



INTERVIEW WITH

Mr. John Krout

by

Dr. Thomas Soapes  
Oral Historian

on

April 27, 1977

for

Dwight D. Eisenhower Library

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John A. Krout  
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This interview is being conducted with Mr. John Krout in his home in Tiffin, Ohio on April 27, 1977. The interviewer is Dr. Thomas Soapes of the Eisenhower Library. Present for the interview are Mr. Krout and Dr. Soapes.

DR. SOAPES: Let's start off with a little bit of your background. Could you tell me where and when you were born and something about your formal education?

MR. KROUT: I was born here in Tiffin, Ohio in October of 1896. I attended the public schools here in Tiffin, attended Heidelberg College in Tiffin for three years and then took my senior year at the University of Michigan where I got my A.B. degree in June of 1918. For about a year I thought I was going to be a public accountant, and I went to Chicago and was sent from there to Mt. Vernon, Illinois and worked on a big audit of the charges of the American Car and Foundry Company when it had been building freight cars for the government during the first world war.

I decided in August of 1919 that I didn't want to stay in that work and went to Columbia University in September of 1919 as a graduate student. I was going to go into law when I went to New York City and enrolled at Columbia. But after I had an interview with Harlan Fisk Stone, who was then dean



of the law school and later became Chief Justice of the United States, I decided that my field wasn't really law, it was probably in history and government. And I enrolled in fact in political science and got my master's degree and ultimately my doctorate in the field of history. Then I taught history at Columbia for, well almost forty years, got drawn into administration after General Eisenhower became president of Columbia University.



SOAPES: What was your specialty in history?

KROUT: I taught American history and usually the early period, that is before the Civil War. I did the colonial period for a good many years and then I taught what we historians call the "middle period," from about the Revolution down to the Civil War, for a good many years after that.

SOAPES: Moving quickly to your service in the administration of the University, when and to what position did you go in administration?



KROUT: When General Eisenhower became president, I was vice-chairman of the committee that arranged the inaugural ceremony. And he very quickly, after he got to the university, asked who were responsible for this celebration, who organized it? Grayson Kirk and I were the two who had done a great deal of work on it and, as you know, Mr. Kirk ultimately became president of the university; I became vice-president.



My first contact with the General was after I had spoken at a meeting of the Men's Faculty Club. It was the annual dinner to welcome President and Mrs. Eisenhower to the university, and I had been designated, before we knew that the Eisenhowers were coming to Columbia, to give the address of welcome that evening. I remember that after the dinner President Eisenhower came up to me and said, "How would you like to turn from teaching to administration?" I said, "Well, I've never given it any thought, but I don't think I'd be adverse to doing that." Soon afterwards I got word that he wanted to see me in his office and when I came in, he said, "We have a vacancy right now in the School of General Studies; we need a dean there."

Would you accept it?" Well I asked for a little time to think it over and then I told him that I would accept only on the provision that I stay until they found someone who was going to be dean for a longer period of time. I didn't think I wanted to spend many years as dean of the School of General Studies. So he said, "Well, will you take it till you do find someone, and you help me find someone." So I agreed on those conditions. After about six months we did find, in Professor Louis Hacker of the economics department, someone who agreed to become dean of the School of General Studies. I can remember when I went in and told President Eisenhower that we had found someone, he looked at me and grinned, and he said, "Now you just didn't get him in order to get out of this position, did you?" I said, "No, that wasn't the real reason."

I thought then that I was going back to teach in the department of history and had no other ideas. But within about two months he called me in again and said, "I've decided that I want you to become dean of the graduate faculties of philosophy, political science, and pure science." And I



agreed to that and was dean in the years that he was actively at the university. I got a chance then to become very well acquainted with him, because he was eager to learn all about the university. And I think he used Dean Harry Carman in the college and me in the graduate faculties probably as the two persons who could take him around to visit various departments of instruction so he could get really intimately acquainted with what was going on in the life of the university. And I know that President Eisenhower was very fond of Dean Carman. I have a letter in which he indicated a half dozen at Columbia whom he was particularly interested in and Carman's name is in that list. Carman use to take him through the departments in the college, and I tried my best to get a plan organized where he and I, perhaps two mornings in a week, would visit two departments of instruction. And we started out very successfully. We had six or eight departments that we visited, and President Eisenhower was keen on it. He enjoyed it very, very much. I can remember one day we walked over to the Faculty Club, which was on the way to 60 Morningside where he lived, and as I stopped at the club, he said, "Now, John,





let's make sure that we do this at least twice a week." Well I think that was the last we ever did it because he was called to Washington. It was just at the time, you see, that they were having the difficulties with the nervous breakdown of Secretary [James] Forrestal; and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Eisenhower were called back constantly. Indeed I think he tidied everything over for the administration at that time when Forrestal was no longer able to carry on; just at the time that they were trying to get the Department of Defense organized properly and into working order.



