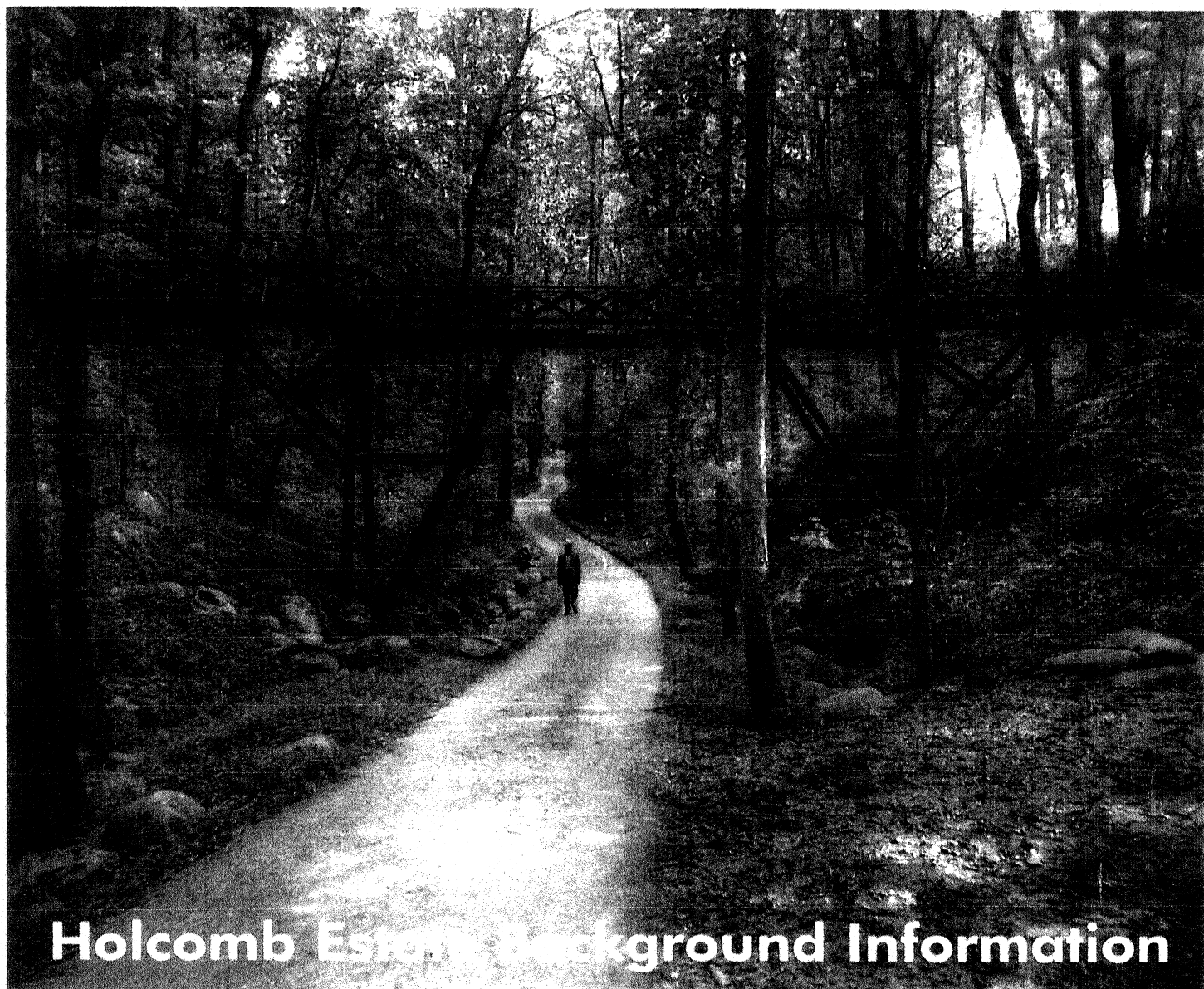
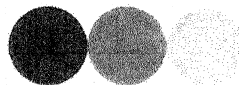




Holcomb Estate Background Information

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Reminiscences of Art Lindberg on his long association with J. I. Holcomb, from a tape made while driving to Butler University from his home at Muncie, June 1976.

