4-17-2017

Rice, Laban Lacy, 1870-1973 (MSS 605)

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Laban Lacy Rice, son of Laban Marchbanks Rice and Martha Lacy and brother of the poet Cale Young Rice, was born in Dixon, Kentucky, on 14 October 1870. In 1879, his family moved to Evansville, Indiana, where his father dealt in tobacco. Rice received his A.B. in 1891, his M.A. in 1892, and his Ph.D. in Latin, Greek and Sanskrit in 1894, all from Cumberland University in Lebanon, Tennessee. At Cumberland, he and brother Cale were star baseball players (pitcher and catcher, respectively) and Rice co-founded the Theta chapter of the Kappa Sigma fraternity. Rice taught at Auburn Seminary in Auburn, Kentucky, then served as professor of English Language and Literature at Cumberland from 1894-1904 (with the exception of 1897-1899, when he was associate editor of The Cumberland Presbyterian in Nashville, Tennessee). In 1902, he founded The Cumberland Presbyterian Quarterly, a review of theology, philosophy and literature, and served as its editor until 1904.

In 1902, Rice helped to establish Castle Heights School in Lebanon, Tennessee. He served as its headmaster from 1904 until 1913, when he became sole owner and president of the school. In 1916, a plan to affiliate Castle Heights with Cumberland University and to combine the schools under a single management, with Rice as president, was abandoned. Rice converted Castle Heights into a military academy in 1917, earning for himself the honorific “Colonel,” then sold the school in 1921. From 1920-1929 he was president of the Junior Military Academy at Bloomington Springs, Tennessee. From 1919-1922, he was owner and director of Camp Kawasawa for Boys on the Cumberland River near Lebanon, and from 1920-1947 he owned and operated Nakânawa Junior and Senior Camps for Girls on the eastern and western shores of Mayland Lake near Crossville, Tennessee. He was also part owner and associate director of Camp Sequoyah for Boys at Asheville, North Carolina from 1929-1936.

In May 1939, Rice was named associate president and chancellor of Cumberland University, where he directed an endowment drive for its law school. He resigned his office in June 1940, apparently due to conflicts over authority with President Ernest L. Stockton. In November 1941, however, Stockton resigned and Rice was appointed president. Upon retiring from the presidency in June 1946, Rice, an accomplished amateur astronomer, donated a building and equipment to establish the Rice Observatory at Cumberland. Over the years, he also donated artwork to various institutions and gave items from his extensive collection of
books and manuscripts to several libraries, including Cumberland and Western Kentucky University.

After his retirement, Rice vigorously pursued his interests in travel, writing and study. He lectured extensively and wrote books and articles on relativity, astronomy, cosmology, and the possibility of life on other planets. He made homes in Ware Neck, Virginia, where he constructed his own observatory, and in St. Petersburg and Orlando, Florida. He established the Rice Planetarium in St. Petersburg in October 1953 and operated it until June 1954; after an abortive attempt to reestablish it at Rollins College in Winter Park, he relocated it to Stetson University in Deland, Florida in 1956. He also presented a telescope to Orlando’s Central Florida Museum in 1957.

Rice read widely, wrote poetry, fiction and memoirs, and was an energetic letter-writer to the editors of newspapers, popular magazines and scholarly journals. Politically, he was a staunch supporter of the Vietnam War (although he sympathized with Representative Eugene McCarthy’s anti-war views in a 1968 letter to him), a foe of Communism and campus radicalism, and a critic of judicial decisions on school desegregation in the 1950s. Two of the more sensational incidents of his life occurred in 1953, when he shot a would-be suitor attempting to abduct his daughter Katherine from her home, accidentally wounding her in the process; and in 1961, when he used his expertise in classical literature and history to perpetrate a widely reported hoax in which a fictional archaeologist claimed to have discovered the tomb of King Orestes at Mycenae in Greece.

As he grew older, Rice received regular invitations and recognition from Castle Heights and from Cumberland University as a popular speaker, benefactor, former president and its oldest living graduate. Cumberland created the Rice Medal in Astronomy in 1957, and its law school awarded Rice a Doctor of Letters degree in 1959. On his 98th birthday in 1968, he spoke to students for more than an hour, and spoke for 90 minutes on his one-hundredth birthday in 1970, when he was feted at Cumberland with celebrations that included “Laban Lacy Rice Day” in Lebanon. In 1971, Castle Heights honored him with one of its inaugural “Lux et Veritas” Awards for outstanding contributions to education.

