

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.039

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.039

FORSYTHE: This tape is part of the Q.M. Smith Collection designated as QMS.1995.39. This is Regina Forsythe. I am interviewing Horace Beasley. Today is Wednesday, July 26, 1995. The interview is being conducted in the Gore Research Center Room 111, in the Ned McWherter Learning Resource Center. Let's talk about the faculty while you were here as a faculty member. Mrs. Ortrun Gilbert?

BEASLEY: She taught piano. Later, of course she was German. She taught German and I believe Phil Howard. Have you interviewed him?

FORSYTHE: Not yet

BEASLEY: His wife Vera was Ortrude's cousin and she came to visit. She and Phil got married and then both of them taught in the Foreign Language Department. [Mrs.] Ortrune, she left the music department and taught languages. She was part time in music, but I am not positive what her status was. I think it was part-time and she had an opportunity to get a full time job in the Foreign Language Department. She taught over there for many years.

FORSYTHE: Charles Hansford

BEASLEY: He was here two or three years and then he left. My first ten years, I taught about two hours a day over at the campus school. At the same time, Hansford taught General Music and Choral Activities over at the campus school. He was here maybe three years and he taught Music Education classes over here on the University campus. He also started a radio program that lasted for a number of years. Many of the public elementary schools did not have a music teacher, but they could get a radio. So he organized and did music education lessons aimed at the fourth or fifth grade or both and they were broadcast weekly. They would do the tapes here and I think that the schools would pay some sort of money to get their local radio to reimburse the cost of doing those things. Then [they would] get their local radio station to play it at a certain time. Then they[the schools] would listen in to that one and then the next week they would have another one and so on.

FORSYTHE: Did that program have a name?

BEASLEY: Music time I think, but I am not sure that Hansford named it that. Dr. Earl Hinton(he came after Smith but he came after I did) continued that. He named it[the radio program] Music Time. They published a book to go with it and they even did it. They did that up until the state Department of Education began requiring sixty minutes of music a week. They also began in the basic foundation to fund music teachers for elementary schools. Then they discontinued that. Music Time, but I am not sure that that is what Hansford called it. I don't remember what he called it.

FORSYTHE: Layne Boutwell

BEASLEY: He was not in our department. He taught in Speech and Drama. He is still living over here. You might interview him if you haven't because he was the Department Head over there for a long time when Q. M. Smith was president. Layne was a very fine gentleman. He organized the Drama Department and got some staff and so on. He also helped design the Dramatic Arts Building which they named for him. He was a professional big-heart. I worked with him on a number of things. [After the Dramatic Arts Building was constructed in place of the Student Union Building], we had are concerts over there. So that was a problem because they liked to do plays. When they did a play, with the scenery and so on, we had to coordinate things very carefully with him. [We also had to coordinate things] with Dorothy Tucker who was the theater director and a good friend of mine and my wife's, so we worked with him.

FORSYTHE: Earl Hinton

BEASLEY: I first knew Earl in college [at] Peabody right after World War II. Then I taught at Cone High School and he came there as one of the two Choral Directors at Cone High School. So I knew him there and then I came up here. A little bit later he came up here. So he did Music Education as I mentioned. He continued that radio program for a while and then he became Director of the Orchestra for a long period of time. He retired about a year and a half or two years ago.

FORSYTHE: Warner Rose

BEASLEY: Warner was the first full-time piano teacher that we had. He was here a couple of years and he went back to Yale. I presume he is still there.

FORSYTHE: Ray Bills

BEASLEY: He succeeded Warner Rose as a piano teacher. He is still doing that.

FORSYTHE: John Duke

BEASLEY: I first knew John when he was in High School at Father Ryan in Nashville. He played saxophone and clarinet. He came to Peabody College while I was still

there or right near the end when I graduated. We played on a lot of dance bands together from time to time and he became a Band Director down at Lewisburg. Then when I left Cohen High School, there was a fellow that succeeded me, who became a principle, Taylor Hagan. There was one that came in for another year and then John Duke came in about a year and a half after I did. Then he was there for a number of years and then after Ken Pace passed away. Duke came up here and is still teaching woodwinds.

FORSYTHE: Philip Howard

BEASLEY: Phil was here when I came. He was a music history and theory [teacher]. [He also] taught some piano. He did the same thing until he retired. He finally got out of the piano business when we got a full time piano teacher and he concentrated on music theory history and literature. He was here for several years and you need to talk him because he had known Q. M. Smith.

FORSYTHE: Lawrence Harvin

BEASLEY: I am not sure who he followed as a string teacher now I have forgotten. He became the Orchestra Director after Earl Hinton. [He] taught string instrument and he is still doing that.