SOAPES: I wanted to back up just a bit to the time of Eisenhower's appointment as president. I assume from what you've told me you were not involved in the decision at all to select him as the president.

KROUT: No, I was not involved at all.

SOAPES: Did you get a feel, though, for why Eisenhower was selected as president of the university?

KROUT: You see we had had a great many years of Nicholas

Murray Butler, who was not merely president of Columbia University but also a public figure. National reputation. Indeed he'd been seriously considered for President of the United States at one time and had actually had the chance to turn down the nomination for vice-president. If he had taken it, he'd have been in the spot that Calvin Coolidge was in and would have succeeded Harding. He made, I think from the standpoint of his ambitions, a great mistake in declining the vice-presidency at that time.

So there were members of the trustees, I would say two in particular: one was Thomas J. Watson of IBM and the other probably was Parkinson of Equitable Life. They were very determined that whoever came to Columbia should be not merely a person in the academic world but also a person who had already achieved distinction in the world of affairs. And who it was that hit on General Eisenhower, I don't know. He laughingly said to a number of us on several occasions that he always thought they had made a mistake, that they meant to get his younger brother, Milton, who was a academic person; instead,



they got him.

He came to Columbia, I'm sure, with a good deal of trepidation. He was worried about coming into an entirely new environment. He often said to me, "My life's all been in the military; I don't know anything really about the academic life. After all," he said, "I was a graduate of a military academy, not of the kind of liberal arts college and university that Columbia is." But he tried to learn as fast as he could, and he was interested in everything.

I've got evidence that he not only was concerned with what was going on in the various departments, but he was concerned with everything that Columbia was doing in its outreach. Just the other day I was looking at the letter from him in which he said, "Come in and talk to me some time and tell me about Columbia's relationship to Riverside Church. What relationship do we have there?" We had a joint program with the Union Theological Seminary and that sometimes involved Riverside Church in connection with the seminary. So that he was anxious about that, to see what our relationships were with other institutions on Morningside Heights.



SOAPES: If I can interrupt for just a moment.

KROUT: Surely.

SOAPES: One thesis we've had suggested to us, and I'm not at liberty to reveal the source, was that people like Watson were very politically minded themselves and were trying to set Eisenhower up politically for the presidency of the United States. Did that thesis bound around the campus?

KROUT: Yes. I think there is something in it, too. And I think that even as early as the fall of 1948 that General Eisenhower was already beginning to feel pressures. I couldn't date when it was that I was in his office one day and he said to me, "I'm so worried that they're going to try to draw me into politics and I don't want to be drawn in." But he said, "I don't always know how to avoid it, to say no without giving offense or causing more difficulties than would arise if I said, well, all right, 'Barkus is willing'--I'll go along with it."

SOAPES: By they he was referring to people like Watson?





KROUT: He never specified the persons to whom he was referring, but certainly there were pressures being brought to bear. "They" could have been in the trustees group or "they" could have been outside the university family entirely; I just don't know about that. My one evidence of this that's pretty conclusive is the episode in 1950. You may have some evidence that in 1950 the president of Heidelberg College here in Tiffin wrote to me and said, "Would President Eisenhower agree to come out and speak at the one hundredth anniversary of the founding of Heidelberg College, which will be in November of 1950?" I wrote back to him and said, "I haven't the remotest idea, but if you want me to I'll find out whether he's at all willing to consider it." So one day I went in and talked to him and he said, "John, give me a couple of days to think about it," which I thought was a nice way of saying I don't believe I will. But instead of that he called me in in about a week and said, "I've decided to go. You say it's November the 11th." I said, "That's the date they have set because it's the time they got their charter, 1850." This was in the spring of 1950 that we had this talk. Time went on and I heard nothing more about it until one



day, I think it was in September he called me in and said; "John, I made you a promise about going out to Tiffin to Heidelberg College and I'm afraid I can't keep it." He said, "I'm going to be very honest with you. I do not have any momentous commitment or any engagement. I want to go down to Texas and shoot ducks and it'll cover the 11th of November and I can't make the trip." But he said, "If you let me off my promise, I agree that I will get to Heidelberg College before the end of the calendar year 1950." So, of course, I wrote and told them he was sorry but he couldn't make it on November the 11th, but he could come later. I wasn't sure then whether he could possibly make it.

