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## UA3/4/8/3 Dero Downing Interview

Dero Downing

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### Recommended Citation

Downing, Dero, "UA3/4/8/3 Dero Downing Interview" (1996). *WKU Archives Records*. Paper 2632.  
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**Western Kentucky University**  
**UA3/4 Dero Downing**  
**Series 8 Interviews & Oral Histories**  
**Item 3 Interview**

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**Biographical/Historical Note:** The president's office was created in 1906. The search for the fourth president of WKU began with Kelly Thompson's resignation announcement May 21, 1969. Vice President for Administrative Affairs Dero Downing indicated that he would serve if asked. The Board of Regents elected him president on August 22, 1969. He served until his retirement in 1979.

Dero Downing was born September 10, 1921 at Fountain Run in Monroe County, Kentucky, and grew up at Horse Cave in Hart County. He enrolled at WKU in 1939 where he played basketball and earned both a bachelor's and master's degree. After serving in the Navy in World War II, he returned to Western as a mathematics teacher and coach at the College's Training School. He later became director of the Training School, college registrar, dean of admissions, dean of business affairs, and vice-president for administrative and business affairs. Upon his resignation as president in 1979 Downing became president of the College Heights Foundation, a position he held until his death on April 4, 2011.

**Description:** Dero Downing interviewed regarding Wilson Wyatt.

**Dates:** June 12, 1996

**Subject Analytics:**

Audio recording

Downing, Dero Goodman, 1921-2011

Governors –Kentucky

Interviews

Politicians

Western Kentucky University

Wyatt, Wilson Watkins, 1905-1996

**Accession Information:** These records were transferred to the WKU Archives upon its creation.

**Access Restrictions:** none

**Preferred Citation:** UA3/4/8/2 Dero Downing Interview, WKU Archives, Bowling Green, Kentucky, USA.

**Processing Information:** Audiotape transcribed by Suellyn Lathrop, 2013.

# Interview Recording List

UA3.4.8.3 ~ Audiocassette

12/04/2013

Media ID	Side	Start time	Subject
Tape 1	1	00:00:00	<i>Unidentified Man: Check, check, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, check, check, 1, 2, check, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 Dr. Dero Downing on Wilson Wyatt who passed away on Tuesday. 1, 2, 3, check, Dr. Downing rolls in 3, 2, 1.</i>
Tape 1	1	00:00:25	<i>Interviewer: . . . yesterday that we lost our number one citizen now that Wilson Wyatt's passed away. What do you think about that? I mean, that's a big statement isn't it?</i> <i>DD: Yes, are we?</i> <i>Interviewer: Yes, we're going.</i> <i>DD: You _____, confident</i> <i>Interviewer: Yes, yes.</i>
Tape 1	1	00:00:49	<i>DD: I did not have the pleasure of being a close associate or even a close personal friend of Wilson Wyatt. I did have the opportunity numerous times to be in his company when he was on the Western campus during the time he was involved in state government. There were occasions when he came to the campus for activities in which, to which he had given such personal and professional support and you cannot be in his company without recognizing and realizing that Wilson Wyatt was an outstanding individual. He was a statesman. He was one of Kentucky's most distinguished, talented attorneys. He at no time did he give any indication or was there any appearance or any reason to believe that Wilson Wyatt had anything other than the welfare of the people of Kentucky in his actions. Either in his personal activities as a citizen of Louisville, Jefferson County, his close association with many people in federal government benefitted Kentucky greatly. He was a close personal friend of Dr. Kelly Thompson, Coach Diddle and I recall when he came to give encouragement to programs and activities at Western in which he took personal interest because he was a believer in the importance of education. He was supportive of higher education and a good friend of higher education. And I'll always have great respect and admiration for Wilson Wyatt for the many ways in which he enriched the quality of life for all Kentuckians. He was just a great man. He was genuine in every way. There was always evidence of his sincere interest in the welfare of Kentuckians.</i>
Tape 1	1	00:03:49	<i>Interviewer: He was offered several jobs, he was rumored to be Harry Truman's running mate in '48 and a couple other jobs in the United Nations. He always turned them down because he wanted to come back to Kentucky. That says a lot about him I think.</i> <i>DD: Well he was a Kentuckian through and through. There's no question that he could have served in Washington in various capacities and did at one time as the record will confirm. But his principle interest was in the civic and governmental affairs of the state of Kentucky. And of course he was devoted to Jefferson County, Louisville. He in so many ways made lasting contributions to programs and activities for that area, but it was not confined to Louisville and Jefferson County. He was interested in all of Kentucky and the people of Kentucky to whom he was so devoted.</i>
Tape1	1	00:05:13	<i>Interviewer: He got along well with everybody.</i> <i>DD: He was a master at I wouldn't want to use the word compromise because that has an implication I think doesn't apply in the way Wilson Wyatt could bring about consensus. He was in many respects way ahead of his time in terms of his vision for ways in which Kentucky could be strengthened and improved. He understood far better than most the legal field, the field of state government, how it relates to federal government and he was always so, so genuine that people respected and appreciated his opinion. And the history of Kentucky will record many, many ways in which Wilson Wyatt made contributions to the quality of life in the Commonwealth.</i>