

The Cornerstone

FALL/WINTER 2001

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE RICE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

VOL. 6, NO. 4

HOUSTON IN 1912

By Karen Hess Rogers

(I originally had the idea of writing a brief article about what the world was like in 1912, the year that the Rice Institute opened. As the project grew, I found I wanted to examine what the world was like for a young woman, born around 1895, who might be considering attending the fledgling university. This became a huge project, so the Cornerstone editorial committee suggested I offer this information in manageable segments. We start with Houston in 1912.)



Houston in 1912



Julia Cameron Montgomery's 1913 book, *Houston as a Setting of the Jewel: the Rice Institute*, describes Houston as "a commercial center, a wonderful place for investment returns...a desirable dwelling place...where there is splendid organization of social and moral uplift touching every phase of civic life; where health consideration is vital, and public comfort, pleasure and recreation receive definite provision." She said she intended "to record the

progressive era upon which Houston is entering."

Although only seventy-six years old in 1912, Houston was truly a city. It consisted of sixteen square miles with many suburban districts. The combined population of this metropolitan area was between 115,000 and 125,000. There were more than 78,000 people in the city itself. There was much industry including lumber, railroads, rice, and oil. There were four hundred incorporated companies. With twenty-three oil companies, Houston was the largest petroleum-producing district in Texas;

the Humble field was seventeen miles from the city. Houston was the financial center of the Southwest; aggregate wholesale trade amounted to \$130,375,000 annually; bank deposits totaled \$45,000,000.

Weekly bank clearings exceeded those of any city in the South with the exception of New Orleans. It was considered the "workshop of Texas" with the most factories and wage earners and

the largest payroll in the Southwest. Of the 25,000 industrial workers 15,000 were men; 6,000 were women; and 4,000 were children. The only elevator and escalator factory in the South was located there. Two telegraph companies sent 3.5 million messages a year. Manufactured products were valued at \$50,000,000 annually. It was the greatest railroad center in the South with seventeen rail lines. Hundreds of passenger trains ran through the city every day. A deep-water port was

Continued on page 3

The Rice Historical Society

PURPOSE

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

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

2001-2002

Lee Mary Kobayashi '50

President

Melissa Kean '96

First Vice President

Elionne Walker '96

Second Vice President

Georgia Tipton '44

Corresponding Secretary

Helen L. Toombs '79

Recording Secretary

Tom Adolph '79

Treasurer

Mary Dix

Cornerstone Editor

Alan Bath '95

John Boles '65

Nancy Boothe '52

Nancy Burch '61

Maydelle Burkhalter '53

Lynda Crist '67

Stephen Fox '73

John Gladu

Doug Killgore '69

Joyce Winning Magle '44

Helen Otte

Victor Otte '70

Ray Watkin Strange '36

Ted Workman '49

*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 donated to
our archival collection.*

NEWSLETTER DESIGNED
BY TOMORROW'S KEY

IN THIS ISSUE

Houston in 1912.....1

Writing The Trust..... 9



*Union Station and
Annunciation Catholic
Church in 1912. The
station is now the main
entrance to Enron Field.
Trolley tracks are
still in our cobblestone
streets downtown.*

Join the Rice Historical Society

OR GIVE A GIFT MEMBERSHIP TO A FRIEND

Newsletter • Projects • Programs • Special Events • Field Trips

One-year membership categories: \$25, \$50, \$100 or other gift

Send name, address, telephone number and payment to:

The Rice Historical Society - MS 520

Rice University

P. O. Box 1892

Houston, TX 77251-1892

1-800-225-5258

Under the 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. Employees of a corporation which has a Corporate Matching Gifts program will receive membership credit for the total amount of personal and company contribution. Please obtain a form from your company's personnel department.



Jesse Jones and the Rice Hotel

two years from completion when the Houston Ship Channel would bring the trans-Mississippi region 500 miles nearer the sea than the Atlantic and Pacific ports.

There were forty skyscrapers of six stories or more, ranging up to eighteen stories. Jesse Jones was building the Rice Hotel. There was a municipal water works that included forty-five artesian wells with a daily capacity of thirty-three million gallons for which consumers paid fifteen cents per thousand gallons. The fire department had twelve stations with fifty horses and 110 men. The city had a commission style of government that operated the city "on a business basis without regard to politics and in the same manner [as] a great private corporation." There was a public

library with 35,000 books. There were sixty-one miles of streetcar tracks with 191 streetcars on 13 main lines.

Houstonians were becoming automobile owners; the number of cars on the streets increased from 870 in 1911 to 4,143 in 1913. There were twenty-four public school buildings with a population of 12,867 school children.

