



The **Historian**

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ARTHUR JAMES COTTERELL

“A Part Of Summit’s History”

Robert A. Hageman

Arthur James Cotterell (Art) has played an important role in the history of Summit for the past seventy-nine years. As a family man, a teacher, a Summit High School baseball coach and as past president (twice) of the Summit Historical Society, his dedication, his value system and his integrity continues to be felt in the minds of the students and the people who have known and worked with him throughout the years.

Parents

Art’s parents were both born in Liverpool, England. His great grandparents were from Ireland. His father served in the British Army for four years during World War I and was wounded several times.

Before the War and during its aftermath, Art’s father worked for the Cunard shipping lines and had been to America several times, especially the New York region.

His parents were married in 1923 in England. Shortly thereafter, they moved to Montreal, Canada where they lived for two years. Art’s oldest sister was born in Montreal.

In 1926, some friends spoke of a job opportunity in Summit, New Jersey. Not wanting to spend so much time away from his family at sea, Art’s father accepted a job as the driver of the first ambulance of the original Overlook Hospital. The family moved to Summit.

Later, he accepted a position as superintendent of the 55 apartment complex called the Parmley Apart-



Coaching at Memorial Field

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ments located at 133 Summit Avenue. This is where Art grew up along with his three sisters.

Family

Art and his wife, Mary Jane, have been married for 56 years. They met after Art got out of the Army in 1949 and Mary Jane was a senior at Summit High School. They married in 1952 and raised three children in Summit. Patty is a graduate of Penn State University and the University of Tennessee. She is an audiologist and has two children. Bobby is a graduate of the Naval Academy and is a retired Marine jet fighter pilot who is currently a commercial airline pilot and the father of four children. The youngest is Tom, a graduate of Rider College who works on Wall Street and has four children.

All three children, as are Art and Mary Jane, graduates at Summit High School (SHS).

Education

Art's elementary school education was at St. Teresa's. In 1947 he graduated from SHS where he played varsity baseball, basketball and football. After serving in the Army until 1949, he worked at CIBA for fourteen years in pharmaceutical manufacturing. In the evenings, Art attended night school at Seton Hall where he received his A.B. degree in 1963 with a major in history. Later he also received his M.A. degree in history from Seton Hall.

Teaching

During his years attending Seton Hall and working at CIBA, where he was offered several positions, Art continued to think about teaching and coaching. In 1964, his thoughts, and by now his dreams, became reality when he accepted a position at SHS teaching history. From 1973 through 1992, Art was Chairman of the Social Studies Department while continuing to teach U.S. History.

He was greatly admired and respected by his students and the other teachers. One former student, Arthur Vanderbilt, later a lawyer whose grandfather had been Chief Justice of the New Jersey Supreme Court, has written that "Mr.Cotterell was a teacher who communicated to us a joy of reading and learning and thinking. His enthusiasm was constant and contagious.... His class still ranks right on the top of all the courses I've ever had."



Art at mill owned by his great-great grandfather (Michael) in Inistioge County Kilkenny, Ireland

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Art's approach to teaching was based upon the Socratic Method. When asked about this he said that "History must be made interesting. The human aspect must be the center. Students must think, question, compare and contrast the events, the people and the conclusions. The whole environment must be made relevant." No wonder Art's teaching years were so successful!

His favorite period in U.S. History is the American Revolution with its intellectual giants formalizing the institutional structure of our nation. The Civil War is also at the top of the list and his number one book is an historical novel entitled: *A House Divided* by Ben Ames Williams which traces two families, one Northern and one Southern, through the Civil War.

Coaching

From 1964-1973. Art was an assistant football coach as well as the freshman baseball coach. Over these years, his freshman baseball teams had a record of 78 wins and 23 losses.

His notoriety as a coach was achieved as the varsity head baseball coach from 1974-1987. His record is astounding. His teams won 213 games while losing 140 for a .603 winning percentage.

Under his guidance, the SHS baseball teams won four league championships, won the Union County Tournament in 1979, and reached the section title round of the Group III State Tournament three times. During his 14 seasons, six of his players were drafted by major league teams. They were Willie Wilson, George Gross, Colon Leisher, Frank Osmulski, John Merchant and Rob Askew. Just as notable is that 40 of his SHS student players went on to play college baseball.

Coaching Awards

In the mid-seventies, Art helped to establish the New Jersey Baseball Coaches Association. In 1980 and 1986 he was named the Coach-of-the-Year by the Independent Press. Art was twice named by his peer coaches as the Suburban Conference Coach-of-the-Year and once by the Northern Hills Conference. The Star-Ledger twice named him the Union County Coach-of-the-Year.

The year 2005 capped his list of baseball coaching awards when Art was elected to the New Jersey Scholastic Baseball Coaches Hall of Fame.

Art retired from coaching in 1987 and from teaching in 1992.

The Summit Historical Society Thanks Art

In 1993 Art began a dedicated series of contributions to the Summit Historical Society through his volunteer work which at times became a full-time job.

Almost immediately, he was elected to the Board and became its Vice President. Shortly thereafter Dr. Dunn, the President, became seriously ill and passed away. Art took on the job of the President. Four years later Art was elected to a second term as President. Among his many contributions are the lecture series which he headed for so many years, the newsletter "The Historian" which he revamped and wrote articles on Summit's history, working at the Carter House on Tuesday mornings and Wednesday afternoons (and sometimes other days), giving tours of the Carter House, writing a booklet of its history and artifacts which is used by all of the tour guides, and implementing a much needed restoration of the filing system.

Art served on the Board for 15 years and still works at the Carter House several times a month giving tours, answering questions and doing the never-ending filing. At the same time he is in charge of membership.

Theodore Roosevelt once said that

... credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena...who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, and spends himself in a worthy cause who, at the best, knows in the end the triumph of high achievement...

These words describe the best of Art Cotterell: his family, his teaching, his coaching and his importance to the Summit Historical Society.