

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Art Fennell

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Fennell, Art, 1961-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Art Fennell,
Dates:	June 12, 2014
Bulk Dates:	2014
Physical Description:	7 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:16:45).
Abstract:	Broadcast journalist Art Fennell (1961 -) was a principal anchor and managing editor for CN8 News, and served as executive producer and anchor of CN8-TV's 'Art Fennell Reports' from 2006 to 2014. He was president of the National Association of Black Journalists from 1995 to 1997. Fennell was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on June 12, 2014, in Voorhees, New Jersey. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2014_173
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Broadcast journalist Art Fennell was born and raised in Bennettsville, South Carolina. One of twelve children, he graduated from South Carolina State University with a communications degree.

Fennell began his broadcasting career as a radio announcer in Orangeburg, South Carolina. He went on to work in on-air positions at The South Carolina Educational Television Network; WBTW-TV in Florence, South Carolina;

WCBD-TV in Charleston, South Carolina; WSAV-TV in Savannah, Georgia and WAVY-TV in Portsmouth, Virginia. Fennell then moved to WCAU NBC-10 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where he served in various roles, including as anchor, reporter, host and producer. He was subsequently named principal anchor and managing editor for CN8 News on the Comcast Network based in Philadelphia, and hosted the nightly 7 p.m. and 10 p.m. newscasts. From 2006 to 2014, CN8-TV aired “Art Fennell Reports,” where Fennell was executive producer and anchor.

Fennell has also served on special assignments for TV-ONE and led the network’s live national coverage of “The Michael Jackson Memorial” from Los Angeles, “The Democratic National Convention” from Denver, “Election Night 2008” from Chicago, and the historic “Inauguration of President Barack Obama” from Washington, DC. In addition, he taught as an adjunct communications professor at Delaware State University.

Fennell served as president of the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ) from 1995 to 1997. He also served on the boards of UNITY: Journalists of Color and the NABJ, as well as president of the Philadelphia Association of Black Journalists, and founding president of the Hampton Roads Black Media Professionals. In 2001, he founded The Arthur Fennell Foundation, which is committed to raising funds and awareness to assist community based organizations dealing with disease, education and prevention in diverse, under-served populations.

Throughout his career, Fennell has been honored with more than seventy-five awards, including the prestigious Vanguard Award presented by the Philadelphia Association of Black Journalists. He also received the 2009 “Journalist of The Year Award” for his work in the Philadelphia region and the 2006 Emmy Award for “Outstanding News Anchor” in the Mid-Atlantic region.

Art Fennell was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on June 12, 2014.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Art Fennell was conducted by Larry Crowe on June 12, 2014, in Voorhees, New Jersey, and was recorded on 7 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Broadcast journalist Art Fennell (1961 -) was a principal anchor and managing editor for CN8 News, and served as executive producer and anchor of CN8-TV’s 'Art Fennell Reports' from 2006 to 2014. He was president of the National Association of Black Journalists from 1995 to 1997.

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:

Fennell, Art, 1961-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Broadcast Journalist

HistoryMakers® Category:

MediaMakers

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 Art Fennell, June 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

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 Art Fennell, Section
A2014_173_001_001, TRT: 1:29:20 2014/06/12

Art Fennell was born on January 10, 1961 in Bennettsville, South Carolina to Sarah McLeod Fennell and James Fennell. His maternal ancestor, Killis Wright, was held as a slave by the Wright family in South Carolina. After killing a white man, he was saved from lynching by the plantation owner's son, who made him the plantation overseer. Fennell's maternal grandparents, Mary McLeod and Fred McLeod, were sharecroppers in South Carolina. They had twelve children, who were known for carrying firearms for self-defense. Fennell's mother worked as a farmer after graduating from high school, and later became a nurse at an integrated medical facility. Fennell's paternal grandmother, Mary Fennell, worked in the cotton fields of North Carolina from a young age. She later became a domestic, and married sawmill worker Arthur Fennell II, with whom she moved to South Carolina. There, Fennell's father was educated through the sixth grade, and worked as a traveling hog butcher and chef.

Video Oral History Interview with Art Fennell, Section
A2014_173_001_002, TRT: 2:28:29 2014/06/12

Art Fennell's parents, Sarah McLeod Fennell and James Fennell, met and married in the rural community of Clio, South Carolina in the mid-1930s. They worked as cotton

sharecroppers, and raised their own food crops and livestock. They also had twelve children, of whom Fennell was the youngest. Before he was born, his parents relocated to Bennettsville, South Carolina, where his father butchered hogs for the community. When Fennell was eight years old, his family's home was destroyed in a tornado. Although none of his family members were harmed, they lost all of their possessions. Fennell began his education at Blenheim High School in the neighboring community of Blenheim, South Carolina. There, he completed both his primary and secondary education, and graduated in a class of thirty-two students. He also served as the school's bus driver. Additionally, Fennell describes his family's ghost stories, including his grandfather's encounter with the spirit of his drowned brother.

