

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with William Layton

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Layton, William W., 1915-2007
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with William Layton,
Dates:	January 26, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:00:20).
Abstract:	Historian William Layton (1915 - 2007) was appointed as an equal opportunity employment officer with the Federal Reserve Board, making him the Board's first African American staff officer. Layton has also served in the capacity of director of education with the Michigan Civil Rights Commission, and is a renowned collector of Civil War and abolition materials. Layton was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 26, 2003, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_022
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Historian, storyteller and retired government executive William Layton was born in Hanover, Virginia, in 1915. The son of a teacher and the superintendent of a reform school for African American boys, he graduated from Lincoln University in Pennsylvania and Fisk University in Tennessee.

Layton worked as a social worker for Nashville public schools and the Urban League in Columbus, Ohio, and Muskegon, Michigan. In 1959, he joined the staff of the Michigan Civil Rights Commission, where he served as director of education. After working for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, he was hired as the equal employment officer at the Federal Reserve Board, becoming the first African American to serve as a staff officer for the Board of Governors for the Federal Reserve. From 1977 to 1988, Layton fulfilled engagements as a consultant and public speaker.

A historian known for enlivening stories of the past with anecdotes and astute connections, Layton has published two books of essays he wrote for a column in the newsletter of his service club, *The Clarke County Kiwanian*, and other reflections. For more than fifty years, he has been collecting historical documents and memorabilia, mainly related to the Civil War and abolitionist movement. The National Archives duplicated 1,500 items of his renowned collection. A founding member of the board of directors of the Fort Collier Civil War Center, Layton has been credited for saving Fort Collier, an important Civil War battlefield. Layton's grandson, NFL player William Roaf, contributed to the site, which houses a museum named in his grandfather's honor. A friend of Rosa Parks, Layton visited the White House on President Bill Clinton's invitation.

Layton married his wife, Phoebe, in 1940. They had three daughters, the late Serena Layton Davis, who worked in advertising in New Jersey and Michigan; Andrée Layton Roaf, a court of appeals judge in Arkansas; and Mary

Layton, a public relations professional who served as assistant U.S. postmaster general in the 1980s.

Layton passed away on September 12, 2007 at the age of 92.

Layton was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on January 26, 2003.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with William Layton was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on January 26, 2003, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Historian William Layton (1915 - 2007) was appointed as an equal opportunity employment officer with the Federal Reserve Board, making him the Board's first African American staff officer. Layton has also served in the capacity of director of education with the Michigan Civil Rights Commission, and is a renowned collector of Civil War and abolition materials.

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:

Layton, William W., 1915-2007

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Layton, William W., 1915-2007--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Civic Leader

HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

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 William Layton, January 26, 2003. 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 William Layton, Section A2003_022_001_001, TRT: 0:30:00 ?

William Layton describes his family background. His father, William Brown Layton, was born in 1886 in Millwood, Virginia, which was settled by Revolutionary War hero Daniel Morgan. Layton's mother, a slave named Peggy, allegedly descended from William Brown, half-brother of abolitionist John Brown, and Betsey Harrison Brown, granddaughter of Benjamin Harrison, a signer of the Declaration of Independence. Layton attended St. Paul's College in Lawrenceville, Virginia, where he met Mary Sully, the daughter of Virginia politician and contractor Ballard T. Edwards, and Sarah Ann Coy. The couple married in 1910, and settled in Millwood, Virginia, where Layton worked as a blacksmith. In 1911, Layton was offered a position at the Negro Reformatory Association of Virginia's Manual Labor School in Hanover County, Virginia, which he accepted. The couple gave birth to William Layton on July 17, 1915. As a child, Layton enjoyed collecting memorabilia related to WWI and Hampton Institute, and reading encyclopedias.

Video Oral History Interview with William Layton, Section A2003_022_001_002, TRT: 0:31:30 ?

