

The John Arch Rollow Family

Of all the people whose lives have been linked to the College through the years, there is only one family who literally moved on campus and stayed, making their home right here at 2000 North Parkway. It is a family whose name is synonymous with loyalty, service and dedication to this great institution. It is, of course, the family of John Arch Rollow, the beloved “Mr. Johnny” who served as College Engineer from the time of his graduation until his retirement.



John Rollow as a college student.

In one of the more colorful chapters in Rhodes’ history, John Rollow was a student at Southwestern Presbyterian University in Clarksville who assisted in the move to Memphis. As a member of the first graduating class in Memphis in 1926, he remained at the side of his close friend President Charles E. Diehl in the creation of this magnificent campus.

Mr. Rollow’s title may have been “college engineer,” but in fact, he was “college everything.” Born near Clarksville, TN, where the college began, he majored in physics at the old Southwestern



Harris Lodge

Presbyterian University. When SPU moved to Memphis and changed its name to Southwestern in 1925, young John Rollow bought a \$15 Model-T and helped move the physics and mathematics departments to their new home. The next spring he was a member of the first class to graduate from Southwestern.

He also brought seedlings from the Clarksville campus and planted them to line the walk leading to the main south entrance of Palmer Hall. The stately Rollow Avenue of Oaks was dedicated in his memory in 1976.

Early in his career, Mr. Rollow met a transfer student, Louise Mayo ('30), one of five students from Holly Grove, Ark. “We met the first day I was on campus. He was wearing his work clothes. We had a date the second night, and when I saw him in a suit I almost didn’t recognize him.” She was to become Mrs. Rollow in 1930.

The newlyweds lived on nearby Snowden Avenue for a year before

moving into Harris Memorial Lodge, at the University Street and Phillips Lane campus entrance. There they resided for almost 40 years, raising their two daughters, the late Lisa Rollow Justis, a graduate of the Class of 1955, and Ann Rollow Ross, a member of the Class of 1952.



The young Louise Mayo.

Mr. and Mrs. Rollow personified the spirit of family that is an integral part of the Rhodes experience. They became surrogate parents to countless students. After a long day’s work, Mr. Johnny would often go home, put on his tux and return with Mrs. Rollow to chaperone a dance in the old wooden gym, the Fargason Field House.

The Rollows were close to everyone on campus. Prof. Charles L. Townsend gave Ann and Lisa books and took them to the movies. He even gave Lisa her nickname. She was named Louise, for her mother, but he found it confusing. “Her name should be Lisa,” he said one day, and it stuck.



The Rollow family with Lisa (l) and Ann.



Lisa Rollow Justis

As a beloved member of her graduating class, Lisa’s classmates crowned her “Miss Southwestern” and until her untimely death in 1970, everyone she met was attracted to her natural grace and love of people.

Mr. Rollow, who died a year after he retired in 1968, worked right up to the end of his career. At his retirement party he received a tackle box with a check for \$500 inside.

As the late Prof. James E. Roper wrote in his history of the college, “It was a typical Johnny Rollow act, when he was presented with a \$500 check by the alumni, to add \$500 of his own and present the total to the college as a memorial to Dr. Diehl.”

The *Sou’wester* in a farewell editorial said, “Mr. Rollow is one of the last of those men who came to Southwestern when it moved to Memphis, and literally grew up with it. He is, in a very real sense, leaving an inheritance to the college.”

During the 50th reunion of the Class of 1952, Ann Rollow Ross

made a magnificent gift to Rhodes in memory of her parents and her sister. In appreciation of her generosity and in celebration of her family and their place in the life of Rhodes, the main dining



Ann Rollow Ross

room in Catherine Burrow Refectory, once known as “West Hall”—a room that is a gathering point for students, faculty and staff alike—was officially renamed “Rollow Hall.” A bronze plaque at the east entrance to Rollow Hall commemorates this event.

In addition, a portrait by artist Tom Donahue captures the Rollows as a young family standing proudly in front of their campus home.



Mr. and Mrs. Rollow at home in Harris Lodge.

Unveiled during the Homecoming ceremonies on October 25, 2002, the painting has a place of honor in Rollow Hall, where it will remind the college communities of

the future that once upon a time, this campus was a family’s home.



Rhodes College