

# JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER AND THE GOLF HOUSE IN LAKEWOOD, NEW JERSEY

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Remarks to the Lakewood Heritage Commission, Claflin House, Lakewood Country Club,  
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Rockefeller Archive Center Research Reports Online is a periodic publication of the Rockefeller Archive Center. Edited by Ken Rose and Erwin Levold under the general direction of the Center's Executive Director, Darwin H. Stapleton, Research Reports Online is intended to foster the network of scholarship in the history of philanthropy and to highlight the diverse range of materials and subjects covered in the collections at the Rockefeller Archive Center. The reports are drawn from essays submitted by researchers who have visited the Archive Center, many of whom have received grants from the Archive Center to support their research. The ideas and opinions expressed in this report are those of the author and are not intended to represent the Rockefeller Archive Center.

It is a pleasure to have the opportunity to be with you tonight to talk about John D. Rockefeller, and to finally have the opportunity to visit Lakewood. As someone whose job is to help other researchers learn about our collections and to figure out how the archives might be helpful for their research, I rarely get an opportunity for any concentrated study of the materials themselves, so I am doubly pleased to have been able to use this occasion not only to get out of the archives and see where Rockefeller history happened, but also to have a chance to examine in some detail certain aspects of John D. Rockefeller's life in Lakewood. Tonight I hope to give you a better sense of who John D. Rockefeller was, where his life in Lakewood fits in the larger

picture of his life and career, and to review some of the particular details that the archives reveal about the history of the Rockefeller estate in Lakewood, which he always called Golf House.

John D. Rockefeller was, of course, the founder in 1870 of the Standard Oil Company, in Cleveland, Ohio, and made his vast fortune (which peaked at \$900 million in 1913) refining crude oil into kerosene and other petroleum products. Within twenty years Rockefeller and his colleagues at Standard Oil had built one of the first modern corporations; they had brought order to a chaotic young industry; and they had gained a virtual monopoly over the oil business. In doing so at a time when business was not regulated, their business practices went to the limits of what people considered to be fair, honest, and above-board. By pushing beyond these limits, Standard Oil and Rockefeller became the object of criticism and scorn in the muckraking press, and their practices came under the scrutiny of state legislatures and state attorney generals. Indeed, in many ways we have Rockefeller and the Standard Oil Company to thank for the beginnings of our interstate commerce regulations and our anti-trust legislation.

In the mid-1890s, however, John D. Rockefeller retired from the daily management of the Standard Oil Company. Then in his mid-fifties, Rockefeller also wanted to give up the title of company president as well, but his colleagues, faced with a growing number of criminal and legislative investigations, refused to let him relinquish the presidency. When he began buying property in Lakewood in 1901, Rockefeller was one of the wealthiest men in America and one of the most hated men in the country – the public face and nominal leader of a notorious corporation that he no longer managed and whose offices he rarely visited.

By 1901, then, the active business phase of Rockefeller's career was over and he was trying to settle into retirement. He was also moving into what he came to call wholesale philanthropy. In 1901 he began to create what would become a series of endowed philanthropic

institutions designed for specific purposes. From the time he received his first paycheck in November 1855, at age 16, Rockefeller had given liberally to charitable causes, and his donations grew in size as his resources did. Much of his charity prior to 1900 was channeled through the Baptist church, first in his own congregation and later through established Baptist institutions, such as the American Baptist Home Mission Society and the American Baptist Education Society. He helped build churches, missions, YMCAs, and religious schools and colleges all across the U.S., and he supported foreign missions and individual missionaries and ministers. In the 1880s his donations enabled the founders of Spelman College to preserve that school as one devoted to African-American women (the school took the name “Spelman” to honor his abolitionist in-laws), and in the 1890s his gifts made possible the creation of a great university for the Baptist denomination, the University of Chicago.

Rockefeller always had turned to Baptist ministers for advice about his philanthropy, and in the 1890s he hired the Rev. Frederick T. Gates to manage his philanthropic giving. Gates and Rockefeller’s son, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., who graduated from Brown in 1897 and promptly joined his father’s office, took the lead in creating a series of endowed philanthropic institutions to tackle specific problems. Their new philanthropic endeavors were scientific in their approach – designed to discover and attack the causes of misery, disease, and ignorance, not to ameliorate their symptoms. The first of these new institutions was the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research, established in 1901, to conduct research in the medical sciences; it still exists today as the Rockefeller University. The second of these was the General Education Board, chartered by Congress in 1903, to promote education, especially in the South and especially for African Americans; it was active until about 1964. The Rockefeller Sanitary Commission for the Eradication of Hookworm in the South was established in 1909 to eliminate what came to be

