

Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with Charles Wilson

Interview #: SAA-A-D-2007-046

Conducted by the Springfield African-American History Foundation
For the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library

Charles Wilson was born in Springfield, Illinois in 1923. Wilson is a direct relative of one of the lynching victims of the Springfield Race Riot in 1908, William Donnegan. In his interview, he discusses growing up in Springfield and the segregation that he witnessed. He also served in the military, playing French horn in an army band. Wilson talks about the band that he formed in Springfield after leaving the army.

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Interviewer:	Lee Patton
Transcription by:	_____
Edited by:	_____
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Interviews are archived at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential
Library in Springfield, Illinois.

Abstract

Charles Wilson, Springfield African-American History Foundation Project

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Biographical Information and Synopsis: Charles Wilson was born in Springfield, Illinois in 1923. His father died when he was still a baby. He was raised by his maternal grandparents after his mother was killed in a car accident when he was six years old. While living with his grandmother, he learned of his great-grandfather, William Donnegan, who was one of the lynching victims in the Springfield Race Riot of 1908.

Wilson served in the military during World War II and was assigned to an army band that played at dances for the soldiers. After he left the military, Wilson joined the Springfield Symphony Orchestra, breaking the color barrier as the first African American to join the symphony. He also had his own band, the Chuck Wilson Band that played at dances in Springfield and throughout central Illinois.

Wilson talks about some of the discrimination he faced while he was trying to find work in Springfield, especially in the worker's unions. He struggled to get a permit to work as a bricklayer in Springfield, so he moved to Chicago to complete his apprenticeship, which was required to receive the permit. After he was accepted into the union in Chicago, he returned to Springfield where he struggled to find reliable work. He returned to Chicago and stayed there for the remainder of his career.

Topics Covered: Springfield Race Riot of 1908; William Donnegan; Springfield Municipal Band; Chicago, Illinois; Mt. Vernon, Illinois; Springfield Symphony Orchestra; Chuck Wilson Band; Charles Lockhart; Charles Carter; Count Basie

Note to the Reader: Readers of the oral history memoir should bear in mind that this is a transcript of the spoken word, and that the interviewer, interviewee and editor sought to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for the views expressed therein. We leave these for the reader to judge.

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