

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Serena Strother Wilson

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Wilson, Serena Strother, 1934-2012
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Serena Strother Wilson,
Dates:	March 16, 2005
Bulk Dates:	2005
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:26:33).
Abstract:	Quilter and elementary school teacher Serena Strother Wilson (1934 - 2012) is an African American griot and has taught at the elementary, middle, and high school levels in Columbus, Ohio, and in Heidelberg and Berlin, Germany. Wilson and her daughter founded and run the McDaniel Secret Quilt Code Museum Exhibit, a program designed to increase public awareness of quilting and its place in African American history. Wilson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 16, 2005, in Columbus, Ohio. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2005_066
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

African American griot, master-quilter, educator and entrepreneur Serena Strother Wilson was born in Edgefield, South Carolina, in March 18, 1934. Wilson grew up in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and Williamson, West Virginia. Wilson attended West Virginia State College from 1952 to 1955 and earned her B.S. degree in elementary education from Bluefield State College in 1968. She went on to earn her M.A. degree in psychology and guidance in 1973. Wilson taught at the elementary, middle, and high school levels in Columbus, Ohio, and in Heidelberg and Berlin, Germany. Wilson also tutored special education students in Oklahoma, Virginia, and in Germany. She retired from the Columbus Board of Education as a consultant and teacher supervisor with the Department of Special Education in 2000.

As a child, Wilson learned the basics of quilting, a family specialty. She also learned about the “code” hidden in the patterns of the quilt blocks that had been handed down to five generations of her family from Wilson’s great grandmother, Eliza Farrow, to her grandmother, Nora Bell McDaniel, to her mother, Mary Eva McDaniel and her aunts Ozella and Katherine, and then to her. She passed the knowledge on to her daughters Teresa Wilson Kemp and Maria Denese Wilson and to her grandchildren. After mastering the art of quilting, she made these works of fiber art available to people in South Carolina, Ohio and communities across the country. Wilson and her daughter, Teresa Kemp, founded and run the McDaniel Secret Quilt Code Museum Exhibit, a program designed to increase public awareness of quilting and its place in African American history. The history of the family’s quilting traditions is the subject of *Hidden in Plain View: A Secret Story of Quilts and the Underground Railroad*, a book by Jacqueline L. Tobin and Dr. Raymond G. Dobard.

Serena Strother Wilson is married to Colonel Howard Wilson, a retired army veteran. The couple resides in Columbus, Ohio.

Serena Strother Wilson passed away on February 9, 2012.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Serena Strother Wilson was conducted by Regennia Williams on March 16, 2005, in Columbus, Ohio, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Quilter and elementary school teacher Serena Strother Wilson (1934 - 2012) is an African American griot and has taught at the elementary, middle, and high school levels in Columbus, Ohio, and in Heidelberg and Berlin, Germany. Wilson and her daughter founded and run the McDaniel Secret Quilt Code Museum Exhibit, a program designed to increase public awareness of quilting and its place in African American history.

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:

Wilson, Serena Strother, 1934-2012

Williams, Regennia (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Wilson, Serena Strother, 1934-2012--Interviews

African American women educators--Interviews

African American quiltmakers--Ohio--Columbus

Griots--Interviews

Interracial marriage--Law and legislation--Southern states

Miscegenation--United States--Southern States

Racially mixed people--Interviews

African Americans--Genealogy

African American families--South Carolina

Edgefield County (S.C.)--Race relations

South Carolina--Social life and customs

Country life--United States--Anecdotes

Education--West Virginia

Education--Pennsylvania--Philadelphia

Glenville State College

Families of military personnel--United States

African American women educators--Germany--Interviews

Americans--Foreign countries

Manners and customs--Family

African American quilts

African American symbolism

African American folk art

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Quilter

Elementary School Teacher

HistoryMakers® Category:

ArtMakers|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 Serena Strother Wilson, March 16, 2005. 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 Serena Strother Wilson, Section A2005_066_001_001, TRT: 0:28:40 ?

Quilter and historian Serena Strother Wilson discusses her well-researched family history in Georgia and South Carolina and shares some early memories of

her father, a white Southerner who broke miscegenation laws to live with his African American wife and children. Wilson also shares stories about her mother's background and personality.

African American women educators--Interviews.

African American quiltmakers--Ohio--Columbus.

Griots--Interviews.

Interracial marriage--Law and legislation--Southern States.

Miscegenation--Southern States.

Racially mixed people--Interviews.

African Americans--Genealogy.

African American families--South Carolina.

Edgefield County (S.C.)--Race relations.

South Carolina--Social life and customs.

Country life--United States--Anecdotes.

Education--West Virginia.

Education--Pennsylvania--Philadelphia.

Glenville State College.

Families of military personnel--United States.

African American women educators--Germany--Interviews.

Americans--Foreign countries.

Manners and customs--Family.

African American quilts.

African American symbolism.

African American folk art.

Video Oral History Interview with Serena Strother Wilson, Section A2005_066_001_002, TRT: 0:29:39 ?

Quilter and historian Serena Strother Wilson shares memories of growing up in a bi-racial family in Edgefield, South Carolina during the 1930s and 1940s. She then discusses her own family history and race relations in Edgefield County, South Carolina from Reconstruction through the early decades of the twentieth century. Wilson also recalls being influenced by her grandmother's quilting and shares memories of her siblings and cousins.

Video Oral History Interview with Serena Strother Wilson, Section A2005_066_001_003, TRT: 0:28:56 ?

Quilter and historian Serena Strother Wilson talks about her family's homes and traditions in rural South Carolina, including quilting and other crafts, food storage, and types of work traditionally done by men and women. Wilson also describes her childhood house and surroundings. She briefly recalls the schools she attended in Philadelphia and in West Virginia, and then goes on to talk about her own children. Wilson then discusses the different roles that each member of her family took on in day to day life.

Video Oral History Interview with Serena Strother Wilson, Section A2005_066_001_004, TRT: 0:29:35 ?

Quilter and historian Serena Strother Wilson recalls her teenage years in West Virginia and describes her courtship with Harold Wilson, a young U.S. Army cadet whom she met and married at West Virginia State College. Wilson talks about their family's travels during her husband's career as an Army officer. She discusses her own studies and work in the field of special education; she taught

in Columbus, Ohio and in Germany where her husband was stationed for several years. Finally, Wilson mentions her renewed interest in quilting, which she had originally learned from her grandmother as a child in South Carolina.

Video Oral History Interview with Serena Strother Wilson, Section A2005_066_001_005, TRT: 0:29:43 ?

Quilter and historian Serena Strother Wilson talks about renewing her interest in quilting, opening a quilt shop in Columbus, Ohio and making quilts for family members. She discusses having found African symbolism in American quilt patterns and talks about double-meanings in lyrics of spirituals. Wilson also shares thoughts on her legacy, her recommendations for youth, and the importance of recording black history.