

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Paul W. Stewart

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Stewart, Paul W.
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Paul W. Stewart,
Dates:	November 6, 2008
Bulk Dates:	2008
Physical Description:	9 Betacame SP videocassettes (4:08:18).
Abstract:	Curator Paul Stewart (1925 - 2015) created a collection of 35,000 artifacts related to black cowboys of the American West, which became the Black American West Museum and Heritage Center in the Five Points district of Denver, Colorado. Stewart was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 6, 2008, in Aurora, Colorado. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2008_127
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Curator Paul Wilbur Stewart was born on December 18, 1925 in Clinton, Iowa to Eugene Joseph Stewart and Martha L. Moor Stewart. His father was in the trucking business, and during the Great Depression, he owned a trucking company. Stewart's family was one of the few Black families to live in a predominately white area at that time. After graduating from high school, Stewart joined the U.S. Navy and earned the rank of seaman first class. After he served in the Navy, he moved to Evanston, Illinois with his brother, Eugene. He took night classes at Roosevelt University while working as a mail sorter at the post office. However, he did not receive a degree from Roosevelt because he dropped out in order to assist his brother with his school expenses. Instead, he went on to get his barber's license from Moler Barber College in 1947. After that, he spent more than a decade working as a barber in Illinois, Wisconsin and New York.

In the early 1960s, Stewart's interest in the involvement of Blacks in the West peaked after visiting a relative in Denver. Stewart made a commitment to exposing the world to the prominence of Black cowboys in the American West. In 1971, Stewart started a collection in an old Denver saloon. His collection consisted of more than 35,000 items, including personal artifacts, photographs, clothing, paintings, letters, legal documents, newspapers, and oral histories. However, with the onset of the downtown urban renewal, he was forced to find another location. He housed the "Paul Stewart Collection" in Denver's Clayton College for almost ten years. During the time it was at the college, it had become incorporated and had a board of directors.

The museum's prominence grew, so once again, the location needed to be adjusted. In the mid-1980s, Stewart packed up his museum and moved it to a larger, more convenient location in Denver's Five Points historical district, a predominantly Black neighborhood in downtown Denver. During the growth of his museum, in 1986, Stewart married gospel artist Johnnie Mae Davis.

In the early 1990s, the collection was moved to another location in Five Points. Today, the museum is open five

days a week. More than 5,000 visitors come to the museum every year. The Black American West Museum and Heritage Center also offers educational activities and programs, tours and other special events. Over the years, Stewart also served as a member of the Historical Records Advisory Board for Colorado and has taught at Metropolitan State College in Denver.

Stewart was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on November 6, 2008.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Paul W. Stewart was conducted by Denise Gines on November 6, 2008, in Aurora, Colorado, and was recorded on 9 Betacame SP videocassettes. Curator Paul Stewart (1925 - 2015) created a collection of 35,000 artifacts related to black cowboys of the American West, which became the Black American West Museum and Heritage Center in the Five Points district of Denver, Colorado.

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:

Stewart, Paul W.

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Stewart, Paul W.--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Curator

HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

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 Paul W. Stewart, November 6, 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).

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 Paul W. Stewart, Section A2008_127_001_001, TRT: 0:28:30 ?

Paul Stewart was born on December 18, 1925 in Clinton, Iowa to Martha Moore Stewart and Eugene Stewart, Sr. His paternal grandmother, Alantha Glanton Stewart, was born in Atlanta, Georgia, and became a teacher after moving to the North. She met Stewart's grandfather, Noble Stewart, when he was a student at Howard University. He struggled to find a job after graduating in 1896, and returned to earn a second degree in theology. The couple then moved to Clinton, where Stewart's father was born in 1900. Unable to find work as a minister in Iowa, Stewart's grandfather traveled around the United States, and eventually taught in Liberia for over twenty years. After graduating from high school, Stewart's father enlisted in the U.S. Army, and later became a nightclub musician in Evanston, Illinois, where he met Stewart's mother. Together, they returned to Iowa, and founded a trucking business called the Stewart Transfer Company in partnership with Stewart's paternal aunt, Elizabeth Stewart Fisher.

Video Oral History Interview with Paul W. Stewart, Section A2008_127_001_002, TRT: 0:28:55 ?

Paul Stewart's paternal great-grandmother, Melissa Glanton, had ten children with her first husband, Thomas Culberson. After marrying Stewart's paternal great-grandfather, she migrated with her children and both their fathers from Georgia to Clinton, Iowa, where Stewart's paternal grandmother, Alantha Glanton Stewart, was raised. Stewart's other paternal relatives included musician Roland Hayes and Earl Mann, the first black state legislator in Colorado. Stewart's maternal grandfather, Saul Moore, was a landowner in South Carolina. After being threatened by a white man, he fled to Georgia and then to Evanston, Illinois, where he owned property that was eventually seized by the government. In Evanston, Stewart's maternal grandmother, Mary Moore, was active with the church, and raised three children, including Stewart's mother, Martha Moore Stewart. Stewart's parents met in Evanston, and then moved to Clinton, where he was raised alongside his cousin, Duke Slater, who became a professional football player.

Video Oral History Interview with Paul W. Stewart, Section A2008_127_001_003, TRT: 0:29:27 ?

