

John Davison Rockefeller: Oil Tycoon and Philanthropist

Jacqulean Salib

Chien-Chung Huang

Rutgers University

This case study explores the impact John Davison Rockefeller had on America. Rockefeller was a man who came from humble beginnings and worked hard to build an empire. He developed the oil industry and the John D. Rockefeller Foundation. In this case study, we review the scrutiny that Rockefeller faced while building his empire and the dilemmas he faced with his foundation. In addition, we examine the milestones that Rockefeller accomplished, which made him one of the most prominent figures in America and around the world. He is known as both a businessman and an individual who donated much of his money and time to make significant changes domestically and globally.

Introduction

John Davison Rockefeller Sr. was born on July 8, 1839 in Richford, New York, to William Avery Rockefeller and Eliza Davison. Rockefeller was born into modest circumstances, however, through hard work he became one of the greatest industrialists and philanthropists in the United States. Rockefeller built one of the biggest oil empires with his company Standard Oil, later creating one of the first major business trusts, making him one of the first billionaires in America. In 1913, Rockefeller created the Rockefeller foundation in which he donated his wealth to charities worldwide that include but is not limited to religious causes, health related issues, art and agriculture. His impact on the world is everlasting, and his legacy lives on with many of his family members today (Schweikart, 2008). Rockefeller's mark on American history signifies the importance of examining this case study, in which we explore his life, oil empire and his foundation.

Early Beginnings

John was the second of six children. John's father was of English and German descent and his mother of Scottish and Irish decent. John's father William was a charlatan; he travelled from town to town under the alias Dr. William Levingston with elixirs that he claimed could "cure" cancer. William charged exorbitant amounts for the treatments. John's father left his mother with all the children for months at a time, leaving Eliza to raise their six children and tended to the farm on her own (Flynn, 1933; Chernow, 2007).

At a young age, John learned the value of working and making money. As a child, he bought large amounts of candy, portioned them out and sold them to his brothers and sisters. He also discovered the power of lending money and charging interest, while lending money to a neighbor. A year

later he received a little over \$3 in interest which is equivalent to about \$90 today. Rockefeller quoted this as being the point in which he realized you have to make money a slave to you instead of being a slave to money. His other business activities included raising turkeys that he captured, then selling them for profit and field work for neighbors such as digging up potatoes for thirty seven and a half cents. The Rockefeller family moved around quite a bit. At a young age, John and his family moved to Moravia, New York, where he attended a one room school house that his father established. In 1853 the family moved to Owego where he attended Owego Academy. The family finally decided to settle in Strongsville, Ohio where John finished his high school education (Chernow, 2007; Hamen, 2011; Segal, 2001).

Rockefeller wasn't the brightest of children; however he was good with numbers. Whatever he lacked understanding in, he worked diligently and hard to try and excel in it (Chernow, 2007). He constantly questioned his teachers long and hard and double checked the answers they came up with (Segall, 2001). John never did anything without thinking. He thought of every possibility and outcome before he made a move, which would later play a key role in his success (Chernow, 2007). Since John's father spent most of his time away, his mother Eliza had to play both roles. When John's father would come back, he'd play the part of the more laid back and playful parent, leaving Eliza to play the role of the disciplinarian parent. She was very stern with John and his siblings however, she never raised her voice at them. Eliza used to always take John and his sibling to church and have them donate some of their earnings to the church (Chernow, 2007). Rockefeller noted his mother's altruism as the origin of his philan-

thropy. From her he learned economy, thrift, and other qualities that factored into his success (Hamen, 2011). Although John's father wasn't around much, he also taught John valuable lessons like to always honor a contract and pay debts (Segall, 2001).

John Rockefeller attended Folsom's Commercial College, in which he took a short course on bookkeeping after completing the course, John would walk from place to place handing out his resume. Eventually John found work at Hewitt and Tuttle as a bookkeeper. In the three years spent there, he acquired skills on how to commission houses and how railroads and barges worked together. In the midst of all that he developed his own style of collecting debt. When it came to working, John was very precise and honest to the penny when it came to bill payments. He never rounded up or down. Not only did he keep an eye on funds at work, he also kept an eye on his own funds. John kept a detailed ledger in which he recorded every dollar he spent, including charitable giving. When Mr. Tuttle retired, John took over and helped run the company. At that point John was making about six hundred dollars a year. Shortly after John left Hewitt and Tuttle to pursue a business of his own, Hewitt and Tuttle went out of business (Hamen, 2011; Flynn, 1932; Chernow, 2007).

