

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

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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>	Merrill, Philip J.
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Philip Merrill,
<b>Dates:</b>	August 7, 2013
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2013
<b>Physical Description:</b>	8 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:30:06).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Historical researcher Philip Merrill (1962 - ) founded Nanny Jack & Company, where he collected and researched African American memorabilia for over twenty years. He was also the author of <i>The Art of Collecting Black Memorabilia</i> and <i>The Black America Series: Baltimore</i> . Merrill was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 7, 2013, in Baltimore, Maryland. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2013_211
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Historian, writer, appraiser and collector Philip J. Merrill was born in 1962 in Baltimore, Maryland, and grew up in the Sandtown-Winchester neighborhood of Baltimore. His mother headed a nonprofit job training institute for the disadvantaged; his father, George B. Merrill, was a pastor. Merrill's great-grandmother helped to raise him. He was one of only two African American students in his graduating class of 1981 at the Friends School of Baltimore. Merrill would go on to graduate from Loyola University in Maryland in 1985.

In 1994, Merrill founded the organization Nanny Jack & Company, an archives and consulting agency specializing in creating projects that illuminate the African American experience through memorabilia, oral history and research. The company would eventually house over 30,000 artifacts, including photographs, rare books, folk art, documents, music, dolls, furniture, and quilts. Nanny Jack & Company would go on to collaborate with various educational organizations and television channels, including The Smithsonian Institution's Anacostia Museum and Center for African American History and Culture, the Discovery Channel, the Maryland Historical Society, Maryland Public Television, and the History Channel. In 1996, Merrill became an appraiser with the Public Broadcasting Service's (PBS) television show *Antiques Roadshow*. He created the category for black memorabilia on *Antiques Roadshow*, and would stay on the program until 2001. Then, in 2006, Merrill became a fellow of Open Society Institute, where he developed the "Know History, Know Self" program, which used artifacts to teach African American students about their family, community and school history.

In 1998, Merrill published the book *The Art of Collecting Black Memorabilia*, and, in 1999, he published *The Black America Series: Baltimore*, which chronicled the history of the Baltimore's African American community. Merrill was also the editor of a 2002 book of historical photographs entitled *The World War II Black Regiment that Built the Alaska Military Highway: A Photographic History*. Then, in 2013, he authored the children's book, *How Princess Wee Wee Got Her Name*. Merrill was named *Baltimore City Paper's* Best Historian in 2001, and, in 2002, Merrill received the Towson University's Distinguished Black Marylander Award. He was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters from Eastern Theological Seminary in 2007. Philip J. Merrill was interviewed by the *The HistoryMakers* on August 8, 2013.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Philip Merrill was conducted by Larry Crowe on August 7, 2013, in Baltimore, Maryland, and was recorded on 8 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Historical researcher Philip Merrill (1962 - ) founded Nanny Jack & Company, where he collected and researched African American memorabilia for over twenty years. He was also the author of *The Art of Collecting Black Memorabilia* and *The Black America Series: Baltimore*.

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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:**

Merrill, Philip J.

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### **Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews

Merrill, Philip J.--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:**

Historical Researcher

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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 Philip Merrill, August 7, 2013. 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 Philip Merrill, Section  
A2013\_211\_001\_001, TRT: 1:22:26 2013/08/07

Philip Merrill was born on March 14, 1962 in Baltimore, Maryland to Betty Jackson Merrill and Wayland Jones. There was speculation that Merrill's maternal family was related to the family of President George Washington. Merrill's earliest known ancestor, Jennie Berry, was a slave in West Virginia who became a sharecropper after emancipation. Her family worked alongside a white family, with whom they shared living space. Merrill's maternal great-grandmother, Gertrude Berry Jackson, and maternal great-grandfather, Philip Jackson, moved north to Baltimore during the Great Migration, where they raised their family in the predominantly black Sandtown-Winchester neighborhood. Due to her experiences in an abusive relationship, Merrill's great-grandmother opened a safe house for battered women. Merrill's mother attended the all-black schools in Baltimore's Old West Baltimore Historic District before integrating Western High School. Later, she became a schoolteacher at Baltimore City Public Schools.

Video Oral History Interview with Philip Merrill, Section  
A2013\_211\_001\_002, TRT: 2:28:56 2013/08/07

Philip Merrill's mother, Betty Jackson Merrill, was one of the first African American students to attend Western High School in Baltimore, Maryland. After graduating, she enrolled at Baltimore's Coppin State Teachers College. She then worked as a teacher in the Baltimore City Public Schools system, where she met Merrill's stepfather, George Merrill, who was white. After two weeks of

dating, they married in the first year that interracial marriage was legalized in Maryland. When Merrill was six years old, his stepfather legally adopted him. He left his career as a teacher to become a lawyer and pastor. Merrill's family moved from Baltimore's Sandtown-Winchester neighborhood to Park Heights, where he attended School No. 66, Mount Royal Elementary and Middle School before his family's settled in the Ten Hills neighborhood. Merrill's biological father, Wayland Jones, was born in Raleigh, North Carolina, and studied at Meharry Medical College. Later, he worked as a doctor in Baltimore.

