

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Dr. Rachel Keith

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Keith, Rachel Hannah Celestine, 1924-2007
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Rachel Keith,
Dates:	January 21, 2005
Bulk Dates:	2005
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:55:37).
Abstract:	Physician Dr. Rachel Keith (1924 - 2007) worked in Burton Mercy Hospital and Sinai Hospital in the Detroit area, as well as keeping her own private practice. Keith was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 21, 2005, in Detroit, Michigan. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2005_023
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Detroit physician Rachel B. Keith was born Rachel Hannah Celestine Boone on May 30, 1924, in Monrovia, Liberia; her parents, Reverends Clinton C. and Rachel Tharps Boone, were Baptist medical missionaries. Keith's grandfather, Reverend Lemuel Washington Boone, was a founding trustee of Shaw University. Keith came to the United States at age three and began her schooling at Richmond, Virginia's Paul Laurence Dunbar Elementary School; she graduated from Armstrong High School in 1938, at age thirteen. That same year, Keith lost her mother and moved in with her aunt, Dr. Bessie B. Tharps, in Rhode Island. Keith graduated second in her class from Houghton College in upstate New York

in 1943; she completed her medical degree at Boston University School of Medicine in 1949.

In 1949, Keith was featured in *The Boston Globe* for achieving the highest score to that date on a medical school test. One-time president of the Blackwell Society, Keith was also featured in *Look Magazine's* 1949 story about Boston University's home medical service. After completing her internship at Harlem Hospital, Keith served at Brooklyn's Coney Island Hospital before moving to Detroit in 1951. Keith completed a two-year residency in internal medicine at Detroit Receiving Hospital in 1953; in 1954, she joined the staff at Detroit Memorial Hospital and entered private practice with Dr. Thomas Batchelor in Conant Gardens. Keith's hospital affiliations included Burton Mercy Hospital and Sinai Hospital; she was also a member of the Wayne County Medical Society, Michigan State Medical Society, American Medical Association, Detroit Medical Society, Detroit Gastroenterological Society, and the National Medical Association.

Active in the NAACP and the Links, Keith held memberships in the American Leprosy Mission; the Detroit Science Center; and the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. Keith also served on the Michigan Board of Medicine from 1986 to 1993. Keith and her husband, Judge Damon Keith, raised three daughters.

Keith passed away on Thursday, January 4, 2007.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Dr. Rachel Keith was conducted by Larry Crowe on January 21, 2005, in Detroit, Michigan, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Physician Dr. Rachel Keith (1924 - 2007) worked in Burton Mercy Hospital and Sinai Hospital in the Detroit area, as well as keeping her own private practice.

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:

Keith, Rachel Hannah Celestine, 1924-2007

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Keith, Rachel Hannah Celestine, 1924-2007--Interviews

African American women physicians--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

Occupations:

Physician

HistoryMakers® Category:

MedicalMakers

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 Dr. Rachel Keith, January 21, 2005. 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).

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

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Rachel Keith, Section
A2005_023_001_001, TRT: 0:29:47 2005/01/21

Dr. Rachel Keith was born on May 30, 1924 in Monrovia, Liberia to Rachel Tharps Boone and Clinton Boone. Her mother was born in Richmond, Virginia to William Tharps and Hannah Tharps. She sang at the First African Baptist Church and attended Hartshorn Memorial College, the sister school to Virginia Union University. Keith's father was born in Cofield, North Carolina to Charlotte Boone and Lemuel Boone. Part of his family was Cherokee. He attended Shaw University for his degree in dentistry and worked as a medical missionary in Liberia for twenty-five years. Keith's mother joined him, and Keith and her older brother, Clinton Boone, Jr., were both born in Africa. Keith's father wrote two books about his missionary work, 'Liberia As I Know It' and 'Congo As I Saw It.' Keith and her family left Africa for Richmond, Virginia when she was two years old. In Richmond, her mother taught at The Dunbar School and her father was a minister. She remembers arriving in the U.S. and seeing snow for the first time.

