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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
 TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER ESTATE

AND/OR COMMON

Same

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

Pocantico Hills

___ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Mt. Pleasant

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
23

___ VICINITY OF

STATE

New York

CODE

36

COUNTY

Westchester

CODE

119

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES - RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES. UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

John D. 3rd, Nelson A., Laurance S., and David Rockefeller

STREET & NUMBER

Pocantico Hills

CITY, TOWN

Tarrytown

___ VICINITY OF

STATE

New York

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
 REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC

Register of Deeds

STREET & NUMBER

Westchester County Courthouse

CITY, TOWN

White Plains

STATE

New York

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

None

DATE

___ FEDERAL ___ STATE ___ COUNTY ___ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
 SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

During his long life John D. Rockefeller made his home in Cleveland and New York. In Cleveland Rockefeller owned both a large home on Euclid Avenue and a country estate called Forest Hill. In 1884 he moved his official residence to New York City where he purchased a substantial house at 4 West 54th Street. Although Rockefeller continued to spend the summers at Forest Hill, he desired to own a country home in the New York area. Rockefeller's position in Standard Oil had made him a public figure and he desired a retreat where he and his family could achieve a freedom and privacy divorced from the demands of his business role and public image. In 1886 his brother William purchased an estate in the North Tarrytown area called Rockwood Hall, which he remodeled and expanded into his country home. William was apparently responsible for John's interest in the area. Although realtors tried to interest Rockefeller in property around Tarrytown as early as 1885, it was not until 1893 that he made his first purchase near the small village of Pocantico Hills, north of Tarrytown. In subsequent years Rockefeller and his heirs continued to add to the estate until it eventually reached, at its largest extent, a size of some 4,000 acres.

The heart of Rockefeller's Pocantico Hills estate is a 249 acre section today called the Park. Within the Park is Kykuit ("lookout" in Dutch) which rises some 500 feet above the nearby Hudson and which offers magnificent views of the Tappan Zee and the surrounding country. When Rockefeller purchased the property, a house called Kykuit was located on the hill and in October 1893 Rockefeller moved in. The house, a plain structure which Rockefeller enjoyed a great deal, remained his Pocantico Hills home until it burned in 1902. Rockefeller moved into another house on the estate and began considering building a new home on Kykuit.

In considering a new home at Pocantico Hills Rockefeller faced the question of what kind of estate Pocantico Hills should become. If he looked for examples of a country estate of a man of his means, he had an ample selection to choose from. During the period from approximately 1880 to 1916 the American leisure class which Veblen's acid pen critically analyzed raced to outdo itself in the size and sumptuousness of its in-town houses and country estates. Employing the cream of the established American architectural profession, the rich, both old and new, turned places like Newport, Rhode Island, Lake Forest, Illinois, and Long Island, New York, into Beaux-Arts, Colonial Revival, and Second Renaissance Revival communities of marble and granite palazzi, chateaux, and fortresses. The ideal country estate of the period was designed by a firm such as McKim, Mead, and White or by architects such as Richard Morris Hunt or Charles A. Platt. It consisted of an elaborate main house, extensive formal gardens, and attendant buildings such as gate house, carriage house, orangerie, tennis courts, swimming pool, stables, and the like.

Although Rockefeller himself abhorred ostentatious displays of wealth and had no intention of building a show place on the Hudson that would outshine his wealthy compatriots, he did desire an estate of distinction that would correspond

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES	1893-1937	BUILDER/ARCHITECT	Delano and Aldrich William Welles Bosworth
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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

When during the early morning hours of May 23, 1937, John Davison Rockefeller, Sr. aged 97, died peacefully in his sleep, Americans familiar with his name, and almost all were, knew that a famous and enigmatic personality had passed into history. Highly controversial during his lifetime, Rockefeller has remained in death a subject of unique curiosity to his fellow Americans. Almost yearly new books are published dealing with him and his family. Like other great men he stimulates interest not only in relation to his deeds but also because he is perceived as a symbol of American civilization. Rockefeller's many students, be they admirers or detractors, agree that in studying him they are interpreting an important figure in American history. As Allan Nevins, Rockefeller's principal and most balanced biographer, wrote, "With no great personal magnetism or versatility or breadth, he accomplished two epochal tasks: he set an original pattern in the efficient organization of industry, and an equally original pattern in the efficient superintendance of benefactions . . . By his clarity of thought, keenness of foresight, and strength of purpose, he made his life an important part of the nation's history."¹

