

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW  
WITH  
EUGENE SLOAN

26 JULY 1995

MURFREESBORO, TENNESSEE

INTERVIEWED BY REGINA FORSYTHE  
FOR THE Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW #QMS.040

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

ALBERT GORE RESEARCH CENTER

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MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

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## ABSTRACT



**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH  
EUGENE SLOAN**

Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW #QMS.040

FORSYTHE: This tape is part of the Q. M. Smith Collection designated as QMS.1995.40. This is Regina Forsythe. I am interviewing Mr. Eugene Sloan. Today is Wednesday, July 25, 1995. The interview is being conducted in the home of Mr. Sloan located at 402 Richard Road, Murfreesboro, Tennessee. The tape of this interview along with a transcription will become part of the Quintin Miller Smith Collection and will be available to the public. Future researchers may include portions of this interview in their publications. Is that all right with you, Mr. Sloan?

SLOAN: That's fine. I would like to begin by telling you how I became associated with Mr. Smith who was president of MTSU in 1955. At that time I was acting senior editor of the "Nashville Banner", and Mr. Smith invited me to talk with him about becoming a member of his staff as soon as the war was over. It was virtually over at that time in Europe, but was still very much alive as far as fighting in the Asiatic theater. As I said, he wanted me to come into MTSU to add a department closely associated with him as president of Middle. He said that he wanted me to teach some courses in journalism and to begin an active public relations campaign. He specifically mentioned Girls' State. At that time, Girls' State had been meeting at Belmont College. They had become dissatisfied in some way with Belmont, and he thought that I could make contacts there and bring them to the local campus. He also wanted me to teach some courses in journalism and make public relations a vital, active thing here at MTSU. Mr. Smith was a very fine administrator. Among other things he labored to keep as much of his budget to the college, as it was then known, as possible. To that end, we agreed that I would quit the "Banner", and that he would have me put on the staff of Miss Martha Park who was at that time state librarian for public schools. During WW II the Army had supplied, especially the Middle Tennessee schools, with an enlarged library. He was seated on that to develop it still further and to also get paid for out of other funds. To that end, I left the "Banner", and he had to put me on the staff of the Education Department over in the War Memorial Building. There I became associated with all the various functions of the department, but particularly, the library extension or expansion. Where there were already libraries, I was to visit boards of control of those groups and encourage them to participate in the regional library program. I continued in the State Department of Education being transferred over to the superintendent's office during the campaign of Governor McCord. I did research in education and helped write Governor McCord's effort to be elected governor. I spent a year there coming back to the campus on occasion. At that time, there were a good many campus

personalities who appeared. You had given me a list of individuals, and I made some notes. I believe the first individual there is Bob Abernathy. Is it not?

FORSYTHE: Yes, and you wrote here, "Practical jokes."

SLOAN: Mr. Abernathy was a wonderfully fine speaker. Mr. Smith assigned student recruiting to Mr. Abernathy and to me. I was to take the northern counties and he the southern counties of Middle Tennessee. We were to call on those schools taking copies of our Midlander, that is the Murfreesboro school yearbook, and to counsel with students on career days and career nights and encourage them to come to Middle Tennessee as students. About the same time, large numbers of students came to the University from the service. We have an annual here in which there is a picture that you are familiar with of several hundred G.I.'s who came back wearing the emblem of an honorably discharged Navy or Marine Corps or Army veteran. There were actually two Army groups at that time, those who had been serving with distinction in Europe and who had been trained here in Middle Tennessee in what is known as the Middle Tennessee Maneuvers. I was charged with trying to get as many of these European veterans as possible into our unit here and also with bringing back many of our faculty members who had been in the service, including some of these that you have listed and we will say more about as we go along. Mr. Abernathy was one of the finest after dinner speakers. He was in great demand. He spoke to educational groups all over the United States, especially up at Berea in the middle part of the United States. They'd have a meeting every year and bring Bob up to speak. He had literally hundreds of speaking engagements at various functions. Move on to the next one. Who is it?

FORSYTHE: Bonnie McHenry. You have written here, "Discreet."

SLOAN: Bonnie McHenry was the secretary of Mr. Smith, a very fine personality, highly sensitive to Mr. Smith's protection and able to shift people away from him. Miss Bonnie was a marvelous person. Who is the next person?

