

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
WITH
R. FRED NANCE

15 AUGUST 1995

MURFREESBORO, TENNESSEE

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

INTERVIEW #QMS.060

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

ALBERT GORE RESEARCH CENTER

MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

EDITORIAL NOTICE

This is a transcript of a tape-recorded interview conducted by the Albert Gore Research Center at Middle Tennessee State University. The original recording and associated materials are archived at the center, whose collections may be accessed in person or via the web site gorecenter.mtsu.edu. After a draft of this transcript was made, the interviewer, or in some cases another qualified staff member, reviewed the draft and compared it to the tape recordings. In a few cases, the interviewee also contributed editorial corrections. This final transcript incorporates the corrections and other changes suggested by the interviewee and interviewer. The transcript follows as closely as possible the recorded interview, including the usual starts, stops, and other rough spots in typical conversation. The reader should remember that this is essentially a transcript of the spoken, rather than the written, word. Stylistic matters, such as punctuation and capitalization, follow the *Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th edition. The transcript includes bracketed notices at the end of one tape and the beginning of the next so that, if desired, the reader can find a section of tape more easily by using this transcript.

RESTRICTION

The interviewee has donated her or his copyright in this interview to the state of Tennessee through Middle Tennessee State University and has agreed that use of the recorded interview and transcript shall be governed by the director of the Albert Gore Research Center.

Researchers may read, quote from, cite, photocopy, and download this transcript without permission for purposes of research only. Publication is prohibited, however, without permission from the director of the Albert Gore Research Center.

ABSTRACT



ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH

R. FRED NANCE

Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW #QMS.060

FORSYTHE: This tape is part of the Q. M. Smith collection designates as QMS.1995.60. This is Regina Forsythe, I am interviewing Mr. Fred Nance. Today is Tuesday, August 15, 1995. The interview is being conducted in the home of Mr. Nance located at 1029 East Northfield, Murfreesboro, Tennessee. The tape 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. Is that all right with you Mr. Nance?

NANCE: Yes

FORSYTHE: What is your full name?

NANCE: Richard Fred Nance

FORSYTHE: Your date and place of birth?

NANCE: August 12, 1910 in Versailles, it is the southwest corner of Rutherford County, two miles from Rockvale. There is a four-way stop sign out there now, it used to be the center of the universe but it has kind of died down. The four way stop sign is right there, it is the only one I know of that is in a rural area of Rutherford County. Nobody ever stops there either, if you do you get run over. That was about it, there was a lot industry out there then, the economy has passed them by. There was a saw mill, a general store, a photographer shop, a grist mill, and a gym, a blacksmith shop, the second post office in Rutherford County, the first was at Old Jefferson, that was before they had rural routes. When they got a rural route, the moved the post office to Rockvale so they would have a long enough route to hire someone to carry the mail.

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

NANCE: H. J. Nance, he was a farmer and merchant.

FORSYTHE: What was your mother' name and occupation?

NANCE: Evie Jo Christopher, housewife.

FORSYTHE: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

NANCE: William Henry Nance, he was in Nashville and was the athletic coach at Hillsboro High School for more than twenty years, and John Nance, he lives out there at Versailles now. He has a nice house that he built himself.

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

NANCE: Cathryn Powers Nance, she is a housewife. I can tell you a whole book about her. She cooks pies, well she just about quit because we go out to eat for lunch. I want tell you, we are on our second go around. Her first husband died in '81 with a terrible case of cancer, and my first wife died in '83 with cancer and a few other complications. We had known one another all of her life, not quite all of mine, but all of hers. We grew up about one hundred yards apart, and we just happened to get together after all that was over. It couldn't have been a better deal.

FORSYTHE: What degrees do you have?

NANCE: That's is right there. During just about thirty years I attended enough seminars in the Eastern part of the country, east of the Mississippi, to have been in one that I organized or attended or had a part in the program, in every land grant university east of the Mississippi river. That is on record.

FORSYTHE: So this certificate is a "permanent professional high school certificate August 1937" you got a certificate to teach "education, math, English, science, biology, chemistry, physics, social science, civics, geography, history, economics and sociology"

NANCE: I actually taught elementary school the seventh and eighth grades, combined at Eagleville, and at a two-teacher school out in the county not far from Eagleville, that was Patterson. They have been merged with Eagleville now. I had forty six kids in the one room, I kept them all day long. Now you don't do that, you get to go out and go somewhere, and just leave them in there. Somebody else takes them over.

FORSYTHE: So you had to teach all of the classes?

NANCE: All of the classes, except music. Now I can't teach music, I don't know one thing from another, but on this thing here, after I taught in high school a while, there is English, mathematics (that is solid geometry,) that is in high school now, civics, geography, I guess that covers it. I was a part time in high school , and did one year in the elementary school, I was out there eight years.

