EDWIN HENRY FOLK
ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

Edwin Folk joined Georgia Tech in 1924 as instructor in the Department of English. Prior to his death on December 17, 1939, he had become one of the most popular members of the English faculty in the history of Georgia Tech.

The 1960 Blue Print was jointly dedicated to Edwin Folk and Hal Brown. The citation reads as follows.

“BOTH POSTHUMOUS
AND DUAL DEDICATIONS
area rarity with the Blue Print. But, the past year was a rare and tragic one for Georgia Tech—a year when the school lost two of its finest teachers and gentlemen. Professor Hal Brown and Professor Edwin Folk

joined the English department here within two years of each other. Professor Folk in 1924 and Professor Brown in 1926. For a combined total of 68 years these two gentlemen conscientiously taught composition, literature, and speech to an often reluctant and sometimes semi-belligerent series of students. For their devotion to Georgia Tech and
for the dignity they brought to their chosen profession, we respectfully dedicate the 1960 Blue Print to the memory of Hal Brown and Ed Folk, true teachers in every sense of the term.”

As noted from the dedication of the Blue Print, Ed Folk was a favorite of students. He served as Resident Faculty Member of Brown Dormitory from 1931-45. He then became Resident Faculty Member of Harris Dormitory during 1946-47. He was superintendent of dormitories from 1947-52. He used his position in the dormitories to obtain feedback from students and when the situation warranted he became their advocate.

As a professor in English, Ed Folk made a sincere effort in his classes to encourage students to make oral presentations. This was true not only in his classes in public speaking but in his other classes. In his 1950 Annual Report, he writes as follows.

“In all my classes I have stressed training in speaking more than formerly. Students are encouraged to read aloud and to give oral reports without reducing their written work. I have continued to use our recording equipment to a considerable extent.

As a teacher in charge of debating, I meet with this group of interested students once a week for a debate. My work in the dormitory system brings me in contact with large numbers of students.”

The 1947 Blue Print lists 39 student members of the M.L. Brittain Debating Society with Ed Folk and Glen Rainey as Faculty Advisors. The debating society was quite successful in their intercollegiate competitions. They frequently beat institutions known for their liberal arts curriculum.
In 1940 Ed Folk along with A. J. Walker published a “Handbook For Public Speaking” which was used in Georgia Tech public speaking courses. In the early days of voice recorders, Ed Folk began to make extensive use of the devices in his public speaking courses.

Ed Folk was an outspoken advocate of making Georgia Tech an outstanding learning environment. In 1950 a question to the faculty members on their annual report was “What new or changed opportunities for service or development do you desire the Institute to provide for you in the immediate future?” The response of Ed Folk was the following.

“(a) A new and adequate library

(b) New Class Room building

(c) Revising of curriculum to utilize Quarter System as it was supposed to operate.”

Not only the students but the faculty had great respect for Ed Folk. During the academic year of 1953-54, Professor A. J. Walker, Head of the Department of English, was on leave of absence. On the recommendation of Professor Walker and Dean Hefner, Professor Folk was appointed to Acting Head of the Department of English for that period.

During this period a Security and Loyalty questionnaire had been passed by the Georgia State Legislature. This period was the McCarthy era in the United States and tenure of faculty served a very important function. Feelings of many faculty were expressed by Professor Folk in the 1953-54 Annual Report of the Department of English.

“Most members of the English Department bitterly
resented the implications of the Security and Loyalty Questionnaire; Several attached statements of conscience to their completed forms. A large number took an active part in the successful effort to revise the questionnaire. Altogether this was a disturbed period that hampered us in performing our work as teachers and injured our feelings as loyal citizens. Perhaps the time will come again when fear and distrust will not attempt to keep free men from studying, thinking, and speaking as their conscience dictates.”

Yes, Ed Folk was an excellent teacher interested in his students. But, Ed Folk was also a gentleman of conscience and an advocate of Georgia Tech becoming an outstanding center for learning not only academic subjects but also high ethical standards.

Edwin Henry Folk was born December 10, 1901 in Edgefield, South Carolina. He graduated with an A.B. degree in English from the University of South Carolina in 1922.

1922-23 was spent as an instructor in English and Latin at Glynn Academy in Brunswick, Georgia.

In 1923 he returned to the University of South Carolina and received his M.A. in 1924.

He joined the Georgia Tech faculty as instructor in 1924.

He was promoted to assistant professor in 1925.

During the time he was on the faculty at Georgia Tech he was also a graduate student at Princeton University. In 1927 he received a second M.A. from Princeton University.

He was promoted to associate professor in 1931 and to professor in 1941.
Professor Folk was married to Ruby Wilds and they had a daughter Mary Ellison Folk, and two sons, Edward and Hugh.

Professor Folk died December 19, 1959.