

Leaving the controversial 1896 convention at the ripe old age of three score and ten, Allen was old enough to think about retiring. But politics had become the bone of his bone and the flesh of his flesh. While he played no further role in statewide politics after the turn of the century, Allen remained a feisty participant in Houston affairs. As late as 1908 he was still trying to dictate to blacks who they should vote for, who should be the main speaker for the annual Juneteenth celebration, and who should hold office in the Emancipation Park Association.<sup>37</sup> Allen continued to engage in such activity until his death in the Bayou City in 1911.

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Richard Allen was articulate, talented, and manipulative—qualities desperately needed as blacks struggled for a place in the political life of Houston, of Texas, and of the nation. But Allen's faults eclipsed even these virtues. Proud and arrogant, he often displayed a tendency to help people especially when he could help himself even more. Allen longed for power, status, and prestige. However, his overweening ambition, coupled with an abrasive personality, led him into trouble wherever he went. He attracted people by his oratorical ability and by his intelligence, but he also antagonized people of both races by his blatant opportunism. His role in the Exodus affair typifies his interest in promoting his own welfare more than that of the blacks he claimed to represent.

Allen's inability to transcend his paternalistic relationship with James G. Tracy offers a clue to some of the weaknesses of black leadership during and after Reconstruction. Both men rode to power on the strength of reform politics, which were then supposedly embodied within the Republican party, and each man needed what the other had to offer. Tracy, a white man in a white-dominated society, had power. Allen, a leader among recently liberated blacks, had votes. It was natural for the two to develop a relationship; the experiment in biracial politics demanded cooperation between political activists of both races. But cooperation did not imply equality, and blacks were always the junior partners, often forced to make painful choices between the demands of their white patrons and the needs of their black constituency. While it would be remiss to say that Allen was divorced from the interests of black voters, it can be said that on some issues which concerned blacks he was outspoken, while on others he simply spoke loudly but carried a small stick.

<sup>37</sup>Houston Post, June 19, 1908.

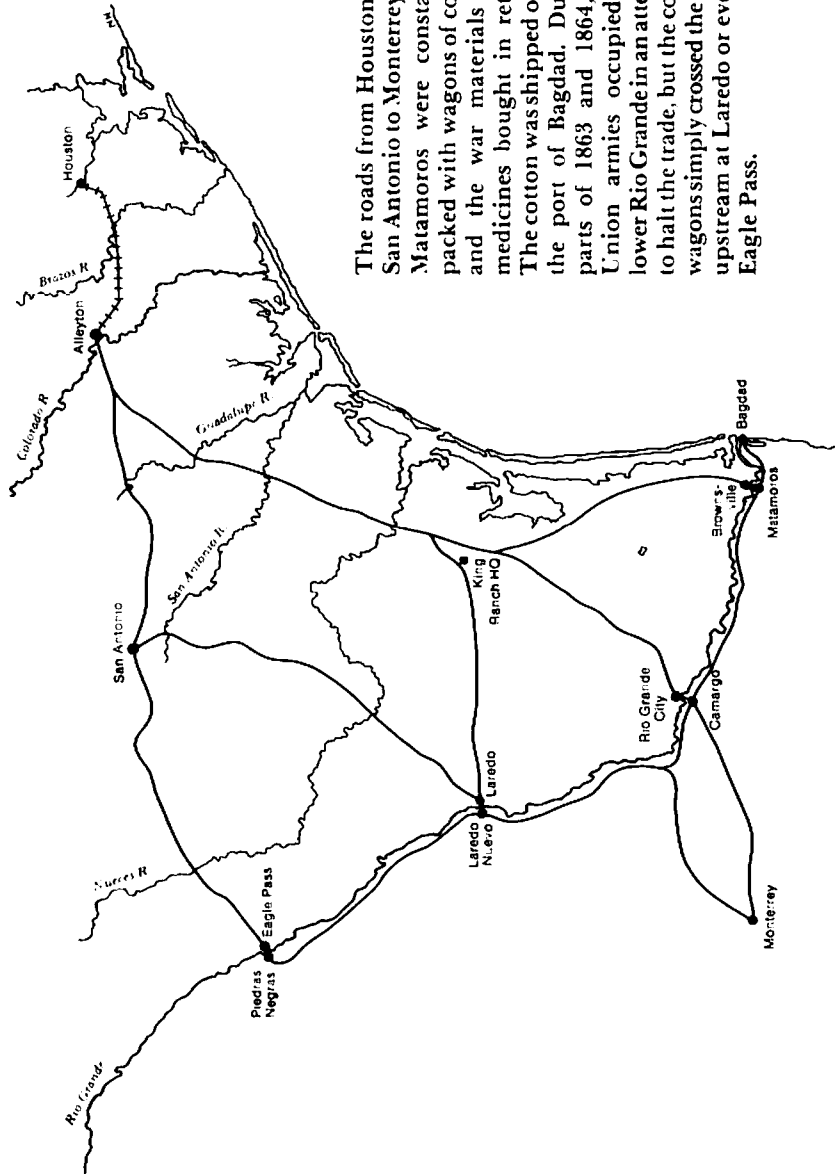
## Cotton and Profits Across the Border: William Marsh Rice in Mexico, 1863-1865

