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**AFFECTIONATE REMEMBRANCES: ABBY ALDRICH ROCKEFELLER, LUCY
TRUMAN ALDRICH, AND A CASE FOR COOPERATIVE COLLECTING**

by

Cheryl Irene Denbar

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of
Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Arts in Early American Culture

Spring 2001

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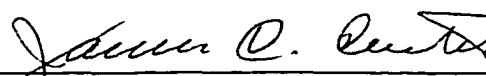
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ABSTRACT

The thesis explores the human connection created by the consumption and exchange of objects. Examining the ceramics and glass at Bassett Hall, Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller Jr.'s Williamsburg, Virginia residence, the paper considers public versus private collecting motivations and performances. Reintroducing the well-established multi-dimensional persona of Mrs. Rockefeller in the private sphere, the paper explores her relationship to her sister Lucy Truman Aldrich. Using artifactual and written evidence, primarily between 1919-1947, the paper argues for Lucy Aldrich's role as an agent of taste. The thesis explores their interests and value systems as reflected at Bassett Hall. Acknowledging that most of the objects held private and emotional meanings and were signals of a sisterly bond, the paper explores Mrs. Rockefeller's exhibited value system in the context of the contemporary social norms. Surveying methods of acquisition, transfer, management, and display, the paper validates the disparate group of objects as a coherent collection.

INTRODUCTION

In 1994, John Elsner and Roger Cardinal published a collection of essays under the title The Cultures of Collecting. In their introduction, the pair asserted that classification is "truly the mirror of our thoughts, its changes through time are the best guide to the history of human perception."¹ This paper will consider the glass and ceramic objects at Bassett Hall, the Williamsburg, Virginia, home of Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr.

Many of these objects were collected as a collaborative effort between Lucy Truman Aldrich and her sister Abby Aldrich Rockefeller. The decorative function of these glass and ceramic wares was superseded by their role as symbolic mirrors of individual thought processes and a sisterly relationship.

Elsner and Cardinal further suggested that collecting is classification lived and experienced in three-dimensions. Not only is a collection a reflection of taste, it also

¹ John Elsner and Roger Cardinal, *The Cultures of Collecting* (London: Reaction Books, 1994), 2.

represents the creation of an identity over time. Abby Aldrich Rockefeller and Lucy Truman Aldrich shaped a visual identity for their relationship and nurtured strong kindred bonds through the selection, acquisition, transfer, and display of particular objects at Bassett Hall.

What tied a somewhat disparate catalog of wares gathered during the period 1919 to 1947 into an effective and valid collection were the strong emotional bonds between two sisters. Their motivation for collecting often transcended social status. Indeed, the two sisters' collecting practices offered a "parody [of] the orthodox connoisseurship system, [that would] challenge expectations of social behavior and construct a maverick anti-system."² The sisters' letters examined for this project offer a context for this interpretation. Consequently, this paper will propose that Lucy Truman Aldrich's collecting fits this notion of an anti-system. As we shall see the sisters' personas and social agendas were represented at Bassett Hall. Additionally, this study will examine the potential legacy of Lucy Aldrich's selections and how they operate as tribute to her relationship with Abby Rockefeller. Collecting implies a conscious practice with recognized goals. This study will also explore Lucy Aldrich's collecting strategies, focusing on the evidence that

² Ibid., 3.

suggests she was consciously collecting for her sister's residences, particularly Bassett Hall, as a testament to her affection for Abby Rockefeller. The physical distance that usually separated these two sisters was mitigated by correspondence and by the exchange of opinions and experiences related to domestic furnishings. Decorative arts, specifically ceramics and glass, served as tangible symbols of shared affection. Moreover, objects functioned as symbolic conversation. Throughout the twenty-eight year period surveyed, Abby Rockefeller and Lucy Aldrich were aware of the human connection created by the consumption and exchange of objects. Miss Aldrich recalls this recognition in a letter to her sister, "You are never out of my thoughts one minute, because everything curious and beautiful that I see, I wish you were here to see it too."³ At Bassett Hall, objects that Lucy Aldrich selected for Abby Rockefeller were active agents of love. They were distinct visual signals of their relationship, quite often operating on an aesthetic level outside the standards of contemporary taste. Indeed, this is a story about the complexity of collecting and of public versus private performances and products.

Abby Rockefeller's achievements are well documented and continue to have an enduring effect on the welfare of

³Aldrich to Rockefeller, 25 April 1919, Record Group 2 OMR, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Papers, Sub-Series LTA-AAR, Box 1, Folder 6, Item 4-25-19, Sleepy Hollow, New York.

several communities. Her public legacy reflects her deep sense of moral duty, social service and passionate love for art. Most noted for her instrumental role and vision in establishing the Museum of Modern Art in New York, she also founded a hotel for workingwomen, developed a community center for immigrant families, and helped direct the restoration of Colonial Williamsburg. In addition to her creation of what would become one of the founding components of the Museum of Modern Art collection, Mrs. Rockefeller pursued her interest in American Folk Art with a similarly systematic and public manner. By contrast, the glass and ceramics at Bassett Hall were a private collection separated from her more public efforts. They were a formal collection nonetheless. In contrast to the other four residences she and John D. Rockefeller Jr. occupied from 1936 to 1948, Bassett Hall did not boast of wealth or status but rather of family and private interests. Abby Aldrich Rockefeller used ceramics at Bassett Hall as part of a furnishing plan that served as a form of remembrance and homage to her heritage and family.

An exploration of Mrs. Rockefeller's relationship to her sister Lucy Truman Aldrich is critical to understanding her collecting patterns for Bassett Hall. In what ways did Lucy Aldrich act as an agent of taste? What role did her individual aesthetics and experiences play in the outfitting

of Bassett Hall with glass and ceramics? How do these objects inform our understanding of a great collector?

**BIOGRAPHY: ABBY ALDRICH ROCKEFELLER AND
LUCY TRUMAN ALDRICH**

As an iconic American matriarch, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller's life is well-recorded (fig. 1). Her story was told most sentimentally by Mary Ellen Chase in a 1950 biography, published just two years after her death and most comprehensively by Bernice Kert in her 1993 Abby Aldrich Rockefeller: The Woman in the Family. Drawing largely from papers held by the Rockefeller Archives Center, Kert offers a thorough survey of Mrs. Rockefeller's experiences, sensibilities and legacy. It is from here that this paper draws most biographical conclusions to offer an introduction of our subject.

Abby Greene Aldrich was born to Nelson Wilmarth Aldrich and Abby Pearce Chapman on October 26, 1874. She joined her older brother Edward (1871-1957) and sister Lucy Truman (1869-1955) as the third living child. Ultimately, the family grew to include Nelson Wilmarth Jr. (1867-1871), Stuart (1876-1960), Robert (1878-died in infancy), William (1881-1966), Emma (1882-1884), Richard (1884-1941), Winthrop

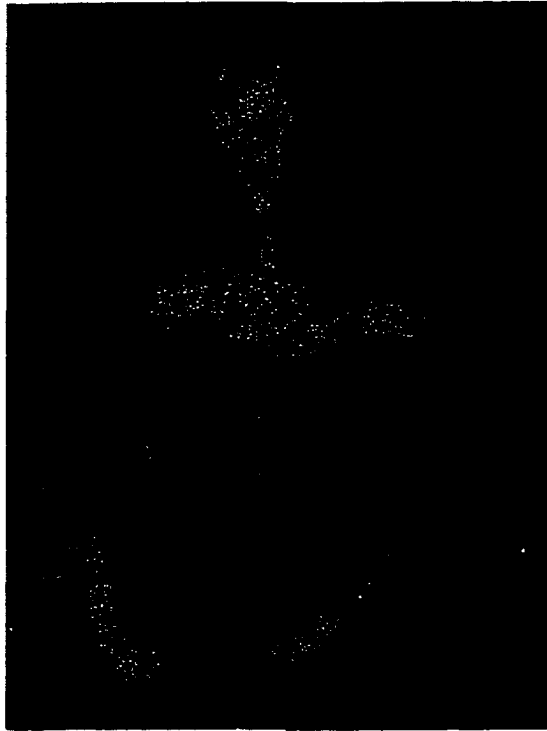


Figure 1
Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, Portrait by
Robert Brackman.
Courtesy of Rockefeller Family Archives

(1886-1974), and Elsie (1888-1968).⁴

As an Aldrich, Abby Rockefeller was reared in a home of sophistication, privilege, and deeply rooted New England sensibilities. Her mother was born in Preston, Connecticut on April 10, 1845 as a tenth generation descendant of a founder of Plymouth Plantation. Nelson Aldrich was born in Foster, Rhode Island on November 6, 1841 with similarly distinguished lineage tracing back to the 1630s Massachusetts Bay Colony. However, ancestral pedigree did not bequeath either parent a life of wealth.⁵ Rather it would take the tenacity and vision of Nelson Aldrich for the family to achieve the social standing into which Abby and Lucy Aldrich were born. Shifting from finance to politics, Nelson Aldrich became a Republican Congressman from Rhode Island in 1878. He would maintain a powerful presence in Washington for the most of the third quarter of the nineteenth century, being widely renowned for his service in the Senate.

