OAKHURST
A Brief History
by
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for
Honors Thesis ID 499
8/17/90
Dr. Hoover
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OBJECTIVES

1. To learn how to do archival research using county records, deeds, plats, abstracts, photographs etc.

2. To learn how to manipulate archival images
   a. slide and photo copy work
   b. cataloging of images
   c. storage of images

3. To learn how to use a computer to collate information, draw maps, create timelines

4. To write a brief history of the Oakhurst property dating from 1894 - 1990 which will include:
   a. a chronology relating property, house, gardens and family
   b. maps denoting property acquisitions, land usage
   c. a slide show
   d. a written report
   e. a short genealogy
   f. an album of current photographs of the property
I. Introduction

II. Brief history of Ball family
   A. genealogy
   B. why and when the Balls came to Muncie
   C. who bought what property and when the houses were built

III. The G.A. Ball family
   A. personal history of George, Frances and Elisabeth

IV. The House
   A. building the house
   B. improvements/changes made on house

V. The grounds
   A. property acquisitions
   B. other buildings
   C. the gardens

VI. Future plans for the property
   A. use of house
   B. reconstruction taking place
The Ball name has long been recognized as the one word that put Muncie on the map. When the Ball family moved to Muncie it was a small town; "...dusty and very dirty..." according to Mr. Frank Ball. Due to the contributions the Ball family has made to change Muncie into what it is today, interest in the family and its history has grown. When Elisabeth Ball, the daughter of the youngest Ball brother, died, the decision was made to turn her home Oakhurst into an historical landmark for the community to participate in. The history of Oakhurst is, therefore, important not only as a community history, but to the process of restoring one of the oldest homes in Muncie.

The Ball family is not originally from Muncie. Lucius Styles Ball, patriarch of the family was born in 1814 in Ascot Canada. He moved to Ohio in 1834 and married a fellow Canadian, Maria P. Bingham of Stanstead Canada in 1846 (Table 1). They began a farm near Greensburg, OH and had eight children: two girls and six boys, one of whom died when only an infant. The family moved to Canandaigua, N. Y. in 1863 due to Lucius’ failing health.

Edmund B. and Frank C. Ball began a business making glass containers for kerosene lamps in 1882 in Buffalo. As the business prospered and grew in reputation, the other three brothers -- William C., Lucius L., and George A. -- joined the business. When their factory burned down, the Ball brothers decided to come to Muncie in 1887 due to a
business offer from James Boyce. Central Indiana was experiencing the "gas boom" of the 1880's and, though undeveloped, held great potential for the Ball brothers.

Even though the natural gas supply ran out in the early 1890's, the family decided to settle permanently in Muncie. The brothers followed their mothers advice to, "...combine efforts in all endeavors..." and in 1893 purchased a strip of land along the White River. The land was named "Minnetrista" supposedly by the two Ball sisters, Lucina and Mary Frances, who used the Indian word minne for "water" and the old English word tryst for "agreed meeting place". Frank was the first to build a home in 1894, William in 1898, and Edmund in 1907; Lucius purchased a home and then renovated it in 1895 (Table 2).

George had Oakhurst built in 1895 and shortly thereafter moved in with his wife Frances. George had married Frances Woodworth of Buffalo, NY in 1893, shortly before the family moved to Muncie. Their only child Elisabeth was born in 1897 at Oakhurst. George and Frances and Elisabeth were known throughout the community for their kindness, intelligence and creativity. George was a quiet, unassuming man who was very involved in the community, and an astute businessman. Frances was known for her devoted care to Elisabeth as well as for her culinary and domestic talents. Elisabeth was perhaps the most unique of the three; she believed in fairies, bound books by hand with leather, and had one of the largest collections of children's books in the country.

There are many stories about George Ball; all of them complimentary. Bonnie Hatch, a friend and niece of Frances describes him: "He was a perfect old fashioned gentleman." Yet underneath that gentle exterior
was the heart of a true businessman. In 1935 Mr. Ball and George A.
Tomlinson became joint stock holders of a railway system owned by O.P.
and M.J. Van Sweringen. The partners planned to let the Van Sweringens
operate the business, their plans being foiled when the brothers suddenly
died, leaving Messrs. Ball and Tomlinson owners of the Allegheny
Corporation, top holding company of the Van Sweringen financial pyramid.
George Ball bought out Tomlinson and became sole heir to a legendary
empire. This caused quite a stir in the financial world and George was
involved in lawsuits until 1942 over the matter. The most interesting part
of the story is that while G. A. owned the railroad he never took a private
room on the train on which he traveled so frequently, always sleeping in a
berth and never demanding special attention. When asked to describe G.
A. a friend put it, "...he totes his own suitcase to save a dime and then
bought the fairgrounds for his daughter to raise flowers in..." (Picture 1).

