



Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Betty Francis

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Betty Francis
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Betty Francis,
Dates:	May 18, 2004
Bulk Dates:	2004
Physical Description:	4 Betacam SP videocassettes (1:58:48).
Abstract:	Government lawyer and state government administrator Betty Francis worked as an attorney for the Boston Housing Authority, was appointed Commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Public Works, Director of Public Works in Washington, D.C., and Director of Prince George's County, Maryland's Department of Public Works and Transportation. Francis was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on May 18, 2004, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2004_052
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Government lawyer and state government administrator Betty Hager Francis was born and raised in Washington, D.C. Her father, William Henry Hager, was a supply clerk for the United States Department of Treasury and a part-time carpenter, while her mother, Helen Brown Hager, was a homemaker and owner of a catering business. Francis and her siblings were raised in a devout Catholic home. Her childhood neighborhood exposed her to prominent African Americans such as Charles Houston and Edward Brooke, III, whose niece, Peggy Amos, was Francis' best friend. In 1963, Francis graduated from high school at the Sacred Heart Academy where she headed the student council.

Francis attended Howard University on a four-year academic scholarship while also working in the Capitol Hill office of Indiana Senator Birch Bayh. She took a year off from college to work on the 1966 United States Senate campaign of Edward Brooke, III in Boston, Massachusetts. Francis got married shortly before graduating from Howard with her B.A. degree in political science in 1967. She then returned to Boston to work at Harvard University's Astrological Observatory. In 1971, she began working at the Harvard University Press, where her boss persuaded her to go to law school. She attended Suffolk University Law School at night, earning her J.D. degree in 1980.

From 1980 to 1981, Francis worked on family and probate cases as an attorney for Greater Boston Legal Services. She then worked at the Boston Housing Authority where she handled landlord-tenant disputes, civil rights issues and labor and personnel cases. In 1984, she was appointed Deputy Chief Counsel for the Massachusetts Department of Public Works. Three years later then-Governor Michael Dukakis appointed her Associate

Commissioner of Massachusetts Department of Public Works. Francis directed the maintenance and operation of roads and bridges and worked on a variety of other transportation issues, including the multi-billion dollar project to build the Central Artery/Third Harbor Tunnel (also known as "The Big Dig"). She also served as Chief Administrative Law Judge in that agency. Francis was elected the first President of the Northeast Association of State Transportation Officials, serving from 1988-1994.

In 1991, Washington, D.C. Mayor Sharon Pratt Kelly appointed Francis as Director of Public Works, making her the first woman to hold this position. She received particular recognition for improvements to vehicle registration and parking management; for the initiation of curbside recycling; and for the successful reengineering and delivery of snow removal services within the District. Francis was named Director of Prince George's County, Maryland's Department of Public Works and Transportation in 1995. She was the first African American and the first woman to hold the position in the County's history. She led a dramatic increase in capital investment in the County's transportation infrastructure, the development of its regional and community-based transit services and significant improvements in land development and emergency response operations. She served in this post until 2004. Francis has three children and two grandchildren.

Betty Francis was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on May 18, 2004.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Betty Francis was conducted by Hamilton, Racine Tucker on May 18, 2004, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 4 Betacam SP videocassettes. Government lawyer and state government administrator Betty Francis worked as an attorney for the Boston Housing Authority, was appointed Commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Public Works, Director of Public Works in Washington, D.C., and Director of Prince George's County, Maryland's Department of Public Works and Transportation.

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:

Francis, Betty

Hamilton, Racine Tucker (Interviewer)

Lane, Edgar Carey (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews.

Francis, Betty--Interviews.

African American lawyers--Interviews.

African American government executives—Washington (D.C.)—Interviews.

African American government executives—Maryland—Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Maryland. Dept. of Transportation.

