

**PARTNERS IN HOUSING REFORM: THE APARTMENT DEVELOPMENTS  
OF JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER, JR., CHARLES O. HEYDT, AND ANDREW J.  
THOMAS**

By Kenneth W. Rose

Assistant Director  
Rockefeller Archive Center  
15 Dayton Avenue  
Sleepy Hollow, New York 10591-1598

[rosek@rockefeller.edu](mailto:rosek@rockefeller.edu)

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John D. Rockefeller, Jr. is known for many accomplishments – for developing Rockefeller Center, for example; for restoring Colonial Williamsburg, and for his support of conservation and the national parks across America. He is not well known as a housing reformer. Yet in the 1920s, Rockefeller and his real estate advisor, Charles O. Heydt, formed an unusual partnership with the architect Andrew J. Thomas, built around Thomas's pioneering ideas about the “garden apartment.” Heydt brought together Rockefeller money and Thomas's ideas about tenement reform to build experimental model housing projects in Bayonne, New Jersey, in the Bronx, in Harlem, and in North

Tarrytown (now Sleepy Hollow), the small town near the Rockefeller estate in Westchester County.

With the exception of Rockefeller's friend and biographer, Raymond Fosdick, and a few scholars who have written about the Harlem project, Rockefeller's housing efforts have attracted little attention. Fosdick has described how JDR Jr. entered the field of housing as a business experiment to demonstrate that attractive, comfortable, and affordable housing could be made available at a profit to the developer of about 6%.<sup>1</sup> The historian Gilbert Osofsky, writing about the Harlem project, has noted that Rockefeller's approach was a throwback to "the nineteenth-century 'limited dividend' tradition" of housing reform.<sup>2</sup> But Fosdick's brief summary of Rockefeller's housing projects and Osofsky's focus on a single project obscure both the scope of the partnership between the philanthropist and the architect, and the reformist nature of their efforts. Thomas sought to promote his garden apartment plan as well as the cooperative plan for apartment ownership, which he viewed as both a tangible benefit for the owner and as a method of financing construction on a large scale. Convinced of the merits of the garden apartment design and the value of cooperative ownership and financing, Heydt used Rockefeller money as a form of passive philanthropy to bolster the marketplace in an attempt to prove that an investment in modern, efficient apartment houses for working families could earn an acceptable return. Moreover, Heydt and other key Rockefeller advisors hoped that successful demonstration projects would inspire other public-spirited men of wealth to follow Rockefeller's lead and undertake housing projects in sufficient numbers to thwart the growing movement toward state involvement in housing.

The result was an odd three-way partnership of unequals, or, rather, two partnerships involving three people – the brash and idealistic Andrew Thomas and Charles Heydt on the one hand, and business-minded Charles Heydt and the philanthropic John D. Rockefeller, Jr., on the other hand. Thomas had the ideas and the designs; Rockefeller had the money and thus the ability to turn plans into reality, and Heydt had the experience, the access, and the persuasive ability to bring the designer and the financier together. In fact, the archival records indicate that Rockefeller and Thomas had very little personal contact during their partnership – all communication, it seems, passed through Heydt. This was not an unusual arrangement in Rockefeller’s relationship with people whose work he funded, but it may have been partly a strategic arrangement on Heydt’s part. In a letter of reference for him in 1936, Heydt described Thomas as “a very active man but somewhat temperamental,” a man who “some times antagonizes the people with whom he is working by his brusque, curt manner.”<sup>3</sup> Perhaps Heydt realized that Rockefeller would not respond well to Thomas’s personality and style and created a distance between the two men in order to preserve the working relationship.

The partnership between the three men certainly produced results. Between 1923 and 1930, Thomas designed and built eight projects for Rockefeller, seven in the New York City area, and one in Cleveland. (See Table I).

