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## Chapter 07: The Later Holt Years (Depression and War), 1932-1949

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## **CHAPTER 7**

### **THE LATER HOLT YEARS (DEPRESSION AND WAR), 1932-1949**

However regrettable the Rice affair, it could neither obscure nor diminish the college's substantial accomplishments of the Holt administration. These advances were even more amazing because they occurred in the midst of an unprecedented devastating depression. During this period, the college undertook major curriculum reform, Holt doubled the size of faculty and the college continued to attract large numbers of students with high academic qualifications. Holt built virtually a new campus, adding 32 new buildings all constructed in the Spanish-Mediterranean architectural style. These changes evidenced the transformation and drama of a small, provincial college undergoing a profound and often wrenching metamorphosis into a nationally celebrated institution.

In, in the early years of his presidency, Holt, with the firm conviction that the faculty was the keystone of the academic structure, devoted much of his time and the college's resources to finding qualified professors. He first cleared the community of what he perceived to be "academic deadwood" -- that collection of poor teachers and aged professors which he had inherited. He replaced them with what he called "Golden Personalities." As defined by Holt, these luminaries would be teachers with a fund of knowledge, combined with the creative and engaging styles that made learning interesting, exciting, and worthwhile. "It is professors who make a college great," Holt proclaimed repeatedly, "and yet how rare a great teacher." GPs, as students and faculty irreverently dubbed them, were those "rare souls whose personality appeals to young men and women,

who possess the gift of teaching and the nobility of character to inspire youth." To most institutions of higher learning, who were looking for more tangible evidence such as advanced graduate degrees, particularly PhDs, these were timeworn generalities. Holt did not ignore these concrete factors, but he more often ignored earned degrees and relied on his own intuition in hiring his "Golden Personalities." For several years, Holt alone interviewed and hired most of the faculty.(1)

For the most part, Holt's personal judgment served him well. Within five years he had assembled a well-qualified and interesting group of "golden personalities," certainly the most impressive faculty the college had ever seen. It was also one that compared favorably with that of quality colleges in the Northeast and Midwest. Eleven of his faculty appointments possessed earned doctorates from such universities as Cornell, Columbia, California and Pennsylvania and such foreign universities as Dublin and Heidelberg. This accomplishment came in an era when PhDs were scarce. The group also included seven Phi Beta Kappas. Several of the professors had published or would make important scholarly contributions later in their careers. Willard Wattles, Professor of Literature, had already published several volumes of poetry when he arrived in 1927. At Rollins he subsequently wrote two more. Leland Jenks, Professor of History, published several scholarly articles on Cuba while at Rollins and, after leaving in 1931, completed an important study on Cuban-American policy. Holt also managed to hire three graduates from Oxford University: Cecil Oldam, Allan Tory and the Rhodes scholar, John Rice.

Even so, the president remained adamant that a collection of graduate degrees and a list of publications did not necessarily add up to good teaching. He valued the "universal gift of teaching" as more important than research; student testimony about professors more

than the praise of their colleagues. Having himself entered academia without a graduate degree, Holt downplayed its significance in effective teaching. "While no one cares less for a degree than I," he wrote John Rice in 1930, "I rather hope you can arrange to get your M.A. from Oxford. It looks good in the catalogue and is supposed to be an academic plus." Holt's patronizing, if not unfriendly, attitude toward the academic professional led him to seek "golden personalities" outside the educational sphere. One of his first appointments was Edwin Osgood Grover, former editor-in-chief of Rand-McNally and Holt's colleague in the publishing world.(2)

Grover's academic qualifications included an honorary degree from Dartmouth, a few publications of his own private press, and a knowledge of publishing, qualifications not much different from Holt's. Since Grover possessed no traditional academic area of expertise, he could not be assigned to an existing academic department. Holt created a new one, the Department of Books and gave Grover the unique title of Professor of Books. College literature proclaimed it to be the one and only such professorship in the world. So far as we know, the claim went unchallenged. The idea of starting heretofore unknown positions excited Holt. Only the failure to uncover supporting funds kept Holt from appointing a Professor of Hunting and Fishing. In 1930, he appointed the famous writer, Corra Harris, as Professor of Evil. Holt never bothered to explain how a Southern novelist who revealed deep racial prejudices in national magazine articles, (Holt had published many of those articles in *The Independent*) had managed to acquire expertise in the subject of evil. Students often complained that her sole source for the meaning of evil came from the Bible. When she became ill after teaching three classes, many thought this may be an example of life imitating art.(3)

These quixotic notions aside, Holt's faculty appointments from outside academe generally worked out well. Edwin Osgood Grover proved to be a credible teacher, made significant contributions in several areas of college life and became a valued citizen in the Winter Park community. A little known writer named Zora Neale Hurston met Grover in his Winter Park bookstore and they became close friends. Grover was instrumental in getting Hurston's first book published. In addition to his many contributions to the college, he was active in Winter Park's African American community. With the help of his wife Mertie, Grover established the Welbourne Day Nursery for the children of working African-American mothers. He was the chief contributor to the Hannibal Square Library, helped form the Hannibal Square Associates and raised most of the money for the DePugh Nursing Home. His final gift to the community was putting together the land for Mead Gardens, forty-five acres of a natural environment that became Winter Park's crown jewel.