known as “the germ of laziness” in the Southern states. Its pioneering public health work was expanded internationally by the most ambitious of the Rockefeller philanthropies, the Rockefeller Foundation, which was incorporated in the state of New York in 1913 for the benefit of mankind throughout the world. The foundation immediately set up two international divisions – the International Health Board to promote public health and combat disease around the world, and the China Medical Board to introduce western medicine into China. The Rockefeller Foundation was the largest private foundation in the U.S., for many decades, and although it has now been eclipsed by larger foundations and its program has changed over the years, it remains one of the most respected and one of the most influential foundations, such that young emerging philanthropists like Bill Gates and his advisors have turned to it for advice and experience in developing their own programs.

So that was life for John D. Rockefeller in 1901 when he began to buy property in Lakewood – he was the president and public face of Standard Oil and still the major stockholder, but he was not involved in its daily operation; he was trying to settle in and enjoy his retirement but he’s under scrutiny by journalists, legislatures and the courts; and he was trying to make the best philanthropic use of his growing wealth through the creation of endowed philanthropic foundations, which is a very new kind of institution that he is helping to define.

Why did Rockefeller begin to buy property in Lakewood, New Jersey, when he already had four homes to choose from? In 1901 Rockefeller owned a home on Cleveland’s fashionable Millionaire’s Row, Euclid Avenue, a home that he had bought in August 1868 and which was his primary residence in Cleveland until 1883, when he moved to New York. He also had a country estate in Cleveland’s eastern suburbs, Forest Hill, which he bought in 1873 and continued to use as a summer home until the house burned in 1917. In New York, Rockefeller also had both a

city house and a country estate. In 1884 he bought a brownstone at 4 West 54<sup>th</sup> Street in Manhattan and it became the main family home. In the late 1930s it was razed to make way for a new Rockefeller institution – the Museum of Modern Art, which Rockefeller’s daughter-in-law, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, helped to create.

In 1893, after admiring his brother William’s impressive estate along the Hudson River north of Tarrytown, New York, John D. Rockefeller bought 400 acres in Pocantico Hills, perhaps the highest point in Westchester County, with expansive views of the river. Rockefeller and his wife established their residence in an existing home on the property; when it burned down on September 17, 1902, they moved into another existing house. Not until 1904 did Rockefeller agree to let his son undertake to build the new house that he thought a man of his father’s stature deserved, the house now known as Kykuit. Kykuit was used as a Rockefeller family home until Nelson Rockefeller’s death in 1979. In 1918 Rockefeller added another home to his collection, purchasing the Casements in Ormond Beach, Florida, as a more comfortable winter residence.

Exactly who introduced Rockefeller to Lakewood and why he began to buy property there in 1901 is not (yet) clear from the archival records. As Lakewood developed as a resort in the 1890s, Rockefeller undoubtedly learned of its charms. Records indicate that members of the family were visiting Lakewood as early as 1894. Ron Chernow notes that Rockefeller learned to play golf in Lakewood in 1899.<sup>1</sup> Correspondence indicates that Rockefeller’s daughter Bessie and her husband, the philosopher Charles A. Strong, were spending time in the resort town as early as 1898. Indeed, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. and Charles Strong appear to have discussed strategy for acquiring land in the area.<sup>2</sup> Some of the initial land purchases may have been designed to provide a home for the Strongs, since they took up residence in one of the cottages for a few years before moving to Europe in search of a better climate for Bessie’s frail health.

Rockefeller's acquisition of land in the area began as early as March 1901. The real estate agent and civic leader Captain Albert Bradshaw handled Rockefeller's real estate transactions. In a letter dated March 16, 1901, John D. Rockefeller Jr. (JDR Jr.) reported to his father that "Capt. Bradshaw has purchased the Claflin place in Lakewood for \$45,000 . . . . Mr. H.M. Tilford appears as the purchaser and you are not known."<sup>3</sup> Rockefeller had learned that keeping his name out of the transactions made deals easier and less expensive. Additional acquisitions soon followed. On August 1, 1901, the law firm of Hatch, Debevoise and Colby reported to JDR Jr. that "all formalities in connection with your father's purchases of the Lakewood properties have been complied with. He is now vested with title to them all." The properties included in this transaction were listed as the Claflin Property, the McCue property, the Bricksburg Land and Improvement Company property, the Pulsifer property, the Irons property and the Starr property.<sup>4</sup>

