

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Lonnie Brooks

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## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Brooks, Lonnie
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Lonnie Brooks,
<b>Dates:</b>	December 4, 2003
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2003
<b>Physical Description:</b>	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:13:40).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Blues musician Lonnie Brooks (1933 - 2017 ) was most known for his album, <i>Bayou Lightning</i> , performed at the Montreaux Jazz Festival, made numerous television appearances, co-starred in the <i>Blues Brothers 2000</i> , and co-wrote <i>Blues for Dummies</i> . Brooks was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 4, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2003_287
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Lee Baker, Jr., also known as legendary blues singer and guitarist Lonnie Brooks, was born in Dubuissou, Louisiana on December 18, 1933 to Lillian Baker, a housewife, and Baker, Sr., a cotton field laborer. His grandfather, “Joe the Banjo,” was a circus strongman, musician and craftsman, and Brooks’ interest in music was fostered early on from him. Brooks left school after completing the eighth grade, and went to live with his father. In 1950, Brooks left Dubuissou for southern Louisiana, got married and relocated to Port Arthur, Texas.

While in Port Arthur, Brooks was approached by one of his musical heroes, Clifton Chenier, about performing with him. Brooks played everything from Zydeco and rock and roll to jazz and country, performing under the name of “Guitar Junior.” In 1959, Brooks joined up with Sam Cooke on a caravan tour of the south, and then hitched a ride to Chicago where he moved in with Cooke’s mother and brother. By the early 1960s, Brooks dropped the “Guitar Junior” name in favor of his current moniker, performed with Jimmy Reed and incorporated the sounds of Chicago in his performance. During the 1960s and 1970s, Brooks worked in a number of tough Chicago clubs, playing cover songs for underworld gangsters.

Brooks’ big break came in 1978 when he recorded four songs on Alligator Records’ *Living Chicago Blues* anthology. The following year, Brooks released the album *Bayou Lightning*, which garnered him a Grand Prix Award, causing him to explode onto the blues scene. His distinctive sound, forged from a combination of Chicago blues, R & B, country and Cajun boogie, came to be known as the “voodoo blues.” Brooks developed a loyal following when he released his Grammy nominated *Bayou Lightning Strikes: Live from Chicago*, and since then, there have been several successful albums.

Brooks performed at the San Francisco Blues Fest and the Montreux Jazz Festival. With television appearances on *Hee-Haw* and *Late Night with David Letterman*, Brooks teamed up with Dan Aykroyd and John Goodman in the *Blues Brothers 2000*. He also co-authored *Blues for Dummies* and headlined the 1996 Chicago Blues Fest. Brooks

was also often found performing with his two guitar-playing sons, Ronnie and Wayne.

Brooks and his wife, Jeannine, lived in Chicago.

Brooks passed away on April 1, 2017.

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# Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Lonnie Brooks was conducted by Larry Crowe on December 4, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Blues musician Lonnie Brooks (1933 - 2017 ) was most known for his album, Bayou Lightning, performed at the Montreaux Jazz Festival, made numerous television appearances, co-starred in the Blues Brothers 2000, and co-wrote Blues for Dummies.

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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:

Brooks, Lonnie

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Brooks, Lonnie--Interviews

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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:

Blues Musician

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# HistoryMakers® Category:

MusicMakers

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# 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 Lonnie Brooks, December 4, 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).

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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 Lonnie Brooks, Section A2003\_287\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:34 ?  
Lonnie Brooks remembers his family background, particularly his maternal

grandfather and his parents. He also discusses Louisiana Creole culture, and how he got his stage name.

Video Oral History Interview with Lonnie Brooks, Section A2003\_287\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:23 ?

Lonnie Brooks recalls growing up in Louisiana, including being the eldest of twelve children to his early interest in music. He also remembers his first jobs in construction.

Video Oral History Interview with Lonnie Brooks, Section A2003\_287\_001\_003, TRT: 0:30:13 ?

Lonnie Brooks details the first years of his music career, including his first gigs, the first song he wrote, and his first recording. He also reflects on his contributions to country music.

Video Oral History Interview with Lonnie Brooks, Section A2003\_287\_001\_004, TRT: 0:30:19 ?

Lonnie Brooks recalls the blues scene in Chicago, particularly his connections with Sam and L.C. Cooke. He also reflects on his experiences with racism, and describes the influence of Louisiana folkways on his music.

Video Oral History Interview with Lonnie Brooks, Section A2003\_287\_001\_005, TRT: 0:17:17 ?

Lonnie Brooks discusses his popular album, 'Bayou Lightning.' He reflects back on his career, and shares his hopes for his sons in the recording industry. He also lists his favorite musicians, and recounts helping his parents move out of their crumbling house.

Video Oral History Interview with Lonnie Brooks, Section A2003\_287\_001\_006, TRT: 0:31:00 ?

Lonnie Brooks narrates his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Lonnie Brooks, Section A2003\_287\_001\_007, TRT: 0:24:54 ?

Lonnie Brooks narrates his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Lonnie Brooks, Section  
A2003\_287\_Brooks\_Lonnie\_06\_MED\_001, TRT: 1:07:54