Royal France may have been one of Holt's most important appointments. France came to Rollins after a successful career as a New York attorney and as president of two large corporations, one of which was Triangle Film, a company that distributed the films of Thomas Ince, D. W. Griffith and Mack Sennett. Paramount Pictures later absorbed the company. Through Joseph Irving France, his brother and a U. S. Senator from Maryland, Royal moved among the highest levels of Washington and New York talent. He knew personally both Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt. Despite this conservative background, France had developed over the years an increasingly liberal outlook on life, which made him more and more uncomfortable in the corporate world. An earlier experience with a progressive preparatory school had interested him in education, and in 1928 he wrote Holt, whom he knew from the peace movement, an inquiry: "I think that one who has

majored in Economics and Law in college and has practiced both, ought to be able to teach those subjects better than someone who has just read about them in books.”(4) Naturally, Holt found this logic appealing, met France in New York and characteristically hired him on the spot to teach economics. France became not only an outstanding teacher, his presence added immeasurably to the college community because, like Ralph Lounsbury, he was a highly principled man. While he supported Rice from the beginning, publicly and privately criticizing Holt's methods, France consistently proclaimed his loyalty to the President. For reasons that are not quite clear, Holt accepted this fractured loyalty, never seeing France as a threat.

In the national election of 1932, France worked for the Socialist candidate Norman Thomas, and afterwards became chairman of the Socialist Party of Florida. If this were not enough to disturb the sensibilities of conservative Central Florida, he became an active public critic of the southern segregation system. An admirer of Zora Neal Hurston's artistic endeavors, France opened his home whenever Hurston visited the area. More than once France brought notoriety to the campus, but even so, Holt reappointed him in 1933, and continued to support the professor's right to speak out on controversial issues. In 1951, at the age of 70, France left the "comforts of his home" in Winter Park, and the comparative calm of Rollins College for the civil liberties struggles of the McCarthy era. He gained national prominence for his defense of Communists hauled before the House Un-American Activities Committee. In 1952, he presented an amicus brief in an effort to reduce the death sentence of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. At the time of his death in that year, he was organizing a rally to protest the McCarran Internal Security Act.(4)

The early Holt era also brought an increase in the quantity and quality of students. When he arrived in 1926, the college reported a total of 368 students. Holt envisioned increasing that number to 700, but the depression, cause of many college woes, created a nationwide decline in student enrollment. Thus, ten years after Holt arrived, enrollment stood at 470. This number remained relatively steady until the outbreak of World War II when it dropped precipitously.

If the college failed to reach the optimum number Holt wanted, its educational reforms did attract higher quality students and particularly students intensely interested in the kind of education they received at Rollins. Many came to the college specifically because of progressive reforms. The statement of Carol Hemingway, sister of Ernest, was commonly subscribed to: "My first impression of Hamilton Holt came from an article I read of his describing the Conference Plan. I determined to go to Rollins because of that article."(5) Because they arrived at the campus with an interest in education, they sought to take an active part in the entire educational process. The college encouraged this participation by periodically asking students to evaluate the Conference Plan, and involving them in the curriculum revision. As a result, students at Rollins directly participated in the educational process and responded to their new opportunities with a zeal surprising to all campus visitors. One was Dr. Charles H. Judd of the University of Chicago. Judd, who visited the campus on behalf of the Rockefeller Foundation, exhibited less than ardent support for college progressive programs, but he could not deny the positive attitude of Rollins students: "There is evidently a spirit of the greatest enthusiasm for the college among the students. The Rollins conference plan is discussed even in class exercise and is thought of by the students as a unique and very inspiring undertaking. Some of the students characterized

American college education elsewhere as a failure, and declared that in their judgment the Rollins plan is destined to replace all types of organization. The whole community seems to be alive in a kind of enthusiastic ecstasy." (6)

Holt, who had always shown a special interest in literature, took advantage of the large colony of reputable artists and writers who wintered in the "Park." Holt often invited them to take part in campus life and their presence helped attract imaginative, creative students whose talents and enthusiasm soon became evident. They transformed *The Sandspur* into a regular-sized newspaper organized on the format of *The New York Times* with sections that included editorials, reviews of books and movies, and various essays. In 1930 and 1931 the newspaper played an important role in encouraging a college dialogue on the curriculum revision. In the 1927 winter term the college authorized a fiction and poetry seminar with writing taught by nationally known poets and novelists including Irving Bacheller, poets Cale Young Rice and his wife Alice Hegan Rice, as well as Clinton Scollard and his wife, Jesse Rittenhouse.(7)

Perhaps the most significant student creative endeavor of this period was *The Flamingo*. This monthly "literary magazine of the young generation," first published in March 1927, contained original poems and short stories. Students edited the magazine and contributed most of the material. The magazine, attracted wide attention, reinforced the reputation of the colleges as a progressive, creative institution, and popularized Rollins as a home of fine literary talent. Writers such as Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings and editors as Maria Leipes of Simon and Schuster praised the stories and poems from the magazine as of "immensely high caliber." In the 1935 edition, a short story entitled "The Key" received critical acclaim and won for its student-author, Frances Perpente, first prize in a national short story contest.



Carol Hemingway, sister of Earnest, decided to come to Rollins after reading about the college's artistic reputation. She later caused a sensation on campus when *The Flamingo* published her short story about a lesbian love affair. A winter visitor from the Rockefeller Foundation noted that "anyone wishing to gain an estimate of the kind of work done by the better students at Rollins should examine *The Flamingo*." Holt once remarked the magazine had become a "veritable sport on the campus," the kind that encouraged community-wide creativity.(8)

*The Flamingo* set the tone for a burst of creative energy that permeated the entire campus. Holt hosted poetry readings and discussions every Sunday in his home on Interlachen Avenue, and similar activity often spilled over into evenings at professors' homes or on campus. Students gathered at John Rice's house almost nightly; Theodore Dreier, a physics teacher, often escorted students on excursions to explore nature's aesthetic delights around the campus; and Richard Fuerstein, who taught German, directed impromptu drama in the evenings. The completion of the theater in 1932 brought quality drama to the campus for the first time. At the helm was a star of the legitimate theater, Annie Russell, for whom the theater was named. Productions that year, which included Russell's own *Major Barbara*, were simply one of the manifestations Rollins College had suddenly blossomed forth as a cultural center of the Southeast. The spirit of progressive experimentation had clearly unleashed latent talent within the community transforming the college into a creative workshop.

