

BLACK HISTORY

KANSAS CITY



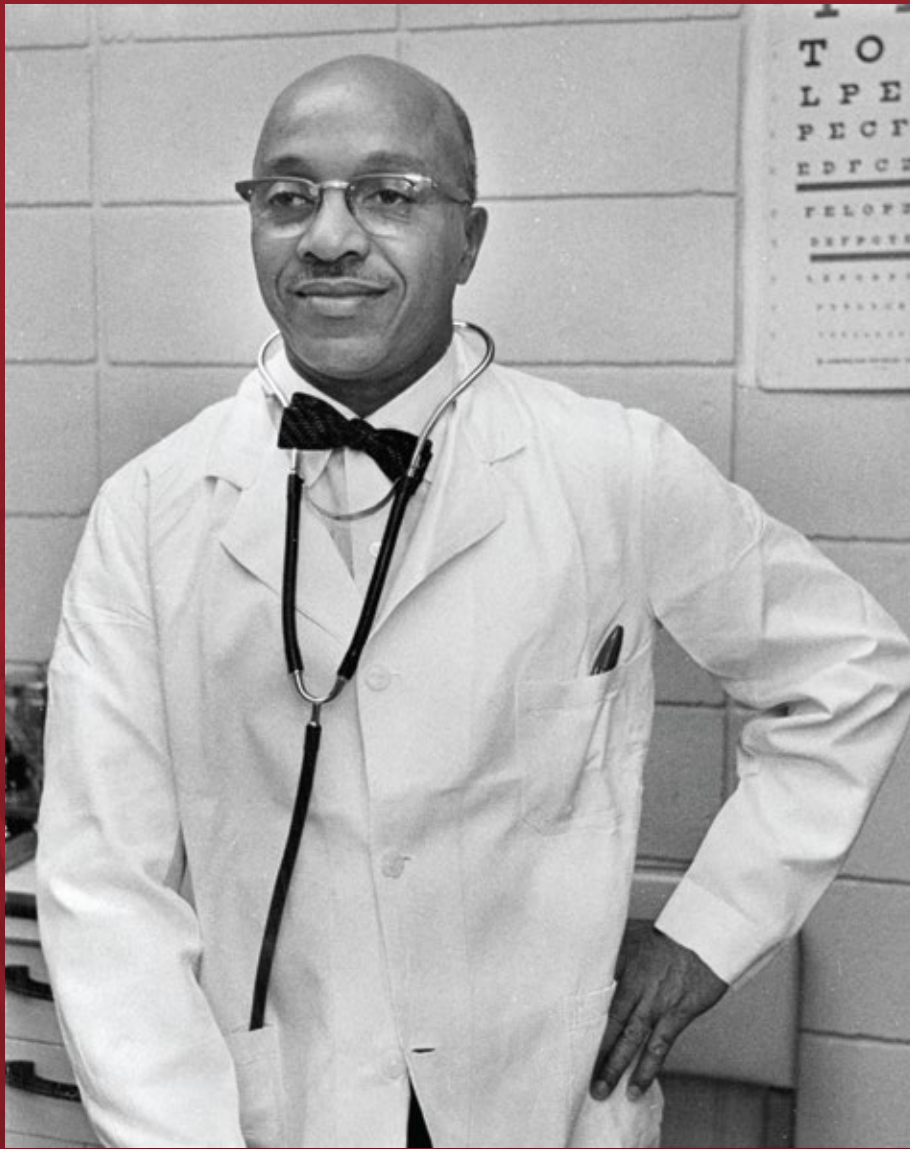
*"I've never been anything
other than a teacher."
— Gvonne S. Wilson*

2026

... This year marks the 250th anniversary of the July 4, 1776, signing of the Declaration of Independence, establishing the original 13 American colonies as a sovereign country free from British rule. While our founding document declared that all men were created equal, freedom and equality were not extended to people of color. Their struggle would go on for decades, culminating in the Civil Rights Movement, and continues to this day.

The individuals highlighted in the 2026 Kansas City Black History compendium — a physician, educator, musician, clergyman, community activist, and restaurateur — embody the American spirit of resilience in the face of oppression. Each carved their own path to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, leaving an indelible mark on our city.

The mission of the Kansas City Black History project, a partnership between the Black Archives of Mid-America, the Kansas City Public Library, and LINC, is to share these stories with a broad audience and inspire future generations.



Carl M. Peterson

1914 – 2007

Those who knew him best described Dr. Carl M. Peterson as a pragmatic thinker focused on problem-solving, service, and breaking new ground. Born in 1914 in Opelika, Alabama, he attended Tuskegee Institute, graduated from Morehouse College in 1937, and earned his medical degree from Meharry Medical College in 1941. He moved to Kansas City to intern at General Hospital No. 2, the city's segregated Black hospital, but soon left with the U.S. Army Medical Corps during World War II. After his military service, he returned to complete his residency. Upset by conditions for Black staff and patients, Peterson helped lead a two-day strike that won supplies and more training for Black doctors. After integration, he became president of the combined medical staff and was the first Black Kansas City physician certified by the American Board of Surgery. In 1949, he cofounded The Doctors Clinic, the first Black multispecialty group practice west of the Mississippi. Later, he became the first Black president of both the Jackson County Medical Society and the Citizens Association. Active in civic life, he held leadership roles with the Urban League and on Lincoln University's board of curators. He died in 2007 and was buried in Leavenworth National Cemetery.

