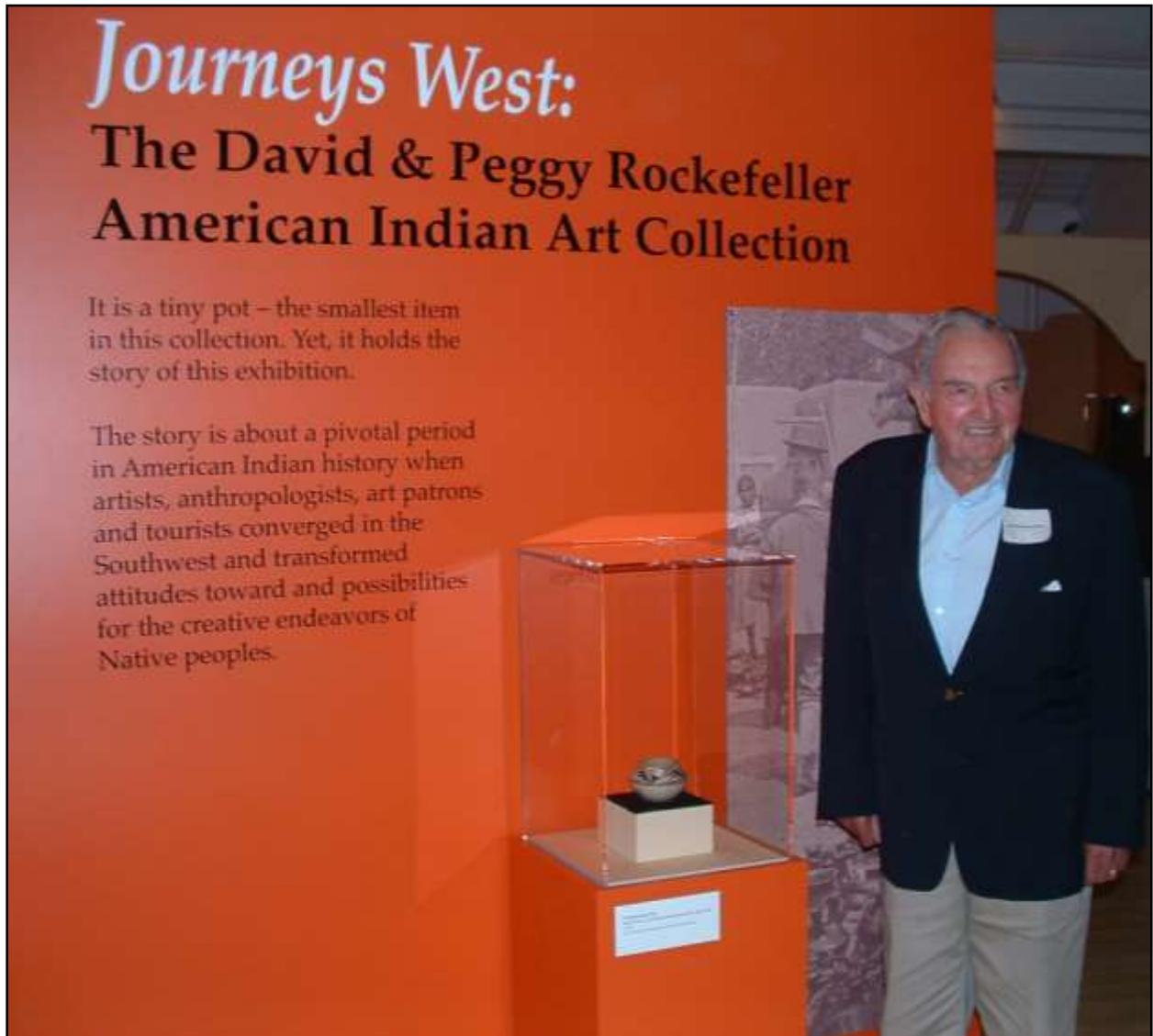


Journeys West:

The David & Peggy Rockefeller American Indian Art Collection

An Abbe Museum Exhibition curated by Bunny McBride, designed by Betts Swanton

August 31, 2007- June 15, 2008



David Rockefeller at private advance opening reception, September 30, 2007 (Photo by Catherine Allen.)

