

The Cornerstone

Summer 1995

RICE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Vol. I, No. 1



Rice Historical Society

Purpose

To collect and preserve for the future
the history of Rice University

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In 1911 the cornerstone was laid for the first campus building of Rice Institute, the Administration Building later named Lovett Hall. The cornerstone combines the shield of the State of Texas and a Rice Institute shield with three owls symbolic of wisdom. The Greek inscription translates: "'Rather,' said Democritus, 'would I discover the cause of one fact than become king of the Persians.'" This declaration was made at a time when to be king of the Persians was to rule the world.

Give a Hoot Letters from Members

Mrs. Karen Rogers, President
Rice Historical Society
Houston, TX

Dear Karen,

Herewith is my gift to the Rice Historical Society to help with your society's founding and first meetings.

I am so happy that at long last such a society has been started at Rice. It has long been needed, and it will greatly help create interest in the university.

Fondly,
Ray Watkin Hoagland '36
Kennebunkport, ME

Mrs. Hoagland is the daughter of William Ward Watkin, first Chairman of the Rice Department of Architecture, a position he held until his death in 1952. Mr. Watkin contributed to the original design of the Rice campus and buildings and later designed the Cohen House.

The Rice Historical Society welcomes letters to *The Cornerstone*, its official newsletter. Rice alumni and friends are encouraged to contribute photographs and remembrances of historical interest which may be used in future issues of *The Cornerstone*. Items cannot be returned and will be contributed to our archival collections.

Wanda Phears Waters, Editor

About the Cover

On Monday, December 9, 1918, the official Mission of French Scholars visited the Rice Institute campus. This group had been invited to tour schools in the United States by the American Council on Education to explain dominant elements of French culture. Lectures were given on such topics as "Real France Revealed in her Scenery and Peoples" and "Family Life in France." The cover photograph shows (l-r): M. Charles Koechlin (composer and music critic), Mme. M. L. Cazamian, Mrs. Edgar Odell Lovett, Prof. L. Cazamian, and President Edgar Odell Lovett.

The cover photo and the photo of H. Malcolm Lovett and his father Edgar Odell Lovett on page 4 were both taken by Schlueter of Houston and were both published with permission of the Woodson Research Center, Fondren Library, Rice University.



First meeting of the Steering Committee of the Rice Historical Society, April 20, 1994. Seated l-r: Nancy Booth '52, Karen Hess Rogers '68. Standing l-r Harry Chavanne '33, John Boles, '65

A Message from the President

Dear Rice Alumni and Friends,

If you are reading this letter, you may already have joined the Rice Historical Society, an organization devoted to gathering, preserving, and disseminating information about the history of this great university. This society did not emerge suddenly in the summer of 1995. Twenty years ago a dedicated group of volunteers saw the need to conserve Rice history and formed the Rice Historical Commission*. For years they conducted interviews and solicited memorabilia from alumni and friends. Because of their work we now have a sizeable collection of scrapbooks, costumes, photos, clippings, and other items. They also sponsored the writing of Frederica Meiners' book, *A History of Rice University*. Much of Rice history would have been lost if they had not acted.

With the example and inspiration of this group's work, we have chartered the Rice Historical Society, an official support group at the university like Friends of Fondren Library or the Shepherd Society. We have a board of directors and are run totally by volunteers, which reduces operating expenses considerably.

To preserve as much of our heritage as possible, the board of directors has decided to focus during the first year on establishing an oral history project—videotaping interviews with as many alumni, faculty, and administrators as possible. Many of the stories gathered in this manner will find their way into this newsletter, which will be published quarterly.

This project is a serious one, but we expect to have fun doing it. We will have dinners and lunches with speakers and programs. We are planning picnics, home tours, field trips, and campus tours. We want to publish more books and some day open a Rice museum.

Besides preserving the history of the university for future generations, we hope to become a link between Rice and the people of Houston and at the same time promote a greater sense of community within the family of Rice alumni.

We have no shortage of ideals, goals, or projects, but we can always use more members. Tell a friend about us!

