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CHAPTER FIVE

THE EARLY HOLT YEARS (AN ERA OF REFORM), 1925-1932

In 1890, an aspiring young writer named Irving Bacheller sent a poem to the prestigious *Independent Magazine*. To Bacheller's great delight the editor, Hamilton Holt, agreed to print his poem. The young poet never forgot the incident and the editor who made his first professional publication possible. Afterward he and Holt formed a close association. In 1918, Bacheller built a palatial home in Winter Park and a few years later accepted a position on Rollins's Board of Trustees. In the midst of the previous years of fruitless search for a Rollins leader, Bacheller, now chairman of the Board, suddenly remembered his friend Hamilton Holt and wrote him a letter suggesting he become candidate. Holt's positive reply led to a two-month long negotiation. Finally, on October 25, 1925, the Trustees announced that Hamilton Holt had been appointed the eighth president of Rollins College. Thus, in a twist of fate a poem printed by a magazine would serve thirty years later as a catalyst for a decision that changed forever the future of Rollins College.(1)

Given the past decade of problems with presidential succession and considering the recent refusals by qualified candidates, why did the Trustees take so long to hire a man of Holt's stature? Ironically, Holt's very prominence made him suspect. Some thought him "too big a man for the job."(2) Born to an illustrious New York family, a graduate of Eastern preparatory schools and Yale University, Holt had risen after college to the editorship and subsequently ownership of *The Independent*, a family owned influential turn-of-the-century

magazine. He had established himself as a national leader in the pre-World War I international peace movement, helping to found the prestigious League to Enforce Peace. Immediately after the war, he worked closely with the Woodrow Wilson administration on the League of Nations. Holt's name was linked not only with President Wilson, but, among many others, with former President William Howard Taft and Republican presidential candidate Charles Evans Hughes. He counted as personal friends luminaries such as Franklin Roosevelt, Bernard Baruch and Colonel Edward House, Woodrow Wilson's chief adviser.

Holt's background revealed a man whose views seemed wholly at odds with traditions of Rollins College and also with the conservative outlook of most trustees. After assuming the editorship of *The Independent*, Holt had turned the magazine into a liberal journal of opinion, which espoused most of the political and social causes of the Progressive Movement during the first two decades of the twentieth century. He wrote many articles himself supporting liberal reforms and at one time he even flirted on the edges of socialism. During the late nineteenth century when Southern States were passing Jim Crow laws, the magazine under Holt's leadership had championed vigorously the civil rights of African Americans, In 1920 Holt ran as a Democrat for the United States Senate seat in Connecticut, losing at least in part because his opponent succeeded in depicting him as a radical. If Holt's background reflected his true views, some trustees felt he would not be a good fit in conservative Winter Park not to mention racially prejudiced Central Florida.(3)

Moreover, many trustees doubted that the college could financially afford Holt. In his original letter inquiring of Holt's interest in the college, Bacheller mentioned a salary of \$5,000 plus a presidential residence.(4) Holt's reply could not have been encouraging. He

was committed until December to promotional work on behalf of internationalism, he wrote, but he would accept a "preliminary" call to the presidency on the terms mentioned by Bacheller. In the meantime he would study the "present and future policies" of the college. Then came the stunning declaration: "If after, the Board wants me to continue on a permanent basis, I will do so for not less than \$10,000 a year and a home, although my income for the past decade has varied from \$21,000 to \$28,000 a year. I could not accept the terms you offer as I am unwilling to have any permanent connection with an educational institution that is compelled to underpay its Presidents and Professors." Holt admitted that he was short on educational experience, but, he argued, he had proven fund raising experience. "The real question," he bluntly told the trustees, "is whether your Board is such as can be depended upon to get enthusiastically behind a sane, liberal expanding program." (4)

The salary demand by Holt was wildly out of line with past presidential salaries. As Bacheller noted, "certain small businessmen were frightened at that amount." The Board had paid Sprague only \$4,000 although to their distress they had been forced to offer Weir \$6,000. Moreover, in 1925 the highest faculty salary was \$2,000 and that sum went to the Director of the Music Conservatory. The average faculty salary was just over \$1,000. Former President William Blackman wrote a letter gently warning him that a "too wide gap between the amount paid the President and the salary given Professors" could create serious morale problems.(5)

For all these reasons, when the Trustees met on August 7, 1925, to discuss presidential candidates. Holt's candidacy was laid aside in favor of another prospect named S. Water McGill, who was an executive member of a Southern Presbyterian Association. Several trustees were attracted to McGill because he had a proven record of successful fund

raising for Southern Presbyterian Colleges. As president he could perhaps revive the effort to unite the college with the Presbyterian Association. Trustee Raymond Greene wrote Holt (with a syntax that must have caused raised eyebrows from the former editor) that he had learned the trustees wanted "a man that can get money rather than a big personality." After unsuccessful negotiations for two weeks, McGill withdrew his name. Rejected by McGill, the Trustees turned reluctantly to Hamilton Holt. In October, they appointed him on Holt's original terms.(6)