Abby and Lucy were educated early by Quaker governess Asenath Tetlow.⁶ Their educational experiences were supplemented by both the Providence and Washington social climates and by extensive travel at home and abroad. The

⁴Bernice Kert, *Abby Aldrich Rockefeller: The Woman in the Family*, (New York: Random House, 1993), 3-44.

⁵Ibid., 4-7.

⁶Ibid., 23.

sisters took their first Grand Tour as a four-month adventure in 1894.⁷ This trip would become Lucy's prelude for a life filled with global travel. At seventeen, Abby participated in day studies at Miss Abbott's School for Young Ladies.⁸ After her debut in October of 1893, she focused her energies on a variety of volunteer efforts in Providence.⁹ While Abby married John D. Rockefeller, Jr. on October 14, 1901, Lucy Truman remained a single woman throughout her life.

John and Abby's well-matched union would become the foundation for their own large family. The home they would create for that family would serve as the center for all of their business, philanthropic, and social activities. In total they would raise six children: Abby (1903-1976), John Davison III (1906-1978), Nelson (1908-1979), Laurence (1910-), Winthrop (1912-1973), and David (1915-). As the mistress of the family, Abby Rockefeller would preside over four households. The primary residence was at 110 West 54th Street in New York City, an eight-story apartment with floors designed to showcase both Mr. and Mrs. Rockefeller's formal collecting interests. Additionally, the family would spend time at Eyrie in Maine and at Abeyton Lodge in Pocantico Hills, New York. In 1936, after a distinguished

⁷Ibid., 43.

⁸Ibid., 39.

⁹Ibid., 60.

and well-documented nine-year involvement in the restoration of Colonial Williamsburg, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. added one more house to their lot, much to the delight of his wife. This house was Bassett Hall (fig. 2).



Figure 2
Bassett Hall, Present front façade.
Courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg
Foundation

BASSETT HALL IN THE CONTEXT OF OTHER ROCKEFELLER RESIDENCES

Bassett Hall had a long history before the Rockefellers acquired it. The present interior, dotted with 1930s and 1940s easy chairs and featuring a modern kitchen with state-of-the-art appliances, belies the appearance of the original structure, which dates to the mid-eighteenth century. Long an important part of the urban landscape in Williamsburg, Virginia, the property on which Bassett Hall is built has historical significance dating to the seventeenth century. Although his family had owned the property since the late seventeenth century, in Colonel Thomas Bray gained title to the tract of land comprised of approximately 950 acres in James City County adjacent to the city of Williamsburg between 1749 and 1751. He also acquired four lots within the city limits. In 1753, two of the city lots and the acreage passed into the hands of Colonel Philip Johnson, Thomas Bray's son-in-law. It is Johnson who is credited with building the original story and one-half frame structure between 1753 and 1766.¹⁰ From 1771 to 1773,

¹⁰Bland Blackford, Burke Davis, and Patricia A. Hurdle, *Bassett Hall: The Williamsburg Home of Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr.*, (Williamsburg, Virginia: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1984), 17.

Richard Hunt Singleton rented the property for use as an inn¹¹. Before Colonel Johnson's death in 1789, the front, northern portion of the house was expanded to two stories and a story and one-half wing was added to the south end¹². Shortly after this initial renovation, Richard Corbin acquired the property in 1793. In Bassett Hall: The Williamsburg Home of Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., the authors note that Corbin's account books offer evidence that he continued renovating the property with interior and exterior refinements between 1794 and 1796.¹³

Corbin's tenure ended when Burwell Bassett, a nephew of Martha Washington, acquired the property between 1796 and 1800. It is for him that Bassett Hall is named. He owned the extensive estate for approximately forty years. Bassett continued his family's distinguished political history following five generations of community leaders who served as members of the colonial House of Delegates and the Governor's Council. He served as a congressman, state senator, and delegate.¹⁴ Another important political figure succeeded Bassett in owning the estate. President John Tyler's Secretary of the Navy and Secretary of State Abel Parker Upshur, purchased the house and grounds in 1840.¹⁵

¹¹Ibid., 18.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid., 19.

After his death in 1842, Bassett Hall changed hands once more before Colonel Goodrich Durfey purchased the estate in 1845. The property would remain in the Durfey family for nearly twenty-five years through the Civil War.¹⁶

After Durfey died in 1869, the property was purchased by Israel Smith.¹⁷ Bassett Hall would remain in this family until 1927 when Dr. W. A. R. Goodwin acquired the estate from Edith, Alice and Fannie Smith on behalf of Colonial Williamsburg. Under the terms of the acquisition the sisters would remain in the house with life-tenancy rights (fig. 3). In May of 1930, Edith Smith, the last living Smith resident, was forced to relocate because of a serious fire that consumed most of the upper floors. Following the disaster, Ms. Smith exchanged her rights to the house for a stipend and tenancy in a cottage renovated to suit her needs located on the property. It was not until January 1931 that renovation work directed by Colonial Williamsburg was underway. The renovation would progress until the project was complete in the spring of 1934. Despite the extensive damage, the interior woodwork, paneling, and yellow pine flooring was salvaged.¹⁸ The two-story front porch and east terrace were removed, and rear additions were reduced from two-stories to one-and-a-half (fig. 4). The newly altered

¹⁶Ibid., 19.

¹⁷Ibid., 20.

¹⁸Ibid.

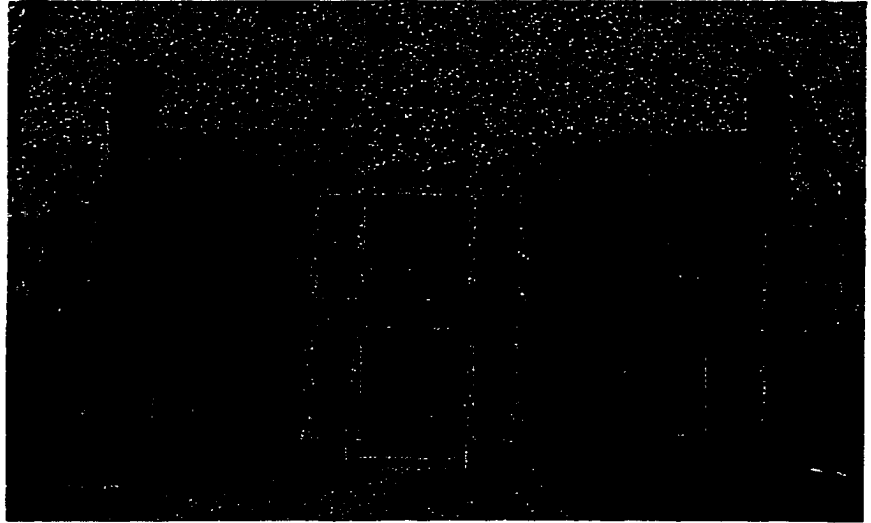


Figure 3
Bassett Hall, Front façade in the 1920s.
Courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg
Foundation

