

Profiles of *African Americans* in Tennessee



Dr. Charles Odom Hadley (1876-1948)

Dr. Charles Odom Hadley was a prominent African American within Nashville and Tennessee medical and military history. His former home, a circa 1914 exuberant Craftsman, still stands at 1601 Phillips Street on the Fisk University campus. This architectural gem serves as a physical reminder of his legacy. In addition to his noteworthy medical career, this Nashville physician achieved great success as a celebrated military leader and respected university instructor.

Hadley was born in Nashville on March 10, 1876 to Jennie Martin and Dr. William A. Hadley, one of the first and most highly reputed African American physicians in Nashville. Dr. W.A. Hadley also founded the Nashville branch of the Independent Order of the Immaculates (IOI, established 1871), a national African American fraternal organization based in Nashville. Once considered the strongest order in Tennessee and one of the strongest in the nation, the IOI admitted members of both sexes. W.A. Hadley's leadership and service-driven roles undoubtedly shaped the aspirations of his son.

The younger Hadley earned a Bachelor of Arts from Fisk University in 1896 and graduated from Meharry Medical College in 1899. That winter he joined the newly-formed Nashville Society of Medicine, a cadre of African American physicians and dentists headed by R.F. Boyd. An early instance within Charles' lifelong pattern of community service, he represented the Third Ward in the 1896, 1898 and 1902 Republican primary elections.

Dr. C.O. Hadley began his Nashville medical practice in 1900, boarding and practicing at 1512 Phillips Street with his father. Upon the elder Hadley's death in 1901, Charles took over his medical practice at 1103 Cedar Avenue. He joined the Medical Alumni Endowment Association of Walden University, elected Vice President of the association in 1903. He also served as President of the Nashville Medico-Chirurgical Society, a group responsible for the formation of an all-Black state medical society of which he was elected Vice President upon its establishment in August 1903. In 1905, Charles married Fisk University graduate Mabel Grant of Nashville and they made their home at 1506 Phillips Street.

In 1906, Dr. C.O. Hadley served on the Advisory Committee of the local branch of the Negro Development and Exhibition Company, a national group which advocated for an African American museum at the Jamestown, Virginia Ter-Centennial Exposition of 1907. Largely comprised of elite African American members who wanted to earn respect from Whites and inspire less-educated Blacks, the group felt that "the Negro Building could ease a path for political and civil rights," and the museum was ultimately realized. Around this time, Dr. Hadley joined the faculty of Nashville's Wilson Infirmary (incorporated 1907), located at the intersection of South First Street and South Hill (now Hart) Street. Following in his father's footsteps and in keeping with his own custom of community betterment, in 1908 Dr. Hadley became an advisory board member for the Colored Knights of Pythias

benevolent order at Stonewall Lodge No. 103. The following year, he and several other doctors jointly opened new offices at 1211 Cedar Street near Twelfth Avenue North, the collocation of their services considered a neoteric model. Members of the state medical association elected him as their new president in June of 1909. Just prior to World War I, the dwelling at 1601 Phillips Street was constructed (c. 1913-1914) for a sum of \$2,500 and the Hadleys took up residence there by 1915.

In addition to his medical, educational and community endeavors, Charles O. Hadley served over twelve consecutive years under the Tennessee National Guard (TNG)'s all-Black Company G of Nashville, later Company K, 372d Infantry and part of the third Battalion. He enlisted in January 1905 (aged 28 years) and was commissioned First Lieutenant of Company G in 1910. Continuing his service with that company, he rose to the appointed rank of captain, revered as the first African American in the south to attain this title despite a lack of military training. Hadley served nearly three years as Captain of Infantry with the TNG, after which the Army drafted him into federal service on August 5, 1917.

As a member of the American Expeditionary Forces, he was part of the United States armed services sent to Europe during World War I. Appointed as Company G's commanding officer by Governor Thomas Clark Rye (in office from 1915-1919), Capt. Hadley joined the Medical Corps in France during the war. Throughout his years of military duty, he was primarily stationed in Nashville and Memphis, Tennessee; Camp Sevier, South Carolina; and Camps Stuart and Lee, Virginia. As Captain Hadley led this local segregated unit of 'doughboys,' some Whites had concerns about the prospect of armed African Americans in uniform. In response to those people, Capt. Hadley departed for Europe with a simple, yet

dignified statement, "Nashville's Negro company will bring credit to those who have shown trust in it." While abroad, he continued his studies of medicine with European universities, but was wounded during service and honorably discharged on July 29, 1919.

Along with his successful military career, Dr. Hadley also led a lengthy and highly-regarded career as a university instructor and physician. He continued his father's medical practice for forty-eight years and spent the last thirty years of his life teaching medicine at Meharry Medical College as a demonstrator of anatomy. Dr. Hadley's medical offices were located at 1211 Cedar Street and later at 1120 Charlotte Avenue, though he also performed operations at Hubbard Hospital. He built a large medical profession as a physician and was praised in the media for his career, "There is not a man of the race who stands higher than Dr. Hadley in the profession, and he has received numerous honors at the hands of his professional brethren, having served as president of the Volunteer State Medical association, one of the highest places to which he could be elevated in the profession in Tennessee."

The Hadleys were very active in numerous other community-oriented endeavors and the couple was affiliated with Howard Congregational Church. In 1913, Dr. Hadley was appointed to the board of directors for the Star Realty & Investment Company, an entity formed in 1912 to build and sell affordable housing. Mabel Hadley, who sang at various functions around town and traveled with the Jubilee singers, passed away in 1943. After a long hospitalization, Dr. C.O. Hadley succumbed to his illness at Veteran's Hospital on December 14, 1948. At the time of his death, Dr. Hadley had lived at 1601 Phillips Street for 33 years.

-Caroline Eller
