

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Chuck Barksdale

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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>	Barksdale, Chuck
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Chuck Barksdale,
<b>Dates:</b>	November 9, 2000
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2000
<b>Physical Description:</b>	5 Betacam SP videocassettes (2:13:04).
<b>Abstract:</b>	R & B singer Chuck Barksdale (1935 - ) is an original member of the R & B group, the Dells, who had forty-six Billboard hits including 1956's "Oh What a Night." Barksdale was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 9, 2000, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2000_004
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Born on January 11, 1935 in Chicago, Chuck Barksdale is one of the original members of the R&B group the Dells. The Dells (originally known as the El-Rays) were formed in 1952 at Thornton High School in Harvey, Illinois, while the five members (Marvin Junior, Johnny Funches, Verne Allison, Michael McGill and Barksdale) were students.

The group's first hit came in 1956 with "Oh What a Night" which they also famously performed at the Apollo Theater in New York. Although the Dells were a doo-wop group they had continued success all the way through the 1990s. Between 1956 and 1992, the Dells chocked up a total of 46 hits on the Billboard and R&B singles charts, including such classics as "Oh, What a Night", "Stay In My Corner", "Always Together", and "Give Your Baby a Standing Ovation." After the success of "Oh What a Night", the Dells performed for two years as the opening act for Dinah Washington. The group also sang back up on Washington's record "Tears and Laughter." Next, the Dells joined Ray Charles and toured as his opening act.

The Dells also experienced their share of set backs. A tragic car accident in 1958 nearly broke the group up. Michael McGill was seriously injured and Johnny Funches never returned to the group. They reunited in 1960 with Johnny Carter taking over the role of lead singer. During the group's hiatus, Barksdale briefly sang with the Moonglows, a group that also included the late Marvin Gaye. Barksdale returned to the group later in the 1960's and has performed with the group for over fifty years. Much of the recent interest in the group can be attributed to Robert Townsend's 1991 film "The 5 Heartbeats" which is based on the music and the lives of the Dells. The group was inducted

to both the Vocal Group Hall of Fame and the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in 2004 and they still perform to this day.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Chuck Barksdale was conducted by Herb Kent on November 9, 2000, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 5 Betacam SP videocassettes. R & B singer Chuck Barksdale (1935 - ) is an original member of the R & B group, the Dells, who had forty-six Billboard hits including 1956's "Oh What a Night."

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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:

Barksdale, Chuck

Kent, Herb (Interviewer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Barksdale, Chuck--Interviews

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African American singers--Interviews.

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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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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

MusicMakers

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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 Chuck Barksdale, November 9, 2000.  
The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

### **Processing Information**

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 2/4/2016 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, November 9, 2000**

Video Oral History Interview with Chuck Barksdale, Section A2000\_004\_001\_001,  
TRT: 0:31:13 2000/11/09

Chuck Barksdale describes his family background, starting with his mother. He recalls that her singing ability and love for music influenced him from an early age. Barksdale remembers his father as a street hustler, who also found jobs on stage as an actor. Barksdale recalls attending a performance and being shocked at the stereotypical character his father played. Barksdale then shares a story from his father's past, involving his grandfather and a mishap at an amusement park. Barksdale moves on to discuss his music group, the Dells. He describes forming the group with friends from high school in Harvey, Illinois. Barksdale says forming the group provided him with the direction and mentors he did not have as a high school student. After talking about the origin of the Dells's name, Barksdale discusses the Dells's first recording experience with Chess Records, and subsequent signing with Vee-Jay Records. [Note: Timecodes have been adjusted to conform with HistoryMakers standards. A copy of the interview with non-adjusted timecodes is available at the HistoryMakers archive.]

African American families.

African American mothers.

African American families.

Dells (Musical group).

Chess Records (Firm).

Vee-Jay Records.

Doo-wop (Music).

