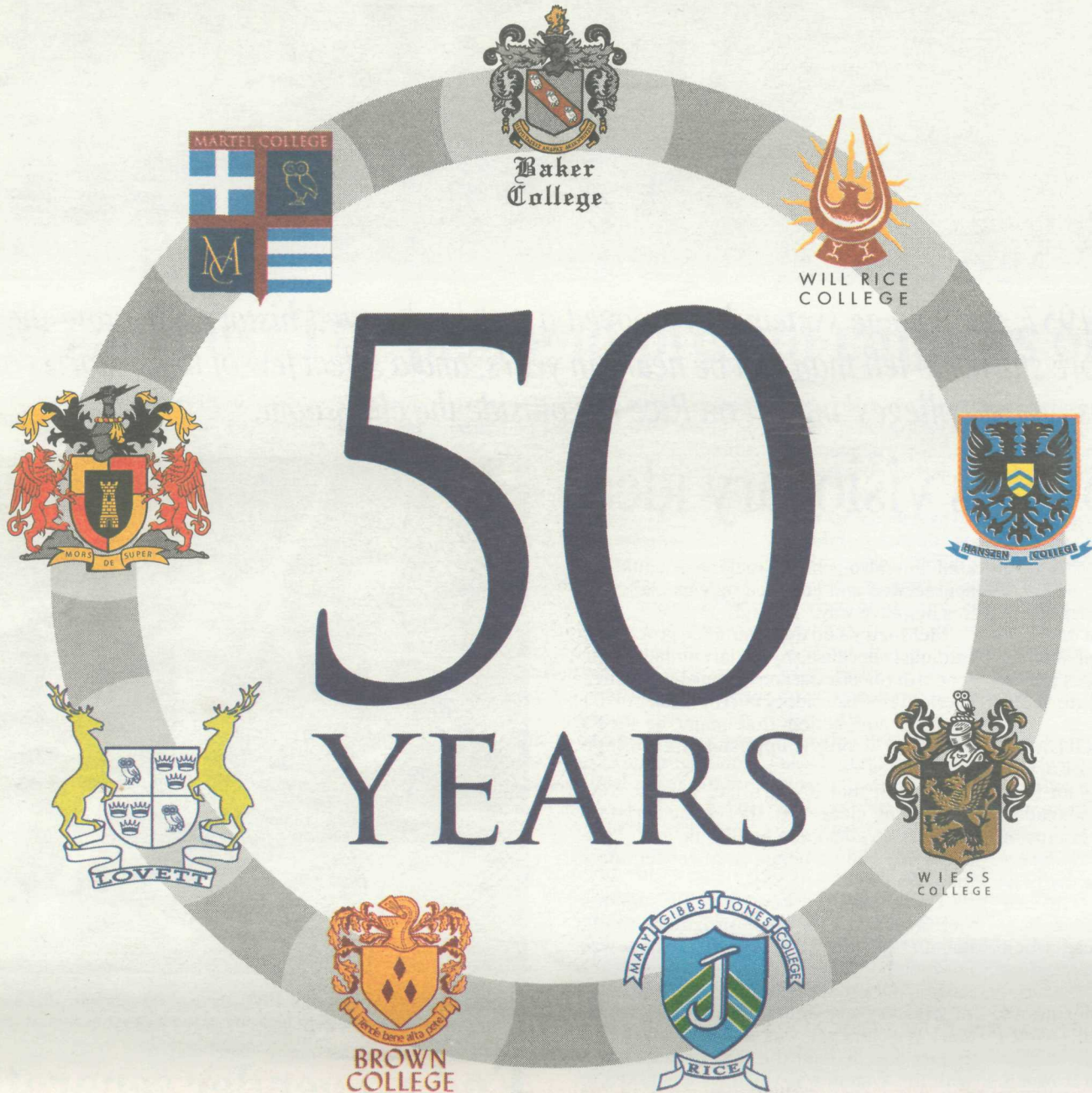
