STRUGGLING WELFARE INSTITUTIONS
AND THE ORGANIZATION OF PHILANTHROPY IN CLEVELAND:
ROCKEFELLER PHILANTHROPY,
THE FLOATING BETHEL MISSION,
AND THE HOME FOR AGED COLORED PEOPLE

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STRUGGLING WELFARE INSTITUTIONS AND THE ORGANIZATION OF PHILANTHROPY IN CLEVELAND: ROCKEFELLER PHILANTHROPY, THE FLOATING BETHEL MISSION, AND THE HOME FOR AGED COLORED PEOPLE

In discussions of attempts to organize charity and philanthropy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, historians have devoted much attention to the institutions being organized — to the charity organization societies, to philanthropic clearing houses, or to the new foundations created by such wealthy, public-spirited citizens as Andrew Carnegie, John D. Rockefeller, or Mrs. Russell Sage — and little concern has been given to the impact such organizing campaigns had on existing social welfare institutions or charity work. Two institutions in Cleveland which were affected by local efforts to organize philanthropy were the Floating Bethel Mission and the Home for Aged Colored People. In the cases of both of these institutions, records located in the Rockefeller Family Archives at the Rockefeller Archive Center in North Tarrytown, New York, provide valuable information about how these institutions fared around the turn of the century. This material suggests some of the problems associated with fundraising at a time when donors were careful to give only to worthy projects, and when organizations were being established to tell potential donors which projects were, and which were not, meritorious.

As the wealthiest Cleveland with a widely known reputation for giving, John D. Rockefeller was a clear target for organizations and individuals seeking financial support for a wide array of projects. From the time of his first employment in a Cleveland mercantile house in 1855, Rockefeller had been making donations to needy individuals and worthy charitable projects, giving largely through his church (1). As his income grew with his success in the oil business, so too did the flow of his charitable giving and his reputation as a philanthropist. It was not unusual for Clevelanders to look to the Rockefellers for contributions toward projects they deemed favorable. The result was a steady stream of correspondence between citizens of Cleveland, Rockefeller, and his staff and advisors in New York and Cleveland. Much of this correspondence is now accessible to researchers at the Rockefeller Archive Center in the papers of John D. Rockefeller and in the Cleveland project files in the welfare series in the records of the Office of the Messrs Rockefeller, the office Rockefeller established to handle his personal and philanthropic affairs (2). Material related to the Floating Bethel Mission

1. Rockefeller’s first personal ledger, "Ledger A," now preserved at the Rockefeller Archive Center, records his earliest charitable gifts.

2. Researchers can gain access to the Cleveland material in the John D. Rockefeller Papers most readily through the published name index for the 394 volumes of letterbooks in the collection: Index to the John D. Rockefeller Letterbooks, 1877–1918 at the Rockefeller Archive Center (1987), compiled by Emily J. Oakhill and Claire Collier. The Rockefeller Family Archives, Record Group 2, OMR Welfare series contains four boxes (boxes 28–31) of material concerning a number of Cleveland organizations: the Cleveland Associated Charities, the Cleveland Automobile Club, the Children’s Fresh Air Camp, the Cleveland Community Fund, the Cleveland-Euclid Avenue Association, the Cleveland Federation for Charity and Philanthropy, Cleveland’s Federated
and the Home for Aged Colored People reveal much about the history of these two institutions, about the nature of fundraising for charitable enterprises at the turn of the century, and a good deal about the process of Rockefeller philanthropy.

**THE FLOATING BETHEL MISSION**

The Reverend J. D. Jones and the Floating Bethel Mission have received little attention from Cleveland's historians. Neither the man nor his mission appears in the Encyclopedia of Cleveland History, and William Ganson Rose's *Cleveland: The Making of a City* gives only scant attention to the more spectacular aspects of Jones' work (3). Indeed, there appears to have been little particularly remarkable or distinctive about the Floating Bethel Mission: it was one of numerous religious-based charitable works undertaken by Clevelanders to save the souls of their fellow citizens, to keep them from sin, and to help them in sickness and in need. Its reports invariably recounted the statistics of its services, reporting the number of souls touched by its work, if not necessarily saved. For the first six months of 1887, for example:

117 visits were made to the bedside of the sick at their homes . . . ; provisions, medicine and clothing were furnished in all cases when needed. Thirty-two tons of coal were given, and rent paid in seven cases; twenty-two visits were made to the City Hospital and Invalids Home, four sick persons were assisted to their homes, two hundred and fifteen Bethel and funeral services were held, 7299 attended our Bethel services, 1367 arose for prayers.

