

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Jacoby Dickens

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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>	Dickens, Jacoby, 1931-2013
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Jacoby Dickens,
<b>Dates:</b>	December 15, 1999 and July 29, 2002
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	1999 and 2002
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:48:36).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Bank chairman and entrepreneur Jacoby Dickens (1931 - 2013 ) went into business as a real estate developer on Chicago's South Side upon graduating high school. By 1971 Dickens was able to purchase two bowling alleys and was later asked to join the board of directors at Seaway National Bank. Dickens used his position at the bank to stabilize the financial health of moderate and low-income residents. Dickens was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 15, 1999 and July 29, 2002, in Olympia Fields, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A1999_004
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

An innovative and successful entrepreneur, Jacoby Dickens was born in Panama City, Florida, in 1931. Though Jacoby's father had to leave school at an early age to work on the family farm, he emphasized the importance of education. Early in his childhood, Dickens' family moved to Chicago's South Side, where he attended school.

After graduation from Wendell Phillips High School, Dickens went into business as a real estate developer in the same South Side neighborhoods where he was raised. There he was able to purchase, renovate and lease apartment buildings in key areas of the city during the peak of the Northern Migration. At the height of this enterprise, Dickens managed more than 100 apartments. By the time he sold his real estate holdings in 1971, Dickens had acquired enough capital to purchase several bowling alleys in Chicago. While running two bowling alleys, Dickens was invited to join the board of Seaway National Bank, one of the largest African American-owned financial institutions in the country. Dickens joined Seaway National in 1979 as vice chairman and became chairman in 1983.

As chairman, Dickens created firm ties between Seaway and its surrounding community. Dickens believes the bank shares responsibility for the financial health of the community, an urban neighborhood of moderate and low-income residents. As such, the institution has tailored itself to fit the economic circumstances of its surrounding neighborhoods, promoting the growth of new businesses through loans, outreach and community development programs.

Dickens has distinguished himself as much for his philanthropic efforts as for his entrepreneurial successes. In addition to the community outreach programs developed through Seaway, Dickens has designed a loan and scholarship program at DePaul University named in his honor. As a director of Chicago State University, Dickens

has donated more than \$1 million to the institution. On December 7, 1995, the Chicago State University Physical Education and Athletics Building was renamed the Jacoby D. Dickens Physical Education and Athletics Center in honor of the esteemed benefactor.

Jacoby Dickens passed away on April 14, 2013.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Jacoby Dickens was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on December 15, 1999 and July 29, 2002, in Olympia Fields, Illinois, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Bank chairman and entrepreneur Jacoby Dickens (1931 - 2013 ) went into business as a real estate developer on Chicago's South Side upon graduating high school. By 1971 Dickens was able to purchase two bowling alleys and was later asked to join the board of directors at Seaway National Bank. Dickens used his position at the bank to stabilize the financial health of moderate and low-income residents.

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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:

Dickens, Jacoby, 1931-2013

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Bieschke, Paul (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Dickens, Jacoby, 1931-2013--Interviews

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African American bankers--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews.

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African American entrepreneurs--Interview.

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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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## Occupations:

Entrepreneur

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Bank Chairman

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

BusinessMakers

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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 Jacoby Dickens, December 15, 1999 and July 29, 2002. 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).

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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.

## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Jacoby Dickens, Section A1999\_004\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:30 ?

Jacoby Dickens, Jr. discusses growing up in a segregated area in Panama City, Florida, one of six siblings in a poor, but tight-knit and supportive family. His parents' divorce at an early age left Dickens's father, Jacoby Dickens, Sr., as a single parent. Dickens Sr. and Jr. shared not only a strong father-son bond, but a deep friendship. His paternal grandmother also played a crucial role in his early developmental years. Dickens emphasizes the role of the church and black businesses in the self-sufficient black Dickens recalls his grandmother's stories of the rural lives that members of the family had led as sharecroppers for a wealthy white man, for whom Dickens, Sr. was named. Dickens relates his family's move to Chicago in 1946; the big city was at first strange and uncongenial to him, but he soon learned to love the excitement of black theaters and stores on the South Side and the large high school he attended. Dickens encountered two particularly supportive school teachers who encouraged and inspired him. Dickens managed his full participation in academic life and various jobs in both Florida and Chicago, Illinois. Dickens also describes jobs he held as a teen both in Florida and in Chicago.

Childhood and youth--Florida--Panama City.

Segregation--Florida--Panama City.

African American families--Florida--Panama City.

Children of divorced parents.

Sharecroppers--Florida.

Migration, Internal--United States.

Mentoring in education--Illinois--Chicago.

