

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Amelia Boynton Robinson

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Robinson, Amelia Boynton, 1911-2015
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Amelia Boynton Robinson,
Dates:	September 4, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007
Physical Description:	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:24:55).
Abstract:	Civil rights leader Amelia Boynton Robinson (1911 - 2015) was one of the civil rights leaders that led the famous first march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge, which became known as Bloody Sunday. She was also the first African American woman ever to seek a seat in Congress from Alabama. Robinson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on September 4, 2007, in Tuskegee, Alabama. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_244
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Civil rights pioneer Amelia Boynton Robinson was born on August 18, 1911, in Savannah, Georgia. As a young lady, Robinson became very active in women's suffrage. In 1934, at the age of twenty-three, Robinson became one of the few registered African American voters. In an era where literacy tests were used to discriminate against African Americans seeking to vote, Robinson used her status as a registered voter to assist other African American applicants to become registered voters.

In 1930, while working as a home economics teacher in the rural south, Robinson became re-acquainted with Sam William Boynton, an extension agent for the county whom she had met while studying at Tuskegee Institute. They married and began to work together to bring education, a higher standard of living, and voting rights to the African American poor, most of whom worked as sharecroppers. In 1936, Robinson wrote a play entitled *Through the Years*, to raise money for a community center that would be open to African Americans in a then-racially segregated Selma, Alabama. *Through the Years* tells the story of Robert Smalls (one of Robinson's ancestors), through the character of Joshua Terrell, a slave, who gains his freedom and goes on to serve in the U.S. Congress.

On February 29, 1964, Robinson became the first African American woman ever to seek a seat in Congress from Alabama. She was also the first woman to run for this office in the state, winning ten percent of the vote when only five percent of the registered voters were African American. In 1965, Robinson was one of the civil rights leaders that led the famous first march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge which resulted in that day being called Bloody Sunday. Robinson was gassed and beaten; a wire photo of her left for dead on Edmund Pettus Bridge went around the world and helped to spark an outpouring of support for the Civil Rights Movement.

Robinson was introduced to the LaRouche Movement in 1983, and a year later, she became a board member and then vice-chairperson of the Schiller Institute. The Schiller Institute was founded to defend the rights of all

humanity. The Schiller Institute published her book *Bridges over Jordan* in 1991. In 1992, Robinson co-founded the International Civil Rights Solidarity Movement, and has received worldwide recognition for her sincere service to humanity. In 1990, Robinson was awarded the Martin Luther King, Jr. Foundation Medal of Freedom; in 2003 she was awarded the National Visionary Leadership Award; and in 2005, Robinson and her deceased husband, Sam Boynton, were honored on the Fortieth Anniversary of Bloody Sunday in Selma. Robinson spent the latter part of her career touring the nation and worldwide, speaking on the behalf of the Schiller Institute to promote civil and human rights.

Amelia Boynton Robinson passed away on August 28, 2015.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Amelia Boynton Robinson was conducted by Denise Gines on September 4, 2007, in Tuskegee, Alabama, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Civil rights leader Amelia Boynton Robinson (1911 - 2015) was one of the civil rights leaders that led the famous first march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge, which became known as Bloody Sunday. She was also the first African American woman ever to seek a seat in Congress from Alabama.

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:

Robinson, Amelia Boynton, 1911-2015

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Robinson, Amelia Boynton, 1911-2015 --Interviews

Human rights workers--Interviews

African American political activists--Interviews

African American civil rights workers--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Civil Rights Leader

HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

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 Amelia Boynton Robinson, September 4, 2007. 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 Amelia Boynton Robinson, Section A2007_244_001_001, TRT: 0:29:15 ?

Amelia Boynton Robinson was born on August 18, 1911 to Anna Hicks Platts and George Platts in Savannah, Georgia. The parents of her maternal grandmother, Eliza Eikerenkoetter Hicks, were Cherokee and German; while the father of her maternal grandfather, Anthony Hicks, emigrated from Ghana to England, and then to South Carolina, where he worked as a builder. Robinson's grandfather was also a builder, and owned land in Ridgeland, South Carolina. Her mother was born in Beaufort, South Carolina, and was one of two daughters. She attended school through the tenth grade; and, after marrying Robinson's father, travelled with him on carpentry jobs throughout Georgia, along with Robinson's older sister, Anna Hicks Platts. In Savannah, her mother operated a preschool from their home. There, after Robinson's sister insulted a white neighbor, their family was threatened with lynching, but were defended by armed members of the local African American community.

Human rights workers--Interviews.

African American political activists--Interviews.

African American civil rights workers--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Amelia Boynton Robinson, Section A2007_244_001_002, TRT: 0:30:40 ?

