

James Mark Purcell 1929-1991

With considerable sadness we must announce to the Society the passing away on June 18, 1991 of our friend and colleague James Mark Purcell.

Mark was born on March 15, 1929 in West Lafayette, Indiana, and he is survived by his wife, Carolann, of Peoria, Illinois; one son, Bruce, of Peoria; and one daughter, Deirdre, of Chicago. Mark had many friends, both known personally and also as pen-pals, around the country. Most knew him in relationship to a particular area of mutual interest; a few of us were fortunate enough to see the full range of Mark's total list of interests. Given his academic background this should have come as no real surprise to anyone.

Mark was a graduate of Duquesne University, and he then earned his Masters degree in English from the University of Pennsylvania. Later he studied for his doctorate degree at New York University. He taught English at Villanova, Ohio State, South Dakota State College, Southwest Missouri State and Bradley.

Mark was also known as a prolific writer on a wide range of topics that included not only football, but also book reviews, dance criticism, movie reviews and religious topics. In fact, Mark published more than 400 articles and reviews in various non-football periodicals. In the area of movie history and criticism he was regarded as a prominent authority, and was quoted by other writers.

It was my good fortune to know Mark personally for nearly eight years. During that time we carried on a long correspondence on endless topics. He was the premier expert on college football of 1929-1942. It was also my good fortune to have spent many hours with Mark talking and arguing on numerous topics. He taught me much about football and literature. But Mark was much more than just an academic acquaintance; he was a close and valued friend.

Mark's love for college football began back in his boyhood days in Milwaukee. He often told of selling concessions at a Marquette game in 1946, while everyone in the stadium seemed to be listening to a radio account of the Notre Dame vs Army game. In the late 1950's Mark's academic interest in the statistical history of the game became a personal passion. For the next 34 years Mark worked on the undocumented statistical history of college football. He compiled the player/team stats by charting hundreds of games from play-by-play accounts in old newspapers on microfilm. When his statistical record book is published in the next 1-2 years it will represent a monumental addition to the written history of college football.

In his pursuit of any topic Mark was always thorough and persistent and he was always looking for the "meaning" of events. For the study of football he taught me seven cardinal rules for the true historian to follow. Mark expected that football history be researched with the same standards as any other historical subject area. In pursuing the study of college football as a true historical topic Mark was instrumental in the founding of the College Football Historical Society. He has left us approximately 15 new articles on college football, never published before, which we will continue to run in the Society Journal.

The football historical society which Mark helped form, and so much believed in, grieves over the loss of a valued friend and colleague.