Perhaps Holt's most innovative and popular contribution the college's national reputation was the *Animated Magazine*. The concept came from the fertile publicist minds of Holt and Osgood Grover. Holt was searching for a way to take advantage of his experience as an

editor and to use the acquaintances he had developed over the years, to create an event that would bring national attention to the college. According to tradition, Holt and Grover were discussing ways to bring national attention to Rollins. Holt suggested publishing a magazine, taking advantage of his contacts in the fields of art, literature and public affairs. Grover suggested a one day event where artists and politicians would “speak” their article. Called it an Animated Magazine, he suggested. That’s it, replied Holt. He organized the first “issue” for February 1927 using mostly artists and writers from the little Winter Park art colony. The “publication” of this annual magazine caught on immediately and became the cultural event each year for Central Florida. As one writer has described it:

“The *Animated Magazine* grew steadily in size and fame over the years, keeping pace with (and, to some degree, inspiring) Florida’s booming tourist trade. *Time magazine* touted the event in 1932; for years, CBS Radio in New York broadcast selections and the *New York Herald Tribune* published the program event in its magazine section. At its peak in the ’30s, “Animag” attracted 8,000 to 10,000 people, who traveled by bus, train and car to sit on bleachers and campstools in the Sandspur Bowl (the Rollins College playing field), the only venue large enough to accommodate the masses. Dressed in their Sunday best, they good-naturedly packed together in sardine-like circumstances, creating a literal sea of people. Remarkably, the *Animated Magazine* was only rained out twice. On those occasions, it was held in Knowles Memorial Chapel and the Congregational Church in Winter Park; speakers were taxied between both venues to present their contributions.”

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Academically and artistically, these were exciting times for the college, but Holt was not able to turn around the deplorable financial situation he had inherited in 1925. He had raised over one and a half million dollars for various peace organizations in the pre-and post-World War I period; surely, if he could raise that much for something as abstract as peace, he could attract sufficient funds to endow a small college. Failing that, he was certain he could rely on his eminent acquaintances among the wealthy and powerful men of the Northeast. The perennial and burdensome college deficit that had leveled several former presidents appeared to Holt as a bully good challenge, and his first effort at fund-raising simply reinforced his confidence in his ability to meet that challenge.

In 1926, Holt persuaded an old peace movement friend, William Short, to join the college as treasurer. That summer and fall Short reorganized the institution's financial structure, and in April 1926, he launched a campaign in Orange County to raise \$300,000 to pay operating expenses of \$60,000 annually for the following five years. The

administration, relieved of the chore of raising funds for operating expenses, devoted its full efforts to increasing the endowment to five million dollars. If the college expected those outside Florida to donate funds, Holt argued, it must first garner local support. The administration began solicitations on April 13, 1926, and one week later announced cash pledges totaling \$304,000, an over subscription of \$4,000. Subsequently, Holt's first attempt to raise funds outside the state brought \$25,000 for student loans from President Elbert Gary of the United States Steel Corporation. Thus, the college seemed financially well secured for the future even before the trustees had held formal inauguration for the new president. This early rush of success swept the Holt administration with a wave of optimism.(10)

But just as quickly as it had appeared, the early successes were followed by a sudden economic disaster. In the summer of 1926 a destructive hurricane swept away millions of dollars in property and precipitated the land boom collapse that had brought Floridians unprecedented (though, as it turned out, false) prosperity. Within a fortnight of the land crash, the real estate given to the college during the campaign could not be sold at any price. Countless pledges simply could not be collected. Subscription pledges for the 1926-27 academic year by January totaled only \$20,000, one-third of the anticipated \$60,000. On January 13, 1927, Treasurer William Short presented Holt with a dismal "analysis of Rollins College's finances." Not only would the college not retire the debt Holt had inherited but would add even more deficit by summer. Even more frightening was the current bills that urgently must be paid within a matter of days. Short's long range predictions proved equally discouraging: Local banks were reluctant to make loans to the college until it had collected the February tuitions, he explained, "because they know we have no further income."

Besides, he said, local banks also had fallen on hard times. This critical financial situation was additionally complicated by the fact that in the halcyon days of the previous summer, Holt had ordered a deferred maintenance program. The true total of the deficit would likely stand at almost \$150,000.(11)

In the midst of this financial crisis, dissension developed within the administration. Short's concerted efforts to collect tuition angered students and his methods jarred the conservative sensibilities of the crusty former treasurer, William O'Neal, the college's oldest and most powerful trustee. O'Neal was incensed by Short's insistence on continuing repairs during the financial crisis. Unwilling to endure the bitter crossfire of criticism, Short resigned in June 1927. Holt, who had persuaded Short to coming to Rollins in the first place, deeply regretted his old friend's resignation. "If I had my own feelings to consider," he wrote later, "I would never have let him leave Rollins. He suited me there absolutely. His going was one of the griefs of my life." (12)