The mission's special task was to serve sailors in the lake shipping trade, and in 1887 it boasted "the largest Sailor Congregation" and "the best located and patronized" reading room on the lakes. So well attended was the reading

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Churches, the Floating Bethel Mission, Fourth of July Celebration—Cleveland, Hiram House, John D. Rockefeller, Jr.'s contribution to the History of Cleveland by William Ganson Rose, Cleveland Home for Aged Colored People, the Cleveland Humane Society, the Children's Industrial School and Home, the Jones School and Home for Friendless Children, the Cleveland Medical Library, the Cleveland Orchestra Concerts, the Cleveland Public Library, the Cleveland School of Art, the Cleveland Foundation, the Phyllis Wheatley Association, Case School of Applied Science, and a folder entitled "Cleveland—Miscellaneous Appeals." In addition to this material, there is substantial material at the Archive Center on the Rockefellers' business interests in Cleveland, real estate holdings in Cleveland, homes in Cleveland, and contributions to area churches, as well as personal correspondence with friends and relatives in the area.

3. One local historian who mentions both Jones and his relationship with John D. Rockefeller is Grace Goulder, *John D. Rockefeller: The Cleveland Years* (Cleveland: The Western Reserve Historical Society, 1972), p. 100. "Brother Jones had only to appear at Rockefeller's office to receive a good size check," she reports, with exaggeration.
room that, apparently in 1888, its floor gave way (4).

Although this "independent unsectarian work" was under the direction of a board of trustees, with a president, a secretary, and a treasurer, the main force behind its work was the Reverend J. D. Jones. Indeed, it is the longevity and dedication of "the one-armed Missionary" that provides the Floating Bethel Mission with much of its distinctiveness. For more than five decades, the Rev. Jones enjoyed the financial and moral support of some of the city's leading citizens for his work along the docks and among the poor (5).

The Rev. John Davis Jones (April 30, 1845–early April 1926) became a

4. "Floating Bethel & City Mission Work, June 1887," leaflet located in the JDR Papers, Office Correspondence, box 21, folder 166. The collapse of the reading room floor is reported in an undated fundraising card, printed apparently in early 1889: "Our reading room floor gave way owing to the great numbers visiting it, [and] we were compelled to put new timbers under and refloor a part of it." Other costs that year included construction of "a new dock on our river front and, owing to the building adjoining us being raised a story higher than ours, made it necessary to extend our three chimneys . . ." See "Summary of Current Expenses," which lists the amount of debt for January 1, 1888 and January 1, 1889, signed by William H. Doan, treasurer, and W. D. Rees, secretary and treasurer, board of trustees.

5. The Floating Bethel's work is described as independent and unsectarian in the June 1887 circular described above. Jones is described as the one-armed missionary in much of the literature about him, including one printed card, dated June 10, 1887, that illustrates the nature of the support for his work. It reads: "We, the undersigned, are acquainted with and help to support the Bethel and City Mission Work that Rev. J. D. Jones, the one-armed Missionary has been engaged in for the past twenty years, and cheerfully recommend his worthy work to the support of the benevolent." The undersigned included local political and civic leaders (the mayor of Cleveland, B.D. Babcock; the president of city council, W. M. Bayne; the port collector, William J. McKinnie; the county treasurer, D. H. Kimberley; and the state senator from the 25th district, George H. Ely); the managers of the leading newspapers (E.H. Purdue of the Leader and Herald; and George F. Prescott of the Plain Dealer); many businessmen associated with the shipping industry and lake trade (ship chandlers J.W. Grover & Son, and Upson, Walton & Company; vessel owners Thomas Wilson, M.A. Bradley, and Palmer & Benham; and Cleveland, Brown & Company, iron merchants); and other prominent citizens: Charles H. Beardslee (with the Cleveland Gas Company); William H. Doan, a local oil producer and one of Rockefeller's partners; and Rufus P. Ranney, a prominent local lawyer who had served in the Ohio Supreme Court. The card is in the JDR Papers, Office Correspondence, box 21, folder 166.