Like other Texas businessmen, William Marsh Rice saw his many diverse business operations undergo a drastic change during the Civil War. The blockade of Confederate harbors by the Union Navy cut off the flow of imported goods into Texas ports and left cotton growers reliant on blockade runners for the export of their crops, a process that did not move cotton in the necessary volume. Increasingly, the Confederate government realized that the only way revenue could be obtained for the rapidly dwindling treasury in Richmond was through the sale of cotton and that the only way to increase the volume of export was to send the cotton overland to Mexico, and then to ship it from Mexico to friendly ports in Cuba and the Bahamas.<sup>1</sup> In the best entrepreneurial tradition, Rice took advantage of the new realities. The same talent that enabled Rice to make a fortune in antebellum Texas helped him to greatly increase his wealth during the course of the war.

As the Federal blockade continued and the warehouses of William Marsh Rice & Co. remained virtually empty of any imported goods, Rice turned his attention to "neutral" Mexico and particularly to the port of Matamoros, where cotton goods could be sold and traded with the British and even with northeastern merchants for much-needed hard currency and import items. Rice left Houston for Monterrey and Matamoros in December 1863, four months after the death of his first wife, Margaret Bremond Rice, and remained there until August 1865. Historian Andrew Forest Muir, in the only published account of Rice's life, *William Marsh Rice and His Institute: A Biographical Study*, wrote that only "two documents are known relating to Rice during these twenty months, one being a laconic handwritten receipt dated July 17, 1865," while the "second document relating to this period is a draft in Rice's own handwriting now found among the William Marsh Rice Papers, which

<sup>1</sup>For further information on the role played by Mexico, see Robert W. Delaney, "Matamoros: Port for Texas during the Civil War," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 58 (April 1955); Avila Larios, "Brownsville-Matamoros: Confederate Lifeline," *Mid-America* 40 (April 1958); Ronnie C. Tyler, "Cotton on the Border, 1861-65," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 73 (April 1970).

The roads from Houston and San Antonio to Monterrey and Matamoros were constantly packed with wagons of cotton and the war materials and medicines bought in return. The cotton was shipped out of the port of Bagdad. During parts of 1863 and 1864, the Union armies occupied the lower Rio Grande in an attempt to halt the trade, but the cotton wagons simply crossed the river upstream at Laredo or even at Eagle Pass.



are housed in the Fondren Library of Rice University, of a statement which was probably to be used in preparing Rice's suit over his second wife's will."<sup>2</sup> It is in the latter document, written many years later, that Rice alludes to his itinerary, adding that after Monterrey, he went "on to Havana, remained there a month or two, then returned to Matamoros where I was in business until August 1865, at which time I returned to Houston."<sup>3</sup> Professor Muir had access to the Rice Papers now at the Woodson Research Center in the Fondren Library, but because his notes were assembled prior to the formation of the Houston Metropolitan Research Center, he was not able to research the smaller collection of Rice materials located here. Had Dr. Muir been able to do so, he would have discovered some 45 items from this period. While the letters and documents held by HMRC are not numerous enough to yield a detailed account of Rice's daily comings and goings, they do provide glimpses of what sort of business transactions he was involved with during this time and even include personal asides about the weather, his family, and the Civil War.

Following are the transcriptions of seven letters from HMRC's William Marsh Rice Collection, all written during the twenty-month period in which so little is known about Rice's life. Six of the letters were written by William Marsh Rice to his brother, Frederick Allyn Rice, who was stationed in Houston as a captain with the Confederate Army's local defense forces and also served as Rice's principal business agent here while Rice was away in Mexico. The other, written by Eugene Bremond to Frederick Rice, gives us the first evidence of specific dates for Rice's movements during this period. Eugene's father, Paul Bremond, was an early partner of William Marsh Rice and the brother of Margaret Bremond Rice. Eugene also served as a business agent for William Marsh Rice & Co. The letters have been reprinted without changes except for some minor additions of punctuation and capitalization to aid in their readability.



