

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Philip Simmons

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Simmons, Philip, 1912-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Philip Simmons,
Dates:	February 1, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007
Physical Description:	4 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:54:30).
Abstract:	Blacksmith Philip Simmons (1912 - 2009) worked as a blacksmith for nearly 80 years, and during that time fashioned over 500 decorative pieces. Simmons fashioned a wrought iron gate for the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta, Georgia Simmons was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 1, 2007, in Charleston, South Carolina. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_040
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Blacksmith Philip Simmons was born on June 9, 1912 to Rosa Simmons on Daniel Island, South Carolina. He was raised by his grandparents until he was eight years old. He then went to live with his mother in Charleston, South Carolina. He completed the sixth grade at Buist Elementary School in Charleston. When he was thirteen years old, Simmons became the apprentice of the local blacksmith, Peter Simmons (no relation). After which, he worked for almost eighty years as a blacksmith.

Simmons' first duties were to clean floors, make and maintain the fire and hold the horses. He moved on to other work, much of which involved shoeing horses and repairing carriage wheels. Although cars replaced horses as modes of transportation, Simmons mastered other tools, allowing him to create trailers for cars. In addition, he learned how to repair ironwork for houses and he became skilled at ornamental ironwork. Sometimes, Simmons would be commissioned to do specific work, but most of the time, the image was his own design. He has fashioned over 500 decorative pieces of ornamental wrought iron throughout Charleston, South Carolina. Simmons fashioned a gate for the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta, Georgia. In 1982, Simmons created his favorite work, "The Star and Fish Gate." It won the National Heritage Award and the National Endowment of the Arts Award, and it was purchased by the Smithsonian. Simmons has also received the Elizabeth O'Neill Verner Governor's Award for Lifetime Achievement in the Arts.

The vestry and congregation of St. John's Episcopal Church dedicated the grounds of the church to develop a commemorative landscaped garden as a tribute to his exceptional mastery of wrought iron. In 2006, South Carolina State University awarded him an honorary Ph.D. in F.A. degree.

Philip Simmons passed away on June 22, 2009.

Philip Simmons was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on February 1, 2007.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Philip Simmons was conducted by Denise Gines on February 1, 2007, in Charleston, South Carolina, and was recorded on 4 Betacame SP videocassettes. Blacksmith Philip Simmons (1912 - 2009) worked as a blacksmith for nearly 80 years, and during that time fashioned over 500 decorative pieces. Simmons fashioned a wrought iron gate for the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta, Georgia

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:

Simmons, Philip, 1912-

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Simmons, Philip, 1912---Interviews

African American blacksmiths--South Carolina--Charleston--Interviews.

Organizations:

Occupations:

Blacksmith

HistoryMakers® Category:

ArtMakers

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 Philip Simmons, February 1, 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).

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 Philip Simmons, Section
A2007_040_001_001, TRT: 0:28:41 2007/02/01

Philip Simmons was born on June 9, 1912 in Daniel Island, South Carolina to Rosa Simmons. He was raised by his maternal grandparents, Sarah Buncum Simmons and William Simmons, who were farmers. On their farm, he fished, hunted and helped with chores. When Simmons was seven years old, he began school at the local St. Luke's Reformed Episcopal Church. His mother worked as a domestic on the mainland in Charleston, South Carolina, and returned by ferry boat every weekend to visit Simmons on Daniel Island. When he was eight years old, he moved to his mother's home in Charleston, and enrolled at the Buist School, where he often drew in class. In need of work, Simmons asked for a position at the blacksmith shop. He was informed by the owner, Peter Simmons, that he was too young, and instead worked as a shoe shiner. He attended the Burke Industrial School until the seventh grade, when he began an apprenticeship at the blacksmith's shop in 1925. He initially tended the fire, and later shoed horses and repaired wagons.

African Americans--Education (Elementary).

African Americans--Education (Secondary).

African American families--South Carolina--Charleston.

African American blacksmiths.

Blacksmithing--South Carolina--Charleston.

Video Oral History Interview with Philip Simmons, Section
A2007_040_001_002, TRT: 0:28:12 2007/02/01

Philip Simmons trained as a blacksmith from the age of thirteen years old under the tutelage of Peters Simmons in Charleston, South Carolina. In his early career, Simmons

mostly worked on horse shoes, wagons, carts and plows. He later made automobile trailers, as cars became more common. In Charleston, Simmons met and married his wife, Eartha Lee Porchie Simmons, with whom he had three children. After his wife's death in the 1930s, his family helped him raise his children, while he ran the blacksmith shop. Simmons received his first artistic commission for a decorative wrought iron gate from local businessman Jack Krawcheck. After this experience, he began creating more decorative pieces. Simmons was commissioned by the City of Charleston to craft a gazebo for the Charleston International Airport and ironwork for Waterfront Park, in addition to commissions from the Smithsonian Institution. He crafted his early ironwork gates by hand, but later used machinery.

African American blacksmiths--South Carolina--Charleston.

Blacksmithing--South Carolina--Charleston.

Video Oral History Interview with Philip Simmons, Section A2007_040_001_003, TRT: 0:29:59 2007/02/01

Philip Simmons was introduced to decorative wrought ironwork while making repairs to deteriorated iron fences, gates and balconies in Charleston, South Carolina. Over the course of his career, he created over two hundred decorative pieces. When wrought iron became scarce and expensive, he transitioned to mild steel and mild iron for his pieces. Simmons drew inspiration from nature, and tailored his designs to the preferences of each customer. In addition to blacksmithing, Simmons taught art classes for all ages, and lectured at schools in Charleston. He was also involved with the Allen Christian Endeavor League, the Boy Scouts of America, and the Philip Simmons Foundation, Inc. Through his foundation, Simmons commissioned the Philip Simmons Garden in Charleston, and designed gates and statues to adorn the space. In 1996, Simmons crafted an iron gate for the Summer Olympics in Atlanta, Georgia. Simmons also reflects upon the changes he witnessed in Charleston over a period of eighty years.

African American blacksmiths--South Carolina--Charleston.

Blacksmithing--Vocational guidance.

Philip Simmons Foundation, Inc.

Ironwork--Conservation and restoration.

African American artists.

Art, Modern.

Video Oral History Interview with Philip Simmons, Section
A2007_040_001_004, TRT: 0:27:38 2007/02/01

Philip Simmons was a member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in Charleston, South Carolina. In the summer of 1963, he took the train from Charleston to Washington, D.C. to join the March on Washington. There, he was unable to find a place on the crowded steps of the U.S. Capitol building, so he listened to Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. speak from the lawn. Simmons describes his message to future generations, and how he would like to be remembered. He concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.

March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, Washington, D.C., 1963.

Civil rights demonstrations--Washington (D.C.).

African Americans--Civil rights.

Garvey, Marcus, 1887-1940.

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People--South Carolina--Charleston.