Frances is more of an enigma than George. She was a gracious
woman, with "...a great sense of humor." According to Bonnie Hatch, "She
ran a tight house, she really kept that house in order... Elisabeth never
knew how to clean and left the help to do everything, but when Frances
was around it was much different." Frances had been to cooking school
and was also a great cook. The Hatches were over to visit for roast duck
almost every Sunday and ate all their holiday meals with the G. A. Balls.
Frances was also known to be cold and domineering to some and for a
reason not known, she and W. C. Ball's wife Emma, her next door neighbor,
were quite cool to each other. But, according to Bonnie, "If you knew her
really well, she was delightful. I know some say she was cold, but I really
liked her." She certainly cared for her daughter, for whom she was an
unfailing companion and guardian (Picture 2).
“Elisabeth...lived harmoniously in two worlds. She did not reject the “real”, but she kept open the gates between the “real” and “the other”.¹⁷ So begins a book of tribute to Elisabeth the poet, only one of her many ‘titles’. Elisabeth was noted for her collections of books, art, butterflies and dolls. She was an avid botanist and was skilled in bookbinding. Other interests included travel, painting, sculpture, and music. She was a true renaissance woman. There was, however, a side to Elisabeth that not many knew. As she grew up she was continually accompanied by her mother due to a condition that many of the time considered socially unacceptable. It is not for public knowledge that Elisabeth was epileptic. Her mother was thus exceedingly overprotective, going off to Vassar with Elisabeth and even attending classes with her. Though she had a boyfriend, Walter Swan, for some time, nothing came of it and Elisabeth never married. Elisabeth was described by her friend Bonnie Hatch as “very quiet, reticent... and stubborn!”¹⁸ She is remembered by all to be a very kind and extremely intelligent woman, who led a life apparently lonesome, but for her, full of things she had taught herself (Pictures 3, 4, 5 and 6).

The house is as unique as the people who lived in it. George purchased the first piece of land to be called “Oakhurst” from Frank in 1893.¹⁹ He continued to add to his property throughout his life, not finishing until 1941 (Table 3). The house was built in 1895. Thought to have been designed by the prominent architect Louis Gibson, who also designed the Frank Ball home, the true architect of the house is in question. The G.A. Ball home is one of the few examples of shingle design in Indiana, as well as being part of a new generation of houses constructed for function rather than beauty. Gibson said of the house (he claims to have designed the house, but members of the Ball family contest this),
“The idea in building this house is invariably to get something as different as possible...In one instance they (the Ball family) were crowded; in the other they have plenty of room...” 20 The exterior of the house is a variation on Queen Ann architecture (Pictures 7, 8, and 9).

The foyer is dominated by a huge ornately carved coat rack (Picture 10). Walking into the main part of the house reveals a large open space with wood parquet floors and high, vaulted ceilings (Pictures 11, 12 and 13). The house holds many marvelous nooks and crannies waiting to be discovered. In G. A.’s study there is a hidden cabinet with a “secret” passageway to the screened-in porch. Some say it was for G.A.’s mistress to visit him, but from the obvious nature of the entrance and the shelving in the tiny room behind the secret door, it seems G.A. was more likely hiding alcohol during the prohibition years (Pictures 14, and 15). At the top of the main stairs is a ‘modern’ bathroom with a cut glass door depicting a nude man standing in a pose reminiscent of Adam (Picture 16). All the way up to the third floor are alcoves with windows at the end letting in streams of sunshine which brighten the whole house (Pictures 17 and 18). One especially notices the cut glass oval window in Elisabeth’s closet (Picture 19). Another feature which is most unusual is the two-story, screened-in porch on the northeast side of the house. The family often took their meals on the porch and certainly enjoyed a lovely view of the west woods and rock garden (Pictures 20, and 21).