**TABLE 1**  
**ANDREW J. THOMAS PROJECTS FOR JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER, JR.<sup>4</sup>**

<u>Project</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Opened</u>	<u># Units</u>
Bayonne Housing Corp.	E. 11 <sup>th</sup> , E. 12 <sup>th</sup> & Ave. E Bayonne, NJ	1924-1925	149
Avenue A (Rockefeller Institute employees)	York Avenue between 65 <sup>th</sup> & 66 <sup>th</sup>	1925	
Thomas Garden Apartments	840 Grand Concourse, Bronx	1927	166
Paul Laurence Dunbar Apartments	149 <sup>th</sup> & 150 <sup>th</sup> at 7 <sup>th</sup> & 8 <sup>th</sup> Harlem	1928	511
C.G. Gunther's & Sons (Furs; Commercial rental)	666 Fifth Avenue	1929	
Van Tassel Apartments	North Tarrytown (Sleepy Hollow)	1930	241
Lavoisier Apartments	115 East 67 <sup>th</sup> & 116 East 68 <sup>th</sup> Streets	1931	54
Forest Hill Homes	East Cleveland/ Cleveland Heights, Ohio	1930	81 houses

Some of these were purely commercial endeavors, but others, such as the Bayonne project and especially the Thomas Garden Apartments and the Dunbar Apartments, were expressly viewed as experimental demonstration projects to prove the validity of Thomas's design ideas and the viability of the cooperative ownership plan, and to stimulate other men of wealth to build similar projects.

The central figure in this partnership was Charles O. Heydt, Rockefeller's long-time advisor. Heydt has recently been partially resurrected from historical obscurity by Daniel Okrent's book on Rockefeller Center, *Great Fortune*. Heydt was more than

Rockefeller's real estate agent, as Okrent shows. Heydt had entered the work force as an office boy at age 14 in 1890, and he had been hired into the Rockefeller offices as a stenographer on October 2, 1897, the day after JDR Jr. himself began work there. The genial but hard-working Heydt soon was the confidential secretary for John D. Rockefeller and his wife, and he was tapped for several special assignments, including accompanying family members on trips. By 1905 he was JDR Jr.'s personal secretary and, as Okrent argues, "his closest business associate." When JDR Jr. traveled to the Colorado coal fields in 1915 to investigate conditions after the Ludlow massacre, Heydt was the only member of the family staff to accompany him. Professionally, as Okrent suggests, the two men "grew up together" and JDR Jr. "extended to Heydt a degree of trust that" he afforded no other staff member. Over the years Heydt became "a real estate specialist, a capable negotiator of leases and terms of sale," but until the 1920s he was "a real estate specialist in an office barely concerned with real estate." But in the 1920s that changed dramatically and Heydt's workload – and, I would suggest, his ambition -- increased substantially. He was the person responsible for assembling the properties that would become Colonial Williamsburg; he was JDR Jr.'s "field general" in what Okrent describes as "the various Battles of 54<sup>th</sup> Street" in Manhattan to preserve the value of the Rockefeller homes there; and, as Okrent shows in detail, it was Heydt's foresight and real estate savvy that was responsible for John D. Rockefeller, Jr.'s involvement in what would become Rockefeller Center. "It is not entirely far-fetched to suggest," Okrent writes, "that Junior was pulled into developing Rockefeller Center because a member of his staff wanted to enhance the value of the family's holdings in the neighborhood."<sup>5</sup>

The archival record suggests that Charles Heydt also shaped Rockefeller's role in housing reform.

Andrew J. Thomas first came to the attention of Heydt and Rockefeller in early 1923. At the time Thomas was a relatively unknown architect with some novel ideas about improving urban housing. But his star was on the rise. Described in one magazine profile as “a rootin’, tootin’ nonconformist, a rebel who hoots at custom and practice,” Thomas portrayed himself as a largely self-made man and a self-taught architect. Thomas was a native New Yorker, born on Broadway, which may have given him a sense of dramatic flair, for Heydt would later complain about “Thomas’s tendency to exaggerate . . . in all . . . things.” His father had sold diamonds and oil paintings, but Thomas’s schooling in a “fashionable military academy” ended abruptly at age 12 when his parents died within months of one another. He worked as an errand boy before heading for California, where he worked a series of odd jobs before returning to New York at 16, going to work in real estate, collecting rent and showing apartments to prospective tenants. The five years he spent thus employed constituted his education in the human needs of tenement dwellers, he would later argue. Lured to Alaska briefly by gold fever in 1897, Thomas returned to New York and entered the building business, and over the next ten years he began to design houses and apartment buildings.<sup>6</sup> In the early 1920s Thomas was engaged to develop a six-block apartment complex in Queens for the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. When that project was completed in 1924, Thomas proclaimed that his goal was “to abolish every slum in New York City” with the help of charitable organizations and the state.<sup>7</sup> In Charles O. Heydt, Thomas found a kindred spirit and a future partner.

