



# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Lois Conley

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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>	Conley, Lois
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Lois Conley,
<b>Dates:</b>	October 19, 2007
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2007
<b>Physical Description:</b>	5 Betacam SP videocassettes (2:22:40).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Museum chief executive Lois Diane Conley (1946 - ) founded the Griot Museum of Black History and Culture in St. Louis, Missouri. Conley was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on October 19, 2007, in St. Louis, Missouri. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2007_299
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Museum chief executive Lois Diane Conley was born in St. Louis, Missouri on July 29, 1946. Conley was born to Leo and Emma Conley, as the second oldest of eight children. Conley attended St. Louis's Waring Elementary School and Vashon High School. After graduating from high school in 1964, Conley attended Saint Louis University where she earned her B.A. degree in communications and her M.A. degree in education.

While researching the black history of St. Louis, Missouri, Conley discovered that notable African Americans, like Madame C.J. Walker and Miles Davis influenced St. Louis history. She became inspired to memorialize their impact and went back to school for museum studies. Conley earned a graduate certificate in museum studies from the University of Missouri-St. Louis in 2001 and founded The Griot Museum of Black History and Culture, the second African American history wax museum in the country. The museum was initially named the Blackworld History Wax Museum, and has since gone through several names before settling on The Griot Museum of Black History and Culture. Under Conley's leadership the museum's exhibitions have expanded beyond just wax sculptures to include a slave ship replica.

Conley has received several awards and honors consisting of the Young Women's Christian Association "Special Leader Award," the Older Women's League "Women of Worth Award," the Coalition of 100 Black Women's "Village Builders' Award" and the Monsanto Y's "Zealot Award."

Lois Conley was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on October 19, 2007.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Lois Conley was conducted by Crowe, Larry on October 19, 2007, in St. Louis, Missouri, and was recorded on 5 Betacam SP videocassettes. Museum chief executive Lois Conley (1946 - ) founded the Griot Museum of Black History and Culture in St. Louis, Missouri.

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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:

Lois Conley

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Lois Conley--Interviews

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African American museum directors--Interviews.

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## Organizations:

HistoryMakers (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Black World History Museum

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

EducationMakers

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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 Lois Conley, October 19, 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 8/29/2011 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, October 19, 2007

Video Oral History Interview with Lois Conley, Section A2007\_299\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:20  
2007/10/19

Lois Conley slates the interview. Conley describes her father, Leo Conley, as a free spirit who was known for being quiet. He worked as a park ranger and was committed to his family. Conley's mother was born in St. Louis, Missouri in a neighborhood called Millcreek. Her maternal grandparents came to St. Louis, Missouri from Mississippi. Her paternal grandfather, John Slaughter, had to flee Mississippi after an altercation left his safety threatened. Conley recounts her childhood in St. Louis. She was the second oldest of eight children. Conley loved where she lived because it was a very tight-knit community; everyone looked out for everyone else. She appreciates that she grew up in a house, rather

than in an apartment building or public housing.

African Americans children--Missouri--Saint Louis.

African American families--Missouri--Saint Louis.

African Americans--Migrations--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with Lois Conley, Section A2007\_299\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:10  
2007/10/19

Lois Conley describes her childhood in St. Louis, Missouri and how the radio played an important role in her youth, especially listening to programs such as the "Lone Ranger and the Shadow." Her father used the radio to follow the Civil Rights Movement as he had a deep-seated suspicion of whites. As a child, she enjoyed activities such as swimming and dancing. Conley then describes her elementary and secondary education. She attended Warren Elementary School in St. Louis and her favorite teacher was Mrs. Kellogg. Conley credits her high school counselor, Ernestine Patterson, future dean of the University of Colorado—Denver, for pushing her to apply to college.

African Americans--Childhood--Missouri--Saint Louis.

Civil rights movements--Missouri--Saint Louis.

African American children--Education (Elementary)--Missouri--Saint Louis.

African American students--Education (Secondary)--Missouri--Saint Louis.

Race relations--Missouri--Saint Louis.

Video Oral History Interview with Lois Conley, Section A2007\_299\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:30  
2007/10/19

Lois Conley describes growing up under the shadow of the violence of the Civil Rights Movement. She was inspired by the March on Washington because so many African Americans were uniting for a common goal. Conley's mother barred her children from becoming involved with the Civil Rights Movement for fear of their safety. When Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated, Conley describes the overwhelming feeling of hurt that filled her heart. Conley describes how when she started leaving St. Louis, she began to see the role the city has played in African American history and she wished more people knew its history. It was then that she realized that this history needed to be preserved in a museum.

Civil rights movements--United States--20th century.

African Americans--Missouri--Saint Louis.

Video Oral History Interview with Lois Conley, Section A2007\_299\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:10  
2007/10/19

Lois Conley explains her vision of the BlackWorld History Museum (The Griot Museum of Black History and Culture). She was first inspired by Baltimore, Maryland's National Great Blacks in Wax Museum. She asked for help to create a museum but she found responses lacking. Instead, she went back to school and attained a graduate certificate in Museum Studies from the University of Missouri-St. Louis University. She began searching for the site of her museum, since she considered it important to own the property. Conley describes how she wanted to put St. Louis's African American history on display, including its slave presence and racial segregation.

Women museum directors--Missouri--Saint Louis.

African Americans--Missouri--Saint Louis.

African Americans--Museums--Saint Louis.

Video Oral History Interview with Lois Conley, Section A2007\_299\_001\_005, TRT: 0:24:30

2007/10/19

Lois Conley discusses the Black World History Museum (now The Griot Museum of Black History and Culture) and its exhibitions and community outreach. One of the most popular exhibitions is the slave ship, which is the main attraction for many school trips. The museum also likes to hold sleepovers, where patrons and staff spend the night in the museum, to learn about history. Conley would like to see St. Louis progress and move forward so that it can bridge the city's large racial divide.

Women museum directors--Missouri--Saint Louis.

African Americans--Museums--Missouri--Saint Louis.

African Americans--Exhibitions--Missouri--Saint Louis.