Photo: The Kansas City Star

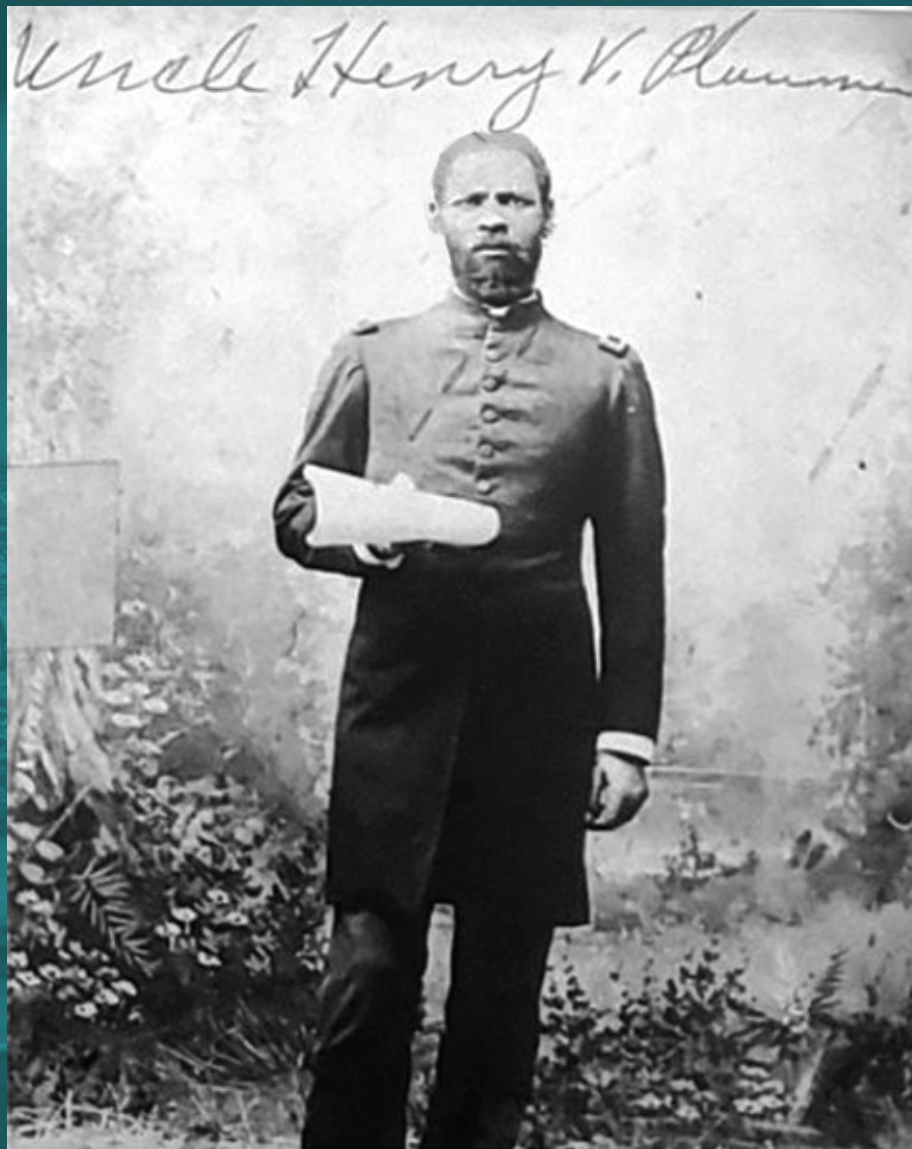


Henry Perry

1875 – 1940

Henry Perry, known as the Barbecue King of Kansas City, was born in Tennessee in 1875. He learned to barbecue as a cook on Mississippi River steamships. Like many Black southerners who moved north during the Great Migration in search of better opportunities, he traveled through several Midwestern cities before settling in Kansas City in 1907. After working in restaurants and saloons, Perry began selling smoked meats downtown and soon built a loyal following. He later moved his operation to the growing Black business district near 18th and Vine, cooking in makeshift locations until he established a permanent restaurant. Perry was a gifted promoter. He cultivated strong relationships with the press, welcomed civic leaders as customers, and was widely admired for hosting annual free barbecues for elderly and needy residents. His techniques formed the foundation of Kansas City–style barbecue and directly influenced future legends such as Charlie and Arthur Bryant and the Gates family through his former cook, Arthur Pinkard. Perry died in 1940, but his legacy lives on. He was inducted into the American Royal Barbecue Hall of Fame in 2014, and in 2020, Kansas City Mayor Quinton Lucas named July 3 Henry Perry Day.

