

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Geraldine Rhodes Kennedy

PERSON

Kennedy, Geraldine Rhodes, 1930-2017

Alternative Names: Geraldine Rhodes Kennedy; Geri Kennedy

Life Dates: July 12, 1930-November 16, 2017

Place of Birth: Union, North Carolina, USA

Residence: New York, NY

Occupations: Dance Group Manager

Biographical Note

Dance group manager Geraldine Rhodes Kennedy was born in 1932 in Union, North Carolina to Viola Williams and Albus Rhodes. Kennedy relocated with her mother and stepfather to Youngstown, Ohio when she was four years old. She was raised in a large family that included eight siblings. Kennedy attended East High School in Youngstown and graduated around 1950.

Following high school, Kennedy moved to New York City to live with her sister Florez. For a time, she worked in a bar, sending her tips to her father in Ohio, who was ill. This bar was frequented by former dancers from the Apollo Theater, many of whom Kennedy befriended. These dancers included Edna “Yak” Taylor, who often told Kennedy fascinating stories about the history and the times of the Apollo dancers.

During the 1970s, Kennedy became interested in doing a benefit for a senior citizens' center and recruited ex-chorus girls to put on a show. Using her connections from her time working with former dancers, Kennedy helped to create a group known as the Swinging Seniors. Kennedy's nieces comprise the R&B group Sister Sledge, and in 1984 she worked for them briefly as a road manager while they toured Europe. Upon her return, dancer Bertye Lou Wood and Kennedy reunited some of their former dancing friends, Marion Coles, Cleo Hayes, Fay Ray and Elaine Ellis. Kennedy began managing the new dance ensemble. They rehearsed in the building that housed the former Cotton Club, renamed the Latin Quarter, and had their first performance in 1986. This group became known as the Silver Belles, and the group of African American senior dancers have been performing together ever since, appearing on Dan Rather's 48 Hours and becoming the first group of its kind to perform in Atlantic City. In 2006, the Silver Belles were featured in the documentary *Been Rich All My Life* produced by filmmaker Heather Lyn MacDonald.

Geraldine Rhodes Kennedy was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on September 20, 2007.

Kennedy passed away on November 16, 2017.

Related Entries

East High School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Sister Sledge (Musical group) [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1984 to 1984]

Road Manager

Silver Belles (Dance group) [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1986 to ?]

Manager