

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
WITH
HORACE BEASLEY

26 JULY 1995

MURFREESBORO, TENNESSEE

INTERVIEWED BY REGINA FORSYTHE
FOR THE Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
INTERVIEW #QMS.038

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
HORACE BEASLEY**

Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW #QMS.038

FORSYTHE: This tape is part of the Q.M. Smith Collection designated as QMS.1995.38. This is Regina Forsythe I am interviewing Mr. Horace Beasley. Today is Wednesday, July 26, 1995. The interview is being conducted in the Gore Research Center, Room 111 of the Ned McWherter Learning Resource Center. 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 publications.

FORSYTHE: Is that all right with your Mr. Beasley

BEASLEY: Yes.

FORSYTHE: What is your full name and birth date?

BEASLEY: Horace Cully Beasley Jr. November 18. 1923, Murfreesboro.

FORSYTHE: What is your father's name and occupation?

BEASLEY: Horace Sr., he worked for the railroad as a dispatcher for many years and also worked for the truck freighting business in Nashville for the latter years of his life.

FORSYTHE: Your mother's name and her occupation.

BEASLEY: Ethel King Beasley. She was a housewife.

FORSYTHE: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

BEASLEY: Yes, I have an older sister Louise Beasley Hall and my brother's name is William K Beasley.

FORSYTHE: What is your wife's name and occupation?

BEASLEY: Mary Beth Beasley. She was a secretary here for the Dean of Liberal Arts.

FORSYTHE: What were the years?

BEASLEY: Well, I am not real sure. First she was a secretary for Layne Boutwell over in the speech and drama department. Then she moved over to secretary to Dr. Clay

Tucker who was Dean of Liberal Arts. He [Dr. Tucker] was followed by Bob Corlew. She was there during his tenure and then the present Dean in John McDaniel. She retired in 1988, but I am not real sure. She was over there most of the time that she was employed here--almost all of the time. It was like 18 years or so, something like that.

FORSYTHE: What are you children's names?

BEASLEY: Marilyn Beasley, Don Beasley, and Horace Cully III.

FORSYTHE: What degrees do you have?

BEASLEY: I have a Master's degree plus 45 semester hours. I got it [the degree] at Peabody college in Nashville. I majored in music education.

FORSYTHE: Why did you choose music?

BEASLEY: Well, it was always [what I] wanted to do. So, I started out in high school here at Murfreesboro Central and [I]was in the band. I played in the band here when I was a senior in high school in 1940. [I played]here with the college band and then I was here in '41 and '42. Then I went into the military service and I was in a military band. When I got out of the service in '46, I went back to Peabody college and I majored in music. I played professionally with the Nashville Sympathy Orchestra and also with a number shows, a state fair, in shrine circus and some on radio and in various dance bands, around this area. While I was here in school before World War II, I played with a band that was made up of campus students--Louis Brinkley was the name of it.

FORSYTHE: Lewis Brinkley?

BEASLEY: Yes, it was his band. He bought the music [and] paid for the transportation. He owned the stands, the light and the whole thing. He booked it, so it was his. There was another band on campus at the same time led by Tom Hugley. That is what we did we played for dances all over this part of the country.

FORSYTHE: How did you come to work here at MTSU?

BEASLEY: Well, I don't know the sequence of events, but I had known Neal Wright after the was at Peabody--just slightly. I taught in Nashville at Cohen High School. I was a band director. [Also],I was president of the Middle Tennessee Orchestra Association. So, Neal called me up one day and asked me if I would be interested. So I came up and talked with him and talked with NC Beasley. Then, [I spoke] with some other faculty members that I had known previously and then with Mr. Smith. They offered me the job and I accepted it. So, I don't know what their thought processes were.

FORSYTHE: Are you related to Dean Beasley?

