

Articoli/Articles

DOCUMENTATION OF THE HISTORY
OF MALARIA IN ITALY AT THE ROCKFELLER
ARCHIVE CENTER

DARWIN H. STAPLETON, KENNETH W. ROSE
Rockefeller Archive Center, New York, USA

SUMMARY

The Rockefeller Archive Center holds approximately 50,000 pages of archival documents pertaining to the history of anti-malaria programs in Italy in the 20th century. Reports on the status of public health in Italy occur in the archives dating from 1915, but there was no sustained Rockefeller commitment to anti-malaria work in Italy until 1924. The article presents a brief description of the sources for the study of the history of malaria in Italy that are held at the Rockefeller Archive Center.

Background

The Rockefeller Archive Center holds approximately 50,000 pages of archival documents pertaining to the history of anti-malaria programs in Italy in the 20th century. These documents are almost entirely within the archives of the Rockefeller Foundation, although some relevant documents may be found in the archives of The Rockefeller University and the Rockefeller family. All of these archives are held at the Rockefeller Archive Center in Sleepy Hollow, New York (USA), which is located 25 miles (40 km) north of New York City. The Rockefeller Archive Center, which is a division of The Rockefeller University, encourages research in its collections and has excellent facilities and services for researchers. Several scholarly publications have been based upon research in the Center's records of anti-malaria work in Italy¹.

Key words: Rockefeller Archive Center - Malaria - History.

History

The Rockefeller Foundation (RF) was founded by John D. Rockefeller Sr. in 1913 as a general philanthropic institution to *promote the well-being of mankind throughout the world*. In the same year John D. Rockefeller Sr. established the International Health Board (IHB) to continue and expand the program of the Rockefeller Sanitary Commission for the Eradication of Hookworm Disease (founded 1909). From their main offices in New York City, the RF and the IHB worked closely together to develop medical and public health programs throughout the world, and in 1928 they merged into a more comprehensive Rockefeller Foundation. The records of both organizations are contained in the current archives of the Rockefeller Foundation.

Reports on the status of public health in Italy occur in the archives dating from 1915, but there was no sustained Rockefeller commitment to anti-malaria work in Italy until 1924. In that year IHB officer Lewis W. Hackett arrived in Italy and instituted negotiations with the Italian government to establish a model anti-malaria program based on control of mosquitoes. The first step in this program was the founding in Rome of the *Stazione Sperimentale per la Lotta Antimalaria* (1925-1935), which was headed by Alberto Missiroli. Working with local and regional governments the *Stazione* created experimental mosquito control programs and subordinate laboratories in over twenty locations in Italy.

The Rockefeller Foundation believed that there was a need for a central agency in Italy to study public health matters and to train public health officers. In 1930 it agreed to provide nearly US\$800,000 to build and equip a public health institute, which opened in 1934 as the *Istituto di Sanità Pubblica* (later renamed the *Istituto Superiore di Sanità*). The *Stazione* was closed the same year and merged with the *Istituto*.

There was little RF activity in Italy involving malaria from 1935 to 1944. After the Allied military forces liberated Rome several Rockefeller Foundation officers were assigned a malaria

control unit. They feared an outbreak of malaria in areas that had been flooded by the retreating German army, and they quickly began to use their new insecticide, DDT, to kill both larval and adult mosquitoes. From 1946 to 1950 the Rockefeller Foundation collaborated with the Italian government and the United Nations Relief and Reconstruction Administration to use DDT to try to eliminate mosquitoes and malaria from Sardinia. In the 1950s the foundation funded mosquito research at the University of Pavia.

Summary of Sources

Following is a brief description of the sources for the study of the history of malaria in Italy that are held at the Rockefeller Archive Center:

1. Rockefeller Foundation Archives

The Rockefeller Foundation archives are the major source of documentation of materials on Italy and malaria at the Rockefeller Archive Center. The archives contain the records of the International Health Board, which operated independently from 1913 to 1928.

A. International Health Board (Record Group 5)

Probably the earliest documentation regarding malaria in Italy at the Archive Center is a few pages of correspondence with Grassi in 1920 in these files. Also included here are: much of Lewis Hackett's correspondence with the New York office during his years in Italy, 1924-1939; reports on IHB and RF programs in Italy, and for the later years, Italy and Albania combined, 1925-1940; and some miscellaneous reports, publications, and speeches, such as a copy of Mussolini's speech to the 1st International Congress of Malaria in Rome (1925).

Any research on the RF's antimalaria program in Italy must start with this record group.

B. Rockefeller Foundation grant files (Record Groups 1.1 and 1.2)

Italian material is designated as series 751 in both record groups. In RG 1.1 there are 12 folders that document the creation of the Stazione Sperimentale per la Lotta Antimalarica in 1925 and its operation for the next decade; and the plans for the Istituto di Sanita Pubblica, opened in 1934. In RG 1.2 there is one folder documenting the proposed socio-economic survey of Sardinia in 1950 (following the completion of the ERLAAS project); one folder for a grant to Missiroli for field studies of insecticides, 1949-50; and two folders for a grant to the University of Pavia to study the cytogenetics of mosquitoes, 1949-57.