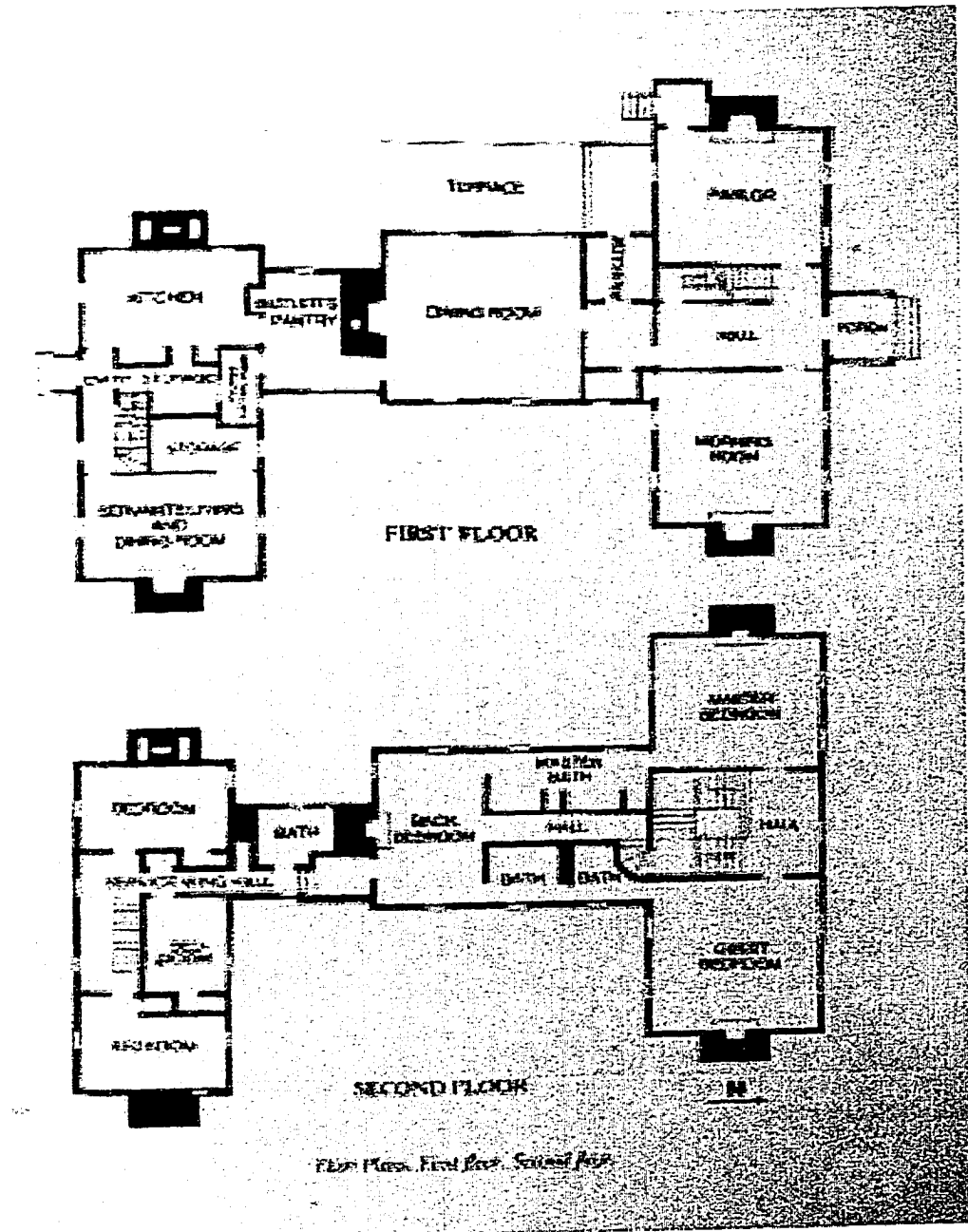


Figure 4
 Bassett Hall, Floor plan.
 Courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

south end would contain a rear stair hall, dining room, and bedrooms. The entrance facade was recentered, and a one-story front porch was completed in April. Once the Rockefellers had assumed ownership, the south service wing was renovated to accommodate a new dining room and modern service area, including the new kitchen. The outbuildings on the property remained largely untouched by fire, and three of the five are original to the eighteenth-century layout. While moved from their initial locations, the dairy, smokehouse, and kitchen still retain structural integrity. The Cottage was renovated, as mentioned above, in 1936 but some elements of the original eighteenth-century frame remain. The Orangery, built by the Rockefellers, incorporates antique paneling and other historic building materials to visually link it to the historic landscape.

By the summer of 1937, having moved into Bassett Hall, the Rockefellers had five houses open. Mrs. Rockefeller wrote to her sister:

At present we have four houses open, and all more or less needing my attention. .. We are all safely and peacefully moved into Mr. Rockefeller, Sr.'s house and everything seems to be running smoothly there. ... Apparently the children never paid much attention to it, but since I have changed things around and made it more homelike, they all love it ... I forgot to mention Bassett Hall, as that make[s] the fifth house, being more or less occupied. ... I feel now that John likes it and is going to enjoy it very much. It is more attractive all the time. I miss you very much in

every way, particularly when I wish I could consult you about this apartment of ours.¹⁹

This letter to Lucy Aldrich conveys a great deal about Abby Aldrich Rockefeller's work, interests, activities, and constant love for and reliance on her sister. In 1925 she wrote, "I am interested in what you say about things to buy."²⁰ Throughout the sister's correspondence we see one woman of great wealth and social standing preoccupied with the direction and maintenance of five residences. She depended on her sister for direction. In addition to the institution-like, eight story New York apartment at No. 10 West 54th Street, the Rockefeller's maintained residence at Abeyton Lodge and Eyrie in Maine, and inherited Kykuit at Pocantico Hills, New York. The character of each residence was clearly shaped by its social function. No. 10 West 54th Street was the center of the family's business, philanthropic, familial and social endeavors beginning in 1913. It embodied the terrific responsibility and stature of the Rockefeller empire. The architecture recalls early skyscrapers and seemed to present more of a challenge in creating domestic space than gallery space. In 1937, No. 10 West 54th Street was demolished and the property was given to

¹⁹Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, *Abby Aldrich Rockefeller's Letter to Her Sister Lucy*, (New York: John D. Rockefeller, Jr., 1957), 243.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 129.

the Museum of Modern Art. Consequently, the family moved into 740 Park Avenue the same year.²¹

Abby Rockefeller's domestic world was in a consistent state of change; raising the question of how the notion of home is defined when one is perpetually adjusting to different surroundings. One explanation suggests that Abby Rockefeller manipulated her environment, specifically the furnishings of each house, to create a sense of order and emotional security. Correspondence between the sisters and cataloging records reveal that Abby Aldrich Rockefeller consistently solicited the advice of her sister. Additionally, Lucy Aldrich regularly served as Mrs. Rockefeller's personal shopper, acquiring goods ranging from millinery to decorative arts. After John D. Rockefeller, Sr.'s death in 1937, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. and Abby Aldrich Rockefeller inherited Kykuit; Mrs. Rockefeller actively imposed a new furnishing plan to alter the environment making it "more homelike."²² From the family members whose lives were so saturated with objects, one observes an unusual appreciation for and recognition of the power of decorative arts. They not only bought objects at a rapid pace; they studied them. In 1947 Miss Aldrich wrote from the Rockefeller's New York apartment, "We have really

²¹Kert, 386.

²²Rockefeller, 244.

been enjoying every minute in the apartment and I am studying everything. I even take my glasses to the table to look at the china. And before I end, I shall probably be on my stomach on the rugs studying them with my reading glasses."²³

²³Aldrich to Rockefeller, 19 February 1947, Record Group 2 OMR, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Papers, Sub-Series LTA-AAR, Box 1, Folder 14, Item 89, Rockefeller Archives Center, Sleepy Hollow, New York.