Education was a primary concern in the first decade of the twentieth century in Houston. Between 1902 and 1912, the number of pupils and teachers roughly doubled and the expense of maintaining the schools tripled, mainly

because of an increase in teachers' salaries and costs for enhanced equipment. In 1912 grade school teachers

could make as much as \$810 and principals, \$1,600. Julia Montgomery says that these increases "are not even yet as large as they ought to be, but they show that the trend of things has been in the right direction." New courses of study were introduced,

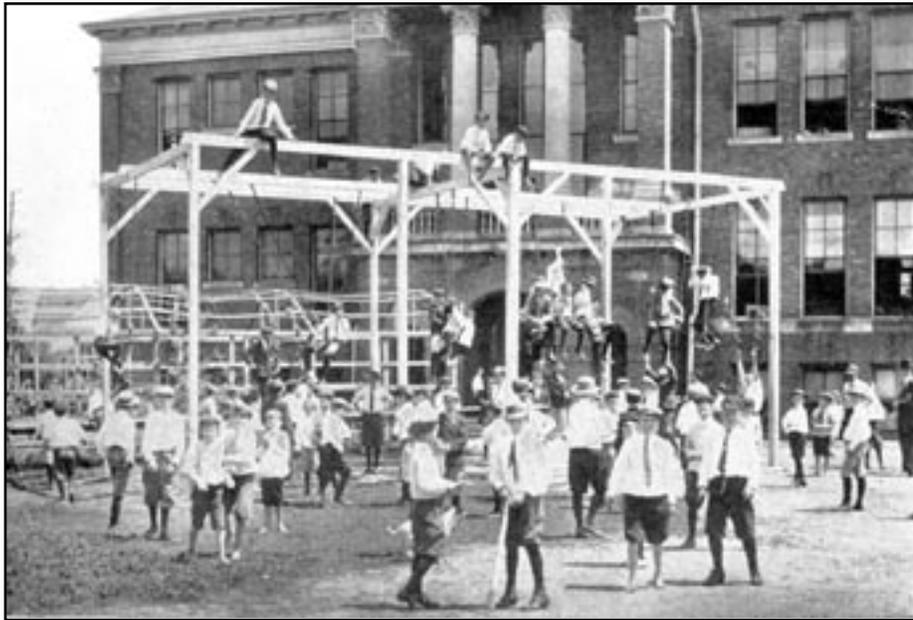
including manual training for boys and domestic science for girls. Night schooling was a new option for "those people who are so situated

Education was a primary concern in the first decade of the twentieth century in Houston.

Continued on page 4



Picture showing a woman, 85, and her grandson on a front seat, she attending school to learn to read from the Bible



Boys outdoor gymnasium, Fannin School



Houston City Auditorium

that they cannot attend school in the day time, but who, nevertheless, are desirous of improving their educational advantage." Many foreign-born students, eager to learn English, and African-American men and women took advantage of these classes. Special education was also offered "for exceptional pupils, where a trained teacher makes extra effort to develop the intelligence of a few to whom nature has been sparing in her gifts." Physical education was offered to all students. Families had the option of sending their children to kindergarten, although they had to pay for it. Even with all of this expansion, the public schools were becoming crowded and private schools became popular for those who could afford them. Harris Masterson remembered riding to one of these, the Kinkaid School on the corner of Elgin and San Jacinto, in a pony cart.

There were numerous music clubs and organizations as well as an art league. The Russian Symphony Orchestra performed ten concerts in the new city auditorium, which seated 7,500. *Parsifal* was offered by the Full Metropolitan Opera and Orchestra. Around 1912 a study was completed that indicated that approximately one-fifth of the population of Houston attended some type of entertainment on Sunday afternoons, usually of the vaudeville, motion picture, or theatrical nature. So an effort was made to provide entertainment that was more educational: high grade music, lectures, and readings, something "intellectually, morally and physically uplifting, instead of leaving them to the petty things of the show business." Apparently this high-minded entertainment appealed to a wide segment of the population since "working men and professional men alike were found among its regular patrons."

Social service agencies abounded; Mrs. Cameron notes that "institutions have grown until almost every conceivable need is being met." She notes



Interior of modern ambulance



Canoe Club on Brays Bayou with clubhouse in background

that the Social Service Federation, a relief organization, is built on "the most modern principles of charity work. The old charity, now obsolete...was content to patch and palliate distress... The charity of today... strives ever to discover and remove the causes of distress and to prevent their recurrence."

Homes for orphans, delinquent

Houston had eight sanatoriums and infirmaries, which were considered excellent.

boys, and destitute women, as well as Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant charities, joined the Star of Hope Mission, the Crittenton Home, the Salvation Army, and many others. Mrs. Cameron notes that "Houston, in her struggle for commercial and industrial supremacy in the great Southwest, has not

forgotten her obligation to those who

are unfortunate and for whom the struggle for existence has been too strenuous." The city was not without slums, however; Samuel Maurice McAshan remembered that Schrimp Alley "had the most horrible slum type of housing, no adequate sewage, only one or two water taps down there...[they] had to get their water in buckets and take it to their hovels."

Houston had eight sanatoriums and infirmaries, which were considered excellent. The city was free of yellow

Continued on page 6



Forest Hill Park looking across stream at Houston Country Club golf links



Above: The Christ Episcopal Church downtown. Below Right: Photos from the Houston Ship Channel.

fever, but diphtheria was still feared as a killer of small children and tuberculosis was treated as highly contagious.

Dr. James Greenwood built a hospital for the care of the mentally ill out on South Main.

Bicycle clubs, yacht clubs, canoeing clubs, and hunting and fishing clubs promoted a healthy, active lifestyle. There were numerous social clubs, including the Houston Country Club, the Houston Launch Club, and the Houston Club. Martha Lovett remembered going to tea dances, organized to expose the younger generation “to the social graces,” at the country club.

There were beautiful parks on the Ship Channel at the San Jacinto Battleground and in the city there was City Park, Forest Hill Park, Vicks Park, Elizabeth Baldwin Park, Old Highland Park and others, although in 1912 Arthur Coleman Comey was engaged to make a comprehensive survey of Houston’s park status and requirements. He concluded that the city needed more parks.

