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## Chapter 03: The Struggle for Survival (Hopes and Frustrations), 1892-1903

Jack C. Lane

*Rollins College*, [jlane@rollins.edu](mailto:jlane@rollins.edu)

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## CHAPTER 3

### THE STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL, 1892-1903 (HOPES AND FRUSTRATIONS)

Following President Hooker's resignation, Rollins experienced three decades of instability caused by a host of problems, some of which came from sources beyond its control. In the mid-1890s, a severe national economic depression made it extremely difficult to raise funds in the Northeast. Then came a natural disaster. Below freezing temperatures crippled the state's citrus crop, devastated the area's economy and sent large numbers of Rollins students home for an indefinite period. The freeze also destroyed orange groves owned by the college, wiping out a significant portion of the institution's projected income.

Faced with these unexpected calamities, the trustees tried desperately to find a president who could guide the college what seemed to be an impending disaster. After Hooker's resignation in February 1892, the trustees appointed Professor John Ford Acting President while they searched for a new leader. In an attempt to deal with the financial problem that had precipitated Hooker's resignation, they called a special meeting of the trustees on March 22, 1892, "to consider the financial condition of the college and take such action as may seem wise." After debating the problem all day, the Board decided to take a well-worn path: Acting President Ford and Lyman would "solicit subscriptions in Winter Park and the vicinity to carry the institution through the current year." Hooker had already rejected this idea on the basis that his office had only recently canvassed Winter Park for support of new dormitory, and many pledges were still outstanding. The trustees surely were grasping for straws, and yet, with startling optimism, they instructed the Executive Committee to use

any surplus funds raised in the proposed campaign to reduce the current debt. The Board then authorized the executive committee "to mortgage or sell any portion of the property now owned or claimed by Rollins College on such terms and for such price as to them may seem advisable." Additionally, the trustees authorized the executive committee "to employ a financial agent for the college on such terms, and under such instructions as said committee may decide upon." The trustees had finally proposed a long-range, systematic approach to college financial management. Unfortunately, they never found an effective professional fund-raiser to fill the position.(1)

John Ford accepted the temporary position of Acting President with some misgivings. Satisfied with his role as a professor of Latin, he was apprehensive about the pressures inherent in the office of the president. Still, he shouldered his new responsibilities with a stoicism possibly derived from years of teaching Greek civilization. Despite the temporary nature of his appointment, he acted aggressively and positively to improve college life.

To deal with the immediate need of raising funds for operating expenses, Ford undertook a thorough canvass of the Winter Park area. He reported a paid \$3,788 subscription at the May commencement meeting of the trustees. In addition, he and the executive committee achieved some economies through administration reorganization. They replaced housemothers in the dormitories with female teachers and when the principal of the Ladies Department retired because of ill health, Ford assumed the duties of that office. The executive committee made further savings by reducing each faculty member's annual salary by one hundred dollars.(5) Ford noted in his first annual report that these personnel reductions, along with the \$5,000 given each year by the Congregational Educational

Society of the Home Missionary Association, would allow the college to get through the 1892-1893 school year without adding to its debt.(2)

Despite Ford's courageous efforts, the college desperately needed a permanent officer at the helm. By October 1893, the executive committee was able to identify a prospect: they found George F. Fairchild, the president of Kansas State A&M College in Manhattan, Kansas. After extensive investigation by the executive committee, the Board of Trustees voted unanimously at a special meeting in April 1893 to offer Fairchild the presidency. But Fairchild, apparently aghast at the financial state of the college, withdrew his name despite the trustees' effort "to impress on him the importance of the Rollins presidency."(3)

Following this depressing outcome, friends of the college in Chicago put forth the name of Charles Fairchild, the nephew of the previous candidate. Formerly a science professor at both Berea and Oberlin Colleges, Charles Fairchild came from a family steeped in higher education. His father had been president of Berea College, and two uncles served as presidents of Oberlin and Kansas State Colleges. Charles Fairchild taught science at Berea and Oberlin, and had also served as part-time financial agent at both colleges. He was particularly successful at Oberlin where he tripled the endowment in nine years and obtained funds for six major building projects. Such fund-raising successes undoubtedly made him very attractive to the Rollins trustees.

On September 20, 1893, the executive committee issued a call for a meeting of the Board of Trustees, urging everyone to attend because, the committee announced, "it now seems possible to elect a new president." As a measure of the college's fundamental problems, the call for a critical meeting scheduled for October 4 did not produce a quorum. The executive committee managed to collect its required number for a meeting the following

day, and the Board of Trustees elected Charles Fairchild to the presidency. Fairchild was in town to accept the offer, but business interests in Chicago prevented him from assuming office until the New Year. In the meantime, Ford stayed on as acting president.(4)

Fairchild's inauguration in February 1893 seemed to presage a brighter financial future for the college. The new president, the executive committee noted, was a "man of large acquaintances in both the East and the West," and was judged capable of using those acquaintances to good benefit for colleges." But as Fairchild would soon learn, seeking funds for a college with an established reputation and dedicated alumni such as Oberlin was one thing; the chore of rescuing a small isolated institution from the brink of financial ruin was another.

