



Rockefeller (Nelson A.) personal papers, Oral Histories, Series I

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Rockefeller Archive Center

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Summary Information

Repository:	Rockefeller Archive Center
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Creator:	Columbia University
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Preferred Citation note

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Biographical/Historical note

Nelson Aldrich Rockefeller was born on July 8, 1908, in Bar Harbor, Maine, the third child of John Davison Rockefeller, Jr., and Abby Aldrich Rockefeller. He graduated from the Lincoln School of Teachers College at Columbia University in New York City in 1926. Mr. Rockefeller attended Dartmouth College where he was elected to Phi Beta Kappa, graduating cum laude in 1930 with an A.B. degree in economics.

After college, Mr. Rockefeller was active in family enterprises, including real estate, banking, and family philanthropies. His major business interests in time became focused on Rockefeller Center and Latin America. In 1938, he became the president of Rockefeller Center.

In 1935, because of his interest in national affairs and his desire to learn about U.S. business abroad, Mr. Rockefeller became a director of Creole Petroleum Company, the Venezuelan subsidiary of Standard Oil of New Jersey. This association led eventually to his deep, life-long interest in Latin America. He made extensive visits to Latin America in 1937 and 1939 to study economic, social, and political conditions. He resigned his directorship in the Creole Petroleum Company in 1940.

In 1940, Mr. Rockefeller and his four brothers organized the Rockefeller Brothers Fund to carry out a broad range of philanthropic activities.

Throughout his life Mr. Rockefeller was an avid supporter of the arts. He served as a trustee, treasurer, president, and chair of the board of the Museum of Modern Art, which was cofounded by his mother. In 1954, he founded the Museum of Primitive Art, which collected of indigenous art of the Americas, Africa, Oceania, and early Asia and Europe.

After his 1939 visit to Latin America, Mr. Rockefeller prepared a memorandum for President Franklin D. Roosevelt outlining his deep concern over Nazi influence and penetration into that part of the world. In the memo he recommended a U.S. program of cooperation with the nations of the western hemisphere to achieve better relations among these nations and to help raise their standards of living. Largely as a result of this memo, President Roosevelt asked Mr. Rockefeller in August of 1940 to initiate and head a new program ultimately known as the Office of Inter-American Affairs. Mr. Rockefeller served as Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, his first full-time position in public service.

Mr. Rockefeller served in this position until December 1944, when President Roosevelt appointed him Assistant Secretary of State for American Republic Affairs. In this post, Mr. Rockefeller initiated the Inter-American Conference on Problems of War and Peace in Mexico City in February of 1945. It resulted in the Act of Chapultepec, which provided the framework for economic, social, and defense cooperation among the nations of the western hemisphere and set the principle that an attack on one of these nations would be regarded as an attack on all and jointly resisted.

Mr. Rockefeller signed the Act of Chapultepec on behalf of the United States. He also attended the United Nations Conference on International Organization in San Francisco in 1945. At the conference, there was considerable opposition to the idea of permitting, within the UN Charter, the formation of regional pacts such as the Act of Chapultepec. Mr. Rockefeller, who believed that the inclusion was essential, especially to U.S. policy in Latin America, successfully argued the need for regional pacts within the framework of the United Nations. The importance of this victory was underscored by the subsequent formation of NATO, SEATO, and the Rio Pact.

During these war-time years, Mr. Rockefeller also served as Chairman of the Inter-American Development Commission, which was established in June 1940 to reorganize and revitalize Latin American economies following the loss of European markets. He was also the U.S. Co-Chairman of the Mexican-American Development Commission to help Mexico emerge as an industrial nation in the transition from war to peace.

Mr. Rockefeller resigned as Assistant Secretary of State on August 24, 1945.

Upon his return to private life in New York in 1946, Mr. Rockefeller became chair of the board of Rockefeller Center and undertook a program of physical expansion. Two other initiatives during this period illustrate Mr. Rockefeller's continuing interest in Latin America and international economic development. In July of 1946, the Rockefeller brothers established a philanthropic organization, the American International Association for Economic and Social Development (AIA). AIA financed nonprofit projects to ameliorate health, educational, agricultural, and other social problems in the poorer areas of Latin America. Nelson Rockefeller served as President from July 1946 to June 1953 and from January 1957 to December 1958. In 1947, he organized the International Basic Economy Corporation (IBEC), a business corporation to help raise living standards in foreign countries through new economic

enterprises. In its early years, IBEC concentrated on enterprises in Latin America but later expanded its activities to other regions. Mr. Rockefeller served as IBEC President from January 1947 to June 1953 and from January 1956 to December 1958.

