

Rockefeller University

**Digital Commons @ RU**

---

BenchMarks 2017

BenchMarks

---

2017

## **BenchMarks 2017, Special Print Issue**

The Rockefeller University

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.rockefeller.edu/benchmarks\\_2017](https://digitalcommons.rockefeller.edu/benchmarks_2017)

---

THE ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY

# Benchmarks

The community newsletter of The Rockefeller University

SPECIAL PRINT ISSUE

Celebrating

# David Rockefeller

1915–2017

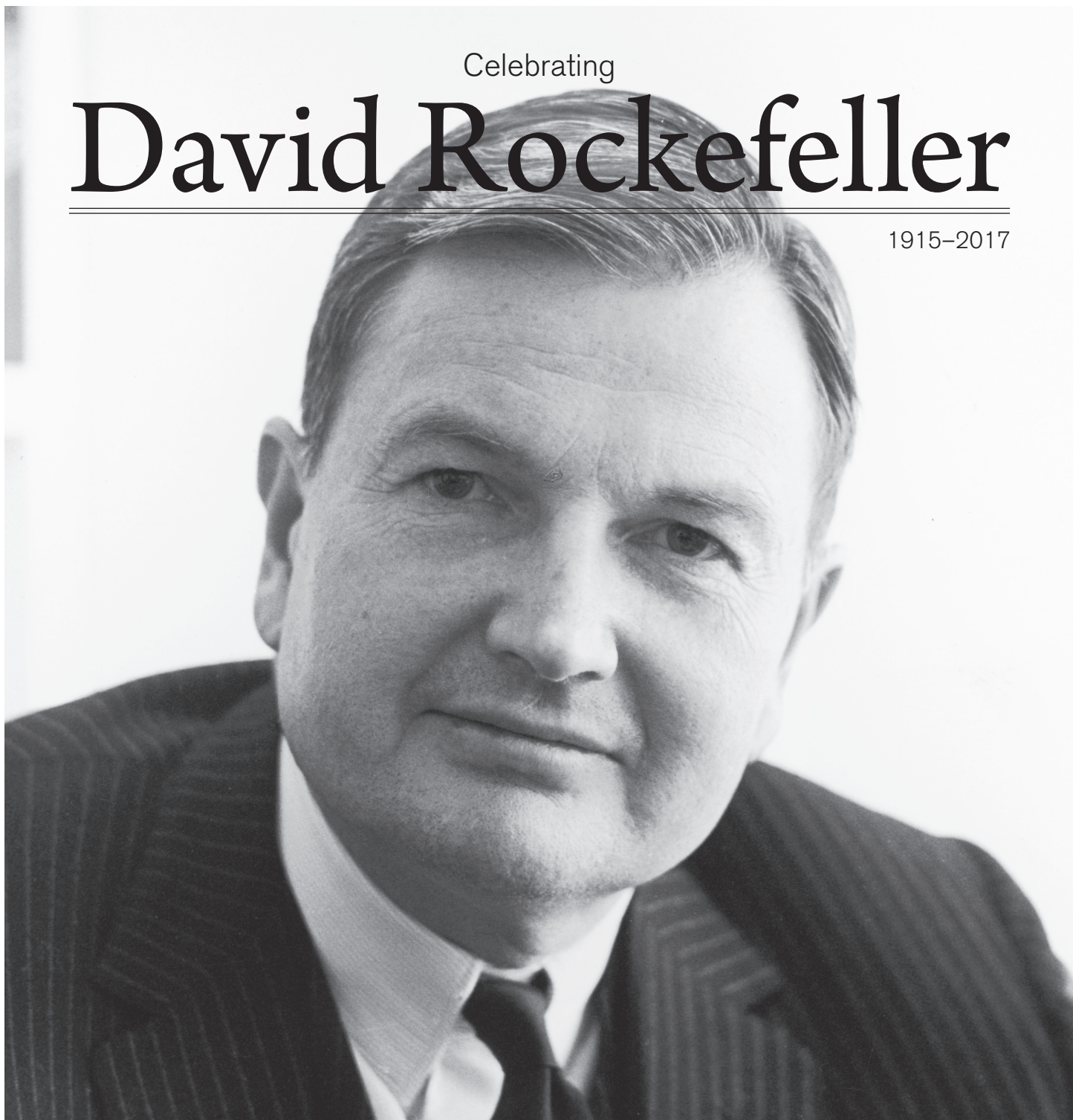


Photo: Bernard Gotfryd/Getty Images

## Of all the many brilliant individuals who have been affiliated with Rockefeller over the years,

none has had as profound and long-lasting an influence on the institution as David Rockefeller. A member of the university's Board of Trustees since 1940—when the institution was still known as The Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research—David played a key role in the university's evolution and its steadfast commitment to excellence for three-quarters of a century. His death on March 20, 2017, marks the end of an extraordinary era for the institution.

"David was one of the great men of our time and his impact on New York City and the world as a whole will be felt for generations," says Russ Carson, who has been chair of Rockefeller's Board of Trustees for 12 years. "His accomplishments are legendary, none more so than the guiding hand he provided to The Rockefeller University. Through his personal involvement and his generous philanthropy he helped to make the university what it is today."

---

David was the grandson of John D. Rockefeller Sr., who founded The Rockefeller Institute in 1901. Born in New York City in 1915, he was the youngest of six children. He attended Harvard University, the London School of Economics, and the University of Chicago, where he earned a Ph.D. in economics in 1940—the same year he joined Rockefeller's Board and married Margaret McGrath, who would herself be an active member of the Rockefeller community for over 50 years. He spent his entire business career at Chase Manhattan Bank, where he was CEO from 1969 to 1980. His specialty was international banking, and he traveled extensively.

