

DOLORES WHARTON

June 1, 2000

Jeff Charnley,
interviewer

Charnley: About Walter Adams.

Wharton: Oh, did I miss that? I have not been writing at all on my autobiography. I edited a piece of my very early years, very early years, but I've decided not to do a book. Now, Clif [Clifton R. Wharton, Jr.] has been working on his book. He's on top of all of his materials, certainly on Michigan State, because he's done a lot on it. But I have not. So I will tell you out in front, my memory is not as good as Clif's on what happened, so I'll have to give you my general impressions, but please do not hold me to any facts, because I am not certain.

Charnley: Those we'll look up.

Wharton: Okay.

Charnley: Today is Thursday, the first of June in the year 2000. We're in New York. This is Jeff Charnley, and I'm interviewing Dolores Wharton.

Mrs. Wharton, you see we're tape recording today. You give me permission to tape?

Wharton: I do.

Charnley: This tape recording is for the purpose of the Michigan State University Sesquicentennial Oral History Project.

Wharton: I'm very flattered that you would include me.

Charnley: We're glad that you agreed. Will you talk a little bit about where were you born and some of your educational background.

Wharton: Well, I was born right here in New York City. My father was an undertaker, and I attended a private school, starting at age five, at the Little Red Schoolhouse. The first day that the school opened, it was a very progressive school here in New York City, and I went through the elevens. We identified ourselves by age groups, not by grades, and I went from the fives through the elevens.

Then my mother divorced my father several years after that and we moved to Connecticut, where I went to high school and was doing, I guess my sophomore, my junior year in high school, that I met my husband. He was at Harvard at that time and I went up on a blind date. I had a cousin at Radcliffe.

Then I went to NYU [New York University] for university. I did not finish. I took a detour and became involved very much in the arts here in New York, which I thoroughly enjoyed. But I finished my work when Cliff went to the University of Chicago. I finished my undergraduate degree at Chicago State University in art history.

Charnley: Were you involved in dance at all?

Wharton: Yes, I studied under Martha Graham. I was a student. I was never professional, but I was a student of Martha Graham's.

Charnley: In the years after you were first married, you mentioned you were interested in the arts. Those early years, how did that interest express itself?

Wharton: It started at the Little Red Schoolhouse. As I say, it was a very progressive school. We did very little of sitting down at desks and writing and reading. We went all over New York City. This was our school. This was our laboratory. This is where we did everything. Classes were held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, just all over the city, all the different museums. We would, for example, be studying the Romans or the Greeks and we would spend weeks looking at their pottery, looking at designs, and then we would go back to the school where we had very wide facilities, studio facilities, for art and we would make our own vessels and whatnot.

We had a route in New York City. You know, you go perpendicular. You don't spread out. We had a roof garden and we would have festivals up on the roof garden, and we would wear our togas and drink from our cups that we had made, and that's the way we learned. It was participatory education, and that's when in my interest in the arts just became a very natural way of living, exploring, of understanding the world. That was my perspective. That's how I got there. The school had a lot to do with how I've come to life.

Charnley: Were there any other particular--you mentioned sculpture, pottery.

Wharton: Oh yes. Sculpture, painting, yes, woodwork. All of it.

Charnley: You were involved in all of that?

Wharton: The school, yes, involved all of us, all of the time. It was part of every day. Even where literature is concerned, it was participatory. One of the student teachers, actually, was Margaret Weiss Brown. She was a very outstanding children's author. She would gather us on the steps there at the school and ask us about stories, and we told her stories, and we would make them up. We would be dancing and performing and carrying out these stories and she wrote them down, and she actually published some of these stories that we would tell her. That's the way we came to everything we did.

And even with mathematics, there was one of the age groups, I think it was probably the tens, the nines or the tens, we had our own store. We had a candy store for the school, for the other students in the school, and we would go to the factories and buy candy. We would prepare our presentations and sell them to the other students. There was an hour when students could come and buy candies. And we kept all the books for the candy store. That was a very practical way of learning how to add and subtract and keep track of our numbers.

