

## **Environmentalism and Ecology Collections Survey**

Resources for the History of Conservation and Ecology at the Rockefeller Archive Center, by Darwin H. Stapleton

The 72 million pages of documents at the Rockefeller Archive Center include major bodies of original source material for the study of conservation, environmentalism, and ecology dating from the late 19th century into the 1980s. These records engage issues relating to the environment and the field of ecology from two directions. First, the Rockefeller family has had a deep interest in the preservation of the American landscape, both as an object of contemplation and appreciation (in part derived from religious belief), and as a matter of patriotic pride. Second, many Rockefeller philanthropic institutions have been interested in the management of the natural order as a means of promoting the welfare of humankind. These interests have ranged from the practicalities of increasing the production of food and fuel to investigations of fundamental biological, chemical, and physical principles.

This essay offers a brief and general overview of the Center's collections relating to conservation and ecology. Prospective researchers should call or write the Center to ask about materials related to their specific topics.

### **Rockefeller Family Archives**

(Biographies of the Rockefeller family members mentioned here can be found at <http://archive.rockefeller.edu/bio/>)

John D. Rockefeller, Sr. purchased large tracts of land for his estates in Ohio, New York, New Jersey, and Florida, and personally supervised much of the improvement of the land in accord with his concepts of landscape. In Cleveland he donated Rockefeller Park to the city, and its development and maintenance are documented in his papers. As an entrepreneur, JDR Sr. was a major purchaser of land in the petroleum, mineral, and timber industries. The records of the Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller contain, for example, a body of material on the Everett Timber and Investment Company in the Pacific Northwest, 1891-1953.

John D. Rockefeller, Jr. continued his father's fascination with landscape by further developing the family estate at Pocantico Hills, New York and by pursuing a similar program at Mt. Desert Island, Maine, for what later became Acadia National Park. JDR Jr. undertook massive acquisitions of land for preservation purposes at Jackson Hole, Wyoming (creating much of what is now Grand Teton National Park) and along the Palisades portion of the Hudson River in New York and New Jersey. He was involved in the development of other national parks, as well as federal, state, and city conservation projects in North and South Carolina, Virginia, and other locales. A selection of JDR Jr.'s

correspondence with Horace Albright, the head of the National Park Service from 1916 to 1933, was published in 1991 as *Worthwhile Places* (Joseph W. Ernst, ed.).

The Nelson A. Rockefeller (NAR) Papers contain three rather different types of materials related to the environment. During NAR's involvement in Latin America he was first a leader in public health projects that involved land drainage, insecticide spraying, and other alterations of the land, beginning with his tenure as coordinator of Inter-American Affairs under Franklin D. Roosevelt's presidential administration, 1940-1945. From the late 1940s through the 1960s he promoted the development of modern agriculture, personally operating farms in three Latin American nations. In 1969 he was asked by President Nixon to undertake a comprehensive review of American relations with Latin America, which included consideration of natural resources. Materials on these subjects are in NAR's papers as well as in related collections of the American International Association and the International Basic Economy Corporation.

NAR's years as governor of the State of New York (1958-1973) are fully documented in his papers. They contain material on his pure waters initiative of 1965 that provided funds for water quality improvement and the purchase of parklands; on the management of the Adirondack and Catskill preserves; and a range of issues associated with the management of land and water resources in New York State.

In the early 1970s NAR was chairman of the National Commission on Water Quality, a federal body which attempted to develop a national policy on water resources. The Archive Center holds 59 cubic feet of the committee's records, which include original research materials, and testimony, and document the internal workings of the committee.

Laurance S. Rockefeller continued JDR Jr.'s interest in land preservation. Some of his papers are open for scholarly research, and some records of organizations that he developed, such as the American Conservation Association and Jackson Hole Preserve Inc., are available to researchers. His work in this area is the subject of a recent book by Robin Winks, *Laurance S. Rockefeller: Catalyst for Conservation* (1997).

Material related to the Greenacre Foundation, an urban land preservation organization established by Abby Rockefeller Mauze in 1968, also is available for research.

### **Rockefeller Brothers Fund Archives**

The interests of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund generally have reflected those of the Rockefeller family, so the archives contain records of grants given to organizations with conservation such as the Central Park Conservancy and the American Farmland Trust. In

the last two decades the RBF has been heavily involved in the sustainable agriculture movement, particularly in Eastern Europe.