The house underwent several changes throughout the years. The original plans for the house include a bay window and large fireplace in the study on the west side of the house; however, in early pictures of the house there is no window or chimney. Apparently they were not added until the 1910’s; perhaps the Balls were waiting on the beautiful marble
for the fireplace (Pictures 22 and 23).21 The most confusing changes made to the house involve the upper right window on the third floor front of the house. The window had a single pane until the 1920's when it was changed to a double pane. It was not until 1958 that it was changed to a triple-paned window to match its neighboring window. It is difficult to understand why the windows were not constructed to match in the first place; it could be this was part of Gibsons' plan to be "different"(Pictures 24, 25 and 26)!22 The front path to the house underwent several changes. It was dirt until herringbone bricks were laid in the 1920's, and then hexagonal bricks in 1936.23

The house was not the only building on the property. In the earliest pictures of Oakhurst it is possible to see a large stable in back of the house as well as an outbuilding of some kind.24 In 1904, a dollhouse was built for Elisabeth to play in with her huge collection of dolls.25 With the increasing use of motor cars the stable was taken down in the 1930's, and a garage was erected north of the house.26 In 1935 Elisabeth's cabin was built in the woods north by northwest of the house, with a small path leading to it from the sunken garden across from the garage (Pictures 27 and 28).27 Elisabeth would retreat to the cabin to read and get away from social pressures. A "caretaker's" house is also visible on the east side of the drive to Highland; by 1961 the house had been taken down.28 Another important feature is the brick path to the W. C. Ball house named "Aunt Emma's path" after W. C.'s wife Emma (Table 4, Picture 29).

The most memorable part of Oakhurst has not yet been mentioned, and that is its gardens. One of Elisabeth's passions was gardening. She gave many garden club talks, and wrote articles on botany while sharing cuttings of plants from her garden with neighbors and friends. Frances
began it all when she began the Formal garden northeast of the house in 1895. The garden was carefully cultivated and sculptured with a pristine lawn, ornate lawn furniture, graceful willows and an arbor with a millstone walk (Picture 30).

The elaborateness of the garden began to flow into a more natural state as Elisabeth grew older. She and Frances collaborated, and in the 1930's the era of the semi-formal gardens began. This included a “sunk” across from the garage; a depression in the ground decorated with rocks and brick paths, one of which led to Elisabeth's cabin (Pictures 31 and 32). There was also a garden behind the house called the “rock garden”. A stone path led to a rock-bordered pool which was fed by a stream from the spigot at the house. It has even been speculated that the semi-formal garden period was more a reflection of Elisabeth and Frances' taste, and that the formal garden was kept only from public pressure.  

When Frances died in 1958, Elisabeth let the garden fall into the same state of disrepair the house was undergoing. She did not plant cultivated plants and instead used perennial wildflowers to create stunning seasonal effects that can still be seen today. Anyone who has driven by Oakhurst cannot ignore the early spring beauty of thousands of Scilla. These are replaced by a bright purple carpet of Carolina Bells and Soft Narcissus, next is a wave of delicate biennial pastel Dames Rocket, followed later by tiger lilies of many colors. These flowers are now growing up through the layers of forest debris left uncleared for the last twenty years. Dead trees remained uncut, and pathways crumbled, pushed aside by tree roots. Elisabeth seemed to enjoy the wild beauty of nature untouched by man, and it is in this state that the grounds were left when she died (Table 4, Picture 33).
The question arose upon Elisabeth’s death in 1982 as to what was to become of Oakhurst. Suggestions for restoration, refurbishment and rental, even the demolition of the house, were discussed. In 1988 a decision was reached that Oakhurst was to become a landmark in the historical representation of the regions’ past. The plan is to restore different parts of the property to different points in history. The house and what was the formal garden will be restored to their early glory of the 1900’s. The sunken garden and rock garden will reflect the time period of the 1950’s. Parts of the property will be left in their ‘wild’ state, a portion being reserved for a nature area. A visitor’s center will be available, as well as a new path with tile mosaic seating areas for easier access to the west woods. There are plans for related art gallery displays, with the first floor of the house to be a revolving gallery of period historical pieces (Table 5, Pictures 34 - 37).

Currently the project is in its second year with a completion date set for 1995. The first step has been a clearing of invasive plants, reconstruction of the brick paths, and construction of the new visitor’s path. Portions of the gardens are being planted, but most of that will take place in the spring. The main thrust has been meticulous research of the plans, and pictures of the gardens. Researchers have poured over old photographs, slides, and receipts to take down the tiniest details of plantings. The project is unique to this area and will hopefully attract many visitors for a living view of the past. Great care is being taken to preserve the personality left behind by Oakhurst’s inhabitants; it is hoped that visitors will be able to look through George, Frances or Elisabeth’s eyes for a unique perspective of the past.30
Notes

3 Sargent, p. 7.
5 Sargent, p. 7.
6 Diebold, p. 2.
7 Sargent, p. 8.
8 Bonnie Hatch, Oral Interview (Muncie, Indiana, 6 August, 1990).
9 Charles Wertenbaker, "Mr. Ball Takes the Trains," The Saturday Evening Post, 6 February, 1937, p. 5.
10 Hatch, oral interview.
11 Hope Barnes, Oakhurst Poems and Obiter Scripta of Elisabeth Ball (Muncie, Indiana: Privately published, 1984), page 1.
12 Hatch, oral interview.
13 Wertenbaker, p. 6.
14 Hatch, oral interview.
15 Hatch, oral interview.
16 Hatch, oral interview.
17 Barnes, p. 13.
18 Hatch, oral interview.
19 General Index to Deeds (Delaware County Courthouse, Muncie, Indiana, 1894 - 1940) Grantee books 11 - 35.
20 Diebold, p. 2.
21 Louis Gibson, "Plans for Oakhurst" (Muncie, Indiana: Ball Brothers Foundation, 1894).

