



## **Henry Radcliffe Sims (1893-1966)**

### **Winthrop President 1944-1959**

Henry Radcliffe Sims was named Winthrop College's fourth president in 1944 by the Board of Trustees to replace his predecessor Shelton Phelps and was inaugurated on November 17, 1945. Sims would serve in this capacity for the next fifteen years, which is the third longest tenure in Winthrop's history behind founder and first president David Bancroft Johnson and current president Anthony DiGiorgio.

Sims was born in Orangeburg, SC in 1893, the son of James C. Sims, owner of the Orangeburg Times and Democrat. James taught young Henry the newspaper business—from how to set type by hand to how to report news—as Henry worked in his father's newspaper office until he began his college career at Wofford in 1909.

Four years later, after graduating from Wofford, Henry and his twin brother Hugo entered the family's newspaper business, while at the same time, opening a law practice.

It is said that the two brothers thought so much alike that each would write editorials every other day, never reading what the other wrote or expressing a conflicting editorial opinion. Slip-ups, however, did occur and occasionally two editorials on the same subject would appear on consecutive days.

Young Henry volunteered for service in World War I. But the army diagnosed him as having a heart murmur and discharged him after seven weeks. Sims eventually gave up newspaper work to devote his efforts full time to the family law practice. In 1929 he was ready to enter politics and won a seat to the South Carolina Senate.

Although South Carolina was a conservative state, Henry Sims made his reputation as a liberal state legislator who supported the New Deal legislation. He helped draft the Unemployment Compensation Act of 1936 and the Public Works Act of 1937, and he drew up bills providing for free school lunches and the addition of the 12<sup>th</sup> grade to the state school system.

As a senator, he was chairman of the education committee, vice chairman of the finance committee, and, in the early 1940's, an ex-officio member of the Board of

Trustees. A fixture in the Senate for 15 years, Sims was considered a possible candidate for governor when he was named Winthrop president in 1944.

The inauguration November 16-17, 1945, of President Henry Radcliffe Sims was a special occasion for Winthrop. It also marked the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Winthrop's move from Columbia, SC to Rock Hill, SC.

Upon assuming the Winthrop presidency, Sims stepped into a controversy with the American Association of University Professors over faculty firing. It took 12 years to settle.

At one point, certain alumnae groups, disturbed by increasingly lower enrollment, demanded Sims' resignation. However, the Winthrop Alumnae Association gave him a vote of confidence by a huge majority.

Sims said, "No educational institution ought to be governed by numbers. I would rather see Winthrop give 200 grads an excellent education than 5,000 a hit-or-miss education."

Sims' critics also claimed that Winthrop graduates left the state for higher paying jobs. At a 1959 summer institute of South Carolina Congress of Parents and Teachers, Sims fired back: "For the last ten years, 70 or 80 percent of Winthrop's teaching graduates have taught in South Carolina. This is one way Winthrop College graduates pay back the state for their education."

Winthrop students also grumbled, especially about the regulation that had required them to wear uniforms since 1895. They complained that uniforms were uneconomical, inconvenient, and impractical.

The Sims administration took notice of the new student attitude and reviewed its uniform policy. Originally it was decided that uniform requirements would be abolished beginning with the fall semester of the 1955-1956 academic year, however the 1954-1955 senior class petitioned to abolish the Winthrop Uniform for their final semester before graduation and Sims, in response, recommended to the Board of Trustees in December 1954 to eliminate the uniform requirement. In January 1955, Sims made a formal motion declaring that Winthrop would no longer require uniform dress effective immediately.

It was Sims administration that coeducation became an issue. In 1954 the Winthrop Board of Trustees went on record approving coeducation, and asked the State Legislature to change the college's status as a women's college. The motion failed and Winthrop did not become fully coeducational until 1974.

When Sims retired in 1959, his accomplishments included strengthening the College's academic program by establishing entrance examinations for freshman and introducing college board examinations as an admissions requirement. He also used his considerable skills to increase the college's financial base. In 1944, Winthrop had an operating budget of \$213,000; by 1959, it was nearly ten times that amount.

Henry Sims remained in Rock Hill after his retirement and died on February 23, 1966, at age 73. As a tribute to Winthrop's fourth president, the Sims Building was named in his honor in 1961.