

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Wilson Frost

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Frost, Wilson, 1925-2018
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Wilson Frost,
Dates:	January 28, 2003 and October 9, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003
Physical Description:	8 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:22:39).
Abstract:	City council member The Honorable Wilson Frost (1925 - 2018) was named the chairman of the Finance Committee of the City Council after fellow aldermen prevented his succession to the Chicago mayor's office upon the death of Richard J. Daley in 1976. A longtime Chicago politician, Frost also served as partner in the firm of Frost & Greenblatt. Frost was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 28, 2003 and October 9, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_227
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Longtime Chicago politician Wilson Frost was born in Cairo, Illinois, on December 27, 1925, and earned his bachelor's degree from Fisk University in 1950. He attended Chicago-Kent College of Law, earning his J.D. in 1958. He later studied at DePaul University's Lawyer's Institute.

After graduating from Fisk, Frost was hired by the Postal Transportation Service as a clerk, where he remained until 1952. That year, he left to work at Provident Hospital as a statistician. After earning his law degree, Frost joined the firm of Frost, Sherard, Howse & Coleman, where he continued on as a partner until 1973. That year, he left to form Meyer & Frost, which later became Frost & Greenblatt. He remained there until his retirement in 1998.

Frost became active in the Chicago political machine in 1967, winning election as alderman of the 21st Ward. In 1971, he was elected alderman of the 34th Ward, and in 1976 he was serving as the president pro tem of the City Council. With the death of longtime mayor Richard J. Daley in 1976, Frost pointed out that under existing law he was to become the new mayor. The other aldermen disagreed, and after the course of several meetings, Frost was kept out of the mayor's seat and instead was named the chairman of the Finance Committee of the City Council. Following the incident, Frost continued to serve the city, retiring in 1998 with the title of commissioner of the Cook County Board of Tax Appeals.

During his many years of public service, Frost was honored by many organizations, including the Original Forty Club, which awarded him the Man of the Year Award in 1974, and the Illinois House of Representatives, which issued a resolution praising his work upon his retirement. Frost also actively served various organizations, including the John Marshall School of Law and Mercy Hospital Medical Center. He also served as vice president of the City Club of Chicago. Frost and his wife, Gloria, had four children.

Frost passed away on May 5, 2018 at the age of 92.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Wilson Frost was conducted by Larry Crowe on January 28, 2003 and October 9, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 8 Betacame SP videocassettes. City council member The Honorable Wilson Frost (1925 - 2018) was named the chairman of the Finance Committee of the City Council after fellow aldermen prevented his succession to the Chicago mayor's office upon the death of Richard J. Daley in 1976. A longtime Chicago politician, Frost also served as partner in the firm of Frost & Greenblatt.

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:

Frost, Wilson, 1925-2018

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Frost, Wilson, 1925-2018--Interviews

African American civic leaders--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews

City council members--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Chicago (Ill.)

Occupations:

City Council Member

HistoryMakers® Category:

PoliticalMakers

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 The Honorable Wilson Frost, January 28, 2003 and October 9, 2003. 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 The Honorable Wilson Frost, Section A2003_227_001_001,
TRT: 0:30:58 ?

Wilson Frost narrates his photographs.

African American civic leaders--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews.

City council members--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Wilson Frost, Section A2003_227_001_002,
TRT: 0:07:31 ?

Wilson Frost narrates his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Wilson Frost, Section A2003_227_002_003,
TRT: 0:30:13 ?

Wilson Frost was born on December 27, 1925 in Cairo, Illinois. Frost's father, General Frost, was born in 1900 in Brownsville, Tennessee. General Frost worked jobs ranging from railroad worker to insurance agent, and died at the age of thirty-four from tuberculosis. Frost's mother, Freddie Bond Frost, was born in 1901 in Mason, Tennessee, the daughter of farmers. Freddie Frost primarily worked as a homemaker, raising four children alone after the death of her husband. Wilson Frost moved to Chicago, Illinois with his family in 1926, when he was an infant, and was raised on the South Side. Frost was quite poor during his childhood, being raised in a single-parent family during the Great Depression. He participated in sports as a way to stay active and avoid getting involved with gangs in his neighborhood. Frost played on the Chicago Junior Cardinals football team. In Chicago, Frost attended Doolittle Elementary School, where he was a patrol boy, and Phillips High School, where he played varsity basketball.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Wilson Frost, Section A2003_227_002_004,
TRT: 0:29:46 ?

