

The Cornerstone

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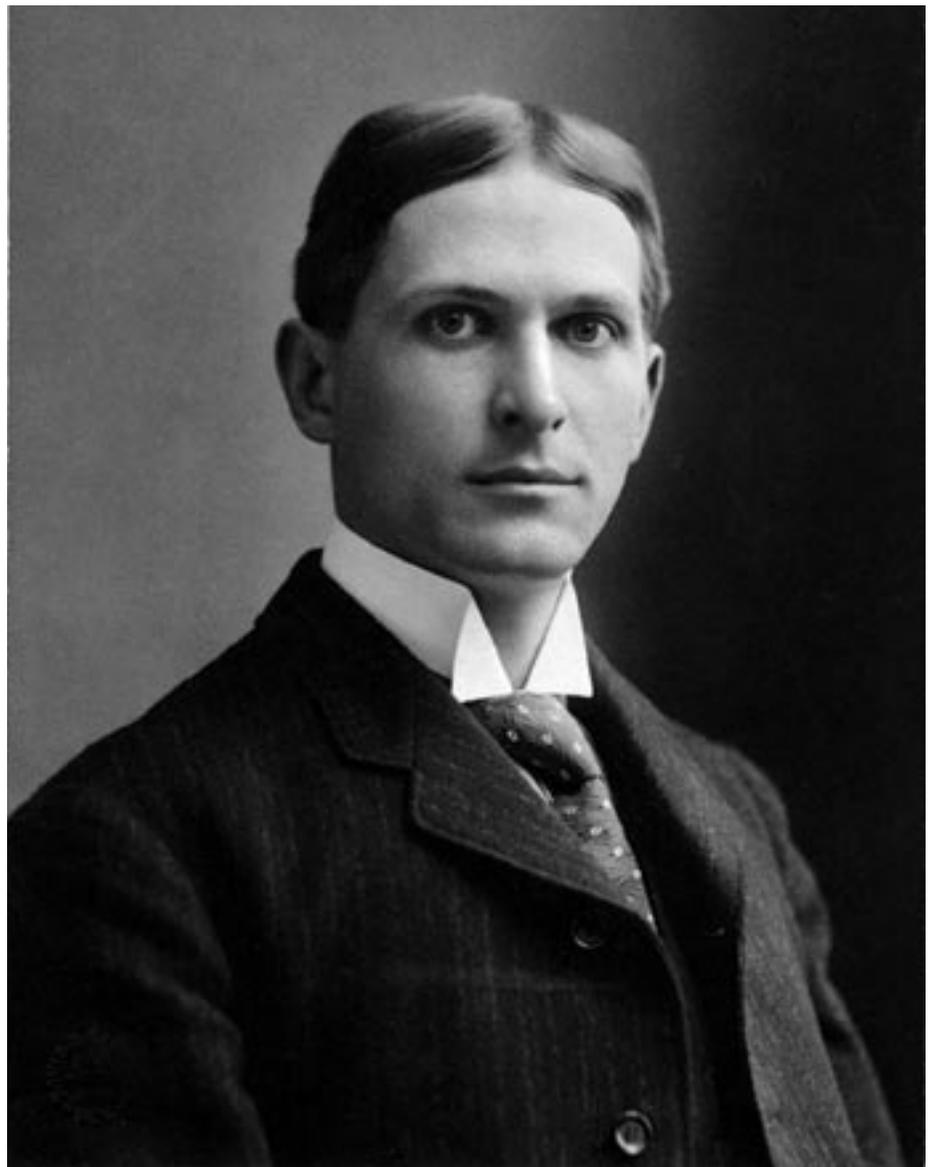
LOVETT FAMILY ARCHIVES ARRIVE AT RICE

A Talk by John Boles to the Rice Historical Society, May 3, 2003

Note: This lecture was presented after Rice became the repository for the balance of the Lovett family archives, an extensive collection from the family of Edgar Odell Lovett, Rice's first president.

