

**Houston Philosophical Society**  
Minutes of 611th Meeting, September 9, 2006

CALL TO ORDER: 8:15 p.m.

President James L. Kinsey called the meeting to order. He announced that parking the faculty parking lot is now included in the cost of the dinner. He also announced that long-time member David Parsons had passed away and that there will be a memorial service for him at 1:00p.m., October 14 at First Methodist Church, 1500 Fannin.

Guests were introduced.

Jim Kinsey introduced the speaker, John Boles, the William P. Hobby Professor of History and editor of the Journal of Southern History. Professor Boles's topic was "Edgar O'Dell Lovett: Education for a Presidency."

Professor Boles credited President Lovett, the first president of the Rice Institute, the predecessor to Rice University, with creating Rice University in every way except giving the money.

The money for the Institute came from William Marsh Rice, an import/export merchant who by 1861 was the first or second richest man in Texas. In the late 1860's, having prospered during the war, Rice retired to New Jersey and built a gentleman's farm, returning to Houston in the wintertime. In 1891, he established the William Marsh Rice Institute with \$200,000 and a charter, but with nothing to be done until he died. Marsh was murdered in 1900 by his valet and a lawyer, who had forged a will. Following an investigation, the lawyer was convicted and the forged will overturned. Letters were sent by the trustees to 40 university presidents asking what to do with the money and the vague charter for the Institute. Woodrow Wilson, the President of Princeton University, suggested the new young head of the astronomy department, Lovett, as a potential president. Lovett interviewed and, on January 1, 1908, accepted the position.

Lovett was instructed by the Rice trustees to travel the world to get an idea of the best institutions, practices, and scholars and to determine what Rice could do. He left on a nine-month trip with his wife, who was still recovering from the death of their 14-month-old son in 1905—a major impetus behind the Lovetts' decision to leave Princeton for Texas. Lovett traveled to Europe and across Asia to Hawaii, learning the traits to look for in faculty and spreading the word about Rice. He worked out a college system combining engineering, science, and the humanities; an honor system; and an emphasis on research and teaching. Returned home, Lovett hired the architect Ralph Evans Cram to begin building the Administration Building (now known as Lovett Hall), as well as outstanding international faculty, including the naturalist Julian Huxley.

On September 23, 1912, the anniversary of Rice's death, Lovett met with the first 12 students, faculty, and trustees and spoke of the lofty ideals of the institute. On October 13, classes began. On October 31, Lovett called a meeting of the Institute, laying out a vision for the university with no upper limit, envisioning the creation of a great university.

Although the money began running out in the 1920's, Rice's vigorous academic program survived the Great Depression and two World Wars. In the 1940's, a new board took up the vision again. In 2012, Rice will celebrate its centennial, still realizing its obligation to employ the energy, creativity and resources to fulfill the vision Lovett spelled out in 1912.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:12 p.m.

Submitted,  
Evelyn Keyes

Recording Secretary