Paul Stewart grew up in Clinton, Iowa, which was located on the Mississippi River. He lived in an integrated neighborhood, and had numerous white playmates who often prevented him from being a cowboy during their games. With his family, Stewart belonged to the congregation of Clinton's Bethel A.M.E. Church, where he was introduced to the city's African American community. Stewart began his education at the majority-white Lincoln School, where he was forbidden from writing with his left hand by his teacher, Ruth Burdick. He was often involved in fights at school, and preferred to spend time with his neighbors, many of whom worked in factories rather than pursuing their high school diplomas. With his father's support, Stewart went on to attend Clinton High School, where he joined the football team. He also worked multiple jobs, completing morning shifts at the grocery store and evening shifts at a printing company. Additionally, Stewart describes his three siblings, of whom he was the second born.

Video Oral History Interview with Paul W. Stewart, Section A2008_127_001_004, TRT: 0:30:28 ?

Paul Stewart was raised during the 1920s and 1930s in Clinton, Iowa, where his father, Eugene Stewart, Sr., was the owner of the Stewart Transfer Company. During the Great Depression, the business struggled due to increased competition and new regulations. To support the family, Stewart's father sold expired chocolates to the local ice cream shops. He recruited Stewart to help with candy sales, and mentored him in business. He was also sometimes forced to defend Stewart from the white shop owners' discrimination. In addition, Stewart accompanied his paternal grandmother to Clinton's Bethel A.M.E.

Church, where he became disillusioned by the preacher's lack of knowledge. Upon graduating from high school, Stewart was drafted into the U.S. military. He requested an assignment in the U.S. Navy, and began as a yeoman in the radio division. He was sent for training at Virginia's Hampton Institute, where he experienced southern segregation for the first time.

Video Oral History Interview with Paul W. Stewart, Section A2008_127_001_005, TRT: 0:29:08 ?

Paul Stewart completed his U.S. Navy training at the Hampton Institute, where he joined the naval glee club. Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, Stewart was sent to Hawaii, where he witnessed the white soldiers initiate a riot after white women from the United Service Organizations tried to dance with the black troops. Then, Stewart was deployed with the Third Fleet to the Enewetak Atoll and Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands. When the Japanese forces surrendered, Stewart returned to the United States, where he was assigned to dispose of ammunition in the Pacific Ocean. Upon being discharged in 1946, he moved to Evanston, Illinois, and enrolled at Chicago's Moler Barber College. He visited New York City for the wedding of his younger brother, Richard Stewart; and decided to move there. Stewart initially lived in Harlem with a friend from the U.S. Navy, Dean Sampson; and obtained a position at a barbershop. He enjoyed the neighborhood's night life, and once narrowly avoided an attempted robbery.

Video Oral History Interview with Paul W. Stewart, Section A2008_127_001_006, TRT: 0:29:16 ?

Paul Stewart was discharged from the U.S. Navy, and moved to Evanston, Illinois. While there, he worked as a trumpeter with musicians like Ike Cole in Chicago, Illinois. He then moved to New York City, where he frequented venues like the Savoy Ballroom, and began working as a barber. Upon returning to Evanston, Stewart opened his own barbershop, and later opened a second shop in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Impressed by the Olympic track tryouts in Evanston, Stewart decided to attend the Olympics in Denver, Colorado. He toured the city with his cousin, Earl Mann; and moved there in 1962. Stewart opened a barbershop in the city, and socialized at the all-black Owl Club of Denver. After meeting an African American cowboy for the first time, he began collecting memorabilia of the American West with help from his customers. He first housed his collection at a saloon, before moving it to Denver's Clayton College for Boys in 1971. The collection was then stored temporarily in the basement of a local physician's office.

Video Oral History Interview with Paul W. Stewart, Section A2008_127_001_007, TRT: 0:28:53 ?

Paul Stewart eventually moved his collection of black Western artifacts to Denver Clayton College in Denver, Colorado, where he founded the Black American West Museum and Heritage Center. The museum struggled with low attendance in its early years; because, despite strong media coverage, the location at Denver Clayton College was difficult to find. After a conflict with the building owner, Stewart relocated the museum to Denver's Five Points neighborhood. He describes the museum's collection, much of which was acquired through donations from the citizens of Denver. Stewart also talks about the black history of the American West, including Dr. Justina Ford, the first black female physician in Colorado; cowboy Walter Jackson; the Younger brothers bandits; and mail coach driver Mary Fields. At the time of the interview, the Black American West Museum and Heritage Center offered interactive exhibits and an annual Juneteenth celebration, and sponsored the Bill Pickett Invitational Rodeo in Denver.

Video Oral History Interview with Paul W. Stewart, Section A2008_127_001_008, TRT: 0:31:11 ?

Paul Stewart talks about notable African Americans from the history of Denver,

Colorado, including businessman E.J. Sunderland, presidential bodyguard Ferdinand Shavers, beauty entrepreneur Madame C.J. Walker, hotelier Barney Ford, legislator John Keganell and pioneer Clara Brown, a former slave who helped establish the first church in Denver. Stewart also describes the history of the Garden of the Gods in Colorado Springs, Colorado. He reflects upon his legacy and how he would like to be remembered, and shares a message to future generations.

Video Oral History Interview with Paul W. Stewart, Section A2008_127_001_009, TRT: 0:12:30 ?
Paul Stewart narrates his photographs.