Dr. Boles enthusiastically told members of the Rice Historical Society of the extensive nature of the collection, with thousands of letters, photographs, and documents contained in boxes, envelopes, and suitcases with literally thousands of postcards from the Lovetts' trip around the world in 1908-09. He reminded the audience of how documents missing from one collection will happily appear in another years later. For example, a letter in the Rice archives from Woodrow Wilson to Dr. Lovett mentioned that he had asked the Secretary of State to write a letter of recommendation for Dr. Lovett to take on his trip around the world, but the letter itself was nowhere to be found. It then surfaced in the family papers almost a century later! Needless to say, it is very exciting when something like this happens and helps complete the collection.

Because this is a family collection, much of the material pertains to the Lovett family, but a great deal of it also is relevant to Rice history. A wealth of information is contained in the thousands of letters it contains. Dr. Boles remarked that obviously people write letters when they are



Edgar Odell Lovett, 1898

apart and cease when they get back together, so "it's good for the historian when people are out of town. You will be following an interesting

story and then they get back together and the story comes to a halt." Historians can only function when

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The Rice Historical Society

PURPOSE

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

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*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

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*Trinity College Library,
Cambridge*

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Beta Theta Pi fraternity, Psi chapter, Bethany College, with the Beta girls of 1890 (Edgar Odell Lovett possibly in the lower left, seated on steps). May 29, 1890

they have records like correspondence or diaries. Dr. Boles says that one cannot separate Dr. Lovett from the world of ideas. "It was the world in which he lived."

It is interesting to contrast the search, under way at the time the lecture was delivered, for a new president for Rice with the search that was conducted for Dr. Lovett. Although he spent ten years teaching prior to coming to Rice, Dr. Lovett spent almost his whole career at Rice. The trustees wanted someone young and energetic and willing to devote the rest of his life to the university. It was what was expected at the time, and Dr. Lovett fulfilled their expectations. Now it seems like eight

or nine years, or twelve or thirteen, are considered the upper limit for a presidency.

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Dr. Lovett and considered him somewhat aloof, formal, even austere and unemotional, but that was really not the case. He said that it is most interesting to look behind the scenes, reading the letters that the Lovetts wrote to each other and their children and friends and to see what they were really like.

Dr. Lovett had graduated from Bethany College, a very small institution in West Virginia. The Lovetts lived in Ohio, but Bethany was very close. There were nine people in Dr. Lovett's graduating class in 1890, and he was the valedictorian. Dr. Lovett had given two orations at a college debating society but his first formal speaking engagement was his valedic-



Fayerweather Gymnasium, University of Virginia, 1897

tory address, which was published in the school literary magazine. Dr. Boles said that it is amusing to compare this speech with those he gave in the next thirty or forty years.

After graduating from Bethany in 1890, Dr. Lovett got his first teaching job in Mayfield, Kentucky, teaching at West Kentucky College, a tiny college established in 1886 by H. S. Hale. Mr. Hale's daughter, Mary Ellen, was a student there at the time. Dr. Boles said that it is not known how Dr. Lovett and Miss Hale met, but he surmises that it might have been in a musical venue. There was an article in the Mayfield newspaper in 1892 announcing on the cover the graduation exercises of West Kentucky College with students performing in concert. Mary Ellen Hale was singing with an orchestra in which Edgar Odell Lovett was playing the violin. Dr. Lovett loved music his whole life. In the collection are several letters with references to Mary Ellen's singing and playing the piano.

In 1892, Mary Ellen Hale graduated. Lovett, after teaching for two years at West Kentucky College,

enrolled in the University of Virginia, studying astronomy. He received a Ph.D. in 1895. Dr. Boles said that "in those days the apex of education was getting a Ph.D. from Germany" so Lovett went to Leipzig where he studied under Sophus Lei, whose countenance appears on one of the columns of Lovett Hall. Dr. Lovett then took two jobs one year, teaching both at Johns Hopkins, the first American university to emulate the new German research university, and the University of Virginia. He had a pass on the B & O Railroad to get from one job to another. In the summer of 1897 he taught at the University of Chicago, a new university which was exciting and experimental, so

he had the experience of both the German research university and the new experimental university.

He was appointed assistant professor of mathematics at Princeton in the fall of 1897, and in December of that year he married Mary Ellen Hale. Mary Ellen's mother visited them soon after they moved to Princeton and wrote home to her family that they were very happy and well-regarded. Apparently they were considered refreshing up-and-coming additions to the community.

