



Rockefeller (Laurance S.) papers

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Rockefeller Archive Center

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Summary Information

Repository:	Rockefeller Archive Center
Creator - aut:	Rockefeller, Laurance Spelman
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Biographical / Historical

Laurance Spelman Rockefeller was born on May 26, 1910, in New York City, the fourth of the six children of John D. Rockefeller, Jr. and Abby Aldrich Rockefeller. He attended Lincoln School, a progressive coeducational preparatory school connected with Teachers College of Columbia University in New York City, before entering Princeton in 1928. A philosophy major, he graduated from Princeton in 1932 with a B.A. degree in philosophy and went on to two years of graduate study at Harvard Law School.

On August 15, 1934, Laurance Rockefeller married Mary French in the Congregational Church in Woodstock, Vermont. Together they raised three daughters and a son.

During World War II, Laurance Rockefeller served in the Navy (1942-1945), attaining the rank of lieutenant commander.

Laurance Rockefeller pursued a number of successful careers during his lifetime. He was a pioneer in the field of venture capital. He was a leading and influential figure for three decades in the American conservation movement. He led the development of one of the world's foremost cancer care and research facilities, and was both a benefactor and advisor to major educational institutions. And,

with great foresight, he combined his personal vision for conservation, recreation, and the spiritual needs of individuals to develop internationally acclaimed environmentally oriented resorts. His many accomplishments have been recognized both nationally and internationally.

In 1935, he began working in the family office in Rockefeller Center. His first duties were to develop his knowledge and understanding of Rockefeller philanthropic activities, conservation projects, and business interests, through both study and playing a modest role in their operation. Simultaneously, he developed his own special interest, blending business acumen with the talents of a "gadgeteer," a label he once pinned on himself.

He became well known as an investor of risk capital in young enterprises whose future was based primarily on scientific and technological developments. Over the years his investment interests included the fields of aviation, aerospace, electronics, high temperature physics, composite materials, optics, lasers, data processing, thermionics, instrumentation, and nuclear power. Beginning in August 1969, his venture capital investments in these areas were made through a venture capital group, Venrock, formed by members of the Rockefeller family.

In a different area of venture capital, he developed outstanding environmentally oriented resort hotels in Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Hawaii, and Vermont, serving as chairman of Rockresorts, Inc., a resort management company which he founded and chaired.

Conservation of the environment and recreational development constituted much of Laurance Rockefeller's philanthropy and public service. His introduction to public service came in 1939 when Governor Herbert H. Lehman of New York appointed him to the Palisades Interstate Park Commission (PIPC). He was president of the PIPC from 1970 to 1977 and continued as a commissioner until his resignation in December 1978. He was an advisor to Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, and Ford on matters of environmental conservation and outdoor recreation, and he worked on federal commissions set up to help develop national conservation and environmental policies and programs. In 1958, President Dwight D. Eisenhower appointed him chairman of the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission (ORRRC), which charted ways of meeting the nation's outdoor recreation needs through the year 2000. He was a special emissary for President Lyndon Johnson in the effort that led to creation of the National Redwoods Park in California, and he served as chairman of President Nixon's Citizens' Advisory Committee on Environmental Quality, successor to a similar group which he headed under President Johnson. He played a pivotal role in the creation and development of several national parks including Grand Teton National Park in Wyoming, Virgin Islands National Park on the island of St. John, and Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park in Vermont.

He served as a leader of several important nonprofit and philanthropic organizations. He was president and later chairman of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund (1958-1980) and was a trustee of the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation (1960-1982). His first association with Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York City was in 1947; he also served as chairman (1960-1982), overseeing an expansion and modernization of its operations. He was a longtime trustee of the New York Zoological Society (1935-1986) and served as its president (1969-1971) and chairman (1971-1985).

Laurance Rockefeller received many honors for his efforts on behalf of the environment and cancer research and treatment. Among them are the Alfred P. Sloan, Jr. Memorial Award from the American Cancer Society (1969), the Medal of Freedom (1969), Commander (Honorary) of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (1971), the Woodrow Wilson Award from Princeton University (1991), the

Congressional Gold Medal (1991), the Chairman's Award from the National Geographic Society (1995), the Theodore Roosevelt National Park Medal of Honor (1995), and the Lady Bird Johnson Conservation Award for Lifetime Achievement (1997). In 2003, he became the first person to be made an honorary citizen of the British Virgin Islands in recognition of his many contributions to the area. In December 1959 he received the National Institute of Social Sciences' Gold Medal for distinguished services to humanity, an award previously bestowed upon his grandfather and father. This was the first time in the Institute's history that three generations of a family had been so honored. The citation to Laurance Rockefeller proclaimed him as a "creative organizer of ventures into new fields of human endeavor for the growing aspirations of mankind; [and a] leader in the conservation of natural resources and in the development of the medical and social sciences for the welfare of the individual." In 1967, the National Institute awarded Gold Medals to all five Rockefeller brothers in recognition of their individual and collective services to humanity.

Laurance Rockefeller died on July 11, 2004, at his home in Manhattan.

Prepared by Rockefeller Family and Associates, June 1982, and 2004.

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Scope and Contents

Types of records include: correspondence, personal papers, photographs, audiovisual materials and the working papers of Mr. Rockefeller's associates.

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Arrangement

The LSR papers consist of two primary collections -- the paper collection and the photograph collection.

The main body of the LSR papers is arranged in record groups by file type. The photograph collection is also arranged in record groups by file type.

Collections are also available for each individual associate.

Additional finding aids are created as records are processed and open for research.

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Administrative Information

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Conditions Governing Access

Open for research subject to the terms specified in the original deed of gift of November 13, 1986, and in the subsequent 2009 deed of gift by Laurance S. Rockefeller's executors.

Material in the Rockefeller family collections which provides the names, correspondence or activities of living members of the Rockefeller family, and/or documents the net worth of any Rockefeller family members, is restricted from scholarly access.

Brittle or damaged items are available at the discretion of RAC. Researchers interested in accessing digital media (CDs) in this collection must use an access surrogate. The original items may not be accessed because of preservation concerns. To request an access surrogate be made, or if you are unsure if there is an access surrogate, please contact an archivist.

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