

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
WITH
BAXTER HOBGOOD

MURFREESBORO, TENNESSEE

25 JULY 1995

INTERVIEWED BY REGINA FORSYTHE
FOR THE Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
INTERVIEW #QMS.035

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
BAXTER HOBGOOD**

Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW #QMS.035

FORSYTHE: This tape is part of the Q.M. Smith collection designated as QMS.1995.35. This is Regina Forsythe, I am interviewing Mr. Baxter Hobgood. Today is Tuesday, July 25, 1995. The interview is being conducted in the home of Mr. Hobgood of 214 Tyne Ave., Murfreesboro, TN. The tape of the 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 publication. Is that all right with you, Mr. Hobgood?

HOBGOOD: That's fine.

FORSYTHE: What is your full name?

HOBGOOD: Baxter Earnest Hobgood.

FORSYTHE: And your birthday?

HOBGOOD: March 17, 1907, been around here awhile.

FORSYTHE: Where were you born?

HOBGOOD: I was born in a little town of Roxboro, North Carolina. That's in northern central section, small town and oh, 30 miles from Durham, between Durham and Danville.

FORSYTHE: And your father's name?

HOBGOOD: My father's name was John Samson Hobgood, John S. Hobgood.

FORSYTHE: Okay, and his occupation?

HOBGOOD: He did a number of things back in those days. From time to time, he operated a restaurant. He did some delivery work. In those days, he delivered ice from home to home, from plant to home and he had horses and hitched them to the ice wagon and delivered ice to people

who had their signs hanging out. Fifty pounds or twenty-five pounds or whatever they wanted. He engaged in a number of things throughout his lifetime and one of the amazing things about him was his generosity in dealing with people. I never saw him turn down any person who came from anywhere and wanted to spend a night or wanted to spend a year; it made no difference. I don't recall that we ever had a lock to the house - wide open all the time and his mother, his father, my grandmother and grandfather wanted to live there. There were three old aunts who wanted to live with my father. The didn't want to live anywhere and when I left to come out here somehow or another in a small home there were fourteen people and he was generous right up to the nth degree.

FORSYTHE: What was your mother's name?

HOBGOOD: My mother's name was Lessie Morris Hobgood and she died when I was about three and a half for a common thing in those days... childbirth. It sometimes brought along death and the second childbirth, three and a half ears after I was born, my mother died giving birth to the second child. And my father, oh some two or three years later married again and I have three half sisters, and I never even think of calling them half-sisters. I call them sisters all the time. We've had very happy relationships and one of them was over here three or four months ago. She has a son that lives here. Murfreesboro, and we see him quite often, and I came in 1926 to work for an uncle in Nashville in that ice business type of thing. At the end of the summer, he said, " Why don't you go down to Murfreesboro?" His wife had been to school and come on back next summer." So your ice job here until you finish down at Murfreesboro, and when I came to the campus, I loved it from the first day and to the last I told some body I'd never live more than a mile from the campus. I've loved it from the first day to the last. Never had a residence more that a mile from the campus. People were so good to me. Students were . . . I enjoyed it.

FORSYTHE: What do you remember about being a student at MTSU?

HOBGOOD: At MTSU, I remember more that anything else the closeness of the teachers to the students . . . Students have always had their favorite teachers and teachers have always had their favorite student. And, I enjoyed this phase of my life out there. I think the first thing and this has nothing to do with Mr. Smith, but I think the first thing that impressed me the morning I went to the first class. I walked into the classroom of Dr. Gillentine, a lady from Arkansas, and I got as far back, scared to death, as far back in the corner of the room as I could and tried to hide myself in the corner. She was kinky-headed. She stood up, and said,

