

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Delano O'Banion

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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>	O'Banion, Delano, 1936-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Delano O'Banion,
<b>Dates:</b>	April 16, 2008 and November 15, 2006
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2006 and 2008
<b>Physical Description:</b>	11 Betacame SP videocassettes (4:41:45).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Music instructor, choral director, and classical singer Delano O'Banion (1936 - ) helped establish the John Work Chorale which specializes in singing Negro spirituals in the Fisk Jubilee Singers' style. O'Banion was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 16, 2008 and November 15, 2006, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2006_143
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Delano O'Banion was born on November 3, 1936 in Chicago, Illinois. He attended Chicago public schools from elementary through high school. While a student at Phillips High School, he played the clarinet and bassoon in the Phillips Concert Band. As a senior at Phillips High School, O'Banion became a student assistant band director and drum major under Professor Earl Madison. In addition to singing various classical styles of choral music, he learned to sing oratorio and opera in the Hartzell Methodist Church's Young People Choir (1951-1955). During this period, he received a scholarship to study voice with Madame Elsa Harthan Arendt at the Sherwood Music School in Chicago, Illinois.

In 1955, O'Banion received an academic music scholarship to Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. While at Fisk University, O'Banion toured the United States and Europe with the famed Fisk Jubilee Singers. During his junior year at Fisk University, O'Banion sang as guest soloist with the Tuskegee Institute Choir at Radio City Music Hall in New York City. In 1958, O'Banion worked with renowned musician, composer and conductor Professor William L. Dawson.

Upon graduation from Fisk University in 1959 with his B.S. degree in music, O'Banion began a teaching career that spanned forty-six years. O'Banion became quite active as a classical soloist, singing oratorio, opera, recitals, and major orchestral works throughout the Midwest. In 1961, along with several alumni friends from Fisk University, O'Banion established The John Work Chorale. His love for conducting this choral group became his primary work. The John Work Chorale specializes in preserving nurturing the perpetuation of singing Negro Spirituals in the original style of the Fisk Jubilee Singers. O'Banion also served as the choral director at Marshall High School for several years.

O'Banion served as minister of music for Grace Presbyterian Church (1960-1966), and serves as minister of music at Hartzell Memorial United Methodist Church, (1977-present). In addition to his work as minister of music,

O'Banion serves on the board of the Chicago Dance and Music Alliance, the Chicago Youth Symphony Orchestra and the Board of Trustees at Hartzell Memorial United Methodist Church. O'Banion has received numerous awards for excellence in music, education, and community service.

O'Banion was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on November 15, 2006.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Delano O'Banion was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson and Linda Williams on April 16, 2008 and November 15, 2006, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 11 Betacame SP videocassettes. Music instructor, choral director, and classical singer Delano O'Banion (1936 - ) helped establish the John Work Chorale which specializes in singing Negro spirituals in the Fisk Jubilee Singers' style.

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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:

O'Banion, Delano, 1936-

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Williams, Linda (Interviewer)

Stegner, Terry (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
O'Banion, Delano, 1936- --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:

Choral Director

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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 Delano O'Banion, April 16, 2008 and November 15, 2006. 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 Delano O'Banion, Section A2006\_143\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:50 ?

Delano O'Banion was born on November 3, 1936 in Chicago, Illinois to Sarah Breckenridge O'Banion and Julian O'Banion. He was named after President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. His mother was born in Maysville, Kentucky in 1910 to Sadie Breckenridge, a house mother, and William Breckenridge, a hunter. O'Banion often visited his maternal grandparents as a child. O'Banion's mother worked as a maid before becoming a nurse. O'Banion's father, was born in Boston, Massachusetts to Mary and J. Winnie O'Banion, and worked for International Harvester in Chicago. O'Banion describes the sights, sounds, and smells of growing up in Chicago's Lake Meadows neighborhood. He also describes Christmas celebrations as a child. He attended Doolittle Grammar School with his three brothers. After his older brother died of cancer in 1948, O'Banion began to sing in his honor in his church's choir. He also joined the band at Phillips High School in Chicago which was directed by Earl Madison. O'Banion recalls his early music teachers.