By early November 1903 Captain Bradshaw had helped Rockefeller acquire more than 330 acres in eight additional properties, including 98.22 acres from the Ocean County Hunt and Country Club, which was giving up its clubhouse and grounds to merge with another club.<sup>5</sup> The Country Club property formed the core of Rockefeller's Lakewood estate. This deal had been agreed to in March of 1902, with a sale price of \$12,500. In this transaction Captain Bradshaw seemed to have played multiple roles. In his letter of March 28, 1902 confirming the deal, Bradshaw wrote as treasurer of the Country Club of Lakewood, on club stationery, yet he indicated to Rockefeller that "in accordance with our conversation over the phone, I have declined at present, to make known the name of the purchaser."<sup>6</sup> One wonders exactly whose interests Bradshaw was serving in this deal – he was an officer of the club benefiting from the

sale, and he was the selling agent, yet he was protecting the identity of the buyer in a move typically used to keep the sale price lower than the seller might ask if he knew the buyer's name.

By the spring of 1910, Rockefeller's Lakewood estate had grown to include 603 acres and was estimated to be worth \$62,000. New construction and improvements were estimated at \$90,000, with another \$20,000 in improvements to the grounds.<sup>7</sup>

To oversee the grounds at Lakewood, Rockefeller hired a superintendent. There were other supervisory staff for the estate as well – a housekeeper, for instance, and other key members of Rockefeller's traveling household – but the superintendent held the central position that coordinated various functions related to the house, the grounds, and relations with the surrounding community. The superintendent was in frequent communication with Rockefeller's New York office, where the financial accounts were centralized, as well as with Rockefeller himself; thus, the superintendent's correspondence represents a key record of the workings and the management of the estate.

A succession of four men held this post at Lakewood. The first was William Foerster, a German of sensitive temperament who worked at Lakewood from the spring of 1904 until homesickness and depression led him to resign and return to Germany in September, 1922. Foerster's successor, A.J. Knapp, was brought in from outside of the estate, but his tenure lasted less than two years and he resigned in April 1924. Roscoe Estell, already employed on the estate, took charge in April 1924 until he was killed in an automobile accident in November 1929. Fred Buswell, a former electrician at the Pocantico Hills estate who had been in Rockefeller's employ as early as 1910, was given command at Lakewood after Estell's death and was still there when the estate was given to the county in 1940.

Improving the grounds, especially by planting trees, seemed to be one of the major activities at Lakewood. Rockefeller described himself as an amateur landscape architect, and he delighted in shaping the countryside and the scenery on the grounds of all of his estates. Lakewood was no exception. Rockefeller took a personal interest in the grounds and met periodically with the superintendent to explain his wishes, often having the superintendent visit him in New York if he couldn't get to Lakewood. When they couldn't meet, Rockefeller would write with questions or instructions. "Had we better put in more red raspberry bushes this summer," he wrote to Foerster in October 1919. "I am very fond of the red raspberries. Did the plants do well last year? I suppose they did not produce much the first year though I have not heard."<sup>8</sup>

Rockefeller may have been fond of raspberries, but his true loves as a landscaper were laying out roads and planting trees. In fact, in his memoirs, *Random Reminiscences*, first published in serial form in 1908-1909, he boasted of the profitable business he had developed selling trees from one estate to another. "If we transfer young trees from Pocantico to our home in Lakewood, we charge one place and credit the other for these trees at the market rate. We are our own best customers, and we make a small fortune out of ourselves by selling to our New Jersey place at \$1.50 or \$2.00 each, trees which originally cost us only five or ten cents at Pocantico."<sup>9</sup>

How many trees Rockefeller and his employees planted at Lakewood is not clear, but they must have planted on a phenomenal scale. On August 12, 1922, Foerster reported that "we have started the planting of Evergreens," and within a month he boasted that "about 800 Evergreens" had already been planted. "If the Weather permits," he predicted, "[we] can figure on about 1000 Trees more for this season."<sup>10</sup>



Foerster's successor, A.J. Knapp, found the grounds to be "very beautiful" but he could not help but noting that "one especial feature of the place is the prevalence of conifer as planting." Ostensibly seeking Rockefeller's guidance on future plantings, his first letter to his new employer made his preference clear: "Would you wish to keep strictly to embellishment of the grounds by use of evergreens as at present, or, would you care to introduce deciduous flowering shrubs & herbaceous flowers? . . . I am of the opinion that a little touch along the lines of this suggestion might add a welcome tone to the place . . . . To stick to one style of planting entirely is apt to produce a slight feeling of monotony."<sup>11</sup> One wonders if creative differences with his new boss contributed to Knapp's short tenure at Lakewood.