Sure enough, very early in December he called me in and said, "We better make plans about that Tiffin trip if we're going to have it before the end of this year." He said, "I've got an idea in my mind." He said, "Mamie and I are going out to spend the Christmas season with the Douds in Denver. Why couldn't we arrange that my special car would be attached to a train which went, if not to Tiffin at least near Tiffin, then we could be detached; we could lay over a night there and go on the next day."



I said, "Well, I didn't see any reason." Of course, Colonel Robert Schulz, who was his transportation man, quickly got into the scene and he said, "Oh, that can very easily be arranged." So he came and we travelled from New York to Bucyrus, Ohio. The car was detached there and they came down from Tiffin, got us, brought us up here to the college. He had a wonderful time. He went over and had lunch in the commons with the students, he sang Christmas carols with them, and he spoke in Rickly Chapel and then drove back.



When we got back that evening to the car in Bucyrus, he said, "We've had such a wonderful day, let's sit around and talk now a while before you fellows go back to Tiffin." And just as we were about to say, "Well, all right if you can spare the time," someone came in and said, "President Eisenhower, Washington has been trying to get you on the line all afternoon." He said, "Well, where can I take a call?" We said, "Well, there's a little box down the line here, it's about a quarter of a mile, maybe an eighth of a mile. You can take the call right there." And he went down and in the little box along the railroad tracks he got the call from Truman that sent him over to become commanding



officer of the allied forces in Europe in the spring of 1951.

I was elated, of course, that he came to Tiffin with me at that time, but I was distressed that he got that call and felt that he just had to accept. When I got back, though, after the Christmas vacation, and the General and Mrs. Eisenhower had come back from Colorado, I saw him twice and both times he said to me, "I hate to go and Mamie hates to go. We both have enjoyed it so much here at Columbia and we love 60 Morningside Drive. It's been a real home for us. And the first home," he said, "we've really had because we've lived in army quarters our whole married life up until this time. So;" he said, "it's only because I feel it's my duty that I'm saying goodbye to Columbia University." Well not really goodbye--he took a leave of absence, and the trustees were very gracious in giving him that leave of absence.

And he kept in touch. Some of my letters show that he kept writing to me all the time as to things that were going on at Columbia that he was deeply interested in. One of them, of course, was the American Assembly. The other, and the one that I knew better than anything else because he asked me to help with the organization, was the Institute of War and Peace Studies. We had hoped to get as the leader in that particular



institute George Kennan, and indeed he came to Columbia and had at least one talk with the General. I don't know whether he was there oftener than that or not. But I was present at one conference. Kennan thought it over but finally decided it wasn't something he wanted to do. And ultimately we persuaded William T.R. Fox, who was then a professor of government at Yale, to come to Columbia and to accept as one of his chief responsibilities the directorship of the Institute of War and Peace Studies. He took that over and he has carried it along ever since. Another thing that he was deeply interested in at Columbia was the Conservation of Human Resources.



SOAPES: Yes, [Eli] Ginzberg.

KROUT: Have you talked with Ginzberg at all?

SOAPES: Yes.

KROUT: So you know all about that phase of it. And out of that sort of grew, it was really Eisenhower's inspiration that started the Manpower Council which Henry David carried along for a great many years and was successful in publishing a number of volumes.

SOAPES: You said that when he first came to Columbia that he expressed his unease in this new situation. Did you find that he had difficulty then handling some of the issues that the president of a university was to handle?

KROUT: I don't think I ever felt that way about it at all. The chief criticism I heard was at the very beginning from members of the faculty--why were we choosing a man who didn't come out of an academic background at all, whose experience was wholly military, and who had won, of course, international fame but still hadn't won it on the basis of any knowledge or connection with institutions of higher learning in the country? The second thing was that a good many of them felt that it was a little bit hard to get any of his time because his commitments were so great in the city, in the nation quite apart from Columbia University, that he just hadn't time to spare when they wanted to see him. I discounted both of those things, maybe I was wrong about it but I don't think I was. In the first place, when he came, he came as a very humble man about academic things, and he did not try to say, "Well, I'll show you how to do this." That wasn't his attitude at all. His attitude was of one who



doesn't know very much about this particular environment and who wants to learn. And he learned, I think, with amazing speed. I was always astounded at the rapidity with which he did master things.

