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## A Word of Introduction

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Nelson Aldrich Rockefeller had an enormous and long-lasting impact on New York State during his fifteen years as governor, and to some extent, on the country as well. He changed the lives of many, particularly those who worked closely with him over the years.

One such who was there to see it all was Joseph H. Boyd Jr., the initiator and coauthor of this book. He signed on with Rockefeller while still in college and served in various responsible capacities for nearly two decades, primarily during the gubernatorial years, which are the principal focus of the book.

### A Long Shot Candidacy

Nelson A. Rockefeller began to consider the possibility of running for governor of New York several years before the 1958 election. He knew that if he ran, he would face very long odds. He had built an impressive record in Washington, serving three presidents, but he was not widely known in New York State. He had no political organization and no record or standing within the Republican Party in New York State. His knowledge of New York State politics and government was sketchy. In July, 1958, he would turn fifty, and he had never before run for any office, much less New York State's highest office. And it was far from certain that he could secure the Republican nomination for governor.

Even if he did get the nomination, he would then have to take on a wealthy and well-entrenched incumbent governor, Democrat W. Averell Harriman. And Harriman, while not the warmest public figure, was a hard worker generally viewed as running a reasonably competent, if dull, administration. Nationally, furthermore, 1958 was expected to be a year of Democratic gains in Congress and in state races all across the country.

Former governor Thomas E. Dewey, who had retired after twelve successful years as governor and two unsuccessful runs for president,

was of the opinion that Rockefeller, whose name connoted such vast wealth and power, could not be elected dogcatcher in New York State. He nonetheless gave his former top aide and law partner, R. Burdell Bixby, his blessing to work as director of scheduling for the Rockefeller campaign.

But Rockefeller brought impressive strengths as well. Along with that famous name came formidable personal and family financial resources. He had boundless energy and drive, an electric personality, and unshakeable self-confidence. He also brought the skills, as well as the scars, of nearly two bruising decades of operating in the bureaucratic and political thickets of Washington, where he had held high-level appointive positions in the Roosevelt, Truman, and Eisenhower administrations.

### **Albany as Stepping Stone**

It is fair to say that in seeking the governorship, Nelson Rockefeller didn't plan to make it the career it subsequently became. His goal was to become president of the United States, and Albany looked like the best available stepping stone.<sup>1</sup>

Like many before him, Rockefeller had chafed in appointed office. Washington was where the power was, but serving at the pleasure of the president—and even reporting to him directly—meant that power and independence were temporary at best, and often illusory. Even high-ranking cabinet or subcabinet appointees were vulnerable to legal, political, and budgetary roadblocks thrown up by special interest groups, by adversaries in Congress, and by other administration officials with competing agendas or policy views.

And so Rockefeller had concluded, as others had done, that he needed the credentials and the independence conferred by high elected office in order to have any chance of reaching the presidency. You had to show not only that you were capable, but that you were electable, and the governorship of a large state could provide the requisite platform for doing so.

In fact, Averell Harriman was trying to do the same thing, and for the same reason. Harriman had an impressive background as a businessman and diplomat. Heir to a railroad fortune, he had built his own business empire and served as chairman of the Illinois Central and Union Pacific railroads from 1932 to 1942. In 1942, Franklin Roosevelt sent his friend Harriman to negotiate the Lend-Lease program with Winston Churchill. But Harriman, too, had been an unknown commodity politically until he won the governorship in

1954 by a razor-thin eleven-thousand-vote margin. That ended twelve years of Republican rule, although the Republicans kept control of both houses of the legislature. Harriman lost out to Adlai Stevenson for the 1956 Democratic nomination for president. Reelection as governor in 1958 would put him in position to compete for the Democratic nomination for president in 1960, or for a high place in a Democratic administration.

Similarly, Rockefeller hoped to use the governorship to build a national reputation as a strong, visionary leader who could get things done, solve big problems, and win elections. New York City's position as the nation's financial and media capital meant that almost anything he did as governor would attract wide newspaper and television coverage. And so it did, although this would later turn out to be a double-edged sword.

### **Trojan Horse**

In any case, Harriman himself had already given Rockefeller a huge, if inadvertent, boost in the summer of 1956 by agreeing to his appointment as chairman of the state's Temporary Commission on the Constitutional Convention. This crucial element in the buildup to Rockefeller's nomination was described by the late Cary Reich in his excellent book *The Life of Nelson A. Rockefeller: Worlds to Conquer*, the first volume of a planned two-volume biography.<sup>2</sup>

New York's constitution requires a referendum every twenty years on whether a constitutional convention should be held to revise the state's fundamental laws. Such a referendum was to be held in November, 1957, and following precedent, the legislature in 1956 created a temporary commission to study and report on possible constitutional changes. Five of the fifteen members were to be appointed by the governor, five by the senate majority leader, and five by the speaker of the assembly. As both houses had Republican majorities, the Republicans would control the commission, but the intention was to make it a bipartisan effort. Accordingly, the chairman was to be named jointly by the leaders of the two houses—Assembly Speaker Oswald Heck of Schenectady and Senate Majority Leader Walter J. Mahoney of Buffalo—and the governor. Thus the chairman would be a Republican, but someone acceptable to Governor Harriman.