I will have to admit that I didn't learn my multiplication tables until I was quite advanced. My mother used to take us to a country place in Pennsylvania. My mother was from Philadelphia, and, by custom, her family always went away for the summer, so she took us away for the summer to Atland [phonetic], Pennsylvania. At the Blue Red, we got out at the end of May. The public schools were running until the end of June, so they put me, to keep me busy, they put me in the public school for that month, and that's when I really learned by multiplication tables and also the alphabet. We didn't do that at the Little Red Schoolhouse.

Charnley: A combination of the two. So after fifty years you figure that blind date worked out?

Wharton: Well, yes. We were teenagers then. We really were. We've just had our fiftieth wedding anniversary, so, yes, I'd say it worked out pretty well.

Charnley: You've talked a little bit about your experiences in Southeast Asia. What countries were you living in at the time?

Wharton: We lived in Singapore and in Kuala Lumpur. However, we traveled all the time. Clif had assignments. He had five countries in his area of responsibility--Laos, Cambodia, Indochina, and then Thailand, and very often he was in Indonesia.

But beyond that, living out there that length of time, I went to many other countries of interest. The foundation was quite wonderful. They encouraged the executives to take their wives with them on trips, so I was

able to visit quite a number of countries. And there again, my window to visiting Southeast Asia was looking at the arts. It was something I enjoyed tremendously.

Southeast Asia, the life in Singapore was one of the great learning points of my life. The other great one was Michigan State, but Southeast Asia was the first. There was a mix of cultures, not only Asian cultures, but also the British culture. Singapore and Malaysia had just gotten their independence from Great Britain. There were a lot of the old guards, or the old guard of the Brits, still living there, and they had established a way of life and a formality that was totally practiced and it was quite formal. Dining was quite formal, quite proper, and my household, we adopted the British style and I took quite a bit of it to my table at Michigan State University.

Charnley: What were some of the things that you learned in your Southeast Asian experience? You mentioned it was an important learning in your life.

Wharton: It was seeing other cultures, really the exposure to other cultures, dealing with people from student-based, low-income people, poverty, really, what we would call poverty, through to the royal family of the Malays. And also, as I say, there were a lot of people traveling among the British and the Americans and the Canadians, and it was an international interaction which I had not had previous to that. The world just opened up. It was very exciting, very exhilarating, every moment. You never woke up any morning when you didn't go through the day and experience something totally new, totally different.

We had three cultures in Malaysia: the Malays, the Chinese and the Indians. They all had different dress, they all had different religions, they all had different languages.

Clifton Wharton: Different foods.

Wharton: Oh, the foods! Oh, the foods were marvelous. Different habits, but in those days, it was before the race riots in '69, those days, all three races were included all the time, certainly socially, professionally. The Malays; this

wasn't us. We certainly did. But they all made an effort to be sure that all groups were there. They accepted one another. It was a very inclusive kind of community, but still the differences were well recognized. There was a great independence, too, of keeping their cultures pure.

I learned more about race there than what I ever had in the United States, that you can accept other races, but they can be distinctive if need be. But also there's also prejudice and when you look at it in a certain fashion, you know it's always going to--my own opinion is, there are always going to be differences in races, and if you recognize them, this is fine, but doesn't mean you have to always say that you're going to be the melting pot. I'm not sure that there is a melting pot. I think we are all different, and this is fine.

Charnley: Any special languages that you either studied or developed?

Wharton: Yes. I was able to get what I wanted and what I needed with Malay, the Malay language. Chinese was spoken, Chinese and Tamil and Hindi were all spoken there. In my household, I had three different dialects of Chinese being spoken, but the lingua franca was English. Everybody wanted to speak English, and as I say, the Brits had been there. English was just easy to get into, but I was able to speak Malay. I'm sorry that I didn't just push and really drive myself to learning Chinese.

Charnley: How did you first get involved in the arts in Malaysia?

Wharton: I went to art exhibitions. I went to almost every art exhibition there in Singapore. And that was very exciting, and I became friendly with a great number of the artists and still have friendships with them. I published the first book, actually, on the contemporary artists of Malaysia. The art at that time had been mostly from the traditional art of the Chinese presence there and the British housewife doing her little painting, you know, in the afternoons. That's pretty much all people knew. But with the independence, the Malays and the Singaporeans wanted to show to the world their own culture, and they were developing beautifully in music and in literature, but

the one that I found most exciting was in the fine arts. We had an excellent department there, the department of art there, and I took courses in there and I just had a wonderful time. I just had a wonderful time.