FORSYTHE: Margaret Wright

BEASLEY: I knew Margaret slightly in Nashville of course. Margaret was one of the most talented musicians we had around this part of the country. She used to write arrangements for WSM radio. They had a staff orchestra and they wrote arrangements for them. She graduated from Vanderbilt at an early age like 18 or 19 or something like that. She and Neal got married and they went up to Bristol. Neal was Band Director up there and then he went into the military service. [Margaret] went in the Red Cross and she wound up in the boon docks as she says in Northern India. She got out of the service and they came back. Neal went to Peabody and I was there at them same time. I knew them some. So then in the fall of '46 Neal came up here and became in charge of the music department. Margaret could do a number of things. She could teach organ. She could teach piano. [Margaret] was interested in sacred harp singers and vocal groups. She was also a professional quality marimba player and so she taught what ever needed to be taught. On the side, she coached Swiss Flags for the marching band. So, she was a really knowledgeable and talented person. So anyway, on the side, she rides horses. She is always busy she never loaf around. Neal was kind of easy going and laid back. Also, [he was] extremely talented with a really good judgment about things.

FORSYTHE: Kenneth Pace

BEASLEY: Kenneth Pace was an employee here as a Band Director. He had also taught woodwind instruments and clarinet. He had been a Band Director before. The way he had done things before apparently did not mix with what was expected here. So, Neal had been the Choral Director here a while and then he got another fellow to come in for a year or two. He left and went into Missouri some place. So Neal wanted to get a woodwind teacher here so he got Ken. Ken's technique did not suit well for college. I suppose he had never had a college band. In a college band, you had to do it quick. You have got to teach what you've got to teach in a very minimum amount of time. You don't have the kind of time that you have with high school people. What they decided was that Neal did the band himself, finished out the marching season, and then did the band again. As I understand it, Ken started doing woodwinds which he [could] do really well. So he did that until he passed away.

FORSYTHE: Mary Scott

BEASLEY: Mary taught class piano and some private piano primarily over the years. She was a graduate of Tennessee College and she got a masters degree from Columbia University. Her husband taught in public schools and was later Supervising Instructor of the county. I am not sure exactly what her status was. She wasn't a full-time teacher in one sense, but I am not sure. She retired. She did a good job. She is still around. I see her every now and then. I don't think she was full time. I think she was on half time, but I think they may have had some sort of problem with what her status was with the changing of legal requirement for employees. So anyway, she let them off easy. Mary played a lot of accompaniments as a volunteer and as an organist down at the Methodist church for a long time. But she was kind of a pioneer in the idea of getting a number of students and teaching them as a group. Now, we did that in band instruments all the time, but she did that in piano to have a group piano lesson. The traditional approach for piano teachers is one-on-one so any way she did that for many years.

FORSYTHE: Joseph Smith

BEASLEY: I knew Joe slightly when he was the band director down at Winchester. He was in school here right after World War II and I was in Nashville at that time. I didn't have a lot of contact with Neal and those people up here when he was a student here. Then, he went down to Georgia and came back. At the same time they employed me to do the concert band, they employed him to do the marching band. We worked very closely and cooperatively together for many years. I always had him conduct the concert band some and I went to all the marching band rehearsals. We just helped each other out over the period of time when I was still in the band business. He was a percussionist, but had also worked on a number of other instruments. [Joe] taught some classes in what they call band organization. [He also taught] one in marching band and some beginning instrument classes. [Joe] also did a number of clinics and was very innovative in marching band techniques. He organized the Contest of Champions which is a

high school event. He published some music and wrote some marching band shows for high schools. So, he in the last few years, started a community band, I think. They call it Middle Tennessee Bands or something like that. [It is] a volunteer band that meets in the evening and performs around the country. Joe retired here two or three years ago. I have forgotten exactly when he retired, but anyway we had a good working relationship for many years.

FORSYTHE: Herald Slagle

BEASLEY: Well, he was here for a year or two. I am not sure how long. He taught at the campus school and some music education classes over here. I don't remember when that was. He didn't have an instrument specialty that I am aware of. He didn't have a specialization so they replaced him with I don't remember who. That has gotten kind of hazy.

FORSYTHE: Harriet Patterson

BEASLEY: Harriet Patterson was a part-time voice teacher and a very good one. She lives here in town, and she taught here for a number of years. If Neal Wright had an overload, more students than he could handle, then they would have these adjunct voice teachers to come in part-time and take them. [They did this] so that people could almost always get voice lessons if they wanted to. So she did that for many years.