22 Slides and Photographs from the Elisabeth Ball Collection (Muncie, Indiana: Minnetrista Cultural Center Archives, viewed 1990).

23 Slides.

24 Slides.

25 Jane Hartmeyer, Oral Interview (Muncie, Indiana, No date).


27 Gerrard and Keely, Architects and Engineers, "Plans for a Cabin for Ms. Elisabeth Ball," 1930 (Muncie, Indiana: Ball State University, College of Architecture and Planning, Drawings and Documents Archives).

28 Slides.

29 Linda Bullard, Collected notes on Oakhurst Gardens, and Oral Interview (Muncie, Indiana, Summer 1990).

30 John Potis, Assistant Project Manager, Oakhurst, Oral Interview (Muncie, Indiana, Summer 1990).

31 Barnes, p. 90.

32 Barnes, p. 91.

33 Barnes, p. 12.

34 Barnes, p. 86.

35 Barnes, p. xx.

36 Barnes, p. 89.

37 Abstract to Properties owned by G. A. Ball (Muncie, Indiana: Ball Brothers Foundation, viewed 1990).

38 Slides.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

DOCUMENTS:

Abstract of properties owned by G.A. Ball. Muncie, Indiana: Ball Brothers Foundation.


General Index to deeds. Grantee books 11-35, Delaware County Courthouse, Muncie, Indiana, 1894-1940’s.

Gerrard and Keely, Architects and Engineers. “Plans for a Cabin for Ms. Elisabeth Ball.” 1930, Drawings and Documents Archive, College of Architecture and Planning, Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana.


Slides and Photographs, Muncie, Indiana: Elisabeth Ball Collection, Minnetrista Cultural Center Archives.

PAMPHLETS:


COURSE PAPER:


NEWSPAPERS:

"G. A. Ball Dies at Home." The Muncie Star 23 October 1955.


ORAL INTERVIEW:


Hartmeyer, Jane. Oral interview. no date.

Hatch, Bonnie. Oral interview. 6 August 1990.

## Table 1

### Genealogy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lucius Styles Ball</th>
<th>Married in 1846</th>
<th>Maria P. Bingham</th>
<th>Married in 1893</th>
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<tr>
<td>1814-1878</td>
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<td>1822-1892</td>
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**Children**
- Lucina Amelia 1847-1901
- Lucius Lorenzo 1850-1924
- William Charles 1852-1921
- Edmund Burke 1855-1925
- Frank Clayton 1857-1943
- Frances May 1860-1926
- George Alexander 1862-1955
- Clinton Harvey 1867-1869

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>George Alexander Ball</th>
<th>Married in 1893</th>
<th>Frances Woodworth</th>
<th>Married in 1893</th>
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<td>1897-1982</td>
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<td>1872-1958</td>
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**Children**
- Elisabeth 1897-1982
  - never married
## OAKHURST CHRONOLOGY

