

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
WITH
CLARENCE RUSSELL

27 JULY 1995

MURFREESBORO, TENNESSEE

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

INTERVIEW #QMS.047

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Albert Gore". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial 'A'.

ALBERT GORE RESEARCH CENTER

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ABSTRACT

**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH
CLARENCE RUSSELL**

Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW #QMS.047

FORSYTHE: This tape is part of the Q.M. Smith collection. It is designated as QMS.1995.47. This is Regina Forsythe. I am interviewing Mr. Clarence Russell. Today is Thursday, July 26, 1995. The interview is being conducted in the conference room of the Murfreesboro Housing Authority located at 318 E Lokey in Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

RUSSELL: The policeman, I believe his name was Aimes, I'm not for sure; but anyway he got out of his car. This car in front, a guy got out and killed him -- right there and got away and left, you know? No wait a minute, after they shot it out, Big Mike told me this out of his own mouth, Big Mike jumped out with his gun, short pistol, and they shot at one another. I asked old Big Mike, I said, "Mike, how did it feel to be shooting at somebody and somebody shooting at you and the fire flying, you know?" He said, "don't ask me cause I don't know!" Anyway this car got away. Well Big Mike got the license plate. He called for help and some way or another they trailed this car. The license plate was from another state, not from Tennessee. They trailed this car up into what we call Goodyear Heights, that was the name. That was where the big residential people, the money people lived, and the fine homes. They surrounded this house and they captured Pretty Boy Floyd. They pulled him out from under the bed. They had two women, two sisters, that was traveling with them. The man that killed the Akron policeman, I believe his name was Martin Walker. I had a chance to go down and see them electrocute him in Columbus, Ohio, the capitol, just like Nashville. They do the electrocuting there. I didn't care to. But I tell you what I did do. They turned the women folks loose. They turned the girls loose. They locked Charles "Pretty Boy" Floyd up in the jail there. I could have seen him if I had wanted to, but someway or another I just didn't care. They had him for a bank robbery down in the southern part of Ohio, coming into Tennessee. Well they put him on a train, passenger, or whatever, with a law man. I forget what you call them now, but anyway they were supposed to have had him shackled, his feet and his hands. They was taking him down to a little place down in the southern part of Ohio where he was supposed to have robbed a bank. Well on the way down, Charles "Pretty Boy" Floyd said he had to go to the bathroom. So they took the shackles off and he didn't come back. That was the tale of the law man that was taking him. So they claim that he went to the rest room all right and there was a window and they claimed he jumped off. He went out that window and jumped off. Well they stopped the train at the next stop, but no Floyd. I don't remember how long after that but the history is that Floyd appeared again in Akron. It's a long story to tell you the truth about it. I was in Akron at the time. Some way or another, not too

far from Akron, Ohio, Floyd was walking, you know he was hitchhiking. He didn't have no car. They spotted him, somebody spotted him, and called the FBI. I did know the big daddy of the FBI. I can't call his name now, it wasn't Hoover. Floyd made a mistake. He stopped at a farm house. He slept in the woods. He paid this woman big money just for breakfast. After he had ate, they had recognized him and they had called the FBI. After breakfast he asked them if they would drive him into this little town, I did know the town. They said sure they'd be glad to. Well, they lived off of the main thorough-fare maybe three or four hundred yards, and in the car going to the main thorough-fare they saw this car coming in. Floyd said, "stop, stop." He jumped out and ran under, up in Ohio they made the corn cribs up off the ground and put tin or whatever around the supports to keep the rats from coming in and out. He first ran under that crib. But it was the city law that they had alerted first. I said FBI, I guess they alerted all of them. But the city law recognized him. So he momentarily stopped under that corn crib and ran out and was headed into some woods and they shot him down. The local authorities was the one. They didn't kill him outright, but they crippled him. The FBI come in and took the whole darn thing, the credit for capturing him and killing him. Of course they buried him back in Pawnee, where my cousin lives in Powers cemetery there. That's Charles "Pretty Boy" Floyd.

FORSYTHE: Do you remember when the MacArthur's came here in 1951?

RUSSELL: Yeah, MacArthur and his son visited. No, I don't think I knew anything about it. I was probably busy milking cows or plowing corn or something. No, I wasn't alerted at that time. I don't know if I'd come up or not, but anyway, I was busy.

FORSYTHE: When did you get electricity?

RUSSELL: Electricity, I'm glad you brought that up. We'd moved. My mother had died and we'd moved back down in the big house with my daddy and my two sisters. We didn't even have a telephone. We had lamp lights, no electricity in the neighborhood. Probably that would have been, help me out just a little bit -- Tom Russell was say four or five years old.

FORSYTHE: So then about 1944.

