

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Hank Aaron

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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>	Aaron, Hank, 1934-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Hank Aaron,
<b>Dates:</b>	October 1, 2016
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2016
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:47:22).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Baseball player Hank Aaron (1934 - 2021) began his career in the Negro Leagues with the Indianapolis Clowns. He led the Milwaukee Braves to a 1957 World Series title, and broke Babe Ruth's home run record in 1974. was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on October 1, 2016, in Atlanta, Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2016_064
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Baseball player Hank Aaron was born on February 5, 1934 in Mobile, Alabama to Estella Aaron and Herbert Aaron. He attended Central High School in Mobile, Alabama and transferred to the private Josephine Allen Institute, where he graduated in 1951. While finishing high school, Aaron played for the Mobile Black Bears, a semi-professional Negro league baseball team.

In 1951, Aaron signed with the Indianapolis Clowns of the Negro American League, where he played for three months before his contract was purchased by the Boston Braves. Aaron was assigned to the Eau Claire Braves, the Class-C minor league affiliate for the Boston Braves and was named Rookie of the Year in 1952. The next season, Aaron was promoted to the Jacksonville Braves, the Class-A affiliate in the South Atlantic League. The following year, Aaron was invited to spring training for the newly relocated Milwaukee Braves and was offered a major league contract. In 1954, he made his major league debut with the Milwaukee Braves. By 1955, Aaron was named to the National League All-Star roster and captured his first National League batting title in 1956. The following season, Aaron won the National League MVP Award and led the Braves to win the 1957 World Series. Aaron went on to lead the Braves to another pennant championship in 1958, and received his first Golden Glove Award. In 1965, the Milwaukee Braves moved to Atlanta, where he became the first franchise player to hit his 500th career home run; and in 1970, he was the first Brave to reach 3,000 career hits. On April 8, 1974 Aaron broke Babe Ruth's all-time homerun record with 715. Aaron was then traded to the Milwaukee Brewers for the 1975-1976 season, when he broke the all-time RBI record. After the 1976 season, Aaron retired from professional baseball and returned to the Atlanta Braves organization as an executive. In 1982, he was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame and was then named the Braves' vice president and director of player development. Aaron continued to serve as vice president of the Braves. He also owned several car dealerships in Georgia and owned over thirty restaurant chains throughout the country. In 1990, he published his memoir *I Had a Hammer*.

Aaron was awarded the Spingarn Medal in 1976, from the NAACP. In 1999, Major League Baseball announced

the introduction of the Hank Aaron Award to honor the best overall offensive performer in the American and National League. Later that year, Aaron was ranked fifth on *The Sporting News'* list of the 100 Greatest Baseball Players, and was elected to the Major League Baseball All-Century Team. In 2001, Aaron was presented with the Presidential Citizens Medal by President Bill Clinton. He also received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, from President George W. Bush in June 2002.

Hank Aaron was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on October 1, 2016.

Aaron passed away on January 22, 2021.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Hank Aaron was conducted by Larry Crowe on October 1, 2016, in Atlanta, Georgia, and was recorded on 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Baseball player Hank Aaron (1934 - 2021) began his career in the Negro Leagues with the Indianapolis Clowns. He led the Milwaukee Braves to a 1957 World Series title, and broke Babe Ruth's home run record in 1974.

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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:

Aaron, Hank, 1934-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

Aaron, Hank, 1934---Interviews  
African Americans--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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Atlanta Braves (Baseball team)

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## Occupations:

Baseball Player

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

SportsMakers

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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 Hank Aaron, October 1, 2016. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

### Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 6/7/2022 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 Hank Aaron, Section A2016\_064\_001\_001, TRT: 1:28:27  
2016/10/01

Hank Aaron was born on February 5, 1934 in Mobile, Alabama to Estella Pritchett Aaron and Herbert Aaron, Sr. Aaron's parents were originally from Camden, Alabama, and settled in Mobile after marrying. His mother was employed as a housekeeper for a white family, and his father worked long hours at the Alabama Drydock and Shipbuilding Company. On Sundays, they attended services at the Greater Morning Star Missionary Baptist Church. Aaron was the third oldest of eight children, who included his brother, Minor League baseball player Tommie Aaron. He grew up in the Toulminville section of Mobile, where the Ku Klux Klan often harassed the black community at night. Inspired by Brooklyn Dodgers player Jackie Robinson, Aaron learned to play baseball with broomsticks and makeshift balls. On the weekends, he played for the Mobile Black Bears, a semiprofessional team founded by Ed Tucker. He was also a member of the Boy Scouts, and directed traffic during Mobile's Mardi Gras festivities.