Mary Ellen was very accomplished in languages and was fluent in French. Dr. Lovett's languages were Greek and Latin. They went to Paris on sabbatical in 1900 and had a wonderful year. Their daughter Adelaide had been born in 1898 and learned to speak French before she learned English. Later when the French delegation visited Rice in 1918, Dr. Lovett told them that, if

he were graced to live in two cities simultaneously, they

would be Houston and Paris. He did not care much for the British, although when just after World War I the British delegation visited Rice, their only stop west of the Mississippi, he was cordial.

Arriving back in Princeton from Paris, Dr.

Lovett enthusiastically embraced many of the academic reforms that the university president Woodrow Wilson was

attempting to institute, like the quad plan or residential college system. Wilson did not have a lot of success



*Mary Ellen Hale, 1897
"Just before I was married"*

with these ideas and actually was forced to leave Princeton. But Dr. Lovett, with his experience at Johns Hopkins, the prototype of the German research university, and the innovative University of Chicago, and his exposure to Wilson's ideas, was possibly becoming open to the idea of starting a new university.

In 1905 the Lovetts had a daughter who was born with a fatal disease that did not allow her to digest food. Her death in 1906 devastated everyone, especially Mrs. Lovett, who spent a period of time in the hospital recovering. Dr. Lovett was at the height of his career; he was chairman of the Astronomy Department at Princeton, was involved in Wilson's academic reform, and was planning to raise millions of dollars for an observatory in the southern hemisphere, but he found time every day to write to his



Lovett children: Malcolm and Adelaide on East front of Homestead, the Hale family home in Mayfield, Kentucky

wife. Dr. Boles said that he would write "these unbelievably sweet and loving and patient letters to Mrs. Lovett. Students

said that he was austere and formal but he was writing these letters filled with such compassion day after day. I have always admired Dr. Lovett but I admire him so much more after reading this amazing correspondence."

In 1907 the Rice trustees were beginning to make the transition from a paper institution to the real thing and were thinking about looking for someone to head the school. They began to

write to academicians and eminent people like William Howard Taft and William Jennings Bryan (who recommended E. A. Ross, the sociologist fired from Stanford; it is probably just as well, suggested Dr. Boles, that he was not picked). The trustees said they were a new institution with

no state or church affiliation, with a vague charter, with six trustees who knew nothing about education, and they had a big endowment. They implied that the right person could shape the university any way he chose. They wrote to Woodrow Wilson, who was at the time president of Princeton. Wilson saw this as a tremendous opportunity for the South because it did not have any great universities. He wrote to Dr. Lovett and said, basically, there is no one at Princeton that I would rather keep, but when such an opportunity comes along, I feel obligated to pass it on to the person most able to take advantage of it. Lovett wrote back a hand-written letter saying that Wilson's note brought tears to his eyes. He said he supported what Wilson was doing and he knew that if Wilson recommended him to the trustees they would probably interview him.

Dr. Lovett came to Houston for an interview and, before boarding a train for his return, he wrote to his wife saying that he thought the interview went well and he hoped he was in the running for the job but he was not sure. When he got back to Princeton he heard nothing from Rice for some time and thought that they had perhaps found someone else. Then in early December 1907