RUSSELL: Forty four or forty five, something like that. We had a change by golly to get electricity. We had to tie in probably about three miles from where I lived. We got the okay to cross the neighbors to bring the wires in. I helped clear the ways, drag the wires. I had a good horse, and help do this that and the other. I helped cross the creeks and we got electricity. I had the first bathroom in that country. You know why? Cause the old log house burned and I built a new ranch type home, of course had bathrooms and everything, showers.

FORSYTHE: So you had electricity and running water about that time?

RUSSELL: Yeah, I put an electric pump in the well. I used to work at Neuhoff Packing Company in Nashville and they had these huge tanks they pickled meat in. After so long they would kind of deteriorate and they would do away them. Well I was well acquainted so I went down there and got two of them and I put them at the back where water ran off the kitchen. We had plenty of water, running water in the kitchen. I piped it into the kitchen, that was the old log house. Of course after we built the new ranch type, we had running water there from the well; but no city water. I dug a new well and piped the water right inside the house.

FORSYTHE: When did you get a telephone?

RUSSELL: Yeah, we got the phone in. Oh, they must have been seven or eight farmers that got electricity and telephones. A couple of years after that, why then on north toward Wilson County, they extended the line, the electric lines.

FORSYTHE: When did you learn to drive a truck or car?

RUSSELL: Who me? Alright, I was about twelve years old, and as I said when I got caught up at home through the summer and school was out, then I'd walk about two miles across the woods and creek over to Sam Adkisson's house. Sam owned about four hundred acres of land and I'd work for a dollar a day. That was my first experience with a automobile. That was about 1923 or '24. Sam Adkisson bought a new Dodge and had a rumble seat and that was the first car I learned to drive. This was low, second, and high. At that time, by golly, it was right opposite. In the late twenty's the floor shift, this was low, that was second, this was high, and that was reverse.

FORSYTHE: So it was like an upside down "v" with reverse?

RUSSELL: Let me see here, just a minute. This was reverse . That was first. This is second and this third. Now that was around 1930. The old ones, I believe this was first. That was second and this was high and reverse. I believe that was the way it was. Anyway, I learned to drive. Then about 1926 or '27, I reckon it was my daddy bought a new Ford, toolin' car.

FORSYTHE: I've heard of those.

RUSSELL: Them durned things, by golly, the gears was up here and the clutch and the brake. It didn't take me long to learn to drive it.

FORSYTHE: So it was on the steering wheel shaft? Gear changing?

RUSSELL: No.

FORSYTHE: Still at the bottom?

RUSSELL: The gears was down here, the clutch. You had a gear and then you had a brake over there. That was the way it was. It was the aggravatingest thing. You got used to it. The old Dodge, about '24 that I'm telling you about, that belonged to Sam Adkisson. That was the first car that I'd drove -- first time I'd rode in the rumble seat with Virginia Hale.

FORSYTHE: Tell me about the different jobs you've had. You mentioned some of them.

RUSSELL: The first job I had was Jersey Farm Milk Company in Nashville, Tennessee. I never will forget. I was in the hay field hauling hay, hot, my it was hot. About mid-afternoon in this big field, I saw this car coming into the field. It was an uncle of mine, the one that was in World War I. He said, "Clarence, if you want a job, I can get you a job down at Jersey Farm Milk Company." That was out in south Nashville. I said, "yeah, be tickled to death!" He took me on over to the house, of course Sam paid me. Well he took me on over to the house and got me some clothes. He took me on to Nashville and I lived with him and worked on Fourth Avenue, Jersey Farm Milk Company. I didn't work there long till I got a job with Neuhoff Packing Company, a big packing company right on the Cumberland River. They had a ball club. I got a job with them to play ball. I worked with them and played ball one year, I believe it was. Then Jacob Packing Company, that was right down the road you might say, they wanted me to pitch baseball for them. They wanted a ball club you know, in the city league. A fellow by the name of Dutch Morrisy, a good friend of my family's, was going to manage them. I quit Nuehoff and went down to Jacob's. We was winners of the pennant in 1928, I think I'm right. I got a card from Akron, Ohio, from a friend of mine that worked at Firestone Tire and Rubber Company. It said if you want a job in Akron, with one of the mines, they are hiring. I hopped in a suite of clothes, seventeen or eighteen dollars, I believe it was, and caught a bus and went to Akron, Ohio and went to work. My first job was at B.F. Goodrich Tire and Rubber Company, making tennis shoes. I mean cutting patterns for tennis shoes. I worked there a while and then I got a job at Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company building automobile tires, as I've already told you. Then I came back and got married and moved to the farm.

FORSYTHE: I think I'm out of questions. Is there anything else I haven't covered?

RUSSELL: Well, I could set here and tell you about my life, I reckon, until this time tomorrow, as far as that's concerned.

FORSYTHE: Well do you want to tell me till just the rest of this side of the tape? Just tell me some stories?

