

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Rena Bancroft

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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>	Bancroft, Rena, 1931-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Rena Bancroft,
<b>Dates:</b>	April 7, 2006
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2006
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:52:43).
<b>Abstract:</b>	College president Rena Bancroft (1931 - ) was the first African American female principal in the San Mateo Union High School District. She also served as president of the San Francisco Community College Centers. Bancroft was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 7, 2006, in San Francisco, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2006_070
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Rena Ercelle Merritt Bancroft was born on September 14, 1931 in Clinton, North Carolina to Sadie B. Herring and William Edward Merritt. Her maternal grandfather was named George Washington Herring. When slavery ended, he founded the Sampson County Normal and Industrial School, one of the first college preparatory high schools for African Americans. Bancroft grew up in Clinton, North Carolina. In 1948, Bancroft took the College Entrance Examination Board test, earning the highest score in the State of North Carolina. As a result of her score, Bancroft earned a Pepsi-Cola scholarship, which funded

her undergraduate studies. After attending Howard University for two years, she transferred to Syracuse University, from where she earned her B.A. and M.A. degrees in home economics and education.

In 1952, Bancroft began her teaching career in Watertown, New York. She taught morning and evening classes in home economics. Bancroft stayed in Watertown for two years, then she moved in with her aunt, Rena Hawkins, and taught in Syracuse, New York. In 1956, Bancroft decided to move to the West Coast, where she joined the Oakland Public School System. She taught at Havenscourt Junior High School for four years followed by Montera Middle School, where she stayed for another three years. In the evenings and during the summer, Bancroft taught sewing at Oakland High School. For the McCall Pattern Company, Bancroft conducted sewing and other home economic demonstrations at schools in San Francisco and San Jose. Bancroft went on to become the first African American female principal for the San Mateo Union High School District. In 1986, Bancroft became president of the San Francisco Community College Centers. Also that year, she earned her Ph.D. in education from the University of California – Berkeley. Bancroft remained president of the centers until 1991, when she began directing the centers' evening division and adult program. When she retired, Bancroft worked as a consultant for the State of California, evaluating school programs.

Bancroft was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April 7, 2006.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Rena Bancroft was conducted by Loretta Henry on April 7, 2006, in San Francisco, California, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. College president Rena Bancroft (1931 - ) was the first African American female principal in the San Mateo Union High School District. She also served as president of the San Francisco Community College Centers.

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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:

Bancroft, Rena, 1931-

Henry, Loretta (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Bancroft, Rena, 1931---Interviews

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## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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City College of San Francisco

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## **Occupations:**

College President

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

EducationMakers

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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 Rena Bancroft, April 7, 2006. 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 Rena Bancroft, Section  
A2006\_070\_001\_001, TRT: 0:28:25 2006/04/07

Rena Bancroft was born on September 14, 1931 in Clinton, North Carolina to Sadie Herring Merritt and William Merritt, Sr. Bancroft's maternal grandfather, George Herring, was born a slave in Sampson County, North Carolina, where his own father, Decateur Herring, was a coachman, and the son of their slave owner. Her maternal grandfather saw the Union Army pass through their town during the Civil War. He attended the State Colored Normal School in Fayetteville, North Carolina, and then founded Clinton's Sampson County Normal and Industrial School, one of the first college preparatory schools for African Americans. Bancroft's paternal grandmother was a midwife in Waycross, North Carolina, where Bancroft's father was born. He studied theology at Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina, and had three children with his first wife, before marrying Bancroft's mother, a teacher who was twenty-four years his senior. Bancroft also talks about Burl Toler, Sr., who was her companion at the time of the interview.

Video Oral History Interview with Rena Bancroft, Section  
A2006\_070\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:40 2006/04/07

Rena Bancroft grew up in the tight-knit, majority black community of Clinton, North Carolina, and had numerous relatives throughout the state. As a child, Bancroft sang spirituals like 'Deep River' and 'Swing Low, Sweet Chariot' with her mother and sister, Bertha Georgetta Merritt Campbell. She also enjoyed caring for her family's farm animals, especially the pigs. Bancroft's father, who passed away when she was eight years old, encouraged her early intellectual curiosity. One of her father's children

from his previous marriage, William Merritt, Jr., attended Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina and Howard University College of Dentistry in Washington, D.C., and then returned to live with Bancroft's family in Clinton. Bancroft attended a segregated elementary school, and took excellent care of her schoolbooks, which came secondhand from the local white school. Bancroft also remembers the illness of her friend Melvia Woolfolk Toler, whose husband, Burl Toler, Sr., later became Bancroft's companion.