Photo: The Kansas City Sun



Henry V. Plummer

1844 – 1905

Henry Vinton Plummer settled in Kansas City later in life, where he became a respected pastor known for speaking out against racism and supporting Black rights. Plummer was born into slavery in Maryland on July 30, 1844. When he was 18, during the height of the Civil War, he escaped and joined the U.S. Navy. After the war, Plummer married Julia Lomax, and in 1872, enrolled at Wayland Seminary in Washington, D.C. After graduating, he served as pastor at St. Paul Baptist Church in Bladensburg, Maryland, and later at Mount Carmel Church in Washington, D.C. In 1884, President Chester A. Arthur appointed Plummer the chaplain of the all-Black Ninth Cavalry Regiment. He later received a commission as a captain in the U.S. Army and served as the only Black officer at Fort Robinson in Nebraska. Following his military service, Plummer moved to Kansas City, Kansas, where he became pastor of the Second Baptist Church. During his time there, he spoke out against racism, traveled throughout the region delivering guest sermons, and attended numerous national meetings of Baptist leaders — championing Black rights. He was also active in Republican politics, both at the national and local level.

Photo: Public Domain



John Lennis Preciphs

1924 – 2002

Rev. John Lennis Preciphs was a minister and community organizer who was active in the local civil rights struggle for over 25 years. Born in Texas in 1924, Preciphs served in the U.S. Navy before earning his Master of Divinity degree from Interdenominational Theological Seminary in Atlanta, Georgia. In 1966, he was appointed to the Methodist Inner City Parish in Kansas City. Through the parish's three "storefront churches," he pursued his passion for ministering to the most vulnerable members of the community. Preciphs helped sex workers, at-risk youth, and those suffering from alcoholism and homelessness, though he would later recall that his most important work was the parish's free breakfast program for low-income families, which he ran in collaboration with the local chapter of the Black Panther Party. Soon after coming to Kansas City, he became the elected clergy vice-president of the Council for United Action, which used civil disobedience to protest issues such as police brutality and led boycotts of local businesses accused of unfair hiring practices. Preciphs pastored at St. James United Methodist Church, Paseo United Methodist Church, and Swope Park United Methodist Church. He retired from the ministry in 1991 and died in Kansas City in 2002.

Photo: The Kansas City Star



Lucille Jeanette Bacote

1880 – 1966

L.J. Bacote, born Lucille Jeanette Bledsoe in Huntingdon, Tennessee, was a musician, teacher, and choir director who spent over 50 years leading the senior choir at Second Baptist Church. Specializing in organ, piano, voice, and choral directing, she demanded musical excellence and spread her musical passion to generations of churchgoers and students. Raised in Topeka, Kansas, Bacote began pursuing music seriously at age 11. She played organ at B Street Baptist Church, where she met Samuel W. Bacote, pastor of Second Baptist Church. After they married in 1901, she reorganized Second Baptist's music department and served as its music director and organist until 1956. She studied at Washburn College, New England Conservatory, Kansas City Conservatory, and earned her Bachelor of Arts in music in 1911 from Kansas City University. She also studied music under private teachers Mario Salvini in New York City and Isidor Philipp in Paris, France. Through her influence and connections, she brought renowned artists like Jules Bledsoe, the Fisk Jubilee Singers, and Marian Anderson to Kansas City. At her home, she gave private piano, voice, choir directing, and organ lessons to pupils who performed in local and national recitals. Under her guidance, daughters Melba and Lucille became accomplished musicians, too.

Photo: Black Archives of Mid-America



Yvonne S. Wilson

1929 – 2019

Kansas Citians knew former Missouri Sen. Yvonne Starks Wilson for her fierce advocacy and dedication to public service. She was born in 1929 in Kansas City, Missouri, and raised by her grandparents in the historic Leeds Neighborhood. After graduating from Lincoln High School, Wilson earned a degree in elementary education from Lincoln University and a master's degree in sociology from the University of Missouri-Kansas City. For 35 years, she worked for the Kansas City School District and retired as the director of elementary education. She also became the first Black president of the Missouri Association of Elementary School Principals. When she was 70, Wilson's husband Jim encouraged her to start a career in politics. Voters elected her the 42nd district state representative in 1999 and the ninth district state senator in 2004. Wilson devoted herself to important committee work and organizations that reflected her passion for education, families, housing, and public safety. She resigned from the Senate in 2010. Wilson's contributions earned her great recognition. In 2018, the city renamed Liberty Park — a former amusement park for Black residents near her childhood home in Leeds — in her honor, and she was inducted into UMKC's Starr Women's Hall of Fame.

Photo: The Kansas City Star



Principal Anna Jones (standing, left) leads a class at Douglass School in Kansas City, Missouri. Circa 1911.



Image courtesy: The Black Archives of Mid-America

KCBlackHistory.org

©2026 Black Archives of Mid-America, Kansas City Public Library, Local Investment Commission.
Original photos used with permission and remain copyright of their respective owners.