

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



Tribune photo

Ada Rice in 1965.

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 and

- \$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

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

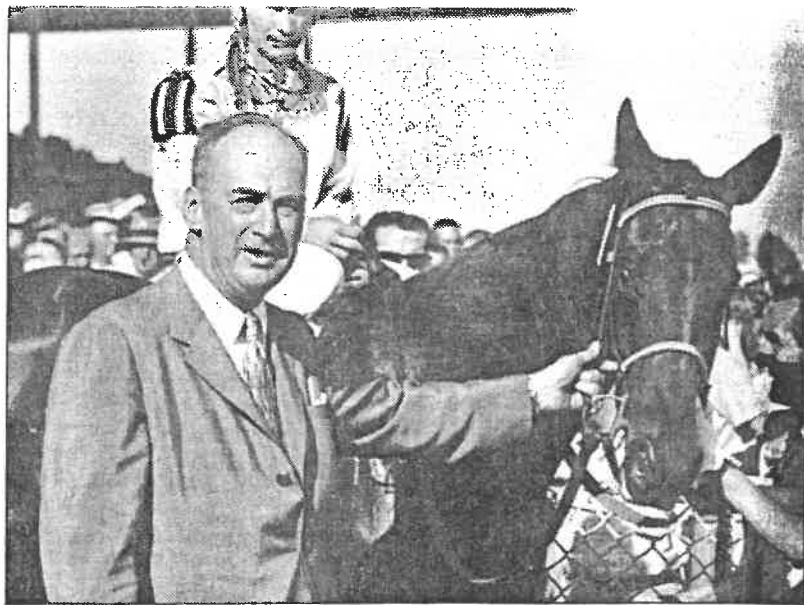
He became a patron of politicians and other public figures. Once asked if he objected to being called a speculator, he laughed. "Why should I?" he said. "That's what I am. It's just a case of deciding whether other people are wrong when they want to sell or buy."

In 1929 Rice bought a 152-acre estate a few miles south of Wheaton, the nucleus of Danada Farms, a name combining the first names 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.

Once 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 Angeles Dons, a team in the All-America Football Conference, along with Louis B. Mayer, Bing Crosby, Pat O'Brien and Don Ameche, the actor for whom the team was named.

It failed, but few other Rice ventures did. Rice and his wife, a shrewd businesswoman, took an active interest in racing, building a stable of 25 horses. Dan Rice became a director of Arlington Park Race-track, joining another pal, Ben Lindheimer, who had assumed control of Arlington in 1940 and, after his death, passed it on to Marje Everett, known during the 1960s as the "Queen of Illinois Racing." In 1965 Rice's Lucky Debonair, with Willie 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



Dan Rice at Arlington Park in 1957 with jockey Willie Shoemaker.

of Dan in 1975 and Ada in 1977.

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 additional \$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 additional \$5 million.

With peace restored, the foundation'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 also is 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 headquarters 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 instructions, his mission, he said, has been "to put ourselves in their shoes" and give money to institutions he feels they would have favored.

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 committee saw it, the place to start was with major institutions. "Chicago is going through trying times," he said. "There are political battles and socioeconomic battles. If Chicago is to succeed as a magnet city, an important cohesive element will be our great cultural institutions, places where everyone can meet on common ground."

Besides big grants to well-established institutions, the Rice Foundation, which fields about 2,000 requests 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 rejoining severed nerves with lasers, \$1,500 to help endangered species of wood turtles, and other grants to a program to aid sexually abused children. For the Field Museum of Natural History, the foundation 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 society has ever received, the reordering of the museum's space was, says 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, improved backstage areas where exhibits can be prepared without disrupting ongoing displays, a museum store, two atrium galleries, display windows for the museum's exhibitions and a 63-seat cafe overlooking Lincoln Park that will open with lunches 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 reflected in the Rice Foundation's continued support of Chicago's treasured cultural institutions."