



The Foundation: Its Place in American Life

Frederich P. Keppel

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As president of the Carnegie Corporation from 1922 to 1941, Frederick Keppel became a widely respected interpreter of philanthropic foundations. First published in 1930, *The Foundation* became one of his best-known works. As a brief, straightforward, and candid discussion of foundations and their activities, the volume was rightly praised.

The book begins with a review of the history of foundations and then goes on to explain the then-current organization of the Rockefeller Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation, the Julius Rosenwald Fund, and a number of other trusts. It sets forth the purposes and procedures of different types of foundations — community foundations like the New York Community Trust as well as grantmaking foundations like the Commonwealth Fund. Comparing foundations to universities, the book argues that the most essential common purpose of the foundation is the furtherance of learning, culture, and research. It also calls on foundation executives to "practice... the art of being well-informed" and urges that informal advisory boards be relied on to provide specialized expertise.

At the time Keppel became president of the Carnegie Corporation, the foundation was still a relatively new type of philanthropic organization. It is likely that Keppel had a significant impact on public attitudes toward these new kinds of organizations. His administrative style and his effort to find the money necessary to assist as many seekers as possible almost certainly helped remove the distance, mystery, and, in some quarters, the hostility that had surrounded foundations. He believed that foundations were accountable to the public, and he sought constructive criticism. Keppel's calls for openness and his service orientation undoubtedly helped define professional foundation practice. He understood what had to be accomplished if foundations were to gain an established place in American society and importantly contributed to the processes through which that was achieved. The Foundation helps us understand how and why he did what he did.

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