As a philanthropist, David followed in the footsteps of his grandfather and father, John D. Rockefeller Jr., serving as an active and generous steward of innumerable institutions and organizations. In New York City, David helped establish the Downtown-Lower Manhattan Association in 1958, which aided the redevelopment of lower Manhattan and led to the creation of the World Trade Center. In 1979, he formed the Partnership for New York City, an organization of business leaders who worked closely with government, labor, and the nonprofit sector to enhance the city's standing as a global center of commerce, culture, and innovation. In addition to The Rockefeller University, two other New York institutions occupied special places in David's heart: the Museum of Modern Art, which was co-founded by his mother, and the Council on Foreign Relations.

"I learned a great deal from David," says Richard Furlaud, Trustee Emeritus and former Chair of The Rockefeller University's Board, who was also a member of Chase Manhattan's Board of Directors. "He was always kind and courteous and generous in his praise

of others. He was also great fun to be with and he was full of humor and wisdom. Even though I had not seen him for several years before his death, David's passing leaves a void in my life. That's the kind of person he was."

It was David, more than any other individual, who led Rockefeller through its 1950s transformation from a medical institute into a modern biomedical research university, a historic period of rejuvenation. With David as Chairman of the Board, and Detlev Bronk as president, Rockefeller took on a new educational mission, remodeled its campus, and drew on new sources of funding to advance its work. David was also committed to the essential role of The Rockefeller University Hospital in conducting biomedical research informed by clinical evidence.

"Because it bears the Rockefeller family name, David felt both great pride for the university and a great responsibility for it," says Barry S. Collier, physician-in-chief of The Rockefeller University Hospital and the university's David Rockefeller Professor. "From our discussions I know that his role in deciding to initiate the Ph.D. program is one in which he took especial pride."

In fact, David took many opportunities to meet with Rockefeller students, both formally and informally, over the years, and rarely missed Convocation, the annual ceremony at which the university awards degrees.

