

Rockefeller, Carnegie, & Canada: American Philanthropy and the Arts and Letters in Canada By Jeffrey D. Brison

Marianne Fedunski

Volume 99, numéro 1, spring 2007

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1065809ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065809ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

ISSN

0030-2953 (imprimé)

2371-4654 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Fedunski, M. (2007). Compte rendu de [*Rockefeller, Carnegie, & Canada: American Philanthropy and the Arts and Letters in Canada* By Jeffrey D. Brison]. *Ontario History*, 99(1), 130–132. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065809ar>

that it would turn out, but their society was already well into its transformation.

This is a very good book and it will live longer than most *festschriften*. It is a fitting tribute to R. Craig Brown.

Ronald G. Haycock
Royal Military College of Canada

Bibliography:

Brown, Robert Craig, and Ramsay Cook. *Canada, 1896-1921: A Nation Transformed*. Toronto; McClelland and Stewart, 1974.

Stephen, Martin. *The Price of Pity: Poetry, History and Myth in the Great War*. London: Leo Cooper, 1996. p. xv.

Rockefeller, Carnegie, & Canada: American Philanthropy and the Arts and Letters in Canada

By Jeffrey D. Brison. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006. xiv + 282 pp. \$75.00 hardcover. ISBN 0-7735-2868-7.

It would seem as though the historical examination of large-scale philanthropic giving is gaining momentum. Since 2005 alone there has been a spate of monographs published which deal with the influence of various Rockefeller philanthropic gifts in the first half of the twentieth century. I include in this list books by Birn and Lawrence, as well as my own. However, whereas these three concentrate on the impact of Rockefeller philanthropies on medical education and public health, Brison ambitiously chooses to examine the impact of both the Rockefeller Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation on the arts and letters in Canada from 1927 to 1957, the era preceding establishment of the Canada Council.

The idea for this monograph originated with Brison's master's thesis in the History Department at Queen's University in which he compared the work-relief system of Canada's Department of National Defence with the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) of the New Deal in the United States. Brison writes in his

Preface that he has always had "an unusual preoccupation with contrasting Canadian and American identities – mythologized, essentialized or otherwise 'imagined.'" (p. vii) When he realized the American Carnegie Corporation had been supporting Canadian art and culture since the 1930s, he "knew what [his] next study was going to be about." (p. viii) This monograph is the result.

Brison divides *Rockefeller, Carnegie, & Canada* into three parts. The first sets the context of the relationship between Canadian culture and American wealth in the era before Ottawa took over support for the arts in Canada. It outlines how the Carnegie Corporation (1911) and the Rockefeller Foundation (1914) were established and discusses early philanthropic projects in Canada in the 1910s and 1920s. As Brison writes, "in this period of limited contact, American philanthropy played a small but significant part in a more general campaign to reform Canadian culture." (p. 45)

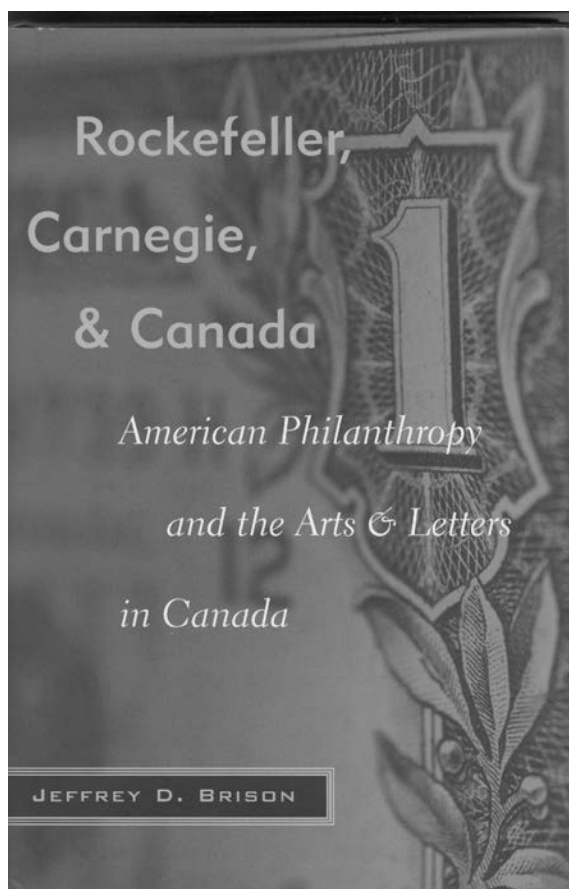
Through his Special Fund (later titled the British Dominions and Colonies Fund), Carnegie supported Canadians and Canadian projects with almost \$10 million between 1911 and 1935. One area touted was higher education, and institutions