FORSYTHE: Miller Lanier.

SLOAN: Miller Lanier was on campus using the agriculture barns. He taught flight training to scores of MTSU students both during the early days of WW II, on through WW II, and now he took over the teaching of aviation at the college. Next person?

FORSYTHE: Joe Nunley.

SLOAN: Joe Nunley was really sentimental. There was, when I left the campus some fifteen years ago, a tree in front of the girls' dormitory. That was a point where so many students and their girlfriends met, went off to war and then came back after the war as veterans. He was the son of a man who was a very fine educator in McMinnville. Next person?

FORSYTHE: Miss Mary Hall.

SLOAN: Miss Mary Hall, whole volumes have been written about Miss Mary. I knew her when I was a high school principal, as a visiting teacher who came by once a year and sat in your classes and then met with the faculty (the high school faculty and elementary school faculty), and told them what was wrong with their teaching. She was somewhat feared by teachers in the field, but she was invaluable in the training of thousands of teachers. Next person?

FORSYTHE: Bealer Smotherman.

SLOAN: Bealer was the county Superintendent of Education when I came here. He came on the campus as a teacher of teachers, and soon he organized what was known as aerospace workshops for summer teaching. Here people learned to be acquainted with different kinds of aircraft, different speakers were brought on the campus, different types of planes participated in the aerospace workshop. Teachers in the field during the winter quarters, fall and winter, in the summertime, made trips. Because of my work with public relations, I made many of those trips. Dr. Quill Cope allowed me to go along on one trip to Europe which was very indicative of the type of leadership of Dr. Cope, for whom the Administration Building is named. Dr. Cope and I roomed together, and we had a tendency to break away from the aerospace workshop group. For instance, when we were in Italy, we left the group and went down where our landing had been during WW II. We followed the route back up the peninsula there. Dr. Cope was a very human person, and he took a lot of interest in the students, just as Mr. Smith had. Mr. Smith knew each and every student that was ever on campus during the years of his administration. That was also true of Jane Beasley. To illustrate the type of person and the interest that he had in the country's students particularly, on this tour of Europe, among other things, we were entertained by the aviation divisions of Britain, France, Italy, Germany, Holland, and others. We were in Denmark, and they had a very elaborate dinner, one with duck under glass and seven, eight, nine courses. We got back to the hotel and Dr. Cope said, "How'd you like that?" I said, "Well, it was the experience of a lifetime. I have read about it and seen it in movies, but I never expected to experience it." He said, "Would you rather have had a country ham dinner?" I said, "Yeah." That and the fact that we would break away and leave the group is indicative of the type of president that Dr. Cope was. Dr. Cope was followed by Dr. Scarlett, Dr. Mel Scarlett. There were three presidents that I served as much as ten years under, Mr. Smith, Dr. Cope and Dr. Scarlett. Dr. Scarlett was a wonderfully fine man and the very opposite of Dr. Cope. Dr. Scarlett was a man that had tremendous degrees and experience as an administrator in Maine, Minnesota, other places. Scarlett was probably the best administrator in the way of organization who has ever been on this campus for a ten year period. He was unpopular in town and unpopular with his faculty. There were a number of reasons for that. Let me simply say that he did more towards

making it a professional university than any one of the presidents under whom I served.

FORSYTHE: Coach Murphy.

SLOAN: Coach Murphy came here during my second year. He had been a very successful high school coach, had joined the Navy beached whale program, and he was really professionalizing a sports program on the campus. If you go back and look at the annuals, you'll see comparatively little attention was paid to athletics until Murphy came. Murphy was a wonderfully fine administrator. We made many trips together. I admire him tremendously as a coach and as a man. He was a real asset to the University. It is well that they call that Murphy Center over there because Murphy has devoted so much of his building talent to building a very fine program. First he was football coach, and basketball coach, and baseball, because the first few years, he did it all, including golf. After Murphy, who else?

FORSYTHE: Dean Kirksey.