The one thing I'm sure he didn't care for at all was presiding over faculty meetings. He thought they could be deadly dull and sometimes he felt, well, here we spent an hour and a half to two hours, we haven't done a single thing. We've done a lot of talking, didn't amount to much; we haven't advanced one inch so far as doing anything for the university is concerned. So, he did, after about four or five months put the presiding at the faculty meetings on to others, and I took my share of those chores during the period after he was there.



SOAPES: You mentioned Schulz earlier. Some have suggested to us that Schulz and some of the other military retinue served to hold people out.

KROUT: There was a feeling, widespread on the campus, that they did. I never noticed it, of course, because my office

was right in the same building with the president's office and he could pick up the phone and call me if he wanted me or sometimes he'd just pencil on a sheet of paper, "Come in tomorrow," or "Come in this afternoon," and send it over to me and I would be there. How many of the faculty wanted to see him and didn't get in, I'm not sure. But I am aware of the fact that there was grumbling over it. And I think it did come from the fact that at the very beginning--but I think it only lasted a few months--there were a good many carryovers from the military side who were actually at Columbia and had desks there for a while. But they didn't stay very long. Colonel Schulz, of course, did stay because he had a continuing responsibility for arranging trips and everything of that sort, and he was invaluable at it, no doubt about that.

SOAPES: One comparison that's been made between him and Butler on this same subject--and Eisenhower being compared unfavorably was--didn't Butler have an elevator that went straight up to his office and any student or faculty could





just hop on the elevator and come up and see him?

KROUT: Well, he had an elevator all right, I'll agree to that. But I was there for a great many years as a young instructor, assistant professor, without ever having laid eyes on President Butler in his office or had any feeling that I could see him. I could see his secretary, Mr. Fackenthall, who was a grand person to go in to and talk to. But once you'd seen Mr. Fackenthall you didn't need President Butler, you usually felt. You had the word and you knew it was authoritative and that was the end of it. President Eisenhower's office was in a new location; he wasn't upstairs, he was right on the first floor. And it's true that to get to him you had to go through some of the persons outside who guarded the gate. Maybe they guarded it too cautiously. If they did, I don't think he was aware of it and I don't believe anyone really alerted him, because he certainly always gave the impression that when he had any time at all he was available, you could call on him. And indeed these trips that I'm telling you about to visit departments, we actually



walked all around the campus and went to the department and saw them. We didn't call them in to talk to him in his office; we went over to the physics department to see what they were doing; we visited with the younger members-- especially the younger members--of the history department. And that's a point that I've always given him high marks for. He was definitely interested in the men who were assistant professor or lower in the academic scale. He wanted to see who the young men were who were coming along. So I think that his attitude there showed that he really had in his mind when he came not the idea he was going to be there just a few years, but he really thought he might be there to see some of these younger men advancing in rank until they became senior members of the faculty.

I forgot one thing I was going to say when I was talking about the trip to Tiffin. He specified on the trip to Tiffin that no advance publicity could be given. And so I wrote to President Wickham at Heidelberg College and said, "You can't even tell the newspapers he's coming." And he didn't. He kept the faith and the faculty and students



merely knew that on a certain date at a certain hour they were to assemble in Rickly Chapel for an important meeting. They didn't know who was coming at all. Many of them thought President Truman was coming at that time. And I said to President Eisenhower afterwards, "Why, why the secrecy?" Really I said, "You lost some of the fun of the trip by having it so secret." And he said, "Well, maybe I did." But he said, "You know, that territory out there is already marked out as Robert Taft's country," and he said, "I was so afraid that if I went in it might look as if I did have political ambitions and was coming in now under the guise of visiting a small college there, doing some political fence-building." But he said, "I didn't want it that way and that's why I insisted on secrecy." So I know that at that time he was already getting pressures, you see, on the political side but he was trying as best he could to resist it.



SOAPES: I'm glad you went back and picked that point up. Just, one final question on this point of access to him--your position as a dean, you had you felt adequate access to him.

Did other deans feel the same way?

KROUT: I think they did. I think they did, yes. I can't remember that I ever asked for a chance to come in and talk to him that I had to wait--well, maybe if I some afternoon said I'd like to see him, they'd say, "Well, this afternoon's kind of bogged up but how about tomorrow morning?" I don't think I ever waited longer than that. And I think the deans of schools like the School of Business, School of Law, School of Engineering, he was very much interested in those schools and very closely acquainted with the deans of those schools, too, at the time. And of course Harry Carman as dean of Columbia College, I think was one who probably saw him more often than almost anyone else in the years '49, '50, and '51 till he left.



[Interruption]

SOAPES: One of the subjects that we've heard that he disliked very much about his Columbia duties was fund raising.

