

# Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with James McQuay

PERSON

McQuay, James, 1924-2012

**Alternative Names:** James McQuay;

**Life Dates:** November 15, 1924-June 23, 2012

**Place of Birth:** Baltimore, Maryland, USA

**Residence:** Mount Vernon, NY

**Occupations:** Furrier

## Biographical Note

Furrier James McQuay was born on November 15, 1924 in Baltimore, Maryland to Sarah and Thomas McQuay. Shortly after birth, McQuay and his family moved to Yonkers, New York. He grew up in a small black community on the second floor of a three-family housing unit. Heavily influenced by his mother and grandmother, they provided him with examples of hard-work and determination. He attended Hawthorne Junior High School and graduated in 1943 from Yonkers High School. Prior to graduation, McQuay began working for Nathan Ginsberg in 1939, a local Yonkers furrier. McQuay and Ginsberg cultivated a friendship that lasted generations. It was through Ginsberg that McQuay realized that he had a dream to own a fur shop.

Immediately after graduating from Yonkers High School, McQuay was drafted into World War II, where he served in the South Pacific until 1946. Upon McQuay's return, he went back to school working for Nathan Ginsberg, before venturing out on his own four years later. In 1950, McQuay opened his first shop in 1950, Furs by James. He became one of, if not the only, African American furriers in New York City. The store remained open for six years before McQuay closed it in 1956 to open another store of the same name in Mt. Vernon, New York. Furs by James stayed open for seven years, until he closed it in 1963 to pursue freelance opportunities. By the early 1970s, McQuay's furs could be seen in many blaxploitation films of the time, including Cleopatra Jones and Foxy Brown. In the early 1980s, McQuay participated in the Congressional Black Caucus' annual fashion show as the only furrier.

Throughout his career, McQuay has received numerous accolades for his achievements, including being featured in Essence magazine and in the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.'s "Furs, the Final Touch" fashion show.

He passed away on June 23, 2012 at the age of 87.

James McQuay was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on September 21, 2007.

## Related Entries

**Yonkers High School** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Hawthorne Junior High School** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**PEARLS Hawthorne School** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Exclusive Fur Shop** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from ? to 1950]

**Apprentice**

**Exclusive Fur Shop** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1939 to 1943]

**Apprentice**

**United States Military** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1943 to 1946]

**Sergeant**

**Furs by James** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1950 to 1956]

**Owner/Furrier**

**Furs by James** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1956 to 1963]

**Owner/ Furrier**