

# The Cornerstone

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## RICE INSTITUTE AND THE PHYSICS DEPARTMENT AT M.D. ANDERSON HOSPITAL FOR CANCER RESEARCH

by Peter R. Almond, Ph.D.

Thirty years after the beginning of Rice Institute in 1912, another institution was started in Houston, the M. D. Anderson Hospital for Cancer Research. Both have gone on to be world-renowned.

Cooperation between Rice Institute and M. D. Anderson Hospital for Cancer Research of the University of Texas (as The University of Texas M. D. Anderson Cancer Center was then known) began before the hospital opened. In 1942 the M. D. Anderson Foundation acquired the property known as "The Oaks" from Rice Institute, to be adapted to the needs of the state cancer hospital and division of cancer research, until permanent quarters could be constructed in what would become the Texas Medical Center. The Oaks, located at 2310 Baldwin Street, approximately three miles northeast of the Rice campus, had been the home of Captain James A. Baker, who had bequeathed it to the Rice



Figure 1. The Baker estate's main residence building, converted to the administration building for The M.D. Anderson Hospital for Cancer Research

Institute. This was a grand estate of a bygone era. The main residence was a brown brick building (Figure 1). The basement contained the heating plant, wine cellar, laundry room, and game

rooms for children and adults. On the main floor were a big reception room, a library, music rooms, banquet room, warming-kitchen, a breakfast room, main kitchen, pastry kitchen, and galleries. On the second floor were bedrooms, sleeping porches, and baths. In the attic a floor had been added to serve as storage. A wisteria-covered arbor connect-

ed the main house with the carriage house that had space for carriages, stables, and automobiles (Figure 2). The upper floor of the carriage house was servants' quarters. Beyond the carriage house was the temperature-controlled greenhouse that supplied plants year round for the grounds. The Rice Institute had kept the gardeners on, and the grounds were immaculately kept.

As nice as all of this was, it was not suitable for a cancer research hospital, and it had to be transformed into laboratories, offices, and clinics. Unfortunately with disuse big gray wood rats had



Figure 2. The stable and carriage house at the Baker Estate, which was converted into laboratories for the biochemistry and biology departments.

Continued on page 3

# The Rice Historical Society

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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  
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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

*Rice Institute and the Physics Department at  
M.D. Anderson Hospital for Cancer Research..... 1*

*In Memorium: Kinga Perzynska..... 6*

*Pershing Day and  
the Pershing Pecan Tree..... 7*

*"Get a Horse!" ..... 11*

*Annual Meeting Snapshots ..... 12*



*General Pershing in the  
cloisters of the Physics  
Amphitheater.*

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Figure 3. A temporary building, after renovation, on the grounds of the Baker estate

also infested the place, and a large pigeon population, with attendant fleas, lived in the stables. World War II was in progress, and it took time to convert the estate. The main residence was turned into the administrative building and also housed X-ray equipment for therapy and diagnosis. The carriage house was converted to research laboratories. A few extra buildings were constructed, and between 1948 and 1950 thirteen war surplus buildings were brought from Camp Wallace, thirty miles away, to provide additional space. One of the warehouses at Camp Wallace was dismantled and then rebuilt on the Baker estate as a physics building with a laboratory and workshops (Figure 3).

In 1946 Dr. R. Lee Clark was appointed the director of the new hospital and in 1947 he sent Dr. Gilbert Fletcher on a tour of European radiotherapy departments to report back on the latest developments in Europe for radiation treatment of cancer. While on that trip Fletcher met Dr. Leonard Grimmett, an English medical physicist, working at that time for UNESCO in Paris. Upon returning to Houston Fletcher recommended to Dr. Clark that Grimmett be hired as chairman of the physics department in the new hospital. The hospital already had several X-ray machines installed on the Baker estate and radium sour-

ces that needed to be handled and maintained by a qualified physicist (Figure 4).

Dr. Grimmett arrived in Houston in February 1949 and moved into a house on Kipling Street, situated halfway between the Rice campus and the Oaks estate. Just before he came, Dr. Clark wrote Dr.

Shields Warren, a radiation pathologist and a member of the Harvard Cancer Commission, seeking his support in getting federal funds for the new hospital to work with radioisotopes.