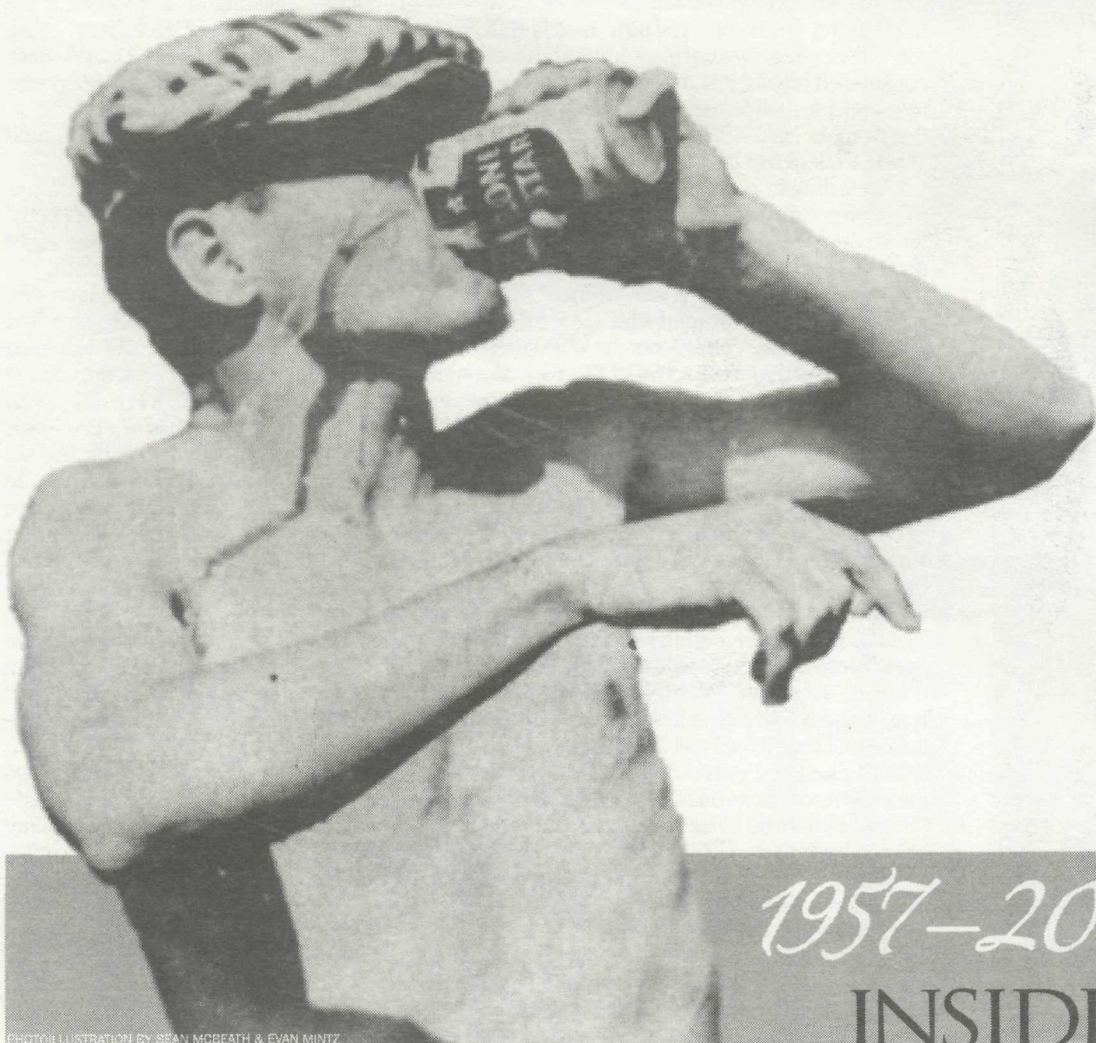