Houston was full of churches. Houses of worship included the First Presbyterian Church, Christ Church Episcopal, First Methodist Church, Church of the Annunciation (Catholic, across from Enron Field today), Christian Science Church, St. Paul’s Methodist Church, Tuam Baptist Church, First Baptist Church, Congregation Beth Israel, Cumberland Presbyterian Church, Central Christian Church, and Second Presbyterian Church.

*A flight to the suburbs
was already apparent
with 150 new
neighborhoods by 1911.*





Home of Captain James A. Baker



Home of Major J. F. Dixon

A flight to the suburbs was already apparent with 150 new neighborhoods by 1911. In *Houston's Forgotten Heritage: Landscape, Houses, Interiors, 1824-1914*, Barrie Scardino notes that in 1912 "houses displayed a range of styles, tastes, and means comparable to those in other American cities." She says that a family's economic status was most obviously shown in the size and quality of their home. In the same book, Dorothy Knox Houghton describes the home as a "moral haven for the family from the outside world." Many families, even Harris Masterson's on Montrose, kept cows, horses and chickens in their yards, although Samuel McAshan recalled that a city ordinance banned animals after 1920. Milk, ice, and fuel were delivered to the homes and services like knife sharpening were offered door-to-door. The City Market was

Continued on page 8



Above: The Houston City Market.

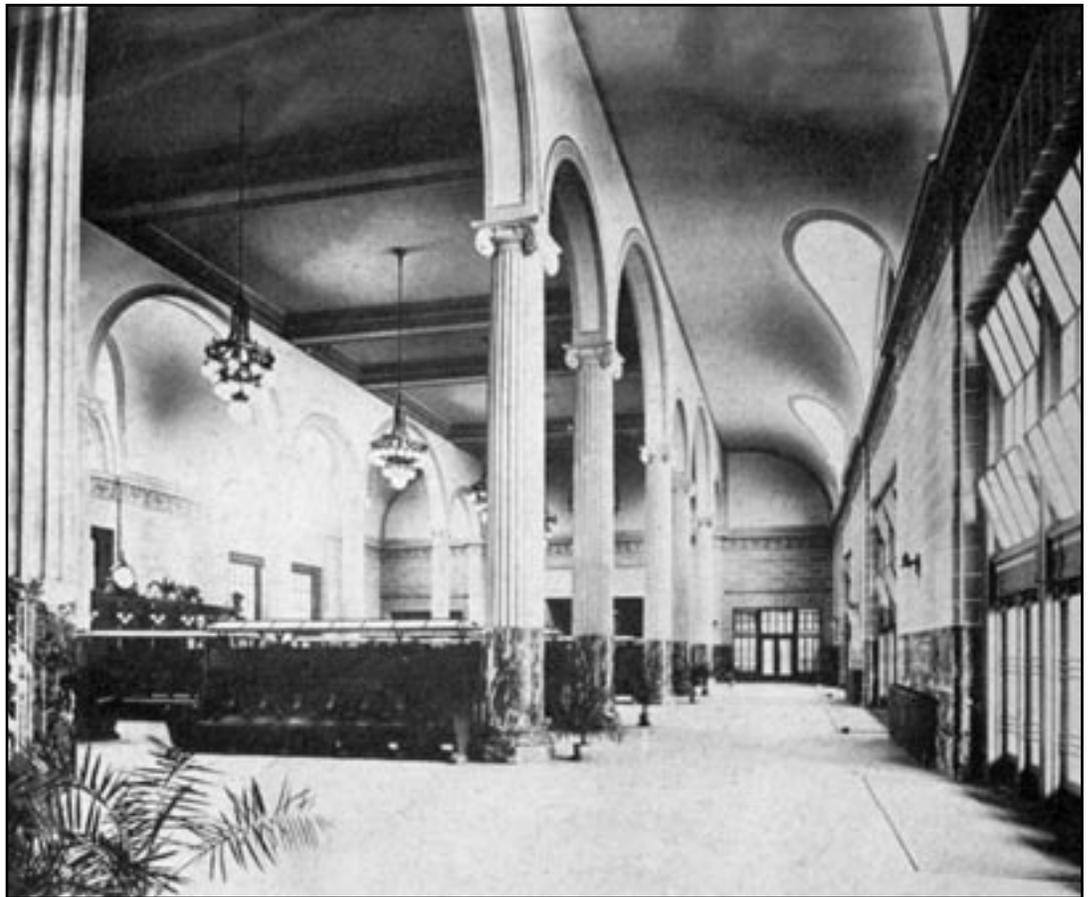
Below: Galveston-Houston Interurban going 50 m.p.h.





the main source of fresh meat, fish, and produce with bakeries, specialty stores and groceries clustered around it. Houston had a great many more apartment buildings than the typical southern town. These tall buildings with their inner courts were seen as a way to deal with the summer heat.