In his inaugural address in January 1949, President Harry S. Truman announced the Point IV program for providing technical assistance to developing nations. This concept was based in part on programs Mr. Rockefeller and his associates had developed through the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs and the private, philanthropic AIA. In November of 1950, President Truman asked Mr. Rockefeller to serve as Chairman of the International Development Advisory Board. The Board was charged with recommending policies for carrying out the Point IV program. The Board's report, entitled "Partners in Progress," provided the basic blueprint for America's foreign assistance program.

On November 20, 1952, President-elect Dwight D. Eisenhower asked Mr. Rockefeller to serve as Chairman of the President's Advisory Committee on Government Organization, a group created to recommend ways to improve the efficiency of the executive branch of the government. As Chairman of that committee, Mr. Rockefeller recommended 13 reorganization plans to the President, 10 of which were approved by Congress. These plans achieved basic changes in the organization of the Department of Defense, the Department of Agriculture, and the Office of Defense Mobilization, among others. Another of the plans led to the establishment of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. In June 1953, Mr. Rockefeller was appointed Under Secretary of the new department. He was especially active in the department's legislative program, recommending measures that covered an additional ten million people under the Social Security program. He resigned as HEW Under Secretary in 1954 to become Special Assistant to the President for Foreign Affairs.

While serving as Special Assistant, Mr. Rockefeller played a key role in the development of the "Open Skies" proposal for checking on world armaments through mutual air reconnaissance. He accompanied President Eisenhower to the Geneva Summit Conference in 1955, where the plan was proposed to the world by the President. Mr. Rockefeller resigned as Special Assistant on December 31, 1955.

Mr. Rockefeller first ran for public office in 1958 and was elected Governor of New York on November 4, defeating incumbent Averill Harriman. He took office January 1, 1959, and was subsequently re-elected Governor three more times, thus becoming the first Governor in the nation's history to be elected to four 4-year terms.

Nelson Rockefeller's tenure as a public servant in the federal government was a formative period in his life. By the time he left Washington to assume the governorship of New York, he had received a thorough education in the workings of the federal government. His chairmanship of PACGO permitted him to examine every aspect of the executive branch. This and his work in HEW exposed him to a wide variety of domestic issues. He gained experience in initiating legislation, in foreign policy and diplomacy, in domestic and international economics, and in national security and military affairs. In the process he also received an education in national politics and gained a reputation for being an effective and hardworking administrator. Most importantly, these appointments provided him with the opportunity to form the friendships and personal associations that served him throughout his political career.

Mr. Rockefeller resigned as Governor of New York in December 1973. In August 1974, President Gerald R. Ford nominated him to fill the vacant vice presidency following the resignation of President Richard

M. Nixon. Mr. Rockefeller served as Vice President from December 19, 1974, to January 20, 1977. Nelson Rockefeller died on January 26, 1979, in New York City.

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Scope and Contents note

This series consists of transcripts of three oral histories with Nelson A. Rockefeller. Two of the interviews were conducted by the Columbia University Oral History Research Office. Transcripts of these interviews are also housed at Columbia University. There are no tape recordings for any of these interviews at the Rockefeller Archive Center.

The first oral history, "The Reminiscences of Nelson Rockefeller," is a composite of several interviews conducted between September 1951 and January 1952 by Wendell Link of the Columbia University Oral History Research Office. Primary subjects covered include Rockefeller's tenure as Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, Latin America, the formation of the United Nations, and international affairs. The file includes five copies of the final version of the transcript, Link's original typescript with penciled edits, and a copy with Rockefeller associate Martha Dalrymple's comments on the transcript.

The second oral history was conducted on August 16, 1967, by John Luter as part of the Columbia University Oral History Research Office's Eisenhower Administration Project. Topics include Rockefeller as Chairman of the President's Advisory Committee on Government Reorganization; Rockefeller as Undersecretary of Health, Education, and Welfare; Rockefeller as Special Assistant to the President; the Four Powers Summit in Geneva in 1955; and the "Compact of Fifth Avenue" and Rockefeller's relations with Richard Nixon.

The third interview was conducted privately by Irwin Gellman on August 11 and 12, 1976, while he was gathering material for the book "Good Neighbor Diplomacy" (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979). Topics include Rockefeller's work as Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs and as Assistant Secretary of State for American Republic Affairs.