THE RICE RESIDENTIAL COLLEGE SYSTEM



AND STILL CHUGGING



1957-2007
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SPREAD DESIGN / SEAN MCBEATH

Since its founding in 1957, the college system has enjoyed a rich and varied history, affecting the lives of countless students. There are more stories to tell than can be heard in years, and a select few of those stories are presented here. This collection focuses on the colleges' impact on Rice life outside the classroom.

President Lovett's visionary idea

By Matthew McKee
THRESHER EDITORIAL STAFF

Today, the college system is inseparable from Rice. It has become one of the key components of Rice's identity and character. While the idea of residential colleges began with the founding of the Rice Institute, it did not take off until after 1950.

Rice's first president, Edgar Odell Lovett, saw the systems at work in Harvard, Cornell and Princeton as excellent models for Rice to follow. The Institute's original plans called for four residential colleges with groups of dormitories. Taking a position of visionary idealism, Lovett wrote: "[Here] in the residential colleges men live in freedom, checked only by self-mastery and gentle manners, a freedom of the kind that Goethe meant when he said, 'He alone attains to life and freedom who daily conquers them anew.'"

Back then, Rice had four dormitory halls — Wiess, East, West and South. Lovett's idea incubated for decades until these halls became visibly dilapidated and overcrowded. Electrical wiring, plumbing and doors were all in disrepair, and students would sometimes flood the hallways or set trash cans on fire.

Donna Martin (Jones '57) said many times three students were crammed in a room designed for one or two.

"[Students] were very wry, and they did not respect their residence halls," Martin said.

The condition and shortage of student housing forced the Board of Governors to take a serious look at what Rice needed in order to grow.

On October 4, 1954, then-President William Houston discussed the plan to improve the housing system with a meeting of campus leaders. He worked to form the Committee on Student Housing from faculty, staff and students and asked them to serve for two years on this planning body. The students went to different universities with similar systems to analyze their methods.

Burton McMurtry (Baker '56) served on this committee and was one of the students to visit other campuses.

"There was a lot of interest on the committee in really trying to establish a system that would be a very constructive communal living opportunity [and which] would have some order where order would be appreci-

ated but also where wackiness could be appreciated and engaged in, especially not in a negative way," he said.

McMurtry said the committee proceeded cautiously because any social engineering is "one of the most hazardous occupations." Engineering Professor Sidney Burrus (Hanszen '57) agreed and added that many of Rice's students strongly opposed the college system idea.

"I think that if there had been a vote, it was not clear that the college system would have come into being," he said. "Students can end up being more conservative than faculty."

The committee knew having students and faculty live in close proximity would benefit both, but the role of the masters was not defined easily. Today, masters support and encourage students, and the departures of masters are much-discussed events. Carl Wischmeyer was the first master of Baker, and he said the first brush he had with the system was when he was asked to take the position.

"I hadn't realized what a complicated situation I had gotten into," Wischmeyer, then an electrical engineering professor, said.

He said when he asked Houston for a job description, Houston replied, "Well, why don't you and Mary come live there, and find out what it's about?"

Problems developed from the outset of planning, including incorporation of off-campus students — called "townies" at the time — mixing of different matriculating classes and the inclusion of faculty members.

"There was some thought ... about having the college have more of an academic role, but for a whole host of reasons, that idea was dropped like a hot potato," McMurtry said. "The educational experience of mixing faculty and students is best accomplished in a living environment without obligatory courses."

After the first students moved into Will Rice College on March 27, 1957, much of the system's opposition fizzled. History Professor John Boles (Will Rice '65) matriculated to Rice in 1961, after the college system had been in place six full semesters.

"It seemed as established as the American constitution," he said.



COURTESY THE CAMPANILE

Brown and Jones women in a 1970 game of Powderpuff. The sport began in 1965, garnering national attention, and grew into one of the biggest events at Rice every fall semester.