The Trustees need not have been anxious about Holt's perceived "radicalism." Typical of early twentieth century progressives, Holt remained a member of the Republican party, even voting for conservative Republican William Howard Taft in 1912 when he had the choice of two self-proclaimed progressive candidates, Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt. A Connecticut editor perhaps intuited Holt's essential moderateness. Although outwardly an outspoken and seemingly a radical progressive, the editor wrote, Holt "was in fact quite sane and a fine type of educated man of today who takes an active part in everything that leads to the better education in the modern world."(7)

The final question concerning Holt's candidacy is why did such a prominent public figure accept the leadership of what appeared to be a tottering educational institution? Part of the answer is the call from Rollins came at a critical period in Holt's career. He had turned *The Independent* from a religious magazine into a respected and influential secular journal. He increased annual circulation from 20,000 to more than 150,000, but it was never a financial success. The magazine lost money almost every year, and when he left it in 1922, Holt had incurred a \$33,000 personal debt. After the war, he held a lucrative leadership position in a new international organization, the League of Nations Non-partisan Committee. In the

era of post-war disillusionment, support for the peace movement suddenly diminished leaving Holt without a steady income. In debt, plagued by health issues caused by a mild diabetic condition and concerned that in the past decade he had been seriously neglecting his family, he was searching for more remunerative work and a more stable life style.

Additionally, Holt had been interested in Florida even prior to the Rollins call. The Florida land boom of the early 1920s seemed to offer him the possibility of quick wealth. Holt was considering spending the winter months in the state so that he could get involved in real estate investment. Not surprisingly then, Holt found the Bacheller proposal of July quite appealing. Though the salary in his counter-proposal was smaller than he anticipated, it would be steady and dependable and could perhaps be supplemented with lucrative land investments. Thus, like so many others who came to Rollins, in the end it was the college's location that attracted him. Holt admitted later that he would not have accepted the presidency of such an institution in any other state, because Florida, he thought, was synonymous with achievement and creativity. The Rollins presidency would allow him to meet his family obligations while at the same time offer him the challenge of turning a failing college into a respectable institution of higher learning. With typical New England aplomb, Holt drove a hard bargain, but he also experienced relief when the trustees accepted his proposition.(8)

The public reception of Holt's appointment undoubtedly dissipated any lingering Trustee concern, as congratulations from high places came pouring into the college. Political notables as Florida's Senator Duncan Fletcher and former President William Howard Taft, now Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, sent felicitations. Congratulations from the

academic world came from presidents of America's leading colleges: J. K. Kirkland of Vanderbilt, James Angell of Yale, John Greer Hibben of Princeton, Henry King of Oberlin, and Glenn Frank of Wisconsin.⁽¹⁵⁾ In its forty-year history, no other Rollins appointment had aroused such national interest. The mere announcement of Holt's appointment had given the college the kind of public recognition that four decades of tireless effort by other presidents had been only a dream.⁽⁹⁾

Holt assumed the presidency of an institution in disarray. It was several thousand dollars in debt, and its most profitable program, the Preparatory Academy, had been dropped, leaving the liberal arts college to its own resources. The previous administration had virtually lost control of the institution. The Dean of Women submitted a special report to the Board in August 1925 complaining of the "lax methods of discipline." Academic standards, long the pride of the college, had declined dangerously. Students cut classes at will without much repercussion. One parent, on paying a late bill, complained he was throwing his money away anyway since his daughter did little in the past term but "hang around with football players." The owner of a local pharmacy in Winter Park which sold the college's textbooks reported in July 1926 that he was left with over half the textbooks. An investigation revealed that many professors did not require students to purchase them. Both Holt and the Trustees understood only drastic reorganization could save the college. At the appointment meeting in October 1925, the board gave Holt carte blanche authority to devise a reorganization program "as to curriculum, professors, grounds and buildings for a student body not to exceed 700."⁽¹⁰⁾

Holt's first goal was to strengthen the college sufficiently to receive accreditation from the Southern Association of Colleges, the region's principal accrediting agency. No one--students, professors or donors--would take the college seriously until accreditation was accomplished. Unfortunately, the Association had turned down the college's application two years earlier. To gain accreditation Holt decided to hire a reputable Dean of the College with experience in this area. After extensive search, he found such a person in George Carrothers. The new Dean had earned a PhD from Columbia University in education, was teaching at Ohio University and was serving as consultant for a Midwestern college association. After looking at the condition of the college, the new dean predicted it would take three years to gain accreditation. Actually, it would take only two, but not without an academic transformation.

Little in his background had prepared Holt for this new work. He later called his reforms an "adventure in education," but the term more aptly applied to his own decision at the age of fifty to enter the field of education. Holt did possess personal qualities that counter-balanced his lack of educational experience. Above all, he was a supremely self-assured person. After overcoming a period of insecurity at Yale, his experiences in journalism and the peace movement had given him a sense of achievement and built solid self-confidence in areas of leadership and administration. Most importantly, in the past few years, Holt had given some thought to the state of American higher education. He thought he understood what was wrong with it and believed he knew how to improve it.