Shipping interests played a major role in supporting the Bethel, although that role apparently declined along with business in the first decade of the twentieth century. When the Mission incurred a debt of $467.76 in 1901-1902, Jones explained that "the consolidation of several Steamboat and Dry Dock and Ship Building Companies has cut down our annual subscriptions over $500.00, and at the same time our work and expenses have increased." (Jones to Rockefeller, June 19, 1902, OMR/Welfare, box 28.) In 1908, when Rockefeller was the major contributor to its work, the next largest supporter was the Pittsburgh Steamship Company, which reduced its annual subscription from $300 in 1908 to $100 in 1909. (N. A. Quilling to Rockefeller, January 22, 1909.)
well-known figure on the streets of Cleveland as he ministered to the sick and needy along the lakefront and in the flats. The founder of the Floating Bethel Mission and "a pastor—at-large to the poor of the city," (6) the Rev. Jones was a native Clevelander, one of eight children born to David Jones, one of the founders of the area's first rolling mill. According to his obituary, Jones first went to sea as a cabin boy, later advancing to mate, before enlisting in the army in 1861. He served in the Seventh Ohio Volunteer Infantry until he was discharged with a disability, then re-enlisted in the navy. While serving on the gunboat Yantic, he was rendered partly deaf by a cannon explosion during a battle. Following the war, Jones worked on the lakes during the summers and with the railroads during the winter season. His work on the railroads led to further disability: an accident "cost him an arm and part of a foot." (7)

Jones' religious work reportedly began following his own conversion in 1867 "at a noonday service conducted by the Young Men’s Christian Association." Jones began distributing religious tracts along the docks, but soon extended his work into hospitals and local prisons (8). By the early 1870s, he was preaching in a Methodist Church; in 1876 he was ordained a sailor evangelist; and on December 12, 1877, he was ordained minister of the Woodland Avenue Presbyterian Church, where he served until failing health forced him to retire in 1924. By the late 1870s, Jones had, according to William Ganson Rose, "fitted an old scow in grand style" to attract sailors to his ministry, and in 1894 he revived the boat by mounting it on wheels and putting it behind a team of horses, taking his open-air services throughout the city. A powerful speaker, Jones reportedly combined material service with his religious services, giving tickets to his Sunday prayer meetings that permitted their collectors to redeem a certain number for shoes or clothing (9). In addition to his own work on behalf of the sick and needy, the Rev. Jones was active in the founding of the Jones' Home for Friendless Children. He claimed to have influenced his uncle and aunt, Carlos L. and Mary B. Jones, to donate their land and home for the orphanage (10).

6. The Rev. E. R. Wright, writing in his "Church News" column in the Cleveland Leader, September 26, 1912, offered this description of Jones. "Everybody in Cleveland" knows his story, he wrote.

7. This brief biographical sketch relies heavily upon his obituary in an unidentified Cleveland newspaper. An undated copy of the clipping is located in the correspondence in the Rockefeller Family Archives, Office of the Messrs Rockefeller, John D. Rockefeller series, box 15, folder 113. Laura W. Jones, his second wife and widow, sent the obituary to Rockefeller with a letter dated April 9, 1926. This record group and series will hereafter be cited as OMR/JDR.


10. Jones to Rockefeller, June 19, 1902, in a letter that appeals for aid on behalf of both the Floating Bethel and the Jones Home, in OMR/Welfare, box 28, folder "Floating Bethel Cleveland." For the history of the Jones Home,
When and how the Rev. Jones came to establish the Floating Bethel Mission is unclear from these sources. However, by the mid 1880s, the Sailors Floating Bethel and City Mission Chapel was in operation at 165 River Street, with Jones as chaplain and superintendent. Throughout much of its history, the Floating Bethel Mission had trustees and officers in addition to the Rev. Jones, but it remained a largely one-man operation. The Rev. Jones not only held the services and ministered to those in need, but was also the Mission’s fundraiser.

John D. Rockefeller and the Rev. Jones were acquaintances for nearly seventy years. According to Jones, they were classmates together at both the Brownell School and "the Baptist Church Sunday School" at the corner of Ohio and Erie streets (11). For the most part, the preserved correspondence between Jones and Rockefeller is very businesslike, with few personal touches. But there are strong indications of a personal relationship. When the Rev. Jones’ daughter died in July 1904, Rockefeller sent his sympathies; and when he learned that Jones was ill in the fall of 1905, Rockefeller instructed his secretary to send him $250 for his personal use, along with Rockefeller’s best wishes for his recovery of health, "the suggestion that he look into the question of osteopathic treatment," and Rockefeller's personal recommendation of a specific physician in Cleveland (12).

It is likely that Rockefeller began making donations to the Rev. Jones’ missionary work in a casual way during the 1870s, but exactly when he made his first charitable contribution to the Floating Bethel Mission is not clear. Rockefeller’s charity recording cards show that by the mid 1880s he was a regular supporter of the mission. Between 1882 and 1888, Rockefeller made annual contributions of $50 to the mission; he increased his annual subscription to $100 in 1889; to $200 in 1899; and to $500 in 1903. By about 1908, Rockefeller was the largest contributor to its work (13).

