

Two years were to pass before the Christian Brothers were able to purchase property and to erect new facilities for their school at Barrytown, New York. On July 14, 1931, the last of the Brothers and students departed for their new home, and the property was turned over to John D. Rockefeller, Jr. In May of 1931 the buildings were demolished, and henceforth the acreage became woodland and pasture.²⁸

28. Heydt to J.D. R., Jr., June 21, July 14, 1930,
Christian Brothers Property, Rockefeller Archives.

E. Rockwood Hall in the 20th Century

1. The Rockwood Hall Country Club

William Rockefeller died in June 1922 and left his estate to his children. Shortly thereafter, the heirs disposed of their father's property in Mount Pleasant Township. Rockwood Hall and the property east and west of the Albany Post Road was sold to Rockwood Hall, Inc., a group of individuals interested in developing an exclusive country club. Not having

the necessary capital to fund the transaction, Rockwood Hall, Inc. secured a loan of \$625,000 from Equitable Trust Company of New York. This loan was secured by a mortgage, dated February 3, 1928.²⁹

29. Duncan to Heydl, Dec. 16, 1937; Mortgaged, dated Feb. 3, 1928, by Rockwood Hall, Inc. to Equitable Trust, Rockwood Hall File, Rockefeller Archives.

Meanwhile, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., had been pushing the development of woodland bridle trails on his father's estate. The wooded area between the Pocantico and Gorge Brook, owned by the William Rockefeller estate, was especially desirable for this use.³⁰ An opportunity to do so occurred in 1927. The

30. J.D.R., Jr., to Hilton, Jan. 6, 1921, Rockwood Hall File, Rockefeller Archives. Junior had let it be known on that date that he would be interested in purchasing, if the price were right, his uncle's property east of Gorge Brook Road.

Rockwood Hall Country Club had not prospered. It was unable to compete with ^{the} nearby and well established Sleepy Hollow Country Club. To secure operating capital, Rockwood Hall, Inc., on May 3, 1927, sold to John D. Rockefeller, Jr., for \$450,000 a 450-acre tract south of the Sleepy Hollow Country Club and east of the Albany Post Road. The price paid by Junior was \$100,000 above that offered by the Mandell Corporation, which was interested in developing the Gorge Brook Tract as home sites.³¹

31. J.D.R., Jr., to Percy Rockefeller, April 30 and Heydt to Hall, May 3, 1927, Rockwood Hall File, Rockefeller Archives. Percy Rockefeller was a son of William Rockefeller.

The stock market crash of 1929 and the ensuing depression caused the Rockwood Hall Club to sink deeper into debt. In 1936 the Rockefellers' Chase National Bank, having acquired the mortgage from

Equitable Trust Company, was compelled to institute foreclosure proceedings. At this time the mortgage totaled \$625,000. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., had no desire to acquire the property or buildings, so he contacted Arthur C. Jones, the railroad magnate who owned the Phelps Estate. If Jones were interested in the property, Junior wanted him to know that the property was being foreclosed.³²

32. J.D.R., Jr., to Jones, April 22, 1937, Rockwood Hall File, Rockefeller Archives.

Jones was not seriously interested in the acquisition of the 212-acres, and on December 10, 1937, the bankruptcy court, by referee's deed, transferred the property owned by the Rockwood Hall Club, Inc., to John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Junior's bid was \$244,374, while the total mortgage indebtedness, including back taxes, was \$724,222.20.³³

33. Keebler to J.D.R., Jr., Nov. 29 and Duncan to Heydl, Dec. 16, 1937, Rockwood Hall File, Rockefeller

2. The Washington Irving Theatre at Rockwood Hall

Although he now owned the buildings and 212 acres west of the Albany Post Road, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., had no immediate use for the property. Rockwood Hall and the grounds were leased to the newly chartered Washington Irving Country Club, while the coachhouse and stable were remodeled and leased to the Washington Irving Theater. In June 1938 the summer theatre opened. The season's list of plays included: "Boy Meets Girl," "Coquette," "Holiday," "High Tor," "Broadway," "Her Cardboard Lover," and "Personal Appearance."³⁴ In 1939 the coachhouse was again used

34. Tarrytown Daily News, Sept 3, 1938.

as a summer theatre. But in 1940 this use was discontinued.³⁵

35. Heydt to Seranne, Nov. 5, 1941, Rockwood Hall Files, Rockefeller Archives. Miss Anne Seranne was a director of the Washington Irving Theatre.

3. The Demolition of the Buildings

In 1941, with World War II threatening to engulf the United States and the structures deteriorated^{ing} badly, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., determined to have all of them, except the gatehouses, demolished. David Swope, who owned and was developing the area fronting the Hudson above Rockwood Hall, learned of this decision and contacted Junior. He informed Junior that he would be interested in Rockwood Hall "on the basis of lots not less than three acres in size." He, however, was not prepared to develop the entire 212 acres at one time, so the subject was dropped.³⁶

36. Swope to J.D.R., Jr., Oct. 11, 1941, Rockwood Hall Files, Rockefeller Archives.

A contract was accordingly drawn on November 21, 1941, with the Walsh Wrecking Company, for the demolition of all structures on the Rockwood Hall estate, except the gatehouses. Work was to commence immediately and be completed before January

31, 1942. Debris was to be dumped into the Hudson, fronting the property.³⁷

37. Walsh to J.D.R., Jr., Nov. 21, 1941, Rockwood Hall File, Rockefeller Archives.

By the designated date, the mansion, coachhouse, greenhouses, powerhouse, barn, chicken house, pigeonhouse, sheds, and boathouse had been razed. Care was taken by the Walsh workmen to avoid damage to the trees, shrubs, roads, walks, terraces, and retaining walls.³⁸

38. Tarrytown Daily News, undated clipping, Rockwood Hall Files, Rockefeller Archives. It has been estimated that William Rockefeller invested over \$1,000,000 in building his mansion.

4. Laurence Rockefeller Acquires the Property

On April 8, 1946, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., transferred to his son, Laurence, the Rockwood Hall

property. This move was interpreted by the editor of the Tarrytown Daily News, as further evidence that Junior had adopted a policy of "the setting up of estates for members of the Rockefeller family." Previously, it was noted, he had established an estate for John D. Rockefeller, III, at Fieldwood Farm, and Mr. and Mrs. Milton at Hudson Pines.³⁹

39. Ibid., March 4, 1946.

F. Hudson Pines

Mr. and Mrs. David Milton by July 1937 had begun to think seriously about building a home of their own. Within the year plans had jelled and a site had been selected. The Miltons would build their home on the northside of Bedford Road, opposite Abeyton Lodge and the Playhouse. A 35-acre tract was deeded to Mrs. Milton by her father and the contract for construction of the house was awarded to Todd & Brown.⁴⁰

T+B were also the architects (What about Holt Schmitt?)

40. J.D.R., Jr., to Mrs. Milton, July 1, 1937; Cuzzi Bros. to Nelson Rockefeller, July 18, 1938; Gumbel