BEASLEY: No, I am not related to the Dean. [However], I have known him almost all my life--of course he is deceased now. As a matter of fact, we lived out on North Maple Street. Memorial Boulevard goes right through where I lived. Dean Beasley live out on the right just beyond Middle Tennessee Christian [School]. In fact, the big house is still there and they are building a bank in the side yard of it right now. So, we went to the Methodist church as he, his children, and his wife did. I knew them all. His name was NC Beasley and my father's name was HC . So, they [the postal service] would get [our] mail mixed up and deliver some of ours to him and his to us and so [on]. When I came back in 1957, which is when I came back up here in June of '57, the college had a dairy at that time. They actually delivered milk to, I suppose, mostly employees. We took milk from the college dairy here and they delivered it home. So the first month after I was here, they sent Dean Beasley my milk bill. So, he put it in the campus mail and sent it back and said "don't start this again." So, I have known the family and of course I knew Bill well. He passed away about three years ago, that is Dean's son. He was on the English faculty here at the same time I was in the music department.

FORSYTHE: How was that milk from the dairy?

BEASLEY: It was fine. It was homogenized and they had it in glass bottles. We had this little case in the back door and it was insulated. They would come up and pick up the bottles [that] you had in it and put fresh milk in there. I don't know whether they did it every day. I don't remember now, but they did it often enough to keep you supplied with milk.

FORSYTHE: What classes did you teach?

BEASLEY: Well, I taught a lot of different ones. For the first ten years I was here, from '57 to '67, I did campus school band. We had at that all of our music school teachers over there and we also had a choral general music teacher over there who would do the people in that area. That is where, of course Mrs. Smith was secretary over there. I don't know if you were aware of that. So, I had known both she and Mr. Smith prior, but I really got acquainted with Mrs. Smith during that ten year period. So, I supervised student-teachers [and I] taught band to the campus school people-- grades five through eight in those days. I also taught private instruction on trumpet, trombone, baritone horn and tuba, for music majors over here at the University. I taught a class called Instrumentation, which is band and orchestral arranging. [In addition], I taught a class called brass Familiarization. [This was a class] for people who were preparing to be teachers in band. so I did [teach classes] for all the people who were preparing to be teachers in band and some other supporting classes [that would] qualify them to teach those instruments in the public schools. I [occasionally taught] Music Appreciation. [Also], for about fifteen years, I taught one [course] in the Survey of Popular Music in America. I also did some seminars with student-teachers and I did some summer work shops

and things of that nature. Those are the primary. In the early days, I had to teach whatever had to be taught if Neal Wrigth couldn't find somebody else to do it. We were not as specialized in the early days as the faculty is now, where you have a specialist in this that and the other.

FORSYTHE: Where was your office?

BEASLEY: Well, when I first came up here, we were in what is now the Alumni Center. It was converted to a music building with some additions and partitions after World War II. It had been a cafeteria when I was a student here. Now, they have redone it and torn out a lot of the additions that were made in the alumni center. It was in a, what I would think of as a closet about half the size of this room, [referring to room 111B of the Gore center] and it had one of those upright pianos in there [with] a desk, a filing cabinet, and two chairs. They [MTSU] had re-done the floor out in what was the lobby. The inside of that building now does not look very much like it did when it was a music building. So, I don't know what their guidelines were for designing it to look like the way it does now. Anyway, they had a good size lobby and the students would sit out there. [However], coming under the door down into my office for some reason or other was an incline. So I would be sitting there teaching a student and a cigarette butt would come rolling down into that office down that incline. My office in the Saunders Fine Arts Building was 110, for most of my time. When they built the Wright Building addition to it, then they sealed up the window in my office and built a stairwell to it. So, I moved across into what had been the Music Office. [It] was a really nice office. It had two rooms--a closet and it even had a private bathroom! In my office, I did private instruction, seminars, [and] a lot of student advising over the years. Also, I would meet prospective student-teachers and parents of the children who were contemplating entering the music department or the band. I forgot to mention that I was also the concert band director for seventeen years. I forgot that.

FORSYTHE: Was that a student organization?

BEASLEY: Yes. At that time, they had a director who was Joseph T Smith. [He] did the marching band and I did the concert band. [They] were two different organizations [and] of course they met at different times of the year.

FORSYTHE: Where would you play?

