

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Ludie Jones

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## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Jones, Ludie, 1916-2018
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Ludie Jones,
<b>Dates:</b>	April 26, 2010
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2010
<b>Physical Description:</b>	5 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:14:07).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Dancer and dance instructor Ludie Jones (1916 - 2018) was a tap dance legend who tapped for over seventy years. Once a member of The Lang Sisters and The Three Poms, she later performed in Shades of Harlem and taught the Tapping Seniors at the Kennedy Center. Jones was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 26, 2010, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2010_008
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Ludie Jones is a renowned tap-dancer, famous for her performances in the era of prohibition. She was born on January 28, 1916 in New York City to Lottie and Luther Jones, a family of seven. Jones was introduced to tap in the form of the Charleston at age three. Her mother enrolled her in dance lessons at Elks Hall. At age eleven, she was asked by Amanda Kemp, a ballet teacher, to teach tap dance to her students.

In 1934, Jones graduated from Wadleigh High School for Girls and began touring around England with the chorus line of “Lew Leslie’s Blackbirds of ’34.” Upon returning to the U.S., Jones immediately became a member of “The Lang Sisters” along with Marion Worthy and Peggy Wharton. The three of them attended Buddy Bradley’s School of Dancing in London and began working with Louis Armstrong at the Paramount Theatre in New York.

By 1941 “The Lang Sisters” had disbanded so Jones formed the group “The Three Poms” with Sybil Warner and Geraldine Ball. As a group, they were the opening act for the Cab Calloway Band. “The Three Poms” also did shows for troops during World War II in Okinawa, Japan, and the Phillipines before breaking up in the early 1950’s. In 1984, Jones was asked to join the musical “Shades of Harlem” and they toured internationally. That same year, she and Ruby Riley began teaching senior citizens how to dance at the Kennedy Center in Harlem. They called themselves the “Tapping Seniors.”

In 2008, Jones was honored at the St. Louis Tap Festival and was given an award on behalf of the Robert L. Reed Tap Heritage Foundation. Two years later, she continued to teach with the “Tapping Seniors” and has been an active member of the Central Harlem Senior Citizens Coalition since 1984. Jones has been featured in many books including *Tap Dancing America: A Cultural History* by Constance Valis Hill.

Jones passed away on October 3, 2018.

Ludie Jones was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April 26, 2010.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Ludie Jones was conducted by Larry Crowe on April 26, 2010, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 5 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Dancer and dance instructor Ludie Jones (1916 - 2018) was a tap dance legend who tapped for over seventy years. Once a member of The Lang Sisters and The Three Poms, she later performed in Shades of Harlem and taught the Tapping Seniors at the Kennedy Center.

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## 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®.

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## **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.

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## **Controlled Access Terms**

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

### **Persons:**

Jones, Ludie, 1916-2018

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### **Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews

Jones, Ludie, 1916-2018--Interviews

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## **Organizations:**

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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## **Occupations:**

Dancer

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Dance Instructor

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

ArtMakers

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## **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 Ludie Jones, April 26, 2010. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

### **Processing Information**

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 2/5/2020 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

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## 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.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Ludie Jones, Section  
A2010\_008\_001\_001, TRT: 0:28:17 ?

Ludie Jones was born on January 28, 1916 in New York City to Lottie Watkins Jones and Luther Jones. Jones' mother was born in Roanoke, Virginia in 1879 to Mary Watkins and Charles Watkins, and left school after the third grade to work as a domestic. Upon moving north to New York City, she left her first child, Julius Johnston, in the care of Jones' maternal grandmother. Jones' father was born in Georgia, and attended Paine College in Augusta, Georgia before relocating to New York City, where he worked for the U.S. Post Office Department. Jones parents met and married in New York City, where they raised Jones and her three siblings, Gladys Jones, Vivian Jones Stanley and Earl Jones, in the Phipps Houses. They attended St. Mark's United Methodist Church, which was located a few blocks from their home. At thirteen years old, Jones moved with her family to New York City's Harlem neighborhood. Her parents separated shortly afterwards; and, from that time, Jones was raised by her mother.

Video Oral History Interview with Ludie Jones, Section  
A2010\_008\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:16 ?

Ludie Jones began tap dancing at five years old. She initially studied under Emma Kemp, who discriminated against students with darker skin, including Jones. As a young dancer, Jones styled her performances after the notable entertainers of the time, including Eddie Rector, the Whitman Sisters and Eleanor Powell. Jones attended

P.S. 141 and J.H.S. 69 while living in the Phipps Houses in Lower Manhattan; and, after moving to Harlem, enrolled at the Wadleigh High School for Girls. Upon graduating, she successfully auditioned for a tap dancing role in 'Lew Leslie's Blackbirds of 1934,' which starred singer Florence Mills, jazz trumpeter Valaida Snow, and comedians Tim Moore and Blue McAllister. Jones travelled with the cast for nine months, performing in Chicago, Illinois and Europe. After the tour's completion, Jones partnered with Marion Worthy Warner and Peggy Wharton to form the Lang Sisters, and they went on to tap with the bands of Fats Waller, Louis Armstrong and Luis Russell.

Video Oral History Interview with Ludie Jones, Section  
A2010\_008\_001\_003, TRT: 0:32:18 ?

Ludie Jones and the Lang Sisters performed during the 1930s with notable jazz bandleaders like Louis Armstrong, Luis Russell and Fats Waller. In 1939, Peggy Wharton left the Lang Sisters, and the group disbanded. Shortly afterwards, Jones formed another tap trio, The Three Poms, with Sylvia Warner and Geraldine Ball. The Three Poms performed with Cab Calloway, The Peters Sisters and Pearl Bailey; and, near the end of World War II, toured the U.S. military bases in the United States and Japan through the United Service Organizations. The U.S. military was segregated at the time, and Jones often danced for audiences of all-black troops. In the late 1940s, The Three Poms dissolved, and Jones briefly toured as a solo act. The popularity of tap dance began declining in the 1950s, and Jones quit dancing to work for the New York Telephone Company, where she remained for twenty-three years. Jones retired in 1968; and, in 1984, reprised her dance career as a cast member of Jeree P. Wade's 'Shades of Harlem.'

Video Oral History Interview with Ludie Jones, Section  
A2010\_008\_001\_004, TRT: 0:13:30 ?

Ludie Jones travelled internationally as a chorus girl in 'Lew Leslie's Blackbirds of 1934'; and, later, with her tap dance trios, the Lang Sisters and The Three Poms. In 1934, Jones toured Europe, performing in cities like London, England and Paris, France. While there, she faced

discrimination from the working class citizens, but was embraced by the country's elite. In 1984, Jones joined the touring cast of 'Shades of Harlem,' and performed in locations like Little Rock, Arkansas and on St. Croix in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Jones retired from dancing in 2004, at the age of eighty-nine years old. Four years later, she was honored by the City of St. Louis, Missouri, which held a holiday in her name. Jones reflects upon her life, legacy and how she would like to be remembered. She also talks about the changes in the popular styles of music and dance, and describes her hopes and concerns for the African American community.

Video Oral History Interview with Ludie Jones, Section  
A2010\_008\_001\_005, TRT: 0:29:46 ?