Matamoros Feb 22, 1864

Dear Fred

It has occurred to me that we might possibly raise the money upon our January & July coupons that are in Europe by paying say 25% of the amount,

<sup>2</sup>Andrew Forest Muir, *William Marsh Rice and His Institute: A Biographical Study*, edited by Sylvia Stallings Morris, Rice University Studies, Vol. 58, No. 2 (Houston, 1972), 35.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 36.

and have written Nichols<sup>4</sup> about it. See if you have the number; if not, John Bremond has, in the receipt he took from Nichols when he delivered them to him. I am now over two months from home and not a line from you, which I cannot understand when you have had so many opportunities to write. Besides, the mail is regular to Eagle Pass and letters directed to me care of A. Duclos, Piedras Negras, will come through all right, and you must certainly suppose I feel some interest in matters there besides anxiety as to our business and the cotton coming forward.

Yours Truly, WMR

Eagle Pass May 12th 1864

Friend Fred

I arrived here yesterday, left Matamoras on 28th. Your Brother had arrived on 14th from Havana well. He wrote you by me. I sent the letter forward and hope you received it. As regards the funds whatever you may have on hand in the way of coin, Gen. Nichols will arrange to put it in the hands of W. M. Rice in Matamoras, as I think this will be the safest and best way. The Gen. is and will ship quite a quantity of cotton to W. M. R. on commission. Ned Bremond went to Havana. He and Howanthon(?) will invest in a schooner and try the Blockad. All well. Will be here some ten or twelve days and anything to go through to W. M. R. will take it. In haste, I remain yours,

Eugene Bremond

Matamoras June 14th/64

Dear Fred

I wrote you on the 4th via San Antonio and also sent press copy of former letter. Mr. Eaton<sup>5</sup> has arrived on his way to Europe. Ennis<sup>6</sup> & company not yet

<sup>4</sup>Ebenezer B. Nichols emigrated to Texas in 1833 from New York. By December 1844 he had become a business partner in the firm of Rice & Nichols. In 1851 General Nichols moved to Galveston, and the two men amicably dissolved their partnership late in 1853. The Union blockade forced Nichols to move his firm back to Houston in December 1861, into some empty warehouses belonging to William Marsh Rice. R. G. Dun & Company's credit records on William Marsh Rice, reprinted in Harold M. Hyman, "William Marsh Rice's Credit Ratings, 1846-1866," *The Houston Review* 6, no. 2 (1984), give illuminating information on Rice's various business partnerships.

<sup>5</sup>Possibly the Reverend Benjamin Eaton, who officiated at Rice's first marriage.

<sup>6</sup>Cornelius Ennis was responsible for the first shipment of cotton from Galveston to Boston in 1841. He was a lifelong friend of Rice.

in, but expected today. I have nothing particular to say to you, but as Dr. Bowles Baker is leaving for Houston, a good opportunity offers which may not again soon. The weather is very hot. We have a breeze most of the time, but the atmosphere is so filled with dirt that we should be almost as well off without it. Mr. Adams<sup>7</sup> has left for Europe and I am closing up his business. I hope to be making something after awhile, if I can get means together. The bundle sent by Ruthven many months ago not yet received. Ennis & family have just arrived, whilst I am writing, with your letter to me. I think you have done very right in sending Libbie<sup>8</sup> along with Mrs. Ennis. I have not time to write to Groesbeeck<sup>9</sup> by this opportunity, but I do not see how Mrs. Groesbeeck can travel through to Houston by herself, *particularly at this season of the year*, the weather is terribly hot & dry. She might wait here a month before she could get anyone to take charge of her and even then it would be terribly uncomfortable. A months residence for a Lady here at a Hotel, such as we have here, and then through to Texas under the protection of some person, would be worse than going through purgatory and more than I would inflict upon any respectable Lady. Ennis has been 32 days in making the trip. Tell Groesbeeck this, & that I will write to him, first opportunity.

Wm. Hutchins has sailed direct to Liverpool on the Brig St. George.

[unsigned]

Matamoras June 30th 1864

Dear Fred

I have received nothing from you since the arrival of Ennis. Eugene goes up to Piedras Negras tomorrow and will remain there a short time, perhaps two or three months. You can write to him and say any thing you wish to say to me. I have been sick for several days, but am getting well again. I have written Mrs. Groesbeeck to draw on me for two hundred Dollars at Groesbeeck's solicitation, and he (Groesbeeck) will return it to you. The weather is about the same as in Houston at this season. We have been having considerable rain lately. Charley Thompson is here without a cent in his pocket; how he got away from Larado I cannot imagine. Remember me to the wife & children.

