
Above photos by Jim Hokanson (left); Bill Van Dusen, The Houston Post (left-center); Terry Cloudman, The Rice Campanile (right center); and Richard Scholes (right).

BY TOM BERTRAND
Thresher Staff Reportor

Last Friday a pre-recorded IMP satellite signal detonated a small charge to break ground for the Rice University, Space Science and Technology Building, as honored guests of the University and student pickets and observers leaned over to catch sight of the heralded event.

The explosion, which tossed a few clods of sod about 20 feet in the air, seemed rather an anticlimax to an afternoon which had begun with the pre-ceremonial appearance of a rumored band of pickets.

Parading signs reading “Ban the Bomb,” “Free Love,” “No Detonation Without Education,” “Commies for LBJ,” the pickets were clearly farceurs whose explicit “gag” was met by at least one counter-demonstration, “Use the Bomb in Vietnam.”

Dean ‘Security Officer’

One local TV station was that evening to broadcast its coverage of the “university security officer” moving among the crowd taking names. Evidently Dean of Students S. W. Higginbotham took to heart the picket’s sign of “Down With Everything” and, perhaps interpreting everything to include signs, dispersed the students.

Higginbotham later stated his feeling that the demonstration was presented entirely as a joke, that it was an insignificant affair, though regretfully embarrassing to the university in the presence of NASA and the press. “I feel it did make our students appear unfortunately frivolous.”

‘New Era Threshold’

President Pitzer began the ceremonies by speaking of the $2.5 million building as the threshold of a new era of university-government relations. The building will be financed with a $1,500,000 grant from NASA and with $900,000 provided by Rice.

Chancellor Carey Croneis introduced the guests present including area political figures, Rice Trustees, and NASA officials.

Washington weather had prevented the presence of NASA Administrator, James E. Webb, and his prepared speech was read by Dr. Thomas L. K. Smull, Director of the Washington NASA Office of Grants and Contracts. The speech traced recent NASA achievements and earlier Rice-NASA cooperation.

Smull noted that Rice recently became the first university in the country to receive approval to design and build its own satellites in its own Space Science Department, also the first in the country.

Complete By 1966

Completion of the building is scheduled for June, 1966, by Linbeck Construction Corporation, which won the contract of the Pierce and Pierce-designed structure. With three floors and a deep extra-basement, the new building will bring together projects now being carried on in nine separate departments around the campus.

According to Dr. Dessler, there will be facilities for the design, construction, check-out and environmental testing of research payloads; a telemetry and command communications station; and a high speed computer center.