Overview of the Collection

Repository: The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616
            info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator: Gardner Edward
Title: The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Edward Gardner,
Dates: February 9, 1993
Bulk Dates: 1993
Physical Description: 4 Betacam SP videocassettes (1:44:33).
Abstract: 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.
Identification: A1993_004
Language: The interview and records are in English.

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.

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 Betacam SP videocassettes. Personal care entrepreneur Edward Gardner (1925 - ) launched Soft Sheen Products with his wife, Bettiann, in 1964.

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®.

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.

Controlled Access Terms

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

Persons:

Gardner, Edward

Hodge, Adele (Interviewer)

McCauley, Brewster (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Edward Gardner--Interviews
African American entrepreneurs--Interview.

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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**


**Processing Information**

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 1/28/2016 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

**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**
Video Oral History Interview with Edward Gardner, Section A1993_004_001_001, TRT: 0:29:26 1993/02/09

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 1993/02/09

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 1993/02/09

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 1993/02/09

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.
Elections--United States--Illinois.
Chicago (Ill.).
New Regal Theater (Chicago, Ill.).