Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Janet L. Sims-Wood

Overview of the Collection

Repository: The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com

Creator: Janet L. Sims-Wood

Title: The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Janet L. Sims-Wood,

Dates: April 24, 2007

Bulk Dates: 2007

Physical Description: 6 Betacam SP videocassettes (2:46:00).

Abstract: Historian, publisher, and reference librarian Janet L. Sims-Wood (1945 - ) served as Assistant Chief Librarian for Reference, Reader Services for the Moorland Spingarn Research Center at Howard University. Sims-Wood was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 24, 2007, in Largo, Maryland. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.

Identification: A2007_159

Language: The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Historian, publisher, and reference librarian Janet Louise Sims-Wood was born on May 22, 1945 in Rutherfordton, North Carolina to Marvin and Hazel Sims. Sims-Wood attended Carver High School where she worked in the school library. At the encouragement of her school librarian, she attended college at North Carolina Central University in Durham, North Carolina, receiving her B.S. degree in sociology with a minor in library science in 1967. Sims-Wood worked in several Washington, D.C. libraries until a supervisor cautioned her that she would not advance without a master's degree. She enrolled at the University of Maryland where, in 1972, she received her M.L.S. degree. Sims-Wood later completed twenty-one hours in African American history at Howard University before earning her Ph.D. in 1994 in women’s studies, history and oral history from Union Institute in Cincinnati, Ohio. She also holds a ministerial diploma from the Spirit of Faith (SOF) Bible Institute in Temple Hills, Maryland.

Sims-Wood began her career in library science in 1972 as a Reader’s Advisor in the Black Studies Division of the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Library in Washington, D.C. This experience led to her interest and specialization in African American history. In 1974, Sims-Wood became an assistant reference librarian at Moorland Spingarn Research Center at Howard University. She was appointed to Assistant Chief Librarian for Reference, Reader Services of the Moorland Spingarn Research Center in 1987, a position she held until her retirement in 2005. Sims-Wood has taught black women’s history courses at the University of Maryland, and has served as a children’s librarian with the Washington, D.C. Public Library System. She worked part-time for Prince George’s Community College Library. Sims-Wood was part of a team of librarians who provide online services through a nation-wide 24/7 virtual reference program called AskUsNow.

Sims-Wood is a founding associate editor of “SAGE: A Scholarly Journal on Black Women” which published the
anthology "Double Stitch: Black Women Write About Mothers and Daughters." She was the founder of a small publishing company, Afro Resources, Inc., which published a 1993 calendar depicting black women who served in the Women’s Army Corps during World War II. Sims-Wood has served as a consultant to several publishers and agencies, including Carlson Publishing Company’s Black Women in America series and the American Girl's Addy doll and book series. Sims-Wood has also served as a bibliographer for the annual Black History Month kits of the Association for the Study of American Life and History. She is a life member and has held several executive positions in the Association for the Study of American Life and History and the Association of Black Women Historians.

Janet Sims-Wood was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on April 24, 2007.

**Scope and Content**

This life oral history interview with Janet L. Sims-Wood was conducted by Denise Gines on April 24, 2007, in Largo, Maryland, and was recorded on 6 Betacam SP videocassettes. Historian, publisher, and reference librarian Janet L. Sims-Wood (1945 - ) served as Assistant Chief Librarian for Reference, Reader Services for the Moorland Spingarn Research Center at Howard University.

**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:**

Sims-Wood, Janet L., 1945-

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)
Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews.

African American librarians--Washington (D.C.)--Interviews.

African American historians--Interviews.

African American publishers--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Howard University. Moorland-Spingarn Research Center

HistoryMakers® Category:

EducationMakers

MediaMakers

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


Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 8/9/2011 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, April 24, 2007

Video Oral History Interview with Janet L. Sims-Wood, Section A2007_159_001_001, TRT: 0:28:50 2007/04/24

Janet Sims-Wood discusses her family history whose roots in Rutherford County, North Carolina, extend for generations. Her mother, Hazel Sims, was a seamstress. At an early age, her father Marvin Sims began working in the cotton mills, cleaning up and stoking the fires, the only jobs available to blacks. He eventually became a brick mason, teaching others and building many homes in the area. Sims-Wood was also born in Rutherford County before moving to a mostly white area in Avondale, North Carolina. It was a small town with many older residents so Sims-Wood had limited interactions with other children. Sims-Wood was a tomboy who played mostly with her older brother. Although the town possessed a community feeling, it was segregated. Sims-Wood describes some of her experiences of segregation, including attending the all-black Dunbar Elementary and Carver High Schools.

