

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Ann Cooper

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Cooper, Ann Nixon, 1902-2009
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Ann Cooper,
Dates:	December 8, 2005 and March 24, 2004
Bulk Dates:	2004 and 2005
Physical Description:	11 Betacame SP videocassettes (5:05:49).
Abstract:	Civic leader Ann Cooper (1902 - 2009) served on the board of directors of the Gate City Nursery Association for more than fifty years, was a founder of a Girls Club in Atlanta and was the oldest member of the Atlanta Chapter of the Links, Inc. Cooper was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 8, 2005 and March 24, 2004, in Atlanta, Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2004_035
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Civic leader Ann Louise Nixon Cooper was born on January 9, 1902 in Shelbyville, Tennessee and attended school in that rural community. After the death of their mother, she and her six siblings were separated, and an aunt raised Ann. In 1922, Ann Nixon married Albert Berry Cooper, a young dentist in Nashville, Tennessee. Soon after, the Coopers moved to Atlanta, Georgia, where Dr. Cooper established a highly successful dental practice, and the young couple started their family of four children. Cooper served as a homemaker for most of her life, working briefly in 1923 as a policy writer for the Atlanta Life Insurance Company, which had been established in 1905 by African American barber Alonzo Herndon.

Cooper was a vibrant member of Atlanta's African American elite for more than eighty years. During the first half of the 20th century, she and her husband counted as friends or acquaintances such luminaries as educators W.E.B. Du Bois, Lugenia Burns Hope and John Hope Franklin, Benjamin E. Mays and E. Franklin Frazier. She was an adult eyewitness to life in Georgia during two world wars, the Great Depression, and the efforts of whites to maintain segregation.

Cooper has worked to improve conditions in the African American community for much of her adult life. For more than fifty years, she has served on the board of directors of the Gate City Nursery Association. She was a founder of a Girls Club for African American youth in Atlanta, and in the 1970s, she taught people to read in a tutoring program at the historic Ebenezer Baptist Church.

In 1980, Cooper received a community service award for her activism from Atlanta's WXIA-TV. In 2002, she was awarded the Annie L. McPheeters Medallion for community service from the Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History.

The centenarian was the oldest living member of the Atlanta Chapter of the Links, Inc. and had been a member of

the Utopian Literary Club since 1948.

On the evening of November 4, 2008, Barack Obama was elected the first African American president of the United States. That night, in his acceptance speech, President-elect Obama mentioned Ann Cooper and stated that her life exemplified the struggle and hope of the African American experience of the 20th and 21st centuries. She saw the changing times from the Depression and the Jim Crow South to new technologies and the election of the first African American United States president.

Cooper passed away on December 21, 2009 at the age of 107.

Cooper was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on March 24, 2004.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Ann Cooper was conducted by Clarissa Myrick-Harris and Larry Crowe on December 8, 2005 and March 24, 2004, in Atlanta, Georgia, and was recorded on 11 Betacame SP videocassettes. Civic leader Ann Cooper (1902 - 2009) served on the board of directors of the Gate City Nursery Association for more than fifty years, was a founder of a Girls Club in Atlanta and was the oldest member of the Atlanta Chapter of the Links, Inc.

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:

Cooper, Ann Nixon, 1902-2009

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Myrick-Harris, Clarissa (Interviewer)

Jackson, Adrian (Videographer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Cooper, Ann Nixon, 1902-2009--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Civic Leader

HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

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 Ann Cooper, December 8, 2005 and March 24, 2004. 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 Ann Cooper, Section A2004_035_001_001, TRT: 0:29:10 ?

Ann Cooper was born on January 9, 1902 in Bedford County, Tennessee. Her mother, Mollie George, was born in Bedford County in 1875. George was not close with her family, with the exception of one brother who died before Cooper was born. Cooper's father, James Henry Nixon, had Native American heritage and came from a large Tennessee family that produced many teachers. One of Cooper's paternal cousins was her teacher at the local schoolhouse and another cousin taught at Tennessee State University. As a girl, Cooper changed her name from Annie Lou to Ann Louise, picked blackberries with her mother and made ice cream on her family farm. Her father often rewarded his children by buying them new shoes. Cooper reflects on the fragmentation of her extended family over the years, and regrets not keeping in touch. She compares her scant amount of information on her family history to her husband, Albert Berry Cooper, Jr., who came from an established family in Atlanta, Georgia.

Video Oral History Interview with Ann Cooper, Section A2004_035_001_002, TRT: 0:28:16 ?