At Fairchild's inauguration, Acting President Ford precisely voiced the college's desperate hope for the new chief's success. "You have been engaged in the financial part of college work, having raised several hundred dollars for colleges. You have planned college buildings, you have had opportunities to study and compare different colleges and acquaint yourself with the economies and details of college management. We have reason to believe that in you, a man of affairs, we have a president this young institution needs at this hour."(5)

In his inaugural address, Fairchild identified the college's most persistent problem: Northerners, he noted, perceived Rollins as located in a climate where little learning could take place. They imagined Florida as located in the "land of perpetual afternoon." In the mind of Northerners, this meant an "afternoon sense of languor" that did not lend itself to serious study. Leaving the biting airs of the North, Fairchild continued, Northerners expected to find "in latitudes rarely visited by frost that which soothes and enervates and predisposes

to dreams of romance. A most valuable education is thought to come from the stern struggle with the long winters of snow and ice, and this education must of course be wanting when genial and equable airs give perpetual summer." This sentiment, noted Fairchild, was nonsense. Florida rested on the same global parallel as the ancient civilizations of Egypt, Greece and Rome, which, he asserted, proved there was no special relationship between "latitude and lassitude." Still, he admitted, the college had to deal with perceptions.(6)

The new president's argument was convincing, but its most telling aspect lay in the fact that he had to raise the question at all. Many of Rollins's financial worries in this early period arose from being a transplanted New England college dependent on Northeastern resources. This meant finding donors willing to take seriously a college located in the land of "perpetual afternoon." The college had tried with little success to overcome this negative Northern perception, persistently proclaiming that its course of study accorded with rigorous New England standards. Thus, very early, Rollins College presidents learned the benefits and dangers in governing a college located in the land of perpetual afternoon.

Despite the subdued tenor of Fairchild's address, the college community clearly expected impressive results from him, waiting anxiously in the first few months of his presidency for signs of a forthcoming miracle. The new president's first fund raising trip north in March 1894 proved unproductive, dampening some anxious hopes.(7) In an effort to prod him along, the executive committee voted "that the President be requested to take up the financial task for the college in such a way and in such places as to him may seem wise." Apparently concerned about Fairchild's lack of success, the Board of Trustees endorsed the executive committee's demand that the president "push aggressively the financial work of the college during vacation."(8) The record fails to document the nature of Fairchild's

efforts in the summer and fall of 1894, although the executive committee minutes do indicate that he was absent from the campus all of November and part of December. The results were disappointing. The Treasurer's report for the fiscal year ending December 1894 listed a large debt increase over the previous year. Under Fairchild, the college was not only not showing a lack of progress financially, it was falling even further behind.(9)

In December 1894, nature dealt the college a severe blow. Following an unusually benign winter, a severe cold front dipped down into Central Florida four days after Christmas. Temperatures plunged to around twenty degrees around midnight, dropped to eighteen around four A.M. and remained there until mid-morning. For two additional days, the killing frosts and freezing temperatures persisted. By the time the cold front had passed, virtually the entire Florida citrus crop lay rotting on the ground. One observer left the following description of the landscape after three days of frost: "The whole country looked as if swept by fire. The orange trees were black, the fruit, lumps of yellow ice. As for pineapples, bananas, mangoes and other tropical plants, they were all dead. The frozen oranges began to fall. In one grove I saw as many as four thousand boxes of magnificent fruit on the ground. Groves, for which a week earlier two thousand dollars had been asked could now be bought for twenty."(10)

Still, there was a "ray of hope in this hour of gloom." Although the freeze had destroyed the fruit crop and the leaf growth, the trees themselves remained unharmed. When warm weather returned, sap flowed into the outer layer of bark, and the denuded trees put forth new growth. Then, on February 7, barely a month after the December freeze, an even more severe cold front settled on the peninsula. When temperatures plummeted to fourteen degrees, the recently flowing sap turned to ice, expanded, ruptured the bark and virtually

exploded from the trees. A later resident, who interviewed witnesses, graphically described the scene in his history of Orange County: "The trees stood bare, gaunt, pathetic; the ground beneath was already covered with fallen fruit in layers and the air was laden with the stench of decaying oranges; the people were shocked, disheartened, bankrupt, and helpless." Overnight the primary source of income in Florida, had been wiped out. Hundreds of people simply packed their belongings and left the state as banks failed and business came to a virtual standstill. Mrs. Fairchild wrote a friend that all the college's orange trees had been destroyed. "If there had been a death in every family in the state, we could not be more depressed," she lamented. (11)