The Standard Oil Company

In 1859, before he turned twenty, Rockefeller decided to start his own business with Maurice Clark, a classmate he met in Folsom. Maurice and John agreed to put in \$2,000 each to start the business. At the time, John only had \$1,000 that he saved from working at Hewitt and Tuttle. His father advanced him \$1,000 that he had intended to give him for his 20th birthday. John was a natural when it came

to running a business and making it successful. It was no surprise that in the first year, the business turned a profit. Their business grew even more during the Civil War era. In 1863, when the oil business was still very new, Rockefeller started investing in the Cleveland Ohio refinery with several partners. John and Maurice joined with two of Maurice's brothers as well as experienced oil refiner Samuel Andrews to form Andrews, Clark & Co. The following year Rockefeller married Laura Celestia Spelman (Beatty, 1998; Poole, n. d.).

In 1865, due to finance disagreements, John decided to barrow money and buy out the Clark brothers. He created a new business with Samuel Andrews named Rockefeller & Andrews. By the age of 24, Rockefeller leveraged the business and expanded intensely. Rockefeller put all profits back into the business and continued to strengthen it. In 1866, John had his Brother William come into business with him to help manage the New York office (Chernow, 2007; Beatty, 1998; Poole, n. d.).

In 1870, Rockefeller founded the Standard Oil Company with his brother William and partners Samuel Andrews, Henry Flagler, Stephen Harkness and O. B. Jennings. Rockefeller was the president and the largest shareholder of the new business. His thoughts were that the state of the oil business was in disarray because of low entry costs. This resulted in a market filled with oil, which in turn lead to pollution as refiners disposed oil by-products into bodies of water around the city .Rockefeller thought the best solution was to buy out the small companies since he felt they hurt larger companies such as his own. By 1872, Rockefeller had obtained possession of almost all the oil refining firms in Cleveland; In addition, he owned two refineries in New York (Chernow,

2007; Granitz & Klein, 1996: Folsom, 1988).

Standard Oil Trust and Legal Issues

In 1881, along with the Standard Oil Company, Rockefeller owned forty companies. In 1882, in order to gain cost advantages and to appear more legitimate, Rockefeller combined all his companies into one, The Standard Oil Trust. The trustees were given control over all Standard Oil properties, and properties that were affiliated with Standard Oil. Each shareholder of Standard Oil was given shares, with Rockefeller holding the majority of the shares. Standard Oil Trust controlled about 90% of all kerosene produced in the United States (Chandler, 2001; Boyd, 2001).

Although Standard Oil Trust appeared to be legal on paper, it was an Ohio company controlling out of state interests, which was illegal. In 1892, the Supreme Court dissolved the trust. The eighty-four companies in the trust were reorganized into twenty constituent companies. In 1899, the business became a part of Standard Oil of New Jersey, which functioned as a holding company. In 1904, the Standard Oil Company was negatively publicized again. This time, a few of their operations were being sued by eleven states. In 1907, Judge Kensaw Mountain Landis ruled that Indian Standard would be fined over \$29 million for illegally receiving rebates on oil shipments (Boyd, 2001; Raymond, 1911; Montague, 2001).

Standard Oil was hit with a federal case once again in 1907. This time they were charged for violation of the Sherman Antitrust Act, which was created in 1890 in order to prohibit trusts that restrained trade. The case had over 400 testimonials from witnesses and lasted until 1909. The District Court in St. Louis had a solid case and ruled that New Jersey Standard Oil must be abolished. Standard Oil attempted to ap-

peal, however, in 1911 they were found guilty and told they had six month to dissolve the company (Boyd, 2001; Larson, 1955). Due to the scrutiny and several legal issues Standard Oil faced, many were skeptical about accepting money that Rockefeller donated. In one particular case, Rockefeller had donated \$100,000 to The American Board of Commission for Foreign Missions of Congregational church. One of the leading ministers did not want to accept the donation, stating that the money was tainted. However, the board of the organization decided to accept it (Boyd, 2001; Larson, 1955).

By 1914, Rockefeller's net worth was well over \$1 billion, equivalent to what is currently about \$13.8 billion. Several oil companies today, such as BP, Chevron and Exxon-Mobil, are the products of the companies that Standard Oil broke up into (Hylton, 1992).

