

The Cornerstone

SPRING 2002

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE RICE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

VOL. 7, NO. 1

“WHAT’S A NICE TEXAS UNIVERSITY DOING IN A PLACE LIKE THIS?”

Alan Bath – Ph.D. 1995

Yankee Stadium – home of baseball legend, of Ruth, Gehrig, and DiMaggio – owned by Rice. Fagetaboudid! But, it’s true. In 1962 John William Cox, Rice Class of 1927, gave the university all of the stock in the corporation that owned Yankee stadium.

The transaction was far from simple. In 1945 Dell Webb, Dan Topping, and Larry McPhail purchased the Yankee ball club and the stadium from the estate of beer baron Jacob Ruppert. Topping and Webb subsequently bought out McPhail, and eight years later, sold the stadium and its land to Arnold M. Johnson of Chicago. Johnson had previous business ties to both Topping and Webb. He and Topping were both directors of the Automatic Canteen Company, and Webb a substantial stockholder. Johnson promptly sold the land on which Yankee Stadium stood to the Catholic fraternal organization, The Knights of Columbus, then leased it back and sub-leased the land and the stadium to the Yankees organization.

“The net financial effect,” comments Neil J. Sullivan, author of *The Diamond in the Bronx*,¹ “was that



Yankee Stadium at the time Rice held it.

Johnson raised the money to buy Yankee stadium and related properties through an elaborate series of paper transactions that risked none of his own money.”

Rice benefactor Cox purchased the stadium from Johnson in 1955. Johnson had acquired the Philadelphia Athletics the previous year and was planning to move the team to Kansas City. Under the rules then governing baseball he could not hold an interest in two clubs at the same time. The Yankee franchise previously had been sold to



*John William Cox
Washington, D.C.
Candidate for B.A. Degree*

the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), so this left only the stadium to be disposed of. Mr. Cox’s gift to Rice was the primary lease, which with renewal options could have been extended until well into the 21st century.

At the time of his gift, John Cox said, “Realizing as I do that the future of our nation, and indeed of mankind, depends on the continued healthy growth of the educational process and of the institutions devoted to

its advancement, I have decided to commit a part of my resources to this high cause. I will always be grateful to Rice for the educational opportunities it afforded me.” Mr. Cox was born in Stephenville, Texas, attended high school in Kansas City, Missouri, and, following his graduation from Rice, received a law degree from George Washington University in Washington, D.C. During his career in business Mr. Cox was President and Director of the General Package Corporation and President of the Automatic Canteen Company of America.

The name Yankee Stadium will forever be associated with baseball – “the House that Ruth Built” – how-

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The Rice Historical Society

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

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*The Rice Historical Society welcomes letters
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cannot be returned and will be donated to
our archival collection.*

NEWSLETTER DESIGNED
BY TOMORROW'S KEY

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*Dickson House
Drawing Room*

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PANDEMONIUM

EVIL'S EFFECTS ON ARCHI-ARTS IN 1961

Roy Nolen* – BSArch. 1961 (Wiess)

Events surrounding the 40th annual Archi-Arts ball in 1961 terminated a long-standing student fund-raising activity that paid for Rice University's most prestigious student award in architecture. The primary cause was the reaction of a student from another college to costumes worn at Archi-Arts by a Rice junior (a chemistry major) and her date from S.M.U. The penalty was thought by some to be inspired by the ambition of a staff member who wanted a fund-raising list. The pretext for the penalty was non-compliance with little-known and previously unenforced administrative rules.

Until 1961 student members of the Rice Architectural Society raised the money to pay for the William Ward Watkin Traveling Fellowship in Architecture. Proceeds from the annual Archi-Arts ball provided the funds, and by 1961 the annual stipend had become \$2,500. As a point of comparison, full room rent and board (19 meals a week) in the colleges for 1960-61 cost \$945 for the academic year. The Fellowship was awarded annually by the faculty to a graduating fifth-year architecture student on the basis of a design competition. (The basic architecture curriculum in those years covered five years, leading to the Bachelor of Science in Architecture degree.)

Then came *Pandemonium*, as Archi-Arts of 1961 was named. In its aftermath, the Architectural Society was barred from raising funds for the Fellowship. Student officers of the Society were compelled to turn over to a member of Rice's administrative staff the records of years of Archi-Arts fund-raising work, and the Society was prohibited from sponsoring any social event, including Archi-Arts, for

the next academic year. Rice thereafter assumed financial responsibility for funding the William Ward Watkin Traveling Fellowship.

