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JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER  
The Cleveland Years

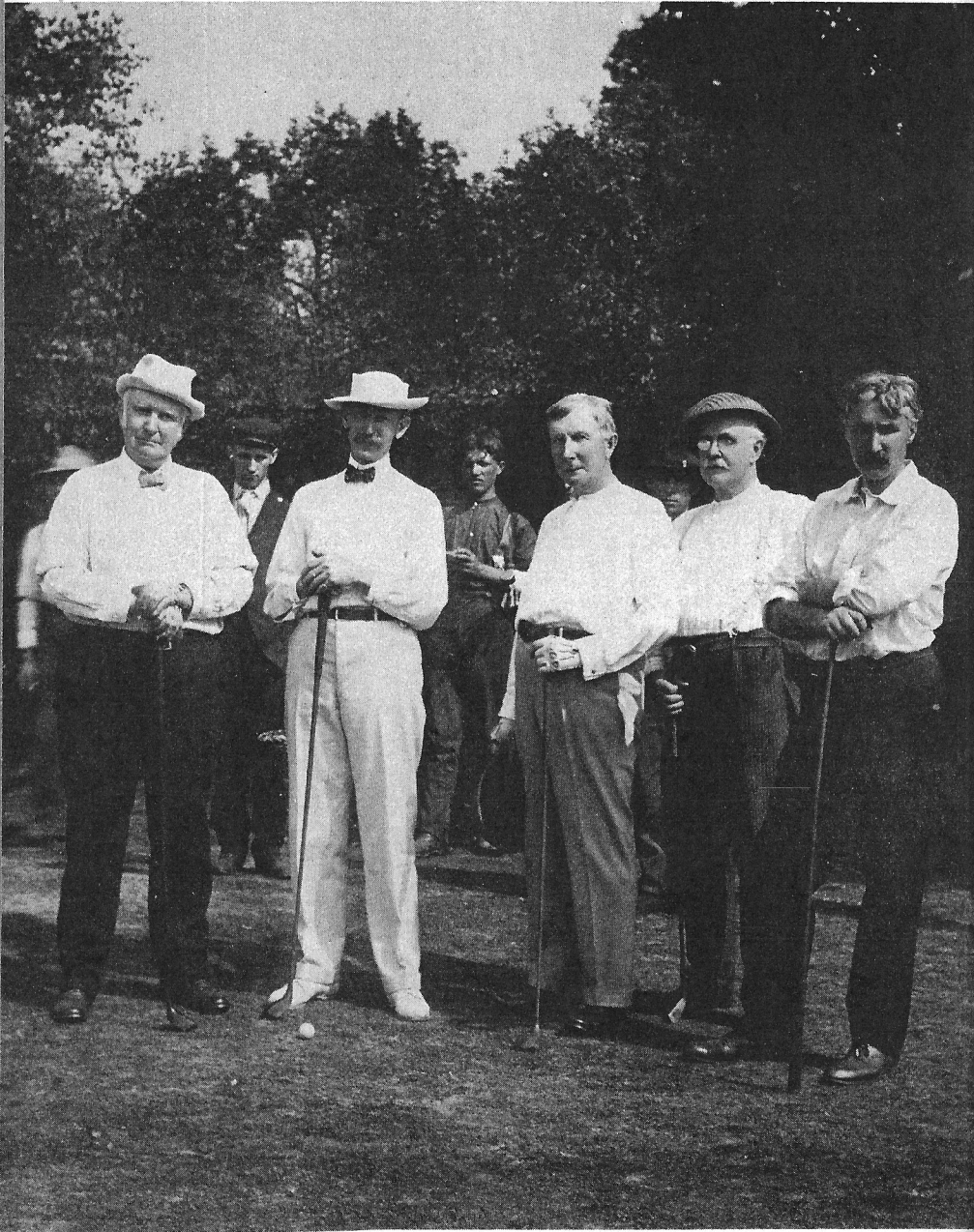
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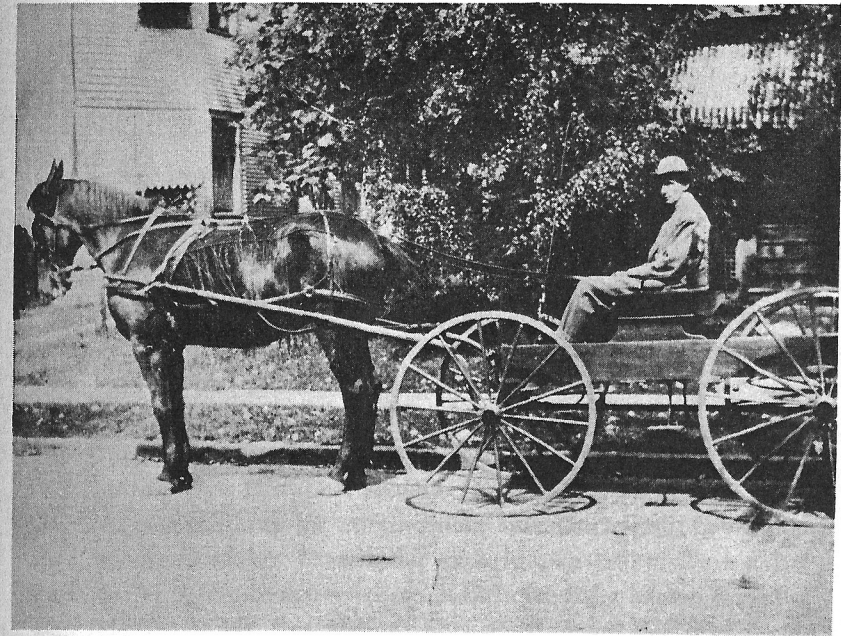
By Grace Goulder