FORSYTHE: Tom Naylor

BEASLEY: He came here in the late sixties, I guess, and I left the campus school. I guess it was probably sixty-seven, some where in there. He took that campus school thing and then taught trumpet. I had taught everything up until he came. He took the trumpet lessons because I had like twenty-five or so private lessons in addition to my regular classes. So I was working days and nights and everything trying to do all that. So he did that. Later he did some ensembles and he taught some other classes. When he retired, he became the department head and was up until a year or two after I retired. He is still teaching of course and he runs the Governor's School in the summertime.

FORSYTHE: What is the Governor's School?

BEASLEY: Under governor Alexander, they organized under the department of education some special schools for people with exceptional talents. They had a Governor's School for the arts. Here they have different Governor's schools located around various campuses. I don't remember the name of all of them. Anyway, they invite in 150 or 250 college juniors and seniors and give them instructions in some of the specialties. The Governor's School here has dance and drama and music. I believe those are the three things. So they invite talented high school

people in and give them special instruction for a month, at no cost to them. They have several of these schools. This is just one of them.

FORSYTHE: Michael Salzman

BEASLEY: He was here for three of four years. He did the campus school music and some music education classes. He went back to El Paso. His home is in El Paso. I believe his father had a music store and he passed away. So he went back to operate the music store.

FORSYTHE: Jerry Perkins

BEASLEY: He is still here. He was the second full-time piano teacher that we had and he still does that. Ray Mills was the first one and we had much more demand for private instruction piano. So Jerry was the second one and he is still here.

FORSYTHE: Marianna Harving

BEASLEY: Well, that is Larry's wife and she was a part time teacher occasionally with string instruments.

FORSYTHE: Paula Cox Kilgore

BEASLEY: Paula wrote us a letter back in the early 1960's and she applied for a scholarship. Her father was in the air force, in the air transport command and they had been all over everywhere. At the time, she was in Abilene Texas. So, Joe Smith and I read her letter and she was wanting to have an audition for a scholarship. So [from] the tone of the letter, the way it was worded, we could tell [she] was a super individual. This is not some ordinary individual. So she came up and auditioned. She proved to be just like her letter sounded. So she was on scholarship. I was still at the campus school during her tenure as a student. She worked for me. She came over to the campus school and I used to have prospective teachers come over there as a part of their [interview]. She had to perform some work for the money. So she was one among many who came over there who would teach instruments. We had two or three rooms available to us down in the basement and she taught clarinet. Upon occasion when I wasn't there, she taught band. Also, we had a lot of old equipment and she would overhaul clarinets, re-pad them, and re-cork them and all that sort of thing. Then she got married to Ed Kilgore and she went down to Georgia. He was in graduate school there. Then they came back up here and she still teaches in Murfreesboro city schools. For a number of years, she taught band, then she became a librarian. She is the librarian over at Hobgood Elementary right now, but she is also a level three teacher. She does the band at Hobgood on the side. She is a very busy person. She helps the city schools in their library program get various types of equipment, audio visual aids, and organization of their library program. She also edits the newsletter for the band of blue alumni club on the side, just to give her

something to do. In fact, she was by my house the other day to pick up some stuff that I had for her. She is a super individual. She is also in the Band of Blue hall of Fame.

FORSYTHE: Matt Ward

BEASLEY: Matt was a student here and was a percussionist--a very good one. After he graduated, he went up in Ohio. I believe it was in Ohio and he taught up there for several years. He married Pat Ward, Pat Porterfield, and then they came back down here. He was the percussion instructor for a while, then. He is in real estate now.

FORSYTHE: Pat Porterfield Ward

BEASLEY: Pat, she is the staff accompanist in the music department now. I first met her when she was in the fourth grade and I started her on clarinet in Nashville. [She is] a very talented individual and she was a good piano player in the fourth grade. She was in my high school band at Cohne. Then when I came up here, she came up and majored in piano and voice. She and Matt were married. She graduated before he did, then their first son came while they were still here. So they had a little bit of a problem with what to do with him while they were in school. So my wife kept him during the day. Pat had perfect pitch. She was a really terrific piano player and she sight-reads music very well. [She also] plays well, which is why they had her as an accompanist. She doesn't have to spend a long time figuring out this great variety of literature that they give her to use. So she was also a pianist down at the first Baptist church and has been for a number of years. Down there, Matt sings in the choir and also plays trumpet some when they have brass ensembles. But I have known Pat since she was in the fourth grade and as I said before she is the staff accompanist here.