Two frameworks of the time are relevant – student social life and Rice's fund-raising activity. After World War II and into the early 1960's social life for Rice students fell into patterns that were traditional for the times, without much variation from year to year. The ratio of four men to each woman in the undergraduate population of about 2,000 students was a limiting factor. Until the newly created colleges (initiated in 1957) developed their own social traditions, dating and partying for most students originated with class activities, the several women's "literary" societies, some special interest clubs, and a few campus-wide dances.

In the last category, Homecoming in November, Archi-Arts in February, and Rondelet in May attracted the largest crowds. Club dues and proceeds from ticket sales covered the expenses of almost every such event. Archi-Arts was the only campus-wide student social activity that was designed to raise a significant amount of money over and above the expenses of the occasion.

Fund-raising by Rice in the 1950s and into the 1960s was thought by many to be virtually non-existent. The 1961 *Campanile* pictured Howard Alexander Thompson as Development Assistant. He was a retired military officer and had been in his Rice role at least since 1956. No other development or fund-raising staff existed. There was no Annual Fund as such, and alumni were not solicited systematically for contributions. Alumni contact information was incomplete. In addition to an occasional signifi-

cant gift, the endowment income on which Rice traditionally relied was supplemented in a relatively small way by the Rice Associates and a few individuals and philanthropies – without much effort other than gentle cultivation. In the 1960-61 academic year, times were changing. President William V. Houston had retired over the summer; the effort to hire a new president was under way. The Rice charter soon would be changed to permit tuition charges. Financial support increasingly would be sought from alumni and other donors.

THE TRADITION OF ARCHI-ARTS

By the mid-1950's Archi-Arts followed a familiar pattern each year. The new Sylvan Beach Pavilion, a circular, glass-walled modern-design building overlooking Galveston Bay near La Porte, became a favored venue. A large band provided music for dancing. Most of those attending wore costumes; otherwise, formal wear was expected. A theme selected by members of the Architectural Society determined the decorations and the nature of the publicity, which was designed to encourage imaginative attire for those attending. Attendance customarily ranged between 400 and 500 people, and, while most of those were students, the crowd also typically included faculty, alumni, parents, and supporters of architecture and the arts in Houston. These last three groups were the source of the contributions that made the event a financial success and enabled the Architectural Society to fund the William Ward Watkin Traveling Fellowship.

People who now are accustomed to computer-generated solicitations of support for a variety of galas, dinners, and parties may not understand the

Continued on page 4

significance in the 1950s of a student-maintained reliable target list of 300 or more names kept on 3x5 cards with notations of affiliations and giving history. There was little professional fund-raising activity in Houston at the time. Charity benefits were rare. As the years passed, the Architectural Society had developed a core group of dependable contributors to Archi-Arts as a part of a sizeable mailing list to which invitations to Archi-Arts annually were sent beyond the campus. The Architectural Society kept track of Rice architecture alumni and invited them to support and attend Archi-Arts.

The membership rosters of the Houston chapter of the American Institute of Architects, the Engineering Society of Houston, the Contemporary Arts Association of Houston, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, were made available by Rice architecture department faculty to the student list-keepers. Parents of current architecture students were added to the list each year. Rice's president and other senior members of the Rice administration, as well as the trustees and board of governors, were invited to contribute and to attend.

The Architectural Society mailed invitations to purchase tickets or provide patron support to the list of potential donors several weeks in advance of Archi-Arts, and architecture students followed up with telephone calls to encourage past patrons to continue their support. There was a scale of patron ticket prices, all more than the price for students, offering preferred seating and other benefits. The upper echelons of support for Archi-Arts in 1959, 1960, and 1961 included Rice's president and his wife, Dr. and Mrs. William V. Houston, and such other prominent Houstonians and Rice benefactors as Herbert Allen, Mr. and Mrs. James A. Baker, Jr., I. S. Brochstein, Mr. and Mrs. George R. Brown, George S. Cohen, Nina Cullinan, Mrs. Libbie

Rice Farish, Mrs. Walter W. Fondren, Gen. and Mrs. Maurice Hirsch, Gov. and Mrs. W. P. Hobby, Mr. and Mrs. Wendel Ley, H. Malcolm Lovett, Mr. and Mrs. Hugo Neuhaus, Jr., J. Newton Rayzor, Simon Sakowitz, and Mr. and Mrs. Wesley West. Year after year these generous patrons were listed in the program distributed at the event itself.

