

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.023

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.023

FORSYTHE: This is part of the Q.M. Smith collection designated as QMS.1995.23. This is Regina Forsythe. I am interviewing Whitney Stegall. Today is Monday, July 10, 1995. This interview is being conducted in the Gore Research Center, Room 111 of the Ned McWherter Learning Resource Center. Harold Thompson Straw in Geography?

STEGALL: Sorry.

FORSYTHE: E.N. Waller?

STEGALL: Dr. Waller wore a size 14 shoe, and that's all I remember about him.

FORSYTHE: J.C. Waller?

STEGALL: I don't remember anything about him.

FORSYTHE: Clark Woodward?

STEGALL: I remember him, but I don't think I had any classes under him.

FORSYTHE: Did I ask you about T .B. Woodmore?

STEGALL: He was connected somehow to the bursar's office. I can't tell you how his connection was with that downstairs area of the Old Main building. I remember Mr. Woodmore quite well. He had two children. Amy was one of them, and the other was his son. They're both dead. But I can't tell you what Mr. Woodmore did. But it had something to do with money.

FORSYTHE: What do you remember about Mr. Lyons?

STEGALL: Well, I got called into his office once or twice, my nefarious activities. He was a nice fellow. We had chapel then. All of the students were supposed to assemble. I don't know whether it was once a week or once a day. But Dr. Lyons would make speeches to us. He worked hard at his job. He was nice looking and well dressed. He stood up proudly. He wasn't a big fellow. The first tea I ever went to was in his house- in the President's home over here. As a freshman, you were supposed to

attend the President's tea, and that's all I remember about him. Horace Jones married his daughter. She was the mother of the two Jones' boys.

FORSYTHE: How did the students relate to Mr. Lyons?

STEGALL: Very distantly. We tried to have nothing to do with them because as the expression is now, "He was on your case," if you got summons into his office. That's the way I remember.

FORSYTHE: What do you remember about Mrs. Lyons, his wife?

STEGALL: She was gray-headed motherly woman that presided over the tea. That's all I remember about her.

FORSYTHE: What memories do you have about Q.M. Smith?

STEGALL: Q.M. wasn't here when I was here. I don't know when he came, but it had to be after 1937. I went to Smyrna to teach school in the fall of 1937, and I had no relationship whatsoever with the university until we got back from World War II. And then I was at Vanderbilt in law school several years. So, it was about 1950 until I had any contact with anyone out here including Q.M. I don't know when he retired, but it was in the late 1950's, I think. He became interested in First Tennessee Bank, and I was interested in that. Our relationship grew out of that. He had lots of contacts over the world. Many people knew him and spoke highly of him. He referred the New Jersey Zinc Company to us when they came in this area. They thought they had zinc under Rutherford County. They found it in menial quantities and qualities in Smith County in Carthage, Tennessee. They or their successors... I don't know how many successors were after New Jersey Zinc. We represented them is the reason. And Q.M. was responsible for our representation of them. They were good clients of ours, and that's how they got into this. Q.M. was very active in boy scouts. I tried to be. We [Q. M. Smith and Stegall] made several trips to Nashville. I was driving, and Q. M. was talking. It was very difficult to talk to him without looking him in the face. So driving and trying to hear Q. M. [was difficult]. He had a brilliant, perceptive mind. The thing he liked to do was to tell me the story of how he was offered the presidency of East Tennessee State University when he was ready to start practicing law. He consulted with some of his friends, and they all advised him, so he said, to accept the presidency. They said that you never see the president of the University that didn't have his lawyer with him. He liked to tell me that . I guess he's told it to me half a dozen times. He had a great mind, and he was a good administrator. All the teachers liked him. He had an excellent reputation.

FORSYTHE: Did he ever practice law?

STEGALL: No.

FORSYTHE: Were you his lawyer?

STEGALL: I would have to look and see whether or not I wrote his will. I think I did, but I don't know.

FORSYTHE: What about his wife, Mrs. Smith?

STEGALL: She was something else. She was secretary over at the Campus School. My son went through Campus School. Some age along about the third or fourth grade somebody asked him where he went to school and he told them Campus School. They asked him who was in charge. He told them that Mr. Papin owns it, but Mrs. Smith runs it. The secretary was always there to answer all the questions. That generally describes Mrs. Smith. I later worked with her at the Murfreesboro Housing Authority. I was their lawyer for five or six years. My principle job was condemning, as a lawyer for them, parcels of land that were owned in what we called the "bottoms" of Murfreesboro. She was the lady that took applications for housing and would rule on whether or not they were eligible. One lady came in and wanted to get "one of them projects." Mrs. Smith took her name and address and husband's name and address and asked her how many children she had. The woman said, "Sixteen and they ain't narry an outside one in the crowd."

FORSYTHE: What did she mean by that?

STEGALL: Some women have children by different men, and if some man slipped in and became the father of one of her children. They weren't many women that could've said that.

FORSYTHE: What did you do after you left MTSU?

STEGALL: I taught school in Smyrna. I taught Chemistry and Biology.

FORSYTHE: Where did you go after that?