Most civic institutions lay paralyzed by the economic calamity, but none more so than a privately funded college with tuition-paying students. Shortly after the freeze, Rollins students began leaving in large numbers, the exodus continuing throughout the school year. The financial condition of the college rapidly deteriorated. When bills for the month of January went unpaid, several businesses threatened to sue the institution. In desperation, Fairchild, along with Treasurer William O'Neal, hurried to New York seeking a note from friends of the college. They returned with a loan, which eased the immediate problem but in the long run merely added to the college's indebtedness. While in New York, the College and Educational Society of the Congregational Association offered assurances that funds would be forthcoming, but the Northeast itself was in the grip of a deep economic depression, and the Society failed to keep its promise.(12)

In the midst of the financial crisis, Fairchild was forced to deal with a controversy within the college community. Shortly after arriving from Oberlin College (which before the Civil War was a hotbed of abolitionism), Fairchild made it clear that should a Negro apply to



Rollins he would judge the applicant on his qualifications, not on his color. This statement incensed several trustees, particularly Frederick Lyman, who warned Fairchild that he (Lyman) would withdraw his support of the college if it ever admitted a "colored" person. The incident left lingering hard feelings. If this was not enough stress, Fairchild had personal financial problems. With nine children to support, he often complained to the Trustees that his salary barely allowed his family to make ends meet.

On March 18, 1895, overwhelmed by the mounting pressure, Fairchild suddenly resigned his office. The "stress from various directions but preeminently in the financial field" had become more than he could bear. "I have not aided you as yet," he continued, "and I do not see how I can aid you in the near future." He asked that his resignation become effective on March 31. What had begun as an administration filled with high hopes and cheery optimism had ended in less than two years in a grievous disappointment. With his proven fund-raiding abilities, Fairchild had seemed a perfect candidate for a college in deep financial trouble, but he proved unable to translate his successes at two other colleges to a young frontier institution. The freeze did not cause Fairchild's failure; it simply provided the coup de grace to an already failing effort. The national depression of the early 1890s, the devastating freezes, the college's poor financial foundation, along with its relative obscure and misunderstood location, and perhaps Fairchild's own personality, all combined to make his tenure as president one of the briefest in Rollins history.(13)

The executive committee once more turned to John Ford, asking him to assume again the post of acting president until a new executive could be found. He and the committee immediately turned their attention to the crisis brought on by the freeze. With no funds available to meet teacher's salaries for the month of April, the committee persuaded

each instructor to accept a twelve-month college note at eight percent interest in lieu of the April and May salary payments. Contracts for the 1895-1896 school year were a second urgent problem, because teaching responsibilities and salary promises were traditionally negotiated in April. On April 5, the executive committee made drastic salary reductions; all faculty members (Ford, Austin and Barrows) suffered cuts in their salaries. In its most drastic action, the committee proposed not to "reengage" four faculty members, including the very popular Thomas R. Baker.(14)

In a further effort to forestall bankruptcy, the executive committee sold the college grove and borrowed six thousand dollars from trustee F. E. Nettleton of Lake Helen. The two actions, plus the postponement of salary payments to instructors, allowed the college to carry on through the spring term. Not surprisingly, by May, rumors abounded that when the college closed its doors for the summer, it would never open them again. But at the last chapel exercise just prior to commencement, Acting President Ford announced to a relieved audience that "the trustees had voted unanimously to open as usual in October."(15)

During the summer, the college made every effort to present publicly a sanguine demeanor, issuing optimistic reports about prospects for the coming year. True to their word, the trustees opened the doors in October 1896, but the college had sustained a fifty percent decline in enrollment. Ford wrote a frank, graphic depiction of this malaise in his February 1896 annual report. The litany of problems was becoming all too familiar:

"The last school year closed in gloom. Both the internal and external conditions of the institution conspired to produce a situation almost utterly hopeless. The going out of the President with his family and some special friends from the school had a disrupting effect. The fact that some members of the faculty were not to return and salaries of others were cut down was dispiriting to the faculty themselves and ominous to the public. There were persistent rumors that all the faculty would leave and that the institution would close.

Out in the field of our Florida constituency, the people were beginning to realize the sudden poverty that had come upon them from the freeze the preceding February. We received notification from some of our patrons regretting their inability to send their children another year. In addition to these troubles, it was the misfortune of the institution to be under more burdensome debt than before.”(16)

Such a gloomy picture brought desperate suggestions from the trustees. One wanted to suspend instruction in the collegiate department for the 1896-1897 academic year. Despite his pessimistic assessment, Ford demurred. He warned that such an effort would be "dispiriting to all departments--to our entire educational cause." Because the temporary nature of his appointment prevented him from taking more stopgap efforts to halt the downward slide, Ford urged the trustees to make haste in finding a permanent president. Since the resignation of Fairchild, the executive committee had been busy with the search. By February 1896, the name of George Morgan Ward, a recent graduate of Andover Theological Seminary, had surfaced as the most probable choice. After a trip by the still loyal Frederick Lyman to Boston to interview Ward, the trustees offered him the appointment. When he accepted, Rollins had its third president and many thought its sole hope for the future.

