

John D. Rockefeller Timeline

Directions: Read the events on the timeline below. Use one of the three markers to:

- Box every item on the timeline which shows John D. Rockefeller's side as an aggressive industrialist.
- Circle every item on the timeline which shows John D. Rockefeller's side as a generous philanthropist.
- Underline every item which is neutral, neither building his wealth nor giving away his fortune.

1839: John D. Rockefeller, one of six children, born on a farm in Richford, NY, son of William A. and Eliza (Davison) Rockefeller. Family later moves to Strongsville, Ohio (near Cleveland).

Mid-1850s: George H. Bissell forms Pennsylvania Rock Oil Company and buys land in western Pennsylvania where oil is found "floating in ponds".

Benjamin Silliman, Jr., professor of chemistry at Yale University, hired by Bissell to discover other uses for "rock oil" other than as medicine (snake oil). Silliman finds rock oil is a good lubricant and distills new kerosene for lamps that is brighter and safer.

Rockefeller attends Business College in Cleveland.

1856: Rockefeller earns \$3.57 per week as assistant bookkeeper at a produce shipping firm in Cleveland. He contributes regularly to the Erie Street Baptist. A devout Christian, Rockefeller becomes trustee of the Church.

1859: Edwin L. Drake hired by Bissell and banker James Townsend to "drill" for oil in Titusville, Pennsylvania where eight to ten gallons a day increases to thousands of gallons a day; "oil mania" begins.

Rockefeller takes \$1,000 in personal savings and \$1,000 loan from his father to open own produce business with partner Maurice Clark. They use credit to obtain large quantities of goods for resale.

1860: Rockefeller expands his charitable giving to other denominations, an African-American church, as well as a foreign Sunday school.

1863: Rockefeller and Clark enter oil business as refiners. Cleveland becomes major oil refining center.

Rockefeller marries Laura C. Spelman, a teacher, in Cleveland, Ohio. They have five children.

1865: Rockefeller buys out partners for \$72,500 and establishes largest Cleveland refinery to make kerosene for lighting and oil for lubricating.

1867: Rockefeller acquires refineries in Ohio and Pennsylvania. Buys plants, warehouses, tanker cars and wagon fleets to make his company self sufficient as possible.

1868: Rockefeller makes pact with Jay Gould, owner of Erie Railroad, guaranteeing a specific volume of shipments in exchange for rebates on shipping rates as well as rebates on oil shipped by his competitors.

1870: Rockefeller forms Standard Oil Company of Ohio with \$1 million, gains control of area oil refining facilities.

1871: Rockefeller expresses concern over wasteful production practices, loss of jobs and unbridled competition in oil refinery business. He advocates greater “cooperation” among oil related businesses.

In November, he meets with three major eastern railroads to create the “Southern Improvement Company” (SIC). The SIC eliminates competition and drives small oil companies out of business. Rockefeller buys 21 of 26 small Cleveland refineries (one quarter of all U.S. refining capacity. During one, forty-eight hour period, Rockefeller buys six refineries.) Congress later labels SIC “gigantic and daring conspiracy.”

1873: Stock market crashes and sets off six-year economic downturn. Rockefeller absorbs refineries in Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, New York and Pennsylvania.

1875: Rockefeller buys pipeline systems and direct marketing facilities.

1879: Rockefeller and his Standard Oil Company control 95 percent of U.S. oil refineries.

Mid-1880s: Standard Oil sells inexpensive lamps and the oil to fill them in China and around the world. Half of all U.S. oil shipped abroad.

1882: Standard Oil Trust created with 42 certificate or stockholders. Trust circumvents state corporation laws.

1888: Anti-monopoly sentiment grows across the United States.

1889: Rockefeller profoundly influenced by peer Andrew Carnegie’s *The Gospel of Wealth*, in which Carnegie asserts the wealthy have obligation to use personal wealth to improve common good. Carnegie: “...who dies rich dies disgraced.”

1890: Sherman Antitrust Act passed, outlawing trusts and “combinations in restraint of trade.” Rockefeller argues that Standard Oil Trust is not monopoly when measured against world market.

1891: Rockefeller establishes the University of Chicago, which ultimately receives \$35 million from him. Support of the new University is Rockefeller’s first major philanthropic undertaking. Rockefeller hires Frederick Gates to oversee his philanthropic endeavors.

1892: Ohio Supreme Court dissolves Standard Oil Trust and separates its 38 different companies.

1896: Electricity is replacing kerosene for lighting purposes. Henry Ford begins plans for manufacturing automobiles, creating huge demand for gasoline. Rockefeller retires from active Standard Oil leadership, but keeps title of President.

1897: Rockefeller, his son John, Jr., and the Reverend Frederick T. Gates develop a new approach to philanthropy that is still key to most individual, corporate and foundation philanthropy – one stressing “cooperation and conditional system of giving” that hinges major support to charitable commitments from other sources. Rockefellers begin ongoing, major charitable effort to establish American institutions in philanthropy, medicine, public health, and the arts.

1899: Standard Oil Company of New Jersey created from former companies in Ohio Trust. New Jersey law permits parent company to own stock in other companies. Rockefeller devotes full-time to philanthropy.

1901: President McKinley assassinated. Theodore Roosevelt, vehemently opposed to trusts, becomes President.

Rockefeller and his son establish the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research (later Rockefeller University), which goes on to discover causes of diseases and cures. It pioneers serum treatment for spinal meningitis and pneumonia, identifies causes of infantile paralysis (polio) and African sleeping sickness, and key factors of DNA.

1902: Rockefeller creates General Education Board (GEB), another endowed philanthropic foundation, to promote education in the South without distinction of race. Over six decades, GEB will distribute \$325 million for improved education in the South and spawn the national 4-H Club movement, and federal programs of farm and home extension.

“McClure’s Magazine” begins running installments of muckraker Ida Tarbell’s history of Standard Oil.

1907: Federal government brings lawsuit against Standard Oil.

1908: Rockefeller funds campaign to eliminate hookworm disease in the South.

1911: Rockefeller gives up title of President of Standard Oil as U.S. Supreme Court begins dismantling the business.

1913: In greatest philanthropic act in U.S. history to that time, John D. Rockefeller donates \$100 million to establish the Rockefeller Foundation, chartered in state of New York. Foundation’s purpose is “to promote the well-being of mankind throughout the world.”

1914: World War I begins and the Rockefellers donate millions to international relief.

1918: Rockefeller creates Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial in honor of his late wife (1839-1915).

1927: Hookworm disease eradicated.

1937: John D. Rockefeller dies on May 23 at his home, The Casements, in Ormond Beach, Florida, age 97 years old. He is buried in Lakeview Cemetery, Cleveland.

By time of his death, Rockefeller’s charitable gifts totaled \$540 million.