

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Reverend Addie Wyatt

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## Overview of the Collection

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| <b>Repository:</b>           | The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616<br>info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com  |
| <b>Creator:</b>              | Wyatt, Addie L., 1924-   |
| <b>Title:</b>                | The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Addie Wyatt,   |
| <b>Dates:</b>                | June 1, 2002   |
| <b>Bulk Dates:</b>           | 2002   |
| <b>Physical Description:</b> | 8 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:54:31).  |
| <b>Abstract:</b>             | Labor leader and pastor Reverend Addie Wyatt (1924 - 2012 ) was the first female local union president of the United Packinghouse Food and Allied Workers. Wyatt also served as co-pastor of Vernon Park Church of God in Chicago, Illinois. Wyatt was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on June 1, 2002, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview. |
| <b>Identification:</b>       | A2002_096  |
| <b>Language:</b>             | The interview and records are in English.  |

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Addie L. Wyatt was born on March 8, 1924, in Brookhaven, Mississippi. The oldest girl of eight children, Wyatt (then Cameron) looked to her mother, Maggie Cameron, as an example. When Wyatt was only three, she gave her first recitation in church. This began a career in public speaking which reaches through religion to human rights, which represents a lifetime of work in which her actions speak even louder than her powerful words.

Wyatt is one of the nation's foremost labor leaders. She was the first female local union president of the United Packinghouse Food and Allied Workers. She began working for the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of North America in 1941 and became the organization's first female international vice president. She and her husband, Dr. Claude Wyatt, Jr., founded the Wyatt Choral Ensemble in 1944. Wyatt was ordained in 1955 and the next year the Wyatts began working closely with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. They helped found Operation Breadbasket and serve on the board of Operation PUSH, People United to Serve Humanity.

Wyatt believes in a holistic Gospel and that all things are connected, and this can be seen in her work. Wyatt served as the director of the women's affairs and human rights departments in the Amalgamated Meat Cutters union. Eleanor Roosevelt appointed her to serve on the Labor Legislation Committee of the Commission on the Status of Women, which presented its report in 1963. In 1974, she helped found the Coalition of Labor Union Women and delivered the keynote address at the founding meeting to 3,200 participants. Wyatt was a founding member of the National Organization for Women and a leader in the struggle for an Equal Rights Amendment.

Today, Wyatt serves as co-pastor of Vernon Park Church of God in Chicago, Illinois. The church, which Wyatt and her husband helped found, has approximately 1,000 members and is widely know for its work with homeless people, seniors and youth. She works for peace and has supported worthy political candidates. She was named one of *Time Magazine's* Women of the Year in 1975 and received a similar honor from *The Ladies Home Journal* in 1977. *Ebony* named her one of the 100 most influential black Americans from 1980 to 1984.

Rev. Addie Wyatt passed away on March 28, 2012.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Reverend Addie Wyatt was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on June 1, 2002, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 8 Betacame SP videocassettes. Labor leader and pastor Reverend Addie Wyatt (1924 - 2012 ) was the first female local union president of the United Packinghouse Food and Allied Workers. Wyatt also served as co-pastor of Vernon Park Church of God in Chicago, Illinois.

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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:

Wyatt, Addie L., 1924-

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Wyatt, Addie L., 1924- --Interviews

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African American women clergy--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews

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African American labor leaders--Interviews

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African American civic leaders--Interviews

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Public speaking

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African Americans--Genealogy

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Mothers--Death--Psychological aspects

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Rural-urban migration--United States

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African American families--Mississippi

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Lynching--Mississippi--History

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Discrimination in employment--Illinois--Chicago

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Labor unions--United States

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Poverty--Southern States

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United Packinghouse Workers of America

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Sex discrimination in employment--Illinois--Chicago

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Families of military personnel--United States

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Montgomery Improvement Association

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Civil rights movement

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King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968

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Feminism--United States

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United States. Civil Rights Act of 1964

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Equal pay for equal work--United States

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Women--employment--United States

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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:

Labor Leader

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### HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

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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 Reverend Addie Wyatt, June 1, 2002. 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 Reverend Addie Wyatt, Section A2002\_096\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:27 ?

Addie L. Wyatt gives some details on her mother's background and describes that she died at a young age, leaving Addie her five children to raise. She also discusses her father's life and how racism caused him to be an angry and frustrated person. The family relocated from Brookhaven, Mississippi, to

Chicago, Illinois, after her father had an altercation with his white boss and was forced to leave town. She recalls her earliest memory: at two years old she remembers complaining about having her hair braided. Addie L. Wyatt then recounts her family history, including how her parents met and the names and ages of her siblings. She then describes her childhood in Brookhaven. Finally, Wyatt describes a trip she took back to her childhood home and the stirring of emotions that resulted.

African American women clergy--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews.

African American labor leaders--Interviews.

African American civic leaders--Interviews.

Public speaking.

African Americans--Genealogy.

Mothers--Death--Psychological aspects.

Rural-urban migration--United States.

African American families--Mississippi.

Lynching--Mississippi--History.

