

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Cornelius "Boots" Shepard

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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>	Shepard, Cornelius, 1915-2007
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Cornelius "Boots" Shepard,
<b>Dates:</b>	October 4, 2007
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2007
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:44:21).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Railroad chef Cornelius "Boots" Shepard (1915 - 2007 ) worked for the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad. Shepard was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on October 4, 2007, in Lincoln, Nebraska. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2007_278
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Railroad chef Boots (Cornelius Orville) Shepard was born on July 11, 1915, in Sedalia, Missouri to Mabel Smith Shepard and Raymond Shepard. Shepard has traced his ancestors back to slavery and many of his relatives attended the now forgotten George R. Smith College, which was a popular Methodist institution named for Sedalia Missouri's founder and the college's benefactor. The school was a magnet for black people for miles around. Shepard was a very strong willed child; he received the nickname "Boots" when he refused to take off a pair of his new boots before going to bed. Shepard attended Franklin Elementary School and graduated from Lincoln High School in 1935.

While attending high school in the 1930s, Shepard met his future wife, Loreatha Mae. The couple raised eleven children and emphasized the values of family and hard work. In 1935 Shepard moved to Lincoln, Nebraska where he found a job as a cook on the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad (CB&Q). He worked for thirty-five years on the railroad and was the youngest chef at CB&Q Railroad during his tenure. This was a great accomplishment because African Americans were rarely promoted to the position of head chef on the railroads. As a chef, Shepard also traveled to Chicago where he worked on the California Zephyr. As a resident of Lincoln, Shepard joined the Newman Methodist Church and became an active member for seventy years.

Cornelius Orville Shepard died on November 17, 2007 at the age of 92.

Cornelius Orville Shepard was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on October 4, 2007.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Cornelius "Boots" Shepard was conducted by Larry Crowe on October 4, 2007, in Lincoln, Nebraska, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Railroad chef Cornelius "Boots"

Shepard (1915 - 2007 ) worked for the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad.

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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:

Shepard, Cornelius, 1915-2007

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Shepard, Cornelius, 1915-2007 --Interviews

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African American labor union members--Interviews.

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African American cooks--Interviews.

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African American cooks.

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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:

Railroad Chef

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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 Cornelius "Boots" Shepard, October 4, 2007. 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 Cornelius "Boots" Shepard, Section A2007\_278\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:05 ?

Cornelius "Boots" Shepard was born on July 11, 1915 in Sedalia, Missouri to Mabel Smith Shepard and Ray Shepard. His maternal grandmother was born in St. Louis, Missouri to Martha Branum, a former slave, and a white policeman. Shepard's maternal grandfather, William H. Smith, was born in Georgia, and then moved with his parents to Shrewsbury, Missouri. He became a Methodist

minister, and preached in towns throughout Missouri, including Warrensburg, where Shepard's mother was born in 1892. When his mother was three years old, her family moved to an all-black neighborhood on the north side of Sedalia, where she was educated through the tenth grade. Shepard's father was born in the 1890s in Poplar Bluff, Missouri. He attended Sedalia's George R. Smith College, where he played baseball and football, and then worked for the Missouri Pacific Railroad. When Shepard was sixteen years old, his father moved west to work as a railroad waiter.

African American pioneers--Missouri.

African American families--Missouri.

Methodist Episcopal Church. Board of Education for Negroes.

African American grandparents.

George R. Smith College (Sedalia, Mo.)--History.

Video Oral History Interview with Cornelius "Boots" Shepard, Section A2007\_278\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:22 ?

Cornelius "Boots" Shepard and his brother, Willard Shepard, were raised in their maternal family's house in Sedalia, Missouri. From an early age, Shepard worked selling bottles to bootleggers, bellhopping at a hotel and shining shoes. He attended the Franklin School until the fourth grade, and then continued at the Lincoln School under Principal Christopher Columbus Hubbard. The all-black Hubbard Park, a thirty-five acre parcel near Shepard's home, was donated to the black community by local philanthropist Sarah Smith Cotton during segregation, and named in Principal Hubbard's honor. In school, Shepard excelled at math and manual training, but had difficulties with English. He was the quarterback of the Lincoln School's football team, and played on the baseball team as well. Shepard often attended Negro League baseball games, and saw Bill Drake, Satchel Paige and Goose Tatum play. Shepard also recalls the suspected arson of the all-black George R. Smith College in Sedalia in 1928.

