

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

REATHA CLARK KING

Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by

Jeannette E. Brown

at

Minneapolis, Minnesota

on

1 May 2005

(With Subsequent Corrections and Additions)

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This oral history is one in a series initiated both by the Chemical Heritage Foundation and the Iowa State University Library. The series documents the personal perspectives of women in chemistry, and records the human dimensions of their involvement in academic, industrial, and governmental laboratories during the twentieth century.

This project is made possible through the generous support of the
Iowa State University Library and its Archives of Women in Science and Engineering

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

Oral History Program
FINAL RELEASE FORM

This document contains my understanding and agreement with the Chemical Heritage Foundation with respect to my participation in the audio- and/or video-recorded interview conducted by Hilary Domush on 28 May 2009. I have read the transcript supplied by the Chemical Heritage Foundation.

1. The recordings, transcripts, photographs, research materials, and memorabilia (collectively called the "Work") will be maintained by the Chemical Heritage Foundation and made available in accordance with general policies for research and other scholarly purposes.
2. I hereby grant, assign, and transfer to the Chemical Heritage Foundation all right, title, and interest in the Work, including the literary rights and the copyright, except that I shall retain the right to copy, use, and publish the Work in part or in full until my death.
3. The manuscript may be read and the recording(s) heard/viewed by scholars approved by the Chemical Heritage Foundation subject to the restrictions listed below. The scholar pledges not to quote from, cite, or reproduce by any means this material except with the written permission of the Chemical Heritage Foundation. Regardless of the restrictions placed on the transcript of the interview, the Chemical Heritage Foundation retains the rights to all materials generated about my oral history interview, including the title page, abstract, table of contents, chronology, index, et cetera (collectively called the "Front Matter and Index"), all of which will be made available on the Chemical Heritage Foundation's website. Should the Chemical Heritage Foundation wish to post to the internet the content of the oral history interview, that is, direct quotations, audio clips, video clips, or other material from the oral history recordings or the transcription of the recordings, the Chemical heritage Foundation will be bound by the restrictions for use placed on the Work as detailed below.
4. I wish to place the conditions that I have checked below upon the use of this interview. I understand that the Chemical Heritage Foundation will enforce my wishes until the time of my death, when any restrictions will be removed.

Please check one:

- a. *K* **No restrictions for access.**
NOTE: Users citing this interview for purposes of publication are obliged under the terms of the Chemical Heritage Foundation Oral History Program to obtain permission from Chemical Heritage Foundation, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
- b. _____ **Semi-restricted access.** (May view the Work. My permission required to quote, cite, or reproduce.)
- c. _____ **Restricted access.** (My permission required to view the Work, quote, cite, or reproduce.)

This constitutes my entire and complete understanding.

(Signature) *Reatha C. King*
Reatha Clark King

(Date) 10-4-2010

This oral history is designated **Free Access**.

Please note: Users citing this interview for purposes of publication are obliged under the terms of the Chemical Heritage Foundation (CHF) Oral History Program to credit CHF using the format below:

Reatha Clark King, interview by Jeannette E. Brown in Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1 May 2005 (Philadelphia: Chemical Heritage Foundation, Oral History Transcript # 0663).



Chemical Heritage Foundation
Oral History Program
315 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106



The Chemical Heritage Foundation (CHF) serves the community of the chemical and molecular sciences, and the wider public, by treasuring the past, educating the present, and inspiring the future. CHF maintains a world-class collection of materials that document the history and heritage of the chemical and molecular sciences, technologies, and industries; encourages research in CHF collections; and carries out a program of outreach and interpretation in order to advance an understanding of the role of the chemical and molecular sciences, technologies, and industries in shaping society.

REATHA CLARK KING

1938 Born in Pavo, Georgia, on 11 April

Education

1958 B.S., Clark College
1960 M.S., University of Chicago
1963 Ph.D., Thermochemistry, University of Chicago

Professional Experience

1963-1968 National Bureau of Standards, Washington, D.C.
Research Chemist

1968-1977 York College, City University of New York, Queens, New York
Chemistry Faculty

1970-1974 Associate Dean for the Division of Natural Sciences and
Mathematics

1974-1977 Associate Dean for Academic Affairs

1977-1988 Metropolitan State University, St. Paul and Minneapolis, Minnesota
President

1988-2002 General Mills, Inc., Minneapolis, Minnesota
Vice President

1988-2002 President and Executive Director, General Mills Foundation

2002-2003 Chairperson of the Board of Directors

2004 University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota
Louis W. Hill, Jr. Fellow in Philanthropy, Hubert H. Humphrey
Institute of Public Affairs