Thomas was introduced to the Rockefeller circle in January 1923 through Winthrop Aldrich, JDR Jr.'s brother-in-law, who sent Heydt a letter of introduction for one of Thomas's associates, Monroe D. Robinson, "a nephew of President Roosevelt and a very nice fellow" who represented the engineering and contracting firm of T.C. Desmond & Company.<sup>8</sup> Thomas was looking for land on which to erect a model building to demonstrate the validity of his housing ideas and his cost estimates, and he had his eye on land that Rockefeller owned on the East River by the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research. Heydt did not think that was a feasible site for a housing project, but he soon suggested another idea: building two apartment houses for employees of the Institute. Thomas drew up plans, but that project was delayed amid concerns about the Institute's legal standing to construct an apartment building.<sup>9</sup> This project would later re-emerge as the Avenue A project.

Nevertheless, Heydt was captivated by Thomas's progressive ideas about architecture and his reformist zeal, and he soon involved Thomas in an effort the Rockefellers had been interested in for a number of years. Heydt "thinks [Thomas is] quite an extraordinary man," JDR Jr. wrote to C.J. Hicks of the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey on January 27, 1923. Since 1915, Hicks and officials of other industrial firms in Bayonne, New Jersey had been concerned about the poor housing situation for their workers, and Rockefeller was writing to Hicks to suggest that he meet with Thomas. In January 1924 Thomas was commissioned by the Bayonne Housing Corporation to design and supervise construction of five garden apartments for Bayonne wage-earners, and in 1925 these apartments opened for occupancy. The leaders of the Bayonne experiment were so pleased with the results that they trumpeted Thomas's ideas in a

booklet entitled *Industrial Housing*, crediting Thomas as the author.<sup>10</sup>

By 1925, with two significant projects completed, Thomas was beginning to enjoy much wider publicity for his housing ideas. A series of articles in the *Evening World* gave wide circulation to a study in which Thomas insisted that his garden apartments could replace the slums at rents of “\$10 a month or less per room and still yield the builder a fair return on his investment.” Thomas had studied the buildings and living conditions in a four-block area of New York City bounded by Grand, Delancey, Chrystie and Eldridge streets, home to 1,003 families who lived in 3,399 rooms covering 81% of the land area. The crux of Thomas’s argument was that his building design of 20 apartment houses of six stories each would provide more rooms (4,230) to house more families (1,012), giving each family its own bathroom, while using only 52% of the land area. The garden apartment design permitted more open construction that let in air, light, and sun and provided more green spaces for recreation and leisure.<sup>11</sup> Thomas’s ideas were gaining not only a wider circulation but more credence as well among influential people in policy-making circles. In May 1924, Kenneth Chorley, another of Rockefeller’s advisors, interviewed various men involved with the housing situation and wrote a memorandum that quoted heavily from Thomas’s work. “It is evident that ‘slum clearance’, at least in New York, and the building of modern tenements on the same land . . . depends principally upon three things,” Chorley reported: “1) large production, 2) [the] cost of land and [the] ability to assemble large areas of land, and 3) [the availability of a] large amount of capital at reasonable rates of interest.”<sup>12</sup>

John D. Rockefeller, Jr., of course, had the kind of money that could carry out housing projects on a large scale; he could afford large tracts of land, and he could be



flexible in his expectations on rates of return. Heydt explained their philosophy toward the use of Rockefeller money as a sort of passive philanthropy in developing housing. “The only philanthropy . . . which enters into our housing enterprises is that we waive commissions, fees and charges of one kind or another over and above actual costs, and we keep our interest charges down to a reasonable basis. . . .; in other words, we do not make any gift, but we allow the use of our money for a flat 6% net charge and also give our services free of charge.” Although Rockefeller and his advisors always portrayed their housing work as business endeavors and not philanthropy, this certain softness to the business approach tended to encourage the expectation that the philanthropic motive might assert itself in times of economic distress or hardship. Indeed, other people’s expectations and varying attitudes toward what might seem “reasonable” was one source of criticism. If your reputation as a philanthropist precedes you – if you are known for your generosity and your wealth – when and how do you revert to business principles without just appearing to be stingy and cheap?