Sincerely,

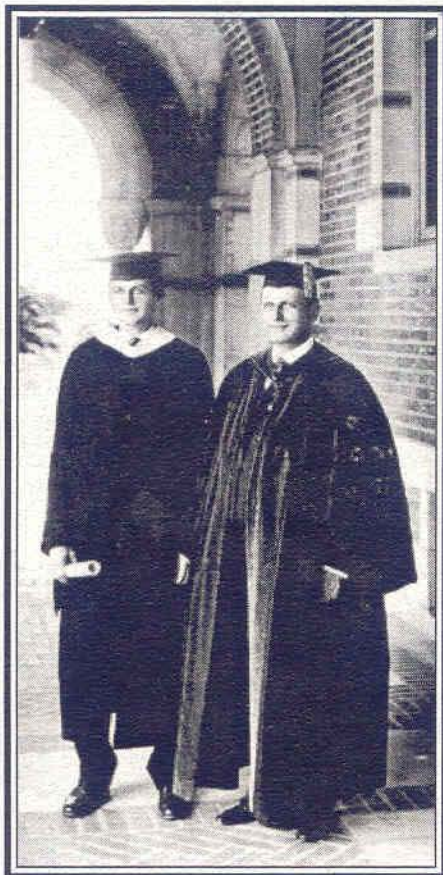
Karen Hess Rogers

Karen Hess Rogers '68

*The Commission included such distinguished people as H. Malcolm Lovett, Frank Vandiver, Willoughby Williams, Ray Watkin Hoagland, and Katherine Fischer Drew.

Recollections of Edgar Odell Lovett, Rice's First President

*Edited Excerpts from an Interview with H. Malcolm Lovett, Son of Edgar Odell Lovett
Interview Conducted on May 25, 1989, by Dr. John Boles of the Rice History Department*



H. Malcolm Lovett upon his graduation from Rice in 1921, in the Sallyport with his father, Edgar Odell Lovett.

“Well, the beginning, the first I ever heard of Rice, we were still living in Princeton, of course. My father was Professor of Astronomy and he had accepted the Rice position in December, 1907, and they allowed him to finish his year in Princeton in 1908. And I heard about it shortly after New Year. I was a boy about six years old in January, 1908. At that time my father was planning to go to South Africa and build an observatory for Princeton on one of the high mountains down there that would do for that hemisphere what Mount Wilson and other California observatories had done for this hemisphere, and he'd raised about two-thirds of the money. I was very glad when he accepted the Rice job and I didn't have to live in South Africa.”

Q: “What was it about the Rice offer that was so attractive that he was willing to give up building that observatory?”

“Well, I suppose it was the idea of starting from scratch. Of course, Rice was incorporated by the trustees—there were seven trustees of which Mr. Rice was one—and he authorized the other six to incorporate Rice as an educational corporation under the laws of the State of Texas, but he didn't want to start Rice as an institution while he was still alive. The University of Chicago and Leland Stanford, Jr. University in California were started the same time. Stanford was, of course, started with the Stanford money and the University of Chicago had a lot of Rockefeller money and Rice had, of course, its six to eight million dollars—whatever it was at that time, a substantial amount of money. They thought they could build the whole thing for that. So it was quite a challenge. And he never had had any experience at a coeducational institution, because they didn't have them in the East; they only had them west of the Mississippi River in those days. But he was interested in building.”

Q: “Did Mr. Lovett have his vision of Rice largely worked out before he took his around-the-world trip?”

“No, this is what happened. One of the original Rice trustees, Emanuel Raphael, wanted Rice to be a MIT or something like that, but of course my father wouldn't have come if they hadn't agreed that Rice would have a full university program. It's true it started from science and engineering because that was thought to be the thing to do here in outlying areas of Texas in those days. The nearest engineering schools with any prominence were Georgia Tech in Atlanta and Washington University in St. Louis. A&M was about ten years old, and the University of Texas was still younger. I'm thinking about 1900.

“Well, of course, Mr. Rice was murdered in 1900, but it took them a number of years to put Patrick in jail, and they didn't start looking for a president until about 1907, as I recall. So, they let my father finish the year.

Then he and my mother and a young Houstonian who'd been a graduate student at Princeton that my father asked to come help him start Rice, Fontaine Carrington Weems, took this wonderful trip around the world with my father's talking over his plans for Rice with heads of all the European universities everywhere: Turkey, Russia, Italy, Greece, Germany, Belgium, France, England, Scotland, Ireland-- everywhere.