Charnley: Was that your first effort at publishing a book?

Wharton: Oh, yes. Yes, yes, yes. It was.

Charnley: What do you remember most from that experience, of your research or the actual publication of that?

Wharton: The joy of interviewing the artists. They were quite happy to sit and talk with me. I had done a lot of it when we lived there. I collected, had the friendships, and then it wasn't until I came back and people were asking me about the arts, and I began telling them, because they were all expecting the little native on the palm tree, but I was saying, "No, that's not what's there." They had some very fine accomplished artists with advanced degrees. Most of the degrees were out of U.K. or Germany. The Germans were in there doing a lot in the arts.

When I first did my book, the United States was not recognized at all, when I first started the surveys. Then I went back, I guess it was in 1968, I went back and did another survey and going on forward, anybody wanted to come to the United States. So it was explosive. The events were explosive in the arts, and it was just exciting to be there and to observe it. That's what I remember.

Charnley: Were there some that you still had contact with from the earliest study? What were their names?

Wharton: Well, there was [lists names]. Oh, there are a lot of them. We recently, '99, yes, in '99, we gave the major part of our collection to Cornell University. We're very proud of that, and Cornell received it most warmly and they had an exhibition last fall of our art collection. They had it there at the Johnson Museum in the gallery. I was in touch with a number of the artists at that time, so it comes up fairly recently. Many of them have died, of

course, since then, because this goes way back to the--it started in the late fifties. So, yes, I'm in touch with some of them.

Charnley: In the 1960s, if we go back, go right up to Michigan State, what were some of your reactions when you first heard that your husband was interested in the presidency of Michigan State University? Had you ever heard of the campus?

Wharton: Oh yes. Yes. He was in agriculture economics, so sure.

Charnley: You knew some of the same people?

Wharton: Yes, I had met them, not formally, not professionally, as Clif had, of course. But I had known them and known the names there at the University of Chicago and whatnot. There were names that came up that were familiar.

Charnley: In terms of your discussion on whether or not he should take the position, do you remember any of that discussion about whether or not he should? What was your recommendation about taking the presidency in 1969?

Wharton: I can't say I was excited about it as I was very pensive about it. Is this something we really wanted to do? I was devoted to Asia at this point, and my hope was after I published my book, was my book is for the traveler going out to Asia, because this is where I had always been approached, what do I look at? I am coming into Kuala Lumpur. What do I look at? What do I look for? And I had planned to do a book like this for travelers for the Philippines and for Thailand and possibly Indonesia. So, I had a path already well laid out. Writing was something that appealed to me, because I could do it at home while the boys were in school.

Then came this suggestion that maybe we could head up a major American university, and I guess my reaction was, "Oh, my God." [Laughter]

Charnley: And East Lansing was not Kuala Lumpur. [Laughter] After that first reaction, when the reality set in, what do you remember about some of your first reactions of moving to campus?

Wharton: Well, yes. We were there on a big football weekend. I think that was our first weekend.

Charnley: In 1969?

Wharton: Yes, '69. I was overwhelmed with the acceptance on campus, certainly at that football game. People applauded us all around. The attention was tremendous. The spotlight was on us. At first I would say I was almost blinded by the spotlights. We were thought of as being very unique, very unusual, some people who had come from Mars. I think there was the perception that we--I think they eventually they came to like us, but initially it was, with some people when they began to think about it, was, "This is our beloved Michigan State University campus, and what have those trustees done by inviting to meet this campus New Yorkers? Black? Who are these people?" was kind of the reaction. "Well, let's take a good hard look at them." If you know Michiganders, they are for taking a good, hard look and say, "Well, what makes them tick?" And there were people who would sit down with me and kind of study me, look me up and down.

Then as we got into the years and whatnot, the reaction was, "Well, do you really want to do something on this campus?" And my reaction was, "You bet I do." And then their reaction was, "Okay, let's get going." And that's kind of the way it all developed.

Charnley: Sounds like that adds to the appeal of the students at the time.

Wharton: Well, yes. I had a good time with the students, actually. I didn't have the trouble--well, I did have the troubles at Cowles House, the steps of Cowles House, but I wasn't frightened by it. I guess I just don't frighten easily.