BEASLEY: Well, when we were in the old, cafeteria music building, we would give concerts in the spring out on the front porch of that present building. The porch is still there. Well, not actually on the porch. It was out on that concrete apron out in front of it. We gave a number of concerts there. Also, we would go to the auditorium, there in Old Main, as you go in the front door of that building. If you went straight across that big wide hall, you went into the auditorium. From the second floor, there was a balcony. If you went out into the hall in that area, it was

the balcony of the auditorium. That part of the building backed up into what is now the business building. That was the old gymnasium. What they [MTSU] did is just gutted it except for the walls and built classrooms and one thing or the other. The music department was in the basement underneath that auditorium. So we gave a number of concerts in there. A little bit later we gave a lot of them in the Tennessee room. When they took that Auditorium and broke it up into classrooms and things, then the only place you could go on campus was the Tennessee room in the James Union building. So we gave many concerts there. Then, we would take them on tours of high school and give concerts in various schools around the middle Tennessee area.

FORSYTHE: What kind of music did you play?

BEASLEY: Well, a great variety of band music from marches to overtures, symphonies, specialty things, some novelty music and some band accompaniment. [We played] just a great variety.

FORSYTHE: What years were you a student here?

BEASLEY: I enrolled in the fall of 1941 and I was here during the '41 '42 year. I was here fall of '42 and then I went into the military in January of '43. Prior to that, they used to rehearse band down in that basement with Gabrielle Valdez. He was the band director. So I played in the marching and the concert band the year before I entered in here.

FORSYTHE: Did you graduate from here?

BEASLEY: No I graduated from Peabody. When I first got out of the service they didn't have the music department. It was in a state of flux [because] they were in the process of hiring some staff. The only full-time person, left over from when I had been here before, was Miss E May Saunders. For whom the fine arts building is named.

FORSYTHE: What did students do for fun?

BEASLEY: Well of course they had a lot of recreation. They had tennis courts and a variety of things that they did. Well, I played in a lot of dances. That group, that I played with at Christmas of 1941, we played here on campus and at various places around twelve nights in a row. Students did that sort of thing, but they had various clubs and so on and things like that. But I was pretty well occupied with music and doing things in those groups.

FORSYTHE: What did you do on the weekends?

BEASLEY: I played dance jobs.

FORSYTHE: Did you have a job while you were a student?

BEASLEY: I worked in Nashville for a trucking company loading and unloading trucks. My father went down everyday and I went down with him and worked on a truck dock. I worked as a stock boy at F.W. Woolworth's, [which was] on the square for a period of time. I worked one summer for what was then the Carnation milk plant. [If]you go across North West Broad and Memorial and cross a light up, there is a place where Hayne's building supply is now. That big white building was part of the Carnation milk plant. I washed trucks right under where that viaduct is now. There wasn't a road there, and I loaded box cars and all kind of stuff like that. But then, as I became a little more skilled at playing, I got out of that. I made my living playing an instrument.

FORSYTHE: Tell me about E May Saunders

BEASLEY: She taught Theory and Music History. She was a very serious person, but also very warm and understanding. She made her classes interesting and fun. Miss E May was sort of an original and I don't guess there was another one like her and I don't think there ever will be again. We had some funny experiences. She, for example, organized a male choir. They had a chorus, that she conducted, but this was sort of just on the side. I don't know. It had about twenty or twenty four men in it. We sang a lot of things and gave some programs and so on. [Miss E. May] lived down here on Tennessee Boulevard across East Main street on the left down there. She had a brother who lived there with her. As far as I know, she was never married and I am not sure whether he was or not. Anyway, [her brother] was retired and wasn't doing anything and she used to. I lived over on Bilbro, which was about two blocks away, and I used to walk down East Main and down Tennessee Boulevard. Sometimes, she would come along after lunch and pick me up. Then, I learned to try to time it so I didn't get a ride with her. She didn't pay a whole lot of attention to her driving and I was a afraid of it. A number of years later, after she had retired, she used to come over a visit some on campus. [Miss E May] had worked with Neal Wright and she had known me as a student. She had known Joe Smith also as a student and Margaret Wright. So she would come in over there and she would look down the hall and for some reason she would call him "hound dog" and it didn't matter who was around she would holler "hey hound dog, come down here I want to talk to you!" She called me sonny boy. We didn't get offended or anything [because] she was jolly about the whole thing. That is just the way she was. After I was back up here teaching, she went to town one day. She had a reputation about not being real careful about her driving. So she parked the car and ran it over the curb into a store front. I know this is true because Whitney Stegall told me it was but it wasn't her fault that she did that. The accelerator spring broke off and she couldn't stop it. [Whitney Stegall] was a lawyer at that time. [Miss E May] got out and a crowd gathered around. She wasn't hurt or anything and she says "Somebody call my lawyer and tell him to take care of this because I have a hair appointment!" So she went to her hair appointment. That is the kind of person she was; she was terrific to know. Let's see. Of course Gabrielle Valdez was the band director. He was born