Both Forest Hill and his estate in Pocantico Hills allowed Rockefeller opportunities to indulge his passion for arranging the landscape. Lakewood had the further advantages of affording Rockefeller greater opportunities to indulge his passion for golf, and its secluded location gave him greater ability to control his security.

Given the controversies swirling around Rockefeller when he took up residence in Lakewood, security was very much on his mind. In his masterful biography of Rockefeller, Ron Chernow describes Rockefeller's concerns for the safety of his family and himself, and the measures he took to protect against intruders at his various homes. The seclusion of Golf House made it a preferred hideaway. Chernow describes how Rockefeller sent JDR Jr. and his family to Lakewood in the fall of 1912 while security was improved at Kykuit after he received threats from the Black Hand, a "secret society engaged in blackmail and terrorism."<sup>12</sup> As Chernow describes it, Golf House "could be reached only by a twisting road of crushed bluestone that ran through dense woods – perfect for security purposes."<sup>13</sup> Such seclusion helped protect Rockefeller not only from anarchists and labor radicals but also from officers of the court, as

various investigators sought his testimony. Chernow describes how on one occasion in 1905, pursued by “waves of process servers,” Rockefeller “fled by boat from Tarrytown to Golf House in Lakewood, where he set up conditions worthy of a maximum-security prison. Floodlights were trained on people approaching the estate at night, and delivery wagons were searched thoroughly, lest they conceal cunning servants of the law.”<sup>14</sup>

In consolidating his holdings and setting up his private sanctuary, Rockefeller ran into some forceful opposition from local residents who did not appreciate the closing off of once passable roads. In mid November 1905 Rockefeller wrote to one of his in-house attorneys, Starr Murphy, to complain about local opposition and ask for advice:

“We have been trying to close some roads at Lakewood. We believe that we have a perfect right to close them, and we have put up gates and fences, but they have been torn down thirty or forty times. We are proposing now to have some of our men made deputy sheriffs, and after that, have men watch and note who tears down the fences. What is the crime, what can be done with the men, and what is your suggestion about our course of procedure? The lands were formerly owned by a large corporation, and the people had more freedom than is usually accorded, where the lands are owned by residents, in small parcels.

“They have gone so far as to threaten personal violence upon our superintendent and our men who put up the fences and gates. I have told these men to be very patient and to avoid any collision or trouble, but the superintendent was a German soldier, and he said if he were attacked, he would shoot the man who attacked him. I advised him against this. What could be done with him if he did? Yours very truly, John D. Rockefeller”<sup>15</sup>

Murphy responded that the destruction of Rockefeller’s property amounted to “malicious mischief,” which was “a misdemeanor . . . punishable by fine not exceeding \$200., or

imprisonment at hard labor not exceeding one year, or both.” Murphy also offered a long discourse on the law of self-defense. “By all possible means I should avoid anything like a personal encounter between any of your employees and the guilty parties.” He counseled against having Rockefeller employees appointed deputy sheriffs, since “this looks a little like taking the law into your own hands which is always to be avoided, and especially so in your case.” Murphy recommended hiring “some good local attorney who knows the officers of the county, and let him work the case up,” encouraging the detective work that will produce evidence to identify and prosecute the people responsible.<sup>16</sup> It is not clear from the archives how Rockefeller fared in his attempts to combat these populist protests against the closing of formerly accessible lands.

The archives are also surprisingly silent on Rockefeller’s use of Golf House as a golf course. As Chernow makes clear, Rockefeller was passionate about golf once he caught the golf fever in 1899. His son describes both Rockefeller and his wife as playing for hours at a time. At Pocantico Hills Rockefeller would have his groundskeepers remove the snow from the greens so that he could play.<sup>17</sup> A major attraction of the Lakewood property was that the milder climate enabled him to enjoy the game more comfortably in the late winter, spring and fall. But while his correspondence with the superintendents occasionally asks about the conditions of the course or instructs them to attend to certain matters regarding course maintenance, the golf course is not a major topic of discussion. Perhaps the fact that the Lakewood property came with its own already developed course, whereas Rockefeller had to construct the courses at his other estates, led to less discussion about the Lakewood course. Moreover, Rockefeller liked to golf with visitors, so perhaps the seclusion of the Lakewood estate – which was such a benefit in other ways – worked against Rockefeller’s enjoyment of golf as a social occasion.

