

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Cheryl McKissack Felder

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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>	Felder, Cheryl McKissack, 1961-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Cheryl McKissack Felder,
<b>Dates:</b>	February 9, 2005
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2005
<b>Physical Description:</b>	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:16:52).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Architect Cheryl McKissack Felder (1961 - ) was the CEO of The McKissack Group and McKissack and McKissack Associates, an architecture and design company. As The McKissack Group's chief executive officer, Felder managed many large projects and was the principal in charge of Philadelphia's Lincoln Financial Field, the US Airways International Terminal in Philadelphia and the renovation and reconstruction of the School District of Philadelphia. McKissack Daniel was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 9, 2005, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2005_043
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Architect Cheryl McKissack Felder was born with her twin sister, Deryl, on May 15, 1961 in Nashville, Tennessee. Felder comes from a family of architects that start with an enslaved Ashanti ancestor in 1790. Grandfather Moses McKissack founded the family business in 1905. Her father, William DeBerry McKissack, took it over in 1968. Felder's mother, Leatrice Buchanan McKissack, grew the business after her husband died. Felder attended Peabody Demonstration School, graduating in 1979, in the meantime earning her B.S. degree in civil engineering in 1981 and her M.S. degree in 1983 from Howard University.

At the United States Department of Defense, Felder provided quality assurance and quality control for government research projects, including MX missile silos, the United States Embassy anti-terrorist program and a large space structures project for NASA. From 1985 to 1989, she worked as a civil engineer for Weidlinger Associates and, in 1989, she served as an estimator for Turner Construction, both New York City firms. Felder also served as the estimation manager for the \$2.5 million restoration/addition of the historic Schomburg Theatre. In 1991, she formed The McKissack Group (TMG), a full service construction management firm based in New York City. In 1999, Felder launched McKissack and McKissack Associates, an architecture and design company.

As The McKissack Group's chief executive officer, Felder managed construction of the US Airways maintenance hangar in Philadelphia. She also served as project executive for the Medgar Evers Academic Building and Student Support Services buildings in Brooklyn, New York. Felder was the principal in charge of Philadelphia's \$395 million Lincoln Financial Field football stadium, the \$450 million US Airways International Terminal in Philadelphia and the \$1.5 billion renovation and reconstruction of the School District of Philadelphia. Other projects include the Brooklyn NBA Stadium, the University of Pennsylvania Hospital, the New York School

Construction Authority and the African Burial Ground Monument in New York City. Felder and her husband Fred Felder belong to the 25,000-member Christian Cultural Center in Brooklyn, New York.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Cheryl McKissack Felder was conducted by Larry Crowe on February 9, 2005, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Architect Cheryl McKissack Felder (1961 - ) was the CEO of The McKissack Group and McKissack and McKissack Associates, an architecture and design company. As The McKissack Group's chief executive officer, Felder managed many large projects and was the principal in charge of Philadelphia's Lincoln Financial Field, the US Airways International Terminal in Philadelphia and the renovation and reconstruction of the School District of Philadelphia.

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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:

Felder, Cheryl McKissack, 1961-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Felder, Cheryl McKissack, 1961---Interviews

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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:

Architect

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# HistoryMakers® Category:

BusinessMakers

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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 Cheryl McKissack Felder, February 9, 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 5/30/2023 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 Cheryl McKissack Felder, Section A2005\_043\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:51 ?

Cheryl McKissack Felder was born to HistoryMaker Leatrice McKissack and

William DeBerry McKissack on May 15, 1961 in Nashville, Tennessee. Felder's maternal grandfather, A.A. Taylor, a Ph.D. from Harvard University, was provost of Fisk University and wrote its history. At Fisk, he became friends with Arna Bontemps, Langston Hughes and Aaron Douglas. Felder's paternal lineage in the U.S. begins with Moses McKissack, an Ashanti brought from Ghana as a slave in 1790. He learned construction from his master, William McKissack, who freed him. This trade was passed down to his son, Gabriel Moses McKissack, who in turn passed it to his son, Moses McKissack III. He and his brother, Calvin McKissack, founded the company McKissack and McKissack upon finally obtaining their architecture licenses in 1921 after the State of Tennessee initially denied them due to racism. McKissack and McKissack constructed buildings for the black community all over the South, including Meharry Medical College and Tuskegee Air Force Base.