Holt had formed his views on education during his not altogether happy experiences as a student at Yale and on the lecture circuit where in fifteen years he visited over three hundred colleges. He left Yale with an intense dislike of the prevailing pedagogical methods of

lecture and recitation. In his early years at Rollins he told anyone who would listen that the lecture system was the “worst pedagogical method ever devised for imparting knowledge because though a lecturer may serve to inspire a student who has some familiarity with the subject, it invariably mostly discloses the personality--good or bad--of the lecturer.” “The assumption,” Holt argued, “that knowledge may be poured into another and assimilated without the other going through something of the same process of preparational [sic] study is perhaps the greatest fallacy of modern pedagogical psychology.” Through his two decades of talks to hundreds of campuses, Holt became convinced that the chief fault of American education was its “insatiable impulse to expand materially.” Holt came to the conclusion that the passion for expansion, was harming the university systems. For colleges, he argued, expansion seemed to be the end not the means of education. They were forced to devote “their chief energies to drumming up students and multiplying buildings [while] the students and professors are ground between the millstones of materialism.”(11)

Holt’s unfavorable impressions of American higher education were further solidified when he edited a series of articles written for *The Independent* by its literary editor Edwin Slosson. The reporter’s discoveries reinforced Holt's attitude toward the bankruptcy of American higher education. After visiting several American universities including Yale, Harvard and the University of Chicago, Slosson found a monotonous similarity of pedagogical methods--the lecture, the recitation--which had changed little since the Colonial period. He found students “sitting like automatons in lecture classes oblivious to the efforts of the professors to engage them in the learning process.” Slosson's sweeping indictment of higher education came from a rather limited investigation, but because his conclusions reinforced

Holt's own predisposition, the new president accepted them without questioning their validity.(12)

Holt first revealed his own thinking on higher education in an article in *The Independent* in May, 1920 entitled, with unintended prescience, "The Ideal College President." Holt's ideas were not earth-shaking. His ideal college president should decide on the size of student body, get it approved by the Trustees, build a proper physical plant and raise enough money to pay the faculty more than any other institution. He should then discharge or pension deadwood professors and attract quality students. No evidence exists that Rollins Trustees had read Holt's article, but if they had, they could not have been reassured by such platitudes.(13)

Although Holt brought no educational experience to the Rollins presidency, he did possess an active, eclectic mind sharpened by his editorial work in prior years and by his ideas of the need for educational change in higher education. Perhaps more importantly, growing out of his participation in progressivism, he brought a powerful belief in the transforming possibilities of reform. He was convinced that there were new educationally beneficial ways to create more human contact between teacher and student.

He often compared his apprentice experience in the editorial offices at *The Independent*, where he seemed to have learned so much, with his classes at Yale where he claimed to have learned so little. The reason, he concluded, was the methods of teaching. Meeting students only in the lecture room, Yale professors had had no opportunity to help shape their character or personality. On the other hand, at *The Independent* he worked in close contact with associates who not only taught him the complexities of the editorial room but also helped him mature. Holt thought he detected a serious irony: "My colleagues in the

editorial room who never had thought of teaching me anything taught me everything while my professors at Yale and Columbia that were paid to teach me taught me virtually nothing.” The difference, he felt, was in the sense of association, the idea that learning was a cooperative effort. Thus the solution to the problems of American education, it seemed clear to Holt, lay in somehow transferring the associational experience of the editorial room to the classroom.(14)

In essence, Holt wanted to socialize education by bringing the professor and the student into a closer relationship thus making that relationship as important as the subject matter. In this sense both teacher and student would actively participate in the educational process. Apparently on his own, Holt had arrived at an insight that formed the foundation for a new American educational movement termed Progressive Education. Led by educational philosopher John Dewey, who would later guide Rollins in a curriculum revision, Progressive educators stressed a humanized system that placed the student at the center of the educational process. Within a short time after assuming the presidency of Rollins, Holt became a full convert to this Progressive Education movement, a decision made easier because he had earlier worked out its basic principles himself.

As many educators discovered (and continue to discover), it is no simple matter to turn theoretical ideas into a concrete academic program. Holt was full of educational ideas but he possessed no practical experience in a college educational setting. Dean George Carrothers did possess that experience and thus would be a key player in the creation of what they would call a “New Rollins.” No sooner had Carrothers accepted the position than Holt began bombarding him with his ideas for pedagogical reform, much of which Carrothers

later admitted shocked him. To implement his idea on teaching reform, Holt wanted professors to develop courses that lasted for half a day at a time. and in classrooms that would contain all the required books, sources, references, equipment. Students would then select courses that interested them, moving from one professor to another as his interests guided him. Carrothers had difficulty taking seriously such an unorthodox system, which, if nothing else, would be a logistical nightmare. However, on a trip to Rollins in the latter part of April 1926, he found Holt determined to carry it through. Disturbed by Holt's insistence, Carrothers made a second trip and, after hours of discussion, persuaded Holt the Southern Association would never accept such an informal arrangement and would certainly reject the requirement professors remain so long in a classroom. The normal requirement for students, Carrothers reminded Holt, was one hour in the classroom and one hour of study outside the classroom. Well then, Holt suggested, why not have the students spend both hours in the classroom--one hour for classroom work and one hour for study under the professor's supervision. Carrothers agreed that such a plan was possible. Thus, was born the Two-Hour Conference Plan. Much more orthodox than Holt had originally envisioned, it nevertheless contained his essential principle of close association for an extended period between professors and students. The plan satisfied Holt's dream of allowing for constant interaction as the professor advised and supervised the student during the two-hour class.