During the 1880s two exceptions to these annual donations occurred, exceptions which set a pattern for future Rockefeller gifts to the Mission.


11. Jones to J. D. Rockefeller, October 22, 1923, OMR/JDR, box 15, folder 113. In his letter to Jones’ widow on April 9, 1926, Rockefeller also noted the length of their friendship.


13. See the charity recording cards, "Cleveland Floating Bethel," card #1, in the John D. Rockefeller Papers, hereafter cited as the JDR Papers. The 1903 increase is described in a letter from John D. Rockefeller, Jr. to Jones, March 14, 1903, in OMR/Welfare, box 28. Writing on his father’s behalf, the younger Rockefeller explains the larger check as an efficient means of avoiding two appeals and two considerations during the year.
One occurred in 1889, when Rockefeller made two $100 payments: one to help clear up the mission's debts, pledged conditionally upon the remainder of the debt being pledged "by good and responsible parties" before a certain date, and the other a payment toward current expenses (14). This became a regular pattern for Rockefeller donations to the Mission: distinguishing between an annual subscription for general support of the work, and donations to meet special needs. Rockefeller also made occasional gifts of money to the Rev. Jones for his own personal use.

The second exception to the annual gift came earlier and illustrates the care with which Rockefeller made donations, even if they were to old acquaintances. In 1886, Rockefeller gave $300 to the Mission, in addition to his regular $50 subscription for current expenses. This significant departure from prior practice is revealing. While in New York, Rockefeller received an appeal from the Rev. Jones explaining the $1800 in debts the Mission had incurred for its land and buildings. "I want to share in the good work" of the Floating Bethel, Rockefeller replied, but he asked to see "a list of contributions already obtained." When the list was received, he advised the Rev. Jones to call upon L. H. Severance, the Standard Oil Company cashier, for an answer to his appeal. Rockefeller, still in New York, turned to Severance in Cleveland as his agent and advisor in this matter:

You may pledge for me $200.00 or $300.00, and, if your judgment approves, I will add $100 or $200 more, but kindly ascertain, in the conversation with him, if others cannot be found to join and make up the balance. The more contributors, the better for the work, for the present and the future.

I would want you to feel assured from Mr. Doan [treasurer of the Floating Bethel], also, that their financial affairs are all honestly and carefully managed. (15)

Here are several emerging principles of Rockefeller philanthropy: he is careful not to be the sole supporter of the project, wanting others to be found to join in this work; and he relies on the expert advice of someone on the scene who is able to investigate its soundness more thoroughly than he himself could. This reliance on the advice of others figured prominently in the fate of later Rockefeller gifts to the Mission.

As Rockefeller philanthropy became more and more the function of experts and advisors rather than the work of John D. Rockefeller personally, more and more people were relied upon for advice with regard to the Floating Bethel Mission. Their suggestions varied according to their opinions of the Rev. Jones and new ideas about the nature of effective philanthropy. Their descriptions of the Rev. Jones and his work, however, remained remarkably consistent over time. "His big heart keeps him poor and his nose on the grindstone all the time," wrote L.M. Bowers of the Rev. Jones in 1902. "He


15. See the letters from Rockefeller to Jones, April 14, 1886, vol. 10, p. 74; and April 19, 1886, vol. 10, p. 124; and Rockefeller to L. H. Severance, April 19, 1886, vol. 10, p. 122 in the letterbooks in the JDR Papers.
cannot keep a dime when he sees suffering and his pocket is of course empty most of the time." One of Rockefeller's closest advisors, Starr J. Murphy, gave his approval to the Rev. Jones' work in both 1905 and 1906. Noting that the number of contributions fell from 256 in 1902 to 212 in 1905, Murphy argued that while "the work is not of a kind which makes a general appeal to modern ideas of philanthropy . . . the work seems to be one which carries a ministry of love and comfort to many people." "I should think it worth maintaining," Murphy reported, "at least during the lifetime of Chaplain Jones. . . . [who is] a man of advanced years, and of lovable personality." Murphy, whose own father engaged in city mission work similar to that of Rev. Jones for twenty-five years, recommended continued support at $500 a year for the Floating Bethel Mission (16).