Series 700 (Europe) in both RG 1.1 and 1.2 documents the operations of the Rockefeller Foundation Health Commission in Italy, 1944-46. Series 700 in RG 1.2 documents the ERLAAS (Ente Regionale per la Lotta Anti-Anofelica en Sardegna) program in Sardinia.

Series 704 (Albania) in RG 1.1 should be examined because under Hackett the Italian and Albanian programs were both directed from Rome. There are eight folders of documents on malaria operations for 1924-39.

C. General Correspondence (Record Group 2)

For each year from 1915 to the present the foundation has retained important correspondence that does not relate directly to its grant program. Under the reference number 751 (Italy) for each year will be found several hundred interesting letters and memoranda.

D. Program and Policy, 900 series (RG 3.1 and RG 3.2)

These record groups contains materials on planning the foundation's programs. There are four folders for the malaria program, 1913-59. Also in this series are the research notes and manuscripts for two histories of the foundation's public health programs: one was published by Greer Williams, and the other by Lewis Hackett remains unpublished.

E. Virus Laboratory (RG 4)

There is a folder of correspondence with Levvis Hackett in the 1930s. Other folders labeled *malaria* should be checked.¹

F. Paris Field Office (RG 6.1)

The Paris Field Office coordinated the foundation's activities in Europe, including many financial matters. Many of the major figures in foundation activities communicated with the office, or visited the office while in Paris. For example, this series contains about 400 pages of Lewis Hackett's letters for 1939, which was his last year in Italy.

G. Officers' Diaries (Record Groups 12.1 and 12.3)

Rockefeller Foundation officers were required to keep a daily record of meetings and telephone conversations. When they were outside of the United States or were traveling, officers were expected to write a detailed account of what they were doing and what they observed, as well as who they met. These diaries therefore are extremely valuable sources of information for understanding the malaria program in Italy. Probably the most important diaries are those of foundation officers who worked directly on the malaria program in Italy, including Lewis Hackett (1920s and 1930s), J. Austin Kerr (1940s), Frederick Knipe (1940s), Henry Kumm (1940s), John A. Logan (1940s), Paul F. Russell (1940s), and Fred Soper (1940s). The diaries of foundation officers who were based in New York but who had responsibility for public health programs in Italy also are valuable sources, including Elizabeth Crowell (1920s and 1930s), Edward Embree (1920s), Frederick F. Russell (1920s), and George K. Strode (1930s and 1940s).

H. Fellowship Recorder Cards

The correspondence files for Rockefeller Foundation fellows were destroyed in the 1950s, but information about fellowship awards and summaries of correspondence regarding the fellows were put on index cards. Many public health fellowships, particularly for malaria studies, were awarded to Italians in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s.

I. Photograph and Film Collection

Under the rubric 751I (Italy-Malaria) there are about 200 photographs. The largest body of photographs was made by Lewis Hackett to accompany his survey of malaria conditions in Italy in 1924.

The Frederick Knipe Collection contains the following films: 1) anti-malaria work in Sardinia in 1930; 2) ERLAAS project, 1946-51; 3) ERLAAS project, 1948-51 (2 reels); 4) two commercial films about the ERLAAS project, c. 1948.

2. Personal Papers

The Lewis W. Hackett Papers are quite extensive, and have a great deal of correspondence and photographs that document his years in Italy. Reports of the Stazione Sperimentale per la Lotta Antimalarica are included.

The J. Austin Kerr Papers have a few pages of material on Kerr's direction of the ERLAAS campaign.

3. The Rockefeller University Archives

There is a small amount of documentation of Italian fellows who studied at the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research in the 1920s and 1930s.

4. Rockefeller Archive Center Library

The library holds three bound volumes of scientific papers published by the staff and resident fellows of the Stazione Sperimentale per la Lotta Antimalarica, 1925-1935.

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND NOTES

1. For example: HARRISON G., *Mosquitoes, Malaria and Man: A History of the Hostilities Since 1880*. New York, 1978; FANTINI B., *La Lotta Antimalarica in Italia (fra Controllo ed Eradicazione: L'Esperimento Sardegna)*. *Parassitologia* 1991; 33:11-23; FANTINI B., *Anophelism without Malaria: An Ecological and Epidemiological Puzzle*. *Parassitologia* 1994;36, 1-2: 83-106, and FARLEY J., *Mosquitoes or Malaria? Rockefeller Campaigns in the American South and Sardinia*. *Parassitologia* 1994; 36, 1-2: 165-173. STAPLETON D., *A Success for Science or Technology? The Rockefeller Foundation's Role in Malaria Eradication in Italy, 1924-1935*. *Medicina nei Secoli: Arte e*

Scienza 1994; 6: 213-228; TOGNOTTI E., *La Malaria in Sardegna: Per una Storia del Paludismo nel Mezzogiorno (1880-1950)*. Milano, 1996; BROWN P., *Failure-as-Success: Multiple Meanings of Eradication in the Rockefeller Foundation Sardinia Project, 1946-1951*. *Parassitologia* 1998; 40: 117-130.

Correspondence should be addressed to:

Darwin H. Stapleton and Kenneth W. Rose, Rockefeller Archive Center,
15 Dayton Avenue, Sleepy Hollow, New York, 10591 (USA).

e-mail: <archive@rockvax.rockefeller.edu>; world wide web:< www.rockefeller.edu/archive.eu>