I met J. I. in 1944 in the company of Charles DeTurk, who was then Superintendent of Parks in Indiana. We visited his estate. When we arrived there he was at the south end of his property where he was supervising the work of a landscape architect who was reforming, recontouring his south area. He never did like flat areas. Ground had to have some movement so he was constructing small hills and ravines to make it a more picturesque landscape. He also had in mind to work out a drainage system. He had a vision that he would construct large waterfalls and make a series of ravines and gullies, which would drain the rainwater and steer it to his waterfall area. He asked me my opinion of it and I obliged by waving my arms. Later he told me that the waving of my arms cost him several hundred dollars making the changes he thought I recommended. These waterfalls he mentioned -- it was several years later that he started construction. He had in mind to have the largest waterfalls in Indiana so he started out thinking he would send the water into pools and recirculate the water to the top by means of pumps. He would enjoy his artificial waterfalls and call it the largest in Indiana. The stone for waterfalls was purchased from quarries in Brown County. Many times he and I drove down to Brown County to select the stone. One incident down there -- the quarry master also ran a dive in Nashville. We stopped in there one time and we interrupted a rather big poker game, which from the eyes of the participants, they were rather suspicious of J. I. and myself walking into this game. We did, however, make arrangements to deliver tons and tons of this stone, which was later used in the waterfall construction.

J. I. Holcomb took Charles deTurk and me on tour; we started going through the Japanese garden at the north end of his estate. At the main gate entrance, we stepped into this little ravine and found the water supply was from a small spring and it meandered down through the ravine and under the bridge. He had Japanese lanterns and such Japanese objects placed in beautiful fashion on the banks of the ravine. He also had a small pagoda constructed at the north end of the ravine and it formed a picnic shelter. We walked down through the ravine on tile trails which he had supervised the laying of in there. The banks were covered with pachysandra, myrtle, and all the flowering shrubs you could think of. He had azaleas, rhododendron, and different types of pine trees, yews of all types, junipers, and they terminated at the end of the ravine with huge beeches, ash and hickories. This Japanese garden was the site of many a garden tour that was held in Indianapolis. On the upper banks he had constructed a sort of summer house, a game house, which he had built of stone boulders and logs, shake shingles, with a fireplace. In the game room he had card tables and a billiard table. During my long acquaintance we went down there only once to look at the place and I don't think he ever used it, other than that, he called it a game house. In the upper level, of course, was the main house and swimming pool area. The main house was constructed in 1926 and I judge the cost amounted to several hundred thousand dollars. The basement was made of concrete; the upper floors of wooden construction. He had on the first floor a living room, raised dining room, butler's pantry, kitchen, a garden room and a den. This den was his favorite place. He took his naps there; he held business conferences there. It held his library and it was his favorite place to sit and visit with his friends. The upper level contained four bedrooms; one large master bedroom, connecting bath and another bedroom and he had the servants' quarters at the north end, and a beautiful winding stairway to the main lobby. He had always a vision that this house would be retained, kept, by Butler University. It would either house the president or left to represent how people lived when it was constructed in 1926. At the north end of the house he had a huge swimming pool, very similar in size to that of the regulation pool of Butler University's. A peculiar thing about it, he never had a circulating system. However, his friends,

nephews, and other children used the pool frequently. In the basement of the house he had a bath house with separate rooms and showers and so forth. Next to the swimming pool area he had a small summer house. This summer house contained an outside kitchen for entertainment. He did a lot of entertaining. He invited church groups en masse to have picnics with him on these grounds and he enjoyed these occasions very much. Leading down a rather precipitous bank some 60 feet to the lower level he had constructed trails flanked by huge boulders. Incidentally, all the boulders on his estate were gathered personally by him. He would visit farms that had stone piles, quarries, and he gathered them wherever he could. He brought them in by the thousands. I once asked him if he would put a price on these boulders; \$10, \$15 a boulder, and he looked at me and said he had never had a price put on them nor did he know how many he had there. He confided several times that at some many years into the future some geologist would walk through the place and say that possibly it was a terminal place where glaciers deposited boulders on his particular piece of ground. He enjoyed selecting these boulders for color, shape; how they would fit into his landscaping. He like conglomerates, red stones, white stones, any color he could possibly get, he would strive to find in his boulders. At one time I took him up to my farm and showed him my boulders. He looked at them and said, "You can keep them, the boulders I have on my farm are big boulders, they are rounder." The ones I had were rugged and sort of jagged and nondescript in color. He liked the stones as they came out of the quarry with the right colors on them, without having to take off the natural weathering that adheres to a field boulder. He was a landscape architect in his own right. He placed his boulders in such a way where they would be very picturesque. He would tell me that he never placed boulders in a row like soldiers, but two or three; they must be touching; they were grouped that way.