African American women physicians--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Rachel Keith, Section
A2005_023_001_002, TRT: 0:29:34 2005/01/21

Dr. Rachel Keith's father was a medical missionary in the Belgian Congo when his first wife passed away from a snake bite and fever in 1902. Although Keith does not recall her early childhood in Liberia, she remembers singing the Zulu song 'Come To Jesus Just Now' after returning to the U.S. While visiting Liberia in the 1970s, Keith met Antoinette Tubman, the nation's former first lady. Her father preached at Fifth Street Baptist Church in Richmond, Virginia which Keith and her brother, Clinton Boone, Jr., attended. Keith enjoyed eating pig feet at

church suppers and roller skating as a young girl. She remembers standing in soup lines during the Great Depression and becoming ill from drinking too much hot chocolate when it was the only food at home. Keith took piano lessons and attended Dunbar School and Armstrong High School, which she graduated from at the age of thirteen. A few months later, her mother died, and her father passed away soon after. She went to live with her aunt in Cranston, Rhode Island.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Rachel Keith, Section A2005_023_001_003, TRT: 0:28:33 2005/01/21

Dr. Rachel Keith graduated as valedictorian of Armstrong High School at the age of thirteen. Since she was too young to be admitted to college, she attended Cranston High School in Rhode Island. Keith and her brother, Clinton Boone, Jr., both attended Houghton College in New York where they were the only black students. She majored in social science and history, minored in music and joined the a capella choir. She graduated second in her class and attended Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island to finish her pre-med courses. She was one of eleven women accepted to Boston University School of Medicine as more women were entering medicine due to the shortage of doctors during World War II. Keith found medical school challenging and struggled to maintain her ranking in the upper third of the class. She visited patients in Boston's Roxbury neighborhood as part of Boston University's Home Medical Service, and was photographed for an article in Look magazine about the program.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Rachel Keith, Section A2005_023_001_004, TRT: 0:29:49 2005/01/21

Dr. Rachel Keith studied under Dr. Chester S. Keefer, the world-renowned expert on penicillin during World War II and was president of the Elizabeth Blackwell Society, a professional organization for women in medicine, while attending Boston University School of Medicine. As an intern at Harlem Hospital Center in New York City, Keith met Dr. Lucille Constance Gunning, who told her about Marjorie Meyers, a black chief resident at Detroit Receiving Hospital. Keith applied there to study under

Meyers. Upon arriving in Detroit, Keith found the city cold and lonely. However, she grew to like it after visiting the neighboring town Gross Pointe and becoming acquainted with other hospital staff. Keith met HistoryMaker Damon J. Keith through a mutual friend, and the two married in 1953. Keith established a private practice in Detroit, despite the prejudice she faced as a black female doctor. She describes the segregation she encountered in the medical field and while working at Detroit Memorial Hospital in the 1950s.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Rachel Keith, Section
A2005_023_001_005, TRT: 0:31:22 2005/01/21

Dr. Rachel Keith saw African American patients at Detroit Memorial Hospital segregated from white patients. Keith and other doctors of color addressed this issue with the hospital administrator, Owen Pinkerman, and his successor, Franklin Carr, but the hospital remained segregated until 1964, when the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and Senator Philip Hart pushed the city's hospitals to integrate. Keith remembers HistoryMaker Reverend Jesse L. Jackson's impassioned speech to doctors at the National Medical Association's 1970 convention in Atlanta, Georgia. A lifelong member of the NAACP, Keith chaired the hospitality committee for the Detroit chapter's Fight for Freedom Fund Dinner, the largest dinner in the NAACP. Keith describes the discrimination she encountered in Detroit, and shares her concerns about health issues that impact the African American community, including the problem of patients self-medicating in lieu of visiting a doctor. She also reflects upon her life and legacy.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Rachel Keith, Section
A2005_023_001_006, TRT: 0:26:32 2005/01/21

Dr. Rachel Keith served on the Board of Visitors of the Wayne State University College of Nursing and on the board of trustees at the Detroit Science Center. She was appointed by the city's former mayor, Coleman Young, to the Detroit Health Advisory Commission, the hunger relief committee and the task force on substance abuse. Keith also served on various committees at area hospitals, including as chair of the bioethics committee at Hutzel

Women's Hospital. In February of 1994, Keith attended a White House dinner in honor of Black History Month and spoke to Hillary Clinton about her bill, the Health Security Act of 1993. Keith shares her regrets about the bill not being passed and her thoughts about socialized medicine, which she favors given the lack of access to healthcare for the poor. Keith talks about her husband, HistoryMaker Damon J. Keith, and their three daughters and two grandchildren. She concludes the tape by describing how she would like to be remembered and narrating her photographs.