SLOAN: I am going to list all the deans there, including Dean Hampton who was the first woman dean. Of course the dean of all deans was Dean Beasley. I don't know how many years he devoted to that job, but he knew every student who went through there. He was most gracious to me. I came in and a head of a department, Mr. Smith, who was the son of the first president of the Murfreesboro College was also chairman of the Athletic Committee. That committee breached the ground of the athletic program. Smith took charge of me, and he encouraged me, told me what he had done. He said, "I just want to get out of this political mess." So Q. M. Smith, the president accepted Mr. James Smith's resignation as athletic chairman and appointed me as athletic chairman and also treasurer of the Athletic Association along with others who I had in public relations. That was the finest bunch of teachers who were faculty members that you can imagine. There are over 500 faculty members there now, but when I went there, there were actually only about 19 who had anything like faculty status.

[This is the beginning of Side B.]

SLOAN: The deans were all very fine persons. One who came in from the State Department of Education and who had formerly been principal of Lebanon High School, Clayton James really professionalized the deanship there. He took over the discipline and the organization of all the deans and was succeeded by many very fine, well qualified deans. Among them was Dr. Kirksey who did a great deal towards academic deanship, the organization of faculty, the leadership of faculty, where Mr. James had been largely a disciplinarian. But both were the persons who built a really strong deanship, first assisting Dean Beasley who had been dean so long. Then gradually, as Dean Beasley eased out of his deanship, they took over most admirably as dean.

FORSYTHE: Wink Midgett.

SLOAN: Wink was Athletic Director when I came here. He had been my coach at Lebanon High School when I was principal there. He left the high school to go over to Castle Heights Military Academy as coach and athletic chairman. Mr. Smith had known Wink or W. E., actually Willard E. Midgett. He was coach when I came here. We made several trips together and were very close friends. I counted it a personal loss when Wink died just a short time ago. I remember one occasion when Wink and I were attending an SIAA meeting, Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Association meeting in New Orleans. We came down to the lobby and went into breakfast. He ordered, and I ordered. He ordered coffee, and I ordered Coca-Cola. He got up and went over to the magazine rack and picked up a magazine, and the waitress came up and brought his breakfast. She said, "Where is your friend?" I said, "He's over there." He came up about that time, and he said, "Here I am. You think I'm willing to be seen with a man who has Coca-Cola for breakfast?" He would tell that story on me. That is just indicative of the kind of jokes we'd pull on each other. Wink was succeeded by Coach Murphy. Wink then took over the Business department at the College. He had one woman assistant teacher. I was put in his department to teach business law, and I did that among other things for several years, gradually enlarging the Business Law department until I finally had to start bringing in other lawyers from downtown, young lawyers who were getting started in their practices. Most of them were practicing attorneys, and we built a real good legal section. At one time, I think we had about nine classes in business law. At that time I was teaching only one other class, however. Wink built the Business School. He was author of at least two, maybe three, business textbooks, and business college texts. Whereas I edited one and contributed to one other book, he wrote the book that was adopted at other state universities and colleges. Wink was a very fine person. Who else?

FORSYTHE: Buleah Davis.

SLOAN: Buleah Davis was the only woman member of the nine member Athletic Committee that ran the Athletic department for twenty-five years over there. The others included Nooby Freeman, who you also have listed. All of them were very well qualified persons. The greatest instance to me as chairman, I got to make all the national meetings. They did most of the work including helping to raise money, with scheduling, with going to the early national games like the Tangerine Bowl, the Refrigerator Bowl, the Tangerine Bowl at least twice. Buleah was an excellent administrator. She was also a women's coach. I couldn't say enough about her.

FORSYTHE: Nance Jordan.

SLOAN: Nance Jordan was in the Navy. He had much the same job. He had been a star athlete at Vanderbilt, and had been brought out here by Mr. Smith. He coached baseball and assisted in football along with Nooby Freeman. They made up the athletics staff. Nance was also women's coach of basketball. At that time he organized in Nashville a league of women players, and we had regular games down there. He and I would take the team down to Nashville, to Vanderbilt, to the Women's Athletic Association, and various places where teams had been organized. We had a league for two years, and I believe that both of those years, we finished first in the league. Nance was a returned veteran from the Navy, a highly well qualified officer at Vanderbilt before he came out here.

FORSYTHE: Bettie Murfree.

SLOAN: I only remember her in connection with the dormitories. I don't recall what her duties were.

FORSYTHE: Charles Phillips.

SLOAN: He was the bookstore manager for many years. The bookstore is named for him now. He was an excellent businessman.

FORSYTHE: T. B. Woodmore.

