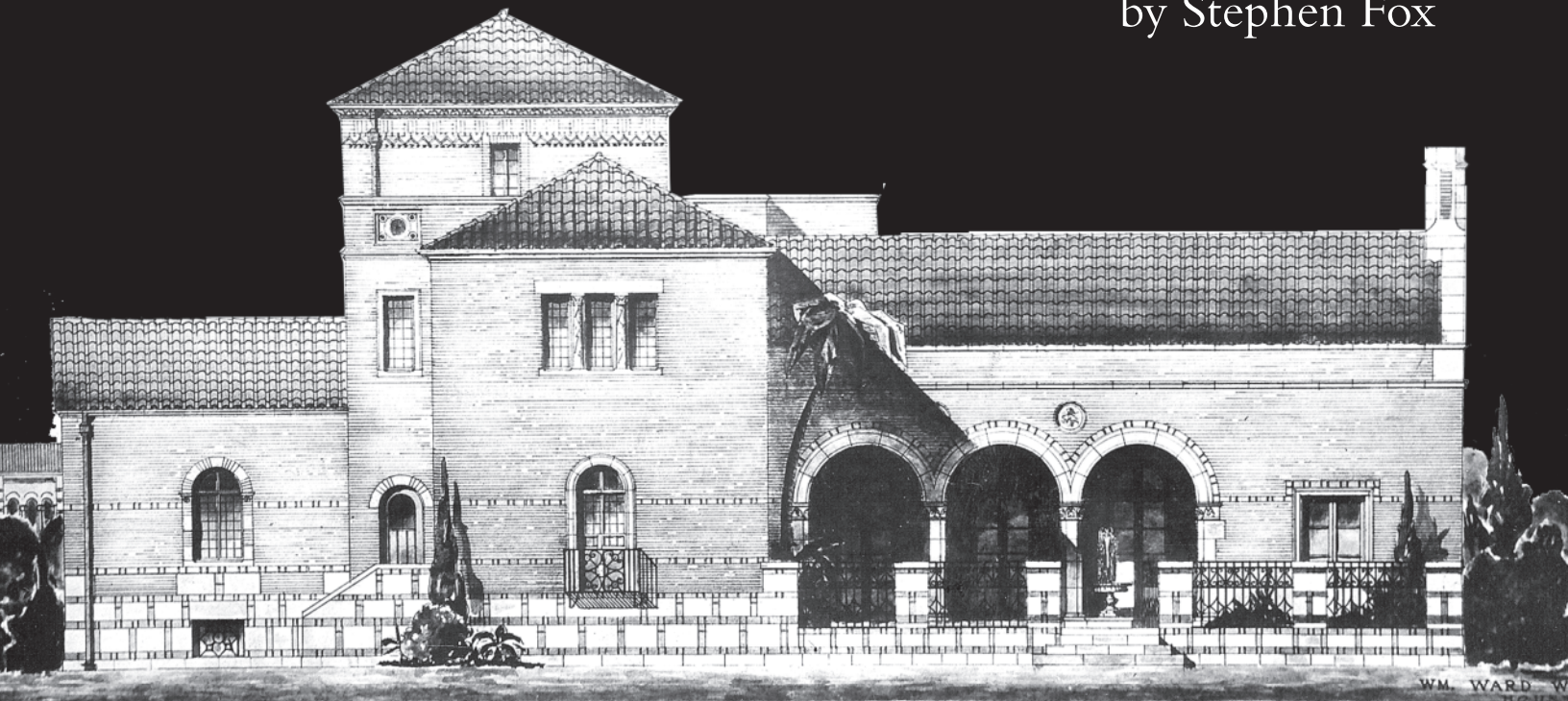




ROBERT AND AGNES COHEN HOUSE

The Rice University Faculty Club

by Stephen Fox

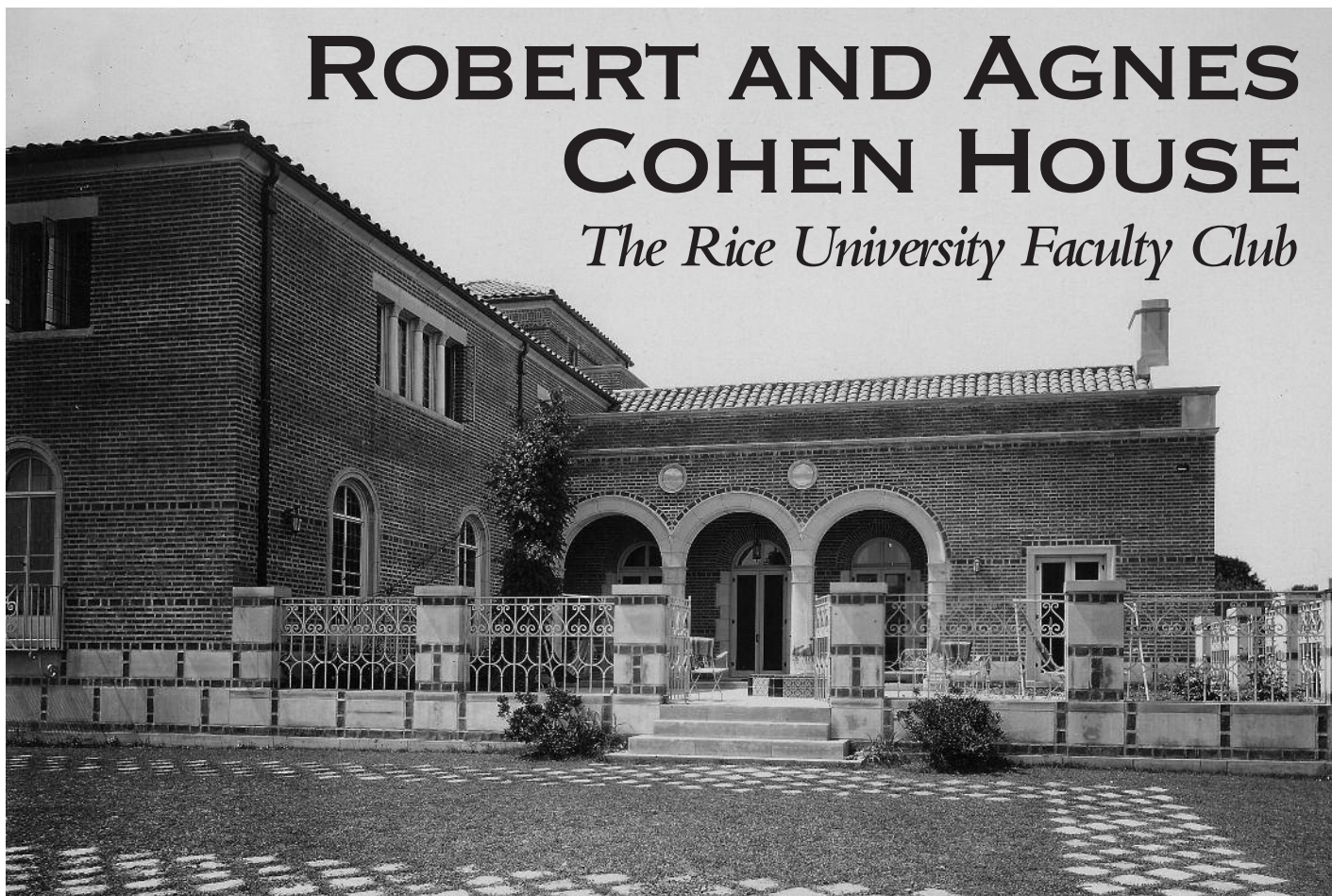


THE ROBERT AND AGNES COHEN HOUSE

A RICE HISTORICAL SOCIETY PUBLICATION

ROBERT AND AGNES COHEN HOUSE

The Rice University Faculty Club



Robert and Agnes Cohen House, home of the Rice University Faculty Club, was built in 1927 with a gift of \$125,000 from the Houston retail merchant George S. Cohen in honor of his parents Agnes Lord and Robert I. Cohen.¹ Cohen House was the first purpose-built university faculty club building in Texas.² It was also the first building at Rice whose construction was funded by a philanthropic donation rather than by the university. Although the club has been expanded in size (most dramatically in 1958–59, with smaller additions in 1976, 1994, and 2005), it retains strong associations with the generations of Rice professors, administrators, staff members, and graduate students who have dined there, and with such organizations as the Houston Philosophical Society and the Rice University Faculty Women's Club, which regularly meet at Cohen House.

