

Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with Jessie Mae Finley

Interview #: SAA-A-D-2003-003

Conducted by the Springfield African-American History Foundation
For the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library

Born in Danville, Illinois in 1906, Jessie Mae Finley was interviewed at age 97. She was a talented musician and worked for the State of Illinois. In five interviews, she covers her ancestors, husbands, and children; her activities as a music teacher and leader of musical groups; her volunteer work and church activities; life during the Depression and two World Wars; discrimination in education and in the workplace.

Interview date(s): Nov. 15, 22, 29, Dec. 13, 20, 2003

Interview Location: Springfield, Illinois

Interview Format: audio cassettes

Interviewer: Naarah Patton

Transcription by: Susan Crapo Transcription Service &

The Tape Transcription Center

Edited by: Edna Shanklin, Barbara Dickerman, Marian
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Total Pages: 86 (in 5 transcripts)

Total Time: 5 hours, 47 minutes, 20 seconds / 5.78 hrs

Interviews are archived at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential
Library in Springfield, Illinois.

Abstract

Jessie Mae Finley Springfield African-American History Foundation Project

Biographical Information and Synopsis: Jessie Mae Finley was born in 1906 to James and Elizabeth Schultz. She had 5 siblings and 5 half siblings. She was married twice: her first husband was Dr. A.H. Kenniebrew and her second husband was Theo E. Finley. She had 2 children with her first husband, Alonzo and Charlotte. She worked for the State of Illinois for over fifty years. In an interview conducted on five successive dates in 2003, Mrs. Finley discusses a range of topics:

- In tape 1 she discusses her two husbands; her childhood; the Jessie Mae Finley Scholarship Concert and her love for music; her family; religion; being the recipient of the Copley First Citizen Award and other awards; vacationing; retiring; volunteer work and her work in the ministry
- In tape 2 she discusses desegregation; discrimination in the workplace; working for the Illinois Department of Mental Health; her children's education; discrimination in the school systems; her schooling; how she met her husbands; how Springfield has changed and how Springfield could be improved
- In tape 3 she discusses encountering the Ku Klux Klan; church; teaching music and her various musical activities; musicians that she knew; working on newspapers; what life was like during the Depression.
- In tape 4 she discusses the power of music; doctors; World War I; World War II; her brothers
- In tape 5 she discusses how she trained most of the musicians in town; her husband's talent for building houses (including their own); her proposal and marriage to her second husband Theo E. Finley; having to leave her house and go into a nursing home

Topics Covered: Springfield, Illinois, 1900s – present; *George Schultz and His* (book); Jessie Mae Finley Scholarship Concert; Copley First Citizen Award; Dr. A.H. Kenniebrew; YWCA; Underground Railroad; Retired Senior Citizen Volunteer Program; Colored Women's Club; James Weldon Johnson Study Guild; Zion Baptist Church; Douglas Community Center; Roy Schultz Band; Springfield Colored Municipal Band; Lincoln Liberty Chorus; John Crisp; *Illinois State Informer* (newspaper); the Depression; World War I; World War II; NAACP Webster plaques; Voices of Love, Joy and Peace (vocal group)

Note to the Reader: Readers of the oral history memoir should bear in mind that this is a transcript of the spoken word, and that the interviewer, interviewee and editor sought to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for the views expressed therein. We leave these for the reader to judge.

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