

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Jolyn H. Robichaux

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Robichaux, Jolyn H., 1928-2017
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Jolyn H. Robichaux,
Dates:	February 24, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:29:10).
Abstract:	Retail entrepreneur Jolyn H. Robichaux (1928 - 2017) was the former CEO of Baldwin Ice Cream and the first African American to open a concession business at O'Hare. Robichaux was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 24, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_033
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Successful businesswoman Jolyn H. Robichaux was born in Cairo, Illinois, on May 21, 1928, to Margaret Love and Edward Howard. Robichaux graduated from Sumner High School in 1945 and went on to attend Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, for two years. In 1960, Robichaux received her B.A. degree in education from Chicago Teachers College.

On June 6, 1952, she married Joseph J. Robichaux, with whom she had two children: Sheila and Joseph, Jr. While raising her children, Robichaux worked as a medical assistant; the first African American employee of Betty Crocker; and as a secretary and fundraiser at a public relations firm.

In 1967, as a business investment, Robichaux and her husband purchased Baldwin Ice Cream Company; created in 1922, it was the first African American-owned ice cream company in Chicago. Robichaux worked as a secretary for the company; following her husband's death in 1971, she assumed leadership of Baldwin, becoming president and CEO.

When Robichaux took over Baldwin, the company's gross sales were \$300,000; she took her new role seriously, and in 1975 earned a certificate in ice cream technology from Pennsylvania State University. In 1984, Robichaux became the second African American to open a food concession at O'Hare International Airport; she eventually grew Baldwin into a major corporation, with annual sales topping \$5 million by 1985. Robichaux was also named the National Minority Entrepreneur of the Year by the U.S. Commerce Department in 1985, for which she was presented with the award by Vice President George Bush; she was the first African American woman to receive this honor.

Robichaux retired from Baldwin Ice Cream in 1992; from 1999 until 2001, she worked for a heart disease project at the University of Texas in Dallas. In her retirement, Robichaux continued to serve on various boards and professional organizations.

Ms. Robichaux passed away on March 9, 2017

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Jolyn H. Robichaux was conducted by Adele Hodge on February 24, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Retail entrepreneur Jolyn H. Robichaux (1928 - 2017) was the former CEO of Baldwin Ice Cream and the first African American to open a concession business at O'Hare.

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:

Robichaux, Jolyn H., 1928-2017

Hodge, Adele (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Robichaux, Jolyn H., 1928-2017--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Retail Entrepreneur

HistoryMakers® Category:

BusinessMakers

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 Jolyn H. Robichaux, February 24, 2003. 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).

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

Video Oral History Interview with Jolyn H. Robichaux, Section A2003_033_001_001, TRT: 0:28:30 ?

Jolyn Robichaux details her family history, and discusses the different members of her family, from her great-grandparents to her siblings. She talks about about her early educational experiences, including her favorite elementary and high school teachers. Robichaux also gives a moving account of her father's illness

and death. She concludes by talking about the difficulties of attending a segregated school.

Video Oral History Interview with Jolyn H. Robichaux, Section A2003_033_001_002, TRT: 0:29:15 ?

Jolyn Robichaux takes the listener through a chronological exploration of her early adulthood, including her brief stint at Fisk University, her early career in Chicago as a stenographer, and her courtship and subsequent marriage to Joseph J. Robichaux. She then details the events leading up to their purchase of Baldwin Ice Cream, and describes her close involvement in the daily operations of the company, including both her challenges and her success.

Video Oral History Interview with Jolyn H. Robichaux, Section A2003_033_001_003, TRT: 0:31:00 ?

Jolyn Robichaux details her close involvement in the daily operations of Baldwin Ice Cream, describing both her obstacles and her success. She soon realizes that, with some changes, Baldwin could be a very profitable venture. However, her success at the company is marred by her husband's death, and the challenges of managing the company on her own. Robichaux also gives a brief history of the African American ice cream enterprise. She concludes by discussing her children's ambitions, and explains her decision to sell Baldwin.

Video Oral History Interview with Jolyn H. Robichaux, Section A2003_033_001_004, TRT: 0:29:25 ?

Jolyn Robichaux discusses the expansion and achievements of Baldwin Ice Cream; however, she also provides a lengthy account of her disastrous contract with O'Hare airport. She explains her decision to sell the entire enterprise to Eric Johnson. Robichaux briefly recalls her husband's political ambitions; she concludes by describing her successful cultural pursuits in Paris, France.

Video Oral History Interview with Jolyn H. Robichaux, Section A2003_033_001_005, TRT: 0:31:00 ?

Jolyn Robichaux discusses her move from Paris, France, to Dallas, Texas, and compares the cultural activities in Dallas to those in Chicago, Illinois. She also gives a detailed summary of her book, tentatively titled 'After the Ice Cream Wars.' Robichaux talks about the people who influenced her, and speculates on how she will be remembered. She concludes by congratulating the HistoryMakers on their work.