Princeton campus: School of Science on the left, Dickinson Hall on the right

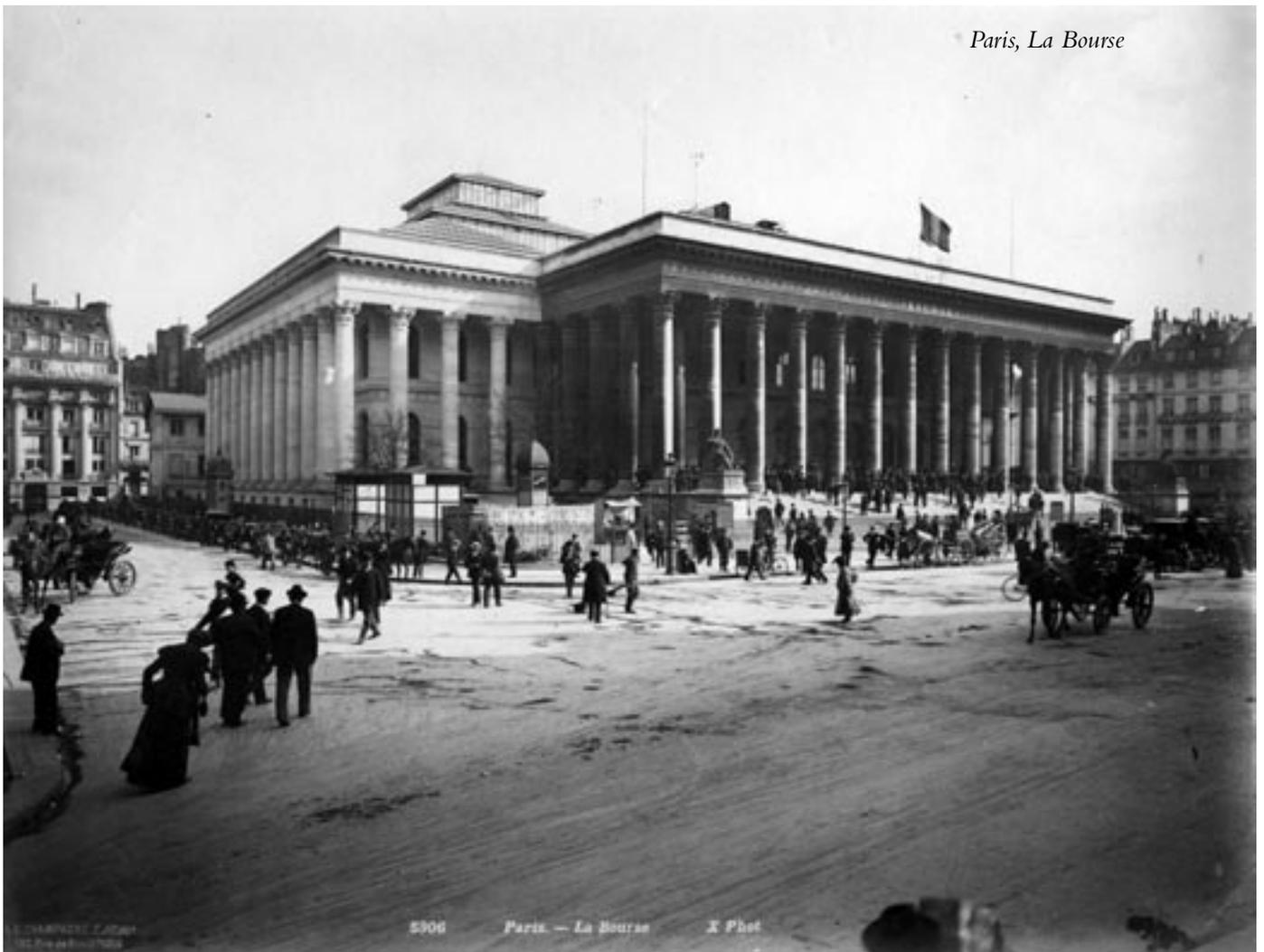


Interior of the Lovetts' Princeton home

Will Rice, Jr. went to visit him in Princeton and offered him the job but Lovett did not accept the offer instantly. On December 18, James A. Baker, chairman of the board of trustees, wrote to him and reminded him that Rice had a lot of money and a vague charter and said "The opportunity offered you is an unusual one, and however promising may be your prospects at Princeton, you ought to be slow in declining. Such an opportunity rarely comes to one so young in life." Another board member, Emmanuel Raphael, wrote that he admired Will Rice but "he is a taciturn man and he may not have conveyed the enthusiasm of the trustees" for Dr. Lovett. Raphael said he was present at the interview and all of the board agreed that Lovett was the only man for the job and they would

Opposite: Page from Dr. Lovett's journal from the trip around the world dated August 1, 1908, he says, "Vice Chancellor Dale [A.W.W. Dale, Professor of classics in the University of Liverpool] regretted that the members of the University staff were all away on vacation." He advised Dr. Lovett that when he became president of Rice, "You will read no more books, write no more papers, and take no more vacations."

Paris, La Bourse



Vice-Chancellor Dale (A.H.H. Dale, Professor of Classics in the University of Liverpool).

