

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
WITH
WHITNEY STEGALL

10 JULY 1995

MURFREESBORO, TENNESSEE

INTERVIEWED BY REGINA FORSYTHE
FOR THE Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
INTERVIEW #QMS.022

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

ALBERT GORE RESEARCH CENTER

MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT



**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH
WHITNEY STEGALL**

Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW #QMS.022

FORSYTHE: This tape is part of the Q.M. Smith Collection designated as QMS. 1995.22. This is Regina Forsythe. I am interviewing Whitney Stegall. Today is Monday, July 10, 1995. The interview is being conducted in the Gore Research Center, Room 111 at 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 okay with you? What is your full name?

STEGALL: Whitney Stegall. I am the only one in Rutherford County that spells his name like that.

FORSYTHE: Where is your birthplace?

STEGALL: Rutherford County, TN.

FORSYTHE: Your birth date?

STEGALL: February 17, 1916.

FORSYTHE: Your father's name?

STEGALL: Benjamin Duggins Stegall.

FORSYTHE: His occupation?

STEGALL: He was a farmer and a merchant.

FORSYTHE: And your mother's name?

STEGALL: Nanny Mae Love.

FORSYTHE: And her occupation?

STEGALL: She was a housewife. Prior to marriage, she was a schoolteacher. She taught in Kentucky, Louisiana, and Tennessee?

FORSYTHE: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

STEGALL: I have one brother, but he is deceased. His name was Goodwin Stegall. I have two sisters that are living. One is Adeline Stegall Stevenson. The other one is Mae Love Gale, a widow.

FORSYTHE: What is your wife's name?

STEGALL: She's deceased. It was Orene O. Cowan.

FORSYTHE: What was her occupation?

STEGALL: Before marriage, she was a clothing specialist at the University of Missouri. After that, she was a mother and housewife.

FORSYTHE: Do you have any children?

STEGALL: Whitney Jr. and Amy Swartz.

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

STEGALL: I think all of did at some point, but Mae Love is the only one that graduated from MTSU. Goodwin went to UT for the last two years. I'm not sure about his attendance here, but he graduated from UT. I don't know about Adeline. I guess she graduated from UT. She graduated in May of 1943 just before my father died.

FORSYTHE: Did your children come here?

STEGALL: Whit attended some classes here, but he spent most of his time at UT, and Amy graduated from UT.

FORSYTHE: What degrees do you have?

STEGALL: I have a BS from here and a LLB, now known as JD from Vanderbilt Law School.

FORSYTHE: What year did you graduate?

STEGALL: January 1950. That's the way the semesters ended then.

FORSYTHE: When did you get your BS here?

STEGALL: 1937.

FORSYTHE: What was your major?

STEGALL: Chemistry

FORSYTHE: Your minor?

STEGALL: One in chemistry, one in biology and one in industrial arts.

FORSYTHE: Why did you choose to come to MTSU?

STEGALL: Money. When I registered for school, I believe the matriculation fee was nine dollars and a quarter. I got here with two dollars and a half of that nine dollars much to the disgust of some of the professors. Others were very considerate about it, and I finally got together nine dollars to pay it before the quarter was over.

FORSYTHE: What memories do you have of MTSU?

STEGALL: This was a very small college. It was Middle Tennessee State Teacher's College. During the regular quarter, there was about 250 to 300. In the spring when the teachers from outlying counties came in for the spring quarter, we'd get up between 400 and 500. I would say that in no quarter when I attended did we have over 500 students including the summer. The teachers that were teaching could teach then with one year, maybe less. The teacher's would come in and would graduate finally.

FORSYTHE: Did you student teach?

STEGALL: You had to if you were going to get a teacher's license. I taught math. Ms. Snail was my supervisor at Campus School. You only taught one quarter.

FORSYTHE: Why did you pick the particular background that you did?

STEGALL: I had planned to go to medical school if I could get the money. I never did.

FORSYTHE: What did students do for fun while you were here?

STEGALL: I worked. I was a janitor for a private home here. Ms. McCoy gave me my room and breakfast, and I was the janitor for a boarding house. It was known as Aunt Bette's. It was on the corner of Highland and Lytle. I got my supper there and I either bummed, did without, or stole my lunch.