Honors

1958-1960 Woodrow Wilson Fellow

1960-1961 National Medical Fellow

1968 Meritorious Publication Award, National Bureau of Standards

1976 Builder of Brotherhood Award, National Conference of Christians and
Jews, Queens-Long Island Chapter

1976-1977 Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship for Higher Administration

1979 Leader Award in Education, Minneapolis YWCA

1979 Merit Award for Consumer Rights and Advocacy in Education,
Minneapolis-St. Paul Alumnae Chapter, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority

1982 Honorary Degree, Carleton College

1983 Distinguished Alumnus Award, Clark College

1983 Paul Harris Fellow Award, St. Paul Rotary Club

1984 Communication and Leadership Award, Toastmaster's International
District VI, Twin Cities

1984 Exceptional Black Scientist Award, CIBA-GEIGY Corporation

1984 Leader Award in Education, St. Paul YWCA

1985 Honorary Degree, SUNY Empire State College

1985 Minds in Motion Award, Science Skills Center Inc., Brooklyn, New York

1985 Spurgeon Leadership Award for Community Service, Indianhead Council
of Boy Scouts of America

1986 Drum Major for Justice Award, Southern Christian Leadership
Conference

1986 Educational Excellence Award, National Association of Black Women in
Higher Education

1987 Reatha Clark King Scholarship Fund, 10th Anniversary Recognition of
Presidency, Metropolitan State University

1988 Honorary Degree, Alverno College

1988 Honorary Degree, Rhode Island College

1988 Honorary Degree, Seattle University

1988 Minnesota Public Administrator of the Year Award

1988 Professional Achievement Award, University of Chicago Alumni
Association

1988 Twin Citian of the Year Award

1989 Honorary Degree, Clark-Atlanta University

1989 Honorary Degree, Marymount Manhattan College

1990 Honorary Degree, William Mitchell College of Law

1993 Honorary Degree, Monmouth College

1993 Honorary Degree, Nazareth College

1993 Honorary Degree, Smith College

1993 Sisterhood Award for Distinguished Humanitarian Service, National
Conference of Christians and Jews, MN Dakota Region

1994 Minneapolis NAACP Community Service Award in Education

1995 Honorary Degree, South Carolina State University

1995 Woman of Distinction Award, St. Croix Valley Girl Scouts, St. Paul,
Minnesota

1996 Inducted into Hall of Fame, International Adult & Continuing Education

1996 Director's Choice Award for Leadership as Outstanding Corporate
Director, National Women's Economic Alliance Foundation

1997 Community Builder Award, Boy Scouts of America, Indianhead Council

1998 Honorary Degree, Metropolitan State University

- 1999 100 Most Influential Minnesotans of the Century, *Minneapolis Star Tribune*
- 2001 Honorary Degree, Bennett College
- 2001 2001 Odyssey Award, Big Brothers and Big Sisters, Minneapolis Chapter
- 2001 National Black College Hall of Fame Award
- 2002 Phyllis Wheatley Community Center Community Services Award
- 2002 Community Leadership Award, Hennepin County Office of the County Attorney
- 2003 Humanitarian Award, Minneapolis Community and Technical College
- 2003 Special Distinction Award, General Mills Sales Division
- 2003 Pioneer Award, Women Venture Inc., Minneapolis, Minnesota
- 2003 Community Service Award, The Cookie Cart Learning Center
- 2004 Louis J. Hill, Jr. Fellowship in Philanthropy, Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota
- 2004 Corporate Director of the Year Award, National Association of Corporate Directors
- 2005 Inducted in Midwest Junior Achievement Business Hall of Fame
- 2005 Co-Recipient of the 2005 Lifetime Achievement in Philanthropy Award by the National Center for Black Philanthropy, Inc.
- 2008 Meritorious Service Award, Association of Occupational Therapy Foundation Board
- 2010 Winds of Change Award, Multicultural Forum, University of St. Thomas, Minneapolis, Minnesota

ABSTRACT

Reatha Clark King was born in Pavo, Georgia, the second of three daughters. Her father was a sharecropper who never learned to read or write, and her mother, who went to school only through third grade, worked as a maid. There King began elementary school in the Colored church, Mt. Zion Baptist, in which one teacher taught all seven grades in one room. Her parents divorced when King was young; before the divorce, King was sent to live with her widowed maternal grandmother who lived alone. During that time, King attended elementary school in nearby Coolidge, Georgia. Later she re-joined her mother and sisters. Then her mother moved the family to Moultrie, Georgia, where King attended high school. She says she and her sisters always did well in school, and her teachers and family were always proud and supportive of her scholarship. When she was in high school King discovered science.

