

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Harrell Spruill

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Spruill, Harrell Solomon, 1924-2012
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Harrell Spruill,
Dates:	July 26, 2008
Bulk Dates:	2008
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:55:50).
Abstract:	High school industrial arts teacher Harrell Spruill (1924 - 2012) was the founder of the Har-Pearl Foundation, which provided inner city youth with the opportunity to learn about farm life. Spruill was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 26, 2008, in Tracy's Landing, Maryland. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2008_094
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Philanthropist and educator Harrell Solomon Spruill has established programs to help young people build vocational skills for a successful life path. Spruill was born in Travis, North Carolina on August 18, 1924, to Solomon, a farmer and Georgiana, a homemaker. Spruill and his nine siblings grew up on a thirteen acre farm which his father owned. Growing up, Spruill was painfully shy and throughout his youth Spruill's closest friends were his siblings.

Spruill graduated from Tyrell County Training School in Columbia, North Carolina in 1940. Inspired by his sister's college degree, Spruill was determined to attend the Hampton Institute. After high school, Spruill deferred for a year to work in a wood mill to raise money for tuition. Spruill also had a work study position, and though he was thankful to have the opportunity, he longed to be a "regular" college student. In 1943, he was drafted into the U.S. Navy where he worked as a diesel mechanic and rose to the rank of Fireman First Class and Motor Machinist Second Class. Though he saw no combat, Spruill was incredibly successful in the Navy because it allowed him to practice the values his parents instilled in him, that of education and hard work.

Following his time in the service, Spruill returned to Hampton more self assured and eager to become involved with extra-curricular activities. He joined the Omicron Social Club, and was a two time division-champion wrestler. In 1949, Spruill received his certificate in the automobile and diesel mechanics program. After returning from a training program in Chicago, Spruill saw the disrepair the farm had fallen into since his father's death and stayed to return the farm back functional. He received his B.S. degree from Hampton in 1952. That same year, Spruill taught at Alcorn University in Mississippi. He remained there for two years. Later, he took a position at Wiley H. Bates High School in Annapolis, Maryland, where he taught industrial arts in the Anne Arundel County school system for twenty-nine years.

In 1956, under the advisement of a close friend, Spruill bought fifteen acres of land. To make his loan payments on

a teacher's salary, Spruill lived in boarding houses and cooked his own meals. Another example of his resourcefulness, Spruill had his students serviced neighborhood cars to raise funds for classroom supplies. In 1987, the State of Maryland bought his land to build a new road. With the profit from the sale, Spruill and his siblings established a scholarship in their parents' names. The following year, Spruill bought another piece of land on Tracy's Landing, so he could run farm programs for inner city school children. With the land that he purchased, he formed partnerships with the Boys and Girls Club and African American fraternities to use his surplus crops for fundraisers. Spruill started the Har-Pearl Foundation in 2003. Co-named after his late wife of thirty-two years, Pearl, the organization donates to various causes. Spruill is married to Annetta Spruill, and they reside on the farm at Tracy's Landing. He has two children with Pearl: Kevin and Kecia; three grandchildren: Sarah Spruill, Jazlyn and Myles Johnson; and one step-son: Jay Pittman (Annetta's son).

Spruill was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on July 26, 2008.

Harrell Spruill passed away on December 6, 2012.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Harrell Spruill was conducted by Larry Crowe on July 26, 2008, in Tracy's Landing, Maryland, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. High school industrial arts teacher Harrell Spruill (1924 - 2012) was the founder of the Har-Pearl Foundation, which provided inner city youth with the opportunity to learn about farm life.

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:

Spruill, Harrell Solomon, 1924-2012

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Spruill, Harrell Solomon, 1924-2012 --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Anne Arundel County Public Schools.

Occupations:

High School Industrial Arts Teacher

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 Harrell Spruill, July 26, 2008. 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 Harrell Spruill, Section A2008_094_001_001, TRT: 0:29:20 ?

Harrell Spruill was born on August 18, 1924 in Travis, North Carolina to Georgiana Wynn Spruill and Solomon Spruill, Jr. His paternal great-grandfather was born a slave. Spruill's paternal grandfather, Solomon Spruill, Sr., owned several properties in Travis, where Spruill's father was born. Spruill's mother grew up nearby in Creswell, North Carolina, where she worked on her family's farm, and was educated through the third grade. After Spruill's parents married, they purchased thirteen acres for \$400 from his paternal grandfather, and established a farm where they raised livestock and produce. They had ten children, including Spruill; and attended the Chapel Hill Baptist Church each Sunday. Spruill began working on his family's farm at the age of three years old, by helping his father with the plow. As a child, Spruill was teased by his siblings for his first name, Solomon; and decided instead to go by his middle name, Harrell.

