

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Mel Farr, Sr.

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Farr, Mel, 1944-2015
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Mel Farr, Sr.,
Dates:	August 21, 2002
Bulk Dates:	2002
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:29:42).
Abstract:	Auto sales entrepreneur and football player Mel Farr, Sr. (1944 - 2015) owns a number of car dealerships. The Mel Farr Auto Group was recognized as the the top African American business in the country in 1998. Before his business career, Farr was also NFL Rookie of the Year in 1967 with the Detroit Lions, and made the All Pro Team in 1967 and 1972 as a running back. Farr was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 21, 2002, in Ferndale, Michigan. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2002_151
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Mel Farr enjoyed success on and off the football field. Farr was an All American and All Pro running back, and then later shot to the top of the African American business world when the Mel Farr Auto Group grossed a staggering \$596.6 million dollars in 1998. Farr was born November 3, 1944 in Beaumont, Texas, to Miller Farr, Sr. and Doretha Farr.

A natural athlete, Farr excelled in baseball, basketball, track and football. It was football that captured Farr's imagination, as he was inspired by an outstanding collection of local heroes. Al LaBlanc, Bubba Smith, Buck Buchanan, Jerry LeVias, Warren Wells and other football greats all came from the "Golden Triangle" area around Beaumont. Farr was widely recruited from black Hebert High School in 1963, choosing the University of California, Los Angeles. At UCLA, Farr was a consensus All American from 1963 to 1967. He was also NFL Rookie of the Year in 1967 with the Detroit Lions and made the All Pro Team in 1967 and 1972. Plagued by injuries, Farr retired in 1973, ready to make the transition from football hero to businessman.

Determined to have a career beyond the gridiron, Farr completed his degree at the University of Detroit while still in the National Football League. He worked during the off-season for the Ford Motor Company in its management program. In 1975, Mel Farr Ford opened at 2470 Greenfield Road in Oak Park, Michigan. Targeting the inner-city population with its high credit risk, but its need for automobiles and ready financing, Farr employed a variety of creative marketing and management approaches. Purchasing additional dealerships beginning in 1986, Farr's empire grew to over thirteen dealerships and a Seven-Up Bottling Plant. By 1998, the Mel Farr Auto Group was the top African American business in the country and the thirty-third largest auto dealership in the United States.

Farr passed away on August 3, 2015.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Mel Farr, Sr. was conducted by Larry Crowe on August 21, 2002, in Ferndale, Michigan, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Auto sales entrepreneur and football player Mel Farr, Sr. (1944 - 2015) owns a number of car dealerships. The Mel Farr Auto Group was recognized as the the top African American business in the country in 1998. Before his business career, Farr was also NFL Rookie of the Year in 1967 with the Detroit Lions, and made the All Pro Team in 1967 and 1972 as a running back.

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:

Farr, Mel, 1944-2015

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Farr, Mel, 1944-2015--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Detroit Lions (Football team)

Occupations:

Auto Sales Entrepreneur

Football Player

HistoryMakers® Category:

BusinessMakers|SportsMakers

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 Mel Farr, Sr., August 21, 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).

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 Mel Farr, Sr., Section A2002_151_001_001, TRT: 0:29:35 ?
Automobile dealer and former professional football player Mel Farr recalls

growing up in Beaumont, Texas, where he recalls parents dedicated to providing a better life for their two sons despite the institutionalized segregation and racial tension that sometimes turned deadly, such as in the case of a man from a nearby town who was dragged to death, and in the infamous Beaumont race riot that had broken out a year before Farr's birth in 1944. Farr describes himself as an ambitious and goal-oriented boy, who decided at age twelve to become a professional football player, and spent the rest of his youth in a dedicated pursuit of that goal.

Video Oral History Interview with Mel Farr, Sr., Section A2002_151_001_002, TRT: 0:29:32 ?

Automobile dealer Mel Farr talks about playing football in high school in Beaumont Texas, and comments on the many top football players from that area. He recalls his experiences at UCLA both on and off the field, and then talks about being the Detroit Lions first draft pick in 1967. Successive injuries plagued his career and he began to plan for life after football.

Video Oral History Interview with Mel Farr, Sr., Section A2002_151_001_003, TRT: 0:30:40 ?

Automobile dealer Mel Farr recalls his retirement from professional football in 1973 and looks back at some of the other great players of the Detroit Lions team. He discusses his subsequent career as an automobile dealer including the founding of the National Association of Minority Automobile Dealers and his own rise to become the top African American-owned business in the country by 1998.

Video Oral History Interview with Mel Farr, Sr., Section A2002_151_001_004, TRT: 0:30:55 ?

Automobile dealer and retired professional football player Mel Farr discusses his choice to concentrate on selling inexpensive vehicles to urban dwellers. He expounds on his belief that providing access to transportation will help people lift themselves out of poverty, and he discusses the controversial technology to ensure that his low-income customers will pay their car note--a device that will not allow the car to start unless the weekly payment is made.

Video Oral History Interview with Mel Farr, Sr., Section A2002_151_001_005, TRT: 0:29:00 ?

Automobile dealer and former professional football player Mel Farr talks about his business endeavors in automobile retail as well as his finance company and a bottling company he owned for several years. He urges the need for African Americans to reinvest in urban neighborhoods. Finally, Farr looks back at his accomplishments, credits his parents, and considers his hopes for the future.