Rice died on 14 February 1973 in St. Petersburg, Florida, and was buried there at Cedar Grove Cemetery. He was predeceased by his wife Blanche Alexander Buchanan (1871-1937), who he married on 23 November 1892. They were the parents of two daughters, Katherine (Rice) Shaw and Anne Hays (Rice) O’Neil.

**COLLECTION NOTE**

This collection consists of correspondence, writings (fiction, non-fiction, autobiographical, scientific), poems, clippings, genealogy, and miscellaneous papers of Laban Lacy Rice. His scientific writing is principally on astronomy, cosmology and relativity. Also included are correspondence and papers relating to Rice’s brother, poet and dramatist Cale Young Rice, and his sister-in-law, author Alice Hegan Rice.

Box 1 contains clippings (Folders 2-6), chiefly from local newspapers, chronicling Rice’s life and career. Included are lecture announcements, reviews of his books, news of his gifts of books and astronomical equipment, and retrospectives published when he reached his 100th year and beyond. Materials relating to the 1974 dedication of a historical marker at the Dixon,
Kentucky home of Rice and his brother Cale (Folder 7) include clippings and the ceremony program.

The remainder of Box 1 (Folders 8-15) and Boxes 2 and 3 contain Rice’s general correspondence. Much of the correspondence relates to his literary and scientific pursuits and is frequently with persons distinguished in their fields. Included are authors’ acknowledgements of notices in the *Cumberland Presbyterian*; letters of thanks from recipients of Rice’s books; exchanges with scientists and other scholars about their work and ideas; responses to Rice’s submission of manuscripts for publication and to his solicitation of endowments for Cumberland University; greetings, invitations and reminiscences from alumni and administrators of Cumberland and Castle Heights; letters of appreciation from patrons of Nakánawa Camps for Girls, especially after Rice’s 1947 announcement that he would sell the camp, and in observance of his 102nd birthday in 1972; correspondence regarding lecture arrangements, the relocation of his Florida planetarium, his telescope gift to the Central Florida Museum, and other gifts; his letters to politicians commenting on national issues; letters (genuine and fabricated) relating to his “Mycenae hoax”; and cards and letters of tribute on his 100th and subsequent birthdays. Of interest is a copy (the original is at Cumberland University) of a letter from Dwight D. Eisenhower (Box 2, Folder 10) responding to Rice’s request for comment on Confederate tactics at the Battle of Gettysburg. Also included throughout the correspondence are letters to newspapers and journals such as *Time, Life, Harper’s, The American Scholar*, the *New York Times Book Review, The Atlantic* and the *Saturday Review* in which Rice responds to articles on literary, religious, historical, scientific and political subjects or points out errors in English usage. A separate folder (Box 6, Folder 4) contains Rice’s editorializing on race. In letters to the editor and opinion pieces, he reacts to articles on civil rights activism and race relations and criticizes 1950s U.S. Supreme Court decisions on school desegregation.

Box 3 also includes separate folders of Rice’s correspondence with Albert Einstein (Folder 9) about his theory of relativity and other ideas, as well as correspondence detailing Rice’s gifts of books, manuscripts and artifacts made over a period of years to Western Kentucky University (Folders 10, 11). The correspondence with WKU relates to Rice’s gifts of his own papers and to those of his brother and sister-in-law, Cale Young Rice and Alice Hegan Rice (see MSS 47 RICE Collection).

Box 4 contains correspondence, photographs and other papers relating to Rice’s brother and sister-in-law, Cale Young Rice and Alice Hegan Rice. Cale’s letters to Rice (Folder 1) concern family matters, his and Alice’s literary work and health, and their travel to New York, London, Paris and Maine. He also writes of his despondency following Alice’s death in 1942. Condolences to Rice following Cale’s suicide in January 1943 (Folder 2) include reminiscences and a *Louisville Times* obituary and editorial. Letters from Alice Hegan Rice (Folder 5) concern her and Cale’s literary work, travel and family matters, Nakánawa Camp, her reading, and her praise for Rice’s books, *Sonnets to B.B.R.* and *A Mountain Idyll* (the latter dedicated to Alice). Other materials include Alice’s social calendar for 1941-1942 (Folder 7), her journal of quotes and epigrams (Folder 9) and remarks on short story writing (Folder 10). Rice’s essay, “Alice Hegan Rice–Home Maker” and short anecdotes (Folder 8) demonstrate his personal regard for her. Rice’s correspondence relating to Alice and Cale after their deaths (Folder 11) concern recordings of Cale’s poems made for the blind, acknowledgements from recipients of Cale’s books, acknowledgements of Rice’s solicitations to publish his writing about Cale and Alice, copyright permissions, a proposal from a Louisville friend to write a novel about Cale and Alice,
and Rice’s proposals to establish a writing award at Cumberland University in memory of Alice and Cale.

