Patrons par excellence

The Rice name is built into Chicago culture

By Jon Anderson

Names make news. They also make buildings, especially in Chicago, where wealthy people take wing, in a sense, by leaving their money and attaching their names to parts of cultural, medical and educational institutions. It's an old tradition, linking funding and honoring, but few have reached the scale of the late Daniel F. and Ada L. Rice of Wheaton. Consider these gifts made in their names for projects completed or underway this year alone:

- $10 million to the Art Institute of Chicago for the Rice Building, an addition that increased the institute's gallery space by one-third and currently houses "The Art of Paul Gauguin."

- $3 million to the John G. Shedd Aquarium to help fund Chicago's Oceanarium, a $43 million project with pool and amphitheater that will house 6 whales, 4 dolphins and 10 seals plus penguins and sea otters.

- 19 acres to the Illinois Institute of Technology for the Dan and Ada Rice "high-tech" campus in Wheaton to expand the university's offerings in computer, engineering and business education.

- 13 acres to the Wheaton Park District for the Danada Water Park and community center

$100,000 to the Boy Scouts of America for a camping facility for handicapped Scouts near Yorkville.

- $2 million toward the Chicago Historical Society's $15.3 million modernization program, a donation that spawned the Rice Pavilion, a wraparound addition along Clark Street that opens with hoopla, this week.

So who were Dan and Ada Rice?

Sometime soon, an engraver will begin to chisel part of their story on a 5-foot slab of black marble that, when finished, will sit in the front window of the Chicago Historical Society's headquarters at 1601 N. Clark St. The Rices, the slab will note, "were generous Midwesterners" who were "known for their enterprising spirit and unlimited vitality" and who "lived life on their own terms at Danada Farms in Wheaton, Illinois, for 50 years, married 50 years, and had 5 children."

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years."

That was, friends remember, quite a farm. A lavish showplace known for its skeet-shooting range and its
private training track for
thoroughbreds, it had a tunnel under
Naperville Road so skittish horses
would not have to worry about traf-
cic on the way to practice.

The Rices, friends also recall, were
quite a couple. She was an avid
painter and good storyteller. He was a
daring speculator on the Chicago
Board of Trade.

The son of a man who was a park
commissioner, a city engineer and
the founder of the Illinois Boiler Co.,
Dan Rice was born in 1896 on
North Hudson Street on the Near
North Side. At 17, he dropped out
of DePaul University to work as a
messenger for Logan & Bryant, a
Loop brokerage house. In 1919, af-

er learning such elements as why
and when to buy and sell wheat,
corn, rye and oat futures, he opened
his own trading firm, Daniel L. Rice
& Co., and quickly becoming known
as the biggest and most daring
speculator in town.

He became a patron of politicians
and other public figures. Once aske
d if he objected to being called a
"rake," he laughed. "Why would I?
" he said. "That's what I am. It's
just a case of deciding whether other
people are wrong when they want to
sell or buy."

In 1929 Rice bought a 152-acre
estate a few miles south of Wheaton,
the nucleus of Danada Farms, a
property containing the first naming of
Dan and Ada. The couple moved
into its white-brick mansion set
amid luxuriant flower gardens and
exotic shrubs raised on the estate's
own nurseries. Over the years their
home turf grew to 1,355 acres.

Odia Rice was described as a "restless
person who can't stay put," Rice later
moved out of the brokerage business
and into sports. In the late 1940s he
became a co-owner of the Los Ange-
les Dons, a team in the All-America
Football Conference, along with
Louis B. Mayer, Bing Crosby, Pat
O'Brien and Don Amche, the player
for whom the team was named.

It failed, but few other Rice ven-
tures did. Rice and his wife, a
shrewd businesswoman, took an ac-
tive interest in racing, building a sta-
tle of 25 horses. Dan Rice became a
director of Arlington Park Race
track, joining another pal, Ben
Lindevie, who had assumed con-
trol of Arlington in 1940 and, after
his death, passed it on to Marie
Everett, known during the 1960s as
the "Queen of Illinois Racing." In 1941
Odia Rice, with Jockey Debois, with
Wylie Shoemaker on board, won the
Kentucky Derby.

