



Grantland Rice
1880-1954

Memorialized by the
Grantland Rice Fellowship Fund in

The New York Community Trust
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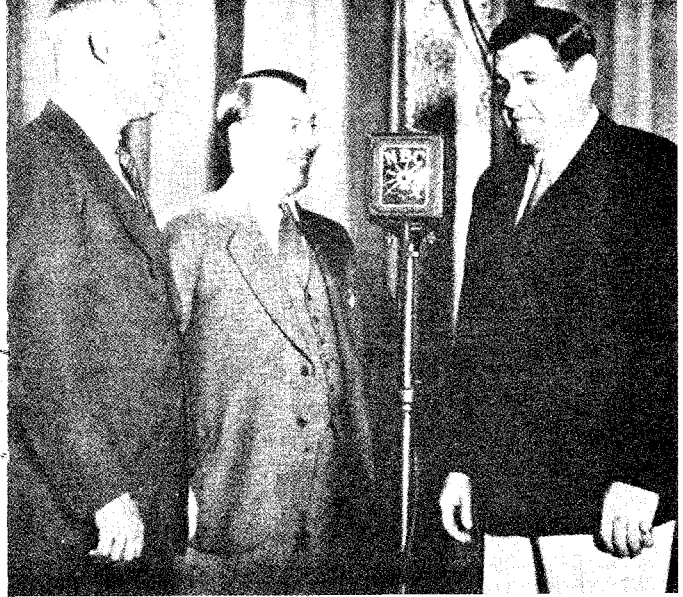
In 1951, the Grantland Rice Fellowship Fund was established in the New York Community Trust for the benefit of young men pursuing careers in sports writing.

Grantland Rice, gentleman and sports writer, was 73 years old when he sat down to write *The Tumult and the Shouting*, his personal reminiscences of a career that spanned over half a century. From 1901 through 1954 he had spun out some 22,000 columns, 7,000 sets of verse, and 1,000 magazine articles that added up to more than 67 million words. But Granny Rice had done a great deal more in his lifetime than to accumulate statistics. He was "the evangelist of fun, the bringer of good news about games." And he made sports writing a respectable profession.

Henry Grantland Rice was born in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, on November 1, 1880, the eldest of the three sons of Bolling and Beulah Grantland Rice. He was also the grandson and namesake of Major Henry Grantland, Civil War veteran and cotton farmer. When Grant was four years old the family moved from Murfreesboro to Grandfather Grantland's home in Nashville, thirty miles away. A few years later the Rices moved out into the country. Under the Christmas tree that year, little Grant found a football, a baseball, and a bat — but no glove. "My hands have been calloused ever since . . . Those three presents were the sounding instruments that directed my life."

Hard work and long hours were a part of Grant's early years. By the age of twelve, he had several acres of his own to care for. He arose at three every morning to drive to market. He returned by seven o'clock in order to put in twelve hours in his fields. As a young teenager, Grant attended military schools — Tennessee Military Institute and Nashville Military Institute — where, though he weighed only 120 pounds spread out over a six-foot frame, he learned a lot about football.

When Grant was sixteen, the Rices moved back again to Nashville. In the fall of 1897, after a year at Wallace University School, he entered Vanderbilt University. He graduated in 1901 with a Phi Beta Kappa Key, a major in Greek and Latin, and considerable knowledge of football and baseball. For three years he had tried valiantly to play football, breaking a number of bones in the process. But baseball came naturally to the lanky young man, and the summer after graduation Granny went barnstorming with a semi-pro team.



With Graham McNamee (center) and Babe Ruth.

The Rice family looked askance at Granny's plans for a life in sports, and before the summer was over his father invited him to come home to Nashville and get a job. The *Nashville Daily News* was just being launched. Granny signed on as sports editor — with the additional duties of covering Capitol Hill, the produce market, and the customs house — for a salary of five dollars a week. Thus began the career of the man who was to become known as "the dean of sportswriters."

The following year, 1902, Granny headed south to the *Atlanta Journal*. There he wrote the entire sports page and covered the theater beat. He was paid \$12.50 a week, shared a room with Don Marquis, who later created "archie the cockroach," and tried to eat for ten cents a day — the price of one large mince pie.

Granny stayed in Atlanta for three years. They were important years for him. The habit of writing verses to break up the long columns of his stories became firmly entrenched. This habit was not uniquely Rice's: In those days many journalists entertained themselves and their readers with bits of rhyme interspersed among the prose paragraphs. Most of such versifying was less than immortal, but some of Granny's has endured:

For when the One Great Scorer comes
To mark against your name,
He writes — not that you won or lost —
But how you played the Game.

Years later Granny wrote, "While sport has been a big part of my life, I must admit that verse has meant even more."