Faculty clubs in U. S. universities seem to go back no farther than the late nineteenth century. The Quadrangle Club at the University of Chicago was founded in 1893, the year after classes began at the university. The Lenape Club (forerunner of the Penn Faculty Club at the University of Pennsylvania) was founded in 1898. The Johns Hopkins Club opened in 1900. The Faculty Club at the University of California, Berkeley, opened in 1902. The Colonnade Club at the University of Virginia dates to 1907, the year the Rice Institute's trustees invited Edgar Odell Lovett to become Rice's first president.³

The organization of faculty clubs was part of a broader process of social differentiation that occurred in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The growth of American cities due to industrialization and internal and foreign immigration created opportunities for the production of wealth but also social tensions and insecurity. Gentlemen's clubs became instruments for stabilizing social identity among elites in American cities and asserting claims to social superiority. During the second half of the nineteenth century, urban gentlemen's clubs, sporting clubs (tennis, sailing, riding), and—an innovation—family-oriented “country” clubs were organized in or on the outskirts of American cities.⁴



Houston Country Club (Houston book)

Membership in the most exclusive clubs with the most impressive clubhouses conferred social prestige.

During the early twentieth century, this process began to affect Houston. The Houston Club, a downtown businessmen's luncheon club founded in 1894, the Houston Country Club (founded 1904), and the Houston Yacht Club (1907) existed by the time President Lovett arrived in Houston.⁵ These were organizations with which many of Rice's trustees were affiliated. During the 1920s, as Houston's population and economy soared, there was a corresponding expansion in the formation of clubs.⁶ New country clubs (River Oaks of 1924, Glenbrook of 1925, Golfcrest of 1927, and Braeburn of 1927) supplemented the Houston Country Club. The Houston Riding and Polo Club built a clubhouse (1925), the Tejas Club outfitted quarters for its businessmen members on top of the Petroleum Building downtown (1929), and the women who founded the Junior League of Houston built their clubhouse in 1929. The Houston Turn-Verein, organized in 1854 by prosperous German-Houstonians, sold its sixteen-year-old clubhouse in what had become downtown and built a new clubhouse on Almeda Road in 1929 (demolished). Even institutions that were not social clubs constructed buildings that were club-like in appearance, accommodations, and sometimes nomenclature. Examples include Autry House on Main Boulevard across from Rice (1921), the YWCA Activities Building in downtown Houston (1923, demolished), the Forum of Civics on Westheimer (1926, now the River Oaks Garden Club), and "clubhouses" built at Mac Gregor Park (1931), Mason Park (1932), and Hermann Park (1933) by the City of Houston. The classic club interior consisted of a spacious sitting room, often called the lounge, a dining room where members could take their meals together, a card room, a library or reading room, and a small reception room where guests of members could wait. Behind the scenes, a kitchen and staff spaces were essential. Clubs might also contain spaces to facilitate athletic play as well as bedrooms where members or their guests could stay overnight.

William Ward Watkin, professor of architecture at the Rice Institute, was associated with this club-building phenomenon as co-architect of Autry House and the YWCA Activities Building. He had also designed the club-like YWCA Building in Galveston (1924). By coincidence, George Cohen was a Galvestonian. Cohen was president of Foley Brothers, one of Houston's leading dry goods stores, which he and his father, Robert I. Cohen, bought from its founders in 1917. George Cohen moved to Houston to run the store, bringing the brothers Leon, Marcus, Hyman, Leopold, Lasker, and Arthur Meyer, also from Galveston, into the business as his associates. In 1921, Cohen married Esther Meyer, the Meyer brothers' only sister. Cohen and his brothers-in-law turned Foley

Brothers into Houston's foremost department store before Cohen sold it to Federated Stores in 1945. After 1927, Cohen House became Esther and George Cohen's primary philanthropy and they maintained close ties to it and to Rice until George Cohen's death in 1971 and Esther Cohen's death in 1978.⁷

In the early 1920s Cohen became a supporter of the Rice Institute Student Loan Fund and served on its loan committee. As Cohen explained to a reporter in 1959, when his father turned seventy in November 1926, he decided to honor his parents with an act of philanthropy. The sociologist J.W. Slaughter, lecturer in civics and philanthropy at Rice, and President Lovett interested Cohen in the project of building a faculty club. In March 1927, on the occasion of George Cohen's mother's seventieth birthday, the Rice Institute announced his gift of \$125,000 in honor of his parents: \$100,000 was to be used for the construction and outfitting of the building and \$25,000 was to be set aside as an endowment, the income to be applied to building maintenance.⁸ William Ward Watkin was architect for the clubhouse. In June a construction contract for \$71,540 was awarded to Thomas T. Hopper Company of Houston to build Cohen House.⁹ A cornerstone dedication ceremony was held on July 26th with Esther and George Cohen, Agnes and Robert Cohen, and Dr. Henry Cohen, rabbi of Congregation B'nai Israel in Galveston, present.¹⁰ The completed building was dedicated at Homecoming on Thanksgiving Day 1927, which coincided with Robert Cohen's seventy-first birthday.¹¹ Although Cram & Ferguson of Boston, who had designed Rice's original buildings, were consulting architects, Cohen House was the first Rice building for which Watkin was the primary architect. The minutes of the Rice Institute Faculty Club indicate that it was not until late October 1927 that a club was actually formed. Robert G. Caldwell, professor of history, was chair. Griffith C. Evans, professor of mathematics, Slaughter, Watkin, Harry B. Weiser, professor of chemistry, Harold A. Wilson,



William Ward Watkin



Robert C. Caldwell



Laying the Cornerstone of Cohen House, July 26, 1927, left to right: William Ward Watkin, architect; Robert I. Cohen (with box), Mrs. George S. Cohen; Mrs. Robert I. Cohen; Benjamin Botts Rice; Dr. Edgar Odell Lovett; E. A. Peden; Rabbi Henry Cohen, rabbi of Congregation B’Nai Israel, Galveston; Thomas T. Hopper, contractor.

professor of physics, and J.T. McCants, university bursar, constituted the club’s founding members. At their second meeting, they elected Miss Alice C. Dean, fellow in mathematics and de-facto university librarian, to membership.¹² As a result, the Rice Faculty Club never

experienced the conflicted process of having to convince members of the “gentlemen’s club” to admit women to membership.



