

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Walter Royal

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Royal, Walter, 1957-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Walter Royal,
Dates:	February 19, 2012
Bulk Dates:	2012
Physical Description:	7 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:18:05).
Abstract:	Chef Walter Royal (1957 -) was among the nation's top African American chefs. He won numerous culinary awards, including the Restaurant Guild International's Five Star Chef of the Year and the James Beard Foundation Rising Star award. Royal was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 19, 2012, in Raleigh, North Carolina. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2012_042
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Chef Walter Royal was born on May 18, 1957 in Eclectic, Alabama to Ida Royal Reynolds and Columbus Ransaw. At the age of fourteen, Royal knew he wanted to cook professionally. However, his parents dissuaded him, unsure of how successful he would be as a black chef. In 1974, Royal attended LaGrange College in LaGrange, Georgia, where he graduated with his B.S. degree in psychology. In 1980, he graduated from Auburn University with his M.S. degree in psychology. After working with mentally disabled children for five years, Royal enrolled in a nine-month program at Nathalie Dupree's Cooking School in Atlanta, Georgia in 1983. After graduating from the cooking program, he was hired as a sous-chef at the Farrington House restaurant in Pittsboro, North Carolina. There he worked under acclaimed chef Edna Lewis. In 1986, Royal was hired as a chef at the Magnolia Grill in Durham, North Carolina before becoming the executive chef and co-owner of the Crescent Café. In 1995, Royal was hired as the executive chef of the award-winning steakhouse The Angus Barn in Raleigh, North Carolina.

Royal has won numerous culinary awards. In 1997, he was the first African American chef to be awarded the Restaurant Guild's Five Star Chef of the Year. Royal was also deemed one of the James Beard Foundation's Rising Stars along with being honored as one of the Top Five Chefs in the Southeast, the Top Black Chef in America and the Best Chef in the Triangle region of North Carolina. Royal was featured in *Southern Living* magazine. In addition to being featured in *Ebony*, Royal performed a cooking demonstration in Raleigh, North Carolina on the CBS Network program *The Early Show*. In 2006, Royal competed on the Food Network reality cooking show, *Iron Chef America*. Royal has cooked with popular American chefs and television personalities like Bobby Flay, Guy Fieri and Cat Cora. In 2010, he was awarded an honorary doctorate from Johnson & Wales University in Providence, Rhode Island. Royal has one son, Walter Royal, Jr.

Walter Royal was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on February 19, 2012.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Walter Royal was conducted by Larry Crowe on February 19, 2012, in Raleigh, North Carolina, and was recorded on 7 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Chef Walter Royal (1957 -) was among the nation's top African American chefs. He won numerous culinary awards, including the Restaurant Guild International's Five Star Chef of the Year and the James Beard Foundation Rising Star award.

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®.

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.

Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

Persons:

Royal, Walter, 1957-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Royal, Walter, 1957- --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Chef

HistoryMakers® Category:

BusinessMakers

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 Walter Royal, February 19, 2012. 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).

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.

Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Walter Royal, Section A2012_042_001_001, TRT: 1:29:09 ?

Walter Royal was born on May 18, 1957 in Coosa County, Alabama to Ida Royal Reynolds and Columbus Ransaw. His great-grandparents owned one of the largest parcels of land in Coosa County, which they bequeathed to Royal's grandfather, Washington Royal. He married Royal's maternal grandmother, Willie Royal, and together they raised eight children, including Royal's mother. She met Royal's father in high school; but, due to a rivalry between her parents and his parents, Sadie Ransaw and farmer Felix Ransaw, they were unable to marry. She went on to attend Talladega College in Talladega, Alabama, where

she studied to become a social worker. Royal's father served in the military during the Korean War, and then settled in Gadsden, Alabama, where he worked as a truck driver. Royal moved with his mother to Elmore County, Alabama after she married carpenter Willie Reynolds. His family were prominent members of the congregation at Peace and Goodwill Baptist Church in Rockford, Alabama.

Video Oral History Interview with Walter Royal, Section A2012_042_001_002, TRT: 2:29:42 ?

Walter Royal attended J.D. Thompson High School in Coosa County, Alabama, until moving with his family to Elmore County, Alabama. There, he grew up in an integrated community with his mother and stepfather, Ida Royal Reynolds and Willie Reynolds. A native of Clearwater, Florida, his stepfather was a stockholder in Alabama Power Company, and worked as a carpenter for Russell Mills, Inc. Royal completed middle school and high school at Elmore County High School in Eclectic, Alabama, where he was a member of the Future Farmers of America and 4-H club. He also joined the football, basketball and track teams. Each Sunday, his family returned to Coosa County to eat dinner at the home of his maternal grandmother, Willie Royal. Royal recalls her involvement in the Civil Rights Movement and the Order of the Eastern Star. He also talks about southern eating habits, and how his mother reunited with his father, Columbus Ransaw, later in life.

