

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Marie Dixon

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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>	Dixon, Marie, 1937-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Marie Dixon,
<b>Dates:</b>	August 25, 2013
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2013
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:30:30).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Music executive Marie Dixon (1937 - 2016 ) was the widow of legendary blues musician Willie Dixon and the president of the Blues Heaven Foundation in Chicago. Dixon was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 25, 2013, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2013_228
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Nonprofit executive Marie Dixon was born on August 1, 1937 in Oxford, Mississippi. Her mother was Amelia Booker and her father was Fred Booker. Dixon comes from a family of fourteen brothers and sister. Her family had deep roots in Oxford, as both of her parents were born and raised there. Dixon attended New Hope, the school at her local church in Oxford, and then Oxford Training School. Then, in 1954, Dixon left Oxford and moved to Chicago.

Dixon first worked in retail and attended the Red Cross School in order to become a nurse. Then, in 1956, Dixon met the legendary blues musician, producer, and her future husband, Willie Dixon. In the late 1970s, Willie had a vision for a blues foundation, and, in 1984, he established the organization as the “Blues Heaven Foundation,” a non-profit designed to promote the blues and to provide scholarships, royalty recovery advice, and emergency assistance to blues musicians in need. After her husband’s death in 1992, Dixon purchased the building of the legendary Chess Studios in Chicago in 1993 in order to house the Blues Heaven Foundation. She then went on to serve as the foundation’s president. Through the efforts of Dixon, her daughter Shirli, and others, the Blues Heaven Foundation and museum finally moved into the restored Chess Studios in 1997.

In 2003, after her daughter Shirli’s untimely death, Dixon’s other daughter, Jacqueline, joined in order to help in running the Blues Heaven Foundation as the new executive director. In 2012, Sugar Blue, a famous blues harmonica player, presented Dixon with the Blues and Spirit Award at the third biennial Blues and the Spirit symposium held at Dominican University in River Forest, Illinois. Then, in 2013, she was honored with the Willie Dixon’s Legendary Blues Artist induction, as well as the induction of the Willie Dixon Blues Heaven Foundation, into the Chicago Blues Hall of Fame. Dixon’s Blues Heaven Foundation provides an annual Muddy Waters Scholarship to a full-time Chicago college student studying music, African American studies, history, journalism, or a related field. The foundation also sponsors and performs harmonica workshops.

Marie Dixon was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on August 25, 2013.

Dixon passed away on November 20, 2016.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Marie Dixon was conducted by Larry Crowe on August 25, 2013, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Music executive Marie Dixon (1937 - 2016 ) was the widow of legendary blues musician Willie Dixon and the president of the Blues Heaven Foundation in Chicago.

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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:

Dixon, Marie, 1937-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Dixon, Marie, 1937- --Interviews

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## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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## Occupations:

Music Executive

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

MusicMakers

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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 Marie Dixon, August 25, 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 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 Marie Dixon, Section A2013\_228\_001\_001, TRT: 1:29:03 ?

Marie Dixon was born on August 1, 1937 in Oxford, Mississippi to Amelia Wilson Booker and Frederick Booker. Dixon's mother was one of four daughters born in Oxford to Robert Wilson. She was educated through the eighth grade, and her parents died when she was a teenager. In 1929, she eloped with Dixon's father, who worked on a highway construction crew. After

marrying, they worked as sharecroppers, and became tenant farmers before purchasing their own land. They also raised fourteen children, including Dixon. To earn extra money, Dixon's father hosted an annual cookout and dance for the black community at the Oxford fairgrounds. The city was strictly segregated at the time, and most African Americans worked in agriculture or worked as custodians and cafeteria staff at the all-white University of Mississippi. In addition to her father's picnics, Dixon was exposed to music at the New Hope Missionary Baptist Church, where her family were longstanding members of the congregation.

Video Oral History Interview with Marie Dixon, Section A2013\_228\_001\_002, TRT: 2:28:59 ?