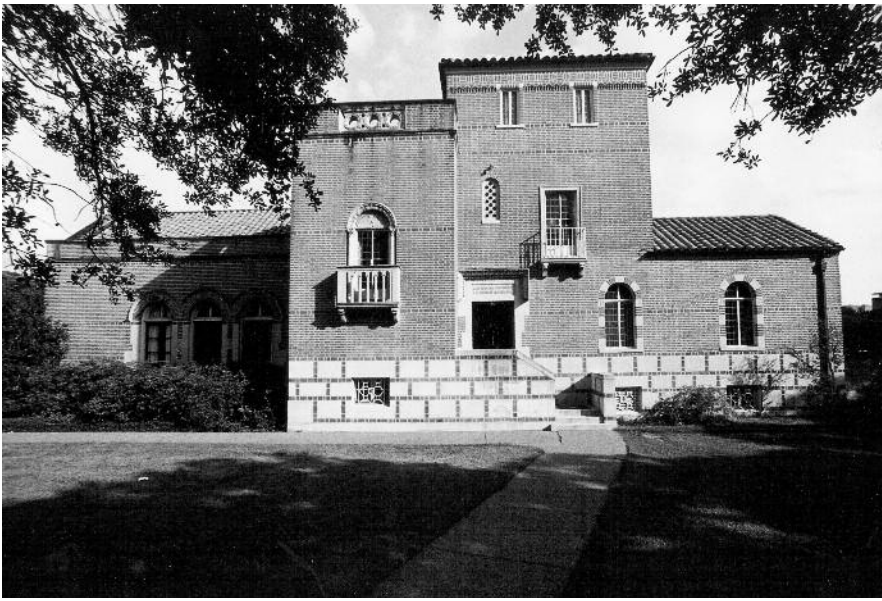
Alice C. Dean

The clubhouse was a one-, two-, and three-story structure built above a raised basement. The foundations and floor slabs are of reinforced concrete construction. The walls are of load-bearing interlocking tile block faced on the outside with brick and Lueders Texas limestone. The clubhouse contained 7,100 square feet. The main floor was organized around an entrance hall and stair tower. The hall gave access to a small, reception-waiting room (now called the Cohen Room) paneled in quarter-

sawn white oak; a game room (now called the Card Room); the lounge; and the dining room (now the buffet-serving room). Guests were scarcely aware of an office for the manager and a very compact kitchen. The lounge was, and remains, the most architecturally impressive space in Cohen House. It is twenty-three-feet wide and forty-four-feet long, with a high, wood-compartmented tray ceiling finished with decorative stenciling. A hooded, Renaissance



Lounge of Cohen House



Front of Cohen House

style limestone fireplace is centered on the east wall of the room. The floor is surfaced with cordovan-colored cement tile. The walls are of hand-finished plaster. Originally, a colorful stenciled wainscot suggesting tile patterns was painted on the lower half of the wall. French doors with arched fanlights open to the campus on the north and to an arcaded cloister on the south, the latter providing access to the spacious, elevated garden terrace, which was paved with flagstone and contained a low tile fountain. A reading alcove opened off the southeast corner of the lounge, near the fireplace. The dining room occupied the clubhouse's rear wing, giving it exposure on three sides through French doors (although there was no direct access to the rear terrace). The dining room also had a concrete tile floor and a wainscot of quarter-sawn white oak. At 20 feet by 30 feet in area, it could seat 50 people. The game room, which is eighteen feet wide and nineteen feet long, lay in the northwest corner of the clubhouse. It is the only room on Watkin's plans shown as equipped with a ceiling fan. The basement contained a gym beneath the game room and a handball court beneath the dining room. A men's locker and shower room lay between these spaces beneath the kitchen. The second floor contained a ladies' sitting room (now the President's Dining Room) at the head of the stairs. Next to the ladies' sitting room was the library (now the George S. Cohen Dining Room) and occupying the rear wing above the dining room was the billiard room (now the Esther M. Cohen Dining Room). A concealed stair next to the ladies' sitting room provided access to the third-floor tower, which contained a bed-sitting room and a bathroom for overnight guests.

News reports described Cohen House as an example of Byzantine architecture, designed to harmonize with Rice's existing campus buildings.¹³ It was constructed next

to the Residential Group for Men (comprising what became Baker, Will Rice, and Hanszen Colleges) and adjacent to the site where the student center was supposed to have been built (now parking lot L behind Allen Center). Watkin gave the clubhouse a picturesque massing to make it look house-like rather than institutional. The three-story tower containing the entrance steps and front door incorporates the offset two-and-a-half-story stair tower. The low-set, one-story lounge wing projects from the east side of the entrance tower and the one-story wing containing the game room projects from the west side. Watkin offset door and window openings to enhance the building's picturesqueness. The base of the clubhouse is surfaced with blocks of limestone set between brick

courses. At different levels on different wings, the walls transition from stone to brick laid up between horizontally striated, oversized courses. Pitched roofs are surfaced with red terra cotta barrel tiles. Steel casement windows contain smaller scaled glass panes framed with metal kames. The south (rear) side of the clubhouse was wrapped in an L-plan configuration around the raised, open-air terrace (now part of the Main Dining Room), which was surrounded by stone and brick piers and wrought iron railings. The terrace was oriented to the prevailing southeast breeze and it was accessible from an auto turnaround on its east flank. The cloister off the lounge opened to the terrace through triple arches. French doors opening onto wrought iron balconies overlooked the terrace from the dining room. The third-floor guest room had access to a terrace deck set behind a solid brick parapet. The tower-and-terrace combination, tiled roofs, and arched window



Portraits: J. T. McCants/S. G. McCann; Marcel Moraud, Agnes and Robert Cohen

openings allied Cohen House with the architecture of East Hall and the Institute Commons (now Baker College). Its limestone and brick facing and comparatively large scale enabled it to cohere with the materials and scale of the Administration Building (now Lovett Hall). A collegiate touch, characteristic of Rice's early academic buildings, involved relief portraits that Oswald Lassig, the sculptor who executed the most demanding stone carvings on the Administration Building in 1911 and 1912, installed on the caps of the cloister piers. These featured the likenesses of Rice's senior faculty: Stockton Axson (English), Caldwell, Asa C. Chandler (biology), Evans, Max Freund (German), Herbert K. Humphrey (electrical engineering and first chair of the faculty club's board of directors in 1928) sharing his frame with Joseph H. Pound (mechanical engineering), J. T. McCants sharing a frame with S. G. McCann (registrar), Marcel Moraud (French), Lewis B. Ryon (civil engineering) sharing his frame with Slaughter, Radoslav A. Tsanoff (philosophy), Watkin, Weiser, and Wilson. Agnes and Robert Cohen also share a frame (facing page).¹⁴

There are few interior photographs of Cohen House from the 1920s and 1930s. Photographs that the Houston photographer Frank Schlueter took of the lounge and looking from the entrance hall into the lounge in 1932 survive, as does a photograph of the lounge in the 1928 *Campanile*.¹⁵ Schlueter's photographs emphasize the textured plaster walls (which appear to have had a glossy, reflective sheen, although this may result from his use of spotlights to illuminate the interiors), the stenciled wood-cased ceiling, and the stenciled wainscot. The ornate, Renaissance style, carved oak case pieces, tables, chairs and a settee (the chairs and settee upholstered with tapestry fabric) that Watkin and George Cohen traveled to Chicago in August 1927 to order from the Newton & Hoit Furniture Company stand out, as do such modern conveniences as electric reading lamps, coffee tables, free-standing ashtrays, and leather-upholstered easy chairs.¹⁶ Simple draperies hang from exposed wooden rods mounted above the north facing arched French doors. A large square rug is centered in front of the triple set of French doors. A leather sofa is diagonally aligned to one side of the fireplace. Flanking the fireplace is a pair of rectangular, wall-mounted grills concealing the recessed radiators that provided heat during cold weather. Two pairs of wrought iron electrical chandeliers were suspended from the lounge ceiling. Mounted on the sloping fireplace