A pageant in keeping with the theme was a central feature of Archi-Arts. Early in the school year members of the Architectural Society selected a small group of women, usually eight, from the junior and senior classes as Archi-Arts honorees. Criteria for selection were unstated, but the group usually included one or two accomplished dancers and often included some of those elected by student vote to the Homecoming or Rondelet courts. Each honoree was expected to bear the expense of a costume individually designed for her by a male architecture student and then to dance, march, walk, pantomime or otherwise move around as her talents permitted, accompanied by appropriate music. The honorees' costumes ranged in complexity from a simple sequined sarong to an elaborate set of five-foot flower petals pivoting from a harness around the hips. A Houston dressmaker remembered as "Mrs. Plank," known for her debutante gowns, frequently was engaged by honorees to make reality out of concepts proposed by the inexperienced costume designers.

A committee of faculty and friends designated one of the honorees as the queen at each year's Archi-Arts based on the combination of costume and performance. Pictures of the honorees in their costumes appeared each year in the *Campanile*. The committee also awarded prizes to guests wearing costumes best reflecting the theme.

Archi-Arts decorations were elaborate. Creative urges of architecture students temporarily separated from the real world of the drafting table found

new outlets using lumber, chicken-wire, paper, cardboard, fabric, and paint. For three or four weeks prior to the event, the architecture labs became theater workshops.

Xanadu, site of Kublai Kahn's stately pleasure-dome described in Coleridge's poem, was the Archi-Arts theme in February 1957. Decorations reflected Far-Eastern motifs, and the eight honorees wore costumes in the same spirit. They portrayed, respectively, Deceit, Dreams, Frivolity, Lust, Melancholy, Pride, Romance, and Violence.

In February 1958 the *Incubus* theme inspired dream-like and surrealist décor and costumes. A number of guests wore specially built masks; others wore sleepwear. A member of the faculty wearing a beast-like skull mask was given the award for best guest costume. Representing Death, Egotism, Fantasy, Fear, Premonition, Recurrence, Sex, and Sorrow, the eight honorees wore costumes that, taking advantage of surrealist ideas, were more structurally challenging than those in the prior year's pageant. That year an architecture student, as often happened, separated from the main construction effort to construct a personal costume.

The *Incubus* theme led sophomore David. F. Thorman (BA 1960, BArch 1965) to construct a five-foot papier-mâché eyeball, which he and his date wore suspended from a shoulder-harness as she looked out through the iris. The morning after Archi-Arts the eyeball was discovered covering the statue of William Marsh Rice in the Academic Quadrangle. Orders quickly issued from Lovett Hall to remove the item from the resting place of the founder's remains, but no disciplinary inquiries were made. A small group of architecture students generally were thought to be the eyeball's depositors.

The 1959 Archi-Arts title was *Eos*, suggesting creative and elemental forces as a theme. Forsaking Sylvan



Betsy Graham – Addiction
Pandemonium

Beach Pavilion for a venue that was more convenient to the campus, the student architects used light, shadows, and paint to disguise the interiors of the parking garage of the Shamrock Hilton Hotel. The committee of architect, faculty wife, and alumna selected a group of eight (mostly architecture students) dressed in a specially-made, elaborate caterpillar construction for the costume prize. The nine honorees were costumed as Air, Chaos, Crystals, Destruction, Energy, Fire, Life, Mystery, and Rain. For the first time, an architecture student, Carolyn Satterwhite Brewer (BA 1958) was an honoree, portraying Mystery.

Archi-Arts returned to Sylvan Beach Pavilion in 1960 for *Mata-Mua*. Verse written for the program said, "In the time that Gods lived on the land, /Mighty Ublat Kiva stopped to rest. /He chose an island, Mata-Mua; /God-land now, with gaiety and joy. /Now, Mata-Mua held the secret –/The knowledge of ways to dream. /It became the home of vision, /Pleasure-place beyond compare." The Polynesian theme inspired a significant number of missionary, ship-wreck, and beach-bum costumes.

In a break with custom, the honorees and their costume designers were not assigned specific concept roles, but all their costumes fell within a framework of sea, beach, pleasure, and nature. A ten-foot head resembling an Easter Island figure had been made out of wood, wire, paper and paint as a prominent feature of the decorations. For a number of weeks after Archi-Arts the large head rested in the lobby of Anderson Hall. Just prior to exams the head appeared in the chapel of the Rice Memorial Center covering the marble drum-like altar as the apparent focus for worship. Again, there were no disciplinary repercussions, although it was rumored that only architecture students could have gained access to the locked chapel and accomplished the feat.