African American families—North Carolina.
African Americans—Social life and customs—North Carolina.
Employment—North Carolina.
Segregation—North Carolina—Avondale.
Cotton manufacture.

Video Oral History Interview with Janet L. Sims-Wood, Section A2007_159_001_002, TRT: 0:28:30 2007/04/24

Janet Sims-Wood talks about her childhood and introduction to librarianship. She discusses reading as a young girl, recalling her parents' books and periodicals. Although she initially hated history, her attitude changed as she learned to connect the past to current events. While at Carver High School, she worked in the school library, an experience that convinced her to become a librarian. Although few students were college bound, the school librarian steered her toward North Carolina Central College's library science program. Sims-Wood shares her college experiences, including her participation in voter registration drives. After college, she moved to Washington, D.C., where she worked in clerical positions at several libraries, including the Library of Congress. A supervisor told her that she needed a master's degree to advance and took her to the University of Maryland for an interview. Sims-Wood discusses her experiences as a graduate student.

Library science—Vocational guidance.
Education, Higher.
Civil rights movement.
North Carolina Central University.
Janet Sims-Wood relates her experiences at the University of Maryland from 1970 to 1972. She recalls taking a computer class and student protests against the Vietnam War. After graduate school, she worked at the Washington, D.C., Public Library where she first became interested in black studies. She began working at the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center at Howard University in 1974. During the 1980s, she served in several executive positions, including the national council of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History. In the course of her career at Howard, Sims-Wood met many prominent scholars including John Hope Franklin, John Blassingame, Darlene Clark Hine, Sharon Harley and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn. Sims-Wood earned her Ph.D. degree from the Union Institute in 1994. She talks about her dissertation research about four African American members of the Women's Army Corps and shares her opinion on areas of African American studies that need more research.

Janet Sims-Wood discusses her projects as a historian. For her dissertation, she conducted oral histories of black members of the Women's Army Corps who served during World War II. She co-founded "Sage: A Scholarly Journal of Black Women," in 1984. She is particularly proud of the anthology, "Double Stitch: Black Women Write About Mothers and Daughters," an outgrowth of the journal. Sims-Wood was a consultant for American Girl, helping to design the historical story and relevant artifacts for Addy, the company's first African American doll. She owned a small publishing company that published one book during the 1980s and a 1993 calendar of the black members of the Women's Army Corps. Sims-Wood shares her experience doing African American oral history. She talks about serving on the Maryland Humanities Council Speakers Bureau, where her areas of expertise include women’s military history and Brown v. the Board of Education.

Janet Sims-Wood relates stories of her consultant work. One project gave her the opportunity to meet Marian Anderson. Sims-Wood has been the recipient of many grants, allowing her to conduct historical research and to write books of African American bibliography. Although she talks about her family, Sims-Wood does not discuss her marriage at length except to note that she married in
1980 and that her husband was a carpenter. She had five step-children, three of whom are alive. She talks about her religious background, including her current involvement with the Spirit of Faith Christian Center. Sims-Wood discusses her position as a part-time reference librarian at Prince George's Community College. The internet has greatly influenced research as signified by her work on the twenty-four hour service, "Virtual Reference." She identifies some of the challenges in getting students to use the library or the internet.

African American families—Maryland.
History—Sources—Study and teaching (Higher).
Internet in higher education.
Academic libraries.
African Americans--Religion.

Video Oral History Interview with Janet L. Sims-Wood, Section A2007_159_001_006, TRT: 0:22:00 2007/04/24

Janet Sims-Wood talks about her recent project, “Kids’ Black History on the Net,” a series of teacher workshops. She discusses her leadership roles in the Association of Black Women Historians. Sims-Wood chaired the organization's inaugural nominating committee in 1979. She shares her experiences of pledging Alpha Kappa Alpha in Prince George’s County while in graduate school at the University of Maryland. Sims-Wood answers philosophical questions. She has a few regrets about not travelling and not finishing some projects. She expresses her concern that researchers of African American history rely too heavily on the internet rather than the library. She concludes the interview by talking about her experiences as a breast cancer survivor. Sims-Wood shows photographs from her personal collection.

Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority.
Association of Black Women Historians.
Breast—Cancer—Patients.
African American women--Sororities.
Internet research.