Charnley: What was the trouble at the steps of Cowles House?

Wharton: Well, that happened all the time, many evenings.

Charnley: Students actually showed up?

Wharton: Oh, oh by ten, twenty, fifty, hundreds. Oh, yes. Oh, absolutely. Many a night.

Clifton Wharton: When I wasn't there?

Wharton: Yes. They would come looking for him, and I would go out on the steps of Cowles House and talk to them about all different kinds of things, and we had good conversations, many good conversations. They were still kids to me, and a lot of them were just absolutely wonderful and really great young people, but some of them were obnoxious.

There was one young woman, for example, who came. They were going to be discussing racism at the Union, and I was supposed to have been impressed. Remind you, now, I'm a New Yorker. [Laughter] Oh, my dear, well, she came up and said the Student Union had to remain open. This was very important because we were having a very important dialogue about racism on the campus, and here across the street at the Union.

So I just happened to be wearing a long skirt in an outfit and had a little bandanna. So I took the bandanna out of my pocket and put it around my head, and I said, "Yousa, is that so you mean all these hundreds of years

we've been black in this country and tonight's my big night? I'm going to let you go over to the Union and discuss racism? Is that what you're saying to me?"

Well, she had a fit. The child got so upset. The lawn isn't the way it is now. She just [unclear] great anger. And then, of course, I took off the bandanna and I said, "Now, really, are you really serious?" Well, she went berserk.

Then there was a lawyer. Then there was another night when we were having confrontation over there at the Student Union. You arrested [unclear].

Clifton Wharton: That was before the arrest.

Wharton: Well, just before the arrest, this young chap was standing at the Cowles House with me. So we were talking back and forth, all this conversation was going on, and I said, "Well, you're doing all this protest, why aren't you over there at the Student Union with the kids, instead of standing up here protesting with me?"

He said, "Oh, I'm not going to do that. I want to go to law school. If I get arrested, they're never going to let me in law school. It's better to be here with you. I'm protesting with you." [Laughter]

Remind you, one of the things that was so strange for me, all this was going on at night at Cowles House. Then in the daytime, I would be going to functions on campus with the wives, and I would be talking about all these disturbances and they would say, "What disturbances? What are you talking about? That doesn't happen at Michigan State University." They couldn't understand. They did not understand the double role that I was playing, and it really was a very serious double role. It was very genuine.

Charnley: The physical presence on campus must have been a very important, more than just the symbolic aspect about your actually living in the "MSU White House." [Laughter]

Wharton: I thought it was important for Clif's viability there at Michigan State. I have tremendous respect for the Hannahs. As Clif has indicated, they did so much, and I admired them tremendously. I thought that they had built this great university and I did not want it to change so dramatically that I wouldn't be living on campus. I thought that this was important. This was part of the institution, and I was very happy, honored to have that role and I wanted to play it.

Clifton Wharton: Plus, being there, you get a sense of the pulse of the campus.

Wharton: Oh yes. You know what's going on.

Clifton Wharton: By August you're saying, "Where are the kids? They've got to come back." [Laughter]

Wharton: By the end of May when they left, I was glad to see them go. But then by August, when it's time for them to come back, I was really ready to welcome them back.

Charnley: Some of the speeches that you did around the state, how were you involved, or what were some of the talks that you gave around Michigan?

Wharton: One was on my book. I was invited to Detroit Institute for the Arts and whatnot, and then Governor Millikin was just wonderful in appointing me to different organizations, and I would speak about the arts. And then Mrs. Millikin, if you remember that time, had Art Train, and I was involved with Art Train. She was just really marvelous, a really outstanding American. I was on the Art Train presentations, and certainly when it came time to go to the National Endowment of the Arts to get funding, I was present.

Larry [Lawrence L.] Boger had set it up for us to go out and meet the people of Michigan, because there was so much curiosity about, as I say, this young New York couple. Who were they? Several years out, we would

go to various arranged meetings and we would speak to the local people. Usually they were graduates of Michigan State or Extension people who had interacted with Michigan State, very large groups. Clif would always tell about what was happening on campus, and I was very often asked to speak and give my side, my perspective of what was going on.

