

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Sister Mary Alice Chineworth

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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>	Chineworth, Mary Alice
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Sister Mary Alice Chineworth,
<b>Dates:</b>	July 12, 2010
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2010
<b>Physical Description:</b>	7 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:06:04).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Teacher and nun Sister Mary Alice Chineworth (1917 - 2017 ) was a member and former superior general of the Order of the Oblate Sisters of Providence, the oldest religious order for black women. An educator for more than thirty years, Chineworth was profiled in the book, "A Wealth of Wisdom: Legendary African American Elders Speak." Chineworth was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 12, 2010, in Halethorpe, Maryland. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2010_072
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Nun and teacher Sister Mary Alice Chineworth was born on July 16, 1917 in Rock Island, Illinois. Her mother, Victoria, was German-American, while her father, Alexander, was the son of a former slave. A student of St. Joseph's Catholic School in Rock Island from kindergarten through twelfth grade, Chineworth was inspired by the charity of the nuns who taught her. In 1936, after learning that her race prevented her from joining most religious orders, Chineworth took vows with

the Order of the Oblate Sisters of Providence, the oldest religious organization for black women in America. Chineworth went on to earn her B.A. degree in English from Mount Mary College in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 1952 as well as her M.A. degree in psychology and her Ph.D. degree in higher education from The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C.

Chineworth dedicated her adult life to educating young people. For over thirty years, she taught in schools administered by her order, including St. Frances Academy, the school founded by the first members of the Oblates in 1828. In 1966, she became an administrator at Mount Providence Junior College, an Oblate community college, before serving as president from 1969 until the college closed three years later. In 1973, she began to hold higher-level positions within the Oblate administration, culminating in her appointment in 1989 to the position of superior general. She was a member of the National Black Sisters Conference, an association of African American nuns. In 1996, Chineworth edited *Rise 'n' Shine: Catholic Education and the African-American Community*. In 2002, Chineworth was interviewed by Camille Cosby, a former Oblate student, for the National Visionary Leadership Project. Chineworth's story was included in the 2004 book *A Wealth of Wisdom: Legendary African American Elders Speak*. In 2005, she accepted a \$2 million donation from Camille Cosby to start a scholarship fund at the school.

Chineworth passed away on June 21, 2017 at age 99.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Sister Mary Alice Chineworth was conducted by Larry Crowe on July 12, 2010, in Halethorpe, Maryland, and was recorded on 7 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Teacher and nun Sister Mary Alice Chineworth (1917 - 2017 ) was a member and former superior general of the Order of the Oblate Sisters of Providence, the oldest religious order for black women. An educator for more than thirty years, Chineworth was profiled in the book, "A Wealth of Wisdom: Legendary African American Elders Speak."

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## Restrictions

### Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The

## 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:

Chineworth, Mary Alice

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Chineworth, Mary Alice--Interviews

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African American nuns--Maryland--Baltimore--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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Oblate Sisters of Providence

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## **Occupations:**

Nun

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Teacher

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

ReligionMakers|EducationMakers

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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 Sister Mary Alice Chineworth, July 12, 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 Sister Mary Alice Chineworth,  
Section A2010\_072\_001\_001, TRT: 0:28:01 2010/07/12

Sister Mary Alice Chineworth was born on July 16, 1917 in Rock Island, Illinois, to Victoria Schlicker Chineworth and Alexander Chineworth, Sr. Her maternal great-grandfather was white, and founded the Hotel Schlicker in Munich, Germany. His son, Chineworth's maternal grandfather Joseph Schlicker, had an arranged marriage to her maternal grandmother, Frances Roiger Schlicker; and together, they emigrated from Germany to Waseca, Minnesota, where her mother was born. Her maternal grandparents later relocated to Fremont, Nebraska, where her maternal grandfather started his own livestock sale business, Hillicker and Schlicker Horse and Cattle. There, her mother attended school until the eighth grade. Her paternal grandfather was brought to Missouri from Madagascar as a slave, where he was renamed Archibald Chineworth by his master. He married another slave, her paternal grandmother Lucy Branch Chineworth; after they were freed, they had her father in Missouri, and later moved their sixteen children to Fremont.

Germans--United States.

Arranged marriage.

Slaves--United States.

Slaves--Madagascar.

Slave trade--America--History.

African American families--Missouri.

African American families--Nebraska--Fremont.

Video Oral History Interview with Sister Mary Alice Chineworth,  
Section A2010\_072\_001\_002, TRT: 0:27:49 2010/07/12

Sister Mary Alice Chineworth's paternal grandparents, Lucy Branch Chineworth and Archibald Chineworth, moved to Fremont, Nebraska, where her father, Alexander Chineworth, Sr., obtained a fourth grade education. Chineworth's parents met in Fremont, but married in Iowa to avoid persecution for their interracial marriage. Despite that, Chineworth's mother's race was changed on the marriage license, as the courthouse clerk could not believe a white woman would marry an African American man. In Nebraska, her father worked as a shoe shiner for her maternal uncle, barber Otto Schlicker. He became a cobbler, and later opened two shoeshine parlors in Rock Island, Illinois. Chineworth began her education at St. Joseph's School in Rock Island, where she was one of six African American students. There, she was called to religious vocation at four years old. She achieved the highest marks in her class, but was denied a scholarship and admittance into the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary order due to her race.

African American families--Nebraska--Fremont.