Yours, Will R

<sup>7</sup>Probably Charles Adams, a longtime friend and briefly a business partner of Rice.

<sup>8</sup>Possibly Julia Elizabeth Baldwin Brown, who would become William Marsh Rice's second wife in 1867.

<sup>9</sup>Abraham Groesbeeck (also spelled Groesbeck) became Rice's partner after Nichols's withdrawal from the business. A few years later, Groesbeeck left the firm to become president of the Houston & Texas Central Railroad.

Matamoros March 12/65

Dear Fred

Your of 2nd by Mrs. Thompson came safely to hand, the first & only letter I have received since yours of Decmb. 12th. I wrote you by Ennis—Geo. Ennis, and several other persons who promised to deliver to you. The letter you mentioned having sent by Mr. Ringo never came to hand. Who is Mr. Ringo? I am glad to learn that you are all well, and have at last got the articles sent. I expect shortly to receive some quinine, calomel & Blue Mass<sup>10</sup>—what can you get for some of them? Also I shall have some tin which I can sent in some of, if you can get an order. I have eight bales of cotton in bill of lading from Gal. Do not sent any cotton that is mean or damaged as it will not pay. What is the quality of the Boins cotton? Good cotton such as yours is worth about 30¢ here, against which say 15¢ expenses, 5¢ duty or permit, leaving clear 10¢ only. Mean cotton thus would not bring over 25¢, would only leave 5¢ to pay for the cotton, which with all the risk of damage etc. on the Road would not, you see, amount to much.

There is not much use in depending upon private opportunities. You can occasionally find safe opportunities but better usually write by mail directed to me at *Brownsville Box 54*. I think the polocy of the Central Road<sup>11</sup> is bad. They will never find another such an opportunity to pay their debts. Time will show who is right. I understand that you paid Mrs. Thompson \$125.11 which covers half the draft and was the amount I became responsible for should Sterritt[?] pay. Half comes to us and half goes to Thompson or his agent.

Remember me to wife and babies. Did you get my letter concerning letting Groesbeeck have the brick?

Send some letter stamps.

[unsigned]

Matamoros March 29th 1865

Dear Fred

I last wrote you on the 12th which I hope you received. This will be handed to you by Capt. Armstrong. I have from Liverpool a consignment of Bagging, Rope, Iron, Tin, Sheet Iron, Wire for Tin manufacturers, Quinine, Calomel, Blue Mass, Linseed Oil, Soda, Crushed Suger, Trace Chains, Horse Shoe

<sup>10</sup>Quinine, calomel, and blue mass were all chemical preparations widely used for medicinal purposes.

<sup>11</sup>Probably Houston & Texas Central Railroad.

Nails, Manufactured Tin such as plates, Tin cups, etc., also Tumblers, Woe Sives, Frying pans, etc.

These goods will cost here very cheap and as business is dull owing to Galvestons being open, I shall be glad to send some of them in. Please see what can be done in a quiet way. Keep the matter as close to yourself as you can. You can say that you can order these things to Morris if you think best to take an order from him, and can feel of the market quietly. You might engage Bagging & Rope, say, at 30¢, half of the amount being furnished at Alleyton<sup>12</sup> before its arival to pay freight etc., and balance to be paid in cotton out of first picking, say by 1st to 15 September, but only to persons in whom you can rely fully. We do not wish to be humbugged any more if we can help it. Perhaps parties can be got to ship their cotton to me here or will let you, to Havana to Mess. Adat[?] Spalding & Co. But all fall operations must be consummated very early as there is no telling what condition you will be in then or even perhaps before. It is possible your port may be even shut up this Spring though I hardly think so. Should you make contracts, take the contingency of Galveston being shut up and make provision for it. Make the contracts clear and explicit so as to have no misunderstanding. And should anything happen to the goods on the Road, you are not responsible. You agree to have the goods shipped & they take all responsibility afterwards. I suppose you are putting in a large crop of cotton and will want considerable bagging & rope. I think the state of affairs late in the fall will be very uncertain. Also my belief is that cotton will hereafter [unintelligible] at much lower figures than heretofore, and my idea will be to realise and make sure of what is in hand. Cotton shippers will make terable losses this year. The stocks have been steadily up on the increase for a long time. Consinees touch very lightly, they manage to do with much less than when it was so cheap, besides using other fabrics whose production have been greatly stimulated since the war.