King had always thought she would attend Hampton University, which she had learned about in Black History Week programs. But Clark College sent a recruiter to her high school who offered her a full tuition scholarship to enroll at Clark. Chemistry was a required course for a home economics major, and King was immediately smitten with it. She resolved to become a research chemist, an ambition encouraged by Alfred Spriggs, head of the department, in whose lab she worked on gas chromatography. He and several other professors at Clark and at Morehouse College influenced King to apply for a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship and to seek admission to the best universities in the country. She won the fellowship and was admitted to the University of Chicago, where she obtained her PhD in thermochemistry. At Chicago, O.J. Kleppa was her mentor, and his wife became her friend. During these years she also met and married another chemist, N. Judge King.

Reatha King's first job was as research chemist at the National Bureau of Standards in Washington, D.C., where she remained for five years. While there she worked on a project for ARPA, the Advanced Research Projects Agency, and published several papers. She also bore two children. When her husband accepted a position at Nassau Community College in Garden City, Long Island, New York, King took an assistant professorship at York College of the City University of New York, progressing to associate dean of the college. From there she was chosen president of Metropolitan State University in Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota, and the family moved to its most permanent location; King's husband became a research chemist at Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Company (3M). After eleven years as president of Metropolitan, King joined General Mills, Inc., as a vice president, and as president of the General Mills Foundation, a philanthropic organization, where she served for fourteen years as president, and one additional year as chair of the Foundation's Board of Trustees. King has received numerous awards, including fourteen honorary degrees; and she has served on the boards of directors of many nonprofit organizations as well as of for-profit companies.

During the interview King talks about having worked hard, both in school and during summer employment as a maid; the various transitions in her life: from rural to urban; from South to North; from research lab to academia to business and then to philanthropy. She discusses the challenges posed to women and African Americans, especially in her young years; the difficulties of balancing home life with work; two-career families; her church; and the importance of attitude and communication.

INTERVIEWER

Jeannette E. Brown has a research MS degree from the University of Minnesota and a BS degree in the Field of Chemistry from Hunter College. She started her industrial career at CIBA Pharmaceutical Co. as a junior chemist, working there for eleven years, and she held the position of Research Chemist at Merck & Co. Inc. for twenty-five years. Brown is a former Faculty Associate in the department of Pre-College Programs at the New Jersey Institute of Technology, holding the title of New Jersey Statewide Systemic Initiative (NJSSI) Regional Director. She was appointed to the National Science Foundation Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women Minorities and Persons with Disabilities (CEOSE) and served on that committee for six years. She is the 2005 recipient of the American Chemical Society Dreyfus Award for mentoring minorities in science and she is currently working on a book about the history of African-American women chemists.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Early and College Years	1
<p>Born in Pavo, Georgia. Parents' work. Move to Moultrie, Georgia. Early schooling. Encouragement from parents and teachers. Discovers science in high school. Clark College in Atlanta, Georgia, sends recruiter, who offers King scholarship. She matriculates, expecting to major in home economics. First chemistry class persuades her to become research chemist. Alfred Spriggs as mentor. Gas chromatography in Spriggs' lab. Influence of Spriggs and other chemistry professors on decision about graduate school.</p>	
Graduate School	8
<p>Applies for and receives Woodrow Wilson Fellowship. Chooses University of Chicago over University of Minnesota. Dr. Clement. Studying hard. Summer employment as maid in upstate New York. Rules of the time for women more inhibiting than racial discrimination. O.J. Kleppa her dissertation advisor. Meets fellow chemist, eventually marries him. Obtains PhD in thermochemistry.</p>	
Life in Washington, D.C.	19
<p>Accepts position as research chemist at National Bureau of Standards. Husband's studies at Howard University. Works on project for Advanced Research Projects Agency of the Department of Defense. Publishes some papers. Gives birth to two sons. Discussion of gender barriers. Many transitions.</p>	
Move to New York	24
<p>Husband begins teaching at Nassau Community College in Garden City, Long Island, New York. King becomes assistant professor at York College, part of the City University of New York system. Moves up to become associate dean.</p>	
Role Reversal	26
<p>Becomes president of Metropolitan State University in Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota. Husband becomes research chemist at Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Company. Benjamin Mays, former mentor and man who performed marriage of the two Kings, remains friend. Importance of her church. Spends ten years at Metro. Becomes vice president at General Mills, Inc.; and president of General Mills Foundation. Discusses her role and goals there. Importance of communication. Attitude. Applying scientific approach in all her jobs. Balancing family life with work. Her children today.</p>	
Index	35

INDEX

3

3M. *See* Minnesota Mining and
Manufacturing Company

A

Advanced Research Projects Agency, 22, 32
African-American, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 10, 14, 15,
18, 20, 21, 25, 29
Albany State College, 6
Albany, Georgia, 2, 6
Alberty, Robert, 9, 13
aluminum carbide, 22
Armstrong, George T., 21, 22, 23, 25
ARPA. *See* Advanced Research Projects
Agency
Atlanta University, 19
Atlanta, Georgia, 1, 6, 17, 18, 19, 29, 31

