Autry House Reflects A Changing Role of Service To Rice Students

By DEBBIE ROMOTSKY

The name Autry House is a familiar one to Rice students. To them, it is a symbol of the welding of their academic, religious and social worlds into a smoothly-functioning whole.

Built in 1921 through the generosity of the family of the late Judge James Lockhart Autry, and maintained by the Episcopal Diocese of Texas, Autry House was intended to serve as a center for the students of Rice, on a purely non-denominational basis. Its chapel, now the Collegiate Chapel of St. Bede, has been the scene of religious events under the auspices of many different churches.

BEFORE THE advent of a centralized student center or an organized college system, Autry House performed many of the functions now allotted to these newer institutions, providing a snack bar, cafeteria, barber shop, and cleaners.

In addition, space was available for literary society and religious group meetings, as well as for band rehearsals and performances of the band and other musical and dramatic groups.

In pre-Jones days, before the place of the woman was assured on the Rice campus, Autry House set aside several rooms for their exclusive use. This was a most important function, as it provided Rice women with a place to meet each other, enabling them to become more involved in the workings of their academic community.

TODAY, Autry House, under the guidance of the Rev. John Lane Denson, still serves an important, although somewhat altered purpose. Its main function now is in coordinating the efforts of campus religious groups.

Offices are maintained in the building by the Canterbury Association (Episcopal), the Wesley Foundation (Methodist), and the Presbyterian Student Association, (all of whom provide chaplains who are available in the building), by the Church of Christ and Christian Science Clubs, as well as by the Joint Christian

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Ministry to Rice University. The range of the center has increased, and now includes the members of the academic institutions of the Texas Medical Center as well.

THE FUTURE of Autry House appears most promising. In the words of Mr. Denson, the participating chaplains hope to keep Autry House “a symbol of the churches’ continuing concern for the furthering of higher education.”