

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with James Guilford

---

## 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>	Guilford, James, 1911-2015
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with James Guilford,
<b>Dates:</b>	April 7, 2006
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2006
<b>Physical Description:</b>	3 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:30:39).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Painter and barber James Guilford (1911 - 2015 ) was the owner of Jimmy Guilford's Hairstyling Salon, which catered to Boston's black elite, entertainers and athletes such as Count Basie, Sarah Vaughn, Nat King Cole, Louis Armstrong, Jackie Robinson, Duke Ellington and Sugar Ray Robinson. Guilford was also the first African American president of the Associated Master Barbers of Massachusetts. Guilford passed away on December 16, 2015. Guilford was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 7, 2006, in Roxbury, Massachusetts. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2006_067
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

---

## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

James Edward Guilford, Jr. was a master barber, hair stylist and entrepreneur, who started cutting hair at the age of twelve. He was a living legend in the lower Roxbury neighborhood in Boston, Massachusetts where he maintained an art studio, continuing his love for painting. He also played golf.

Guilford was born at home in Boston, Massachusetts on October 7, 1911. His mother, Nancy (Haskins) Guilford migrated from Lynchburg, Virginia and his father, James, from Petersburg, Virginia around 1910. He attended Boston public schools and completed his studies at the prestigious Boston Latin School in 1928. He was the only African American on the thirty-two-member track team at the Latin School in 1926. Later, he studied at Northeastern University School of Law, Wilfred's Academy of Beauty Culture, and the Lee Institute of Real Estate. Throughout his teenage years, Guilford worked in barbershops after school and during the summers. He was the youngest of three siblings and his earnings as a junior barber helped his family through the Depression. He opened and managed his own shop - Dunbar Barbers from 1934 to 1942.

As a barber from 1923 until 1979, with three years in the military fighting in the Pacific during World War II and as the proprietor after the war of Jimmy Guilford's Men's Hairstyling Salon on Tremont Street, Guilford catered to all classes and especially to Boston's black elite. His customers included Sarah Vaughan, Count Basie, Louis Armstrong, Nat King Cole, Duke Ellington, Jackie Robinson, Oscar Peterson, Sugar Ray Robinson and Jack Johnson.

From 1962 to 1963, Guilford was the President of the Associated Master Barbers of Massachusetts, which included white and black barbers. He was the first African American elected to this position.

As a professional artist, Guilford also received recognition. He exhibited widely and was a founding member and a president of the Boston Afro-American Artists, Inc. He was a member of the Piano Craft Guild Artists' Association, where he maintained a studio. Many of his drawings, oils and watercolors are in private collections. His oil painting of Martin Luther King, Jr. hangs in the Martin Luther King, Jr. Library in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Guilford was among the leading 20th century black artists in Boston whose creative works have educated and contributed to the arts culture of the city.

Guilford was the father of three - Marcia Davenport, Jeanne Eason and James Guilford, III.

Guilford passed away on December 16, 2015.

---

## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with James Guilford was conducted by Robert

Hayden on April 7, 2006, in Roxbury, Massachusetts, and was recorded on 3 Betacame SP videocassettes. Painter and barber James Guilford (1911 - 2015 ) was the owner of Jimmy Guilford's Hairstyling Salon, which catered to Boston's black elite, entertainers and athletes such as Count Basie, Sarah Vaughn, Nat King Cole, Louis Armstrong, Jackie Robinson, Duke Ellington and Sugar Ray Robinson. Guilford was also the first African American president of the Associated Master Barbers of Massachusetts. Guilford passed away on December 16, 2015.

---

## **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:**

Guilford, James, 1911-2015

Hayden, Robert (Interviewer)

Burghlea, Neculai (Videographer)

## **Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews

Guilford, James, 1911-2015--Interviews

---

## **Organizations:**

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

---

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

---

## **Occupations:**

Painter

---

Barber

---

## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

ArtMakers|StyleMakers

---

## **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 James Guilford, April 7, 2006. 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 James Guilford, Section  
A2006\_067\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:23 2006/04/07

James Guilford was born on October 7, 1911 in a cold-water flat on Sterling Street in Roxbury, Boston, Massachusetts. His mother, Nancy Haskins Guilford, was born in Lynchburg, Virginia and followed her sister to Boston. There, she met Guilford's father, James Guilford, Sr., a waiter from Petersburg, Virginia. Guilford grew up in the mixed African American, Irish, and Jewish neighborhood of Roxbury and frequently played in Madison Park. After completing kindergarten at Hyde School, he attended the Lafayette School, where he was falsely accused of stealing pennies even though his family was middle class. Guilford began working in a barbershop at the age of twelve to earn extra money for his family. He

soon became a skilled professional barber and worked through his high school years at Boston Latin School. Since no teachers would tutor him because of his race, he was unable to pass his senior exams. Guilford obtained his diploma at Boston Central Adult High School in Roxbury Crossing, Massachusetts.

Video Oral History Interview with James Guilford, Section  
A2006\_067\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:03 2006/04/07

James Guilford worked at his cousins' newspaper stand at the corner of Northampton and Tremont Street to earn extra money as a teenager in Boston, Massachusetts. Many customers bought papers so that they could bet on numbers at black market stores around the city. After a brief stint at a barbershop in Everett, Massachusetts, he was hired as a first chair barber at a shop in Boston, and cut as many as thirty heads a day. He opened his own business in 1934. In 1942, Guilford was drafted by the U.S. Army and sent to the Pacific Theater as a medical assistant. He was saved from drowning by George Watson, who posthumously received the Medal of Honor for his actions. After returning to Boston in 1945, he was initially unable to work due to war trauma. In 1947, Boston's barbers organized an Associated Master Barbers of America chapter. Guilford served as chapter president for over a decade and was elected state association president in 1962. Guilford also talks about his three children, grandson and great-grandson.

Video Oral History Interview with James Guilford, Section  
A2006\_067\_001\_003, TRT: 0:30:13 2006/04/07

James Guilford learned hairdressing at Wilfred's Beauty Shop in Boston and in New York City, where he discovered chemical relaxers. He introduced them to Boston at Jimmy Guilford's Men's Hairstyling Salon on Tremont Street, which he opened with a small business loan for disabled veterans. Guilford barbered celebrities Jackie Robinson, Jack Johnson and Duke Ellington, and spent time with Billie Holiday, a personal friend, just before her death. Guilford married in 1965. Interested in art and drawing since his youth, he took up painting to decorate his apartment in 1968. Encouraged by the artists who lived across from his shop at the Chickering Piano

Factory, Guilford joined the Boston Afro American Artists and promoted their shows. His portrait of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. hangs in a library in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He was forced to close his shop when the Boston Redevelopment Authority acquired it by eminent domain. Guilford reflects upon his life, longevity and how he hopes to be remembered.