HistoryMakers® Category:

LawMakers

CivicMakers

PoliticalMakers

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 Betty Francis, May 18, 2004. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 8/9/2011 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

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

Series I: Original Interview Footage, May 18, 2004

Video Oral History Interview with Betty Francis, Section A2004_052_001_001, TRT: 0:30:29
2004/05/18

Betty Francis discusses her family history and childhood in Washington, D.C. She knows few details about her grandparents and other ancestors but believes that her maternal grandfather might have been Jewish. Devout Catholics, her parents raised Francis and her siblings in a stable, well-structured home. She describes the family's daily life during her early years. Lawyer Charles Houston and future U.S. Senator Edward Brooke, III were among her prominent neighbors. Brooke's niece, Peggy Amos, was her childhood best friend and the two remain in contact. Francis then shares memories of her school days at Park View Elementary School and Sacred Heart School. From a young age, Francis was a good student and a promising leader, overcoming a stuttering impediment. Although she generally respected authority, she had a rambunctious relationship with her mother.

African American families--Washington (D.C.).

African American Catholics.

African Americans--Washington (D.C.)--Social life and customs.

African Americans--Education--Washington (D.C.).

Stutterers.

Video Oral History Interview with Betty Francis, Section A2004_052_001_002, TRT: 0:30:16
2004/05/18

Betty Francis reflects on the influence of her Catholic upbringing. She loved church, attending the Shrine of the Sacred Heart with her entire family. She reminisces about her classmates and the nuns at the Sacred Heart Academy. She then focuses on the lasting impact of her time at Howard University, where she received a full scholarship in 1963. She discusses her college years, including her classics professor Dr. Frank Snowden and her job working for Senator Birch Bayh. Francis took a year off of college to work on Edward Brooke's senate election campaign in Boston, Massachusetts, an experience that she describes in detail. Francis met her future husband shortly before

graduating from Howard. She did not have any career aspirations, believing that marriage would be sufficient. Not wanting to overshadow her husband, she declined a graduate scholarship to Harvard University to work instead at the Harvard Astrological Observatory in 1968.

African American Catholics—Washington (D.C.).

Bayh, Birch, 1928-.

Brooke, Edward William, 1919-.

Political campaigns--Massachusetts.

Snowden, Frank M., 1911-2007.

Howard University.

Video Oral History Interview with Betty Francis, Section A2004_052_001_003, TRT: 0:26:52
2004/05/18

Betty Francis discusses her career in Boston, Washington, D.C. and Maryland. Arthur J. Rosenthal, her supervisor at the Harvard University Press, was influential in shaping her career path by encouraging her to attend law school. She describes the challenges of working as an attorney at the Greater Boston Legal Services and the Boston Housing Authority. She discusses her career shift to transportation in taking the position of deputy chief counsel for the Massachusetts Department of Public Works and through her later appointment by Governor Michael Dukakis to the Massachusetts Public Works Commission. In 1991, a search committee invited her to become Washington D.C.'s director of public works under Mayor Sharon Pratt Kelly, an administrator whom Francis holds in high esteem. After Kelly lost her re-election bid, Francis decided to join the staff of Wayne Curry, Prince George's County Executive, as Director of Transportation.

Greater Boston Legal Services.

Kelly, Sharon Pratt, 1944-.

Boston Housing Authority.

Harvard University. Press.

Public works--Massachusetts.

Public works--Washington (D.C.).

Video Oral History Interview with Betty Francis, Section A2004_052_001_004, TRT: 0:31:11
2004/05/18

Betty Francis draws on her years of experience to reflect on the future of transportation. She then talks about the importance of family, describing her relationship with her siblings Beryl Hager and Billy Hager. She stresses the importance of making a contribution to society and describes the legacy she would like to leave behind. She expresses her hopes and concerns for the African American community. She reminisces about Charles Houston, her childhood neighbor, and about Carmen Turner, the first African American woman to head a major transit system.

Houston, Charles Hamilton, 1895-1950.

African American brothers and sisters.

African American women executives--Transportation.

Transportation.