Steady University Growth Reflects Three Presidents' Efforts

By ED FUNKHOUSE

The transformation of a cotton merchant's dream into a successful university is largely credited to Edgar Odell Lovett, first president of the Rice Institute.

Born in Shreve, Ohio on April 14, 1871, Dr. Lovett graduated from high school there, and in 1890, he received his Bachelor of Arts degree from Bethany College in West Virginia.

AFTER TWO YEARS of teaching mathematics at West Kentucky College, he became an astronomy instructor at the University of Virginia in 1892. At the same time he continued his studies, receiving his Master of Arts and Doctor of Philosophy degrees in 1895. He then went to Europe where he attended Norway's University of Christiania and the University of Leipzig, receiving two more advanced degrees from the latter school.

For the next few years, Dr. Lovett lectured at Johns Hopkins, Virginia and Chicago. Moving to Princeton as an instructor of mathematics, he became head of the astronomy department.

MEANWHILE THE Board of Trustees of the Rice Institute, which was more than an idea and some money, was looking for a president. Dr. Lovett, on the basis of the recommendation of Woodrow Wilson, was hired in 1907.

Dr. Lovett devoted all his energies to building up the growing school, retiring in 1946, after 39 years of service, but serving on the board until his death in 1957 at the age of 86.

For the next fourteen years, the presidential post was ably filled by William Vermillion Houston. Under Dr. Houston's guiding hand until September, 1960, when he resigned as president for health reasons, Rice continued to grow in size and stature.

Dr. Houston, born in Mt. Gilead, Ohio, in 1900, received his bachelor's and doctor's degrees from Ohio State University.

From 1927 until Rice called upon him, Dr. Houston was a professor of physics at Cal Tech.

THE HONORS belonging to Rice's second president are too numerous to list totally. Among them are memberships in the National Academy of Sciences and the American Philosophical Society, membership on the board of the National Science Foundation by Presidential appointment, and a Presidential Medal of Merit for scientific work awarded in 1947.

Dr. Houston is now Distinguished Professor of Physics and Honorary Chancellor. He still teaches graduate students and is active in research.

In July, 1961, Kenneth S. Pitzer, Professor of Chemistry at the University of California, was named the third president of the re-named Rice University.

Born in Pomona, California, Dr. Pitzer received his Bachelor of Science degree from the California Institute of Technology. Two years later he received his doctorate at the University of California.

DR. PITZER SERVED the University of California as chemistry professor, Assistant Dean of the College of Letters and Science, and Dean of the College of Chemistry. Among his honors was his chairmanship of the general advisory committee of the Atomic Energy Commission, on which he also worked as director of research from 1949 to 1951.

Dr. Pitzer's inauguration in October, 1963, was a highlight of the university's semicentennial celebration.