(15)

Throughout the summer of 1926, Holt and Carrothers worked out the details of the plan. The end product established a four-period day, with two hour classes meeting three times a week (Monday, Wednesday, Friday or Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday: 8-10, 10:30-12:30, 1:30-3:00) and with a supervised fourth period, 3:00-5:00, devoted to varied activities as

field trips, laboratory work or physical education classes. Professors were required to teach three courses each term with all required work to be accomplished in the classroom. Teachers would assign no homework although students were encouraged to undertake additional study outside the class. Moreover, in the two-hour period students would proceed at their own paces. More mature, intelligently capable students would be given the freedom and opportunity to explore more complex material, while the slower students might require more supervision from the professor. As stated in the first catalog, ideally the plan promised "the free exchange of thought between pupil and teacher in personal conference during which the student is helped over difficulties, shown how to study, and given an illustration of a scholarly attitude for knowledge."(16)

A few professors worked with Holt and Carrothers during the summer months, but the majority of the faculty had not seen the plan until they returned for classes in September. The calendar for 1926-1927 called for the first faculty meeting on September 17, and for student class registration on September 27. It seemed unlikely that the Two-Hour Conference plan could be voted on and implemented before student registration for the 1926-1927 calendar year. Yet at a special faculty meeting called on September 24, three days before registration, the faculty began debating the new plan. "After many phases of the matter had been considered," many faculty remained skeptical. Professor Lyle Harris of the English Department proposed introducing the new plan gradually during the morning periods. Instead of considering that proposal, the faculty voted on a motion by Professor of Chemistry Frederick Georgia that the college go over entirely to the two-hour period. With apparent blind faith, the faculty voted in favor of the motion. (17)

With classes already scheduled and only two days remaining before students were required to register for them, the new program created a registrar's nightmare. That evening and during the next two days, Dean Carrothers and his staff worked furiously to revise class schedules. Incredibly, by the time the students arrived on September 27, the administration were ready to register student for the new classes.

Holt and Carrothers believed that the new Two-Hour Conference Plan would represent more than simply a change in the number of hours students spent in the classroom. They intended that the reform would provide a more meaningful structure within which new and innovative teaching would take place. They hoped the expanded time would give professors the opportunity and the framework to design a variety of activities for the students, ranging from research to reading, from writing to oral reports, from general discussion to individual conferences. Without doubt Hamilton Holt's ingenious plan opened countless ways for professors to engage students in the learning process. The possibilities would be limited only by the professors' imaginations. Therein lay the uncertainty. Would professors accustomed to generations of the well-established lecture method of teaching, be willing and, more importantly, creative enough, to make the new approach work? (18)

During the first term, both the president and the dean advertised the rationale and possibilities of the plan. Holt tended to articulate the purposes of the plan in practical terms. The purpose of the two-hour plan, he stated *ad infinitum*, "was to put academic life on a more practical basis by placing class attendance on par with the hours and duties of a business office or editorial room." To Holt the most significant aspect of the new two-hour plan was the opportunity for maximum of interaction between professor and students where immature and untrained students would receive systematic supervision from master teachers.

Holt saw "the chief departments of the college domiciled in large, lighted study rooms, attractively furnished, eventually with open-air connecting piazzas." As Holt envisioned it:

The students would have their desks and easy chairs in this room where they would study under his supervision and in [the professor's] presence. For the brighter students it would be enough to assign them reading and writing projects. The slower students would have to be coached when necessary, but there would be little of the old style of recitation or lecturing in the common workroom. The professor would know what the students were doing or not doing, and in the course of their studies if they came to difficult problems, he would be at their elbow to help them. Under this system there would certainly be sufficient work, both intellectually and physically, but under conditions where the impact of the teacher's mind is at its maximum than under the system where the professor sits on the throne in a repugnantly furnished classroom for a few hours a week and lectures the students before him, a large portion of whom are trying to get by with the least possible effort.(19)

As the plan developed, Dean Carrothers began to have new insights into its possibilities. If the faculty approached the plan with a spirit of open-mindedness, Carrothers noted, significant, perhaps even profound, innovations could be developed. The two-hour classroom period, he thought, allowed professors to recognize student individual talents and differences. Students could be allowed to move at their own paces and to work in various directions. A sense of freedom could pervade the classroom with students involved in a variety of activities, some studying individually, and others studying in groups, leaving and returning to the classroom as if it were a workshop. Learning then, rather than being enclosed within a recitation room and restricted by a lecture and a textbook, would be limited only by the imaginations of students and the professor.

To guide the professors toward these possibilities, Carrothers wrote a long letter to the *Sandspur* in January 1927, suggesting a host of creative approaches. The Conference Plan, Carrothers explained, "may mean individual or group discussion, it may mean some stu-

dents working in the library while others are working in the classroom; it may mean a complete break in the continuity of all group and individual activity and the sending of the entire class to the open air for a relaxation; it may mean leaving breaks and study time to the discretion of the individual students." These ideas, Carrothers hastened to add, were merely suggestive; "no administrator could or should state in detail just what [would take place] in the classroom. Critical decisions should be made by the instructor but with the cooperation of the students."(20)

Earlier, reforms had unshackled the students from the prescribed classical curriculum and replaced with the elective system. Few academic institutions were prepared to offer the kind of freedom to professors and students suggested in the Conference Plan. Although neither Holt nor Carrothers used the phrase "progressive education" clearly they were attempting to implement one of the basic principles of this new educational theory -- the recognition of individual differences in students and of the need to provide students with the freedom to express those differences. Later, when Holt began to perceive the similarities between the Conference Plan and progressive education theory, he would move swiftly to place the college firmly in the progressive reform tradition. For the time being he and his staff found themselves on the cutting edge of excitingly new innovative educational reforms.