Video Oral History Interview with Jacoby Dickens, Section A1999\_004\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:03 ?

Jacoby Dickens, Jr. recalls his adolescence attending Wendell Phillips High School, an exclusively black school on Chicago's South Side, and enjoying the great variety of entertainment available at venues like the Savoy Ballroom and the Regal Theater, institutions at the center of black social life in Chicago in the segregated 1940s. Following high school, Dickens both worked and attended college. He describes how, after repeatedly being broke before payday and borrowing from his father, Dickens, Sr. refused to lend more and gave him a lecture on his financial habits that turned him into a saver. Working two jobs, he began to save conscientiously and was eventually able to invest in real estate, his entry into the business world. He used expertise he had acquired as a building engineer to refurbish apartment buildings and lease them to residents. Dickens talks about his entrepreneurial spirit, his inspiration by the success stories of black millionaires and he describes Chicago as a city that presented limitless opportunities for business enterprise to black entrepreneurs. Dickens was eventually invited to buy into Seaway National Bank where he started as vice chairman and within a few years bought out his partner and became chairman of the city's largest black-owned bank.

Education, Secondary--Illinois--Chicago.

Theater--Illinois--Chicago.

Poverty.

Real estate business.

Banks and Banking.

Entrepreneurship.

Video Oral History Interview with Jacoby Dickens, Section A1999\_004\_001\_003, TRT: 0:28:38 ?

Jacoby Dickens, Jr. describes the early sacrifices and hard work he put into becoming a millionaire businessman. His first major investments were in real estate; he then became involved in a bowling venture initiated by Daddy-O Daylie, a Chicago disc jockey and fellow entrepreneur. He received several bank rejections, but ultimately received a loan from a large downtown bank. In pursuit of a loan in order to purchase his second bowling alley, Dickens began to build a relationship with Seaway National Bank [Chicago, Ill.]. He later joined Seaway himself, investing in the bank and joining the board, becoming first vice chairman and then chairman. Though he had no previous banking experience, Dickens was successful in the industry. In his tenure, Seaway has experienced significant growth. He discusses the strong partnership that Seaway National Bank has had with the local community from the beginning of his involvement. He expects growth in the future -- both financially and in terms of the bank's contributions to the community it serves.

Entrepreneurship.

Daylie, Daddio.

Banks and Banking.

Community development--Illinois--Chicago.

Financial institutions.

Video Oral History Interview with Jacoby Dickens, Section A1999\_004\_001\_004, TRT: 0:28:30 ?

Jacoby Dickens, a Chicago-based businessman, discusses the banking issues he has witnessed in his career. He describes his strong belief about starting businesses in one's own community. He goes on to discuss the Community Reinvestment Act (1979) that required large banks to build branches in areas that would otherwise be ignored, in this particular instance, the mostly black South Side of Chicago. Dickens also discusses his investment in television and his pursuit of a riverboat casino license. He talks about his involvement on the board of Chicago State University and shares his support for affirmative action and the need for more government support for higher education.

Banks and Banking.

Community development--Illinois--Chicago.

United States. Community Reinvestment Act of 1977.

Investment bankers.

Chicago State University.

Affirmative action programs.

Video Oral History Interview with Jacoby Dickens, Section A1999\_004\_001\_005, TRT: 0:26:12 ?

Entrepreneur Jacoby Dickens talks about the advantages of entrepreneurship for young African Americans. He stresses the benefits of mentorship, giving examples of his work with Chicago State University and sharing anecdotes about black teens he is sponsoring through private high schools. He touches on his bank's connections with black churches. Dickens urges the importance of black political participation, advocates term limits, remembers former Chicago mayor Harold Washington and contrasts Washington's integrity with a bribery scandal in the Chicago City Council. Finally, Dickens talks about his legacy and

explains his plans to leave assets to his foundation and other organizations to help black youth.

Entrepreneurship.

Mentoring in business.

Chicago State University.

Banks and banking--Vocational guidance.

Chicago (Ill.)--Politics and government.

Video Oral History Interview with Jacoby Dickens, Section A1999\_004\_002\_006, TRT: 0:25:43 ?

Entrepreneur Jacoby Dickens describes a series of photos depicting his life, family, and career.

Photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Jacoby Dickens, Section A1999\_004\_Dickens\_Jacoby\_06\_MED\_001, TRT: 0:03:46 ?

In honor of BusinessMakers: Breakout Leaders, we salute Jacoby Dickens (1931-2013), bank chairman and entrepreneur, who speaks about his real estate and bowling businesses, Chicago's Seaway National Bank, and more.