

THE ROCKEFELLER
UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE PROGRAM:
*AN EVOLUTION
OF EXCELLENCE*



by David Rockefeller

AN EVOLUTION OF EXCELLENCE

*The following remarks were delivered
by David Rockefeller
Chairman of the Executive Committee, The Rockefeller University
on the occasion of the
25th Anniversary of the Conferring of Degrees at
The Rockefeller University
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THIS FIRST reunion of The Rockefeller University alumni—25 years after the initial graduation ceremony—is one of the more special days in my long and happy association with the institution.

I may well have been a habitu  of this campus for longer than anyone else at this gathering. Someone may challenge me on that, but my parents brought me here when I was a small boy, more than 60 years ago, so I think my bet is pretty safe. In fact, my family and I came here quite often in those early days.

Some of you may have heard the story about how my older brothers, Nelson and Laurance, had their first experience in entrepreneurship. During a visit to the animal laboratories, they learned of the heavy demand for rabbits and decided it might be a good idea to raise some and then sell them to the Institute. They thus bought a pair of rabbits and soon discovered what many other people also have—that rabbits reproduce rather rapidly. Consequently, they created a thriving enterprise, and learned some fundamentals about both biology and business.

A Lasting Family Commitment

Learning from our visits was true of all of us, and this institution has, I believe, been closer to our family than any other with which my grandfather or father was involved. Indeed, four generations of the family have been active in the Institute's and then the University's affairs—first my grandfather, then my father, then I, and, more recently, two of my children. My daughter Neva is now on the board and, before her, so was my son David. In addition, my brother John was on the board for some time.

On this anniversary occasion, I would like to relate some of the experiences

that ultimately led to the establishment of this wonderful Rockefeller University Graduate Program.

My own involvement began in 1940, after I had graduated from Harvard and then the University of Chicago, when Father asked me if I would go on the board of the Institute. Before very long, however, I went into the war. So it wasn't really until late 1945 that I began to be more active as a Rockefeller trustee.

The Institute then had two governing bodies. One was the Board of Trustees, which managed the financial and administrative affairs of the University, and of which Father was president. The other was the Board of Scientific Directors, which oversaw the scientific activities of the institution, and which was headed by Dr. Herbert Gasser, the director of the Institute. Dr. Gasser had won a Nobel Prize for his research in neurophysiology.

It was an inspiration for me to be able to work with Father in his capacity as president, and this was the only organization that he led on which I served as a member of the board. I had an opportunity to observe first-hand the meticulous and caring way in which he followed the affairs of the Institute and the businesslike manner in which he presided at meetings.

In 1950, Father decided to retire from the Institute and I was asked to become president. I continued in that capacity until 1975, first with the Institute and then later, under the new title of chairman of the board, with the University.

Dr. Gasser still was the director of the Institute when I became president. Unfortunately, however, he was not well and it became clear that we would shortly have to find another director. Indeed, Dr. Gasser's health soon deteriorated even more and we asked Dr. Tom Rivers—whom many of you may

remember as head of the hospital — to serve as acting director of the program.

The following year, 1951, also was to be the Institute's 50th anniversary, so it seemed to me, as a young upstart, that it would make sense to take a good hard look at the institution. This, I thought, should include a thorough review of its accomplishments, of where it stood in relation to comparable institutions in this country and around the world, and of where it ought to be going in the future. Consequently, we put together a special policy and review committee to make recommendations for the future. Once this was done, we felt we could better determine what sort of qualifications we would want in a new director.

The Institute's Early Years

Father had often talked about the early days and the founding of the Institute, and what I learned from him helped greatly in setting a context for the review.

Dr. Frederick Gates, that remarkable Baptist preacher who was a great *friend and colleague of my grandfather, was the person who advised Grand-*father that it would be desirable to establish an institution of this sort. Dr. Gates had read widely on medicine, on medical schools, and on infectious diseases. As a result, he became convinced that the quality of instruction, and particularly research, in the medical schools in this country was not as good as it was in Europe. He believed that we would be better off if scientific investigation could be more closely combined with instruction in the medical schools.

At the same time, Dr. Gates was very conscious that the world was being ravaged by numerous infectious diseases. Obviously, he felt, it would be an

enormous contribution to mankind if it were possible to determine the causes of those diseases and find cures for them.

