

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Esther A.H. Hopkins

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Hopkins, Esther Arvilla Harrison, 1926-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Esther A.H. Hopkins,
Dates:	October 13, 2012
Bulk Dates:	2012
Physical Description:	8 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:54:48).
Abstract:	Chemist and lawyer Esther A.H. Hopkins (1926 - 2021) is known for her continued dedication to environmental protection and for her work in scientific research at such business organizations as the Polaroid Corporation. Hopkins was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on October 13, 2012, in Boston, Massachusetts. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2012_222
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Chemist, city council member, and patent attorney Esther Arvilla Harrison Hopkins was born on September 18, 1926 in Stamford, Connecticut. Working as household servants, Hopkins's parents encouraged her and her siblings to pursue their education. In 1947, Hopkins graduated from Boston University with her B.A. degree in chemistry. Just two years later, she obtained her M.S. degree in chemistry from Howard University.

Hopkins taught chemistry at Virginia State College for a short period of time before she decided to pursue research. Hopkins worked with companies such as the New England Institute for Medical Research as an assistant researcher in biophysics and the American Cyanamid Stamford Research Laboratory as a research chemist. Hopkins studied at Yale University, where she received her second M.S. degree in chemistry and her Ph.D. degree in chemistry in 1962 and 1967, respectively. She continued her work at the American Cyanamid Stamford Research Laboratory while she earned these degrees.

Following the completion of her Ph.D. program, Hopkins was hired as a supervisory research chemist with the Polaroid Corporation, where she led the Emulsion Coating and Analysis Laboratory, checking the chemical composition of the film coating for uniformity. During this time, Hopkins also developed an interest in the work of the patent department and returned to school. She received her J.D. degree from Suffolk University Law School. Hopkins retired from Polaroid Corporation in 1989 and began work as the deputy general counsel at the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection. In 1999, Hopkins became the first African American selectman of Framingham, Massachusetts. She stepped down from this post in 2005, but has remained active in the community. Hopkins is married to Ewell Hopkins, a social worker and minister. They have one son, Ewell Hopkins, Jr.

Hopkins was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on October 13, 2012.

Hopkins passed away on May 19, 2021.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Esther A.H. Hopkins was conducted by Larry Crowe on October 13, 2012, in Boston, Massachusetts, and was recorded on 8 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Chemist and lawyer Esther A.H. Hopkins (1926 - 2021) is known for her continued dedication to environmental protection and for her work in scientific research at such business organizations as the Polaroid Corporation.

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:

Hopkins, Esther Arvilla Harrison, 1926-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Hopkins, Esther Arvilla Harrison, 1926- --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Chemist

HistoryMakers® Category:

ScienceMakers

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 Esther A.H. Hopkins, October 13, 2012. 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 Esther A.H. Hopkins, Section A2012_222_001_001, TRT: 1:29:21 ?

Esther Hopkins talks about her maternal family background. Her mother, Esther Small, was born in Society Hill, South Carolina. At the age of twelve, she independently moved to New Rochelle, New York and became a domestic. She spent her days off learning how to read and write, as well as attending church. Although she only received an elementary school education, education

maintained a priority in her life, as well as that of her children. She was also an active member of the church, becoming part of a group that founded Union Baptist Church in Stamford, Connecticut, where she eventually settled.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

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Affirmative action programs.

Video Oral History Interview with Esther A.H. Hopkins, Section A2012_222_001_002, TRT: 2:29:56 ?

Esther Hopkins talks about her parents and her childhood. Her father, George Burgess Harrison, was raised in East Orange, New Jersey. He attended high school briefly but left and later worked as a janitor and chauffeur. Due to her parents' service affluent communities, her family had unique access to more experiences and luxuries than what were typical for African Americans. They made efforts to acquire luxury items and expose their children to more experiences. Hopkins' father was particularly fond of the Turkish cigarettes brand, Lord Salisbury. During Hopkins' childhood, her father was involved in the church, neighborhood safety, and the Boy Scouts. He was a scout leader and was awarded the Silver Beaver for his volunteer service. As a young girl, Hopkins aspired to be a part of the Boy Scouts because she was more interested in their activities than she was of the Girl Scouts.