When he planted a tree he would place it where it would be most picturesque, and if he didn't like trees that were well grown, down they would come. I don't mean to say that he would cut his trees down promiscuously. He let them stay where they were, providing they fit into his landscape picture. He imported and bought many picturesque trees. He had his pine trees, spruces, junipers. He had horse chestnuts, flowering magnolias, flowering crabs. It was quite a beautiful sight to visit in the spring. He had a drive down to the lower level that started at his greenhouse area and went down through a rather narrow ravine which he flanked with boulders to simulate what he saw in Colorado in the Thompson Canyon and it was quite a thrill to drive down and you were lucky if you didn't dent your fenders around some of those curves. The road terminated in a huge peony bed and at the base at the lower ground it spread out to a lovely green swath and he had at one end of the area quite an orchard which he was proud of. Again, he took care of those trees, but used it only to gather fruit to use and give away to his friends. On the shore of the White River, which is now across from the Museum area, he had boat docks and more boulder accumulations and landing spots and fishing holes along the river. This precipitous bank in front of his house was quite a bank and he included that in his landscape projects. Here at the base he built three or four large lakes and he connected all these lakes with waterfalls and he had huge recirculating pumps built into manholes, which, when in operation would recirculate and splash thousands of gallons of water over these waterfalls.

Then, he also had a sort of a level promenade which he told me had been the setting for one wedding. Then, at one end, he had a huge cave. He built this cave after visiting the caves in Kentucky and imported many stalactites and stalagmites and he built this cave into the banks and he had it well lighted and it was quite a thrill to make your way through the caverns. This cave is still there, probably in a state of disrepair, but it still exists.

He also had what he called a World Court. When he made his trip around the world he gathered stones and he gathered them from throughout the United States and he made this court in such a way that he placed these stones in the walls and he had them all properly tagged -- identified. In the center of his World Court he had a huge totem pole. This totem pole is now on loan to the Children's Museum. Most of these stones now have been scattered around by vandals and is in a state of much disrepair, as well as the other landscaping. However, you can't take away the beautiful trees that he put in -- the dogwoods, red buds, magnolias -- that burst into bloom in the spring.

The garage area he was quite proud of. He had installed a laboratory to do all the experimental work in connection with his business and he made an office out of the old residence which was probably on the estate when he bought it. He conducted most of his wax experiments there. You will remember that he did an enormous business in floor waxes and all his experiments in connection with his business were done here at this lab. I can assure you that it wasn't the sweetest smelling place to visit. In addition to the garage, he had a small workshop and room for his two cars, and a greenhouse. In the greenhouse, from it, he had flowers daily sent to his house so he could enjoy them while he was living there. He raised poinsettias which he was quite proud of and which he would give to his friends and neighbors at Christmas time. If you knew him, you would know that he always wore a boutonniere and that flower came always from his greenhouse.

He spent much time in his den and there I used to sit and talk with him, and there I learned from him what he had in mind for Butler University. When he was elected to the Board he began to study universities and he became convinced that if he were to leave money, a university was the place to leave it. The universities in Europe, he found, had lasted for thousands of years and he felt that if he left his name and money to Butler his name would last long in the memory of the people. He felt that if he were to construct a building downtown, in a few years the city could decide to put a road through it, or tear it down and his memorial would be gone. And so that is where his interest was. And then he decided what to do about Butler. As a member of the Board and Chairman of the Buildings and Grounds Commission, and later Chairman of the Board, he felt that Butler had to excel in something and he would say to me many times that Butler could not be the richest and he would say that the Yale endowment could never be surpassed so he felt that probably other things (probably thought; how to excel)...He looked into the sizes and after learning about the huge enrolments at Columbia and at the state universities he decided Butler couldn't be the biggest school, so he decided that maybe he could make it the most beautiful place. In this connection, during my early years of acquaintance with him, we made trips throughout the south and through the east, through various colleges and gardens with the idea of coming back and building Butler into a very beautiful place -- and we learned many things. He felt that we should have a lilac garden and in this respect we visited the Arnold Arboretum and the Rochester Gardens in New York and the Burton Arboretum at Chicago and a study was made into their lilac gardens. When we first approached the lilac project, J. I. told me that I should gather information on all the lilacs of the world and it was easy for me to get him off that track by showing him that with our fifteen acres it was impossible to plant all the lilacs, so with that in mind, we finally thought: "let's get the best." During our trip through Rochester, we learned of a select group of landscape architects who, together with nurserymen, had gathered and recommended the 100 best lilacs in the world, so we purchased them. We got them from California, from Mexico, and from England, and we had now at Butler University the 100 best lilacs that were recommended by this landscape group. J. I. still wasn't satisfied