African American high school students.

African American children--Missouri.

Negro leagues--History.

Sedalia (Mo.)--Race relations.

Video Oral History Interview with Cornelius "Boots" Shepard, Section A2007\_278\_001\_003, TRT: 0:31:08 ?

Cornelius "Boots" Shepard learned to cook from his mother, Mabel Smith Shepard, who often prepared meals for her chapter of the Order of the Eastern Star. He graduated from the Lincoln School in Sedalia, Missouri; and moved to Lincoln, Nebraska with plans to become a cabinetmaker. Instead, he received a football scholarship to Lincoln's Nebraska Wesleyan University, where he played quarterback against opponents such as the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and York College in York, Nebraska in 1936. Shepard left school in 1937, due to his difficulties in English and history. He initially worked as a hotel waiter, and then was hired as a fourth cook on the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad's (CB and Q) Pioneer Zephyr train. He soon obtained a position at CB and Q for his brother, Willard Shepard. He describes life on the railroad, including the long hours and extreme heat of the grill. In 1938, Shepard married Loretha Jackson Shepard, who was from his hometown of Sedalia.

Order of the Eastern Star.

Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad Company.

Nebraska Wesleyan University.

African American college students--Race relations.

Universal Negro Improvement Association.

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Video Oral History Interview with Cornelius "Boots" Shepard, Section A2007\_278\_001\_004, TRT: 0:30:13 ?

Cornelius "Boots" Shepard joined the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad as a fourth cook in 1937, and was promoted to chef cook in 1939. He used his experience as a hotel waiter to prepare hors d'oeuvres for private parties on trains like the California Zephyr. He belonged to a union for dining car workers, and admired A. Philip Randolph and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. Shepard also worked as a chef for country club luncheons, homecoming parties and other events in Lincoln, Nebraska. He married Loretha Jackson Shepard in 1938, although she did not immediately move to Lincoln, as he traveled often. Their first child, Ray A. Shepard, was born in 1940. From that time, they lived together in Lincoln, and raised eleven children. He also helped his wife's relatives obtain education and employment throughout the country. Shepard registered for the selective service at the start of World War II, but was never drafted due to his large family.

African Americans--Marriage.

African American families--Missouri.

Pullman porters.

Randolph, A. Philip (Asa Philip), 1889-1979.

Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad Company.

Video Oral History Interview with Cornelius "Boots" Shepard, Section A2007\_278\_001\_005, TRT: 0:28:21 ?

Cornelius "Boots" Shepard worked for the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad (CB and Q) for thirty-nine years. In 1970, the CB and Q merged with several other railroads to form the Burlington Northern Railroad. Although the new railroad promised equal wages after the merger, the African American waiters and cooks of the former CB and Q still earned less than the white workers. After retiring in 1973, Shepard filed a complaint with the Office of Equal Opportunity for pay discrimination. The resolution of the case was delayed for many years, and Shepard enlisted the help of U.S. Senator J. James Exon, who helped him and 144 other black railroad workers receive a settlement in 1986. Later, Shepard threatened legal action against the Wyuka Cemetery in Lincoln, Nebraska, after its employees refused to bury Shepard's deceased grandchild beside white children. Shepard talks about the practice of train hopping, and reflects upon his life and legacy.

Discrimination in employment--Law and legislation--United States--Cases.

Amtrak.

Discrimination in employment.

African Americans--Employment.

Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad Company.

Bereavement--Psychological aspects.

Video Oral History Interview with Cornelius "Boots" Shepard, Section A2007\_278\_001\_006, TRT: 0:14:12 ?

Cornelius "Boots" Shepard's second son, Cornelius Shepard, Jr., was born in 1942. After his son's birth, Shepard made an appointment to have his son's picture taken by a photographer in Lincoln, Nebraska, but the photographer

refused to serve him due to his race. Shepard retained the services of attorney John Doyle, sued the business and received a three hundred dollar settlement. He reflects upon his career in the railroad industry, and concludes the interview by describing how he would like to be remembered.

African Americans--Religion.

Race discrimination--Missouri.

African Americans--Social conditions.

Railroads.