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Video Oral History Interview with Esther A.H. Hopkins, Section A2012_222_001_003, TRT: 3:29:11 ?

Esther Hopkins was born and raised in Stamford, Connecticut. She describes her neighborhood and talks about the sights, sounds and smells of her growing up. At the age of four, Hopkins attended Hart Elementary School, where favorite subject was math. Her father also played a significant role in cultivating her math skills. Hopkins then went on to attend Burdick Junior High School and was among the most academically advanced students in the school. Hopkins played the piano in the church and was president of the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA).

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Video Oral History Interview with Esther A.H. Hopkins, Section A2012_222_001_004, TRT: 4:30:40 ?

Esther Hopkins attended Stamford High School in Connecticut, where she was first introduced to chemistry. She also enjoyed music and math and received a prize for her algebra skills. Hopkins graduated 21st in her class in 1943 and went on to attend Boston University. Hopkins had initial aspirations of becoming a doctor and attending the Boston University School of Medicine. However, after

not being admitted to medical school, Hopkins decided to continue with her studies in chemistry. In 1947, she completed her B.A. degree in chemistry and pursued her M.S. degree in physical chemistry at Howard University.

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Video Oral History Interview with Esther A.H. Hopkins, Section A2012_222_001_005, TRT: 5:29:11 ?

Esther Hopkins received her M.S. degree in physical chemistry from Howard University in 1949. She was then appointed as a chemistry instructor at Virginia State College in Petersburg, Virginia. While she found the faculty to be nice, she was frustrated with the caliber of students that she was required to teach. Hopkins left after three years and returned to Boston University to take graduate courses in chemistry. After one year of coursework, she moved to Connecticut and transferred to Yale University, where she completed her second M.S. degree in biophysical chemistry in 1962. Concurrently, she worked as an assistant researcher in biophysics at the New England Institute for Medical Research in Ridgefield, Connecticut. She also served as a research chemist at American Cyanamid's Stamford Research Laboratory.

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Video Oral History Interview with Esther A.H. Hopkins, Section A2012_222_001_006, TRT: 6:28:07 ?

Esther Hopkins received her Ph.D. degree in biophysical chemistry from Yale University in 1967. Under the guidance of Jui Wang, her dissertation research focused on the effects of the release of adenosine diphosphate (ADP) in fireflies. In 1967, Hopkins was appointed as a supervisory research chemist at the Polaroid Corporation's Emulsion Coating and Analysis Laboratory in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Hopkins developed an interest in patent law and after being transferred to Polaroid's patent department, she decided to attend Suffolk University to earn her J.D. degree; she worked during the day and took her law coursework in the evenings. After earning her J.D. degree, Hopkins served as a patent attorney in Polaroid's patent department and with the division of new business development.

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Video Oral History Interview with Esther A.H. Hopkins, Section A2012_222_001_007, TRT: 7:29:40 ?

Esther Hopkins attended the National Science Foundation's Double Bind Symposium in 1975, which was a conference that focused on the challenges that minorities, the disabled, and women face and illuminate the underrepresentation

in STEM fields. Hopkins received her J.D. degree, with a focus on patent law, from Suffolk University in 1977. She then became a patent attorney for the Polaroid Corporation. Hopkins authored an article entitled, “A Certain Restlessness,” in which she explored the propensity for women scientists to navigate into interdisciplinary applications of their scientific skills. In 1989, Hopkins retired from the Polaroid Corporation and was appointed as deputy general counsel at the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection. After leaving the Massachusetts DEP, Hopkins embarked on a political career and became the first African American selectman of Framingham, Massachusetts. She describes her professional activities and talks about her involvement with professional organizations.

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Video Oral History Interview with Esther A.H. Hopkins, Section A2012_222_001_008, TRT: 8:28:42 ?

Esther Hopkins is a Golden Soror of the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, she was part of the National Board of the YMCA, and chairs the Della Hartman Day committee. Hopkins talks about her family, reflects on her career and talks about how she would like to be remembered. She also describes her photos.

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