

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Vivian D. Hewitt

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Hewitt, Vivian D.
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Vivian D. Hewitt,
Dates:	June 18, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003
Physical Description:	8 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:36:30).
Abstract:	Art collector and librarian Vivian D. Hewitt (1920 - 2022) served as the chief librarian at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace until 1983. She and her husband also collected artwork, especially Haitian art, and in recent years, the collection, considered one of the finest of African American art in the world, was bought by Bank of America and given as a gift to the Afro-American Cultural Center in Charlotte, North Carolina. Hewitt was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on June 18, 2003, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_136
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Art lover and librarian Vivian Hewitt was born on February 17, 1920, in New Castle, Pennsylvania. Hewitt was the fourth of five children, her elder siblings all born in North Carolina. Her father, Arthur, was a skilled laborer, and her mother, Lela, worked as a teacher and housewife. After completing high school, Hewitt attended Geneva College in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania, where she earned a B.A. in 1943. The following year, she graduated from Carnegie-Mellon University in Pittsburgh with an M.S. in library science. She attended the University of Pittsburgh for further graduate studies in 1947 and 1948. Geneva awarded her an honorary degree in 1978.

Hewitt began her career working in libraries in 1944, when she was hired by the Carnegie Library in Pittsburgh as the senior assistant librarian. Relocating to Atlanta in 1949, Hewitt took a position as a librarian and instructor at Atlanta University's School of Library and Information Science. Hewitt and her husband, John, had a son in 1952, and Hewitt returned to work in 1954 as a researcher for Crowell-Collier Publishing. Hewitt joined the Rockefeller Foundation in 1956, and in 1963 she was hired by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace to serve as chief librarian. She remained there until her retirement in 1983. Since then, she has served on the Council on Foreign Relations and on the faculty of the University of Texas at Austin.

A lover of travel, Hewitt and her husband began buying works of art wherever they would go, and gave them as gifts on special occasions. They began their collection in earnest by collecting Haitian art for fifteen years. Living near and knowing many of the African American artists from New York, they began to collect their works, as well. In recent years, the collection, considered one of the finest of African American art in the world, was bought by Bank of America and given as a gift to the Afro-American Cultural Center in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Hewitt was also active in other areas, serving on the Board of Governors of the Laymen's Club of the Episcopal

Church of the Diocese of New York, and served as the secretary of the board of the Graham Windham Child Care & Adoption Agency. She also received the Distinguished Service Award of the Black Caucus of the American Library Association and was inducted into the Hall of Fame of the Special Library Association.

Vivian Hewitt was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on June 18, 2003.

Hewitt passed away on May 29, 2022, at the age of 102.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Vivian D. Hewitt was conducted by Larry Crowe on June 18, 2003, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 8 Betacame SP videocassettes. Art collector and librarian Vivian D. Hewitt (1920 - 2022) served as the chief librarian at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace until 1983. She and her husband also collected artwork, especially Haitian art, and in recent years, the collection, considered one of the finest of African American art in the world, was bought by Bank of America and given as a gift to the Afro-American Cultural Center in Charlotte, North Carolina.

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:

Hewitt, Vivian D.

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Hewitt, Vivian D. --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

Occupations:

Art Collector

Librarian

HistoryMakers® Category:

ArtMakers

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 Vivian D. Hewitt, June 18, 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 Vivian D. Hewitt, Section A2003_136_001_001, TRT: 0:29:22 ?

Vivian Hewitt was born on February 17, 1920 in New Castle, Pennsylvania to Arthur Davidson and Lela Mauney Davidson. Hewitt's maternal ancestry can be traced to Guinea. Her maternal grandfather, Wesley Mauney, was a landowner who gave land to churches and schools. Mauney Memorial Library in Kings Mountain, North Carolina bears his name. He married Naomi Mauney, a woman of Irish and Cherokee descent and their descendants include journalist Karen Grigsby Bates and HistoryMaker Melvin L. Watt. Hewitt's father attended the Biddle Institute and was a Buffalo Soldier in the 25th Infantry in the Army of Occupation in the Philippines. While in the U.S. Army, he courted Hewitt's mother via postcard. Hewitt's parents settled in Asheville, North Carolina where her father worked as a waiter at the Asheville School for Boys until he was hired as a butler by Senator William M. Brown and moved to Pennsylvania. Hewitt's mother was educated by the American Missionary Society and was a school teacher in South Carolina.

Video Oral History Interview with Vivian D. Hewitt, Section A2003_136_001_002, TRT: 0:27:00 ?

Vivian Hewitt was raised in the steel mill town of New Castle, Pennsylvania. Her neighbors were Irish Catholic, Italian Protestant, and African American. Like many other black families, Hewitt's family was of modest means and attended the A.M.E. church, which was the center of Hewitt's social life. Hewitt also traveled to the nearby town of Youngstown, Ohio for social activities. Hewitt describes the town of New Castle and the impact of the Depression. She attended integrated schools: Martin Gantz School, North Street School, Washington Junior High School, and New Castle High School. Hewitt remembers grade school teachers who did not exhibit discrimination until junior high school. She excelled academically and was a member of the Latin Honorary Society. Hewitt developed an early interest in Haiti after reading John W. Vandercook's "Black Majesty". She later traveled to Haiti and collected Haitian art. After graduating from high school in 1937, Hewitt enrolled at Geneva College in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania.

