

Elder, Alfonso ^[1]

Elder, Alfonso

by G. W. Reid, 1986

(6 Feb. 1898–7 Aug. 1974)



Photograph of Alfonso Elder during his tenure as president of North Carolina College (1948-1963).

^[2]

Alfonso Elder, college president, was the son of Lucy Lillian Phinzy and Thomas J. Elder, of Sandersville, Ga. ^[3], who were also the parents of Blanche and Charles Elder. Alfonso received his early education at the Thomas J. Elder High and Industrial School, where his father was principal from 1889 to 1942. At the age of twenty-three, he was graduated magna cum laude from Atlanta University ^[4] and began teaching at Bennett College ^[5], a black female college in Greensboro ^[6], N.C. During the academic year 1922–23, he taught mathematics at the Elizabeth City State ^[7] Teachers' College, an all-black, four-year teacher education institution in Elizabeth City. In 1924 he earned an M.A. degree from Teacher's College, Columbia University ^[8], and in 1938 an Ed.D. degree from Columbia. He also studied at the University of Chicago ^[9] during the summers of 1930 and 1931 and at the University of Cambridge ^[10], England.

From 1924 to 1943, Elder served as dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at the North Carolina College for Negroes ^[11], Durham, where he had been appointed professor of education earlier in 1924. In 1943, he left the college to accept a temporary position as chairman of the Graduate Department of Education at Atlanta University. He remained there four years, eventually becoming dean of the Graduate School of Education. Returning to Durham, he was inaugurated ^[12] as the second president of the North Carolina College on 4 June 1949. On 29 Aug. 1931 he had married Louise Holmes; they had no children.

Active in numerous professional and civic organizations, Elder helped found the Durham chapter of the all-black Alpha Phi Alpha ^[13] fraternity. He was a member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People ^[14] and of the first Mayor's Committee on Human Relations in Durham. In addition, he was treasurer of the North Carolina Teachers Association (1941–43); a member of the board of directors of the Durham County Tuberculosis and Health Association, of the Mutual Building and Loan Association, of the Lincoln Hospital, of the Resource Education Commission, and of Family Services, Inc.; a member of the board of trustees of Hammock's Beach Corporation for Teachers; and chairman of the Committee of the National Clinic on Teacher Education (1947). He was a registered Democrat.

Elder retired as president of North Carolina College on 30 June 1963, after having been honored many times for his service by the faculty, staff, and student body. At his retirement he was named president emeritus of the college. Eight years later he suffered a fatal heart attack. An Episcopalian, his funeral service was conducted by the rector of St. Titus Episcopal Church; he was buried in the Beechwood Cemetery, Durham.

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