### **Rockefeller Foundation Archives**

This vast archive documents the global activities of the foundation and connects with ecological matters at two points: public health and agriculture. The former area was a major focus of the foundation from its creation to the early 1950s. Global programs aimed at the eradication of several infectious diseases, primarily hookworm, yellow fever, and malaria, included numerous strategies of environmental regulation and control, including drainage of swamps, altering of watercourses, the distribution of mosquito-eating fish, and the spraying of insecticides. The foundation was a major participant in a singular attempt to eradicate mosquitoes from the entire island of Sardinia (Italy) in the latter 1940s.

In 1943 the foundation initiated a program of plant breeding and agricultural innovations that became known as the Green Revolution. Elements of this program, such as substantial use of chemical fertilizers and insecticides, and specific methods of land management, have required consideration of the effect of the Green Revolution on local and global ecological systems.

The foundation has been active in so many areas of human endeavor in the 20th century that it is impossible to list all of the other areas in which its work has been related to conservation and ecological issues. But researchers should take into consideration its strong support of the biological sciences in the 1930s and 1940s, and its funding of some aspects of urban planning.

### **The Rockefeller University Archives**

Much of the research at The Rockefeller University (established 1901 as the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research) has related to the human physiology. However, a number of researchers have gone in directions that have been important ecologically. The leading figure in this area is Rene Dubos (1901-1982), whose early work on the antibiotic Gramicidin convinced him that the solutions to human problems lay in the better understanding of ecology, and thence to a conviction that the public needed to be far better educated about the functioning of the biosphere. The university archives contain a body of Dubos's scientific papers, some correspondence, and drafts of his publications. The Archive Center's library has a major collection of his printed works.

Until the late 1940s the university had a plant and animal research laboratory at Princeton, New Jersey, which carried out important work on the transmission

of diseases. More recently the university established a Center for Field Research at Millbrook, New York, which includes ecologically related research in its programs. The behavior of birds, particularly vocal communication, has been a major focus of study.

### **Other Archives**

The General Education Board (1902-1964), active primarily in the American South, began promoting improved farming practices soon after it was established, and also promoted better sanitary facilities in rural areas.

The short-lived Rockefeller Sanitary Commission for the Eradication of Hookworm Disease (1909-1915) pioneered in encouraging the improvement of sanitary practices in the American South in order to eliminate hookworm transmission; it served as the model for the Rockefeller Foundation's International Health Board, established in 1913.

Researchers interested in outdoor recreation should examine the archives of the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial, which in the 1920s funded outdoor museums and other aspects of regional and national parks. It also gave a large grant to help establish the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Also in the 1920s the International Education Board provided fellowships and grants to forestry and agriculture students in Europe and the United States.

The Russell Sage Foundation Archives document its support of the Regional Plan Association, which created comprehensive plans for the expansion of the infrastructure of the New York City region in the 1920s, as well as promoting the creation of the Appalachian Trail.

### **The Bird Islands**

In the 1910s both the Rockefeller Foundation and the Russell Sage Foundation purchased islands on the Gulf of Mexico as bird refuges. Intended particularly to protect wading birds whose feathers were prized for the decoration of women's hats, the islands became models for wildlife conservation.

### **Personal Papers**

The Archive Center holds several large bodies of personal papers that may be of interest to researchers in the fields of environmentalism and ecology.

Kenneth Chorley's papers focus primarily on the development of Colonial Williamsburg, but there is abundant material on the management of Rockefeller property at Jackson Hole, Wyoming, as well as the Grand Teton Lodge Co. There is also a separate collection of GTLC papers.

Harold Fabian's papers are the records of a real estate agent who helped acquire the Jackson Hole lands for JDR Jr.

The Nelson C. Davis and Wilbur Downs papers document professional lives committed to yellow fever and malaria eradication, including (in Downs's case) by means of the use of DDT.

Louis Hackett's papers reveal the work of one of the most effective managers of yellow fever and malaria projects in both Latin America and Italy in the 1920s and 1930s.

The papers of J. George Harrar, a plant pathologist who became head of the Mexican Agricultural Project in 1943, and was later president of the Rockefeller Foundation, are important to understanding the history of the Green Revolution.