

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Glennette Tilley Turner

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Turner, Glennette Tilley
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Glennette Tilley Turner,
Dates:	August 12, 2004
Bulk Dates:	2004
Physical Description:	8 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:26:13).
Abstract:	Elementary school teacher and historian Glennette Tilley Turner (1933 -) taught in Wheaton-Warrenville Public Schools for twenty years. Turner has also served as a supervisor for student teachers at National-Louis University, and is a published historian, who focused much of her research efforts on the Underground Railroad. Turner was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 12, 2004, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2004_125
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Educator and historical researcher Glennette Tilley Turner was born November 23, 1933 in Raleigh, North Carolina. Her mother, Phyllis, was a teacher, and her father, John, was the first executive director of the SCLC. As a child, Turner moved several times with her family, first to Florida, and then to Illinois. After graduating from high school, she attended Lake Forest College, earning her B.A. in 1955, and she later returned to school at Goddard College to earn her master's degree in 1977.

After earning her bachelor's degree, Turner first went to work in advertising, but made the switch to education in 1962. That year, she was hired by the Chicago public school system, and she remained there for four years. In 1966, Turner went to work for the Maywood-Melrose Park public schools, and in 1968, she began teaching in the Wheaton-Warrenville public schools. She remained there for the next twenty years. Today, Turner supervises student teachers at National-Louis University.

In addition to her work as a teacher, Turner is a historian, and has focused much of her research efforts on the Underground Railroad. Her first book, *The Underground Railroad in DuPage County, Illinois*, was published in 1978, and since then she has continued to write and conduct research. Most recently, she has published *The Underground Railroad in Illinois*. Turner has also written collections of biographies of notable African Americans, and she serves as an advisor to the National Park Service, where she helps plan programs for the national historic Underground Railroad trail.

Turner lectures widely on the history of the Underground Railroad, and she has been honored numerous times both as an educator and historian. She is the recipient of the Studs Terkel Humanities Award, the Alice Browning Award from the International Black Writers Conference, and she is a member of numerous historical organizations.

Turner and her husband have two grown children. They reside in Illinois.

Glennette Tilley Turner was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on August 12, 2004.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Glennette Tilley Turner was conducted by Larry Crowe on August 12, 2004, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 8 Betacame SP videocassettes. Elementary school teacher and historian Glennette Tilley Turner (1933 -) taught in Wheaton-Warrenville Public Schools for twenty years. Turner has also served as a supervisor for student teachers at National-Louis University, and is a published historian, who focused much of her research efforts on the Underground Railroad.

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:

Turner, Glennette Tilley

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Turner, Glennette Tilley--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Elementary School Teacher

Historian

HistoryMakers® Category:

EducationMakers

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 Glennette Tilley Turner, August 12, 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 Glennette Tilley Turner, Section A2004_125_001_001, TRT: 0:31:00 ?

Glennette Tilley Turner was born on November 23, 1933 in Raleigh, North Carolina. Her mother, Phyllis Geraldine Jones Tilley, was born in 1906 in Elgin, Illinois. Her maternal ancestors were enslaved near Roanoke, Virginia then migrated to Belvidere, Illinois after the Civil War. Turner's great-grandfather migrated further west, and homesteaded in Holt County, Nebraska. He later left the family and returned to Virginia, prompting Turner's great-grandmother, a mid-wife, to return to Illinois with her children. Turner's mother attended high school in Springfield, Illinois near the State Capitol where she saw Colonel Otis B. Duncan. After receiving her degree from Hampton Institute, she worked in early childhood education in North Carolina. Turner's father, John Lee Tilley, was born in 1898 in Wake County, North Carolina on a farm his family acquired after the Civil War, and attended the University of Chicago. Her father's uncle, a North Carolina state legislator, attempted to be seated in the U.S. Congress.

Video Oral History Interview with Glennette Tilley Turner, Section A2004_125_001_002, TRT: 0:29:50 ?

Glennette Tilley Turner's paternal great-uncle Robert Glenn was sold away from his family, despite his father's offer to purchase him from the slaveholder. When slavery ended Glenn reunited with his family and his story was record in the 1930s by the Works Progress Administration. Another of Turner's paternal relatives, Hugh Tilley, ran for reelection in the North Carolina state legislature. The African American community feared that Black Jack, the horse that brought ballots to the county seat, would be attacked on his journey, so they painted a decoy horse black and sent Black Jack on an alternative route. In the late-1920s, Turner's father earned his M.Div. degree from the University of Chicago where he attended Olivet Baptist Church, worked on Frederic H. Hammurabi Robb's 'Wonder Book,' and wrote a booklet, 'The Negro in Chicago.' During WWII, Turner's grandfather and father flexed their math skills by computing the national budgets. Turner grew up on Shaw University's campus in Raleigh, North Carolina.