See America First

John D. Rockefeller, Jr. (1874-1960), sole son of billionaire Standard Oil industrialist John Davison Rockefeller (1839-1937), made sure all of his children saw Europe at an early age—but not until they had traveled their own country. “Americans should become familiar with their own land before going abroad,” he told a journalist. And the heart of America, in his view, was Indian Country west of the Mississippi. From 1920 through 1930, he took his family on four extended journeys to the West. They traveled by train, station to station, taking side trips by automobile and on horseback. The trips included stopovers at Indian reservations, archaeological sites, and national parks.



1926 Western journey. J.D. Rockefeller, Jr., (2nd from right) and his sons Winthrop (3rd from right) and David (4th from right), with other members of the camping trip in Montana near the northern border of Yellowstone National Park. (Photo by Laurance S. Rockefeller, Rockefeller Archive Center.)

For the children, these excursions were hands-on history lessons about their country, its natural environment and its original inhabitants. For their father, the journeys inspired major contributions to extend parklands and to support research and education efforts concerning American Indians historically rooted in those lands. En route, he and his wife Abby, as well as the children, discovered the distinct beauty of American Indian art and purchased the pieces in this exhibition.

After Abby and J.D. Rockefeller, Jr., passed away, their youngest son, David, and his wife Peggy, became the primary caretakers of the collection. Now 92 years old, David Rockefeller continues to cherish the collection and the memories of how it came to be. Those memories are reconstructed here by a presentation of the art in the company of photographs taken mostly by family members.

Bar Harbor Wharf, Maine Central Railroad



Maine Central Railroad wharf, Bar Harbor (Postcard, Earl Brechlin Collection).

Journeys West were an exception to the usual summer plans of Abby and J.D. Rockefeller, Jr., and their children. Typically, come July, the family boarded a Pullman sleeping car hooked to the Bar Harbor Express bound for Maine.

We would climb down excitedly from the rail car when it arrived at the Mount Desert Ferry at the head of Frenchman's Bay. Each of us boys helped carry parcels down the dock to the Norumbega, a side-wheeler, which would carry us to the island. The ferry stopped first at Bar Harbor, then steamed around the headland to Seal Harbor.

(David Rockefeller)



Norumbega steamer, which carried passengers between Bar Harbor and the railway station at Hancock Point (Postcard, MHPC).



Top: "The Eyrie," the Rockefeller's summer home in Seal Harbor. Designed by Marcus Reynolds in 1897 for a Williams College professor, it was purchased in 1910 by J.D. Rockefeller, Jr., who expanded it to the 100-room mansion pictured here. (Photo by Laurance S. Rockefeller, Rockefeller Archive Center.) *Middle:* Standing in front of the Eyrie are Abby & J.D. Rockefeller Jr.'s six children: David, Winthrop, Laurance S., Nelson, John D. 3rd, and young Abby, known as "Babs," c1925. (Rockefeller Archive Center.) *Bottom:* David Rockefeller (rear) paddling Old Town canoe in Maine, 1924. (Rockefeller Archive Center.)

There was a fancy dress horse show in Bar Harbor, and I rode my pony Sunset.
(David Rockefeller)



In the early decades of the 1900s, Bar Harbor held an annual summer horse show. Here we see young David Rockefeller leading the 1925 fancy dress parade. His Plains Indian regalia won him a trophy. The war bonnet was given to his father when he visited the Taos Pueblo Indian reservation the previous summer. (Rockefeller Archive Center.)

In all likelihood, all of the Plains Indian regalia David Rockefeller wore in the opening parade of the 1925 Bar Harbor horse show were acquired in 1924 when his older brothers (J.D. 3rd, Nelson and Laurance) went on a Western adventure with their father. In the summer of 1926 the two youngest Rockefeller boys, David and Winthrop, finally had their chance to make the trip, along with their parents and brother Laurance.