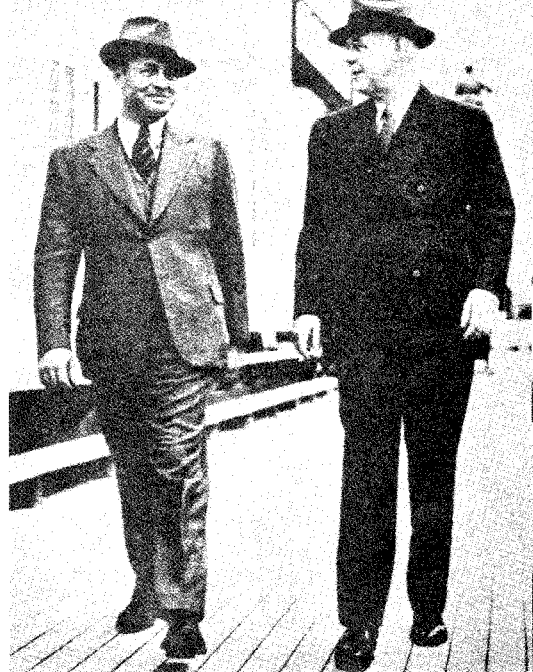
While he was in Atlanta, Granny stumbled on his first big story. Telegrams and postcards had been pouring in from all over Alabama and Georgia, singing the praises of "Tyrus Raymond Cobb . . . a terrific hitter and faster than a deer," and Granny finally caved in under the pressure and wrote an entire column about baseball's newest discovery. Forty-odd years later, Ty Cobb confessed that he himself had sent all those cards and wires, signing different names, because he was "in a hurry." The eighteen-year-old ballplayer had heard about the up-and-coming sports writer at the *Journal*, and he thought they could help each other.

It was in an Atlanta amusement park that Granny met Katherine Hollis, a visitor from Americus, Georgia. Rice and Miss Hollis began to see a great deal of each other. In the meantime, Granny was offered a job with the *Cleveland News* for \$50 a week — enough to support a wife. The wedding was set for April 11, 1906. Kit claimed Granny was so exhilarated by the reunion with his brother, John, who came to serve as best man, that he nearly missed the ceremony. The allegation was stoutly denied by Granny as he and Mrs. Rice went off to spend their honeymoon catching up with the Cleveland baseball team.

A year later Granny took his family, which by then included baby Florence, back to Nashville and a new paper, the *Nashville Tennessean*. Kit and Floncy settled down in Granny's mother's house, and Granny began to grind out two pages of sports daily, four on Sunday, a daily column of verse, and theater reviews nearly every night. He put in twelve, and sometimes as many as eighteen, hours a day.

In 1910 Granny Rice got his first crack at New York, a city he was soon to describe as "a maelstrom compared to the more sedate ways of Nashville." He was offered a job at the *New York Evening Mail* at a salary less than he was earning in Nashville. Granny hesitated, but Kit said, "Go ahead!" Soon he moved his family into an apartment on Riverside Drive. He called his column "The Spotlight." The title became Grantland Rice's personal trademark. Three years later Granny moved to the *New York Tribune*. Now he was well established.

When the United States declared war on Germany in April, 1917, Granny was 37 years old. He had now managed to accumulate a bit of money. In De-



With Bob Jones (left) aboard the *Europa* en route to the '36 Olympics.

cember of that year, Granny handed over his savings — about \$75,000 in securities — to a lawyer friend for safe-keeping. Then he enlisted as a private in the Infantry. He became a candidate for officer training and was commissioned a second lieutenant. When at last his outfit was shipped to the front, Granny, to his chagrin, was kept back and assigned to the office of *The Stars and Stripes* in Paris. Four months later he finally saw some action. He hated it. "In war," he wrote, "the good in a fellow surfaces — or sinks — much quicker than in civilian life. In many ways, the same applies to sport."

Lieutenant Rice landed back in New York in February, 1919. Kit met him with the news that the lawyer to whom he had entrusted their money had speculated with the securities, lost every cent, and had committed suicide that very morning. Rice, recalling the dark day in *The Tumult and the Shouting*, commented, "I blame myself for that poor fellow's death; I shouldn't have put that much temptation in his way."

Henry McLemore, a close friend of Granny's, added this significant postscript to the story: "The first thing Granny did when he got home was call the widow and tell her that he was back and how distressed he was about his friend's death. As soon as

he started making money again, he saw to it that his friend's widow was sent a weekly check."

Financially, Grantland Rice was starting all over again. But for a man with Granny's talent, making money was not a problem. He went back to work for the *New York Tribune*. At the same time, during the decade of the Twenties, Granny was also writing for *The American Golfer* magazine and creating a series of one-reel motion pictures about sport.