William Layton talks about his great-grandfather, Ballard T. Edwards, who was a member of the Virginia House of Delegates from 1870-1870. His wife, Sarah Coy, was a Pamunkey Indian. The couple saw unusual success in Reconstruction-era Virginia. In 1927, Layton's father, William Brown Layton, became Superintendent of Virginia Manual Labor School. Layton attended the school until 1927, when he moved to Richmond, Virginia to attend Armstrong High School. He developed a friendship with James Jackson, and the duo graduated in 1932. They enrolled at Virginia Union University, where Jackson became affiliated with the Communist Party, leading he and Layton to be followed by the FBI. In 1934, Layton transferred to Lincoln University in Oxford, Pennsylvania, where he was nearly tricked into having sex with a white Communist organizer. He graduated in 1937, and enrolled in graduate school at Fisk University. Layton talks about his admiration of Frederick Douglass and George Washington Carver, whom he met in 1939.

Video Oral History Interview with William Layton, Section A2003_022_001_003, TRT: 0:29:10 ?

William Layton grew up on the grounds of Virginia Manual Labor School in Hanover County, Virginia, where his father was the superintendent. Here, he enjoyed climbing trees and building relationships with staff members. Layton met his wife, Phoebe Anderson, at the school, as their fathers were friends; Anderson's father "passed" to gather information regarding the school. Layton transferred from Virginia Union University to Lincoln University 1934, where he edited the school newspaper, hitchhiked on Highway One, and was friends with Kwame Nkrumah, president of Ghana. Layton was also an avid poet, and recited several poems, including "Young Black Boy," which was published in the NAACP's Crisis Magazine. Layton graduated with a B.S. degree in sociology in 1937, and then enrolled in graduate school at Fisk University. In 1939, Layton conducted a research study with sociologist Charles S. Johnson and psychiatrist Harry Stack Sullivan. This research was used in Johnson's "Growing Up in the Black Belt."

Video Oral History Interview with William Layton, Section A2003_022_001_004, TRT: 0:29:40 ?

In 1937, William Layton received a National Youth Administration Scholarship to attend graduate school at Fisk University. Here, he worked with Charles S. Johnson and Harry Stack Sullivan to conduct research on the attitudes of black youth towards race. After graduating with his M.S. degree in sociology in 1939, Layton was hired by the Nashville Public School System to study student learning and attendance issues. His office was located in Nashville Public

School headquarters, but he was later relocated to a black school. Layton married Phoebe Anderson in 1940, and moved to Columbus, Ohio in 1941 to work for the Columbus Urban League. Here, he was instrumental in securing housing for black migrants, and creating radio programs about African American issues. Layton was drafted to serve in World War II around 1943, yet his service draft was waived. In 1951, Layton went on to work for the Muskegon Urban League. He also led the Council of Churches, and was selected by the State Department to visit Europe in 1954.

Video Oral History Interview with William Layton, Section A2003_022_001_005, TRT: 0:30:45 ?

In the 1940s, William Layton and his colleagues were refused service by whites at The Neil House hotel. After he moved to Michigan 1951, Layton became acquainted with Helen Jackson Clayton, the mother of HistoryMaker Roger Wilkins. In 1959, Layton was hired by the Michigan Civil Rights Commission, where he worked against corporations like General Motors. In 1965, he was hired as the director of contract compliance by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Here, he enforced fair employment practices for corporations like Archer Daniels Midland and Anheuser-Busch. In 1971, Layton was hired by the Federal Reserve Board as the equal employment officer. His first cases involved a Jewish woman in Washington, D.C., a Chinese man in San Francisco, California, and his work brought him in contact with HistoryMakers like William Clay and John Conyers. Layton retired in 1977 due to health issues. Layton describes his concerns for the African American community, in Washington, D.C. and across the U.S.

Video Oral History Interview with William Layton, Section A2003_022_001_006, TRT: 0:29:15 ?

In the 1950s, William Layton began collecting documents and memorabilia related to the abolitionist movement and Civil War history. The collection includes letters from poet Countee Cullen and freedom papers given to former slaves. Layton obtained most of the items in his collection from dealers, or direct from other owners. Layton talks about the Boulé, an African American fraternal organization founded in 1904, of which he became a member in the 1950s. Layton joined Omega Psi Phi Fraternity at Virginia Union University, where he quit the Alpha Phi Alpha Pledge process after he endured excessive hazing for speaking out against the son of Alpha Phi Alpha founder Eugene Kinckle Jones. In sum, William Layton feels that his accomplishments have allowed him to help people start new lives. Layton talks about his grandson, football player William Layton “Willie” Roaf, and reflects upon his legacy. Layton closes the interview by reciting his poems “My Bridge” and “God Everywhere” and narrating his photographs.