Not everyone was so favorably impressed by the Rev. Jones or the Floating Bethel Mission. As it spearheaded efforts to promote greater efficiency and cooperation among the various charitable organizations working in the Forest City, the Cleveland Chamber of Commerce established a Committee on Benevolent Associations to assess the work of each organization and to endorse those it believed were doing worthy work. Such endorsement was denied to the Floating Bethel Mission on two grounds. According to Howard Strong of the Chamber in a letter to one of Rockefeller's Cleveland advisors, the Committee on Benevolent Associations found that the Floating Bethel Mission "absolutely refused to cooperate in its relief-giving work with the other relief organizations of the city." Moreover, he noted, the Floating Bethel "seems rather to consider these organizations as its rivals and to vie with them for support." Both of these tendencies ran counter to the committee's belief "that cooperation is a fundamental principle of all charities." The committee also determined that the Floating Bethel's "administration of charity . . . is not always of the wisest and most effective character, tending occasionally to pauperize rather than to uplift." (17) The charge that its actions tended to pauperize rather than uplift the poor was perhaps the most damning charge that could be levelled against a charitable organization according to the tenets of modern charitable work at the turn of the century.

The Chamber's refusal to endorse his work was the beginning of a long and bitter dispute between the one-armed missionary and the proponents of organized charity in Cleveland. The Rev. Jones believed, according to one Rockefeller agent, "that all charitable organizations opposed him and were using desperate methods to injure his work in order that they might get his supporters and contributions. He gave me proof . . . ." There was "bitter feeling," and other organizations had made "ugly charges" against Jones (18). These "ugly charges" included an attempt by the Chamber of Commerce

16. L.M. Bowers to John D. Rockefeller, Jr., December 26, 1902; Starr Murphy to F.T. Gates, March 16, 1905; and Murphy to John D. Rockefeller, Jr., May 1, 1906, in OMR/Welfare.

17. Howard Strong, Assistant Secretary of the Cleveland Chamber of Commerce, to N.A. Quilling, December 21, 1909. One apparent source of tension, disagreement, and lack of cooperation was Jones' refusal to reveal the names of the recipients of his charity. See Wright, Church News," Leader, September 26, 1912.

to blame Jones for the criminal acts of some of the people he had tried to help. Nathan A. Quilling, Rockefeller's Cleveland agent, reported that "the Chamber of Commerce made specific charges against Chaplain Jones and insisted that I make an investigation through the police department. I found the charges groundless as Chaplain Jones is not responsible for the conduct of the low class of people he is trying to help." (19)

The Chamber's refusal to endorse the Floating Bethel Mission apparently led Rockefeller to seriously reconsider his own support for it, and he requested that Nathan Quilling investigate the Mission, its work, and the nature of local support for it. Quilling met with the Rev. Jones on January 21, 1909, and reported on his meeting and investigation to Rockefeller in two letters during the next week, with an additional report in May. Quilling agreed with earlier assessments of Jones and his work, including that of the Chamber: "He may be overly generous, and some families helped a year ago are no more self-respecting or self-supporting to-day." Still, Quilling was impressed by the religious nature and value of Jones' work, as well as its vastness: "Chaplain Jones is 90% of the energy of the Floating Bethel; I do not think it would last long without him. He is widely known throughout the City and it is impossible for him to meet the demands of calls to the bedsides of the poor, sick, and dying people. . . . With one helper I cannot understand how he gets over so large a territory." The Rev. Jones apparently gave a rousing account of his work and its increasing strength and support, and won Quilling's moral support: "My sympathies are decidedly with Chaplain Jones in his fight with the Chamber of Commerce and other organizations." Despite his admiration for the Rev. Jones, however, Quilling determined that local support was sufficient to support its work and that Rockefeller should eventually cease his contributions: "I recommend that you do not contribute to last year's Bethel deficit . . ., and that you gradually decrease your contribution, or, discontinue entirely after this year. The Bethel is in good shape financially. The Widlar Estate left them $3,000 last year to be used as they saw fit. Part of this sum was used in repairing their building, and $2,000 of the amount remains on hand." Clevelanders, he believed, "would amply take care of the institution and . . . others would give more if you gave less." (20)

Rockefeller's annual donations to the Mission decreased from $500 between 1904 and 1909 to $400 in 1910 and $325 in 1911, with an additional $50 for a new Bethel dock in October 1911. By that date, Rockefeller had contributed a total of $10,260 to the Floating Bethel Mission.

By September 1912, however, the Bethel was $1,500 in debt and needed another $2,500 for repairs on its building "demanded by the City Building inspectors." Jones was discouraged by the various battles he was waging. "It is now a serious question whether I had not better give up the Bethel work and seek some other employment," he wrote to Rockefeller. Money was a constant headache, and he was growing weary of the task of raising it. "I find by past experience that many people are just as willing to give their money to our work as they are to give their teeth to the Dentist. If I was only skilled in the art of giving laughing gas I might succeed in getting some of their money." He vowed to "make another effort to make a financial success of the

19. Quilling to Rockefeller, May 9, 1910.
20. N.A. Quilling to Rockefeller, January 22, January 27, and May 9, 1910.
work," and embarked on another fundraising campaign (21).