The Western Reserve Historical Society

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Cleveland 1972





For my husband

Robert James Izant 1887-1971

Robert Izant, when an undergraduate, worked as messenger and driver of High Head at Forest Hill.

*Frontispiece:* On the golf links at Forest Hill: Dr. Hamilton F. Biggar,  
E. M. Johnson, guest from Chicago, Rockefeller, Levi Scofield,  
Rev. Charles A. Eaton. (Josephine Schofield Thompson)

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"As head of the Standard Oil Company Mr. Rockefeller was a world personality, and almost as much so as the good angel of Baptists. As a result of Dr. Harper's meeting with these Baptists, plus their knowledge of his close relationship with Rockefeller, delegations of these churchmen began coming to Cleveland to appeal for funds for struggling churches in their homeland.

"Mr. Rockefeller put up the visiting Russians at the Hollenden Hotel and saw to it that they were well provided for. I was often sent downtown with Uncle Charles to assist them, or to carry messages to them from Mr. Rockefeller. They were a fine lot of people, practically all of them aristocrats, many titled individuals among them. I thoroughly enjoyed meeting them."

Dr. Harper usually was accompanied to Cleveland by his wife, Ella, and their son Samuel, a boy a couple of years older than Cyrus. "We liked each other from the very first," Eaton said. "My uncle often played golf with Mr. Rockefeller, but not Dr. Harper—he didn't enjoy exercise. However, Sam was enthusiastic about the sport, and he and I took many a turn around the course when it was free. Sam and I developed a close friendship that lasted until his premature death in 1942.

"He shared his father's enthusiasm for Russia. Eventually he made Russian literature and history his career. He became head of the Russian Department of the University of Chicago after his father's death. His father died young—in 1906. For years Sam made annual trips to Russia. He spent six months there and six at his post in Chicago. During part of this period I served on the University of Chicago board of trustees.

"Through Sam Harper and his father my interest in Russia was kindled there at Forest Hill. It has continued throughout my life, and I am 87." (The interview took place in 1970). He recently had completed his twelfth trip to Moscow in pursuit of his continuing aim, improved Soviet-American relations. He admitted he would like to visit Peking to help further Sino-American understanding.

