

Griffith Conrad Evans
and
The Rice Institute

The Rice Institute was planned by a mathematician, Edgar Odell Lovett. He was the first president of the Institute, appointed by the Board of Trustees in 1908, first professor of mathematics at the opening in 1912, and member of the Board of Trustees until his retirement in 1946. It is not surprising that in the early years of Rice the department of mathematics was outstanding among the scientific departments. Mathematics was a required subject for all students. By 1916 Dr. Lovett had gathered together four outstanding young mathematicians as members of the department--

Griffith Conrad Evans (1912)

Percy John Daniell (1913)

William Caspar Graustein (1914)

Francis D. Murnaghan (1916) .

World War I broke up this distinguished quartet. Evans and Graustein, both Harvard men, gave outstanding service, Evans in the Air Force, Graustein in the Ordnance Department. Daniell, an Englishman, Murnaghan, an Irishman, remained to carry on the teaching load along with assistants until the end of the war. In 1919 Graustein returned to Harvard, Murnaghan to Hopkins, each to his alma mater, to spend nearly all the rest of his teaching career. In 1919-1920 Evans returned as Chairman of the department to rejoin Daniell and Bray. In 1920 Lester R. Ford came to Rice from Harvard to round out the department.

It is interesting to note that whereas in the early years Evans was listed as Assistant Professor of Pure Mathematics, Daniell as Assistant Professor of Applied Mathematics, Evans devoted himself largely to Potential Theory

and later to Mathematical Economics, Daniell became well known for his work on "A General Form of Integral," now known as "The Daniell Integral," which he carried on at the Institute, beginning with his first publication in Annals of Mathematics, June 1918.

There is no doubt that in the few years they were together these two mathematicians exercised a valuable influence on each other. Daniell, who was the last Senior Wrangler of Cambridge University, returned to England in 1923 to become Professor at the University of Sheffield.

Evans had the honor of sharing with Professor Oswald Veblen the platform of the American Mathematics Society at the annual meeting in Cambridge, Massachusetts to present Volume 1 of the Cambridge Colloquium Lectures entitled "Functionals and their Applications. Volume 2 by Veblen was entitled "Analysis Situs."

Evans was a most inspiring teacher, especially for advanced students. Between the years 1918 and 1934 no less than thirteen graduate students wrote doctoral theses under his inspiration, many of whom distinguished themselves later as mathematicians at other universities. He was chairman of the department effectively from 1912 to 1934, when he resigned to become Chairman of the Department of Mathematics at the University of California (Berkeley). In all his years at Rice he was Secretary of the Faculty, an office which, though important, involved relatively little of his time and labor as there were usually only three or four meetings each year.

Evans' departure in 1934, was a great loss to Rice, especially to President Lovett who had always counted on him as a staunch friend and supporter of his policies and those of the trustees. This pleasant relationship undoubtedly changed when in 1930 the Rice faculty voted favorably on a motion which, in effect, established a Department of Physical Education for the

explicit purpose of admitting athletes (only) as candidates for the degree of Bachelor of Science in Physical Education. The avowed purpose of the plan was to strengthen the athletic teams which, especially in football, had been becoming less and less successful in Southwest Conference competition. Evans opposed the plan.

The new department had the desired effect upon Rice's athletic fortunes, but it may have been a deciding consideration in Evans' acceptance of the invitation to go to Berkeley in 1934. There is an ironic side to these events: in the summer of 1935 when I visited Evans in Berkeley he said to me "It's worse here!" He referred of course to overemphasis on athletics as it seemed to a Harvard man in California, as in Texas.

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