

# Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Maxine Powell

PERSON

Powell, Maxine, 1915-2013

**Alternative Names:** Maxine Powell;

**Life Dates:** May 30, 1915-October 14, 2013

**Place of Birth:** Texarkana, Texas, USA

**Residence:** Detroit, MI

**Occupations:** Music Manager

## Biographical Note

Motown talent agent Maxine Powell was born in Texarkana, Texas, and raised in Chicago, Illinois, by her aunt, Mary James Lloyd, who taught etiquette and refinement. Powell attended Keith and Willard elementary schools. Before Powell graduated from Hyde Park High School in 1933, her aunt passed away. Powell attended Madame C.J. Walker's School of Beauty Culture and worked as a manicurist to finance her acting studies; for eight years, she studied elocution with James Baron, playwright, producer, and director of the Negro Drama League. Powell also took dance and movement lessons from Chicago legend, Sammy Dyer.

Soon, Powell developed a one-woman show called An Evening with Maxine Powell complete with pantomime and skits and performed with the first African American group to perform at the Chicago Theatre. At the same time, Powell taught etiquette as a personal maid to wealthy clientele and held fashion shows featuring the Fashionettes.

After reading a magazine article about John White's nine-story, 200 room Gotham Hotel, Powell visited Detroit for eleven days in 1945; soon after she moved to Detroit and was teaching self-improvement and modeling classes. In 1951, Powell established the Maxine Powell Finishing and Modeling School. In 1953, Powell bought and remodeled a huge house on Ferry Street which became the largest banquet facility in Detroit for African Americans. As a member of the Zonta Club, Powell brought black productions and artists to Detroit venues; as head of her own agency, she was the first to place black models with several of Detroit's automobile companies and in mainstream print ads. In 1964, Motown founder Berry Gordy's sister, Gwen Gordy Fuqua, a top Powell model, convinced Gordy to establish a Powell finishing school for Motown talent. Powell taught Marvin Gaye posture and how to sing with his eyes open. Diana Ross, The Temptations, and Martha Reeves acknowledge Powell as the one who

taught them how to enter a room and work with their fans.

From 1971 to 1985, Powell taught personal development at Wayne County Community College. After 1985, Powell began working as a consultant on an individual basis.

Maxine Powell passed away on October 14, 2013.

## **Related Entries**

**Hyde Park Academy High School** [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

**Keith School** [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

**Frances E. Willard Elementary School** [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

**Zonta International** [MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

**Entertainment Director**