The hasty inauguration of the plan gave professors little opportunity to readjust their teaching methods, resulting a mixed bag of teaching efforts. Some like Leland Jenks in history, dropped the lecture method altogether and began experimenting with discussion and conferences; others made a partial attempt by lecturing one hour and trying other methods in the second hour; some professors, unable or unwilling to break old habits, simply lectured for two hours. The administration expected this mixed outcome. Holt had predicted

that they were likely to encounter unforeseen difficulties and, working from this assumption, the administration arranged "experience meetings" where professors could share accomplishments and problems. In addition, less than a month into the term, the administration called for an evaluation of each class. Students were asked to state what changes had been made, how they were responding and what improvements could be made. A majority of the students expressed enthusiasm for the new plan. Comments from the classes where professors had attempted to revise teaching methods indicated that the students were having new and stimulating educational experiences. Many students criticized professors for assigning on additional homework despite the claim that they could complete all the necessary work in the classroom. (21)

In his history class, Professor Jenks abandoned lecturing, conducted brief discussions and allowed most of the time for supervised study. Professor Frederick Georgia's chemistry classes were built around a kind of self-paced study with one student on page 170 of the textbook while another had reached only page 75. Professor Grover's class on the History of Books was held in an "ideal environment" with students seated at a round table and before a wall lined with books. Following the student evaluation reports, the administration held an all-college meeting to discuss the two-hour system. Although student representatives voted enthusiastically for the plan, when Carrothers urged them to criticize the plan if they desired, he opened the door for a barrage of complaints, primarily centered on the fact that some professors were not changing their methods and that many were requiring work outside the classroom. Still, the meeting ended with a sense that although improvements were necessary, the new system was working. Even more importantly, the meeting began a discourse on the curriculum that would continue for months afterward. By the end of the

first school term, the two-hour system was firmly entrenched and most faculty members were adjusting their teaching methods to the new system.(22)

Commencement exercises in May 1926 concluded one of the most stimulating and fruitful academic experiences since the college had opened forty years earlier. In one short year the college had embarked on a direction that within a decade would bring national attention to its innovative approaches. The Two-Hour Conference Plan had furnished a catalyst for a reawakening. Faculty and students who had fallen into a kind of academic stupor suddenly came alive to the excitement and possibilities of a new way of learning. Holt and Carrothers, with the help of a few faculty, had devised the plan, but the entire college became involved in its implementation. Faculty meetings, traditionally a time for discussing such day-to-day institutional minutiae such as course and examination schedules, student discipline, and grade problems, were transformed into three-and-four-hour forums for debating pedagogical methods. Students, who had passively accepted an academic structure as something handed down from on high, found themselves not only expressing their own views on the new changes, but encouraged to participate in its revision. In the prior systems, student discontent usually manifested itself in some rules violations; in the new system they were encouraged to voice that dissatisfaction with their education with some assurance that their voices would be heard. For generations students had accepted an enforced silence about their own education. Now they were encouraged to express participate in the development of new system. All-community involvement not only gave Rollins singularity in the 1920s and 1930s, this democratic approach to community would form the foundation upon which the college would grow and develop in the decades ahead.(23)

Despite the excitement created by the Two-Hour Conference Plan, it contained a potential problem. The most innovative aspect of the two-hour conference plan was its effort to place the student closer to the center of the educational process. Early brochures proclaimed that Rollins had "shifted its emphasis and its focus of responsibility from faculty to the students." But requiring the two-hour class and only the two-hour class threatened the openness it encouraged. The division of the day into two-hour blocks potentially restricted the goals of self-directed individual education. Leland Jenks, Professor of History, who enthusiastically supported Holt's innovation and immediately grasped the student-centered nature of the changes, maintained that Holt had the right idea but had placed that idea in too rigid a framework. Why not, he argued, schedule class times and then allow the student and professor to arrange the conference times. "My suggestion," he wrote the administration, "is that the student work out his own schedule for individual self-directed activity subject to the special limitations of announced conference hours and of the instructor's giving part-time instruction." Holt never seemed to grasp the contradiction between rigid structure of two-hour blocks within which all learning would take place and the goals of self-directed education. He remained steadfast in his belief that all teaching-learning should function within two-hour periods. Holt's two-hour class idea began as an experiment and ultimately drifted into certainty and finally into rigid orthodoxy. By the mid-1930s it had become Holt's signature achievement and no one was allowed to touch it.(24)

In the meantime, Holt used his publicist talents to advertise to the world that a small provincial college in Central Florida had undertaken "an adventure in common sense education," the title of a speech extolling the successes of the two-hour conference plan. He managed to get the speech published in several educational magazines: *World's Work*,

School and Society, *High School Quarterly*, to name a few. In addition, between 1926 and 1929, he wrote over a score of articles for such important national journals as *Review of Reviews*, *Forum* and *The Nation*. Carrothers wrote four articles himself. Stories about the plan appeared in newspapers throughout Florida as well as in the *Boston Globe*, the *New York Times* and the *New Republic*. (25)