At O'Neal's suggestion, Holt replaced Short with Erwin T. Brown, an experienced and competent treasurer, but even so the old Trustee was not placated. He proposed shocking Draconian measures: "cut expenses at every corner, reduce salaries, make no repairs not absolutely necessary." The college had completely drained its Florida resources, O'Neal claimed, because every president had conducted a local campaign promising that "if a given amount was subscribed it would be ample for present needs." In his judgment, he told Holt, "it would be impossible to raise anymore money in Orlando and vicinity" for sometime to come. Do not rely on the trustees, he warned. He had seen them "shut up like clams..." saying "it is heartbreaking [that this is happening to the college] but that's the way of the

world." His final advice: "close the college until endorsement interest revives." Holt's answer was that he had accepted the call to Rollins to build not to destroy.(13)

On the premise that the best defense was an all-out offense, in June 1928, Holt and Treasurer Brown presented the Trustees with plans for a two and a half million dollar endowment fund raising campaign. The Trustees authorized the campaign but in face of the college's inability to meet day-to-day operational problems, the endowment campaign was a bold, aggressive — and some thought foolish — move. Despite this need for daily operational funds, Brown supported the new endowment campaign because, he told Holt, "there is only one direction we can go: forward," and because "I have faith in you and that faith has caused me to stay at Rollins for another year. In August 1928 Brown wrote Holt, who was summering at Woodstock, he could not meet even necessary maintenance costs and had no idea how he would pay faculty salaries for September. To add to these problems, Brown discovered over one-third of the enrolled students had failed to pay fees and tuition. Trustees John Goss and Milton Warner kicked off the guarantee fund by contributing \$25,000 each, but contributions came in a slow trickle thereafter. It was not until February 1929, that a last minute gift from William Bingham enabled the administration to complete the guarantee fund.(14)

While the administration strained every effort in the fund campaign, college deficits from operating costs continued to mount at an alarming rate. To use Holt's metaphor: a "financial sword of Damocles," suspended tenuously by the "gossamer thread," swung menacingly over their heads. It was an enormous gamble, for a failed campaign would drag the entire institution down with it. Nevertheless, in February 1929, the Board of Trustees authorized the firm of Tamblin and Brown to open the two and one half million-dollar campaign.

Unfortunately, in another bit of pure bad luck, the campaign announcement coincided with the stock market crash of October 1929. Even a gift \$125,000 gift from H. H. Westinghouse (earlier the college's largest gift) failed to brighten the dark cloud that spread over the campaign after the crash.

Then, just at that darkest hour, while Holt was canvassing furiously in Pittsburgh, there came a sudden burst of hopeful, financial light. On January 31, 1929, Holt received a stunning telegram from his old and close acquaintance, Dr. John Gering, physician and financial advisor to philanthropist William Bingham II: "On this last day of the first month of the year the word of the Lord came to a certain Samaritan saying write my servant Hamilton Holt offering the sum of \$500,000 and send it now but with no publicity save to the Trustees." Kenneth Wilson, a Tamblin and Brown agent working with Holt in Pittsburgh, later recalled Holt's stunned reaction to the news. "As he stared at the message his cheeks flushed and his body became rigid. He seemed almost paralyzed by the news." Wilson suggested Holt prepare a reply to the incredible message, but when Holt tried to put his appreciation into words, the potential implication of the gift came flooding in on him, and according to Wilson, the President "broke down and wept."<sup>(26)</sup> Only later did Holt learn how the momentous decision had been made. Gering, with little success, had been bringing the college to Bingham's attention for several months, but then, Gering reported, on the morning of the 31st, Bingham "came to me to inquire as to the welfare of Rollins College followed by a declaration that he would like to give a half a million dollars toward it."<sup>(27)</sup> As the first of the college's major gifts since his arrival, (it almost doubled the endowment), Bingham's donation was valued more highly than any other, because Holt believed it proved that his new educational plan could attract financial support. In a letter of appreciation to Bingham,

the President spelled out its meaning to the college: "Rollins was reaching a turning point in its career. I had about exhausted every available liquid asset short of mortgaging the campus and I feel that this great and most timely aid will bring me safely past the first big milestone and give every friend renewed courage and strength for the tasks ahead in upbuilding the little college I have learned to love." In Holt's mind the gift saved the college, and he celebrated its anniversary every year.(15)

The increase in endowment income could satisfy the college's immediate financial needs. (Those needs had increased enormously by Holt's determination to maintain small conference classes, to hire more teachers and at higher salaries and to make major improvements in the physical plant.) Holt understood that the new funds offered no long-term panacea for the college's financial condition. As the depression deepened, drying up the college's normal resources, the campaign lagged and finally atrophied. On February 18, 1931, the Trustees canceled the Tamblyn contract. The campaign had netted just over \$900,000, a sizable amount but still far short of the two and one-half million-dollar goal. Holt wrote a friend that he, Brown and his assistant Fred Hanna would "go it alone."(16)

When Holt decided to go on the offense rather than retrench during the national economic depression, few would have imagined he would embark on a building program that would completely transform the physical appearance of the campus. From the beginning Holt envisioned an architectural design consistent with the Florida landscape and at the same time congruous with the college's progressive academic changes. Thus, when he received funds for a new dormitory, the new president was determined to find an architectural style that would reflect the new progressive educational changes and in turn take advantage of Rollins's semi-tropical location. He chose Spanish-Mediterranean style because, he



thought, that designed blended best with “palms, bamboos and brilliant sunshine.” He once told a group that he was looking “for the most beautiful buildings of Mediterranean type in Florida, then find who designed them, then get that man to design every building on our campus..., all in harmony and all parts a unified whole.” The college’s unified curriculum purpose, Holt argued, ought to be reflected in its architectural style. Holt also maintained that since the college was located in the land of sunshine its buildings should be designed with spacious and open breezeways. Holt hoped that one day Rollins would have a logo that would proclaim that it was the “Open Air College of America.”