By May 1925, Rockefeller’s advisors, led by Charles Heydt, were prepared to advocate that a portion of Rockefeller’s wealth be used to influence the direction of work and public policy in the housing field. Heydt had learned from another Rockefeller advisor, Colonel Arthur Woods, that “there is underway at the present time a serious effort to bring about State aid for housing projects on a large scale, in the form of subsidies, exemption from taxation, direct loans, and even construction by the State.” These developments were alarming. “We think all such efforts [are] economically unsound, and likely to do a great deal of harm to the workingman himself,” Heydt

argued. “It is certain that the carrying out of such policies will mean abuse and waste and graft and very large increases in taxes.”<sup>13</sup>

So serious was the situation that action was needed to forestall state involvement. “We believe that a demonstration should be made of some plan which would attract attention and possibly point the way to a different solution to the problem,” Heydt wrote. “Such a plan we believe to be that of apartments to be sold on a co-operative basis to workingmen.” This was no longer just a housing issue, but a political and economic issue: “There is no question,” Heydt asserted, “but that if the workingman has an equity in property and is directly affected by increases in assessments and taxes he will soon be giving much more attention to the government and want to have a better class of officials than those functioning at present in practically all the departments of the state and city administrations. It is needless to add that ownership of property will also prevent the spread of socialism and bolshevism.”<sup>14</sup>

Fortunately, an opportunity for action had presented itself. The success of Thomas’s Metropolitan Life buildings in Long Island City and the joint Rockefeller-Thomas projects in Bayonne and on Avenue A by the Rockefeller Institute had attracted the attention of labor leaders, Heydt reported, and the leaders of the Needle and Garment Workers Union had sought Thomas’s help in developing housing for their members. They had an option for a contract on a site in the Bronx and even had collected subscriptions for 170 apartments. But the union leaders were “timid about embarking on such a large project” in an unfamiliar field. In Heydt’s view, the justifiably “cautions and conservative” approach of the union leaders offered “just the opportunity for capital to assist the workingman by guiding and helping him to attain the object sought and to keep

it on a thoroughly sound and economic basis.” Heydt and Thomas had convinced other Rockefeller advisors of “the wisdom of the undertaking” and now laid out the facts and figures for Rockefeller himself. “There is no doubt that you can make a real contribution to the solution of the housing problem in such a demonstration as this,” Heydt wrote. “You would launch what we believe is a real movement which is economically sound, and get your money out of it within five or six years.”<sup>15</sup>

Rockefeller was concerned about forming a partnership with the unions and preferred to work independently. By late July the union had taken title to the land in the Bronx and had created the Labor Home Building Corporation to carry out the plan. But new cost projections indicated that the plan could not be completed for the estimate of \$15 per room, the price the leaders had quoted their members. With insufficient capital, the project was stalled. Heydt urged Rockefeller to finance the project with \$1,250,000 and to do so very publicly as a stimulus to other public-spirited men of wealth. Heydt wanted a number of men to take up the cause in order to prevent action in Albany. “The very point,” Heydt wrote, “is that it should be well advertised that you are making this experiment as a demonstration in the hope that others would take it up and extend the operation throughout the city and other cities. . . .In my opinion there are other rich men only waiting to be shown that the housing situation can be met by fair business arrangement and that there should not be any philanthropy about it.”<sup>16</sup>

Rockefeller refused to participate in the project as a partner with the unions, Heydt reported to Thomas, but he was willing to take over the project at cost, provided that “he is entirely free to carry out the enterprise on his own account and in his own way, and without any commitments” to the Labor Home Building Corporation. By the fall of

1925, agreements had been concluded and Rockefeller took over the development of what would become the Thomas Garden Apartments, located at 840 Mott Avenue in the Bronx. Even though the unions had withdrawn from the project, the prospectus for the Thomas Garden Apartments billed the project as one “Where Capital and Labor have Co-operated to Enable Working men and Women to Obtain Attractive Apartments at Moderate Cost.”<sup>17</sup>