Shield carved by Peter Mansbendel

hood above the mantle is the scrolled walnut plaque designed and executed by the Austin wood carver Peter Mansbendel. It is inscribed with a dedicatory text; a line in Hebrew from the Decalogue translated as "Honor your father and mother;" a shield bearing two Rice owls, the lamp of learning, and a pair of gloved hands raised in priestly blessing, the symbol of the Kohanim.¹⁷ George Cohen took a proprietary interest in the design and construction of Cohen House and was very involved in the selection of furniture, fabrics, equipment, china, silver, crystal, and linen. Cohen's knowledge and connections as a merchant of household goods meant that he was especially well suited to choose artifacts that materialized the ambience he wanted the club to possess and the equipment that would enable it to function efficiently and economically. All of the contents of Cohen House were ordered through Foley Brothers.¹⁸

The *Campanile* of 1942 is another source of rare interior photographs of Cohen House. By 1942 a console radio had been added to one corner of the lounge. The *Campanile* shows the dining room with its paneled oak wainscot and plastered upper walls, much as it appears today. It also shows the billiard room.¹⁹



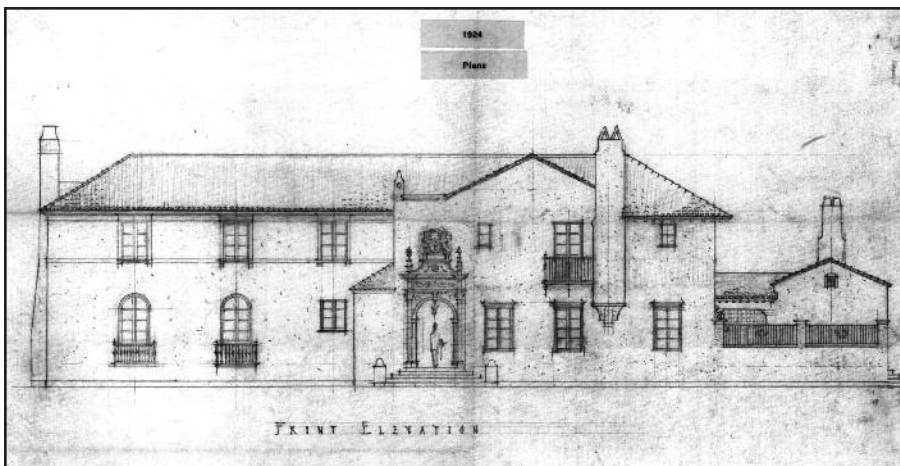
Carroll Camden and Joseph Davies in front of console radio, 1942 (*Campanile*)

As a place to entertain dignitaries visiting Rice, Cohen House became a surrogate for the President's House that President Lovett never persuaded the trustees to build for him. Cram & Ferguson had produced two complete designs for a President's House in 1913 and 1916 and Watkin produced two more schematic designs in 1923 and 1924.²⁰ Examining the first floor plan of Cohen House, it is clear that Watkin derived certain spatial elements of the clubhouse from his unbuilt President's House design of 1924, especially the entrance hall-lounge-terrace spatial relationship. Watkin was just as clearly inspired by Cohen House when he designed one of his grandest houses, the "Casa de Mañana" in Sugar Land of 1926-28, for the sugar refiner W. T. Eldridge.²¹ Rice's faculty club building was planned and built during what, in architectural-historical perspective, was the golden age of American university faculty clubs. Like the Quadrangle Club at the University of Chicago (its new Tudor style clubhouse of 1922 designed by the distinguished Chicago

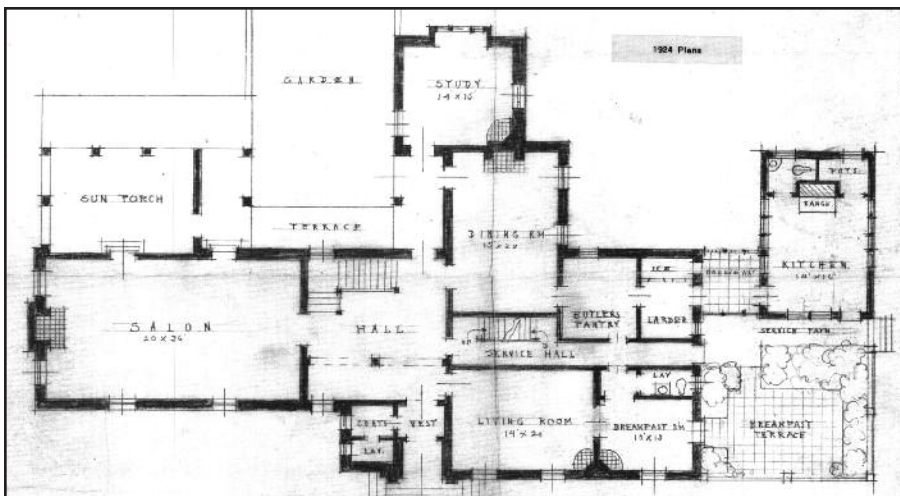
country house architect Howard V. Shaw), the Spanish Mediterranean style Athenaeum at Cal Tech in Pasadena (1931, by the Los Angeles architect Gordon B. Kaufmann), and the Georgian style Harvard Faculty Club (1931 by Coolidge, Shepley, Bulfinch & Abbott of Boston), Cohen House was designed to look like a slightly institutionalized version of a country house. In this respect, it contrasted with Columbia University's Faculty House of 1923 by the architects McKim, Mead & White, designed to appear like a grand townhouse, and the Women's Faculty Club at Berkeley (1923, John Galen Howard), whose rustic shingled exterior was intended to make it compatible with Berkeley's (all-male) Faculty Club of 1902 next door.²² The Faculty Club was open to use by other university groups (minutes of the meetings of faculty members who in the fall of 1927 organized the club specifically named the Houston Philosophical Society and the Rice Institute Faculty Women's Club) and the club extended membership to Esther and George Cohen. But unlike the

Quadrangle Club or The Athenaeum, which extended membership to community residents not otherwise affiliated with the university, membership in the Faculty Club was focused on Rice faculty, staff, trustees, and graduate students. Also unlike its counterparts at Chicago, Columbia, Cal Tech, and Harvard, overnight guest accommodations were not a significant part of the conception of Rice's faculty club.