with that; he had to have 101 so we went out and bought an extra lilac. This applied to his drive to excel. This was our precedent and we put out peonies, 101 different kinds and we have 101 different kinds of iris. So this is basically how we arrived at these display plants at the botanical garden. When we first started on the botanical project, you must remember that the botanical garden was there. The Botany Department at Butler had established a garden and they had a beautiful and a great variety of plants. But this wasn't what J. I. was searching for. He was searching for something arranged in such a way that would attract people. So he started out rearranging the garden. Not destroying everything there, but to rearrange it in such a sense that the people visiting Butler University would become attracted to Butler through its gardens. So he laid out a plan and under the plan, of course, was the reflection pool and the statue of Persephone. Persephone's statue we found in an estate in Chicago and moved it here next to the reflection pool and then the huge mall was established. The mall was flanked on each side by a hedge and this hedge, incidentally, started about three feet wide and now is, because of nature and the way it is trimmed, reaches six or seven feet wide. The trees flanking the hedge were selected from white flowering crabs to the deep red and in the spring as you walk around the mall or view it from the road you will feel the gradation of color. Of course, trees being as they are, there are only certain years when everyone of these crab trees bloom at the same time, but I have seen it, and it is very beautiful. In addition to that, we have other little gardens. The lilac garden, of course, is outstanding. Then later we wanted more architecture in the garden and we ran two spur malls from Persephone, one called the Poet's Corner, in which the architecture is engraved with many outstanding poetic verses and the other spur we terminated with a bronze of Socrates. You may be sure to find a hemlock behind the architecture. Then he used quotations around Socrates. This ended the architecture in the garden with the exception of our benches, of course.

And then, I must say something about the Garden House, how it came to be. After we finished the reflection pool; after receiving requests from the students for using the reflection pool for the first Spring Sing, and he installed the huge fountains and recirculating pumps and had quite a picturesque backing for the first Spring Sing, it was discovered that the garden had no rest rooms. J. I. turned to me and said "Where are the rest rooms?" And this started the Garden House. So we laid out plans and thought that along with the rest rooms we would build a room large enough for fraternity and sorority groups to hold small dances, garden clubs could visit, other faculty groups and things at Butler could use the Garden House and it now is probably the most popular place for wedding receptions in the city. So all of this worked out to be quite a nice little house, rather than just a rest room. Later, when we built the carillon, we used part of this house for the carillon room. I believe that J. I. succeeded in making this area attractive to people. It's a great pleasure to hear former students come in and talk about the beauty of Butler. I have also witnessed parents bringing their children to the East, touring the various colleges to decide where to go, and after seeing the garden outlay and the outlay of the upper level, would decide Butler was the place to send their child. An amusing incident occurred at the time we were installing the hedge plants. We took some 500 of these hedge plants and they were moved in by huge semi-trucks and we began to plant them one by one to form the hedge and in the morning when we would ride down to continue our work we saw some of the hedge plants had been removed during the night. The same thing happened the following day and after discussing this with J. I., he asked "How many hedge plants have been stolen?" and I said, "about 15 to 20," and he said, "How much do they cost?" and I told him \$2.50 apiece. When he asked how much it would cost to employ a watchman at a year's salary, I told him that at that time, about \$2,400 would do the job. He turned to me and said, "Let them steal the plants." To reach the gardens, when

we first started in, we only had a little dirt trail. Our first project was to widen this road and pave it and prepare a loop road, which we did, and that's the road existing now at the end of the mall.