Box 5 contains miscellaneous personal papers of Rice and his autobiographical writing and reminiscences. Materials relating to Castle Heights Military Academy and Cumberland University include certificates and citations (Folder 1), his grade records from Cumberland (Folder 4) and addresses, reminiscences, and programs in connection with recognitions of Rice by both schools (Folder 5). Papers relating to his membership in the Kappa Sigma fraternity (Folder 6) include correspondence, reviews of his books and articles written for the fraternity magazine, the Caduceus, Rice’s “ode” read at the 1957 Grand Conclave, greetings and reminiscences sent to other conclaves, and a profile of Rice published in the August 1971 Caduceus. Personal and autobiographical writing of Rice’s (Folder 9) includes memories of Lebanon, Tennessee and Evansville, Indiana as well as recollections of his childhood, school days and family, and a lengthier reflection, “A Backward Look at Eighty” (Folder 10). Although they contain some autobiographical content, the book-length Reflections and Recollections, published in 1961 (Folder 11), and Obiter Dicta of a Post-Centenarian (Folders 12 and 13) are more notable as chronicles of Rice’s philosophical and intellectual development. Shorter writings (Folder 14) reflect on old age and death.

Box 6 contains mostly Rice genealogy material and Rice’s miscellaneous notes, lectures and writing, much of it on scientific subjects. Genealogical data (Folder 1) includes letters with information from other Rice family members, many in response to a 1969 article by Rice in the Providence, Kentucky Journal-Enterprise, as well as a copy of Charles Elmer Rice’s By the Name of Rice (Folder 2). A journal kept over a few months in 1967 (Folder 3) contains Rice’s reflections on various topics.

Box 7 contains Rice’s writing, mostly fiction—stories, a novel, a script for television, and humorous pieces. Also included (Folder 1) is a series he wrote on American poets for the Cumberland Presbyterian.

Box 8 contains Rice’s poems, collected epigrams, photographs, and miscellaneous items. Poems (Folders 1 and 2) are arranged alphabetically by title, with a few published versions included. Oversized items (Folder 10) consist of Rice’s 1959 Doctor of Letters diploma and his Kentucky Colonel and Tennessee Colonel certificates. Also included are photographs of Rice (Folders 11 and 12), his parents (Folder 18), Rice’s homes and observatories (Folders 13-16), and his Doctor of Laws degree ceremony (Folder 17).

