

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Camilla Thompson

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Thompson, Camilla, 1922-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Camilla Thompson,
Dates:	October 19, 2006
Bulk Dates:	2006
Physical Description:	4 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:52:54).
Abstract:	High school math teacher, newspaper columnist, and historian Camilla Thompson (1922 - 2022) wrote more than 500 articles for a weekly column called “Reflections on Black Jacksonville” for the Jacksonville Free Press. Thompson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on October 19, 2006, in Jacksonville, Florida. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2006_125
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

High school math teacher, newspaper columnist, and historian Camilla Bolton Perkins Thompson has distinguished herself as both a science educator and as an authority on the African American history of Jacksonville, Florida. As an African American teacher of chemistry and physics, she was a pioneer for her generation. As a local lay historian, her historical research, writings, interpretation, presentations and organizational activities on Jacksonville’s African American history were motivated by the need to preserve the history for younger generations.

Thompson was born on March 6, 1922 in Jacksonville, Florida. Her mother, Camilla (Bolton) Perkins, was a Jacksonville elementary school teacher, and her father, Daniel W. Perkins, was a prominent lawyer. Thompson grew up in the LaVilla neighborhood of Jacksonville, which was segregated, where she attended a wooden two-story school house. She graduated from Stanton Senior High School in 1939. In 1943, Thompson received her B.S. degree in chemistry from Florida A&M University. In 1974, she received her M.S. degree with a focus on the teaching of chemistry and physics from the University of North Florida.

From 1944 to 1976, Thompson taught chemistry, physics and math at four Jacksonville junior and senior high schools—Abraham Lincoln Lewis Jr. High, Northwestern Jr. High, William Raines High, and Andrew Jackson High School. From 1976 to 1981, she was an instructor of chemistry at Florida Community College. During her teaching career, Thompson was married to Capers M. Thompson and they had three children—Muriel, Michael, and Reginald, born between 1947 and 1953. When Thompson retired from teaching, she was serving on the board of the Clara White Mission. The White family had accumulated a large collection of news articles and artifacts on Jacksonville’s African American life and history. Thompson volunteered to organize and preserve a large collection of historical materials accumulated by the White family.

Over a ten year period, between 1985 and 1995, Thompson wrote a weekly column called “Reflections on Black

Jacksonville” for the *Jacksonville Free Press*. Her more than 500 articles covered people, places, and events in Jacksonville’s black history and culture. She is widely known for her illustrated talks on “Remembering the African American History of Jacksonville from 1925 to 1960.”

As chairperson of the Black Historical Tour Committee and as a tour coordinator, Thompson served as a principle figure in the Tour of Black Historical Sites in Metropolitan Jacksonville, sponsored by the Gamma Rho Chapter of the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. Thompson’s work as a lay historian, researching, preserving, interpreting, and disseminating the African American history of Jacksonville, was a major contribution to historical memory and cultural and educational programs for the City of Jacksonville.

Camilla Thompson was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on October 19, 2006.

Thompson passed away on January 10, 2022, at the age of 99.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Camilla Thompson was conducted by Robert Hayden on October 19, 2006, in Jacksonville, Florida, and was recorded on 4 Betacame SP videocassettes. High school math teacher, newspaper columnist, and historian Camilla Thompson (1922 - 2022) wrote more than 500 articles for a weekly column called “Reflections on Black Jacksonville” for the Jacksonville Free Press.

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:

Thompson, Camilla, 1922-

Hayden, Robert (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Thompson, Camilla, 1922- --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Science Educator

Nonprofit Executive

HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers|ScienceMakers

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 Camilla Thompson, October 19, 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 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).

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 Camilla Thompson, Section A2006_125_001_001, TRT: 0:31:05 ?

Camilla Thompson was born on March 6, 1922 in Jacksonville, Florida to Camilla Bolton Perkins and D.W. Perkins. Her maternal great-grandfather bought property in Jacksonville after moving there from Whiteville, North Carolina. Her maternal family was well educated, and after her grandfather attended Howard University in Washington, D.C., he worked as a newspaper editor and carpenter. Her mother was a young girl during the fire that struck Jacksonville in 1901, and was told to carry what she could to the river, in case the flames approached the house. Both Thompson's parents attended college. Her mother graduated from Florida Normal and Industrial College in St. Augustine, Florida, and became a teacher; while her father earned his law degree from Shaw University in his birth state of North Carolina. He practiced civil rights law in Knoxville, Tennessee before moving to Jacksonville. Thompson recalls her aunts picking grapes to make jelly, and family vacations at Jacksonville's all-black Manhattan Beach.

Video Oral History Interview with Camilla Thompson, Section A2006_125_001_002, TRT: 0:30:19 ?

Camilla Thompson grew up in Jacksonville's LaVilla neighborhood, where her neighbors were doctors, Pullman porters and postal workers; and she once accompanied her father to a National Negro Business League Conference in New York City. During her childhood, LaVilla became mostly African American, as its Jewish and Syrian residents moved away. Thompson attended the LaVilla School, and played at LaVilla Park, where her mother's friend, Florida Cutton Dwight, was the park director. She briefly attended the Boylan-Haven School, but transferred to Stanton High School after one year. She studied science and math, and hoped to attend medical school, although her father discouraged it. He sent Thompson to Tallahassee's Florida Agricultural and Mechanical College for Negroes, because it was close to home. There, Thompson joined Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, and earned a degree in biology in 1943. She became a teacher, and later took classes at Virginia's Hampton Institute and Ohio's Case Institute of Technology.

Video Oral History Interview with Camilla Thompson, Section A2006_125_001_003, TRT: 0:30:10 ?

Camilla Thompson met her husband, Capers M. Thompson, Sr., at Florida Agricultural and Mechanical College for Negroes. Upon graduating, she taught chemistry at Jacksonville's A.L. Lewis Junior High School for three years, and later at the Davis Street School, Northwestern Junior-Senior High School and William M. Raines High School. During this time, she had three children. In 1970, Thompson was selected to oversee the desegregation of Jacksonville's schools. She went on to teach at Andrew Jackson High School, and then at a naval air station. Thompson took summer classes at colleges across the South, and earned her master's degree from Jacksonville's University of North Florida in 1974. Becoming interested in history, Thompson helped found the Eartha M.M. White Memorial Art and Historical Resource Center. She began writing a

history column in the Jacksonville Free Press; led historical tours with Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority; and became chairman of the history committee at Bethel Baptist Institutional Church.

Video Oral History Interview with Camilla Thompson, Section A2006_125_001_004, TRT: 0:21:20 ?

Camilla Thompson was instrumental in the establishment of the Bethel Baptist Institutional Church museum in Jacksonville, Florida in 1995. She describes the history of the church, and her favorite artifacts from the museum's collection, including the church's membership book, which contained the name of Zora Neale Hurston, who lived for a time with her father in Jacksonville. At the time of the interview, Thompson was compiling a book about Jacksonville's history that contained all of her columns from the Jacksonville Free Press, and she also hoped to complete a book on the history of Bethel Baptist Institutional Church. Thompson talks about the importance of history, and her hope that young people will embrace African American history. She also reflects upon her life, and her hopes for Jacksonville's African American community. Thompson concludes the interview by narrating her photographs.