During the time of student unrest, I accepted the students' invitations. I let it be known that I would welcome invitations to go live in the dormitories, and I spent several weeks as guest in residence at a number of dormitories. So I had something really to say about what was happening on the campus and being in the dormitories. When you're sitting on the floor at night with your socks on, talking to kids, you find out a lot about what's going on. And I did. It was very insightful.

Charnley: How did the students react to having the president's wife in their dorm?

Wharton: Oh, it was wonderful. It was just great. We had a good time. I took films in, so that we had a base of getting together for something that was fun. I had films. There's a genre called short films; they have a social message. They run from one minute to ten. They're never longer than ten minutes. I would take several of the films in, and I would show these films and we would discuss the implications, the social implications of the films, and then we would get to some of their problems, too.

Charnley: Did you advise your husband on some of those issues, student-related?

Wharton: It wasn't a case of advising. We talked a lot, but it wasn't a case of advising. We did talk.

Charnley: Your role in actually dealing with the demonstrations went beyond just something in the background. Would you talk a little bit about that? That first February demonstration. You had just arrived a month or so.

Wharton: Yes. That was surprising. That really was a surprise. I was amazed.

Clifton Wharton: [unclear].

Wharton: Oh yes. And my response was, "Intelligently." [Laughter]

Charnley: [Laughter] Good answer.

Clifton Wharton: [unclear].

Wharton: Yes, it was a vigil on campus. It was a candlelight vigil and it started over in East Lansing, over there by Jacobson's. Jacobson's was brand new in those days and very fine. They marched around East Lansing. I declined the invitation to march off campus. I thought my province should be right there on campus. It was all very peaceful. They came to Cowles House and they stood outside. There were several hundred. Young Clifton was there and I asked him to join me, and it started off with their coming to the door and singing, holding their candles. I think Clif was still over at the administration building. I came downstairs, went out on the steps again.

Clifton Wharton: [unclear].

Wharton: Oh, that's right. Yes, that evening. You had gone to bed. I had sent him to bed. He had been up for a couple of days. He hadn't been to sleep in several days. So I went down and said that--and I think the students knew this, that Dr. Wharton was asleep, finally, and would they accept me. They all agreed, very warmly, that I could go.

So then I was given a candle, and young Clifton came, and we marched in front and we marched around the campus, and we ended up over at the auditorium. Well, it turned out that there was a big rock concert over at the

auditorium and it was just breaking up. Students were coming out, those students were stoned. So on one side of you have very sincere, dedicated young group of people holding candles, and these other kids coming out with their eyes rolling. It was quite a meeting, a coming together of different segments of the campus.

Charnley: Sounds representative of the times.

Wharton: We didn't have a lot of that kind of thing. We really didn't, but the concerts did tend to promote that kind of activity.

[Begin Tape 1, Side 2]

Charnley: This is side two of interviewing Dolores Wharton.

We were talking about the student protests of early 1970s and her first days on campus. Would you talk a little bit more, Mrs. Wharton, about some of the Cowles House activities that you were involved in besides the student protests? What were some of the other activities that you were involved in at Cowles House?

Wharton: They were endless. They were endless. You had a quote in your book, three to four thousand. I say five thousand a year went through Cowles House, all different kinds of receptions, student receptions. One of the things which I thoroughly enjoyed and loved was the invitations that were accepted by the artist that Ken Beachler had performing at the auditorium. There were many a superstar who accepted, like Rudolf Nureyev, Van Cliburn, just a host of artists who would come. They did not like coming before the concert, and they would come afterward. Sometimes we'd have dinner. Duke Ellington, for example, he would only stay for a reception, he didn't stay for dinner.

But what I did was I invited the people from the community to come and meet these brilliant American performers, and they accepted the invitations. There was not a lot of interaction with the people in the community at

that time, not a lot when we first went in. But when they did get invitations to meet some of these superstars, they accepted our invitation with great delight. It started a program that I just thoroughly enjoyed. I loved it.

Then of course, we had the President's Club, which I started receiving at Cowles House.

Clifton Wharton: The widows.

Wharton: Oh yes, the widows.

Clifton Wharton: [unclear].