Amelia Boynton Robinson's paternal grandmother, Elizabeth Johnson Platts, gave birth to Robinson's father, George Platts, four months after his father was killed in the Civil War. Later, after Robinson's parents' married, they moved to Savannah, Georgia, where her father worked as a carpenter. He also owned a wholesale wood yard near their home, where he cut pine timber to ship on the Savannah River, and was occasionally assisted by Robinson and her nine siblings. Her father built the family's large home, where they often housed community members who were suffering financial troubles. Robinson also frequently accompanied her mother as she registered citizens to vote in Savannah. After Robinson left to attend the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute in Alabama, her father relocated to Arizona on account of his rheumatism, and then moved to Pennsylvania with her mother. He passed away there, shortly after building a porch for their home.

Video Oral History Interview with Amelia Boynton Robinson, Section A2007_244_001_003, TRT: 0:28:20 ?

Amelia Boynton Robinson had six sisters and two brothers. Their father, George Platts, built the family's home in a wealthy neighborhood of Savannah, Georgia, where Robinson did not see many of the women work. Vegetables and seafood were sold along the street, and the neighborhood children often came to Robinson's house, as her mother, Anna Hicks Platts, worried she would get into trouble elsewhere. Robinson enjoyed bicycling, and once broke her uncle's bicycle after fitting too many children on it. She also visited her godmother, and

attended the circus with her father. Robinson began her education at the Cuyler Street School, where she admired her teacher, Eureka Jackson. Once, after arriving late to school, she skipped class to shop with an older classmate in town. Robinson attended high school at the Georgia State Industrial College for Colored Youth, where she was influenced by her teacher, Ophelia Lee; and confronted another teacher, Ms. Simmons, over a low grade.

Video Oral History Interview with Amelia Boynton Robinson, Section A2007_244_001_004, TRT: 0:29:00 ?

Amelia Boynton Robinson visited a Methodist church near her home in Savannah, Georgia for New Year's celebrations, although her family belonged to the Church of God. Her family often hosted poor members of the community in their home, including Mother Belle, a widow, and three neglected children. After two years of high school at Georgia State Industrial College for Colored Youth, Robinson transferred to the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama, and graduated with a normal degree in 1927. She began her teaching career at the rural Camden County Training School in St. Marys, Georgia, where she was isolated from the other teachers, most of whom were related. Even so, she raised money to build a gymnasium, and hosted a parent teacher association party. However, after upsetting a fellow teacher by befriending her boyfriend, and speaking poorly of the principal, Toler Harris, at a teachers' convention, Robinson was fired.

Video Oral History Interview with Amelia Boynton Robinson, Section A2007_244_001_005, TRT: 0:28:30 ?

Amelia Boynton Robinson visited her family in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania after leaving St. Marys, Georgia. In Philadelphia, she was turned away from a waitressing job due to her darker skin tone, but soon found a childcare position. Then, Robinson was hired by Principal F.R. Lampkin to teach home economics at the Americus Institute in Americus, Georgia. While taking her students to a basketball game in Tuskegee, Alabama, Robinson was recruited by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to do extension work in the spring of 1929 in Dallas County, Alabama. There, she witnessed the extreme poverty of sharecroppers as she visited their homes and schools. She worked with her supervisor to assist the farmers in buying land, and offered low interest loans, which upset many of the plantation owners from whom they had rented. Robinson also recalls being visited by her former principal, Toler Harris, when his son was renting a room at her home in Georgia.

Video Oral History Interview with Amelia Boynton Robinson, Section A2007_244_001_006, TRT: 0:28:10 ?

Amelia Boynton Robinson attended the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama, where she met General Benjamin O. Davis, Sr. and Dean Hattie Kelly. During her first week there, she joined the choir, after being caught listening to them in the chapel. She also played basketball. Robinson attempted to find a job at the school, but was fired from a waitressing position after spilling food, and from the laundry for working too slowly. She also met her roommate's brother, Samuel William Boynton, whom she later married, although they dated other people and reconnected later. In addition, Robinson was acquainted with Professor George Washington Carver, who taught her husband, and was the godfather of her first son, Bruce Boynton. Later, while working with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, she used his portable cooker invention to improve the lives of sharecroppers in Dallas County, Alabama. She also helped them register to vote, despite the threats of the plantation owners.

Video Oral History Interview with Amelia Boynton Robinson, Section A2007_244_001_007, TRT: 0:31:00 ?

Amelia Boynton Robinson wrote 'Through the Years,' a play about Robert Smalls, a slave who bought his freedom, stole a Confederate ship and helped others escape to the North. In 1936, she produced the play in Selma, Alabama and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to raise money for a community center in Selma. Soon after, she quit her job at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and married Samuel William Boynton. At their home in Selma, they hosted such notables as inventor George Washington Carver and educator Mary McLeod Bethune. Her husband served as the president of registration and voting for Alabama's 4th Congressional District, and as the civil rights chair of the Elks organization, a position that Robinson held in the Daughters of the Elks. In the decades following their marriage, Robinson witnessed changes in the voter registration requirements, as local authorities tried to prevent African Americans from voting. By the 1960s, she often received death threats for her voter registration work.