Ann Cooper went to annual county fairs in Nashville, Tennessee during her childhood. As a preteen, she changed her name from Annie Lou to Ann Louise since she felt little connection to her namesake, the midwife who delivered her. Her husband, Albert Berry Cooper, Jr., also changed his middle name as a child for a similar reason. Cooper's family left their farm to move to Langley Hall, a large estate owned by the Allens and other prominent white families, in Gallatin, Tennessee. On the estate, her father gardened and helped farm and she was chosen to play with a white girl who lived there. Cooper's family was isolated at Langley Hall except for threshing and hog butchering seasons when additional employees were hired. Cooper has six sisters and one brother, who have all predeceased her. During one childhood prank, several of the siblings burned each other with carbolic acid. As an adult, she remembers sitting in the segregated balconies of the Loew's Grand Theatre and the Fox Theatre in Atlanta, Georgia.

Video Oral History Interview with Ann Cooper, Section A2004_035_001_003, TRT: 0:28:16 ?

Ann Cooper attended segregated schools during her childhood in Gallatin, Tennessee, but her community was racially integrated and her mother counted several white women as friends. Cooper's father crafted shoes for his children and occasionally took them to religious revivals, although they did not have a regular church nearby. After Cooper's mother died in 1913, she was taken in by her extended family in Nashville, Tennessee. In 1920, she met her husband, Albert Berry Cooper, Jr., at a dance class, while he was studying at Meharry Medical College. At that time, Albert Berry Cooper, Jr. was involved with another woman, but broke up with her in order to attend a Christmas dance with Cooper. They corresponded through letters for a year while Albert was stationed in Cleveland, Ohio while in the U.S. Army. Cooper did not finish high school, and therefore was not able to win admission to Walden University in Nashville, where she planned to study to be able to help her husband with his dental

practice.

Video Oral History Interview with Ann Cooper, Section A2004_035_001_004, TRT: 0:29:30 ?

Ann Cooper moved with her husband, Albert Berry Cooper, Jr., to Atlanta, Georgia, where he worked as a dentist. In 1923, they bought their first house and moved in to a larger house in 1938. The Coopers were active in the social scene of Atlanta. They became friends with Nat King Cole and his wife Maria due to both families' connection with the Palmer Memorial Institute in North Carolina, where the Coopers sent their two youngest children for school. Cooper admired the authoritative teaching style of Dr. Charlotte Hawkins Brown, Palmer's principal, and her husband served on the school's board of directors. Cooper was friendly with sociologist E. Franklin Frazier, who was the godfather of one of her daughters, and his wife Marie Frazier, who consoled her after the death of her husband. Cooper was not friendly with W.E.B. Du Bois, because he had been publicly critical of her father-in-law, an A.M.E. minister. The Coopers supported civil rights efforts in Atlanta during the 1940s but were not active in them.

Video Oral History Interview with Ann Cooper, Section A2004_035_001_005, TRT: 0:29:50 ?

Ann Cooper attended parties thrown by the second wife of Alonzo Herndon, who owned the Atlanta Life Insurance Company, and dances at the Odd Fellows Building. The Cooper family lived in a home built by Walter H. Aiken, and Cooper was close with the family of Aiken's wife, Lucy Rucker Aiken. Cooper was a member of the Utopian Literary Club for many decades. She was acquainted with John Hope, the first black president of Morehouse College in Atlanta, and his wife Lugenia Burns Hope, a community activist. Cooper was close friends with Benjamin E. Mays, another Morehouse president, who officiated the wedding of one of her daughters. Her brother-in-law, Edward Allen Jones, wrote a history of Morehouse. On two occasions in the 1950s and 1960s, Cooper experienced discrimination on Atlanta buses: once, she was berated by a trolley driver for using the front exit rather than the rear; later, she argued with a white man who had his feet on the seat in front of him and did not want her to sit in front of him.

Video Oral History Interview with Ann Cooper, Section A2004_035_001_006, TRT: 0:30:45 ?

Ann Cooper was active in numerous community organizations in Atlanta, Georgia. She served for over fifty years on the board of the Gate City Day Nursery and helped found the first Girls' Club for African Americans in Atlanta. When the Boys and Girls Clubs mandated integration and white leaders took over control of the Atlanta clubs, Cooper left the organization. Cooper served as a den mother for the Cub Scouts while her son, Albert Berry Cooper, III, was young. She describes how she would like to be remembered, and considers why the preservation of history is important. Cooper expresses her regret that she has been unable to find more about her own family history, and reflects upon her legacy. Cooper concludes by describing an episode from her early childhood where she nearly drowned in a stream near her family farm.