"Hey, you." I looked up and pointed to myself. He said, " yeah, you with the Marsel in your hair . . . get up and go over to the gray cottage up on the second floor and get those papers on the trunk and bring them to me." Gray cottage? I had no knowledge of where the gray cottage, but I knew it had to be out the back instead of the front. So, I started to the back, met somebody , and I said, "Say, tell me, where is the gray cottage?" He said, "That's it , right there," He pointed to me. I said, "That's a cottage?" He said, "That's what they call all the . . . I was looking for a little place with roses around it and a fence and everything, but this was a big two and a half story house there. Tennessee Boulevard, and all of them were called cottages, but I found those papers and I carried them back, placed them on here desk, and went to my seat. Well, I had a good class with here that year and made a B, and at the start of the second year, she gave an intelligence test, and she had a student to help grade it. The student that worked on mine put his paper down while he was checking in just exactly the wrong way. So, every question I got right was marked wrong. Every one I got wrong was marked right. I came up with a miserable score. I took it to her, and explained what had apparently happened and she just took it and tore it up. I said, "Dr. Gillenstin, what are you doing?" She said, "Baxter Hobgood, quit worrying you have proved yourself to me. The only thing you have to do from this day on to make an A in my class is to come to it. I took five classes with her, and I think they're the only A's I have. But, she was the one that first impressed me so much, and Mrs. Buchanan, who is the daughter of the only governor this county ever furnished. They lived out on an estate out here named Buchanan. There's a school and Buchanan, he was in charge of drama, speech teaching, Good speech teacher, I loved the way she handled things and did things, I just . . . these days I get in the habit of coming in here occasionally and jotting down a little bit of story, little bits of Boro Lore and wrote one, had no intention of reading it or publishing it in any way, but some people heard about it and got a hold of it, and this one club that has heard it and wanted to. I got John Douglas Hood to polish it up for me and to put his expertise in speech helping to deliver. I've got an old man's voice and he did an excellent job with it, but incidentally, it has some connection with some of the Gore business. It's called "All's Quiet on the Western Front" and it was a play that had been produced on Broadway, and Mrs. Buchanan and Ed Bell . . .I don't know if you've ever heard that name . . . tremendous guy. XXX And, Senator Albert Gore and Ms. Buchanan did it. Now, Ed Bell was for the most part responsible for the fireworks. An old man was over on both sides of those high windows . . I don't know if they close now or not, but just high windows and he had fireworks going outside peering on both sides of the old man as if the whole building were going to collapse at any minute, just tearing the place down and Senator Albert Gore in

addition to helping with some of the lighting part of it assisted with some of the direction and also had a part in the play (I've been threatening to send this to him and let him see it.) It might give him a laugh or two. At the end of the thing of course, everything just becomes this silent as sight itself . . . not a sound in the world. That was true in the auditorium. There was not a sound. All was truly quiet on the western front. That's where I got this name, of course. Allis quiet on the western front. Then, all of a sudden, I thought the audience would never stop. They started applauding and supposedly, the dramatic club will be named Buchanan Dramatist Club forever supposedly on the basis of that performance, of course I guess thing get changed when you don't intended to change them . . .who don't know these stories.

FORSYTHE: Well, now that we have it maybe the won't. We have it and we're going to have it there so we can fight if they try to change it! (Laugh)

HOBGOOD: Let me tell you another little story that has nothing to do with this. After 4:00 this afternoon, the visitation hours start for the father of Scott Hickton. Scott Hickton is a graduate of MTSU. From birth,, the only thing that he could move was his neck, head. The rest of his body was completely paralyzed from the day of his birth yet a brilliant mind, just brilliant. To make a long story short . . .When he first came to our school, we had a teacher and a supervisor who insisted that he should go into a regular classroom. Please, Mr. Hobgood, let us put him in regular classrooms. And they didn't have to be me too much because we put him in regular classrooms and teachers, children cooperated in a way that was unusual even the big boys would fuss over whose time it was to help take Scott to the restroom and this sort of thing. Teachers were working on their theory that when you challenge students, they are going to respond. In this case, they did. This went right on into MTSU from which he graduated and it's his father who is being or for whom they are having the services and he'll be buried tomorrow. He left here and went to Massachusetts Institute of Technology. They, alone with the government brought him into training, changes in his movement and his abilities to the point where he could get a job as what you call a cartographer drawing maps with a firm in St. Louis. They kept working with him until he could do other things and I feel must have been able to with the doctor's help get some additional movement, maybe into his fingers, one of them or something because the government has constructed him a van which he himself drives to Murfreesboro, all based on the command of his voice, what his voice tell that van to do , it does. He himself, sometimes he'll have company with him, sometimes not. He married, and his wife will be with him over here at the visitation. He's an inspiration, and I've tried so often to convince him that he needs to be in the outstanding graduate section.

They elect three every year, and one special one. If nothing else, he should be elected into that out of the special. He deserves it.

FORSYTHE: He's amazing. I don't know too many people that would have the will to that well. And, then to drive a van . . .that's amazing.