**THE NATURE OF THE COLLABORATION BETWEEN LUCY ALDRICH AND
ABBY ROCKEFELLER**

Tenacity, enthusiasm, candor, and curiosity characterized the Aldrich family, particularly the girls. Once Abby Aldrich married John D. Rockefeller, Jr., she would have to moderate these traits in order to ensure the endurance of the passionate and true love that would last until her death in 1948. Her sister, born several years earlier than Abby in 1868, never married and lived a freer and less lavish life. Lucy Aldrich's interest in exotic lands and her insatiable quest for objects and adventures was expressed through her fondness for travel. Deaf from an episode of scarlet fever in her youth, Lucy Truman Aldrich traveled with her secretary and dear companion Minnie MacFadden and her maid Mathilde Schoneberg.²⁴ In contrast to Abby Rockefeller, Miss Aldrich's path did not require restraint; rather, her status as adventurer continued to shape an outspoken, gifted, loving, and undeniably extraordinary woman. Correspondence dating from 1919 to 1938 weaves a narrative of unusual color:

I think you are the nicest sister a deaf old maid ever had and much better than she deserves. I appreciate every minute all you and John do for

²⁴Kert, 176, 196.

me. . . . If you send my letter to any of the family, couldn't you get that nice Miss Kelly to typewrite them and correct the spelling. Thank God I brought the dictionary instead of the Bible, but its so heavy I can't lug it 'round everywhere."²⁵

The two sisters remained in constant contact, with unusual success through the postal service due largely to Standard Oil's global presence and Rockefeller name recognition. Lucy Aldrich's letters are filled with harrowing stories including a famous and true tale of being kidnapped by Chinese bandits, which she published in the Atlantic Monthly in 1923. Of this famous episode she wrote: "Of course, for the rest of my life, when I am 'stalled' conversationally, it will be a wonderful thing to fall back on: 'Oh, I must tell you about the time I was captured by Chinese bandits.' That remark from a fat, domestic-looking old lady in a Worth gown, ought to wake up the dullest dinner party."²⁶ She painted verbal pictures for Abby Rockefeller of the details of her surroundings and encounters: by sharing reports of social calls and luncheons, expressing opinions on fellow passengers both in and out of favor, and describing the exotic lands where even

²⁵Aldrich to Rockefeller, 18 July 1919, Record Group 2 OMR, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Papers, Sub-Series LTA-AAR, Box 1, Folder 6, Item 7-18-19.

²⁶Rockefeller, 308.

an avid traveler like Abby Rockefeller would not dare to explore.

Before Lucy Aldrich's trip to India, Mrs. Rockefeller wrote to her sister:

It seems to me even if you can go, it may not turn out to be entirely wise, as everyone seems to agree that the conditions there are more unsettled and upset than in any other country in the world. I don't want to make you nervous about it, but I wonder if it would really be wise for you to try it.²⁷

Miss Aldrich's willingness to endure unusually hazardous and unsavory traveling conditions are testimony to her unusual adventurousness and tenacity.

²⁷ Rockefeller, 34.

LUCY TRUMAN ALDRICH AS AGENT

Lucy Truman Aldrich's involvement as an agent of taste and as intermediary between dealers was not limited to the Bassett Hall years. Rather, throughout the years surveyed (1919-1947), correspondence and the exchange of goods prove that Lucy Aldrich's role in collecting for domestic space continued over decades. Bassett Hall was the product of an established relationship and method of collecting. To a large extent, the discourse of the letters seems to omit Mrs. Rockefeller's public collecting pursuits; instead she focuses on rather private, ordinary objects. In an exchange in 1937, Lucy Aldrich wrote:

If you hadn't taken the epergne at Tessierrs I would, Mr. Parsons told me the last time he sold that epergne it went for 450 pounds and he thought it was a very wise purchase. I sent my cake basket to you because there is this great scare about America putting a duty on antiques and they wanted to get into the country at once. ... Mr. Ballard told me yesterday most of the American dealers are buying nothing. Prices are very high. I have bought a little.²⁸

Mrs. Rockefeller's reply also gives the simple epergne attention, "I simply *adore* the epergne. I have taken it up

²⁸Aldrich to Rockefeller, 24 May 1937, Record Group 2 OMR, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Papers, Sub-Series LTA-AAR, Box 1, Folder 14, Item 82.

to Pocantico and it really is beautiful in its Georgian setting up there."²⁹ Again in September she wrote, "Every one loves the epergne, which we have been using [at] Pocantico ever since it arrived. John thinks it is one of the most beautiful pieces of silver he has ever seen."³⁰

From Lucy Aldrich's letters, one gains a sense of the consumer climate and perceptions of commerce in cultural artifacts, most notably, how headlines of the day affected her ability to serve as the collector. As a determined consumer Miss Aldrich evaluated the cultural commodities market often, citing in a letter from Shanghai in 1919, "I got a lot of embroideries and spent a lot of money but the prices are way up and the things are not much. People that know told me that the supply of old things is about exhausted and there hasn't been any thing really very good for a year."³¹

The standard process by which Lucy Aldrich acquired goods or offered goods for her sister followed a consistent formula. Particular dealers, including New York and Japan based Yamanaka & Company and London based Gilman Collamore, would call on Miss Aldrich at her hotel or invite her to peruse their showroom. She would then request photographs

²⁹ Rockefeller, 246.

³⁰ Ibid., 249.

³¹ Aldrich to Rockefeller, 1919, Record Group 2 OMR, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Papers, Sub-Series LTA-AAR, Box 1, Folder 6, Item 7-B.

of the object of interest and mail them directly to Abby Rockefeller for consideration:

We have done a lot of shopping - by that I mean we have had a string of Chinese bringing us all sorts of things to look at. On the whole I am disappointed the Oriental things in New York, London and Paris are much more beautiful - and the things here are by no means cheap."³²

On other occasions, she would simply cable her sister with news of a find, or she would make the purchase, willing to keep the item if her sister rejected it. She seems to have been privy to inside knowledge and working within the dealer's circle. Because of her powerful kinship ties, she gained informal dealer status as a private liaison to Mrs. Rockefeller. The sisters' system to fund the purchases is evidenced in this letter,

... go ahead buying whatever you think I would like. I will have the money ready when you come back, or I can send you another letter of credit ... I have been buying so little in this country lately that I feel justified in taking some of what I call my 'Aldrich Account' for works of art.³³

The verve which fills these letters and Lucy Truman Aldrich's competitive quest for collecting are summed up in: "I have often thought I would almost sell

³²Ibid., Item 7-A.

³³Rockefeller, 26.

my soul for a beautiful thing and I think this time I have come the nearest to it I ever did and I may not get anything after all. What is it about a 'mess of potage'?"³⁴ This collaborative effort reflects the mutual trust and admiration that pervades the correspondence. Lucy Aldrich wrote to her sister:

I have spent so much myself but I have bought some lovely things. I wish I could see you to consult about some of them. You are the only person whose opinion I really value. Miss MacFadden is very good - and her taste improves all the time. Elsie has taste but no knowledge. You have both.³⁵

Her sense of sisterly bond and shared taste is echoed in Abby Rockefeller's letter from approximately twenty years earlier, "Please don't worry about buying things for me. We always admire the same things and I am sure that anything you choose I shall love."³⁶

Furnishing Basset Hall was not limited to glass and ceramics. Rather, Abby Rockefeller solicited Lucy Aldrich to purchase a variety of key objects, including many important textiles.

I cabled you some time ago that if you did happen to find an eighteenth-century or early nineteenth-century embroidered carpet for the drawing room in Williamsburg, I should be delighted, as the one I have down there is a little too dull for the room. The room is 17

³⁴Aldrich to Rockefeller, 8 January 1925, Record Group 2 OMR, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Papers, Sub-Series LTA-AAR, Box 1, Folder 11, Item 51.

³⁵Ibid., Folder 14, Item 84.

³⁶Rockefeller, 13.