ARCHI-ARTS 1961

Before the end of the academic year in May, 1960, the Architectural Society fixed the date and tentatively selected the theme for the 40th Archi-Arts, to be held Saturday, February 18, 1961. Advance planning was essential to ensure the inclusion of the Archi-Arts date in the printed calendar of Rice events sold by the Owen Wister Literary Society in September and to the development of ideas during the summer for a pageant and for decorations. Milton's *Paradise Lost* provided a line for the theme: "Pandemonium - capital seat of Satan and his peers." Eight manifestations of evil were designated for representation by the honorees and their costume designers: Addiction, Affectation, Bigotry, Deception, Hedonism, Negligence, Nihilism, and Sophistry. The honorees were formally announced with photographs and an article describing the theme and purposes of Archi-Arts in the *Houston Post* and the *Houston Chronicle* following similar publicity in *The Rice Thresher*.

As an indication of the recognized high quality of the event, *Life Magazine* tentatively committed to



Barry M. Moore as Lucifer
Honorary honoree and master of ceremonies

feature photographs from the 1961 Archi-Arts as its "Life Goes to a Party" section in March, but notified the Architectural Society the week of the event that another party had arisen to take precedence. That contact had been made by the Architectural Society's officers, with the knowledge of Rice's Acting President, Cary Croncis, through Oveta Culp Hobby, publisher of *The Houston Post* and a strong supporter of Rice.

The City Auditorium, soon to be demolished to make way for Jones Hall, had been selected as an appropriately decaying venue. Guests were encouraged in publicity and by word of mouth to wear costumes in keeping with the theme of evil. Jo Waddell Lawson (BA 1961, BSArch 1962), vice president of the Architectural Society, according to the *Thresher*, urged everyone to wear an interesting costume in keeping with the general theme. In a departure from recent tradition, in part to provide the first opportunity for a woman architecture student to design a pageant costume, junior class member Barry M. Moore (BA 1962) was asked to join the pageant as a master of ceremonies and "honorary honoree." He did so, elaborately costumed as Lucifer, a fallen angel with misshapened wings. As usual, honorees' costumes varied

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from complicated constructions to subtle simplicity.

The committee of costume judges awarded the first prize for guest's costume to junior Linda Day (BA 1962, *summa cum laude*, MA 1965) and her date from S.M.U. The couple were costumed as a pregnant nun and a priest. Applause greeted the selection. The judges were a Fondren Library staff member who was the wife of a member of Rice's art history faculty, the Episcopal chaplain at Autry House, and a Houston architect who was a Rice alumnus. Mary Lou Sauer Henry (BA 1960, BSArch 1961), the secretary of the Architectural Society that year, told one member of the committee, as she overheard their deliberations, that she thought such a selection was a bad idea.

THE REACTION

Barry Moore's date was a younger, but long-time, acquaintance who attended another college. A Roman Catholic, she was a member of a prominent Houston family with close ties to the hierarchy of the Galveston-Houston Diocese. Left largely to herself before and during the pageant, while Moore was busy dressing as Lucifer and then playing the role, she apparently became uncomfortable around some of the costumes worn by guests entering into the spirit of the evening. As events later demonstrated, the award of the prize by the judges to the pregnant nun and priest distressed the young woman. Her reaction was not manifested to Moore or to the architecture students they were sitting with after the pageant, but she did not accompany him to a midnight breakfast for the honorees hosted by Architectural Society President Robert F. Mattox (BA 1960, BSArch 1961).

It was later learned that on reaching home late that Saturday night (or early that Sunday morning) Moore's date told her mother of her distress over the costume award and the applause that greeted it. The mother, according to the more or less reli-

able stories that circulated, called the Roman Catholic bishop for the Galveston-Houston Diocese, who, according to stories, communicated to certain parish priests the view that the matter should be commented on unfavorably from the pulpit that day.

The prominent Houston family of which Moore's date was a part was not closely identified with Rice, although members of the family were friendly with members of the Rice governing bodies, including some who also were Roman Catholic.

THE UNIVERSITY'S ACTIONS

Early the week after the event, Mattox, the Architectural Society President, was contacted by the office of James R. Sims, the Adviser to Men, who generally, in concert with the Adviser to Women, had oversight of student activities. During the days that followed Mattox attended meetings with Sims, Acting President Croneis, and Thompson, the Development Assistant. It was acknowledged that, in producing Archi-Arts, the Architectural Society and Rice's architecture students had comported themselves appropriately and consistently with past practices. No misbehavior was known to have occurred during the event. Wide publicity had been given to the Archi-Arts theme, which in substance did not vary that much from prior years. A responsible group of mature adults had awarded the prize to the costumes in question. No disciplinary infraction could be assigned to a guest's choice of costume.

