

From Martha Mitchell's Encyclopedia Brunoniana:

Rockefeller, John D., Jr.

John D. Rockefeller, Jr. (1874-1960) came to Brown in the fall of 1893 on the advice of a young minister at the Fifth Avenue Baptist Church, William Herbert Perry Faunce, later president of Brown, who recommended the college for its advantages of small classes, contact with professors, the inspiration of President E. B. Andrews, and the fact that "Providence is more healthful than New Haven." He moved into Slater Hall with some friends, enjoyed the same austerities of washing in water heated over a burner in his room, joined the Glee Club and taught a boys' class at Central Baptist Church. At Brown he gained independence and confidence, was elected junior class president and named manager of the football team. Under his guidance the Junior Celebration ended with all his classmates sober, and the football team was the first to finish the season with a financial profit. At the fiftieth reunion of his class Rockefeller remembered his college days: "Only here on the campus did I enjoy a completely independent personality. With you fellows I was hailed as 'Johnny Rock,' just one of a hundred others, but at least one who stood on his own feet. ... There has been nothing in my life since then quite like this kind of comradeship. That's why I like to come back to the campus from time to time, and particularly to these reunions where we all meet on the old-time footing and where again, to you, I'm only 'Johnny Rock.'" At the dedication of the John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Library in 1964, his son David Rockefeller noted, "at Brown my father discovered an intellectual challenge to which he could respond. In later years, with the single exception of this University, he never accepted an honorary degree, perhaps in part because he valued so highly the diploma and Phi Beta Kappa key that he received here only through the merit of his own performance." He received an honorary master of arts degree in 1914 at the time of Brown's sesquicentennial celebration, and an LL.D. degree in 1937, forty years after his graduation, when he served as chief marshal at the first Commencement presided over by President Wriston. He was awarded the Rosenberger Medal in 1931 and a Brown Bear award in 1956.

He was devoted to the Brown that he knew and for many years disagreed with University policy which was promoting ever-increasing enrollment. In 1946 he wrote of his changed opinion, "In view of the new world in which we are living, this country needs ... trained men and women of vision, breadth and courage. To that end the percentage of students for whom the colleges and universities are providing opportunities ... must be materially increased," and gave a substantial contribution to the Housing and Development Campaign which was to build the Wriston Quadrangle. In 1955 he contributed five million dollars which he identified as a compliment to Wriston on his retirement.

While a student at Brown, John D., Jr. met Abby Aldrich, whom he later married. Three years after her death, he married in 1951 Martha Baird Allen, widow of his classmate Arthur Allen. Together they gave to the University the Arthur Allen Room in the John Hay Library in 1952. Rockefeller died in Tucson, Arizona, on May 11, 1960. When the John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Library was dedicated to him in 1964, his "credo," which had been expressed in a speech he delivered at the 75th anniversary celebration of Fisk University in 1941, was inscribed on the wall in the lobby of the library:

I believe in the supreme worth of the individual and in his right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

I believe that every right implies a responsibility ...

I believe that the law was made for man and not man for the law ...

I believe in the dignity of labor ...

I believe that thrift is essential to well ordered living ...

I believe that truth and justice are fundamental to an enduring social order.

I believe in the sacredness of a promise ...

I believe that the rendering of useful service is the common duty of mankind ...

I believe in an all-wise and all-loving God ...

I believe that love is the greatest thing in the world; that it alone can overcome hate; that right can and will triumph over might.