

The Family Heritage Series

A weekly discussion of Americanist truths and traditions for those "heirs of all the ages" who will have to preserve that most important inheritance of all – freedom. Produced by the Movement To Restore Decency.



Volume II

Lesson Eighty-Four

John D. Rockefeller

LESSON IDEA

To examine the rise to wealth and power of John D. Rockefeller, and to see how he used capitalism to create a monopoly and an economic dictatorship.

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JOHAN DAVISON ROCKEFELLER, one of the world's most infamous capitalists, was born July 8, 1839, in a small farmhouse near the village of Richford, New York. His father was a glib-tongued, fast-traveling patent medicine man who claimed to be a "Celebrated Cancer Specialist" but who probably specialized in the proverbial "snake oil" cure-all and similar medicinal quackery. One thing is certain: Whatever the elder Rockefeller sold or did caused the family to move frequently from town to town – often on short notice under cover of darkness. And it was only after the head of the house did a con man's disappearing act that Mrs. Rockefeller and her two sons, John and William, were able to settle in one place for any length of time.

John D. finished his formal schooling in Cleveland, Ohio, and enrolled in a business course at B.S. Folsom's Commercial College. Graduating at the age of sixteen, he took a job in the office of Hewitt and Tuttle, commission merchants. (A commission merchant is anyone who buys or sells another's goods for a commission.) According to biographer Ida Tarbell, young Rockefeller was an admirable accountant, "one of the early-and-late sort, who saw everything, forgot nothing and never talked." His salary, \$3.50 per week or fourteen dollars per

month, was raised to twenty-five dollars a month after a year's employment; and from this meager sum, he was always "saving a little money to put away." In 1858, at the age of eighteen, he pooled his savings with an ambitious associate, Maurice B. Clark, and launched his own business as a commission merchant.

The new firm, Clark & Rockefeller, cleared \$4400 the first year and \$17,000 the second year. "When he was twenty," writes journalist John T. Flynn, "Rockefeller was a successful businessman and recognized as such in Cleveland. He was a quiet, handsome, dignified, serious, earnest young man, utterly absorbed in the important business of getting along. He had joined the church – the old Erie Street Baptist Church . . . where he acted as usher, took up collections, [and] taught Sunday School . . . He went to no plays, played no games, took part in no movements, acted on no committees, but resolutely 'minded his own business.'"

Had he bothered to venture from the small circle of his own self-interests, Rockefeller might have become involved in the political debates of that backwoods lawyer from the nearby state of Illinois – Abe Lincoln – or he might have joined the fortune-seekers' stampede to neighboring Pennsylvania where on August 21, 1859, oil – the product that was to make him a millionaire – was discovered. But he did neither.

A year passed, in fact, after the discovery of oil before John D. took any interest in the liquid gold that was gushing out of the Pennsylvania subsoil –

