

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Willie Taylor

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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>	Taylor, Willie, 1932-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Willie Taylor,
<b>Dates:</b>	August 13, 2012
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2012
<b>Physical Description:</b>	5 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:32:27).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Business chief executive Willie Taylor (1932 - ) was the vice president of Sonicraft, Inc., and managed one of the largest single series contracts the United States government has ever awarded a minority owned business. Taylor was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 13, 2012, in Bryan, Texas. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2012_188
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Vice President of Operations, Willie J. Taylor was born September 2, 1932 in Centerville, Mississippi. His parents were Tena and Lois Taylor and he is the youngest of three children. In 1946, Taylor graduated from Forestville Elementary School in Chicago, Illinois and in 1950; he graduated from Dunbar Vocational High School in Chicago, Illinois. At the age of twenty, Taylor worked as a clerk for the United States Postal Office before joining the United States Army Signal Corp.

Post World War II, there was technology growth and Cold War inspired emphasis on cutting edge research and development, Taylor took a job as a research assistant for the Illinois Institute of Technology's Research Institute. In 1966, Taylor joined Sonicraft Inc. as Vice President of Operations. In 1982, Sonicraft Inc. signed a manufacturing contract with the U.S. Air force that resulted in a two hundred and sixty-eight million dollar deal for the company. The contract was expected to last until 1989; making it the largest single series of contracts the government has ever awarded a minority owned business. Taylor was responsible for overseeing production and installation of equipment to automate radio communications from control tower to plane, including self-diagnostic electronic systems that are supposed to lower maintenance costs in FAA facilities. He also, produced a remote control mechanism for airport lighting systems; power sources so that they can be regulated from control towers and develop equipment for a new visual plane approach system.

Taylor has served as Trustee for Northeastern Illinois University and the Board of Governors Universities. In 1996, Taylor retired after serving thirty-years as the Vice President of Operations at Sonicraft Inc. He currently resides in Bryan, Texas with his wife Ollie Taylor. They have three children together, Theresa Doughty, Louis Taylor, Jr. and Valerie Taylor.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Willie Taylor was conducted by Larry Crowe on August 13, 2012, in Bryan, Texas, and was recorded on 5 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Business chief executive Willie Taylor (1932 - ) was the vice president of Sonicraft, Inc., and managed one of the largest single series contracts the United States government has ever awarded a minority owned business.

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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:

Taylor, Willie, 1932-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Taylor, Willie, 1932- --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:

Entrepreneur

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

BusinessMakers

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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 Willie Taylor, August 13, 2012. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

### Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 5/30/2023 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 Willie Taylor, Section A2012\_188\_001\_001, TRT: 1:29:25 ?

Willie Taylor was born on September 2, 1932 in Centreville, Mississippi to Tena Chapman Taylor and Louis Taylor, Sr. His maternal great-grandfather, Joseph Chapman, was born as a slave in Louisiana in 1820. After emancipation, he settled in Centreville, and married Laura Chapman. The couple raised eighteen children, including Taylor's maternal grandfather, Jacob Chapman. Taylor's parents were both born in Centreville in 1907. During World War I, his maternal family's land was seized by the government, and his maternal grandfather relocated with Taylor's grandmother, Eliza Chapman, to a farm in Gloster, Mississippi. Taylor's paternal family remained in Centreville, where his father

was raised by sharecroppers Mary Spears Taylor and Carey Taylor, and studied to become an electrician. He married Taylor's mother, who worked as a teacher; and, after an incident, they fled the South and moved to Little Rock, Arkansas. Taylor's family eventually settled on the South Side of Chicago, Illinois.

Video Oral History Interview with Willie Taylor, Section A2012\_188\_001\_002, TRT: 2:29:36 ?

Willie Taylor moved to Chicago, Illinois with his parents, Tena Chapman Taylor and Willie Taylor, when he was three years old. They initially lived on Chicago's West Side, but soon moved to a home on the South Side, where their neighbors included educator Harold Pates and opera singer Patricia Pates Eaton. His father joined a singing quartet called the Progressive Moaners, which was affiliated with Chicago's Progressive Baptist Church; and also acted on the radio program 'I Love a Mystery.' Taylor began his education at Forrestville Elementary School, where his favorite subject was math. He also took piano lessons at the Chicago Musical College. He went on to attend Dunbar Vocational High School, where he was inducted into the National Honor Society. He belonged to the Boy Scouts at the nearby Grant Memorial A.M.E. Church, where his family were members of the congregation. To earn extra money, he delivered newspapers and fixed radios for his neighbors.

Video Oral History Interview with Willie Taylor, Section A2012\_188\_001\_003, TRT: 3:29:42 ?

Willie Taylor graduated in 1950 from Dunbar Vocational High School, and immediately went to work as a radio and television tester for Spiegel Inc. He then secured a position as a post office clerk; and, after two years, was drafted into the U.S. Army Signal Corps. Following his discharge, he returned to the post office, and matriculated at Woodrow Wilson Junior College. Two years later, Taylor enrolled at the Illinois Institute of Technology, where he worked at the IIT Research Institute. In 1957, he met Ollie Taylor, whom he married the following year. Upon graduating in 1968, Taylor joined Sonicraft, Inc., a communications equipment manufacturer that was founded by his IIT coworker, Jerry T. Jones. They initially worked with the University of Chicago and Argonne National Laboratory, and secured government contracts through the Small Business Administration. The company went on to develop shipboard amplifiers for the U.S. Navy and Omnidirectional light systems for the Federal Aviation Administration.

Video Oral History Interview with Willie Taylor, Section A2012\_188\_001\_004, TRT: 4:30:18 ?

Willie Taylor joined Sonicraft, Inc. in 1968. The company began in cofounder Jerry T. Jones' basement, and expanded to a storefront on the South Side of Chicago, Illinois. As the vice president of operations, Taylor worked with the firm's production and design engineers; handled inspections from clients like the Ford Motor Company; and managed overall production, including testing, engineering and packaging. The company was a member of the SBA 8(a) Business Development Program, the National Association of Manufacturers and the National Black Manufacturing Association. At the height of their success, Sonicraft, Inc. employed five hundred people in five locations, including Chicago and Washington, D.C. During this time, the company had a contract with AT&T Inc. When the contract expired in 1996, the company was forced to close, and Taylor chose to retire that year. He remembers working with Harold Washington's mayoral administration, and talks about the challenges of bidding on government contracts.

Video Oral History Interview with Willie Taylor, Section A2012\_188\_001\_005, TRT: 5:33:26 ?

Willie Taylor worked with the eta Creative Arts Foundation, which was founded by theater producer Abena Joan P. Brown in Chicago, Illinois; and joined the foundation's board in the 1980s. He also belonged to the Catholic church, and

was member of the Knights of Peter Claver. Following his retirement, Taylor and his family moved to Bryan, Texas, where he volunteered at the Brazos Valley African American Museum. He and his wife, Ollie Taylor, had three children: Anthony Taylor, Angela Taylor and Valerie Taylor. Taylor reflects upon his life and legacy, his concerns for the African American community and how he would like to be remembered. He concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.