**SHELF LIST**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BOX 1</th>
<th>Laban Lacy Rice – Biographical &amp; Correspondence</th>
<th>1890-1973</th>
<th>507 items</th>
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<tr>
<td>Folder 1</td>
<td>Inventory and separation records</td>
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<td>Folder 2</td>
<td>Clippings on life and career</td>
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<td>Clippings on life and career</td>
<td>1845-1960</td>
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<td>Clippings on life and career</td>
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<td>Clippings on life and career</td>
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<td>Clippings on life and career</td>
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<td>Rice brothers historical marker – Dixon, Kentucky</td>
<td>1974</td>
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<td>Correspondence</td>
<td>1897-1939</td>
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<td>Correspondence</td>
<td>1940-1945</td>
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<td>Correspondence</td>
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<td>Correspondence</td>
<td>1948-1949</td>
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<td>Correspondence</td>
<td>1951</td>
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<td>Correspondence</td>
<td>1952-1953</td>
<td>23 items</td>
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<td>Folder 15</td>
<td>Correspondence</td>
<td>1954</td>
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<td>BOX 2</td>
<td>Laban Lacy Rice – Correspondence</td>
<td>1955-1968</td>
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<td>Correspondence</td>
<td>1955</td>
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<td><strong>Laban Lacy Rice – Correspondence</strong></td>
<td>1969-1988</td>
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<td>Correspondence</td>
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<td>Correspondence</td>
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<td>Correspondence</td>
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<td>Correspondence</td>
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<td>Correspondence</td>
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<td>Folder 9</td>
<td>Correspondence with Albert Einstein; associated article</td>
<td>1942-1952, 1988</td>
<td>8 items</td>
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<td>Folder 10</td>
<td>Correspondence with WKU and Special Collections Library regarding Rice collections</td>
<td>1943-1956</td>
<td>52 items</td>
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<td>Folder 11</td>
<td>Correspondence with WKU and Special Collections Library regarding Rice collections</td>
<td>1956-1971</td>
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<td>Letters to editors and publications</td>
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<td>BOX 4</td>
<td><strong>Laban Lacy Rice – Cale Young Rice &amp; Alice Hegan Rice</strong></td>
<td>1896-1979</td>
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<td>Folder 1</td>
<td>Letters from Cale Young Rice to Laban Lacy Rice</td>
<td>1901-1943</td>
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<td>Folder 2</td>
<td>Letters to Laban Lacy Rice regarding death of Cale Young Rice</td>
<td>1943</td>
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<td>Folder</td>
<td>Title</td>
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<td>Cale Young Rice – Photograph</td>
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<td>Cumberland Sports Hall of Fame citation for Cale Young Rice</td>
<td>1979</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Letters from Alice Hegan Rice to Laban Lacy Rice and Blanche Rice</td>
<td>1906-1941</td>
<td>25 items</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Alice Hegan Rice – Photograph</td>
<td>n.d.</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>List of Alice Hegan Rice social engagements</td>
<td>1941-1942</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>“Alice Hegan Rice – Home Maker”; anecdotes about Alice Hegan Rice</td>
<td>n.d.</td>
<td>4 items</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Alice Hegan Rice journal of quotes and epigrams</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Alice Hegan Rice remarks on short story writing</td>
<td>n.d.</td>
<td>1 item</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Letters, etc. regarding Cale Young Rice and Alice Hegan Rice</td>
<td>1896-1970</td>
<td>28 items</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>“The Poetry and Prose of Cale Young Rice” and “Cale Young Rice and Alice Hegan Rice: The Story of Their Books,” published by Century Co.</td>
<td>n.d.</td>
<td>2 items</td>
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<td>BOX 5</td>
<td>Laban Lacy Rice – Miscellaneous; Castle Heights Military Academy and Cumberland University; Autobiographical and personal writing</td>
<td>1887-1979</td>
<td>141 items</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Certificates, citations</td>
<td>1950-1979</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Passports, vaccination certificate</td>
<td>1927-1961</td>
<td>7 items</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Nakánawa Camps for Girls</td>
<td>1945</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Grade records from Cumberland University</td>
<td>1887-1891</td>
<td>13 items</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Castle Heights Military Academy and Cumberland University – Reminiscences, addresses, programs</td>
<td>1946-1972, n.d.</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Kappa Sigma – Correspondence, publications, etc.</td>
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Folder 7  Cumberland College Math Club – Guest book 1967 1 item
Folder 8  Rice Observatory, Cumberland University n.d. 1 item
Folder 10 “A Backward Look at Eighty” [1950] 1 item
Folder 11  Reflections and Recollections manuscript 1961 1 item
Folder 12  Obiter Dicta of a Post-Centenarian typescript [1971] 1 item
Folder 13  Obiter Dicta of a Post-Centenarian manuscript and partial printed copy [1971] 2 items
Folder 14  Writings on old age 1967-1970 5 items

Box 6  Laban Lacy Rice – Genealogy; Writing 1897-1969 128 items
Folder 1  Rice genealogy – Correspondence, etc. 1915-1972 33 items
Folder 2  By the Name of Rice – Historical sketch of Deacon Edmund Rice and his descendants, by Charles Elmer Rice 1911 1 item
Folder 3  Journal of Laban Lacy Rice 1967 1 item
Folder 4  Writing on race relations 1951-1970 23 items
Folder 5  Writing and data on ancient Greece n.d. 8 items
Folder 6  Writing and notes on Mars, planets, stars 1957-1958 20 items
Folder 7  Writing and notes on extraterrestrial life 1962, n.d. 9 items
Folder 8  “What to Know About Relativity” and notes n.d. 5 items
Folder 9  Writing on cosmogony n.d. 5 items
Folder 10  The Universe: Its Origin, Nature and Destiny 1951 1 item
Folder 11  Notes and drafts for lectures “Our Puzzling Universe” and “Origin and Destiny of the Universe” n.d. 13 items
| Folder 12 | Scrapbook on Rice Planetarium | 1953-1954 | 1 item |
| Folder 13 | L. L. Rice Planetarium, Stetson University – Report | 1962 | 1 item |
| Folder 14 | Miscellaneous writing – Scientific | 1897-1950 | 6 items |
| Folder 15 | “Behind the Veil,” by Frank Logan Goodwin | 1957 | 1 item |