FORSYTHE: How long did you go to MTSU?

NANCE: I started in September 1929 and it took me eight years to get through. I had to work.

FORSYTHE: Where did you work?

NANCE: Wherever I could find a place to make a dollar, first on the farm, the telephone company, wherever

FORSYTHE: You said you worked for a dollar a day when you started teaching?

NANCE: I got fifty dollars a month. It took fifteen dollars a month for board and I had no transportation. That's a dollar and seventy-five cents a day for teaching school. Laundry cost a quarter a week. I don't see how people believe that, the times I have told it I have decided that nobody believes it, so I am going to quit telling it. The young folks, they don't believe that. Let's see it was fifteen miles out to that two-teacher school, I was principal there but that didn't amount to anything. At Eagleville the principals were Roy Dowdy and Charlie Grigsby. When I was out there they were good friends of mine.

FORSYTHE: Where else did you teach?

NANCE: That is it, I quit when I left there. The two-teacher school was at Patterson, also known as Possum Trot, out Coleman Hill road. It was just like throwing a rabbit in a briar batch, we had the biggest time. You could go anywhere, every day if you wanted to, and eat, somebody was at home and they would just take you in. I would do it again if I had to.

FORSYTHE: Why did you choose to go to MTSU?

NANCE: It was close and I could get there.

FORSYTHE: Why did you decide you wanted to be a teacher?

NANCE: You know that started back in the 8th grade, when the 7th and 8th grade teacher gave a lot of encouragement. That is where it began, and it just never did wear itself out.

FORSYTHE: How long did you teach?

NANCE: I taught eight full years, enough to retire on. You could retire after eight years, they passed that law in 1945 I believe, that if you had as much as eight years you could retire.

FORSYTHE: What did you do after that?

NANCE: Oh, that is when life began. I managed the Carnation milk plant in Sparta, Tennessee after I left Eagleville, after I quit teaching. The milk was shipped back down to Murfreesboro to process it. That is to homogenize and whatever they had to do to it. During the war the Army would send a big tank up there and take all we had, and it wasn't grade A milk, it was the run of the mill, they couldn't get what they had to have. They would ship it from there to Jacksonville, Florida and they would lose about two degrees in that time. There is more than fifty thousands pounds in one tank, the more you got, the slower it cools. Well that is enough of that. Then I went to the Army. I stayed two years down in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, then I went home, I figured I had better make a living so I worked for the Rural Electrification Administration and that was where I spent a year. That was when there was no rural electric service in this country. In Tennessee it was three percent of the rural people had electricity, most of the other states had ten percent. This is not TVA it is REA the Rural Electrification Association, the act was passed in 1936.

FORSYTHE: And what areas did it cover?

NANCE: The whole country. There were forty electric cooperatives in all the states except Rhode Island and Hawaii.

FORSYTHE: What happened to it when TVA came here?

NANCE: Well TVA was already here. All TVA does is supply power from the dams they have around here, the electric cooperatives were financed by REA, and we had mortgages and loan contracts with them, just like this one here, Middle Tennessee Electric is one of them. There is one at McMinnville, and there are over one thousand in the country.

FORSYTHE: Let me bring you back to MTSU. What was registration like?

NANCE: Well it was a pretty hard job because I believe the first year, Rollie Holden, he runs the hardware store down town, he and I went out to register for the first time. You know you could register for five dollars, and they begin to change that and it went up to eight dollars. It seemed to me like it stayed that way, it may have gotten a little higher when I got out in 1937, but it seemed like it just boomed, but that is cheap enough for registration.

FORSYTHE: Did you stay on campus?

NANCE: No, I did well enough just to get down there. About two years of the time I lived at home, we tried to commute. I spent a lot of the time trying to catch a ride, we stayed with some friends down there. Rollie and I spent some time together, but it was a big problem. I don't know how to emphasize it. It was a big problem to get to school.

FORSYTHE: A lot of people have told me about hitchhiking and I would be worried about getting to class on time.

NANCE: Well, I don't know why you would worry, because there was no choice. The only thing about it you had to start early. I couldn't have gotten out here at eight o'clock if I hadn't started on time, it would take two and a half hours to get there, by the time you found a way and then you would walk from the square.

FORSYTHE: Did you eat on campus.

NANCE: Seldom ever.

FORSYTHE: What did students do for fun?