It also is difficult to determine from the archives the degree to which Rockefeller participated in the life of the Lakewood community. Much of the early correspondence regarding Lakewood appears to have been discarded sometime in the 1930s, but the card index to Rockefeller correspondence gives some indication of his interactions.<sup>18</sup> A fair number of photographs from Lakewood show him emerging from church or talking with clergy, so that attendance at religious services was one aspect of his relations with the local community. Charitable gifts were another way that Rockefeller participated in the life of the various communities in which he had homes, and this was true in Lakewood. As early as 1905 he was contributing to the library association and to the Emergency Fund for the Sick Poor; the following year he contributed to the St. James Hospital. Other local institutions that benefited from Rockefeller gifts in the 1910s and 1920s included the Lakewood Library, Paul Kimball Hospital, Lakewood District Nurse Association and the Lakewood Visiting Nurse Association, the World War Memorial Committee, the Lakewood Presbyterian Mission, the Lakewood Baptist Church, and the Ocean County Council of Religious Education.<sup>19</sup>

One of Rockefeller's longstanding practices, both with his philanthropy and his business, was to identify someone locally in whom he could trust for advice on local institutions and personalities – someone who had his or her finger on the pulse of the community. In Lakewood that person was Miss Katharine L. Hinsdale, the librarian. When and how Rockefeller and Hinsdale became acquainted is not clear from the archives, but her name appears many times in correspondence between Rockefeller, his New York office and his staff in Lakewood as the person they can turn to for insight into the local community. She also was a personal friend of Rockefeller's. By 1917 he was sending her small monetary gifts for herself and the aunt she lived with, and during the 1920s and 1930s Rockefeller frequently hosted and supported her trips

to Ormond Beach, Florida during February and March. He consulted her about donations to local institutions and channeled some of his contributions through her. And she apparently was the person who suggested that the piano at Golf House be given to the high school after Mr. Rockefeller died.<sup>20</sup>

By 1920 Golf House was well integrated into the network of Rockefeller estates and enjoyed a regular spot on Rockefeller's itinerary. Rockefeller and his traveling household would spend spring and sometime parts of the summer at Lakewood. In addition to playing golf and overseeing the planting and gardening, Rockefeller could watch the sheep grazing on the lawn, or visit the dairy to check on milk production. In September 1922 the superintendent estimated that the cows were producing about 75 quarts of milk a day, but he did not consider the herd to be particularly productive.<sup>21</sup> The Lakewood dairy provided milk for the main house, for estate employees and local friends, and for the needy in the community, especially during the depression. In September 1933, for example, Buswell recommended to JDR Jr. that they send milk to a woman and her sick brother who were in "almost destitute circumstances" and that they send two quarts each school day for "several very poor children attending Clifton Avenue Grade School."<sup>22</sup> The dairy also gave the estate a commodity to contribute to the Rockefeller intra-estate trade. On March 27, 1923, the superintendent asked the main office in New York to inform another Rockefeller property that "we are shipping 12 ½ [lbs.] of Butter . . . today by Express."<sup>23</sup>

As you might expect of the richest man in the country, Rockefeller provided the best veterinary care possible to his sheep. In the fall of 1918, he called in doctors from the Department of Animal and Pathology at the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research to

examine his flock of more than 500 sheep. Some of the animals had become ill and were diagnosed with lungworm and Rockefeller wanted the best advice possible about their care.<sup>24</sup>

In January 1925 Frank Staley from Rockefeller's New York office paid two visits to Lakewood to study the progress of work at the Golf House. "The impression gained was of careful management and of loyalty to the 'Mister,'" he reported. The workers complained about the long hours worked, he noted – "9 in the winter and 10 in summer" – but Staley concluded that since "the labor turn over amounts to practically nothing . . . the grumbling need not be taken seriously." He noted a few problems that could be corrected easily, but was most concerned about inadequate fire protection for the house, the lack of police presence on the estate (again reviving the notion that someone on staff be made a deputy sheriff), and inadequate financial controls. "No record of costs of the various activities or maintenance were kept," he noted. "There was no dollar measure of efficiency. The dairy, sheepfold, woodland or other activities might increase its cost, month after month, unbeknown to the superintendent or man in charge. Without the analysis of the dollar, there is little incentive to carefully guard expenditures." "A simple [account] book was installed," he reported, and the superintendent "seems very happy with it." Accounting was a concern because the annual expenditures for the estate had risen from \$20,711 in 1915 to more than \$72,600 in 1922 and remained around \$70,000 in 1924.<sup>25</sup>