Summers were hot and homes had cross-ventilation created by high ceilings, large windows, and southern exposures. Many houses had sleeping porches. Swimming was a popular way to cool off. Houston had several amusement parks with large natatoriums. Samuel McAshan remembered bicycling to Shepherd Dam to swim in the bayou; he rode down



Interior and exterior of new Union Station

shell roads along which there were few buildings. Anyone who could afford

to escaped to the seacoast. The Galvez Hotel opened in Galveston in 1911,

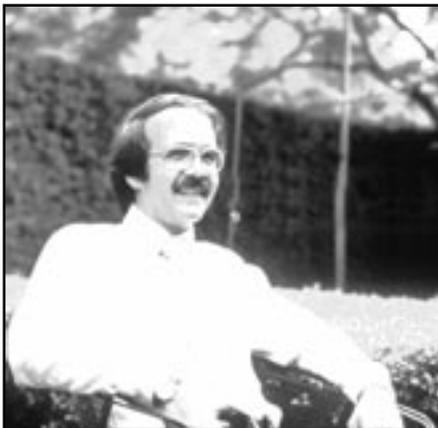
WRITING THE TRUST

By Doug Killgore, Wiess '69

the same year that interurban service was established between Houston and Galveston.

This was the city that welcomed the Rice Institute in 1912.

For good or ill the murder of William Marsh Rice has tugged at a corner of my life virtually every day since one pleasant afternoon in 1977. I was working on a slide show for Rice, a PR piece that would be taken around to alumni groups to bring them up to date, show them a bit of Rice history, and encourage their philanthropy. Stewart Baker, who was then master of Wiess College and a member of the English faculty, had agreed to let me interview him on tape, and we were chatting in the walled garden of Wiess House. By that point I had heard, like most of us who had attended Rice for any length of time, that Willie, the guy in the statue in the middle of the quad, had been murdered and "the butler did it." I had also heard that Stewart Baker's family had something to do with the history of Rice. I suspected this was true and that there might be some historical significance here that I could incorporate into the slide show. With the oldest residential college named Baker, this was no great mental leap. So, with the tape recorder rolling, I



Stewart Baker telling Doug Killgore the story of the murder of William Marsh Rice.

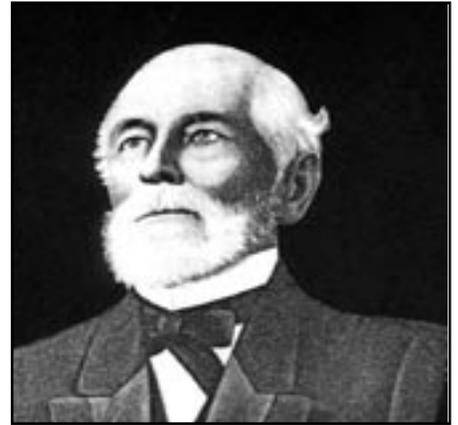
asked Stewart the question, the answer to which was going to change my life: "Can you tell me how the Baker family was involved in the history of Rice?" Or something like that.

"Captain Baker, who was my grandfather, was the attorney and eventually the executor for William Marsh Rice. When Mr. Rice was murdered, my grandfather was instrumental in proving that a crime had been committed - it was not at first clear that Mr. Rice had been murdered -

"When Mr. Rice was murdered, my grandfather was instrumental in proving that a crime had been committed - it was not at first clear that Mr. Rice had been murdered..."

and then he helped protect Mr. Rice's interests from claims of other possible heirs of the estate."

That is the quote that made it into the slide show. I took a photo of Stewart and also a shot of the portrait of Captain Baker in the Baker College Commons, but I felt I needed something more - a photo of Mr. Rice or a newspaper headline. I went to the University Relations office, where I had been hired to make the presentation, and asked around. Someone there told me a book published by Rice University Studies, entitled *William Marsh Rice and his Institute* by Andrew Forest Muir, had some old



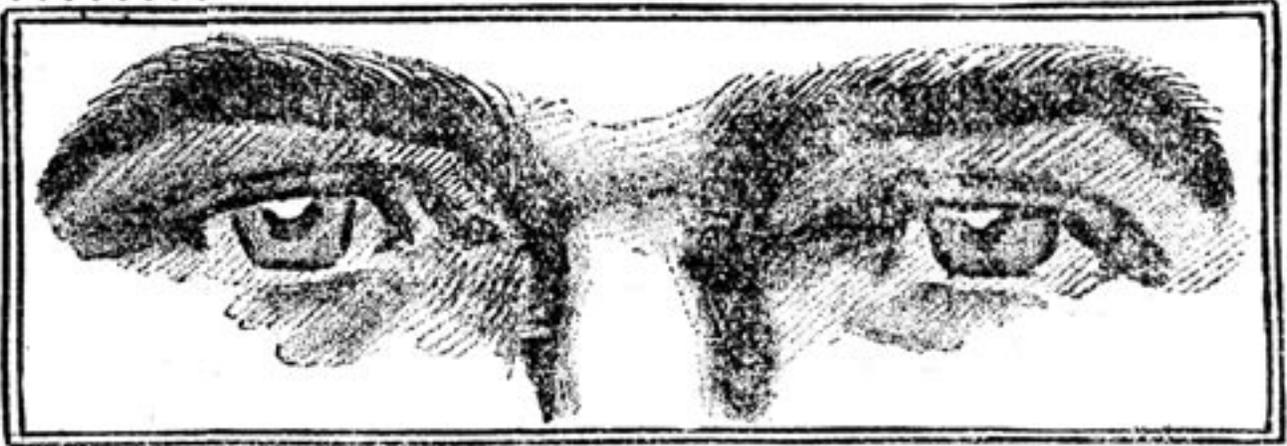
Rice University founder, William Marsh Rice

pictures in it. I went to the Campus Store and bought a copy.