George Morgan Ward came to Rollins with little educational experience, but he did arrive with some administrative background and a reputation for energetic, dedicated work. Although only thirty-seven years of age in 1892, he had accumulated a rich and varied background. After graduating from high school in Lowell, Massachusetts, he had entered Harvard University in 1879, transferring after his sophomore year to Dartmouth College where he graduated Phi Beta Kappa in 1882. While reading law with a Boston judge, he accepted a position as general secretary of the United Society of Christian Endeavor, an evangelical organization with a national reputation for religious service. He also served as

the editor of the society's publication, *The Golden Rule*. After resigning this position because of ill health, he entered the mercantile business in Lowell, Massachusetts. Later he resumed his work in Christian service before attending Andover Theological Seminary, one of the leading theological schools of the Northeast. Just prior to receiving his Bachelor of Divinity from Andover in 1896, both Rollins and Washburn College of Topeka, Kansas began considering Ward for their presidencies. He accepted the Rollins offer on May 9, assuming his duties as President and Professor of Economics and Law on May 29. Ward's mind must have been spinning from the whirlwind of circumstances that descended on him in those few short weeks. Within a month, he had received a BD from a prominent theological seminary, was ordained a Congregational minister, offered the presidency of two liberal arts colleges, and just before leaving for Florida, Ward married Emma Sprague, daughter of a Massachusetts Congregational minister.

Although a novice to college administration, the young Ward did bring to Rollins a wide and varied experience. While Secretary of the Christian Endeavor he had shown that he could raise money for worthy causes. The trustees hoped that the contacts he had made in that organization and in New England would serve him and the college well. Above all, Ward was blessed with a magnetic, compelling personality and a commanding appearance. At medium height, with a full head of hair and a curling mustache, both turning steel gray, Ward had the rugged good looks that one of his acquaintances described as "the Gibson type," a very high compliment in the late Victorian era. Many spoke of what one admirer called his "flashing eyes" that could both burn an opponent and melt a friend.(28) In the colorful academic gown he often wore, Ward appeared almost regal. He effortlessly captivated audiences with his deep, resonant and appealing voice while his youthful good looks made

him an idol of the students. In his first address to the college community, he promised to serve them openly and personally, a pledge he made good in the following years. "Grow old with me," he told the students affectionately, "the best is yet to come, the last of life for which the first was made."(17)

Students reciprocated with adoration most vividly manifested in the custom of meeting the new president and his wife at the train station. When the Wards returned from official trips, several college men invariably met their train, waited until they were comfortably seated in their carriage, and then quickly removed the horses and proceeded to pull the vehicle themselves to Pinehurst (which the couple shared with boarding men students) with "rousing hurrahs" from the students along the way.(18)

Although the trustees may have left out a few details, Ward came to Rollins with no illusions." They told me in the North," he wrote later, "that Rollins College did not owe any money. Well, I reckon it didn't. But the Trustees owed \$5,000." This led Ward to warn the Board of Trustees in no uncertain terms in his acceptance letter that he intended to be a college president not an absentee fund-raiser. He would accept the position of president only with the "full understanding" that if he needed help in raising funds, the trustees would provide him with a financial assistant. "I am not called upon," he bluntly informed them, "to neglect or abrogate the executive duties of the presidency or to delegate the matters of administration and management in order that my own time may be devoted to fund-raising." The trustees assented to these terms, knowing full well what Ward would soon learn: his view of the presidency was idealistically naive because the college's survival depended on annual subscriptions, and only the president could raise the necessary funds. Even when

the trustees provided him with a financial agent as they had promised, Ward did most of the fund raising himself. (18)

Ward approached the immediate financial crisis from a much broader perspective than simply as a matter of raising funds. To the new president, underlying Rollins's financial woes lay in an academic problem brought on by the classical curriculum. Whatever its perceived education values, (Ward even doubted those), the classical curriculum with its emphasis on ancient languages and higher mathematics barred otherwise well-qualified students from attending Rollins. Rural public schools, he argued, simply could not prepare its students for Rollins's classical curriculum. Those who attended the Academy were not pursuing the classical course of study in large enough numbers to fill the college's needs. Moreover, as he pointed out, those who pursued the classical course of study in the preparatory department often did not enter the liberal arts program at Rollins, opting instead to attend colleges in the Northeast. Additional numbers of students would not resolve all of Rollins's financial issues but an increase in student tuition would be a major step forward. Ward firmly believed that an expanded student body could be achieved only if the college changed its course of study.(19)

