

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW  
WITH  
MORTIMER COHEN

11 AUGUST 1995

MURFREESBORO, TENNESSEE

INTERVIEWED BY REGINA FORSYTHE  
FOR THE Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT  
INTERVIEW #QMS.055

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**  
**MORTIMER COHEN**  
Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT  
INTERVIEW #QMS.055

[Transcribers note: The first part of this interview was inaudible, and the transcription has been reconstructed from Forsythe's notes.]

FORSYTHE: This is Regina Forsythe, I am interviewing Mr. Mortimer Cohen. Today is Friday, August 11, 1995. The interview is being conducted in the home of M. Cohen located at 802 Shawnee Dr. in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. The tape of this interview along with a transcription of this interview will become a 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. Cohen?

COHEN: Yes.

FORSYTHE: What is your full name?

COHEN: Mortimer Joseph Cohen.

FORSYTHE: What is your birthday and place of birth?

COHEN: November 11, 1917, in Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

FORSYTHE: What is your father name and occupation?

COHEN: David Cohen, he was a merchant.

FORSYTHE: What was your mother name and occupation?

COHEN: Jeannett, she was a housewife.

FORSYTHE: Do you have any siblings?

COHEN: Yes, a brother named Gerald.

FORSYTHE: What is your wives name?

COHEN: Marilyn Stin Cohen

FORSYTHE: Do you have any children?

COHEN: Yes, Adell, Misty, Michael, Richard, and Diane.

FORSYTHE: Did you live on campus?

COHEN: No I lived at home.

FORSYTHE: How did you get to school?

COHEN: I drove a car.

FORSYTHE: How was parking?

COHEN: Parking wasn't too bad at that time? The time I was going there was about eight hundred people, but twelve hundred teachers came back for extra training.

FORSYTHE: Where did you park?

COHEN: I parked just off of the campus, Right behind the Science building. There weren't that many buildings at that time.

FORSYTHE: Did you have a job?

COHEN: I had a job in my father's store on Saturdays. He had a home furniture company. Dave Cohen and Son's Home Furniture Company.

FORSYTHE: What did students do for fun?

COHEN: We went to ball games, also they had dances at the old cafeteria. They also had dances at the gymnasium periodically. The only extra curricular activity I was in was debating, which I enjoyed very much, I was also in theatre.

FORSYTHE: Where did you do the debating?

COHEN: We would go to different schools to debate, also at the University, but we did do some traveling.

FORSYTHE: How did you get to the other schools?

COHEN: Our coach took us. That was rather funny because he was sort of an absent minded fellow, a nice guy, I remember one time he was pulling into a school yard, and he ran into a dead end and had to start all over again. That was Dr. Charles Lewis.

FORSYTHE: Where was the theatre?

COHEN: That was in the Main Building.

FORSYTHE: What condition were the buildings in when you were here?

COHEN: As far as I could tell they were all Right, I didn't go into the dormitories very much, though.

FORSYTHE: Let me ask you about the faculty starting with Philip Mankin. You were a part of the group that started the petition to keep Mankin?

COHEN: That is right. I remember I was at dance, and I told someone "that a shame the way Mankin was dismissed for economy Reasons" so I said we ought to get together. About a couple hundred people met in the auditorium, then after a while some other people told us we were making too much noise, so we went to the main Room upstairs, and the manager of the football team said "get out of here, you are going to get thrown out" so I did. We went to Nashville to the meeting of the State Board of Education, we cooled are heals outside. They say that the school commission was checking to see that President Smith was a competent president, not weather Mankin was to be dismissed or not, I think this went on, there was publicity in the papers and in magazines and it became a cause celebre, so we had heard that the reason he was dismissed was that he was to radical. He was a socialist, I Recall that, at that time it was a dirty word, but he was very much against communism, he made a strong point of that, he was just a liberal fellow, and he had a good sense of humor. Sometimes in class he would "Little Auger" his favorite comic strip, and he was a brilliant teacher and the fact that he was a Radical, later he went to Vanderbilt, then later to Kentucky. I recall one meeting down at the old James K. Polk hotel that there were some political people saying that this was against president Smith, which it wasn't, as far as I was concerned it was just because of a member of the faculty being dismissed.

FORSYTHE: I copied down the names of some of those who were in that meeting, would you know who I was talking about if I called out a name? Julian Gobelet?

COHEN: That is who I organized the meeting with.

FORSYTHE: Jim Buchanan

COHEN: Yes he is Dr. Buchanan, he is a nobel prize winner.

FORSYTHE: Did you get to go in and see any of the hearing in Nashville?

COHEN: No, we had to stay in the hall. It seemed like a cut and dry sort of thing, rather than deciding whether Mankin was a competent person to teach, the investigation was whether President Smith was making the Right decision. That did away with any sort of pros or cons.

COHEN: In the reading I have done, it seems like they tied it into some of the earlier years, problems that they had with Coach Floyd. I am not real sure. There is even an article put out by a national teachers group, that is where I got a lot of information. I have other faculty members, if you can remember any anecdotes about them.

FORSYTHE: Dean Beasley?

COHEN: He was very helpful with the students.

FORSYTHE: Philip Cheek?

COHEN: He was a very interesting person, he taught German, and discussed about Germany which I thought was good.

FORSYTHE: B. B. Gracy?

COHEN: Mr. Gracy taught masonry at that time, I was sort of absent minded at the time and I had locked my keys in my car, and he let me have a wire to get in the window, it got so frequent that he just hung the wire on the nail, so that I would have it ready to go.

FORSYTHE: Miss Ollie Green?

COHEN: I remember one time that I was doing an experiment and the thing exploded and hit me in the face, and I said "damn" she said "you need to not say that sort of thing in the class" also I recall, that chemistry was one of my finest subjects, so if I knew what I was talking about I would ask questions, she got on to that, and she would embarrass me if I didn't have a firm hold on what I was doing.

FORSYTHE: Charles Lewis?

COHEN: Yes he was my debate coach, and I remember one time we were driving back at night and he got so close to a passing car that they clipped bumpers.

FORSYTHE: William Mebane?

COHEN: He was a professor of physics, one of the things that really impressed me was in a two hour course, and for the first hour he would talk about everything but physics. It was very interesting. I can remember him now, bald headed and very congenial looking, he always stands out in my mind.

FORSYTHE: Katherine Monohan?

COHEN: She was advanced in age then, and she had some interesting stories but I thought she should have been teaching in a high school, I don't think she got into the subject as deep as she should.

FORSYTHE: Anne Ordway?

COHEN: I remember writing a paper on Shakespear and writing about the comic elements in Shakespearean tragedy and the tragic elements in the comedies. She was quite an interesting teacher, she made the course interesting.

FORSYTHE: Ruby Taylor Sanders?

COHEN: I didn't know her in school, but prior to then she taught violin and I took three or four years of violin training from her. We always played the scales.

FORSYTHE: E. May Saunders

COHEN: I was in the glee club for one year and she was the person who did that.