

Lafayette Tillman Collection (AC131)

Introduction:

The Lafayette Tillman Collection is a collection composed of documents, photographs and objects related to Lafayette Tillman.

Descriptive Summary:

Creator: Lafayette Tillman

Title: The Lafayette Tillman Collection

Date Range: 1894-1998

Size: TBD (1 Box + 1 Tray)

Collection Number: AC131

Donor Information:

Donated by Portia Tillman Johnson Powell on August 16, 1976.

Citation Note:

The Lafayette Tillman Collection (AC131), Black Archives of Mid-America, Kansas City, Missouri

Subjects:

Military

Local history

Administrative Information:

Reproduction Restrictions: Unrestricted.

Access Restrictions: Unrestricted.

Biographical Sketch:

Lafayette Tillman was born in Indiana in 1858. He went to college at Oberlin College and Wayland Seminary School, studying Baptist ministry along with singing. From there, he was able to tour with different music groups as a singer. He toured with the New Orleans University

singers and the Don Tennesseans in the US Midwest and East Coast as well as Europe, even performing for US President Grover Cleveland. He moved to Kansas City in 1881, where he ran a restaurant, followed by a barber shop, and began to study law. In the late 1890s Tillman served as a Quartermaster sergeant in the US Army. While he didn't take part in the Spanish-American War, he did serve in the Philippines during the Philippine-American War. The war lasted from 1899-1902, but Tillman was discharged earlier in 1901 after two years of service. Following his honorable discharge, Tillman returned to Kansas City where he became the third Black police officer in the city's history. He served as a police officer from 1903 until his 1914 death. He was survived by a daughter named Portia. Later, his grandson would follow in his footsteps by joining the army.

Scope and Content Note:

Series 1: Exhibit

This series contains two copies of a booklet from an exhibit on Lafayette Tillman. The exhibit happened at the Kansas City Museum. While the booklet is undated, it did happen during or after 2006.

Series 2: Correspondence

This series contains handwritten correspondence. There are a few original letters from Tillman, and the rest are from the 1960s to 1970s.

Series 3: Handwritten Notes

This series contains two handwritten documents. There is a note on Lincoln University and a brief familial history of Tillman.

Series 4: Photographs

This series contains photographs from the collection. There are two oversized photographs that are stored separately.

Series 5: United States Military Documents

This series contains documents from the United States military. They are for Tillman's grandson, Harry A. Johnson. They are dated to 1945.

Series 6: Government Documents

This series contains two oversized documents that are from the government. One document is an appointment from the state of Missouri deeming Tillman a Notary Public, while the other is from the Board of Police Commissioners appointing Tillman to be a patrolman from 1906-1909.

Because they are oversized, they are stored separately.

Series 7: Artifacts

This series contains two candlesticks. They are in fair condition. They were replaced on the altar of St. Augustine's Church with wooden candleholders and were then given to Harry and Artie at a later date, as noted on an envelope contained in f. 6.

Collection Inventory:

Oversized folders are denoted with an (OS). They are stored in Flat File #1, Drawer 3.

Series 1: Exhibit

f. 1 Exhibit Pamphlets

Series 2: Correspondence

f. 2 Original Handwritten Letters from Tillman-1899-1901

f. 3 Letter from 1898

f. 4 Letter from 1974

f. 5 Unidentified Correspondence-Letters

f. 6 Miscellaneous Notes on Envelopes

f. 7 Postcards

f. 8 Envelopes from 1890s

Series 3: Documents

f. 9 Brief Familial History

f. 10 Note on Lincoln University

Series 4: United States Army Documents

f. 11 Military Documents for Harry Johnson

Series 5: Photographs

f. 12 Photographs-3 Photos

f. 13 Photographs (OS)-2 Photos

Series 6: Government Documents

f. 14 Government Documents (OS)

Series 7: Artifacts

f. 15 Candlestick

f. 16 Candlestick

Processed by David Rocha, AmeriCorps VISTA Member, February 2025.

Sources:

African American Registry. “Lafayette Tillman, 19th-century Policeman Born - African

American Registry,” April 24, 2024. <https://aaregistry.org/story/lafayette-tillman-served-his-city-and-country/>.

“Philippine Insurrection, 1899-1902,” n.d. <https://www.history.navy.mil/browse-by-topic/wars-conflicts-and-operations/early-20th-century-conflicts/philippine-insurrection.html#:~:text=The%20ensuing%20Philippine%20Insurrection%20or,was%20brutal%20on%20both%20sides.>