

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Sallie Ann Robinson

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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>	Robinson, Sallie Ann
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Sallie Ann Robinson,
<b>Dates:</b>	February 9, 2017
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2017
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:47:26).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Chef and culinary historian Sallie Ann Robinson (1958 - ) authored the cookbooks <i>Gullah Home Cooking the Daufuskie Way</i> and <i>Cooking the Gullah Way, Morning, Noon, and Night</i> . She also worked as a personal chef and culinary instructor. Robinson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 9, 2017, in Savannah, Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2017_045
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Chef and culinary historian Sallie Ann Robinson was born on August 4, 1958 on Daufuskie Island, South Carolina to Albertha Robinson Stafford and Alton Ward, Sr. She attended Mary Fields School on Daufuskie Island. Robinson was featured as the character Ethel in the 1972 memoir, *The Water is Wide* written by her teacher Pat Conroy. She then moved to Savannah, Georgia, to attend Bartlett Middle School, but returned to South Carolina, where she graduated from Bluffton's H.E. McCracken High School in 1975.

After living and working at the William Hilton Inn on Hilton Head Island, Robinson moved to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. There, she became a licensed practical nurse for BAYADA Home Health Care before returning to Daufuskie Island. In 1991, Robinson began working as a home health care nurse and as the secretary and manager of a cleaning company. Encouraged by a client, she began collecting recipes and stories of the Gullah community for a cookbook of foods from her childhood. Robinson worked with other natives of Daufuskie Island during the late 1980s to launch Daufuskie Island Day, which was observed on the fourth Saturday in June. In 2008, Robinson created the Daufuskie Island Tours. She also served a council woman on the Daufuskie Island board. She went on to work as a personal chef, and private culinary instructor. She was also featured on numerous television shows for her culinary skills including *The QVC Show*, *The 700 Club*, CN8's *Your Morning Show* and the Food Network. In 2010, Robinson was invited to give a presentation and dinner on the cuisine of the Gullah peoples at the Smithsonian Institution for attendees from West Africa and Ghana.

Robinson's first book *Gullah Home Cooking the Daufuskie Way* was published by the University of North Carolina Press in 2003. Then, in 2006, she released *Cooking the Gullah Way, Morning, Noon, and Night*. Robinson was highlighted in many publications including *Southern Living*, *National Geographic*, *Hilton Head Monthly*, *The South Magazine*, *Garden and Gun*, and *Bon Appetit*.

Robinson has four children: Thomas Bush, Rakenya Robinson, Jermaine Robinson, and Charles Simmons IV.

Sallie Ann Robinson was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on February 9, 2017.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Sallie Ann Robinson was conducted by Denise Gines on February 9, 2017, in Savannah, Georgia, and was recorded on 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Chef and culinary historian Sallie Ann Robinson (1958 - ) authored the cookbooks *Gullah Home Cooking the Daufuskie Way* and *Cooking the Gullah Way, Morning, Noon, and Night*. She also worked as a personal chef and culinary instructor.

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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:

Robinson, Sallie Ann

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Robinson, Sallie Ann--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:

Chef

Culinary Historian

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### HistoryMakers® Category:

BusinessMakers

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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 Sallie Ann Robinson, February 9, 2017. 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).

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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 Sallie Ann Robinson, Section A2017\_045\_001\_001, TRT: 1:29:50 ?

Sallie Ann Robinson was born on August 4, 1958 on Daufuskie Island, South

Carolina to Albertha Robinson Stafford and Alton Ward, Sr. Her maternal great-grandmother, Sallie Williams Bentley, lived on Daufuskie Island, as did her maternal grandparents, Louvenia Bentley Robinson and Josephus Robinson. They subsisted by farming, fishing and hunting, and also sold pecans and seafood in Savannah, Georgia. Robinson's mother was born on the island in 1926. She remained there for most of her life, and occasionally worked in Savannah. Robinson's father was absent from her life, and instead she grew up with her stepfather, Thomas Stafford, who was born on Bull Island, South Carolina. In the past, Daufuskie Island was the site of an oyster cannery, a lumber company and a U.S. military installation. At the time of Robinson's childhood, these industries had left the island, which served as a haven for Gullah culture. Robinson's maternal grandparents were among the first island residents to have a television in their home.

Video Oral History Interview with Sallie Ann Robinson, Section A2017\_045\_001\_002, TRT: 2:28:49 ?

