

Introduction

“Santa Claus of the South”—that is how one veteran educator characterized the General Education Board (GEB) in 1953, near the end of the philanthropy’s active work.¹ For twenty-five years Mabel Carney served on the faculty at Teachers College, Columbia University, as a professor of rural education. Her interest in rural education and the education of African Americans brought her into close association with both the officers of the GEB and its fieldworkers throughout the South, giving her a unique perspective from which to assess the Board’s work.

Although it defined its purpose as “the promotion of education within the United States without distinction of race, sex or creed” and was active in all regions of the country, the GEB focused most of its attention on the South. Endowed by gifts from John D. Rockefeller (1839–1937), founder of the Standard Oil Company, the GEB had been organized in 1902 by Frederick T. Gates, Rockefeller’s philanthropic adviser, and John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and was chartered by an act of Congress in 1903. Rockefeller’s gifts to the GEB began with \$1 million in 1902, followed by \$10 million in 1905, \$32 million in 1907, and another \$10-million gift in 1909. His gifts eventually totaled \$129 million, which, through investments, provided the Board with \$324.6 million to spend on education before it ceased operation in 1964.²

Origins and Early Years

The GEB continued and expanded along nondenominational lines, two trends that were already part of Rockefeller philanthropy. Since the early 1880s, John D. Rockefeller had been making increasingly large donations to the American Baptist Home Mission Society (ABHMS) to support its missionary work and to build churches and schools for the denomination. With the formation of the American Baptist Education Society (ABES) in 1888 to examine whether and where to establish a great Baptist university and to more systematically foster financial support for fledgling Baptist colleges, Rockefeller became even further involved in the development of institutions of higher education.

As the head of the ABES, the Rev. Frederick T. Gates guided Rockefeller through the intricacies of university development at the University of Chicago and smaller colleges throughout the Midwest and the South, while the Rev. Henry L. Morehouse at the ABHMS persuaded Rockefeller to support denominational schools serving the needs of African Americans and Native Americans. The result was increasing charitable demands upon Rockefeller’s growing fortune; a deeper involvement of Rockefeller and his advisers in the details of building, operating, and financing specific colleges and universities; a growing sense of how great were the needs of educational institutions in different parts of the country; and, at least for Gates, who Rockefeller hired away from the ABES in 1893 to become his philanthropic adviser, an uneasy sense that Baptist institutions were not always the most worthy of support.

¹Mabel Carney to the secretary, GEB, March 1, 1953, in the GEB Archives, box 209, folder 2016, Rockefeller Archive Center, North Tarrytown, New York.

²For general overviews of the GEB’s history, see Raymond B. Fosdick, *Adventure in Giving: The Story of the General Education Board* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962); and *General Education Board Review and Final Report, 1902–1964* (New York: GEB, 1964).

As Rockefeller and Gates became more deeply immersed in educational matters, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. (JDR Jr.) joined his father's office in 1897 as a recent graduate of Brown University. In 1901, JDR Jr. took part in one of Robert C. Ogden's train trips through the South to call attention to the educational needs of African Americans. The interest of Rockefeller philanthropy in African-American welfare and education was already well established: the family was providing support to such schools as Spelman Seminary, a school for black women whose single-sex status had been preserved by a Rockefeller gift, prompting the founders to rename it in honor of Rockefeller's abolitionist in-laws. But the Ogden train trip held double significance for the future of the GEB: it introduced JDR Jr. to other Northern philanthropists interested in the South and in black education, and they heard a significant warning about race relations and the politics of education from a Southern college president. Henry St. George Tucker of Washington and Lee University in Virginia cautioned the philanthropists against providing for black southerners and ignoring the educational needs of the white South, for doing so would arouse suspicions and hatreds that would undermine their best efforts. "You must lift up the 'poor white' and the Negro together if you would approach success," he said.

Taking this warning to heart, Gates and JDR Jr. abandoned plans for a Negro Education Board and, along with other Northern philanthropists interested in the South, such as William H. Baldwin, Jr. (chairman of the GEB, 1902–1905) and Robert C. Ogden (GEB chairman, 1905–1907), developed the plans that made the GEB perhaps the most important philanthropic foundation working in the field of education in the United States in the first half of the twentieth century.

During its formative years the Board was under the immediate direction of Wallace Buttrick, who, like Gates, was a former Baptist minister who had gained his experience in institution building with the ABES and the ABHMS. Buttrick served the GEB as secretary and executive officer (1902–1917), president (1917–1923), and chairman (1923–1926). The Board was active on a variety of fronts under his leadership during these early years. In 1905 it launched a campaign to promote the development of public high schools throughout the South. To do so, it funded professorships in secondary education in the state universities and assigned these state agents the task of helping localities plan and organize modern high schools. The Board and its local agents also worked to strengthen the powers and finances of state agencies responsible for public education, supporting surveys and studies of educational needs to raise public awareness and foster support for new public policies and new legislation. The Board also collaborated with the U.S. Department of Agriculture to promote agricultural education by supporting the farm demonstration work of Seaman Knapp and extended the concept of demonstration work to home economics, funding homemakers' clubs throughout the South in the 1910s.

