

# Laurance Rockefeller

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

**Laurance Spelman Rockefeller** (May 26, 1910 – July 11, 2004) was a venture capitalist, financier, philanthropist, a major conservationist and a prominent third-generation member of the Rockefeller family. He was the fourth child of John D. Rockefeller, Jr. and brother to John D. III, Nelson, Winthrop, David and Abby Rockefeller Mauze.

## Contents

- 1 Early life and marriage
- 2 Business, philanthropy, interests
- 3 Controversial Science
- 4 UFO
- 5 Conservation
- 6 Conservation affiliations
- 7 Further reading
- 8 See also
- 9 Notes
- 10 External links

## Early life and marriage

Rockefeller was born in New York City. He graduated from Princeton University (1932) and attended Harvard Law School for two years, until he decided he did not want to be a lawyer.

In 1934, Laurance married childhood friend Mary French, whose mother, Mary Montague French, and Laurance's mother were friends. When Nelson attended Dartmouth College, he shared a room with Mary's brother. Mary was granddaughter of Frederick H. Billings, a president of Northern Pacific Railway.

Laurance and Mary had three daughters and a son. They are Laura R. Chasin, Marion R. Weber, Dr. Lucy R. Waletzky, and Larry Rockefeller. In 2004, when he died, he had eight grandchildren and 12 great-grandchildren. Mary had died in 1997.

## Business, philanthropy, interests

In 1937 he inherited his grandfather's seat on the New York Stock Exchange. He served as founding trustee of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund for forty-two years, from its inception in 1940 to 1982; during this time he also served as president (1958–1968) and later its chairman (1968–1980) for twenty-two years, longer than any other leader in the Fund's history. He was also a founding trustee of the *Rockefeller Family Fund* from 1967 to 1977.

### Laurance Spelman Rockefeller



Laurance and Mary Rockefeller (1965)

<b>Born</b>	May 26, 1910 New York City, United States
<b>Died</b>	July 11, 2004 (aged 94)
<b>Occupation</b>	Financier, philanthropist
<b>Spouse</b>	Mary French
<b>Children</b>	Laura Marion Lucy Larry

He was a leading figure in the pioneering field of venture capital, which began as a joint partnership with all five brothers and their only sister, Babs, in 1946. In 1969 this became the successful Venrock Associates, which provided important early funding for Intel and Apple Computer, amongst many other start-up technology companies, including many other firms involved in healthcare. Over the years his investment interests ranged also into the fields of aerospace, electronics, high temperature physics, composite materials, optics, lasers, data processing, thermionics, instrumentation and nuclear power.

Venrock was a limited partnership investment company financed by members of the Rockefeller family and a number of the institutions with which the family had longstanding philanthropic ties, among them the Museum of Modern Art, Rockefeller University and Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center.

Rockefeller's major interest was in aviation; after the War, he became friendly with Captain Rickenbacker, who had triumphed in many dogfights over Europe. Rockefeller had learned to fly, and found Rickenbacker's vivid accounts of an approaching boom in commercial air travel to be persuasive. Within a decade after Rockefeller's considerable investment, Eastern Airlines had become the most profitable airline to emerge after World War II. He became its largest shareholder. He also funded the pivotal post-WWII military contractor McDonnell Aircraft Corp.

Rockefeller was a longtime friend and associate of DeWitt Wallace, who with his wife in 1922 co-founded *Reader's Digest*. Wallace, who was a major funder of the family's Colonial Williamsburg, appointed Laurance as an outside director in the company. He wanted to ensure that it preserved its patriotic mission of informing and educating the public, along with support for national parks, one of Rockefeller's primary interests.<sup>[1]</sup>

Through his resort management company, Rockresorts, Inc., Rockefeller opened environmentally focused hotels at Caneel Bay on Saint John, United States Virgin Islands (1956) (a favorite resort today for celebrities), some property of which was later turned over to the Virgin Islands National Park; in Puerto Rico, the British Virgin Islands, and Hawaii, contributing to the movement now known as ecotourism. The last of these, the *Mauna Kea Beach Hotel*, was established in 1965 on the Kohala Coast of the island of Hawaii. It's most noted General Manager was Adi Kohler who later wrote the story of the construction of the famous hotel in his book "Mr. Mauna Kea" published by McKenna Publishing Group.

Rockefeller funded the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center at a critical juncture of its early development. He also funded William Irwin Thompson's Lindisfarne Association, a think tank and retreat. He had a major involvement in the New York Zoological Society, along with support from other family members and philanthropies; he was a long-time trustee (1935–1986), president (1969–1971) and chairman (1971–1985).

## Controversial Science

---

Rockefeller also became interested in spiritual research and crop circles. He funded a study about crop circles in the late 1990s. Rockefeller also funded <sup>[2]</sup> controversial, though peer reviewed and not-disproven, research of the PEAR lab - dealing with consciousness-based physical phenomena.