Charnley: The widows was an annual--

Wharton: Yes, it was an annual event. They were widows of employees. The employees themselves had died, and there were a lot of widows in the community who felt as if they had nothing whatsoever to do with Michigan State anymore. It was over and they were forgotten. I found a number of them. Mrs. Vemott [phonetic], who was Clif's secretary, she was terrific, and she helped me to identify these women all over the Lansing area. I had programs for them, lunches for them, and I'm not so sure then I also didn't take them on tours around the campus. I developed a number of tours around campus. I never knew that we had a mink farm, and I took the ladies to see the mink farm and all different kinds of things.

Then there was a program at Fairchild and at the auditorium we had at the same time. We went backstage, saw a performance and we went backstage and we saw what our conditions were on both sides of the theater. They shared a common stage then. There were a lot of different things that we had, but usually I started out at Cowles House with some sort of a reception.

Charnley: The auditorium was a WPA [Works Progress Administration] project.

Wharton: Yes, exactly.

Charnley: I send my students over there when I'm talking about the Great Depression. Eleanor Roosevelt was there at the christening of the building in 1940, I think it was. So at the time, thirty years, a whole generation later, when you were there, how would you describe it, in terms of the facilities? What were your early reactions?

Wharton: [Imitating Eleanor Roosevelt] It was spartan. [Laughter] But the audiences turned out, though. Ken said that there's a travelogue series, and he said that was always packed. So the people did go out. I think that it was accepted. It was just accepted. The thought of a new performing arts center was just not in the cards, it was just not necessary, if you're going to do anything, it had to be for sports. There was talk of a new sports arena or something like that. And here this strange woman from New York wants a theater. That was not smiled upon.

Charnley: Who would you say hatched the idea of a new center for the performing arts?

Clifton Wharton: There had been a proposal made before we came, and that was in reaction to an earlier proposal, before we came, for an all-events building. The students got angry about the proposal for the all-events, and they wanted a performing arts center, so there was a very rough proposal made, but both had died. So when we came, then the issue was stimulated.

Charnley: You mentioned Ken Beachler. He was one of those that was a strong supporter of a new facility? Any other faculty that you remember that were active in lobbying for a new facility?

Clifton Wharton: There was a committee. I asked [unclear] to appoint a committee, and that committee was to look at performing arts facilities all over the United States and come forward with a set of recommendations.

Dolores was on that committee, along with Les. But that committee's proposed set of recommendations--

Wharton: Anne [C.] Garrison, Frank Rutledge [phonetic], Ken, of course, [James F.] Niblock.

Clifton Wharton: Then their recommendations formed the basis for the development of a genuine prospectus for the performing arts center. That was all done under the aegis of John Kent. So when we decided to have a capital drive and the performing arts center was included in that, that's when we began to campaign on campus, and that was when Dolores and I went all over that campus, before it was a public drive, to speak to the different communities on campus, students, grounds crew, and you name it, departments, and what we said to them was, "If you really want this, we have to contribute first, before I can go out to the general public and get the money." We spoke I don't know how many times, the two of us, all over that campus.

Wharton: Well, then we also stretched out and went across the country. I went on a number of speaking engagements by myself, actually. We went up the West Coast and just all over.

Clifton Wharton: As I remember it, we set a target on campus to raise 500,000 dollars, and before we even got to the public launch with the Tony and Nina benefit, we had already passed, I think 750,000 or 800,000. We had passed a million on campus. So that I was then able to go to public and say, "Look, our people want this." But that was when it really got started.

Charnley: Did you find that to be a tough sell at the time?

Wharton: By that time, no, not really. We worked hard. We worked very hard. A lot of people were saying, "It's a state university. It is not necessary to make private contributions." Now, today, everyone realizes state institutions do go out fundraising, but at that time, it was quite, quite new. And that was the big argument that we had.

Charnley: While you were in the role of presidential first lady at Michigan State, how else were you involved in the arts or in the performing arts?

Wharton: I had been invited to serve on the board of trustees of the Museum of Modern Art here in New York City. I had been invited to be a council member of the National Endowment for the Arts when President [Gerald] Ford was President. It was observed that when he became President, that there was no one representing the good state of Michigan, so my name had come up prior to that. But when Ford came in, my nomination just went right through and I was appointed by Ford.

Charnley: Did you know the Fords personally at that time?

Wharton: No, not till later. Mrs. [Betty] Ford came and spent the night with me when President Ford was at the University of Michigan. He said that he was going to run for second term, and he went to Michigan and she came to Michigan State and spent the night with us in Cowles House. That was lovely.

