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# Guide to the University of Chicago Founders' Correspondence 1886-1892



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## **Descriptive Summary**

<b>Identifier</b>	ICU.SPCL.ROCKEFELLER
<b>Title</b>	University of Chicago. Founders' Correspondence
<b>Date</b>	1886-1892
<b>Size</b>	1 linear ft. (2 boxes)
<b>Repository</b>	Special Collections Research Center University of Chicago Library 1100 East 57th Street Chicago, Illinois 60637 U.S.A.
<b>Abstract</b>	Consists of typewritten transcripts of correspondence between John D. Rockefeller, founding donor of the University of Chicago, and others involved in the establishment of the University. Correspondents include William Rainey Harper, Thomas W. Goodspeed, Frederick T. Gates, and others.

## **Information on Use**

### **Access**

No restrictions

### **Digital Images**

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The University of Chicago Library appreciates hearing from anyone who may have information about any of the images in this collection.

## **Citation**

When quoting material from this collection, the preferred citation is: University of Chicago. Founders' Correspondence, [Box #, Folder #], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library

## **Biographical Note**

The industrialist and philanthropist, John Davison Rockefeller's (8 July 1839-23 May 1937) practice of philanthropist giving is juxtaposed against his legacy as the founder of Standard Oil which dominated the oil industry and provided him with \$900 million to share.

Born in Richford, New York, the son of William Avery Rockefeller and Eliza Davison, Rockefeller's family settled in Cleveland, Ohio in 1855. Rockefeller's father, a hardworking business man who lent money and traded in lumber, salt, horses, medicines, etc., traveled a great deal and left John D. to care for the family. His mother, a devout Baptist, emphasized the virtues of discipline, thrift, handwork and proper moral conduct. Throughout his life Rockefeller would apply these values and would never exhibit ostentatious behavior in style or manner.

Graduated from Cleveland's Central High School Rockefeller enrolled in business course's in Folsom's Commercial College in the summer of 1855. By the spring of 1859 Rockefeller had determined to begin his own commission house with a \$1000.00 loan at ten percent interest from his father. He and his partner, Maurice B. Clark, profited from the start and considerably more throughout the civil war.

In those years Rockefeller used his Baptist faith to guide his behavior and took a role of leadership in the Erie Street Baptist Church. Sharing his church duties was his wife Laura C. Spelman. The couple married 1864 and Spelman, a retired teacher, mothered three daughters and one son.

Rockefeller entered the oil industry in 1863 and consolidated the various companies and modes of transportation to form a formidable company. As the largest stockholder he amassed a personal wealth of \$900 million by 1913. In this process he created the modern corporation by bringing stability to the emerging oil industry and instituting the board of corporate trustees. In 1911 Standard Oil could no longer resist the many court decisions regarding monopolies and struck by the Supreme Court's 1911 anti-trust act, the Standard Oil was dismantled to reform 38 companies. The stresses from his business life were so severe that by 1910 Rockefeller had lost all of his hair, including his eyelashes.

Rockefeller's philanthropic attention was pulled toward supporting and later establishing educational facilities in the Chicago area beginning in 1873. Through his association with Goodspeed and Harper he began donating to the Morgan Park Seminary. Goodspeed and his Baptist associate William T. Gates were able to convince Rockefeller to donate funds toward a college later to be expanded into a university. Rockefeller went to great lengths to procure the services of Harper for the Presidency of the future University of Chicago.

Although Rockefeller believed the college should be in the Midwest Goodspeed and Gates had to convince him that a large amount of funds were needed. Once it was determined that one million was the start up cost Rockefeller offered \$400,000 and pleaded that he could not donate more due to other obligations. Gates convinced him that the fundraising must seem at least half completed in order to give heart to the remaining fund raising efforts. Within the first ten years Rockefeller donated \$35 million to the University of Chicago with a strong faith in the three other university founders and he never directed how they should organize the university. He interfered only when felt they were not financially self sustaining. Rockefeller felt Harper had over reached the university's financial means and he stopped donating to the university in 1910. He returned to assisting the university in 1912 after it had ridded itself of its deficit.

Rockefeller has been criticized because the bulk of his philanthropic giving began after 1900. Prior to that he treated giving as a tithe. Rockefeller himself described the process of giving as a burden of decision making. He felt weighed down by the number of pleas for assistance that he received. From his early business days, Rockefeller's ledgers reveal that he freely donated part of his earnings, generally through the church. He would eventually donate 540 million. His philanthropy became an industry of its own as he established a foundation to make the distribution decisions. He persuaded Gates to join the advisory staff; Gates became one of Rockefeller's chief financial advisors; taking on investment responsibilities too. Including the sale of Rockefeller's iron ore interest to J.P. Morgan with a clear profit of 50 million.

Rockefeller established various foundations to receive his donations but also continued giving to existing groups and through his church. 82% of his donations went toward the endowment for the first biomedical research facility, the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research (established in 1901 it is now Rockefeller University). Also important were the General Education Board (1903), dedicated toward "the promotion of education within the United States, without distinction of race, sex, or creed,"; the Rockefeller Foundation (1913); the Rockefeller Sanitary Commission for the Eradication of Hookworm Disease (1909) which expanded into the International Health Board of the Rockefeller Foundation; and for his deceased wife's remembrance, the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial (1918) primarily for the concern of women and children.

