

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW  
WITH  
GERALD PARCHMENT

22 JUNE 1995

MURFREESBORO, TENNESSEE

INTERVIEWED BY REGINA FORSYTHE  
FOR THE Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT  
INTERVIEW #QMS.009

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Albert Gore". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

ALBERT GORE RESEARCH CENTER

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MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

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## ABSTRACT



**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH  
GERALD PARCHMENT**

Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW #

FORSYTHE: This tape is designated as QMS.1995.09. This is Regina Forsythe. I am interviewing Dr. J. Gerald Parchment. Today is Thursday, June 22, 1995. The interview is being conducted in the conference room of the Learning Lab, Room 101 of the Ned McWherter Learning Resource Center. The tape of this interview along with a transcription of the interview will become part of the Quintin Miller Smith Collection and will be available to the public. Future researchers may include portions of this interview in their publications. Is that all right with you, Dr. Parchment?

PARCHMENT: Fine.

FORSYTHE: That is your full name?

PARCHMENT: John Gerald.

FORSYTHE: Birthplace?

PARCHMENT: Cumberland City, Stewart County, Tennessee.

FORSYTHE: Birth date?

PARCHMENT: August 13, 1923.

FORSYTHE: Father's name?

PARCHMENT: John Milton.

FORSYTHE: His occupation?

PARCHMENT: He was a farmer and a carpenter.

FORSYTHE: Your mother?

PARCHMENT: Olean Wickham. She didn't have a middle name.

FORSYTHE: What was her occupation?

PARCHMENT: Just housewife. Six children. She had plenty to do. I had twin brothers.

FORSYTHE: What are your sisters' and brothers' names?

PARCHMENT: I have a sister, the first child, was Lucille. I came along second. Then another sister, Jeanette, and then the twins, Roy and Ray. Fifteen years younger than I was a little boy, Sam. He still lives at the home-place.

FORSYTHE: What is your wife's name?

PARCHMENT: My wife's deceased, but her name was Elaine Stepp. She was an alumni here and a faculty member in the Business Education Department.

FORSYTHE: And your children's names.

PARCHMENT: I have two sons, Ralph and Stephen.

FORSYTHE: Did any of your family members come to MTSU?

PARCHMENT: Stephen graduated here, my second son. And Elaine's brother and sister graduated here.

FORSYTHE: What degrees do you have?

PARCHMENT: I have the B.S. here, M.A. at Peabody College and PhD. at Vanderbilt University.

FORSYTHE: What was your MTSU degree in?

PARCHMENT: They just called it general science major. I had a minor in biology, minor in chemistry, and a minor in math, I believe, and a year of physics. They called it a science major.

FORSYTHE: What do you remember as a student here?

PARCHMENT: I remember quite a bit. I came here with a job. I worked for the university two weeks out of high school in the dairy. I kept the herd records and helped deliver milk to the cafeteria and to the campus school.

FORSYTHE: Who was your boss?

PARCHMENT: J. H. Bayer. There's a building on campus named for him over there in maintenance. He was my grandmother's brother. That's how I got information. I was close to Austin Peay, only 25 miles, but it was a junior college then, and I'd have to transfer. So I decided just to come here first. And he said he'd give me a job in the dairy.

FORSYTHE: How long did you have that job?

PARCHMENT: All the time I was here. I started two weeks out of high school and took courses in the summer as a beginning freshman, which I don't recommend. By going two more summers then I graduated in three years, '44. My roommate begged me to stay on three more months, so I worked three months after I graduated and went home with a war bond, savings bond.

FORSYTHE: What dorm did you live in?

PARCHMENT: I had my own domicile near the Art Barn now. It's no longer there. It was a little office building that Knox Hutcheson built. It was right comfortable. It was a study room with a fireplace and a little bedroom and a kitchen. Three rooms, I believe we had.

FORSYTHE: A bout where was it located?

PARCHMENT: It would be under the Stark Building, I guess. It was built of very sturdy concrete. We were near the dairy because all we had to do was walk right across the street. The Art Barn then was the dairy.