Holt was particularly adept at coining catchy phrases: "Adventure in Common Sense Education," Rollins has abolished "lock-step education"; at Rollins the professor is not a "lecturer but a guide, a philosopher, and friend"; and his most oft-quoted, though problematic, slogan, "Rollins has put Socrates on an eight-hour day." In 1930, Holt contributed an article to *The Nation's* popular series on educational experiments in higher education. (26) Holt's article, "The Rollins Idea," indicates how thoroughly the college community had embraced progressive ideas. At Rollins, Holt declared, "we hold the belief that the individual student's growth and development are the all-important things, and that to justify itself, every course, by its subject matter and manner of being taught, must deepen and broaden the student's understanding of life and enable him to adjust himself more quickly and more effectively to the world in which he lives. This theory assumes an approximation of college life to normal living as well as a correlation of subjects to be studied. On this premise, we have shifted our emphasis and our forms of responsibility from the faculty and administration to the students. We find that because young people really accept responsibility willingly and carry it well, because they like being treated as adult, reasonable beings, they seem to lose, if they have it on entrance, the average student's resistance to things academic. They learn to recognize education for the thing we believe it should be: a joint adventure and a joint quest."

Holt closed his article suggesting that the college was prepared to explore additional progressive educational reforms. In the past five years, he explained, the faculty at Rollins had been experimenting with new progressive teaching methods. Now that those methods had become firmly established, the college was embarking on a study of the courses themselves with a view to making a major curriculum revision. For that purpose, he said, he had called a curriculum conference composed of leading national educators to advise the college on its revision. Holt proudly announced that he had persuaded progressive education's leading theoretician, Professor John Dewey, to head the conference. It was scheduled for the middle of January 1931.(26)

By the time Holt's article appeared the college community was in another academic ferment. The Curriculum Committee, chaired by chemistry professor Frederick Georgia, had been studying a number of suggestions for a "comprehensive reconstruction of the curriculum." Before the summer break of 1930, the Committee presented the faculty with its report which proposed dividing the college into lower and upper divisions. At Holt's suggestion the faculty took the unprecedented step of approving a plan for a Student Educational Committee. A dozen students would be given a course credit to present their ideas for curriculum reform. Another group calling itself the Independent Student-Faculty Committee, "stimulated by an interest in the subject of education, and by the prospect of the conference in January," began meeting in November 1930, and it also presented a curriculum report in January, 1931.(27) The student committee, chaired by the president's son, George Holt, presented its report at the end of Fall break. It reflected student excitement over a recent speech given at the college by Goodwin Watson, a young progressive professor at Teachers College, Columbia University. Watson, an early proponent of a branch of progressive education

called "life adjustment," called on the college to abandon the old academic departments and create new "functional" ones based on such areas as health, home participation, vocation, leisure and citizenship. All student activity, he proclaimed, should be "worthwhile and important to life." The student report then suggested a parallel course of study designed to prepare students for living--to prepare them to "become diligent and efficient workers, intelligent and socially minded citizens, tolerant husbands and wives, fathers and mothers." They specified such courses as "Health -- Mental and Physical; Value of Money and Time; The Individual and the Family; The World We Live In." (28)

Yet another report came from an independent faculty/student group headed by Malcolm Forbes and Edwin Clarke. The Independent Student-Faculty Report argued the other reports had fallen short of a truly progressive educational program.(29) The independent group wanted John Dewey's theory of student interest to shape curriculum reform. "We believe," the group argued, "that interest is a very basic and important factor in the progress of education and of getting an education. We therefore wish to have the interests of the students discovered, in order that they may study those things which interests them and thereby have their learning properly motivated."

The Independent Report then stressed four Deweyian principles: "1) Specific Learning, meaning that all courses should be worthwhile in themselves; 2) Individual Differences, meaning that a curriculum ought to take into consideration that no two people are alike in mental capacities, interests, attitudes or needs; 3) Interests, meaning that a curriculum ought to provide for the fact that there is more learning, retention and continuation of interest in a subject chosen voluntarily than one that is prescribed; and 4) Use, meaning that a curriculum ought to provide a structure for the implementation of these principles."(29)

Thus, by the time Holt convened the Curriculum Conference in January 1931, the Rollins College community had already embarked on an exciting, substantive debate on the nature of progressive education, and the degree to which the college should adopt its principles.(30) Holt had achieved a major coup when he secured John Dewey to chair the conference, for this guru of progressive education quickly attracted several disciples. Holt and the conference organizer, Frederick Georgia, invited leading progressive educators. The final list included a stellar constellation of progressive stars. John Dewey, of course, headed the list. In 1931 he was Professor Emeritus of Philosophy in residence at Columbia University with duties that included counseling graduate students and consulting with his colleagues. Probably this era's leading philosopher, Dewey had written extensively on the nature and meaning of progressive education. In *School and Society* (1896), already a classic in educational literature, he had expounded the basic principle for what later became known as progressive education -- namely, that human experience should provide the motivating force for all educational programs. In *Democracy and Education* (1916) he asserted that the development of individual freedom ought to be the goal of all education. Between 1896 and 1904, Dewey successfully tested these theories at the University of Chicago Experimental School (which he organized) where he directed his thought and efforts toward elementary and secondary schooling. The call from Holt gave the aging philosopher his first opportunity to put his fertile mind to work on higher education. So far as the record shows Dewey's only specific ideas on undergraduate education came at the Rollins Conference.(31) Other leading figures in higher education include historian John Harvey Robinson, Dewey's colleague at Columbia and author of two influential books on education: *Making of the Mind* (1921) and *Humanizing of Knowledge* (1923), where he called for abandoning the old conservative

