Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Waverly J. Person

Overview of the Collection

Repository: The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616
info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator: Person, Waverly J.
Title: The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Waverly J. Person,
Dates: June 19, 2002
Bulk Dates: 2002
Physical Description: 5 Betacam SP videocassettes (2:15:42).
Abstract: Geophysicist and seismologist Waverly J. Person (1927 - ) heads the Office of Earthquake Information for the United States Geological Survey in Golden, Colorado, becoming the first African American to do so. Person is a sought after earthquake spokesperson for national and international media. Person was also the director of the Colorado National Earthquake Information Center. Person was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on June 19, 2002, in Denver, Colorado. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification: A2002_119
Language: The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Geophysicist and seismologist Waverly J. Person was born on May 1, 1927, in Blackenridge, Virginia, to Bessie Butts and Santee Person, a farmer. After completing his B.S. degree at St. Paul's College in Lawrenceville, Virginia, in 1949, Person joined the U.S. Army. When he was honorably discharged in 1952, First Sergeant Person received Good Conduct and Asian Pacific medals.

Person married Sarah Walker in 1954, and relocated to Washington, D.C., where he performed a series of odd jobs. In 1962, Person obtained a position with the National Earthquake Information Center, an organization designed to monitor tremors worldwide, locate earthquakes, and dispatch emergency crews. Person was intrigued by the readings on the rolls he was assigned to maintain, and began to study the field in more depth; he continued to work as a technician while simultaneously studying at American University and George Washington University until 1973. Upon earning the qualifications of a geophysicist, Person transferred to Colorado to begin his work within his field; in 1977, he was named director of the Colorado National Earthquake Information Center and eventually became a sought after earthquake spokesperson for national and international media. Person went on to serve as the director of the United States Geological Survey's National Earthquake Information Center, becoming the first African American to do
so.

Honors that Person earned include the Outstanding Government Communicator Award; the Meritorious Service Award from the United States Department of the Interior; and the Annual Minority Award from the Community Services Department in Boulder, Colorado. Person served as the eastern section treasurer of the Seismological Society of America, and as a member of the board of directors of Boulder County Crimestoppers. Person held the positions of president and member of Flatirons Kiwanis Club in Boulder, Colorado, and as the membership retention chairman of the Rocky Mountain District.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Waverly J. Person was conducted by Larry Crowe on June 19, 2002, in Denver, Colorado, and was recorded on 5 Betacam SP videocassettes. Geophysicist and seismologist Waverly J. Person (1927 - ) heads the Office of Earthquake Information for the United States Geological Survey in Golden, Colorado, becoming the first African American to do so. Person is a sought after earthquake spokesperson for national and international media. Person was also the director of the Colorado National Earthquake Information Center.

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:
Person, Waverly J.

Crowe, Larry

Stearns, Scott

**Subjects:**

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Earthquakes--United States--Research

Organizations:

HistoryMakers (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

HistoryMakers® Category:

ScienceMakers

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


Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 9/28/2009 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, June 19, 2002
Geophysicist and seismologist Waverly J. Person discusses his family background and childhood in Black Ridge, Virginia. He describes his father's struggles to be an independent farmer and his mother's efforts to maintain dignity in a segregated rural area.

African American families--Virginia.
African American farmers--Virginia.
African American mothers.

Waverly J. Person details his education and sacrifices his family made to send him to a boarding high school. Person discusses life at St. Paul's College boarding school in Lawrenceville, VA. Person recalls his efforts to educate and register black voters through the NAACP and he shares some of the insidious methods used by whites to deny blacks the vote.

Saint Paul's College (Lawrenceville, Va.).
Voter registration.
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.
Voter intimidation--United States.

Waverly J. Person, discusses his life as a soldier during WWII in the Pacific. He recalls the invasion and occupation of Japan after the dropping of the atomic bombs. After later serving in the Korean War, Person returned to his alma mater for college, St Paul's. After graduating, Person landed a position in the US Department of Agriculture, where he had to invoke his rights as veteran just to keep his job. Transferred to another position in the Seismology department, Person recalls the relentless racism, where he wasn't even allowed to hang his jacket next to his white coworkers' coats.

World War II--Japan.
African American soldiers--Korea.
Veterans--Employment--Law and legislation.
Discrimination in employment--United States.

Waverly J. Person, discusses his position as the Chief of the U.S.G.S. National Earthquake Information Service, the first black person to achieve that rank. He details the measurement and impact of earthquakes and other research conducted by the organization.
Waverly J. Person shares more information on seismology and fault lines. He then turns to contemplating his legacy and hopes for the black community.

Seismology.
Seismic data.
Faults (Geology).