Staley's visit was part of a shift in power that was concluding within the Rockefeller family. Since about 1917, John D. Rockefeller had been transferring his financial assets to his only son. Along with the wealth went the transfer of property, and in July 1925, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. bought from his father the property in Lakewood as well as his property in Ormond Beach, Florida. At the time of the sale, the Lakewood real estate was valued at

\$242,950, while the contents of Golf House were appraised at \$30,214, and all other personal property and outlying buildings at \$16,540.99 for a total cost of \$291,704.99.<sup>26</sup> JDR Jr. later bought two additional pieces of land totaling less than 7 acres from George Matthews.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, when John D. Rockefeller died in Ormond Beach, Florida on May 23, 1937, the Lakewood estate already belonged to his son. The younger Rockefeller and his associates moved quickly to put the property on the market. On Saturday, June 26, Charles O. Heydt, the manager of John D. Rockefeller, Jr.'s real estate investments, visited Golf House and met with Buswell. He also conferred with Miss Hinsdale at the public library to get a list of real estate agents in the area, and then met with J.F. Stephenson, who had appraised the estate in 1925. Heydt asked Stephenson to take charge of the sale. Stephenson's son was a real estate agent with an office in town. Heydt also authorized a survey of the site as well as drawings of the house and outlying buildings, and he discussed with a photographer the possibility of having some aerial photographs made of the property. The photographer was a former Navy aviator.<sup>28</sup>

By January 1938, Heydt reported that he had received "numerous inquiries for the Lakewood property" and that he expected to be able "to get around \$200,000 cash."<sup>29</sup> But none of the offers resulted in a deal. By late July 1939, Rockefeller representatives were discussing the county's takeover of the property with the Board of Freeholders of Ocean County. One board member, Harry Newman, had been a classmate of Jay Downer, one of JDR Jr.'s office staff and a former Westchester County executive. The county officials reported "that they would be glad to take over at any time the big house with an appropriate amount of land around it." They were especially eager to have the house for use as "a home for the aged of Ocean County, who are being boarded out at County expense." Downer reported that "they fully understand . . . that it would be inadvisable to segregate this central portion from the remainder of the property

and they are very favorable to taking the whole for a park.” The park was not an urgent need, as was the home for the aged, Newman explained, but the officials “felt the park would be an asset for the future.”<sup>30</sup>

Other possible uses arose in the interim. One included interest from the Order of the Eastern Star, but members of the order found it difficult to come to a decision about the disposition of the home it already owned, and by early October JDR Jr. had grown tired of the delay and decided to “go ahead with the County people.”<sup>31</sup> On January 10, 1940, Downer met with Ocean County Board of Freeholders and other county leaders, all of whom unanimously agreed “that they should take advantage of the opportunity to secure the property for the County.” By then all other offers to buy the property had evaporated, making the county’s proposal “the only definite one now before us,” Downer reported.<sup>32</sup> By mid April the legislature had passed and the governor had signed the legislation authorizing the county to accept the property, and on April 17 the Board of Freeholders formally accepted the property. As the plan became public, political opposition arose to the proposed uses. The loss of tax revenue was of special concern, and the Lakewood Taxpayers Association opposed the planned conversion of the private estate into a public park. Some residents proposed developing the site for recreational use to generate revenue. Moreover, Downer reported that “some of the local hospitals in the County are reluctant to lose the board which the County pays them for long-term convalescents, and they are raising the point that the big house is not fireproof and should not be used for a convalescent home.” Downer proposed that the property be conveyed to the county “on a liberal basis as to the future use or sale of substantial portions of the area.” This would allow sales of some of the outlying properties as a means of raising capital to be used in developing the park areas. “I, personally, feel that the Board of Freeholders is rather courageous in assuming a



responsibility which is fairly large for their situation,” Downer wrote, “and it may be desirable to give them considerable freedom as to the future use of the property.”<sup>33</sup> JDR Jr. agreed that certain properties outside of the core estate could be sold, and he further agreed to pay the taxes for 1941, thus forestalling the loss of taxes on the estate for another year.<sup>34</sup> The contract for the property was closed on June 28th and the county took possession on July 1, 1940.<sup>35</sup>