Regretted that the members of the University staff were all away on vacation.

"You will read no more books, write no more papers, and take no more vacations."

Advised strongly to articulate with the school-system. The U. of L. had begun lower down and is only now recovering the higher level after many difficulties.

Would not require the classics for a Science student. Would require Latin for Arts students and for half his course after entrance.

Should consider men and equipment rather than expensive buildings. "Students do not observe and there are no architects." Qualified latter statement and suggested seeing the new buildings at Aberdeen.

Could name no man who has the promise of such a career as that of Goldwin Smith after he went to Cornell. Oxford and Cambridge are not producing that type of man in these days. Those who get the training cannot write because of the flippancy they affect. The older universities are turning out specialists and not men of wide interests in academic or other affairs.

In response to a specific question he was unable to name any English classical scholar to head an English department except Butcher, and he is not available. "Too old and in politics."

Kindly offered to have plan of their physical laboratory drawn up and sent to us. Considered it a very successful building at moderate cost.

He would of course consult with J.F. Thomson of Cambridge. Ought also to talk with A.R. Foyth of the same university. "A man of wide outlook."

Attended the Dublin meeting of the British Association first week in September.

In case we should have a department of medicine suggested that we study the relations of the Institute of Tropical Medicine to the University of Liverpool. felt that they had found the best solution of that detail of organization.

Remarked the multiplex duties to the public that come to a man in his position.

There were difficulties enough in undertaking administrative work in an institution already established. Could not understand how a man persuaded himself to attempt a new one from the ground up.

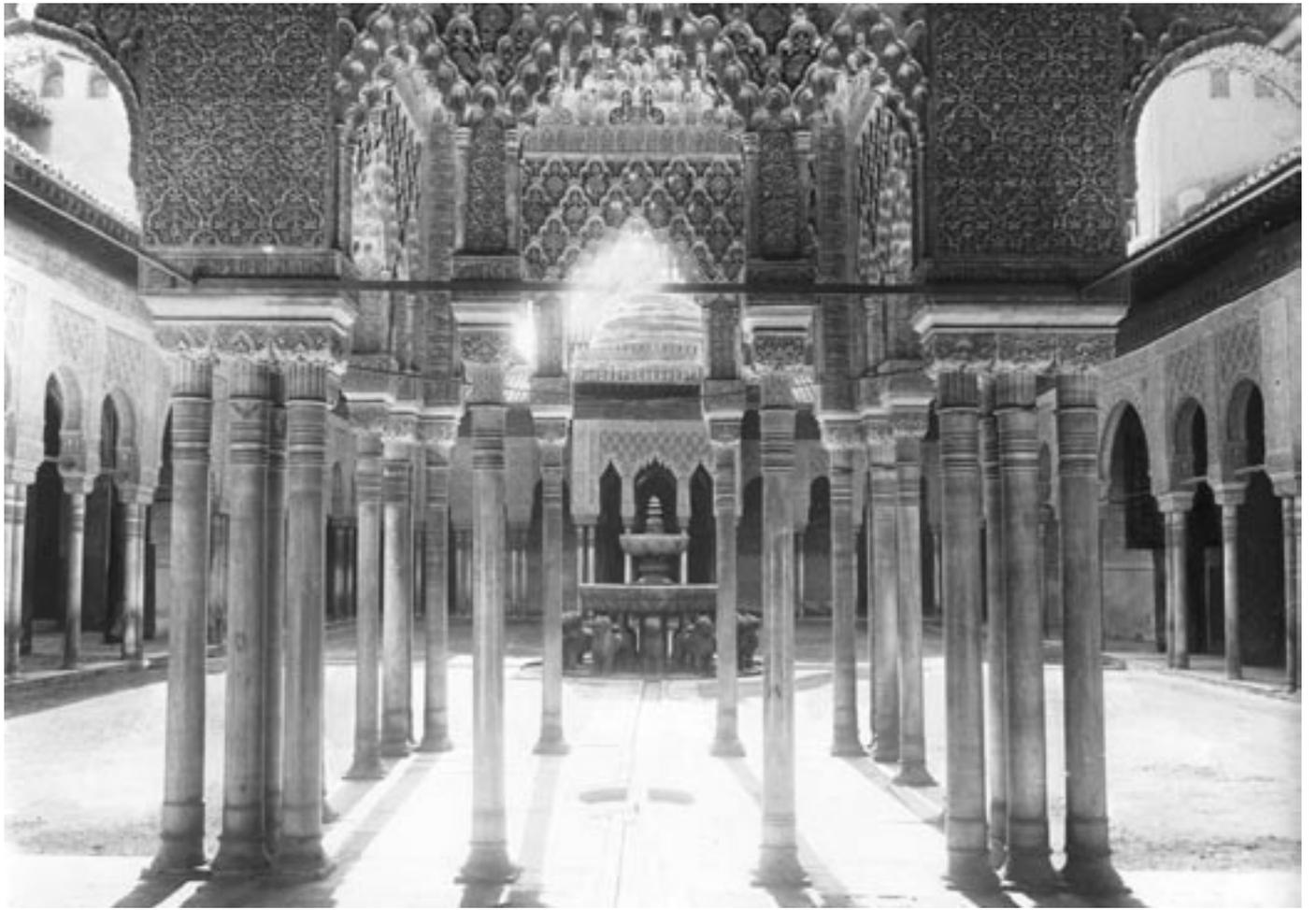
Told a good story about Sir Robert Ball.