Video Oral History Interview with Chuck Barksdale, Section A2000\_004\_001\_002,  
TRT: 0:29:40 2000/11/09

Chuck Barksdale discusses the Dells's influences, citing the Five Keys as being particularly inspirational musically, while Dinah Washington taught them how to properly perform on stage. Barksdale also explains the inspiration behind their hit single 'Oh What A Night,' saying it became so popular that they made another recording twelve years after its original release. Barksdale then talks about various record companies, including the failure of the Dells's first label, Vee-Jay Records, and the overwhelming success of Motown Records. He then describes the hard times for the Dells after they were involved in an auto accident, crediting their perseverance and friendship for allowing the Dells to stay together for almost fifty years despite hard times. Barksdale then discusses the talents of the Dells' lead singers Marvin Junior, whose vocal style was widely imitated, and Johnnie Carter, whom Barksdale believes does not get enough credit for his talent. [Note: Timecodes have been adjusted to conform with HistoryMakers standards. A copy of the interview with non-adjusted timecodes is available at the HistoryMakers archive.]

Dells (Musical group).

Washington, Dinah, 1924-1963.

Vee-Jay Records.

Motown Record Corporation.

Traffic accidents.

Junior, Marvin.

Doo-wop (Music).

Video Oral History Interview with Chuck Barksdale, Section A2000\_004\_001\_003,  
TRT: 0:30:34 2000/11/09

Chuck Barksdale discusses at length the reasons behind the Dells's longevity. He explains their personal relationships, he praises each member of the group for fulfilling a specific role, and he talks about the cohesion they developed over their many years on the road, a key ingredient to their longevity. Barksdale then moves into a discussion about the film 'The Five Heartbeats', a movie loosely based on the Dells's career that featured some of their music. Barksdale describes the Dells being first approached to consult for the movie, then taking on a more significant role. He talks about the success and popularity of the movie, which led to an increase of interest in the Dells by the younger generation, and a new hit record. Barksdale says that director Robert Townsend did not give the Dells enough credit for the movie, but says such situations are the nature of the entertainment industry. Barksdale then talks about some of the Dells's concerts, including a legendary performance at Carnegie Hall with Ray Charles. Barksdale discusses some of the Dells's bad performances as well, but believes they made the band grow closer. Barksdale then talks about the first songs recorded by the Dells. [Note: Timecodes have been adjusted to conform with HistoryMakers standards. A copy of the interview with non-adjusted timecodes is available at the HistoryMakers archive.]

Dells (Musical group).

Motion pictures.

Townsend, Robert, 1957-

Concerts.

Charles, Ray, 1930-2004.

Doo-wop (Music).

Video Oral History Interview with Chuck Barksdale, Section A2000\_004\_001\_004,  
TRT: 0:31:13 2000/11/09

Chuck Barksdale talks about the Dells's early recording career with Vee-Jay Records, listing some of the songs they recorded and naming artists with whom they worked. Barksdale explains that following the collapse of Vee-Jay, the Dells signed with Chess Records, where they enjoyed many years of success. Barksdale credits owner Leonard Chess with much of their success, saying that Chess's death marked the end of an era. Barksdale names some songs that reached the top of the charts during the Dells's time at Chess. Barksdale then discusses the financial and legal side of the music business, explaining why the Dells chose to incorporate and talking about dishonest attorneys and managers in the business. Barksdale then gives his advice to young people and to anyone aspiring to succeed in show business, emphasizing education and experience. Along those lines, Barksdale discusses many of the Dells's mentors, including Quincy Jones, Harvey Fuqua, and Joe Zawinul. [Note: Timecodes have been adjusted

to conform with HistoryMakers standards. A copy of the interview with non-adjusted timecodes is available at the HistoryMakers archive.]

Dells (Musical group).

Vee-Jay Records.

Chess Records (Firm).

Music--Economic aspects.

Music--Vocational guidance.

Doo-wop (Music).

Video Oral History Interview with Chuck Barksdale, Section A2000\_004\_001\_005,  
TRT: 0:10:24 2000/11/09

Chuck Barksdale shares and discusses personal photos.

Photographs.