



BHC-MSS 0146
Guide to the Papers of Craig Kelly
By Meg Rinn and Elizabeth Van Tuyl

Descriptive Summary

Creator: Kelly, Craig

Title: Papers of Craig Kelly

Dates: 1966-2023, [bulk 1970-1971]

Quantity: 1 document box

Abstract: Largely photocopies of newspaper articles on the Black Panthers in Bridgeport in the early 1970s, including Kelly's involvement, and the Bridgeport Fire and Police Departments. Other documents cover the Young Lords and the L'Ambiance Plaza construction disaster. A South End resource guide and two short films about firefighting in Bridgeport and on 9/11 are also included.

Language: English

Repository: Bridgeport History Center

Biographical History:

The Bridgeport chapter of the Black Panther Party was the first in the state and Craig Kelly joined when he was 19. The Panther's focus of activity eventually shifted to New Haven and another chapter was founded in Hartford. According to Kelly, the Young Lords Party, led by Willie Matos, and the Panthers often worked together in Bridgeport as they shared many common concerns such as housing, education, and unjust and disproportionate imprisonment. Kelly is still in touch with Matos. After his work with the Panthers, Kelly built a career with the Bridgeport Fire Department and helped establish the Bridgeport Firebird Society, a branch of the International Association of Black Professional Firefighters that grew out of a class action discrimination lawsuit against the City of Bridgeport Fire Department in 1975. Kelly rescued construction workers at the L'Ambiance Plaza construction site after its collapse and he participated in 9/11 recovery operations. He helped produce a documentary film about black firefighters called *All Our Sons* which aired on PBS. In his career after firefighting, Kelly has been a social worker.

NOTE: Craig Kelly will be interviewed for the BHC's oral history program, Summer and Fall of 2024. The interviews will be cataloged as BHC oral histories and kept separate from this collection.

Scope and Content note:

This small collection reflects Kelly's several careers and his interest and involvement in his community. It consists largely of photocopied newspaper articles on the activities of the Bridgeport chapter of the Black Panthers, the Bridgeport Fire Department, and the initiatives to establish a community relations program with the City of Bridgeport Police Department. A small number of documents on Young Lords and Black Panther initiatives

and the L'Ambiance Plaza construction disaster are also included. Particularly the articles on the Panthers are of note as Kelly is featured in several when he was arrested along with Bridgeport Panther leader Lawrence Townsend and fellow panther James Murphy in 1970.

The collection includes a spiral bound publication called South End Resource, a booklet prepared by Kelly in the summer of 1981 whose purpose was to inform South End residents of Bridgeport about available social services and "to disseminate information about community and city activities." There are two films on DVD, one on black firefighters who worked on the 9/11 recovery and one on the Bridgeport Firebirds Society which Kelly helped found.

Arrangement Note:

Due to a lack of original order and Kelly's research interests, the collection has been treated as a series of subject files and arranged in alphabetical order. The collection begins with files on L'Ambiance Plaza, the Black Panthers and the Young Lords, then continues with newspaper articles on the Black Panthers, Bridgeport Fire and Police Departments, and concludes with a booklet on the South End Resources and the two films on fire fighters.

Administrative information:

Provenance: donated by Craig Kelly

Preferred Citation:

Papers of Craig Kelly (BHC-MSS 0146), Bridgeport History Center, Bridgeport Public Library.

Names and Subject Tracings

Personal names

Kelly, Craig
Townshend, Lawrence
Murphy, James
Thompson, Thomas
Koskoff, Michael

Corporate names

Black Panther Party of Connecticut | n 2014081077
Bridgeport Black Panther Party
Koskoff, Koskoff and Bieder
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People | n 80049704

Subject tracings

African American fire fighters | sh85001845
Housing | sh85062603
Housing and health | sh85062623
Fire fighters | sh2002006171
Police-community relations | sh85108786
Detention of persons | sh85037293

Detailed box and folder listing

Box 1

1. L'Ambiance Plaza disaster
2. Black Panther Party platform, October 1966
3. Young Lords Party – Inmate Liberation Front (I.L.F.)
4. Newspaper clippings – Black Panthers, 1970
5. Newspaper clippings – Black Panthers, 1971
6. Newspaper clippings – Black Panther, trials [*Hartford Advocate*, 2023 article]
7. Newspaper clippings – Bridgeport Fire Department
8. Newspaper clippings – Police-community relations
9. Booklet – South End Resource, summer 1981
10. Film -- Firebird Society, undated
11. Film -- All Our Sons, 2003

Box 2

1. Laminated newspaper clippings – Bridgeport Fire Department,