½ by 21 ½ and the carpet could be as small as 15 by 9, which is the size of the one that is there now. I am sure you can carry the color of the room in your eye, and you will remember that the curtains are to be pale green.³⁷

I forgot to mention Bassett Hall, as that makes the fifth house, being more or less occupied, although it is now closed for the summer. I think I wrote you that John and I spent the first week in June down there. I feel now that John likes it and is going to enjoy it very much. It is more attractive all the time. There is very little needed for it except the new rug for the drawing room and a little rug at the front door and if possible two little square rugs for the stair landing. I am counting on you to supply these since you have all the measurements. Of course if you cannot find anything in London, I shall probably be able to find something here in New York, but they charge the most ridiculous prices here for any needlework rugs.³⁸

Miss Aldrich's systematic and widespread acquisition on behalf of her sister constantly reaffirmed emotional bonds. The continual cycle of request, quest, and offering provided a life-long connection and material exchange between the women that allowed for repetitive expressions of gratitude and admiration. It allowed Abby Rockefeller the freedom to possess, display, and wear exotic goods that would otherwise be difficult to obtain given the heavy social demands in her life. Additionally, it gave an unselfish purpose to Miss Aldrich's travels and the

³⁷Ibid., 241.

³⁸Ibid., 243.

opportunity for physical manifestation of fond remembrances of her sister. Separated by different adult circumstances and markedly divergent occupations, the two sisters found travel and collecting as a unique outlet for sisterly solidarity. The world of cultural commodities and material goods was one where the sisters did not have to share one another. It guaranteed the growth of an intimate sisterly bond. Abby Rockefeller wrote to her sister, "But here I am giving you another commission when you are doing too much for me already. I don't know what I should do without you, look like a frump - probably. I am more grateful than I can ever tell you. You have much better taste than I have about things."³⁹

Of all the objects the sisters wrote about, they mention ceramics most often in their letters. It seems that in addition to the formal, public collecting which highlighted Mr. Rockefeller's exemplary Chinese porcelains and Mrs. Rockefeller's modern and folk art, the Rockefellers were fascinated with the aesthetics and domestic nature of tablewares.

Do buy me some more fascinating things for the table. John enjoys so much having me change the table decorations. Both he and the children seem to love china and he is very much interested in whatever we put on the table, as it seems to give him pleasure. We

³⁹Ibid., 144-145.

can even use the small dessert sets now,
because we are so often just two alone or
only four at the table.⁴⁰

⁴⁰Ibid., 223.

**PROFESSIONAL PERCEPTIONS: THE MANAGEMENT OF
GLASS AND CERAMICS AT BASSETT HALL**

Although later curators have tended to focus their attention on other segments of the Rockefeller collection, the objects Miss Aldrich obtained for her sister were treated with the same administrative standards as Mrs. Rockefeller's more famous collections. In 1936, with the recommendation of her friend Holger Cahill, Mrs. Rockefeller hired Mrs. Elinor Robinson Bradshaw.⁴¹ Ms. Bradshaw, a graduate of Smith College and a participant in the first Museum Apprentice Class at the Newark Museum under the direction of John Cotton Dana, was educated as a pioneer professional in the field of collections management. She implemented the systematic approach that Mrs. Rockefeller demanded and was employed with offices at 10 West 54th Street and 740 Park Avenue from 1936-1941 - precisely the key years in the development

⁴¹Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Archives, Oral History Collection, Elinor Robinson Bradshaw, "The Reminiscences of Elinor Robinson Bradshaw," transcript of interview, October, 25, 1984.

of the Bassett Hall furnishing plan.⁴² Two of Ms. Bradshaw's oral histories, both in the archives at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, provide us with insight into how Mrs. Rockefeller viewed the organization of objects at Bassett Hall. As Mrs. Rockefeller's art secretary, Ms. Bradshaw noted that her position did not encompass decisions regarding the purchase of objects, but centered on refining and executing cataloging procedures.⁴³ She described her work as a continuation of a previous attempt by Mrs. Rockefeller's former secretary Miss Nourse, who was not trained in arts management.⁴⁴ When asked about Mrs. Rockefeller's diligent tracking of her collection, Ms. Bradshaw stated that, "this was not just possessions that were put to the side and brought out when she wanted them. She really cared and I think of well, of her sons, John III certainly Nelson and David have that same feeling, that they really know their collection, and like them as individual things."⁴⁵ Mrs. Rockefeller felt that all of the objects at Bassett Hall were important parts of a collection. Bradshaw also talked

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Archives, Oral History Collection, Elinor Robinson Bradshaw, "The Reminiscences of Elinor Robinson Bradshaw," transcript of interview, October, 24, 1984.

⁴⁵Ibid., October, 25, 1984.

about Mrs. Rockefeller's motivations for the whimsical themes repeated in the decorative and fine art in her Williamsburg home. Speaking about Abby Rockefeller's choices for pictures and visual themes, particularly at Bassett Hall, Ms. Bradshaw noted:

I don't remember she was a great appreciator. I don't remember her actually remarking anything like "I love this picture as opposed to another. She really reacted but she didn't effervesce publicly about things but just from what she has collected and from what we know about her in general. I'm sure she liked the velvet pictures, the flower pictures, because she liked flowers and in her home were lovely flower arrangements. The same with portraits of children. She loved children as individuals. ... I think they had a lot of individuality and the children's portraits had a lot of individuality. I think she responded very much to them. ... She saw people's differences and so ... and her sense of humor would have come into some but defiantly her aesthetic feeling, just spontaneous feeling had a lot to do with what she liked.⁴⁶

Abby Rockefeller's personal approach to collecting objects with her sister and the professional manner in which she displayed and managed the collection are significant.

Lucy Aldrich's keen insight into the power of a group of objects and their potential legacy is best expressed in her own words:

I have been thinking that it is a very sad thing to have the houses and collections scattered after a person's death, but I have come to the conclusion that these collections, without the people that made them, lack a soul - I really do think so. They really need you and John and we missed you both very much. I feel, too, that the

⁴⁶Ibid.

museums should keep the gift of people together and not scatter them all over the museum in the places where they think they belong. A collection is much more interesting to me if it is kept together. Then you feel a little of the donor's personality.⁴⁷

Thirty-seven years later, Ms. Bradshaw's conclusion, expressing her own impression of Bassett Hall, reflects the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation's commitment to keep the historic furnishing plan of Bassett Hall's eclectic collection intact. She spoke of her appreciation for Mr. and Mrs. Rockefeller's achievements as "human beings" and the pleasure that gained from their actions. Bradshaw remembers them as conscientious collectors and expressed her appreciation for the measures Colonial Williamsburg Foundation has taken to "preserve their things as they would have wanted them preserved."⁴⁸

⁴⁷Aldrich to Rockefeller, 19 February 1947, Record Group 2 OMR, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Papers, Sub-Series LTA-AAR, Box 1, Folder 14, Item 89.

⁴⁸"The Reminiscences of Elinor Robinson Bradshaw," transcript of interview, October, 25, 1984.

A SURVEY OF OBJECTS AND SPACE

Bassett Hall provides an opportunity for a case study of the collecting collaboration between Abby Rockefeller and her sister Lucy Aldrich. The main entrance hall is a grand, open space outlined in soft neutral hues. This space is flanked on either side by the parlor to the right and the morning room opposite. In addition to the Dining Room, the Parlor serves as one of the few formal, public rooms at Bassett Hall (fig. 5). The Rockefellers arranged traditional English furniture in a symmetrical layout atop a large French Aubusson carpet. The walls are punctuated with schoolgirl silk embroideries, some of them purchased by Lucy Aldrich. Upon entering the room, one notices the extraordinary pair of Chinese export porcelain hawk figures. Among the rarest objects at Bassett Hall, the hawks stand approximately ten inches in height and date between 1720-1760. Displayed on card tables on either side of the fireplace, these figures are testament to Mr. Rockefeller's passion for fine Chinese porcelains. Their presence combined with objects representing Mrs. Rockefeller's family associations and her personal tastes, shape a space that mirrors both individual's interests. Throughout the room design, it is difficult to overlook the prominence of

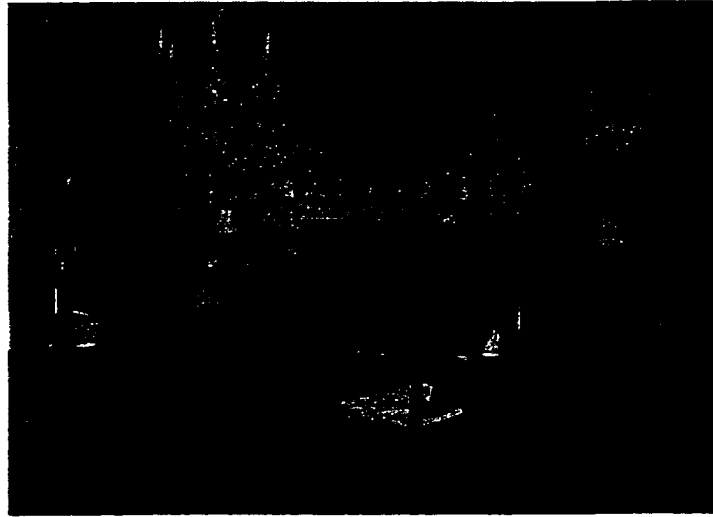


Figure 5
Bassett Hall, Parlor, east view.
Courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg
Foundation

decorative ceramics. Most noticeably are the whimsical English Bow and German Meissen figurines.