The youth spent three summer vacations working at Forest Hill. "By then," he said, "I was planning to enter McMaster University and expected to get a part-time job there. Mr. Rockefeller sug-

gested in his quiet way that if I were interested he could arrange a position for me at 26 Broadway. I did not take up the offer. "I wonder," he mused, "what my life would have been, had I done so."

During his college days young Cyrus returned to Cleveland, but not to work at Forest Hill. He acted as substitute pastor for three months in 1906 at Lakewood Baptist Church. "In every generation on both sides of my family there had been at least one Baptist minister," he continued. "I had occupied the pulpit at the Euclid Avenue Baptist Church when my uncle was away. While at the Lakewood church I had to make up my mind whether or not to enter Divinity School. I finally decided the ministry was not my calling."

Instead, he went into business in Cleveland. His friendship with Rockefeller continued. Invited for tea one afternoon, he found Charles Evans Hughes there as another guest. He was candidate for the governor of New York State opposing William Randolph Hearst, who was anathema to the Rockefellers.

"I remember Mrs. Rockefeller saying very earnestly to Mr. Hughes, 'Charles, I do hope you best that man Hearst!'"

He spoke of the attacks on Rockefeller at the time by publications like Hearst's. "I have heard Mr. Rockefeller say more than once he had no need to defend himself against such," he said. "I learned a great deal through my privileged association with that man. He was kindness itself to me.

"When I was a teen-age boy, and later as a young man starting on my way, I had the greatest admiration for him and I have never changed my mind," the youthful appearing octogenarian concluded.

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A retired Cleveland bank executive, Robert J. Izant, who was a vacation-time helper for several summers from 1906 on, talked about what Forest Hill had meant to him. "Lessons I learned there," he said, "have stayed with me through life."

The "lesson of the rake" he learned the first day. He was assigned the job of hoeing and raking in the vegetable garden. The work day had begun at 6:30 a.m. At 5 o'clock, he dropped his rake and hurried home. Next morning when he went to the tool house to get

it, it was missing. But, he said, "Morin, truck and flower garden boss, was there to tell me firmly that at Forest Hill when 'you are finished with tools, you put 'em back where they belong!'"

"Rockefeller gave meticulous attention to the place, never missing a detail in the smoothly operated enclave. Mr. Rockefeller was particular—everything had to be done just so," this former college boy continued. "But he was kind and patient with us boys. He was a man of few words, always soft spoken and deliberate. I never heard him raise his voice."

Years later he realized that during the years when he had worked on the estate storms were swirling around Rockefeller. But with the self-centered outlook of youth, the boy was unaware of any of it. And looking back, he added, he could recall Mr. Rockefeller only as placid and calm, never giving a hint of such a pile-up of worries.

This summer extra, after a bit, was given the responsibility of taking outgoing mail to the Lake View postal substation and bringing back the batch for the family and personnel of the estate. For this he had at his disposal a buckboard and a horse named High Head.

He described how without warning one day High Head stumbled and fell, bloodying a foreleg alarmingly. As the distraught boy was trying desperately to get the animal to its feet, the dour English estate manager, Alfred Knapp, came up. With one look at the catastrophe, he called a groom to take care of the horse, and on the spot curtly discharged its rider.

"It all happened a good many years ago, but I'll never forget it. My \$55 a month salary was gone and I needed all the money I could get if I were to go on to college in the fall. I held a position of trust and I had lost it. I was in disgrace. I walked slowly back to the house, a long trek, to turn in my mail bag and money pouch at the office on the second floor. As I went up the stairs I could hear the clicking of the telegraph and knew that Mrs. Tuttle, the current operator of the instrument, was at her post in the room.

"There sat Mr. Rockefeller reading the morning newspaper. He greeted me pleasantly, then told me Knapp had phoned him about

my trouble. 'But you are not dismissed,' he said emphatically. 'High Head, I am sure, will recover. I am more concerned about you. I have arranged with Edward Blakemore (head coachman and a very important individual) to give you driving lessons. He is waiting for you. You will start right away. Before you go, though, I want to say something: you have to make a horse know you are boss—not he. I learned that from my father and later when I used to ride from our Euclid Avenue home to the office on horseback.'"

