

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Charles E. Simmons

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## Overview of the Collection

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| <b>Repository:</b>           | The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com   |
| <b>Creator:</b>              | Simmons, Charles E., 1928-2016   |
| <b>Title:</b>                | The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Charles E. Simmons,   |
| <b>Dates:</b>                | January 29, 2007   |
| <b>Bulk Dates:</b>           | 2007   |
| <b>Physical Description:</b> | 5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:19:38).  |
| <b>Abstract:</b>             | Real estate entrepreneur and civic leader Charles E. Simmons (1928 - 2016 ) served as the director of the Beaufort-Jasper County Equal Opportunity Commission. He also acted as a liaison between the land developers and the residents of St. John's Island, South Carolina, in the development of the upscale town of Kiawah, ensuring employment opportunities for local residents. Simmons was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 29, 2007, in Hilton Head, South Carolina. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview. |
| <b>Identification:</b>       | A2007_032  |
| <b>Language:</b>             | The interview and records are in English.  |

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Real estate developer Charles Edward Simmons, Jr. was born an only child on December 6, 1928 on Hilton Head Island, South Carolina to Estella and Charles Edward Simmons, Sr., Gullah natives of Hilton Head Island. Simmons' parents owned many acres of farmland, and his father was a shrewd businessman who owned the only ferry transportation service to Savannah, Georgia from Hilton

Head Island before the bridge connecting Hilton Head to the mainland was built in 1956. He also operated a bus service that catered to laborers and schoolchildren.

Simmons attended elementary school in the Spanish Wells community but later would be in the last graduating class of the Penn Normal Industrial and Agricultural School on St. Helena Island. This school was begun in 1862 as an experimental program to educate Sea Island slaves freed at the beginning of the Civil War.

After graduation, Simmons was drafted into the United States Army where he served for two years. In 1952, Simmons entered South Carolina State University where he was president of the Commercial Club. He received his B.A. degree in business administration in 1956.

Simmons became the Director of the Beaufort-Jasper County Equal Opportunity Commission and was the liaison between the land developers and the residents of St. John's Island, South Carolina. While the corporation began to develop the upscale town of Kiawah, he worked to ensure employment opportunities for local residents. In 1976, Simmons went to work for Hargray Telephone Company as a technician. He then retired in 1993.

Simmons owned Simmons Properties. He was also on the Trustee Board of the Penn Center, a founding member of the Native Island Business and Community Affairs Association, Inc. (NIBCAA) and was the President of the Spanish Wells and Native Island Property Owners Association.

Simmons lived on Hilton Head Island with Rosa, his wife. They had four adult children, Charlesetta, Palmer, Greg and Benjamin.

Simmons was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on January 29, 2007.

Simmons passed away on May 26, 2016.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Charles E. Simmons was conducted by Denise Gines on January 29, 2007, in Hilton Head, South Carolina, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Real estate entrepreneur and civic leader Charles E. Simmons (1928 - 2016 ) served as the director of the Beaufort-Jasper County Equal Opportunity Commission. He also acted as a liaison between the land developers and the residents of St. John's Island, South Carolina, in the

development of the upscale town of Kiawah, ensuring employment opportunities for local residents.

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## **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®.

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## **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.

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## **Controlled Access Terms**

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

### **Persons:**

Simmons, Charles E., 1928-2016

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

## **Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews  
Simmons, Charles E., 1928-2016--Interviews

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## **Organizations:**

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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## **Occupations:**

Civic Leader

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

CivicMakers

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## **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 Charles E. Simmons, January 29, 2007. 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).