NANCE: Well I guess there were regular sports. There was baseball, and basketball, and football, except I didn't bother with football. Of course the girls played basketball. They never lost a game in what they called the old gymnasium. That is a place where they have got rooms for classes. There was a balcony around there for seating and two or three seats around the edge, but they couldn't get very many people in there to see the games. They just didn't have a place to take care of them, but on the other hand there wasn't many going there any way. It was just like everything else. I have never been in what they call the new gymnasium.

FORSYTHE: Tell me about Dr. C. C. Sims.

NANCE: Dr. Sims taught an orientation class, it was supposed to be history. He was supposed to be a good teacher, except I am not sure I ever knew what the thing was all about. I passed the course but I don't know what it is about. The next thing I know about him, is when he died he gave the Presbyterian church out here, seems like one hundred and eighty thousand dollars.

FORSYTHE: T. J. Golightly.

NANCE: He was good in psychology. They got this story going around about venereal disease and he just got scared to death. He couldn't touch the door or anything, they would have trouble getting out of the house. But I enjoyed his classes.

FORSYTHE: George Davis

NANCE: He taught biology. There are a lot of things I ought not to tell I guess but upstairs in the classroom, for a final examination, nobody had any idea what he was going to ask. But he left the room and he went out the door and he broke the limb off of a tree and brought it up there. It just so happened that that was a Mock Orange

and everybody knew how to trace that all the way back and knew exactly what it was. He may have intended that, I don't know.

FORSYTHE: Neal Frazier.

NANCE: I guess he was a routine type college teacher, no glamour in his class. He also taught a class in Bible, which they don't do anymore. His wife taught English too. She taught about as long as he did.

FORSYTHE: William Mebane.

NANCE: He was one of the best teachers out there that I had. I am not sure he wasn't the best. He taught physics. At the break we would all go out side and he was out there with us for the full ten minutes. When the ten minutes were up he would take us right back in there. Some of them smoked, but not many, in that class. I remember him saying, if they ever learn how to split the atom, we will really have something in this country. He left out there and went to work up at Oak Ridge, working on nuclear energy. I haven't heard of him since, but they did split the atom.

FORSYTHE: J Marion Edney.

NANCE: I didn't think too much of him. He had never taught anywhere but in college, and it showed on him.

FORSYTHE: Clayton James.

NANCE: He is one of the best friends I have ever had. Dr. James died two years after I moved back down here. He was in Lebanon for a long while. His personality just glowed, he was a good teacher.

FORSYTHE: Anne Ordway.

NANCE: She was the best English teacher I have had in college. She is the aunt of Dr. Sam Hay in the city here now.

FORSYTHE: Philip Mankin.

NANCE: Well, as a teacher I think he had a bad reputation, but otherwise he was all right. He just talked about a lot of modern stuff, there wasn't anybody very modern then.

FORSYTHE: Horace Jones.

NANCE: I had him enough to get twenty-eight hours of math with him. He had the same book for years and years. He didn't have to see it, he would look at such and such a problem on such and such a page, and he would work it out in his head or put it on the board. He was a pretty good teacher.

FORSYTHE: Miss Mary Hall.

NANCE: Oh she was fine. She taught reading. I always kidded her about teaching reading. I would say, "You taught reading and I still can't read," she enjoyed that.

FORSYTHE: Isalee Freeman, she was in the library.

NANCE: No, I never went there unless I had some extra time, but I never had anything to do with the people in the library. That is what you did if you had some extra time, you hung out on the front porch, or you when to the library. Several of us would go to the library.

FORSYTHE: Tommie Reynolds

NANCE: She was a good math teacher and she was also good with the girls in physical education. You would be surprised that she was a good math teacher. I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't had a course with her. You just wouldn't think a woman could teach solid geometry.

FORSYTHE: Ollie Green.

NANCE: She was the best chemistry teacher out there. You know you had to balance an equation and most of them couldn't teach how to balance a chemical equation, it was too complicated. But she held class and the next day you got five questions, and if you answered all five of them you got an A and if you answered four you got a B and so on. The averages would come out and that is what you got, nobody got anything they didn't deserve. I sort of hesitate to tell you this. In a way she taught the difference between a rotten egg and an H₂ SO₄ smell. You better look that up. Back then you had to be ladylike to do it, I guess you don't have to be ladylike now. There was a completely ladylike way of doing it, no smile or nothing. The class didn't burst out, they didn't snicker, it was just perfect.

FORSYTHE: Katherine Monohan

NANCE: She was old and if she fell on the floor, you had better not put your hands on her, she didn't want any help to get up. Somebody brought her mail to her, he got a little special favor when it came to grading time, that is about all I know.

