The Arthur G. James, MD Collection: His Life and Work

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James Archivist and Collections Curator

The Medical Heritage Center is proud to announce that the Arthur G. James, MD Collection has been processed and is now open and available to researchers world-wide. The announcement marks the end of a multi-year project dedicated to this important cancer care pioneer.

The collection is approximately 159 linear feet and consists of artifacts, awards, slides, negatives, photographs, audio and video recordings, as well as various paper materials such as departmental records, correspondence, and publications. There are nine series in this collection and they include:

- Series I: Artifacts, Artwork, and Oversized
- Series II: Associations/Foundations/Societies
- Series III: Awards and Memorials
- Series IV: Cancer Hospital Research Institute (CHRI)
- Series V: Correspondence
- Series VI: Media
- Series VII: Personal
- Series VIII: Publications
- Series IX: Research

The items contained in this collection document James's position as the first medical director of the Arthur G. James Cancer Hospital and Richard J. Solove Research Institute at The Ohio State University, his thirty-five year effort to acquire funding to build a cancer hospital in central Ohio, his presidential year with the American Cancer Society, his career at The Ohio State University, and his family life.

Arthur G. James was born Arthur David Giangiacomo on March 14, 1912 in Rhodesdale, Ohio, a small mining town that no longer exists in Belmont County. James was the third of eight children of Italian immigrants. His father was a coal miner who later owned a grocery store.
James’s education began in a one-room mining town school. When he was in third grade, James and his family moved to nearby Uniontown. As a boy, James worked in the family store, learning all phases of the business and helping to deliver groceries—first in a horse-drawn cart and later in a pickup truck.

In 1930, he graduated from St. Clairsville High School as co-valedictorian. He attended The Ohio State University (OSU), eventually earning three degrees: a bachelor’s in 1934, a master’s in surgery, and a medical degree, both in 1937. Giangiacomo literally means son of James and it was at some point between his bachelor’s and masters’ degrees (according to the name on these certificates) that James started going by the name Arthur G. James.

James did his medical internship at the University of Chicago and spent his second year as a surgical intern at Duke University Hospital in Durham, North Carolina. He then returned to OSU hospitals and completed his three-year residency in general surgery. At OSU, he served as chief resident from 1941 to 1942.

On February 29, 1940, James married Mildred “Millie” Cameron. The couple had two sons, David and Cameron.

After completing his surgical residency, James wished to continue training in the field of cancer and applied for and was accepted as a Fellow at Memorial Hospital—now known as Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center—in New York City. His fellowship began July 1, 1942, however, six weeks later he was called into service for World War II with the 65th General Hospital, which he had joined while at Duke University. James served forty-three months in the Army Medical Corps as a major, twenty-two of which were in the European Theatre at the Duke University Army General Hospital. After the war he returned to Memorial Hospital and completed his fellowship.

James came back to The Ohio State University in 1947 as an assistant professor in the Department of Surgery. He remained at OSU for the rest of his career, working his way up to full professor and chief of the Division of Surgical Oncology. James was also the first to hold the Lucius A. Wing Chair of Cancer Research and Therapy.

James once said, “All cancer will eventually be wiped out; there’s no doubt about that, I don’t know how long it will take, but... I’m sure that day is coming.” That belief coupled with his dedication to the idea that cancer patients need specialized care, led James to lobby, campaign, and fundraise for thirty-five years to build a cancer hospital in Ohio.

Finally, on July 10, 1984, the groundbreaking was held to build what became the Arthur G. James Cancer Hospital and Ohio State University Comprehensive Cancer Center. In 1989, at the age of 77, James stopped his medical practice when his Alzheimer’s disease progressed, but he remained an integral part of the cancer hospital by attending meetings, consulting, and writing letters.

Then on October 22, 2001 at the age of 89, James died of Parkinson’s disease. Even after his death, James continues to have an impact in the community through the cancer hospital he spent his career building, which is so fittingly named in his honor.

Items from the Arthur G. James, MD Collection are currently on display in the Medical Heritage Center and will remain on display through the end of April. The exhibit is open during the MHC’s public hours of 1-5pm Monday-Friday.

For more information about the Arthur G. James Collection contact Kristin Rodgers by phone (614-292-9966) or email kristin.rodgers@osumc.edu.