

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Fredi Sears Brown

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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>	Brown, Fredi, 1923-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Fredi Sears Brown,
<b>Dates:</b>	April 24, 2002
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2002
<b>Physical Description:</b>	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:03:37).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Museum chief executive and cultural heritage collector Fredi Brown (1923 - ) is the founder of Family Heritage House which features tapes, photographs and books from prominent African American figures such as Charles Drew and John Henrik Clarke. Brown was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 24, 2002, in Bradenton, Florida. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2002_050
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Fredi Brown, founder and director of the Family Heritage House Museum in Bradenton, Florida, was born on December 4, 1923, in Bradenton. She grew up in a close-knit neighborhood where everyone listened to Joe Louis fights on the same radio. Brown was active in the church and an excellent student at Lincoln High School, where she graduated in 1939 as valedictorian of her class.

Brown wanted to become a dietician and enrolled in Florida A&M University in East Tallahassee, Florida. She wrote for the school paper and when she graduated with a B.A. in 1944, she decided to pursue a career in journalism. She moved to Kansas City, Missouri, and through the National Urban League found a position writing ads for the *Kansas City Call*. There, Brown met her husband, Ernest Brown, whom she married in Detroit, Michigan, in 1946. The Detroit Urban League hired Ernest and the couple became immersed into the public life of Detroit. The Browns collected materials relating to black life in Detroit from civil rights victories to the devastating 1967 riots. When they relocated to Bradenton in 1976, Brown, who taught at Manatee Community College, shared these items with her students.

When she retired in 1990, she sought a place to house her collected books and papers. Interest from the college administration and community resulted in a new wing of the library that now serves as the home of the Family Heritage House Museum. Focusing primarily on African American history and culture the museum such figures as Charles Drew and John Henrik Clarke are featured in this 2,085-square foot facility that houses books, tapes, paintings, prints, heirlooms and photographs. The museum opened in 2000 and is the only museum of its kind on a community college campus.

Brown was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April 24, 2002.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Fredi Sears Brown was conducted by Samuel Adams on April 24, 2002, in Bradenton, Florida, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Museum chief executive and cultural heritage collector Fredi Brown (1923 - ) is the founder of Family Heritage House which features tapes, photographs and books from prominent African American figures such as Charles Drew and John Henrik Clarke.

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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:

Brown, Fredi, 1923-

Adams, Samuel (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Brown, Fredi, 1923---Interviews

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Collectors and collecting--Florida--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:

Museum Founder

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### HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

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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 Fredi Sears Brown, April 24, 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).

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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.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Fredi Sears Brown, Section A2002\_050\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:32 ?

Fredi Brown talks about her family history and childhood memories. Her mother, Mary Etta Hines was born to Rebecca Moore. Her father, Oscar Columbus Sears, Sr., moved to Parrish, Florida as a young man. He founded the St. Mary Missionary Baptist Church in Bradenton, Florida and worked as a

handyman at the Kiwanis Trailer Park. Her mother was active in several community organizations and worked as a laundress. Beginning at age nine, Brown worked as an assistant at Bradenton General Hospital. After she graduated as valedictorian from Lincoln High School in Bradenton, Florida, Brown moved to Kansas City to pursue journalism.

Collectors and Collecting--Florida--Interviews

Video Oral History Interview with Fredi Sears Brown, Section A2002\_050\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:37  
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Fredi Brown recalls both segregation and a strong sense of community as a child in Bradenton, Florida. Brown spoke out against racial discrimination when she and a friend were not waited on at a dime store, and she was subsequently taken to the police station. Neighbors called her the “Rosa Parks of Bradenton.” Brown graduated from Lincoln High School in 1939 and attended Florida A&M University [then called the Florida Agricultural and Mechanical College for Negroes] where she majored in home economics. The summer after her college graduation in 1944, she worked at a department store and a summer camp in Hartford, Connecticut. Then, she moved to Kansas City, Missouri where she wrote ad copy for the black newspaper, the Kansas City Call, and became the essay contest editor at the National Newspaper Publishers Association.

Video Oral History Interview with Fredi Sears Brown, Section A2002\_050\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:21  
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Fredi Brown talks about the time period between 1946 and 1976 when her family lived in Detroit, Michigan. During this time, Brown’s husband, Ernest Brown, worked at Chevrolet Gear and Axle, the Urban League, and the Michigan Consolidated Gas Company. Brown worked at Bond Bread before becoming a homemaker while raising her four children. Brown then became a teacher for the Detroit Experimental English program. Brown remembers mid-20th Century Detroit as a culturally vibrant city with many educational opportunities for her children. At the same time, the Detroit riots of 1967 deeply concerned and frightened her. In the 1970s, Brown returned to Bradenton, Florida due to her husband’s retirement and her daughter’s admission to New College of Florida.

Video Oral History Interview with Fredi Sears Brown, Section A2002\_050\_001\_004, TRT: 0:31:00  
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Fredi Brown chronicles her founding of the Family Heritage Museum in Bradenton, Florida in 1990. Brown worked for fifteen years as an instructor and an equal opportunity coordinator at Manatee Community College in Bradenton, Florida. When she retired, she decided to create a public collection of the historical materials that she and her family had gathered. Brown was motivated to found the museum in order to fill in missing gaps in African American history and to promote education at Manatee Community College. For two years she had used a donated trailer to house the collection. Then, the President of Manatee Community College offered to house the collection on campus. In 2000, a wing was built for the museum. Brown wants to be remembered as a compassionate person and sees her legacy as the Family Heritage museum and her children. Brown closes by narrating her photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Fredi Sears Brown, Section A2002\_050\_001\_005, TRT: 0:03:07  
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Fredi Brown narrates her photographs.