Certain limitations became evident once the club began operation.²³ In 1929, George Cohen funded a \$22,000 addition to the west side of the building, designed by Watkin: a one-story wing containing a new kitchen that enabled the original kitchen to be remodeled as a butler's pantry. Storage rooms were added in the basement beneath the new wing, as was an architecturally aggrandized outside entrance to the basement, which meant that faculty members using the gym or handball court no longer had to go through the club.²⁴ The roof above the new kitchen extension was a terrace accessible from the second-floor library. In 1928 Rice built a tennis court, located just east of the clubhouse, for the use of faculty members. An aerial photograph of the campus from 1940 indicates that hedges were planted to enclose a



Front elevation of proposed president's house designed by William Ward Watkin in 1924



First floor plan of proposed president's house, 1924



Tea Party, 1934

rectangle of lawn behind the terrace and dining room as a garden. Eight live oak trees planted in 1927 were beginning to mature. A series of photos dated June 1934 indicate that even after the onset of summer, garden parties were staged on the terrace of Cohen House.²⁵ During the academic year, weekday lunch was served between 12:15 and 1:30 p.m. and coffee and tea were served between 3:00 and 5:00 p.m. There was also a Sunday dinner served between 6:00 and 8:00 p.m. With permission from the board of directors, members could reserve space for such private events as luncheons, receptions, teas, and card parties.²⁶

Because the Great Depression forced President Lovett to reduce student enrollment and faculty salaries, and even to lay-off faculty members, the number of faculty members at Rice declined from 73 in 1930 to 64 in 1940. By 1950 the faculty had been expanded to 100 members and by 1959 to 140 members.²⁷ The pressure that increasing numbers of club members put on Cohen House was reflected in the magnitude of its expansion between 1958 and 1959. Esther and George Cohen supported this expansion by underwriting the \$260,000 cost of a 6,500 square-foot addition to the back of the club and all the equipment and furnishings this entailed.

William Ward Watkin had died in 1952. To design the addition, Mr. and Mrs. Cohen turned to the architects Hermon Lloyd (Rice '31) and W. B. Morgan, who had just completed Mary Gibbs Jones College (1957) at Rice. Lloyd, Morgan, and their designer (and future partner) Arthur E. Jones (Rice '47) demonstrated with their one-story addition just how radically American architecture had changed between 1927 and 1957.

Lloyd & Morgan's addition was a new dining room encompassing the rear terrace and a completely new kitchen, pantry, and delivery dock. A flat roof plate, 66 feet wide, 80 feet long, and suspended from steel upstand beams, free-spanned above the terrace and a 36-foot wide extension built at grade level; George Cohen did not want interior structural columns to interrupt the view to the outdoors. The new dining room (now called the Main Dining Room) could seat 350 people.²⁸ Circular plastic skylights perforating the roof plate above the terrace made the expanded interior very bright and compensated for the fact that the lounge would thereafter receive only north light and the original dining room would become completely internalized. The enclosure of the original dining room occurred because the new kitchen was slotted along what had been its west wall. What made this

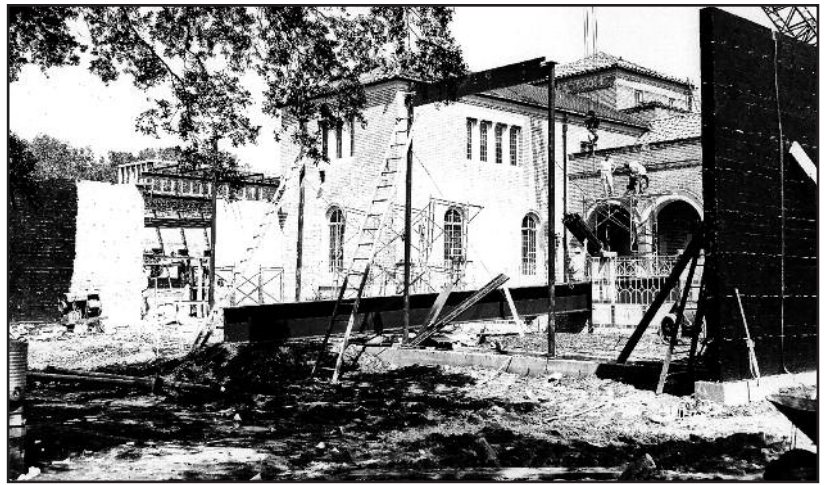
degree of internalization feasible was that the entire clubhouse was centrally air-conditioned. As modern architects, Lloyd & Morgan dispensed with any effort to continue the Byzantine style of the 1927 Cohen House. Their one concession was to detail the exterior brick facing the addition's interlocking tile block structural walls with striated courses. The south wall of Lloyd & Morgan's new dining room was all glass. Sliding doors made it possible to open the 13 ½-foot-high dining room to a new garden enclosed by a faceted brick wall built in 1960. The openness, transparency, horizontal expansiveness, and luminosity of the new dining room contrasted with the textured, decorated, historically detailed rooms of the 1927 clubhouse. At George Cohen's insistence, changes to the original clubhouse were minimal (the most visible alteration was the elimination of the stenciled wainscot in the lounge).²⁹

Cohen House possessed two different architectural and spatial identities: the neo-historical 1920s and the expansive, streamlined 1950s. The Houston interior designer Inez McHale furnished the dining room with articulated wood tables, chairs, and serving pieces that did not interrupt views out to the garden. Lloyd & Morgan provided the new dining room with a separate east-side entrance beneath a curved canopy. This gave access to a new surface parking lot on the site of the tennis court, a modern amenity that, like central air-conditioning, was not to be regretted and for which George Cohen was responsible. One additional concession to historical continuity involved relief profiles of faculty members modeled in terra cotta by the artist William McVey (Rice '27) and mounted on the exposed brick east and west walls of the dining room addition.

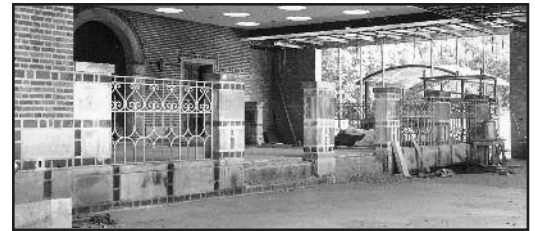


Profiles of Edgar Odell Lovett (top) and Hubert E. Bray

These were portraits of Joseph I. Davies (biology), Carroll Camden (English), Claude Heaps (physics), G. Holmes Richter (chemistry and dean of the institute), William V. Houston (Lovett's successor as president), Carey Croneis (geology and provost), Floyd E. Ulrich (mathematics), Alan D. McKillop (English), James Chillman, Jr., (architecture and art history), André Bourgeois (French), Arthur J. Hartsook (chemical engineering), Hubert E. Bray (Mathematics), Edgar Odell Lovett, Floyd S.



1958 Construction, enclosing the terrace (outside view, interior view)



Lear (history), Edgar Altenburg (biology), James S. Waters (electrical engineering), and Gilbert L. Hermance (physical education).³⁰ McVey also executed a special portrait plaque of Esther and George Cohen. In addition Mr. and Mrs. Cohen donated to the club a pair of oil portraits that the distinguished Houston artist Robert Joy painted of them.³¹

Following the dedication of the addition to Cohen House in January 1959, Mr. and Mrs. Cohen concentrated on constructing the new walled garden, completed under their direction in November 1960 and dedicated on Cohen's 75th birthday. The landscape architects Robert F. White & Associates designed the garden with a deep planting bed. The planting bed meets the flat lawn with a continuous serpentine curve constructed with massed



Portraits of George Cohen and Esther Cohen

ground cover of Asiatic jasmine and English ivy. White and his associate Fred Klatt planted magnolia trees, flowering dogwood, azaleas, and camellias to give the garden its lush, evergreen, woodland texture. A circular pool on the lawn is the setting for a fountainhead by the French glass artist Max Ingrand, which the Cohens commissioned. Since 1978, the garden has been called the Esther M. Cohen Garden.³²

The 1959 addition to the club and the garden of 1960 are in the mainstream of faculty club design during the postwar period. By rejecting historical models and emphasizing transparency and indoor-outdoor connections, modern architects re-imagined faculty clubs, which they no longer sought to identify as gentlemen's clubs but as pavilions, whose glass walls, lack of formality, and house-like scale liberated them from snobbish, exclusionary associations and hierarchical practices.