The Board also actively supported colleges and universities in accord with the intent to Rockefeller's \$10-million gift of 1905, which stipulated that the income from this gift should be used "to promote a comprehensive system of higher education." All manner of institutions received support, from the large state universities and well-known colleges, such as the University of Alabama, Tuskegee Institute, Spelman College, the University of North Carolina, Hampton Institute, and the University of Virginia, to lesser-known schools, such as Snow Hill Normal and Industrial Institute in Alabama, Ouachita College in Arkansas, Bessie Tift College in Georgia, and Wiley College in Texas. Some schools received large gifts toward their endowments, while others received smaller grants for specific purposes, which ranged from purchasing materials for the library to constructing new buildings. Files in the GEB Archives pertaining to particular schools typically contain requests for support from the GEB, reports and additional material submitted in support of grant proposals, and correspondence from Board officials detailing what financial support, if any, was forthcoming.

Organization of the GEB Archives

The archives of the GEB at the Rockefeller Archive Center in North Tarrytown, New York, are organized into twelve series. The largest of these, Series 1, Appropriations, contains 722 boxes of material and is divided into five subseries:

- Subseries 1, Early Southern Program (boxes 1–193)
- Subseries 2, Secondary and Higher Education (boxes 194–362)
- Subseries 3, New Southern Program and Related Programs, 1931–1961 (boxes 365–587)
- Subseries 4, Northern and Western programs, 1905–1961 (boxes 588–694)
- Subseries 5, Medical Education, 1905–1961 (boxes 695–722)

Additional series in the GEB Archives are:

- Series 2, Finance Offices (85 boxes)
- Series 3, Minutes, 1902–1967 (36 vols.) and Dockets, 1907–1969 (55 vols.)
- Series 4, Officers Actions, 1916–1924, 1931–1952, 1958–1964 (12 vols.)
- Series 5, Officers Conferences, 1924–1936 (4 vols.)
- Series 6, Charts, 1902–1950 (67 charts)
- Series 7, Reports, 1915–1955 (19 reports, 50 vols., 5 items)
- Series 8, Annual Reports, 1902–1964 (43 vols.)
- Series 9, Trustee Bulletin, 1837–1947 (3 vols.)
- Series 10, Authorizations, 1930–1957 (35 vols.) and Appropriations, 1916–1931 (9 vols.)
- Series 11, Occasional Papers, 1917–1940 (2 vols.)
- Series 12, Diaries of GEB officers and staff members, 1925–1955 (93 vols.). Diaries of living personnel are not available to researchers.

Photographs in the GEB Archives have been removed to a separate photograph collection at the Archive Center, photograph collection #1054, which contains approximately 1,283 items arranged in a manner that corresponds to the manuscript collection.

Related collections at the Rockefeller Archive Center include the Rockefeller Family Archives, especially the John D. Rockefeller Papers for earlier material on some of the institutions mentioned in the GEB Archives; the Educational Interests series in Record Group 2, Office of the Messrs Rockefeller Files (OMR), for additional family support of institutions mentioned in the GEB Archives; and the GEB files in the Rockefeller Boards series of Record Group 2, OMR, for additional material on the organization and administration of the Board.

Subseries 3: The New Southern Program and Related Programs

The records presented in this microfilm collection constitute the records of the GEB's New Southern Program and Related Programs (Series 1.3 of the GEB Archives, boxes 363–587, folders 3739–6251). These records are arranged in numbered subject categories, and within these subject categories the files are arranged alphabetically by institution or university. The numbered subject categories are:

- 919 Survey of Education, 1931–1934 (and related correspondence); folders 3739–3846
- 923 Education Records Bureau, 1929–1941; folders 3847–3848
- 930 Child Study; folders 3849–3928
- 931 Seminar on Human Relations, 1933–1936; folders 3929–3931

- 940 Adult Education; folders 3932–3975
- 950 New Southern Program—General, 1933–1958; folders 3976–5664
- 950.1 Forestry, 1940–1947; folders 5665–5701
- 950.2 Seafood, 1938–1940; folders 5702–5721
- 950.3 Nutrition, 1940–1946; folders 5722–5780
- 950.4 Health Education, 1940–1954; folders 5781–5842
- 950.5 Handicrafts, 1951–1958; folders 5843–5853 and folder 5859
- 950.6 Cotton, 1947; folders 5854–5858 and folders 5860–5861
- 950.7 Nursing Education, 1948; folders 5862–5882
- 950.8 Business Education, 1944–1953; folders 5883–5889
- 950.9 Segregation, 1956–1961; folders 5890–5897
- 951 Postwar Education, 1943–1947; folders 5898–5905
- 952 International Education, 1944–1951; folders 5906–5915
- 960 General Education, 1933–1948; folders 5916–6223
- 960.1 Natural Science, 1934–1937; folders 6224–6246
- 961 Federal Aid to Education, 1949–1959; folder 6247
- 962 American Association of University Women, 1959–1960; folders 6248–6251