Families--Illinois--Rock Island.

Interracial marriage--Laws and legislation--Nebraska.

Race relations--Religious aspects--Catholic Church.

African American Catholics.

African Americans--Education (Secondary)--Illinois--Rock Island.

Catholic schools--Illinois--Rock Island.

Nuns--Illinois--Rock Island.

Monasticism and religious orders.

Vocation (in religious orders, congregations, etc.).

African American nuns.

Racially mixed people.

Video Oral History Interview with Sister Mary Alice Chineworth,  
Section A2010\_072\_001\_003, TRT: 0:28:17 2010/07/12

Sister Mary Alice Chineworth attended St. Joseph's School in Rock Island, Illinois, where she aspired to become a nun, but was denied entry into the all-white Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary order due to her race. She wrote to other orders, and was accepted into the intercultural Oblate Sisters of Providence. She graduated in 1935, and attended the nearby St. Ambrose College in Davenport, Iowa; then in 1936, entered the convent at Saint Frances Academy in Baltimore, Maryland. At this point in the interview, Chineworth describes the history of the order of the Oblate Sisters of Providence, which was founded by Haitian refugee Mary Lange, who was rejected by the white orders. She and Father James Nicholas Joubert established the Oblate Sisters of Providence on July 2, 1829 in Baltimore, Maryland, as the first congregation of women of color in the world, and also founded the Saint Francis Academy with a mission to educate black youth. Chineworth talks about the racism in the Catholic church.

Ku Klux Klan (1915-)--Illinois--Rock Island.

Hate crimes--Illinois--Rock Island.

Oblate Sisters of Providence.

African American nuns.

Monasticism and religious orders.

African Americans--Education.

Catholic Church--Education--United States.

Race relations--Religious aspects--Catholic Church.

Catholic universities and colleges.

Segregation in higher education--United States.

Catholic University of America.

Video Oral History Interview with Sister Mary Alice Chineworth,  
Section A2010\_072\_001\_004, TRT: 0:32:51 2010/07/12

Sister Mary Alice Chineworth entered the Saint Frances Church and Convent of the Oblate Sisters of Providence in 1936 in Baltimore, Maryland. In 1939, she worked as a

fifth grade teacher in Charleston, South Carolina, and later taught in Minnesota and Virginia. During this time, she earned her bachelor's degree in English from Mount Mary College in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. In 1950, she returned to Charleston, where she was employed as a principal, and dissuaded her students against skin color bias. From 1958 to 1960, she served as the Oblate Sisters of Providence's magazine editor. Following the completion of the order's Our Lady of Mount Providence headquarters, she served as a registrar and instructor; and oversaw public relations for the Mount Providence Junior College. She also studied at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., and obtained her master's degree in psychology in 1962. Chineworth recalls Senator Robert F. Kennedy's 1963 inaugural speech at Mount Providence Junior College.

Oblate Sisters of Providence.

Catholic teachers.

African American nuns.

Monasticism and religious orders.

African Americans--Race identity.

Catholic Church--Education--United States.

Sisters of the Holy Family (New Orleans, La.).

National Black Sisters Conference.

Kennedy, Robert F., 1925-1968.

Catholic universities and colleges--Maryland--Baltimore.

United States. Army Air Forces. Fighter Squadron, 99th.

Video Oral History Interview with Sister Mary Alice Chineworth,  
Section A2010\_072\_001\_005, TRT: 0:30:23 2010/07/12

Sister Mary Alice Chineworth obtained her master's degree in psychology in 1962 from the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. During this time, she handled student recruitment for Mount Providence Junior College in Baltimore, Maryland; and became its president in 1969. In 1972, she closed the school because of low student enrollment, but maintained its child development center. That same year, Chineworth earned her Ph.D. degree in higher education from the Catholic University of America. From 1989 to 1993,



Chineworth served as superior general of the Oblate Sisters of Providence, and as principal of St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Alexandria, Virginia. In 1996, she edited the book, 'Rise 'n' Shine: Catholic Education and the African American Community.' She was also an active member of the National Black Sisters' Conference.

Chineworth talks about Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s death; black liberation theology; and the challenges of recruiting membership to religious orders.

African American nuns.

Oblate Sisters of Providence.

Catholic universities and colleges--Maryland--Baltimore.

King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968.

Civil rights movements.

Liberation theology.

Catholic Church--Education--United States.

National Black Sisters Conference.

Cosby, Camille O. (Camille Olivia), 1944-.

Cosby, Bill, 1937-.

Catholic teachers.

Catholic Church--Education--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with Sister Mary Alice Chineworth,  
Section A2010\_072\_001\_006, TRT: 0:17:52 2010/07/12

Sister Mary Alice Chineworth reflects upon the changes in the Oblate Sisters of Providence order, and shares her hopes for the future of the other religious orders. She talks about her family, her Catholic faith and the importance of fostering ecumenism. Chineworth also reflects upon her life and legacy, and describes her hopes and concerns for the African American community. Chineworth then concludes the interview by describing how she would like to be remembered.

African American nuns.

Monasticism and religious orders.

Catholic Church--Doctrines.

Women in the Catholic Church.

African American families.

Video Oral History Interview with Sister Mary Alice Chineworth,  
Section A2010\_072\_001\_007, TRT: 0:20:51 2010/07/12

Sister Mary Alice Chineworth narrates her photographs.