Dr. Gates's proposal to my grandfather for the establishment of an institute for medical research in the United States was intended to combine the dual goals of better research and the conquest of infectious diseases. Grandfather, in turn, passed on the proposal to my father, who had just joined my grandfather's office at 26 Broadway. Father proceeded to put together the plans for the Institute with the help of a small group of distinguished physicians and scientists, including Dr. Simon Flexner, who subsequently became the first director of the Institute, and Dr. William Welch, dean of the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. The Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research was incorporated in 1901, and in 1903 the land here on the East River was purchased. Over the years, the Institute matured and flourished, first under the dynamic leadership of Dr. Flexner, and then under Dr. Gasser.

1950: A Year of Redefinition and Transition

By 1950, the Institute stood in the front rank of the world's scientific institutions, and young scientists trained in its laboratories were to be found in research institutes and universities throughout the world. But, as Father and others with whom I talked pointed out, many of the original objectives for the institute had been accomplished. Medical schools in this country *had* introduced research in their programs, and cures *had* been found for many of the infectious diseases that had been so elusive and devastating. These facts underscored the importance and timeliness of the policy and review committee we appointed to examine the future and search for a new director.

This group at the onset decided to explore every possibility—including even the possibility of turning the endowment over to other research institutions and going out of business. Its members came from both the board of trustees and the board of scientific directors, and we asked Dr. Detlev Bronk, then president of Johns Hopkins University and also a member of our Board of Scientific Directors, to be chairman. Other members included Dr. George Whipple, the distinguished dean of the University of Rochester Medical School, and Dr. A. Raymond Dochez, another member of the Board of Scientific Directors. Dr. Dochez was a renowned professor at the Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons.

On the lay side, we included Dr. Lindsley Kimball, an executive vice president of The Rockefeller Foundation, who had previously helped the Institute evaluate the desirability of consolidating a Princeton facility into New York. Thomas Debevoise, who was the Institute's counsel and a close associate of my father for many years participated in the meetings. His son Whitney, one of the founders of Debevoise & Plimpton, the well-known law firm, also served on the Rockefeller Institute's board.

Finally, we asked Barklie Henry, a very able man who was active in the Institute for Advanced Studies in Princeton, and Donald David, who was the dean of the Harvard Business School. He also was a trustee and had been a close associate of Father. These, together with myself, completed the group. To staff the committee, Det Bronk recruited a young medical researcher, Dr. W. Farnsworth Loomis.

The committee held, over a period of a year and a half, at least eight major meetings, which lasted from seven to eight hours each. We would gather in the middle of the afternoon and continue through dinner, well into the eve-

ning. To gain perspective we continually sought the judgment and opinions of well-informed people in this country and around the world. In many cases, members of the committee would interview them. In other cases, Dr. Loomis would do so. In the case of individuals who were especially knowledgeable and imaginative, we would ask them to come and join us at our meetings. Many very interesting and challenging ideas were put forward and vigorously discussed. It was a fascinating process.

*Det Bronk, the Birth of the Graduate Program,
and Other Initiatives*

As time went on, it became clear that the person who had the sharpest vision of where the Institute ought to be going was Dr. Bronk himself. Many of the best ideas were initiated by him, including, importantly, the introduction of a graduate degree program.

There had been, of course, postdoctoral fellows from the beginning who always had made very vital contributions. Dr. Bronk was convinced, however, that a younger group of really outstanding students, working with our remarkable faculty, would create a synergy and excitement that would add to the enrichment of all concerned. He also felt that there was insufficient interaction among the independent laboratories, and perhaps a little too much of an ivory tower mentality. He believed that the creation of more of a university campus atmosphere, including the catalytic impact of the new students, would promote better communication among the members of the laboratories.

A second very constructive suggestion of Dr. Bronk was to combine the Board of Trustees and the Board of Scientific Directors. One of the things we

found, somewhat to our astonishment, was that each of these two bodies felt the other was in charge. The trustees felt that the scientific directors were really running the Institute and that, therefore, all they had to do was to make sure that the funds were well invested. On the other hand, the scientific directors thought the trustees were fully responsible, and that they only needed to give wise advice from time to time. This blurring of responsibility meant that the Institute's director had little guidance or oversight. Fortunately, we had had a series of very brilliant directors, but this obviously was not a sound long-term administrative policy.

A third proposal made by Dr. Bronk was to expand the diversity of subjects taught at the Institute. In particular, he wanted to include the behavioral sciences, as well as mathematics, philosophy, and physics. Biomedical sciences would remain the primary areas of study and research, but these additional disciplines would enhance the overall institution.