FORSYTHE: Why did you choose your particular coursework?

PARCHMENT: A lot of it was due to Mrs. Edney who taught it. She was a very inspiring teacher. I didn't even have biology in high school. I really got interested in the subject with her that summer and went on and minored rather than majored so I could teach in high school. I have a high school certificate to teach biology, chemistry, physics, math, and I think English. My first job offer was English, but I didn't take it.

FORSYTHE: What buildings were your classes held in?

PARCHMENT: I call it Old Science. I believe it's the Wisser-Patten Building now. And then before I retired, I had classes in the new science building, Davis Science Building, right behind the other one.

FORSYTHE: What floors did you have?

PARCHMENT: We were on the third floor at one time, and then Home-Ec left and built a new building, and we got half of the second floor.

FORSYTHE: Who got the other half?

PARCHMENT: Chemistry and physics. They had all of the basement. When I was a student, even that's the way it was with biology on the top and chemistry

on the bottom and Home Ec in the middle. When Home Ec moved out, we divided the second floor.

FORSYTHE: How did you do registration?

PARCHMENT: They had tables on the third floor of Kirksey Old Main. The faculty sat there. You had a little 3" x 5" card with your courses, and they had to sign by each course. Then you turned it into Dean Beasley's office. He approved the total for your class admission.

FORSYTHE: What do you remember about your teacher George Davis?

PARCHMENT: He was the chairman. He was a good teacher. He was strict. One day in class, he turned back a test paper to this boy with a "0" as big as you could make it, 8 1/2" x 11". It covered the whole page. The boy said, "What was wrong with it?" He said, "I don't know; I didn't read it. I told you the first day of class not to tear the notebook paper out by the rings. I do not accept papers that are torn out of notebooks." He was real strict. At that time the faculty, sometimes senior faculty, gave assembly talks or devotionals. We had assembly every week. He was one of those who would make little pep talks in assembly.

FORSYTHE: Tell me more about the assemblies.

PARCHMENT: It was required. Of course we had few enough students that we could all get in the auditorium, which is no longer there. It's the Business Building, business offices, I believe. It was wonderful auditorium. It had good acoustics. Didn't need a microphone for anything. And we had visitors. Lucy Gage, I remember made a talk one time. We had spiritual emphasis week where different ministers would come. Some of them were professors like from David Lipscomb. I can't remember the guy's name, but he taught Bible down there. Dean of the Divinity School at Vanderbilt was a speaker one time. They were good. Ed Baldwin, geography professor, led the singing.

FORSYTHE: Tell me some more about Ed Baldwin.

PARCHMENT: He gave true/false tests all together. He counted off double. If you left one out that you didn't know, he counted off; if you put it down and missed it, it counted double. He said you were guessing. I went on some trips with him, and I went into the President Cope's office to get permission for transportation and meals to the meeting. He said, "Well, I'll approve it if any other school approves their people." I said, "Even Tennessee Tech?" And he said, "Yes, even Tennessee Tech, and they're dead, so...." Ed Baldwin ate a huge steak for dinner. It cost a lot of money. When I turned it in to Mr. Smith, he said, "Well, I should have

known better than that. That's the last meal I'll ever approve for Ed Baldwin." He said, "I made an agreement. I'll take care of it."

FORSYTHE: Merriam Ebney?

PARCHMENT: He wasn't here. He was on leave at the University of Michigan working on his doctorate. Mrs. Edney was my teacher, his wife. She married him. He was a student here from Dixon, and she taught him biology and later married him. He was older than most students. I don't know why he was so long graduating from high school. He was even the janitor at Dixon High School at one time. I think Mr. Bayer in the farm talked him into coming here. He was smart.

FORSYTHE: C. P. Blankenship, he was a cafeteria man.

PARCHMENT: Yeah, I knew him. He had a farm. He was always coming up there wanting to look at the cow records, registration papers, and milk production and all. I think he even bought a few Jersey calves from us.