in Zacatexas, Mexico and was educated down there. At some point in his life, he came to this country and he was in the army band for a long time. He wound up in the National Guard--I think in Nashville. Anyway, he was a terrific musician and he spoke English, but it was sort of a broken fashion. So back in the middle thirties, Dr. Mebane he was a band director sort of. Actually, he was a scientist, but he had played cello. So Q. M. Smith told him to organize a band. He started it[and] he got together some people who played like James Lokey. They call him Bud. He knew a little bit more about bands than Mebane did, but Bud organized the first marching band. I think there were 13 strong and [they're] in a picture in one of the old annuals. I've got a Xerox copy of that band that did the first performance over here on Jones Field. Well anyway, Tom Hugley and some other students had known Mr. Valdez in the National Guard and so they persuaded Mr. Smith to hire him to come in to do the band-- which he did. He attracted a world of good musicians and he was such a fine musician himself. Incidentally, if you have not talked with Pete Dill(well it is Madison Dill, he was present in the band and he knew Mr. Smith), I am sure he would have a lot of things to contribute. He lived, until last year, on East Main street. Then he and Charlotte sold that and bought a condo. I don't know what the address is ,but he is in town.

FORSYTHE: What about Ruby Taylor Sanders?

BEASLEY: Mrs. Sanders, I believe she was part time. There were only three teaching in the music department--Mrs. Sanders, Mrs. Saunders, and Mr. Valdez. Mrs. Sanders lived over there next to the campus school. Her husband Altman had a jewelry store downtown. [Mrs. Sanders] had taught previously down at old Tennessee college which was located where Central middle school is now. The building is gone and they replaced it after it burned during World War II. The Tennessee College for Women had gone under and they moved over there. They gradually built a new building for it, but she had an orchestra over there. It was a girls school. So, then she came over here and of course none of the orchestras have had enough string players because there are not very many string players in the public schools. So they historically have brought in community people which Mrs. Sanders did as well. Mrs. Sanders didn't actually conduct the orchestra. I suppose she didn't feel confident in her conducting. She did rehearse the orchestra and she would frequently bring in a guest conductor for concerts. I played in the orchestra and they had some players from Nashville because they didn't have enough players. The wind players they usually had enough on campus. Mrs. Sanders taught classes in String Familiarization which would be a counterpart to what I did in Brass. She was a good violinist and she played a lot in the Methodist church downtown. She had a knack for being able to get students and other folks to do things that she needed to have done. She was a very nice person. I knew her family and her sister and her sister's children and her sister's grandchildren. I don't know when she passed away; it has been a number of years now. She was sort of a red headed lady. Anyway I enjoyed my

association with her. [Those were] the three who were teaching. Are you interested in other teachers?

FORSYTHE: Yes

BEASLEY: Clayton James, I knew him quite well. after I came here to teach, I was on some of his committees.

FORSYTHE: What about Horace Jones?

BEASLEY: Well, he wrote a number of text books. One in particular, an arithmetic book that was used in the elementary schools for many years. [Also], he was quite helpful in getting things done in athletics and so they named that field after him. He used to live down here on Tennessee Boulevard, down toward the corner of Main Street.

FORSYTHE: Tell me about Philip Cheek

BEASLEY: He was a very serious sort of fellow. He didn't laugh or chuckle much except very rarely. He was well versed in literature--all sorts of literature. He really loved literature whether it was poetry or prose. I recall one time he had been talking to a class. Back in those days teachers, if they saw a student not paying attention, they would try to do something to get their attention. So he had been talking about a composer, Frederick Chopin, and he noticed one student wasn't paying attention. So he called him by name and s[aid] "what nationality was Chopin?" The only thing this fellow heard was Chopin and he said "Chinese" and that is the only time I ever heard Dr. Cheek laugh. He went into the service before I did. He wrote some of the faculty on campus and said the he was fascinated by the military slang. He was apparently jotting down all of this stuff so I don't know what happened to him. I never heard from him after he left for the military service.