---

## UFO

In later life, Rockefeller became interested in UFOs. In 1993, along with his niece, Anne Bartley, the stepdaughter of Winthrop Rockefeller and the then-president of the *Rockefeller Family Fund*, he established the *UFO Disclosure Initiative to the Clinton White House*. They asked for all UFO information held by the government, including from the CIA and the US Air Force, to be declassified and released to the public. The first and most important test case where declassification had to apply, according to Rockefeller, was the Roswell UFO incident. In September 1994, the Air Force categorically denied the incident was UFO-related. Rockefeller briefed Clinton on the results of his initiative in 1995. Clinton did produce an Executive Order in late 1994 to declassify numerous documents in the National Archives, but this did not specifically refer to UFO-related files.<sup>[3]</sup>

He also had an interest, gained via his mother Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, in Buddhism and Asian cultural affairs. He funded the research of Harvard Medical School Professor Dr. John Edward Mack, author of *Passport to the Cosmos*. He also supported the work of Dr. Steven M. Greer of the Disclosure Project.<sup>[4]</sup>

## Conservation

He was noted for his involvement in conservation (Lady Bird Johnson in 1967 was to label him "America's leading conservationist") and the protection of wildlife and was chairman of the *Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission*. He served on dozens of federal, state and local commissions and advised every president since Dwight D. Eisenhower on issues involving recreation, wilderness preservation and ecology. He founded the American Conservation Association and supported many other environmental groups.

He funded the expansion of Grand Teton National Park and was instrumental in establishing and enlarging national parks in Wyoming, California, the Virgin Islands, Vermont, Maine and Hawaii. In his home state, New York, he expended further cash and influence to help establish parklands and urban open spaces. There, as an active member of the Palisades Interstate Park Commission, he helped create a chain of parks that blocked the advance of urban sprawl.

In September 1991, he was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal for contributions to conservation and historic preservation. Awarded by President George H. W. Bush, it was the first time in the Medal's history (since 1777) that it had been awarded for outdoor issues, effectively naming Rockefeller as "Mr Conservation", who more than any other American had put this issue on the public agenda. Rockefeller said at the award presentation that nothing was more important to him than "the creation of a conservation ethic in America".<sup>[5]</sup>

In 1992 Rockefeller and his wife Mary donated their Woodstock, Vermont summer home and farm to the National Park Service, creating a national park dedicated to the history of conservation, now called the *Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park*. In 2001, Rockefeller transferred ownership of his landmark 1106-acre (4.5 km<sup>2</sup>) *JY Ranch* to the Grand Teton National Park in Wyoming. It was accepted by Vice-President Dick Cheney on behalf of the Federal government (see External Links below).

He died in his sleep of pulmonary fibrosis on July 11, 2004.

## Conservation affiliations

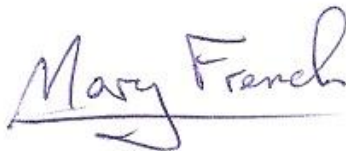
Partial list of his more notable memberships:

- American Conservation Association, Inc. - Founder, President and Trustee.
- American Museum of Natural History - Life Member.
- The Conservation Foundation - Founding Member and Trustee, Board of Directors.
- Environmental Defense Fund - Member.
- Greenacre Foundation - Trustee.
- Jackson Hole Preserve, Inc. - President.
- National Audubon Society - Life Member (Recipient, Audubon Medal, 1964).
- National Geographic Society - Board of Trustees.
- National Park Foundation - Vice Chairman, Board Member Emeritus.
- National Trust for Historic Preservation - Life Member.
- National Wildlife Federation - Member.
- The Nature Conservancy - Member.
- New York Zoological Society - Trustee, Chairman.
- Palisades Interstate Park Commission - President.
- Save-the-Redwoods League - Life Member.
- The Wildlife Conservation Society - Chairman.
- World Wildlife Fund - Member.

## Mary and Laurance Rockefellers' Billings Farm and the Farm & Museum

May 26, 2010

in [Woodstock](#)



In 1934, Mary French, a granddaughter of Frederick Billings, and Laurance Rockefeller were married in the old white Congregational Church in Woodstock. Mary had grown up spending summers in Woodstock, living in the mansion, and roaming the Mount Tom forest on her pony. With their marriage, Laurance adopted Woodstock as his summer home, and as the years passed his affection for the Vermont town grew. Woodstock became one of his important conservation interests, and in many respects, Laurance Rockefeller's activities in Woodstock became a microcosm of his conservation career.

