

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Geraldine Rhodes Kennedy

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Kennedy, Geraldine Rhodes, 1930-2017
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Geraldine Rhodes Kennedy,
Dates:	September 20, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007
Physical Description:	2 Betacame SP videocassettes (0:57:03).
Abstract:	Dance group manager Geraldine Rhodes Kennedy (- 2017) was the manager of the Silver Belles dance troupe. Rhodes-Kennedy was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on September 20, 2007, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_267
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Dance group manager Geraldine Rhodes Kennedy was born in 1932 in Union, North Carolina to Viola Williams and Albus Rhodes. Kennedy relocated with her mother and stepfather to Youngstown, Ohio when she was four years old. She was raised in a large family that included eight siblings. Kennedy attended East High School in Youngstown and graduated around 1950.

Following high school, Kennedy moved to New York City to live with her sister Florez. For a time, she worked in a bar, sending her tips to her father in Ohio, who was ill. This bar was frequented by former dancers from the Apollo Theater, many of whom Kennedy befriended. These dancers included Edna “Yak” Taylor, who often told Kennedy fascinating stories about the history and the times of the Apollo dancers.

During the 1970s, Kennedy became interested in doing a benefit for a senior citizens' center and recruited ex-chorus girls to put on a show. Using her connections from her time working with former dancers, Kennedy helped to create a group known as the Swinging Seniors. Kennedy's nieces comprise the R&B group Sister Sledge, and in 1984 she worked for them briefly as a road manager while they toured Europe. Upon her return, dancer Bertye Lou Wood and Kennedy reunited some of their former dancing friends, Marion Coles, Cleo Hayes, Fay Ray and Elaine Ellis. Kennedy began managing the new dance ensemble. They rehearsed in the building that housed the former Cotton Club, renamed the Latin Quarter, and had their first performance in 1986. This group became known as the Silver Belles, and the group of African American senior dancers have been performing together ever since, appearing on Dan Rather's *48 Hours* and becoming the first group of its kind to perform in Atlantic City. In 2006, the Silver Belles were featured in the documentary *Been Rich All My Life* produced by filmmaker Heather Lyn MacDonald.

Geraldine Rhodes Kennedy was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on September 20, 2007.

Kennedy passed away on November 16, 2017.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Geraldine Rhodes Kennedy was conducted by Adrienne Jones on September 20, 2007, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 2 Betacame SP videocassettes. Dance group manager Geraldine Rhodes Kennedy (- 2017) was the manager of the Silver Belles dance troupe.

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:

Kennedy, Geraldine Rhodes, 1930-2017

Jones, Adrienne (Interviewer)

Burghelea, Neculai (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Kennedy, Geraldine Rhodes, 1930-2017 --Interviews

Silver Belles (Dance group)--Interviews

African American dance--History--20th century.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Silver Belles (Dance group)

Occupations:

Dance Group Manager

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 Geraldine Rhodes Kennedy, September 20, 2007.
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 Geraldine Rhodes Kennedy, Section A2007_267_001_001,
TRT: 0:29:15 ?

Geraldine Rhodes Kennedy was born in 1932 in Union, North Carolina to Viola Williams. Her mother studied music at Bethune-Cookman College in Daytona Beach, Florida and was a singer who once performed at Abyssinian Baptist Church in New York, New York. Kennedy did not know her father, Albus Rhodes. At four years old, she moved with her mother and sister Florez Sledge to Youngstown, Ohio where her mother married James Carl Williams and had five more children. She graduated from East High School in Youngstown in 1956 and left to join Florez in Harlem, New York City. Kennedy's jobs at the Apollo Theatre box office and the Palm Cafe acquainted her with many former chorus dancers who told her stories about racial discrimination and the long hours they faced. Kennedy managed Sister Sledge, her nieces' R&B group, in 1984 and then decided to reunite her friends and former show dancers as the Swinging Seniors. This group became the Silver Belles who work to raise money for senior citizens and AIDS victims.

African American families--Ohio--Youngstown.

African American sisters--New York (State)--New York.

Apollo Theater (New York, N.Y. : 125th Street).

Cotton Club.

Lafayette Theatre (New York, N.Y.).

Harlem (New York, N.Y.)--History--20th century.

African American entertainers--New York (State)--New York--History--20th century.

Silver Belles (Dance group).

Sister Sledge (Musical group).

Video Oral History Interview with Geraldine Rhodes Kennedy, Section A2007_267_001_002,
TRT: 0:27:48 ?

Geraldine Rhodes Kennedy and the Silver Belles performed at Lena Horne's eightieth birthday and were featured in the documentary 'Been Rich All My Life.' Despite HistoryMaker Elaine Ellis's repeated threats to quit the group, she continued to make the four-hour round trip to rehearse with the Silver Belles. Her recovery from a stroke showed Kennedy the importance of keeping seniors active and demonstrating their capabilities to the world. Kennedy explains how the clothing styles of today lack the style of fashion from her youth and contrasts current performers with those of the 1950s and 1960s She describes the Silver Belles' shows and the new generation of Silver Belles. Kennedy concludes her interview by narrating her photographs.

Silver Belles (Dance group).

Apollo Theater (New York, N.Y. : 125th Street).

Older people--Mental health.

Aging--Psychological aspects.