Linda Day was not aware of the controversy that had developed over her costume until she was called by someone in the Rice administration with instructions that she must not talk to the press about it. A letter expressing disapproval of the prize-winning costume appeared in the *Thresher*. A few students told Day they were offended by her costume although they had not seen it. A senior member of the architecture

faculty sent word to members of the Architectural Society through Henry, the Architectural Society secretary, that they should not talk to the press about the matter. There apparently was considerable pressure for disciplinary action against someone or some group over the costume.

Several days after Archi-Arts, a spokesman for Acting President Croneis issued a statement, as reported in one of the Houston newspapers: "The Archi-Arts ball is a student affair conducted by the students' architecture society and is an annual off-campus function. The judges were picked by the officers of the society and were adults not directly connected with the student organization and were not members of the Rice faculty. The university, however, sincerely regrets the poor taste on the part of the students for appearing in such objectionable regalia and deplores the bad judgment shown by the judges." But apparently none of that could be the basis of disciplinary action.

The Rev. Lane Denson, the Episcopal priest who was one of the judges, defended the choice of costume in the Houston newspaper article on the ground that the theme of the event was evil and that the intent of the costumes in question was to represent evil. Mrs. E. R. DeZurko, the wife of the art historian on the judging committee, was quoted as saying the costumes were in good taste and in keeping with the theme. The third member of the committee, Aley Newton (BSArch 1950), a practicing architect, was quoted as saying that he had considered the costumes on the basis of evil, but he thought the students' costumes were in poor taste.

During Mattox's meetings, surprise at the extensive fund-raising activity associated with Archi-Arts had been expressed, perhaps by Thompson, despite the annual campus and community publicity given the purposes of Archi-Arts and the broad mailing to potential patrons, including

members of the Rice administration. A former member of the administration who was at the time a Resident Associate in Wiess College told a member of the Architectural Society living in Wiess that he had heard that comments within the administration noted that the architecture students' fund-raising resources surpassed those of Thompson's office. A previously unenforced rule was revealed: the Architectural Society had failed to obtain advance approval from the Office of the Adviser to Men for its long-standing annual fund-raising activity. A punishment was designed to fit that offense. Mattox was required to turn over to Thompson all copies of all Architectural Society fund-raising records, including the carefully maintained lists of donors and history of their gifts. The Architectural Society was prohibited from further fund-raising activity, in exchange for which the University would assume responsibility for providing funds for the William Ward Watkin Traveling Fellowship every year.

Another formality had not been observed: chaperones for the event had not been formally listed with the Office of the Adviser to Men before

the event. The customary attendance at the event by virtually all the members of the architecture faculty and by many alumni and parents was deemed insufficient compliance. Although Archi-Arts later could be resumed as a purely social occasion, the Architectural Society could not sponsor that or any other social event until the end of the following academic year.

According to a story in the *Thresher*, apparently quoting an official statement, the reasons given for the penalties rested in part in the occurrence of a "well-publicized incident during the dance which offended good taste."

THE NEXT YEAR

In the spring of 1962 an unofficial costume gala was organized by some of the architecture students, who designed costumes for eight honorees from the senior class, all around the toga-related theme *Hilaria*. Archi-Arts resumed in 1963, but the fund-raising goals that had so motivated members of the Architectural Society were gone. By the end of the 1960s the appeal of elaborate costume parties had waned. The customarily elaborate nature of Archi-Arts perhaps would not have survived the cultural shifts of

the 1960s. On the other hand, there could not have been a more effective way to end the traditions of Archi-Arts, if that is what the complaining parties wanted, than to remove the fund-raising goal that had become its reason for being.

During the next academic year Howard Alexander Thompson's title was elevated, and he became Rice's first Director of Development.