FORSYTHE: Why was he looking at the records?

PARCHMENT: He wanted to be sure he had good stock. They were ancestors of the calves he'd bought. They were registered, some of them.

FORSYTHE: Eva Mae Burkett?

PARCHMENT: I didn't have her. I knew her. She was a very good person, a good teacher.

FORSYTHE: Phillip Cheek?

PARCHMENT: Didn't have him, but I know him. He was a bachelor and very absent minded. His landlord told me she had to remind him to comb his hair before he came to school every morning. They drafted him. He was 40 odd years old, not married, no family, so they drafted him in World War II. They put him to picking up cigarette butts. He came back here and said that was quite different from translating Greek and Latin. He said, "I guess I will adjust." Later they found out that he was an expert, and they made him an interpreter.

FORSYTHE: Lowell Crain?

PARCHMENT: He was here a short time, and I didn't have him.

FORSYTHE: Neal Frazier?

PARCHMENT: I had English with him. He was chairman and my minor professor. I didn't have a minor; I just had a certificate in English. Anyway, he never gave back test papers. You never knew what you made. He said, "It just causes trouble." You didn't know what you made on anything. At the end of the semester, you got a grade on the course and that was it. Also, he was the Sigma Club sponsor and founder. I joined that. It was an honorary thing for boys.

FORSYTHE: What did you all do?

PARCHMENT: We had meetings and talks and a fun initiation and a serious part too. The school was little then, so it was very small. You'll see pictures of it in the Midlanders.

FORSYTHE: What did you all do in the initiation?

PARCHMENT: You'll have to read that in Melanie's book. It's complicated. It was sort of an intellectual thing, you know, quizzes and that sort of thing. No goat riding or beatings or anything like that. It was all academic sort of stuff but fun.

FORSYTHE: Mary Purcell?

PARCHMENT: I knew her, but I didn't have any courses with her. She was elementary education. She decided that she was wrong in her theories, and she wrote all her majors and told them that she was quitting the course. She told them to forget everything she'd taught them. She was going to David Lipscomb to teach German. The students reported that she weighed their notebooks. The bigger the notebook, the better the grade. They wanted their biology papers back so they could put them in there. They had a unit on biology. She was something else, little tiny woman.

FORSYTHE: Otis Freeman?

PARCHMENT: I had him. He was Industrial Arts. I had a course in woodworking with him. That was the only thing I had. I built a bookcase. I don't know where it is now.

FORSYTHE: B. B. Gracy?

PARCHMENT: I had him in first aid and agriculture. First aid met at night.

FORSYTHE: You didn't like it?

PARCHMENT: Yeah. I liked it, but I don't think I got credit just to learn the first aid. One night Mr. Q. M. Smith, the president, was my partner for artificial

respiration. I whispered in his ear, "You're a large man, and I can't turn you over. Would you please help?" I was just an 18 year old.

FORSYTHE: Did he help you out?

PARCHMENT: Yeah, he did. He rolled over. That was during the war effort. I just barely finished before they got me.

FORSYTHE: Ollie Green?

PARCHMENT: I had lots of stuff chemistry and physics too during the war. She taught both. I had General Organic. We had a course in physics one summer called Heat and Light. And she's supposed to be a tough, hard, mean lady, but she felt sorry for us that summer. And she said she was going to have a demonstration of heat exchange, and she brought a home-made freezer with ice and salt. We froze ice cream, and then we ate it to see how good it would be. I turned out liking her pretty well.

FORSYTHE: T.J. Golightly?

PARCHMENT: Yeah, I had an education class with him, History of Education or Philosophy or something. He was a Yale graduate and a very knowledgeable guy. He majored in character education. I better not comment on that. He had two children. They're both characters.

FORSYTHE: Yeah, I heard about Bonnie yesterday.

PARCHMENT: Tom wound up an older man. Had been starting up and he had to take care of parents in there old age. I don't think Bonnie could help it.

