

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with William Whitley

---

## 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>              | Whitley, William N., 1934-   |
| <b>Title:</b>                | The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with William Whitley,  |
| <b>Dates:</b>                | February 12, 2014  |
| <b>Bulk Dates:</b>           | 2014   |
| <b>Physical Description:</b> | 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:41:24).  |
| <b>Abstract:</b>             | Architect and business chief executive William Whitley (1934 - ) served as vice principal and project principal of Whitley/Whitley Architects and Planners LLC. Whitley was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 12, 2014, in Beachwood, Ohio. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview. |
| <b>Identification:</b>       | A2014_036  |
| <b>Language:</b>             | The interview and records are in English.  |

---

## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Architect and business executive William N. Whitley was born on April 29, 1934 in Rochester, New York and raised in Warren and Cleveland, Ohio. Whitley's father was a chemist; his mother an actress. He graduated from Kent State University in 1957 with his B.S. degree in architecture, and went on to serve as a captain in the United States Air Force from 1958 until 1960.

In the 1960s, Whitley joined his brother, James, in operating Whitley/Whitley Architects and Planners LLC, a full service architectural and planning firm specializing in institutional design, sport facility design, and commercial housing

design, where he served as vice president and project principal. Whitley/Whitley Architects has provided a substantial amount of work in Cleveland and the State of Ohio for various city and state public agencies, as well as services for cities and community groups in cities throughout the United States, including Saint Louis, Missouri; Indianapolis, Indiana; Fort Wayne, Indiana; Gary, Indiana; Chicago, Illinois; Saginaw, Michigan; Buffalo, New York; Rochester, New York; New York City, New York; Orlando, Florida; Atlanta, Georgia; Reading, Pennsylvania; Washington, D.C. and San Diego, California. Whitley/Whitley was involved with work on Cleveland's Tower City Center, the Cleveland State University Convocation Center, Lincoln Junior High School, the Lee-Harvard Branch of Cleveland Public Library, the Central Area Multi-Service Center, and the Cleveland Clinic Guesthouse development. Other projects have included Kent State University's Fashion Museum, Cuyahoga County Community College's Learning Center, and Cleveland's John F. Kennedy Recreation Center. Whitley's firm has also designed numerous housing units and worked on several rehabilitation projects.

Whitley/Whitley Architects and Planners LLC has received many awards and honors, including the Progressive Architecture Design Award, the HUD Biennial Design Award, Burlington Awards, the House and Home Award, the Ohio Prestressed Concrete Design Award, the Ohio Masonry Council/ASO Award for Excellence in Masonry Design, the Cleveland Chapter of Architect's Building Design Award, the East Ohio Energy Conservation Award, and the ASO Honor Awards Certificate of Merit.

Whitley has three children: Kyle, Kym and Scott.

William Whitley was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on February 12, 2014.

---

## **Scope and Content**

This life oral history interview with William Whitley was conducted by Larry Crowe on February 12, 2014, in Beachwood, Ohio, and was recorded on 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Architect and business chief executive William Whitley (1934 - ) served as vice principal and project principal of Whitley/Whitley Architects and Planners LLC.

---

## **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®.

---

## **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.

---

## **Controlled Access Terms**

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

### **Persons:**

Whitley, William N., 1934-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### **Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews

Whitley, William N., 1934---Interviews

---

## **Organizations:**

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

---

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

---

## **Occupations:**

Architect

---

Business Chief Executive

---

## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

BusinessMakers

---

## **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 William Whitley, February 12, 2014. 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).

---

## 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.

---

## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with William Whitley, Section  
A2014\_036\_001\_001, TRT: 1:29:15 2014/02/12

William Whitley was born on April 29, 1934 in Rochester, New York to Beatrice Nivens Whitley and Moses Whitley. His maternal great-grandmother, Emeline Brewer, was bequeathed land by her slave owner and father after the Civil War. Whitley's mother was born in 1902 in Monroe, North Carolina. Her father, William Nivens, worked in a train mailroom, and her mother, Effie Brewer Nivens, was a housewife. Although she aspired to a career in theater, Whitley's mother studied business at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. There, she met Whitley's father, who was a chemistry major from Marked Tree, Arkansas. They later moved to Rochester, where Whitley enrolled at Nathaniel Rochester School No. 3. His family moved to Warren, Ohio after his father was hired as a chemist at the Ravenna Army Ammunition Plant in Ravenna, Ohio. Whitley had older sisters and a twin brother named James Whitley. His oldest sister, Gloria Whitley Fleming, was a musician and actress who performed at the Karamu House in Cleveland, Ohio.