The Thomas Garden Apartments were completed in early 1927, and offered 166 apartments for sale. By April 1927, more than half (85) had been sold. Sales soon slowed, however, and in early July 1927, Heydt reported that sales were so slow that management was contemplating renting the unsold units. Heydt reported a vacancy rate of 12% in 1930, which he attributed to the boom in apartment construction in the region since 1927, to the cost of a down payment being more than the average working family could afford, and to the hostility of real estate agents, who steered clients away from cooperative buildings. But he also acknowledged dissatisfaction on the part of some tenant-owners because maintenance fees had been increased in an attempt to offset some of the deficit. He also noted the tendency of “the average person who has a slight equity in the building . . . [to] assume the role of dictator and fault-finder.” By late September 1930, twenty-five tenant owners had asked to withdraw from the cooperative plan and for return of their downpayments and accumulations, and Heydt sought to borrow money from Rockefeller to cover these expenses.<sup>18</sup> Rockefeller held on to the property into the fall of 1936. In February 1927, when his development company, the Empire Mortgage Company, sold the buildings to the Thomas Garden-Apartments, Inc. the price had been

\$1,400,000. On October 27, 1936, the Post-Orchard Corporation bought the buildings and property at a foreclosure sale for \$625,000.<sup>19</sup>

The Thomas Garden Apartments had been designed for working-class families. The next major housing experiment that the partnership undertook – the Paul Laurence Dunbar Apartments – was designed for the African American community in Harlem. The six buildings that Rockefeller built on the Ontario Field between 149th and 150th streets and Seventh and Eighth Avenues and Macombs Place contained 511 apartments when they were made available to tenants in February 1928. They constituted, in the words of one historian, “the most ambitious project for community improvement undertaken in the 1920s.”<sup>20</sup>

While all of the cooperative garden apartment complexes that Thomas built for Rockefeller had housing reform in mind, the Dunbar apartments were unique in that they embodied the further goal of community education and uplift. This goal for the project is evident in Rockefeller’s choice for the resident manager of the complex, Roscoe Conkling Bruce, a prominent former educator who promoted himself for this new position as the Booker T. Washington of Harlem.

Roscoe Conkling Bruce was born in Washington, D.C. on April 21, 1879, the only child of Blanche Kelso Bruce, who at the time was the United States Senator from Mississippi, and his wife, Josephine Willson Bruce, the daughter of a wealthy black doctor from Philadelphia. The younger Bruce was, in the words of his biographer, born into “America’s first black dynasty.” Educated in the segregated public schools of Washington and then at Phillips Exeter Academy, Bruce entered Harvard, where he graduated *magna cum laude* in 1902. From 1902 until 1906 he served as the director of

the academic department of Tuskegee Institute. In 1906 he was hired as supervising principal of the black schools in Washington, D.C., and the following year became assistant superintendent of the city's black schools, a position he held until 1921. Bruce's tenure in Washington was a rocky one, and he was forced to resign by parents and teachers angered by his elitism and his apparent contempt for lower-class and darker skinned blacks.<sup>21</sup>

Had Rockefeller bothered to look beyond Bruce's resumé, his cultured demeanor, and his recommendation from Mary Van Kleeck of the Russell Sage Foundation's Department of Industrial Relations,<sup>22</sup> he might not have hired such a controversial figure to manage the apartment complex. But he and his advisors were clearly taken in by Bruce's demeanor and bearing, despite his shameless self-promotion. In short, Bruce played to the paternalism of Rockefeller and Heydt. In lobbying Heydt for the job, Bruce sent him excerpts from a letter to a friend that reveals his disdain toward African-American intellectuals and his own aristocratic, patronizing attitude toward the masses of Harlem residents: "My wife and I . . . have abounding faith in the masses of our own people," he wrote, in direct contrast to the behavior that brought him trouble in Washington. "Quick to sense our emotional attitude toward them, they have always liked us and been eager to please us." Bruce contrasted his attitude with that of "the Negro intellectuals [who fail] to command any large following . . . due to their lack of nearness to the masses of their own people." He cast himself in the leadership mold of Booker T. Washington: "Now, it is the Booker T. Washington type of leadership which has always appealed to me and my wife," he wrote. "There is no such leadership in Harlem today. The intellectuals with their aristocratic airs and their distinct preference for the society of

white people, hold themselves aloof from the homes and churches and fraternal societies of the plain people of color. . . . [W]hat the masses of the colored people of Harlem need and desire is friendship. They have no prejudices against authentic culture. But they do hate condescension. With our eyes wide open to these things my gifted wife and I are really very eager for this unique opportunity. . . . I most earnestly hope and trust that we shall be given a chance to show what can be done with the materials at hand.”<sup>23</sup>