FORSYTHE: Lynn Hutcheson

BEASLEY: Well, I don't remember when he came, but it had been a number of years now. He was a horn teacher and he also was interested in electronic music and theory. So he did those things. Primarily I guess, we got him here because the number of private lessons in brass continued to increase. So, Tom Naylor was teaching trumpets and we had a horn teacher and a combination theory teacher. I continued to teach the other three low brass instruments. That is what he did and I presume is still doing it.

FORSYTHE: What years did you work here?

BEASLEY: I came in June of '57 and retired in May of '89.

FORSYTHE: Let me ask you about the presidents that were here while you were working here.

BEASLEY: Well of course Q. M. Smith was the first one and he was followed by Quill Cope and then by Scarlett and then Sam Ingram. Then we had an interim president Dr. Prescott and then of course Dr. Walker. Well of course, Dr., Walker and Prescott came after I left.

FORSYTHE: What do you remember about Dr. Cope?

BEASLEY: Well, Dr. Cope was a very close man with the dollar. Of course, he didn't have a whole lot. After meeting the basic needs, he didn't have a whole lot to spend on things. Of course, those of us in the faculty could always think of all kinds of stuff to send money on. He was very close to the dollar. He also, in the old school style, ran things with a very heavy hand. He wanted to control everything which he did pretty much. My personal opinion was that after he had been here a while, he had mellowed some what. I guess everybody does. Then he left here and had a tragic thing happen to him.

FORSYTHE: What was that?

BEASLEY: Well, he died when he was at the University of Tennessee. My impression is that they were giving presents and were giving another position in the system somewhere and they gave him one. I think he was very disappointed in the situation up there. I don't want to get into any more of it than that.

FORSYTHE: What about Dr. Scarlett?

BEASLEY: I think he had more money to spend and could therefore be a lot more liberal in the things. He did he also had certain things that he was interested in doing in public relations. He promoted Murphy Center over there and he promoted some other buildings. He was the first president that I recall that had an inauguration ceremony. He did and they spent some money on that. They had it down there behind the Cope administration building on this side of it. They had a processional and all kinds of flags. I had the concert band down there and we played for it. They had a processional of faculty and visiting people. He was very interested in public relations I think. He changed a whole lot of things from the old ways of doing and they organized some different schools. You know, for a long time, we had a president and some deans and then we developed a vice president. Then during an interim and so on, the hierarchy expanded a lot during his time and of course the student enrollment did to. So I guess there was some reason for that. He was interested in the band as a public relations things--how it effected public relations.

FORSYTHE: Dr. Ingram

BEASLEY: Well, I knew Dr. Ingram when he was the Department head in the Department of Education and I had an occasion to work with him. I had one or two of his sons in band over at the campus school. I had a good working relationship with him.

When he became president, I had occasion to work with him on some things like United Way. He called on me to work with that, which I did, and some other projects from time to time. I had a good relationship with Sam and I enjoyed it. I was in his office for various things from time to time. The only one that really hangs out clear was that United Way [project] and that was because it was one of the last ones that I did. United Way every year had a fund raising campaign. The University has generally shied away from those things because you could have a fund raising campaign every week for something or other that tried to utilize faculty and staff to raise money for some group. So somewhere along the line, they decided that they would only do one and that is it. That is the United Way because they had fifteen or so organizations that belonged to it. So there was a good bit of resistance to it from the faculty and staff to being solicited. So what [Dr. Ingram] wanted us to do to see if we couldn't reorganize it to get more participation. So it was a hard job and we made a little progress. Whoever had been doing it in recent years had made a lot more progress, but very little money was collected and there was very little support for it during those days. Joe Nunley and Bob Womack kind of got it rolling and it seemingly has done rather well in recent years in supporting that group of organizations in fund raising. What we did was that we would get a chairman or somebody to try and work on it in each department and each office area. We generated a lot of paper, posters, and personal contacts. [We] had a situation where you could get checked off of your salary each month or a one-time thing-- just mechanical things like that. All of those things kind of pushed it in the right direction.

FORSYTHE: How were you involved in the community?