Life

The broad outlines of John D. Rockefeller's long life are well known. He was born July 8, 1839, at Richford, New York, the second of six children of William Avery and Eliza Davison Rockefeller. His father was a trader and colorful self styled doctor of medicinals who was often away from home. Rockefeller's mother, to whom in old age he bore a remarkable resemblance, was a devoutly religious and austere individual. Of the parents the mother appears to have been the greater influence. In 1853 when John was fourteen his father moved the family to the vicinity of Cleveland, Ohio. Rockefeller completed high school in Cleveland. Although he wanted to go on to college, his father insisted that he pursue a business career. After a three month book keeping course at a local commercial school, Rockefeller at the age of 16 went to work. And work he did.

His first job was the now famous \$3.50 a week position of clerk with the firm of Hewitt and Tuttle, commission merchants. Three and one half years later, after diligently mastering the techniques of the commission trade and also making important contacts in the Cleveland business community, Rockefeller and a young Englishman named Maurice Clark went into business on their own account buying and selling farm commodities. Thanks in part to the Civil War economic

¹ Allan Nevins, John D. Rockefeller, abridged by William Greenleaf, (New York, 1959, p.3)

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See continuation sheet

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 249

UTM REFERENCES

A	<u>18</u>	<u>597760</u>	<u>4549760</u>	B	<u>18</u>	<u>597780</u>	<u>4548560</u>
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
c	<u>18</u>	<u>596360</u>	<u>4548540</u>	D	<u>18</u>	<u>596360</u>	<u>4549750</u>
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION The boundary begins at the intersection of Bedford Road and Lake Road then south along Lake Road 3,250' to the intersection of Lake Road and County House Road then west along County House Road 4,450' to the intersection of County House Road and Bedford Road then northeast along Bedford Road 6,000' to the beginning point at the intersection of Bedford Road and Lake Road. The national historic landmark resources within the boundary are: Kykuit, Garage, Playhouse, Orangerie, Administration Building and Shops, and the general environment including formel gardens and attendant structures. All other buildings do not contribute to the national significance of the landmark.

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

James Sheire, Historian

ORGANIZATION

Historic Sites Survey, National Park Service

DATE

February, 1976

STREET & NUMBER

1100 L Street NW

TELEPHONE

202-523-5464

CITY OR TOWN

Washington, D.C. 20240

STATE

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL X

STATE _____

LOCAL _____

As the designated State Historic Preservation 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

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

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I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION
ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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to the prevailing taste of the period. To design the new Kykuit Rockefeller did not turn to McKim, Mead, and White or to Richard Morris Hunt. Instead, at the advice of his son, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., he chose the then new New York firm of William Delano and Chester A. Aldrich. In 1902 Aldrich had done some work for John Jr. at his New York home. In the same year after the first Kykuit burned down Rockefeller's son talked to Aldrich about a new house for the hill. In 1905, when the decision to build had been reached, John Jr. returned to Aldrich with the idea. Both Delano and Aldrich attended the École des Beaux Arts and both had worked together in the studio of Carrère and Hastings before joining forces in 1903. They did not receive their first important commission, the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore, until 1905, about the same time the Rockefellers decided to build. In later years Delano and Aldrich became one of New York's better known firms. They are best remembered for their eclectic Federal and Georgian buildings, especially the Willard Straight residence, in New York City and the James A. Burden House at Syosset, Long Island.

In addition to the house the Rockefellers also decided to build formal gardens, a garage, and an orangerie. The design of all three was entrusted to William Welles Bosworth. Although Bosworth was not among the elite of New York architects, he was well known. His gardens included those at the Samuel Untermyer estate in Yonkers. His best known buildings are his neo-classic complex at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He worked in the Beaux-Arts tradition.

The Rockefellers' choice of architects and their building plans indicate, first, that they desired a substantial estate, and second, that they were not interested in flaunting their wealth. According to John Junior the conception given Delano and Aldrich was that the main house should reflect both simplicity and architectural quality. "The ideal for this house," he wrote, "was to have it so apparently simple that any friends visiting my father, coming from however humble homes, should be impressed with the homelikeness and simplicity of the house while those who are familiar with beautiful things and appreciated fine design should say, 'How exquisitely beautiful.'"¹ The Rockefellers obviously wished to avoid the showiness that characterized many large homes of this era (of which the Vanderbilt homes are perhaps the best examples).