Wilson Frost graduated from Wendell Phillips High School in Chicago, Illinois in 1943 where he had played varsity basketball and run track. Frost then studied accounting for a year at Wilson Junior College in Chicago. He was drafted into the U.S. Army during World War II, but suffered a severe knee injury in training and was medically discharged. Once Frost recovered, he received an opportunity to play basketball and study at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. He graduated with a degree in economics in 1950. After graduation, Frost returned to Chicago, worked as an accountant and a juvenile parole agent, and then decided to change careers and become a lawyer. He was accepted into Chicago-Kent College of Law and graduated from there in 1958 as the only black student in his class. Frost worked in private practice before he decided to start his own firm, Frost, Claytor, Sherard, and Howse. Frost handled primarily criminal law cases, but declines to discuss any of the cases for the sake of confidentiality.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Wilson Frost, Section A2003_227_002_005,
TRT: 0:29:34 ?

Wilson Frost ran for alderman of Chicago, Illinois' 21st Ward in 1967, after spending years working as an organizer under Joe Robichaux, a supporter of Chicago Mayor Richard J. Daley. His opponents were HistoryMaker James Montgomery, HistoryMaker Gus Savage, and a Republican incumbent. Frost won the race. When wards were redistricted in 1970, Frost was reelected four more times to represent the 34th Ward. Frost was responsible for launching the

political careers of several aides, including Eugene Barnes and HistoryMaker Emil Jones, who were both elected to the Illinois legislature during the 1970s. During 1973, Frost was appointed as president pro tempore of the Chicago City Council. Due to Daley's failing health, Frost frequently presided over the council sessions. This position should have placed Frost in line to succeed to the role of acting mayor when Daley died in 1976, but state and local government officials colluded to keep him from the position. Wilson reflects upon Illinois' criminal justice system.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Wilson Frost, Section A2003_227_002_006, TRT: 0:30:10 ?

Wilson Frost worked with Harold Washington during their early years in Chicago, Illinois politics. After the death of Chicago Mayor Richard J. Daley in 1976, Frost was unable to gather enough votes from the city council to be appointed mayor, although as the reigning president pro tempore of the City Council he was next in the order of succession. Instead, he arranged a deal to be appointed chairman of the council's Finance Committee. During his tenure, he increased the funding directed to neighborhoods with lower socioeconomic status. He also remembers helping Mayor Jane Byrne avoid a potential scandal by reminding her to bring the salaries of Chicago's two African American department heads in line with those in similar positions. Using his clout, Frost worked to achieve recognition and representation for black politicians at the city level. Frost stresses that his attempt to strike a middle path between independent and machine politicians and reflects upon African Americans political power in Chicago.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Wilson Frost, Section A2003_227_002_007, TRT: 0:30:08 ?

Wilson Frost served on the Chicago City Council in the late 1970s and early 1980s during the administrations of Mayors Michael Bilandic and Jane Byrne. Mayor Byrne was unpopular in the city's 34th Ward, which Frost represented; so, he backed Harold Washington in his campaign for mayor of Chicago in 1983. Frost supported Mayor Washington during his years in office, although the two often disagreed about patronage and the level of grandeur to be displayed by a mayor. By the time Mayor Washington died in 1987, Frost was serving on the Cook County Board of Tax Appeals, so he did not play a role in the ensuing battle between HistoryMaker Eugene Sawyer and Tim Evans to succeed Washington. While on the tax appeal board, Frost worked to increase public awareness about the board in lower-income neighborhoods and to hire additional workers from minority backgrounds at the board's main office. Frost also talks about the federal investigation of the tax appeal board in 1994.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Wilson Frost, Section A2003_227_002_008, TRT: 0:14:19 ?

Wilson Frost represented the 34th Ward for four terms in the City Council of Chicago, Illinois. He explains the boundaries of his ward on Chicago's far South Side. Frost describes his concerns for the African American community and how he would like to be remembered. He reflects upon his legacy.