

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Zonia T. Way

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Way, Zonia T., 1905-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Zonia T. Way,
Dates:	December 14, 2006
Bulk Dates:	2006
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:35:29).
Abstract:	Interior design consultant Zonia T. Way (1905 - 2015) was an active part of civic life on Chicago's South Side and in Idlewild, Michigan for many years. She designed and sold draperies, did interior design and taught crafts. Way was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 14, 2006, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2006_170
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Longtime Chicago resident Zonia Thomas Way was born Zonia Matticx on May 9, 1905, in Meridian, Mississippi. Her grandfather founded St. Paul's Methodist Episcopal Church in Meridian. Way's mother, Virginia Anna Shields Matticx, who taught Greek and Latin at Meridian College (later named Haven College) met Way's father, Frank Henry Matticx (who was half French and half Choctaw Indian), in college. Way attended Meridian Academy and later attended Meridian's Colored Public School. When Way's mother died in 1915, her father relocated to Chicago, remarried, and then sent for his daughter in 1918.

In Chicago, Way attended Doolittle Elementary School and Hyde Park High School, where she was an honor student and a member of the Girl's Reserves. Her stepmother, Grace Abney Garnett Matticx, frequently entertained black business leaders and notables like Congressman Oscar de Priest, Provident Hospital leader Dr. George Cleveland Hall, Dr. T.K. Lawless, *Chicago Defender* publisher Robert S. Abbott, banker Jesse Binga, and Illinois State Representative Louis B. Anderson.

Way's first job was in a hat shop in 1925. That same year, she met Walker V. Thomas, a dental student. Soon they married, and Way for many years was an active part of civic life on Chicago's South Side and in Idlewild, Michigan. She joined the Church of the Good Shepherd in 1934 and was a member of the Douglass Chapter of the League of Women Voters, the YWCA board, the Meharry Auxiliary and the Dentists Wives Club. After her husband died in 1949, Way made draperies and sold them to clients. In 1960, she married John Way and continued to design draperies and do interior design. A former president of the Seniors Club of Parkway Gardens, Way designs and teaches crafts.

Over one hundred years old, Way has a grown daughter, grandchildren and great grandchildren.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Zonia T. Way was conducted by Larry Crowe on December 14, 2006, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Interior design consultant Zonia T. Way (1905 - 2015) was an active part of civic life on Chicago's South Side and in Idlewild, Michigan for many years. She designed and sold draperies, did interior design and taught crafts.

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:

Way, Zonia T., 1905-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Way, Zonia T., 1905- --Interviews

Women interior decorators--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews

Older African Americans--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Interior Design Consultant

HistoryMakers® Category:

ArtMakers

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 Zonia T. Way, December 14, 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).

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 Zonia T. Way, Section A2006_170_001_001, TRT: 0:28:58 ?
Zonia T. Way was born on May 9, 1905 in Meridian, Mississippi to Virginia Shields Matticx and Frank H. Matticx. Although Way's paternal grandfather was French, and her grandmother was Choctaw Native American, her father

identified as African American, as he was raised by his half-sister, a black woman, in Mobile, Alabama. Way's mother was the daughter of a drayman named Christopher Shields. She taught Greek and Latin at Meridian Academy, where she met Way's father, and became a dressmaker after they married. Way's mother also taught Sunday School and sang in the choir at Meridian's St. Paul United Methodist Church, and her father was the president of the church's Epworth League. At home, Way kept a pet calf with her brother, Frank C. Matticx, and was visited by her uncle, William Shields. At Meridian Academy, Way's second grade teacher disciplined her with a whip, prompting her parents to transfer her to a public school. Way also describes the street where she grew up, and Meridian's 29th Street streetcar.

Women interior decorators--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews.

Older African Americans--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Zonia T. Way, Section A2006_170_001_002, TRT: 0:28:29 ?