### Rockefeller Makes an Impact on his Adopted Hometown

After Mary French Rockefeller's mother, Mary Montagu Billings French, died in 1951, Mary Rockefeller came to own the mansion and its forested surroundings. Through the 1950s, Mary and Laurance Rockefeller remodeled the house, grounds, and outbuildings, creating a more livable space while respecting its Victorian detail and furnishings as an expression of their sense of the house's heritage. This was affirmed in June of 1967, when Lady Bird Johnson visited Woodstock to dedicate the mansion as a National Historic Landmark.

Laurance Rockefeller said that his interest in Woodstock flowed simply from the fact that it was Mary's home – his active participation in the shaping of Woodstock's future grew as a natural consequence of their shared interests and their love of the outdoors. He saw the dangers that unwise development could pose for Woodstock, and drawing upon his experience in conservation and preservation elsewhere, he worked to guide the town in environmentally sound directions. He firmly believed that landscape and townscape must be considered together – that one could not be preserved without the other.

With this philosophy in mind, he purchased and replaced the aging Woodstock Inn, greatly improving the country club and ski areas and making the Woodstock Resort Corporation a mainstay of the economic health of the community, while helping to preserve the ambiance of the small New England town. In one of Laurance's greatest gifts to the community, he funded the underground routing of electrical and telephone wires throughout the village, greatly enhancing Woodstock's historical and aesthetic appearance. At the same time, he protected the village by acquiring many acres of open space to assure their preservation. Laurance Rockefeller's activities in Woodstock put into practice the conservation agenda that he had helped the nation embrace, combined with

his personal affection for the community, its history, and the heritage of Mary's family. In 1974 he purchased the farm from the Billings Dairy.

In 1968 Mary and Laurance Rockefeller had created the Woodstock Foundation, Inc., as a philanthropic vehicle for furthering the betterment of Woodstock. Laurance later described the foundation's objectives as follows: Through the Woodstock Foundation, it is my hope, in the broadest sense, to help preserve the environment and historical integrity of Woodstock, and more specifically the Billings Family heritage that has been so important to the community for more than 100 years.

The foundation's activities were intended to "add to the balance of Woodstock and have a beneficial effect on the long-term economic vitality and stability of the community." Primary objectives would include the preservation of open space, the preservation of the historical values of rural Vermont, the expansion of the outdoor recreational opportunities that are inherent in the natural beauty of the Woodstock area, the encouragement of the best practices of forest management, and the creation of broad educational values of benefit to Vermonters as well as visitors to the area.

In 1972 the Woodstock Foundation launched the Vermont Folklife Project with a mission of collecting, studying, and preserving the rapidly vanishing remnants of traditional farm life in the region of East Central Vermont. This vision resonated with Laurance Rockefeller's perception of the special human values of traditional Vermont culture – values that included a self-reliant work ethic, a close human relationship with the land, and a farm family-based sense of husbandry. With the 1974 re-acquisition of the farm, the folklife project became the precursor of a new farm museum that would interpret rural Vermont farm culture around 1890 as well as the Billings Farm itself.

In the 1970s and 1980s, under the leadership of farm manager Bob Lord, Billings Farm regained its national preeminence as a championship breeder of Jersey dairy cows. At the same time, between 1980 and 1983 the upper group of farm buildings were adapted as exhibition galleries for the Billings Farm & Museum. In June 1983 Mary and Laurance Rockefeller formally opened the Billings Farm & Museum. A quarter century later, and after more than a million visitors, the museum is recognized as among the nation's premier farm museums. Situated at an operating dairy farm, the museum has a dual mission of education and preservation. As an educational museum it collects, cares for, and interprets the heritage and values of the Billings Farm and of the surrounding region of rural Vermont, and it also preserves the Billings Farm as a significant landscape and a historic place. As an important cultural institution, it has become a "gateway to Vermont's rural heritage."

The creation of the museum gave an educational purpose to the historic Billings Farm. As the museum evolved, the farm increasingly came to be thought of as a historic place. In the late 1980s the museum restored the farm's 1890 Farm House, a pivotal part of Frederick Billings's progressive farm. The creation of Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park in the 1990s underscored the national significance of the mansion and the Mount Tom forest, as well as the farm, and the independently owned and operated Billings Farm & Museum became its National Park's operating partner.

Toward the end of his long life, Laurance Rockefeller commented that, for him, the impulse for conservation was rooted in a humanistic desire to help fellow humans find and do those things that would enhance their healthy relationship with their environment. He believed that places of natural beauty, heritage, aesthetic value, and recreational opportunity had the power to inspire and lift the human spirit. Mary French Rockefeller died in 1997, and Laurance Spelman Rockefeller died in 2004, but their spirits can be found all around forested hills, farm meadows, and historic streetscapes of Woodstock, at the Billings Farm, in the National Park, at the Inn, and in the village that they loved.