The new president laid the groundwork for such a risky curriculum revision in his 1896 commencement address, his first major speech to the college community. He spoke on specialization, approaching the topic not in the circuitous manner so typical of liberal arts presidential addresses, but in direct words considered anathema to supporters of the classical curriculum. "Life is too diverse in its varied interests," he proclaimed, "for any person to have a working knowledge of sufficient breadth, to enable him to be of real assistance to the world in more than one department." In addition to a broad course of study,

he proclaimed, colleges ought to give students the opportunity to become specialists in a special field of endeavor.

Ward's remarks clearly foreshadowed a major change in the course of study, because under no circumstances could the classical prescribed curriculum embody such views. After working with a group of faculty in the summer of 1896, Ward announced a major curriculum revision for the next academic year. It proposed two fundamental changes. In place of the rigidly prescriptive classical curriculum that required all students to take the same course of study, the revision introduced the concept of electives, a program that allowed "pupils to choose their own courses in order that their education may be designed to their tastes and chosen vocations." Thus, whereas the classical curriculum had divided the course of study according to class year and prescribed the courses students would take in each of the years, the new curriculum separated the course of study into four divisions. These new categories included General Courses, Special Groups, Thesis and Additional Electives. General Courses, included the fields of English, Moral and Political Sciences, and Modern Languages. Students would be required to take at least one course in each of the areas, but since several courses were offered in each area, they were given the opportunity to exercise the elective principle. The same options were open in the Special Groups, where students could select one of the eight courses and devote an entire year (spread over four years) to the subject. Another requirement included a written thesis "on some subject connected with the Special Group and embodying the results of original investigation." As a way of further emphasizing freedom of choice, the students were allowed to select almost one-third of their courses as electives with "no restrictions whatsoever on the selection."(20)

Rollins had cast aside the hoary classical curriculum, replacing it with a general framework within which students were encouraged to determine their own course of study. The ancient languages no longer occupied a central role in the college's academic life. Latin was still taught but was not required. Graduates could now receive a Bachelor of Arts degree without a single course in Latin. Greek was relegated to near obscurity and soon disappeared altogether. Entrance requirements, revised drastically to coincide with the new curriculum, replaced a long list of Greek and Latin works with new requirements that emphasized English, Modern Languages, Science and History. Ward announced the new changes in November 1896. He stated in no uncertain terms the demise of the classical course of study: "We have eliminated the old idea that the promoting of higher education must necessarily be the application of some years of Greek, Latin and higher Mathematics. While we are prepared to teach these courses, we do not require study in them as requisite to a degree of Bachelor of Arts." (21) The writers of the Yale Report of 1828 were surely whirling in protest from their graves.

Rollins had made a radical shift in its approach to education. Rather than clinging to conventional wisdom of what constituted a liberal education, the Ward administration courageously decided to redefine that conventional wisdom. In part the changes were driven by desperation. By employing the classical curriculum, the college had created a chasm between Florida rural educational conditions and the requirements of that course of study. For years Rollins officials were reluctant to abandon the "Yale Model" for fear of being stigmatized as academically substandard. In a sense, it came down to a choice between change and possible survival or no change and certain demise.



From another perspective, new developments sweeping the country gave Ward the courage to fly in the face of conventional educational wisdom. By the turn of the century classical education was crumbling everywhere. Following the lead of Harvard University under President Charles Eliot, many colleges were in the process of replacing the classical curriculum with precisely the kind of elective course of study devised by Rollins. New forces in the late nineteenth century--increase in the number of students in college, industrialization and urbanization, the growth and democratization of public high schools and universities, the rise of new professions and finally, the emergence of completely new areas of knowledge such as the natural sciences and social sciences--all placed unbearable strains on the old, prescribed classical curriculum with its elitist reputation. By 1897, Harvard University abandoned Greek and Latin languages for entrance requirements, and Yale, the bastion of classical education, had reduced its requirements in ancient languages by over one-third and mathematics by one-half. Even so most colleges introduced the elective process piecemeal; few undertook the wholesale revision Rollins made in 1896. In hindsight it is clear that Ward's decision left the college with a permanent legacy: curriculum change, even when risky, or perhaps because of its risk, would become a part of the Rollins tradition to be repeated in almost every generation.(22)