Video Oral History Interview with Rena Bancroft, Section  
A2006\_070\_001\_003, TRT: 0:30:00 2006/04/07

Rena Bancroft's father, William Merritt, Sr., studied theology at Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina. When Bancroft was a child, he wrote sermons for other Baptist preachers, and taught classes on the Bill of Rights and the Pledge of Allegiance to prepare African American voters. He passed away in the middle of a church service when Bancroft was eight years old. After an altercation with her home economics teacher, Bancroft transferred from her school in Clinton to Garland High School in Garland, North Carolina. She was the College Entrance Examination Board's highest scorer in the state, and earned a scholarship from Pepsi-Cola to attend Howard University in Washington, D.C. Bancroft remembers the support of her high school English teacher, Betsy McLean, and her principal, W.M. McLean. She reconnected with their daughter, Cassandra McLean Clay, later in life. Bancroft's sister, Bertha Georgetta Merritt Campbell, earned a bachelor's degree in library science from North Carolina College at Durham.

Video Oral History Interview with Rena Bancroft, Section  
A2006\_070\_001\_004, TRT: 0:28:00 2006/04/07

Rena Bancroft studied for two years at Howard University in Washington, D.C. with funds from the Pepsi-Cola Scholarship Board. Then, she transferred to Syracuse University in Syracuse, New York, where she lived with her mother's friend, Rena Hawkins. Upon earning her bachelor's degree in home economics education, Bancroft taught in Watertown, a small, majority white community in Upstate New York, for two years, and then returned to

Syracuse to teach at North Syracuse High School. While her mother wanted her to return home, Bancroft relocated to the San Francisco Bay Area. There, she taught at Havenscourt Junior High School and Montera Junior High School, which were both located in Oakland, California. At this time, she began her doctoral studies at the University of California, Berkeley; conducted pattern demonstrations for the McCall Corporation; and married Richard Bancroft, whom she divorced after four months. In the San Mateo Union High School District, she taught home economics at Hillsdale High School.

Video Oral History Interview with Rena Bancroft, Section  
A2006\_070\_001\_005, TRT: 0:28:50 2006/04/07

Rena Bancroft served as the assistant superintendent of the Sequoia Union High School District in the early 1980s. She also directed the San Mateo Union High School District's Title I and adult education programming. On the advice of a friend, Bancroft met with a female spiritualist in Vallejo, California, who counseled her about her career and personal matters. They became close friends. In 1989, Bancroft assumed the presidency of the San Francisco Community College Centers, the non-credit division of the San Francisco Community College District. The centers provided classes throughout the San Francisco Bay Area. As president, Bancroft oversaw the centers' budget and compliance with federal and state policy, including the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. During her tenure, the centers provided the state's largest English as a second language program. In San Francisco, Bancroft also attended services at both Bethel A.M.E. Church and the Cathedral of Saint Mary of the Assumption.

Video Oral History Interview with Rena Bancroft, Section  
A2006\_070\_001\_006, TRT: 0:27:48 2006/04/07

Rena Bancroft joined Delta Sigma Theta Sorority's Alpha Chapter while she was a student at Howard University in Washington, D.C. She later joined the sorority's graduate chapter in San Mateo, California, and was an active member of its scholarship committee. At the time of the interview, Bancroft owned a house in her hometown of Clinton, North Carolina, in addition to a condominium in San Francisco, California. She reflects upon her life,

legacy and how she would like to be remembered. She also shares an anecdote from her experience as a Rockefeller Foundation intern in Portland, Oregon, where she was once late to a meeting because there were cows blocking her way on the Morrison Bridge. Bancroft concludes the interview by narrating her photographs.