FORSYTHE: Mary Hall?

PARCHMENT: Oh, I heard a whole program on her Monday night. The director of the campus school did her dissertation on Mary Hall. I never did have any classes with her, but I knew her well when I came here to teach. She invited me for a tea out at her home on Woodbury Road along with several others.

FORSYTHE: Now who was that that did there dissertation on her?

PARCHMENT: I am trying to think of her name. She is the director of the campus school. Willie King, I believe.

FORSYTHE: W.C. Hastings?

PARCHMENT: He was an engineer. Ran the bar rooms and fixed the electricity that went bad and things.

FORSYTHE: Baxter Hobgood?

PARCHMENT: I had one course with him. He taught history and social studies. He was a very good teacher. He is still living by the way.

FORSYTHE: Is he? I'll have to find him.

PARCHMENT: He has had two by-pass surgeries. I see him. I see him at the post office and sometimes... I met him one time and helped him find his car which he lost at the parking garage downtown.

FORSYTHE: J. Ed Holmes

PARCHMENT: Yeah he was the bursar that is where I paid my fees and picked up my check. He was one of the early students here.

FORSYTHE: The first one to register. Clayton L. James.

PARCHMENT: Okay. I had education courses with him. And I knew him before I ever came here because he was a high school supervisor for the state. He visited my high school several times [and] made talks in assembly.

FORSYTHE: What was the name of your high school?

PARCHMENT: W. T. Thomas High-school in Cumberland City. It's no longer operating. See, I came here fifty years ago.

FORSYTHE: Howell Jewel?

PARCHMENT: I knew him. I didn't have any courses with him. He taught physics, but I think a lot of his students were cadets. We had cadets here for a while.

FORSYTHE: William Judd?

PARCHMENT: Yeah W.B. I had something with him, and I don't remember what. I believe they had a course with team teaching, and he taught economics.

FORSYTHE: What is team teaching?

PARCHMENT: Well, they had units. Different teacher for each unit. Like I think we had something, History of Western Civilization. I don't know how many teachers we did have? Two or three? I don't know how they decided the grade.

FORSYTHE: Nance Jordan?

PARCHMENT: He was my physical education teacher,[who] ran a shirt laundry here after he retired. Carried my clothes there.

FORSYTHE: Robert Martin?

PARCHMENT: He wasn't here as a student. He was here when I was faculty. I knew him well. Knew where he lived and visited him. Talked with him.

FORSYTHE: Tell me about him.

PARCHMENT: Well I don't know that much about him except he was really interested in economics. That was his specialty. He was a native [of] Rutherford County.

FORSYTHE: T.H. Kennedy?

PARCHMENT: T.H. or T.P. ?

FORSYTHE: It says T.H. here. Was he Geography?

PARCHMENT: I guess. I don't know who that is.

FORSYTHE: Who was T.P.?

PARCHMENT: Well he was a minister at the Church of Christ that taught here a while. I thought he was T.P. Kennedy. He might have been in English but that is somebody else.

FORSYTHE: The night watchman E. S. Lane?

PARCHMENT: Oh yeah, and his son Sam still lives here, and I was in the city club with him. He is inactive now. There was a student here at the same time. His youngest son was Jim Butler. I knew him well. He died with cancer, but his older brother, Sam, is still hobnobbing around

FORSYTHE: What do you remember about Mr. Lane?

PARCHMENT: He would engage in conversation. I would be going to the library. He liked to philosophize. I never will forget it. He looked up at the stars said, "You know there are two things we don't know much about. Ones up there and ones down here."

FORSYTHE: Charles Lewis?

PARCHMENT: Charles D. Lewis. [I had] an education course with him. He taught Childhood Education. I had to have all those education courses to get my certificate. He had a grandson, Billy, that he used a lot for an example. Grandson Billy used to have temper tantrums. He took a cup of cold water and cured him of that. He had a big notebook he always sat by. He never moved all during the class. He had that notebook in front of him and his notes never moved out of the chair or that place all during the fifty minutes. And talked about "my grandson Billy."