*The author, as a member of the Rice Architectural Society and architecture student, participated in the planning and implementation of the 1961 Archi-Arts and worked on Archi-Arts in the four immediately preceding years. The contents of this article represent his best recollection of events, stimulated and supported in large part by yearbooks, programs, and newspaper clippings. Recognizing that the passage of time could have reformed his memory, he referred this article in draft form for review by Linda Day (BA 1962, *summa cum laude*, MA 1965); Nancy Moore Eubank (BA 1955 and Adviser to Women 1959-1961); Mary Lou Sauer Henry (BA 1960, BSArch 1961 and former secretary of the Architectural Society); Robert F. Mattox (BA 1960, BSArch 1961 and former president of the Architectural Society); Barry M. Moore (BA 1962); and Phillip S. Morris, (BA 1960, BSArch 1961 and former president of the Architectural Society). Even with their helpful observations and suggestions concerning this article, for which he is grateful, the author alone bears responsibility for the contents.

WHAT'S A NICE TEXAS UNIVERSITY...

Continued from page 1

ever it was much more than that. Built in 1923, it seated 67,000 spectators, and could be reconfigured to hold upwards of 100,000 for special occasions. Twenty-nine world championship boxing events were held in the stadium. In 1956 it became home to the New York Giants football team, and in 1965 an anticipated crowd of 90,000 gathered to hear Pope Paul VI say mass.

By 1970, despite earlier attempts at repair and refurbishing, it became evident that Yankee Stadium would have to be replaced. A few years earlier the City of New York had agreed to

finance a stadium for the New York Mets baseball team. Michael Burke, president of the New York Yankees, convinced the team's owners, CBS, to approach New York mayor John Lindsay with a similar proposal. After considerable discussion and infighting, including threats to move the Yankees out of New York to New Jersey, the town fathers agreed.² The City bought the old stadium and property from Rice and the Knights of Columbus, allocating \$25 million for the purchase and rebuilding.

At the time of his gift, Mr. Cox estimated its worth to Rice as being

in excess of \$1,000,000. In 1977 Rice received a check from the City of New York for \$2.5 million for the lease rights. This sum, added to annual revenues received from the lease, brought the total realized from the gift to \$3.7 million – surely a Home Run in any ballpark!

¹ Neil J. Sullivan, *The Diamond in the Bronx: Yankee Stadium and the Politics of New York* (Oxford University Press, 2001)

² Details of the negotiations are contained in Michael Burke's autobiography, *Outrageous Good Fortune* (Little Brown, 1984).

SPELLING CORRECTION

The Fall/Winter issue of *The Cornerstone* incorrectly spelled Major J. F. Dickson's name on page 7 as "Dixon". RHS member Val Wier, whose great-uncle this was, pointed out the spelling error. The house pictured was a significant one in Houston history.

Constructed in 1877, it was the earliest grand Victorian home in the city. Designed by N. J. Clayton, it was the first elaborate mansion constructed after the Civil War and the first to be designed by an acclaimed Texas architect. Barry Scardino in *Houston's Forgotten Heritage* says also that it established Main Street as Houston's new elite residential thoroughfare. Major Dickson purchased the house in 1900 and remodeled it by knocking out the common wall between the two parlors, making one large drawing room, "one of Houston's grander formal spaces".

The Dicksons were world travelers and among Houston's earliest art collectors. The Humble Oil and Refining Co. bought the house in 1918 for the site of its office building and demolished the house. Barry Scardino notes "This pattern of commercial development along Main Street was responsible for the demolition of all the mansions built along this tree-lined thoroughfare during the last quarter of the nineteenth century." The displaced residents tended to go on to build new houses in the South End subdivisions.



Dickson House



Dickson House Hall and Dining Room

Letter from J. Ray Peterson '20
February 10, 2002

Rice Historical Society
P. O. Box 1892
Houston, TX 77251-1892

I appreciate being sent information about such things as the [Albert Thomas] lecture – even though it is not possible for me to attend. For example, I happen to also be a member of the class of 1920. I remember "Yam" Thomas very well – sorry I have forgotten how the "Yam" nickname came about.

In addition to usually being president of the *Campaniles*, "Yam" was a natural leader of most anything he was associated with.

One of our clubs was a sort of debating society – I forget the name of the club. "Yam" was president. One of the favorite topics for debating was the question of the success of ship channel into Houston; I defended the NEGATIVE once – did not win.

I have been told that I may be the class of 1920s only living member. Last August I reached my 100th birthday. To my surprise, the alumni association sent a representative to attend a family luncheon at Jefferson City, MO. I appreciated this very much.

Should the lecture by Francelle Pruitt be printed, I hope to obtain a copy. The role of my classmate in bringing NASA into Houston really deserves appreciation.

Sincerely,
J. Raymond Peterson
(*Francelle's remarks about Albert Thomas will appear in a future Cornerstone.*)