

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Bettiann 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, Bettiann, 1930-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Bettiann Gardner,
<b>Dates:</b>	August 26, 2002
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2002
<b>Physical Description:</b>	3 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:24:20).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Hair care manufacturer Bettiann Gardner (1930 - ) is the co-founder of Chicago's Soft Sheen Products and New Regal Theatre. Along with her husband, Ed Gardner, Gardner is an active philanthropist in Chicago. Gardner was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 26, 2002, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2002_168
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Hair care manufacturer Bettiann Gardner was born in Chicago, Illinois. Gardner Working with her husband and business partner, Edward, Bettiann Gardner became an innovator in African American hair care when she co-founded Soft Sheen Products, Inc. in 1964. Soft Sheen Products began in the couple's basement in Chicago; their goal was to create better hair care products designed specifically for African Americans. With brands such as Optimum and Care Free Curl, Soft Sheen Products grew into a multimillion-dollar enterprise employing over four hundred Chicagoans. Exporting to Canada, the Caribbean, and West Africa, the

company became a global force, eventually being purchased by the L'Oreal group in 1998.

From the beginning of her business activities, Gardner saw to it that each of her children were also involved in Soft Sheen Products. A staunch advocate of the arts and African American theater, Gardner helped to revitalize the old Regal Theater by contributing millions toward the purchase of the once-dormant Avalon Theater in 1987. As further testament to her commitment to the arts, Gardner also supported the New Regal Theater Foundation, and acted as chairwoman of the Chicago Sinfonietta's honorary board of directors.

Gardner and Edward, her husband of over fifty years, raised four children.

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## **Scope and Content**

This life oral history interview with Bettiann Gardner was conducted by Adele Hodge on August 26, 2002, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 3 Betacame SP videocassettes. Hair care manufacturer Bettiann Gardner (1930 - ) is the co-founder of Chicago's Soft Sheen Products and New Regal Theatre. Along with her husband, Ed Gardner, Gardner is an active philanthropist in Chicago.

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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, Bettiann, 1930-

Hodge, Adele (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Gardner, Bettiann, 1930---Interviews

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African American businesspeople--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews

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Hair preparations industry--United States

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Hairdressing of African Americans

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African American women--Health and hygiene

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Creoles--Louisiana--New Orleans

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Bronzeville (Chicago, Ill.)--Social conditions

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Community life--Illinois--Chicago--History

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Pullman porters--United States--History

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Regal Theater (Chicago, Ill.)

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African American theater--Illinois--Chicago--History--20th century

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African American grandmothers

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Chicago Bulls (Basketball team)

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African Americans--Marriage

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Courtship

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Man-woman relationships--United States

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African American families

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African American women--Social life and customs

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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:**

Hair Care Manufacturer

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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 Bettiann Gardner, August 26, 2002. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

## Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 2/5/2020 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 Bettiann Gardner, Section  
A2002\_168\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:44 2002/08/26

Bettiann Gardner talks about her family and how she received her instruction in social graces from her French Creole grandmother. She then recalls her personality as a

child and growing up in Chicago's Bronzeville neighborhood. Gardner then gives highlights from her childhood and ends with her courtship and subsequent marriage to Edward Gardner.

African American businesspeople--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews.

Hair preparations industry--United States.

Hairdressing of African Americans.

African American women--Health and hygiene.

Creoles--Louisiana--New Orleans.

Bronzeville (Chicago, Ill.)--Social conditions.

Community life--Illinois--Chicago--History.

Pullman porters--United States--History.

Regal Theater (Chicago, Ill.).

African American theater--Illinois--Chicago--History--20th century.

African American grandmothers.

Chicago Bulls (Basketball team).

African Americans--Marriage.

Courtship.

Man-woman relationships--United States.

African American families.

African American women--Social life and customs.

Video Oral History Interview with Bettiann Gardner, Section  
A2002\_168\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:47 2002/08/26

Bettiann Gardner talks briefly about her grandfather's occupation as a Pullman porter. She then discusses her involvement with the purchase and management of the New Regal Theatre, plus her activities with the Chicago Sinfonietta orchestra. Gardner then details the origins and family involvement of the Soft Sheen Products hair care empire.

Video Oral History Interview with Bettiann Gardner, Section  
A2002\_168\_001\_003, TRT: 0:23:49 2002/08/26

Bettiann Gardner details the negotiations involving the sale of Soft Sheen Products to the L'Oréal corporation. She then talks about her daughter Terri's activities as CEO

of Soft Sheen during the transfer of the company. Gardner then discusses her tenure as the publisher for a beauty trade magazine she developed. She then discusses her involvement as a stockholder of the Chicago Bulls professional basketball team. Lastly, she talks about her role as a grandmother.