

Vanilla Powell Beane – Milliner Extraordinaire



Vanilla Beane is a milliner or hatmaker, known for her custom-made pieces adorned by civil rights activist Dorothy Height. Born Vanilla Powell in Wilson, N.C. in 1919, as the youngest of seven. She moved to Washington, D.C. in 1942 where she met her husband, Willie Beane. Working in the downtown Washington Millinery Supply and as a seamstress in the 50s, she sharpened her craft. After leaving the company, Beane continued to passionately make hats while working as a mail clerk for the General Services Administration. In 1979, she opened Bene Millinery & Bridal Supplies on Third Street in Northwest Washington, to serve the African American community that kept the tradition of ornate hats alive, especially in the church. The centenarian milliner paid a visit to the museum on Grand Opening day. You can see an example of a millinery shop in our Power of Place exhibition on the fourth floor.

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