Ending gender separation at Rice

by David Brown
THRESHER STAFF

Edgar Odell Lovett, Rice's first president and the oft-quoted visionary of the college system, did not have women in his vision. In fact, he harbored reservations about admitting women to Rice altogether.

But it was the creation of the residential college system that brought to an end a four-decade-long exclusion of women from on-campus housing. Though nearly left out — the college system planning committee considered having just a women's dorm and not a college — all-female Jones College joined the all-male Baker, Will Rice, Hanszen and Wiess Colleges to launch college system.

According to *The History of Student Life at Rice University*, there were strict limitations on students' attendance at colleges of the opposite sex. Some ventured across campus more than others: The "Wiess Women" were a group of 20 or 30 women who spent lots of time at the all-male college, but the Wiessmen were far less than respectful of their female counterparts. Women who entered Wiess with a male escort were traditionally greeted with growls if they were found attractive — and barks if not.

The 1970s was undoubtedly the decade of change for women in the college system. Virginia Hess (Jones '68) remembered sentiments among women starting to change in 1968.

"We read Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* as freshmen and applied the lessons learned," Hess said. "We designed cross-cutting, demand-driven courses taught in the colleges. Denied the Beer-Bike Race, we had a Tea-Trike Race, and a Powderpuff football game, whose quarterback was the first woman sports editor of the *New York Times* [LeAnne Schreiber, Jones '67]."

When a 1970 poll found that 65 percent of students were interested in the idea of integrating the colleges, President Norman Hackerman began considering changes. And in October 1972, Baker and Hanszen Colleges overwhelmingly voted to allot spaces for women in the following year.

"Going coed was the best thing that ever happened for Hanszen," Ron Osborn (Hanszen '76) said. "We went from an artificial environment in which interaction with the opposite sex was somehow tied to getting a date and going all the way across campus, to an environment that included interaction

with the opposite sex continually for all of life's daily activities."

Baker men echoed those sentiments. Gary Hornberger (Baker '70) said that male versus male competition had to start considering the presence of women.

"[Were] they going to be impressed with feeding-trough table manners, slovenly appearances and conversations punctuated by grunts or consisting of an analysis of the current calculus problems?" Hornberger said. "Civilization had come to Baker. Daily — dare I say, intimate — interactions with the opposite sex brought about a sea of change."

In 1979, a group of Baker women became the first to join the Baker 13 tradition.

"We were all talking one day at dinner and decided that ... it needed to be coed," Lily Avellan (Baker '81) said. "Around eight women ran that next 13th of the month."

The transition for the rest of Rice, however, was a cautious one. The initial 1973 plan called for a four-year trial at Baker and Hanszen before retaining, expanding or dropping the coed system. After that trial, a President's ad hoc committee chaired by History Professor Gale Stokes recommended making the six remaining colleges coed. However, a decade passed before full integration. Colleges tended to wait for widespread support before making the change. Will Rice went coed in '78, Jones and Lovett in '80, Wiess in '83, and Sid and Brown in '87.

Jones and Will Rice held onto some separation of the sexes via single-sex floors, but a survey of Jonesians in 2005 found that many students supported removing those separations in their college.

The Jones cabinet voted in winter 2005 to make the college's last male and female floors — called "hell" and "heaven" by many students — coed.

At Will Rice, unruly male students on the college's all-male first and second floors in Old Dorm brought about the integration of those floors last year. In February 2006, only two months after the Jones Cabinet voted to make its single-sex halls coed, then-Will Rice masters Joel and Traci Wolfe made the change after dealing with multiple disciplinary problems in the all-male section.

Despite some reservations about sharing coed bathrooms — and some nostalgia among the second-floor men for their floor's camaraderie — most Will Rice students supported the change.



COURTESY THE CAMPANILE

Construction on Jones College, one of the first five colleges, concluded in 1957. It was initially an all-female college, and the other four (Baker, Will Rice, Hanszen and Wiess) were all-male.