Although Rollins's new course of study still provided for a heavy dose of required courses (including the ancient languages as an option), for public relations purposes, the Ward administration chose to emphasize elective and specialization thrust of the new curriculum. In its literature the college stressed how the "practical" side of the program would "fit students for earning a living." According to one announcement, many students "are anxious to attend school but have only a limited time for such a privilege and wish to make

their studies count toward a livelihood." For all such interests, the announcement proclaimed, "practical courses are arranged." Accordingly, and this time with conviction, the college revived its business and teacher's education programs, this time with genuine conviction. The Normal School provided for a course of study that included a Model School where prospective teachers received experience in practical teaching. Upon completion of the education program, the college awarded the graduate not merely a certificate (as had been the case with the original Normal School) but with a somewhat more prestigious Bachelor of Pedagogy.(23)

The business school (a revival of the aborted earlier plan for an Industrial Training Department), a barely veiled move toward vocationalism, was perhaps the college's most drastic departure from the ideals of liberal education. It included courses in bookkeeping, commercial law, banking, shorthand, typewriting and letter writing. Several rooms in Pinehurst were equipped with "modern appliances," devoted exclusively to the use of the Business School, where "the air of the counting room and office rather than the classroom" prevailed. Students who completed the prescribed courses received a Diploma in Business.

Ward's attempt to open the college to a wider population of tuition-paying students was a mixed success. Total college enrollment did increase during this period from a low of about fifty students immediately after the 1896 freeze to almost two hundred by 1900. Undoubtedly, most of the increase can be attributed to the new curriculum's relaxed requirements. It was helped along also by general improvement in the economy as Central Florida began to recover from the freeze and the nation move forward from an economic Depression. The new programs in education and business did attract more students, but only in moderate numbers. Students taking business courses averaged between fifteen and

twenty in this period, while Normal School enrollment reached eighteen and then dropped drastically after 1898.(24)

However, the new curriculum with its less restrictive entrance and course requirements did result in a somewhat modest higher enrollment in the Liberal Arts College. Between 1896 and 1902, students in the college numbered between fifteen and twenty, which was not a significant increase compared to eleven in 1894, the year before the freeze. In fact, because of the growth of public schools, the number of students in the preparatory department never reached the level of the 1894 enrollment of one hundred. Thus, the college recovered from the catastrophe of 1895 and the highly touted curriculum revision did play a role in that recovery.

Above all, the revision gave the college a psychological boost. Without students, without leadership, and seriously short of funds, clouds of defeatism had settled upon the college community after the freeze. Many feared the institution was doomed to extinction. The youthful, energetic Ward and his reforms dispelled those clouds and brought a breath of fresh buoyancy to the campus. The revised curriculum became a symbol of a new birth for the college. It revealed an institution not only alive but vitally alive, even a bit ahead of national academic trends. For years the young college had proclaimed adherence to the "Yale Model." Now it advertised itself as following in the wake of Harvard, thereby allowing it to discard the traditional course of study without a loss of prestige.(25)

Ward soon directed his energies toward improving the physical plant. The interiors of buildings were renovated, the exteriors painted and the campus grounds were extensively landscaped. New physics and chemistry laboratories were installed in Knowles Hall and the library was moved from Knowles to four connecting rooms in Pinehurst,(26) These

improvements, plus the new president's contacts and engaging personality helped attract new donors to the college. No new friend was more significant than Frances Knowles, daughter of Rollins's greatest benefactor. The Knowles family had lost contact with Rollins after the death of Francis, but Ward renewed the relationship in a rather dramatic fashion.

During his first year, Ward's work on the curriculum revision left him little time for fund-raising. He paid many of the college's bills with his personal funds, but this source was exhaustible. Just before Christmas of 1896 he learned that much of his personal income had been lost through the failure of his investment firm. As his wife described the calamity: Ward came home to Pinehurst on Christmas Eve lamenting that he was at the end of his rope. "My money is gone and there is nothing in the college treasury to meet the bills which come due on Monday. I have prayed over this matter continually. If this is God's college and he wants me to stay He must make it manifest in some way. You can pack our trunks and we will go north." Emma persuaded him to wait a few days before making the final decision. (32 Emma gave wise advice. A few days earlier, Frances Knowles, apprised of the college's financial problems, had placed a generous contribution in the mail. When Ward opened his mail the day following news of his financial disaster, a check for \$5,000 fell out on the desk. The donation marked the revival of a long and fruitful relationship between the Knowles family and Rollins College.(27)

The Knowles windfall was a turning point in Ward's quest to stabilize the college's finances. In 1897, the college not only met its annual expenses but also started to reduce the size of its burdensome debt. The following year, the college treasurer made one of the first optimistic financial reports that trustees had heard in several years. "The institution's financial condition is excellent," O'Neal proudly declared, "with all expenses paid up to date,

and every provision made for next year." By the end of Ward's administration in 1902, the college had not only satisfied that deficit, but was showing a small surplus.(34) At almost every meeting, the trustees voted some accolade to Ward, as typified by the 1899 commencement meeting. "On the motion of Rev. S. F. Gale, it was unanimously voted that it is the sense of the Board that the President brings to the College that energy, vision and judgment, which is raising up a larger number of friends than has ever been known in its history; is placing the institution on that high plain which merits the support of all persons interested in education; that we, by this vote, express our full confidence in and approval of his management of its affairs."(28)