Although comfortable with his family, Rockefeller rarely appeared in public or gave speeches or interviews. It was often remarked by his business associates that he seemed cold, reserved and quiet. To improve his public image Gates and his son convinced him to appear more frequently at public affairs in addition to granting more interviews with journalists and prospective charities, and individuals to whom he would dispense shiny dimes. A shrewd and conservative businessman his judgments avoided wasteful giving. Every penny must be used to its greatest extent.

Rockefeller was buried in Lakeview cemetery in Cleveland after passing away at his home in Ormond Beach.

## **Scope Note**

This collection consists of typewritten transcripts of correspondence between the founders of the new University of Chicago. It begins in 1886 and runs through 1892, after the new University had opened its doors. The correspondents include John D. Rockefeller, Sr., William Rainey Harper, Thomas W. Goodspeed, Frederick T. Gates, and others.

As is best explained in the letter of January 20, 1915 from Gates to John D. Rockefeller, Jr., (Box I, folder 1) these transcripts were collected and edited by Gates from the files of J. D. Rockefeller, Sr., The American Baptist Education Society, William Rainey Harper, Dr. Henry L. Morehouse, and Thomas W. Goodspeed.

The Collection has been left as Mr. Gates arranged it in chronological order.

## **Related Resources**

The following related resources are located in the Department of Special Collections:

<http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/spcl/select.html>

## **Subject Headings**

- Harper, William Rainey, 1856-1906
- Goodspeed, Thomas Wakefield, 1842-1927
- Gates, Frederick Taylor, 1853-1929
- Rockefeller, John D. (John Davison), 1839-1937
- Rockefeller, John D. (John Davison), 1839-1937-Correspondence
- University of Chicago

## **INVENTORY**

### **Box 1**

#### **Folder 1**

1886 January-December

View digitized documents, part 1. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/rockefeller-0001-001-01>

View digitized documents, part 2. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/rockefeller-0001-001-02>

### **Box 1**

#### **Folder 2**

1887 January-December

View digitized documents. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/rockefeller-0001-002>

### **Box 1**

#### **Folder 3**

1888 January-October

View digitized documents, part 1. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/rockefeller-0001-003-01>

View digitized documents, part 2. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/rockefeller-0001-003-02>

### **Box 1**

**Folder 4**

1888 November-December

View digitized documents, part 1. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/src/md/rockefeller-0001-004-01>

View digitized documents, part 2. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/src/md/rockefeller-0001-004-02>

View digitized documents, part 3. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/src/md/rockefeller-0001-004-03>

**Box 1****Folder 5**

1889 January

View digitized documents, part 1. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/src/md/rockefeller-0001-005-01>

View digitized documents, part 2. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/src/md/rockefeller-0001-005-02>

**Box 1****Folder 6**

1889 February-March

View digitized documents, part 1. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/src/md/rockefeller-0001-006-01>

View digitized documents, part 2. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/src/md/rockefeller-0001-006-02>

**Box 1****Folder 7**

1889 April-May

View digitized documents, part 1. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/src/md/rockefeller-0001-007-01>

View digitized documents, part 2. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/src/md/rockefeller-0001-007-02>

**Box 1****Folder 8**

1889 June-December

View digitized documents, part 1. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/src/md/rockefeller-0001-008-01>

View digitized documents, part 2. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/src/md/rockefeller-0001-008-02>

**Box 1****Folder 9**

1890 January-April

View digitized documents, part 1. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/src/md/rockefeller-0001-009-01>

View digitized documents, part 2. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/src/md/rockefeller-0001-009-02>

**Box 1****Folder 10**

1890 May-July

View digitized documents, part 1. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/rockefeller-0001-010-01>

View digitized documents, part 2. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/rockefeller-0001-010-02>

**Box 1**

**Folder 11**

1890 August-September

View digitized documents, part 1. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/rockefeller-0001-011-01>

View digitized documents, part 2. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/rockefeller-0001-011-02>

**Box 1**

**Folder 12**

1890 October-December

View digitized documents, part 1. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/rockefeller-0001-012-01>

View digitized documents, part 2. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/rockefeller-0001-012-02>

**Box 2**

**Folder 1**

1891 January-February

View digitized documents. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/rockefeller-0002-001>

**Box 2**

**Folder 2**

1891 March-May

View digitized documents. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/rockefeller-0002-002>

**Box 2**

**Folder 3**

1891 June-July

View digitized documents. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/rockefeller-0002-003>

**Box 2**

**Folder 4**

1891 August-December

View digitized documents. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/rockefeller-0002-004>

**Box 2**

**Folder 5**

1892 January-March

View digitized documents. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/rockefeller-0002-005>

**Box 2**

**Folder 6**

1892 April-June

View digitized documents. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/rockefeller-0002-006>

**Box 2**

**Folder 7**

1892 July-December

View digitized documents. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/rockefeller-0002-007>