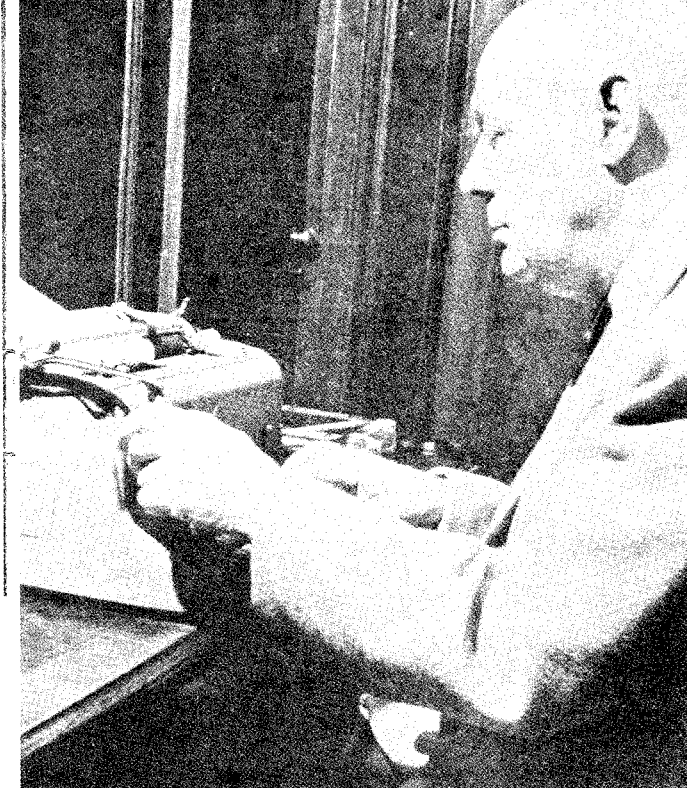
Toward the end of the decade he was able to build a summer place on Long Island. He and a friend, writer Ring Lardner, bought four acres facing the Atlantic at East Hampton. In 1931, the Rices' beach house was nearly swept away by storms. After having the house moved back to a safer spot, Granny had a sporting club built even farther back on the property. All his friends — and there were multitudes — were members. On summer Sundays, he and Kit entertained crowds of 30 to 50 people who came to enjoy the conviviality as well as the 9-hole chip and putt golf course, croquet, horseshoes, archery, and swimming in the Atlantic Ocean just beyond the front door.

Like many others, Granny was hit hard by the Depression. Yet, ever the optimistic philosopher, he considered those losses a kind of blessing: Without the incentive to work and make money, Granny theorized, he might very well have become a dead millionaire.

Granny stayed with the *Tribune* until 1930, when he started writing for the North American Newspaper Alliance. His syndicated column, his films, his radio broadcasts — as he branched out, whatever he produced was titled "The Spotlight." When World War II erupted, Granny went right to work touring training camps, where he lectured on sports to the new generation of soldiers.

All through those busy, productive years, Granny was making friends. He claimed that many of his friendships developed on the golf course, and he often said that many of his columns originated there. Granny had started hitting balls at the Nashville Golf Club in 1901 and even then had found it was one sport in which he and the greatest athletes of his day could enjoy both competition and fellowship.

Granny liked to play with Babe Ruth, but he once watched another Babe — woman golfer Babe Didrikson Zaharias — outdrive baseball's greatest hitter. On another occasion, Granny described how boxer Gene Tunney, not long before a big match in the



ring, would drive his golf ball down the fairway and then, tossing aside his club and muttering "Dempsey ... Dempsey ... Dempsey," start throwing phantom punches.

Granny loved to tell about the time he and polo-player Dev Milburn went out to play golf in mid-winter. Milburn had painted the balls red, and they played until all the balls were lost in snowdrifts. One of Granny's closest friends and favorite golfing companions was Christy Mathewson, whom Granny dubbed one of baseball's four master pitchers. He and Granny played golf from New York to St. Louis, as Matty's sport and Granny's writing kept them both on the move.

Granny seems never to have made an enemy. He was admired both by the athletes he wrote about and by other writers in the highly competitive field of sports journalism. In fact, columnist Red Smith once said of him, "Wherever Granny sits is the head of the table."

In 1951, a distinguished group of citizens gathered for dinner at the Links Club in New York to cele-

brate Granny's half century as a sports writer. Among those present were some of the most notable and successful in business and the professions, and they shared the bond of being friends of Granny Rice. The high point of the evening was the announcement by Robert W. Woodruff, one of Granny's oldest and most loyal friends, of the establishment of the Grantland Rice Fellowship in Journalism, a fund of \$50,000 given anonymously — half from an individual, the rest from a corporate source — to be administered by the New York Community Trust for the benefit of young men of talent who wanted to pursue careers in sports writing.

The granting of the fellowships was for "the recognition of those qualities of heart and mind and character that have made Grantland Rice a beloved figure to his contemporaries and the perpetuation of those professional standards that won him the allegiance and acclaim of younger newspapermen."

At the time the announcement was made, the donor insisted on anonymity. But some years later it became known that the man was Mr. Woodruff himself, chairman of the Coca-Cola Company and Atlanta sportsman, and that the corporate source was the Coca-Cola Company. Woodruff and Rice had made innumerable trips together to play golf and to hunt, Granny's favorite sports as a participant. They also shared an admiration for such outstanding Georgia sports figures as Ty Cobb and golf's Bobby Jones.

Until Grantland Rice died three years later on July 13, 1954, at the age of 73, he was still going strong, although, he said, perhaps not quite as strong as he once had. He was writing a column six days a week and *The Tumult and the Shouting* was about to be published. Death came swiftly, as he had wanted it. Life was Granny's game, and in the minds of those who gathered to say a last goodbye, there was no question that Granny had played it well.

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