

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Betty Francis

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Francis, Betty, 1946-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Betty Francis,
Dates:	May 18, 2004
Bulk Dates:	2004
Physical Description:	4 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:58:48).
Abstract:	State government administrator Betty Francis (1946 -) worked as an attorney for the Boston Housing Authority, was appointed Commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Public Works, Director of Public Works in Washington, D.C., and Director of Prince George's County, Maryland's Department of Public Works and Transportation. Francis was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on May 18, 2004, in Mitchellville, Maryland. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2004_052
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Government lawyer and state government administrator Betty Hager Francis was born and raised in Washington, D.C. Her father, William Henry Hager, was a supply clerk for the United States Department of Treasury and a part-time carpenter, while her mother, Helen Brown Hager, was a homemaker and owner of a catering business. Francis and her siblings were raised in a devout Catholic home. Her childhood neighborhood exposed her to prominent African Americans such as Charles Houston and Edward Brooke, III, whose niece, Peggy Amos, was Francis' best friend. In 1963, Francis graduated from high school at the Sacred Heart Academy where she headed the student council.

Francis attended Howard University on a four-year academic scholarship while also working in the Capitol Hill office of Indiana Senator Birch Bayh. She took a year off from college to work on the 1966 United States Senate campaign of Edward Brooke, III in Boston, Massachusetts. Francis got married shortly before graduating from Howard with her B.A. degree in political science in 1967. She then returned to Boston to work at Harvard University's Astrological Observatory. In 1971, she began working at the Harvard University Press, where her boss persuaded her to go to law school. She attended Suffolk University Law School at night, earning her J.D. degree in 1980.

From 1980 to 1981, Francis worked on family and probate cases as an attorney for Greater Boston Legal Services. She then worked at the Boston Housing Authority where she handled landlord-tenant disputes, civil rights issues and labor and personnel cases. In 1984, she was appointed Deputy Chief Counsel for the Massachusetts Department of Public Works. Three years later then-Governor Michael Dukakis appointed her Associate Commissioner of Massachusetts Department of Public Works. Francis directed the maintenance and operation of roads and bridges and worked on a variety of other transportation issues, including the multi-billion dollar project

to build the Central Artery/Third Harbor Tunnel (also known as "The Big Dig"). She also served as Chief Administrative Law Judge in that agency. Francis was elected the first President of the Northeast Association of State Transportation Officials, serving from 1988-1994. In 1991, Washington, D.C. Mayor Sharon Pratt Kelly appointed Francis as Director of Public Works, making her the first woman to hold this position. She received particular recognition for improvements to vehicle registration and parking management; for the initiation of curbside recycling; and for the successful reengineering and delivery of snow removal services within the District. Francis was named Director of Prince George's County, Maryland's Department of Public Works and Transportation in 1995. She was the first African American and the first woman to hold the position in the County's history. She led a dramatic increase in capital investment in the County's transportation infrastructure, the development of its regional and community-based transit services and significant improvements in land development and emergency response operations. She served in this post until 2004. Francis has three children and two grandchildren.

Betty Francis was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on May 18, 2004.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Betty Francis was conducted by Racine Tucker Hamilton on May 18, 2004, in Mitchellville, Maryland, and was recorded on 4 Betacame SP videocassettes. State government administrator Betty Francis (1946 -) worked as an attorney for the Boston Housing Authority, was appointed Commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Public Works, Director of Public Works in Washington, D.C., and Director of Prince George's County, Maryland's Department of Public Works and Transportation.

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:

Francis, Betty, 1946-

Hamilton, Racine Tucker (Interviewer)

Lane, Edgar Carey (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Francis, Betty, 1946---Interviews

African American lawyers--Interviews.

African American government executives—Washington (D.C.)—Interviews.

African American government executives—Maryland—Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Maryland. Dept. of Transportation.

Occupations:

Government Lawyer

HistoryMakers® Category:

LawMakers

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 Betty Francis, May 18, 2004. 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 Betty Francis, Section A2004_052_001_001, TRT: 0:30:29 ?