FORSYTHE: T. B. Woodmore

NANCE: I didn't have any money, and I went down to register and I got my card all filled out and I put it to Mr. Woodmore, he was where you paid your money, I said "I don't have any money" and he took the card and went off about a year or two after that I went through the graduation line in August and Mr. Beasley was giving out the degrees, when he got to me he said "I think you ought to go see Mr. Woodmore" I went to see him and he made a note for me to pay that off, I think it was ten or twelve or fifteen dollars, when I signed that note I went back to Mr. Beasley and I got the degree. I have seen Mr. Beasley stand before that auditorium with two hundred people in there on the training day for principles and teachers, that had come in and he could call everyone of their names, right there with no notes. I have never heard of anyone who could do that since.

FORSYTHE: Knox Hutchinson

NANCE: He was in a contest to get Mr. Lyon's job every year, but he never got it. He was the president of the electric co-op down here and also appointed to the secretary of agriculture in Washington, they brought a suit against him for conflict of interest, and they kicked him off of the electric co-op board, down here because of being secretary of agriculture. He had a farm out on 231, and he developed the first irrigation system that anybody had ever heard of in this part of the country, to irrigate his farm.

FORSYTHE: Did you student teach?

NANCE: Yes I taught for four years, I started in '33.

FORSYTHE: What do you remember about P.A. Lyon?

NANCE: I guess that is about all, he knew who I was and I knew who he was, that is about it. The president has to see that the legislature gives him enough money to run this place and he was good at that. That is all. After him was that fellow from Cookeville. Everybody enjoyed him he just talked funny, well it was peculiar not funny, he had a speech defect and everybody enjoyed putting up with it. Cope followed him, When I first went to Sparta, they were having trouble getting teachers, Cope was the superintendent, so he came out to the house to get my wife to teach, and she didn't want to teach, but he almost took her out here and he was there for several years.

FORSYTHE: Did you know President Ingram?

NANCE: Yes. Catherine and I went to the alumni meeting and we were sitting on the side in a row, and I think we were about the only ones there, next thing you know he came in and sit down beside me, just as if he was one of us. Well a lot of people were rushing around trying to get some special favors from the top people would

have a fit. But he just came down there and sat down by us without even knowing it. That is the best thing I know about him.

FORSYTHE: Tell me about the condition of the buildings.

NANCE:: They were kept up, they weren't new. Bob Kerr had the job of ringing the bell to change classes, he was a senior student that year, that is Charlie Kerr's brother, but he come back there, to the back part of the auditorium and he would mach that bell, and the classes would change, he had a lot of power. You could hear it all over the place. The classes were let out, and they would push a bell and it was time to go back in, that is the way he worked his way through school. He had to be there you see. I just thought the world of him, he was a hero of mine. But he went from there to teach school and coach football at Cornersville, and one Saturday night he and some of his friends were out in a car, and they drove into a truck that had a pole sticking out of the back, and the pole came through the windshield and it killed him. Everybody thought the world of him.

FORSYTHE: Didn't you play basketball?

NANCE: Well I went out but I wasn't very good and I only played in a few games. But Faulkinberry never told me to leave, and I never quit. He wanted to take me to Mississippi on a road trip, but the guy whose I was going to go in his place, changed his mind and I didn't go.

FORSYTHE: Tell me about coach Faulkinberry.

NANCE: He was a big old raw boned guy. They would invite him to make a commencement address at one of the schools and he would get up there without a note or anything and make a speech for twenty minutes and you could hear a pin drop, he had no idea what he was going to say when he started but it just came out. He was a good coach. There was five or six of us doing our own cooking in what we called the White House. It was on a street that runs into Ewing avenue, it is still there. Anyway there were five or six of us staying on the first floor doing our own cooking, literally. He lived between us and the school, and one morning about 6:30 or 7:00, why he shot himself in the garage. Nobody knows why he did that. Some of his players who were seniors at that time thought they did, but as far as I know nobody did. There was a lot of rumors going around that there was some woman involved, but nobody ever knew that. What ever come out about that, there is no truth to it. When he was coaching football at Sewanee, that was back when football got started, he was big enough that, he had a belt on and the guy would hold on to his belt, and he would take him through the line. He came from Fayetteville, everybody liked him. When he died, the girls quit playing games with other schools, and they just started back not to long ago.

FORSYTHE: Who came after him?

NANCE: Red Floyd, and then Freeman was in there some where, pretty soon, the one that the field house is named for, Murphy, he took over in the late forties and nobody has done a better job than he has, and everybody like him.

FORSYTHE: Where you involved in any of the other student organizations?

NANCE: No I had to spend all my time either in class or trying to get home, one way or the other.

FORSYTHE: Is there anything else you would like to talk about?

NANCE: No but you don't think of anything funny until it is to late.

FORSYTHE: Thank you.

End