Benefactors of a wide variety of
charities, Dan and Ada Rice set up
the Rice Foundation in 1947.

Though the foundation made 1,257
grants totaling $12.4 million during
its first four decades, it went through
considerable turmoil after the deaths


Paralyzed during an eight-year
battle among the foundation, heirs
and other interested parties, the
foundation fought 13 lawsuits and
spent $7.5 million in legal fees for
28 lawyers to settle the imbroglio. In
the end a dozen heirs split an addi-
tional $5.7 million. One of them,
Daniel Rice Jr., the couple's adopted
son, received $2.5 million in return
for dropping his claim for an addi-
tional $5 million.

With peace restored, the foun-
dation's wealth has grown to more
than $60 million, a sum guarded,
with many checks and balances, by
Arthur A. Nolan Jr., president of the
Rice Foundation. He is also husband
of Patricia, an artist who was Dan
Rice's niece and "the apple of his
eye," Nolan said, settling in for an
interview in the foundation's head-
quarters in Glenview.

"I think they'd be very pleased," he
said, in response to a question
about how the Rices might view
their new fame. Left no specific in-
structions, his mission, he said, has
been "to put ourselves in their
shoes" and give money to institu-
tions he feels they would have fa-
vored.

In his last visit to Ada Rice in the
hospital just before she died, Nolan
said, "I asked her, 'What do you
want me to do?' She took my hand,
patted it and said softly, 'You'll
know.'"

"As Nolan and his grants com-
mittee saw it, the place to start was
with major institutions. 'Chicago is
going through trying times,' he said.
There are political battles and so-
cioeconomic battles. If Chicago is to
succeed as a magnet city, an im-
portant cohesive element will be our
great cultural institutions, places
where everyone can meet on com-
mon ground."

Besides big grants to well-es-
istablished institutions, the Rice
Foundation, which fields about 2,000 re-
quests a year, takes time to search
out smaller worthy recipients.

"We're mavericks but in a nice
way," Nolan said. "We do our own
thing. We are a foundation of last
resort. We look a little deeper."

Recently the foundation gave
$50,000 to fund research on re-
joining severed nerves with laser
$1,500 to an effort to save endan-
gered species of wood turtles, and
other grants to a program to aid sex-
ually abused children. For the Field
Museum of Natural History, the foun-
dation backed an expedition to study
aspects of the ecology of Costa
Rica.

This weekend the public will get
another chance to see what one big
Rice donation can do, when the
Chicago Historical Society holds a
Grand Reopening to show off its
$15.3 million modernization, begun
in 1985. Helped by a grant of $2
million, the largest single gift the so-
ciety has ever received, the reorder-
ing of the museum's space was done
by the society's director Ellsworth
Brown, "like working a Chinese tile
puzzle," the kind where numbers are
slid back and forth into new
patterns.

The new complex has state-of-the-
art conservation laboratories, im-
proved backstage areas where ex-
hibits can be prepared without disrup-
ting ongoing displays, a museum
store, two atrium galleries, display
windows for the museum's exhibi-
tions and a 63-seat cafe overlooking
Lincoln Park that will open with
hunches and flame up to full-service
by next spring.

With such sprucing up, the society
hopes annual attendance will rise to
300,000 people a year, 50 percent
above present levels. That would be
fine with foundation officials, who
hope every visitor will stop by the
front door, look at the black tablet
and read about Dan and Ada Rice.

"The Rices were an old Chicago
family but not well known. They
were private people," Nolan said.
But, as the marble inscription will
note, "Dan and Ada Rice's quiet
dedication to helping others is reflec-
ted in the Rice Foundation's contin-
ued support of Chicago's treasured
cultural institutions."