Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Samuel Saxton

Overview of the Collection

Repository: The HistoryMakers®
1900 S. Michigan Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60616
info@thehistorymakers.com
www.thehistorymakers.com

Creator: Samuel Saxton

Title: The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Samuel Saxton,

Dates: November 9, 2006

Bulk Dates: 2006

Physical Description: 5 Betacam SP videocassettes (2:20:25).

Abstract: Captain and county government administrator Samuel Saxton (1929 - ) is the former
director of corrections for Prince George's County, Maryland and is a retired captain in
the U.S. Marine Corps. Saxton was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November
9, 2006, in Largo, Maryland. This collection is comprised of the original video footage
of the interview.

Identification: A2006_136

Language: The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Captain Samuel Farlee Saxton was born on August 5, 1929 in Asheville, North Carolina to Mary Patterson and
Thomas Odell. Although his father left the family, his mother, a former teacher, worked as a domestic to raise
Saxton and his four younger siblings. He attended and dropped out of Stevens High School in Asheville during
ninth grade in order to work full time. In 1944, he told the World War II draft board that he was eighteen when he
was actually sixteen so that he could join the U.S. Navy. Saxton trained as a steward, one of the few Navy jobs
open to African Americans, but served as a gunner during intense battles, including the Battle of Leyte in the
Philippines in 1944 and at Iwo Jima, Japan in 1945.

At the end of World War II, Saxton left the Navy and earned his high school diploma. In 1946, he joined the U.S.
Marines, training at Montford Point, a segregated facility for African Americans at Camp LeJeune, North
Carolina. Rising through the ranks to become a commissioned officer, Saxton served in the Korean and Vietnam
Wars. In addition to defending U.S. bases in Korea and Vietnam, he managed military prisons in Da Nang,
Vietnam and at Camp Pendleton, California. After a serious car accident in 1975, Saxton retired from the Marine
Corps and went on to earn his B.S. degree in criminal justice and his M.A. degree in rehabilitative counseling
from the University of Maryland.

In 1975, Saxton joined the Montgomery County Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation in Maryland as a
deputy director and was later appointed as the director of the department. Renowned as an innovative corrections
administrator, Saxton was recruited to be the director of corrections for Prince George’s County, Maryland in
1983. During his tenure, he created several programs to improve inmates’ living conditions and to facilitate their
reintegration into society. His comprehensive drug treatment program, The Awakening, gained national attention
and earned a visit from President Bill Clinton in 1994. Retiring from Prince George’s County in 2000, Saxton
taught courses in criminal justice at Prince George’s Community College until 2004. Throughout his career, Saxton received numerous honors for instituting prison reforms, including the American Correctional Association's E.R. Cass Correctional Achievement Award and the 1986 Austin MacCormick Award from the Correctional Education Association.

Captain Samuel Saxton was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on November 9, 2006.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Samuel Saxton was conducted by Robert Hayden on November 9, 2006, in Largo, Maryland, and was recorded on 5 Betacam SP videocassettes. Captain and county government administrator Samuel Saxton (1929 - ) is the former director of corrections for Prince George's County, Maryland and is a retired captain in the U.S. Marine Corps.

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:

Saxton, Samuel

Hayden, Robert (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews.
Saxton, Samuel--Interviews.

United States--Armed Forces--African American officers--Interviews.

African American government executives--Maryland--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

United States. Marine Corps

Prince George's County Department of Corrections

HistoryMakers® Category:

MilitaryMakers

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 Samuel Saxton, November 9, 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 8/16/2011 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
Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I: Original Interview Footage, November 9, 2006

Video Oral History Interview with Samuel Saxton, Section A2006_136_001_001, TRT: 0:31:00 2006/11/09

Captain Samuel Saxton begins by discussing his family background. His mother, Mary Patterson, was born around 1901 in Clinton, South Carolina, and had once been a teacher but worked as a domestic during his childhood. His maternal grandfather, Sam Patterson, was driven out of South Carolina by the Ku Klux Klan after buying a white man's barbershop. Saxton's father, Otis Odell, was born in Asheville, North Carolina, but was not involved in his children's lives. His paternal grandfather ran a moonshine still. Saxton describes the hardships of his childhood in Asheville, where neighborhood gangs, the Southside Gang and Stumptown Gang, frequently attacked him. As the eldest child, Saxton served as a surrogate father to his four siblings, Steve, Kenneth, Pickins and Mary Lilli, earning money as a delivery boy, growing corn and collecting stray coal for fuel. He recalls hearing President Franklin D. Roosevelt announce the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941.