Clifton Wharton: [unclear].

Charnley: After the appointment to NEA [National Endowment for the Arts]?

Wharton: No, I was already on the Phillips Board. No, no, no. That's not correct. That's not correct. No, I was on Phillips and I think Kellogg at that point. No, Michigan Bell, no.

Charnley: Within Cowles House on campus, did you do anything to support the local artists at Michigan State?

Wharton: Well, the paintings that I had in the house, that's one of them right now, right there, right now, which we bought. Yes, I was very proud of that. I had a program where I rotated art, I guess it was perhaps every term. The artist from the department, the studio professors, brought their work to a particular classroom that they would allow to be donated to Cowles House. Erling Brauner was the head of the department, and he and I would go through the contributions, and we would select paintings that were hung in Cowles House. We had, oh, just marvelous shows, just wonderful shows. I was thrilled with them. And there were times when we had over fifty pieces.

One of the artists in Kuala Lumpur was there, Jolly Koh, and he said that he'd been over to the art department and had heard all the different artists who said they had paintings at Cowles House. He said, "I thought this place was going to be cluttered, clustered." He said, "The way you've done this is really quite beautiful."

And it was well done. The house is big. It lent itself exquisitely to the art. It was very eclectic. So you had the contemporary art and the rather beautifully decorated designs that went traditionally into Cowles House. It had been beautifully done before our coming. The furnishings were really just splendid. The architecture, I thought, was great. So the combination was really quite wonderful, and the artists were most kind and gracious to me in letting me use their things.

Charnley: Was there student art?

Wharton: No.

Charnley: It was primarily faculty?

Wharton: Totally. That was my interest.

Charnley: The corporate boards that you just briefly mentioned, how was that developed?

Wharton: The first one was with Michigan National Bank. I was invited to go on that. And I was very pleased. That was a local board. There were a number of boards that I had served. I was on the American Red Cross, and the governor had appointed me to various commissions and whatnot, and I had done my books. And with the students and the press and whatnot, I had a lot of visibility. I had become fairly well known there in Michigan at that time. So with the visibility and with the understanding of what was going on on the campus and having spoke out about it, I think under those circumstances, I was someone that the boards were interested in. They were interested in having me.

I received the first invitation, as I say, corporate, was Michigan National Bank and then Michigan Bell, and then there was Kellogg and Phillips Petroleum. And later, after we came to New York, I was invited to go into the Gannett board.

Charnley: In talking about the Wharton Center, and what came to be called the Wharton Center--

Wharton: That was a great thrill. Greatest honor of our lives.

Charnley: So you were involved in that after you left? Not in the naming, I don't mean that. I mean, in raising the funds and talking about some of the development of the Wharton Center. Were you involved at all after you left the university?

Wharton: No. I had a deep affection for it and hoped that it was going to go well, but, no, we were not. It was SUNY then and making that adjustment to the State University of New York.

Charnley: What was your reaction when you heard that the board of trustees was interested in naming it in your honor?

Wharton: We were thrilled beyond words. Absolutely, for me, it was the greatest single honor in my life, bar none. I'm still ecstatic about it.

Charnley: How did you feel when you walked into the great hall for the first time?

Wharton: I was just overwhelmed with joy and light and the fact that it was so well received by the community. It was just the ultimate. It was just brilliant.

Charnley: Your name is invoked many, many times by thousands of students and faculty.

Clifton Wharton: Without knowing who it is. [Laughter]

Charnley: "Where are we going tonight?" [Laughter]

Wharton: Some of those who think we're dead. [Laughter] When you have a building named for you, you're supposed to be dead.

Charnley: The whole concept of going to the Wharton Center is so significant. I introduced my daughter at age five. We went to a show in 1986, and for her that was exciting, and now she's a freshman at Michigan State.

Wharton: Oh, that's great.

Charnley: But I think that's important, and seeing your name on the building is significant. Do you remember anything about the dedication?

Clifton Wharton: We've got it on tape.

Wharton: On tape, yes. The whole thing, I'm very seriously, I'm not just coming out with glowing words, it was the single most brilliant moment of my life. My husband was there. Young Clifton wasn't there, but Bruce was there. Friends from all over that campus. It was elevating. It was dazzling with joy and excitement and accomplishment and humility but, by George, you know, we pulled it off. It was just incredibly wonderful.