Video Oral History Interview with Cheryl McKissack Felder, Section A2005\_043\_001\_002, TRT: 0:28:53 ?

Cheryl McKissack Felder's grandfather, Moses McKissack III, built the family business of McKissack and McKissack into a successful architecture and construction business. The firm was contracted by many black colleges and universities and even worked for Haiti's President Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier. Felder's father, William McKissack, inherited the company in 1956. Felder's parents were active in the community around Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee and her mother, HistoryMaker Leatrice McKissack, was close with Olympic runner Wilma Rudolph. Felder and her twin sister Deryl were raised in Nashville. Her family lived on a hill her grandfather had bought in a neighborhood of lots he had sold to other families. As a young girl, she enjoyed sports. At Peabody Demonstration School, she and her sister were among the few black students, and she enjoyed math. The Civil Rights Movement in Nashville made a great impression on Felder. She talks about her twin sister kicking her out of the womb at birth.

Video Oral History Interview with Cheryl McKissack Felder, Section A2005\_043\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:43 ?

Cheryl McKissack Felder graduated from Peabody Demonstration School in Nashville, Tennessee in 1979. She matriculated at Howard University in Washington, D.C., initially studying architecture and engineering, until she switched to focusing solely on civil engineering. From a young age, Felder aspired to be an engineer, but she did not plan to join the family firm. Felder enjoyed studying at a black institution, having spent her youth at a majority-white school, and she returned to Howard for her master's degree, completing research for NASA as part of her graduate work. From 1985 to 1989, she worked for Weidlinger Associates on projects for the U.S. Department of Defense. She then went to Turner Construction, working out of its New York City office. Her mother had taken over the family firm after her father's death, and in 1990, Felder returned to Tennessee to help with the business. Finding that she missed New York too much, she returned and started her own firm, The McKissack Group, Incorporated, in 1991.

Video Oral History Interview with Cheryl McKissack Felder, Section A2005\_043\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:37 ?

Cheryl McKissack Felder formed The McKissack Group Incorporated in 1991. She then created McKissack and Associates, a design and architecture firm, in 1999 and M and M Solutions for information technology in 2001. M and M Solutions' first project was to create a geographic information system for the City of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The company wrote a uniform land map

system for the city that is now used by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Felder met her husband, Fred Felder, while pursuing a construction project. They married in 1993 and, at the time of the interview, had two children. Felder reflects upon what she has learned about expanding her goals and aspirations as a minority business owner. She talks about the challenges facing minority and women-owned businesses. Felder describes the three big projects McKissack & McKissack was recently awarded, and outlines her hopes and goals for the company. She also describes her hopes and concerns for the African American community.

Video Oral History Interview with Cheryl McKissack Felder, Section A2005\_043\_001\_005, TRT: 0:18:48 ?

Cheryl McKissack Felder was planning a second century celebration in honor of McKissack & McKissack's one hundredth anniversary at the time of the interview. The event aimed to highlight and support various African American cultural and educational institutions. To this end, Felder planned to work with the National Liberty Museum in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Brooklyn Preparatory School in New York, New York and Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. McKissack & McKissack was also involved in designing a potential memorial for the African burial ground in New York City and a memorial slave ship for the African American Museum in Philadelphia. Felder talks about her involvement with Christian Cultural Center; although living in Philadelphia, she and her husband travel to New York City to attend services there every Sunday, and Felder has been involved with the church's construction plans. Felder reflects upon her life, legacy and how she wants to be remembered. She concludes by narrating her photographs.