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File Plan note

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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Processing Information note

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Processing Information note

John LeGloahec, Harold Oakhill May 2000

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Controlled Access Headings

- Agriculture
- Education -- Latin America
- New York (State)
- Art, Primitive
- Agriculture -- Latin America
- Political campaigns -- United States
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- Business enterprises, Foreign
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- Public health -- Latin America
- Civics
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- Philanthropy -- New York (N.Y.)
- National security -- United States
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- International relations -- United States
- International relations
- International economic relations
- Governors -- Election -- New York (State) -- 1970
- Governors -- Election -- New York (State) -- 1966
- Governors -- Election -- New York (State) -- 1962
- Governors -- Election -- New York (State) -- 1958

- Government policy
- Government agencies
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- Philanthropy -- United States
- Philanthropy -- New York (State)
- Philanthropy
- Nixon, Richard M. (Richard Milhous)
- United Nations
- Rockefeller Brothers Fund

Other Finding Aids note

Detailed finding aids for each series of this collection are available:

[Nelson A. Rockefeller papers, Activities \(FA338\)](#)

[Nelson A. Rockefeller Papers, AIA-IBEC \(FA339\)](#)

[Nelson A. Rockefeller Papers, Art \(FA340\)](#)

[Nelson A. Rockefeller Papers, Countries \(FA341\)](#)

[Nelson A. Rockefeller Papers, DNA \(FA342\)](#)

[Nelson A. Rockefeller Papers, Family and Friends \(FA343\)](#)

[Nelson A. Rockefeller Papers, Politics - New York City Office \(FA345\)](#)

[Nelson A. Rockefeller Papers, Politics - George L. Hinman \(FA346\)](#)

[Nelson A. Rockefeller Papers, Politics - Oscar M. Ruebhausen \(FA347\)](#)

[Nelson A. Rockefeller Papers, Projects \(FA348\)](#)

[Nelson A. Rockefeller Papers, Speeches, Post-Vice Presidential \(FA349\)](#)

[Nelson A. Rockefeller Papers, Washington, DC \(FA350\)](#)

[Nelson A. Rockefeller Papers, Ann C. Whitman - Politics \(FA351\)](#)

[Nelson A. Rockefeller Papers, Hugh Morrow Interviews \(FA352\)](#)

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Collection Inventory

Title/Description	Instances	
1952 Columbia University Oral History, 1951-1952		
Scope and Contents note		
"The Reminiscences of Nelson Rockefeller," interviewed by Wendell Link, September 1951 through December 1952, 731 pages.		
Copy #1 - pages 1-160, 1951-1952	box 1	folder 1
Copy #1 - pages 161-330, 1951-1952	box 1	folder 2
Copy #1 - pages 331-510, 1951-1952	box 1	folder 3
Copy #1 - pages 511-680, 1951-1952	box 1	folder 4
Copy #1 - pages 681-731, 1951-1952	box 1	folder 5
Copy #1 - Index, 1951-1952	box 1	folder 6
Copy #2 - pages 1-160, 1951-1952	box 1	folder 7
Copy #2 - pages 161-320, 1951-1952	box 2	folder 8
Copy #2 - pages 321-510, 1951-1952	box 2	folder 9
Copy #2 - pages 511-680, 1951-1952	box 2	folder 10
Copy #2 - pages 681-731, 1951-1952	box 2	folder 11
Copy #2 - Index, 1951-1952	box 2	folder 12
Copy #3 - pages 1-150, 1951-1952	box 2	folder 13
Copy #3 - pages 151-300, 1951-1952	box 2	folder 14
Copy #3 - pages 301-450, 1951-1952	box 2	folder 15
Copy #3 - pages 451-600, 1951-1952	box 3	folder 16
Copy #3 - pages 601-731, Index, 1951-1952	box 3	folder 17
Copy #4 - pages 1-150, 1951-1952	box 3	folder 18
Copy #4 - pages 151-300, 1951-1952	box 3	folder 19
Copy #4 - pages 301-450, 1951-1952	box 3	folder 20
Copy #4 - pages 451-600, 1951-1952	box 3	folder 21
Copy #4 - pages 601-731, Index, 1951-1952	box 4	folder 22
Wendell H. Link Interview Transcript - pages 1-224, 1951-1952	box 4	folder 23
Wendell H. Link Interview Transcript - pages 225-390, 1951-1952	box 4	folder 24

Martha Dalrymple's Comments on Link Interview, 1952	box 4	folder 25
General Material, 1952, 1967	box 5	folder 28
Copy #5 - Volume 1, 1951-1952	box 6	folder V 1
Copy #5 - Volume 2, 1951-1952	box 6	folder V 2
Copy #5 - Volume 3, 1951-1952	box 6	folder V 3
1967 Columbia University Oral History, 1967	box 4	folder 26

Scope and Contents note

"The Eisenhower Administration Project, Nelson A. Rockefeller," interviewed by John Luter, August 16, 1967, 40 pages with index.

Irwin Gellman Interview with Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1976 August 11 & 12	box 4	folder 27
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Scope and Contents note

Irwin Gellman's personal interview with Nelson Rockefeller on the Good Neighbor diplomacy policy, 112 pages, no index.