What can we read from them? What do they say? Beyond the display of a particular elite aesthetic, they exemplify a care for pleasure and playfulness that is so effectively stated throughout the design plan. In form, the decorative ceramics offer dramatic visual signs of frivolity and leisure, hallmarks of a social and economic class occupied by both sisters. The strong colors, appealing nonchalance, and spirited shapes reflect each woman's own playful spirit. They are vitrified symbols of gaiety imbued with nineteenth-century notions of beauty and represent the lack of a visual hierarchy at Bassett Hall. In addition, they also project contemporary stereotypes and represent an awareness of the Other. Like their contemporaries, Lucy Aldrich and the Rockefellers were fascinated by newly introduced cultural groups. Figurative and idealized representations of nonwestern peoples displayed among archetypal images of a western notion of beauty, served to equalize and verify the subject.

On the south wall of the parlor, a porcelain figurine crowns a gilded wall bracket that Lucy Aldrich purchased for Bassett Hall. In fact many of the objects she collected are displayed prominently throughout the room. For example; under this figurine is a tea canister adorning a side table (fig. 6). The canister dates from approximately 1790 and

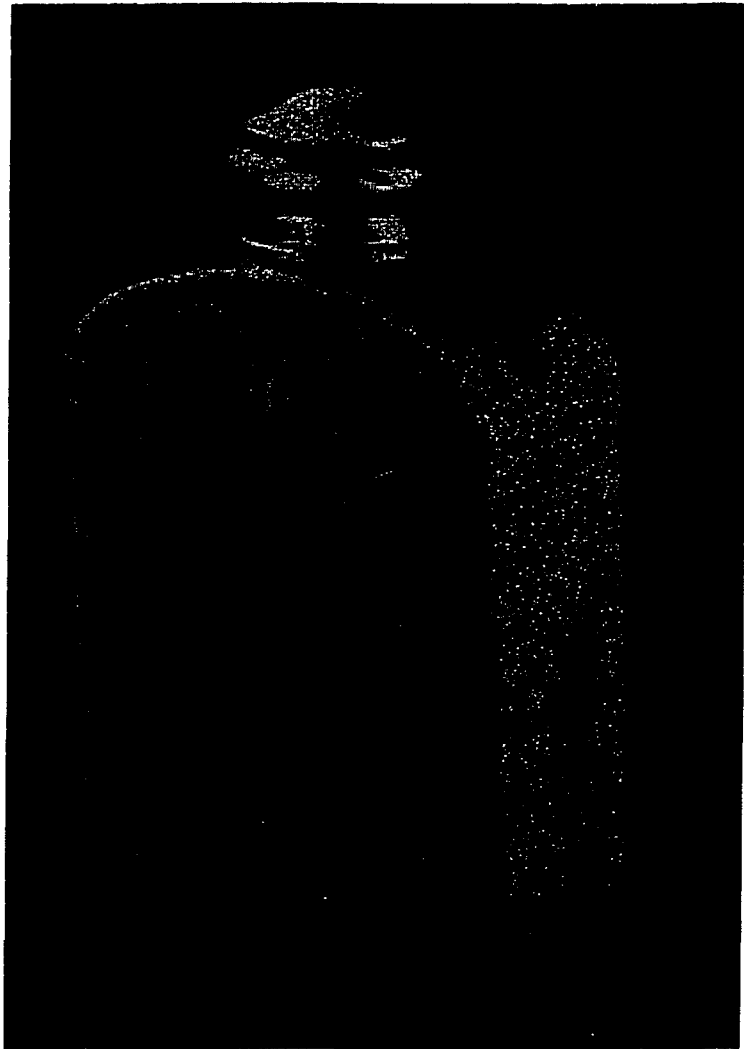


Figure 6
Tea Canister. Porcelain, silver, and
enamel, 1780-1800, China.
Courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg
Foundation

features a white porcelain body embellished with enameled floral decoration in green, pink, and purple hues. Beyond its importance as a fine example of painted porcelain and silverwork, the tea canister was likely a souvenir gathered by Lucy Aldrich. Displayed in the parlor, it is just a form suited to the purpose of socializing in a formal room. At a different level it is a reminder of Miss Aldrich's extensive travel in the East. The tea canister is an exception to the room's dominant themes which emphasize children, romance, and youth. The mantel shelf features five porcelain figures. The large English Staffordshire group figure, a gift from Lucy Aldrich, marks the center of the garniture (fig. 7). One of a dozen porcelain figures in the room, it depicts a coy young lady resisting the advances of her suitor. The couple is seated on a yellow bench in front of a tree and leafy backdrop. The group figure dates to approximately 1835 and represents a romantic Victorian theme that had fallen out of favor by the time Abby Rockefeller received it as a gift from her sister. Despite its sentimentality, the figurine is displayed prominently at the center of the mantel in Bassett Hall's most public room. Here we observe the fireplace, a symbol of the warmth and heart of a home, transformed by the use of ceramics into a casual altar to domestic affections. The porcelain figures



Figure 7
Group Figure. Pearlware, 1825-1845,
Staffordshire, England.
Courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg
Foundation

are arranged in a reverent display, which speaks of a shared aesthetic and acts as a visual sign of a devoted sisterly bond.

FAMILY AND FURNISHINGS

Mrs. Rockefeller's motivations for collecting are revealed through a comparison of her legacy interests in modern and folk art and her creation of a private domestic environment. Bassett Hall served to mediate Abby Rockefeller's public collecting interests, which often conflicted with her husband's notions of value and art. Bassett Hall provided a space that would be comfortable to both of them.

The prominence of ceramics on display at Bassett Hall reflects their shared respect for and interest in the medium. The forms and rarity reflect more of Mrs. Rockefeller's personalized, sentimental perspective than that of her husband. Unlike the apartment in New York, which was large enough to provide a division of gendered space based on aesthetic choices, Bassett Hall's small scale prompted a mutually comfortable living environment. In 1937, Abby Rockefeller wrote: "We are going to Williamsburg for a little quiet and peace."⁴⁹ In Williamsburg, the respite could be found within their home, in privacy. The comfort and peace gained at Bassett Hall came from the house

⁴⁹Rockefeller, 251.

itself and the visual environment that Abby Aldrich Rockefeller created.

In April of 1946 she wrote to her sister Lucy:

Anyhow, it has meant that I have spent almost all of the five days we have been here in the house [Bassett Hall]. I cannot say that I mind it very much because both John and I were pretty tired when we arrived and we have had a wonderful rest. ... The weather has been very cold and rather damp since we arrived, but this does not seem to make any great difference to me either because I am so happy to be in this house again, surrounded by things that bring back so many happy memories to me.⁵⁰

While Mr. Rockefeller might not have shared his wife's appreciation for the aesthetic value of the objects, it is likely that he understood them as familiar signs of kinship ties.