The park opened to the public for the first time on August 27, 1940. The *Lakewood Citizen* reported that 3,188 people arrived at the opening in cars, 110 on bicycles and others walked to the park to see the new facility. Among the visitors were the governor and his wife. Not everyone was impressed by the new public facility, however. The paper quoted one local resident’s reaction, in dialect: “‘Shucks, ‘taint anything to see but a big, old house, lots of trees ‘n maybe the deer. Can’t see what folks wanta go there for.’”<sup>36</sup>

Others did see a reason to visit the park, of course, as the land again returned to public use after four decades as a private residence. One local resident was even inspired to poetics by his visit. Lakewood resident Arnold J. Turner had been a Western Union messenger as a boy and had delivered telegrams to Golf House on his bicycle. He wrote to John D. Rockefeller, Jr. about one memorable delivery: “I remember, quite vividly, a deep snowy day when my bicycle wouldn’t push thru the snow and I was hours getting there. Your father called me in, patted me on the head, made me take off my wet things, and served me a hot glass of milk and crackers. Being somewhat over-awed, I remember gulping down the refreshment, thanking him, and hurrying away with several brand new dimes.”<sup>37</sup> Turner also sent JDR Jr. a poem that he wrote after visiting the reopened estate after the county took over:

“‘Reflections’ On visiting the former John D. Rockefeller Estate at Lakewood, N.J.”<sup>38</sup>.

“Here  
Noble foundations were laid.  
Fashioned by their substance  
Of forest mold  
That has created  
Quietly, yet purposefully  
A forest primeval.

Here  
Breathes, in perfect form,  
Nature,  
Lovely and serene,  
Before whose presence  
In profound humility  
We bow,  
In breath-taking wonder.

Halt ye all, and beware,  
Lest rampage runs,  
And careless acts  
Defile this sanctuary.  
Stay now the hand,  
That would make of this cathedral  
A blatant “hurdy-gurdy”  
Of riot and disorder.

Here  
Dwells solitude  
And long sought  
Peace.  
Here,  
Glad throated choirs  
Improvise melody;  
Where faun and buck  
Stand immobile  
Like statuary  
Beneath  
Widespreading trees  
Whose branches, upraised  
Hold hands  
One with another,  
In constant  
Praise and offertory.

Here  
Ye who seek  
Communion,  
Who thirst,  
May drink  
Deeply.  
Here  
Man's purpose  
Serves his fellow-man  
Well,  
For all may perpetually share  
And possess  
The secret balm,  
The ever increasing beauty,  
The lavish generosity,  
Of another's  
Handiwork.

## ENDNOTES

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1. Ron Chernow, *Titan*, p. 398.
2. See JDR Jr. To Charles A. Strong, April 13, 1901, JDR letterbooks, vol. 65, p. 262; and Strong to "Dear John," April 15, 1901, on Laurel-in-the-Pines stationery, in folder 36, box 4, OMR Homes. On the Strongs being in Lakewood as early as 1898, see letterbooks, vol. 47, p. 430.
3. Ernst, *Dear Father/Dear Son*, pp. 20-21
4. 5: 52 OMR Homes
5. Bradshaw to E.V. Cary, November 3, 1903, 5: 52 OMR Homes.
6. Bradshaw to Rockefeller, March 28, 1902, folder 45, box 5, OMR Homes.
7. See OMR Homes, box 5, folder 45.
8. JDR to Foerster, October 18, 1919, OMR JDR 50: 399.
9. JDR, *Random Reminiscences*, p. 37.
10. Foerster to JDR, August 12, 1922 and September 9, 1922, box 50, folder 401, OMR JDR.
11. Knapp to JDR, August 31, 1922, folder 401, box 50, OMR JDR.
12. Chernow, 562.
13. Chernow, 411
14. Chernow 523
15. JDR to Murphy, November 11, 1905, 4:36, OMR Homes
16. Murphy to JDR, November 13, 1905, OMR Homes 4: 36.
17. Chernow, 402.
18. See the card index to the Office of the Messrs Rockefeller correspondence, ca. 1917-1960, for cards for Lakewood and Ocean County, New Jersey.
19. Summary of Donations to Lakewood, from the cards in the OMR Card Index:
  - St. James Hospital, 1906-1907, 1909
  - Paul Kimball Hospital, 1912-1925
    - April 12, 1912 – \$5,000 check sent
    - April 28, 1916 – \$200 gift through Founders Requisition

