

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Henry Ponder

PERSON

Ponder, Henry, 1928-

Alternative Names: Henry Ponder;

Life Dates: March 28, 1928-

Place of Birth: Wewoka, Oklahoma, USA

Residence: Hilton Head, SC

Occupations: University President

Biographical Note

Henry Ponder was born on March 28, 1928 in Wewoka, Oklahoma. He was the eleventh of fourteen children born to Frank and Lillie Mae Ponder. Ponder excelled in academics and participated in his high school student council as the class president. After hearing a speech by Mary McCloud Bethune, Ponder was inspired to become a university president. He graduated from Douglas High School in 1946 and attended Langston University, where he pledged the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity and received his B.S. degree in agriculture in 1951. Ponder served two years in the United States Army during the Korean War. When he returned to civilian life, he worked as a research assistant at Oklahoma State University. He then earned his M.A. degree from Oklahoma State University and his Ph.D. from Ohio State University.

Ponder served as both Chair and Assistant Professor for the Department of Agriculture and Business at Virginia State College in Petersburg, Virginia. He also served as the Chairman of the Department of Business and Economics of Fort Valley State College in Fort Valley, Georgia. Additionally, Ponder was the Vice President of Alabama A&M University in Normal, Alabama. In 1973, he fulfilled his dream by becoming President of Benedict College in Columbia, South Carolina. After an eleven year tenure, he became the President of Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee for twelve years. While at Fisk, Ponder was honored as one of the “100 Most Effective College Presidents in the United States.”

In 1996, Ponder left Fisk University to serve as the CEO and president of the National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education. In early 2002, he became President of Talladega College in Alabama. While in his presidency, Ponder helped retain the 160-year-old institution’s accreditation with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

Ponder currently lives on Hilton Head Island in South Carolina with his wife of fifty-five years, Eunice. They have two adult daughters.

Ponder was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on January 29, 2007.

Related Entries

Johnson Grove School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Douglas High School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

The Oklahoma State University for Agriculture and the Applied Science [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Agriculture Economics

Langston University [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Agriculture, Education

Oklahoma State University [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Master's

The Ohio State University [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

PhD

The State Training School for Incurable Negro Boys [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1951 to 1953]

Farm Superintendent

Tinker Air Force Base [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1951 to 1951]

Virginia State University [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1958 to ?]

Assistant Professor and Agribusiness Department Chair

Fort Valley State College (Ga.) [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1964 to 1966]

Chair of the Department of Business and Economics

Alabama Agricultural and Mechanical College [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1966 to 1973]

Vice President of Student Affairs

Benedict College [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1973 to 1984]

President

Fisk University [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1984 to 1996]

President

National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education (NAFEO)
[EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1996 to 2001]

President and CEO

Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

Member

Southern Association of Colleges and Schools [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

Officer

The United Negro College Fund [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

Chair of Membership

American Council of Education [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

Board