Video Oral History Interview with William Whitley, Section  
A2014\_036\_001\_002, TRT: 2:28:46 2014/02/12

William Whitley continued his education at Roosevelt Elementary School in Warren, Ohio, where he and his twin brother, James Whitley, were the only African American students. As a child, Whitley took classes at the Cleveland Museum of Art in Cleveland, Ohio, and built

structures with his brother in the woods near their house. Later, his family moved to Glenville, a majority-black, middle class neighborhood in Cleveland. There, Whitley briefly attended Rawlings Junior High School, and then transferred to Alexander Hamilton Junior High School, where he took his first course in drafting. In 1951, Whitley enrolled at John Adams High School in Cleveland. There, he and his brother played left and right halfbacks on the football team, alongside quarterback Gerald King and defensive lineman Luke Owens. Upon graduating, Whitley and his brother received football scholarships to attend Kent State University in Kent, Ohio. Whitley was later drafted by the Baltimore Colts, but decided to focus on architecture.

Video Oral History Interview with William Whitley, Section  
A2014\_036\_001\_003, TRT: 3:29:38 2014/02/12

William Whitley studied architecture at Kent State University in Kent, Ohio from 1953 to 1957. During this time, he and his twin brother, James Whitley, played on the college football team. Whitley also joined the Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, the junior chapter of the American Institute of Architects and the Reserve Officers' Training Corps. During his freshman year, he met Kaysonia Whitley, whom he later married. Upon graduating, Whitley interned under architect Robert P. Madison, and worked at the firm of Joseph Baker and Associates in Newark, Ohio. Then, he was drafted into the U.S. Air Force, where he served as a flight navigator for two years. After his service, Whitley returned to Cleveland, Ohio, where he worked for the firm of Damon, Worley, Samuels and Associates, and then for Dalton and Dalton. In 1963 Whitley's brother founded Whitley and Whitley, Architects and Planners. After joining the firm, Whitley helped secure the contract for the John F. Kennedy Recreation Center in 1967.

Video Oral History Interview with William Whitley, Section  
A2014\_036\_001\_004, TRT: 4:28:40 2014/02/12

William Whitley began his career as an architect during the early 1960s in Cleveland, Ohio. While working at the firm of Dalton and Dalton, he completed a two-year contract in Sudan, and traveled throughout East Africa. In

1967, he returned to Cleveland to work with his twin brother, James Whitley, at Whitley and Whitley, Architects and Planners. That year, they obtained their first major public works contract with support from Mayor Carl Stokes' administration. They received a Progressive Architecture Award for their design of Cleveland's John F. Kennedy Recreation Center. The firm went on to secure valuable design contracts, including the Kent State University Museum, the Gateway Sports and Entertainment Complex in Cleveland and eight facilities for the East Cleveland City School District. At this point in the interview, Whitley describes how contracting decisions are made in the architecture industry, and talks about the importance of listening to clients.

Video Oral History Interview with William Whitley, Section A2014\_036\_001\_005, TRT: 5:26:48 2014/02/12

William Whitley was a principal architect at Whitley/Whitley Architects and Planners LLC, which he cofounded with his twin brother, James Whitley. The firm completed a number of notable projects in Cleveland, Ohio, including the Wolstein Center at Cleveland State University and eight facilities for the East Cleveland City School District. Whitley also designed the apartment building attached to the Christ Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church in Chicago, Illinois. At this point in the interview, he talks about the material selection process, and the balance between innovation and regulation in architectural design. He also describes the importance of detailed documentation. Whitley shares his advice to aspiring architects, and his hopes and concerns for the African American community. Whitley had three children with his wife, Kaysonia Whitley. Their daughter, comedian Kym Whitley, starred in the television documentary series 'Raising Whitley,' which premiered on the Oprah Winfrey Network in 2013.

Video Oral History Interview with William Whitley, Section A2014\_036\_001\_006, TRT: 6:18:17 2014/02/12

William Whitley and his wife, Kaysonia Whitley, had three children together. His daughter, Kym Whitley, worked as an actress and comedian in Los Angeles, California. His younger son, Kyle Whitley, was an

architect at the firm of McKissack and McKissack, and his older son, Scott Whitley, worked as a construction manager. Whitley reflects upon his legacy and how he would like to be remembered. He concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.