Marie Dixon was born in Oxford, Mississippi, where she was one of fourteen children raised in a three-room house owned by her parents, Amelia Wilson Booker and Frederick Booker. Dixon was introduced to blues music at an early age, when her father brought home a Sonny Boy Williamson record. He played it regularly and replaced it when it became worn, to the chagrin of Dixon's mother, who preferred gospel music. Dixon attended kindergarten at the New Hope Missionary Baptist Church, and then enrolled at the segregated Oxford Training School. She missed school to work on her family's farm during the fall, and she fell behind on her education as a result. At the age of sixteen years old, Dixon moved to Chicago, Illinois, where she lived with her older sister, Nancy Booker. In Chicago, Dixon worked as a store clerk to support herself. She also met and married Willie Dixon. Dixon's parents eventually sent her younger brothers to join her household in Chicago.

Video Oral History Interview with Marie Dixon, Section A2013\_228\_001\_003, TRT: 3:28:32 ?

Marie Dixon left Oxford, Mississippi in 1954, when she was sixteen years old. She was unwilling to continue living with her father, who required her to work on the farm instead of attending school. She wrote to her older sister, Nancy Booker, who lived in Chicago, Illinois. Dixon took a Greyhound bus to Chicago, and moved into her sister's home in Kenwood. There, she secured a position at the Neisner Brothers discount store at 47th Street and Ellis Avenue. After her shifts, she frequented blues venues like Club Zanzibar, Silvio's and the 708 Club. There, Dixon met her future husband, Willie Dixon, in 1956. She came to the club to see a performance by Howlin' Wolf, but his act was replaced by the Big Three Trio. After flirting with the band members, Dixon was pursued by the bassist, Willie Dixon, who began visiting her at work. At this point in the interview, Dixon talks about her husband's career as a music writer, and remembers serving as a research consultant for the biopic movie 'Cadillac Records.'

Video Oral History Interview with Marie Dixon, Section A2013\_228\_001\_004, TRT: 4:29:54 ?

Marie Dixon was married to the renowned blues singer, bassist and songwriter Willie Dixon. In 1969, he held a concert in Grant Park that became the forerunner of the Chicago Blues Festival. He also worked with musicians like Muddy Waters at Chess Records. In 1977, Dixon's husband sued Chess Records' publishing company, Arc Music Group, for disproportionately small royalties. At this point, Dixon talks about the resemblance between the music publishing industry and the methods used to defraud African American sharecroppers. In 1982, Dixon and her husband established the Blues Heaven Foundation to support musicians and artists in Chicago. Her husband died a decade later. Dixon continued directing the foundation, which held an annual blues concert series and offered music classes, scholarships and a financial assistance program for struggling musicians. She talks about the importance of her husband's music rights, which continued to support her family and

foundation at the time of the interview.

Video Oral History Interview with Marie Dixon, Section A2013\_228\_001\_005, TRT: 5:29:14 ?

Marie Dixon and her husband, blues musician Willie Dixon, founded the Blues Heaven Foundation while living in Los Angeles, California. The organization lacked a formal headquarters until 1992, when Dixon acquired the former Chess Records building and moved the foundation to Chicago, Illinois. Dixon talks about the foundation's support for African American musicians, as well as the changes in the blues music scene. After the 1950s, the genre became increasingly popular among Europeans and white Americans, including musicians like Eric Clapton. Additionally, as hip hop music emerged, the blues fell out of favor in the African American community. As a result, many of the blues clubs on Chicago's South Side went out of business. At this point, Dixon reflects upon her life, as well as her hopes and concerns for the African American community.

Video Oral History Interview with Marie Dixon, Section A2013\_228\_001\_006, TRT: 6:04:48 ?

Marie Dixon talks about her five children, three of whom passed away at an early age. She reflects upon her legacy, and concludes the interview by describing how she would like to be remembered.