FORSYTHE: Dr. Davis

BEASLEY: He was another one that was completely serious. You had better go to class and you better pay attention when you were in class. He had that severe look about him that was no nonsense.

FORSYTHE: BB Gracy

BEASLEY: I was in physical education with him. In fact two or three times, he taught tumbling and I had it like Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday mornings. He taught tumbling and I had it at eight o'clock in the morning. I got to where I could hardly eat breakfast because of all that turning over and he had a variety of things that you had to do in there. I had him at least two or three times. It has kind of run together what we did in various classes. In one of them(I guess this was

probably the spring of '42, sometime along there, after the war started) Mr. Q. M. Smith decided that everyone should get into good physical condition. So they had great emphasis in physical education. This class, it was either the winter of the spring, what we did was to go out on this track (located in exactly the same place, it was cinders in those days) and run. In order to pass the course by the end of twelve weeks, you had to be able to run five miles. Well, I managed to do it. Mr. Smith, as I understand it, had everyone [who was not] in a physical education class go out on the football field and take calisthenics. So you had to get some kind of major excuse not to show up. They would check it I assume, but I would never go out there because I was always in the physical education class. I heard a lot of people talk about their experience out there and some of the older students felt it was a hardship.

FORSYTHE: Knox McClarin

BEASLEY: When I was here is when they started having an advisor. Up until that time, Dean Beasley had done all the advising and he did part of the time I was here. Then somewhere along in there Knox McClarin got into the picture. He would call students in and you would go over what you were supposed to do and take and so on. Dean Beasley used to sign off on everything. He was actually in charge of everything that Mr. Smith wasn't, but he would look over what you planned to take and approve it and so on. But anyway, McClarin was over in that old library. I met with him several times. Then later on after the war, he was principal of the Peabody Demonstration School. I got to know him again, down there, then I met him some after he had retired from there. I can't remember exactly what the circumstances were, but of course I was teaching in Nashville and I guess I ran into him some way or another down there.

FORSYTHE: Bonnie McHenry

BEASLEY: I worked on some things with her after I came back up here. She did not retire until after Quill Cope had become president. So I remember Miss Bonnie. She kept track of everything for Q. M. Smith-- his appointments, where he was supposed to be as well as reservations for all of his facilities around the campus. She was supposed to know everything and I guess she did.

FORSYTHE: What do you remember about Q. M. Smith?

BEASLEY: Well, I knew Mr. Smith soon after he came here and I believe he came here from Tennessee Tech. I didn't have an occasion to meet with him very much, but I would see [him] around nearly every day. You were speaking about campus recreation as the war began. I entered here in September of '41 and the war began on December 7th. So immediately it had an effect on the student body here. So, they had an organized student recreation club and one thing and another. They had dances, in the old gym over here pretty often. So all at once they couldn't get anybody to play for them and the group I was in and the other group, Tom