To carry out this conception Delano and Aldrich designed a two and one half story Neo-Georgian mansion. Again the choice of a relatively simple American architectural style, as opposed to the elaborate French or Italian, is another indication that the Rockefellers did not desire a sensational architectural

¹As quoted in Edwin C. Bearss, "Historic Basic Data Study, Pocantico Hills," March 31, 1970, unpublished ms., National Park Service Research Files

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masterpiece. Construction of the new Kykuit began in 1907 and the building was completed in 1909. Stone for the structure came from old walls that had formerly crossed the estate.

John Junior apparently left the gardens completely to Bosworth. In 1911 the landscape architect published a description of his gardens at Pocantico Hills in "The American Architect." According to Bosworth the United States possessed no tradition of formal landscape architecture, thus the ideal garden should reflect an eclectic borrowing from the European landscape forms. For a house on a hill Bosworth felt it was possible, ". . . to achieve more beauty by studying the terrace treatment so preferred by the Italians . . . with a touch of French taste."² Bosworth adapted his gardens to Kykuit's hill top location by laying out the gardens around the north-south axis of the house. "It is a spring and fall garden," he wrote, "designed with the one thought of its owners pleasure in providing a variety of walks and places to sit and enjoy the views under changing weather conditions."³ No attempt will be made here to describe verbally the gardens (please see the accompanying illustrations). They are eclectic with Italian, French, and English borrowings and are well ornamented with sculpture. John D.

Rockefeller Jr. was fully satisfied with Bosworth's work. "The gardens cannot fail to give increasing pleasure to all who will enjoy them during the years to come," he wrote the architect.⁴

Below Bosworth's formal Orange Tree Terrace on the west side of Kykuit the Rockefellers in 1908-1909 laid out a Japanese Garden and constructed an oval swimming pool. The architects for the garden, Uyeda and Takahashi, were hired in Japan. They designed the garden including a mahogany tea house and a number of wooden bridges.

In 1907 the Rockefellers began the construction of an orangerie to provide shelter for the estate's 200 year old orange tree collection that was imported from Le Mans, France. Bosworth designed the building. The structure measures 200' x 40' x 30' and is architecturally compatible with the other major estate buildings. The building is a large open hall and it continues to serve as an orangerie.

Also in 1907 Bosworth designed the carriage house and stables. The original carriage house and stables was completed in 1908. Between 1908 and 1913 with

²William Welles Bosworth, "The Gardens at Pocantico Hills," The American Architect, January 4, 1911.

³Ibid.

⁴Bearss Basic Data Study, op. cit. An unpublished manuscript describing the gardens, William W. Bosworth, "The Kykuit Gardens," edited by John D. Rockefeller, Jr., is located at the Rockefeller Archives, New York City.

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the advent of the automobile it was decided to enlarge the building. Bosworth designed the addition which was completed in 1915. The garage is a large building measuring 145' x 110' and is constructed of granite quarried on the estate. The motor room, 110' x 30', has space for some 20 cars. There is also a carriage room and stables. On the second floor apartments were built for some of the household staff while the basement contains the heating plant for Kykuit and the garage. The handsome building harmonizes with Kykuit and is adorned with a lovely clock and chimes over the main entrance (see illustrations).

In 1911 John D. Senior decided that Kykuit should be enlarged. He felt that the accommodations for guests were inadequate and also he was disturbed by noise from the delivery entrance located under his bedroom window. Delano and Aldrich were employed to design the addition and Bosworth was called on to make the necessary changes in the gardens. Work began in 1911 and lasted until 1913. Major changes were: the addition of a full third story and a half fourth story, the construction of an underground access tunnel for the use of delivery vans, the extension of the front entrance as well as the extension of the approach to the house, and extensive redesigning of the garden. In its final form Kykuit is a four story stone Neo-Georgian mansion. The building contains a subbasement and basement in which are located the main kitchen and staff areas. On the main floor are a music room, lounge room, library, dining room, reception room, office, and small pantry. Several of these rooms open directly upon the terraces and gardens. On the floors above, which open on a center well, are bedrooms, storerooms, and staff quarters. Kykuit was John D. Senior's Pocantico Hills home until his death in 1937. His son then occupied the house until his passing in 1960. Since 1960 Kykuit has been the residence of Governor and later Vice-President Nelson A. Rockefeller. The exterior of the house has undergone no significant alterations since its final completion in 1913.