As for his opinion of the Bethel in 1912, Quilling recommended that Rockefeller "make no further contributions to this object." A contribution would not be "a wise and judicious expenditure of your money," he wrote to Rockefeller. Much more than in the past, Quilling now relied upon the ideas of organized charity in assessing the Floating Bethel's work. Its board took little interest in its work, knew "little of the charitable needs of our poor," and placed all of the funds at the discretion of one man, a poor administrator who was likely to incur deficits repeatedly in the future. Moreover, Quilling reported, "the Bethel is playing a lone game. There is no co-operation with any organization. No investigation is made to determine the actual needs in giving, nor an after-investigation to learn whether the expenditure was helpful or harmful. I find that no commendation is made of the charity end of the Bethel work by disinterested charity workers." (22)

Less than a year later, the Rev. Jones reported to Quilling that the Bethel was "in better physical and financial condition than ever before." A new dock had been built, a new roof put on, the building had been made fireproof, and, above all, the Mission was debt-free, thanks to better financial support from its own trustees. For his part, Rockefeller continued to make annual contributions of $250 to the Mission through the 1910s into the 1920s, with occasional special gifts to the Rev. Jones or for special needs within the Mission (23).

The creation of Cleveland's Federation for Charity and Philanthropy in 1913 renewed the battle between the Floating Bethel Mission and the proponents of organized charity. At Rockefeller's urging, the Rev. Jones reported to his old friend his view of the Federation. For him, the Federation, chaired by a member of Cleveland's Jewish community, represented a coalition of interests opposed to the Christian gospel: "Jews, Roman Catholics and liquor dealers have no use for our gospel work," he wrote. "Many of their people and customers have been converted to Christianity through our instrumentality." The Bethel's exclusion from the Federation hampered its fundraising by implying that "something [was] wrong" with its work, Jones argued (24).

Jones clearly resented the intrusion into the charity field of these "latter day scientific Charity workers." "They have come to Cleveland and want to domineer over those of us who were engaged in the work before they were born," he complained in 1916. "They have succeeded in getting the charity givers to strain at a gnat and swallow a camel," and in the process "made it very hard for me to continue my work." Moreover, he hurled back at these intruders the same charge of pauperizing the poor that they levelled at him, only he returned the charge on a much grander scale. He was convinced that the well-publicized work of these new scientific charity workers brought into Cleveland "many hundreds of paupers ... from Canada and other countries and all parts of our own country ... . A number have confessed to me that because of letters and newspaper clippings they had received from people who

21. Jones to Rockefeller, September 11, 1912 and October 8, 1912.

22. Quilling to Rockefeller, October 17, 1912.

23. Quilling to Rockefeller, June 17, 1912; on annual giving during this period see the correspondence in OMR/Welfare box 28.

had come here from their old homes, telling how easy it was to get relief, they, too, came." The result was a system that "so humiliates the best poor of our City, that they would rather suffer than be registered with the many paupers." In addition to attracting paupers to Cleveland and humiliating the worthy poor, Jones argued, the system often failed those most in need. The new scientific system rendered "poor work": "we have found sick and dying people in the greatest distress who have confessed to us they were already registered by this Clearing House organization." Accused often of duplicating the charity of other organizations, the Rev. Jones operated from the point of view that service to the needy was paramount over concerns about jurisdiction in specific cases. He provided assistance first and asked questions later. He claimed that Solon Severance examined a complaint that Jones had acted improperly in one instance, sided with Jones in the handling of the affair, and then withdrew from the Associated Charities (25).

The Rev. Jones' charges and complaints against organized charity in Cleveland suggest that these movements did not proceed smoothly and unchallenged. More was at stake than merely the shape and form of charity in Cleveland, for what emerged was a new view of the poor as social problems that needed to be fixed. The Rev. Jones understood the poor and needy as dignified individuals deserving of help, with few questions asked. The one-armed missionary, a veteran charity worker with a clear religious point of view, and with ties to some of the oldest families and wealthiest individuals in Cleveland, was certainly a formidable opponent for the younger scientific charity workers. His Floating Bethel Mission was exactly the kind of work they sought to force from the field of charity, but it took more formidable forces — failing health and death — to remove him from the field.

THE HOME FOR AGED COLORED PEOPLE

The Home for Aged Colored People fared much better with the proponents of organized charity than did the Floating Bethel Mission, enjoying the support of the Federation for Charity and Philanthropy. It has also fared better with local historians, who have recounted its story in the standard works on local black history, and it has fared better over time: the first nonreligious institution organized by Cleveland blacks continues to serve the community as the Eliza Bryant Center (26).

