

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Marion McElroy

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	McElroy, Marion, 1922-2017
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Marion McElroy,
Dates:	August 10, 2002
Bulk Dates:	2002
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:30:00).
Abstract:	Diversity specialist Marion McElroy (1922 - 2017) is an equal employment opportunity officer in Minneapolis McElroy was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 10, 2002, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2002_156
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Marion McElroy, born on March 16, 1922, was the third of four children born to Ruth Jordan-Majors and Andrew Majors in Minneapolis, Minnesota, where she resides today. McElroy has given many years in service to her Twin Cities community.

She has been a member of the NAACP, the Urban League, the Minneapolis Socialites, U Meet Us and the American Association of Retired persons (AARP). She was one of six people chosen to oversee activities of the 635,000-member AARP Minnesota, where she has served as a Diversity Outreach Specialist and has been a member since 1984. She was a board member for 20 years at the Phyllis Wheatley Community Center, the oldest African American institution in the Twin Cities, where she has been involved for most of her lifetime. McElroy has also served as the Youth Employment Director for the National Alliance of Businessmen, on the Minnesota Board on Aging, as the Wallin Scholarship Coordinator for the Friends of North High School, as the secretary to the Minneapolis Socialites, and has been an active parishioner at the St. Peter's A.M.E. Church for 42 years. From 1969 to 1986, McElroy worked for Northwestern Bell, for whom she coordinated the continuing Corporate Minority Business Exchange event to promote minority owned and operated businesses.

McElroy passed away on January 22, 2017 at age 94.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Marion McElroy was conducted by Larry Crowe on August 10, 2002, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Diversity specialist Marion McElroy (1922 - 2017) is an equal employment opportunity officer in Minneapolis

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:

McElroy, Marion, 1922-2017

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

McElroy, Marion, 1922-2017--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Northwestern Bell Telephone Company.

Occupations:

Diversity Specialist

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 Marion McElroy, August 10, 2002. 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 Marion McElroy, Section A2002_156_001_001, TRT: 0:30:00 ?

Marion McElroy was born on March 16, 1922 in Minneapolis, Minnesota, to Ruth Albertine Jordan-Majors, who was born in 1890 in Memphis, Tennessee, and Andrew Raymond Majors, who was born in 1877 in Natchez, Mississippi. Her paternal grandfather escaped slavery to enlist in the U.S. Army, where he adopted the name "Majors." McElroy's maternal grandfather was an African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Minister from Langston, Oklahoma. Her mother was a homemaker, and her father, who lived in nearby St. Paul, Minnesota, worked as a railroad waiter. McElroy grew up on the Near North Side of Minneapolis, where she attended Sumner Elementary and Junior High School, and graduated from there in 1937. She received little encouragement from the all-white teaching staff there, and most of her life revolved around the Phyllis Wheatley Community Center. It opened in 1924 by W. Gertrude Brown as a community center for the black community in McElroy's Minneapolis neighborhood; and it provided housing for black college students, activities for

children, and entertainment for the community.

Video Oral History Interview with Marion McElroy, Section A2002_156_001_002, TRT: 0:30:00 ?

Marion McElroy attended North High School in Minneapolis, Minnesota, graduating from there in 1940. She and the other black students did not receive encouragement from her teachers, and her social life revolved around Phyllis Wheatley Community Center, where she took dance and drama classes. McElroy also became interested in politics there, as the Center hosted activists like Roy Wilkins and Whitney Young. She describes how the Phyllis Wheatley Center, founded by W. Gertrude Brown, and named for poet and former slave Phillis Wheatley, had a positive impact on her community. In 1940, McElroy graduated from North High School and worked for the wealthy J.T. Williams family in Minneapolis, before finding a job as the first African American at Strutwear Knitting Company in 1947. She faced discrimination there until enlisting the help of the Urban League to pressure the company in allowing her to advance her career. In 1945, she married her first husband, Chester Johnson, moved to California, before ending the marriage and returning to Minneapolis later that year.

Video Oral History Interview with Marion McElroy, Section A2002_156_001_003, TRT: 0:30:00 ?

Marion McElroy worked at Strutwear Knitting Company from 1947 to 1952 as a clerk and machine operator, becoming the first African American in that position. In 1947, she was able to purchase a house, which she and her family turned into a boarding house, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. In 1951, McElroy married Walter McElroy and moved to Cleveland, Ohio. There, she got her real estate license and sold homes to black families during the 1950s “block breaking” trend. McElroy returned to Minneapolis in 1959 and worked for the Government Employees Mart and then at Musingwear Knitting Company. In 1969, she got a job at Northwest Bell as the first African American hired in sales. In 1974, McElroy became the Youth Director of the National Alliance of Business on loan from Northwest Bell, and in 1976, she went to Washington D.C. to run the program nationally. In 1977, she returned to Minneapolis to become Coordinator the Minority and Women’s Business Enterprise Program at Northwest Bell.

Video Oral History Interview with Marion McElroy, Section A2002_156_001_004, TRT: 0:30:00 ?

Marion McElroy returned to work at Northwest Bell in 1977, where she worked as the coordinator of the Minority Business and Women’s Business Enterprise Program until her retirement in 1986. She traveled around the country to promote business relationships with Northwest Bell. McElroy reflects on her business success despite not getting a college degree. She then describes the history of the black community in Minnesota; and she has volunteered at the Minnesota History Center as well as the NAACP, the Urban League, AARP, and the Board of the Phyllis Wheatley Community Center in the 1980s and since her retirement. McElroy credits her mother with encouraging a work ethic in her which helped her to succeed in her career. She then reflects upon her legacy and what her hopes and concerns for the black community are. Then, McElroy narrates her photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Marion McElroy, Section A2002_156_001_005, TRT: 0:30:00 ?

Marion McElroy narrates her photographs.