ways of teaching and instead constructing educational systems that freed individuals for a "life of creative thinking;" and Joseph K. Hart, Professor of Education at Vanderbilt University, who had recently published a study entitled *Discovery of Intelligence (1924)*, where he argued that education was a community endeavor. Education, he wrote was more than training children; it was "the problem of making a community within which children cannot help growing up to be democratic, intelligent, disciplined to freedom, reverent to the good life, and eager to share in the tasks of the age."

In addition to Dewey, Robinson and Hart, the conference membership included Henry Turner Bailey, a nationally recognized innovator in creative arts in the schools; A. Caswell Ellis, author of books on educational psychology and an authority on adult education; John Palmer Gavit, an associate editor of *The Survey*, who had recently surveyed over thirty colleges in preparation for a widely read article on education; Goodwin Watson, whose recent talk had stimulated the Rollins community's interest in curriculum reform. Also present were three college president: Arthur Morgan of Antioch, an institution involved in an innovative educational experiment; Constance Warren of Sarah Lawrence, a new two-year women's college constructed on progressive principles; and Rollins's Hamilton Holt.

The report from the three-day conference ringingly endorsed the overarching principles of progressive education: the significance of individual differences, the primacy of individual interests, and the relationship between education and life. Most of the conferees had presented these ideas in reference to primary and secondary education. The Rollins conference gave them their first opportunity to apply these principles to the liberal education. Dewey expressed this special value of the Conference in his closing remarks. "It is signifi-

cant that while many conferences have discussed problems of secondary and primary education, and some groups have taken up social problems of college teaching and curricula, this conference is, so far as I know, unique in devoting itself to the fundamental principles of college education as distinguished from those both of lower schools and of the university. While differences of opinion marked some phases of the conference we have precipitated the essentials necessary to further development of the college of liberal arts.”

Armed with a a set of guidelines for constructing a progressive curriculum, in May 1931, the faculty passed a final version of the new curriculum. Influenced by the Curriculum Conference, the college now pushed interest and individual differences to the foreground, to what the college called "Individualization in Education." The catalogue, published the following year, proclaimed that the revised course of study would "substitute learning for instruction," would "encourage intellectual curiosity and enthusiasm," and most importantly, would "develop the individual in the manner best suited to him." Individualization thus became the centerpiece of the new curriculum. It would be achieved by admission requirements that emphasized individual character and student achievement in secondary school rather than some fixed number of units studied; by assigning students advisers who would guide and nurture them through their education; by allowing students, with faculty advice, to pursue personal interests, especially in the upper division. Even in the lower division, which required some nine specific courses, the curriculum allowed students considerable flexibility in devising a plan to meet requirements for entrance into the upper division. In further recognition of individual differences, the curriculum placed no time limit for completion of work within either division. Finally, the college determined a student's qualifications

for graduation not by the number of course credits accrued, but by the student's "accomplishments, intellectual ability and degree of application."(31)

Starting with the freshman class of 1931, the college community placed itself at the cutting edge of small colleges that had embarked on new and innovative progressive experiments in higher education. With its individualized curriculum, the college could (and most loudly did) proclaim that it was in the forefront of progressive higher education, basking proudly in its national reputation of an institution eager to experiment with fresh educational ideas. The most immediate benefit of the new curriculum, however, was the intellectual ferment that engulfed the campus during the early thirties. The faculty, the students, the independent curriculum reports, and finally, the Curriculum Conference kept the entire college community involved for over a year in an intensive debate over educational ideas. This discourse itself was a significant learning experience at Rollins, and it precipitated a dialogue that would last for over two decades.

In this sense, the spirit of the educational reforms meant more than the substance or structure of the curriculum changes. The debate and the new curriculum, coupled with Holt's original Conference Plan, left a permanent legacy of experiment and innovation. The educational experiments in the first two decades of the Holt era came not only from the introduction of innovative pedagogical devices and the launching of a new curriculum, though these two would occur with increasing frequency. The real and more permanent heritage of this period came from the emergence of a spirit of reform and the sense that true education came from a mutual cooperation between administration, faculty and students. Above all, the creation of a democratic educational community, where innovation and change were encouraged and became everyone's responsibility, proved to be the greatest legacy of the

Holt era. Generations afterward, the college community's openness to educational innovation became its major source of identity.

NOTES

1. Trustee Minutes, October 15, 1925.

Irving Bacheller was a successful writer of fiction when he arrived in Winter Park in 1918. He immediately established a relationship with Rollins College. He created the Irving Bacheller Essay Contest in 1920 to train young people to write effective and professional essays. From 1921 until 1930, he lectured at the college. During this time he wrote three novels: *In the Days of Poor Richard*, *Father Abraham*, and *Dawn*. He continued to be a profile novelist, writing seven more novels before his death.