When we had the gardens in such shape and state of completion, J. I. and I began to think of other things to do, so the next project was the lake. (end of Side One)

He walked up the ravine and suggested that here would be a place where we could put in the lake and we surveyed it and we determined that we could get a lake in this ravine; a small lake of four or five acres could be constructed, without doing too much damage to trees. In fact, very few trees were taken down so we could build this lake. We then investigated the water. As you know, the drainage area to support a lake that would not become stagnate and would not evaporate to the point where it would have low water. So we decided to investigate the old well which was constructed about the time of Fairview Park. We found after testing it that it had an adequate water supply so we installed a pump house and carried the water through an underground cast iron pipe down through the center of the ravine to the extreme south end and there we constructed a spring. The water turned out to be a very good water; there was a little sulphur smell. There was a time while we were building it, and probably still going on, that people would bring their buckets and draw water for drinking. A dam was constructed with a center steel core and then an earth dam and then covered with a veneer of boulders. Of course, boulders were Mr. Holcomb's favorite and after being examined closely in judging the size of the boulders, without equipment, by the way, a lot of labor was involved, installed these stones. The Butler crews and Holcomb's crew worked together on this, supervised, of course, by the Master Holcomb. Every boulder had to be just so and many a time -- the Butler crew especially, would walk off the job when they thought they had a boulder just right and J. I. would say, "Let's turn it around and look at the other side." It was fun to do this, though. We gathered these stones from the quarry at Road 100 and the White River and there was an ample supply and they could be selected for size, color, and shape. J. I. and I would spend hours on a rock pile searching for boulders and then we hired a man by the name of Pott from Zionsville to pick these boulders up and move them to the Butler campus. It didn't take long to get water into the lake, a few rains and we had an ample water supply. In fact, the lake was filled before we completed the spur and we spent much time to get the right effect from the water falls and splashing to make picturesque water falls. This same thing applied to the springs. Again, it was Holcomb's insistence that everything be done as naturally and as picturesque as possible with the water. J. I. Holcomb considered the Holcomb Gardens to be encompassed by what we call the Lake Road and the Northern line of the School of Religion Building. He was always looking for projects for filling out this acreage. He wanted the Botanical Gardens, he wanted the natural woods to be left, Hoosier Woods, and then he wanted architecture. He came up with this observatory. Hilton U. Brown was still alive and we talked it over with Hilton U. Brown and he suggested a seismograph but it wasn't big enough so they thought of the observatory. In discussion with Dr. Crawling, of the Astronomy Department and after making investigation found there weren't too many telescopes in the United States and so we bought one from this firm in Pittsburgh. It measured 38" in diameter. We now have the ninth largest telescope in the United States. This pleased Holcomb no end and we then proceeded to work around it. We bought the telescope and then began to think about the building. The building itself is what Holcomb wanted it to be -- attractive to visitors, schoolchildren. The building itself is unique because Holcomb wanted it to be attractive to visitors to the campus, not so much for research. So we went a little bit overboard in the base of design. We set this base design up on concrete columns which wouldn't do at all