KROUT: I think he probably did, but then doesn't every



university president dislike it? It isn't an easy job. And I'm sure that at the very beginning he was quite conscious of the fact that he probably had been partly brought in because the trustees thought he might be the magnet to draw in funds, and he did his utmost I'm sure with those who were his close friends--and he had a good many friends in Texas as you know whom he thought might become interested in Columbia, though they hadn't been connected with Columbia at all in the past. But I can't be specific as to what he did. I have no knowledge really of that fund-raising side. The only place where fund raising impinged on my awareness of things was when we were talking about the Institute for War and Peace Studies. There we thought we could get some outside money and we did get some outside money. But he brought in a helper to help us there and that was General Edwin M. Clark. Has that name appeared at all?

SOAPES: I don't--

KROUT: He had served with Eisenhower, I think in North Africa. He had been a graduate of the military academy probably four



or five years, I suspect, after Eisenhower graduated at West Point. But at any rate they were close friends, and General Clark was in New York--I think in a law firm probably at the time. He came up to Columbia and I must say that he deserves a great deal of praise for the time and the effort that he put in in getting in contact with persons who might conceivably give money, and many of them did give money to getting the Institute of War and Peace Studies launched. Also, he made contacts with men and women whom we later brought into the board for the Institute. We had an outside board as well as academic persons on it, and I think probably as many as fifteen or twenty persons who weren't really Columbia people but were interested in the university because it was in New York City were brought in, largely through the efforts of General Clark, who worked with us day after day at great cost in time to him and helped us raise some money.



SOAPES: You mentioned that Eisenhower was concerned with the younger members of the academic faculty, that he had some interest in--

KROUT: Very much so.

SOAPES: --and students. Did Eisenhower have a feel for the intellectual aspects of the university, the research characteristic of a university as opposed to just a teaching responsibility?

KROUT: Yes. I think there were two areas where he was very deeply interested. He was interested in the Council on Foreign Relations and really attended their meetings pretty faithfully. He was also interested in what was going on in the physics department. Whether that grew out of the atomic research that had preceded his coming to the university, I don't know, but the two scientists with whom he came very closely acquainted were I.I. Rabi, who is now professor emeritus of physics, a Nobel Prize winner, and John R. Dunning, who was at that time in the physics department; and Eisenhower made him dean of the School of Engineering while he was there. And I know that both Rabi and John Dunning were two of his close associates. And he was deeply interested in the work which had been going on in the field of physics. In fact I was with him, I remember,



the day we went over to the physics department and saw some of the work they were doing. And from then on he and Rabi were very closely associated. At that time I think Professor Rabi was probably chairman of the department of physics. Those two things I'm sure of. How much he was interested in things like literature, philosophy, I just don't know.

SOAPES: You were talking to me earlier, before we started the tape, about the American Assembly--

KROUT: Yes.

SOAPES: --and the beginnings of that. Could you recount for me what you can of that?

KROUT: My own first awareness of anything like the American Assembly was the fact that there was talk on the campus that Averell Harriman had approached, I think probably approached the president, and said that he was prepared to give Arden House to Columbia University if the university could convince





him that there was a really useful purpose to be served and that the property would not just become a sort of white elephant on the hands of the university. I attended two meetings. The one I remember with great vividness is the one at 60 Morningside Drive when President Eisenhower had invited Averell Harriman to come. And then he had Dean [Phillip] Young, and Provost Kirk, and Dean William Warren, and myself, and I think Dean [George] Pegram, who was then vice-president of the university. We were all there, and we talked for several hours. And I am not sure who it was that first brought up the proposal of some kind of a meeting that would bring experts together from all parts of the country, and even perhaps from foreign countries, to discuss a particular problem and have it viewed from various points of view so it wouldn't be a monolithic thing but would be multifaceted. I do know that the person who seemed to pick up the idea and be willing to push it and to get behind it and work was Dean Young of the School of Business. And that I think is why Arden House ultimately came into the orbit of the School of Business, and for a while Dean Young had it. And then when he left, Courtney



Brown, who became dean of the School of Business became-- and indeed, I guess, is responsible to this very hour for Arden House and a good deal of the operations there.

Now Arden House was not solely an American Assembly place. It also housed a great many other conferences. And it was rented out also to organizations, until I think pressures got so great they probably had to limit a little bit. There were too many demands for it; they couldn't really provide the time. But they did rent it out.