HOBGOOD: He's really something. I'll see him in a little while. We've stayed pretty close all through the years.

FORSYTHE: Do you know when he graduated?

HOBGOOD: When he graduated? I don't know the exact date of when he graduated from MTSU, but it hasn't been that long?

FORSYTHE: I just wanted to ask because I can do people up to 1960. Any body before 1960 I can interview, so I'm always looking for good interviews. You said Ed Bell . . .

HOBGOOD: Ed Bell is kind of an interesting character . . he married a beautiful Murfreesboro girl named Sarah McGuire. He was many facets of a person yet timid in a very outstanding way. He wouldn't go to church and would say to me . . . he and two other fellows were all working when XXX nah, we just don't believe like you believe. They never did come right and say they were atheists or anything other. They just didn't believe the way I believed. All of them on the other hand seemed to obey at least one of the commands the Lord gave, and that was "Feed my sheep." I've seen Ed when he had fifty cents in his pocket, spent thirty five of it to go buy a loaf of bread and some bologna and take it to people on what was called XXX because they hadn't anything to eat in two days. That left him fifteen cents, spent thirty five cents on them. I was on the street talking to him one day when he did that. He just told me where he was going and then said meet me out at the house. I've already got something to eat out there. I've got some bread and a book. I wasn't you to tell me how you like it. I met him and kind of struck me below that because I looked in my pocket and had seventy five cents, and I wasn't going to give anybody anything. But , he was just that way and one of the others, Bob Lassitt, Bob wrote a book, He wrote several, but one with had to do with Ed Bell and it was entitled "These Lonely People and Their Strange Ways." It's about Ed Bell. Ed wrote some books himself. He said, "Oh, Lord, Let me die on the courthouse square late in the afternoon when some of my friends are coming up from Mink Slikde." His books were called "Fish on the Steeple" and "Tommy Lee Fellows." They are interesting. The other one was "Just Beasley." Now, Jess had the same kind of feeling like I don't believe like you believe, but he did a lot of sculpture work. It makes you think of the book XXX.

There's not anything in this sculpture that was written about the book, but just the title makes you think about it. "Look Homeward, Angel," do you remember that? Because his XXX was our children and they were standing holding something towards the sky, and got to the point that he had such demand for those that he would have a XXX of them, 15,000 dollars a piece. Yet, he suffered all the time with a bad back, worse than mine. Mine is bad enough, but his was worse. He had a little dog called Tinkerbelle. She'd get behind him and press his back. When he died, he left an amount of money for the place where they take care of animals. Tinkerbelle was to be taken care of as long as Tinkerbelle lived, and then he left an amount of money to operate what is called the Beasley Place for Animals. He went on one afternoon...He was down at Limeball Library. He was standing against one of the doors resting his back and said to me, "Baxter, I can't XXX.

FORSYTHE: This is a continuation of the interview with Mr. Baxter Hobgood by Regina Forsythe on Tuesday, July, 25, 1995.

HOBGOOD: As he left that afternoon, he turned back and waved to the librarian, and we were standing there at the window, and she made a remark, "Mr. Hobgood, I don't think I've ever seen him as down as he is right now, He's hurting. He is sick." Sure enough, the next morning, I got a call from his niece telling me that he had passed on during the night. She asked me if I would take charge of the funeral. I did. I told him once I was going to preach him into heaven if he went on before I did. (Laughing by Hobgood and Forsythe) I went ahead and did the best I could. I thought very highly of him. He did a lot for Lineball Library, although Bob Lassitt would have to be called the top person as far as Lineball Library is concerned. Mr. Lineball did a lot, but no one ever did as much as Bob Lassitt. I told him once that if he did go on before I did, I was going to insist that it be named "Lasitter-Lineball." He said, "If you do and there's any possible way of coming back from that place that you talk about, I'm going to come back and haunt the dickens out of you!" I don't talk about it much because he didn't want it that way. He didn't want the credit. He wouldn't accept it being named after him.

FORSYTHE: Let's talk about Q.M. Smith. What do you remember about him?