Charnley: What did you learn from your experience at Michigan State?

Wharton: I learned a lot more about my country. This goes back to the little things from the Little Red Schoolhouse and how to look at your surroundings, your environment, your people, your society. I had been in Asia, and that was big time looking at different people. In the United States, it's pretty much New York. I shouldn't say it was exclusively to New York, because we had moved to Connecticut from New York when I was just at my teen-age years. But Michigan was quite different for me. The Michigander has a real personality, really strong characteristics. That was important to me in getting to know the people of Michigan and broadening it to the people of the Midwest. It was learning about my country.

Fred Honhart: I have just one question for you. When you came, you really did change the role of the first lady at Michigan State University, because in the past, the person had not taken a particularly public role. How did you find the reaction to that?

Wharton: Could you be a little more specific as to which groups you're talking about?

Honhart: You took a very public role as first lady at Michigan State University, which had not been the practice.

Wharton: Yes, I understand that part. But were there any particular groups or just in general?

Honhart: No, I just was wondering which groups you did find and how they reacted.

Wharton: Well, just one day led to the next, kind of thing. It just happened. It just moved in that direction. Since Michigan State, there have been times when I have given a side of this coupling with Wharton that I have a part that I play that is part of the totality of the two of us, and I was never discouraged from speaking out, being a part, making my comment, so that it just flowed. There were several times when Clif was off campus or when he was invited to make presentations and speeches and whatnot off campus, and he would have me go in his stead. Through my book, I had done some radio broadcast, television and that kind of thing, so I had spoken before. He had me speak, and I'm speaking on campus, so one thing led to the other.

Then I made one speech I remember. Pam Roman.

Clifton Wharton: [unclear].

Wharton: I made a speech someplace, I think it was over at the Student Union, they had asked me to speak. I was always being asked to speak, and this was the first one. And then the title, the big headlines was, "Mrs. Wharton Speaks." [Laughter] Otherwise, before that I had been dumb? But that kind of started it. Then after that, there were just a lot of invitations, more invitations than what I could actually fill.

Clifton Wharton: I think one thing that's probably true is that to a certain extent, since previous first ladies had not performed this role, Dolores could, in a sense, design the whole thing on her own. There was no pattern, no model to follow. As she says, there were forces of circumstance, which through a lot of it, that is, for example, giving the

talks about what the students are like and what's happening on the campus, that's what was happening so that's what you would talk about. So those sorts of things encouraged that kind of development. The same thing is I think is true in terms of the corporate boards, having the base of experience and exposure to what the youth think and what the youth are doing and thought, was a tremendous resource for many corporate boards, particularly those at the state level.

Wharton: Students were protesting a lot of major corporations.

Clifton Wharton: Here's somebody who knows what it's like. I felt that this was all positive. I didn't say, "Stay at home and be pouring tea." It didn't make sense.

Wharton: I never had a tea party.

Clifton Wharton: No. That's what the *New York Times* said. [Laughter]

Wharton: But I loved Cowles House. I thoroughly enjoyed it. And every first lady has her own approach. No matter who she is, she has her own approach, and my approach was different from others and different certainly from what it is now. That was my house.

Clifton Wharton: And your home.

Wharton: And my home. I did not invite anybody in my home. It was not that I expected anybody to come and say it was the university's and they had every right to do whatever they wanted to. I objected to that very, very much. I ran it. I was in charge of it. I was in control of it, and if there was going to be any change, I was going to leave. I kid you not. I would have left. I had student waiters whom I trained and I told them if anyone dares set foot in that kitchen, they would tell them, "By Mrs. Wharton's orders, no one is admitted into the kitchen." And in

those first years, I had a lot of people trying to get into the kitchen to get their own drinks and that kind of thing. I even had one trustee, yes, I did, who went into the kitchen. I was livid. You can't do that. It's improper. It's rude. So it was my house, and when they were invited to my house, it was by my invitation.

Charnley: I want to thank you for the time that you've given us and ideas that you've shared. We appreciate your contributions to the project. Thank you very much.

Wharton: Thank you.

[End of interview]

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