Efforts to organize the Home were begun by a long-time resident of Cleveland, Eliza Bryant. Her mother, a freed slave from North Carolina, established residence in Cleveland in 1858, and her home became a well-known local refuge for blacks coming north until they could establish their own residences. Raised in a household that regularly provided service to other African-Americans, Bryant in 1893 undertook efforts to organize local women to create an institution for poor elderly blacks who were denied aid and service by existing old age homes. By 1895 they had elected a president and


established a board of trustees, and in September 1896, the Home for Aged Colored People was incorporated. On August 11, 1897, the Home opened at the corner of Giddings Street (E. 71st) and Lexington Avenue. Purchase of the $2,000 home left the officers with a debt of $1,400, which they undertook to raise through benefit parties, socials, fairs, and appeals to local blacks and to at least some of Cleveland’s white wealthy elite (27).

The Rockefellers were early supporters of the Home for Aged Colored People. Records indicate that the first appeals were directed to Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, but it is unclear whether there was any personal acquaintance between her and the leaders of the Home. On July 29 and again on September 27, 1898 the Rockefellers contributed $50 to the Home; in 1898 they made two payments of $100 each; and they gave a total of $175 in 1900; $100 in 1901; and in 1902 paid a $500 pledge toward a mortgage for a new building for the Home, to which they soon added $200 on the strength of the fundraising work by the Home’s leaders. By the spring of 1904, the Rockefellers had donated more than $1,305 to the Cleveland Home for Aged Colored People (28).

The Rockefellers were thus major supporters of the Home in its first two locations, donating a total of $700 to the $2,275 debt that remained from the purchase of a new location on Osborne Street (E. 39th Street) in late 1901. They also made occasional donations for current expenses of the Home. Other white donors during this period included Samuel Mather and L.C. Hanna (29). Leaders of the Home succeeded in paying off the debt on the Osborne Street house by March 1903, and the Home enjoyed a stable period at that location for the next decade. But when a new home became desirable in late 1913, the Home’s officials once again looked to the Rockefellers for aid.

The letters of appeal to John D. Rockefeller and his advisors from the Special Fund Committee for the Home for Aged Colored People clearly spelled out the need for a new home, described in some detail the new property to be purchased, and explained the limitations on their fundraising. The old home housed twelve elderly residents, with three more applicants awaiting admission in the new larger house. The plumbing, bathrooms, and ventilation were poor at the old home, which needed extensive repair and renovation. Moreover, the old site at East 39th Street near Woodland was located next to an unsightly barrel factory and was "somewhat away from the people we want to visit our institution and take an interest in its welfare." By contrast, the new home at 4807 Cedar was a large, fifteen-room, three-story brick house "in excellent repair," with "a full cemented cellar [and] an almost new furnace," located such that it "will put us in direct contact with the colored people of our city." (30)


29. Cornelia F. Nickens and Marie Perkins to N.A. Quilling, June 29, 1914.

30. Mrs. Hattie Fairfax, Mrs. Letitia Fleming, and Mrs. Marie Taylor Perkins to John D. Rockefeller, December 14, 1913; and Marie Taylor Perkins to
By 1913, the Home for Aged Colored People had the endorsement of the Federation for Charity and Philanthropy, but this meant little in terms of raising funds for a new home. The Federation provided support for current expenses, but did not contribute to building funds. Indeed, being a member organization of the Federation was something of a hindrance in raising a building fund: "we, as one of the Institutions in the Federation are not permitted to solicit from ... subscribers to the Federation, unless there is a special canvas on for us by this same body. ... We have so far got very little or no encouragement from the Federation as there seem to be so many greater institutions who have deficits and need more building room that our work seems small and our representative given little encouragement." Support from within the black community was forthcoming through "various entertainments" and a general canvass organized by women's clubs, but, as the fundraising secretary put it, "the various colored societies as well as individuals of Cleveland have said WHEN you buy we will help you but we must have money to buy." The home was purchased in January 1914 for $5,000 down and with a $4,000 loan from the Cleveland Trust Company (31).