Video Oral History Interview with Philip Merrill, Section  
A2013\_211\_001\_003, TRT: 3:29:34 2013/08/07

Philip Merrill attended School No. 66, Mount Royal Elementary and Middle School in Baltimore, Maryland. For middle and high school, he enrolled at Friends School of Baltimore, which was the oldest Quaker school in the area. There, Merrill experienced racial discrimination from his white peers, who made derogatory comments about his physical appearance and touched his hair without permission. As a young child, Merrill attended New Bethel A.M.E. Church in Baltimore, and frequented Quaker worship meetings with his stepfather, George Merrill. Even though his stepfather's father, George Merrill, Jr., was an Episcopalian minister, his stepfather later became a Baptist before founding his own nondenominational church. After graduating from Friends School, he completed one year at St. Mary's College of Maryland in St. Mary's City, Maryland before transferring to Baltimore's Loyola College in Maryland. There, he earned a bachelor's of arts degree in sociology. Merrill also recalls watching the 'Roots' miniseries.

Video Oral History Interview with Philip Merrill, Section  
A2013\_211\_001\_004, TRT: 4:28:55 2013/08/07

Philip Merrill graduated from Loyola College in Maryland in 1985, and joined his family's company, Human Development Institute, Inc., in Baltimore, Maryland. The organization provided job readiness training for underserved populations in the community. Many of the participants were employed in the Merrill family's flower

shops until they found careers elsewhere. During his lunch breaks, Merrill scouted local antique shops for black memorabilia. Uninterested in the popular collector's items, Merrill began to search for obscure black materials. In his interactions with white collectors, he learned effective bargaining skills, and how to avoid discriminatory practices. Later, he developed an interest in African American oral history. Merrill founded Nanny Jack and Company in Baltimore to fund and house his archives and collection, which were displayed at Baltimore's American Visionary Art Museum at the time of the interview. He decided to consult and appraise collections rather than become a dealer.

Video Oral History Interview with Philip Merrill, Section  
A2013\_211\_001\_005, TRT: 5:30:20 2013/08/07

Philip Merrill founded Nanny Jack and Company in Baltimore, Maryland, an archive dedicated to documenting the black Americana through materials and oral histories. He contributed to the African American Art and History Collection in Baltimore's Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History and Culture. He was also hired by Nell Draper-Winston, the sister of Louis Draper, to evaluate Draper's photography for an exhibit at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, Virginia. His other appraisal work included Dorothy Height's hat collection and Sam Cooke record collection. During his career, Merrill often encountered financial challenges with clients who wanted to use his services for free. In addition to his private consultation work, Merrill served as an appraiser on 'Antiques Roadshow' and 'Chesapeake Collectibles.' He talks about the lack of reference guides for appraising black material; and describes the importance of the black photographer in depicting the black community.

Video Oral History Interview with Philip Merrill, Section  
A2013\_211\_001\_006, TRT: 6:29:15 2013/08/07

Philip Merrill became an appraiser on the television program 'Antiques Roadshow' in 1996. Since the show did not pay for travel expenses, he used funds from Nanny Jack and Company in Baltimore, Maryland. On 'Antiques Roadshow,' Merrill developed the black memorabilia

segment. He was given the opportunity to present a pottery piece by slave David Drake, but ultimately refused due to the racism of his co-host. Merrill also lobbied against producers to showcase controversial artifacts, such as a copy of 'And Then There Were None' by Agatha Christie. In 2001, Merrill left the show, and eventually appeared on the television series 'Chesapeake Collectibles.' Merrill expanded Nanny Jack and Company over time to include benevolent society artifacts, as well as black beauty and the Ku Klux Klan materials. He talks about the surge of amateur researchers, and the difficulties in appraising black memorabilia. Merrill also describes his visit to the exhibit of furniture maker Thomas Day in North Carolina.

Video Oral History Interview with Philip Merrill, Section  
A2013\_211\_001\_007, TRT: 7:30:12 2013/08/07

Philip Merrill offered internship positions for high school, undergraduate and graduate students at Nanny Jack and Company in Baltimore, Maryland. He continued his educational outreach by developing the Know History, Know Self program. Funded by the Open Society Institute, the program taught African American students in Baltimore about their regional history. Merrill also wrote a children's book about Baltimore native Harriet Thompson called 'How Princess Wee Wee Got Her Name,' which he dedicated to his daughter, Indie Merrill. At the time of the interview, Merrill was conducting research for a writing project on comedian Dave Chappelle's grandfather, George R. Reed. Merrill describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community. He also reflects upon his legacy, and how he would like to be remembered as a historian of black material culture. Merrill concludes this part of the interview by narrating his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Philip Merrill, Section  
A2013\_211\_001\_008, TRT: 8:10:28 2013/08/07

Philip Merrill narrates his photographs.