

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Louis Dinwiddie

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Dinwiddie, Louis, 1935-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Louis Dinwiddie,
Dates:	July 29, 2002
Bulk Dates:	2002
Physical Description:	3 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:25:08).
Abstract:	Radio entrepreneur Louis Dinwiddie (1935 -) owned the first black radio stations in Fort Wayne, Indiana. Dinwiddie started a cable radio station from the ground up and later made it an FM station. WJFX broadcasts urban programming. Dinwiddie was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 29, 2002, in Fort Wayne, Indiana. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2002_195
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Pioneering radio broadcaster Louis Dinwiddie was born on October 29, 1935, in St. Louis, Missouri, and grew up as an only child in Fort Wayne, Indiana. His father, James Arthur Dinwiddie, was a trumpet and saxophone player who traveled all over the country.

The only African American in his parochial school, Dinwiddie helped lead Central Catholic High School to a state championship in 1950. He spent four years in the United States Air Force after graduating and then moved back to Fort Wayne. After working in a steel mill for over six years, he sold insurance for Chicago Metropolitan Life. Enjoying sales, Dinwiddie moved into retail. He opened a clothing store in 1970 that successfully catered to both blacks and whites, selling trend-setting fashions for years. However, a bank denied him a loan to buy his fall merchandise, forcing Dinwiddie to close the shop.

The booming cable television industry inspired him to learn about cable radio and he entered the industry headfirst. The station's urban format included gospel music on Sunday mornings, blues on Saturday afternoons, heavy soul and news geared to an African American audience. In 1990, the station that Dinwiddie built from the ground up switched from cable to an FM frequency. WJFX continued to broadcast the original urban programming until 1999, when Dinwiddie sold it. Now retired, Dinwiddie still lives in Fort Wayne.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Louis Dinwiddie was conducted by Larry Crowe on July 29, 2002, in Fort Wayne, Indiana, and was recorded on 3 Betacame SP videocassettes. Radio entrepreneur Louis Dinwiddie (1935 -) owned the first black radio stations in Fort Wayne, Indiana. Dinwiddie started a cable radio station from the ground up and later made it an FM station. WJFX broadcasts urban programming.

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:

Dinwiddie, Louis, 1935-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Dinwiddie, Louis, 1935---Interviews

African American radio broadcasters--Interviews

African American businesspeople--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Radio Entrepreneur

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 Louis Dinwiddie, July 29, 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).

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 Louis Dinwiddie, Section A2002_195_001_001, TRT: 0:29:30 ?

Louis Dinwiddie describes his family background. His mother, Mary Mable, was born in 1910 in Greenville, Texas. Her father worked for the Nickle Plate Railroad, and moved his family to Fort Wayne, Indiana in the early 1900s. It was here that Mable met musician James Arthur Dinwiddie. Dinwiddie was born in 1910 in Paris, Tennessee. He settled in St. Louis, Missouri, yet his career as a musician took him all over the United States. He met Mary Mable while on tour in Fort Wayne, and later moved to the city to marry her. The couple gave birth to their only child, Louis Dinwiddie, on October 29, 1935. The couple separated in 1948. Louis Dinwiddie grew up in Fort Wayne's Westfield neighborhood, where

he enjoyed building soapbox derby cars, swimming and riding his bike. Dinwiddie was a mediocre student, but excelled athletically. He received a scholarship to play football at Catholic Central High School around 1949, which he accepted. Dinwiddie was a quarterback, and led the school to a state championship in 1950.

African Americans--Indiana--Fort Wayne--History--20th century.

African Americans--Indiana--Fort Wayne--social life and customs.

African American families--Social life and customs.

Education, Secondary--United States--History--20th century.

School sports.

Video Oral History Interview with Louis Dinwiddie, Section A2002_195_001_002, TRT: 0:29:40 ?

Louis Dinwiddie graduated from Central Catholic High School in 1953, and enlisted in the U.S. Air Force. He met his wife while stationed at Luke Air Force Base in Phoenix, Arizona. Dinwiddie left the Air Force in 1956, and settled in Fort Wayne, Indiana, where he worked at a steel mill from 1956 to 1961. He then took a position selling insurance for Chicago Metropolitan Life, and opened a small retail store; each of these endeavors lasted about six months. Dinwiddie was hired at a clothing store in 1961, where he was taught about the retail business. He excelled, and was offered a job managing a branch of the department store in Biloxi, Mississippi around 1965. Dinwiddie declined the promotion, and elected to manage the “Misses” department at Patterson Fletcher Department Store. Dinwiddie opened his own clothing store, “Louie D’s” in 1970. Dinwiddie closed “Louie D’s” in 1980, and entered cable radio industry by opening his own cable radio station Cool Radio.

African American businesspeople--History--20th century.

Fort Wayne (Ind.)--History--20th century.

Fashion merchandising--History--20th century.

Radio broadcasting--Indiana--History.

Video Oral History Interview with Louis Dinwiddie, Section A2002_195_001_003, TRT: 0:25:58 ?

In 1980, Louis Dinwiddie opened Cool Radio, one of Fort Wayne, Indiana’s first cable radio stations. In 1990, the federal government sponsored a lottery to encourage more minority-owned FM radio stations. Dinwiddie applied to the lottery, and won a spot. WGFX-FM, or Foxy 107.9, aired in 1990 as Fort Wayne, Indiana’s first urban radio station. The station aired gospel, soul, and jazz music, as well as a public affairs program. Dinwiddie sold WGFX-FM in 1999 to a white entrepreneur. Unfortunately, much of the radio’s staff was laid off unexpectedly during the sale, and the station was switched to a hip-hop format. Dinwiddie comments on modern urban radio, as well as well-known radio deejays like HistoryMakers Herb Kent and Hal Jackson. Dinwiddie also spoke about his legacy, how he would like to be remembered, and his family. He closes the interview by narrating a photograph.

Radio broadcasting--Indiana--History.

African American radio stations--Indiana--Fort Wayne.