These appeals impressed one Rockefeller advisor, W. S. Richardson, "as worthy": "Such homes for aged colored people, when well managed, are very useful. ... I think Mr. Rockefeller may wisely help. A contribution of $300 would meet with my approval." (32) No action was taken, however, partly because Rockefeller's agent in Cleveland believed no outside aid was necessary: "The home for aged colored people is undoubtedly worthy of support, but it does seem to me that the sense of duty and pride of the colored people might be sufficiently stimulated to support ... [the Home] without outside aid." (33)

Another factor in delaying action was that further investigation had revealed a more troubling issue: the question of improper expenditure of past Rockefeller gifts. When Mrs. Perkins appealed directly to Mrs. Rockefeller for aid in April 1914, she was told that "Mr. and Mrs. Rockefeller had a very unfortunate experience in connection with contributions to this Home some years ago, through Mrs. Belle Bolden, who had been very highly recommended to them." (34)

This news shocked the new leaders of the Home for Aged Colored People, raised the concerns of the Federation for Charity and Philanthropy, and prompted an investigation by Rockefeller's advisors. Mrs. Perkins responded promptly with a sense of outrage and regret, taking pains to make clear that the Home was under new management: "We younger women who are taking and have

Richardson, December 15, 1913. Quotes are from the first letter.

31. Marie Taylor Perkins to W.S. Richardson, December 15, 1913, and N. A. Quilling to John D. Rockefeller, January 29, 1914. The secretary for the fundraising drive, Mrs. Marie Perkins, was described by Quilling as "a very bright woman" who for seventeen years had worked as the private secretary in the home of Rockefeller's personal physician, Dr. Hamilton F. Biggar.

32. W. S. Richardson to Starr J. Murphy, December 23, 1913.

33. N.A. Quilling to Rockefeller, January 29, 1914.

34. Harry D. Sims to Mrs. Marie T. Perkins, April 9, 1914, in reply to her letter to Mrs. Rockefeller, April 7, 1914.
taken up the work have only the deepest regret that those who have gone before or particularly Mrs. Bolden, has so conducted business that we who are now working must lose subscriptions or any particular subscription thru dishonesty on the part of a former President. . . . It is deplorable." Word of the apparent scandal soon reached the Federation for Charity and Philanthropy, which asked the leaders of the Home for a report. "This particular incident . . . is holding up donations of which we are sorely in need," Perkins explained to Rockefeller, asking for the help of his office in clearing up the matter (35).

The money in dispute proved to be a loan from the Rockefellers to a former officer of the Home, and did not involve the operation of the Home for Aged Colored People. Belle Bolden had been president of the Home at the turn of the century, but her relationship with the Home was ended in 1903 "on account of discrepancies which were at that time reported," according to Perkins. Rockefeller's main Cleveland agent during this period, Nathan Quilling, described Bolden as "Cassie Chadwick Number 2," referring to the celebrated female con artist who posed as the illegitimate daughter of Andrew Carnegie and swindled local banks out of thousands of dollars between 1897 and 1905. Quilling's first assignment for Rockefeller was to investigate a letter Bolden had written "begging for money to pay off some pressing debts." She had been recommended to the Rockefellers by Mrs. Martha Tuttle, Mrs. Rockefeller's secretary. Bolden had established a relationship with the Rockefellers through her work with the Home, and, according to Quilling, "continued to write pitiful letters to Mrs. Rockefeller." Since his wife "seemed to be anxious to help her, Mr. Rockefeller finally decided to place with the Superior Savings & Trust Company $3500, the amount we believed to be her total indebtedness, and this money to be used to pay off mortgages and debts in order that she might save her home." Instead, she defaulted on the monthly payments, according to Quilling, and "we finally sold the home." (36)

The confusion between the personal loan to Bolden and the administration of the Home was undoubtedly a costly one for the Home; indeed, it may well have cost it further financial support from the Rockefellers, for there is no indication that they contributed to the Home in response to the appeals of 1913-1914. It was just this concern about the proper and efficient appropriation of donated funds that the proponents of organized charity sought to address, seeking to assure donors that their money would be used well and effectively. The Home apparently never lost the trust of the Federation for Charity and Philanthropy and enjoyed its status as a financial participant in the Welfare Federation in subsequent decades (37), but it still had to expend energy and time to overcome the burden of Belle Bolden's administrative and personal financial problems.

Thus, the cases of the Floating Bethel Mission and the Home for Aged Colored People illustrate two kinds of concerns for donors and their

35. Perkins to Sims, April 11, 1914, and Perkins to Rockefeller, April 27, 1914.


organizations: first, that the work be effective, efficient, and as useful as possible, and secondly, that the administration of the charity be trustworthy and accountable. These cases also illustrate the dynamic interplay between donors, charitable institutions, and organized philanthropic clearinghouses such as the Chamber’s Committee on Benevolent Associations and the Federation for Charity and Philanthropy, an interplay that necessitates histories of charitable organizing efforts that examine the impact of these efforts on the charitable institutions and charity workers who were as much their targets as the poor and needy of the lower classes.