Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Geraldine Rhodes Kennedy

Overview of the Collection

| Repository: | The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616  
info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com |
| Creator: | Geraldine Rhodes Kennedy |
| Title: | The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Geraldine Rhodes Kennedy,  
September 20, 2007 |
| Dates: | 2007 |
| Bulk Dates: | 2007 |
| Physical Description: | 2 Betacam SP videocassettes (0:57:03). |
| Abstract: | Dance group manager Geraldine Rhodes Kennedy (-) is the manager of the Silver Belles dance troupe. Kennedy was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on September 20, 2007, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview. |
| Identification: | A2007_267 |
| Language: | The interview and records are in English. |

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

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.
Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Geraldine Rhodes Kennedy was conducted by Adrienne Jones on September 20, 2007, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 2 Betacam SP videocassettes. Dance group manager Geraldine Rhodes Kennedy ( - ) is the manager of the Silver Belles dance troupe.

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:

Kennedy, Geraldine Rhodes
Jones, Adrienne (Interviewer)
Burghhelea, Neculai (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Geraldine Rhodes Kennedy--Interviews
Silver Belles (Dance group)--Interviews
African American dance--History--20th century.
Organizations:

- HistoryMakers (Video oral history collection)
- The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection
- Silver Belles (Dance group)

HistoryMakers® Category:

ArtMakers

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 8/15/2011 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, September 20, 2007


Geraldine Rhodes Kennedy briefly discusses her childhood in Youngstown, Ohio and her reasons for relocating to Harlem. She remembers her first job in Harlem as a ticket booth attendant at the Apollo Theater. Rhodes-Kennedy
describes her conversations with former chorus girl Edna "Yak" Taylor, who inspired her to preserve the history of chorus girls and shared her knowledge of the chorus girl strike of 1936. Rhodes-Kennedy named various venues where chorus girls performed including the Lafayette Theater and the Cotton Club. She stressed the importance of preserving the legacy of black dancers. She also remembers attending the opera with her mother, the style of fashion which was appropriate for such an occasion as well as the differences between contemporary fashion and that of her generation. She describes how the idea for the Silver Belles was born while she was working as the road manager for Sister Sledge. The original purpose of the Silver Belles was to raise money for charity.

African American families--Ohio--Youngstown.
African American sisters--New York (State)--New York.
Apollo Theatre (New York, N.Y. : 42nd Street).
Cotton Club.
Lafayette Theatre (New York, N.Y.)
Harlem (New York, N.Y.)--History--20th century.
Silver Belles (Dance group).
Sister Sledge (Musical group).

Geraldine Rhodes Kennedy tells of Elaine Ellis’ depression; a doctor prescribed a treatment of medication and a wheelchair. Rhodes-Kennedy emphasizes the need of senior citizens to remain active. Rhodes-Kennedy recounts various memories related to the Silver Belles including the time Bertye Lou Reed, dance captain for the Apollo Theater during the 1930s, forgot her teeth. Rhodes-Kennedy discusses the new generation of Silver Belles and her desire to bring them public recognition. Rhodes-Kennedy also describes the documentary “Been Rich All My Life” and the impact of the visual and audio medium as a source of information.

Silver Belles (Dance group).
Apollo Theatre (New York, N.Y. : 42nd Street).
Older people--Mental health.
Aging--Psychological aspects.