The American Assembly sessions, the very first ones that I attended, were excellent it seemed to me. They were attended by interested persons who were enthusiastic, who contributed on their own, who were also missionaries who carried the gospel back home, you know, and talked about it a great deal in the regions from which they came to the Assembly. And I assume, I'm really assuming, that that sort of thing still goes on at the present time.

SOAPES: Was there discussion early that proceedings would be published as they are now doing and that it would be a source of publication?

KROUT: Yes. There was a great discussion over whether or not some of these sessions might involve material that was of a rather sensitive sort and ought not to be broadcast. My recollection is that the balance of opinion leaned heavily toward the idea of publicity and that we oughtn't to get in material that had to be top secret so that it couldn't possibly be revealed, that there ought to be a wide dissemination of the preliminary papers before the session was really held and then the results.



SOAPES: Do you remember which side Eisenhower came down on in terms of openness?

KROUT: Yes, I think he came down on the side of openness very strongly. That he didn't think of this as anything except a chance to have a very unbiased--I remember that that was one thing he stressed hard--that he did not want to see the Assembly become an organization that seemed to favor a particular point of view and to be headed in that direction. In fact, I think I have a letter in my letters from him in which he goes into that and says after about the second meeting



of the Assembly, he said, "I was fearful that this Assembly might be regarded as biased," and I can't remember what controversial question--. Most of the questions were controversial that it took up all right, but they tried to give both sides of the question. And he was strongly committed to two things, as I see it--unbiased and open, so that the public could see exactly what had been said and by whom and what the result of the deliberations finally was.



SOAPES: Were there any parameters of the issues to come before the American Assembly?

KROUT: None that I can remember at all. None that I remember.

SOAPES: And the funding for the American Assembly.

KROUT: Well that was a little bit delicate because we realized probably the funding would come out of big corporations and therefore there was some feeling. But in, I think, the very first Assembly we had strong representatives of organized labor there, too, who presented their views on the question. So even if the funding came from the corporate side, it was from corporation leadership that was willing to say, "All right, let's hear the other side, too. We're prepared to take it if they've got something to say that disagrees with what we have in mind."



SOAPES: Do you remember any particular episodes during Eisenhower's tenure on the campus that would illustrate his style of administration, his way of discharging his routine, day-to-day duties of the office of the president of the university?

KROUT: I'm not sure that I do. One thing that I remember about him very well is the fact that he was willing to spend time on what seemed to me rather unimportant things if he thought that they were important to some person. Let me give you one example of that. After he had gone over to Europe to take charge of the allied forces, he wrote me a letter and said, "I've had a letter from the father of an Eisenhower scholar who's in Columbia College, the boy is. He's a freshman and the father can't come to the father-son-banquet" that we always had for these fellowship and scholarship persons. "And he's asked me if I can come." Well, of course, I don't think he realized at the time that General Eisenhower was going to be over in Europe all the time, wasn't going to be back in New York. He said to me in the letter, "Would you act in my place as the father for this boy?" And I remember I went with



him to the banquet; and I got a letter back from the boy's father thanking me for doing it and a letter from the General thanking me for substituting for him. But here he was in charge of the allied forces of Europe and he took the time to sit down and work that all out that someone would represent him at the father-son-banquet of the Eisenhower Scholars who were there, and other fellowship and scholarship holders who were that at the university. And he did that time without number. His capacity to handle big things and yet take on little things as well always was amazing to me.



SOAPES: Now the Eisenhower Scholars, was that something that was set up after he became president of the university?

KROUT: Yes, I think it was. I think it was, right.

SOAPES: Was it set up out of the general scholarship fund of the university?

KROUT: I think so. Though don't quote me as authoritative on that; I'm not positive about where the funds for that came

from. Whether it was just an honorary designation for him or whether extra funds came in, I'm not sure, but there may have been some extra funds come in to underwrite that fund.

Now speaking about administration, I know one thing that baffled him a good deal. He would often call a group of the deans in or other administrative officers who had to carry out things and we'd agree on a program of action on a particular subject. Sometimes three weeks later he'd say to some of us, "Whatever happened about that? We decided, didn't we? It was all understood by all of us. Has anything ever happened?" "No, nothing's ever happened." That baffled him, that decisions could be made, and then, as so often happens in academic life, somehow or other someone just lays it on the shelf and nothing is carried out. And I heard him once or twice complaining about that phase of administration that he didn't understand in academic life.

SOAPES: He felt there should be somebody on the staff who--

KROUT: That's right, who saw to it that once you had decided this is what we're going to do and the reasons why we want to



do it, that then it got translated into action. And in an academic community, as you know, it often happens, nothing resulted after the conference. You had what you thought was a meeting of minds, but you didn't have any action flowing out of that meeting of minds.

