Dr. Ross William Collins was born in Port William, Nova Scotia. He earned his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1912 and his Masters two years later at the Acadia University in Wolfville, Nova Scotia. He then studied theology at Pine Hill Theological College in Halifax, followed by the Union Theological Seminary in New York City, obtaining his Bachelor of Divinity degree in 1918. Upon realizing his main interest was history, he entered Columbia University where he received his Ph.D. in 1923.

After teaching for several years in the department of history at the University of Syracuse, he joined the University of Alberta staff in 1930. He became head of the department of history, and remained in this post until retiring in 1958. In recognition of his outstanding writing, he was recognized by a fellowship in the Royal Historical Society and the honorary title of professor emeritus was conferred by the University of Alberta.

Dr. Collins passed away in 1964. He was survived by his wife Margaret and three children. The University of Alberta has developed a $100 award to be used towards books for students of outstanding merit in Renaissance and Reformation History, provided that the student achieves first-class standing in the courses and satisfactory work in other courses. This award is the Ross William Collins Memorial Book Prize.

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