FORSYTHE: What did you do on the weekends?

STEGALL: Well, the second year, I worked for Woodfin-Moore Funeral home. I drove the ambulance and assisted with funerals. I did that until I graduated. They furnished a room upstairs over the funeral home. Raymond Merriman was my first roommate there. After my first year, he went to Washington, D.C. as an employee of the one of the departments up there. To my knowledge, he never returned to this

section of the country that I know of. The next one was Henry Nance. He came from Rockvale and we were handymen around the funeral home.

FORSYTHE: How did you find out about that job?

STEGALL: I don't know, but Mr. John T. Woodfin was a friend of our family. I frequently ate at the home of one of the Woodfin's for dinner. I don't know how I got the job. I know I just went and asked for it.

FORSYTHE: Were you involved with any student activities.

STEGALL: All I could be involved in between working and school. I was a member of the Science Club and the Sigma Club. I got involved in one or two plays.

FORSYTHE: What was the Science Club?

STEGALL: It consisted of those concentrating in chemistry, biology, physics. If you had taken so many classes, you could join the science club if you wanted to.

FORSYTHE: What kind of activities did you do?

STEGALL: I don't remember.

FORSYTHE: What was the Sigma Club?

STEGALL: That was an honorary society that required better grades than what I had, but they voted me in anyway. Mr. Frazier, the English professor, here was the sponsor of it.

FORSYTHE: Do you remember Dean Beasley?

STEGALL: Oh, yes. He was dean of the school. He had a fantastic mind. I don't how long he had been dean when I got here, but he could still call everyone by name that had been in the college. He was a perfect gentleman and was a dean for everyone.

FORSYTHE: Frank Bass?

STEGALL: He was connected with the education system for the State of Tennessee if I remember correctly, but I don't remember what he did.

FORSYTHE: J.H. Bayer?

STEGALL: I heard that he came from the general area of Centerville, Tennessee. He started Bayer's Academy down there, but the money ran short as those private schools often did. Dr. Stark was a graduate of Bayer's Academy. Dr. Bayer's got Dr. Stark to come here. Dr. Stark graduated from here and then went to Cornell

where he got his doctorate and stayed on staff there until he was forced to retire. Then he came back here as head of the Agricultural Department for about ten years. Mr. Bayer was a member of the Murfreesboro Kiwanis Club as I later became a member. He was short and very industrious. Most of the trees around the campus, Mr. Bayer set them out. This was a cornfield when they purchased it in 1911. I would say that Mr. Bayer is responsible for the beauty of this campus. He supervised all of the NYA boys and girls that were given jobs during Roosevelt's administration. Many of the athletes got NYA jobs. That's about all I remember about him. We were very fond of him in Kiwanis.

FORSYTHE: Eva Mae Burkett?

STEGALL: I remember her, but I never had any classes under her. She was tall, thin, and energetic.

FORSYTHE: Philip Mankin?

STEGALL: Yes. He would talk with his fingers in his mouth and look at you very peculiar. I caught a ride with him to town one day. We chatted as we drove, and he parked at the square. Both of us got out of the car and then walked around the car and met in the back. He looked at me and said, "Hey, Mr. Stegall. How are you?" He always acted as if he hadn't seen you. He was absentminded, but he was brilliant. He obtained his doctorate at Vanderbilt. When he came up for his oral exam, the board decided they'd ask him some questions about Russia. He never had had any Russian, but he had read extensively on it. He knew more than any of the board members, so they gave him his doctorate.

FORSYTHE: George Davis?

STEGALL: Oh yes, Mr. Davis taught biology. My sister, Mae Love, was in biology class. And Mr. Davis had a habit that if he asked a student a question and they couldn't answer it, then he would sing a verse of some song. He had asked this student some biological question of course. They didn't know the answer, so he said, "Miss Stegall?" And she just said, "Sing on, Mr. Davis." It made him furious.

FORSYTHE: Neil Frazier?