The book had no photo of Rice (in fact, I have yet to find an actual photo of him), but it did have reproductions of a couple of paintings and several drawings from newspapers and photos of Captain Baker and others. I copied some of them, made them into slides, finished the slide show, and put the book on the shelf.

At some point during the next five or six years, I picked up the book and read it. I would like to state right here that I have never had much interest in or talent for history. I got through American History under Dr. William Masterson my freshman year with a 4-, the lowest grade you could get and not have to take history again. However, as you grow older and realize that the world changes through time, you begin to appreciate that things (such as universities) are the way they are because of events in the past. Also, I have always loved a good old-fashioned mystery, and when I started on Muir's book, actually put together from his notes and a few published articles by Sylvia Stallings Morris after Professor Muir's death, I

Continued on page 8



VALET JONES'S HYPNOTIC EYES

became deeply absorbed by the story and the structure of the "plot" as it developed:

Mr. and Mrs. Rice have no children, so he decides to leave his fortune to the boys and girls of Texas in the form of an institute to



Mrs. Elizabeth Rice

be built after his death, and his young attorney, Captain Baker, will be in charge. Mrs. Rice has a stroke and for several weeks is taken care of by an attorney's wife. When Mrs. Rice dies, the attorney comes up with a will that gives away half of Mr. Rice's estate based on Texas' community property



*Rice's valet,
Charlie Jones*

laws. Baker tells Rice to return to New York, where he and his wife have lived during the warm months of the year, and he will challenge the will on the basis of residence, since New York has no community property. Rice hires Charlie Jones to be his valet in New York. The Houston

attorney who concocted Mrs. Rice's will hires a former Houston attorney (Albert Patrick) who now lives in New York (because he is disbarred in Texas) to take depositions in support of the Rice's Texas citizenship. Patrick, intrigued by the huge sum of money with no real heirs, meets valet Jones and induces him to poison the old gentleman while Patrick writes a new will to give the bulk of the Rice estate to Patrick himself. Baker, in order to get to work on the institute with which he is entrusted, has to



Albert Patrick

solve the murder and successfully challenge Patrick's will. I could not have come up with a more tightly intertwined plot if I had tried. Katherine Drew seemed to make my assignment quite clear, saying that the work "presents William Marsh Rice as a warm human being, the center of a drama of no mean proportions."

Well, she was right. I thought the story would make a great movie, but it did not cost a million dollars to produce a play, and there were theaters around looking for plays to produce. In fact, several years earlier

Main Street Theater had produced a play, which I had co-written with my mother, entitled "*Katie, Inc.*" - not a cerebral work, but it had found an audience among the older set and had been picked up by a theater in Dallas for a subsequent production. Becky Greene Udden, with whom I had worked on plays at Rice, was artistic director of Main Street, and when I mentioned the possibility to her, she said that for years she had hoped someone would dramatize the Rice murder. That cinched it, and I started working on a play, figuring that if the material showed promise it might be possible to fund a movie later on.



Captain Baker

At the Woodson Research Center in the back corner of Fondren, I found a wealth of information to help me in my research. All of Dr. Muir's papers were there as were scores of scrapbooks from Captain Baker and boxes of newspaper clippings in many languages - enough source material to have written a dozen plays about William Marsh Rice, Captain Baker, Albert Patrick, Charlie Jones, and the rest. Every time I went (I was quickly becoming good friends with the library staff there), someone would

bring out a large box of material I had never seen before. One of the major sources for the play turned out to be the text of a speech Captain Baker made at the 1931 commencement in which he pretty much told the whole story. He told it again later in life and had it taken down by his secretary at Baker Botts and published in a small booklet entitled "*The Patrick Case.*"

Several newspaper articles in Houston papers had retold the story since then, but the most fascinating discoveries were to be made in sensational newspaper clippings from the time of the murder and the trial - Rice's eccentric diet, the woman who gave him the bananas that poisoned him, the hypnotist who taught Jones how to mesmerize the old man into signing the bogus will, the woman who "haunted" the Tombs prison to catch a glimpse of the handsome murderer Albert Patrick, the phrenologist's diagram of Albert Patrick's head (though reputedly handsome, he had a prominent bump on top showing deceit and avarice). Story after story. Woodson had at least five full front pages from the *New York World* (the Hearst paper in NY) for five days in a row, every story on page one, and most on page two dealt with an aspect of the Rice murder and the trial. When the news came out that attor-

ney Patrick was going to marry his landlady during the trial (probably so she would not have to testify against him), the five-word headline in the newspaper took two lines of four-inch high type to state (in bright red ink): **PATRICK TO WED MRS. FRANCIS.** Not "*Defendant in Murder Trial Marries Key Witness!*" There was no need to identify the stars of the drama that was unfolding in the New York court. Everyone knew about it and followed it religiously for months. And not just in New York and Texas. There were clippings in German and French and Italian and languages whose characters I could not read from newspapers around the world. The more I read, the more excited I got.