In 1925 John Junior with the concurrence of his father decided to construct a building to house the family's recreational activities. Rockefeller commissioned a New York architect named Duncan Candler to design the building which was called The Playhouse. The Playhouse, which was completed in June 1927, is a large Tudor building (see illustrations). The interior contains a two lane bowling alley, game rooms, music room, lounging area, dining area, an indoor mosaic tile swimming pool, a gymnasium, and an indoor tennis court. On the grounds of The Playhouse are a croquet court, outdoor tennis courts, and an outdoor pool with cabanas. The building continues to function as a playhouse.

By 1932 the Rockefeller Estate had grown considerably beyond the core area of the Park. The larger estate encompassed numerous houses, roads, a farm,

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gardens, riding paths, woods, and the like. The care and maintenance of the estate required a substantial work force. In 1932 the Rockefellers decided to build an administration complex. As designed by Bosworth the administration headquarters consisted of a two story stone administration building measuring 50' x 180' and six garages. These structures continue to be used as the headquarters for the estate administration.

When Rockefeller died in 1937, his Pocantico Hills estate, and especially its core area, the Park, had become an elaborate symbol of social status and wealth. Although it was Rockefeller's intention to maintain an atmosphere of simplicity at Pocantico Hills, he was not successful. Pocantico Hills when viewed in its entirety testifies to extensive wealth. Today it is a period piece that reflects the tastes and life style of the age of the great financiers and industrialists. It stands as a symbol of the popular interpretation of the name Rockefeller and the age in which he lived. Nevertheless, for Rockefeller the material manifestations of his industrial success were not his most important concern at Pocantico Hills. Although he owned a fabulous estate, his greatest enjoyment came not from its formal architecture, its many buildings, its elaborate gardens, its sheer size, or even its golf course. For Rockefeller, Pocantico Hills' riches were its views of the Hudson, its rolling hills, and its woodlands.

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boom, the firm of Clark and Rockefeller thrived. By the end of the war, Rockefeller, then 26, was recognized as a successful commission merchant. Also by the end of the war his interest had been drawn in another, for his subsequent career crucial, direction.

In 1859 Edwin Drake launched the modern petroleum age when he discovered oil at Titusville, Pennsylvania. By 1863 the green gold from the "Oil Regions" was arriving in Cleveland to supply numerous small refineries. In the same year Rockefeller, Clark and his brother, and Samuel Andrews, a refinery expert, entered the oil business by building a small refinery. The business grew quickly. By 1865 Rockefeller had recognized the growth potential of the industry and decided to give up the commission merchant business and devote his full attention and talents to oil. When in February 1865 the Clark brothers disagreed with his ambitious expansion plans, Rockefeller and Andrews bought them out. Rockefeller later wrote, "The firm of Rockefeller and Andrews was then established and this was really my start in the oil trade." With typical understatement he continued, "It was my most important business for about forty years until, at the age of about fifty-six, I retired."²

Rockefeller was 26 at the time. The next thirty years of his life is the history of the rise of Standard Oil, the organization he founded and led in spirit and fact until 1896. The story of America's prototype multinational from its beginnings to its dissolution in 1911 is a case study writ large in American business history. The facts of the company's expansion and development trace a line of continuous growth. Beginning in 1865 with a small 505 barrel refining capacity, the Standard by 1911 had become a vertically integrated organization which controlled the bulk of the American petroleum industry. It was the largest industrial organization in the world. As of 1911 Standard produced oil from its own wells, transported it through its own pipelines and in its own tank cars, trucks, and ships, refined it at its own strategically located refineries, and sold petroleum's many by-products through its own marketing systems. Almost all students of the conglomerate agree that the Standard's major contribution to American industry was the efficiency and economy it brought to a previously chaotic American petroleum industry. There is little disagreement surrounding the Standard's managerial quality and technical expertise in the oil business. Even no less a figure than V.I. Lenin, not exactly a company friend, in his famous essay on "Imperialism, The Highest State of Capitalism," wrote that the Standard had become a capitalistic success because, "It possessed far more capital and an excellent system of oil transportation and distribution."³ There is disagreement, often highly polemical in

²John D. Rockefeller, Random Reminiscences of Men and Events, (New York, 1909), p.81.