In another memo a month later, Bruce was more explicit about how the resident manager should approach “the materials at hand”: “The colored tenants have never had the chance that white people have, to master the fundamental arts of civilized living,” so that “the standards and habits of civilized living must be skillfully, patiently, sympathetically taught.” For this the resident manager would require “a really able assistant,” preferably a woman, since “this assistant must more or less mother the tenants while the Manager fathers them!” Not surprisingly, Bruce recommended his wife to be his assistant.<sup>24</sup>

Bruce and his wife were hired in August 1927. Bruce was responsible for the selection of tenants and for the operation of the buildings; his wife was to “be as helpful as she can in the development of a community spirit and in social service and other work . . . among the tenants.”<sup>25</sup> Bruce's pamphlet, “The Paul Laurence Dunbar Apartments of New York: An Adventure in Community Building,” describes the terms and conditions of tenancy he established, the process of selection he used, and the social services provided on the premises, including a nursery, the vocational placement service, and the health information service. Other Rockefeller housing developments offered as amenities such facilities as a supervised playground, an auditorium and meeting rooms, but none

offered the kind of social services that were available for the African American tenants of the Dunbar.

Bruce's biographer, Lawrence Otis Graham, credits the Bruces with bringing "elegance and sophistication to the Harlem community. Their weekly newsletter and their monthly teas, classes on parenting, home decorating, and proper etiquette all served to enhance the Dunbar's reputation." But another sad truth that Graham acknowledges was that "most of the apartment dwellers simply did not like Roscoe" and complained about the "'autocratic' manner in which he selected tenants and governed them after they moved into" the Dunbar. "Snobbish and elitist in almost every sense, he looked down on the black residents who lived in the development and elsewhere in Harlem. This reputation put him out of favor with local ministers, editors at the black-owned *Amsterdam News*, and other prominent blacks."<sup>26</sup>

The behavior and reputation of the resident managers had little to do with the ultimate fate of the Dunbar apartments, however. As both David Lewis and Gilbert Osofsky have shown, the Dunbar Apartments never became what their founder envisioned.<sup>27</sup> Prices remained too high for the vast majority of working-class blacks, and the white-collar tenant-owners were hit hard by the depression. Rockefeller and his advisors modified the terms of payment several times during the early 1930s to ease the burden on tenants, but by 1934 even the resident manager was in arrears, much to the consternation of the owners. In 1936 Rockefeller foreclosed on his mortgage on the complex, returned the tenant-owners' investments and made the buildings strictly rental units. He also dismissed Bruce, who had worn out his welcome. With the original



purpose gone and a new public housing project under construction nearby, Rockefeller sold the buildings to a private company in 1937.

After 1930, Rockefeller stopped building apartments, Thomas had moved on to other projects and was no longer part of the Rockefeller circle, and Charles O. Heydt was left to oversee the management of the properties as the economy worsened. The economic situation doomed the promise that Heydt had seen in these housing projects. Certainly the various housing projects that Rockefeller, Heydt and Thomas built were successful in terms of providing modern, efficient homes for families, even if they were not the financial successes that Heydt had predicted. Their joint projects certainly garnered publicity for Thomas, who received architectural awards for both the Thomas Garden Apartments and the Dunbar Apartments.<sup>28</sup> But they did not inspire many other public-spirited men of wealth to come forward with similar projects, certainly not in sufficient numbers to stop the movement toward state involvement in housing. Indeed, Governor Al Smith made personal overtures toward John D. Rockefeller, Jr., to encourage his work in the housing field and to solicit his support for state action. Smith's representatives invited JDR Jr. to be a member of the Advisory Committee of the State Board of Housing (he declined) and the governor met with Rockefeller on November 9, 1927 to encourage his work. Moreover, the governor's plan for a state housing bank seemed designed to further the kinds of private housing development that Rockefeller had undertaken. But Rockefeller's advisors, especially Charles Heydt, steadfastly opposed tax exemptions and other public financial incentives for and involvement in housing work.<sup>29</sup> On such political matters, Heydt and Thomas probably differed considerably, as Thomas sought support for his housing projects wherever he could find it.