By the fall of 1984, I was ready to start writing the play and by the end of October the first draft of the play was well on the way to being completed. As the structure of the play emerged, I realized it had become a combination of *Julius Caesar* (without the magnificent language) and *Columbo* (with the first five minutes stretched to half the play). Rice was, of course, Caesar, putting his trust unwisely in Charles Jones (Brutus), whom he thought was his loyal friend. Jones let his senses be warped by Patrick (Cassius), who convinced him to participate in the murder of the old man. It all would have gone as planned but for the subtle brilliance of Captain Baker (Antony), who saw through Patrick's scheme and ultimately undermined it. As in a *Columbo* episode, the audience sees the murder committed and knows more about what happened than the detective (Baker), so we watch him figure it out, seem to be beguiled by



Mrs. Francis

the guest star (Patrick), but snare him in the end. There was no conscious effort to structure the play along the lines of great literature or classic idiot box; it just happened and these are observations as to why the story worked as well as it did. If you are going to copy something, though, it might as well be Shakespeare or what is surely the longest running series in the history of television (Peter Falk is still at it as far as I know).

Another thing I noticed as writing progressed was how depressing the story was becoming. Two younger men poisoning and killing the old millionaire. Mr. Rice getting sicker and sicker as the poison took effect. I had tried to throw in as much ironic humor and anachronistic parallels (e.g., Mr. Rice philosophizing on the efficient design of the banana and on the tiny factories of the banana seeds that were each capable of "manufacturing a whole tree full of bananas and thousands more of the little factories.") Dr. Mark Udden, Becky's medical researcher husband, later pointed out, good-naturedly, that I had gone a bit far with Rice conjuring up the equivalent to DNA, but I could tell he appreciated it, nonetheless.

In spite of the humor, the overall progress of the play was still a bit grim, and I realized another potential problem: scene changes. In the past audiences had been content to wait two or three minutes in the dark or semi-dark while backstage workers changed the furniture between scenes and set the props. Most modern plays found ways to get around this. One of the most impressive things about a production I saw of *Les Miserables* was how the action and music never stopped for scene changes. The set rotated on a huge turntable, set pieces came on and off on motorized tracks, and the actors kept singing. Fat chance of having rotating sets at Main Street or wherever my play was going to be performed, but there had to be something I could do to keep it mov-

RICE HISTORICAL SOCIETY WINS BOOK AWARD

The first publication of the Rice Historical Society, *Edgar Odell Lovett and the Creation of Rice University*, with an introduction by Dr. John Boles won the "Best of Category" graphic excellence award from the Printing and Imaging Association of Texas and Oklahoma, beating out 1,400 other entries. The category was Books, Paper Cover with Perfect Binding.

ing, and there were, unfortunately, a lot of scenes. I hit on two devices to accomplish this and add a bit of much-needed levity as well: the use of Captain Baker as a narrator and creating a Rice Glee Club to change the sets while singing amusing, though somehow relevant, songs.

While working on that same Rice slide show back in 1977, I had been looking for some "Rice music" to use in the soundtrack and came across, in the music collection at Fondren, a red record which had been recorded in the fifties by the Rice Glee Club. It was unusual both because it was red instead of black, but also because it had the same six or eight songs on both sides. Most of these were old standards; there were a couple of school songs I knew ("*Rice's Honor*", "*Fight for Rice*") and there was a great Rice song I had never heard before, "*Sammy, Sammy, O!*" I learned later this was parody of Yale's "*Eli, Eli, O!*" but the first time I listened to it I fell in love with it. Each verse was about a year in college: "As freshmen first we came to Rice...Examinations were not nice," etc. The last verse was about graduation and greatly slowed down: "The saddest tale we have to tell...Is when we bid old Rice farewell." I had dubbed this song onto tape and used it for the theme of the slide show, sprinkling verses one at a time throughout and ending with shots of commencement. It had worked quite well, and when I thought of songs for the Glee Club in my play, it was the first one to come to mind, along with the school songs on the record. The last verse of "*Sammy, Sammy, O!*" would be used just before the murder scene.

I needed more songs to cover more scene changes, and though I had never written a song before (or ever learned

to read music, for that matter), I started singing to myself whenever I was driving around. Once I hit on an idea, I would sing it over and over out loud, adding verses and memorizing the tune. When I arrived where I was headed, I would write down the words and hope I had remembered the tune long enough to sing it into a tape recorder. This is how "*Good Morning, Mr. Jones*," "*The Tombs, Tombs, Tombs, Tombs*" and "*The Hurricane of 1900 (Blew my Dinghy Away)*" were born. The latter came from the spirit of an old song of the twenties or thirties - "*Row, Row, Row.*" I related how the



singer's love life was based on his rowboat and how his girlfriend dumped him when it was destroyed by the hurricane. It ended with a horrible rhyme that never failed to bring the house down: "My baby said, 'Honey, I'll tell you one thing. You ain't worth much without your dinghy.'"

This song started the second act. It provided much-needed comic relief for the murder that was to follow, and it related to the story. We were just about to find out that the Hurricane of 1900 had destroyed a factory owned by Mr. Rice, and he would have to spend all of his available cash

(\$250,000) to rebuild. To avoid losing the money, Patrick induced Jones to go ahead and murder the man he had been slowly poisoning.

At this point I did not have a title for the play, though I used "*The Rice Murder*" or "*The Murder of Mr. Rice*" as working titles. An idea that intrigued me, but rejected immediately, was to call it "*Ill Will*." The triple pun (wishing someone dead, a forged legal document, and a sick old man named William) was tempting, but...no, not for a play that was trying to be fairly serious. The title did show up in a little ditty for the Glee Club to sing as a round: "Poor ill Will, you lie so still. They're taking your loot and your life to boot, and all your plans for the Institute, and it's just not a thrill for poor ill Will."