Video Oral History Interview with Walter Royal, Section A2012_042_001_003, TRT: 3:32:00 ?

Walter Royal grew up in an integrated community in Elmore County, Alabama. Although there were few African American families in the area, Royal experienced very little prejudice from his predominantly white neighbors. His stepfather, Willie Reynolds, was a respected carpenter who worked for Russell Mills, Inc., a family-owned company founded by Benjamin Russell. Royal enjoyed gardening and farming from an early age, and learned to fish and cook from his aunt, Verta Royal. From the age of fourteen years old, he aspired to cook professionally, but was discouraged by his stepfather. In 1975, Royal graduated from Elmore County High School in Eclectic, Alabama, and was recruited by Coach Ralph Jordan to play football at Auburn University in Auburn, Alabama. Royal lost his athletic scholarship during his freshman year, when he was injured in a car accident. He then transferred to LaGrange College in LaGrange, Georgia, where he studied psychology under Marilyn McKay.

Video Oral History Interview with Walter Royal, Section A2012_042_001_004, TRT: 4:30:37 ?

Walter Royal majored in psychology at LaGrange College in LaGrange, Georgia. After graduating in 1978, he worked as a mental health professional at the J.S. Tarwater Development Center in Wetumpka, Alabama, while pursuing a master's degree at night at Auburn University at Montgomery. After completing his coursework in 1980, he considered becoming the department director at the J.S. Tarwater Development Center, but decided to focus on developing his culinary skills instead. Royal attended a cooking seminar in Montgomery, Alabama, where he met Chef Nathalie Dupree, who invited him to enroll at Rich's Cooking School in Atlanta, Georgia. There, he completed the program in two years. While traveling home to Alabama, Royal met Jenny Fitch, who hired him to cook at the Fearrington House Restaurant in Pittsboro, North Carolina. There, he worked with the renowned southern chef Edna Lewis. After six years, Royal left to become a sous chef under Chef Ben Barker at the Magnolia Grill in Durham, North Carolina.

Video Oral History Interview with Walter Royal, Section A2012_042_001_005, TRT: 5:30:54 ?

Walter Royal worked for six years as the sous chef at the Magnolia Grill in Durham, North Carolina. In 1990, he partnered with Maceo K. Sloan of the

Mechanics and Farmers Bank and North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company to open the Crescent Café in Durham. There, Royal served Creole and Cajun cuisine. However, due to the cafe's poor location and his mother's failing health, Royal was forced to close the restaurant after two years. In 1993, he went to work for the Bonnie Brae inn, which was located on a former tobacco plantation near Durham. In 1996, he served as a chef for the Summer Olympics in Atlanta, Georgia. Shortly afterwards, Royal was hired as the executive chef at the Angus Barn in Raleigh, North Carolina. The steakhouse was founded in the early 1960s by Alice Eure and Thad Eure, Jr. Under the leadership of the couple's daughter, Van Eure, the Angus Barn opened the Pavilion, a 27,000 square foot special events venue. Royal also talks about his plans to invest in a jazz and blues club.

Video Oral History Interview with Walter Royal, Section A2012_042_001_006, TRT: 6:31:12 ?

Walter Royal was the executive chef at the Angus Barn in Raleigh, North Carolina. In this role, he was responsible for the day to day business operations and food preparations. The restaurant's specialties included a seven ounce beef filet, prime rib and seafood, in addition to pasta dishes and other vegetarian options. In 2006, Royal competed against Chef Cat Cora on 'Iron Chef America,' and placed first. He was also named the Rising Star Chef of the Year by the James Beard Foundation, and Five Star Chef of the Year by the Restaurant Guild International, becoming the first African American to receive the distinction. Royal had one son, Walter Royal, Jr., from a previous relationship. He reflects upon his life and legacy, including his efforts to mentor students at the Chef's Academy in Morrisville, North Carolina, and his healthy eating program for inner city children. He also talks about culinary programs in prison, and his hopes and concerns for the African American community.

Video Oral History Interview with Walter Royal, Section A2012_042_001_007, TRT: 7:14:31 ?

Walter Royal grew fresh vegetables like potatoes to donate to a prison food program, which sought to promote healthy eating habits among inmates. Royal describes how he would like to be remembered, and concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.