

Clarence M. Kelley

Kansas City Police Chief and FBI Director
1911-1997

by Dory DeAngelo

Clarence Kelley was called a “cop’s cop.” He was destined to enter law enforcement. He was nicknamed ‘chief’ in Northeast High School where he batted .300 on the baseball team.

Kelley received his Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Kansas and then studied law at the University of Kansas City. After college he joined the FBI. In 1943 he enlisted in the U.S. Navy and served in the South Pacific. He returned to the FBI after the war and became an administrator handling criminal cases in 10 cities across the country.

In 1961 Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy recommended Kelley to take over as police chief of Kansas City. He pioneered the use of computers to trace criminals, initiated using a helicopter to patrol the city, created the metro squad to deal with major crimes, recruited and promoted black policemen, and founded the office of citizen complaints. Kansas City’s police department became a national model. He served as police chief for 12 years.

When it was discovered that L. Patrick Gray, director of the FBI, had destroyed information pertinent to the Watergate investigation, Gray resigned. A temporary director was named while a search was conducted for someone to fill that post. Twenty-seven candidates were considered. On June 7, 1973, President Richard Nixon chose Clarence Kelley. At this time, when the Watergate scandal prompted distrust, Kelley told the Senate Judiciary Committee, “I’ve never bowed to political pressure and I don’t mean to start now.” He was quickly approved and lived up to his reputation as an innovator and an honest cop.

When Jimmy Carter became President, Kelley was replaced as FBI director. He returned to Kansas City and founded an investigation and security organization, employing many former FBI investigators.

The new library and resource center at Northeast High School is named after Kelley. Another former student, William H. Sessions,



served as FBI director from 1987 until 1993, and the school's law library bears his name.

Sources

The Kansas City Star, 6 August 1997.

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