In part he wrote:

*We now have procured the basic personnel and feel that they are most superior. Dr. Gilbert H. Fletcher, our radiologist, had five years in higher mathematics and physics before taking his medical degree...*

*Our physicist, Dr. Leonard Grimmett, is coming from England. He has had a number of years work with high voltage generators and was consultant to UNESCO in radiation physics...*

*We have an arrangement with Rice University [sic], Houston, whereby they send a graduate student to our institution on a scholarship basis as part time to work on the application of physics to radiation therapy...*

*We would like to give complete instruction in the field of medical physics as a postgraduate entity, and will be able to offer a course leading to postgraduate degrees affiliated with the basic science department of Austin. We are planning to approach the Rice University [sic] Department of Physics to assist in this part of our program.*

The arrangement with the Rice's physics department to send a graduate



Figure 4. Dr. Leonard G. Grimmett

student to the hospital had started the year before in 1948. The first student was Jasper E. Richardson, who upon graduation from Rice with a Ph.D. in 1950, joined the staff of the hospital and remained until 1955.

When Grimmett arrived in Houston on February 1, 1949, he wasted no time in getting to work, including consulting Dr. Tom Bonner, chairman of the physics department at Rice. On February 15, 1949, he submitted to the hospital administration a nine-page document titled "Provisional Work Plan for Physics Section."

Under "Standardisation [sic] of X-ray fields", he wrote:

*"The best that can be done until more equipment is to hand is to build a cubical phantom of 'presswood' sheets, containing slots to admit the Victoreen dosimeter... Through the kind offices of Dr. Bonner of the Rice Institute, the presswood cube is now being made in the Rice workshops."*

Presswood was a commercial composite wood material used to simulate tissue because they had similar densities. The Victoreen dosimeter was an instrument for measuring radiation. Dr. Grimmett had the physics shop at Rice fabricate the presswood into a cube, called a phantom, with slots machined to hold the Victoreen dosimeter, so that he could measure

Continued on page 4

the amount of radiation absorbed in a tissue-like material.

Then in a section on “Contacts with academic and industrial institutions,” he says:

*“It will be helpful to have the goodwill and friendly interest of the nearby institutions, such as the Rice Institute... Contact has already been established with Dr. Bonner, Professor of Physics at the Rice Institute. He has kindly offered workshop facilities and loan of apparatus until our own department is sufficiently equipped to carry on by itself.”*

Whether any other machine shop fabrication at Rice for the hospital was done, beside the presswood phantom, or if there was any exchange of apparatus is not known. Grimmet very quickly got his own machine shop operational, and although he was himself an excellent machinist he quickly hired one for the hospital. Dr. Bonner, however, remained a firm supporter of

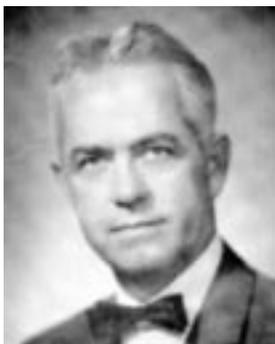
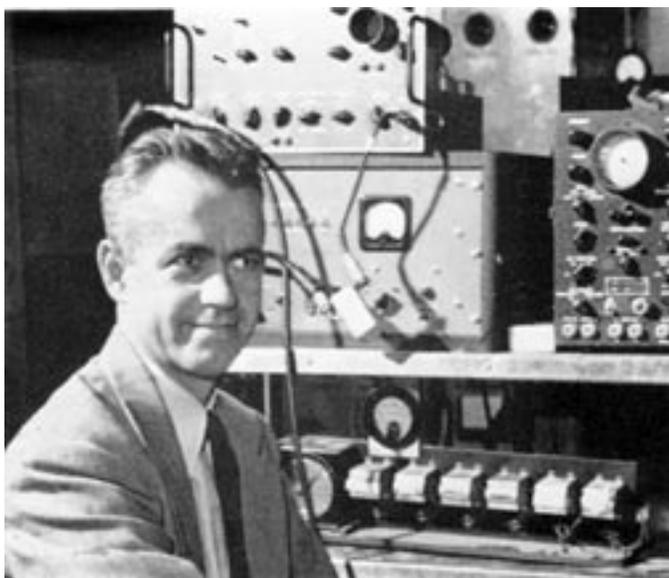


Figure 5.  
Dr. Tom W. Bonner

Below: Dr. Tom Bonner



the hospital’s department for the rest of his life (Figure 5).