The Faculty Center at the University of Washington in Seattle (1960, Paul Hayden Kirk & Associates and Victor Steinbrueck), the Faculty Center at the University of California, Los Angeles (1961, Jones & Emmons), the Stanford Faculty Club (1965, Edward B. Page), and the Faculty Club at Duke University adhered to modern, and increasingly suburban, architectural identities.³³ Duke's faculty club, located adjacent to the university's golf course, is a full-scale country club.

Since the 1959 addition, the Faculty Club has undergone major improvements at intervals of approximately ten to twenty years. In February 1973, the Cohen-Blum Fund became available as an endowment to underwrite improvement projects at Cohen House.³⁴ In 1976 work was completed on an addition that nearly doubled the size of the kitchen, replaced Lloyd & Morgan's side entrance canopy with a wide porte-cochère (as George Cohen had wanted to do as early as 1962), entailed interior alterations to ease circulation for arriving diners (acknowledging that a substantial percentage of diners arrived from the parking lot by car rather than by walking across campus), and installed a landing and steps leading from the French doors in the original dining room down to the level of the original terrace. This alteration made it feasible to use the original dining room as the

buffet serving line for daily lunch. William T. Cannady and Anderson Todd, professors of architecture, designed this round of improvements.³⁵ In 1993-94, a small, one-story wing was added to the southeast corner of the dining room extension. This contained offices for the club manager and staff and men's and women's restrooms on the same level as the dining room. An important element of this phase of improvements was the installation of a handicapped ramp adjacent to the porte-cochère giving access to the cloister, terrace, and lounge. The San Antonio architects Ford, Powell & Carson designed the 1994

alterations and additions.³⁶

The most recent alterations and additions were made in 2005. The men's and women's restrooms installed in the 1959 remodeling (in the space occupied by the original kitchen and manager's office) were eliminated and the space was opened up to become an ante-room to the buffet-serving room. On the second floor, the terrace above the 1929 kitchen was filled in to become an extension to the library. A service stair connecting the kitchen with



Faculty club lunch crowd in the seventies

a new second-floor serving pantry was added. Since the 1970s all of the second-floor rooms have become private dining rooms. As part of the 2005 alterations, interior finishes in the first-floor game room and the second-floor billiard room were restored, revealing the polished terrazzo floor in the billiard room. Not since the early 1980s have guests occupied the tower room, which does not conform to current safety codes because it is accessible only by a single stair. The 2005 alterations were carried out by the Houston office of Gensler. The Houston architects Stern & Bucek carried out additional interior alterations and also performed historic conservation work in 2006.³⁷

Although peripheral to undergraduate student life at Rice, Cohen House is a central fixture for faculty, staff, and graduate students. In addition to an average of 250-300 diners at weekday lunches during the academic year, many campus-based town-gown organizations hold luncheon meetings at Cohen House: the Rice Historical Society, the Rice Design Alliance, Friends of Fondren Library, and the Jones Graduate School of Management, as well as departments from Baylor College of Medicine and the University of Texas M. D. Anderson Cancer Center. The Faculty Women's Club and the Houston Philosophical Society still meet regularly at Cohen House, as do the Moonlighters, a dance club, and investment and

Bible study groups. Such ritual events as the Shepherd Society's annual Madrigal Dinners, the president's reception for graduates and their families following commencement, the new faculty orientation reception, the international students luncheon, the Rice Global Engineering and Construction Forum dinner, the Office of Admissions' Vision Weekend, the Athletics department's Baseball Dinner, and the Holiday Dinner Dance occur there. Private events, especially wedding receptions, Bar and Bat Mitzvahs, and receptions for visiting dignitaries mean that Cohen House stays busy during evenings, especially on Fridays and Saturdays.³⁸

The board of directors of the Rice University Faculty Club, composed of 11 Rice faculty members, must contend with such challenging issues as management of expenses, the factor that has caused many U. S. universities to close their faculty clubs. The cost of maintaining, upgrading, and, when needed, adding new construction is assured by the Cohen-Blum Fund. Lynn Davis Lasher, whose mother, Elene Meyer Davis, is the niece of Esther Cohen, maintains the Meyer-Cohen family connection to the club. The image of the gentlemen's club no longer seems quite applicable to Cohen House. Rice faculty members are as apt to wear shorts and sandals to lunch as suits and ties. It is the stateliness of the lounge (its fireplace, arched windows, polished tile floor, and stenciled ceiling intact), the intimacy of the paneled reception room, the profiles of professors past keeping an eye on their successors, the vista of the garden from the dining room that never fails to impress visitors, and the conscientious preservation of the street front of the clubhouse that make Cohen House such a special place to those who know it. Cohen House conserves a sense of Rice's history that is more immediate and personal than the Administration Building or the Academic Court. It is the part of Rice's history that is about conviviality, food and conversation, seeing and being seen, and mid-day relaxation, necessary complements to the university's dominant activities of research, teaching, and administration.

NOTES

- 1 For their assistance in the preparation of this article, I extend thanks to Mary Dix, editor of the *Cornerstone: The Newsletter of the Rice Historical Society*; Mark Ditman, associate vice president for housing and dining, Rice University; Ann Swain, director of Cohen House and her staff, Ahmed Mihabi, chef, Frances Zientek, manager, and Sonia Amador, assistant manager; David Rodd, University Architect, Joe McGrath, Architectural Records Analyst in Facilities Engineering and Planning, and Joujou Zebdaoui, project manager for Facilities Engineering and Planning. Also Lynn D. Lasher; Karen H. Rogers; John B. Boles, Hobby professor of history; William T. Cannady, professor of architecture; Ray Watkin Strange; the Woodson Research Center and the Brown Art and Architecture Library of Fondren Library, Rice University.
2. Although Cohen House was the first purpose-built university faculty club in Texas, it was not the first faculty club. The Faculty Club of Southern Methodist University in Dallas was founded in 1921 for male faculty members, followed by the founding of a Women's Faculty Club at SMU in 1928. The two merged in 1963. See the History page of the club's website at www.smu.edu/facultyclub/history.html.
- 3 There seems to be no single source on the history of the American university faculty club. The dates of origin of the clubs cited come from websites. On the Quadrangle Club see: www.quadclub.uchicago.edu/quad.php?Q=history. On the Penn Faculty Club's predecessor, the Lenape Club, see: www.upenn.edu/almanac/v44/n26/lenape.html. On the Johns Hopkins Club, see: www.jhuclub.jhu.edu/history.html. On the Faculty Club at the University of California, Berkeley, see: James Steele, *Faculty Club, University of California, Berkeley: Bernard Maybeck*, London: Academy Editions, 1995. On the Colonnade Club, see: www.indorgs.virginia.edu/colonnadecub/about.htm. John B. Boles, *University Builder: Edgar Odell Lovett and the Founding of the Rice Institute*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007, pp. 39-49.
- 4 On the history of American clubs, both gentlemen's city clubs and country clubs, see James M. Mayo, *The American Country Club: Its Origins and Development*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998.