Holt found the architect he wanted in Richard Kiehnel of Miami. Kiehnel, a native of Germany, had established a national reputation in South Florida for adapting the Spanish-Mediterranean style to the Florida landscape. In Kiehnel Holt had found a perfect match for his new architectural vision. When the cousin of Alonzo Rollins gave the college a generous donation, Holt immediately hired Kiehnel to design the college’s first Spanish-Mediterranean building. Rollins Hall was completed in 1929. The following year came two more Kiehnel designed dormitories—Mayflower and Pugsley. Altogether Kiehnel was responsible for eight buildings: Rollins Hall, Pugsley Hall, Mayflower Hall, Lyman Hall, Gale Hall, Annie Russell Theatre, Student Center, French House and Dyer Memorial Hall. Through his connection with the Roosevelt administration, Holt was able to persuade the Public Works Administration to fund dormitories along Holt Avenue, some of which were designed by Kiehnel.

The piece de resistance of Hamilton Holt’s contribution to the built landscape came two years later in 1932 with the construction of a theatre-chapel complex. When Francis Knowles’s daughter, Frances Knowles Warren, agreed to donate sufficient funds for the

construction of a chapel, Holt immediately set out to acquire the services of the world-renowned college and church architect, Ralph Adams Cram. Cram agreed provided he could design a chapel similar to one he had seen in Toledo, Spain. The result became the college's signature building, the spiritual center of the community. During the Holt era, the chapel was not only held Sunday services, but also provided the venue for weekly all-college forums. While the chapel was under construction, the college received a gift from Mary Curtis Bok for a theatre to honor her friend Annie Russell, a highly successful nationally known actress. The Annie Russell Theatre was placed alongside the Knowles Chapel separated by a formal garden. Physically, spiritually and academically, the theatre-chapel complex now stood at the center of the campus representing the college's commitment to intellectual, artistic and spiritual values.(17)

Holt's other major addition to the college community came with the construction of the Student Center along with the Alumni House in 1942. The Center's beautiful Florida style large interior with its stylized Spanish-designed interior and whirling ceiling fans, snack bar and post office boxes became the true social center of the campus for the next fifty years, serving as a place where the faculty and students gathered daily for coffee and conversation. Other buildings included four dormitories on the East side of the campus connected by covered walkways, and five on the West side also connected by covered walkways; one classroom building—Orlando Hall, designed to accommodate the conference plan curriculum; Mills Memorial Library, Warren Administration Building, house attached, Casa Iberia and French House and finally two one room buildings for social/academic meetings: Woolson and Sullivan Houses. Thus, in addition to creating a quality progressive academic institution, Hamilton Holt had left the college with an

architecturally unified campus. The two accomplishments were deeply intertwined: the educational program was based on the progressive principle of individual student interest and perennial innovative change, while the prevailing and unified Spanish-Mediterranean style of the buildings reminded the college of its unity of purpose.(18)

All of this construction came at a cost, and unless large sums of money suddenly began pouring into the college coffers for operating expenses, something had to give. That "something," coming at the end of the college year in 1932, was faculty salaries. The payment of salaries in June 1932 had completely emptied the college treasury, and with a debt destined to soar over \$300,000, banks declined to lend until the next academic year. With salaries for the summer months soon to be paid, Holt gave faculty the cheerless news: the college would withhold fifty percent of all salaries through the summer months. The Trustees added an even more ominous note to the announcement: "If adverse financial conditions continue, faculty members may be requested a) to donate to Rollins College on or before October 15 a given percentage of the payments withheld as defined above, or b) to accept a percentage reduction in salaries for the year 1933; or c) to face a possible reduction in personnel." During the summer months, Holt and Fred Hanna, the president's new assistant, made valiant efforts to forestall any of these alternatives. "We have been wearing out automobile tires and shoe leather," Holt wrote a friend in August, "chasing around the country seeking whom we can financially devour. I confess it is gall and wormwood to beg in this strenuous way. I have gone to some of my real personal friends which I swore I would never do."(19)

By combination a of hard work and good luck the administration managed to meet the July, August and September payrolls, but with no further prospects, it was decided to make

additional economies. Following a meeting of the trustee finance committee in Connecticut on August 11, Holt wrote the faculty informing them that their salaries would be reduced by thirty percent in the coming year.<sup>(36)</sup> The trustees hoped to repay this reduction, but Holt warned the faculty not to count on it. He deeply regretted the action and assured the faculty that no one would blame them if by leaving Rollins they improve their personal situations. The "retain" caused serious hardship among the faculty who were receiving an average of only \$1,800 per year, by Holt's own admission, a sum well below that of southern sister colleges and less than half the average salary of Northern institutions.

The faculty, without exception, chose to remain at Rollins but not without some grumbling. In autumn 1932, the faculty of the local AAUP delivered a pointed letter to the president complaining that extensive capital outlays, not large faculty salaries, had created the college's precarious financial predicament. The committee letter bluntly set forth the position: "an underpaid faculty now faced the prospect of paying for capital improvements made in the past by accepting a salary scale below their present living cost. The obligations of the college are thus being converted into private obligations of faculty members." Holt bristled at the tone of the letter and the barely hidden accusation that his extravagant spending policy had caused the college's financial problems, but he made no reply. Many, including Holt, later believed the fifty-percent loss of income through retainage in the summer of 1932, followed by an outright reduction in their salaries, laid the basis for the faculty disaffection during the Rice affair. After Holt had fired Rice and several of his colleagues, the administration announced that the 20 per cent salary retain would now be entered on the books as a "donation" from the faculty to the college. Not a single voice of protest arose from the faculty ranks.<sup>(20)</sup>

