

KCFD History Collection (AC109)

Introduction:

The KCFD History Collection contains histories written by KC Fire Department historian, Ray Elder.

Descriptive Summary:

Creator: Ray Elder

Title: KCFD History Collection

Date Range: 1982- 2021

Size: 0.417 linear feet (1 box)

Collection Number: AC109

Commented [DR1]: Missing a date range, and the size can probably be rounded up to 0.42 linear feet.

Donor Information:

Ray Elder, November 2021

Citation Note:

KCFD History Collection (AC109), Black Archives of Mid-America, Kansas City, Missouri

Related Collections:

AC105 Fire Station 11 Collection

Administrative Information:

Reproduction Restrictions: Unrestricted

Access Restrictions: Unrestricted

Historical Sketch:*Kansas City Fire Department*

The Kansas City Fire Department began in 1858 as a simple volunteer bucket brigade. In 1867, Kansas City officially formed a fire department. Colonel Frank Foster was selected as the first Chief of the department. Two years later, the city's first ladder company formed. By the early 1870s, there were three steamers (a steam powered water pump), one hook and ladder, one

chemical engine (a chemical engine mixed sulfuric acid and sodium bicarbonate, aka baking soda, to create carbon dioxide gas which was then used to put out fires), and 36 paid professional firefighters. Steamers were discontinued in 1877, and the fire department reduced to 14 men. However, a massive fire in the West Bottoms soon after this demonstrated the need for steamers and so they were replaced the next day.

George C. Hale, Fire Chief from 1882-1902, revolutionized KCFD and fire departments across the nation with his multitude of inventions such as the Hale Water Tower, Hale Harness, Hale Tin Roof Cutter, and dozens of others.

By the 1920s, the fire department had increased to 30 fire stations with 40 companies. In 1928, KCFD ceased using horse drawn carriages and began solely using motorized fire trucks.

Edward Wade Wilson, Jr. (1925-2019), was the first black Fire chief. He joined the KCFD in 1943. He briefly left the fire department to fight in WWII but rejoined upon his return and quickly rose in ranks becoming the youngest person, at the time, to make captain. He became Battalion Chief in 1960 and Deputy chief in 1975, and finally Fire Chief in 1980. He retired in 1989.

KCFD did not integrate until 1958. KC's first all-Black fire brigade, Fire Station 11, dates back to 1890 and was located on Independence Avenue. In 1908, FS11 moved to 1812 Vine Street, and in 1931 moved to 2033 Vine St. At that time, only 15 cities across the U.S. had all-Black crews. Fire Station 11 remained in use until 1952. The second all-Black fire station, begun in 1946, was Station 15, located in the West Bottoms.

KCFD has faced several deadly events: the explosion on Southwest Blvd in August 1959, the Coates House Hotel in January 1978, the Hyatt Regency collapse in July 1981, and the ammonium nitrate explosion in November 1988 among others.

Biographical Sketch:

Ray Elder

Ray Elder, historian of the Kansas City Fire Historical Society, was a member of the KCMO Fire Department from 1958 to 1993. He retired as a Captain. As the historian of KCFHS, he has written several histories of the Kansas City Fire Department.

Collection Inventory:

- f. 1 History of Fire Station 11
- f. 2 KCFD Employment Record of African American Fighters beginning in 1878
- f. 3 Work Record of Black Fighters, KCMO, 1878- 2006
- f. 4 Report of the Chief of the Fire Department, 1878-b1879
- f. 5 List of KCFD Officers & Members, April 1891- April 1892
- f. 6 Kansas City, MO Fire Stations of 1913
- f. 7 KCMO Fire Department Yearbook, Vol. 1, 1982 [1st copy]
- f. 8 KCMO Fire Department, Yearbook, Vol. 1, 1982 [2nd copy]
- f. 9 KC Firefighters, Yearbook, Vol. 3, 1991

Processed by Laura Darnell, Archivist, October 2024.

Sources:

Adler, Eric. 2024. "KC wants fire station that housed first all-Black brigade to get historical designation." *Kansas City Star*. August 18.

<https://www.kansascity.com/news/local/article291082735.html>

Edward Wade Wilson Jr. | Kansas City Black History. (n.d.).

<https://kcblackhistory.org/articles/edward-wade-wilson->

<jr#:~:text=More%20than%20a%20century%20after,for%20The%20Kansas%20City%20Star>.

Elder, R. S. & Native Sons of Kansas City. (2013). Raymond S. Elder Collection. In *The State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-Kansas City* [Collection; Mixed]. The State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-Kansas City.

<https://files.shsmo.org/manuscripts/kansas-city/K1141.pdf>

FIRE Station No. 11 — *African American Heritage Trail of Kansas City*. (n.d.). African American Heritage Trail of Kansas City. <https://aahtkc.org/firestationno11#:~:text=share-.Kansas%20City%20Register,Places%20on%20April%204%2C%202009>.

History | *Kansas City Fire Historical Society* | *Kansas City*. (n.d.). Kcfdhs.
<https://www.kcfdmuseum.com/history>

Kansas City fire History. (1996, August 1). *Firehouse*.

<https://www.firehouse.com/home/news/10545204/kansas-city-fire-history>

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