³Vladimir I. Lenin, Lenin on the United States, (New York, 1970), p. 229.

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nature and often based on an ideological or political perspective, concerning the techniques which the organization employed in its growth. Above all there is controversy about the moral or ethical implications of the practices the Standard selectively employed in relation to competition. The earliest studies of the Standard, books like William D. Lloyd's polemical Wealth Against Commonwealth (1894) and Ida M. Tarbell's more disciplined but essentially muckraking History of the Standard Oil Company (1904), presented the organization as an undisciplined octopus that crushed all opposition in arms known as rebates, drawbacks, price cutting, bribery, industrial espionage, and secret take overs and manipulation. Later studies have corrected this distorted image of the company and its practices. In their history of Standard Oil (New Jersey) from 1882, the year the Standard Oil Trust was formed, to the 1911 dissolution, Ralph and Muriel Hidy, the authors of the most objective business history of the organization, present the contemporary opinion among historians. "Innovations in administrative techniques, as well as in methods of production and manufacturing, were at the root of its success,"⁴ they write. But the same authors go on to point out that the company indeed at times employed semi-monopolistic techniques and amoral practices. The organization's greatest failure, they contend, stemmed from its failure to perceive and evaluate a basic belief of American pluralistic democracy, namely, its fear and indeed almost hatred of monopoly. Allan Nevins reaches a similar conclusion. Nevins carefully documented the questionable and objectionable practices to which the Standard and its representatives at times resorted. Although Nevins points out that the Standard reflected the prevailing business practices and ethics of the period, and although he makes allowances for the organization's public relations mistakes, his conclusion is, "The charge that, when it became strong enough to raise the standard of business ethics, it failed to do so, is valid. Particularly after its feat in 1878-1880 in taking virtual control of trunk pipe lines from the Regions to the great refining centers, its monopolistic position became hateful."⁵ Rockefeller was Standard's chief executive officer until 1896. Within the company he became famous for his attention to even the smallest operational detail. Rockefeller must share in history's interpretations and judgements of one of America's most important industrial corporations.

Although John D. Rockefeller retained the title of head of Standard Oil until 1911, he in fact retired from the organization's daily operations in 1896 or 1897. He was fifty-six at the time and had worked continuously for forty years. Retirement for Rockefeller was not a period of total rest and relaxation. To be sure he welcomed the opportunity to spend more time with his family at his now numerous houses and estates and the chance to indulge his pleasure in landscape architecture and outdoor recreation. But he also required time to manage his

⁴Ralph W. and Muriel E. Hidy, Pioneering in Big Business, 1882-1911, (New York, 1955), p. 714.

⁵Allan Nevins, "John Davison Rockefeller," Dictionary of American Biography, Supplement Two, (New York, 1959), p. 572.

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personal fortune and, above all, to guide carefully the benefactions to which he had committed himself from his youngest days. For the next forty-one years the latter became his major interest. In the process Rockefeller transformed American philanthropy on a scale similar to his transformation of American corporate life.

Rockefeller remained vigorous in body, mind, and spirit to the end of his long life. He died peacefully in Florida at approximately 3:50 A.M. on May 23, 1937. His body was transported to his New York estate at Pocantico Hills. Almost his entire family, fully realizing the historical import of his passing, sorrowfully gathered to pay its last respects to its patriarch. One grandson was in Latin America. Upon hearing the news he chartered a plane and flew home. Another came from the Southwest. Approximately 125 people, family, close associates, and descendents of his original colleagues in Standard Oil, attended the ceremony. The body was then taken to Cleveland, the place where at sixteen he began a career which is singular in American history. He was laid to rest beside his wife.

