

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Harold A. Dawson, Sr.

---

## 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>	Dawson, Harold A., 1935-2012
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Harold A. Dawson, Sr.,
<b>Dates:</b>	October 12, 2004
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2004
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:42:44).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Real estate entrepreneur Harold A. Dawson, Sr. (1935 - 2012 ) is the founder of the Harold A. Dawson Company, which develops multimillion dollar projects across the United States. Dawson was also the first African American board member and former chairman of the Georgia Real Estate Commission. Dawson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on October 12, 2004, in Atlanta, Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2004_198
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

---

## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Real estate tycoon Harold A. Dawson, Sr., was born in Atlanta, Georgia on March 5, 1935. While still in grade school, Dawson began working, polishing brass and washing windows for money. After graduating from Booker T. Washington High School in 1953, he went on to attend Morehouse College. However, a personal crisis in 1955 forced him to leave school early. In 1957, he was hired by T.M. Alexander, Sr. of Citizen's Trust Bank as a realtor, and later went over to Alexander's firm, Alexander & Associates, the most prestigious African American

owned real estate firm at the time. but he returned, earning his B.S. degree in business administration in 1963.

Alexander & Associates later became Alexander-Dawson & Associates, where Dawson served as president. Under his guidance, Alexander-Dawson & Associates built the University Plaza Apartments, the first luxury mid-rise building in Atlanta's black community. The firm also bought and developed properties behind the "Peyton Wall," the controversial wall built in an attempt to separate Atlanta's black and white communities. In 1969, he formed the Harold A. Dawson Company (HADCO), where he remains today as CEO.

HADCO has grown from its early years of selling homes in the Atlanta area to developing multi-million dollar properties across the United States. Some of the recent accomplishments of the company include Centennial Hill in Atlanta, which houses the Children's Museum of Atlanta and a high-rise condominium building, and Centerpoint in Baltimore, which occupies a full city block for commercial and residential use. HADCO has remained a strong family business. When Dawson was diagnosed with cancer in 1992, his son, Harold Dawson, Jr., returned to Atlanta to join the business.

A firm believer in giving back to his community, Dawson has set up a family foundation to fund a new building for Radcliffe Presbyterian Church, as well as scholarships for students who attend the church. He has also established scholarships for students attending Morehouse and Clark Atlanta Universities. Dawson holds the distinction of being the first African American to serve on the Georgia Real Estate Commission, where he is the former chairman and also a member. He is the past president of the National Association of Real Estate License Law Officials, the Empire Board of Realtists and the National Association of Real Estate Brokers.

In addition to his son, Dawson and his wife, Rose, have a daughter, Cari.

Harold Dawson passed away on January 19, 2012.

---

## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Harold A. Dawson, Sr. was conducted by Larry Crowe on October 12, 2004, in Atlanta, Georgia, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Real estate entrepreneur Harold A. Dawson, Sr. (1935 - 2012 ) is the founder of the Harold A. Dawson Company, which develops multimillion dollar projects across the United States. Dawson was also the first

African American board member and former chairman of the Georgia Real Estate Commission.

---

## 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:

Dawson, Harold A., 1935-2012

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Melnick, Coy (Videographer)

## **Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews  
Dawson, Harold A., 1935-2012--Interviews

---

## **Organizations:**

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

---

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

---

## **Occupations:**

Real Estate Entrepreneur

---

## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

BusinessMakers

---

## **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 Harold A. Dawson, Sr., October 12, 2004. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

### **Processing Information**

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 2/5/2020 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 Harold A. Dawson, Sr., Section A2004\_198\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:19 2004/10/12

Harold A. Dawson, Sr. was born on March 5, 1935 in Atlanta, Georgia. His mother, Katherine Singleton Dawson, was born in 1912 in Barnesville, Georgia and moved to Atlanta at a young age with her mother and sister. Her father owned a shoe repair shop prior to his mysterious disappearance, and her grandfather was a Christian Methodist Episcopal minister. The Singleton family was very accomplished and stressed education. Dawson's maternal great-uncle George G. Singleton was a business professor at Virginia State College in Petersburg, and he inspired Dawson's interest in business. Dawson's father, Thomas Dawson, was born in 1911 in South Carolina. His mother died when he was young and his father, who was a nurse, moved the family to Atlanta. Dawson's father attended Morehouse College in Atlanta, where he met Dawson's mother who attended a nearby secretarial school around 1931. Dawson's mother was a secretary for the Atlanta Housing Authority most of her career. Dawson explains that he has no siblings.