STEGALL: He was an English professor. I knew his nephew, and he turned out to be a doctor in his home. All of us were very envious of anyone who had a relative here they could live with. Dr. Murphy, after he graduated from Vanderbilt Medical School, went to North Carolina to practice medicine.

FORSYTHE: Nooby Freeman?

STEGALL: He was an industrial arts teacher. Nooby was a blowhard. That's the best I can say about him. He did know how to finish furniture and how to make furniture. I

took that because of my father's interest. He had some furniture that he bought and redid. I took that eighteen hours just to learn about that. Nooby was also assistant football coach. He was in our Kiwanis club. We are the ones that started the little league baseball here in Murfreesboro. He was coaching one of the teams, and he said to an opposing player, "Let me see that ball!" The little boy threw it to him and Nooby stepped aside and just let it go on and his man ran home.. It made us all furious. We tried to ball him out, but Nooby insisted he was trying to teach them character. He said that they weren't supposed to listen to other people. They were supposed to play the ball game. I didn't see it like that and many others didn't. Nooby bragged about everything he did.

FORSYTHE: Dr. Thomas Golightly?

STEGALL: Oh, yes, he taught psychology. He was a nice gentlemen. He knew his psychology, but he had a hard time teaching it. And he knew it. I had some under him. Whatever I had, I had under him, but I don't remember much psychology.

FORSYTHE: B.B. Gracy?

STEGALL: He was in the Agricultural Department. He taught some health courses . I expect he was here for a lifetime. He got his degree at Peabody College and came back here as a teacher. He was here when I came, and he was still here long after I left. He lived across Main Street, North Tennessee Boulevard He had three children. Mr. Gracy's father was a doctor in Smyrna. Mr. Gracy was B.B. Gracy, Jr. and B.B. Gracy, III was clerk and master here after World War II. In the Battle of the Bulge, he got hit by a piece of shrapnel about like your fingernail that severed his spinal chord. So, he was a paraplegic. He just died two or three years ago. I was the executor of his estate. He was clerk and master of the gentry court under me, John Templeton, under Knox Bingham, under Chancellor Robert E.Lee. He had two daughters. One was named Martha and the other was named. . . can't think of it. Anyway, she lives in Athens, Georgia, and Martha lives in Stone Mountain. Mr. Gracy taught agricultural classes and health courses.

FORSYTHE: This is a continuation of the interview with Mr. Whitney Stegall by Regina Forsythe on Monday, July 10, 1995.

FORSYTHE: Ollie Green?

STEGALL: She was a chubby person. Ollie was a most gracious soul. She taught chemistry during my tenure under her. She could really pound it into your head. She did not have a car. She lived on South Tennessee Boulevard, and she walked to and fro from here. She wouldn't ride. She looked after her mother who was an invalid. During my entire knowledge of Miss Ollie, she was still a professor here. When I got back from the army after World War II, Miss Ollie gave me a student job in the chemistry department. I worked under her, and that was the only job I had in the university.

FORSYTHE: What year was that?

STEGALL: It had to be 1936 or 1937. While I was working for her, there was another young man who was working for her as well. She adored him, and he held the best student job because he was the best student. Well, after he graduated, he went to another university and got his doctorate in chemistry. He came back here and became head of the Chemistry Department. He fired her. . He kicked her out. She was under tenure of course, and she stayed on staff and taught biology. Eldridge Wiser was his name. I thought it was unmerciful because she had a memory like a steel trap. She knew everything in a chemistry book. Why he fired her, I'll never know. But she had to go from the Chemistry Department when he came back. That was shortly after the war when he came back. Miss Ollie really knew her chemistry. She was a great friend of mine. MacFarland Medical Center here now has one of those rooms dedicated to her. I expect Miss Ollie was the best chemistry teacher that has ever been associated with this school.

FORSYTHE: Mary Hall?