Bacheller was elected to the Rollins College Board of Trustees in 1922 and served until 1948. In 1927 the college awarded him the Algernon Sidney Sullivan Medallion for integrity of character in 1927. In 1940 the college awarded him an honorary degree and later that established the Irving Bacheller Professorship of Creative Writing. His friend Edwin Granberry was the first to be appointed to the position. In 1943 Bacheller left Winter Park for good and died seven years later in White Plains, New York.

2. Raymond Green to Holt, August 7, 1925. All the following Holt correspondence found in the Holt Presidential Papers, Rollins Archives.

Ray Greene served the college from 1913 through the 1950s. He came to Rollins as "special student" because he enrolled at the age of 25. While studying for his degree, which he earned in 1921, he served as physical education director. In a short period after World War I he was secretary to the president and at one time was co-president along with William O'Neal. While director of the Alumni Association, he ran a successful real estate business. He was elected to the Winter Park City Commission and later served a term as mayor of the city. He and his close friend Rex Beach founded the Florida Parks Association and identified Highland Hammock as Florida's first state park. In 1967, President McKean established the Raymond Green Chair of Health and Physical Education. Greene died in 1979 at the age of 90.

3. Holt's background is covered thoroughly in Warren Kuehl, *Hamilton Holt (1950)*.

4. It is not clear who authorized Bacheller to write Holt or whether he simply made the approach on his own impulse. His promise that he could get Holt "an unanimous call from the Board," proved to be unfounded. Bacheller to Holt, July 3, 1925; Holt to Board of Trustees August 2, 1925.

5. Bacheller to Holt, August 10, 1925; Trustee Minutes, March, 1925; Blackman to Holt August 12, 1925.

6. Trustee Minutes, August, 1925; October, 1925; Green to Holt, August 7, 1925.

7. Quoted in Kuehl, *Holt*, 62.

8. *Ibid.*; Holt to Morgan Gress, June 29, 1925; to William Blackman, June 30, 1925 and Bacheller, June 30, 1925.
9. Trustee Minutes, April, 1926; Holt to Father, April 27, 1926.
10. Trustee Minutes, October, 1925; William Short to George Carrothers, July 17, 1926; August 16, 1926.
11. Kuehl, *Holt*: Hamilton Holt, "Rollins in the Making," *Rollins College Bulletin*, 19 (March, 1926); Holt, "Ideals For the Development of Rollins," *RC Bulletin* 19 (June, 1926).
12. Edwin Slosson, "The Great American Universities" *Independent*, January 1909-March 1910. Slosson published these essays in book form in 1910 and dedicated the book to Hamilton Holt. Included in the book was a statement that Holt repeated many times: "The lecture method of teaching was largely informational and the attitude of the student was passive receptivity." A scientist by profession, Slosson published books and articles interpreting complicated science theories to the layman.
13. Holt, "The Ideal College President," *Independent* 102 (May, 29, 1920), 285-287.
14. Holt, "Adventure in Commonsense Education," *World's Work*, 55 February, 1928), 423-24.
15. Carrothers to Friend "Jack," August, 1958. Copy in Holt Presidential Papers.
16. Memorandum to the Faculty, "The Two Hour Study Plan," November, 1926.
17. Faculty Minutes, September 24, 1926.
18. *Ibid.*, October 25, 1926.
19. Holt, "Ideals For Rollins."
20. Carrothers, "Freedom in the Two Hour Plan," *Sandspur*, June 27, 1927.
21. Faculty minutes, September and October, 1926; *Sandspur*, October 1, 1926.
22. *Sandspur*, October 15, 1926; Memorandum, Dean's Office, "Report of the Students on the Two Hour Plan."
23. *Ibid.*
24. Holt, "The Open-Air College of America," *RC Bulletin*, 25 (March, 1930); Leland Jenks to Dean Short, January 21, 1927. In 1917 Jenks had started his academic career as instructor in History at the University of Minnesota. From 1919 to 1920 he was Assistant Professor of History and Political and Social Science set Clark College. Later he was appointed Associate Professor of History and Social and Economic Institutions Amherst College He came

to Rollins in 1926 and left in 1930 to teach at Wellesley College. He was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1936.

25. See Kuehl, "Holt Bibliography," copy in Holt Presidential Papers, for a complete listing. Holt's editorship of *The Independent* provided him with a talent for publicity. In addition to his speeches and articles about Rollins, he and Osgood Grover conceived other another publicity scheme to advertise Rollins: The Animated Magazine. Another publicity schemed to emerge from Holt's fertile mind was the Walk of Fame See Appendix for fuller descriptions.

26. Holt, "On the College Frontier: The Rollins Idea," *Nation*, 131 (October 8, 1930.), 322-373.

27. All three reports were printed in "The Curriculum for the College of Liberal Arts," *RC Bulletin* 26 (February, 1931).

28. Student Curriculum Committee Report in IBID., 24-31. Watson's speech was published in *Sandspur*, November 10, 15, 1930 and republished in *Progressive Education* (December, 1930.)

29. Independent Student-Faculty Report in "Curriculum for the College of Liberal Arts," 31-39.

30. The following discussion of the conference is based on the verbatim typescript compiled in three volumes located in the Rollins Archives.

31. Catalogue, 1931-1932.