Write me promptly to Brownsville Box 54 unless you can send by hand of some person coming out that is reliable. I have a part interist in these goods and the way trade looks now I shall be troubled to get my money out of them here and must make an effort to work off my interist so as not to loose and make a little if I can. Quinine costs about 160 in store, then the duties. The freight will not be much, 2.50 in Houston would pay some profit. Calomel cost say 8/- & Blue Mass 6/- in store, Soda 5¼¢. Can you get anything for soda ash for making soap? We have a few Bbls. Horse Shoe Nails 20¢, Trace Chains 60¢, Iron up 4¢ in store. Keep these prices to yourself. We shall also have some

<sup>12</sup>The railroad lines ended in Alleyton, TX, just west of Houston. From this point, cotton had to be shipped by wagon to the Mexican border.

white cambric, [unintelligible], cheap hosery, etc.; cotton cards, cost here 8½ pr Dz. I send you a couple of late papers. I wrote you in my last concerning selling your cotton there. Such as yours is worth about 30¢, Boins quality much less. The freight, duties, permit, etc. will nearly eat up poor cotton. Freight from Alleyton must come down to 6¢ before cotton will pay, unless of very good quality. I sent you some papers by Falkner, also to Bremond who has kept me supplied with Houston papers.

[unsigned]

Matamoros May 14th 1865

Dear Fred

I wrote you a few days since, since which I sent to you by Mr. Dumble a hat, which with the one sent to you by Sawyer completes your wants in that line. The cloth I have yet found, nor have I seen anything of Wash Hill. Do you want it dark bleu? Since you exchange has become more plenty and can be bought at five dollars to the pound or 12½ advance which is a little less. There has been quite an excitement upon the expectation of the Yankees marching upon Brownsville. Yesterday Col. Ford had a fight and took about eighty prisoners, several hundred stand of arms. I do not believe there is immediate danger of their attacking Brownsville. You need not make any purchase of exchange by drafts on me as I can obtain a supply here. Send me papers by every mail. Put them in a big envelop—the postage is not much.

[unsigned]



The Battle of Palmito Ranch, discussed in this letter, was the last land engagement of the Civil War. Lee had surrendered on April 9, 1865, but news of the end of the war had not yet reached the Confederate troops in Texas by May 13. Like Colonel John S. Ford and his men, Rice seems to have had no indication that the war was in its final stages and that he would return to Houston before the end of the summer.

Steven Strom  
Assistant Editor

## Book Review

*Indians, Cattle, Ships, and Oil: The Story of W. M. D. Lee.* Donald F. Schofield. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985. Pp. 240.)

Houston's modern face is concrete, glass, and steel. Yet behind this glistening veneer lies a history of people, of workers, and of Houston entrepreneurs, many of whom are now forgotten. William McDole Lee is not a household name. Yet he was one of that bold band of hardy entrepreneurs who opened up Texas and Houston for commercial exploitation. Born in Wisconsin, Lee was a Yankee who wore many hats in his 83-year life. He began in 1869 as a trader and merchant among the tribes in the U.S. Department of Missouri (Kansas, Illinois, Missouri, Colorado, New Mexico, and parts of Oklahoma and Texas). Trading with the southern Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes, and operating as provisioners to army soldiers at Camp Supply, Lee and his partner became prosperous from their operations in supplies and buffalo hides. Lee's initial wealth came in large part from his role in destroying an irreplaceable resource of the expanding U.S. frontier—the many thousands of buffalo grazing on the plains.

Whether the hides were secured legally or illegally, Lee vigorously pursued his enterprise. Donald F. Schofield, author of *Indians, Cattle, Ships and Oil: The Story of W.M.D. Lee*, captures this side of Lee's entrepreneurial personality:

The idea of violating government orders by transporting contraband out of the region did not seem to bother the men (Lee and his partner) so long as he [sic] was also exploring new inroads into the hide trade. White hunters were just too successful to be ignored. (p. 35)

The frontier ethic of these early commercial capitalists sometimes traded in a respect for the traditional values of honesty and legality for an ethic of profitability and enhanced accumulation. Lee's dealings with the Native American (Indian) tribes deteriorated as the buffalo herds declined, for the tribes could no longer trade valuable hides for Lee's supplies.

The profitable trade in hides was ending, and Lee moved on to a new career in the cattle business. Purchasing cattle with capital gained from exploiting Native American tribes and decimating buffalo herds, Lee became one of the