

# Horace M. Peterson III

Historian and Archivist  
1945-1992

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by Kimberly R. Riley

A voracious appetite for preserving African American history and passing it on to future generations prompted Horace Peterson to launch the Black Archives of Mid-America. When he founded the project in 1974, Peterson could not fit its contents in the trunk of his car. The project quickly grew and, in 1976, moved to a location inside the former Kansas City Firehouse #11 at 2033 Vine St.

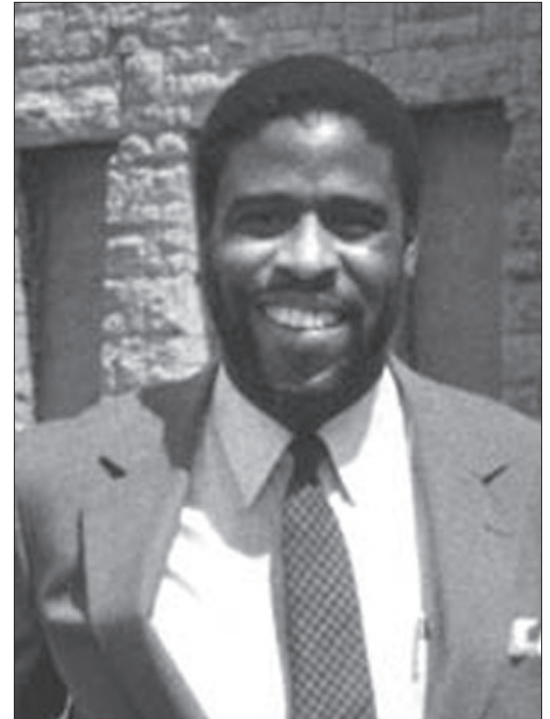
Horace Michael Peterson III was born in 1945 in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and moved to Kansas City in 1948. He graduated from Central High School in 1964 and received a bachelor's degree in sociology from the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff in 1968. He served internships at the Truman Library and the National Archives in Washington, D.C.

Peterson was well known in historic preservation circles, serving as regional adviser to the Afro-American Museum Association, charter president of the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life & History, a member of the Kansas City Landmarks Commission advisory committee, and board member of the Historic Kansas City Foundation. Peterson was also active in several community organizations, including Freedom Inc., the Oak Park Community Development Association, Urban League, and the George Washington Carver Neighborhood Center.

Exhibits and artifacts at the Black Archives include a reconstructed slave cabin from Trenton, Missouri, Buffalo Soldiers uniforms, photographs of prominent and private citizens, and historic documents.

Peterson made his mark in 1980 when the Black Archives sponsored an exhibit at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art of the original copy of the Emancipation Proclamation. The document had been lent only once by the National Archives. Approximately 10,000 Kansas Citians viewed the document signed by Abraham Lincoln freeing slaves, marking quite a coup for Peterson.

Peterson was busy searching for a bigger facility for the Black



Archives when, in 1992, he drowned in Swope Park during a family outing. He is memorialized at the Black Archives, and the visitor's center at the museums at 18th & Vine is named in his honor.

**Sources**

*Star Magazine*, 26 April 1981, 15, 16, 18.

*The Kansas City Star*, 17 March 1992, B1, B6; 18 March 1992, C4; 20 March 1992, C1.

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