Video Oral History Interview with Delano O'Banion, Section A2006\_143\_001\_002, TRT: 0:28:29 ?

Delano O'Banion remembers his teachers at Doolittle Grammar School in Chicago, Illinois. He began playing the clarinet after joining the band at Phillips High School in Chicago and soon became student assistant to band director, Earl Madison. During his senior year, O'Banion was offered a scholarship to attend Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee as a Jubilee Singer impressing the ensemble's director, John Work, III. O'Banion talks about the history of the Fisk Jubilee Singers, who were initially perceived as a minstrel group, but later garnered international acclaim. He also describes John Work's reorganization of the Jubilee Singers, and the group's European tour in 1956. As a student at Fisk University from 1955 to 1959, O'Banion majored in music and studied conducting under John Work and William L. Dawson. O'Banion describes the pathos of spirituals and their impact on American music. He also talks about directing the Jubilee Singers' 125th anniversary concert.

Video Oral History Interview with Delano O'Banion, Section A2006\_143\_001\_003, TRT: 0:28:53 ?

Delano O'Banion was a member of the Fisk Jubilee Singers as a student at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee from 1955 to 1959. While on tour with the ensemble, O'Banion saw the effect of spirituals on audiences abroad. He talks about African American composers like Scott Joplin, and William L. Dawson. As a boy, O'Banion attended Hartzell United Methodist in Chicago, Illinois. He describes the difference between anthems, gospel songs, hymns, art songs, and spirituals. He also sings some song excerpts. Many of these musical forms were part of the Jubilee Singers' repertoire. In the summer of 1958, O'Banion performed with the Tuskegee Institute Choir at Radio City Music Hall in New York City, New York. After graduating from Fisk University in 1959, O'Banion worked as a substitute teacher at Beidler Elementary School before he was hired as a music teacher at Marshall High School in 1963. O'Banion recalls the 1960 founding of the John Work Chorale, and career opportunities throughout his life.

Video Oral History Interview with Delano O'Banion, Section A2006\_143\_001\_004, TRT: 0:30:11 ?

Delano O'Banion talks about the John Work Chorale's collaboration with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in Brazil. O'Banion also served as a musical director at Hartzell Memorial United Methodist Church and Marshall High School in Chicago, Illinois. He directed Chicago's pilot Theater-In-The-Streets program for kids from 1967 to 1970. In 1970, O'Banion entered the University of Chicago for graduate studies in social psychology. After graduating in 1972, he returned to Marshall High School as a general music

teacher. O'Banion reflects upon his legacy at Marshall High School where he built a respected band program. After retiring in 2005, he continued to direct the John Work Chorale and the choir at Hartzell Memorial United Methodist Church. He talks about his parents' careers, the value of education, and his future aspirations. O'Banion also describes his blessings, his hopes and concerns for the African American community, how he would like to be remembered, and his legacy.

Video Oral History Interview with Delano O'Banion, Section A2006\_143\_001\_005, TRT: 0:04:58 ?  
Delano O'Banion narrates his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Delano O'Banion, Section A2006\_143\_002\_006, TRT: 0:31:23 ?  
Delano O'Banion was named after Franklin Delano Roosevelt. As a boy, O'Banion grew up in a tight-knit family with three brothers who enjoyed singing together in harmony. One of his brothers, Lincoln Levi O'Banion, died of cancer in 1948. The death had a devastating impact on the O'Banion family and contributed to his parents' separation. O'Banion remembers his brother as a talented artist and singer. O'Banion's mother, Sarah Breckenridge O'Banion, was a maid and caterer who sang in the choir at Hartzell Memorial United Methodist Church in Chicago, Illinois. O'Banion enjoyed a close relationship with his father, who was a mechanic at International Harvester. O'Banion describes the sights, sounds, and smells of his childhood in Chicago's Lake Meadows neighborhood. O'Banion joined the youth choir at Hartzell Church where he sang anthems, spirituals, and classical works. His role models at Hartzell included Mr. Campbell, the choir director, and local baritone Nathaneal McLin, husband of Lena McLin.

