FORM 10-300 UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

1. NAME
COMMON: Founder's Hall, The Rockefeller University
AND/OR HISTORIC: The Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research

2. LOCATION
STREET AND NUMBER: 66th Street and York Avenue
CITY OR TOWN: New York
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT: New York

3. CLASSIFICATION
CATEGORY (Check One)
☐ District ☐ Building ☐ Site ☐ Structure ☐ Object

OWNERSHIP
☐ Public ☐ Private ☐ Both

PUBLIC ACQUISITION:
☐ In Process ☐ Being Considered

STATUS
☒ Occupied ☐ Unoccupied ☐ Preservation work in progress

ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
☒ Yes: ☐ Restricted ☐ Unrestricted ☐ No

PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)
☐ Agricultural ☐ Commercial ☐ Educational ☐ Entertainment
☐ Government ☐ Industrial ☐ Military ☐ Museum
☐ Park ☐ Religious ☐ Other (Specify)
☐ Private Residence ☐ Transportation ☐ Comments
☐ Scientific

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY
OWNER'S NAME: The Rockefeller University, c/o Dr. Frederick Seitz, President
STREET AND NUMBER: 64th Street and York Avenue
CITY OR TOWN: New York

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION
COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC: New York County Courthouse, Register of Deeds
STREET AND NUMBER: 60 Centre Street
CITY OR TOWN: New York

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS
TITLE OF SURVEY: None.
DATE OF SURVEY: ☐ Federal ☐ State ☐ County ☐ Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:
STREET AND NUMBER:
CITY OR TOWN:
STATE:
CODE:

NEW YORK 10021

CODE:

NEW YORK

FOR NPS USE ONLY
ENTRY NUMBER DATE

SEE INSTRUCTIONS
The site of The Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research was chosen in October 1902. John D. Rockefeller purchased the Schermerhorn estate, situated between Avenue A (now York Avenue) and the East River, and extending from 64th Street to a line north of 67th Street. A laboratory building, animal house, and power house were erected in 1905-06, from plans drawn by the Boston firm of Shepley, Rutan and Coolidge.

The first laboratory building of the Institute, or Founder's Hall as it is now known, is a fireproof structure with a steel frame, constructed of yellowish-grey brick and limestone. Its simple facade shows five full stories, and the basement is partially above ground. On the front, two Ionic columns support a rather rudimentary portico. Ivy now almost entirely covers the facade.

Much of the interior remains unaltered, though a modern lobby and reception area has been installed on the first floor. On the exterior, Welch Hall (now the Institute library) was added to the rear of Founder's Hall in 1927, and doorways were cut through to connect the two buildings. In addition, an elevated, enclosed walkway was built to connect the laboratory building to the isolation pavillion and hospital (both constructed in 1910 and currently serving as a nurses' residence and clinical research center, respectively), and to Flexner Hall, another laboratory facility. Founder's Hall continues to serve its original function.
John D. Rockefeller faced the problem of what to do with his mounting fortunes when he retired in 1897. By 1901 the wholesale philanthropy that he had been practicing was inadequate to dispose of an accumulation totaling not tens but hundreds of millions. Some new, more effective method was needed for the organization and conduct of what Rockefeller called "this business of benevolence." The answer was plain. "Let us erect a foundation, a trust," Rockefeller said, "and engage directors who will make it a life work to manage, with our personal cooperation, this business of benevolence properly and effectively." Rockefeller, Carnegie, and other donors proved, in the next decade, that philanthropy could be made a successful venture. They established a series of foundations, and in Robert Bremner's words,

"... their number, and even the size of their capital assets, was less significant than the boldness of the enterprise to which they were committed. Most earlier charitable trusts had been established for some narrowly defined purpose.... The major trusts founded by Carnegie and Rockefeller, however, were limited only to the advancement of knowledge and human welfare. Relieving the needy was not their objective. They would attack misery at its source through the weapon of research."

Founded in 1901, The Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research was the first of the great philanthropic foundations. Its objective was "to conduct, assist and encourage investigations in the sciences and arts of hygiene, medicine and surgery, and allied subjects, in the nature and causes of disease and the methods of its prevention and treatment...."

In 1903, Rockefeller purchased a site for the first laboratory, a rocky plateau overlooking the East River at 66th Street in New York City. There a modest five-story brick and stone building was opened on


2Ibid.

### 9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES


### 10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

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**APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY:** less than 1 acre

**LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES**

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### 11. FORM PREPARED BY

**NAME AND TITLE:** Carol Ann Poh, Survey Historian

**ORGANIZATION:** Division of Historic and Architectural Surveys, National Park Service

**DATE:** 12/11/73

**STREET AND NUMBER:** 1100 L Street NW

**CITY OR TOWN:** Washington

### 12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

- National [ ]
- State [ ]
- Local [ ]

**Name**

**Title**

**Date**

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

**Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation**

**Date**

**ATTEST:**

**Keeper of The National Register**

**Date**
8. Significance (page 1)  Founder's Hall, The Rockefeller University

May 11, 1906. Since that date the explorations of the Institute's scientists have yielded numerous discoveries--discoveries that have placed America in the front ranks of medical progress.