SOAPES: Did he then adjust to that situation and start monitoring?

KROUT: Yes, he did. He did considerably. And he always did it, so far as I was aware, quietly, in a good nature. I know he could lose his temper at times, some of them have told me they had sessions when they were distressed beyond words. But personally I never happened to have that kind of a session with him. I don't think I was ever in his office when I saw anything more than what I would call righteous indignation at something he thought had gone wrong and which he felt some of us along the line ought to have caught and saved the embarrassment that ultimately came back on him. Because after all, he was where things stopped.





SOAPES: Now when he went to NATO, of course he could spend very little time on the university and although, as you point out, he did spend some time on some matters.

KROUT: Yes.

SOAPES: Did this injure the university to have him absent and someone as just an acting president?

KROUT: Well, you're asking a person whom you shouldn't ask probably, because with his departure it devolved on Grayson Kirk and myself really to run the university, and we ran it in his name. And I must say that the university responded to us very, very well. And I wasn't aware of any difficulties at all in the period between the time he left in the spring of '51 and until he actually resigned in January of '53 when he was going to Washington.

SOAPES: Did you and Kirk feel that you had to clear a number of decisions with him or that you could just take your own action?



KROUT: We felt that we had been told, "Go ahead. Report to me on everything, but don't ask me in advance what would you do if you were here." Now I can't say--have you talked to Grayson Kirk?

SOAPES: Yes.

KROUT: I can't say how much Kirk--I know he was in constant touch with him; and I got quite a few letters from Europe, many of which said that he hoped to be back for ten days at this particular time, but something came up and he just couldn't make it. But he kept in touch; he knew what was going on. And if we didn't turn to him to say, What would you do? we certainly told him what we had done and usually he would write back and say, "I agree heartily." I don't remember that I ever got any blasts that said, "Why did you do this?" or, "Why did you do that?" Normally it was saying, "I think what you decided was probably the best way we could have handled it." But he didn't lost his touch with the university, even in that period of his leave of absence. He didn't cut lose entirely. And I suppose the fact that he stood there in the



background made it much easier for Kirk and me to handle things as we went along.

SOAPES: It was well known within the university that you had his support in what you were doing?

KROUT: That's correct. Yes. That was correct.

SOAPES: Can you evaluate for me, as best you can with the perspective now of some twenty-five years, was Eisenhower's tenure at the university a good one for the university? Did the university benefit from him being president?

KROUT: Let's put it this way: I don't think the university lost a thing by his being there. The reason I can't say that it strongly benefited was simply this, that he wasn't there often enough even in the brief period from 1948 until 1953 when he actually resigned. You see that was about a four year and some month period, but so much of that time he was in Washington or over in Europe, so he really wasn't there. Now he did things, though, that are still surviving. The American Assembly is his; the Institute of War and Peace



Studies is his; the Manpower Council and the Conservation of Human Resources were, I'm sure, very largely his inspiration or at least they wouldn't have happened if he hadn't been there. He was the one who really gave them substance and put the drive behind them to get going. Because once you had said we're going to do this--I know on the Institute of War and Peace Studies once I'd said all right I'll do my best to work that out with you, he didn't let up. He wasn't overly insistent, but he let me know that he hadn't forgotten about it and that I couldn't forget about it for months at a time and do nothing. He wanted to know every few weeks, "Now what are you doing? How are you getting along? What are your problems? Can I help? Is there anything I could do that would really help?" And he would often do it. Well, look at his coming out here to Heidelberg; he didn't have to do that. It meant time and effort and everything for him, yet he came out and spoke to his little college here, and it was a great occasion for them as well. And I think he enjoyed it, too. He got a big kick out of it.





SOAPES: Did you have much contact with him then after he became President of the United States?

KROUT: Yes, quite a little bit. I had gotten interested in a project that was called "The Hall of our History." Does that mean anything to you at all?

SOAPES: No, it doesn't.