HOBGOOD: Let me make these two comments about Mr. [Q. M.] Smith to begin with. There are two things that stand out in my memory concerning Mr. Smith. The first, is his complete loyalty to his fellow workers and his friends. I knew Mr. Smith before he came here as president. I would meet him on committees in Nashville and here and there. He had expressed to me the desire he had in his heart at the time "Someday I will go back to my old school and be the president of that school." That

was while he was president who was very important at TPI. There was another person who made the same comment who was very important at TPI that was Coach Overall. But he never did quite get back to his alma mater to work. Had some personal reasons for not trying to make it so. The second fact I remember about him is that he tried hard always to get back into the service during World War II. He had been in World War I and was injured. He wanted to get back. They refused him and would not let him return. I guess somewhat based on the injury that he had received. If he got real nervous you had a little difficulty understanding him. He had a little trouble with his speech. He was injured in such a way that his speech was impaired to a certain degree. When it was claim and quiet just like that [his voice would be okay]. But if he got the least bit nervous [he would be hard to understand]. He wanted back in there and he tried hard to get back in. He wanted you to be trying to get into an uniform. As long as you were trying it was alright. But the minute you quit trying it was another thing. Those are the two things I remember first about him, his devotion to friends and fellow workers. Once something strong that denied that friendship. His extreme be of assistance in uniform. If they would have him. They would not have him at that time. A couple of the first things I remember about him is that I haven't exactly followed protocol when I changed jobs myself. I went into the state department of education for part of my work. I thought I had touched every base and had seen every person that I needed to see, but I had missed one. He had a way of doing things, and when he came in to start work here to XXX, I met him in a hallway, and told him I had a problem. When I named the problem, he said, "Forget it, forget it I know exactly how to take care of it." So, in a short while it was taken care of. I was at work when Mrs....Bill and Nancy, I read their work, and I think that for the most part, it is exactly right. I believe there was a little extension on some of the things they said. I believe Bill and Nancy both were students of my wife at Central High School which is now the Middle School. Both had her for Latin. I recall that Bill went with us on one occasion to Florida to take XXX some exercises down there. I don't recall what the exercises were at this time, but he went with us down there. Mrs. Laura Smith was particularly well known for her teacher XXX. She worked on local committees as well as state wide committees. During this period, she supported a discussion that came up concerning adding an S to PTA which meant that it became Parent, Teacher, Student Association, and I guess it has been so since then. I haven't checked it recently, but I think it's still operates as Parent, Teacher, Student Association. As time approached for our entrance into XXX, Middle Tennessee was assigned around the country. This meant some of the most intelligent young men in the country came to the Middle Tennessee State College campus from all parts of the United States...Texas, all around the country. The

classroom instruction, part of their training Mr. Smith assigned to Dr. E. B. Baldwin whose wife is still living. She taught with me in city schools for a long time. I was assigned one class an instruction part of the aviation cadet program.

FORSYTHE: Which class was that?

HOBGOOD: Geography. They were asked to identify some of the spots in the terrain that they would most likely be going in the years to come. They were to learn something about it and tell something about it. Mr. Baldwin was very helpful in this because he, in directing would even draw up some of the plans himself for directing the work and showing what was to be taught and how it was to be taught. As far as the teaching of the class was concerned, it wasn't too much of a problem, but there were other things to be done and Mr. Smith asked for the officer in charge of everything to place me with a physical training group which was headed by Mr. B. B. Gracey, Sr. and Mr. E. W. XXX. In this round about way, I became coach of the cadet baseball team and coach of the girl's regular basketball team. I had some outstanding baseball players. Some of them went professional. They knew a lot more baseball than I did! I enjoyed working with them. Harold Smith, third baseman from Northwestern University married a Murfreesboro girl...Eba Cannon. They came back to live in Murfreesboro for awhile. I don't where they are living now...I guess somewhere closer to his home. Two of my best players didn't get back. One of them was the best of all of the, a young man by the name of Sayer, a professional player. Also, a Piedmont league companion, whose name I can't call at this time, but those two out of the baseball group lost their lives in the war. We had some strong opposition in the games because we would played places like Seward Air Force Base. Which was managed by a man who was called Danny Mertaw. He later became a great major league baseball manager. They gave us a lot of problems in that game, but we would go to such places as Camp Forest and Seward Air Force Base which became Smyrna Air Force Base. We were impressed by the fact that the athletic floor at Tullahoma contained seven basketball courts, one of them long ways in the building and the others cross ways. The sides were pretty well full to the main court whenever we took a team down there. We could always pick up a little gas down there because they would give us gas down there to make the trip. I recall one night...it was late and the XXX was coming to a close. They sent a young German to try to get the gas, and he couldn't understand the word gas. He didn't know the word gas. Somehow or another someone said the word Benzine. He said "OH, Benzine, Benzine!!" He went and got it and brought it, then he touched me on the shoulder and wanted to go in with us. He wanted us to take him in. He was a prisoner of