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June 2, 1922 – \$500 sent to Miss Hinsdale on JDR pledge to hospital  
October 28, 1925 – Further pledge to Miss Hinsdale (\$6,000)  
Lakewood, New Jersey Emergency Fund for the Sick Poor, 1905-1908 (to E.B. Glover)  
Lakewood District Nurse Association – July 8, 1921 – \$50 through Ida L. Frank  
Lakewood Visiting Nurse Association, 1928–1932 (to Alice G. Pack)  
World War Memorial Committee, 1922 – \$100 through W.C. Muller  
Lakewood Library, 1905-  
March 10, 1905 – \$500 through Captain Bradshaw for library association  
April 25, 1917 – \$2,000 for new building; paid October 19, 1917 (S.B. Ferris)  
September 9, 1918 – \$300 for desk sent to Sophie W. Downer  
February 4, 1935 – \$50 to Miss Hinsdale for rebinding books  
September 4, 1936 – apparently sent another check for rebinding books  
Lakewood Presbyterian Mission – contributing through Rev. H.G. Hinsdale  
Lakewood Baptist Church – toward a car for Rev. Sewall  
August 17, 1925 – \$260 to S.W. Mathews through Lakewood-Kiwanis Club  
Ocean County Council of Religious Education (formerly the Ocean County Sunday  
School Association), 1924-1925 – through Ida S. Robinson

20. See the OMR Index Cards for Katharine Hinsdale, and see Buswell to JDR Jr., January 17, 1938.

Summary of OMR Index Cards:

April 12, 1917 – \$50 sent to her  
November 27, 1920 – \$50 sent to her  
May 7, 1921 – \$50 (or 60?) sent to her  
March 12, 1923 – \$100 sent to her  
Hosted and supported her trips to Ormond Beach, Florida, in February 1923,  
March 1926, March 1931 (or 1930?), March 1934, February 1935

21. Knapp to JDR, September 26, 1922, OMR JDR, box 51, folder 404.

22. Buswell to JDR, September 19, 1933, 4:38 OMR Homes

23. Knapp to Davis, March 27, 1923, folder 402, box 50, OMR JDR.

24. OMR JDR, box 51, folder 411. Theobald Smith and F.S. Jones were the doctors called in.

25. Memo from Staley, “Progress report on Golf House,” January 25<sup>th</sup>, 1925, 4:37, OMR Housing.

26. See Keebler to Sinclair Hamilton, October 15, 1937, in OMR Home box 6, folder 63.

27. See memo “Lakewood, New Jersey Real Estate Owned by John D. Rockefeller, Jr.,” June 4, 1937, 6:61 OMR Homes

28. Charles O. Heydt, “Memorandum re: Lakewood, N.J. Property,” June 28<sup>th</sup>, 1937, 6: 61, OMR Homes

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29. Heydt to JDR Jr., January 19, 1938, folder 61, box 6, OMR Homes. In various real estate negotiations, Heydt showed himself to be especially concerned about dealing with Jews, rarely mentioning the ethnic or religious nature of other parties except for Jews. This was true in Lakewood. For example: "About the best prospect I have thus far is a Jew, a Mr. Saltzman, who operates the Café Loyale at the corner of 43<sup>rd</sup> St. and Fifth Avenue. . . . Saltzman would like to buy the place at Lakewood, but he is willing to pay only \$25,000 down and wants ten years in which to pay the balance with 4% interest. . . . He would make the Lakewood place a high-class Jewish boarding house or Jewish club." The files do not indicate that John D. Rockefeller, Jr. shared Heydt's concerns on these matters.
30. Downer to JDR Jr., folder 61, box 6, OMR Homes. On Downer's background, see *Rockefeller Century*, 372.
31. See note dated October 6, 1939, typed at end of Downer Memorandum to JDR Jr., September 25, 1939, folder 61, box 6, OMR Homes.
32. Downer memo to JDR Jr., "Lakewood Estate," January 11, 1940, 6: 56 OMR Homes.
33. Downer to JDR Jr., April 18, 1940, 6: 56, OMR Homes
34. See JDR Jr. Memorandum, April 24, 1940, and notation on Downer to JDR Jr., May 3, 1940, in 6:56, OMR Homes.
35. Memo from Jay Downer to the Real Estate Committee, July 1, 1940, 6:56 OMR Homes.
36. Lakewood Citizen, August 30, 1940, copy in folder 58, box 6, OMR Homes.
37. Arnold J. Turner to JDR Jr., no date, 4:41 OMR Homes
38. Turner to JDR Jr. 4:41 OMR Homes.