Discrimination in employment--Illinois--Chicago.

Labor unions--United States.

Poverty--Southern States.

United Packinghouse Workers of America.

Sex discrimination in employment--Illinois--Chicago.

Families of military personnel--United States.

Montgomery Improvement Association.

Civil rights movements.

King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968.

Feminism--United States.

United States. Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Equal pay for equal work--United States.

Women--Employment--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Addie Wyatt, Section A2002\_096\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:53 ?

Wyatt recalls memories from her childhood, including visiting patients with her grandmother, a midwife, and a family tradition, the weekly "love fest." Wyatt also remembers sobering moments from her childhood, news of lynchings in her community and the general tone of aggression against black people. Wyatt describes that she was known by many in her community as an "old child", a girl who concerned herself with the business of adults. Wyatt names the schools she attended in Chicago after the family's change of residence. She then describes her childhood reaction to the family's limited resources, during the era of the Works Progress Administration.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Addie Wyatt, Section A2002\_096\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:44 ?

Addie L. Wyatt remembers being humiliated as a youth when having to prove to a welfare worker that she did, in fact, need new shoes. Wyatt describes how she used to make money as a child and give her mother most of the profits, while only keeping a small portion for herself. She then tells of her experience, at seventeen, when she worked at Armour and Company and discovered that she was making less money than the whites and the men. It was at this point in time

when she first became interested in labor unions. She then joined the union and soon became a delegate. At her first conference she saw the mix of races coming together to fight for workers' rights and equal rights and became incredibly inspired. Wyatt suggested the idea of having a female vice president of the union. The union agreed and begged her to run for the position. After much deliberation she ran and was elected. Later she was elected as President of the United Packinghouse Workers.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Addie Wyatt, Section A2002\_096\_001\_004, TRT: 0:30:29 ?

Wyatt faced many challenges in the male-dominated negotiations. She had to start with the basics of equality and first demanded that she sit at eye level with the company leaders when negotiating instead of on the sofa where they literally looked down on her. Her first victory as a labor leader came when she was able to get an employee's job back after he had stolen meat from the packinghouse. Her husband was drafted into the Navy during World War II. Addie L. Wyatt describes how she managed work and home life during these trying times. During the 1940s, Wyatt met Reverend Willie Barrow and briefly describes their relationship. Wyatt was very loyal to the Church of God; however, she faced opposition from the members when they discovered her involvement in the labor movement, as it was thought to be male-run and gangster. Wyatt received support from other women labor rights workers.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Addie Wyatt, Section A2002\_096\_001\_005, TRT: 0:30:20 ?

Addie L. Wyatt discusses her career ascent and tells of the increase in responsibility and travel. She then describes how her ministry, Vernon Park Church of God, was formed. She tells of how the church was shunned because of the members' support of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. when the contractor pulled out of the project to build their church. Wyatt fully supported Dr. King and worked with him in Alabama with the Montgomery Improvement Association. She explains the emotions she felt the first time she heard Dr. King speak and the powerful presence he had. Wyatt describes the violence that she, Dr. King and other marchers experienced at a civil rights march in Chicago.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Addie Wyatt, Section A2002\_096\_001\_006, TRT: 0:30:12 ?

Addie L. Wyatt makes the point that she was integrating equal pay for equal work clauses into union contracts even before the Equal Pay Act or the Civil Rights Act came into effect. She then talks about some of the common objections and worries that surrounded the idea. Wyatt goes into detail on the struggles that women, specifically black women, have had to overcome. She explains that women did not face these problems only in the workplace, but also in the church and in the home. Addie L. Wyatt talks in general about and expresses pride in having achieved greater freedom for minorities. As she looks into the future, she realizes that all of the progress that has been made could easily be lost. She calls for continued struggles for peace, justice, freedom and equality. Wyatt also makes it clear that the up and coming African American generations need to be aware of the struggles their elders have gone through to better their race. These lines of communication and the passing down of stories of the movements prove incredibly important to Wyatt. Addie L. Wyatt then describes the role of the church in cultivating better citizens.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Addie Wyatt, Section A2002\_096\_001\_007, TRT: 0:30:33 ?

Addie L. Wyatt tells how she has always looked to God for strength during

adverse times. When asked of her late parents, she explains that they would both be pleased with the strides she's made for African Americans, unions and women. Wyatt would like to be remembered as someone who inspired others, as she was inspired. In terms of her legacy, Wyatt mentions love and confidence in people for who they are. Addie L. Wyatt then discusses the accomplishments of her ministry, the Vernon Park Church of God. Following are photos from Addie L. Wyatt's life. Photos include Addie with the likes of Rosalyn Carter, Jesse Jackson, Andrew Young, Carol Moseley Braun as well as Wyatt on the cover of Time magazine.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Addie Wyatt, Section A2002\_096\_001\_008, TRT: 0:21:53 ?

Photographs throughout Addie L. Wyatt's life. Photos include Addie L. Wyatt with Jimmy Carter, Rosa Parks, Coretta Scott King, Jesse Jackson and Richard M. Daley among others.