Foundation Beginnings

In 1896, at the age of 57, Rockefeller retired from leadership of Standard Oil in order to focus on philanthropy. Impressed by Andrew Carnegie in the late 1800's, Rockefeller wrote to him, "I would that more men of wealth were doing as you are doing with your money, but be assured your example will bear fruits and the time will come when men of wealth will more generally be willing to use if for the good of others" (Nasaw, 2007). From 1896 till his death in 1937, John Davison Rockefeller Sr. focused strictly on philanthropy and contributed greatly to his church and other charities. Rockefeller hired a reverend who worked with the American Baptist Education Society by the name of Reverend Fredrick T. Gates, to help manage his philanthropy (The Rockefeller Foundation, 2014). Gates and Rockefeller's son John Davison Rockefeller Jr. helped John Davison Rockefeller Sr. establish multiple institutions that are important today in philanthropy, medicine, public health,

and science (Rockefeller Foundation, 2014).

In 1913, Rockefeller established The Rockefeller Foundation to "promote the well-being of mankind throughout the world" (Rockefeller Foundation, 2014). Giving money to the church was important to John. He felt that it was his religious duty to make an honest living and give everything that could be given. The first year, Rockefeller made a gift of \$35 million. The following year he almost doubled his gift and gave \$65 million (Rockefeller Foundation, 2014).

1913-1919

The first board of trustees meeting was held on May 22, 1913. John's only son John Davison Rockefeller Jr., who was 39 at the time, was named president. John Rockefeller Sr. decided not to attend any meetings since he felt that those more experienced in philanthropy should be the ones working out the details and making decisions. Health was a big part of the foundation's framework; as a result the foundation's first grant of \$100,000 was made to the Red Cross in March 1913. The grant was used to purchase property for the Red Cross headquarters. The foundation also granted money to John Hopkins University to extend its model system to medicine, surgery and pediatrics (Rockefeller foundation, 2014).

Rockefeller expanded his work on the Sanitary Commission for Eradication of Hookworm Disease overseas, due to its domestic success, the project to create the International Health commission was granted \$25,000, marking it the first grant that was granted outside of the United States. The Foundation also began its support of the Bureau of Social Hygiene. The goal of the Bureau was to provide education on birth control, sex education, and mental health. (The Rockefeller Foundation, 2014).

In 1915, in response to the malaria epidemic, the foundation established multiple research centers around South America, Europe and Asia. In 1917, Peking Union Medical College opened up in China for pre-med students. In 1919, a Division of Medical Education was established in order to improve several prestigious medical schools domestically and to help place medical schools around the world to improve research (The Rockefeller Foundation, 2014).

1920-1929

In 1921, the foundation funded Harvard University's and the University of Michigan's school of public health. They also launched a plan to place schools around the world, spending over \$25 million over the decades to form schools in Prague, Warsaw, London, Toronto, Copenhagen, Budapest, Oslo, Belgrade, Zagreb, Madrid, Cluj, Ankara, Sofia, Rome, Tokyo, Athens, Bucharest, Stockholm, Calcutta, Manila and São Paulo. Currently the Rockefeller Foundation has granted about \$357 million to schools of public health around the globe. In 1927, John Davison Rockefeller made another donation to the Rockefeller Foundation, bringing his total donation amount to \$183 million which today is equivalent to \$2.8 billion. In 1928, the foundation divided its focuses into five groups, which included; international health, medical sciences, natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities (The Rockefeller Foundation, 2014).

1930-1939

In 1931, the Foundation provided support to reproductive biology, which later led to the development of newer and more effective contraceptives. In 1934, the Foundation showed its first interest in agriculture. They set up a program of rural reconstruction in China. The program also included sanitation, preventive medicine and community work, however the pro-

gram was dissolved during World War II. Over the decades the Foundation granted nearly \$14 million in the fight against yellow fever, in 1935, in the Foundations New York laboratories they developed a vaccine that prevented yellow fever. The Foundation also decided to immerse in new fields in humanities and arts. In 1936, the Foundation started funding the development of the clinical use of penicillin, the Foundation also funded a project in the University of Wisconsin, which lead to Americas first ultracentrifuge. In 1938, the Foundation provided grants to the Authors League of America and in 1939, to the National Theatre Conference (The Rockefeller Foundation, 2014).

1940-1959

In 1946, Columbia University's Russian Institute opened with financial help for the Rockefeller Foundation. In 1947, \$10 million was granted to the China Medical Board, which was the last grant given to the Pecking Union Medical College. In 1948, the Foundation's division of social science, health and natural science combined to fund the first effort to survey socio-economic conditions in developing countries. In 1949, a 12-year program was developed in order to help members of one culture understand the members of another culture. In that same year, a biochemist by the name of Erwin Chargaff whom the Foundation supported announced the "Chargaff Ratios" which was crucial in the development of the description of the DNA structure. In 1950, broad-scale support was given to research in genetics to help establish centers and build departments in several universities around America and several around the world (The Rockefeller Foundation, 2014).