Under the mantle in his office there was carved

βασιλικὸν οὐ ποιοῦν κακῶς ἀκοῦσιν.

Intends to come to America in the near future. Has there twenty years ago. Spoke well of Yale especially in classics. Had a man Walker in conversation.

Urged large salaries. "Should double ours if possible."



Above: The Alhambra, Granada, Spain Below: Trinity College Library, Cambridge



Right: Postcard from Yokohama

support him wholeheartedly. Lovett accepted informally in 1907 and officially in January 1908.

The board decided that they wanted Dr. Lovett to take a trip around the world. By 1908 Mrs. Lovett was well and their children were used to being cared for by their grandparents, so the Lovetts and a private secretary set out to visit universities in Europe, Russia, and Japan. Dr. Lovett determined he wanted to look at new universities as well as old. There are many letters from the Lovetts to their children; Mrs. Lovett calls them her "little chicks" and described all the things they saw. After six months the trustees decided

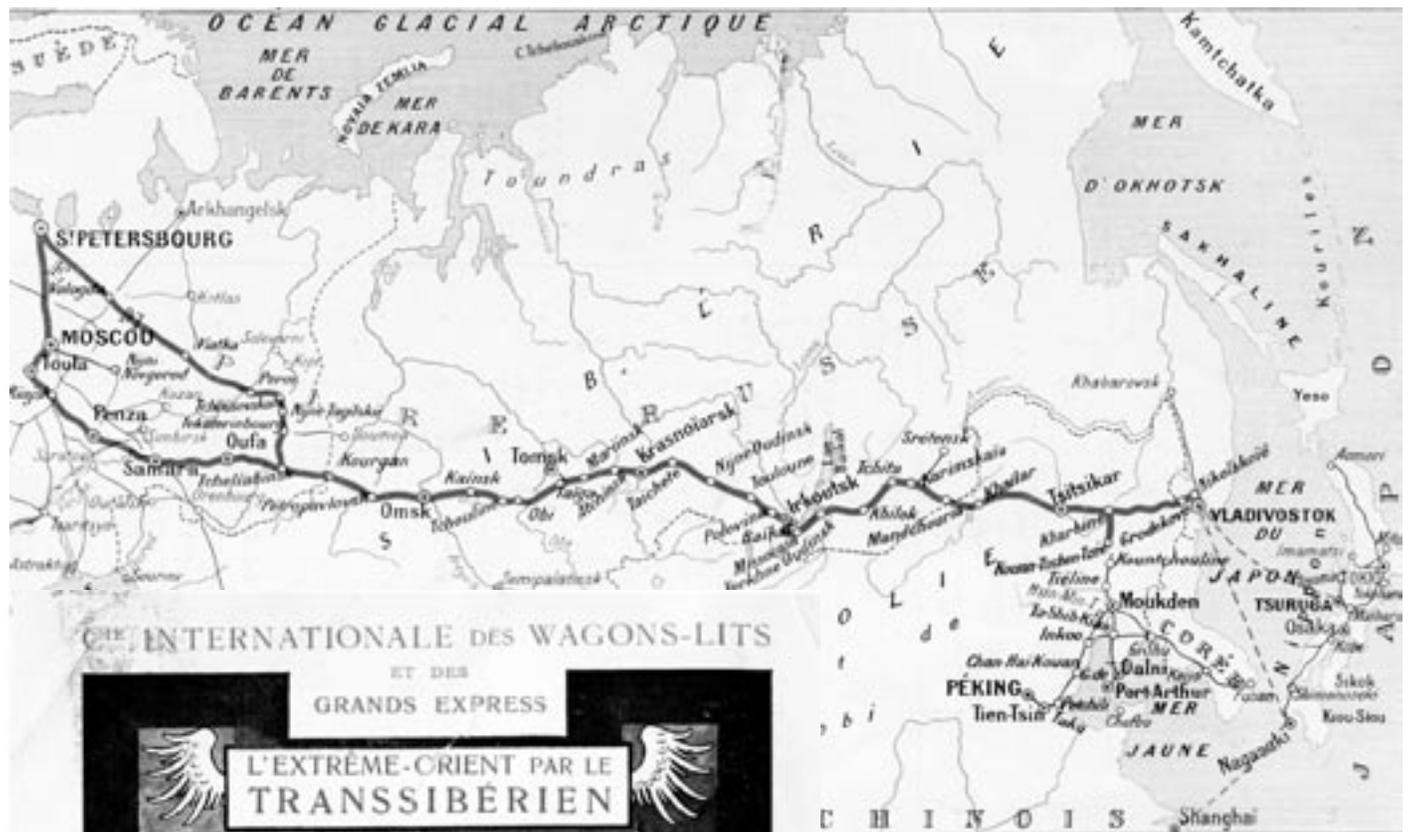


that it probably was time for them to return, but Dr. Lovett wrote back to them, saying that this trip had been so well planned it would be foolish

to cut it short. The board accepted that rationale, and the Lovett party continued around the world. For part of the trip Mrs. Lovett stayed in Paris



Stockholm, Grand Hotel and National Museum [Note: Both these images were done with hand-painted color.]



L'INTERNATIONALE DES WAGONS-LITS
ET DES
GRANDS EXPRESS



Pour réserver ses places à l'avance, s'adresser
PARTOUT aux Agences de la Compagnie.

Above: Route of the Trans-Siberian railroad the Lovetts took to Japan.
Right: Cover of travel brochure for the Lovett's journey on the Orient Express.