When Jasper Richardson graduated in 1950, Robert J. Shalek became the next graduate student to hold the M. D. Anderson Hospital fellowship in that Rice physics department.

During this time plans were proceeding to construct the new hospital approximately one mile south of the Rice campus, in the Texas Medical Center. The Korean War had started and the scarcity of building materials and the increase in cost caused delays. However, construction officially began December 20, 1950, with ground-breaking ceremonies at the hospital’s future site. Dr. William V. Houston, president of Rice at the time, was among the official guests introduced by Dr. Clark at the ceremony (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Ground-breaking for the M. D. Anderson Hospital for Cancer Research in the Texas Medical Center, December 20, 1950, at which Dr. William V. Houston, President of Rice Institute, was an invited guest

In May of 1951 Grimmet was looking for a graduate in physics to be hired to help mainly with the radioisotope program. In a memo to Clark on May 22, 1951, he wrote:

*“We have located such a man at the Rice Institute - Mr. Kohl [sic] who intends to specialize in electronics and biophysics, and would be keenly*

*interested in joining us here.”*

This man was Arthur Cole, who received his master’s degree in physics from Rice and then joined the staff of the physics department at the hospital.

This probably is the last memo written by Grimmet; he died suddenly on May 27, 1951, from an aortic aneurysm. This left the physics department at the hospital without a chairman. Dr. Fletcher was appointed acting chairman and he again turned to Rice Institute for help. In a memo dated September 26, 1951, to Dr. Clark he reported on a visit he made to Rice:

*On September 14<sup>th</sup>, I visited Rice Institute to have talks with Dr. Bonner, Professor of Physics, and Dr. Houston, President of the Institution, on the possibility of outlining a combined Rice-M. D. Anderson program in medical physics, or biophysics. Both showed great interest in establishing such a program. Theoretical courses in physics and basic biology would be given at Rice, and the practical work in biophysics done here at the Anderson Hospital. The possibility of getting some research work done at the Anderson Hospital and make it eligible for thesis material was also discussed.*

*Dr. Bonner agreed in principle to be a consultant to the Physics Department*

September 26, 1951

Dr. T. Bonner  
Physics Department  
Rice Institute  
6100 South Main  
Houston, Texas

Dear Dr. Bonner,

Following my session with President Houston and yourself, I had a conference with Dr. Clark, who is very enthusiastic about the project of forming a combined training program in either medical- or biophysics. Dr. Clark is also anxious to see you appointed as consultant to the Physics Department of the M.D. Anderson Hospital, with an honorarium attached to it either on a monthly fee basis, or per visit.

Whenever it is convenient to you, we could have some further conferences to outline the program.

Kindest regards, -

Yours sincerely

GIF:tk

Gilbert H. Fletcher, M.D.

Figure 7. Letter from Dr. Fletcher to Dr. Bonner concerning cooperation between the two institutions

of the Anderson Hospital.

President Houston suggested the Professors Chandler (Biology), Richter (Chemistry), Bonner (Physics), and myself make up the Board outlining the program, which could then be publicized and in particular be put in the Rice catalogue.

Fletcher must have hand-carried this letter to Clark and given him a verbal report of the meeting. On the bottom of this letter Clark wrote, "We will proceed as things develop."

Later that day Fletcher wrote to Dr. Bonner:

*Following my session with President Houston and yourself, I had a conference with Dr. Clark, who is very enthusiastic about the project of forming a combined training program in either medical- or biophysics. Dr. Clark is also anxious to see your appointment as consultant to the Physics Department of the M. D. Anderson Hospital, with an honorarium*

*attached to it either on a monthly fee basis, or per visit.*

*Whenever it is convenient to you, we could have some further conferences to outline the program.*

The joint program in medical physics and biophysics that Drs. Bonner and Fletcher talked about in 1951 never came about. Within ten years the University of Texas had created the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences in the Texas Medical Center and the medical physics program at M. D. Anderson Hospital became part of that program. With the creation of the University of Texas graduate programs in the Texas Medical Center the need for an M. D. Anderson Fellowship to the physics department at Rice diminished and with the death of Dr. Bonner in 1961 the fellowships lost one of their greatest proponents.