Sallie Ann Robinson was born on Daufuskie Island, South Carolina, where she was delivered by the local midwife, Sarah Grant. She began her education at the Mary Fields School, which was a small two-room schoolhouse built on Daufuskie Island in the 1930s. During the sixth grade, Robinson was taught by a white man from the mainland named Pat Conroy. He emphasized the importance of learning about the world beyond Daufuskie Island, and advocated for Robinson and her peers to receive the same resources as their mainland counterparts. He also organized field trips for Robinson's class to visit Savannah, Georgia and Washington, D.C. During the eighth grade, Robinson moved to her aunt's home in Savannah in order to attend Bartlett Middle School, where she was bullied for her Gullah accent. After one year, she transferred to H.E. McCracken High School in Bluffton, South Carolina, where many of her classmates shared her background. She excelled academically, and graduated one year early.

Video Oral History Interview with Sallie Ann Robinson, Section A2017\_045\_001\_003, TRT: 3:29:29 ?

Sallie Ann Robinson learned to farm, fish and hunt while growing up on Daufuskie Island, South Carolina. She first heard the terms Gullah and Geechee after leaving the island to pursue her education. She went on to attend high school in Bluffton, South Carolina, and had her first son, Charles Simmons IV, during her senior year in 1975. To be near his father, Charles Simmons III, Robinson remained in the area and found work at the William Hilton Inn on Hilton Head Island. There, she enjoyed preparing food and meeting people from other places. She also gave birth to Jermaine Robinson. He was her second son with Charles Simmons III, who died shortly afterwards. In 1979, Robinson had her daughter, Rakenya Robinson. In 1980, she married Alfred Coleman and moved to Savannah, Georgia. There, she worked at a lumber company and a grocery store, and had her fourth child, Isaiah Coleman. Then, Robinson separated from her husband and returned to Bluffton, where her youngest son, Thomas Bush, was born.

Video Oral History Interview with Sallie Ann Robinson, Section A2017\_045\_001\_004, TRT: 4:28:57 ?

Sallie Ann Robinson moved with her youngest three children to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania after the death of her stepfather, Thomas Stafford, in 1988. In Philadelphia, Robinson lived with her great aunt, and trained as a licensed practical nurse through a city program to support single mothers. She completed the program in 1991, and worked briefly for BAYADA Home Health Care

before returning to Daufuskie Island, South Carolina. Although tourists had visited the island on excursions since Robinson was young, commercial development intensified during the 1990s, when the International Paper Company and The Melrose Company built luxury resorts on the island. The developments brought increased access to electricity and some jobs for residents like Robinson, who worked as a secretary and managed a cleaning company. However, the construction also disrupted subsistence based livelihoods and displaced native residents, who were forced to sell their land because of rising property taxes.

Video Oral History Interview with Sallie Ann Robinson, Section A2017\_045\_001\_005, TRT: 5:29:28 ?

Sally Ann Robinson enjoyed cooking from the time of her childhood on Daufuskie Island, South Carolina. She learned to cook from her mother and maternal grandmother, Albertha Robinson Stafford and Louvenia Bentley Robinson, who were known for their culinary creativity. In 1993, Robinson closed the cleaning company and became a home health care nurse on Hilton Head Island, South Carolina. Encouraged by a client, she began collecting recipes for a cookbook of foods from her childhood. During the writing process, she weaved a narrative out of the recipes and stories about her community. 'Gullah Home Cooking the Daufuskie Way' was published in 2003. While recovering from back surgery, Robinson decided to write a second book, 'Cooking the Gullah Way, Morning, Noon, and Night,' which was released in 2009. The collection included seventy-five recipes and twenty-five home remedies from her childhood. Each book centered on the Gullah tradition, and used ingredients that were readily accessible on the island.

Video Oral History Interview with Sallie Ann Robinson, Section A2017\_045\_001\_006, TRT: 6:20:53 ?

Sallie Ann Robinson encountered widespread misunderstanding and misrepresentation of the Gullah culture after leaving Daufuskie Island, South Carolina. As an author, she sought to create a more accurate presentation of the island. To this end, she was writing a new collection of stories and recipes at the time of the interview. In 2010, Robinson travelled to Washington, D.C. to deliver a presentation and dinner at the Smithsonian Institution. At this point in the interview, Robinson reflects upon her life and legacy. She shares her perspective on Pat Conroy's representation of Daufuskie Island in 'The Water is Wide,' and describes her concerns for the island's future. She concludes the interview by narrating her photographs.