Work

In a thematic conceptualization of American history John Davison Rockefeller is remembered for his contributions to American industry and to American philanthropy. In a brief summation of Rockefeller's achievements, Nevins wrote, "Rockefeller gained a preeminent place, both in industry and in philanthropy, as an organizing genius whose foresight, patience, analytical power, intense application to detail, and skill in selecting able lieutenants enabled him to manage undertakings on a magnificent scale."⁶

Of Rockefeller's many contributions to the history of American industry, three stand out. The first was his concept of the Standard Oil combination itself. From his experience in the 1860s and 1870s Rockefeller recognized that in order for the American petroleum industry to be placed on a firm foundation that would correspond to the economic and legal environments in which it functioned, it was necessary to combine previously disparate, destructively competitive, and non-coordinated interests. "The chief advantage from industrial combinations," Rockefeller always contended, "are those which can be derived from a cooperation of persons and aggregations of capital . . . once admit the fact that cooperation, or, what is the same thing, combination, is necessary on a small scale, the limit depends solely upon the necessities of business."⁷ In petroleum, the "necessity of business," as Rockefeller perceived it, was a capitalistic combination that could operate at the highest degree of efficiency in markets that had become national and international in scale. Under Rockefeller's leadership, Hidy makes clear, "A group of executives developed for the first time in American history

⁶Nevins, Dictionary of American Biography, p. 576.

⁷Rockefeller, Random Reminiscences, p. 66.

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an effective system of working cooperatively to manage a large integrated business enterprise producing goods for a wide market."⁸ Standard Oil, or the Trust as it was often simply called, succeeded in uniting and integrating previously independent companies. In creating the Trust Rockefeller pioneered a qualitative transformation of the American industrial revolution that was as important as the development of interchangeable parts. In Standard Oil Rockefeller created an industrial form that made it possible to carry on a business on an economy of scale. Steel, autos, appliances, indeed all the major branches of American industry, followed the Standard's lead.

Rockefeller's second major industrial achievement was his perception of the importance of quality personnel. For Rockefeller the choice of people was as important as putting together an industrial structure. "In speaking of the real beginning of the Standard Oil Company," he wrote, it should be remembered that it was not so much the consolidation of the firms in which we had a personal interest, but the coming together of the men who had the combined brain power to do the work, which was the actual starting point. Perhaps it is worth while to emphasize again," he continued, "the fact that it is not merely capital and plants and the strictly material things which make up a business, but the character of the men behind these things, their personalities, and their abilities; that are the essentials to be reckoned with."⁹ Rockefeller, who personally selected the men who occupied the Standard's important positions, was among the first to break with the tradition that business enterprises should be administered by those who owned them. He early perceived that executive ability and stock ownership were not synonymous. Rockefeller's only son never exercised important managerial responsibilities in Standard Oil, but rather employed his considerable executive abilities in other directions (the philanthropies, Rockefeller Center, conservation, etc.). Rockefeller based his personal choices, e.g. John D. Archbold, his successor, on a man's ability to master the complexities of the petroleum industry. In so doing Rockefeller was a pioneer in another significant innovation in American industry which sociologists would later call "the managerial revolution."

Rockefeller's third important industrial accomplishment was the decision making process which he established for Standard Oil. He was among the first to institute a consensus form of decision making. Again he recognized the pragmatic realities of his business. Standard Oil brought together highly able, ambitious, and strong willed executives whose previous experience had been competitive, independent behavior. In order to secure their dedicated cooperation "in the general interest" of the organization, and in order to satisfy their intellectual and psychological needs, Rockefeller employed consensus as opposed

⁸Hidy, Pioneering in Big Business, p. 40.

⁹Ibid; p. 40.

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to dictatorship in policy formulation and execution. At the heart of the consensus form of decision making rested the Standard's committee structure. Top management was organized in an Executive Committee. Rockefeller, his brother William, Flagler, the Pratts, to name a few of the famous Standard personalities, belonged to this committee. After examining together all opinions, information, and options, the Executive Committee formulated policy and unanimously agreed on all important operational decisions. The Executive Committee based its deliberations on the expert information received from an extensive system of subordinate staff committees which were set up to deal with each one of the organization's major functions, e.g. transportation, exports, salaries, and lubricating oil. The entire committee system united the abilities of executives and experts to form one of the "smoothest running teams" in American industry.

In conceiving the first truly modern corporation and in guiding the creation of the first vertically integrated industrial combination, Rockefeller established himself as a major figure in the history of American and world industry. His other contributions, his participation in the managerial revolution and his consensus decision making process, were industrial innovations the relevance of which has carried over into the so-called post-industrial era. As both Rockefeller's admirers and detractors agree, in business he was a highly creative human being.