BEASLEY: Well, I have a severely handicapped son who is forty-one. When I came here, he was about four or five. So I got together with some people who had similar problems and we organized the Rutherford County Association for Retarded Citizens. As an offshoot to that, we managed to participate in a federal grant for ten non-urban centers for job training placement services for handicapped people. [This] then became a part of the State Agency for Vocational Training Centers and we still have one. I am the chairman of it out in the industrial park now. That thing has been going for twenty-five years now and [it has] placed a lot of people in employment and so on. We found as a part of that we had a lot of folks that were coming up through school. [If you are a severely handicapped person, you can stay in school until you have reached your twenty-second birthday]. Then schools don't have a program. So I helped organize and I wrote the charter and various part of the bylaws and set up the program for what we call the Rutherford County Adult Activity Center. [It] is also out in the industrial park. In fact, they are in county owned buildings side by side out there. There [are] about seventy-five people in that Rutherford County Adult Activity Center and all of those are handicapped. Very few of them will ever get employment. The Vocational Training Center is a part of the state [and] the Adult Activity Center is a private group. We have a Board of Directors, and we get grants and various things to help operate it. We also have a group home and some four assisted living

apartments. So they do contract work and so on. This is for multi-handicapped and severely handicapped so they have some place to go everyday. They have counselors, physical therapists, and occupational therapists. We have twenty-five staff members working. In the Vocational Training Center, they emphasize job training and placement. In general, the people who go through there are a little more skilled in meeting life's requirements. Right now, the job market is such in this county that if you want to go to work you can go to work. So our placement rate is really good right now. They serve one hundred and twenty-five people a year. They have several counselors, some with specialization for the deaf and for the blind and various things like that. They also have an in-house contract work thing. I was also on the Governor's Committee on Employment for the Handicapped at one time. I was in the Civitan club and their objective was to raise money to help handicapped programs. They would purchase equipment for special education classes. They would do a variety of things with the money that they made that would help handicapped folks. [That is] just like the Lion's are interested in sight and each one has kind of a specific interest. I also did a lot of professional activity over the years I was president of the Middle Tennessee Band Orchestra Association for many years. I was on the Tennessee Music Educators Association Board of Directors. I was in the Phi Beta Mu, which is a national honorary band administrators association, and Tennessee Band Administrators Association. Here on campus over the years, I hosted a variety of events like the Solo Band Ensembles for the Middle Tennessee Band Association. We would have several hundred people show up on Saturdays and we would have a concert festival. I organized for a number of years. I, at one time, had Tennessee Music Education Convention on campus here which I hosted.

FORSYTHE: Tell me more about the Middle Tennessee Band./Orchestra Association.

BEASLEY: Well, it was organized around '37 and it was for band and orchestral directors who were teaching from the Cumberland Mountains to the Tennessee River. It was affiliated with the Tennessee Music Association and MEMC, which was the National Organization. It was to improve things for public school music in this particular area for instrumental music. There was a counterpart to that called the Middle Tennessee Association and they organized festivals. Then they would organize clinics. They also became the vehicles through which students would audition for all state along with their comparable organizations in East and West Tennessee and all that still goes on. They maintain a lending library of band literature that you can borrow. They did a whole lot of things. They would bring in well-known national figures to do clinics or to conduct the band. It helps individual band directors and teachers to do a better job if somebody is once and a while going to evaluate your performance and doesn't know you personally. That is what that organization is all about.

FORSYTHE: Tell me about the Tennessee Music Educators Association.

BEASLEY: That organization still exists and it is a combination of three band and orchestra associations and three choral associations and three music associations. So there are about nine music associations that meet together under a board of directors for the Tennessee Music Education Association. They sponsor the All State Band and Orchestra and conventions and things of that nature.

FORSYTHE: Phi Beta Mu

BEASLEY: That is a national honorary association. There is a state chapter of which I am a retired former member.

FORSYTHE: What was the Solo festival?

BEASLEY: Solo and ensembles festival, small groups.

FORSYTHE: Did you have something to do with the music industry in Nashville?

BEASLEY: Well, I would play professionally.

FORSYTHE: Where would you play?

BEASLEY: I would play in the symphony and we did concerts in the old Ryman Auditorium and War Memorial Building and other places. We did some radio programs in those days. We played occasionally in public schools. I played in the shrine circus and what they do is bring in a leader and some other musicians. Then, they hire local musicians and you go in and you have one part of rehearsal and then you play the shows. I played some Broadway shows that were on tour in the Old Ryman Auditorium and that one again. They would bring in a leader and a book and two or three musicians and you would go in and sight read music. While the show was going on, you had to do it their way and do it exactly right. Actually it was a highly skilled sort of thing. I played some radio shows. One in particular, they had a sport show at WSM and she had what amounted to a little band. They would play marching music and you would play football fight songs and stuff like that. The guy's name was Freddie Russell and he had this sport show for the Nashville Banner. Then, on the Old State Fairgrounds(they have redone it) they had sulkey racing and every afternoon they had a grandstand show. They would hire a band to come and play these grandstand acts and they would be acts.