Finally, this review of Rockefeller's work in housing highlights the important role that his advisors played in influencing Rockefeller's activities and shaping the projects in which he became involved. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. relied heavily on men such as Charles O. Heydt and others for information, ideas, and advice. As this case study shows, Heydt was an important actor in his own right and played a central and influential role in promoting Thomas's work and ideas, and in shaping the uses of Rockefeller's fortune.

## END NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Raymond B. Fosdick, *John D. Rockefeller, Jr.: A Portrait* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956), pp. 409-411.

<sup>2</sup> Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto, Negro New York 1890-1930* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966; paperback edition, 1968), pp. 156-157.

<sup>3</sup> Heydt to William J. Bradford, December 19, 1936, Housing 13: 117.

<sup>4</sup> Information from records in the “Business Interests” Series, “Housing Interests” Series, “Real Estate Interests” Series and “Rockefeller Boards” Series, in Record Group 2 Office of the Messrs Rockefeller, Rockefeller Family Archives, Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow New York. The list of Thomas projects for JDR Jr. is taken from a letter dated December 10, 1936 from Charles O. Heydt to William J. Bradford, in Housing Interests, folder 117, box 13. The final apartment building that the Rockefeller, Heydt and Thomas undertook was the Van Tassel Apartments in North Tarrytown (now Sleepy Hollow). The development, billed as “Westchester’s Most Prominent Apartment Building,” opened in January 1930 with 241 apartments, built at a cost of about \$2,400.00. For an overview of the Van Tassel Apartments, see Anke Voss-Hubbard, “John D. Rockefeller, Jr. and the Van Tassel Apartments,” *Rockefeller Archive Center Newsletter*, Fall 1997, pp. 12-14, accessible online from the Publications section of the RAC home page at <http://archive.rockefeller.edu/>

<sup>5</sup> Okrent, *Great Fortune*, pp. 45-49. On Heydt’s biography, see the obituary in the *New York Times*, January 6, 1958.

<sup>6</sup> Biographical information on Thomas from Jerome Beatty, “You Don’t Have to be Rich to Live in a Mansion,” *The American Magazine*, March 1931, pp. 68-69, 140, 143-144; a copy is located in Housing, box 13, folder 117; on Thomas’s tendency toward exaggeration, see Heydt to Colonel Arthur Woods, January 12, 1928, Housing box 13, folder 117. This tendency “has made me extremely careful in my dealings with him,” Heydt reported. “I certainly do not understand him.”

<sup>7</sup> See the obituary for Andrew J. Thomas in the *New York Times*, July 27, 1965. A copy is located in Housing 13: 117.

<sup>8</sup> Aldrich to Heydt, January 3, 1923 and Heydt to Aldrich, January 5, 1923, in Rockefeller Boards, box 48, folder 479.

<sup>9</sup> On the timing of their meeting, see JDR Jr. to Hicks, January 27, 1923; on the other details of events, see Heydt to Hicks, December 27, 1923, both in Business 133: 995.

<sup>10</sup> JDR Jr. to Hicks, January 27, 1923, Business 133: 995; Andrew J. Thomas, *Industrial Housing* (Bayonne, New Jersey: The Bayonne Housing Corporation, 1925.)

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<sup>11</sup> See the pamphlet “Garden Apartments to Replace Slums; A Series of Articles reprinted from The Evening World Showing How New York Can Profitably Build Low rental Homes on High Priced Land” (April 1924), in Housing, box 13, folder 117.

<sup>12</sup> Chorley memo to Colonel Arthur Woods, May 14, 1925, Housing box 10, folder 98.

<sup>13</sup> Heydt to Rockefeller, May 11, 1925, Housing box 12, folder 106.

<sup>14</sup> Heydt to Rockefeller, May 11, 1925, Housing box 12, folder 106. The idea of cooperative ownership seems also to have been one that the Rockefeller advisors borrowed from Andrew Thomas. In his “Plan for the Cooperative Ownership of Tenement Housing,” Thomas promoted cooperative ownership as an improvement in housing finance on a par with his “remarkable improvement in tenement design and economies.” He also saw political and social benefits in giving the working class an economic stake in the future: “Renting fills our congested cities with a nomadic, irresponsible population, who feel that they have no stake in the community and who are subject to unrest. Under democracy, our big cities suffer both economically and socially as a result.” Distrustful of the wage-earners whose money he sought to use to finance construction of his model apartment houses, Thomas called for vesting financial responsibility not in the tenants’ organization, as was the case in European cooperatives, but in “a board of Trustees, men of the most experienced business capacity and leadership.” See Andrew J. Thomas, “Plan for the Cooperative ownership of Tenement Housing,” undated typescript (11 pp.), Housing box 13, folder 117.

