

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Waverly Person

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## Overview of the Collection

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| <b>Repository:</b>           | The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616<br>info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com   |
| <b>Creator:</b>              | Person, Waverly, 1926-  |
| <b>Title:</b>                | The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Waverly Person,  |
| <b>Dates:</b>                | June 19, 2002   |
| <b>Bulk Dates:</b>           | 2002  |
| <b>Physical Description:</b> | 5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:15:42).   |
| <b>Abstract:</b>             | Geophysicist Waverly Person (1926 - 2022) was the first African American to be the chief scientist at the National Earthquake Information Center for the United States Geological Survey in Golden, Colorado. Person was also renowned as an earthquake spokesperson for national and international media. Person was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on June 19, 2002, in Golden, Colorado. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview. |
| <b>Identification:</b>       | A2002_119   |
| <b>Language:</b>             | The interview and records are in English.   |

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Geophysicist and seismologist Waverly Person was born in Blackridge, Virginia on May 1, 1926 to Bessie Butts and Santee Person. Person grew up as the third of twelve children and helped on the family farm. For high school, he attended the Saint Paul Normal and Industrial School, the high school associated with the historically black Saint Paul's College in Lawrenceville, Virginia. In 1944, he was drafted into the U.S. Army as a high school senior, and Person served in the Pacific during World War II and in the Korean War. In the Army, he was promoted seven times to achieve the rank of first sergeant and received the Good Conduct Medal and the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal. After his honorable discharge in 1951, he returned to Saint Paul's College and received his B.S. degree in mathematics. Person met Sarah Walker during college and they married in 1954.

Person worked as a physical science technician for the Department of Agriculture before being transferred to the Department of Commerce as a seismic monitoring technician. He became interested in geophysics while he was working and started attending American University and George Washington University. Person became a qualified geophysicist in 1965, but he remained a technician due to racism. He was finally hired as a federal geophysicist and he transferred to the United States Geological Survey's National Earthquake Information Center in Golden, Colorado in 1971. Person worked his way up and became the first African American chief scientist in 1977, where he remained until his retirement in 2006.

Person was often sought out by national and international media as an earthquake spokesperson. He received an honorary doctorate in science from St. Paul's College, the Outstanding Government Communicator Award, the Meritorious Service Award from the United States Department of the Interior, and the Annual Minority Award from the Community Services Department in Boulder, Colorado. He was active with the Seismological Society of America, Boulder County Crimestoppers, and Flatirons Kiwanis Club.

Waverly Person was interviewed by the *The HistoryMakers* on June 19, 2002.

Person passed away on February 10, 2022, at the age of 95.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Waverly Person was conducted by Larry Crowe on June 19, 2002, in Golden, Colorado, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Geophysicist Waverly Person (1926 - 2022) was the first African American to be the chief scientist at the National Earthquake Information Center for the United States Geological Survey in Golden, Colorado. Person was also renowned as an earthquake spokesperson for national and international media.

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## 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®.

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## 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.

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## Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

### Persons:

Person, Waverly, 1926-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Person, Waverly, 1926---Interviews

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Geophysicists--Colorado--Interviews

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Seismologists--Colorado--Interviews

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African Americans--Genealogy

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African American families--Virigina

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Segregation--Virginia

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African American farmers--Virginia

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Saint Paul’s College (Lawrenceville, Va.)

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Voter registration--United States

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African Americans--Suffrage

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World War, 1939-1945--Personal narratives, American

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World War, 1939-1945--Campaigns--Pacific Area

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Korean War, 1950-1953--Personal narratives, American

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Discrimination in employment

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National Earthquake Information Service

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Seismology

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Earthquakes--United States--Research

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**Organizations:**

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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**Occupations:**

Geophysicist

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**HistoryMakers® Category:**

# 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 Waverly Person, June 19, 2002. 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).

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## 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.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Waverly Person, Section A2002\_119\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:32 ?

Geophysicist and seismologist Waverly J. Person discusses his family background and childhood in Black Ridge, Virginia. He describes his father's struggles to be an independent farmer and his mother's efforts to maintain dignity in a segregated rural area.

African American families--Virginia.

African American farmers--Virginia.

African American mothers.

Video Oral History Interview with Waverly Person, Section A2002\_119\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:31 ?

Waverly J. Person details his education and sacrifices his family made to send him to a boarding high school. Person discusses life at St. Paul's College boarding school in Lawrenceville, VA. Person recalls his efforts to educate and register black voters through the NAACP and he shares some of the insidious methods used by whites to deny blacks the vote.

Saint Paul's College (Lawrenceville, Va.).

Voter registration.

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Voter intimidation--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with Waverly Person, Section A2002\_119\_001\_003, TRT: 0:30:16 ?

Waverly J. Person, discusses his life as a soldier during WWII in the Pacific. He recalls the invasion and occupation of Japan after the dropping of the atomic bombs. After later serving in the Korean War, Person returned to his alma mater for college, St Paul's. After graduating, Person landed a position in the US Department of Agriculture, where he had to invoke his rights as veteran just to keep his job. Transferred to another position in the Seismology department, Person recalls the relentless racism, where he wasn't even allowed to hang his jacket next to his white coworkers' coats.

World War II--Japan.

African American soldiers--Korea.

Veterans--Employment--Law and legislation.

Discrimination in employment--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with Waverly Person, Section A2002\_119\_001\_004, TRT: 0:28:51 ?

Waverly J. Person, discusses his position as the Chief of the U.S.G.S. National Earthquake Information Service, the first black person to achieve that rank. He details the measurement and impact of earthquakes and other research conducted by the organization.

Geological Survey (U.S.).

National Earthquake Information Service.

Earthquakes Observations.

Video Oral History Interview with Waverly Person, Section A2002\_119\_001\_005, TRT: 0:17:32 ?

Waverly J. Person shares more information on seismology and fault lines. He then turns to contemplating his legacy and hopes for the black community.

Seismology.

Seismic data.

Faults (Geology).