Video Oral History Interview with Harrell Spruill, Section A2008_094_001_002, TRT: 0:28:20 ?

Harrell Spruill grew up on his family's farm in Travis, North Carolina. From the age of three years old, he worked on the farm and completed chores at home. At six years old, he began his education at Travis Elementary School, where the school year began in October, when the cotton harvest was complete. After skipping the seventh grade, Spruill transferred to the Tyrrell County Training School, a high school founded by local African American philanthropist Simpson P. Dean. He tended the farm after class each day, while his father worked on a road maintenance crew and slaughtered pigs for white farmers. During the summers, Spruill worked on a neighboring farm to earn extra money. He was inspired to attend college by the Hampton Institute's dean of women, Flemma Pansy Kittrell, who spoke at his high school. In 1940, Spruill completed the eleventh grade, and enrolled in a work study program at the Hampton Institute the following year. Spruill also describes his siblings, and a typical day on his family's farm.

Video Oral History Interview with Harrell Spruill, Section A2008_094_001_003, TRT: 0:29:50 ?

Harrell Spruill attended the segregated Travis Elementary School in Travis, North Carolina, where he enjoyed mathematics. His teachers included his older sister, Carrie Spruill Whitaker, who inspired him to succeed academically. He continued his studies at the Tyrrell County Training School in Columbia, North Carolina. There, he was active in the New Farmers of America alongside his younger brother, Albert Spruill, with whom he served as a judge for livestock contests. Spruill graduated at fifteen years old, and aspired to study medicine. To save money for college, he worked at a saw mill in Columbia. After a year, he enrolled at the Hampton Institute in Hampton, Virginia, where he worked part time in the cafeteria and the wood shop. In 1942, he was drafted into the U.S. Navy, and was sent to Fort Monroe in Virginia, and then to the Naval Station Great Lakes in Lake County, Illinois. Later, Spruill returned to the Hampton Institute, where he trained at the naval diesel mechanic school.

Video Oral History Interview with Harrell Spruill, Section A2008_094_001_004, TRT: 0:29:50 ?

Harrell Spruill was stationed at the segregated Naval Station Great Lakes in Lake County, Illinois during World War II. After four months, he returned to the Hampton Institute, where he trained as a naval diesel mechanic, and was promoted to the rank of motor machinist, third class. He completed his training in Hawaii, where he worked in a barbershop to help pay for his younger siblings' educations. He was then sent to a segregated naval base in Corpus Christi, Texas, where he was frequently addressed with racial slurs, and witnessed a white woman falsely accuse a black sailor of rape. In 1945, Spruill was stationed at the Naval Station Norfolk, and then discharged from service in 1946. He returned to the Hampton Institute, where he was certified as a diesel mechanic in 1949. That year, his father passed away, and Spruill returned to his family's farm to assist his mother. He reentered the Hampton Institute in 1950, and obtained a degree in industrial education in 1952.

Video Oral History Interview with Harrell Spruill, Section A2008_094_001_005, TRT: 0:29:40 ?

Harrell Spruill began his teaching career in 1952 at the Alcorn Agricultural and Mechanical College in Lorman, Mississippi. There, he established an industrial education program that emphasized auto mechanics and detailing. He also oversaw the repair of school equipment, and taught mathematics courses. In 1954, Spruill joined the faculty of the Wiley H. Bates High School in Annapolis, Maryland, as an auto mechanic shop teacher. In 1956, he purchased fifteen acres of land in Annapolis from an African American property owner, and built his first home. After the integration of the local schools in 1966, Spruill faced discrimination from white students, who sometimes accosted him with racial slurs. In 1987, the government of Anne Arundel County bought five acres of Spruill's land; and, with the proceeds, Spruill acquired a farm in Tracy's Landing, Maryland in 1988. Later, the State of Maryland purchased more of his land to build a road, and Spruill leased the remaining acreage. He also recalls his first marriage.

Video Oral History Interview with Harrell Spruill, Section A2008_094_001_006, TRT: 0:28:50 ?

Harrell Spruill retired in 1983 from his role as an industrial education teacher in the Anne Arundel County Public Schools. In 1990, he sold his property in Annapolis, Maryland, and invested the profits in his farm in Tracy's Landing, Maryland. Spruill and his second wife, Pearl Spruill, created agricultural education programs through organizations like the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity and the First Baptist Church in Annapolis. He also used the proceeds from his crop sales to support civic programs. Spruill went on to collaborate with the Sojourner Douglass College to set up a farming project for minority students on his land. In 2003, he established the Har-Pearl Spruill Foundation, Inc. to sponsor scholarships and educational programs. Spruill reflects upon his life, legacy and family. He also describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community, and how he would like to be remembered.