

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Claibourne Smith

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Smith, Claibourne, 1938-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Claibourne Smith,
Dates:	May 25, 2012
Bulk Dates:	2012
Physical Description:	6 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:43:59).
Abstract:	Chemist Claibourne Smith (1938 -) led a thirty-four year career at E.I. du Pont de Nemours & Company as a research chemist and corporate executive. Smith was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on May 25, 2012, in Greenville, Delaware. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2012_125
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Chemist Claibourne D. Smith was born on January 6, 1938 in Memphis, Tennessee to Lessie Minor and James Smith, Jr. At Melrose High School, he decided that he wanted to become a chemist. Smith petitioned the Memphis School Board to bring higher-level trigonometry and math courses to his school. He graduated from the University of Denver with his B.S. and M.S. degrees in chemistry in 1959 and 1961, respectively. During college, Smith worked in chemical synthesis at the Denver Research Institute. He then went on to earn his Ph.D. degree in organic chemistry from the University of Oregon in 1964.

Smith began his career at E.I. du Pont de Nemours & Company as a research chemist where he remained for thirty-four years. Smith’s research in organic chemistry focused on the chemical properties and reactions of specific cyclic compounds. Throughout his career at E.I. du Pont de Nemours & Company, he held many management positions, including director of Marketing Liaison and Vice President of Marketing in the Corporate Plans Department. Smith retired from the company in 1998 as Vice President of Technology and Vice Chairman of Corporation Education Aid.

Throughout his career, Smith has served as a member of numerous organizations and advisory boards. After serving as the board chairman of Delaware State University, he was named the acting president of Delaware State University from 2008 to 2010. Smith was appointed to the Delaware State Board of Education in 1993, and reappointed in 1999. He also served on the Leadership and Assistance for Science Education Reform Advisory Board, the Delaware Council on Crime and Justice and on the board of directors of the Fair Housing Council of Delaware. For his service to public education, Smith was given the Distinguished Service Award by the National Association of State Boards of Education in 2006. He was also the recipient of the Dean’s Alumni Achievement Award from the University of Oregon in 1989 and the Jefferson Awards Certificate of Excellence from the *The News Journal of Delaware* in 1994.

Smith lives with his wife, Roseann in Greenville, Delaware.

Claibourne D. Smith was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on May 25, 2012.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Claibourne Smith was conducted by Larry Crowe on May 25, 2012, in Greenville, Delaware, and was recorded on 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Chemist Claibourne Smith (1938 -) led a thirty-four year career at E.I. du Pont de Nemours & Company as a research chemist and corporate executive.

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:

Smith, Claibourne, 1938-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Smith, Claibourne, 1938- --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

E.I. du Pont de Nemours & Company

Occupations:

Chemist

HistoryMakers® Category:

ScienceMakers

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 Claibourne Smith, May 25, 2012. 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 Claibourne Smith, Section A2012_125_001_001, TRT: 1:28:59
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Claibourne Smith describes his family background. Smith was born in 1938 in

Memphis, Tennessee to Lessie Minor and James Smith, Jr. Lessie Minor was born in Coldwater, Mississippi in 1915. Her family ancestry traces back to slavery in the 1820s. Minor completed high school but could not afford to attend college, and instead, worked as a housekeeper to support her family. Smith's father, James Smith, Jr., was born in Tuscaloosa, Alabama in 1914. James Smith studied until about the fifth grade, and worked as a cook throughout his life. Smith's parents divorced when he was two years old, and he and his sister were raised by their mother. Smith grew up during segregation, and spent his childhood in the Magnolia neighborhood of Memphis. He attended Magnolia Elementary School and Melrose School for middle and high school, where his favorite subject was science.

African American families--Southern States.

Slaves--United States.

African American parents--Education--Southern States.

Segregation--Tennessee--Memphis.

Video Oral History Interview with Claibourne Smith, Section A2012_125_001_002, TRT: 2:30:18
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Claibourne Smith describes his childhood in Memphis, Tennessee. Smith grew up during the Jim Crow era. He was interested in chemistry closely followed the work of George Washington Carver. During his time at Melrose High School, he was known for his explosive chemistry experiments. Smith was also a voracious reader and a good student throughout school. In high school, encouraged by his mathematics teacher, he and his classmates petitioned the Board of Education to include the instruction of trigonometry, geometry and calculus in their high school curriculum, so that they could prepare for college.

African Americans--Segregation--History.

Childhood and youth--Memphis (Tenn.).

Carver, George Washington, 1864?-1943.

Chemistry--Experiments.

Mathematics--Study and teaching--United States--Standards.

Video Oral History Interview with Claibourne Smith, Section A2012_125_001_003, TRT: 3:31:37
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After graduating from Melrose High School in 1955, Claibourne Smith attended the University of Denver for his bachelor's degree in chemistry, where he also experienced another less overt form of racism. While in college, Smith was hired as a research assistant at the Denver Research Institute. Smith earned his B.S. in chemistry in 1959, and continued to work at the DRI until 1961, when he received an M.S. degree in chemistry from the University of Denver. Smith then went on to pursue his doctoral studies at the University of Oregon in Eugene, Oregon. Under the tutelage of Dr. Virgil Boekelheide, Smith's dissertation research focused on the synthesis and study of 2H-benz[cd]azulene. He published his findings in the Journal of the American Chemical Society in 1966. In 1964, Smith earned his Ph.D. degree in organic chemistry from the University of Oregon.

Chemistry--Study and teaching (Higher)--United States.

Denver Research Institute.

Boekelheide, V. (Virgil), 1919-

Science publishing--United States.

Chemistry--Periodicals.

Video Oral History Interview with Claibourne Smith, Section A2012_125_001_004, TRT: 4:31:41
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Claibourne Smith describes his experiences at DuPont Chemical Company and at Delaware State University. Upon earning his Ph.D. degree in organic chemistry from the University of Oregon in 1964, Smith joined DuPont (E.I. du Pont de Nemours & Company) as a research scientist. During his early years at DuPont, Smith worked on the chemistry of strained ring systems, and published several reports on his novel findings about the products of reactions involving the highly strained quadricyclane molecule. In 1969, Smith left DuPont's research area for management. Smith retired from DuPont in 1998, and served on the trustee board of Delaware State University, where he remains focused on science education for the minorities.

E.I. du Pont de Nemours & Company.

Chemical industry--United States.

Delaware State University. Board of Trustees.

Science--Study and teaching (Higher)--United States.

Minorities in science--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with Claibourne Smith, Section A2012_125_001_005, TRT: 5:31:47
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Claibourne Smith's involvement with Delaware State University began in 1967, as an industry representative to the Department of Chemistry. Smith was appointed to the University's Board of Trustees in 1987, and remained on the board, assuming several roles including chairmanship of the board and interim presidency of the University. Smith's legacy lies in his passion for education. He strongly believes that all children should receive a fair opportunity at an education; his work at Delaware State University is focused on this mission.

Delaware State University. Department of Chemistry.

Delaware State University. Board of Trustees.

Education, Higher.

Right to education--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with Claibourne Smith, Section A2012_125_001_006, TRT: 6:09:37
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Claibourne Smith narrates his photographs.

Photographs.