STEGALL: Oh, Miss Mary. Someone once did a thesis on the "Life of Mary Hall." She was one of those people. When Dr. Stark died, he was going to be buried in the county he came from. He and Mrs. Stark had gone down and arranged for their funeral. So, I took Ms. Stark, the president's wife, and Ms. Mary down to Centerville. When we rounded the square in Murfreesboro going towards Centerville, Ms. Mary started a story, and in this story she would weave in another. When we rounded the square in Franklin, she paused and said, "I know you all think I don't remember what I started telling you originally, but I do. And this story is going to end before we get to Centerville." That was Miss Mary. She taught in the Campus School. I don't remember other places she taught. In addition to that, she worked for the State Department of Education and traveled as supervisor. She was the daughter of Dr. Hall, an M.d. out at Central. He practiced medicine there until his death. He left her the farm for life, and we and Chancery court approved the sale of that and put the money, invested the money for her. She died with all of the proceedings for that plus the interest that had accumulated. She was a great soul. She looked after her sister for almost a year before she died.

FORSYTHE: J.C. Holmes?

STEGALL: He was the bursar. He took my nine dollars! He was fair on the job.

FORSYTHE: Dr. Knox Hutchinson?

STEGALL: He was head of the Agricultural Department at that time. I would consider him a good friend of mine. I was pallbearer at his funeral. He bought an old farm here out on the edge of town and refurbished it. He got the WPA to build a dam across

Stones River, the west part of Stones River. He's got a big lake out there behind it. His son, Thomas, did own the farm. And I think his son, Glen, now owns it. I think Thomas is still living. Mr. Hutchinson ran against whoever the senator was at the time. He wanted to be state senator. He ran for the announced purpose of passing a law that would not permit PA Lyon to continue as president of this school. He wanted to get rid of P.A. Lyon. He did, and he wanted a good farm, and he got one.

FORSYTHE: Horace Jones?

STEGALL: Horace Jones was a math professor. He was the son of the former president of this university. He taught most of the time using football and baseball as a way of working in examples.

FORSYTHE: Dr. Simms?

STEGALL: He was completely bald. Some comedian came in and walked in late. Dr. Simms was seated at the desk. He went over and put his hand on Dr. Simms' head and said, "Hmm, that feels just like my wife's knee." Dr. Simms very carefully put his hand up there and said, "Damn if it doesn't." It just tore the class apart.

FORSYTHE: Charles Lewis?

STEGALL: All I remember about him was that he was a psychology teacher

FORSYTHE: What do you remember about Philip Cheek?

STEGALL: I remember him, but I never had him for anything. I remember he smoked a pipe, but he wouldn't smoke it inside. He'd go out and walk around the building back and forth smoking his pipe. He wasn't visiting with anybody, and he wasn't talking with anybody. He was just one of those strange professors.

FORSYTHE: Bonnie McHenry?

STEGALL: She was secretary for one of the presidents. She could've been secretary for Dean Beasley. My contact with her was in and out of Dean Beasley's office.

FORSYTHE: Dr. William Mebane?

STEGALL: He was head of the chemistry department. Dr. Mebane went from here to Huntsville, Alabama at the beginning of the war. He was here for two or three years after I graduated. He was a good teacher. He knew his chemistry, but he wasn't as good a teacher as Ms. Green was. Although he was head of the department, she only had her master's degree. He had his Ph.D. in chemistry, that made him head of the department.

FORSYTHE: Katherine Monahan?

STEGALL: Miss Monahan was Catholic. She lived in the Moffit House. I believe she taught history. I had a class or two under her. The story we told about her in the most vivid part of my memory of her is that she went to the president and said, "The boys next door undress without lowering the shades, and we can see them from my room." So, the President sent some men over to investigate what should be done about it. So, the men looked across and said, "Ms. Monahan, we can't see anything." She told them if they'd get up on that chest they could! She was a wonderful lady. I don't know if that's a true story or not, but it's one we enjoyed then.

FORSYTHE: Eller Midgett?

STEGALL: I don't know whether he's dead yet or not. I didn't have any classes under him. I knew him.

FORSYTHE: Betty Murphy?

STEGALL: I don't remember her.

FORSYTHE: Dr. A.A. O'Kelly?

STEGALL: Dr. O'Kelly wasn't here but one year if I remember correctly. He was chemistry professor. He may have been head of the department my first year here, but Dr. Mebane succeeded him.

FORSYTHE: Anne Ordway?

