

**The original documents are located in Box 38, folder “Gift - Italian Creche - 1967” of the Betty Ford White House Papers, 1973-1977 at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.**

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FOR RELEASE AFTER 9:00 A.M.  
Wednesday, December 13, 1967

Office of the Press Secretary  
to Mrs. Johnson

THE WHITE HOUSE

The White House has received an exquisite Christmas gift-- an 18th century Italian creche -- from Mr. and Mrs. Charles W. Engelhard, Jr. of Far Hills, New Jersey.

The Nativity scene contains thirty baroque carved figures including the Holy Family, the three kings and their attendants, shepherds, angels, cherubs, and various animals associated with the manger scene. Brightly colored and richly clothed, the figures range from 12 to 18 inches high and are delicately carved in wood.

Mrs. Johnson has long hoped that a creche might be acquired for the permanent collection that would be a work of art commensurate with other White House treasures. In previous years, a creche has been borrowed, and last year Mrs. Engelhard provided a contemporary creche with figures made of gold fabric and paper mache.

After extensive research and travel in Europe on the subject of creches, Mrs. Engelhard acquired the figures from Marisa Piccole Catello of Naples, Italy, whose family has been collecting Nativity figures for more than 300 years.

Noted stage designer and theater consultant Donald Oenslager of New York City has contributed his time and talents to create the setting and lighting. The figures will be arranged on a multilevel stage placed in the center window of the East Room. The baroque proscenium arch is ivory colored with gold trim, and the architectural details match the decor of the East Room.

The stage extends four feet from the window, and the entire set is about 14 feet high. The backdrop (cyclorama) is a luminous dark blue, and three angels and a small cherub are suspended over the manger. Lights are contained within the structure, and the entire creche can be easily disassembled for storage.

Mr. Oenslager has designed settings for numerous plays and operas, and he was a consultant on the New York State Theater and Philharmonic Hall at Lincoln Center. Mr. Richard Casler is associated with Mr. Oenslager in supervising the arrangement of the creche.

The creche will be unveiled by Mrs. Johnson at a reception 6:30 p.m. Friday, December 15. After a brief presentation ceremony in the East Room, there will be a receiving line in the Blue Room and refreshments in the dining room.

Among the 75 guests will be Mr. and Mrs. Engelhard and their family, the Ambassador of Italy and Mrs. Ortona, Mr. and Mrs. Oenslager, Mr. Angelo Stefanucci, president of the Italian Christmas Crib Association, Rev. Aloysius Horn, president of the American Christmas Crib Society, and numerous American museum officials.

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WASHINGTON, D. C., SATURDAY, DECEMBER 16, 1967

A-11



—Star Photographer Rosemary Mariuffi.

Mr. and Mrs. Charles W. Engelhard Jr., their granddaughter, Beatrice Reed, 6, and Mrs. Johnson look at the 18th Century Italian creche presented to the White House.

## Johnson Hail Gift of Creche

By ISABELLE SHELTON  
Star Staff Writer

The White House last night celebrated receipt of a new East Room creche that Na-

hards' family, including four daughters, were present for the reception and stayed on afterwards with them for a private dinner in the second

also were guests, including Arthur A. Houghton Jr., president of the board of directors of New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, who

acquire them from their owner, Marisa Piccole Cant Castello of Naples, Italy, "except that it was for the White House."

The Washington Post

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SECTION C

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 16, 1967

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## Curtains Open On Creche Scene

By Dorothy McCardle

Washington Post Staff Writer

An 18th Century nativity scene in a 20th Century stage setting was presented to the American people for this and every coming Christmas at a ceremony at the White House last night.

The gift, valued at \$25,000, was presented by Mr. and Mrs. Charles W. Engelhard

created for the 30 figures of the tableau.

The miniature proscenium or boxlike stage with the slopes of Bethlehem and the textured blue sky of pale silk and gauze is the work of New York stage designer Donald Oenslager who gave his time and talent for the





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**Item:**

10 6x12 photos of Italian crèche from 1967 White House decorations

The item was transferred from:

Betty Ford White House Papers

Box: 38

Folder: Gifts – Italian crèche 1967

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