



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

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## 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>	Simmons, Philip
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Philip Simmons,
<b>Dates:</b>	February 1, 2007
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2007
<b>Physical Description:</b>	4 Betacam SP videocassettes (1:54:38).
<b>Abstract:</b>	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.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2007_040
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## 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.

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## 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 Betacam 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

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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, Philip, 1912-.

Gines, Denise (Interviewer).

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer).

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews.

Simmons, Philip, 1912---Interviews

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African American blacksmiths--South Carolina--Charleston--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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## HistoryMakers® Category:

ArtMakers

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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 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 8/24/2011 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

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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, February 1, 2007

Video Oral History Interview with Philip Simmons, Section A2007\_040\_001\_001, TRT: 0:28:41  
2007/02/01

Phillip Simmons slates the interview and lists his favorites. Simmons discusses that he was raised and adopted by his grandparents William and Sarah Simmons (nee Bumcum) on Daniel's Island near Charleston, South Carolina,

while his mother Rosa Simmons worked as a domestic in Charleston. He spent his early years working on his grandparents' farm. At eight years old, he moved to Charleston with his mother to attend Buist Elementary, where he spent his time reading and sketching. He also attended Burke High School until seventh grade. Simmons recalls his excitement at working at Peter Simmons' blacksmith shop, where he eventually was hired as an apprentice. The shop eventually became his and he ran it for seventy-seven years.

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: 0:28:20  
2007/02/01

Philip Simmons discusses the fact that as he became more confident in his iron making abilities, he made creations of his own, including wagon wheels and carts. Peter Simmons (no relation) mentored and supported Simmons in what he wanted to accomplish. Simmons talks about how he was forced into doing other types of work, including repairing gates and creating trailers that hooked on the back of cars, after the car replaced the horse as a mode of transportation. Around 1944, he began creating ironwork for houses, including gates, fences, balconies and indoor and outdoor furniture. Simmons provides information about the various gates the City of Charleston commissioned him to create that would welcome visitors to Charleston. He married his late wife, Eartha Lee Porchie, and had three children together, who he raised with the help of family and friends.

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 notes that before he created ironwork pieces he actually began repairing ironworks, which were deteriorating due to the salt air. He originally used wrought iron to do ironwork, but eventually it became scarce and expensive, so he used mild steel or iron instead. Customers either came to Simmons with a variety of ideas or they asked him to think of something to fit the occasion. He notes that blacksmiths need the ability to think creatively and to be flexible. During the year, Simmons visits schools to inform them about his career. In addition, he provides information about the Philip Simmons Foundation and the garden that was created to commemorate his work. He tells a story about when he went to register for the U.S. Army and the reaction of the recruitment officer.

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 remembers attending the 1963 March on Washington and his excitement about the possibilities of the movement. He was moved by the crowds and the speech that Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. gave. However, he has a problem with how history is taught to the current generation, specifically that nothing happened in African American history until King came on the scene, which is not true he explains. Simmons admits that he is disappointed that many of the same issues that were problems then are still problems today. He compares the number of people in Charleston following Marcus Garvey to those involved in the NAACP. Simmons encourages current and future generations of students to do more reading, tells how he wants to be remembered and narrates personal, family and professional photos.

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.