

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Junius "Red" Gaten

PERSON

Gaten, Junius, 1900-2005

Alternative Names: Junius "Red" Gaten; Red Gaten

Life Dates: February 28, 1900-November 30, 2005

Place of Birth: Smithdale, Mississippi, USA

Residence: Chicago, Illinois

Occupations: Community Activist

Biographical Note

Junius Gaten was born February 28, 1900, in Smithdale, Mississippi. He was called "Red" because of his thick red hair. At age five, Gaten moved with his aunt to Chicago. He attended Haven Elementary School and Chicago's oldest black church, Quinn Chapel A.M.E Church. At sixteen, Consumer's Ice Company in Chicago's Bridgeport neighborhood hired him. His horses knew the route, which wound through the Black Belt and down integrated Grand Boulevard (now King Drive).

As "Iceman Red," Gaten delivered ice to black activist Ida B. Wells and former black Congressman John Roy Lynch. He resisted and survived the violent Chicago Race Riot of 1919 and the Palmer House Riot of 1924. In the 1920s, Gaten frequented the Dreamland, Royal Garden, Sunset Café and Grand Café. Able to earn extra money by playing the piano for rent parties, Gaten was advised by businessman Jesse Binga to open an account in his Binga Bank. Running errands for Al Capone, he earned \$10 dollar tips and Cuban cigars. Gaten knew the Gordon family of the Universal Negro Improvement Association and heard Marcus Garvey speak at Chicago's Liberty Hall. He talked with Carter G. Woodson, who stayed with Gaten's uncle during his frequent visits to Chicago. During the Depression, he was assigned to work in Haiti by the Works Progress Administration. "Washington Park Red" aired his political views publicly. He was a union man seeking better wages and equal rights.

Gaten was associated with the Communist Party in the 1940s, joining Margaret Burroughs and Ishmael Flory. In this context, he helped sponsor an appearance by Paul Robeson. Gaten retired more than thirty years ago as operations manager for the Jefferson Ice Company. He bought a house for himself and his late wife, and bought real estate in what is now called the Bronzeville community. In his later years, Gaten served as Sunday School Director at St. John Church - Baptist on Chicago's southside.

Gaten lived to be 105 years old. He passed away on November 30, 2005.

Related Entries

Haven School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Moseley School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Jefferson Ice Company [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

Operations Manager

St. John Church - Baptist [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 2011 to ?]

Sunday School Director