My wife and classmate, Carolyn (Morris, Brown '69) came up with the "*The Trust*" for a title. This also had multi-levels of meaning (Rice unwisely trusted Jones, Jones unwisely trusted Patrick, Rice wisely trusted Baker [who became the chairman of the board of trustees], and Patrick cooked up a "Secret Trust," which he said Rice had set up to give Patrick all his money and the discretion to spend it for the "secret" purposes about which Rice had supposedly instructed him). "*The Trust*" was a more dignified title than "*Ill Will*" and it stuck.

When I had completed the first draft in the spring of 1985, I gave it to a few friends to read. Feedback on the play was positive and very gratifying. I tinkered with it a bit more, printed it out on heavy stock, bound it, and gave it to one of America's outstanding regional theaters - the Alley.

Over a year after I had submitted my play to the Alley, they finally

told me it was not good enough and mailed it back. I will never know whether this was a fortunate or unfortunate turn of events. If it had been a tremendous hit at the Alley, it might have gone on to Broadway. If it had been so-so, they certainly would never have revived it year after year.

At any rate, I had my play back and I had access to a theater where a production could be mounted – Becky Udden’s Main Street Theater, which of course was no longer on Main Street, but it was not a chapel/ cafeteria either. It was an intimate (max audience: 100 with folding chairs added) space with an incredibly fortuitous location – within spitting distance of Rice University and within five or ten miles of the homes of maybe half the alumni who had ever attended Rice.

We had a reading of the play to a select group of invitees. If memory serves (and these days it often does not), Sandy Havens read Mr. Rice, Bill Blanton read Captain Baker, Joe Ponessa read Charlie Jones, Charles Tanner read Albert Patrick, Roy Hollingsworth read the stage directions, and someone, probably Becky Udden, read the women’s roles. A student from the Shepherd School sang the songs.

I do not recall the audience leaping to their feet, applauding wildly and screaming “Author! Author!” Though, as they were mostly friends, I am sure their response was kind. I do remember Fr. John Worrell (who had played Julius Caesar in the first play I had ever directed [Shaw’s, not Shakespeare’s] at Wiess College) coming up to me afterward with his great, reassuring smile and saying an encouraging word or two. It was a satisfying and informative evening, and I got a glimmer of why the Alley had passed on it. The play needed work. I started tinkering some more.

One thing I knew early on was that we would be bringing a character to life that nobody knew much about, but everyone wanted to see: William

Marsh Rice. Quite a lot about his character was discussed in the Muir book: his frugality, wanting to eat healthy foods, daily exercises, etc. It also told about his sloppy habit of leaving his clothes on the furniture or floor. This was a man of great business acumen, who arrived in Houston with very little, got a job helping in a general store, and saved his money until he could buy that store. By the 1890s he had become the wealthiest man in Houston. Finding the right actor to give life to this extraordinary character would be critical to the play’s success, and I had been worrying about this for some time.

A few years earlier I had seen Harold Suggs in a play at Theater Suburbia - *That Championship Season* - the story or a reunion of a high school basketball team and the coach who had led them to victory. Harold had played the coach and had done an excellent job of projecting his lovable/ irascible personality. A year or two later I met him in person. I told him about the play I was working on and that I thought he might be the person to play Mr. Rice. Harold was kind and said he would be quite interested

in the role, when and if.

By the time the writing had been completed and Main Street was ready to produce the play, Harold was working at the Alley and had joined Actors’ Equity. With the size of its house and the budgets of its shows, Main Street, though it paid its actors, had never had the budget to afford Equity scale.

Sandy Havens had agreed to direct the first production of *The Trust*, a favor for which I remain ever grateful. Auditions were held early one evening, and quite a fine group of actors turned out. We were able to cast Charles Tanner as Albert Patrick, Mo Tuttle as Charlie Jones, and Claire Hart as Mr. Rice’s banana-prescribing friend, Maria VanAlstynne. Only one or two men within thirty years of Rice’s age auditioned, and no one conveyed the tough charm of Harold Suggs.

From my directing days at Wiess Tabletop, I had learned first and foremost that nothing a director can do to affect the success of a production can compare to having a great script and terrific actors. Our script was untried and shaky at best. We had sure better

Continued on page 12



Sandy Havens, Becky Udden and Doug Killgore with a portrait of William Marsh Rice



The Houston *Chronicle's* Zest Cover Story about *The Trust*.

have a good cast. I called Harold and got him to meet with Sandy to read for Rice. Sandy reported he was satisfied; then I went to talk to Becky Udden.

An Equity actor was out of the question. Even if we could get a special contract from Actors' Equity to allow one Equity actor to be employed in an otherwise non-equity cast, he would have to be paid something on the order of \$3,000 for the four-week run. This was roughly twice the salaries of all the other actors put together, and the money absolutely had to be guaranteed from the beginning. We could not plan on paying it out of gate receipts, especially with an unknown play. She suggested using makeup and a wig to age one of Main Street's regular character actors (who was in his forties at the time) to play the role. I admired the actor greatly, but I did not trust makeup to be convincing on the tiny stage, and I had the image of Harold Suggs etched in my mind.