for research work because of the vibrations which are picked up by these long columns and transmitted to the instrument itself. Again, the instrument was for the public relations thing and this is why it was done this way. We made quite a study on what to do; we had to get the telescope up high because of the tree growth. We didn't know we had it 55 feet above the ground. Horizontal viewing of stars on the horizon is practically impossible. We went to a wood dome for the reason that when we visited the Pittsburgh observatory it was raining and it was a cold day and the humidity was high and the steel dome was literally raining so we eliminated that thinking and went to the design of the wood dome. The wood dome came from a plywood firm in Louisville and we purchased the wood from there and we constructed it on the job. Choosing the location for the telescope, we began to think in terms of where to put it. There were three on the committee, Mr. Holcomb, Dr. Ross and myself. I thought that we should align on the axis of tandem (?) and Dr. Ross felt there were too many buildings so it should face the School of Religion. From the effect itself, it makes a much more imposing building. The phenomenon of this building is that as you approach from Clarendon through the avenue of trees the building seems larger and when you approach the campus itself the building shrinks and takes the proper proportion with the other buildings on the campus. The reading around the main building of the upper part of the observatory reads "The Heavens Declare the Glory of God" was suggested by Mrs. Holcomb (? , not clear) and accepted by Mr. Holcomb and Dr. Emil Ross. The dome of the planetarium is the exact duplicate of the dome over the telescope and was purchased too from the Louisville firm and we were a little skimpy with our money. We should have provided a basement under the classrooms to provide for workshops for the Astronomy Department, which we felt later was very much needed. A little interesting note on Holcomb's appraisal on the 38" glass for the telescope, when it arrived we measured it and found it to be a little over that so he insisted we call it a 38 1/2" telescope, which would move it a little bit higher in standing with the other big telescopes in the United States. When we built the telescope we hired carpenters from around town and we hired one young man with a tremendous physique and he joined the construction work stripped to the waist, to the admiration of the co-eds. I mention this because later Mr. Holcomb made a trip through South America and it was on this trip in Lima, Peru at a hotel and who was there but Jayne Mansfield and he was much impressed with the fact that he was staying at the same hotel. She had a tremendous party that night and he was not invited, and later when we were talking about it I told him that if he had remembered, the young man who had pounded nails in the dome and the observatory was the same Mickey Haggarty that married Jayne Mansfield and he could have used that as an entry. Much to my surprise, I was told in so many words that this was the kind of thing he should have been abreast with and I should have informed him when he was in Lima, Peru that he knew Mickey Haggarty and might have been invited to that party.

The cornerstone for the building contained many accounts of Butler activities and someday it will add to the story of J. I. Holcomb. When the building was completed, J. I. was in Florida and when he came home, back to the campus, up Clarendon, he told me later that he closed his eyes, afraid it might not meet his expectations, but it did and he was very happy with it and we had a very fine dedication and reception celebrating the building's construction. Spruce surround the building and it was donated from Holcomb's estate and brought over with heavy equipment and put into place. I think J. I. was a very happy man when the first busloads of Indianapolis school children arrived and were given a tour through the observatory. He was particularly proud of the planetarium and though small, is very usable, and in fact, gives more enjoyment than the huge planetarium in Chicago. J. I. was spending his money, also giving the University \$50,000 a year and, as he made out a check, he would say, "Art, this isn't exactly hay, is it?"

After the lake had been completed; the observatory completed, we turned our sights to another piece of architecture and that was, of course, the carillon. Here again he studied various carillons constructed on various university campuses. J. I. assigned me the job of coming up with the design, and I did. He was in California at the time and I sent him a picture and he wrote back and told us to go ahead and start working on it, which we did. We selected the site so that we could have the projection over the quiet waters of the lake and we arrived at a design approved by Mr. Holcomb, and proceeded with the construction. We chose electronic bells, rather than designing the carillon with the heavy bells as in Europe, simply because of the enormous size it would have to be and also the fact that the carillonneuers are very few and far between and almost impossible to obtain. He found this out with the Shrine, who had the bells and how difficult it is to play a real carillon. When the carillon was completed we could look at it and then again, I think Mr. Holcomb's thinking was that this could be more magnificent, it ought to be higher, how do we make it higher? Then we would go down to the lake, and we said if we could construct a stairway from the carillon to the lake level and measure it from the lake level to the top of the carillon it would give it some height and make it a more magnificent structure. With this in mind, we laid out the stairway and made a little dock at the front and then when we finished the construction and lighted the stairway, a phenomena occurred which pleased Mr. Holcomb very much. We had placed mercury lighting on the tower itself and incandescent lighting on the stairway. It happens that when this incandescent is turned on, the blue in the mercury lights -- as Holcomb put it, "It looks like a red carpet from the lake up to the carillon," which made him very happy with the carillon design. At the dedication for the carillon, Mr. Holcomb invited many notables from throughout the United States, including Kettering. He dedicated the building to his wife, Musetta, and it was a very fine dedication and it pleased Mr. Holcomb except for one thing. He was working closely with the Public Relations Director and he had arranged for the publicity to come out on the front page of the Sunday morning Star. When we opened the paper there was no headline on the carillon; it had been moved back and the headline read that the Pope had died. Holcomb felt that they should have delayed this so he would have first shot at the headlines.

