

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Sister Constance Murphy

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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>	Murphy, Constance
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Sister Constance Murphy,
<b>Dates:</b>	June 3, 2003
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2003
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:40:22).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Nun Sister Constance Murphy (1904 - 2013 ) served the Anglican Church of Canada for over seventy years and wrote a book of memoirs entitled <i>Other Little Ships</i> . On her 105th birthday Murphy became the oldest American living in Canada. Murphy was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on June 3, 2003, in Baltimore, Maryland. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2003_116
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Born in Baltimore on February 2, 1904, into a middle-class family in the newspaper publishing industry, Sister Constance Murphy elected not to stay in the family business. After graduating from high school, Murphy moved to Philadelphia to attend the University of Pennsylvania, where she graduated with a B.S. in education in 1928. She would later return to school at the University of Michigan to earn a master's degree at the age of seventy-three.

Murphy felt her religious calling most strongly after attending a passion play in Oberammagau, Germany in 1930. Returning to Baltimore, she attended a presentation by the Sisters of St. John the Divine, an Anglican order of nuns based in Canada, in 1932. Four years later, she traveled north to Toronto to join the order. In 1938, she was sent to teach at the Qu'Appelle Diocesan School in Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada. While there, she rose to the position of headmistress and returned to the Toronto convent in 1955. Murphy was named administrator of the Church Home for the Aged in Toronto in 1958, a position she held until 1972.

At the age of ninety-four, Murphy published a book of her memoirs, *Other Little Ships*, and a year later visited the Holy Land for the first time. She has also co-authored several books of prayer and hymns. Murphy has been honored for her work on many occasions and continues to work diligently today. On her 105th birthday Murphy was recognized as the oldest American in Canada by Consul General John R. Nay.

Sister Constance Murphy passed away on August 2, 2013.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Sister Constance Murphy was conducted by Larry Crowe on June 3, 2003, in Baltimore, Maryland, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Nun Sister Constance Murphy (1904 -

2013 ) served the Anglican Church of Canada for over seventy years and wrote a book of memoirs entitled Other Little Ships. On her 105th birthday Murphy became the oldest American living in Canada.

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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:

Murphy, Constance

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Murphy, Constance --Interviews

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Anglican Church of Canada--Clergy--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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Anglican Church of Canada

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## Occupations:

Nun

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

ReligionMakers

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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 Constance Murphy, June 3, 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).

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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 Constance Murphy, Section A2003\_116\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:02 ?

Sister Constance Murphy describes her father's family background. Her paternal grandmother Martha Elizabeth Howard Murphy, gave her husband, John H. Murphy, \$500 to buy a printing press to start the "Afro-American" newspaper in the 19th century. Murphy recalls that her grandfather, John H. Murphy, limped due to an injury during the Civil War and was a strict, tall, meticulous man. Her grandmother, Mary Elizabeth Murphy, was born in Howard County, Maryland.

The Howard family descended from slaves who escaped slavery and moved to Canada. Eventually, her grandfather became wealthy enough to buy the home of the white slave-owning Howard family, but he chose to lend them money instead. Murphy describes Mary Elizabeth Howard as a gentle woman who encouraged education and was instrumental in founding the Druid Hill Branch of the YWCA in Baltimore, Maryland. Mary Elizabeth Howard became financially savvy as a child when she collected chicken, turkey, duck and geese eggs and sold them at a neighboring market.

Anglican Church of Canada--Clergy--Interviews

Video Oral History Interview with Sister Constance Murphy, Section A2003\_116\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:10 ?

Sister Constance Murphy describes her parents and her grandparents. Her paternal grandparents entertained notable African Americans such as Booker T. Washington and other editors of African American newspapers. Her grandfather, John H. Murphy, bought beautiful silverware and vases at auctions. Her father George Benjamin Murphy was the family's eldest son and he worked as a school teacher and then became the school master at Robert Brown Elliot School in Baltimore, Maryland. Murphy describes her father as punctual, soft-spoken, and involved in community organizations. Murphy's maternal grandparents, James William Hughes and Mary Rebecca Hughes, were Episcopalians and worked as prominent caterers who were known in Baltimore and Washington D.C. for their "Hughes croquettes." Her maternal grandmother was strict and required formal manners at Sunday dinners. Murphy's mother, Grace Lee Hughes Murphy, was distant and unaffectionate. Murphy describes playing with white children while growing up on Argyle Street.

Video Oral History Interview with Sister Constance Murphy, Section A2003\_116\_001\_003, TRT: 0:30:14 ?

Sister Constance Murphy talks about the book she published entitled "Other Little Ships" that was based on a story in the Bible. Murphy remembers her grandparents' church affiliations and talks about her childhood activities. She describes herself as a matter-of-fact child who aspired to be a schoolteacher. Murphy attended Robert Brown Elliot Elementary School from kindergarten to third grade and then transferred to Division Street School. Murphy's school teachers earned degrees at Northern schools such as Wellesley College, Radcliffe College, Howard University, or Lincoln University. Murphy remembers that the schools focused on reading, writing, and arithmetic and did not offer many clubs. Murphy describes Indian clubs and the sight of dumbbells lined up against the wall for calisthenics. Murphy graduated from high school in 1921 and then attended the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to become a teacher.

Video Oral History Interview with Sister Constance Murphy, Section A2003\_116\_001\_004, TRT: 0:30:58 ?

Sister Constance Murphy attended the University of Pennsylvania, where she graduated with a B.S. degree in education in 1928. While at college, she played basketball and ran, and she was one of the few black students on campus. She attended classes during the summer and taught school as well. Murphy tells of her Aunt Francis founding Delta Sigma Theta Sorority. In 1929, Murphy accompanied her friend Hilda to Italy in hopes of abating Hilda's depression following Hilda's mother's suicide. The following year, in 1930, Murphy returned to Europe to see a passion play in Germany. After she returned from Europe, Murphy decided that she wanted to become a nun. In Baltimore, Maryland, she had grown up with sisters around her and she was drawn to a life

of service, particularly given the high prevalence of orphanages in her neighborhood.

Video Oral History Interview with Sister Constance Murphy, Section A2003\_116\_001\_005, TRT: 0:30:21 ?

Sister Constance Murphy describes why she became a nun. Although she had boyfriends as a young woman and her parents, especially her mother, did not want her to enter the convent, Murphy chose to devote her life to God. Murphy recalls that both the Episcopalian and Roman Catholic nuns were mostly white; however, most of the black nuns were Roman Catholic. Nonetheless, Murphy joined an Episcopalian convent in Toronto called The Sisters of St. John the Divine and she describes the process for doing so. She was a postulant for six months and then engaged in training to make communion bread and priests' vestments as well as learning to sew, cook, and build. After six years of prayer and passing the sisters' vote, Murphy was assigned to teach in Saskatchewan, Canada at the Qu'Appelle diocese school where she became head mistress. After fourteen years she served in a convent in Toronto, Canada. Murphy views her legacy as teaching and serving others. Murphy hopes that racial prejudice will be eliminated.

Video Oral History Interview with Sister Constance Murphy, Section A2003\_116\_001\_006, TRT: 0:09:37 ?

Sister Constance Murphy narrates her photographs.