In fact, having Harold seemed so important, I offered to guarantee to pay his salary if box office receipts

were not sufficient to cover it. Becky knew I was good for it, but she did not want to put me in such peril. We talked for a while, and suddenly she came up with an idea that probably did more for the success of the play than anything else. We would have a benefit opening night to raise the money to pay Harold. The tickets could be fifty to a hundred dollars or more and if we sold even half the house we would have a great chance of covering the three thousand or at least minimizing my liability.

I talked with Dan Wise, a friend and business acquaintance, who had earlier worked in the Rice Development Office. He recommended we draft a letter to Rice Alumni and get it signed by four or five of the more important members of the Rice community. We could talk about Harold Suggs and how important he would be to the success of the play, and even sow a few seeds about the future possibility of making the play into a movie.

Dan drafted a great letter and somehow came up with a terrific mailing list of prominent Rice alumni.

One of the signers of the letter was Malcolm Lovett, son of Rice's first president. Mr. Lovett had gone to work for Captain Baker right out of law school (in the 1920s) and still kept an office at Baker Botts over sixty years later. I had wanted to talk to him about my story for a long time and had another reason to speak to him as well.

I had been intrigued by the fact that Captain Baker told the story of Mr. Rice's murder at the Rice Commencement in 1931. I had seen still photos of the address and thought, "Wouldn't it be great if we had a film clip from that speech to start off the play?" As a filmmaker myself, I knew that it would not be too hard to fake it. I had shot some black and white 16mm film at a recent graduation and had found a 10-second film clip showing a 1920s car going into the main gates with Lovett Hall clearly in the background. With a few professors in caps and gowns filling in the background, actors playing Dr. Lovett and old Captain Baker, I thought I could put together an authentic-looking "archival" film of the 1931 commencement. And who would be better to portray President Lovett than his son?

I phoned Malcolm Lovett, told him about the play and asked to interview him about Captain Baker. He not only agreed, he invited me to the Houston Club for lunch. It was a meeting I will never forget. I found out many details about Captain Baker and the early days of Rice Institute, and Mr. Lovett enthusiastically agreed to sign our letter and allowed me to talk him into portraying his father in our film.

A week or so later we shot the commencement address. Sandy Havens had gathered Sid Burrus, Ira Gruber, and three or four other Rice professors in their academic regalia to fill in the background, and I had secured Professor J. D. Thomas to play the

role of Captain Baker. I had met Joe Thomas when I was a student at Rice and knew he had portrayed Mark Twain on the stage. What I did not learn until the day of the shooting was that as a brand new member of the English faculty, he had been on the platform behind the real Captain Baker when he had made the commencement address fifty-odd years earlier.

At the shoot, Craig Loper ran camera, I took sound, and my wife Carolyn assisted with the slate. During editing we added scratches to the film and soundtrack. We punched a hole in the wall at Main Street Theater so the projector could project from another room, and we incorporated the “vintage” footage into the play. In the review in the *Chronicle*, the critic mentioned that we had found some wonderful footage of the real 1931 commencement to start off with, overlooking the fact that Professor Thomas and Mr. Lovett were listed in the program as part of the cast for that (and every subsequent) production of *The Trust*.

Rehearsals of the play, under Mr. Havens’ capable direction, were coming along well. The Glee Club, or “Glee Guys” as they came to be called, had a great sound and brought excitement and quite a bit of levity to the show. The many scene changes, which were a pain to pull off, got smoother and smoother. The special props (turn-of-the-century telephones, slide projectors to show the forged signatures from the wills, Victorian furniture, piano, bed, etc.) all were being found or built. Lovely costumes, some of them rented from out of state, were coming together, and though rather long (at 2.5 hours plus), the play was beginning to take form.

Response to our Rice alumni letter was terrific. Opening night sold out right away and tickets for the rest of the run started selling, too. Over eight thousand dollars had been raised

Continued on page 14



Captain James A. Baker speaking at the 1931 Commencement. Joe Thomas was among the faculty members on the platform.



Malcolm Lovett, at the podium, portraying his father, Edgar Odell Lovett; Joe Thomas, front row, third from left, portraying Captain Baker



Maurice Tuttle as Charlie Jones and Harold Suggs as William Marsh Rice

before the curtain went up. My guarantee funds being safe, I went out and bought my first tuxedo and Carolyn bought a ravishing, low-cut black dress.



Doug Killgore with James Baker, III.

Opening night was a mixture of nervousness and elation. James Baker III (Captain Baker's grandson, who

was then Secretary of the Treasury) autographed dollar bills at intermission, lots of people shook my hand, and the play went much better than we had any right to expect.

Despite mixed reviews (it was called a "clunky melodrama by The Houston Post, which subsequently went out of business, though this may be a coincidence), word of mouth got out quickly and by the next afternoon, one-third of the planned run was sold out. The rest of the performances soon sold out, and the run was extended twice. When the next play that was scheduled to open at Main Street got tired of waiting in the wings, space was found for ten performances at

Chocolate Bayou Theater on San Felipe. At length, *The Trust* closed, having well established itself as the all time box office success at Main Street Theater, during late summer, which is traditionally the slowest part of the year.

During the ensuing months, enough people called the theater wanting to see *The Trust* that it was brought back the following summer. And the next. In the sixteen years since it opened, *The Trust* has been produced nine times by Main Street, the most recent production having been in the summer of 2000.

It may be a clunky melodrama, but it sure found an audience.

Coming soon: *Making the Movie.*