Video Oral History Interview with Hank Aaron, Section A2016\_064\_001\_002, TRT: 2:28:55  
2016/10/01

Hank Aaron attended Central High School in Mobile, Alabama, and transferred to the Josephine Allen Institute in 1950. During this time, he played with Ed Tucker's Mobile Black Bears. After graduating, Aaron was recruited to play for the Indianapolis Clowns in the Negro American League. The players received a small salary, and combined their earnings to afford meals. Due to southern segregation, Aaron and his teammates were forced to sleep on the bus, as they were not allowed to stay at hotels. Aaron soon gained the attention of Major League Baseball teams like the New York Yankees and the Boston Braves, whose scout, Dewey Griggs, helped him to improve his batting technique. Aaron signed a contract with the Boston Braves in 1952, and was sent to train with their minor league team, the Eau Claire Bears. The next year, Aaron played for the Jacksonville Braves alongside Felix Mantilla and Horace Garner. Although he was berated by white fans during games, he received support from the team's manager, Ben Garrity.

Video Oral History Interview with Hank Aaron, Section A2016\_064\_001\_003, TRT: 3:28:46  
2016/10/01

Hank Aaron married Barbara Lucas in 1953, and honed his skills while playing in Puerto Rico later that year. In 1954, he started his first season with the Milwaukee Braves, where his teammates included outfielder Bobby Thomson and pitcher Warren Spahn. Aaron played multiple positions, including outfielder, right fielder and second baseman. He initially struggled to adapt to Major League Baseball, but soon learned to hit the challenging pitches of Curt Simmons, Don Drysdale, Bob Gibson and Sandy Koufax. In 1957, the Milwaukee Braves faced the New York Yankees in the World Series, competing against players like Yogi Berra and Whitey Ford. Aaron was part of the starting lineup with teammates Del Crandall, Wes Covington, Red Schoendienst, Johnny Logan, Joe Adcock, Eddie Mathews and Bob Hazle. He led the team to defeat the New York Yankees, and was named the National League MVP. Although the team lost the 1958 World Series, Aaron received the Rawlings Gold Glove Award that year.

Video Oral History Interview with Hank Aaron, Section A2016\_064\_001\_004, TRT: 4:29:53  
2016/10/01

Hank Aaron won first place on the 'Home Run Derby' television show in 1959. While traveling with the Milwaukee Braves, he was allowed to stay in the hotels with the rest of the team, but received subpar accommodations as well as poor service in the local restaurants. In 1966, the Milwaukee Braves moved to Atlanta, Georgia, where Aaron was often criticized by sports writer Furman Bisher. Nevertheless, he continued to excel, and broke Willie Mays' home run record in 1967. Two years later, Aaron faced New York Mets players Gary Gentry, Nolan Ryan and Jerry Koosman in the playoffs, although the Atlanta Braves lost that year. Aaron made his three thousandth career hit in 1970, and surpassed Willie Mays for career home runs in 1972. During this time, he traveled to the Vietnam with fellow baseball stars Stan Musial, Joe Torre, Mel Allen and Harmon Killebrew to play for the troops. Aaron finished the 1973 season with 713 home runs, which placed him in contention to exceed Babe Ruth's home run record.

Video Oral History Interview with Hank Aaron, Section A2016\_064\_001\_005, TRT: 5:28:35  
2016/10/01

Hank Aaron began receiving death threats as he approached Babe Ruth's home run record in 1973. That same year, he married Billye Aaron. In 1974, Aaron surpassed Babe Ruth's record with a home run against the Los Angeles Dodgers pitcher Al Downing. The next year, he decided not to retire, and was traded to the Milwaukee Brewers for the 1975 and 1976 seasons. At this point, he talks about the famous baseball players of his time, including Ted Kluszewski, Billy Williams and Willie McCovey. Aaron also recalls playing with the San Francisco Giants player Bobby Bonds, and talks about the career of his son, Barry Bonds, including his alleged steroid use and his status as Major League Baseball's home run record holder. Aaron reflects upon the current gameplay in Major League Baseball. He also shares his views on Little League coaching, and talks about the diminished popularity of baseball in the African American community.

Video Oral History Interview with Hank Aaron, Section A2016\_064\_001\_006, TRT: 6:22:46  
2016/10/01

Hank Aaron retired from the Atlanta Braves in 1976, and was hired as the team's farm director. In this role, he mentored and trained young players like David Justice. In 1982, Aaron and Frank Robinson, who was the first black manager in Major League Baseball, were both inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum in Cooperstown, New York. The ceremony was attended by Aaron's wife, Billye Aaron, and his family friend, Benjamin Mays. In addition to his position with the Atlanta Braves, Aaron owned several car dealerships and restaurant franchises. In 1990, he published 'I Had a Hammer: The Hank Aaron Story,' with Lonnie Wheeler. Aaron and his wife founded the Hank Aaron Chasing the Dream Foundation in 1994. Aaron talks about the lack of resources for aspiring African American baseball players, and shares his advice for them. He also talks about his family, and his hopes and concerns for the African American community. Aaron concludes the interview by describing how he would like to be remembered.