Video Oral History Interview with Art Fennell, Section
A2014_173_001_003, TRT: 3:28:19 2014/06/12

Art Fennell began his education at Blenheim High School in Blenheim, South Carolina during the late 1960s. He enjoyed writing and drawing, and belonged to several sports teams. The school was integrated when Fennell was in the fourth grade, and he began facing intimidation and harassment from the white students. Upon graduating in 1978, Fennell enrolled at South Carolina State College in Orangeburg with a Basic Educational Opportunity Grant. He was initially unsure of his aspirations, but soon became interested in media and started work at WDIX Radio. Fennell decided to major in communications, and was mentored by Professor Eloise Usher Belcher, whose former students included Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Fennell received his degree in 1982, and was hired as a reporter trainee at SCE-TV, where he covered the South Carolina State House. Additionally, Fennell talks about the influence of Max Robinson, who was one of the first African American news anchors.

Video Oral History Interview with Art Fennell, Section
A2014_173_001_004, TRT: 4:29:36 2014/06/12

Art Fennell studied at South Carolina State College in Orangeburg, South Carolina from 1978 to 1982. While there, he developed an interest in photography. After graduating, Fennell worked as a trainee at SCE-TV, and

then became a videographer at WBTW-TV in Florence, South Carolina. His supervisor promised that he would be promoted to news anchor, but the agreement was rescinded after a change in management. Fennell then moved to WSAV-TV in Savannah, Georgia, where he received death threats for becoming the city's first black anchorman. In 1987, Fennell was recruited to join WAVY-TV in Portsmouth, Virginia. There, he became a member of the National Association of Black Journalists, and founded a local chapter called the Hampton Roads Black Media Professionals. At this point in the interview, Fennell talks about the lack of African American politicians in South Carolina, and the civil rights history of South Carolina State College. He also talks about his fellow black television host, Armstrong Williams.

Video Oral History Interview with Art Fennell, Section
A2014_173_001_005, TRT: 5:30:15 2014/06/12

Art Fennell founded the Hampton Roads Black Media Professionals chapter of the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ) in the 1980s. In 1990, Fennell's contract with WAVY-TV ended, and he was recruited by Paul Gluck to become a talk show host on WCAU-TV in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Originally affiliated with CBS, the station moved to the NBC network in 1996. After moving to WCAU-TV, Fennell joined the Philadelphia Association of Black Journalists, and became a regional director of NABJ. In 1995, he ran unopposed for the organization's national presidency, and was elected to a two-year term. For the NABJ conventions, Fennell hosted speakers like attorney Johnnie Cochran, Minister Louis Farrakhan, Vice President Al Gore and President Bill Clinton. At this point, he remembers coordinating with the Secret Service, and describes President Clinton's arrival at the 1997 convention in Chicago, Illinois. Additionally, he talks about the challenges of being recognized in public.

Video Oral History Interview with Art Fennell, Section
A2014_173_001_006, TRT: 6:28:42 2014/06/12

Art Fennell joined the staff of WCAU-TV in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1990. He covered the U.S. invasion of Somalia in 1992, and interviewed Nelson Mandela during

his visit to the United States to receive the Philadelphia Liberty Medal in 1993. Fennell also continued his leadership in the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ), where he helped establish the NABJ Media Institute to educate young journalists about reporting techniques and the importance of cultural sensitivity. In 1999, Fennell took a brief hiatus from newscasting to found a media consulting firm. One year later, he began working with the Comcast Corporation to create the Comcast Network, where he developed the news show 'Art Fennell Reports.' He also conducted special assignments for TV One, where he covered the election of President Barack Obama and produced 'Murder in Memphis: Timeline to an Assassination.' In 2006, Fennell received an Emmy Award for his accomplishments in broadcasting.

Video Oral History Interview with Art Fennell, Section
A2014_173_001_007, TRT: 7:22:04 2014/06/12

Art Fennell hosted an exhibition of his photography called 'The People of Maasai Mara' in 2011. The show featured twenty-five photographs shot by Fennell during visits to East Africa. Fennell left the Comcast Corporation in 2014, after the cancellation of 'Art Fennell Reports.' At this point in the interview, Fennell talks about his family and his plans for the future, as well as his hopes and concerns for the African American community. He concludes the interview by reflecting upon his life, legacy and how he would like to be remembered.