Overall there were six recipients of the fellowship which lasted for

approximately twenty-three years from 1948 to 1971. They were:

- (1) Jasper Richardson, Ph.D. 1950. M. D. Anderson Hospital physics department staff, 1950- 1955
- (2) Robert Shalek, Ph.D. 1955. M. D. Anderson physics department staff, 1955-1985
- (3) Ronald Ewing Ph.D. 1959. No M. D. Anderson appointment
- (4) Richard Bramblett, Ph.D. 1960. No M. D. Anderson appointment
- (5) Peter Almond, Ph.D. 1965. M. D. Anderson physics department staff, 1965-1985, 1998-present
- (6) Arthur Boyer, Ph.D. 1971. M. D. Anderson physics department staff, 1986-1995

There were other students from the physics department at Rice who also became members of the department at M. D. Anderson Hospital. They were:

- (1) Arthur Cole, M.A. 1950. M. D. Anderson physics department staff, 1951-1985
- (2) Victor Otte, post doc. 1970. M. D. Anderson physics department staff, 1976-1997
- (3) Kenneth Hogstrom, Ph.D. 1977. M. D. Anderson physics department staff, 1975-2004
- (4) William Madigan, Ph.D. 1984. M. D. Anderson physics department staff, 1986-1989

Over the years several other graduate students and post docs from the Rice physics department went into medical physics, but not at M. D. Anderson Hospital, although several of them did get further training at the hospital.

There is a further link between the departments, but it is not known whether Dr. Grimmet was aware of it. Dr. H. A. Wilson was the first professor of physics at Rice and, although he had retired as chairman of the department in 1947, he was still actively teaching in the department in 1949 when Grimmet arrived in Houston.

*Continued on page 6*

Grimmet had been a student in the physics department at Kings College, London, as an undergraduate from 1923-1926 and a graduate student from 1926-1929. This was the department that Professor Wilson had chaired before he went to McGill University, Montreal, in 1909 and where the then-chairman was Sir Owen Richardson, Wilson's brother-in-law. Grimmet had been one of Richardson's graduate students. It is known that Wilson and Richardson carried on a lively correspondence, mainly about family matters, but it is not known if Richardson told Wilson about Grimmet's coming to Houston, although Grimmet was known to be corresponding with Richardson as late as 1946. It seems probable, however, that either Richardson did tell Wilson about Grimmet and that Wilson passed this information along to Bonner, who had succeeded Wilson as chairman of the physics department at Rice, or that Wilson became aware of these facts after Grimmet

arrived. In either case this would help explain Bonner's enthusiastic support for Grimmet and the joint program between the two departments.

Unfortunately there is no record of Dr. Grimmet and Dr. Wilson's meeting, although it would have been highly unlikely if they had not. They had much in common besides their connection with Sir Owen Richardson and Kings College, London. They were both Englishmen. Wilson and Grimmet had been recruited to chair departments of physics in new institutions by Dr. Lovett and Dr. Fletcher, respectively, who had traveled to Europe, partly for that purpose. They both accepted their positions without first visiting Houston. As soon as they arrived, both men established physics machine shops; the importance of this can be seen in the report Grimmet wrote fifteen days after he arrived, having already made arrangements with Dr. Bonner to use the machine shop at Rice until he could establish his own. Wilson had constructed a

high volume Van de Graaff accelerator that was still at Rice when Grimmet came, and Grimmet had built a similar device in England. Both worked closely with their institutions' architects on the design for buildings that can still be seen on the respective campuses.

Each established physics departments in the tradition of the English school of research physics. Both departments continue today as world-renowned departments in their respective areas, and personal ties between the two physics departments still exist.

#### *Acknowledgments*

The information about the Oaks estate and figures 1-3 and 6 are from *The First Twenty Years of the University of Texas M. D. Anderson Hospital and Tumor Institute*, 1964, and are reproduced by permission of M. D. Anderson Cancer Center.

The quotations from reports and letters are from archival documents in the Historical Resource Center and are reproduced, along with Figure 7, by permission of M. D. Anderson Cancer Center.