deemed to be among the most prestigious in the Dominion received Carnegie gifts. Dalhousie, McGill and Queen's Universities, and the University of Toronto all were beneficiaries. The Corporation's special interest in supporting higher education in the Maritime region led to a survey carried out by William S. Learned and Kenneth C.M. Sills in 1921. The goal was to produce a "Scotian Harvard," and a federation of colleges centred around Dalhousie University in Halifax, buoyed up by \$3 million from Carnegie, was proposed. At the start, all Maritime post-secondary institutions, with the exception of University of New Brunswick, were willing to come on board. But by 1925 Acadia, St Francis Xavier and

Mount Allison had opted out, citing tradition, vested interests, and religious and economic considerations. Only King's College merged with Dalhousie – wise, given that King's had had much of its Windsor campus destroyed in a fire. These two institutions, based in Halifax, received the bulk of Carnegie's grants of \$1.5 million to the region between 1922 and 1933.

Rockefeller, during the same period, was concentrating on medical education and public health. With the intent of "making the peaks higher" (a phrase attributed to Foundation director and trustee Wickliffe Rose), the goal was to encourage leading institutions continually to improve upon their established high standards, thereby having a radiating effect throughout the region and even the country. Key to this plan was a gift of \$5 million late in 1919 to aid Canadian medical schools at Dalhousie and McGill Universities, and at the Universities of Alberta, Manitoba, Montreal and Toronto. Brison argues that the exercise of evaluating the various medical schools and the eventual distribution of the monies established a pattern for early Rockefeller Foundation philanthropy in Canada, concentrating on cities that were seen as national and regional capitals. These medical centers and their associated institutions became focal points for future Canadian Rockefeller philanthropic programs.

In the other two parts of *Rockefeller, Carnegie, & Canada*, Brison examines American philanthropy, "cultural interpretation," and imagined communities in Canada, as well as how Carnegie initiative led to a 'New Deal' for Canadian arts. Further, he looks at how American philanthropy influenced intellectual



development in Canada between 1930 and 1957, when the Canada Council took over as the steward of Canadian arts and letters. In his conclusion, Brison points out that the level of financial support for the Canada Council was substantial: \$100 million garnered as succession duties on the estates of Maritime financiers and philanthropists Izaak Walton Killam and Sir James Dunn. Of the 7,300 American foundations in existence in 1957, only seven – including Rockefeller and Carnegie – had endowments larger than \$100 million. These seven spread their largesse broadly, however, both geographically and in terms of projects supported. The new Canada Council was restricted to supporting arts and letters in Canada, which meant that there were fewer worthy recipients who stood to gain more.

Ironically, Brison concludes that “the Canadian model of state support for arts and letters represents not a rejection of the American model of private philanthropy but the adaptation of that model.” (p. 202) This very adaptation, he argues, actually helped Canadians to shift from “private, localized cultural patronage to a system of corporate patronage” in which the nation-state became the leading patron. (p. 202) As Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent told members of the House of Commons in 1957, “the time has come for us to depend in future somewhat more upon ourselves.” (pp. 197-98)

Brison has done a service for anyone interested in Canadian arts and letters and in understanding the complex relation-

ship between a young nation and a much wealthier and more powerful neighbour. His monograph offers a solid starting point for an examination of how, intellectually and culturally, a nation gains momentum, autonomy and self-respect. One hopes that Brison will continue researching into these questions and in future monographs will consider in greater depth key figures, among them leading Ontarians such as Donald Creighton, Harold Innis and Arthur Lismer, as well as illuminating more fully the early days of the Canada Council.

Marianne Fedunikiw
Ontario Genomics Institute, Toronto

Bibliography:

- Birn, Anne-Emanuelle. *Marriage of Convenience: Rockefeller International Health and Revolutionary Mexico*. Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2006.
- Fedunikiw, Marianne P. *Rockefeller Foundation Funding and Medical Education in Toronto, Montreal and Halifax*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005.
- Lawrence, Christopher. *Rockefeller Money, the Laboratory, and Medicine in Edinburgh, 1919-1930: New Science in an Old Country*. Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2005.
- Learned, William S., and Kenneth C.M. Sills. *Education in the Maritime Provinces of Canada*. New York: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1922.