Finally, the committee as a whole recommended seeking new sources of funding. Up to that point, the income from the endowment provided by my grandfather had supported all the activities of the Institute, but, with rising costs and expanding activities, we could no longer expect endowment income to be sufficient. We needed to seek additional funds both from government and from outside private sources.

Today, we clearly couldn't possibly survive on the income from the endowment alone. Even though the endowment and the income on it have grown substantially over the years, only something between a quarter and a third of the total requirements of the University now come from that source. The timing of our 1950 decision turned out to be propitious, since it coincided with the formation of the National Institutes of Health and the National

Science Foundation. For the first time, the government was in a position to make available substantial funds for pure research.

Det Bronk as President

Coming to these recommendations had involved an elaborate and time-consuming process, but that process had itself created strong support for them. The question now was implementation. Nor surprisingly, everyone concluded that Dr. Bronk's ideas were so good that he was the right person to put them into action. I was given the task of recruiting him to head the Institute.

I invited Dr. Bronk to come down and have lunch with me at the Chase Bank. I then told him I thought that he had done a remarkable job in presiding over the committee, that we felt his ideas were the right ones, that we were adopting them, and that it was only right for him to leave Johns Hopkins and become president of The Rockefeller University! Happily, he agreed to do so, and he joined us a few months later.

Dr. Bronk brought with him from Johns Hopkins three distinguished investigators—Dr. Frank Brink, Dr. Clarence Connelly, and Dr. Keffer Hartline. They all played key roles in the evolution of the Institute into the University.

Dr. Brink, a dedicated and outstanding scientist and administrator, became the first dean of students. Dr. Connelly worked very ably in the graduate program first with Dr. Brink and later with Dr. James Hirsch when he became dean. Now, of course, Dr. Connelly is himself in charge of the graduate program.

The contribution of Dr. Keffer Hartline, the third associate Dr. Bronk

brought with him, was a great one, and we all felt honored when he received the Nobel Prize while here. He died in 1983, eight years after Dr. Bronk.

Another invaluable collaborator of Dr. Bronk's at Rockefeller was Mabel Bright, who had assisted both Dr. Rivers and Dr. Horsfall at the Institute before Dr. Bronk's arrival. Her contribution to the Institute and then the University is something that only a very few people really know about and understand. Mabel worked with Det as his alter ego in everything he did and was most particularly involved in the student program. Dr. Bronk set a fast pace, but Mabel was more than a match for him. When the president's office was located in Flexner Hall, for instance, she saved time by traveling to and from Founder's Hall by way of a shortcut along an outside window ledge!

We are all delighted that the "den mother" of the graduate student program will be presented with a well-deserved honorary degree.

New Programs Mean New Facilities

As Dr. Bronk and his team implemented the graduate program and other new concepts, a great many things happened at the Institute—some of which were physical, some academic.

On the physical side, a major building program was required in order to achieve the goals that Dr. Bronk envisioned. To help with this, we enlisted a very remarkable architect, Wallace K. Harrison, who had been largely responsible for the development of Rockefeller Center, the United Nations headquarters, the Metropolitan Opera, and later the Albany Mall. Wally Harrison was a man of great simplicity, but also of great taste and imagination. He and Det worked closely together to determine what buildings were needed and where they should be built.

One dramatic result was Caspary Hall, including the auditorium we are in today. There was no place previously where we could meet for any occasion such as this one, and Caspary has also provided conference spaces and executive offices convenient to the center of the campus.

Det also felt that the president of the Institute ought to live on campus so he could be involved on a day-to-day basis in its activities. As a result, Wally Harrison designed the president's house. With its view overlooking the river, it is one of the most attractive houses in New York City, and, in my opinion, one of Harrison's most successful works of architecture.

In addition, there was a need for a social center for faculty and students, as well as for guest rooms for visiting scholars. This new facility, funded by my father, was named Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Hall after my mother, who had taken a great interest in the Institute during her lifetime. She was responsible, among other things, for the children's gardens in the earlier days of the Institute.

Dr. Bronk felt it was important that those students who would like to should be able to live on campus. So we built the Graduate Students' Residence and a little later Sophie Fricke Hall. These facilities stimulated interaction between students and professors, as did the creation of the faculty and student club in Abby Hall. Finally, we built a new laboratory building at the south end of the central walk which, on the recommendation of Dr. Fred Seitz, was subsequently named for Dr. Bronk, and a smaller laboratory building named for Dr. Gasser.