NOTES (CONTINUED)

- ⁵ Dorothy Knox Howe Houghton, *The Houston Club and Its City: One Hundred Years*, Houston: Houston Club, 1994; Patrick J. Nicholson, *Houston Country Club Seventy-Fifth Anniversary, 1908-1983*, Houston: Houston Country Club, 1984; Dora F. Akkerman, *From Buffalo Bayou to Galveston Bay: The Centennial History of the Houston Yacht Club, 1897-1997*, LaPorte: Houston Yacht Club, 1998. George S. Cohen was a member of all three clubs as well as the River Oaks Country Club.
- ⁶ Marguerite Johnston, *Houston: The Unknown City*, College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1991, pp. 222-225, 243-244, 257, 265.
- ⁷ On Autry House see Paul Micou, *The Church's Inquiry into Student Religious Life*, New York: National Council, Protestant Episcopal Church, Department of Religious Education, 1923, pp. 2-3, 220-221; "Activities Building, Y.W.C.A., Houston, Texas," *Architecture* 48 (October 1923), pp. 337-339 and plates 159-160; "Y.W.C.A. Building, Galveston, Texas," *Architecture* 53 (May 1926), plate 83. On George S. Cohen see "George S. Cohen's Monuments Stand Towering in City," *Houston Post*, January 25, 1959, Sec. 1, p. 9; Nathan Broch, "George S. Cohen and Cohen House," *Rice University Review* 7 (September 1972), pp. 2-11; and Leopold L. Meyer, *The Days of My Years: The Autobiographical Reflections of Leopold L. Meyer*, Houston: privately printed, 1975.
- ⁸ "George S. Cohen Honors Parents With \$125,000 Gift To Rice," *Houston Chronicle* March 22, 1927, Sec 1, p. 1; "Edgar Odell Lovett, Gift and Its Inspiration Shall Abide," Dr. Lovett Says, *Houston Chronicle* March 22, 1927, Sec. 1, p. 1; "George S. Cohen's Monuments Stand Towering in City," *Houston Post*, January 25, 1959, Sec. 1, p. 9; "George Cohen, ex-Foley's Owner, Dies," *Houston Post*, December 23, 1971, p. 4A; "Cohen," *Houston Post*, December 23, 1978, p. 7D; "Announcement is Made in Galveston," *Houston Chronicle* March 22, 1927, Sec. 2, p. 1. Cohen's skill in coordinating publicity is evident in the simultaneous publication of this story as front-page news in the three Houston and two Galveston daily newspapers on March 22, 1927, the date of his mother's seventieth birthday.
- ⁹ "Robert and Agnes Cohen House for Rice Faculty," *Houston Post-Dispatch*, June 26, 1927, Real Estate Building section, p. 5.
- ¹⁰ "Cohen Building Stone is Laid at Rice Ceremony," *Houston Post-Dispatch*, July 27, 1927, p. 1.
- ¹¹ "Cohen House is Opened Formally with Faculty Tea," *Houston Chronicle*, November 26, 1927, p. 12. The minutes book of the Faculty Club of the Rice Institute indicates that on Thanksgiving Day, November 24, 1927, the Rice faculty held a dinner to open Cohen House and honor Robert I. Cohen on his seventy-first birthday. The next day, Friday the 25th, faculty members and their wives hosted an opening tea. On Sunday, November 27th, Watkin's Edward Albert Palmer Memorial Chapel next to Autry House was also dedicated. "Faculty Members Speak at Opening New Rice Building," and "Dedicatory Ceremony is Held Sunday," *The Thresher*, December 2, 1927, p. 1.
- ¹² Ralph Adams Cram's only involvement with the design of Cohen House seems to have involved suggestions he made to Watkin about the design of two balconies on the street front of the clubhouse. Cram concluded a brief letter to Watkin: "You see my criticisms are not very severe, but as a matter of fact I like the building very much indeed. It ought to be extremely picturesque." Ralph Adams Cram to William Ward Watkin, April 6, 1927, William Ward Watkin Papers, Box 2, Folder 44. Bound volume of minutes of the Faculty Club of the Rice Institute, October 1927-February 1928, Rice University Archives-Faculty Club, 1927-75, Box 1. Although Miss Dean seems to have been the first person elected to membership in the Faculty Club, club minutes indicate that the board moved in December 1927 to permit only men to use the first-floor game room. The French novelist and philosopher Simone de Beauvoir mentions Cohen House in her travel book, *America Day by Day*, an account of a journey through the United States that she made in 1947. Beauvoir spoke at Rice on March 28, 1947. She wrote: "M. [Marcel Moraud], who has been a professor in America for twenty years, takes me to Rice University. The buildings stand amid lush lawns flowering with camellias and azaleas. We have lunch at the faculty club. These clubs are reserved for men, which gives the meal a touch of austerity; but in the universities, as elsewhere, men's clubs passionately refuse to open their doors to women. Women demand too much attention and consideration; the men prefer to be bored—at least there are no constraints." Simone de Beauvoir, *America Day by Day*, translated by Carol Cosman, foreword by Douglas Brinkley, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

