

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Edgar Duncan

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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>	Duncan, Edgar, 1932-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Edgar Duncan,
<b>Dates:</b>	August 13, 2008
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2008
<b>Physical Description:</b>	4 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:57:00).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Pharmacist and presidential appointee Edgar Duncan (1932 - 2011 ) was the first black student to graduate with a M.S. degree in hygiene from the University of Pittsburgh's Graduate School of Public Health in 1956. He later was the first pharmacist to be promoted to Assistant Surgeon General in 1972. Duncan was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 13, 2008, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2008_105
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Accomplished pharmacist Dr. Edgar Newton Duncan was born on February 1, 1932 in Monessen, Pennsylvania to Willie and William Duncan. Duncan's father worked as a tailor in the first tailor shop in Monessen. Duncan's mother, graduated from the Tuskegee Institute, became a teacher, married and passed on her love of learning to her six children. Excelling in school, Duncan knew that he wanted to go to college. After graduating from high school as class valedictorian, Duncan went on to Duquesne University.

In 1954, Duncan would be the only black student in his class to graduate from Duquesne University with a B.S. degree in pharmacy. He graduated magna cum laude. At Duquesne University, Duncan would meet Lauraine Thorne, and the two would get married in 1954. In 1956, Duncan became the first black student to graduate with his M.S. degree in hygiene from the University of Pittsburgh's Graduate School of Public Health (GSPH). Duncan began working in the U.S. Public Health Service's Commissioned Officers Corps, and in 1972, he became the first pharmacist to be promoted to surgeon general. After returning as Associate Dean of GSPH, he began to work with Pitt's Partners in Education Consortium and other programs to encourage black and other minority youth to pursue health professions. These programs have made a difference for many young minority students.

In 1990, Duncan earned his Ph.D. in higher education administration from the University of Pittsburgh School of Education. He and his wife raised three sons and sent them all to college.

Duncan passed away on December 17, 2011.

Duncan was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on August 13, 2008.

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# Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Edgar Duncan was conducted by Larry Crowe on August 13, 2008, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and was recorded on 4 Betacame SP videocassettes. Pharmacist and presidential appointee Edgar Duncan (1932 - 2011 ) was the first black student to graduate with a M.S. degree in hygiene from the University of Pittsburgh's Graduate School of Public Health in 1956. He later was the first pharmacist to be promoted to Assistant Surgeon General in 1972.

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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:

Duncan, Edgar, 1932-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Duncan, Edgar, 1932- --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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United States. Office of the Surgeon General

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### Occupations:

Pharmacist

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Presidential Appointee

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### HistoryMakers® Category:

MedicalMakers|PoliticalMakers

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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 Edgar Duncan, August 13, 2008. 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 Edgar Duncan, Section A2008\_105\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:20 ?  
Edgar Duncan was born on February 1, 1932 in Monessen, Pennsylvania to

Willie McMillan Duncan and William Duncan, Sr. His paternal great-grandmother, Effie Montgomery, was a free teacher in Alabama during the era of slavery. Duncan's paternal grandmother, Sarah Duncan, married an immigrant from British Guiana, Duncan's paternal grandfather Henry Duncan, with whom she raised ten sons in Opelika, Alabama. Duncan's maternal grandparents, Reverend John McMillan and Chaney McMillan, lived in Tuskegee, Alabama, where his grandfather was the presiding elder of the Butler Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church. During Booker T. Washington's presidency, Duncan's mother studied education at the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, where her professors included scientist George Washington Carver. She met Duncan's father in Tuskegee, and together they moved to Monessen, where they raised six children, including Duncan. Duncan's father opened a tailor shop in Monessen, and wrote for The Crisis magazine during the 1920s.

Video Oral History Interview with Edgar Duncan, Section A2008\_105\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:50 ?

Edgar Duncan grew up in Monessen, Pennsylvania, where his family was the only black household in their neighborhood. He attended Monessen Vocational High School, where he was one of seven black students in a class of two hundred. He enjoyed chemistry and Latin, and played the tuba and bass violin in the school's band. He also belonged to an all-black Boy Scout troop and the congregation of Monessen's Wayman A.M.E. Church. Motivated by his older siblings, Duncan excelled academically in high school. During his senior year, he applied to a vocational school to become an electrician, but was encouraged by a white teacher to continue his college preparatory education. The community raised money for his college tuition; and, in 1950, Duncan graduated as his school's first black valedictorian. He aspired to become a pharmacist, and spoke about newly developed drugs like Penicillin and antihistamines in his graduation speech. Duncan then matriculated at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Video Oral History Interview with Edgar Duncan, Section A2008\_105\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:30 ?

Edgar Duncan was one of two black students in the pharmacy program at Duquesne University. He graduated magna cum laude in 1954, and then became the first African American to enroll at the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health. During his studies, he worked in the pharmacy at the Western Pennsylvania Hospital; and, although his grades suffered, a professor encouraged him to continue with the program. Duncan earned a master's degree in hygiene science in 1956, and then completed a residency in New York, where he became the first black member of the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps. From 1957, he served in Chicago as the U.S. Public Health Service Hospital's first black chief pharmacist, and became president of the Illinois Society of Hospital Pharmacists. He worked for the Indian Health Service in 1962, and then the U.S. Public Health Service's affirmative action program. In 1972, he became the first black pharmacist to serve as the assistant surgeon general.

Video Oral History Interview with Edgar Duncan, Section A2008\_105\_001\_004, TRT: 0:28:20 ?

Edgar Duncan served as the assistant surgeon general of the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps until 1977. He went on to become the assistant vice president of Medicare at Empire Blue Cross Blue Shield of New York, and then the director of Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey in 1980. From 1982, Duncan served as the associate dean of the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health, where he founded the Public Health Careers Opportunity Program. During his tenure, he also conducted research for the Health ABC Study, which focused on black elders. In 1990, Duncan earned a

Ph.D. degree from the University of Pittsburgh School of Education. Following his retirement in 2005, Duncan worked as a pharmacist, and served as the Center for Minority Health's interim director, where he implemented the Partners in Education Consortium program. Duncan reflects upon his life, legacy and family; his hopes and concerns for the African American community; and how he would like to be remembered.