Video Oral History Interview with Harold A. Dawson, Sr., Section A2004\_198\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:28 2004/10/12

Harold A. Dawson, Sr.'s maternal grandfather owned a

successful shoe repair shop in Barnesville, Georgia, but mysteriously disappeared when his mother was a child. Dawson's father was raised in Atlanta, Georgia and attended Morehouse College where he majored in business. He worked briefly in a Coca-Cola Company lab, but was unable to build a career at the corporation and worked at the U.S. Postal Service his whole career. Dawson was raised in University Homes public housing near the Atlanta University Center. As a child, he was entrepreneurial and started businesses watering flowers, shining brass, washing windows and delivering newspapers and magazines. He attended Ashby Street Elementary School where he was a patrol boy and fundraised for a Cub Scout hut. He attended Booker T. Washington High School where he enjoyed English, chemistry, and biology and aspired to be a doctor like his uncle who had graduated from Meharry Medical College. Dawson remembers a life lesson his physics teacher taught him.

Video Oral History Interview with Harold A. Dawson, Sr., Section A2004\_198\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:47 2004/10/12

Harold A. Dawson, Sr. graduated from Booker T. Washington High School in Atlanta, Georgia in 1953, where he was in the band and the senior class business manager. He matriculated at Morehouse College in Atlanta. He recalls Morehouse president Dr. Benjamin E. Mays and the speeches his classmates delivered at chapel services. Dawson did well his first two years, but an incident his sophomore year led him to drop out of school. He worked at Lockheed Aircraft Company and became involved with real estate on a part-time basis. He eventually joined the firm of Alexander & Associates, Inc. located on Auburn Avenue in Atlanta. At the time, Atlanta had a number of thriving African American lending and financial institutions. Dawson became a member of Atlanta's African American real estate board, Empire Real Estate Board, Inc. Dawson recalls meeting HistoryMaker The Honorable Andrew Young and seeing Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on Auburn Avenue. Dawson returned to Morehouse and earned his degree in 1963.

Video Oral History Interview with Harold A. Dawson, Sr., Section

A2004\_198\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:06 2004/10/12

Harold A. Dawson, Sr. joined T. M. Alexander, Sr. and T.M. Alexander, Jr.'s real estate brokerage firm of Alexander & Associates in 1960. Alexander, Sr. was one of the first African American casualty insurance agents; he owned a large house in the Hunter Hills neighborhood of Atlanta, Georgia. In 1962, Atlanta Mayor Ivan Allen erected a barricade at Peyton Road to keep African Americans from moving into Southwest Atlanta. Dawson and Alexander acquired land on the other side of Peyton Wall, on which they developed a subdivision after the wall came down. During the 1960s, Atlanta acquired two professional sports teams and white businessmen were invested in projecting an image of racial harmony. Prominent white businessmen formed the Atlanta Civic Enterprise and awarded a million dollars to minority developers, including Dawson, to develop the University Plaza Apartments in 1964. In 1969, Dawson founded Harold A. Dawson Company, which is now led by his son and focuses on mixed used developments near transit.

Video Oral History Interview with Harold A. Dawson, Sr., Section A2004\_198\_001\_005, TRT: 0:31:16 2004/10/12

Harold A. Dawson, Sr. was active in the Empire Real Estate Board, the Atlanta, Georgia chapter of the National Association of Real Estate Brokers (NAREB). He was president of the Empire Real Estate Board from 1970 to 1972, and national president of NAREB from 1977 to 1979. While serving as president of those organizations, Dawson sought to implement fair housing practices. In 1972, Georgia Governor Jimmy Carter appointed Dawson to the Georgia Real Estate Commission & Appraisers Board; he was the first African American appointed to a real estate commission in the South. In 1985, Dawson became the first African American president of the National Association of Real Estate License Law Officials. Dawson describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community in the field of real estate development. Dawson has two children. He reflects upon his life, legacy and how he would like to be remembered. He concludes by narrating his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Harold A. Dawson, Sr., Section

A2004\_198\_001\_006, TRT: 0:13:48 2004/10/12

Harold A. Dawson, Sr. narrates his photographs.