The Morning Room, adjacent to the parlor, is a remarkable visual cornucopia that further reflects the Rockefeller's personal notions of comfort and taste. The center of the room is framed by Turkish prayer rugs, which surround contemporary seating furniture. In addition to housing an important body of chalk ware, striking corner cupboards display a varied group of ceramics, ranging from a single Barr, Flight, and Barr Worcester porcelain dinner plate, circa 1815 (fig. 8). Within a border of gold, the pattern features thin, organic gold

⁵⁰Rockefeller, 266.



Figure 8
Bassett Hall, Morning Room, west view.
Courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg
Foundation

lines surrounding a large center field of a painted shell. The plate is displayed in the cabinet among various soft-paste porcelain Derby figures representing the four seasons and the natural elements. The opposite cabinet protects most of a thirty-three piece German porcelain tea service. The Hochst service dates to approximately 1770-1790 and features white-bodied wares encircled by a delicate blue ribbon decorated with garlands of fruit and flowers. Mrs. Rockefeller purchased this group from Gilman Collamore & Co. in New York on May 17, 1927.⁵¹ This exceptional set serves as the backdrop for the conversational seating area.

Between two mid-twentieth-century velour easy chairs, atop a slipper-footed, tilt-top table sits a small, common glass jar with a cover (fig. 9). This mid-nineteenth-century, colorless footed glass jar is a fine example of the pressed diamond pattern. Here Mrs. Rockefeller is using the Morning Room to showcase objects with a family association. This jar was among the items Abby Rockefeller inherited from her Aunt Abby Greene.

Mrs. Rockefeller had a close relationship with her Great Aunt, Abby Truman Greene (1792-1865), who had raised her mother. Following her mother's death and the settling of the estate Abby Rockefeller's inheritance predominately

⁵¹Office of the Registrar. Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Williamsburg, VA. 1979.102.1-33.



Figure 9
Bassett Hall, Morning Room, east view.
Courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg
Foundation

consisted of nineteenth-century glass and ceramics that once belonged to her Great Aunt Greene.

This group of glass and ceramics lacks rarity or pretentiousness, but they were valued for their associations. In a letter to her sister, Abby Rockefeller wrote about the division of her Aunt Abby and Uncle Duty Greene's estate:

I have a number of less important things that appealed to me because of sentiment. I took a few things too that I thought you would enjoy... I thought it would be nice if you could use these things during your lifetime, and perhaps if you would be good enough to leave them back to me, I would pass them on in the family. I think everything worked out very well so that each member of the family has some of what might be called the family heirlooms.⁵²

This quote reveals Mrs. Rockefeller's established value system for objects that had little monetary value or collecting cachet. Objects such as a single worn, Victorian, transfer-printed earthenware plate had value as a family heirloom. It also reveals Mrs. Rockefeller's affection for and thoughtful consideration of her sister.

An analysis of the objects inherited from the Greenes reveals a pattern and shared ornamental vocabulary. Two-thirds of the objects are English transfer-printed earthenware and ironstone. This grouping is almost wholly

⁵²Rockefeller, 148.

comprised of functional forms, mostly individual plates and pitchers. Scattered delicate, floral motifs appear with nearly the same frequency as romanticized genre scenes. One-third of this group is glass, primarily of American and Bohemian origin. A family of cranberry or ruby Bohemian glass with ornamental gilding stands out as particularly notable (fig. 10).

Abby Rockefeller displayed several pieces including the group of cranberry glass in her Master and Guest bedrooms (fig. 11). This type of colored glass was popular throughout the nineteenth century. By the late 1800s, it was available cheaply through department stores such as Montgomery Ward & Company. By the 1930s the popularity of cranberry glass had been replaced by an aesthetic reflected in the clean architectural clear glass forms of Duncan & Miller.⁵³ This group of early Victorian glass laid the foundation for Mrs. Rockefeller's collecting interests that extended beyond the current taste to incorporate an individual aesthetic. Bassett Hall was not a colonial revival warehouse of family kitsch. Instead the collection served as an agent of memory, and its function transcended attempts to communicate status or to provide a refined

⁵³Charles L. Venable, Ellen P. Denker, Katherine C. Grier, and Stephen G. Harrison, *China and Glass in America 1880-1980: From Tabletop to TV Tray*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Publishers, 2000), 45.



Figure 10
Bottle. Cranberry Glass, 1800-1850,
Bohemia.
Courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg
Foundation

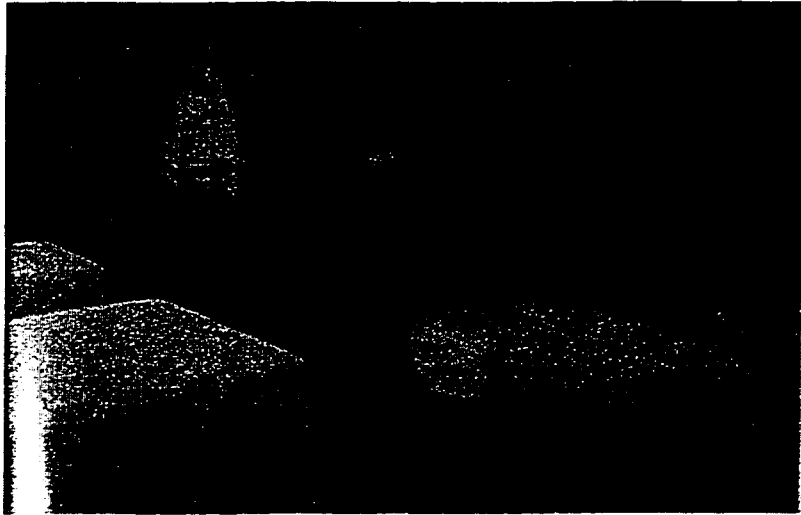


Figure 11
Bassett Hall, Master Bedroom, east view.
Courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

public forum for entertaining. In 1936 when the Rockefellers moved into Bassett Hall, their children were grown. In 1938, Abby Rockefeller wrote to her son David "I am tired of being an interior decorator."⁵⁴ This sentiment suggests that after years of creating interior spaces to serve elite social functions, she was finally content at Bassett Hall to create a comfortable living space and savored being surrounded by objects with identifiable familial associations. At a time when furnishing a home in good taste was considered a reflection of gentility and morality, Mrs. Rockefeller was reaching beyond accepted parameters to make a personal statement of comfort by choosing to display middle class goods.

In addition to displaying her inherited Victorian ceramics and glass, Mrs. Rockefeller actively sought to expand her collection. As in most of her quests, she employed Lucy Aldrich to assist her in attaining her goods: "I am very much excited to know what you have found in the way of 1820-1840 or Victorian china. Have you seen any other interesting ornaments of that period?"⁵⁵ Lucy Aldrich was indeed successful on this mission. She wrote "I am sending this mail photo of china from Thomas [dealer, J. Rochelle Thomas]. The Coalport dessert service is a lovely shade of

⁵⁴Kert, 407.

⁵⁵Rockefeller, 230.

green with delicate pink roses - quite lovely and spring like."⁵⁶ On March 31, 1936, Lucy Aldrich purchased thirty-nine pieces of a Coalport bone china dessert service for her sister from J. Rochelle Thomas in London (fig. 12). The unidentified pattern is brilliantly alive with richly painted pink roses and green foliage on a white ground. The borders feature a bright green granulated pattern with a gilded edge. In addition to reflecting her Aunt Abby Greene's influence in the development of a Victorian aesthetic, this service represents Mrs. Rockefeller's cooperative approach to collecting with her sister.

Perhaps the room that speaks most dramatically of the symbiotic exchange of aesthetic ideals and objects is the second floor guest room opposite the Rockefeller's own master bedroom (fig. 13). As in the parlor, the fireplace mantel is artfully adorned with a "married" garniture of five ornamental glass and ceramic pieces. In the center, Abby Rockefeller has once more placed an object that was purchased by her sister, transferred to her, and catalogued by the art secretary. The object under consideration is a French opaque blue glass compote dating to the nineteenth century (fig. 14). The surface is embellished with a white enamel foliate border accented by gilt stylized floral

⁵⁶Aldrich to Rockefeller, 2 April 1936, Record Group 2 OMR, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Papers, Sub-Series LTA-AAR, Box 1, Folder 13, Item 80.