"And so," continued High Head's former driver, "for the next two weeks Blakemore and I rode over the roads of Forest Hill, an hour a day, eighteen miles of them and behind the best horses in the USA."

After this drill he was promoted to official messenger and errand boy. He was given another horse and a buckboard for morning trips, a coach horse and curtained cart for afternoons. Missions took him to Chandler & Rudd Company for groceries and meat at their store on Euclid at East 55th Street (Cleveland streets were numbered now). There Vincent Meakin, in charge of the store, personally handled the Rockefeller orders. The messenger was often sent with notes or supplies to the Euclid Avenue house, which was well cared for by a resident housekeeper, Miss Antoinette Axe. Later she married Walter E. Coffin, mechanical expert with the National Malleable & Steel Casting Company. She traveled with him on business throughout the world, and wrote to Rockefeller about her experiences.

Mr. Izant described the trips he made to downtown department stores where he collected hats and other wearing apparel ordered by Mrs. Rockefeller or her sister. (The next day to return those they did not want!) He picked up jewelry at Cowell & Hubbard's in the Garfield Building at East 6th Street. Now and then there was a long jaunt to West 25th Street with a pair of Rockefeller's shoes for Zwerlein Shoe Repair Shop. He was sent frequently to Burrows Brothers Company to make purchases or to leave papers for the manager, Wallace Cathcart, who also at this time was president of The Western Reserve Historical Society.

"On return from one of these errands, I drove past Mr. Rocke-

feller who was sitting on a bench near the Lodge at the gate," the former banker related. "He hailed me down saying, 'When was the last time the axles of that cart were greased?' You never made up answers to Mr. Rockefeller, so I told the truth: 'I don't know,' I replied. 'Well,' he began mildly, 'I think they had better be greased soon. I heard a squeak as you came up the road.' I saw about greasing them that very afternoon for I knew he would be sure to check those wheels."

He went on: "There often were newspaper reporters loitering outside the gates that Gatekeeper Pat Lynch kept padlocked. Many times as I drove through onto Euclid Avenue they would stop me and besiege me with questions—what was going on at the Big House, were there any visitors, and the like. I knew Mr. Rockefeller always tried to dodge reporters and would not allow one on the grounds. I made it a rule to say I didn't know anything, though maybe I had just passed John D., Jr. by then as important a personality as his father, bicycling toward the lake. Or I might have seen Frederick T. Gates, so much in the news because of the Rockefeller millions he was dispensing.

"I could have given them a real story one time. The whole place at that very moment was under heavy guard because of a kidnapping scare over a small grandson, Fritz Prentice, who was visiting there with his French governess. I had just come from patrol duty where the little boy was playing.

"One reporter whom I used to meet regularly at the gate tried to make friends with me. He would climb over the wheels of my cart to have a *tête-à-tête* on the seat beside me. Several times he might have had a wonderful scoop, if he had lifted the lid of my dashboard box. Inside he would have seen a package that clearly contained Mr. Rockefeller's toupee. I frequently took it to a hairdresser for renovation.

"I was weeding in the verbena bed one day when George, the butler, came to tell me Mrs. Rockefeller would like to see me in the dining room. She and Miss Spelman were finishing luncheon. I knew them both well and was fond of them. Mrs. Rockefeller wanted a path made through the beech woods. 'When we finish

our round of golf (it was seldom more than four holes), we like to go to the boathouse to rest on the veranda. It would be much shorter to return home if we could come like this': She picked up an unused fork and with the back of it made a diagram on the tablecloth."

She explained that she wanted him to start the work that afternoon, he said. He rounded up three workmen and at once began clearing out underbrush, cutting and graveling the path. They were getting on nicely when the stern Knapp drew up in his cart and angrily demanded to know what was going on.

"I see," he retorted coldly, adding, "but don't let this happen again without seeing me first."

By noon next day the path was completed and Mrs. Rockefeller sent for the boy to thank him.