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## 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.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Charles E. Simmons, Section  
A2007\_032\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:16 2007/01/29

Charles E. Simmons was born on December 6, 1928 on Hilton Head Island, South Carolina to Estella Williams Simmons and Charles Simmons, Sr. His paternal great-grandparents were from Charleston, South Carolina. Simmons' father was born in 1905, and attended school until the third grade. Hardworking, he operated a ferry to Savannah, Georgia, where Hilton Head Island's farmers sold produce like watermelons and lima beans. He also owned a farm. Simmons' maternal grandparents, Ella Holmes Williams and Julius Williams, were also farmers on Hilton Head Island. They bought their parents' land when their parents could no longer afford the property taxes. They were also active churchgoers, and adopted his mother's younger sister. His mother attended school until the fifth grade. After marrying Simmons' father, she managed a general store in Hilton Head's Spanish Wells community. Simmons, an only child, grew up in Spanish Wells, where he attended elementary school, and helped his father farm.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles E. Simmons, Section  
A2007\_032\_001\_002, TRT: 0:28:22 2007/01/29

Charles E. Simmons' father owned about forty acres of land on Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, where Simmons grew up. He attended elementary school at a prayer house in Hilton Head Island's Spanish Wells community, where Emory Campbell's grandmother, Julia Campbell, taught. At this time, Simmons aspired to become a doctor. He went on to Penn Normal, Industrial and Agricultural School, a private boarding school on St. Helena Island. There, students held various jobs, and worked on the school's farm during the harvest. When he returned home to Hilton Head for the holidays, Simmons reunited with family members who lived throughout the Northeast. He attended the Colored Normal, Industrial, Agricultural and Mechanical College of South Carolina in Orangeburg for one year, and then enlisted in the U.S. Army during World War II. Upon completing his training at Fort Jackson, South Carolina and Fort Hood, Texas, Simmons served in Germany with the segregated 2nd Armored Division.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles E. Simmons, Section A2007\_032\_001\_003, TRT: 0:28:19 2007/01/29

Charles E. Simmons served in the U.S. Army in Germany from 1950 to 1952. He then returned to South Carolina State College in Orangeburg, where he studied economics with Paul Webber, Jr., who also owned the College Soda Shop and a used car business. Upon earning his bachelor's degree in business administration and economics in 1956, Simmons moved to Hilton Head Island, South Carolina to work for his father's ferry operation. That year, the James F. Byrnes Bridge, the first connection between the island and the mainland, opened. Simmons recalls the development of Hilton Head Island since the 1950s, when the Thorne and Loomis families sold timber rights to Fred C. Hack and Charles E. Fraser. He also describes the impact of Hilton Head Island's incorporation on the island's residents, who were unaccustomed to regulation. As there were no restaurants or medical services on the island during his early life, Simmons often traveled to Savannah, Georgia, where he first experienced racial discrimination.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles E. Simmons, Section

A2007\_032\_001\_004, TRT: 0:28:08 2007/01/29

Charles E. Simmons worked at his father's stores on Hilton Head Island, South Carolina in the 1960s, when developers made the island a vacation destination. The increase in property taxes affected Hilton Head Island's native residents, as some could no longer afford to retain their properties. Simmons became the director of the Beaufort-Jasper Economic Opportunity Commission, a social services program created by the Civil Rights Act of 1964. He then joined Hilton Head Island's Sea Pines Company, Inc., and acted as the liaison between the company's development efforts on Kiawah Island and the nearby black community on Johns Island. From 1978 to 1993, Simmons worked as a switchboard operator for Hilton Head Island's Hargray Telephone Company, Inc. Simmons also describes his marriage to Rosa Simmons in 1959; Hilton Head Island's herbal medicines; and local government officials like David Jones, the first African American from Hilton Head Island to serve on the Beaufort County Council.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles E. Simmons, Section  
A2007\_032\_001\_005, TRT: 0:25:33 2007/01/29

Charles E. Simmons acted as the liaison between Johns Island and the Sea Pines Company, Inc. when the latter pursued development opportunities on Kiawah Island. Simmons also describes the development of the Sea Pines Plantation, a private, residential community on Hilton Head Island. After retiring from Hargray Telephone Company, Inc. in 1993, Simmons worked for the Native Island Business and Community Affairs Association, which was responsible for the annual Hilton Head Island Gullah Celebration. He also served as president of the Spanish Wells-Jonesville Property Owners Association, and of the Simmons Family Holding, LLC. Simmons describes his concerns for the African American community; his advice for future generations; and his four children, whom he raised with his wife, Rosa Simmons, on Hilton Head Island. Simmons reflects upon his life and how he would like to be remembered, and concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.