# *The Rockefeller Letters*

## *Correspondence from John D. Rockefeller Jr.*

John D. Rockefeller Jr. was a champion and great benefactor of the National Parks and was an advocate for parks in the Eastern United States and not just the West.

On his Seal Harbor, Maine property, Rockefeller oversaw the construction of 45 miles of carriage roads. The roads were part of a 10,000 acre gift he made that expanded and continues to enrich Acadia National Park.

In a chest at the rear of the Homestead attic are two letters from John D. Rockefeller Jr.. The first is to Stephen Mather on his resignation as Parks Director; the second is a letter to Mrs. Mather shortly after Stephen Mather's passing in 1930.

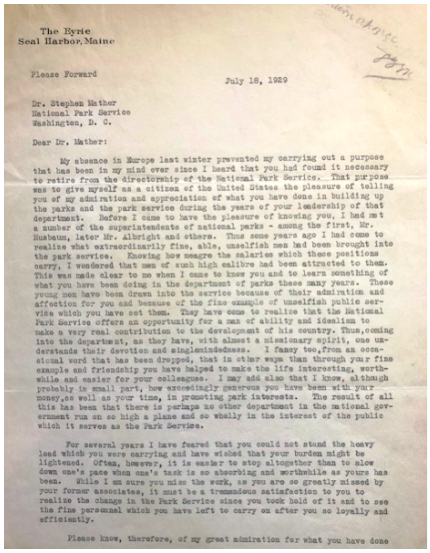
The eloquently expressed thoughts deserve to be read in their entirety, but to note just a sampling…

From the letter to Stephen Mather…

*"…I may add that I also know, although probably in small part, how exceedingly generous you have been with your money, as well as your time, in promoting park interests. The result of all this has been that there is perhaps no other department in the national government run on so high a plane and so wholly in the interest of the public which it serves as the Park Service…"*

From the letter to Mrs. Mather…

*"…I feel this country owes a great debt to your husband, and as one citizen who appreciates the extent of that debt, I count it a privilege to bear testimony to my sense of obligation and gratitude to him…people throughout the length and breadth of this land, who may not even know his name, will continue to bless their unknown benefactor for what he has brought into their lives. I should be untrue to myself had I not given expression to these sentiments…"*



The Eyrie
Seal Harbor, Maine

Please Forward

July 18, 1929

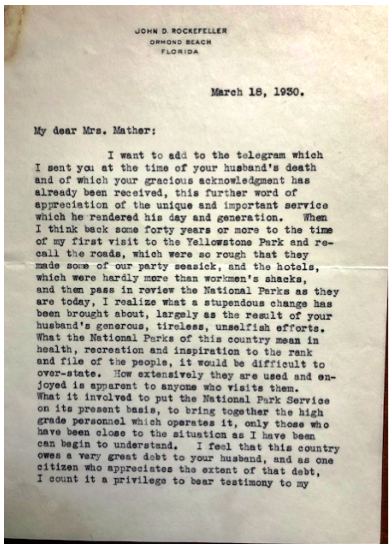
Dr. Stephen Mather
National Park Service
Washington, D. C.

Dear Dr. Mather:

My absence in Europe last winter prevented my carrying out a purpose that has been in my mind ever since I heard that you had found it necessary to retire from the directorship of the National Park Service. That purpose was to give myself as a citizen of the United States the pleasure of telling you of my admiration and appreciation of what you have done in building up the parks and the park service during the years of your leadership of that department. Before I came to have the pleasure of knowing you, I had met a number of the superintendents of national parks - among the first, Mr. Nusbaum, later Mr. Albright and others. Thus some years ago I had come to realize what extraordinarily fine, able, unselfish men had been brought into the park service. Knowing how meagre the salaries which these positions carry, I wondered that men of such high calibre had been attracted to them. This was made clear to me when I came to know you and to learn something of what you have been doing in the department of parks these many years. These young men have been drawn into the service because of their admiration and affection for you and because of the fine example of unselfish public service which you have set them. They have come to realize that the National Park Service offers an opportunity for a man of ability and idealism to make a very real contribution to the development of his country. Thus, coming into the department, as they have, with almost a missionary spirit, one understands their devotion and singlemindedness. I fancy too, from an occasional word that has been dropped, that in other ways than through your fine example and friendship you have helped to make the life interesting, worthwhile and easier for your colleagues. I may add also that I know, although probably in small part, how exceedingly generous you have been with your money, as well as your time, in promoting park interests. The result of all this has been that there is perhaps no other department in the national government run on so high a plane and so wholly in the interest of the public which it serves as the Park Service.

For several years I have feared that you could not stand the heavy load which you were carrying and have wished that your burden might be lightened. Often, however, it is easier to stop altogether than to slow down one's pace when one's task is so absorbing and worthwhile as yours has been. While I am sure you miss the work, as you are so greatly missed by your former associates, it must be a tremendous satisfaction to you to realize the change in the Park Service since you took hold of it and to see the fine personnel which you have left to carry on after you so loyally and efficiently.

Please know, therefore, of my great admiration for what you have done

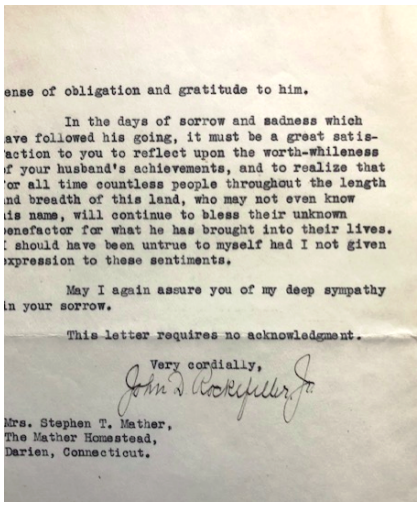


JOHN D ROCKEFELLER
ORMOND BEACH
FLORIDA

March 18, 1930.

My dear Mrs. Mather:

I want to add to the telegram which I sent you at the time of your husband's death and of which your gracious acknowledgment has already been received, this further word of appreciation of the unique and important service which he rendered his day and generation. When I think back some forty years or more to the time of my first visit to the Yellowstone Park and recall the roads, which were so rough that they made some of our party seasick, and the hotels, which were hardly more than workmen's shacks, and then pass in review the National Parks as they are today, I realize what a stupendous change has been brought about, largely as the result of your husband's generous, tireless, unselfish efforts. What the National Parks of this country mean in health, recreation and inspiration to the rank and file of the people, it would be difficult to over-state. How extensively they are used and enjoyed is apparent to anyone who visits them. What it involved to put the National Park Service on its present basis, to bring together the high grade personnel which operates it, only those who have been close to the situation as I have been can begin to understand. I feel that this country owes a very great debt to your husband, and as one citizen who appreciates the extent of that debt, I count it a privilege to bear testimony to my



ense of obligation and gratitude to him.

In the days of sorrow and sadness which ave followed his going, it must be a great satisaction to you to reflect upon the worth-whileness f your husband's achievements, and to realize that or all time countless people throughout the length nd breadth of this land, who may not even know is name, will continue to bless their unknown enefactor for what he has brought into their lives. should have been untrue to myself had I not given xpression to these sentiments.

May I again assure you of my deep sympathy n your sorrow.

This letter requires no acknowledgment.

Very cordially,

John D. Rockefeller Jr.

Mrs. Stephen T. Mather,
The Mather Homestead,
Darien, Connecticut.