FORSYTHE: Ben McThene?

PARCHMENT: Nubbin they called that. He was Physics. I never did have classes with him, but he left here before I finished to go to Redstone in Huntsville. He resigned to go to Huntsville.

FORSYTHE: Charles D. Lewis?

PARCHMENT: Well that is who I thought we were talking about while ago. What? Lewis was that. Charles Lewis was education with his grandson Billy.

FORSYTHE: Mr. Midgett?

PARCHMENT: He started the Business Education department, and I think he hired one other teacher while he was here. Henrietta Wade, she was Myers when she started then she married John Q. Wade. They taught all the typing shorthand and everything. I never did take any of it. My wife, of course, she majored in it.

FORSYTHE: Catherine Monohan?

PARCHMENT: I had history with her. She was a character. She told the same jokes over and over. She was eighty years old I think when she retired. She said that retirement law was horrible. "I have so many good years left".

FORSYTHE: Bettie Merkin?

PARCHMENT: She was librarian in that little bitty cute building they tore down. A very cultured, refined, little lady. Always tiptoed around. Always quiet in the library and lived on East Main in her ancestors home.

FORSYTHE: W. K. Mikarin?

PARCHMENT: Okay, he was librarian. When she retired...Knox, we called him William Knox. He went by his middle name, and he left us to go be principal at Peabody demonstration school.

FORSYTHE: Bonnie McHenry?

PARCHMENT: Secretary to all the presidents. Real nice lady.

FORSYTHE: Annie Orthway?

PARCHMENT: I had English with her. Her farm was on Old Fork Park. Now she was a good teacher.

FORSYTHE: Mary Pick. They had initials. I don't know what that means CAR. Christine Parker ? Tommy Reynolds?

PARCHMENT: Yeah math. She came here as a physical education, but she ended up in math. They put her in math and put Davis in math. I knew her when I came back to teach.

FORSYTHE: Hester Rogers?

PARCHMENT: Yeah I had art with her. She was an art teacher. And she tried to be mean, but she wasn't down deep. And when I came back to teach she invited me, Bob Abernathy, and another teacher and had us to go to the Smoky Mountains to the craft fair. And I have a picture of her sitting there with her feet in one of the little creeks.

FORSYTHE: Ruby Taylor?

PARCHMENT: I didn't have any classes with her, but she was in the music department for a long time and played my wedding reception.

FORSYTHE: E. Mae. Saunders

PARCHMENT: She was the music lady forever. I think she came here when they started the institution.

FORSYTHE: Miss Schardt?

PARCHMENT: I didn't have any foreign language with her. I think she taught mainly French or Spanish.

FORSYTHE: Mr. Woodmore?

PARCHMENT: He was postmaster, bookstore operator, and business manager. He did a bunch of stuff. A real fine fellow.

FORSYTHE: Edward Tarp?

PARCHMENT: Edward Tarpy taught health. I never did have him.

FORSYTHE: C.C. Simms?

PARCHMENT: I had him as a team teacher again, and I had a course in South American History with him, which was a bad way to learn. He was a funny man. I worked in the dairies I told you, and I had an 8:00 class with him like I told you. And it was awful hard to do the milking, deliver the milk, and get to an 8:00 class. I got up at 4:30 moon was up sometimes and two times I was a little tardy. And he said people are not tardy in my class. He said first time you get a hard look. You've had that second time your tardy, I give a lecture about your getting that. The third time your tardy you don't need to come in. That door will be locked. So I went up after his class, and I told him. I said Doctor Simms I have an awful hard time. I try my best not to get an 8:00 class, but I couldn't avoid it. I said I get up at 4:30 every morning and I have all these things to do at the dairy. He said I didn't know that. He said I'll tell you what. I thought you were lying up in the bed in the dormitory over there just goofing off. He said I can understand that. He said you just come up the stairs and set on the back, and we won't say anything. You don't say anything and I won't either.