“Of course there are in the Rice records his letters to the trustees of his discussions with all those people; it's all in the library here. And it settled the fact that Rice was to have a full university program starting, as I say, from the science end. So they got back from that trip. They left in June, 1908, and they got home about July or August, 1909.

Q: “Sum up your father's character.”

“He was a hard-working man, and a very bright man, and he was very serious. He was sent to Bethany College at the age of 15 by his mother and father. He wanted to go to the University of Virginia, but they were afraid he'd become a drunk if he did that. So he was sent to this little Christian school in West Virginia. When he graduated from there at 19 he decided he wasn't going to accept any more money from his family, and he went to the University of Virginia and got his M.A. and his Ph.D.

“He taught math at Hollins College and in Virginia working his way through Virginia. He taught math at West Kentucky College in Mayfield, Kentucky, where he met my mother, working his way through Virginia.

“He got through Virginia in the early 90's, and he decided he wanted to go to Leipzig to study with a certain mathematician. He spent at least two years in Europe and heard every famous mathematician. He went to Rome, and he heard the ones in France and in Belgium and everywhere. I don't know how he got all over Europe like that. He saved up his money, I guess, and went.

“He got back from Leipzig in January of 1897 and he didn't have a job. He had friends at Hopkins in Baltimore and friends at the University of Virginia, and

those friends got him a job at Hopkins and at the University of Virginia, three days at each place lecturing mathematics, and a pass on the B&O Railroad so he could afford to hold both those \$25-a-month jobs. He married my mother December, 1897, and he accepted a job the end of that year as Assistant of Mathematics at Princeton. He made such an impression on them that they made him a full professor before 1900. You know that just didn't happen in those days, so he must have impressed people with his ambition and his achievements.

"He did get interested in stars and all when he was at Leipzig, so he took a year's leave of absence in 1900 and went to France with my mother and my sister who was older than I; I hadn't been born. And he came back and was Professor of Mathematics until 1905 when he succeeded Charles Young as Professor of Astronomy, and we lived in the Astronomer's House on Prospect Avenue. I was born in Princeton, 73 Prospect, and we moved way up to 16 and spent the last two years there.

Q: "How would you describe your father's administrative style? He was obviously an inspirational president."

"Well, I'll tell you this story. He was really a stickler for form, I mean for regulations and all. But at Dr. Houston's inauguration, Harry Weiss was on the Rice board and had gotten Dr. Houston to come to Rice to succeed my father. Harry Weiss had been a student at Princeton, and he had had math under my father. Harry Weiss came from Beaumont to Princeton, and he told a story at the inauguration of Houston. I'd never heard it before. He got on the train to get back to Princeton after Christmas vacation his freshman year, but Princeton had a rule if you didn't attend your first class after any holiday, Thanksgiving weekend or Christmas or Spring vacation or what have you, you were automatically suspended until the next Fall. Well, Harry's first class was my father's math class, 9 o'clock. At 10 o'clock Harry showed up at the class, apologized, said he'd left Beaumont in

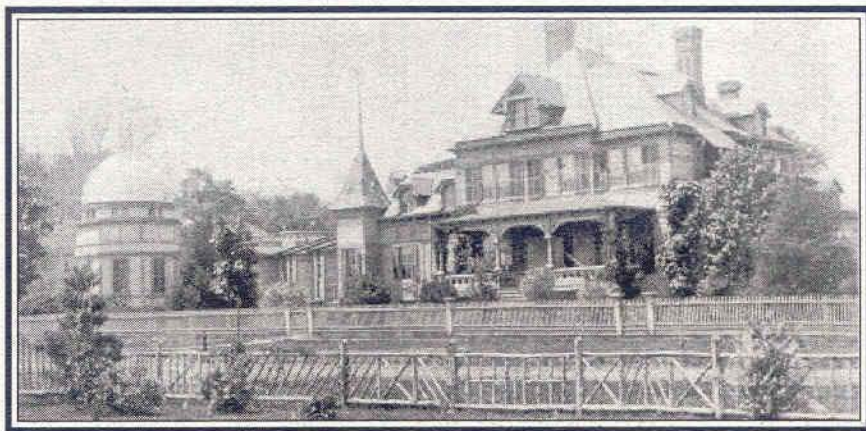
plenty of time to get back, but they had a blizzard on the Pennsylvania Railroad from St. Louis coming across Indiana, Ohio, and Pennsylvania and it lost steam and they were just an hour late into Princeton. He was sorry, and he guessed he wouldn't see him any more until next year, but that's the way it was. So, my father liked the young man; he was a good student and he didn't want to say he was there and didn't want to say he wasn't there, so he didn't turn in any report that day. So they never knew Harry wasn't there. A lot of people didn't believe that about my father, if you want to know the truth. But my father said, 'Yes, that happened.'