Video Oral History Interview with Vivian D. Hewitt, Section A2003_136_001_003, TRT: 0:30:33 ?

Vivian Hewitt attended Geneva College in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania from 1937 to 1943. Hewitt and her brother both received work scholarships to attend Geneva College, which desired more black students. In school, Hewitt worked at the college library, which influenced her decision to become a librarian. She dropped out of school temporarily during the Depression. Hewitt then enrolled at Carnegie Institute of Technology in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and became the first African American librarian in the City of Pittsburgh. She describes her training in library sciences and her work practicum in New York City where she worked with respected librarians like Dorothy Homer and Augusta Baker at the 135th Street Branch Library of the Schomburg Center, and the Nathan Straus Library. After graduating in 1944, Hewitt became a librarian in Pittsburgh's Hill District. She talks about journalists at the Pittsburgh Courier, her social life on the Hill, and Pittsburgh's reputation as the "Smoky City".

Video Oral History Interview with Vivian D. Hewitt, Section A2003_136_001_004, TRT: 0:30:09 ?

Vivian Hewitt conducted a work practicum in 1944 in New York City's Harlem neighborhood while a graduate student at the Carnegie Institute of Technology in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She worked with librarians like Dorothy Homer, Maude Watkins, and Augusta Baker; danced at the Savoy Ballroom; dined at Small's Paradise; and heard Josh White at Café Society. Hewitt talks about New York librarian Ernestine Rose's efforts to eliminate the wage gap between black and white librarians. She also recalls an experience of racial discrimination. Hewitt then worked at the Homewood branch of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh. She talks about playwright August Wilson and Pittsburgh's Hill District. In 1949, Hewitt became a librarian at Atlanta University in Atlanta, Georgia where she met her husband, John Hewitt, an English professor at Morehouse College. Their wedding was photographed by Charles "Teenie" Harris. Hewitt also talks about the numbers game, baseball in Pittsburgh, and HistoryMaker Evelyn Cunningham.

Video Oral History Interview with Vivian D. Hewitt, Section A2003_136_001_005, TRT: 0:26:56 ?

Vivian Hewitt was introduced to special libraries by a classmate at the Carnegie Institute of Technology in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. In 1954, she began working at Crowell-Collier Publishing Company in New York City. The position increased Hewitt's professional development; and in 1956, she was hired by the Rockefeller Foundation as the organization's first African American female professional. Her application was bolstered by references from the dean of the library school at Atlanta University in Atlanta, Georgia and Rufus Clement. Hewitt talks about her experience at the Rockefeller Foundation. In her second year, Hewitt hosted various luncheons sponsored by the Foundation's president, Dean Rusk, and executive vice president, Lindsey Kimball, to introduce herself to other librarians from partnering institutions who were surprised that she was black. Hewitt also talks about working at the Agricultural Library of the Rockefeller Foundation in Mexico City, Mexico and meeting HistoryMaker Elizabeth Catlett.

Video Oral History Interview with Vivian D. Hewitt, Section A2003_136_001_006, TRT: 0:30:15 ?

Vivian Hewitt describes her appreciation for Mexican art. While working at the Agricultural Library of the Rockefeller Foundation in Mexico City, Mexico, Hewitt met Dolores del Río, an actress who inspired Mexican painters like Orozco and Siqueiros. Hewitt also describes how a Jean Charlot mural in Hawaii reminded her of her travels to Mexico. In 1963, she began working as a librarian at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. At the Carnegie Endowment, Hewitt trained potential diplomats, and met Brian Urquhart and Robert Rhodes James. After retiring in 1983, Hewitt consulted for the Atlantic Council in Paris, France and the Katharine Gibbs School in New York City, and worked at the Council on Foreign Relations. An active member of the Special Libraries Association (SLA), Hewitt was elected president of the New York Chapter before becoming the organization's national president in 1979. Hewitt talks about the death of SLA's executive director, Frank McKenna. She also talks about the Hewitt Collection.

Video Oral History Interview with Vivian D. Hewitt, Section A2003_136_001_007, TRT: 0:30:06 ?

Vivian Hewitt talks about honoring the life of Frank McKenna, executive director of the Special Libraries Association (SLA). As the national president of SLA, Hewitt helped select David Bender as McKenna's successor. She also talks about other African American women who were national presidents of SLA. In 1998, Hewitt and her husband's private art collection, which features the work of artists like Jacob Lawrence, Romare Bearden, Henry Ossawa Tanner, and HistoryMaker Jonathan Green, was purchased by the Bank of

America as a gift to the Harvey B. Gantt Center for African-American Arts + Culture in Charlotte, North Carolina. The Hewitt Collection has appeared in many museums like the Museum of the African Diaspora in San Francisco, California and the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, Tennessee. Hewitt talks about the black aesthetic, her legacy, and how she would like to be remembered. She also reflects upon her hopes and concerns for the African American community and the importance of oral history.

Video Oral History Interview with Vivian D. Hewitt, Section A2003_136_001_008, TRT: 0:12:09 ?
Vivian Hewitt narrates her photographs.