STEGALL: Ms. Ordway was the aunt of Dr. Sam Haye. He lived with her when he was a student here and went from here to Vanderbilt Medical School and then came back here to practice medicine, still living in Murfreesboro. Ms. Ordway was famous for her jonquils, she had many. The result of them is still on the grounds out here where she lived unless they've all been dug up for some building purposes. Dr. Haye lived with her and went through school here. That's about all I know. I didn't have any classes under her.

FORSYTHE: Dorothy Bachtel in biology?

STEGALL: Don't think so.

FORSYTHE: Dr. James Furmar.

STEGALL: I remember the name, but I don't remember what he taught.

FORSYTHE: Foreign language.

STEGALL: Ms. Schardt taught the only foreign language I tried to take and that was French. Ms. Schardt had her hand cut off, I don't know how. She wore a false hand with a white glove on it. When I had been in her class and you would either pass or fail, I learned that I was going to fail because I could not hear the nuances in the French language or I couldn't understand it. I don't know what it was. I'd like to drop this course. She said "What a pity" in French. She let me drop and I dropped that French, and I never had another foreign language other than the two years of Latin I had in high school. So, time went by and I came back from the service on crutches, and Ms. Schardt got on the bus in Nashville. I had a seat and no other seats were available for passengers. Then the bus would stop along the road and pick up people and let them out and so on. Here she came down the aisle and so I scrambled up and got on my crutches. I saw that she wasn't going to take the seat and I said, "What a pity" to her in French. She looked at me as though she had never seen me before, and I'm sure that had long since left her mind. At any rate, I got her in that seat. We talked for awhile on the bus. That's all I remember about Ms. Schardt.

FORSYTHE: Coach Faulkinberry?

STEGALL: Coach Faulkinberry shot himself in the summer of 1933 before I enrolled her in the fall of 1933. He had a wonderful reputation.

FORSYTHE: Richard Goldstein?

STEGALL: Best known for a ballplayer as I recall. He wasn't a teacher while I was here.

FORSYTHE: Dr. C.C. Simms?

STEGALL: Dr. Simms was the one that pulled that bald-headed prank. Dr. Simms and Mr. Judd lived on Lytle Street here side by side. That's the reason I think I got them tangled up. Dr. Simms was quite a comedian. I didn't know Mr. Judd very well.

FORSYTHE: Tommie Reynolds

STEGALL: She was in charge of the girls' athletics. I believe she also taught math. I had trigonometry under her or maybe it was solid geometry. It was one of the few A's I had. She was a good teacher, and that's all I can say about her.

FORSYTHE: E. May Sanders?

STEGALL: Miss E. May was a music teacher. A lot of people chewed tobacco then, and she came up with the sentence, "If you expect to rate on the floor in the school, do not expectorate on the floor." She was a great music teacher, but I don't have a musical note in my body. I can't carry a tone and don't try. That has existed throughout my lifetime. My mother was an excellent musician, and she told me

not to try to sing because I couldn't. Miss E. May accumulated considerable wealth for a lady in those days. Her estate was somewhere in the neighborhood of \$165,000 after she was buried and gone. I, as a lawyer, was her lawyer. As I recall, I wrote her will. She left it all to the Foundation and I think Dean Beasley was her executor. She was a great music teacher and worked her heart out. I can't tell you other than that.

FORSYTHE: Ruby Taylor Sanders?

STEGALL: She was in the music department also. Not being a musician, I didn't have anything to do with her.

FORSYTHE: Isa Lee Sherod? She was a librarian, too.

STEGALL: Yes, I remember her. She married Lawrence Freeman.

FORSYTHE: Roy Simpson?

STEGALL: He was married to one of the Woodfin girls. Florine Woodfin lived with her sister and Roy, but I didn't have any classes under him. I don't know what he did.

FORSYTHE: Francis Snell?

STEGALL: She was seventh or eighth grade teacher in the Campus School, and she was a driver. She just pushed everybody and was constantly beating into the heads of those children all that she knew. She was an excellent teacher. I don't know what kind of grade she gave me, but she was an excellent teacher and a nice lady. She was getting close to retirement age as I recall.