Certain that he had exhausted every outside resource, available to the college and particularly after the Rice affair, determined that the faculty would not further shoulder the burden of college finances, Holt decided that the students would pay a larger share of the cost of their education. In the fall of 1933, the administration announced its innovative tuition program called the Unit Cost Plan.<sup>(21)</sup> Starkly simplistic, the plan divided the annual operating budget by the estimated enrollment producing a unit cost per student. In the year 1933-1934, with a budget of \$675,000 and an estimated 500 students, the new unit cost came to \$1,350, an increase of \$400 per student over the previous year. Endowment income was used to assist students unable to pay the higher fees. With the nation at the nadir in an economic depression, it was a bold (some would argue potentially disastrous) move to increase tuition so drastically, but the college had prepared a compelling, equalitarian explanation for its "simple scientific and concrete" new plan. In the past, it argued, society had justified meager student contributions (half of the actual cost) because graduates entered some form of public service such as the fields of ministry or teaching. In the twentieth century students attended college for personal or professional considerations. "It would seem therefore that under these changed conditions, the well-to-do students should be expected to pay for the benefits received, and the endowment income in gifts heretofore distributed equally throughout the student body should go to those unable to pay the full cost of education."<sup>(21)</sup> In another rationalization, the administration depicted the unit cost plan as "the third noteworthy step in Rollins's progressive educational development." The college described the conference plan as the humanization of teaching, the new curriculum as the individualization of instruction. The third step, the Unit Cost Plan ("our third academic departure from existing college practices") meant the democratization of

college financing where the burden of cost was shared by those able to pay.(22) In this sense the college had completed the progressive circle.

Theoretically, the additional monies accruing from increased tuition would balance the budget, but, in fact, the plan never lived up to its expectations. Probably because of the higher fees, student enrollment dropped by 100 in 1933-34, with a corresponding loss in anticipated funds. Moreover, the college had promised exemption from the rate increase to currently enrolled students who could show that they would have to "leave the college if required to meet the increase." That number proved much higher than expected (most likely because many students whose families could afford \$1,350 tuition too easily convinced the administration they could not pay), further diminishing anticipated income. In addition, two-thirds of the student body received some kind of aid. Altogether, the total income from students actually fell in 1933-34, and in this first year of the Unit Cost Plan the college still ran a deficit of over \$46,000. But for an unexpected gift that would have been even larger.(22)

In 1936, the Treasurer Brown was forced announce the Unit Cost plan less than a success. "We adopted it too soon," he told Holt. "Our clientele was not firmly enough established; we did not have uniform housing conditions, and in general we had no physical attraction to justify such a move." Enrollment had dropped by twenty-five percent, meaning another deficit at the end of the academic year.(24) A memorandum to faculty in 1939 indicated how much a toll the Depression was taking on the college's finances: "Due to the fall of Rollins securities and the interests on our endowments the last few years of the depression, we are about at the end of our borrowing capacity and if Rollins is to get "over the hill" in 1939-1940 we must have an increase in the number of full paying students. It

seems to me the faculty, whose future employment and salaries depend upon the success of the college, could devote sufficient time this summer to securing one such student." An increase in enrollment in the fall of 1941 raised hopes that the college may be "over the hill." The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December dashed all optimism overnight.

The war years, coming on the heel of the Great Depression, meant even more travails for Rollins. Male students left campus in large numbers for military service or defense jobs. The slow enrollment decline of 1941-1942 became an avalanche in 1943, and in 1945 only 250 students registered for the fall term. In that year, fewer than thirty graduates received Bachelor of Arts degrees from Rollins. None of them was male. Heavily populated with females, the college enrollment remained constant at about 200 throughout the last years of the war.(23)

The administration began its own war on the declining enrollment and decreasing funds. Retrenchment was the keyword. Through retirement, leaves of absence and non-reappointment, the faculty was cut from 80 to 40, and course offerings were trimmed to bare essentials. The list of courses in the 1940 catalogue covered nearly forty pages. In 1949, it occupied only 17. In November 1942, Holt asked the faculty for a \$20,000 "retain," assigning to a faculty committee the determination of apportionment. These reductions, plus a cut in maintenance funds, permitted Holt to reduce the budget by 23 per cent. The college then embarked upon a campaign, which Holt dubbed the "War Adjustment Financial Program," a title suspiciously similar to the familiar President Roosevelt's national war agencies. (24)

The administration also attracted Army and Navy training units to the campus, a move that not only generated desperately needed funds, but also brought a male constituency during the war years. The training personnel occupied several dormitories and used

Pinehurst as military headquarters. Service men marching to and from classes and holding retreat on the Horseshoe in the evening brought the community face to face with the reality of war. Despite these valiant efforts, the ubiquitous debt continued to accumulate, but doors remained open during what even Holt admitted were the college's darkest hours. Several times Holt stood against the pressure of the O'Neal group to close the college for the duration. The commencement of 1945, just after the surrender of Germany and two months before Japan's capitulation, graduated only 32 females and 2 males. But the college was still alive, poised to take advantage of four years of suppressed educational demands.(25)