HISTORY

More than one historian has suggested that John D. Rockefeller's philanthropy was to some extent prompted by muckraker Ida Tarbell who, coincidentally, had begun interviewing his associates for a series of articles on the Standard Oil Company. The advent of many of the early foundations coincided--perhaps too closely--with the era of muckraking, trustbusting, growing militancy in labor, and a general fear of bigness. Nevertheless, it cannot be refuted that, in the words of Allan Nevins, Rockefeller "led in organizing the most effective use of private funds for broad betterment that the world had yet known."4

Frederick T. Gates, the Baptist minister chosen by Rockefeller in 1891 to act as his adviser in philanthropy, concluded that medical science in the United States was in need of energetic stimulation and development. It seemed that, of the hundreds of diseases then recognized, the medical profession did not know any certain cure for more than a handful. Gates was convinced that the advancement of medicine depended upon the provision for advanced experimentation, permanently established, and carried on by groups of experts with ample salaries and resources for uninterrupted investigation. Thus, with an initial grant of $200,000, seven leading figures in American medical science were drawn together as a group interested in using Rockefeller's benevolence to the best purpose. The seven, Drs. Emmett Holt, Christian A. Herter, T. Mitchell Prudden, Hermann M. Biggs, William H. Welch, Theobald Smith, and Simon Flexner, supported the idea that it would be best, at least for a time, to employ the scientists and laboratories already available. Consequently, in the first years, grants-in-aid were given to the directors of laboratories in the leading medical colleges.

Gates, meanwhile, was discontent with this cautious, exploratory program. The new institute he sought was without a model. European predecessors--notably the Pasteur, Koch, and Lister institutes--had clung to explorations of pathology and bacteriology; the American organizers wished the freedom

8. Significance (page 2) Founder's Hall, The Rockefeller University

to investigate any problem whatever in the biological sciences which might bear upon medicine. Many doubts attended the early work, and observers often expressed uncertainty whether an able research group could be established in an American center.

The phase of cautious exploration soon ended, however. The directors determined to build up a staff under an expert head and, ascertaining Rockefeller's willingness to support a research center, they formulated a proposal. In June 1902, John D. Rockefeller promised $1 million to build, equip, and operate temporarily a research laboratory in New York. Dr. Simon Flexner was chosen as head of the laboratory, and in Nevin's estimate, "[n]o other single step did so much to assure the success of the Institute."5 On October 15, 1904, a small staff began work in a rented and modestly equipped building at 127 East 50th Street.

Early in 1903, Rockefeller had purchased a site for the Institute on the brow of a rocky plateau overlooking the East River at 66th Street. Here a five-story brick and stone laboratory building was opened on May 11, 1906. It furnished excellent facilities for the work already undertaken in pathology, physiology, pharmacology, and biological chemistry, to which experimental surgery and biology were later added. In 1907 Rockefeller, assured that the Institute was a success, gave more than $2-1/2 million as a permanent endowment. A corporation, consisting of both a board of trustees and a board of scientific directors, was formed in 1910 to administer the fund. The research staff of the Institute was given absolute control of their own expenditures, and Rockefeller scrupulously followed a hands-off policy—in fact, he visited the Institute only once, when he and his son happened to be in the neighborhood.

Beginning in 1908, a series of Rockefeller gifts provided for a 60-bed hospital and a 9-bed isolation pavilion, which were opened in 1910 under the direction of Dr. Rufus Cole. Only patients whose diseases were being studied by members of the Institute staff were admitted, and they were treated entirely without charge. As the Institute grew, more buildings were constructed. By 1952, 11 major buildings stood on the Institute grounds bounded by York Avenue, the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Drive, and 63rd and 68th Streets.

The first landmark discovery at the Rockefeller Institute was Dr. Simon Flexner's serum for the successful treatment of epidemic meningitis, a deadly disease that raged in New York in 1905 and later spread throughout the country. Hideyo Noguchi became one of the most gifted research

5Ibid., p. 286.
pathologists of his time, and lost his life in the investigation of yellow fever. In 1919, a drug called tryparsamide was developed by Louise Pearce and three of her fellow chemists to combat the sleeping sickness which had been devastating the Belgian Congo. Alexis Carrel's contributions to arterial surgery opened new fields of operational and experimental surgery, and won for him the Nobel prize. And in 1937, René Dubos discovered the potent antibiotic gramicidin.

In 1954, The Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research assumed the status of a graduate University. The first class was graduated in 1959, and in 1965 the name was changed to The Rockefeller University. Intensive scientific investigation continues, under the continuing generosity of the Rockefeller trust. "Don't be in a hurry to produce anything practical," Rockefeller once said. "If you don't, the next fellow will. You, here, explore and dream." From the explorations and dreams of research scientists have emerged very practical benefits--benefits which have placed the United States in the forefront of medical progress.

6Quoted in Kobler, Rockefeller University Story, p. 13.
9. Bibliography (page 1) Founder's Hall, The Rockefeller University