while Dr. Lovett traveled so they exchanged letters. In Madrid, Dr. Lovett wrote that it was raining so hard the previous day he could not go out so he wrote fifty-three letters. He wrote to his wife and the board describing what he saw and what advice he received and how he got a sense of what the university should be like and what he planned to do upon his return to Houston. He was very formal when he wrote to colleagues but his handwriting and tone changed when he wrote to his children; his letters to them at summer camp, for example, were poignant and warm. "It is fun to see what kind of parent he was," Dr. Boles says.

"It is amazing what charisma he had that he could attract the kind of people he did to Rice in 1912. Houston had 100,000 people and was 1,000 miles away from any other great university. People sometimes think today that Houston is beyond civilization and at that time he was recruiting full professors with tenure from Cambridge, Heidelberg,



Original watercolor purchased by the Lovetts, possibly in Holland

and the Sorbonne, people like Harold Wilson from McGill and Griffith Evans from Harvard.” He was able to convey to these people what an adventure it would be to start a new university. “There was something about Lovett’s vision and persuasion that convinced them it would be an exciting endeavor. It worked.”

Dr. Boles said that he was fascinated by Dr. Lovett’s thought processes in the planning. He consulted with his wife about anything aesthetic as she was always interested in art and music. Dr. Boles said that it is fortunate that Mrs. Lovett summered in North Carolina to escape the Houston heat so there are many letters about these plans. Dr. Lovett wrote to Mrs. Lovett about the design for the invitations for the

formal opening and sent sketches of the heads he wanted on the columns of the Administration Building and Lovett said he spent hours thinking about the design of the diplomas. “It was an interesting partnership.”