"He didn't brag very much, but everything happened that he wanted to happen. He was very firm and he didn't stand for much monkey business. He got that from his mother.

"He thought and worked all the time. I used to go with him to Philadelphia and places and we'd get up in the hotel and he'd be walking around, looking out the window, and I couldn't get his attention to things, to get done what I thought we'd gone to town to do, and all of a sudden he'd snap his finger like he'd figured out what he was trying to figure out in his head—on some mathematical problem or astronomy or something like that. Or maybe trying to make sense out of something he'd read the night before.

He read all the time. He carried an armload of books, and he walked from wherever we lived in Houston, whether it was on Polk Avenue or the Rice Hotel or the Bender Hotel or Sul Ross or the Plaza, he'd walk back and forth every single day. He had a shower bath up in that tower and would change his clothes when he got out to Rice if he got too hot. That sort of thing. So he was just a hard scholar, that's all. And you had to be one, to get by.

"And he took it seriously out here. For instance, we had 77 students the first year, and about 33% flunked out at Christmas time because they couldn't do Math 100. They didn't let them come back until the next Fall. And a lot of them did. Particularly some of the athletes. He was pretty hard. He really was. But he tried to get along with the students. He gave a lecture every year to the entering freshman class in the physics amphitheater and he'd shake hands with each young man or young lady that walked out of that room and try to get their names. They would always go up to him when he'd go through the Sallyport to his office to see if he knew them. And when he answered, 'Well, Mr. Jones, how are you today?' why, Mr. Jones would start studying."



The Astronomer's House at Princeton, home of Edgar Odell Lovett in 1907. Published with permission of the Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Division of Rare Books & Special Collections, Princeton University Libraries.

The Man Behind the Derby

An Evening with Dr. Lovett in New Orleans, June, 1938

By R. T. Wilbanks '27

Most Rice students in the middle 1920's did not know Dr. Edgar Odell Lovett personally. To them he was a great man, president and father of all he surveyed, walking about the campus in his Prince Albert type coat and derby hat. When he would attend football games, wearing the ever-present derby, as he approached his 50-yard-line box seats the band would play a quick rendition of "Rice's Honor." He would remain standing then doff the derby and the kick-off would ensue.

Most students seemed to feel he was involved in so many big things that he didn't have the time or the inclination to be close to the students as individuals. However, this attitude later changed in the minds of Rice alumni in New Orleans.

After my graduation from Rice in 1927, the Great Depression swept away jobs and potentials. A good position beckoned me to New Orleans in 1930 and kept me busy for nine years. In 1935, I ferreted out twenty eight Rice alumni living in New Orleans and surrounding areas.

A Rice Alumni Club was formed, which later promoted beach parties at Lake Ponchartrain, cookouts in backyards, and attendance at every football game when Rice came to play Tulane or Loyola. The club sometimes journeyed to Baton Rouge when Rice played at LSU. Once, to Rice's honor, the final score was Rice 10, LSU 7! It was a very bad night for Huey Long!

In the Spring of 1938, the *Times-Picayune* announced that Dr. Lovett would deliver the upcoming Tulane commencement address. Impressed by this honor to Rice, I wrote a timid letter to Dr. Lovett inviting him to spend an informal evening with the club at my home.

Two days later, I received a long telegram in which Dr. Lovett said that he would be delighted and would MAKE special time in his schedule to attend.

Overwhelmed and thoroughly aroused, I answered the telegram suggesting I would arrive at the St. Charles Hotel to transport him to my home for dinner and the meeting.

Another long telegram arrived shortly, accepting my proposal. So, at the appointed hour of 5:00 p.m. Dr. Lovett climbed into my ancient Ford, and with the greatest of smiles and elegance he greeted my wife and three-year-old daughter upon his arrival.