Betty Francis was born on January 11, 1946 in Washington, D.C. Francis' mother, Helen Brown Hager, was born in 1917 on her father's horse farm in Orange County, Virginia. She moved to D.C. in 1930, following her mother's death and the loss of her father's land in the 1929 stock market crash. Francis' father, William Henry Hager, was born in Upper Marlboro, Maryland. He worked as a supply clerk for the U.S. Treasury Department and as a carpenter. Francis' parents were introduced by her mother's cousin and married in 1939. Francis was raised in the Petworth neighborhood of D.C. and remembers her parents frequently took in roomers or family members migrating to D.C. She also remembers the smell of the sawdust from her father's woodworking shop and sharing a bed with her sister. She attended Park View School in D.C. until 1954, when her mother transferred her to Sacred Heart School to escape the influence of her best friend, Peggy Amos. Francis was a good student and her parents were active in her education.

African American families--Washington (D.C.).

African American Catholics.

African Americans--Washington (D.C.)--Social life and customs.

African Americans--Education--Washington (D.C.).

Stutterers.

Video Oral History Interview with Betty Francis, Section A2004_052_001_002, TRT: 0:30:16 ?

Betty Francis' family was Roman Catholic and attended services at the Shrine of the Sacred Heart in Washington, D.C. She attended school at Sacred Heart School through eighth grade, and graduated from Sacred Heart Academy high school where her teachers were Sinsinawa Dominican nuns. Francis was the first in her family to attend college and earned a full scholarship to Howard University in D.C. While at Howard, she was unsure of her career path, but spent her afternoons working in U.S. Senator Birch Bayh's office on Capitol Hill. After her junior year, Francis left school to move to Boston, Massachusetts and work for the 1966 U.S. Senate campaign of HistoryMaker The Honorable Edward Brooke, the uncle of her childhood friend Peggy Amos. After Brooke was elected, Francis completed her B.A. degree at Howard University in January of 1968 and moved to Boston with her new husband in April of 1968. There, she worked as a secretary at the Harvard Astrophysical Observatory in Cambridge.

African American Catholics—Washington (D.C.).

Bayh, Birch, 1928-.

Brooke, Edward William, 1919-.

Political campaigns--Massachusetts.

Snowden, Frank M., 1911-2007.

Howard University.

Video Oral History Interview with Betty Francis, Section A2004_052_001_003, TRT: 0:26:52 ?

Betty Francis was an executive assistant to Arthur J. Rosenthal at the Harvard University Press in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Rosenthal encouraged her to attend law school at night and gave her Fridays off to study. In 1980, Francis graduated from Suffolk University Law School. She was an attorney for Greater Boston Legal Services, the Boston Housing Authority and the Massachusetts Department of Public Works. In 1987, Michael Dukakis appointed Francis as the first black commissioner for the Massachusetts Department of Public Works, where she approved the Big Dig. In 1991, Mayor of Washington, D.C. HistoryMaker The Honorable Sharon Pratt appointed her director of D.C.'s public works department, which had a budget of \$800 million. In 1995, HistoryMaker Wayne Curry appointed her as the Director of Public Works and Transportation for Prince George's County, Maryland. Francis reflects on her career in government and transportation, highlighting her installation of Superpave and work on roadway beautification.

Greater Boston Legal Services.

Kelly, Sharon Pratt, 1944-.

Boston Housing Authority.

Harvard University. Press.

Public works--Massachusetts.

Public works--Washington (D.C.).

Video Oral History Interview with Betty Francis, Section A2004_052_001_004, TRT: 0:31:11 ?

Betty Francis considers future issues facing the transportation industry such as traffic congestion and suburban sprawl, and predicts that light rail, magnetic levitation, and biking will be advanced as solutions. She describes her siblings, including her brother Billy Hager, who lived with Francis while attending Boston College and now works for Prince George's County, and sister Beryl Hager, who taught kindergarten and then became a principal for HistoryMaker Kent B. Amos' Community Academy Public Charters. Francis talks about the influence of her Buddhist philosophy on her personal relationships and the legacy of Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1954). She considers her future plans and what she would have done differently in her life. She describes her hopes and concerns for the African American community, why she thinks history is important and how she would like to be remembered. She reflects upon her legacy, offers advice for those hoping to work in transportation, and narrates her photographs.

Houston, Charles Hamilton, 1895-1950.

Brothers and sisters.

African American women executives--Transportation.

Transportation.