1960-1979

In 1960, the Foundation supported the first international Rice Research institute which was developed in the

Philippines. In 1963, the Foundations launched The University Development program which was later renamed the Education for Development Program. The program was created to form new leaderships in developing countries. The program was granted \$125 million and focused on agriculture, public health, medicine, and social sciences. The program lasted 20 years ending in 1983. In that same year, the Foundation gave out grants totaling \$85.5 million to aid African American students in College. In 1969, the Foundation began its support for projects dealing with inner city studies. From 1970 to 1978, the Foundation funded a variety of fields in America and around the world including: dance, biomedical research on diseases in developing countries, humanities and agriculture. In 1979, the Foundation re-entered China after decades of tension in order to establish an institute of developmental and reproductive biology at the Chinese Academy of Sciences in Beijing (The Rockefeller Foundation, 2014).

1980-1999

In 1980, the Foundation launched the International Clinical Epidemiology Network. The network was set up in developing countries in order for physicians to be able to research threatening health conditions in their country. In 1987, a program was set up to deal with poverty in America. In 1989, the Foundation launched three initiatives; a global environmental program, a domestic program of school reform, and a program in international security. In 1991, the Foundation teamed up with the United Nations Development Programme, UNICEF, WHO, and the World Bank to for the Children's Vaccine Initiative, to protect children against bacterial and viral disease. In 1996, the Foundation summoned a group of experts in HIV/AIDS to find a vaccine that is affordable and that can be used worldwide,

through this the AIDS Vaccine Initiative was developed. From 1997-1999 the Foundation continued to aid in efforts to better health around the world (The Rockefeller Foundation, 2014).

2000-2009

In 2000, the Foundation joined the Carnegie Corporation, the Ford Foundation, and John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation to support the improvement of higher education institutions in African countries. From 2005 to 2006, the Foundation granted over \$6 million to the areas affected by Hurricane Katrina to rebuild neighborhoods and economic redevelopment. In 2006, the Rockefeller Foundation teamed up with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and granted \$150 million to train and support African scientists to improve agriculture. In 2009, the Foundation launched its Impact Investing Initiative, the Foundation also launched the Asian Cities Climate Change Resilience Network to assess climate change risks (The Rockefeller Foundation, 2014).

China Medical Board and Modern Medicine in China

In 1914, The China Medical Board was established in order to develop a system of modern medicine in China. The Foundation's goal was to develop modern medical schools in two of China's Universities which included Peking University and Shanghai University. In 1915, the Rockefeller Foundation purchased the Union Medical College from the London Missionary Society in China. Over the span of six years, the foundations appointed fifty professors, and expanded the facilities that became the Peking Union Medical College. The college sat on 70 acres of land with several facilities that included a hospital, classrooms, laboratories, and residences (The Rockefeller Archives, N. D.).

In 1919, Pecking Union Medical College opened its doors. When the project first began it was estimated to cost \$1 million dollars. However, expenses grew and in 1921, the project finished at \$8 million. Due to the high expenses of the project, Rockefeller decided to terminate his plans of adding a medical school to Shanghai University (The Rockefeller Archives, N. D.).

The College's contribution towards medicine in China was extremely beneficial to modern medicine in China; however, it was also slightly limited. Due to the school's high standards and the language barrier, since the curriculum was strictly in English, there were only 313 doctors that graduated from 1924 to 1943. However many of the students who graduated were offered CMB grants and continued their studies abroad. Many of the scholars returned to China and became leaders in medical administration, teaching, and scientific research (The Rockefeller Archives, N. D.).

Not only did Peking Union Medical College open the doors for doctors, they also opened the doors for nursing. Before the school opened there where less than 300 trained nurses in China, with the majority of them being male. Peking Union Medical College appointed Anna D. Wolf from John Hopkins University to create a training program to train qualified women to increase the status of Nursing in China. Within five years Anna Wolf created a program that was comparable to U.S. standards (Barnes, 2009).