"David was proud of the students who graduated from Rockefeller and loved to hear about their great achievements in research," says Günter Blobel, professor and Nobel Prize winner. "One could easily sense what an important place Rockefeller occupied in his life. And one felt the energy with which he continued the great founding work of his father and grandfather. His efforts never looked strained. Instead, they were driven

by an admirable curiosity and accompanied by an intrinsic joy of learning. That's what made his presence so special and memorable."

"David Rockefeller was an influential presence on campus," says Marnie Imhoff, senior vice president for development. "He loved talking with faculty, students, and staff, and his enormous personal warmth and ability to connect with everyone he met was at the heart of the culture of civility and cooperation that is a hallmark of our great institution."

Although David stepped down as Chairman of the Board in 1975, he continued to chair the Board's Executive Committee until 1995, when he became Honorary Chairman and Life Trustee. His tenure spanned 10 of the university's 11 presidents.

"Throughout his life, David was an active and generous steward of university affairs, building on the legacy he inherited from his father and grandfather," says Trustee Marnie Pillsbury, David's philanthropic advisor. "His wisdom made Rockefeller what it is today, and his warmth helped bring together this community of scientists. His remarkable generosity touched every aspect of the university's operations—from its scientific and educational programs to its landscape, buildings, and art collection."

"David's personal involvement was no doubt instrumental for the development of the university into one of the pre-eminent research institutions in the world," says Torsten Wiesel, Rockefeller's president from 1991 to 1998. "He was a most thoughtful person, always ready to listen and give good advice when problematic questions came up for discussion. He also had a curious mind and a real interest in the operation and beauty of nature." His beetle collection, for which is he well known, contains over 75,000 specimens, meticulously maintained in custom cabinets.

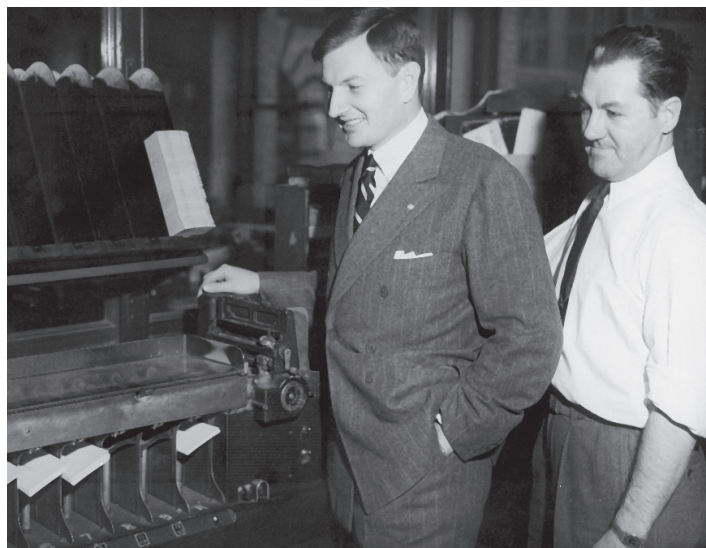
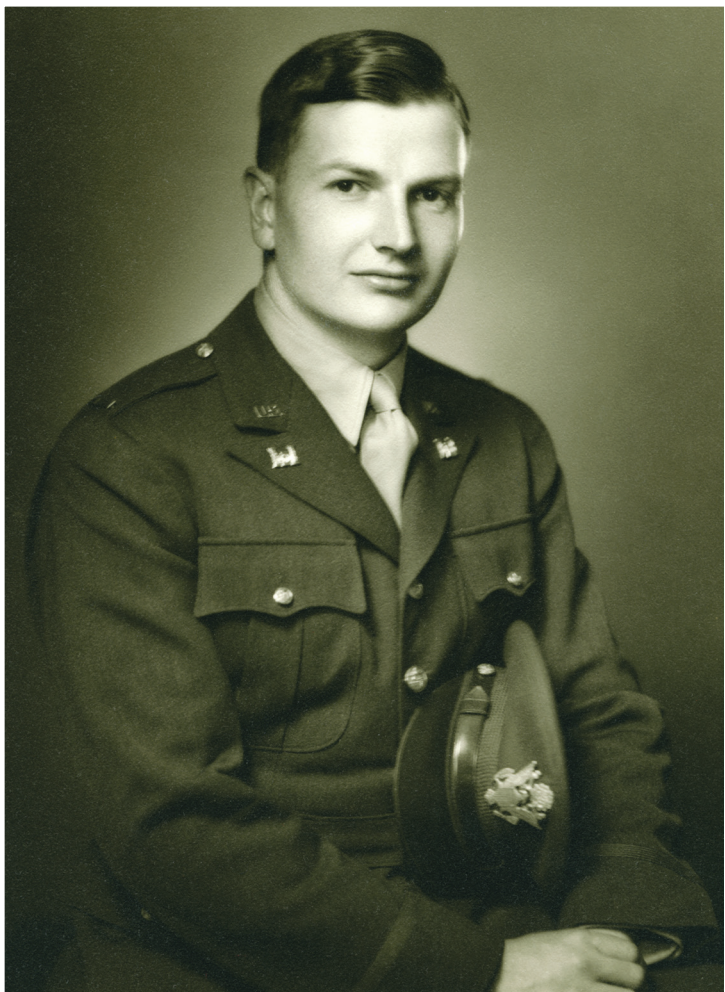




