

C. Rockefeller Buys a Westchester Estate

With the organization of the Trust in 1882, the corporation moved its headquarters from Cleveland to New York City. Although John D. Rockefeller established his legal residence in New York, he continued to spend much of his time at his Forest Hill estate in Cleveland. His home in New York City was a mansion at 4 West 54th Street.

As early as 1885 John D. Rockefeller's interest in the possibility of acquiring an estate in the Tarrytown area had been whetted by his brother, William, who had purchased Rockwood from the Aspinwall heirs.

James Benedict, learning that Rockefeller had been looking at property in the Tarrytown area, wrote him on May 28, 1885. He reported that he owned 200 acres adjoining the village, and that in the past he had sold property to William H. Webb, Peter Hoe, W.C. Casey, and Charles Rockwell.⁴

4. Benedict to Rockefeller, May 28, 1885, Ltrs. Recd., J.D.R., Sr., 1885-1893, Rockefeller Archives

Rockefeller was not ready to act, so he did not

acknowledge Benedict's letter.

In 1886 and again in 1888, W.H. Hoyt, a Yonkers real estate broker, contacted Rockefeller about several choice estates that had been listed with him. On March 10, 1886, Rockefeller was notified that Henry Villard's estate at Dobbs Ferry could be rented for the summer for \$4,000. Rockefeller was not interested in renting the property, as he planned to spend the summer in Cleveland. Hoyt therefore did not pursue the subject.

Twenty-five months later, on June 27, 1888, Hoyt wrote Rockefeller that the A.C. Richard estate on the east side of Broadway in Irvington could be purchased for \$150,000, while the Samuel Tilden executors would dispose of Greystone for \$400,000. The prices for these two properties were too high and negotiations were not pushed.⁵

5. Hoyt to Rockefeller, March 10, 1886, June 14-27, 1888, Ltrs. Recd., J.D.R., Sr., 1885-1893, Rockefeller Archives.

Four years later, on January 26, 1892, Hoyt again listed an estate which he thought might interest Rocke-

feller. He believed the time was opportune for negotiating the purchase of all or part of the Cyrus Field estate. Once again, Rockefeller declined to take action.⁶

6. Hoyt to Rockefeller, Jan. 26, 1893, Ltrs. Recd., J.D.R. Sr., 1885-1893, Rockefeller Archives.

In the summer of 1893 John D. Rockefeller became interested in the Kykuit neighborhood of Mount Pleasant Township. With Hoyt acting as intermediary, Rockefeller from his Forest Park Estate and his office in New York City kept in close contact with the negotiations, which at times were tedious. The property owners held out for all they could get. Rockefeller, however, was not a man that would yield easily, and bargaining was hard. Finally, in the period August 19 through Sept^{ber} 27, Hoyt was able to close deals with ten property owners for over 400 acres at a price of \$390,000.⁷

William Rockefeller to J.R.D. July 21 and Aug. 7, 1893;
7. Rockefeller to Laura Spelman Rockefeller, Sept. 2, 1893, and Curry to Rockefeller, Sept. 22, 1893, Ltr. Book 34, Rockefeller Archives.

Tarrytown Press-Record, Sept. 30, 1893. Properties purchased by Rockefeller included: W.B. Wadsworth, 15 acres; the Tower Hill property from W.H. Blackwell, 26 acres, bisected by Sunnyside Avenue, on which there were several houses; Parsons-Wentworth County Seat, 17 acres, including the mansion known as Kykuit; the Kingsland Tract, 165 acres, including the Milderberger and LaGrine farms; the Diggles country-seat on the north side of Bedford Road, 85 acres; the James T. Law estate, 54 acres, also on the north side of Bedford Road; the A.D. Stephens place, 32 1/2 acres, on the south side of Bedford Road; the C.S. Davison plot of 8 1/2 acres; and Margaret Wilson's house and lot at the intersection of Sunnyside Avenue and County House Road.

At the time of the purchase Wentworth and his family were living in the Parson's^s mansion. It was hoped that the Wentworths would vacate promptly, so the Rockefellers could have possession by October 10. Wentworth was cooperative. Not only did he agree to vacate by that date, but he recommended that Rockefeller hire

his English gardener, who could also double as a coachman. Fifty to sixty tons of coal would be required to heat the dwelling during the winter, he reported.⁸

8. Cary to Rockefeller, Sept. 18, 1893, Ltrs. Recd., Book 34, Rockefeller Archives.

The Wentworths had moved out and the Rockefellers had possession by October 15. As soon as he took up residence at Kykuit, Rockefeller made arrangements for having telephone service installed.⁹ In November, the

9. Rockefeller to Sabold, October 19, 1893, Ltrs. Sent, Book 34, Rockefeller Archives.

Rockefellers had some renovations made. The bathroom was wainscotted.¹⁰

10. Rockefeller to Hart, Nov. 11, 1893, Ltrs. Sent, Book 34, Rockefeller Archives.

It was understood in and around Tarrytown that

Rockefeller planned to build a mansion at an early date. The house, it was said, would cost over a million dollars, and be "in keeping with all of its grand surroundings." By September 30, an observation tower, 75 feet in height, had been erected on Kykuit for use by the surveyors and landscape architects.¹¹

11. Tarrytown Press-Record, Sept. 30, 1893.

News that a mansion was planned caused Rockefeller to be bombarded with proposals from architects. He was not ready to build, however. He and his family, when in residence at Pocantico Hills, continued to live in the Parsons-Wentworth house until the summer of 1902, when it was destroyed by fire.¹²

12. Broome to Rockefeller, Oct. 2, 1893, Ltrs. Recd., J.D.R., Sr. 1885-1893, Rockefeller Archives.

In the period December 7, 1893, through December 18, 1896, Rockefeller continued to add to his Pocantico Hills estate. Seventeen pieces of property totaling 579 acres were acquired at a cost of \$345,000. The most

important tracts purchased were the Carle Farm of 65 acres; the Roberts holdings of 215 acres; the George Juckett Farm of 150 acres; the 15 acres Kent estate with its two houses and other improvements; and the R.D. Coutant Farm. With these acquisitions, the estate on January 1, 1897, totaled 985.555 acres.

When John D. Rockefeller, Sr., acquired his property at Pocantico Hills and became a part time resident at Kykuit, he was 54 years old. With his greatest successes in the business world behind him, he was looking forward to retirement. In the period, 1894-1895, he was to relinquish most of his administrative responsibilities with Standard Oil, and by 1897 he severed all connections with management of the giant trust he had fathered.¹³

13. Owens, Pocantico Hills, 26.