KROUT: Well it was a project that had been in the imagination and mind of Eric Gugler, an architect in New York. Eric Gugler had done some of the, well he had done the monument "The Anzio Beachhead," I think, in Italy. He had done several monuments in Washington. He had done the interior of that magnificent statehouse building in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. And he got the idea that it would be wonderful to have what he called an almost monolithic portrayal in stone of many of the episodes in American history, and he called it, "The Hall of our History." And he had mockups of it and everything. He got me interested in it, two or three in the Park Service were interested in it, and we ultimately got Arthur Sulzberger



of the New York Times and General Lucius Clay, two or three others in New York interested in it. We had a little organization. We were going to put it up in Georgia if we ever got the funds for it, down near Stone Mountain or on Stone Mountain, perhaps, a site there. And that, I think, was probably one of our difficulties. It got to look as if it was a little too provincially Georgian probably for us. But I got the President interested in it, and I went to the White House, I remember, and talked to him about it and he got interested. And for a little while Milton Eisenhower was slightly interested in it, too. We never really got it done, but we spent a lot of time on it and he was concerned with it and wrote me several letters about it. So I had that connection with him. Then my second connection was--well, he invited me to one of his White House dinners. You remember--



SOAPES: The stags.

KROUT: --he had those stag dinners, yes. I was at one in April of 1954. I remember that was the one where none of us knew, of course, who the others were going to be. At least

I didn't. When I got to the portico of the White House I found that John Roosevelt and John D. Rockefeller, III, were two of my colleagues and three or four of us were standing--Olin, I guess, of Olin Industries was there. Three or four of us were standing there talking, finally someone looked at John Roosevelt and said, "Well, John, you used to live here, you must know how to get in." [Laughter] And then we got in. And those were very delightful dinners. He had people from all walks of life. Not only from business, but from education and from the theater and from moving pictures, television, all sorts of people there. I think there were about twenty to twenty-four of us there that particular evening.

Then the next point was in 1956--you recall the Hungarian uprising. He named me to that committee and asked me if I wouldn't take charge of the educational part of the committee for the Hungarian refugees. And I worked hard and long on that one and saw him several times during that period. We set up these scholarships and fellowships to get persons from Hungary who were wanting to continue their education in this country,





fellowships and scholarships in American universities. And a great many colleges rallied round and gave five fellowships, ten some of them did, took them in. And I think all told there were hundreds who got through that way. So I saw him on that.

Then he named me to the Alexander Hamilton Bicentennial-- yes, the two hundredth anniversary of Hamilton's birth. And we met from about 1956, late in the year, until the spring of 1958. I never forget when I went to the last meeting of that particular commission--George Humphrey, the Secretary of the Treasury, was chairman of the commission--we had two or three meetings in Washington. The last one I went to, we got through rather earlier than we thought we would and I thought, "Well, I guess I'll call and see if Kevin McCann's over at the White House." And I called, sure enough he was there and he said, "Where are you?" and I told him I wasn't too far from the White House because we'd been meeting in the Treasury Building with Humphrey. He said, "Come on. Run over to--" particular gate, and he said, "I'll be right there and get you in." And I went in and he said, "The General's got a minute and he'll





see you," and I went in and we had quite a talk. And I told him I was coming from that meeting and I said, "This anecdote will interest you." He'd been having quite a little bit of trouble with Congress in getting some appropriations that he wanted, and one of them who had fought him hard was [Harry] Byrd of Virginia: No, no, he wouldn't vote for anything like this. I said, "Mr. President, you'll be interested to know that this morning when we were talking about the Alexander Hamilton papers, Byrd of Virginia said, 'Anything we have to spend for Alexander Hamilton I'm for. I'll vote for it.'" I said, "Maybe you could get him to say that for your appropriation bill that you have before the Congress right now." [Laughter]

Then I think the last, yes, the last times that I saw him he named me to the Civil War Centennial Commission, and we worked from about '60 on till '65. Of course he was out of the presidency by that time, but I went on to that commission. Allan Nevins did a lot of the work on that. First General Grant, you know, Ulysses S. Grant, III, had been chairman of it, and I'm afraid he had permitted some people to get hold of him, divert



his attention to other things, and the committee sort of revolted against it. Not because we didn't like General Grant, we did, he was a wonderful fine person. But in this instance I think he had made some mistakes. So Allan Nevins took over and finished it up. And that was the last I really saw him officially. I saw him two or three times after that because he would come to New York. Once he came to get the Alexander Hamilton medal from the alumni of Columbia College; that was in '63. And once he came to a special meeting at the Century Club. I remember I saw him there and had a nice chat with him. But I saw Mamie more often, I guess, after his presidency than I saw him probably because she used to come out to Arizona and we'd see her out there.



SOAPES: But for all intents and purposes then your association with him pretty much ended in the early '60s.

KROUT: Yes. Yes, it did. It pretty much ended about the time that he left the White House, that's right.

SOAPES: Is there anything else that I haven't covered that you think we should get on the record?

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KROUT: After you leave I'll think of things, but right at the moment I don't.

SOAPES: Well, thank you very much for your time this afternoon.