**DR at Rockefeller.** From top, left to right: At the press conference to announce Roderick MacKinnon's 2003 Nobel Prize; touring the Collaborative Research Center construction site in 2010; at the dedication of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Hall, named for David's mother, in 1958; awarding degrees to Rockefeller's first graduating class in 1959 (third from left); with Peggy, his wife of over 50 years, in 1987; celebrating his 100th birthday with the university's Board of Trustees in 2015.



**Growing up.** Outside the Rockefeller home in Seal Harbor, Maine, in the mid-1920s with his mother (right); serving in the U.S. Army in Northern Africa and France during World War II (below); joining the Chase Manhattan Bank's foreign department in 1946 (bottom right).



Photos: The Rockefeller University Archive Center

David's legacy will live on at Rockefeller. The David Rockefeller Graduate Program bears his name, as do several awards—the David Rockefeller Fellowship for exceptional scholarship, the David Rockefeller Professorship, and the David Rockefeller Award for Extraordinary Service—all created by members of the university community in his honor. Most recently, David partnered with the Stavros Niarchos Foundation in making a transformative joint gift to help create the Stavros Niarchos Foundation–David Rockefeller River Campus, the most expansive and dramatic remake of the university's footprint since the one David led in the 1950s. Now under construction, the new campus will open in 2019.

"An inspired leader, astute businessman, visionary strategist, and generous benefactor, David contributed integrity, strength, wisdom, and judgment to Rockefeller, shaping the university into the powerhouse of biomedical discovery it is today," says Richard P. Lifton, the university's current president.

"David's pride in the university, his enormous generosity, and his wisdom provided the warp and woof of everything that we, as Trustees, tried to accomplish," says David G. Nathan, Trustee Emeritus and former president of Dana-Farber Cancer Institute. "We have lost our captain, but the crew will sail to make the university the great bastion of biomedical science that David envisaged. We will try to emulate him, and if we work hard enough, we may get close to our objective. That is our pledge to David's blessed memory."

## Benchmarks

### PRESIDENT

Richard P. Lifton

### EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

Timothy O'Connor

### EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Franklin Hoke

### EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Zach Veilleux

### MANAGING EDITOR

Eva Kiesler

### ASSISTANT EDITOR

Alexandra MacWade

### PRODUCTION SPECIALIST

Kelly McLees

*Benchmarks* is produced by the Office of Communications and Public Affairs of The Rockefeller University. The Rockefeller University is an affirmative action/equal employment opportunity employer.

©2017 The Rockefeller University.