

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Barbara Farmer

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Farmer, Barbara, 1946-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Barbara Farmer,
Dates:	December 17, 2002
Bulk Dates:	2002
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:13:27).
Abstract:	Elementary school principal and education professor Barbara Farmer (1946 -) was the first and only African American principal hired by the State College Area School District. Farmer was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 17, 2002, in State College, Pennsylvania. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2002_230
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Elementary school principal and education professor Barbara W. Farmer was born in Newport News, Virginia on February 16, 1946 to Rebecca and John Wilson. After graduating from Huntington High School in Newport News in 1963, she went on to earn her B.S. degree in business education from Hampton University in 1967. Farmer worked as an English teacher at Campbell County High School in Lynchburg, Virginia for one year. She married Edgar I. Farmer in 1968 and moved back to Hampton, Virginia where she taught business education at Kecoughtan High School from 1968 until 1974. Farmer continued teaching at various schools and community colleges, mostly in North Carolina, until 1994. She went on to receive her M.S. degree in education administration and supervision from North Carolina A & T State University, and her Ph.D. degree in educational leadership from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

In 1997, she became the first African American principal hired in the State College, Pennsylvania area school district. Farmer has also served as professor at Pennsylvania State University and hosted several shows. She is the former host of “What Matters” (a call-in television/radio show about diversity issues) and an “Issues Program” on WPSU Inside/Out series. Farmer’s research interests include organizational structures of teachers in traditional and magnet schools, cultural diversity initiatives, and leadership initiatives. In 2007, she co-edited *Diversity in America: Visions of the Future*, a textbook that discusses various issues of diversity. She also contributed a chapter to *Leading with Character*.

Farmer has served as a member of the Committees That Care/ Care Partnership Education Committee for Centre County, the Minority Policing Committee Community Task Force for Center County, a chairperson for the Professional Development Committee for the State College Area School District, and a chairperson for the ACT 48 Professional Recertification Committee. Farmer sat on the board of Leadership for Center Centre County, United Way of Centre County, and the Centre County Women’s Resource Center. Her hard work and dedication have been recognized with numerous honors

Farmer and her husband have three children: Becky, Eric, and Edgar, Jr.

Barbara W. Farmer was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on 12/01/2002.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Barbara Farmer was conducted by Larry Crowe on December 17, 2002, in State College, Pennsylvania, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Elementary school principal and education professor Barbara Farmer (1946 -) was the first and only African American principal hired by the State College Area School District.

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:

Farmer, Barbara, 1946-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Farmer, Barbara, 1946---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

State College (Pennsylvania) Area School District

Pennsylvania State University

Occupations:

Elementary School Principal

Education Professor

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 Barbara Farmer, December 17, 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 Barbara Farmer, Section A2002_230_001_001, TRT: 0:28:05 ?

Barbara Farmer was born on February 16, 1946 in Newport News, Virginia. Her mother Rebecca Young Wilson was born in 1910 in Bishopville, South Carolina. Her paternal grandparents were Blackfoot Indian and worked as tenant farmers in South Carolina. Her father, John Wilson, was born in 1911 in Bishopville, South Carolina. He worked as a farmer in South Carolina until he left for Newport News where he worked as a Longshoreman for a year before sending for his family to join him. He then worked as a carpenter for the housing project where the family lived, at the shipyard and as a handyman in order to pay for his six children's college education. Her parents were image-conscious and her father took great pride in buying multiple cars as a status symbol even though he did not drive them. Farmer recalls playing games in her neighborhood, the heat from a wood stove, her mother's cooking and use of a wringer to wash clothes, and being burned in the face when a gasoline can caught fire.

Video Oral History Interview with Barbara Farmer, Section A2002_230_001_002, TRT: 0:29:40 ?

Barbara Farmer describes her education. Farmer recalls the close knit community of her childhood and how her family allowed migrants from South Carolina to stay with them until they found jobs and housing. Farmer attended Newsome Park Elementary School where she skipped kindergarten. When her father bought a new house, Farmer transferred to Booker T. Washington Elementary School. Her favorite teachers set high expectations and encouraged her interest in music. At Collis P. Huntington High School, Farmer participated in the marching band and excelled in business education courses. After graduating from Huntington High School in Newport News in 1963, Farmer earned her B.S. degree in business education from Hampton University in 1967. Farmer recalls the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and participating in the March on Washington in 1963 with her church. She also helped with voter registration in rural Virginia as part of SNCC's efforts in the 1960s.

Video Oral History Interview with Barbara Farmer, Section A2002_230_001_003, TRT: 0:28:02 ?

Barbara Farmer credits her mother with teaching her how to successfully handle shopping experiences in segregated Newport News, Virginia during the 1950s. While sit-ins and school integration was occurring around the south, Farmer remained in an all-black community. Later, she would have to adapt to integration, gaining new experiences in adulthood. Farmer describes attending Hampton Institute in Hampton, Virginia where the policies were strict and students enjoyed performances by people like Leontyne Price and HistoryMaker Jerry Butler. Farmer met her husband Edgar I. Farmer when she was a senior in high school and they began dating in college. After marrying in 1968, they moved back to Hampton, Virginia where she taught business education at Kecoughtan High School from 1968 until 1974 as part of the first integrated staff. In 1974, she and her husband moved to State College, Pennsylvania for her husband's graduate studies and were among the few minorities there.

Video Oral History Interview with Barbara Farmer, Section A2002_230_001_004, TRT: 0:29:10 ?

Barbara Farmer talks about her post-graduate education. While working at Greensboro National Bank in North Carolina from 1979 to 1984, Farmer became active in Greensboro's black community. The family then moved to Raleigh, North Carolina where Farmer taught at Athens Drive High School and became involved as an educational and diversity trainer throughout North Carolina. The

administrators encouraged her to attend graduate school although she was caring for her children and ailing father. With the support of her husband, Farmer commuted to North Carolina A&T State University and earned her M.S. degree in education administration and supervision. She then earned her doctorate from the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill in 1997. Farmer’s views on race evolved as she parented her children in a more integrated setting. In 1996, the family returned to State College, Pennsylvania when her husband received a job offer.

Video Oral History Interview with Barbara Farmer, Section A2002_230_001_005, TRT: 0:18:30 ?

Barbara Farmer describes how she became the first black principal in State College, Pennsylvania. Farmer volunteered at State College High School where she met the guidance counselor, Karen Stoeher who asked her to make a presentation to the school district’s diversity committee. The school district superintendent, Dr. William Opdenhoff, then invited her to be on the committee. A year later, Farmer was hired as a principal at the Houserville/Lemont Elementary Schools. Farmer sees her legacy as promoting relationships despite difference and she would like to be remembered as a person who loved the children in her charge and as a “hugging, loving person.” Farmer concludes the interview by narrating her photographs.