## ✠ In Memoriam ✠

### *KINGA PERZYNSKA*

**T**he Rice Historical Society lost a dear friend and board member on April 12, 2004 when Kinga Perzynska died. At the time of her death, Kinga was Head of Special Collections at the Fondren Library.

Born in Poznam, Poland, she received her masters degree at the Adam Mickiewicz University in 1976. She moved to the United States in 1984. Soon after, she began work at the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History and in 1988 moved to Austin and the University of Texas Ransom Humanities Research Center.

She served as Director of the Catholic Archives of Texas from 1990 to 2001. Kinga was a very active member of the archival community and will be greatly missed.



*General Pershing in the cloisters of the Physics Amphitheater.  
Captain Baker to his right, Mayor Amerman and Governor Hobby to his left.*

## **PERSHING DAY AND THE PERSHING PECAN TREE**

*by Lee Pecht, Acting Director, Woodson Research Center*

**T**he actual location of the Pershing pecan tree on campus has been difficult to pinpoint, but during the RHS's recent campus botanical tour led by Ecology and Evolutionary Biology Professor Dr. Paul Harcombe, the group located the tree in Founder's Court. No one could relate why it was planted and what was the occasion until an examination of the university archives in the Woodson Research Center revealed articles and photos on the event. [Location of tree: Standing in Sallyport facing Main Street, on the far left of the

open field between the sidewalk and hedge is a bank of trees; fourth large tree is the pecan.]

During mid-afternoon on Thursday, February 5, 1920, at the invitation of President Edgar Odell Lovett, General John J. "Black Jack" Pershing, a military celebrity who in 1917 was the commander of the American Expeditionary Force that led the Allies to turn the tide against the Central Powers, visited a very young educational institute on the outskirts of Houston.

In a car driven by his former chauffeur in France, Pershing arrived in

front of the Administration Building and was met by Rice German professor, Col. Thomas Lindsey Blayney, formerly attached to Pershing's staff in France. The general was introduced to President Lovett, James A. Baker, and Benjamin Botts Rice, both of the Board of Trustees, and then, followed by an honor guard, Houston Mayor A. Earl Amerman and Texas Governor William P. Hobby led the way through the Sallyport down the Administration Building cloisters into the cloisters of the lecture amphitheater. An enthusiastic crowd of students, faculty, and Houstonians

*Continued on page 8*



*General Pershing signing parchment*

eagerly awaited Pershing's appearance.

Dr. Lovett introduced General Pershing: "General Pershing: In commemoration of the honor you do us in calling at the Rice Institute on the occasion of your visit to Houston, we have three favors to ask of you. First, that you grant us permission to send you a special set of our publications as a slight token of the gratitude and good will we bear you. In the second place, that you consent to plant in the soil of the campus a tree, the first individual planting of its kind in our history, a tree that shall symbolize to succeeding generations of students the strengths of the planter of the tree. And as a third favor, will you not allow those here assembled in

your honor to carry away with them a memory of the voice that led the great expedition for freedom and justice?"

The general's response: "Mr. President, Your Excellency, Mr. Mayor, you students, ladies and gentlemen: It gives me great pleasure to have a few moments here and to have visual proof of what this institution is doing for the young manhood and womanhood of Houston and of Texas. And I willingly accede to the requests of your president, and shall be glad to receive the reports of which he refers, and it will give me great pleasure to read them and find out something more of the purpose and aims of this great school. Moreover, it would give me extreme pleasure indeed to throw

a shovelful or two of earth around the roots of a tree, and in doing so to wish you all success and the same length of life that I shall wish the tree. As to the third request, I am doing my best now to comply with it...I have no commands to give, but you have my very best wishes and my sincere thanks for the opportunity for saying a word to you."

Copies of the *Book of the Opening of the Rice Institute* and bound volumes of *The Rice Institute Pamphlets* were presented. Pershing then affixed his signature to a sheet of parchment with the Rice seal (pen and paper still reside in the Rice archives) amid cheers from the crowd. Proceeding to the Founders Court where a



*Governor Hobby with shovel*

young pecan tree had been put in the ground, Pershing ably shoveled dirt on the roots followed in turn by Lovett and Hobby (whose efforts were labeled as “comical” and “feeble”). Student Association President Frank Jungman took his turn, while campus gardener Tony Martino completed the planting.