Hugley's group, broke up because people were gone. So Miss E May Saunders asked me to see if I could organize a group to play for these different groups. So in the process, I had a conference with Mr. Smith about it and I don't remember very much of the details about it. He did it at least for a term or two until I left. So I don't know what they did after that because most every body was gone. Mr. Smith, to look at him and see him operate, you would have to say that he was very focused. He was in charge of everything, but on the other hand he was a pretty deep thinker and did a lot of things to smooth the way for students for their benefit. In a lot of ways, he was Old School and they would say that he carried the budget around in his head. Of course, he did not have a whole lot of money to deal with. Salaries were fairly low and when I came up here I think I started at four hundred seventy five dollars a month. That was pretty good salary [and] they were gradually creeping up. I am sure he suffered a lot of criticism for things he did. I know, for example, he had them build the James Union Building. Of course, a lot of the faculty thought that was terrible and that they needed to do some other things with the money. That is always the way faculties are. What ever you spend money for ,somebody thinks it ought to be spent some other way. That [James Union Building] proved to be a real plus because it was a place for conferences and meetings of various sorts as well as student recreation. So he pushed that through against some criticism and he didn't have much money to work with comparatively to today. He built this fine arts building and that building was built for two hundred thousand dollars. So he got a lot out of the building for the amount of money he had. For example, I was on a committee where we would have some input in it and he said, 'I think steel beams would come from the plant twenty two feet long so there will be no on-the-job cutting of steel. Everything has got to fit the standard lengths that come out of the factory.' So they did and that sort of straightened things out. He said "we don't have enough money to build an auditorium. We will let that old one do for a while, the other than he was going to do about that building. It was going to be art and in fact still is, on the top floor. They had an art gallery on the second floor. Well, originally it was supposed to face north and go lengthwise east/west and at some point near the end he reoriented the building and made it face west and the back east. So that upset the art people because they wanted northern lights. It had another ramification later on. That is the dramatic arts building wasn't back there and in the front yard was an old barracks type building that came from the Smyrna Air Base. Anyway, all the windows that faced East got the morning sun and really heated up the place and all the afternoon sun came in on the other side and it was a hot box. I taught in there for years and years without any air-conditioning. In fact, it is still not air conditioned. So anyway that was a problem with that. He in one meeting, after I first came up here, he had decided he wanted to increase the size of the band. So he offered some band scholarships just to recruit students to play in band which was very useful and existed to any significant degree prior to that. He did say that he wanted a good band, a big band and he implied that if we didn't do it, good bye. So that is what I meant when I said he was tough on one side and very oriented to getting the best things for people. He did a lot of community service too. Most teachers have no idea to

what extent he went to organize across the state the teacher retirement system. I understand that back during World War II he traveled by bus all over the state to various meetings helping to get that thing going. He also helped to push certification. They had a situation where you could go to college two year and take certain courses and be certified to teach. so they had a had along with Dean Beasley in increasing the certification requirements. He believed in some things and whatever he believed in he believed in it strongly. They had what they call chapel in that old auditorium and I can't remember if it was once or three times a week. I kind of think it may have been three times a week, then they changed it back to one time a week, in which freshman were required assigned seats in that auditorium. You would go and they would check role to see if you were there. I don't know, in those days, people didn't challenge authority very much like they do now, so you just went. They would have a program and they would have speakers, Upperclassmen could go if they wanted to. They had graduation out on the football field here and faculty would sit over on the west side in the shadow and the graduates would sit a little lower than that. They would build a platform out beyond where the track is now and bring in trees and make greenery all around behind it. They would have graduation out there and they did that for several years after I came. But if you were a faculty member you went to graduation and you wore a robe and the whole thing. you did it and he insisted that you do it. He also helped the county school system. They didn't have a lot of staff either and he was very experienced in construction projects and so on. So he served as an advisor as I understand it to them. He just volunteered to help them in their school design planning and so on. So he did have a lot of community involvement and was well known. Mr. Smith had a speech impediment and I understand it resulted in an experience he had in World War II. I never did hear [anybody] ridicule him for that because the man was so substantive and every body knew that. Also, he was sort of an imposing figure. So, when I was a freshman here in '41, I was known to a whole lot of people in school because I had played in the band, previously. They used to have freshman initiation and I am sure Mr. Smith was aware of it, but I don't know what his position was on it. They would do things like have you get a wooden paddle about so long and you would have to get fifty names signed on it from upper class men. Every time one of them would sign it you would bent over and one of them would give you a good whop. They also had a belt line. I went through a belt line in front of Old Main and I ran the gauntlet with a whole bunch of people. I thought there were hundreds of them, but I don't know how many there were actually. Also in Jones Hall, it was a boy's dormitory, of course they didn't have those two wings on the end. The reason I thought of this was because of Mr. Smith's speech impediment. I couldn't get out of it because they all knew me you see. They had freshman come and they would put them in a room with somebody and you would go down to kangaroo court. So one of the gimmicks they had, you were blindfolded, is that they would introduce President Q.M. Smith was going to be there. I was very honored that he had decided that he was going to attend this court. They had someone that could speak a lot like him to make a speech. But no one made fun of Mr. Smith.