African American families--North Carolina--Asheville.
Gangs----North Carolina--Asheville.
Pearl Harbor (Hawaii), Attack on, 1941.
World War, 1939-1945.

Video Oral History Interview with Samuel Saxton, Section A2006_136_001_002, TRT: 0:28:40 2006/11/09

Captain Samuel Saxton describes his schooling in Asheville, North Carolina where he attended Hill Street Elementary, Livingston Junior High and Stevens Lee High Schools. After he was left behind a grade by his teacher, he became a studious person, reading extensively. In the ninth grade, he left school in order to support his family, lying about his age to join the military. Saxton talks about his military experiences in the U.S. Navy during World War II. Like most African Americans, he was only trained to be a steward. However, he served as a gunner during the Battle of Leyte in the Philippines in 1944 and at Iwo Jima, Japan in 1945. At the end of the war, Saxton left the Navy and earned his General Educational Development (GED) certificate. In 1946, he enlisted in the Marine Corps to support his family, training at Montford Point, a segregated facility for African Americans at Camp LeJeune, North Carolina.

African Americans--Education (Elementary)--North Carolina--Asheville.
World War, 1939-1945.
Iwo Jima, Battle of, Japan, 1945.
World War, 1939-1945--Campaigns--Pacific Area.
Montford Point Camp (Camp LeJeune, N.C.).
United States. Marine Corps.
Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Samuel Saxton

United States--Armed Forces--African Americans.

Video Oral History Interview with Samuel Saxton, Section A2006_136_001_003, TRT: 0:29:40
2006/11/09

Captain Samuel Saxton continues discussing his U.S. Marines training at Montford Point in Camp Lejeune, North Carolina as well as his service in the Korean War's Marine Air Control Ground (MACG-2) unit. After the Korean War, he provided boot camp training for officers. He also served in active duty during the Vietnam War as a first sergeant, policing bases and providing security for American civilians. Saxton's battalion commander, Colonel Carl L. Sitter, soon recommended him for an officer's commission as second lieutenant. In this new position, Saxton managed the military prison at the U.S. air base at Da Nang, Vietnam as well as trained a company of military police. Shortly after his return to the United States, Saxton was appointed the operations officer for the correctional facility at Camp Pendleton, a prison that was notorious for poor management. He describes meeting and marrying his wife, Sylvia Hazel Trusslow, in 1956.

Montford Point Camp (Camp Lejeune, N.C.).
United States--Armed Forces--African American officers.
Military prisons--Vietnam--Da Nang.
Military prisons--California--Camp Pendleton.
United States Armed Forces--Military police.
United States. Marine Corps.
Camp Pendleton (Calif.).
African Americans--Marriage.

Video Oral History Interview with Samuel Saxton, Section A2006_136_001_004, TRT: 0:30:15
2006/11/09

Captain Samuel Saxton continues discussing his post as operations officer for the correctional facility at Camp Pendleton. He was next stationed as a commanding officer in Okinawa, Japan, where he reduced racial tensions on base by disbanding gangs such as the Okinawa Red Devils and Hell's Angels. After a serious car accident in 1975, the doctors told Saxton that he would never walk again but he regained the use of his legs. He then worked as the deputy director for the Montgomery County Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation in Maryland until 1983 when he was recruited to be the director of corrections for Prince George's County, Maryland. As a result of his reforms to rehabilitate prisoners and provide them with clean and safe facilities, recidivism rates decreased by thirty points in two years. Saxton has received numerous awards for his work.

Military prisons--California--Camp Pendleton.
United States--Armed Forces--African American officers.
United States. Marine Corps.
Traffic accidents.
Montgomery County (Md.). Dept. of Correction and Rehabilitation.
Captain Samuel Saxton continues discussing his prison reforms at the Prince George's County Department of Corrections in Maryland. Successful initiatives included a parenting programs for male and female inmates and a mentorship program through local churches to prepare prisoners for life after their releases. Saxton retired as the director of the Prince George's County Department of Corrections in 2000 in order to take care of his disabled wife. In retirement, in addition to teaching criminal justice courses at Prince George's Community College, he served as chair of the Marine Corps Council and as president of the Montford Point Marine Association, which honors African American Marines. He reflects upon his life, feeling that he was faithful to God, country, his family and the Marine Corps. His only regret is that he did not spend more time with his family.

Montford Point Marine Association.


African American government executives--Maryland.

Correctional institutions--Maryland.

Prisons--Maryland.

Prince George's Community College.

African American college teachers--Maryland.

United States. Marine Corps.

African American families--Maryland.