Video Oral History Interview with Delano O'Banion, Section A2006\_143\_002\_007, TRT: 0:30:42 ?  
Delano O'Banion talks about his experience in the music program at Doolittle Grammar School in Chicago, Illinois. O'Banion's musical interests continued to expand at Phillips High School in Chicago, after he joined the school's band program, which was directed by Earl Madison. O'Banion describes his role as Madison's student assistant. During high school, O'Banion also received vocal training from Elsa Harthan Arendt at the Sherwood Music School. In 1955, he entered Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee where his training continued with F. Bertram Briess. O'Banion was offered a scholarship to Fisk University after singing for John Work, III, the director of the Fisk Jubilee Singers. O'Banion would later name his own choir, John Work Chorale in Work's honor. He recounts his experience of campus life at Fisk and also describes memorable educators like history professor Theodore Currier. O'Banion expresses his admiration for singers William McFarland, Roland Hayes, and HistoryMaker William Warfield.

Video Oral History Interview with Delano O'Banion, Section A2006\_143\_002\_008, TRT: 0:30:00 ?  
Delano O'Banion describes the history of the Fisk Jubilee Singers. Founded by George White in 1871, the group launched a tour of the United States and Europe to raise funds for Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. O'Banion describes campus life as a student at Fisk University from 1955 to 1959. In 1956, he joined the Jubilee Singers for a European tour under the direction of John Work, III. Fisk University president Charles S. Johnson died while the group was on tour. O'Banion spent his college summers working for the Sante Fe Railway in Chicago, Illinois until he was recruited to join the Tuskegee Institute Choir at Radio City Music Hall in New York City in 1958. O'Banion describes challenges faced by African American singers like Paul Robeson, William McFarland, and HistoryMakers William Warfield and Etta Moten Barnett in the 1950s. He also remembers his good friends at Fisk. O'Banion

talks about what he learned as William L. Dawson's assistant during the composer's year-long residency at Fisk in 1958.

Video Oral History Interview with Delano O'Banion, Section A2006\_143\_002\_009, TRT: 0:29:31 ?

Delano O'Banion compares the Tuskegee Institute Choir and Fisk Jubilee Singers. As a student at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, O'Banion studied conducting under John Work, III and William L. Dawson. He compares their directing styles and also talks about their compositions. O'Banion places the contributions of gospel legend Thomas A. Dorsey outside of the musical tradition of Work and Dawson. O'Banion's experience in the Jubilee Singers guided his direction of the John Work Chorale, which was founded in 1961. O'Banion describes his leadership of the group which endured a brief hiatus before its recreation in 1972. He reflects upon challenges he faced as a black teacher in the Chicago Public School system after graduating from Fisk in 1959. O'Banion taught at Beidler Elementary School until 1963 when the John Work Chorale was invited to join the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in Brazil. He was inspired to become a singer by Theodore Charles Stone of the National Association of Negro Musicians.

Video Oral History Interview with Delano O'Banion, Section A2006\_143\_002\_010, TRT: 0:31:14 ?

Delano O'Banion became Marshall High School's boys chorus director in 1963. He was later the school's general music teacher, choral director, and band director, transforming the high school's music program before his retirement in 2005. O'Banion credits his progress as an educator to John Work, III, William L. Dawson, Earl Madison, and Mr. Campbell. He talks about his brief theater career. O'Banion's interest in social psychology led him to study at the University of Chicago from 1970 to 1972, but he ultimately returned to music education at Marshall High School. O'Banion remembers a mentee from Marshall, Clarence Thomas. O'Banion then describes the spiritual aspect of his singing and his connection with his audiences. During O'Banion's freshman year at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, the instruction of F. Bertram Briess had a lasting impact on O'Banion's vocal technique. He sings an excerpt from Handel's 'Messiah,' before reflecting upon his career, his legacy, and his desire to travel the world.

Video Oral History Interview with Delano O'Banion, Section A2006\_143\_002\_011, TRT: 0:05:34 ?

Delano O'Banion talks about how his understanding of Negro spirituals began in the youth choir at Hartzell Memorial United Methodist Church in Chicago, Illinois, and expanded through his involvement with the Sherwood Music School, and in the Jubilee Singers at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. He also talks about how spirituals resonate across different cultures as well as their role during the Civil Rights Movement.