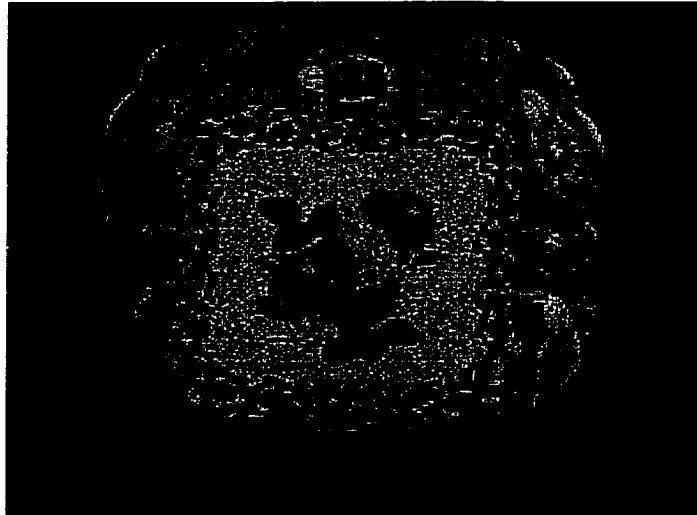


Figure 12
Platter. Bone china, 1800-1825, Coalport,
England.
Courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation



Figure 13
Bassett Hall, Guest Bedroom, west view.
Courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation



Figure 14
Compote. Blue glass, gilt, and enamel, 1800-
1900, France.
Courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

pattern and lines. Another contribution by Lucy Aldrich is an aqua-blue and white covered cat dish located across from the fireplace. Likely made by American Westmoreland Glass Company, the dish sits on a small table at the foot of one of the guest beds (fig. 15). This piece reflects the signature aesthetic created with the sisters' collaboration. Mrs. Rockefeller demonstrated her aptitude for combining antique and modern, sentimentalized objects to create a room design with her display of two blue glass cigarette boxes (fig. 16). The boxes have a well-documented and accepted association to Lucy Aldrich. In a letter to her sister, Abby Rockefeller expresses her collecting standards for Bassett Hall.

I am perfectly delighted with the blue glass cigarette box and two ash trays. I am sure that the cigarette box is a really old one because the gilt metal work is so particularly good; and I wouldn't be surprised if the ash trays were more or less modern but they look beautiful in the guest room. I put the ash trays on the desk and the cigarette box I put on the bureau and put the one I had there on the table. They add very much to the appearance of the room and they also add very much to my indebtedness to you. There are so many things here in Bassett hall you have given me that it gives me great pleasure to look about and think of you.⁵⁷

This example represents the compromise in aesthetic standards Mrs. Rockefeller permitted at Bassett Hall due to the potent sisterly connection afforded her through objects.

⁵⁷Rockefeller, 258.



Figure 15
Bassett Hall, Guest Bedroom, east view.
Courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

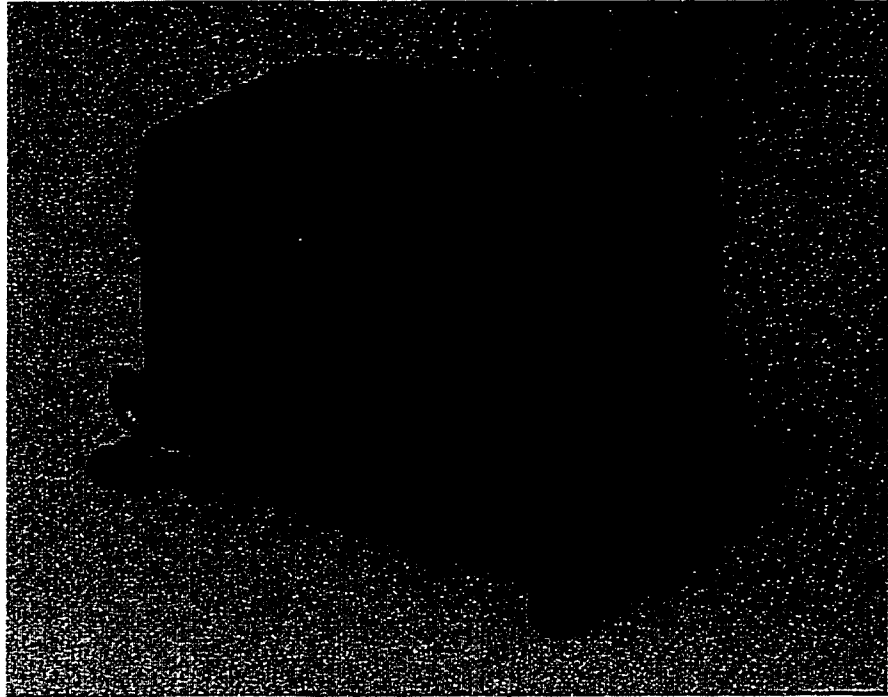


Figure 16
Box with hinged cover. Blue glass and gilded
bronze, 1840-1860, Continental.
Courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

The period houses and museums at Colonial Williamsburg represented the public collecting of John D. Rockefeller, Jr. and Abby Rockefeller. Bassett Hall represented the private collecting interests of a family.

**COMMUNITY AND AN INTERIOR: THE SOCIAL FUNCTION OF
BASSETT HALL**

A longtime friend of Mr. Rockefeller, Raymond Fosdick is quoted in Bernice Kert's biography as saying that John D. Rockefeller, Jr.'s goal in Williamsburg was "to rediscover an atmosphere, not create one."⁵⁸ This sentiment can be applied to Mrs. Rockefeller as well. She used objects and collections to rediscover the atmosphere of family. As a mature woman, she employed glass and ceramics to express the atmosphere of home.

Mrs. Rockefeller's decisions regarding the furnishings of Bassett Hall helped to mediate her and her husband's roles in the Williamsburg community. Due in part to the way in which they settled at Bassett Hall, the Rockefellers were perceived as private individuals and neighbors. Consequently, they looked to their time in Virginia for respite and pleasure. Mrs. Rockefeller's art secretary, Elinor Robinson Bradshaw noted:

I would like to add that Bassett Hall from my watching them when they were there, they loved their visits to Williamsburg, which were generally in October ... though they were truly interested in what was going on here, it was different from having people after them to do things, unless they

⁵⁸Kert, 389.

wanted to. And the way the town took them in, without interfering, respecting their sense of privacy was very strong, but they didn't get much chance to indulge in it, I think that added to their delight in coming here.⁵⁹

⁵⁹"The Reminiscences of Elinor Robinson Bradshaw," transcript of interview, October, 25, 1984.

IN SUM

At Bassett Hall, Abby Rockefeller's wishes could be realized in private. She reveled in its effect, "We are just off for Williamsburg - I can't tell you what pleasure [it will give me] to be back at Bassett Hall. I really love that place."⁶⁰ The Rockefeller's fondness for spending time at Bassett Hall is partly a result of the home's unique furnishing plan. This design which reflects both the personalities of Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., also mirrors the identity of a powerful and affectionate collaboration between sisters. The collaboration took the shape of an eclectic and unconventional collection of ceramic and glass wares. Here objects gained their significance and value through emotional and private associations.

Inspired by shared value systems and heritage, Lucy Truman Aldrich acted as an active agent for her sister Abby Aldrich Rockefeller. Together they shaped the collection of this group of objects and established a system for its purchase, transfer, management and display. The collection signaled an affectionate and steadfast sisterly bond,

⁶⁰Kert, 444.

freeing Mrs. Rockefeller from the scrutiny of her public collecting and contemporary notions of value and taste. In effect it would allow her to have an introspective domestic space.

This paper has considered the well-known multi-dimensional persona of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller in the private context of her relationship with Lucy Aldrich and her ties to glass and ceramic objects at Basset Hall. As a result, the case study suggests an interpretive perspective for Bassett Hall. Articulating the story of Lucy Truman Aldrich and Abby Aldrich Rockefeller's glass and ceramics collecting will add another dimension to a visitor's understanding of the house and family.

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