<sup>15</sup> Heydt to Rockefeller, May 11, 1925, Housing box 12, folder 106.

<sup>16</sup> Heydt to Rockefeller, July 29, 1925, Housing box 12, folder 106.

<sup>17</sup> Heydt to Thomas, August 27, 1925; Heydt to Rockefeller, August 27, 1925, and September 3, 1925, Housing 12: 106; and Prospectus, Thomas Garden Apartments, Housing 12: 107.

<sup>18</sup> Unsigned memo, April 30, 1927, in Housing box 12, folder 113; Heydt to W.J. Leonard, April 14, 1930; Heydt to Ivy Lee, July 3, 1930; Heydt to George Arthur, July 17, 1930; Heydt to T. M. Debevoise, September 29, 1930, all in Housing box 12, folder 106.

<sup>19</sup> On the 1936 sale, see John V. Duncan to Thomas Debevoise, October 27, 1936, Housing box 13, folder 116; see also material in Housing box 12, folders 106 and 113.

<sup>20</sup> Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto, Negro New York 1890-1930* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966; paperback edition, 1968) p. 155.

<sup>21</sup> Lawrence Otis Graham, *The Senator and the Socialite: The True Story of America’s First Black Dynasty* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006). See also Bruce’s vita, “Memorandum in re Roscoe Conkling Bruce,” in Rockefeller Family Archives, RG 2 OMR, Housing Interests, box 15, folder 141; *Who Was Who in America*, vol. 6; August

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Meier, *Negro Thought in America, 180-1915: Racial Ideologies in the Age of Booker T. Washington* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1963; reprint 1988), pp. 213, 240.

<sup>22</sup> See Mary Van Kleeck to Heydt, May 18, 1927. One of Bruce's old friends, Harriet S. Butcher, was the building manager of the Russell Sage Foundation and arranged his recommendation from Van Kleeck. His relationship with Butcher became a scandal and contributed to the downward spiral of his and his family's fortunes. See Graham, *The Senator and the Socialite*, pp. 350-351.

<sup>23</sup> Bruce to Heydt, June 15, 1927.

<sup>24</sup> Bruce memo to Heydt, July 25, 1927.

<sup>25</sup> Heydt to Bruce, August 16, 1927.

<sup>26</sup> Graham, *Senator and the Socialite*, pp. 347-348, 363.

<sup>27</sup> David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, p. 217-219 and Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of Ghetto*, p. 158.

<sup>28</sup> The New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects gave the Dunbar Apartments its first place award for 1927 and the Thomas Garden Apartments its award for "an apartment house six stories or under" in 1929. See H. Van Buren Magonigle to John D. Rockefeller, Jr., February 2, 1928, in Housing box 13, folder 118; and William Adams Delano to the Empire Mortgage Company, February 2, 1929, in Housing box 12, folder 106.

<sup>29</sup> On overtures to Rockefeller and his representatives, see correspondence in Housing box 17, folder 152; on Heydt's opposition to tax exemptions, see Heydt to Charles F. Kerrigan, January 24, 1927. Yet when it came to tax assessments on Rockefeller housing projects, Heydt was more than willing to fight what he considered to be unfair assessments that did not adequately appreciate the philanthropic spirit of the Rockefeller endeavors. The assessment of the Thomas Garden Apartments for 1929 – \$1,150,000, or \$150,000 more than the second reduction in the assessment for 1928 (\$1,000,000; after the original assessment of \$1.4 million) – made his blood boil. "The fact that our efforts in behalf of housing have been met with a response of this kind from public officials certainly gives us no encouragement to try anything further along that line," he complained to Thomas. "Governor Smith and Mayor Walker have both indicated their desire to interest Mr. Rockefeller in housing enterprises of a large extent, but if the Board of Tax Commissioners cannot see their way to cooperate in such movements which are wholly for the benefit of the city and not for the benefit of the individuals who supply the necessary funds, [then] the chances of interesting a group of financiers in investing in such enterprises are practically nil." Heydt to Thomas, October 25, 1928, Housing box 113, folder 114.