SLOAN: He was business manager for many years, a shrewd, fine administrator. He met every student that came through the University, but his greatest strength was as business manager for years and years.

FORSYTHE: Nooby Freeman.

SLOAN: He was in the Manual Arts Department, member of the Athletics Committee, a football coach, a very fine person. As a person he advised me so frequently on things that should be done. Nooby was a very good administrator, very successful head of the department of Woodwork and Metalwork.

FORSYTHE: John Hood.

SLOAN: John Hood was a student and very close friend of my son Joe. They did many things together. They both went to Boys' Nation, and John is still very active as vice-president of one of the banks in Murfreesboro at the present time. He is just a very close personal friend of the family but knowledgeable in business. For many years he was head of one of the city clubs, just a very fine person.

FORSYTHE: Clifford Stark.

SLOAN: Head of the Agriculture department who had been founder of a dairy division at Cornell University where he had taught before coming here. He was one of the

persons who came here and really built a very strong Agriculture department. He is nationally known in his area. He also had his Agriculture department here after his retirement at Cornell University.

FORSYTHE: Tommie Reynolds.

SLOAN: Miss Tommie was a member of the Athletic Committee at one time. She was actually a sort of Dean of Women for many years before Miss Hampton was official Dean of Women.

FORSYTHE: Norman Parks.

SLOAN: Head of the department of Political Science at MTSU and former Vanderbilt professor, former editor of the "Tennessean", head of the Social Science department and still very active on the campus whenever called on to do anything. At the present time, his wife is in a nursing home with a broken hip. Norman Parks did a great deal toward building the library.

FORSYTHE: Francis Riel.

SLOAN: Coach who came in from Boston University, was on the coaching staff, a real good fisherman. I enjoyed fishing with him a great deal. He and his family are transplanted Yankees. Two of his sons are doctors.

FORSYTHE: Lt. Col. Bradley.

SLOAN: First head of the R. O. T. C. department, a veteran who understood how to handle cadets and really built a very fine R. O. T. C. department.

FORSYTHE: C. C. Sims.

SLOAN: Head of the Political Science department, author of a history of Rutherford County, a great fisherman. I enjoyed fishing with him. I can't say enough good things about what he did toward building a real Political Science department, as well as a fine History department and as the author of a book.

FORSYTHE: Neil Wright.

SLOAN: The Wrights came here to the Music department and really built the Music department. When I came here, about all they had was a person who taught public school. The Wrights brought professionalism to the campus. They developed a very fine band and Mrs. Wright's specialty was the Sacred Harp Singers. They brought MTSU Music department to national status. The music building is named for them because they built the Music department like Sims did for Political Science, Murphy did for Athletics, Beasley for English. and Craven did in Manual Arts. Those people were pioneers who built their departments.

FORSYTHE: Richard and Virginia Peck.

SLOAN: They came here to head up the English department and gained true recognition. You can scarcely realize what a tremendous difference there was between Middle Tennessee State College when I came here and MTSU today. In my judgement, we have a number of national organizations here now. When I came here, it was a professional teachers' college. That's really what it was, just a teachers' college. Much growth I could tell you about. My duty as public relations man was to recruit faculty as well as students. Abernathy and I did the student recruiting, but we also did faculty recruiting. I remember one person that he got me to bring onto the campus. He was a man who had achieved national recognition as more than a college teacher, a college research person. He knew that I knew him personally, and he said, "See if you can recruit him. He served some time at Vanderbilt. Do you think he would consider coming out here?" I said, "Yeah, I think he would because he loves teaching." Now don't ever quote me on this, but after this man was on the campus one year, he had established his department on a national level. Mr Smith brought me in and said, "I want you to go up to the University of Missouri and get a man to assist you and take over when you retire." And so I did. So, a year passed and he called me in and said, "I want you to go up to the University of Missouri and Kent University, Ohio State, and University of Illinois and recruit somebody that will eventually succeed you." The man did a real good job here. So, when Smith, who was still president at that time, sent me up to Missouri there were other places to find a public relations person, a woman preferably that I was to try to find. He wrote me and he said, "I am sending you. You recruited a good businesswoman here. You recruited a coach." That was another coach that was in the group. He named the ones I had brought into the faculty. He said, "This man that you got and brought in here from Vanderbilt---," he pointed his finger at me and said, "---he is so good and so determined to have his way."