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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.