The changes and improvements were intended to present the college to the public as a vibrant, growing institution. But these efforts had not been achieved without some traumatic perturbations within the college community. Not all the faculty agreed with Ward's curriculum revisions. His public claim that he wanted to breathe new academic life into the college carried with it the implication that present professors somewhat lifeless and irrelevant. Ward often told others that he inherited a failing institution. He found a college in debt, he reported, "with a collection of run-down, unpainted buildings" and, in a statement he did not mean as a compliment, "a faculty composed largely of professors of classics, mathematics and history."(29)

Ward operated on the assumption that a rejuvenated college required a change of personnel and that many of those presently employed at the college were inadequate for the new regime. The cook and the matron of the dining hall were the first to go, followed by the matrons of the women and men's dormitories. By 1898, the leading faculty of the old, classical course of study, Nathan Barrows, Eva Root and Lloyd Austin, all charter faculty,

had resigned, leaving only Thomas Baker, who had returned in 1893, Caroline Abbott and John Ford, all of whom had come during the Hooker administration.(30)

Ford presented a special problem for Ward. As professor of Greek, he seemed to have no place at all in the new curriculum. According to William O'Neal, Ward took an immediate dislike to the aging professor, probably because he was uncomfortable with a former acting president critically looking over his shoulder. Ford's loyal service when the college was without leadership kept him on the faculty for a while. Otherwise Ward would have removed him earlier. Ford alienated the new president because he understandably showed little enthusiasm for the new curriculum that devalued Latin and virtually eliminated Greek.(37) At the May 1900 trustee meeting, the executive committee seriously considered Ford's non-reappointment as professor of Greek but stopped short of dismissal. "Our difficulty," the committee wrote Ford, "consists in our inability to convince ourselves of your willingness to give the school the hearty support which we must require of all those connected with Rollins College." The committee left Ford's future to the president, who agreed to reappointment. However, Ward wrote Ford, "because of the undue expenditure of the Department of Greek," his annual salary would be reduced from \$800 to \$500. Surely Ford's days were numbered. On the April 10, 1901, there appeared in the Trustee minutes a terse statement without comment: "Voted that Prof. J. H. Ford be not reengaged." (31)

It was a sad ending for someone who had been so selflessly dedicated and loyal to the college. Ford had served the institution twice as acting president without an increase in salary or a decrease in teaching load. He had spent his summers, while others were on vacation, traveling the state searching for students and funds. Unfortunately for him, the academic world that he knew and loved was fading. Any change that demoted the classics

to obscurity was bound to affect the old professor. Still, one wonders whether he could have been treated more compassionately and whether he could have received more recognition for his long and dedicated service. Surely John Ford deserved accolades for faithfully serving during perilous times when the institution's very survival was at stake. Perhaps President Ward and the Trustees could have paid a bit more attention to the college's boast that a liberal education teaches humane behavior.

Ward's relationship with the rest of the faculty was mixed. He admired and respected Baker from the beginning. The college had released Baker in 1895 but rehired him a year later when he agreed to return at a considerably reduced salary. Ward raised it immediately to equal that of the other professors. Baker, who fit well in the new course of study, later had high praise for the Ward administration. The president's relationship with other faculty was less clear. Ward was not comfortable with the Hooker and Fairchild practice of governing through the faculty. Following the curriculum revision, he discontinued faculty meetings without reviving them until 1898. Faculty meetings, he told O'Neal, only produced friction. Even after reinstating them, he rarely chaired the meetings. Other than Baker's cheery attitude, there is no estimate of Ward by other faculty, but the record suggests that his relationship with them was merely professional.(32)

Despite the obvious successes of the Ward presidency, the Trustees began to hear unsettling rumors that he may leave. In February 1902, their worst fears came to fruition. Without prior warning, Ward submitted his resignation. He told the Board that for some years Henry Flagler, the Florida railroad and hotel tycoon, had been offering Ward the summer pastorate at his chapel in the Royal Poinciana Hotel in Palm Beach, a plush resort for wealthy winter residents. Ward had resisted, he said, telling Flagler that he did not relish

preaching "warm cream puff sermons to the idle rich." Flagler persisted, (despite Ward's "sassy letter") promising that he would also help Ward's college. As a further inducement Flagler offered to pay the president's salary that year. The possibility of tying Flagler money to the college assuaged the disappointment of losing one of its most effective presidents. They would be sadly disappointed. Other than the initial contribution of Ward's salary, Flagler never gave another cent to the college.(33)