In 1930, a Chinese Ministry of Education assessed Peking Union Medical School and urged them to increase their acceptance rate and create classes that could accommodate those who could not speak English in order to produce a higher number of graduates. Tension began to build in the 1930's between the Rockefeller Foundation

offices in New York and Pecking Union Medical College, because of their disagreements on which direction the school should go in (The Rockefeller Archives, N. D.). In 1937, there were talks of making Peking Union Medical College less westernized by putting in more Chinese professors in position of leadership and making the curriculum bilingual. However the Japanese invasion in 1937 put a damper on the progression. The effects of the war on Medical Education were devastating, only 5 of the 33 medical pharmacy and dental schools were untouched. Although some faculty from Pecking Union Medical College fled to assist with war related health programs, the college continued to operate. In 1947 the Rockefeller Foundation made a terminal grant of \$10 million to the China Medical Board, however in 1951 the Peoples Republic of China nationalized Pecking Union Medical College and severed ties with both the Rockefeller foundation and China Medical Board (The Rockefeller Archives, N. D.).

Despite the termination between the college and the Rockefeller Foundation and the China Medical Board, both the Foundation and Board continue to have a substantial influence on modern medicine in China, due to the many contributions they made. They provided many scholarships for student to continue their education abroad, medical texts were translated, medical libraries were established, they made small contributions to other missionary hospitals, and their school produced assets to Chinas health system. The Hospital is still ranked number 1 in China. The campus now houses the Chinese Academy of Medicine (The Rockefeller Archives, N. D.).

Conclusion

Being born into moderate circumstances John Davison Rockefeller worked hard to become one of the big-

gest names in America and around the world. From childhood to adulthood he worked diligently to come up with new and inventive strategies to make the most profit. Rockefeller made sure to always keep track of how he spent which was a huge basis to his success. From a young age it was instilled in him to give what he could to church which stuck with him through adulthood. John Davison Rockefeller built his empire on honesty, faith, and good intentions. Although he was faced with several legal issues, he never ceased to reach his goal of helping others. The Rockefeller Foundation had funded many initiatives focusing on the wellbeing of people all around the world. By the end of his life Rockefeller had an estimated net worth of over \$300 billion. As of the closing of 2012 The Rockefeller Foundation was ranked #16 on the top 100 U.S. Foundations based on assets, ending with \$3,695,617,868. They ranked #44 on the top 100 U.S. Foundation based on total giving's, ending with a total of \$135,082,747 in grants.

The Rockefeller Foundation has celebrated its Centennial in 2013. The foundation noted that innovation must be at the heart of all that they do, and that it is what has made everything the Rockefeller foundation has accomplished possible. In order to solve future issues, the Rockefeller Foundations goal is to continue to seek out and support new innovations that will make long lasting impacts on the world. Currently the Rockefeller Foundation is focusing on issues dealing with Health, Resilience to Climate change, Food, Human Welfare, Gender Equality, Transportation, Agriculture and Job creation. There are 75 institutions that came from both John D. Rockefeller and his dependence with over 50 of them still active. Some organizations created entirely or partially by the Rockefeller family are listed in Table 1. With his death in May of

1937, Rockefeller left behind an unforgettable legacy that continues to blossom.

Table 1: Institutions Associated with the Rockefeller Family

Institution	Founder	Years Active	Purpose
The University of Chicago	John D. Rockefeller Sr. & the American Baptist Education Society	1890- Present	Research University
The Rockefeller University	John D. Rockefeller and Fredrick T. Gates	1901- Present	Provide educations on biological and medical science
Rockefeller Brothers Fund	John the 3rd, Nelson, Winthrop, Laurence and David Rockefeller	1940-Present	To support projects of interest to them, it helped them to share research and coordinate philanthropic activities
Population Council	John D Rockefeller the 3 rd	1952- Present	To promote family planning/ reproductive health
Rockefeller Family Fund	Martha, John, Laurence, Nelson, and David Rockefeller	1967-Preseant	To span the philanthropic interests of the third and fourth generations of the Rockefeller family, the fun focusses in public aesthetics, Education, Equal
Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation	Winthrop Rockefeller	1974–Present	Furthering education, economic development, and racial and Social justice in Arkansas.
Partnership For New York City	David Rockefeller	1979- Present	Leaders from prominent corporations and nonprofits along with educational institutions that work together with government agencies to tackle issues dealing with economic development, education and housing
David Rockefeller Fund	David Rockefeller and Wife Peggy	1989- Present	The fund focusses on Criminal Justice and the environment
The Laurence S. Rockefeller Fund	Laurence S. Rockefeller	1991-Present	Provide support to charitable and public organizations that had the same charitable interests as he did
Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors	Rockefeller Family	2002-Present	To help donors make thoughtful, effective philanthropy throughout the world.

Source: The Rockefeller Archives

Resources

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華民研究中心
Huamin Research Center

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
School of Social Work
390 George Street, Room 503
New Brunswick, NJ 08901
848-932-7520, ext. 28256
socialwork.rutgers.edu/huamin