Video Oral History Interview with Ann Cooper, Section A2004_035_001_007, TRT: 0:12:00 ?

Ann Cooper narrates her photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Ann Cooper, Section A2004_035_002_008, TRT: 0:28:51 ?

Ann Cooper was born on January 9, 1902 in Shelbyville, Bedford County, Tennessee. Cooper's mother, Mollie George, was born in 1885. Cooper speculates that her father, James Henry Nixon, met her mother in school near Shelbyville, and that the two ran away to get married. Cooper has never been able to gather a satisfactory amount of information about the history of either

parent. Cooper was the youngest child for four years, before her brother was born, and followed her mother around every chance she got. She also attempted to smoke her father's pipe tobacco before realizing that it made her sick. After her mother's sudden death from a stroke in January 1913, Cooper was sent to live with a cousin in Nashville, Tennessee, while the sister closest to her in age remained with a cousin who was a schoolteacher in Bedford County. The two sisters were eventually reunited. Cooper talks about her preference for starting every meeting of the community organizations she is in with beautiful, inspirational language.

Video Oral History Interview with Ann Cooper, Section A2004_035_002_009, TRT: 0:29:41 ?

Ann Cooper grew up in Bedford County, Tennessee with her seven siblings and her parents. In her early childhood, they moved to Langley Hall, a seventy-acre estate in Gallatin, Tennessee. This was the first time Cooper lived anywhere with electricity, and she gave herself a moderate shock when she stuck her finger in a socket. At Langley Hall, Cooper admired Louise Gill, one of the estate's white owners, and changed her name from Annie Lou to Ann Louise to emulate Gill. Following her mother's death in 1913, Cooper and her siblings were sent to live with various relatives. In 1915, Cooper's father, James Henry Nixon, died of a heart attack in Gallatin. One of Cooper's paternal relatives, Joyce Nixon, who ran the household of a wealthy banker in Nashville, Tennessee and was acquainted with Al Gore, Sr., helped Cooper's older sisters find jobs as nannies for wealthy white families. Cooper remembers spending her summers with her aunt at the banker's estate, Elmwood.

Video Oral History Interview with Ann Cooper, Section A2004_035_002_010, TRT: 0:30:00 ?

Ann Cooper went to grade school first in a one-room schoolhouse in Shelbyville, Tennessee. Although she enjoyed her studies, Cooper did not finish high school upon moving to Nashville, Tennessee. Cooper was introduced to high society in Nashville through her aunt, Joyce Nixon, who threw parties at the Elmwood estate for her white employers and owned a Pierce-Arrow automobile. Cooper lived in Nashville, Tennessee with Joyce's daughter Irene, during World War I, when many men who were in the military or studying at nearby colleges were in town. She met her husband, Albert Berry Cooper, Jr., at a dancing class. After initially competing with another woman from Kentucky for his affections, she and Albert Berry Cooper, Jr. eventually became engaged, and were married in 1922. The couple decided to move to Atlanta, Georgia where Albert could open a dental practice with the help of a loan from Heman Perry's Citizens Trust Bank and Ann could complete her education with the help of her in-laws, who were both educators.

Video Oral History Interview with Ann Cooper, Section A2004_035_002_011, TRT: 0:29:30 ?

Ann Cooper was active in the local Nashville, Tennessee A.M.E. Sunday school union in her youth. Cooper married Albert Berry Cooper, Jr. at Lee Avenue Christian Church in Nashville in 1922. Preston Taylor, founder of Greenwood Cemetery, Nashville's second cemetery for blacks, was the officiant. Her husband's father, Albert Berry Cooper, Sr., an A.M.E. minister and taught at Morris Brown College in Atlanta, Georgia. Cooper, Sr. was well known in the church, but was never promoted to the rank of bishop, which his family ascribes to his honesty and lack of political savvy. The Coopers moved to Atlanta where Cooper, Jr. opened a dental practice with a loan from the Citizens Trust Bank. Ann Cooper, with the aid of a librarian at Atlanta University, obtained a job at the Atlanta Life Insurance Company in 1923, where she clerked and wrote policies. Cooper left that job after becoming pregnant with her first daughter. She became friends with Alonzo Herndon, founder of Atlanta Life, and his

second wife Jessie.