Harriman rejected out of hand all the Republicans put forward for the chairmanship. At this point, the Republican state chairman, L. Judson Morehouse, who had already identified Rockefeller as a

political comer who might be capable of regaining the governorship for the GOP, told Mahoney to offer up Nelson Rockefeller's name.

"Oh, Nelson," Harriman is reported to have said. "I know Nelson. That would be all right. I'd go for Nelson." Harriman, who had worked with Rockefeller in Washington in promoting President Truman's Point Four foreign aid initiative, seems to have viewed Rockefeller as a civic-minded, younger friend and fellow patrician—someone who had no political aspirations in New York State, and was thus no threat to his own reelection.

But the very prospect of Rockefeller as commission chairman alarmed Harriman's closest political advisors. Carmine De Sapio, boss of Tammany Hall and a kingmaker whose support had enabled Harriman to become governor in the first place, was aghast. He saw it as giving an ambitious, deep-pocketed potential rival a mandate to poke into every state agency and operation and to get to know—and become known in—every corner of New York State. Nevertheless, Harriman agreed to the appointment. It proved to be a huge mistake.

Meanwhile, some Rockefeller advisers had strong misgivings as well. Former GOP lieutenant governor Frank Moore argued that chairing the commission would be a lot of work with little opportunity for achievement, as a constitutional convention was neither necessary nor likely. More worrisome, a convention, if held, might enable the Democrats to raise the volatile issue of reapportionment and potentially undermine all-important Republican control of the legislature.

Rockefeller accepted the position anyway. Following a pattern he had already established in Washington, he hired a heavyweight staff and commissioned studies of every aspect of the state's government. His choice for chief of staff was Dr. William J. Ronan, the energetic and ambitious former dean of New York University's Graduate School of Public Administration, whose academic credentials were unimpeachable.

But his choice for counsel set off warning bells among Democrats. George A. Hinman was a prominent member of a politically connected Binghamton law firm founded by his father, Harvey Hinman, who had been a Republican state senator, lieutenant governor, and a longtime power in New York's Southern Tier. The appointment convinced Democrats there was more to Rockefeller's agenda than an objective, nonpartisan examination of the state constitution.

At Rockefeller's insistence, the commission maintained a neutral position on the issue of whether a convention should be held in 1959—the proposition on the ballot. He contended that the commission's role

was only to explore and publicize the issues involved. Only after the election, in which the proposition was voted down, did the commission come out in favor of revising the constitution. Harriman, who favored the proposition, was furious at Rockefeller's delaying tactic.

In the meantime, the process had indeed provided Nelson Rockefeller with a crash course in state and municipal government, and given him considerable exposure around the state.

(Ronan and Hinman played prominent and continuing roles, not only in Rockefeller's subsequent campaign for governor, but throughout his fifteen years in that office. Ronan, as secretary to the governor, was chief of staff and, in effect, chief operating officer. Later he headed the powerful Metropolitan Transportation Authority, the umbrella agency that controls bridges, tunnels, subways, and commuter railroads in the New York metropolitan area. Hinman, who became Republican National Committeeman from New York, was Rockefeller's top political operative and liaison with the Republican Party nationally.)

In early 1958, moving closer toward a candidacy, Rockefeller sought the support of the Republican county chairman of his home county of Westchester. The chairman, Herbert Gerlach, told him that the organization would support longtime Yonkers assemblyman Malcolm Wilson if Wilson decided to run for governor. A meeting was arranged, at which Wilson said he would like to be governor some day, but would not run for governor in 1958. But, he said, if Rockefeller wanted to run, he, Wilson, knew how he could get the nomination.<sup>3</sup>

Weeks later, Rockefeller pursued the subject with Wilson. What Wilson suggested was that he and Rockefeller make an extended tour of the state by car—no entourage, just the two of them—during which Wilson would introduce Rockefeller to the GOP faithful, including potential convention delegates, in each of the state's sixty-two counties.

Thus began one of the most fruitful and long-lasting political partnerships in American political history, between two men who could hardly have been more different in their backgrounds, attributes, or attitudes. In contrast to Rockefeller's ebullience and dynamism, Wilson was cautious, conservative, precise, and lawyerly. Where Rockefeller was brought up a Baptist, Wilson was a devout Catholic. He also had an encyclopedic knowledge of state and local government in New York and of the politics and politicians in virtually every county in the state, and his memory for people's names, faces, and individual circumstances was already legendary.

