

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Edward Gardner

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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>	Gardner, Edward, 1925-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Edward Gardner,
<b>Dates:</b>	February 9, 1993
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	1993
<b>Physical Description:</b>	4 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:44:33).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Personal care entrepreneur Edward Gardner (1925 - ) launched Soft Sheen Products with his wife, Bettiann, in 1964. Gardner was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 9, 1993, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A1993_004
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Personal care entrepreneur Edward George Gardner was born on February 25, 1925 in Chicago, Illinois to Frank and Eva Gardner. Following service in the U. S. Army during World War II, Gardner returned to Chicago and enrolled in Chicago Teacher's College, where he received his B.A. degree in the 1940s. He went on to also obtain his M.A. degree from the University of Chicago.

Gardner worked for fourteen years as an instructor and school administrator for the Chicago Public Schools while simultaneously working part time as a black hair care sales representative. Learning of the dissatisfaction of many African American consumers and hair care professionals, he and his wife, Bettiann, launched Soft Sheen Products from their basement in 1964. With brands such as Optimum and Care Free Curl, Soft Sheen Products grew into a multimillion-dollar enterprise employing more than 400 people. The company also developed globally, exporting its products to Canada, the Caribbean and West Africa. In 1998, Gardner sold Soft Sheen Products to L'Oreal of Paris and passed the day-to-day operation of Soft Sheen on to his children.

Gardner has also been committed to service in the Chicago community. He owned the New Regal Theater and served as president of Garden Investment Partners. In addition, Gardner received credit for helping register over 250,000 people for Mayor Harold Washington's election in 1983. He served as a board member of the Chicago Urban league and was invited by President Bill Clinton to attend an economic summit in Little Rock, Arkansas, to discuss the impact corporations can have on urban employment.

Soft Sheen's honors include a "Company of the Year" award from *Black Enterprise* magazine, and a 1999 Golden Pyramid Award.

Edward Gardner was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on August 12, 2002.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Edward Gardner was conducted by Adele Hodge on February 9, 1993, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 4 Betacame SP videocassettes. Personal care entrepreneur Edward Gardner (1925 - ) launched Soft Sheen Products with his wife, Bettiann, in 1964.

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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:

Gardner, Edward, 1925-

Hodge, Adele (Interviewer)

McCauley, Brewster (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Gardner, Edward, 1925---Interviews

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African American entrepreneurs--Interview.

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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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### Occupations:

Personal Care Entrepreneur

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Personal Care Entrepreneur

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### HistoryMakers® Category:

BusinessMakers|StyleMakers

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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 Edward Gardner, February 9, 1993. 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).

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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

Video Oral History Interview with Edward Gardner, Section A1993\_004\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:26 ?  
Hair care founder Edward Gardner describes his family background, detailing the personalities of his mother, father, grandparents, and great-grandmother. Gardner recalls his childhood on the South Side of Chicago, listing his favorite recreations. Gardner discusses his schooling and then details his time in the

military, explaining how several incidents of racism and discrimination helped to shape his views and goals.

African American families.

Childhood and youth--Illinois--Chicago.

Education--Illinois--Chicago.

United States Armed Forces--African Americans.

Racism.

Video Oral History Interview with Edward Gardner, Section A1993\_004\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:44 ?

Hair care founder Edward Gardner details the origins and the rise to success of Soft Sheen Products, his family-run business that started from the back of his car and expanded into one of the most successful beauty products companies in the world. Gardner describes the vital roles his wife children played in the success of the company, explains the decision to sell the company to L'Oreal, and outlines Soft Sheen's community service involvement.

African American business enterprises--Illinois--Chicago.

Cosmetics industry.

African American families.

L'Oréal.

Community service.

Video Oral History Interview with Edward Gardner, Section A1993\_004\_001\_003, TRT: 0:31:06 ?

Hair care founder Edward Gardner reflects on the beauty products industry and places Soft Sheen Products in its context. Gardner then focuses on his charitable work with Black on Black Love and My Sister's Keeper. Gardner also discusses his newest business venture, the House of Kicks family fun center on the South Side of Chicago.

Cosmetics industry.

Charities--United States.

African American business enterprises--Illinois--Chicago.

Video Oral History Interview with Edward Gardner, Section A1993\_004\_001\_004, TRT: 0:13:17 ?

Hair care founder Edward Gardner discusses his involvement in the Harold Washington mayoral campaign and describes his efforts to revive and maintain the New Regal Theatre on Chicago's South Side. Gardner also reflects on his life and career and shares his concerns for the black community.

Washington, Harold, 1922-1987.

Elections--United States--Illinois.

Chicago (Ill.).

New Regal Theater (Chicago, Ill.).

Video Oral History Interview with Edward Gardner, Section  
A1993\_004\_ED\_GARDNER\_06\_MED\_002, TRT: 0:23:00 ?

This tape contains footage of interviews with Ed Gardner, John Rogers, and Willie Barrow. It is roll 14 of the Tanqueray project.