With war's end in August 1945, students inundated the college with applications. The Fall Term began with the largest freshman class in the history of the institution, and by January 1946, total enrollment reached a record high of 534. One year later it stood at 640. For a decade the administration had been laboring toward just such a favorable situation, Nevertheless the increased enrollment proved a mixed blessing. The sudden increase caught the college woefully unprepared. Even before the war, one half of Rollins's students had lived in substandard housing, and little money went for repairs in the years thereafter. The college faced skyrocketing enrollment with not only a housing shortage, but also with the pressing needs of deferred maintenance. Expanding facilities and providing the necessary repairs, all at inflated prices, placed expenses far beyond even the increased income from the surge of new students. Moreover, to align its tuition and costs; more nearly with similar institutions, Rollins discontinued the Unit Cost Plan, lowering tuition and room and board charges. An embattled Holt prepared another and, as it turned out, his final financial offensive: the Victory Expansion Program. By 1948, he had raised several thousands in new money and had received pledges from Frances Knowles Warren for a



new administration building, from philanthropist Henry Strong for a new dormitory, from Citizens of Orlando for a new classroom building, and from the Davella Mills Foundation for a new library.(26)

In the midst of this optimistic turn in the college's financial fortunes, Holt had to deal with a serious personnel problem. When Holt had authorized an increase in faculty salary to meet inflation costs, Treasurer Brown flatly refused to make new faculty salary increases. As in the Rice affair, Holt found himself in a power struggle, this time with his own Treasurer. This time, however, he had the support of the students and the faculty (the Holt called for special Trustee meeting on June 28, 1948.

No one questioned Brown's loyalty, dedication or capabilities, Holt told the Trustees at the special meeting, but his behavior had alienated a large portion of the college community. Holt asked the Trustees to discharge Brown and then to amend the bylaws making the Treasurer responsible directly to the President. Because a large majority of the Trustees were Holt's nominees, and because he had the support of virtually the entire college community, the President undoubtedly felt assured of a favorable vote.

Unfortunately, he did not reckon with Brown's strong standing in the Winter Park community, nor the Treasurer's support on the Board of Trustees. In a close vote the Trustees not only rejected Holt's by-law amendment but also answered his demand for Brown's dismissal with a resounding resolution proclaiming "complete confidence in the Treasurer's professional ability and competence." Stunned, Holt delivered an impassioned extemporaneous speech accusing the Trustees of ignoring "unanimous opinion of the students and of the faculty and now of myself. I respect your right to vote for or against me but, honestly, I do not think I can come back to the campus and do much good. When

students and faculty comes to me next fall asking about his meeting today, I do not want to be put in a position of feeling I have to defend you. I cannot defend you. I take my stand right here and now with the faculty and students and as I have lost confidence in you and you have lost confidence in me, I think it's better that I ask you to release me from coming back to Rollins next year. This is the hardest thing I have had to do in my life but I do not believe you would respect me if I did not do it."

Facing the unwelcome possibility of starting a school year with a vacant presidential office and a disgruntled college community, the Trustees moved quickly to salvage a suddenly deteriorating situation. One of Holt's supporters moved and the Board adopted a resolution stating that the Trustees interpreted the bylaws to give the President "final authority over all activities and personnel of the college." Holt agreed to return in September. Brown resigned in December 1948.(29)

Holt replaced Brown with Assistant Professor of Economics John M. Tiedtke, a graduate of Dartmouth College's Tuck Business School and a businessman with land holdings in Florida. Tiedtke and Holt immediately "went north," and after a few weeks, with the help of Trustees, they negotiated a loan with Connecticut Mutual Life Insurance Company. The college paid its debts for the year, surmounting what Holt called "the gravest crisis that has ever confronted Rollins College. Holt always believed that John Tiedtke's "leadership and devotion saved Rollins" in his hour of desperation. In complete agreement, the trustees named Tiedtke treasurer of the college. (30)

However unsettling the Brown crisis, Holt always thought the outcome of this struggle was his most satisfying victory if for no other reason than he had the college community solidly behind him. Coming on the heels of the Rice incident, where he seemed to be battling

former friends and students, the Brown affair had provided Holt with a stage and an opportunity to display dramatically his best qualities. He often told others his spontaneous speech before the Board of Trustees on June 28 where he courageously placed his career on the line was his finest hour. He sent the speech to Dean Wendell Stone suggesting he circulate copies to students and faculty as well. "I would like them to know some way," he mused, "that it was largely because I have tried to fight their battle that I have taken the stand that I have." When he returned in September, he found the college community more affectionate and loyal than at any time during his presidency. However, Holt had fought his last battle. Already the Board had formed a Trustee Alumni Faculty Committee to search for the old "Prexy's" successor. Holt's call to service almost thirty years earlier was coming to an end. The academic year 1948-1949 would be his last at Rollins.

Hamilton Holt had a profoundly deep impact on Rollins College. His influence on the life of college community during his presidency and on the college's future is almost incalculable. He came to the institution when it was teetering on the edge of extinction, pulled the college from that abyss, provided it with stability and then guided it into the world of academic respectability. But most importantly he gave the college a new identity. By the end of the Holt era, the Rollins community saw itself as a progressive institution, as a place where academic experiment and innovation was not only tolerated, but encouraged, and some might even say expected. This progressive democratic spirit permeated the entire college life, giving faculty, students and staff a sense of ownership in the community. Despite his sometimes paternalistic behavior, Holt left the entire community with a feeling of empowerment, giving all a belief they could play a role in shaping the future of the college.

This became another source of Rollins's identification. Future leaders who ignored this democratic tradition found themselves in serious conflict with the college community.