During all this work, I say again that J. I. supervised the construction. I remember one time that a particularly nerve wracking time on the carillon construction he was kibitzing a bit too much and I turned to him and said, "J. I., do you have a job?" and he said, "Yes, at the factory," so I said, "Why don't you go back there?" and much to my surprise he said, "All right, Art, I will." There were no hard feelings. He looked at me kind of funny, but I think he realized that we needed less of his kibitzing at that time.

J. I. was always searching for new ideas in landscaping; new ways to make the campus more attractive. He designed the entrance benches, and at his request put Butler University at the corner of Clarendon and 46th Street and also at the Garden entrance we added many more beautiful flowering trees. The big spruce behind the statue of Persephone, a Colorado blue spruce, measured close to 12" at the base and he asked if it could be moved and we felt it could be so we hired equipment and moved it to the campus and put some movement to the contours in front of the observatory. Anything we could do to add to the picturesqueness of the landscaping.....

I remember that at this time J. I. was also working at home on his waterfalls. They were to be the largest in the state of Indiana. This was the last bit of construction he worked on. He didn't live to see its completion, but it still stands there as a waterfall without water.

I mention a little incident that occurred -- one day when Mr. Theofanis, Public Relations Director, and I were down at the lake with him admiring the reflection of the carillon in the waters and the wind was blowing and the reflection was blurred, he turned to me and he said, "Art, could those preachers up at the School of Religion still the waters?" We went to lunch and when we came back the wind had died down the and the reflection was clear and he said, "Thanks, Art, you did a good job."

J. I. did other things for Butler. It was he who put the retaining wall around the football field. He also built the press box and he conceived the idea of the ever-green trees at the north end of the football bowl. He was disappointed at the small crowds at the football games. He felt that it was a White Elephant, as far as Butler was concerned. At one time it had seats for 37,000 people and when the Starlight Musicals came into being, he was a member of the first Starlight committee, of which I also was a member. We made trips to study the outdoor theaters in the midwest and it was he who conceived of the idea that probably we could convert the south end of the bowl to the Starlight Musicals, and this was done. We did it along with the consent of the Parks Department, private money and Butler land. It was Mr. Holcomb who negotiated with the city to obtain the 25-year lease for the parking lot at the fieldhouse along 49th Street and 52nd Street. When this construction was going on he was very much involved in building a mausoleum for himself and his family over at Crown Hill Cemetary and it is worthwhile to go over to see it. Mr. Holcomb, Mrs. Holcomb and their daughter lie there now.

In Florida, at Miami Beach, Mr. Holcomb had a large house and a 58-foot boat and he would invite many Butler people to visit him in the wintertime. We would take long trips on his boat. I enjoyed many of these trips. Later, when he disposed of the property, he gave the house to his church. As you know, Miami is quite flat and he wanted some contours so he built a 7-foot hill just to have the only hill, I think, in the city of Miami. His house was located so he could dock his boat right in back of his house and he spent much time on it cruising, either in the waterways or the open sea. Mr. Holcomb was a member of the Methodist Church on 56th and Meridian. This church was originally situated downtown and they moved it to North Meridian and he was very influential in the design. He hired Wilbur Peat (?) who was then Director of the Art Museum, to arrange all the architectural details of the colonial features of this church and he contributed money enough to build the Holcomb Chapel, which is a part of the church.

J. I. spent much of his time at Butler when he was not down in Florida. He spent it with me and Mr. Theofanis during the week and then on Sunday he would attend church and then report to President Ross's for dinner. He was a rather lonely man after his wife died. He was born in Sullivan, Indiana. He organized his own business, the Holcomb Manufacturing Company, which manufactured cleaning supplies and brushes and, together with Mr. Hoke, he formed the Hoke-Holcomb Company. The big production line where he made his money during the Depression was the invention of the Butter-Kist popcorn machines. He sold many of these throughout the United States during the Depression. It was his company that copyrighted the name "Butter-Kist" popcorn. During the war they had parts for construction of airplanes. Their big product was the Holcomb stokers used as stokers on coal furnaces.

Before coming to Butler University he spent much of his time with the State Conservation Department. He was on the committee with Mr. Lieber, who was then Director of State Parks in Indiana, in establishing the.....end of tape.