

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Ernesta G. Procope

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## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Procope, Ernesta G., 1931-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Ernesta G. Procope,
<b>Dates:</b>	June 13, 2006
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2006
<b>Physical Description:</b>	3 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:18:18).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Investment banker Ernesta G. Procope (1923 - 2021) founded E.G. Bowman, an insurance company that became the first African American owned business to be located on Wall Street. Procope also founded Bowman Specialty Services, LLP. Procope was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on June 13, 2006, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2006_091
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Investment banker Ernesta G. Procope was born in Brooklyn, New York. During her early childhood, Procope studied piano and at age 13 appeared at Carnegie Hall showing early promise as a piano prodigy. By the time she had graduated high school in the 1940s, Procope's interests had shifted from music to real estate and insurance. In 1953, she founded E.G. Bowman, a private insurance company that offered insurance to the residents of the predominantly African American Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn, New York.

Serving as president and chief executive officer, Procope made history in 1979 when she relocated her business from its Brooklyn storefront to 97 Wall Street. The E.G. Bowman Company became the first African American-owned business to be located on Wall Street. Procope became the broker of record for the New York City Housing Authority and the insurance broker for the construction of the United States' portion of the Alaska Pipeline. Licensed in all 50 states, the company counts IBM, Avon Products, Philip Morris Companies, General Motors and Time Warner among its clients. Procope is also the founder and president of Bowman Specialty Services, LLP. This extension of her business provides engineering and safety services.

In 1972, Procope was honored in a White House ceremony where she received the Woman of the Year award from First Lady Patricia Nixon. She was appointed by President Gerald Ford as a Special Ambassador to Gambia and has served on many corporate and community non-profit boards, including The Chubb Corporation, Boys & Girls Clubs of America and the New York Urban League. In addition, she has been a Trustee for Cornell and Adelphi Universities and served as Chairperson of the Adelphi Board of Trustees.

Procope holds Honorary Doctor of Laws degrees from Howard University, Adelphi University and Marymount Manhattan College, as well as a Doctor of Humane Letters from Morgan State University. She has received numerous awards. In 1993, Ernst & Young named her Entrepreneur of the Year. In 2003, Ms. Procope was inducted into the African American Hall of Fame and in 2006, she was named to the Minority Business Hall of

Fame and Museum.

Procope's husband of 40 years, John Procope, is former advertising executive and publisher of the *New York Amsterdam News*, and a trustee of Howard University.

Procope passed away on November 30, 2021.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Ernesta G. Procope was conducted by Shawn Wilson on June 13, 2006, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 3 Betacame SP videocassettes. Investment banker Ernesta G. Procope (1923 - 2021) founded E.G. Bowman, an insurance company that became the first African American owned business to be located on Wall Street. Procope also founded Bowman Specialty Services, LLP.

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## 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®.

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## 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.

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## Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

### Persons:

Procope, Ernesta G., 1931-

Wilson, Shawn (Interviewer)

Burghelea, Neculai (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Procope, Ernesta G., 1931- --Interviews

African American businesspeople--New York (State)--New York--Interviews.

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African American women executives--New York (State)--New York--Interviews.

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College trustees--New York--Interviews.

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## **Organizations:**

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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## **Occupations:**

Investment Banker

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

BusinessMakers

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## **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 Ernesta G. Procope, June 13, 2006. 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).

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## **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 Ernesta G. Procope, Section A2006\_091\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:10 ?

Ernesta G. Procope was born in 1931 in Brooklyn, New York to Elvira Lord Forster and Clarence Forster. Her mother was born in St. Lucia, British West Indies to Edward Lord, the son of English pirate Sam Lord. Edward Lord died young, so Procope's mother lived with her sisters and moved to Brooklyn at sixteen years old. Procope's father was born in Barbados, but his father found him work with Cunard-White Star Line, Ltd. He progressed through the company's ranks to become chief steward. Procope's parents raised their four children in Bedford-Stuyvesant. Her mother was active in the Crispus Attucks Community Council and picketed F.W. Woolworth Company in the 1940s. Procope attended P.S. 3 school and studied piano at New York Schools of Music. At twelve years old, she performed at Carnegie Hall. She attended the School of Music and Arts for high school. She studied at Brooklyn College for one year before marrying her first husband, Albin Bowman, and she later married John Procope.

African American businesspeople--New York (State)--New York--Interviews.

African American women executives--New York (State)--New York--Interviews.

College trustees--New York--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Ernesta G. Procope, Section A2006\_091\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:07 ?

Ernesta G. Procope met her first husband, Albin Bowman, in college and became insurance broker for his real estate business. After his death in 1952, Procope established an insurance business in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York. She met John Procope, an advertising executive and later publisher of the New York Amsterdam News, on a blind date arranged by her friend Virginia Carter. As her business expanded in the 1960s, Procope hired African American staff, and she explains the continuing importance of affirmative action. When insurance companies cancelled the policies of consumers in areas like Bedford-Stuyvesant, Procope met with Governor Nelson Rockefeller, and the New York legislature passed a law banning the practice of redlining. In the 1970s, she was named Tuesday magazine's Woman of the Year. Procope moved her company to Wall Street in 1979 to attract more corporate clients. She also talks about educating young people about insurance, and her parents' reaction to her success.

Video Oral History Interview with Ernesta G. Procope, Section A2006\_091\_001\_003, TRT: 0:20:01 ?

Ernesta G. Procope's commercial insurance brokerage, E.G. Bowman Company, Inc., was the first African American owned business on New York City's Wall Street. Since she established an office there in 1979, many have joined her. She talks about the importance of forming a community of African American executives on Wall Street. Procope also reflects upon her career, accomplishments and the importance of history and education. She describes her hopes and concerns for Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood and for the broader African American community. Procope concludes her interview by

narrating her photographs.