The aura cast by this great man melted into a thrilling dinner conversation. This was not an aloof master of everything; he was the most cordial, friendly, and interesting man my wife and I had ever encountered. No wonder Tulane wanted him to address its grads!

About 7:00 p.m., the alums began arriving, almost awed too much to join the conversation. As the evening wore on, Dr. Lovett turned out to be the most interesting person the former students had ever met, and some were shocked when he called them by name and spoke of some college-day incidents none of them realized Dr. Lovett would have known about!

There could not have been a better Rice Alumni Club meeting because it broke down the stilted opinions club members held about this wonderful, warm, intelligent educator.

Early in the evening, Dr. Lovett mentioned having to board a Houston-bound train leaving the downtown station at 10:00 p.m. He was assured he would make the train, so he settled down to the fun, never once reflecting anxiety about the train, even after 9:30 passed. He didn't know the train stopped at a way station about ten minutes from the meeting.

The club adjourned at 10:00 p.m. Everyone jumped into cars and accompanied him to the station, arriving there as the train headlight appeared in the distance. After frantic goodbyes and hugs all around, Dr. Lovett boarded his

coach and stood in the vestibule waving his derby until the train disappeared around a turn.

The awestruck alums were speechless, not realizing yet what they had witnessed. Finally, a 1925 grad exploded: "Well, I never thought I'd ever see Edgar Odell Lovett wave his derby to anyone!"

The glow of that precious evening still persists in the hearts of those fortunate alumni who are still alive—the exciting discovery of the REAL Dr. Lovett.

But there is yet a sequel. Dr. Lovett had said he would soon be traveling to New York on Rice business, thus the urgency not to miss the Houston train.

Three weeks later, a small package arrived in the mail at my house. It had been mailed by Tiffany's in New York. It contained Dr. Lovett's business card attached to a sterling silver baby spoon engraved "Vera Alice Wilbanks"—my three-year-old daughter.

This larger-than-life individual turned out to be the most thoughtful and down-to-earth individual this group of alumni and friends had ever enjoyed the pleasure of meeting and knowing so well.

Edgar Odell Lovett delivered the commencement address at Tulane University on Wednesday, June 8, 1938. The *Times-Picayune* of New Orleans reported the following: *Personal integrity, faith in one's fellow man and hope for the ultimate prevailing of the goodness in things were listed Wednesday night by Dr. Edgar O. Lovett, president of Rice Institute, in an address at the 103rd commencement of Tulane University at the Municipal Auditorium, as "underlying qualities which the program of education makes accessible to all."*



Rice alumni meet with Dr. Lovett in New Orleans, June, 1938. Front row: W. C. Heflin '26, O. E. Gammill '28, Dr. Lovett, F. G. Hollins '26, R. T. Wilbanks '27. Back row: Boyd Porter '22, Page Harris '30, Boyd Porter, Jr., Mrs. Boyd Porter, Mrs. F. G. Hollins, Mrs. O. E. Gammill, Mrs. Edward Chavanne, two persons unidentified, Mrs. R. T. Wilbanks, person unidentified.

(Note from R. T. Wilbanks: "My camera was old with no flash, so I took a 500-watt bulb and hung it in front of the camera connected to a long cord. When everybody was seated, I set the camera on wide open, returned to my chair, flashed the 500-watt bulb on and then quickly off. Dark again. I rushed to the camera and shut it off then turned the house lights on again. Notice my right hand in the photo—it controls the flash.")

Coming in our next issue—

An interview with Isaac Sanders, Rice's oldest living alumnus

And coming in a future issue—

**World War I protests and military activity on the Rice campus
(factual contributions welcomed)**

JOIN THE RICE HISTORICAL SOCIETY!

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Volunteer Opportunities

I would like to:

- be interviewed
- be an interviewer
- work on the newsletter
- organize archives
- help plan special events

Membership Enrollment

Rice Historical Society memberships run one year from date of joining.

- \$10 Young alumni and non-residents only
- \$25
- \$50
- \$100
- Other
- This is eligible for a matching corporate fund* from

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Under IRS guidelines, the estimated value of any benefits received by you is not substantial; therefore, the full amount of your gift is a deductible contribution.

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