At the 1902 commencement meeting the Board of Trustees characteristically heaped effusive praise on Ward and his presidency. He had worked with "unflagging zeal, and by his great wisdom and diplomacy," they enthused, "he had obliterated practically all the college's indebtedness; interested new and wealthy friends and established the institution upon a substantive basis."(40) The acclaim was not overstated. It verified Ward's success in infusing new life into the college, allowing it to face the future with considerably more optimism than when he arrived six years earlier. Ward was gone but was by no means finished with Rollins College.(34)



## NOTES

1. Trustee Minutes, March, 1893. Treasure's Report in *Ibid.*, December, 1892.
2. *bid.* Income from the orange groves averaged about \$1,000 per year, but had reached \$2,000 in 1891. Hooker to Hutchins, October 10, 1891. Ford to Classmates, May 10, 1893. Ford Papers.
3. Trustee Minutes, April 17, 1893; April 26, 1893; O'Neal, "Recollections."
4. Trustee Minutes, September, 1893; October, 1893.
5. Copy of Speech in Ford Papers.
6. Fairchild Papers. Rollins Archives.
7. The Executive Committee Minutes show that Fairchild was on campus from January through May 1894. See an article in *Orange County Reporter*, March 15, 1894 for a discussion of Fairchild's trip north.
8. Trustee Minutes, May 1894.
9. Treasurer's Report, Trustee Minutes, December, 1894.
10. Herbert Webber, "The Two Freezes in Florida, 1894-1895." *Yearbook*, Department of Agriculture, 1895.
11. William F. Blackman, *History* (1927), 77-89. Rollins Bulletin, 1895.
12. O'Neal, "Recollections"; Thomas Baker, "Recollections." Manuscript, Rollins Archives.
13. For the controversy over racial policy see O'Neal, "Recollections." For Fairchild's resignation see Trustee Minutes, March, 1895.
14. Trustee Minutes, April, 1896.. Ford Papers.
15. Ford Papers.
16. Trustee Minutes, February 1896.
17. For background on Ward I have used William Shaw, *The Evolution of the Christian Endeavor* (1924); Thomas Baker, "George Morgan Ward," *Alumni Record*, IV (December, 1925); and various biographical pieces in the Ward Papers, Rollins Archives.

18. Interview with T.W. Lewton by Kay Lehman, July 31, 1956. Ward Papers. On student deception see Baker, Ward."

19. Ward Speech, February 1930. Manuscript, Ward Papers. Ironically it may have been the college's financial plight that attracted Ward to Rollins rather than to Washburn College. If the college went under Ward could argue that it was unsalvageable; if the college's financial situation improved, he would be seen as a savior. He later candidly admitted as much: "I could do Rollins no harm; I could not hurt the situation." Ward to Brown, June 5, 1896.

20. "Change at Rollins College." Supplement to the Catalogue of 1896. The "special groups" were: Moral and Political Sciences; History of the English Language, the Latin and the Greeks; and Natural Sciences.

21. *Ibid.*

22. Frederick Rudolph, *Curriculum*, 191.

23. Catalogue, 1897,1898.

24. *Ibid.*, 1900.

25. Ward Speech, February, 1930; Emma Ward to Fred Hanna, 1938. Copy in Ward Papers.

26. Trustee Minutes, February 1898; May 1899.

27. Trustee Minutes, February 1903.

28. Trustee Minutes,

29. Ward Speech, 1930.

30. O'Neal, "Recollections."

31. Trustee Minutes, 1901.

32. O'Neal, "Recollections"; Faculty Minutes, 1901;1902.

33. Flagler to Ward, August 12, 1902; Emma Ward to Fred Hanna, March 21, 1938. Ward Papers; Trustee Minutes, February, 1902.

Even more annoying to the Trustees was the news that Flagler, a confirmed Baptist, had given thousands of dollars to Stetson University in Deland.

34. Trustee Minutes, 1902. The following is a description of Ward's pastorate at Flagler's Palm Beach Chapel:

“Dr. Ward started at a salary of \$1,500 for the season (December 1 to Easter) plus room and board for him and Emma, his wife. The Chapel was essentially ‘a religious filling station’ for the winter guests, but Dr. Ward made it an exciting weekly event. At age forty-one the young preacher quickly expanded to two services, filling the building and the lawns with close to nine hundred worshipers at each service. He was a tall handsome man, athletic, with blue eyes and a booming voice, with the ability to make instant and inspired friendships. His sermons were beautifully structured, but fashioned of simple words, the products of a master storyteller. Dr. Ward said, ‘I am no theologian; my beliefs are few and simple.’ He led the Chapel from 1900 to 1931, suffered a heart attack in the pulpit on Palm Sunday, and died before Easter.”

“Our Story: The Royal Poinciana Chapel.” [royalpoincianachapel.org](http://royalpoincianachapel.org).