

# A Party <sup>WIP</sup> For 2 Park Builders

By ROBERTA B. GRATZ

Under a display of rare 1920 cars, an array of flapper dresses and the nostalgic strains of Guy Lombardo's Royal Canadians, Robert Moses and Laurance S. Rockefeller were honored last night for their numberless contributions to the building of the New York State parks system as one of the most impressive in the nation.

The black-tie or 1924-dress affair was held at the Oyster Bay mansion of the late William Robertson Coe, the insurance magnate who developed a horticultural showplace that he donated to the state in 1949.

Called the Planting Fields Arboretum, the 400-acre estate with its sprawling Tudor mansion is one of the few remaining North Shore Gold Coast estates that didn't succumb to sprawling suburbia or the celebrated network of highways created by Moses.

It is considered the "jewel" of the state's 138 parks.

The night was filled with ironies that the more than 200 guests either politely ignored or skillfully discounted as they admired the ornate rooms and incomparable gardens, dined and danced in a candlelit tent and approvingly tasted an assortment of New York State wines.

### The Resignation

Here was the master builder of all time—the man who bulldozed poor neighborhoods and lavish estates alike to make way for parks, highways, bridges and urban renewal projects — and the master conservationist, brother of the governor who orchestrated Robert Moses' official demise. It was reportedly to make way for brother Laurance that Gov. Nelson Rockefeller had sought Moses' resignation as head of the parks system that Moses helped organize 50 years ago.

"Nelson didn't remove Bob to put me in," said Laurance Rockefeller. "That's a small point but a refinement of history that is necessary," he added.

"I don't think about that at all," insisted Moses later in the evening as he smiled at the continuous stream of well-wishers that approached him.

When Rockefeller chatted with Moses upon their arrival—one of the brief moments they were seen together—he insisted on giving 80 per cent of the credit for the state park system to Moses and "maybe 10 or 20 per cent to me." Moses just smiled.

They were clearly among friends, burghers from the 11 park regions that comprise the State Council, a reserve group of officials whose praise for the accomplishments of both men was as lavish as the evening that marked the council's 50th year.

"Courage," "vision" and "tenacious leadership" were equally attributed to both men. Only one guest was

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able to define a difference between them, noting that Moses "focused on creating parks that people drove to while Rockefeller was more concerned with bringing parks to people less fortunate, like the Harlem River State Park."

According to Alexander Alcrich, New York State Parks and Recreation Commissioner (and cousin of Nelson and Laurance), whose office organized the affair, the evening had been in the works well before publication of Robert A. Caro's book, "The Power Broker — Robert Moses and the Fall of New York."

In fact, others confided, the evening had first been planned to honor Laurance Rockefeller, who has "never gotten the deserved recognition as a genuine conservationist. It's always Moses or the Governor that gets all the credit."

But since Rockefeller served only 10 years as chairman of the State Council, starting in 1963 and following Moses' 39 years in that post, it was unthinkable not to honor them together. William A. Taylor from Watertown now serves as the third council chairman and Rockefeller is president of the Palisades Interstate Park Commission.

### "Trained by Moses"

It was, however, clearly a Moses evening, which seemed to suit Rockefeller, who gave credit to everyone but himself when opportunity presented itself.

"I was trained by Moses," Rockefeller said. Although most of the few speakers and many guests used the familiar "Laurance" and the formal "Mr. Moses" for reference, it was to Moses that most guests flocked and to him more reverence was shown.

When it came time for acceptance speeches, Moses enjoyed noting that in "intellectual circles I'm known as Peck's Bad Boy." He criticized "environmentalists who want to leave nature alone and not build at all"

Then with a characteristic bite that made many in the audience squirm, Moses attributed his success to "stubbornness, moral courage and a thick skin that can keep off the miserable mosquitoes and poisonous horseflies."

When it was Rockefeller's turn, he called the evening a "meeting of friends to celebrate what we have done together" and again expressed his wish to "give credit to everybody because that is the significance of this occasion."

Of course, the real Moses' stamp of the evening was the presence of Guy Lombardo, the personification of the 1920 era, who is Moses' favorite musician. It was the first time Lombardo played in Moses' honor and he showed great pleasure in playing "I Want to Be Happy," "The Alley Cat" and "The Charleston."