**Box 7** | Laban Lacy Rice – Writing | 1895-1970 | 54 items |
| Folder 1 | “America’s Poetic Pleiad” articles for *Cumberland Presbyterian* | 1896 | 1 item |
| Folder 2 | “The Man From Tellereve” and other stories | n.d. | 1 item |
| Folder 3 | “Dead Hands” | n.d. | 1 item |
| Folder 4 | *Gunsmoke* scripts | n.d. | 3 items |
| Folder 5 | “Our Town U.S.A.” | 1965 | 3 items |
| Folder 6 | Film treatment for “I Wonder What Next?” or “Our Town U.S.A.” | n.d. | 3 items |
| Folder 7 | “The Wheel Quiz” | n.d. | 1 item |
| Folder 8 | Notes and drafts for “The Wheel Quiz” | n.d. | 6 items |
| Folder 9 | “The Bell Witch” | n.d. | 1 item |
| Folder 10 | Song lyrics | n.d. | 6 items |
| Folder 11 | Miscellaneous writing – Fiction, humor | n.d. | 10 items |
| Folder 12 | Miscellaneous writing | 1895-1965 | 15 items |
| Folder 13 | Book jackets | [1946-1956] | 3 items |

**Box 8** | Laban Lacy Rice – Poems; Epigrams; Photographs | 1890-1971 | 220 items |
| Folder 1 | Poems (A-M) | n.d. | 70 items |
| Folder 2 | Poems (N-W) | n.d. | 57 items |
Folder 3  Poems and short essays  n.d.  1 item
Folder 4  *A Sheaf of Epigrams* – manuscript drafts  1963  2 items
Folder 5  Notebook of collected quotations  n.d.  1 item
Folder 6  Collected quotations  n.d.  1 item
Folder 7  Printed items (poems, prayers, programs)  1913-1961  16 items
Folder 8  Discussion questions regarding women  n.d.  1 item
Folder 9  Miscellaneous clippings of interest to Rice  n.d.  1 item
Folder 10  Oversized items list  1959, 1970  3 items
Folder 11  Laban Lacy Rice – Photographs  1890-1971  9 items
Folder 12  Laban Lacy Rice – Photographs  1935-1971  10 items
Folder 13  Laban Lacy Rice homes – Photographs  n.d.  20 items
Folder 14  Rice Planetarium, St. Petersburg, Florida; Telescope, Central Florida Museum – Photographs  1957, n.d.  2 items
Folder 15  Observatory, Ware Neck, Virginia – Photographs  1947-1953  3 items
Folder 16  Rice Observatory, Cumberland University – Photographs  1946-1957, n.d.  11 items
Folder 17  Doctor of Letters, Cumberland Law School – Photographs  1959  5 items
Folder 18  Laban Marchbanks Rice & Martha Lacy Rice – Photographs  1891, n.d.  4 items
Folder 19  Miscellaneous photographs  1946, n.d.  3 items
**BIBLIOGRAPHIC RECORD**

MSS RICE, Laban Lacy, 1887-1988

605 1870-1973

Correspondence, writings, photographs, clippings, and papers of Laban Lacy Rice, a Webster, County, Kentucky native, educator, author, lecturer, poet, and president of Cumberland University, Lebanon, Tennessee. Includes his scientific writing, principally on astronomy, relativity and cosmology, as well as fiction, poetry, and autobiographical writing. Also includes some correspondence and papers relating to his brother, poet and dramatist Cale Young Rice, and sister-in-law, author Alice Hegan Rice.


SC2017.28.1; 1982.118.1

**SUBJECT ANALYTICS**

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  See also:
    Castle Heights Military Academy

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  See also:
    Jae-seon, John A. Choi

Cumberland College – Lebanon, Tennessee
  See also:
    Cumberland University

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