B

Barnes and Noble, 33
Belle Glade, Florida, 2
Berklee College of Music, 31
Birmingham, Alabama, 30
Black History Month, 6
Bloomingdale's, 20
Bodi, Lewis, 24, 25, 26
Boston, Massachusetts, 31
Boy Scouts of America, 27
Brooklyn, New York, 13
Brown University, 31

C

California, 6, 13
Campbell, Ola Watts (mother), 1
Carver, George Washington, 6, 7
Chevy Chase, Maryland, 1
Chicago, Illinois, 17, 19
Christ Hospital, 31
chromatography, 11
church, 2, 3, 4, 24, 27, 29, 30

Cincinnati, Ohio, 31
City University of New York, 24, 26, 32
Clark Atlanta University, 11, 12
Clark College, 4, 6, 8, 9, 12, 14, 15
Clark, Willie B. (father), 1
Clement, Dr., 12, 28
Coolidge, Georgia, 2

D

Danforth Chapel, 29
Daniels, Farrington, 9, 13
Dann, Harvey, 20
Dann, Mrs., 20, 28
Dillard University, 4, 6

E

Englewood High School, 17

F

Ferguson, Alberta, 6
Freedmen's Hospital, 28

G

Gallaudet University, 23
Garden City Community College, 26
gender, 19, 20
General Mills Foundation, 32
Georgia, 1, 2, 3, 6, 10, 12, 30
Greene, Dorothy Clark (sister), 1

H

Hale, William H., 8
Hamilton, Harold, 6
Hampton University, 5, 6
Howard University, 17, 19, 23, 29
Howard University Hospital, 28
hydrogen fluoride, 22

I

IBM. *See* International Business Machines

Indiana, 9
International Business Machines, 19

J

Jews, 10

K

Keller, Kenneth H., 32, 33
King, Martin Luther, Jr., 17
King, N. Judge (husband), 17
King, N. Judge III (son), 23
King, Scott Clark (son), 23, 31
Kirkland, Avon, 6, 8, 9
Kleppa, Joy, 15
Kleppa, O.J., 14, 15

L

Long Island, New York, 23

M

Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 22
Mays, Benjamin E., 8, 28, 29
McBay, Henry C., 8, 9
Metropolitan State University, 23, 26, 27, 32
Minneapolis, Minnesota, 15
Minnesota, 23, 27, 28, 31
Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Company, 27
MIT. *See* Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Montague, Mamie Clark (sister), 1
Moore, Walter, 9, 13
Morehouse College, 8, 17, 28, 31
Morehouse College Glee Club, 29
Moultrie, Georgia, 2, 3, 6, 28

N

NASA. *See* National Aeronautics and Space Administration
Nassau Community College, 23
National Aeronautics and Space Administration, 22

National Bureau of Standards, 14, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 30, 32
Naval Research Laboratory, 19, 21
Negro History Week, 6
Netherlands, 24
New Jersey, 2, 9
New Orleans, Louisiana, 6
New York, 34
New York City, New York, 17, 20
Nivens, Miss, 24
Norwegian, 15

O

Oracle Company, 31
oxygen difluoride, 22

P

Parsons, Jimmy, 13, 28
Pavo, Georgia, 1, 2
Pawling, New York, 17, 20
Pearson, Dr., 29
Plymouth Congregational Church, 24
Poughkeepsie, New York, 17
Princeton, New Jersey, 9
publishing/publications, 22

Q

Quaker Hill, New York, 17
Queens, New York, 24

R

race, 10, 20, 21
Rockefeller Chapel, 17
Rockville Centre, Long Island, New York, 26

S

Saks Fifth Avenue, 20
Simpson, Booker T., 11
Spriggs, Alfred, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 28
St. Paul, Minnesota, 27

T

Taube, Henry, 13
Technical News Bulletin, 22, 25
Tennessee State University, 11
thermochemistry, 14, 19
Thomasville, Georgia, 2
Tucson, Arizona, 31
Tuskegee Institute, 6

U

U.S. Department of Defense, 22
University of Chicago, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13,
14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 21, 24, 28
University of Georgia, 10
University of Maryland, 22

University of Minnesota, 9, 10, 31, 32

V

Vietnam War, 26

W

Wabash College, 9
Warren Methodist Church, 27
Washington University in St. Louis, 8, 9
Washington, Booker T., 6
Washington, D.C., 1, 19, 23, 24, 28, 30
Woodrow Wilson Fellowship, 8, 9, 10

Y

York College, 24, 26, 28, 32