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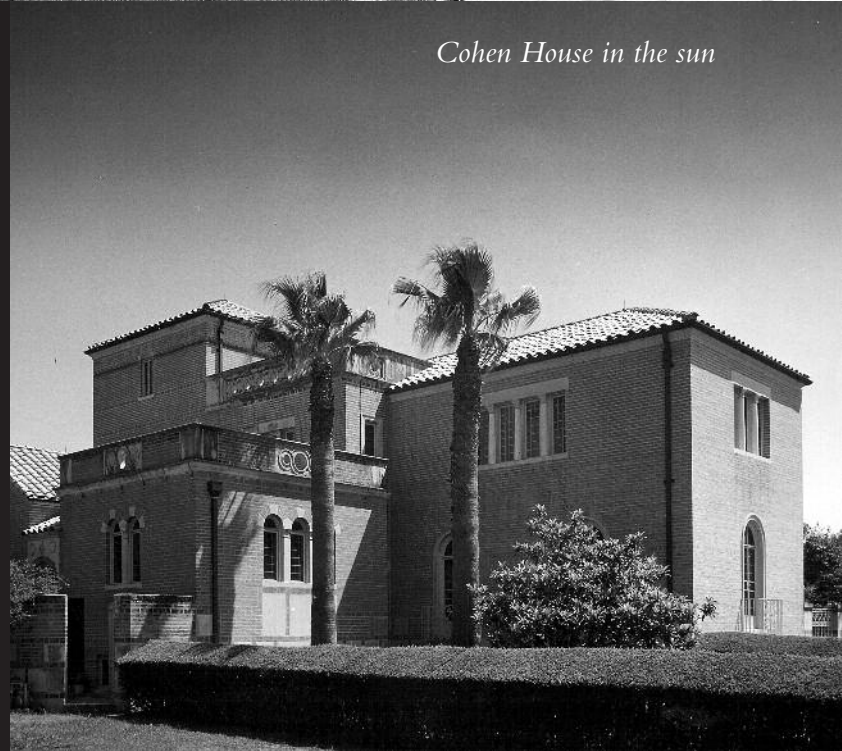
- ¹³ “Cohen House is Wealthy in Old World’s Color,” undated newspaper clipping.
- ¹⁴ James C. Morehead, Jr. *A Walking Tour of Rice University*, Houston: Rice University Press, 1984, pp. 69-71.
- ¹⁵ “The Robert and Agnes Cohen House” in the unpaginated “Campus” section, *The Campanile*, 1928. The Schlueter photographs are in the Rice University Archives-Cohen House Records, Box 6, Folder 21.
- ¹⁶ The copy of a letter from William Ward Watkin to Newton & Hoit of July 23, 1927, apprising them of his and George Cohen’s forthcoming visit, suggests that the Chicago company, which Watkin refers to as furniture brokers, was expected to recommend specific pieces of furniture for the clubhouse based on architectural drawings of the building Watkin sent them while remaining within the furniture budget of \$11,000. The correspondence between Watkin and Newton & Hoit is in Folder 44, Box 2, of the William Ward Watkin Papers. There are detailed invoices from Newton & Hoit in the Rice University Archives-Cohen House Records for all the goods they shipped to Houston. See Box 4, Folder 9 in the Cohen House Records.
- ¹⁷ Watkin turned to Peter Mansbendel after Newton & Hoit quoted a price of \$850 and a time period of three months to fabricate a dedicatory shield. Mansbendel produced an accepted design and then fabricated the cartouche-like plaque, working with George Cohen and Rabbi Henry Cohen to ensure the accuracy of the Hebrew inscription, in less than a month’s time and charged \$350. See Rice University Archives-Cohen House Records, Box 1, Folders 6 and 7 and the William Ward Watkin Papers, Box 2, File 44. On Mansbendel, see Doug Oliver’s website: www.petermansbendel.com. Cohen consulted the New York heraldry specialists Hasbrouck & Waid on a design for the Cohen House shield. The one diagram associated with their letter is not the design that was eventually adopted. Cohen House Records, Box 1, Folder 5.
- ¹⁸ The Cohen House Records contain a number of multi-page letters that George Cohen wrote at various times to Rice faculty members conveying his intense interest in ensuring that the Faculty Club maintain high standards of propriety and that operations, financial management, and maintenance be properly performed. These letters are valuable for revealing Cohen’s personal observations and recollections as he tried to instill in newer Rice faculty members in the 1950s and ’60s his sense of historical continuity. Typescript of Cohen memorandum to the board of directors of the Faculty Club, undated, October 1950, Box 1, File 8; Cohen to Lee M. Sharrar, 27 May 1929, Box 4, Folder 1; and Cohen to William W. Caudill, June 3, 1962, Box 5, Folder 4.
- ¹⁹ *Campanile*, 1942, pp. 18-24.
- ²⁰ Karen Rogers, “All the President’s Houses,” *The Cornerstone: The Newsletter of the Rice Historical Society*, 4 (Spring 1999), p. 1.
- ²¹ “Casa de Mañana,” *Houston Post-Dispatch*, August 19, 1928, p. 7 of the pictorial gravure section.
- ²² On the Quadrangle Club’s clubhouse see Jay Pridmore, *The University of Chicago: An Architectural Tour*, The Campus Guide, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2006, pp. 173-174. On the Athenaeum see Joseph Giovannini, “Gordon Kaufmann,” in *Caltech 1910-1950: An Urban Architecture for Southern California*, ed. Peter de Bretteville and Stefanos Polyzoides, Pasadena: Baxter Art Gallery of the California Institute of Technology, 1983, pp. 28-37. On the Harvard Faculty Club see Douglas Shand-Tucci, *Harvard University*, The Campus Guide, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2001, pp. 189-190. On Columbia University’s Faculty House, see www.neighbors.columbia.edu/construction/current/Faculty_House/index.html. On Berkeley’s Women’s Faculty Club see Harvey Helfand, *University of California, Berkeley*, The Campus Guide, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2002, pp. 227-228.
- ²³ The minutes of the board of directors of the Faculty Club of the Rice Institute for 1927, 1928, and 1929 indicate the problems the board faced with management, finances, and facilities maintenance. Rice University Archives-Faculty Club, 1927-1975, Box 1.

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- ²⁴ “Faculty House at Rice to Get \$13,000 Addition,” *Houston Post-Dispatch*, July 28, 1929, Real Estate Building section, p. 5; Harry B. Weiser to William Ward Watkin, June 18, 1929 and William Ward Watkin to George S. Cohen, July 1, 1929, Cohen House Records, Box 1, Folder 12.
- ²⁵ F.J. Schlueter’s photographs of formally dressed people on the terrace at Cohen House taken in early June 1934 and 1935 seem to document receptions at commencement time.
- ²⁶ Minutes of the Board of Directors of the Faculty Club of the Rice Institute, Faculty Club, 1927-1975, Box 1. In November 1927 the board debated whether to charge 60¢ or 75¢ for lunch. By 1934 lunch prices ranged between 35¢ and 50¢.
- ²⁷ Fredericka Meiners, *A History of Rice University: The Institute Years, 1907-1963*, Houston: Rice University Studies and the Rice University Historical Commission, 1982, pp. 123, 149, and 172-173.
- ²⁸ “Rice Institute Cohen House Job Goes to Oakes,” *AGC News*, April 29, 1958, p. 2. The construction contract was awarded for \$200,696.
- ²⁹ “Addition to Faculty Club at Rice to Open Saturday,” *Houston Post*, January 9, 1959, Section 4, p. 8; Broch, “George S. Cohen and Cohen House,” p. 8.
- ³⁰ Morehead, *A Walking Tour of Rice University*, pp. 72-74.
- ³¹ Ann Hitchcock Holmes, *Joy Unconfined: Robert Joy in Houston, A Portrait of Fifty Years*, Houston: San Jacinto Museum of History Association, 1986, pp. 107-108. Ann Holmes states that the portraits (dates of execution not given) were painted for installation at Cohen House.
- ³² Blue line print of Landscape Development Plan by Robert F. White & Associates, October 17, 1960, Cohen House Records, Box 1, Folder 13, and George S. Cohen to William W. Caudill, June 3, 1962, Cohen House Records, Box 5, Folder 4. Drawer 15 of the Cohen House Records contains a sequence of preliminary site plans by Robert F. White & Associates, the earliest dated drawing from July 1959.
- ³³ Norman J. Johnston, *The University of Washington, The Campus Guide*, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2001, p. 92; Richard Joncas, David J. Neuman, and Paul V. Turner, *Stanford University, The Campus Guide*, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2006, p. 111; and www.facultyclub.duke.edu/about/.
- ³⁴ The Cohen-Blum Fund, which funds improvement projects at Cohen House, became available in February 1973.
- ³⁵ “Proposed Additions to the Cohen House, William Marsh Rice University, Houston, Texas, Offices of Anderson Todd, FAIA, and William T. Cannady, AIA,” 1975, in Rice University-Faculty Club Records, Box 3, Folder 10.
- ³⁶ “Planning Study for Cohen House, Ford, Powell & Carson, Architects,” January 15, 1992. Rice University-Cohen House Records, Box 1, Folder 15.
- ³⁷ Thanks to Mark Ditman, Associate Vice President for Housing and Dining and Joujou Zebdaoui, Project Manager for Facilities Engineering and Planning for this information. Miner-Dederick Construction Company built the 1995 and 2005 additions and was contractor for the alterations and conservation of 2006.
- ³⁸ Thanks to Dwayne Windsor, Lynette S. Autrey Professor of Management and president of the Rice University Faculty Club, Ann Swain, manager of Cohen House, and Frances Zientek, office manager, for information on current activities.



Cohen House in the snow



Cohen House in the sun

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