Rockefeller's second area of significance in American history rests on his contributions to the development of American philanthropy. By the time Rockefeller retired from Standard Oil he had become one of the richest men in the world, if not the richest. The size of his fortune, which of course fluctuated, is unknown. As of 1913 it consisted of some 900 millions in Standard Oil and U.S. Steel stock, government bonds, and unknown amounts in a wide variety of other investments. No matter what the exact size, he was an immensely wealthy man.

In relation to his wealth Rockefeller formulated basic conceptions which determined his attitudes towards it. First, he was fully aware that he had acquired great wealth through a series of historical circumstances for which he was in no way responsible. The evolution in the United States of the institution of private property and its legal framework, the industrial revolution in general, and, not the least important, the totally unexpected and unforeseen growth of petroleum as a major source of world energy were historical trends that transcended any one individual. In worldly terms Rockefeller's fortune was essentially an accident, and he knew it. Second, Rockefeller was convinced that his Maker, the God of his Baptist upbringing and of his life long faith, was the true source of wealth. As Nevins put it "Rockefeller had a semi-mystic conviction that God had lent him the money to be used for the welfare of Mankind."¹⁰

¹⁰Nevins, John D. Rockefeller, p. 251.

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Rockefeller felt he was not the owner of his wealth but rather its steward.

The Bible in which Rockefeller almost daily read provided no guidelines for the efficient stewardship of the world's largest fortune. To accomplish what he called "the difficult art of giving," Rockefeller turned to experience. His experience, of course, was in business and it was to the forms and techniques of business that he looked for guidance. "Let us erect a foundation, a trust," the principal architect of the first great industrial trust wrote, "and engage directors who will make it a life work to manage, with our personal co-operation, this business of benevolence."¹¹

The business of benevolence required policy direction. In cooperation with his advisors, principally Frederick T. Gates and his son John Jr., Rockefeller formulated broad guidelines: benefactions should, ". . . produce an effect which will be of lasting gratification;" they should, ". . . give opportunity for progress and healthful labor where it did not exist before;" the money should go, ". . . beyond the impulses of emotion and get to the source;" and giving should, ". . . help people to help themselves," and not foster dependence.¹²

In determining his fields of philanthropy Rockefeller turned to areas which he felt were fundamental to progress and civilization. The major thrust of his giving was the advancement of knowledge and human welfare. To secure these ends Rockefeller gave widely to charitable organizations, churches, and schools. But the heart of his philanthropy is found in the great institutions associated with his benevolence: the University of Chicago (beginning in 1889), the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research (1901), the General Education Board (1903), the Rockefeller Foundation (1913), and the Laura Spellman Rockefeller Memorial Fund (1918, absorbed by Foundation in 1928). Men such as Simon Flexner at the Institute, Wallace Buttrick of the General Education Board, and Raymond Fosdick at the Foundation translated Rockefeller's "business of benevolence" into institutions that carefully selected realistic humanitarian goals and then accomplished them. A cataloguing of the achievements of these institutions in science, medicine, education, public health, agriculture, and other areas both in this country and around the world is a large study in itself. There is unanimous agreement that their contributions to American society and world civilization have been significant. As Rockefeller intended, his largess, which totaled approximately 550 millions in his lifetime, paid rich dividends "to the welfare of mankind."*

*As of 1955 the New York Times estimated that Rockefeller benefactions totaled 2-1/2 billions of dollars.

¹¹As quoted in Robert H. Bremner, American Philanthropy, (Chicago, 1960), p. 117.

¹²Rockefeller, Random Reminiscences, pp. 141-155.

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"Rockefeller's and Carnegie's chief contribution to philanthropy," an historian of philanthropy in the United States writes, "was to found institutions capable of distributing private wealth with greater intelligence and vision than the donors themselves could hope to possess. The great philanthropic trusts they established climaxed the long effort to put large-scale giving on a businesslike basis."¹³ Unlike Carnegie with his gospel of wealth, Rockefeller did not think that he had been selected to possess great wealth by a process of natural selection and elimination. He viewed his position as that of a steward of wealth which God had placed in his trust. For Rockefeller, the term trust, in philanthropy as well as in business, always possessed a moral dimension. The philanthropic institutions associated with his name are the reality of how he bore witness to that trust.

¹³Bremner, American Philanthropy, p. 120.

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