

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Hank 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, Hank, 1939-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Hank Dixon,
<b>Dates:</b>	July 20, 2017
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2017
<b>Physical Description:</b>	4 uncompressed MOV digital video files (1:34:55).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Singer Hank Dixon (1939 - ) was a member of the Motown R&B group The Originals. They signed with Motown Records in 1966. Dixon was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 20, 2017, in Palmdale, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2017_120
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Singer Hank Dixon was born on December 17, 1939 in Detroit, Michigan to Melvia Thomas Dixon and George Dixon, Sr. As children, Dixon and his ten siblings performed at the nightly services of the Metropolitan Church of God in Detroit. Dixon began his education at Detroit's George Washington Carver School. Following his enlistment in the U.S. Army in the late 1950s, Dixon completed his basic training at Fort Leonard Wood in Missouri; and then he served as a bridge engineering specialist in Karlsruhe, Germany.

Dixon was discharged from the Army in 1965. Around this time, Dixon founded The Originals with baritone Walter Gaines, bass singer Freddie Gorman and lead

tenor C.P. Spencer. The group first served as the male background vocalists for artists like Stevie Wonder and David Ruffin at the Motown Records studios in Detroit. In 1969, the group released their debut album, *Green Grow the Lilacs*, on Soul Records, a subsidiary label of Motown Records. The album featured the song *Baby, I'm for Real* written by Marvin Gaye. Once the track became a commercial success, the album was reissued under the title *Baby, I'm for Real*. Gaye also wrote The Originals' next hit single, 'The Bells,' in 1970. The Originals went on to tour with The Temptations; and they performed at the Apollo Theater in New York City. In 1975, The Originals moved to Los Angeles, California, where they recorded the album *Down to Love Town*. They became a regular guest on the *Art Laboe Connection* radio program, and were also featured on the television show, *Soul Train*. The Originals left Motown Records in 1977; and recorded albums with Columbia Records and Motorcity Records. In 1980, Dixon became a bus driver for the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, retiring in 2004. He and his daughter, Terrie Dixon, re-established The Originals in the mid-2000s; and they went on to tour with Defrantz Forrest and Dillon F. Gorman, the son of Freddie Gorman.

Dixon and his wife, Ella Dixon, have three children: Tammy Dixon, Terrie Dixon and Tony Dixon.

Hank Dixon was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on July 20, 2017.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Hank Dixon was conducted by Harriette Cole on July 20, 2017, in Palmdale, California, and was recorded on 4 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Singer Hank Dixon (1939 - ) was a member of the Motown R&B group The Originals. They signed with Motown Records in 1966.

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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, Hank, 1939-

Cole, Harriette (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Dixon, Hank, 1939---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:

Singer

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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 Hank Dixon, July 20, 2017. 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 Hank Dixon, Section  
A2017\_120\_001\_001, TRT: 1:28:46 2017/07/20

Hank Dixon was born on December 17, 1939 in Detroit, Michigan to Melvia Thomas Dixon and George Dixon, Sr. His mother was born in Evergreen, Alabama. After moving to Detroit, she married Dixon's father, who was a cinderblock maker. They raised eleven children in the city's Black Bottom section. Dixon's family belonged to the Metropolitan Church of God, and performed at the church's nightly services. His mother played the piano, while Dixon and his siblings served as the choir. Dixon attended the George Washington Carver School, where he met his wife, Ella Dixon. They married prior to Dixon's enlistment in the U.S. Army in the late 1950s. He completed basic training at Fort Leonard Wood in Missouri, and then served as a bridge engineering specialist in Karlsruhe, Germany. After his discharge in 1965, Dixon founded The Originals with Walter Gaines, Freddie Gorman and C.P. Spencer. The group recorded background vocals at Motown Records.

Video Oral History Interview with Hank Dixon, Section  
A2017\_120\_001\_002, TRT: 2:27:49 2017/07/20

Hank Dixon and The Originals released 'Green Grow the Lilacs' on Motown Records' subsidiary label, Soul Records, in 1969. The album was redubbed 'Baby, I'm for Real' after the track of the same name became a hit single. The song was written by Marvin Gaye, who provided The Originals with another single hit single, 'The Bells,' in 1970. Five years later, The Originals moved to Los Angeles, California, where they became salaried employees of Motown Records. They also recorded the album, 'Down to Love Town.' The Originals performed at a few venues in Los Angeles, but received little support from the record company, and were unable to break into the local music scene. In 1980, Dixon became a bus driver for the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority. The Originals continued to perform their hit

songs three times a year on the 'Art Laboe Connection' radio program. At this point, Dixon reflects upon his life and legacy. He was the only living member of The Originals at the time of the interview.

Video Oral History Interview with Hank Dixon, Section  
A2017\_120\_001\_003, TRT: 3:29:34 2017/07/20

Hank Dixon was a member of The Originals, who served as the male background vocalists at the Motown Records studios in Detroit, Michigan. There, Dixon's brother, George Dixon, Jr., attended church with Marvin Gaye, whom he introduced to the band. Impressed with their singing, Gaye wrote two hit singles for them: 'Baby, I'm for Real' and 'The Bells.' The Originals went on to tour with The Temptations, where they sang backup in addition to performing their own music. On another tour, The Originals performed at the Apollo Theater in New York City. In 1975, The Originals joined Motown Records in Los Angeles, California. Unlike in Detroit, the group rarely performed live in Los Angeles, and never received Motown Records' full investment due to inconsistent chart results. Nonetheless, The Originals were invited to sing on Don Cornelius' 'Soul Train,' and Dixon received multiple invitations to the Los Angeles Playboy Mansion, where he met Hugh Heffner.

Video Oral History Interview with Hank Dixon, Section  
A2017\_120\_001\_004, TRT: 4:08:46 2017/07/20

Hank Dixon moved with his family to Glendale, California in 1975. Three years earlier, Motown Records had relocated its headquarters to Los Angeles, California. The record company provided Dixon with an apartment in Glendale, which was an all-white neighborhood. There, Dixon's family were frequently accused of robbing the local stores, which eventually required the executives of Motown Records to intervene with Glendale's mayor. Dixon's children also faced discrimination from students at the local schools, where they were sometimes physically attacked. Motown executive Suzanne de Passe barred The Originals from performing at predominantly black venues, and promised them a career in Las Vegas, Nevada instead. In the meantime, Motown Records provided the band with a small salary. While The

Originals were well known in Detroit, the lack of performance opportunities in Los Angeles inhibited their growth. The Originals left Motown Records in 1977. Dixon concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.