war...seventeen years old. I turned to the man in charge that night and asked if we could take him in. He said, "NO, mister, if we let him in, we'd have to let everyone in. I know how you feel, but we can't do it." We got our gas and came home. Another one of the men returned to Murfreesboro to be in business...Mr. Goed returned and operated a business near the present City Hall for a number of years, and I guess he's still living in Murfreesboro. He handled paper lines. That's what we're using right here. All kinds of paper...wrapping paper, paper pens, just everything that had to do with communication. Another thing that I'd like to mention is that at this point, since I did get a little gas to travel from time to time, Mr. Smith called me one afternoon and said, "Baxter, you can get a little gas and then go down to Nashville and go to (he named the residence) and pick up Robert Frost and bring him up her for a lecture tonight. That afternoon, Robert Frost was visiting with one of Vanderbilt's famous literary societies. I believe the group that he was visiting with was called the fugitives. An, the other group was known as the Agrarians. A Murfreesboro man was probably tops in the Agrarian movement, and that was Mr. William Liddell. I have autographed copy of his last four books that he wrote. His family, after the revolution donate the ground on which Murfreesboro was later to be built. He called attention to that several times, and when I went down to pick up someone at this Fugitives Home, they all became one for at least one afternoon. The fugitives were entertaining the Agrarians, and Agrarians were entertaining the fugitives. I don't know what they were trying to make out of Baxter Hobgood, but they took him like he was one of them. They, of course, were entertaining Dr. Frost more than anything else, and I had a big time with them...never nervous or disturbed in any way. They just made me a part of the gathering. When we started home, Dr. Frost, (we were out a little ways and I hadn't said much) then all of a sudden, out of a clear sky, he said, "Mr. Hobgood, when you are playing tennis, don't you like for you net to be perfectly even all the way. I didn't have a racquet in the car. I had not mentioned tennis?" He was eighty-five. He said, I surely do when I am at home. I play doubles; I'm a little afraid to play singles anymore. I played tennis. I said, "Well, tell me something, how in the world did you know that I played tennis?" He made some remark about how all these famous brains know how to play tennis. From then on, we had something to talk about, and I enjoyed him very much. I went to the program that night and listened to him talk about how he had far to go and much to do. These were excerpts from his poetry he had written in his New England Home. Mr. Smith invited me to come on over to the reception they were having that night which I enjoyed very much. Well, that gives you a little bit of my knowledge about the Smiths. I was very fond of the way they worked and I enjoyed being with them...taking part in the things they wanted me to take part in.

Incidentally, they never allowed me to become involved in the main drag of military work because of a back problem that has bothered me all of my life. I missed a lot of things as a result of it, but I've been blessed with the privilege of working with some of the finest people in the world. My wife has contributed as much to the students she has taught as any teacher around, because even today, they will come by and ask if there's anything they can do for us. They love her; she loves them. This has become her trademark.

FORSYTHE:; What is your wife's name?

HOBGOOD: Francis Allen Hobgood. She taught Latin at Central High school in Clarksville and Central High school in Murfreesboro. I met her at Central High school here in Murfreesboro. We were married on July 5, 1933. I jokingly tell her that July 4, 1933 was my last day of independence! She had a sick uncle who lived at his home all of his life. He and his wife wanted us to get married in their home and that was the best way day to set it up. So, we were married July 5, 1933. She tells people we haven't hit each other yet! (both laugh) We're still getting along.

FORSYTHE: What was your aunt name that went to MTSU?

HOBGOOD:; F. M. Beasley Hobgood. Oh, she went back when I was XXX.

FORSYTHE: Does she tell any stories about going to school out here?

HOBGOOD: No, I didn't get anything from her about going to school. She liked the people very much. She introduced me to the campus and to the President. She knew Mr. Line who was president at that time. He had been there when she was there. She knew him and took me in to meet him, and we sat around and talked. The next person I met was one of the basketball players...he was on scholarship. His name was J. stroke several years before and ended up in a nursing home in Hendersonville. When we'd go down to see him, Dr. Kenneth Ezell and I we'd