A Setting of Beauty: Outside and Inside

Along with the new buildings, we thought the people working here should have as pleasant and stimulating surroundings as possible. We thus asked a remarkable man named Dan Kiley, a marvelous landscape architect, to come and develop the gardens and fountains. As a result, I believe this campus is one of the most beautiful spots in this city, where the architecture of two different eras is harmoniously blended by flowers and greenery.

Within the new buildings—and this was at least partly due to the influence of my mother, who had been one of the founders of the Museum of Modern Art—it seemed to me that we ought to have representative paintings and sculptures from the then budding and very important New York School of Abstract Expressionism. At the end of World War II, the United States and specifically New York for the first time blazed a trail with a new school of painting which the rest of the world was following.

We thus asked Alfred Barr, who was then the director of painting and sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art, and his wonderful assistant, Dorothy Miller, to select paintings for our new buildings. Dorothy Miller continues to advise us to this day. I'm not sure that everyone likes every one of the paintings we bought, but I think they have grown on a lot of people.

Early Graduate Classes, Becoming a University and 25 Years of Achievement

In tandem with the new facilities came the development of the core of the new graduate program itself—faculty, curriculum, and, most importantly, students—leading to the first graduates in 1959.

Of all the things that Dr. Bronk did, the one that he cared about most and

which he felt made the greatest contribution was the graduate program. From the early days until his retirement, he wrote letters each year to the presidents of 20 or 30 major universities in this country, and around the world, asking them to suggest two or three students who they thought were most outstanding. Dr. Bronk then personally interviewed each and every individual whose name was sent in.

This personal involvement on his part was surely one reason the program was so successful right from the beginning. He wasn't satisfied just to pick the candidates, he also kept in very close touch with them while they were here. One almost always found students on hand when visiting his house, and you could be sure that he knew them all by their first names. He also seemed to know all, or at least nearly all, of the things that they were doing. His annual Christmas dinner and dance was another great means of getting people together. My wife Peggy and I frequently attended these events where we had a chance to meet students, many of whom we have kept in touch with ever since.

As the graduate program grew in substance, Dr. Bronk felt it justified changing the name from The Rockefeller Institute to The Rockefeller University. True, we didn't grant undergraduate degrees, but then neither, he argued, did the universities of the Middle Ages which also were highly specialized. The change seemed quite reasonable to all concerned, and in 1965 the name "The Rockefeller University" officially came into being to reflect the changes that actually began in 1954 when the charter was revised.

Dr. Bronk continued to guide the evolution and growth of the graduate program until his retirement in 1968. From that time until his death in 1975, he was able to see the course he had set kept true through the able and dedi-

cated efforts of Dr. Fred Seitz. Dr. Seitz served as president during ten years of difficult financial constraints, but never lessened the institution's emphasis on excellence in graduate education. He also established a joint M.D.-Ph.D. program in cooperation with Cornell Medical College through which highly qualified graduate fellows interested in research can obtain both degrees in six years. Dr. Seitz remains an active and valued member of our campus community.

Let me conclude with just a few statistics that demonstrate how remarkable the results have been from the program started by Dr. Bronk and continued by his able successors.

There are currently 430 graduates of Rockefeller, coming originally from 36 states and 15 other nations. They are now working in 111 universities, 30 hospitals, and 30 research institutions. Moreover, within 10 or 15 years of the graduation of the first students, two individuals were awarded the Nobel prize. This seems to me to indicate that Dr. Bronk did a pretty good job in his picking. I am sure it would have given him great satisfaction to know that those two gentlemen are speaking on the program today. I refer, of course, to Gerald Edelman and David Baltimore. And he would be very pleased, as well, by the splendid work of our current president, Joshua Lederberg, another Nobel Laureate.

Given this background, you can understand why I'm so happy to be here with all of you. For my part, I would just like to express my own personal appreciation and that of my family for your presence, for what you are doing, for the contribution that you've made through your lives, and for what you have done outside to enhance the prestige of the Institution.

I also would like to pay special tribute to Det Bronk, to whom we owe so

much, and who I know would be thrilled to see so many graduates and friends here today. I am very happy that his two sons, Adrian and Mitchell, are with us, since they were very much involved in the evolutionary process I have described, along with their dear and devoted mother, Helen, who was a loyal supporter of everything Det did.

From the conferring of five graduate degrees 25 years ago to this week's reunion and convocation, the journey from Institute to University has been a great adventure. I am elated and honored—as I am sure you must be as well—to be able to continue to participate in this most rewarding process of the evolution of excellence.

DR PAUL . F CRANFIELD