STEGALL: I wanted to tell you that I was teaching school for seventy-five dollars a month. Twenty dollars had to be spent for room and board. I didn't have an automobile. I lived down there with Ms. Johnson. The other fifty-five dollars I could throw away. I taught there two years. Then, I quit because of the pay. Only eight months was guaranteed by Rutherford County. The ninth month you had to teach, and that was part of the contract, but Rutherford County didn't have to pay you until they were able to. But we were paid, so I have no complaints in that regard. At the end of the school year in May 1939, I told the principal that I wouldn't be back. Nobody quit a job back then because it was impossible to get jobs. I could not live on that. I was deeper in debt than when I had started. I had to dress better than when I was milking cows. So, he didn't believe me. When school started in the first part of August, he called me and confronted me on not being there. I said, "Mr. McCrary, I told you last spring I would not be back." He asked me if I would come and teach for a month until I can find someone else. I told him that I would. Ralph Robertson

who was also in the chemistry department but a year behind me became the chemistry teacher there. He later became a doctor. He went to Atlanta to practice, and he is now dead. I went then to Pensacola, Florida at one hundred twenty-five dollars a month which sounded like a stupendous raise. But when I got there and found out the cost of living in comparison to here, I had degraded myself monetarily speaking. In Smyrna, I had taught seven classes a day, and in addition to that, I had coached two different basketball teams for girls. I didn't want to work that hard. I had been told that I would not be expected to do this at my new Florida job, but when I got there and before I signed the contract, she had changed her mind. I now had playground supervision, and I refused to do it. This made the entire faculty angry. I had been there exactly a month and I got a telegram to report to Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia for Civilian Conservation Corps as an educational advisor, I had applied for that job. So, I went in to the principal and put the telegram in front of me, and she said, "You've got a contract." I told her that I had never signed it. She told me that she couldn't get a teacher on such short notice. I was to report October 2, 1939 to Fort Oglethorpe. I told her that I could get her a teacher if she would let me borrow her phone. I called Abe Mason, who lived in Cannon County. Before noon, I got Abe Mason on the phone and asked him if he would come and relieve me of my position. He was unemployed and eager to come and take the job. He came and took my class on Monday morning following my resignation on Friday. I got my money and reported to Fort Oglethorpe, Florida as an educational advisor on October 2, 1939.

FORSYTHE: What were your duties?

STEGALL: Teaching. All over America there were young boys or men sitting around with nothing to do, no employment. This program was conceived by Roosevelt and ultimately won the war because all the men were trained as clerks, cooks, truck drivers, mechanics, and so on. We would go out and pick up these boys by the truckload and bring them to camp, and then indoctrinate them. We would teach some of them arithmetic, some writing, some mechanics. I was principal of the school in the camp. There were 200 enrolled. All of the personnel except for the company commander taught classes. I was the one that set up these classes. We would have two hours of class at night. I was running the educational program of that CCC camp.

FORSYTHE: How long did you do that?

STEGALL: Eighteen months. The district education advisor (there were forty-two camps) and he had an assistant in office. After eighteen months of that, both of them got activated as they were reserve officers in the army. One of them was a colonel and the other was a major. A month before the assistant left, I was called in to become assistant educational advisor for the district, and I knew nothing at all about it. Why I was called in, I'll never know, but I took over that office with both the education advisor and the assistant gone. In two or three months, they got Dr. Clegg as district educational advisor and I was his assistant. Then, one day he came in and said, "I

want you to rate all the educational advisors in the district." I didn't even know them all. I asked him for what reason, and he told me it was for the boss, but he didn't know what for. So, I sat down and rated them. I rated James Camel as first, another fellow as second and myself as third. Out of that list of forty-two, I went on with the rest of them. Clegg adopted my list without knowing any of them but me. So, he sent that list down and the first three on the list were then made company commanders. So, I went to Camden, Tennessee as company commander as the CCC camp there. Then, when we closed that one, I went to Stevenson, Alabama and I was there one month. Major Taylor made me a sub-district inspector. I was sub-district inspector for all the camps in East Tennessee and North Alabama. Then, I became a private in the U.S. Army. My number came up and that's the story.

FORSYTHE: What did you do after the war?

STEGALL: I went to law school and practiced law.

FORSYTHE: Why did you decide to go to law school?

STEGALL: I was injured, and the doctor's told me my legs would not hold up through medical school, so I decided I'd go to law school.

FORSYTHE: After I got my law degree, I practiced law in Murfreesboro for 25 years and became Chancellor. I retired in 1990. When we got a new judgeship in this judicial district, the governor had me called and asked if I would take the circuit judgeship until the next general election. That was fourteen months and I did. I served until the first of September last year. Then, I retired again.

FORSYTHE: What have you been doing since you retired?

STEGALL: Nothing. Occasionally, I get called upon to go hear a case.

FORSYTHE: Can you think of anything else we should talk about?

STEGALL: Only that I was married and had two children. My wife was the finest woman I have ever known. She passed away.

FORSYTHE: How'd you meet her?

STEGALL: My sister introduced me to her. My sister was a dietician at the University of Missouri. Orene was a clothing specialist out there. She introduced me, and I liked her. She was the only republican I ever dated. We had a fuss one day and she said, "Why did you ever marry me?" I told her it was because she was the only republican I had ever dated and the only one I ever saw that thought like a democrat!