

A Drum Major for History: Honoring Dr. William H. Cartwright

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Several places and individuals original to North Carolina appear in this issue of *Tar Heel Junior Historian*. However, one person was not a native North Carolinian, but held great importance for the Tar Heel Junior Historian Association: Dr. William H. Cartwright. THJHA acknowledges Dr. Cartwright's passing on October 7, 2004, at the age of eighty-nine.

Dr. Cartwright was born in Pine Island, Minnesota. As a young man, he raised dairy cattle and farmed. At the same time, he started a family, went to college, and taught history in Minnesota's public high schools. He earned a master's degree and a doctorate in history from the University of Minnesota. After serving as the historian for the Military District of Washington during World War II, he taught history and education at Boston University.

What is Dr. Cartwright's connection to North Carolina? He began teaching at Duke University in Durham in 1951, remaining there until 1980. Two years after arriving in Durham, he made one of several lasting marks on North Carolina education. In 1953 he and a colleague from Duke University considered the idea of forming a junior historian program for students of North Carolina history.

In the spring 2003 issue of *Tar Heel Junior Historian*, author Rebecca Lewis researched Dr. Cartwright's role in the association's birth. Records indicate that the idea of a junior historian program was introduced in 1946, five years before Dr. Cartwright came to North Carolina. But he played a role in turning the idea into a reality. In an interview with Lewis, Dr. Cartwright commented that he was involved with a junior historian program in Minnesota, and he wanted Duke University to become a resource for North Carolina's schools. He was well aware of what a junior historian program entailed when, in January 1953, he wrote to Dr. Christopher Crittenden, director of the state Department of Archives and History. Shortly after Dr. Cartwright expressed his interest in starting a junior historian organization in North Carolina, a bill was introduced in the state house of representatives. On April 22, 1953, the bill became law—and the Tar Heel Junior Historian Association was established!

This fact represents only a small piece of the association's long and continuing history, but without Dr. Cartwright, THJHA might not exist today (learn more about the association's history by reading the spring 2003 issue of *THJH*). During Dr. Cartwright's October 2004 memorial service, it became clear that in addition to playing a large role in

the creation of THJHA, he had touched the lives of numerous people during his lifetime. The individuals attending his memorial service remembered the intelligent, motivated man that he was. He constantly made new friends and was sure to say thank you. Friends spoke of his caring nature, particularly for his students.

One of his former students, and later fellow teachers, spoke of three specific memories she had of Dr. Cartwright. One, in particular, referred to her paycheck. Once payday arrived, Dr. Cartwright would say, "Make certain you feel that you have earned what's in the envelope. You are paid to teach a particular subject or subjects for a specified length of time. No minutes are to be wasted, and no child is to be overlooked." His outlook holds a special meaning, especially for teachers now reading this article. He knew, just as teachers today know, that a teacher's paycheck is not a large one. And he saw teaching as the noblest profession.

Dr. Cartwright's diligence in staying current with the daily news was fondly remembered. He called it "history in the making," a point not missed with junior historians.

Dr. Cartwright was not a native North Carolinian; however, through his contributions to education in our state, he became one. His love of education and of North Carolina inspired an organization that thrives today. Each year, thousands of students and advisers hold membership in THJHA. In addition, hundreds of junior historians and teachers across North Carolina participate in the annual contests and convention. Thanks to the hard work of junior historians and their advisers, lost cemeteries have been found and debris cleared, oral histories have been recorded, and historic sites have been recognized and restored.

In honor of Dr. Cartwright's practice of saying thank you, the Tar Heel Junior Historian Association would like to follow suit. Dr. Cartwright, the members of THJHA thank you for your determination to form our organization, and we will strive to continue your efforts in teaching and learning North Carolina's "history in the making."

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