about three black orders of nuns through the nun Katherine Drexel.

African American families--Nebraska--Fremont.

Families--Illinois--Rock Island.

Interracial marriage--Laws and legislation--Nebraska.

Race relations--Religious aspects--Catholic Church.

African American Catholics.

African Americans--Education (Secondary)--Illinois--Rock Island.

Catholic schools--Illinois--Rock Island.

Nuns--Illinois--Rock Island.

Monasticism and religious orders.

Vocation (in religious orders, congregations, etc.).

African American nuns.

Racially mixed people.

Video Oral History Interview with Sister Mary Alice Chineworth, Section A2010\_072\_001\_003,  
TRT: 0:28:17 2010/07/12

Sister Mary Alice Chineworth continues discussing her childhood in Rock Island, Illinois. Her parents encouraged their children to participate in black social events in neighboring towns. Although not directed at her family, the Ku Klux Klan sometimes marched down the streets in full regalia and the town had occasional cross burnings. Chineworth graduated from high school in 1935 but delayed entering the convent for a year in order to spend additional time with her family. She decided to join the Oblate Sisters of Providence, which was founded by Elizabeth Lange in the nineteenth century in Baltimore, Maryland with a mission to educate black children. Chineworth discusses racism in the Catholic Church. When she first joined the order, there were few Catholic colleges that blacks could attend. After Catholic colleges began admitting African Americans, she received a number of scholarships to attend Mount Mary College and the Catholic University of America.

Ku Klux Klan (1915-)--Illinois--Rock Island.

Hate crimes--Illinois--Rock Island.

Oblate Sisters of Providence.

African American nuns.

Monasticism and religious orders.

African Americans--Education.

Catholic Church--Education--United States.

Race relations--Religious aspects--Catholic Church.

Catholic universities and colleges.

Segregation in higher education--United States.

Catholic University of America.

Video Oral History Interview with Sister Mary Alice Chineworth, Section A2010\_072\_001\_004,  
TRT: 0:32:51 2010/07/12

Sister Mary Alice Chineworth describes her early years at the Oblate Sisters of Providence, where she felt immediately at home in the community of black women. She taught and studied, finally earning her B.A. degree in 1952. Chineworth had four mission experiences, teaching in Minnesota, Virginia and South Carolina. She was disturbed by the color consciousness among her southern black students. Chineworth discusses the other two Catholic religious orders for African American women, the Sisters of the Holy Family and the Franciscan Handmaids of the Most Pure Heart of Mary. Around 1950, many of the white orders opened to African Americans, who founded the National Black Sisters Conference to support black nuns within white orders. In 1962, the Oblate sisters opened Mount Providence Junior College with Robert F. Kennedy giving the opening address. Chineworth discusses her opposition to war although her brother Joseph was a Tuskegee Airmen during World War II.

Oblate Sisters of Providence.

Catholic teachers.

African American nuns.

Monasticism and religious orders.

African Americans--Race identity.

Catholic Church--Education--United States.  
Sisters of the Holy Family (New Orleans, La.).  
National Black Sisters Conference.  
Kennedy, Robert F., 1925-1968.  
Catholic universities and colleges--Maryland--Baltimore.  
United States.--Army Air Forces.--Fighter Squadron, 99th.

Video Oral History Interview with Sister Mary Alice Chineworth, Section A2010\_072\_001\_005,  
TRT: 0:30:23 2010/07/12

Sister Mary Alice Chineworth continues discussing Mount Providence Junior College, which the Oblates founded in 1962 for inner city women. She served as president from 1969 until it closed in 1972. During this time, although she admired Martin Luther King, Jr., she did not participate in the Civil Rights Movement since religious orders were discouraged from getting involved in political matters. However, she supports liberation theology because she believes that religious teachings can help promote social equality. Chineworth reflects on her racial pride, which was spurred by the National Black Sisters Conference. She discusses changes in Catholic education and is unhappy that fewer nuns teach in parish schools due to a lack of funds. The order had a successful fundraiser selling aprons autographed and decorated by celebrities, including Bill Cosby and his wife Camille, a former Oblate student. Chineworth discusses the difficulty of recruiting new nuns into religious orders. African American nuns.

Oblate Sisters of Providence.  
Catholic universities and colleges--Maryland--Baltimore.  
King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968.  
Civil rights movement.  
Liberation theology.  
Catholic Church--Education--United States.  
National Black Sisters Conference.  
Cosby, Camille O. (Camille Olivia), 1944-.  
Cosby, Bill, 1937-.  
Catholic teachers.  
Catholic Church--Education--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with Sister Mary Alice Chineworth, Section A2010\_072\_001\_006,  
TRT: 0:17:52 2010/07/12

Sister Mary Alice Chineworth reflects on the future of religious orders and changes within the Catholic Church. Women from religious orders can now live alone, find their own jobs within the church and wear veils instead of habits. She approves of the fact that masses are now given in the vernacular rather than Latin but disagrees with the Church's exclusion of women from the priesthood. Chineworth shares her hopes and concerns for the African American community. Citing the high number of murders and youth violence in Baltimore, she fears that the demise of the black family will result in the demise of the race. She also feels that God is missing from the African American community, which has traditionally been God-fearing. Chineworth hopes to be remembered as a compassionate, loving and generous member of the community. She discusses her own family, which has always been a significant part of her life.

African American nuns.

Monasticism and religious orders.

Catholic Church--Doctrines.

Women in the Catholic Church.

African American families.

Video Oral History Interview with Sister Mary Alice Chineworth, Section A2010\_072\_001\_007,  
TRT: 0:20:51 2010/07/12

Sister Mary Alice Chineworth narrates photographs of her family and life as a nun.