## Road Trips

On June 30, 1958, Rockefeller announced in New York City that he was a candidate for governor, and he and Wilson immediately drove north to Kinderhook, in rural, conservative Columbia County, to meet with the Republican county committee. The trip, in Wilson's Buick, was the first in a series that extended nearly eight weeks, leading up to the party's late-August nominating convention, and that took Rockefeller into every corner of the state.

In Kinderhook, a sleepy Hudson Valley village that had been the home of President Martin Van Buren, they were greeted by the Republican county chairman, Myrtie Tinklepaugh, and her county committee members. Rockefeller was charming, and soon after the dinner ended, the committee voted to endorse his candidacy—as Wilson intended—making Columbia the first county to do so. Mrs. Tinklepaugh, although a conservative, was well disposed toward Rockefeller in any event because, some years before, he had accepted her invitation to take part in a debate at Ichabod Crane High School in Valatie.<sup>4</sup>

She was less favorably inclined toward another principal contender for the nomination, Senate Majority Leader Walter J. Mahoney of Buffalo, whose views were surely closer to her own than were Rockefeller's. Her daughter, Mary Ann Tinklepaugh Fish, recalls that earlier her mother had represented the county at a Republican state committee meeting when the then-county chairman was wintering in Florida. When she explained the situation to Senator Mahoney, who was presiding at the meeting, he sneered, "So I suppose you think you're in charge!" Mrs. Tinklepaugh seethed, and never forgot the slight.

As the weeks passed, Rockefeller's charm and personal magnetism drew more and more upstate Republican organizations to his banner. His rivals for the nomination—Mahoney and former Republican national committee chairman Leonard Hall, a Long Islander—fumed that Rockefeller's liberal views were being kept under wraps. Selling the candidate on the basis of his dynamism and electability, rather than his philosophy, was in fact the strategy.

Seldom mentioned but clearly a factor in the minds of local party leaders was Rockefeller's ability to fund an aggressive election campaign against a wealthy incumbent in what was widely expected to be a Democratic year. (Nationally, it was—the Democrats added thirty Senate seats, forty-seven House seats, and four governorships.) A vigorous, well-financed campaign for the top of the ticket could stymie or reverse Democratic gains upstate and help the GOP maintain control of the legislature. In addition, polls showed Rockefeller

would draw more votes from independents and Democrats than would his rivals.

In that era, statewide candidates were chosen by delegates to the state party convention, who were hand-picked by local party organizations. The GOP convention was scheduled for late August in Rochester, and as it drew near, Hall and Mahoney each concluded that they could not put together a majority of delegates. And so, almost on the eve of the convention, both dropped out of the race, enabling Rockefeller to arrive in Rochester triumphant, and to leave a few days later with impressive momentum and a united party behind him.

In the meantime, the statewide ticket had been put together. Rockefeller chose Wilson for his lieutenant governor, although this flew in the face of conventional wisdom, since they were both from Westchester County. But Wilson's knowledge of the state and its politics, and his clout among conservative upstate Republicans, plus his strong Catholicism, were acclaimed as crucial attributes. The other members of the ticket, meanwhile, provided both ethnic and geographic diversity. Attorney General Louis J. Lefkowitz of Manhattan, previously appointed to that post to fill out the unexpired term of Jacob K. Javits, who had been elected to the United States Senate, would run for a full term. James A. Lundy, former borough president of Queens, was nominated for comptroller, and Congressman Kenneth B. Keating of Rochester agreed, albeit reluctantly, to run for U.S. senator. All except Lundy would win in November.

In contrast to the harmony and jubilation of the Republican convention in Rochester, the Democrats' convention in Buffalo was a shambles. Weeks earlier, Harriman had waffled on the choice of a Senate candidate, but had flatly rejected Manhattan district attorney Frank Hogan, the candidate proposed by De Sapio and other New York City party leaders. At the convention, De Sapio proceeded to round up the votes to ram Hogan down Harriman's throat, along with the Erie County Democratic boss, Peter Crotty, for attorney general.

Harriman was thus publicly exposed as weaker than the party bosses. Not only was the party in disarray going into the two-month election campaign, but Harriman had handed Rockefeller and the Republicans a powerful issue: party bossism. Tammany Hall's De Sapio, with his trademark dark glasses, was a perfect target.

And so began the brief, intense election campaign that put Rockefeller in office by 558,000 votes and sparked the political career of Joseph H. Boyd Jr., then a junior at Colgate University, who would work for nearly two decades under the Rockefeller banner, primarily during the Albany years.