Pershing’s day in Houston was meticulously orchestrated starting at 8:20 a.m. and lasting until 11:00 p.m. The governor of Texas, mayor of Houston, Adjutant General Cope of Texas, and the reception and escort committees greeted him as he emerged from his private railway car via San Antonio.

First came a review of the officers

and enlisted men at Ellington Field, followed by an inspection of the facilities and the airplanes and a reception at the Officers’ Club.

He then was taken to downtown Houston’s Rice Hotel for lunch with the Rotarians, a stop at South End Junior and Central High schools, the visit to Rice, then brief remarks to the American Legion and mingling with the crowd at the City Auditorium.

An evening banquet at the Rice Hotel given by prominent Houstonians included Pershing’s comments and his presentation of the French government’s Legion of Honor award for gallantry under fire to Col. T. L. Blayney. He then returned to the City Auditorium for an infor-

mal reception and dance. Although the general made no formal public address, his mere presence drew thousands of admirers as Houstonians welcomed a hero of the recent war.

The Rice Historical Society hopes to place a marker at the base of the Pershing Pecan Tree to commemorate this event.

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*Location of tree: Standing in Sallyport facing Main Street, on the far left of the open field between the sidewalk and hedge is a bank of trees; fourth large tree is the pecan.*

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*Above: Visitors parked in front of the Administration Building for Pershing's visit  
Below: General Pershing walking with Dr. Lovett followed by Thomas Lindsey Blayney*



# GET A HORSE!

by Alan Bath

In these days of rising gasoline prices and torn up streets in and around the Rice campus, we may think wistfully about alternate modes of transportation. George Flint '42 had the same idea more than sixty years ago.

When George entered Rice in 1938, he lived with his family in what is now known as the Piney Point area in West Houston. At that time it was still "country," with plenty of room to keep horses. George kept two and elected to ride one or the other daily to Rice throughout his freshman year.

We don't know exactly what route he took – he may have gone part of the distance along Memorial, which at that time was a two-lane gravel road. From there he would travel across farmland to reach the campus. It must have been a six to seven mile trip one way.

While at Rice, George kept his "transportation" in the general area of today's stadium - probably near to where Rice grounds keeper, Tony Martino (*Cornerstone*, Fall 2003), stabled the mules that he used for maintenance.

Apparently George's unusual transportation did not keep him from a full life at Rice. He was a mechanical engineering major and president of the 1938 freshmen class.

In his freshman year he was one of the organizers of the bonfire rally before the A & M football game, called by the *Thresher*, "one of the finest ever to blaze its way into the South Main sky."

In the spring of 1939 when the date of the Freshman dance approached, class president Flint became the victim of a sophomore kidnapping plot. He was cuffed, stuffed, and removed to

*Right: George on horse-back while on vacation in Colorado in 1973*



*Below: George Flint (right) as president of the freshmen class, 1938, with the other two freshmen officers.*



*Continued on page 12*

a hiding place off campus. George, however, putting his mechanical expertise to work, picked the lock on the handcuffs and escaped, thus earning him the hopefully temporary nickname of "Slippery George."

By the start of his sophomore year George decided to cut the commute time and moved to a dormitory on campus. He continued active in Rice student organizations, participated in intramurals, and was a member of the Rally Club and the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME). A member of the 1942 Dance Committee, he was said to be "an excellent dancer."

Like many of his classmates, George finished his studies in 1942 but was unable to remain in school for graduation. He entered the U. S. Navy and was immediately assigned to the submarine USS *Pipefish*, operating in the Pacific, where he remained for the duration.

At the war's end George returned to Houston, briefly entered the insurance business, studied at South Texas



*George Flint in his seventies on his property in Cy-Fair*

College of Law, graduated in 1957, and practiced law in Houston from then on.

Although he never adopted mechanical engineering as a profession, he maintained a lifelong interest in the study and put his skills to good

use in his own workshop. In 1998, George, along with other wartime contemporaries, "walked" in his long-delayed Rice graduation ceremony.

And, yes, he retained his interest in horses and continued to ride throughout his life.

## ***ANNUAL MEETING SNAPSHOTS***



*Left: Annette and Lee Duggan at the Rice Historical Society Annual Meeting*



*Right: Helen Toombs and Lee Kobayashi at the Rice Historical Society Annual Meeting*