While the bulk of this material relates to the New Southern Program (category 950 and related subcategories), Series 1.3 also contains documentation of other GEB programs that did not pertain to the South. These programs include the Survey of Education (category 919), the files for which include folders with correspondence and reports from ninety-five educators and academics; and the Child Study Program (category 930), which it inherited in 1933 from the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial, along with the program's director, Lawrence K. Frank, in a reorganization of the various Rockefeller philanthropies. The General Education Program (category 960), begun in 1933 and terminated in 1940 after appropriations totaling \$8.5 million, sought to promote changes in high school education to meet the needs of a changing school population.

The New Southern Program is the largest program represented in this collection, however. If the original impetus for the GEB had been concern about the education of African Americans in the South, the impetus for the New Southern Program were conditions in the South following the Great Depression and the diminished funds of the GEB itself, which prompted its leaders to develop a more focused program.³ Beginning in 1920, when John D. Rockefeller removed all restrictions that he had placed on the purposes and use of his gifts to the Board, the trustees of the GEB made appropriations from the Board's principal as well as its income, so that by 1937 its assets included less than \$9 million in uncommitted funds. Diminished resources helped reduce the level and ambition of the Board's funding. But the South had been devastated by the Great Depression, and the region's poor economic status helped frame new priorities for the GEB's work there. In 1933 the trustees began a series of reevaluations of the Southern program, a process that one can trace within these files.

Social research that the GEB supported during the first half of the 1930s also influenced the direction of the new program for the South. Central to the process of rethinking the program's priorities was *Southern Regions of the United States* (1936), a study led by Howard Odum with funding from the GEB and the Social Science Research Council. Odum sought to offer "a realistic inventory" of the South's social, economic, and cultural status and to provide "something more nearly approaching functional analysis and working specifications" for the rejuvenation of the

³For a discussion of the New Southern Program, see Fosdick, *Adventure in Giving*, pp. 266–97.

region. “The main task,” he argued, “is not the catalogue of handicaps and the backward look, but to turn regional potential into regional reality and national power.” He intended his study to lay the groundwork for the social planning necessary to accomplish this transformation. Odum recognized that the economic rejuvenation of the South would require “considerable outside cooperation and assistance through well designed plans,”⁴ and the GEB was an eager partner in this effort. In earlier years it had worked to improve agriculture by preaching modernization to individual farmers; now it yoked its educational mission to the economic needs of the region by funding particular programs in business education and university-based studies related to specific industries, such as forestry and fishing and seafood.

The GEB’s new focus on the southern economy in the 1930s and 1940s complemented rather than supplanted some of its more traditional programs in education, and in this series researchers will find files on more than 150 schools, colleges, and universities, and files on library and laboratory grants to thirty-two colleges and universities during 1934–1937. The series also documents the Board’s efforts to create cooperative university centers in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia.

The Rockefeller Archive Center

The Rockefeller Archive Center was organized in 1974 as a division of The Rockefeller University, a biomedical research institute established by John D. Rockefeller in 1901. The founders of the Archive Center were the University, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and members of the Rockefeller family. By 1970 the Rockefeller family (1954), the Rockefeller Foundation (1967), and the University (1969) had established archival programs, and between 1965 and 1973 these three organizations, joined by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, explored the possibility of creating a single scholarly research center to house their archival records and make them available to researchers. In the early 1970s these organizations agreed to place their collections in a new archival facility to be constructed at Hillcrest, the home of Martha Baird Rockefeller, who died in 1971.

The Archive Center opened to researchers in August 1975. Since then, more than 20,000 researchers have passed through its reading room, and the bibliography of dissertations, books, and articles written by these scholars contains more than 700 entries. Until the mid-1980s the Archive Center’s collection policy focused on the Rockefeller family, its philanthropic endeavors, and the papers of individuals associated with the family. In 1986, however, the Archive Center broadened its focus to philanthropy in general and accepted the records of two foundations not organized or led by Rockefellers: the Russell Sage Foundation and the Commonwealth Fund. Since then it has accepted additional non-Rockefeller records, including the records of the John and Mary R. Markle Foundation and the Charles E. Culpeper Foundation.

Additional information about the Center’s programs, policies, and holdings is available on the Center’s home page on the World Wide Web at <http://www.rockefeller.edu/archive/ctr>. You may also write to the director of the Rockefeller Archive Center, 15 Dayton Avenue, North Tarrytown, NY 10591, or contact the Center by phone (914) 631-4505 or e-mail: archive@rockvax.rockefeller.edu.

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⁴Howard W. Odum, *Southern Regions of the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1936), pp. 207–9.