"You hear Mr. Rockefeller disapproved of the theater," the former Forest Hill messenger continued. "That may be, but one summer I saw him make a wonderful amphitheater with a sloping lawn arranged for the audience. Every day bicycling home from golf he stopped and handed the wheel to Hafner, his valet. Then the Master would pull a strip of white cloth from his pocket and ask a workman nearby to tie it around a certain tree. This continued several days.

"After a few weeks trees so marked were felled. Stumps were done away with and the ground smoothed and sodded. A large and perfect natural stage emerged with trees in the background forming a proscenium arch. Plays were given here by the YMCA and other groups."

In addition to the large lake, enjoyed so much by all the Rockefellers, Mr. Izant explained there was another smaller one, not much more than a pond in the upper, farm part of the estate. One day he was standing nearby when Mr. Rockefeller asked Knapp "to run a transit line and tell me what the difference is in the level of the two lakes. Sometime we may find it necessary to drain the upper lake into the lower." Rockefeller then added slowly: "My own calculation would make its drop of forty-two feet." In a couple of days, knowing the engineering work was completed, Mr. Izant asked Knapp what he had found. He replied: "Pretty good at mental

arithmetic, Mr. Rockefeller! The difference I figured was forty-seven and a half feet.

The messenger recounted his goodbye from the Squire at Forest Hill at one summer's end. Shaking hands warmly he left in the young man's hand a small envelope: "I am giving you my rules for golf so you can study them this winter," Rockefeller said with a twinkle. Safely out of sight, the boy opened the envelope. It contained a one hundred dollar bill. "First I had ever seen," he said. "And this was repeated the next year, my last at Forest Hill. Mind you, this was when Mr. Rockefeller was being ridiculed as a stingy, rich man who gave away only buffalo nickles and shiny dimes."

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Another member of the summer crew was Samuel Augustus Fuller, now a retired executive of Jones & Laughlin Steel Corporation. He lived on Holyoke Street not far from Forest Hill. City-bred though he was, his chores for a time were on the farm. One very hot day after he and a fellow worker had been pitching hay, they suddenly decided to cool off and, fully clothed, dove into the lake for a swim. After the refreshing plunge they hid in a sunny spot behind bushes to dry off. At that moment Rockefeller drove by. "Certainly he had seen us," Mr. Fuller recounted. "Those sharp eyes of his took in everything. But he went on and said nothing." They knew they would have fared badly if Knapp or his helper had come upon them. "Mr. Rockefeller might be a taskmaster," his former summer helper added, "yet, he liked boys and could overlook an innocent prank."

"He was always trying to improve his game," said Mr. Fuller, recalling how one of his jobs for several days was to follow him from tee to tee and each time Rockefeller started his drive, the boy was ordered to cry loudly: "Keep your head down! Head down!"

Despite what the automobile was to mean to the Standard's business, horse-lover Rockefeller accepted the car age reluctantly. However, by the time young Fuller worked on the Hill, Mr. Rockefeller had a Locomobile and later acquired a Simplex.

A pet story which, in his usual habit, Rockefeller told over and over, concerned one of these cars. He was driving along Euclid

Avenue, enveloped in a linen duster and sitting in the front seat beside his chauffeur. As the big car was chugging on its way, a wagon approached, pulled by a pair of handsome bays that began to rear and prance in terror at the oncoming monster.

The drayman tugged manfully at his reins while his wife sitting behind him, screamed advice and gesticulated frantically. Admiring the fine team and sympathizing with the driver, Rockefeller had his chauffeur stop the automobile, go to the man and offer to lead his horses past the car.

But the wagoner had another notion. He shouted over to Rockefeller: "If you'd take care of me old woman here in the back seat, I can take care of me horses!"

\* \* \* \*

Having a Baptist minister for a father was a great help in getting coveted summer employment at Forest Hill, as Charles and Clifford Stilwell discovered. The Rev. H. F. Stilwell, their father and a good friend of Rockefeller, was the pastor of the First Baptist Church.

The boys working in small gangs under a foreman, trimmed trees to keep the vistas open. They absorbed a good deal about tree management. Some of the time they caddied for Rockefeller, both often pressed into service as a team.