RUSSELL: Well, let me see.

FORSYTHE: Can you tell me about Mr. Jennings? You said you knew him.

RUSSELL: Oh yeah, well he's been dead for a long time. I guess that would be about all. As I said, they buried my mother and dad. Oh let me tell you this. On the way down with Mr. Jennings, he was a fine guy a wonderful personality, on the way down to St. Thomas Hospital, I don't remember where it was to get Becky, Jimmy, or which one; but anyway, I told Mr. Jennings, "I might need a little drink." We stopped at a liquor store and got a fifth of Old Log Cabin white whiskey. We got Mary Lee, my wife, and daughter. That night it was cold, golly bill, snow was on the ground. Of course, I'd done done the milking and I had an aunt, Aunt Dora. Now I had her to take care of the wife and do the cooking and the baby and one thing and another, you see. I had that old Warm Morning stove a-going. Mary Lee was in the bed, Tom Russell was in the cradle or wherever. I decided to go over and visit a friend of mine. So I just walked across the creek. But I left my whiskey on the mantle piece, the fifth, that White Log Cabin, or whatever it was. By golly when I come back a little later on, I didn't stay long, I never will forget; Aunt Dora was snoring up a storm. Later on, Mary Lee told me said, "Jack", that was my name, that's all my wife's people knows me by, Jack. I was named after old Jack Russell. Any old pitcher from Boston Red Socks got that Jack business. The next day Mary Lee got a chance to tell me. Mary Lee said Aunt Dora got up, she was up in her seventies, I reckon all the light was from that Warm Morning stove, through the door, they had done blowed the lamps out. Aunt Dora went to that mantle piece, got that whiskey and turned up. It wasn't nothing back then for people to have drinks, that's why they kept it. Of course they didn't get drunk. Toddies, that's what they called it. Aunt Dora went back to bed and said she rolled and tumbled maybe thirty minutes or a little longer. Said Aunt Dora slipped out that bed again, went back to the mantle and got that bottle and said "google, google." Went back and, golly bill, when you come in you heard her snoring. Most everybody had whiskey, that was practically the only medication they had. Tuberculosis killed a lot of people and colitis killed a lot little fellows, just like my little brother. I know a cemetery where there are 28 babies that have been buried there in the cemetery. There are no markers, just a headstone rock and a foot stone, 28 babies. Of course, there are trees in there now as big as a silo. Now this is history. I found this letter in with Grandpa Cook's date book. Let me jump back a little bit. The McHenry's were very close kinfolk of ours. He was a successful farmer and he had two sons. He sent them to Oxford, England, to educate them. One graduated as a doctor and one as lawyer, two brothers, from Wilson County. One went to Los Angeles as a doctor. One went to New Orleans as a lawyer. Now in this date book of Grandpa Cook's, there was a letter that said "Dear Cousin Jenny." That was my own blood grandmother, Jenny Cook. It said "In regards to your letter asking me about a cure for tuberculosis," he says, "I'm sorry. We have no cure. We have no treatments other than whiskey, brown sugar and honey." There was five different ingredients and he told her how to mix them and take them. He said "That was the only thing we have." Honey, I wouldn't take anything for that letter. No telling what it would be worth. It burned up in the house. That was the only thing they had for tuberculosis at that time. People died like flies. When Rebecca Ann Townes, my grandmother,

she died with T.B. and on her death bed they said there was three women folks, neighbors, setting up with her. Way in the night one of these ladies whispered to the other, "believe Becky Ann is dying." She said "no not yet." But she died that night. She had a brother now that was in Oklahoma, Indian territory, Uncle John Edwards. He'd be my great uncle. I did know the name of the little place in Oklahoma. He married a first cousin of his. They had one little boy and they came by train. Someone met them in horse and buggy in Smyrna. The little fellow was sick. This little boy, the only one they had, died before the funeral the next day. I know exactly where he is buried...just a little over a year old, with T.B. People didn't think nothing about dying back then. They'd lived life.

FORSYTHE: Were there any other epidemics besides T.B. and flu?

RUSSELL: You mean back then? There wasn't no such a thing. They didn't know what flu was back then. It was T.B., consumption, yeah that was oldest name consumption.

FORSYTHE: And that's T.B.?

RUSSELL: Yeah, tuberculosis, they named it tuberculosis later on. They told this, this is a true story too, that these people was named Robinson, I believe. There was a death in the family and they had some of the kin folks came in from Texas or where ever. They went to Smyrna. It was just one person, I believe that was the way it was. They took an extra horse and saddle and went to Smyrna and got them. They had to cross a little old creek, up here in the country. This party they was talking about had T.B. He fell off the horse and died right there in that creek. That's history, too. That tuberculosis, honey, was something else. It had no respect of persons.