



Rockefeller (John D. 3rd) papers

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Rockefeller Archive Center

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Summary Information

Repository:	Rockefeller Archive Center
Creator - aut:	Rockefeller, John D., III (John Davison), 1906-1978
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Biographical / Historical

John Davison Rockefeller 3rd was born in New York, New York, on March 21, 1906, the eldest son of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and Abby Aldrich Rockefeller. He was the brother of Abby Rockefeller Mauzé and Nelson, Laurance, Winthrop, and David Rockefeller.

Rockefeller, whose childhood family nickname was "Demi," received his preparatory education at the Browning School in New York City and the Loomis Institute, Windsor, Connecticut. He went to Princeton University where he received high honors in economics and graduated in 1929 with the degree of bachelor of science. Rockefeller chose industrial relations as the subject of his senior thesis. While attending college, Rockefeller formed interests that would influence his career in philanthropy.

Rockefeller spent the summer prior to his college graduation as an assistant in the Information Section of the League of Nations office in Geneva, Switzerland, thus beginning a lifelong commitment to international relations. A world tour, undertaken after college graduation, concluded with work for the Institute of Pacific Relations conference in Japan.

In December 1929, Rockefeller, who had been reared to assume the lead role in his generation's philanthropic endeavors, began working in his father's office at 26 Broadway in New York. He immersed

himself in the operations of the many institutions associated with the family and became a board member or officer of the Rockefeller Foundation, the General Education Board, the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research (now The Rockefeller University), Colonial Williamsburg, and the China Medical Board, among others.

The young Rockefeller also developed his own interests. Through his work as a member of the board of directors of the Bureau of Social Hygiene (to which he was appointed in 1928), Rockefeller began a lifelong commitment to the issues of population and birth control. In 1932, he became chairman of the Delinquency Committee of the Boys Bureau of New York City. Six years later the Committee published its recommendations for handling youthful offenders in "Youth in the Toils."

On November 11, 1932, at the Riverside Church in New York City, Rockefeller married Blanchette Ferry Hooker, a daughter of Elon Hooker, the founder of Hooker Electrochemical Company, and Blanche Ferry. John and Blanchette had one son, John D. Rockefeller IV, and three daughters: Sandra, Hope, and Alida. They maintained their principal residences in Manhattan and at Fieldwood Farm in Mt. Pleasant (Westchester County), New York.

In July 1942, Rockefeller joined the Navy. He served with the rank of lieutenant commander in the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations and worked in an interagency task force devoted to planning postwar policy for Japan. Rockefeller was released from active duty in 1945, but his wartime experience led to his appointment as cultural consultant to John Foster Dulles during the Japanese peace treaty negotiations. His broad assignment to consider ways to improve U.S.-Japan relations fostered his deep interest in Japan and in all of Asia. Rockefeller came to love the country, its culture, and its people, so much so that Japan became a second home to Rockefeller and his wife. It was during this time, the late 1940s, that he and his wife began collecting Asian art, albeit on an intermittent and amateur basis.

In the early 1950s, Rockefeller revitalized the moribund Japan Society, and in 1956 he organized the Asia Society. Both organizations were devoted to fostering cultural and educational exchanges between the East and the West. He also founded the Council on Economic and Cultural Affairs (later renamed the Agricultural Development Council) to provide assistance to Asian farmers. Rockefeller became the American with whom prominent Asians sought counsel. He was an advocate of moderation and cooperation in foreign affairs.

With the founding of the Population Council in 1952, Rockefeller hoped to bring the problem of overpopulation to global attention. His travels throughout Asia convinced him that population growth had to be checked if underdeveloped countries were to achieve political stability. In 1970, President Nixon appointed Rockefeller to the chairmanship of the Commission on Population Growth and the American Future.

Closer to home, JDR 3rd took leadership of a committee of civic leaders who were working to create Lincoln Center. He became the key figure in fund-raising efforts as well as in forging consensus among the diverse group of civil officials, social leaders, and artists whose cooperation was necessary for the Center to succeed. Rockefeller was the Center's first president, starting in 1956, and became its chairman in 1961, a post in which he served until 1970 when he was elected honorary chairman.

During the 1960s, JDR 3rd and Blanchette became serious collectors of Asian and American art. Sherman Lee, director of the Cleveland Museum of Art and an expert on Asian art, served as a consultant to the Rockefellers, as did Edgar P. Richardson, an expert in American art. Rockefeller viewed himself as

the temporary custodian of his works of art; ultimately, his collections would serve the public. Upon his death, his major collections of Oriental and American art were donated to the Asia Society of New York City and the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, respectively.

In the late 1960s, Rockefeller undertook a major campaign to influence public policy on philanthropy, particularly private philanthropy, which he viewed as a unique social force that was indispensable to the continued success of the United States. Rockefeller became the leading spokesperson on private philanthropy. He lobbied Congress for regulatory and tax laws under which private giving could flourish. In his role as self-appointed caretaker of philanthropy, Rockefeller was responsible for the creation of the Commission on Foundations and Private Philanthropy (usually known as the Peterson Commission) and the Commission on Private Philanthropy and Public Needs (usually known as the Filer Commission).

Rockefeller saw great potential in the civil rights and youth movements of the 1960s. In his book, "The Second American Revolution" (1973), for which he drew on his experiences of the 1960s, Rockefeller described his vision of the United States as a pluralistic democracy that emphasized cooperation between public and private institutions. This book set the stage for Rockefeller's involvement in helping to plan for the U.S. bicentennial celebration of 1976. Rockefeller took an active role through his work on the National Committee for the Bicentennial Era and with the money provided by the JDR 3rd Fund for bicentennial projects.

John D. Rockefeller 3rd was killed in an automobile accident in Mt. Pleasant, New York, on July 10, 1978. Following a memorial service at the Riverside Church in New York City, his cremated remains were buried in the Rockefeller Cemetery.

For lengthier biographical sketches of John D. Rockefeller 3rd, see Series 1 (box 1, folder 10) and Series 2 (box 23, folders 203-205) of this collection.

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Scope and Contents

The papers of John D. Rockefeller 3rd (1906-1978), document Rockefeller's life and philanthropic activities. They provide information on his education; relationships with family, friends, and business associates; travels; and social concerns, including his lifelong involvement in four major areas: population, Asia, philanthropy, and the arts. The records document his concern for the projects and institutions he initiated and developed.

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Arrangement

The John D. Rockefeller 3rd papers consists of 3 collections, representing the main body of John 3rd's paper records, his photograph collection, and the papers of his office associates.

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Open for research with select materials restricted as noted. Brittle or damaged items are available at the discretion of RAC. Material in the Rockefeller family collections that provides the names, correspondence, or activities of living members of the Rockefeller family, and/or documents the net wealth of any Rockefeller family members, is restricted from scholarly access. Researchers interested in accessing digital media (floppy disks, CDs, DVDs, etc.) or audiovisual material (audio cassettes, VHS, etc.) 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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