Video Oral History Interview with Glennette Tilley Turner, Section A2004_125_001_003, TRT: 0:30:10 ?

Glennette Tilley Turner was raised on the campus of Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina where she attended Crosby-Garfield School. She remembers magnolia trees and spending Sunday afternoons with her maternal grandmother, who later patented a toy. She spent summers with her maternal great aunt in Chicago, Illinois. In 1944, Turner's father, John Lee Tilley, became president of Florida Normal College in St. Augustine. Turner remembers listening to her father's stories as he drove across the state fundraising. She attended Excelsior School in St. Augustine and completed high school in Illinois. In 1951, her parents moved to Baltimore where Tilley collaborated with the NAACP and HistoryMakers Reverend Vernon Dobson and The Honorable Clarence Mitchell, III on a voter registration campaign. In 1958, Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. asked Tilley to be the first executive director of SCLC. Turner recalls African American ministers and academics her father knew and her affinity for the Tar Heel symbol.

Video Oral History Interview with Glennette Tilley Turner, Section A2004_125_001_004, TRT: 0:30:40 ?

Glennette Tilley Turner's parents sent her to Aurora, Illinois to get a better education at West Aurora High School where she planned to write a book with a classmate and wrote for the school newspaper. In Aurora, she lived with an elderly couple and had a limited social life. In 1951, Turner's parents moved from St. Augustine, Florida to Baltimore, Maryland, the same year she

graduated from high school. Her father said the prayer at her graduation. Turner decided not to apply to Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism after an administrator mistreated her when she visited the campus in Evanston. Instead, she accepted an academic scholarship to Lake Forest College where she majored in English, won a nationwide poetry competition and met her husband. After graduating from college in 1955, Turner wrote copy for a Chicago department store. She was initially uninterested in teaching. She changed her mind after her sons were born, took courses at Chicago Teachers College and began teaching in 1961.

Video Oral History Interview with Glennette Tilley Turner, Section A2004_125_001_005, TRT: 0:29:10 ?

Glennette Tilley Turner taught in the Chicago Public Schools in the early 1960s, transferred to the Maywood, Illinois school district to be closer to her home; and then taught in Wheaton, Illinois from 1968 until she retired. In 1971, while writing advertising copy, she wrote her first children's book, 'Surprise for Mrs. Burns.' She earned her M.A. degree through Goddard College's external degree program in 1977. Turner first became interested in the Underground Railroad when she moved to Wheaton. In 1981, she self-published a booklet, 'The Underground Railroad in DuPage County, Illinois' Turner talks about lesser known locations where freedom seekers stopped after escaping enslavement in Missouri, such as stops in Wheaton and Oak Brook, Illinois; Sheldon Peck's home in Lombard, Illinois; and natural hiding places along the DuPage River. She names notable African American and white abolitionists, such as Zebina Eastman and Dr. C. V. Dyer; and explains the history of Quinn Chapel A.M.E. Church in Chicago.

Video Oral History Interview with Glennette Tilley Turner, Section A2004_125_001_006, TRT: 0:29:00 ?

Glennette Tilley Turner published the series 'Take a Walk in Their Shoes,' which was illustrated by Elton Fax, in 1989. In 1992, Senator Paul Simon recommended her to serve on the Underground Railroad Advisory Committee, headed by HistoryMaker Charles Blockson. Turner references significant figures in the history of the Underground Railroad, such as African American abolitionists George and Richard DeBaptiste, Henry "Box" Brown, Harriet Tubman and William Lambert. Her children's book 'Running for Our Lives,' published in 1994, follows freedom seekers who traverse the Mississippi River and make their way through Illinois to Detroit, Michigan. In 2001, Turner published 'The Underground Railroad in Illinois.' She talks about the tradition of self-publishing among African American authors, the impact of the Dred Scott Decision, the role of abolitionists in Illinois history and the overlooked stories of white anti-slavery politicians. Turner concludes by describing her hopes for the African American community.

Video Oral History Interview with Glennette Tilley Turner, Section A2004_125_001_007, TRT: 0:20:03 ?

Glennette Tilley Turner's father, John Lee Tilley, was the first executive director for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), a position which probably should have been held by Ella Baker. Tilley collaborated closely with Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Tilley's papers are housed at the Amistad Research Center in New Orleans, Louisiana and his correspondence with Dr. King is held with the King Papers in Atlanta, Georgia. Turner's parents supported her writing endeavors and publications; her mother underwrote the publication for 'The Underground Railroad in DuPage County.' Her father passed away soon after her children's book, 'Surprise for Mrs. Burns' was

published. Turner concludes by reflecting upon her life and legacy, and describing how she would like to be remembered.

Video Oral History Interview with Glennette Tilley Turner, Section A2004_125_001_008, TRT: 0:06:20 ?

Glennette Tilley Turner narrates her photographs.