

Dr. John J. Lentz Collection

Collection Summary:

Title: Dr. John J. Lentz Collection

Summary: Clippings, photographs, and other materials documenting the career of Dr. John J. Lentz, Davidson County public health director for over 40 years.

Physical Description/Extent: 1 box; 0.4 linear feet

Language: English

Stack Location: Closed Stacks

Repository: Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County Archives, 615 Church Street, Nashville, TN, 37219.

Biographical/Historical Note:

Dr. John J. Lentz spent over half of his medical career as Davidson County's Health Director, first appointed in 1920 and serving until his retirement in 1964. Born in Shelbyville, Tennessee, in 1885, Dr. Lentz graduated from Vanderbilt University School of Medicine in 1906. After working in Gibson and Maury counties as a general practitioner, Dr. Lentz came to Davidson County in 1913 as assistant superintendent of the Davidson County Asylum.

Public health was a priority for Dr. Lentz from childhood. A 1955 *Nashville Banner* profile of Dr. Lentz asked "Why public health?" His answer: "I lost a sister with diphtheria and a father with lockjaw."¹ Dr. Lentz spent his career campaigning for many causes, most notably polio vaccinations. After one of his sons was stricken with polio at the age of 2 and left with a slight limp, Dr. Lentz worked to vaccinate all Davidson County schoolchildren, sometimes over the violent disapproval of their parents. He also worked to eradicate infectious diseases such as diphtheria and typhoid, sometimes fought with government officials over sewers and sanitation, advocated rabies vaccinations for dogs, and lowered the rate of tuberculosis in Davidson County.

The end of his career in public health was filled with controversy. Dr. Lentz opposed consolidation in 1963, saying, "My interest is in the public health aspects of this community,....I have not advocated adoption of the 1962 Metro Charter and I am not satisfied with its provisions in regard to public health."² In the face of this opposition, the Davidson County Board of Health re-appointed Dr. Lentz as county health director in 1962, with the knowledge that this appointment would carry over to the new government. In 1961, Dr. Lentz and

¹ Ed Huddleston, "County's Good Health Credited To Dr. Lentz," *Nashville Banner*, August 18, 1955.

² "Against '62 Metro, Declares Dr. Lentz," *Nashville Banner*, June 27, 1962.

the health department stopped mass polio vaccinations for schoolchildren, shifting the responsibility to parents and doctors.

Dr. Lentz retired as head of the Metropolitan Government of Nashville & Davidson County Health Department in 1964, after spending over 40 years working to improve the public health of its citizens. He died in 1970, and was buried in Woodlawn Cemetery.

Scope and Contents of the Collection:

Clippings, photographs, and other materials documenting the career of Dr. John J. Lentz, Davidson County public health director for over 40 years.

Index Terms:

Subjects:

Nashville (Tenn.). Board of Health
Nashville (Tenn.) – Biography – Portraits
Nashville (Tenn.)--History--20th century.
Nashville (Tenn.)--Politics and government.
Nashville (Tenn.)--Social conditions.
Public Health--United States.
Public health--United States--Biography.
Public Health--United States--Personal Narratives.
Public health--United States--Posters.

Places:

Nashville (Tenn.).

Genre/Document Types:

Clippings
Pamphlets
Photographs
Reports

Arrangement:

The collection is arranged alphabetically by type of material.

Contents Listing:

Box 1

Folder 1: Clippings, 1929-1970.
Folder 2: Pamphlets and Reports, Davidson County Health Department.
Folder 3: Davidson County Quarterly Court Resolution, 1958.
Folder 4: Chamber of Commerce Testimonial Dinner Program, June 1964.
Folder 5: Photographs, Chamber of Commerce Testimonial Dinner, June 1964.
Folder 6: Photographs, Colemere Club, 1956.
Folder 7: Photograph album of early medical career, c. 1920s.

Folder 8: Photographs, Lentz family members.

Folder 9: Photographs, Physician of the Year Award, 1962.

Folder 10: Photographs, Salk Shots.

Folder 11: Photographs, Senior Citizens Advisement Committee appointment, 1962.

Folder 12: Scrapbook, 40 Years of "Little Doc's" Career.

Folder 13: Cartoon, "Wonder Why My Parents Didn't Give Me Salk Shots?"

note to researchers, this folder is located in MSS Oversize, Drawer 2.

Folder 14: Scrapbook, "John J. Lentz, M.D., Nashville Academy of Medicine's Candidate for the 1962 Award as Outstanding Physician of the Year." ***note to researchers, this folder is located in MSS Oversize, Drawer 2.***

Restrictions:

Restrictions on Access: In Archives use only. Available by appointment.

Restrictions on Use and Reproduction: The Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County Archives own the intellectual rights to these materials. Materials may be used for research purposes only, and cannot be used in a publication or reproduced.

Administrative Information:

Copyright: This material may be protected by copyright law (Title 17 U.S. Code).

Immediate Source of Acquisition: Donated to the Metropolitan Government Archives of Nashville and Davidson County by Dr. and Mrs. Joe Lentz in 2003.

Processing Information: Processed and arranged by Jennifer Quier, Education and Outreach Librarian, November 2014.

Accruals: No further accruals expected.