

Dr. Howard Nelson Collection (AC70)

Introduction:

The Dr. Howard Nelson Collection contains numerous awards and certificates bestowed upon Dr. Howard Nelson, a civil rights activist and dentist in Kansas City, MO.

Descriptive Summary:

Creator: Dr. Howard Nelson

Title: Dr. Howard Nelson Collection AC70

Size: 2.83 feet (3 boxes)

Collection Number: AC68

Donor Information:

Donated by Jill Nelson, March 2023.

Citation Note:

Dr. Howard Nelson Collection (AC70), Black Archives of Mid-America, Kansas City, Missouri.

Administrative Information:

Reproduction Restrictions: Unrestricted.

Access Restrictions: Unrestricted.

Biographical Sketch:

Dr. Howard Nelson, Jr., born February 11, 1923, in Washington, D.C., was a prominent dentist in Kansas City, Missouri. Dr. Nelson attended Howard University in 1939 at age 16 after graduating from Paul Lawrence Dunbar High School. He was drafted into army reserves after graduating in 1943 and was one of thirteen Black men selected for officer school and then one of only three to graduate. He was apart of the 92nd Infantry Division in WWII, which was the only Black division to fight in Italy. After the war, Dr. Nelson returned to Howard to attend dental school. He was also a member of Kappa Alpha Psi. In 1957, Nelson and his wife moved to Kansas City where he joined the all-Black Heart of America Dental Society.

Dr. Nelson was also a lifelong activist. In 1964, he became the leader of the local chapter of the Congress for Local Equality (CORE) and organized a protest of the Parkway Bowling Club, which refused to allow Black Americans to bowl, despite a law passed by the City Council the year before which outlawed racial discrimination in public spaces. Dr. Nelson was arrested during this protest. A photo of his arrest was publicized by the local papers. Nelson and his family also secretly bought and moved into a house in a racially restricted neighborhood in Overland Park

In 1972, he became the first Black board member for the Board of Governors of Missouri Dental Association, serving two terms. He also became the first Black member of the Missouri State Dental Board in 1986, and in 1991 became the first Black President of the Missouri State Dental

Board. He became one of the first Black professors at the UMKC School of Dentistry and helped start the Wayne Minor Health Center, now the Dr. Samuel U. Rodgers Health Center.

He died February 13, 2023.

Scope and Content Note:

This Collection primarily consists of awards, plaques, and certificates given to Dr. Howard Nelson

Series 1: Biographical information

This series includes scans of Dr. Howard’s birth certificate and documents related to his military service.

Series 2: Military research

This series contains scans of articles from military history journals along with Dr. Nelson’s notes about his own military service.

Series 3: Ephemera

This series contains the 112th Founders’ Day Kappa Alpha Psi program and a torn piece of paper that says “CORE” that was previously glued to the frame of one of his certificates.

Series 4: Awards and Certificates

This series consists of plaques and certificates awarded to Dr. Nelson from Howard University, the NAACP, and the Missouri Dental Board in recognition of his accomplishments.

Collection Inventory

Series 1: Biographical information

f. 1 Biography

Series 2: Military research

f. 2 Military research

Series 3: Ephemera

f. 3 Ephemera

Series 4: Awards and Certificates

f. 4 Proclamations

f. 5 Diploma from Howard

- f. 6 Certificate from Missouri Dental Board
- f. 7 Diploma from Howard
- f. 8 Framed KC Star article
- f. 9 Framed letter from Institute of Race & Justice at Harvard Law School
- f. 10 Heart of America Dental Society Kansas City Award
- f. 11 NAACP Certificate of Membership
- f. 12 Kappa Alpha Psi KCMO Chapter Lifetime Achievement Award
- f. 13 Framed certificate from the Missouri Dental Board
- f. 14 Missouri Dental Board Award, 1991
- f. 15 NAACP Golden Heritage Membership Award, 1980

Processed by Laura Darnell, Archivist, February 2024. Updated by Laura Darnell, Archivist, March 2024.

Sources:

Adler, Eric. "Bowling for equality: KC man, 98, has led lifetime of activism." *The Kansas City Star*. February 18, 2021.

Dignity Memorial. Howard Nelson Jr. Accessed February 2024.

<https://www.dignitymemorial.com/obituaries/kansas-city-mo/howard-nelson-11152468>

U.S. Government Publishing Office. Emmanuel Cleaver. Accessed February 2024.

<https://www.congress.gov/118/crec/2023/02/02/169/22/modified/CREC-2023-02-02-pt1-PgE89-5.htm>