They are not aloof, but very warm and human. The family archives allow us to see this very human side of Dr. Lovett, and he appears even more impressive as a result

When Rice opened in 1912, Mrs. Lovett took an active role with the students. In 1911 a son Lawrence Alexander had been born and the Lovetts were so happy to have a healthy baby. Dr. Lovett wrote to everyone telling them how much weight the baby had gained.

Dr. Boles said that the private letters in the Lovett archives give a strong sense of the personalities of the correspondents. Dr. Lovett addresses Mrs. Lovett as “My Dearest Wife” and she writes to “My Sweetheart.” “They are not aloof, but very warm and human. The family archives allow us to see this very human side of Dr. Lovett, and he appears even more impressive as a result.”

NOTES FROM PETER ALMOND CONCERNING CORNERSTONE ARTICLES 2002 AND 2004

In my two previous articles for the *Cornerstone* on Professor Wilson (Vol. 7, No.3, Fall 2002) and on the association between the physics department at Rice and M.D. Anderson Hospital (Vol. 9, No.3, Summer 2004) I raised several unanswered questions. Thanks to reader response I now have the answers to these questions.

“The worst thing about the place however is its strong theological atmosphere and the terrible set of old crocks one has to get on with.”

In my article I questioned if Wilson had miswrote and put “theological” instead of “theoretical” since a constant theme in his letters was his mistrust in theoretical physics, which he did not care for. I concluded that he had miswritten since at the time King’s College was known for its theoretical physics.

An old friend and colleague wrote me after he had read the article. His father had been a senior lecturer at King’s College in 1928 a few years after Wilson had left and when Owen Richardson, Wilson’s brother-in-law had taken over the department. He wrote:

The theological influence on King’s College persists today; The “Dean”

in fact is a dean in the Church of England. I was baptized by the dean of the college (Dr. W.R. Matthews) in the chapel of King’s College in the Strand. Later I met the “very reverend” Matthews after he became Dean of St. Paul’s Cathedral.

I was wrong and I should have known better. Professor Wilson was the kind of person who meant what he wrote.

In the other article on the relationship between the physics departments at Rice and M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, I noted Dr. Tom Bonner’s strong support for Dr. Grimmert, the first chairman of the physics department at the hospital.

I also wondered if there had been any meeting between Professor Wilson and Dr. Grimmert. As a result of that article letters between Dr. Grimmert and his wife, who was still back in England during Dr. Grimmert’s first couple of months have come to light.

He arrived in Houston on the afternoon of Monday, February 7, 1949. On February 9, 1949, he wrote his wife that he was off to see Dr. Bonner, of the Rice Institute. He noted that Huxley once taught there and that Dr. Bonner was an old

friend of Dr. John Read, who had been a colleague of Grimmert’s back in England.

Read and Bonner had become friends in 1934 at the California Institute of Technology where Read was a graduate student finishing a Ph.D. in physics and Tom Bonner was a National Research Fellow. It seems that either Read had written Bonner that Grimmert was coming to Houston or that Read had told Grimmert that Bonner was at Rice, possibly both.

The next day, February 10, Grimmert wrote his wife about his meeting with Bonner. Dr. Bonner had invited him home for the evening. He met Mrs. Bonner, and later Professor Wilson stopped by. He told his wife that Wilson was a famous physicist and O.W. Richardson’s brother-in-law. (Grimmert had been Richardson’s research student twenty years earlier.) He noted that Professor Wilson was retired and that it was interesting meeting him.

So Grimmert did meet Wilson, and Bonner probably knew that Grimmert was coming to Houston, which goes a long way to explain why Grimmert was so well received at Rice Institute.

Right: Froggy Williams signs book for RHS Treasurer Al Woelfel

RHS MEMBER LUNCHEON

On January 29, 2005, the Rice Historical Society hosted a luncheon in the R Room at Rice Stadium to give members a chance to have their copies of the book, *Jess Clairborne Neely: January 4, 1898-April 8, 1983*, signed by author Froggy Williams.

Below: Froggy signs book for Marian Kisling (left), Dorothy Sattler and Madge Jones (right)

