

NASA Land Deal Probed

The complex transactions that surrounded the establishment of NASA in the Houston area were investigated Monday in an article by John W. Finney in The New York Times.

"With the selection of the Houston site there ensued a real estate transaction that in its swiftness and complexity could only be followed by a title insurance company lawyer or a Texas entrepreneur," Finney said.

"Humble Oil and Refining Company donated to Rice University 1,000 acres of the 30,000 acre "Jim West Ranch" that it had purchased for \$9,200,000 in 1938. Before the ink was dry, Rice gave the land to the Space agency.

"Almost immediately the space agency decided it needed 600 more acres, but this time Humble and Rice were not so charitable.

"Under the arrangement finally worked out, Rice gave Humble 625 acres of land in metropolitan Houston in return for 678 additional acres of the West Ranch land. Rice

kept 78 acres for its own use and sold the remaining 600 to the space agency for \$1,200,000.

"Rice originally asked \$1,400,000. Space agency officials felt that this was a little high, particularly since three appraisals of the fair market value of the land ranged from \$720,000 to \$1,200,000.

"In the end, after some bargaining, they agreed to pay \$1,200,000, \$2,000 an acre, rather than go into condemnation proceedings.

"With the site for the Manned Spacecraft Center selected, the next step was the award of a contract to Brown & Root, Inc., of Houston to do the architectural and engineering work. Some of the top officials of Brown & Root have long been supporters of Vice President Johnson and Representative Thomas."

Finney then digressed on the subject of the facilities to be built, beginning by asserting that "The architectural style chosen is a mixture of windowless modern and Federal penitentiary."