Zonia T. Way's father brought Way's family to his hometown of Mobile, Alabama after an altercation with his boss' son. There, the family lived in poverty. Way also went crabbing with her father, and attended Broad Street Academy. Then the family moved to Grenada, Mississippi, where her father worked at a saw mill. Her mother fell ill; and, after their move to Jackson, Mississippi, passed away. Way then moved to Hattiesburg, Mississippi, where her father operated a hotel, and briefly lived in Mobile with her aunt, before joining her father and stepmother, Grace Garnett Matticx, in Chicago, Illinois at the age of thirteen years old. Way's stepmother was a disciplinarian, and came from the first African American family to live in Evanston, Illinois. She was a chiropodist before marrying Way's father, a stockyard foreman. In Chicago's Bronzeville neighborhood, Way saw William S. Hart's films at the Pickford Theater and the States Theater, and attended the integrated James R. Doolittle, Jr. Elementary School.

Video Oral History Interview with Zonia T. Way, Section A2006_170_001_003, TRT: 0:29:16 ?

Zonia T. Way celebrated the return of Chicago's 8th Infantry Regiment at their armory on World War I's Armistice Day. As a teenager, she attended the predominantly white Hyde Park High School. Rather than work toward a diploma, Way completed two-year certificate in domestic studies. She also studied science and English. After graduating, Way aspired to teach in the South, but lacked the credentials. As a result, she stayed in Chicago and made hats at a hat store until marrying. She lived in a large home in Bronzeville with her father, who founded Matticx Creole Sausage Company in the 1920s, and her step-mother, Grace Garnett Matticx, an NAACP member who knew prominent Chicago figures like Congressman Oscar Stanton De Priest, Alderman Louis B. Anderson, Dr. George Cleveland Hall, Dr. Theodore K. Lawless and Binga State Bank founder Jesse Binga. Way herself read the Chicago Defender, which at the time was personally printed and sold by founder Robert Sengstacke Abbott.

Video Oral History Interview with Zonia T. Way, Section A2006_170_001_004, TRT: 0:28:17 ?

Zonia T. Way was president of the Girl Reserves of the YWCA in Chicago, and her family was active in the community. They were acquainted with Congressman Oscar Stanton De Priest's family and Ida B. Well's daughters. Way's parents taught her the importance of voting, and she joined the Douglass League of Women Voters. In 1925, Way married Walker V. Thomas, a dentist, and joined the Dentists Wives Club of Chicago and the Meharry Auxilliary. During the Great Depression, her husband's dental practice struggled, and the family moved into his office. However, they still enjoyed playing cards with friends; driving to Willow Springs, Illinois; and listening to the 'One Man's

Family' radio program. In 1947, Way and her husband saw the debut of Larry Doby, the second African American player in Major League Baseball, at Comiskey Park. Two years after her husband's death in 1949, Way lost her home in Bronzeville to eminent domain. Lake Meadows Apartments was built on the property, and Way moved out of the neighborhood.

Video Oral History Interview with Zonia T. Way, Section A2006_170_001_005, TRT: 0:29:45 ?

Zonia T. Way protested the development of Lake Meadows Apartments, but ultimately lost her home to eminent domain in 1951. She considered moving to California with her stepmother; but, unable to find work there, returned to Chicago, Illinois, and began working at Aragon Draperies on the North Side. She recalls how, during segregation, African Americans ate at dime stores, because restaurants refused to serve black patrons. In 1960, Way married John Way. They were married for twenty years until he passed away from Alzheimer's Disease. Way was active at Chicago's Church of the Good Shepherd, and served as a deaconess there for eighteen years. Her daughter, Virginia Thomas, attended Hampton Institute, and her son, Walter Thomas, worked with the Red Cross upon graduating from college. Way talks about her healthy diet and activities; her longevity; and her grandchildren. She also reflects upon her hopes and concerns for the African American community; her life and legacy; and how she would like to be remembered.

Video Oral History Interview with Zonia T. Way, Section A2006_170_001_006, TRT: 0:10:44 ?

Zonia T. Way narrates her photographs.