Rockefeller bicycled from the house to and over the golf course. At the same time as he often explained, he wanted to save his strength for the game, and so had his caddie, frequently one of the Stilwells, push the bicycle. The other brother was likely to come along holding a big black umbrella over Rockefeller if the sun was hot, or if a shower came up.

"It took a good deal to keep him from golf," Mr. Charles Stilwell said in recalling those days. "We worked a ten and a half hour day with a half hour off for lunch which we brought from home. Our pay was twelve and a half cents an hour, which seemed all right—it was, too, for our age in those days. It was a long day, but there was a fine crowd of young fellows working there, too. We knew them all."

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To the Rockefeller montage portrait etched in memories of teenage boys who worked for him at Forest Hill, must be added a sketch of the famous man as the friend of a little girl.

She was Elizabeth Rhodes, now Mrs. Kenneth Haber of Cleveland, daughter of Dr. E. B. Rhodes, a previously mentioned golfing crony of Rockefeller and a near neighbor in East Cleveland. Mrs. Haber has recorded her childhood impressions in an unpublished manuscript, "Recollections of My Friend Mr. Rockefeller," from which with her permission the following excerpts are taken:

"Our friendship began when I was about three. . . . The freedom of Forest Hill was at all times my privilege. It was a child's paradise. . . . Pat and Ed (Lynch), those gnarled Irish custodians of the Euclid Avenue gate, and their sister Sarah were my staunchest friends. While other children could get into the estate only by slipping over or under fences, I skipped merrily through the front gate. . . ."

On the Rockefellers' arrival for the summer, word at once was sent to her parents asking Dr. Rhodes to come the next morning for golf. The little girl went along. Rockefeller's golf outfit, she remembered, consisted of white trousers, a green grass helmet and, on cold days, a paper vest laced down the front and worn under his coat. Before driving, he always chalked his club, and he would tell her:

"Lizzie, when you play golf be sure to chalk your driver for then you can tell just how you hit the ball!"

At a regular time during the morning "a boy arrived from the house bringing bottles of barley water, ice water and milk . . . guests could have their choice, but Mr. Rockefeller always had half barley water and half milk, which he mixed himself." The little girl usually managed to sit beside him for the repast and was often teased about her love of milk. "Lizzie," he would say, "don't you think a thin old man like me needs that milk more than a fat little girl like you?"

Her friend often hummed hymns and popular airs while playing golf. A favorite hymn was "Jesus Wants Me for a Sunbeam," which "we often sang together."

One day Rockefeller lost a ball. When the game was over the superintendent of the estate was summoned and told to have every man on the place look for it. "Next morning the ball was brought to him before breakfast."

One summer he had a small driver made especially for Lizzie, just right for her height, perfect as to size and proportion. "He presented it to me with great ceremony and from then on I was often the fifth wheel of the foursome. After the men had driven off, I was allowed to drive with a ball Mr. Rockefeller selected for me from the (caddie's) willow basket."

One morning at the beginning of World War I the golf game was held up by reporters who insisted on seeing Rockefeller. As Lizzie learned later, they wanted information about a foreign loan in which it was rumored the Standard Oil Company was involved. After the newsmen had left, Rockefeller sat down beside his little friend who had been waiting for him. She asked what he had been saying to those men.

"He patted my hand and said . . . 'Oh, I just told them a little verse that goes like this:

A wise old owl lived in an oak,  
The more he saw the less he spoke,  
The less he spoke, the more he heard,  
Why aren't we all like that old bird?"

"Newspapers everywhere printed the verse, which was interpreted as having significant hidden meaning. . . . Stocks dropped and Wall Street was upset. . . ." As Lizzie realized afterwards, her friend "who was famous for never talking, had talked too much."

There came a summer when the Rockefellers did not return. . . . "I remember vaguely there had been some dispute between Mr. Rockefeller and East Cleveland over taxes."

The Rockefellers never came back to Forest Hill. Lizzie missed her friend very much!