**TABLE 2**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>FAMILY</th>
<th>PURCHASES</th>
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<th>PROPERTY</th>
<th>GARDENS</th>
<th>AREA</th>
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<td>1893 - G.A. BUYS FIRST OAKHURST PROPERTY</td>
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<td>1905 - F.C. BALL BUYS MINNESTRISTA</td>
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<td>1895 - G.A. BUYS LOTS 1, 2, 3 JONES SUBDIVISION</td>
<td>1895 - G.A. BALL HOME BUILT</td>
<td>C.A. 1895 - TRELLIS / OLD ARBOR</td>
<td>1895 - 1900'S FORMAL GARDEN</td>
<td>1995 - L.L. BALL PURCHASES HOME</td>
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<td>1894 - F.C. BALL HOME BUILT</td>
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<td>1906 - W.C. BALL HOME BUILT</td>
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<td>1897 - STREETCAR ALONG HIGHLAND SERVING FAIRGROUNDS</td>
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<td>1900'S - STREETCAR ALONG HIGHLAND SERVING FAIRGROUNDS</td>
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<td>1902 - F.C. BALL HOME REMODELLED (STONE)</td>
<td>1903 - AUNT EMMA'S PATH LAID</td>
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<td>1904 - STABLE, DOLLHOUSE ADDED</td>
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<td>1916 - G.A. BALL HOME BUILT</td>
<td>1907 - E.B. BALL HOME BUILT</td>
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<td>1908 - ROSEMARY BORN</td>
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<td>1898 - ROSEMARY BORN</td>
<td>1915 - LARGE CHIMNEY, BAY WINDOW ON W. SIDE OAKHURST BY NOW</td>
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<td>1927 - W.H. BALL HOME BUILT</td>
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<td>1920 - G.A. BUYS C.JONES PROPERTY</td>
<td>1920 - HERRING BONE FRONT PATH BY NOW, NEW ARBOR BUILT</td>
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<td>1897-1942 - RAILROAD LAWSUIT, ALL BUILDING CEASES</td>
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<td>1941</td>
<td>1941 - ELIZABETH BUYS LOT 8</td>
<td>1940 - GRAVEL DRIVEWAY</td>
<td>1949 - W.C. BALL HOME BECOMES PROPERTY OF BALL BROTHERS FOUNDATION</td>
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<td>1942</td>
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<td>1950 - FULL DRIVEWAY TO HIGHLAND</td>
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<td>F.C. BALL</td>
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<td>FRANCES BALL</td>
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<td>1973 - DOLLHOUSE SOLD TO WODEHILL</td>
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<td>1974</td>
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OAKHURST HISTORICAL GROUNDS

WEST WOODS

SOUTH WOODS

UNIDENTIFIED BUILDINGS

OLD GARAGE

COURTYARD POOL

DOLL HOUSE

ROCK GARDEN

FORMAL GARDEN

GARAGE

TOOL SHED

CARETAKER'S HOUSE

AUNT EMMA'S PATH

W.C. BALL HOME

W.C. BALL PROPERTY

HIGHLAND AVENUE

NOW MINNESTRISTA PARKWAY

OAKHURST

AUGUST 10, 1990

NORTH NO SCALE

OAKHURST HISTORICAL GROUNDS

AREAS / BUILDINGS THAT WILL BE REBUILT

AREAS / BUILDINGS THAT USED TO BE ON THE PROPERTY THAT WILL NOT BE REBUILT

CURRENT AREAS / BUILDINGS ON THE PROPERTY

TABLE 4
OAKHURST

conceptual sketch
John J. Potis RLA
17, March, 1990

→ north  no scale
Elisabeth's father, George A. Ball
Picture 3

Elisabeth Ball, five years old
Picture 5

Elisabeth as a Vassar graduate
Picture 8
Oakhurst in the 1950's, Northwest
Picture 9
Oakhurst in 1990, East side

Picture 10
Coatrack in entryway 1990

Picture 11
Parquet floor in front hall 1990

Picture 12
Entry hall 1990
Picture 14
"secret passage" in study 1990

Picture 15
"secret passage" with door open, 1990

Picture 16
"Adam" on bathroom door, 1990
Picture 20
back porch
southwest
view of house
1990

Picture 18
attic
window
1990

Picture 21
Rock garden
path behind
house. 1990

Picture 19
cut glass
window in
Elizabeth's
closet. 1990
Picture 24
single-paned
window, 3rd
floor right
c.a. 1900's

Picture 25
double-paned
window, 3rd
floor right
c.a. 1920's

Picture 26
triple-paned
window, 3rd
floor right
c.a. 1990
Picture 28
Garage
1990

Picture 29
Aunt Emma's path looking Northeast
1990
Picture 33
Formal garden
looking East
1990

Picture 34
restored
arbor path
1990

Picture 35
Sunken garden
1990

Picture 36
visitor's
path, 1990

Picture 37
visitor's
path, 1990
Summary of Goal Achievements

In doing this project I feel I have learned much about the process of historical research. I have never done an independent project of this magnitude, and it was an enriching experience to test myself. I was able to set goals and meet them. Sometimes I was late, and sometimes the goals changed, but I am proud of the finished product in much the way a painter might be proud of a creation. What you have read is a summer of work using many media and tools. It is a representation of the way I have matured as a student at Ball State and, I feel, an adequate reflection of my abilities. The skills I learned in college are all here: how to work under pressure, how to discipline myself, how to bring a multitude of information together into a cohesive unit, how to research a topic thoroughly, how to type and spell and use this computer. Most of all it is a reflection of the confidence I now have in my work; to show this to you is frightening, but fulfilling. What will you think of what I can do?