Holt's ability to lead the college through these fundamental changes was his greatest strength, but also a grave weakness. As we have seen, the expression "Holt is Rollins, Rollins is Holt" was more than a catchy phrase. The phrase described how Holt came to view his presidency. Within in a decade after he assumed leadership of the college Holt was unable to separate the college and its policies from his personal ambitions. Holt saw any attempt to question or change any aspect of the college community as a personal attack on him. Particularly at those times when his authority was challenged, Holt never left any doubt that Rollins was *his* college. This attitude was a fateful flaw. The latter half of his life was so intertwined with the life of the college that Holt simply could not let go. So much of him would be lost if he stepped down. Thus, at a time when most college presidents rarely served more than a decade, making way for fresh leadership, Holt held on three times that long, almost half the institution's history. Only ill health led Holt to retire. A poignant photograph was taken at his last commencement. He is sitting alone in a chair on the commencement stage seemingly lost in contemplation, perhaps recalling the memories of glorious time he had building a great institution.

He may have been contemplating how an unusually lengthy tenure meant that Hamilton Holt cast a long, long shadow that was not altogether healthy for the college. Prolonged incumbencies provide much needed continuity and stability, but they leave an institution with a potentially serious problem. Such was the case with Holt's drawn-out presidency. Only a very special person would be able to respect the Holt legacy and at the same time move beyond Holt's shadow to give the college the benefit of new progressive leadership.

Holt's successor would inherit the very delicate and difficult task of navigating between an institution shaped by a revered president and the dramatic educational changes taking place in the post war era. Clearly, one of the chief challenges facing the new president would be negotiating the Holt legacy.

## NOTES

1. Holt to Gehring, October 29, 1928; Holt, "Ideals For the Development of Rollins College."
2. Holt to Dewitt Keech, May 10, 1926; Holt to John Rice, June 13, 1930; Holt to George Kirchway, June 15, 1931.
3. The Holt and Harris friendship lasted for over two decades. For an analysis of the curious relationship between a Northeastern liberal and Southern racist see my article "Race and the Hamilton/Corra Harris Friendship," at [scholarship.rollins.edu/cgi/view](http://scholarship.rollins.edu/cgi/view) content.
4. France to Holt, January 10, 1928; I have reconstructed France's career from his autobiography, *My Native Grounds* (1957). For a fuller discussion of France's life and career see Jack C. Lane, "Introduction" to a reprint of the autobiography. [scholarship.rollins.edu](http://scholarship.rollins.edu).
5. Carol Hemingway Gardner to Author, October 3, 1979.
6. Report of Charles Judd, January 27, 1930. Rockefeller Foundation
7. Catalogue, 1927; Comment by the authors in *Flamingo*, 1927; H.E. Hawkes Report on Rollins, January 27, 1930. Rockefeller Foundation Archives; Holt to Gehring <no date>. Dee Brown from George Washington University and later the author of the best selling book *Bury My Heart At Wounded Knee*, won Third Prize that year.
8. Carol H. Gardner to author.
9. This quotation comes from a delightfully written essay by Mary Seymour (daughter of President Thaddeus Seymour) published in the *Rollins Magazine*, Fall, 2014. Not every artist accepted the President Holt had published Robert Frost's first poems in the *Independent* and assumed the poet would repay the favor. Frost refused, writing: "I can never be drawn into a show like your living magazine. People have learned that my modest kind of entertainment is better when it has the occasion all to myself." Frost to Holt, December, 1936.in the Holt Papers.
10. Trustee Minutes, April, 1926; Treasurer's Report, 1927; Holt to Milton Warner, November 8, 1927.
11. O'Neal to Holt, July 16, 1927; Holt to O'Neal, July 25, 1927.
12. Trustee Minutes, June 6, 1928.
13. Brown to Holt, August 2, 14, 1928; December 15, 1928; O'Neal to Holt, November 22, 1928; August 2, 1928.
14. President's Annual Report, 1929; Trustee Minutes, December 1919.

15. Gehring to Holt, January 31, 1929; Kenneth Wilson, "Recollections" Manuscript, Holt Papers; Holt to Bingham, February 8, 1930; Holt to Gehring, January 31, 1930.
16. Holt to Harold Strong, April 29, 1931.
17. Trustee Minutes, February 19, 1930.
18. *Ibid.*, May 1931.
19. *Ibid.*, October 1932. October 1932; President's Annual Report, 1933
20. Rollins AAUP Committee to Holt, January 21, 1933; Holt's Statement on Rice Affair, April, 1933.
21. Holt seems to have first conceived the idea of the Unit Cost Plan after hearing from the Rockefeller Foundation. College literature claimed that the plan was a "program entirely new in college finance." President Robert Leigh of Bennington College quickly informed Holt that his college had used the method since 1928. Leigh to Holt, March 13, 1934; Holt to Leigh, April 19, 1934.
22. *Rollins Record*, November, 1933.
23. Carlton South to Dean Anderson, June 18, 1934; Brown to Holt, August 7, 1934.
24. Treasurer's Report, 1934; Trustee Minutes, April, May 1934; Bingham to Holt, May 14, 1934; Brown to Holt, May 23, 1935.
25. Catalogue, 1940-45.
26. *Ibid.*; Professor George Waddington to Holt, November 10, 1942; "Brochure" WAP, March, 1942; *Sandspur*, March 18, 1943; Brown to O'Neal July 31, 1942; Holt to Anderson, October 13, 1943; O'Neal to Holt, July 22, August 8, 1943.
27. Catalogue, 1946.
28. Trustee Minutes, March 1948.
29. Treasurer's Report, 1948; Holt to Trustees, December 12, 1948; Mrs. Stanley Cleveland to Mrs. Warren, May 30, 1948; Brown Memo to Trustees. June 19, 1948. Report from the Faculty Administration Board, February 1948.
30. Trustee Minutes, February 1948. Holt to Wendell Stone, July 2, 1948; Holt to Trustees, July 2, 1948; Trustee Minutes, September 1948. Holt to Stone, July 2, 1948.