

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
WITH
PHILIP HOWARD

15 AUGUST 1995

MURFREESBORO, TENNESSEE

INTERVIEWED BY REGINA FORSYTHE
FOR THE Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
INTERVIEW #QMS.061

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
PHILIP HOWARD**

Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW #QMS.061

FORSYTHE: This tape is part of the Q. M. Smith collection designated as QMS.1995.61 This is Regina Forsythe, I am interviewing Dr. Philip Howard. Today is Wednesday, August 16th, 1995. The interview is being conducted in the Gore research Center, room 111 of the Ned McWherter Learning Resource Center. The tape of this interview 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 Dr. Howard?

HOWARD: Yes.

FORSYTHE: What is your full name?

HOWARD: Charles Philip Howard.

FORSYTHE: What is your birthplace and date?

HOWARD: Smithland, KY. March 7th 1917

FORSYTHE: What is your father's name and place of birth?

HOWARD: Walter Raymond Howard, he was manager of a large stone quarry, a large stone business.

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

HOWARD: Her name was Lucy Karber Howard, she was a housewife.

FORSYTHE: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

HOWARD: No.

FORSYTHE: What is your wife's name?

HOWARD: Wera Dross Howard, at the moment she is a housewife, she however taught for twenty five years here at MTSU in the foreign language department.

FORSYTHE: What languages did she teach?

HOWARD: French and once in a while German when there was an overload.

FORSYTHE: Do you have any children?

HOWARD: We have two, a boy named Frank Howard, who is thirty five, and a daughter Barbara Howard who is twenty nine.

FORSYTHE: Did anyone else in your family work at MTSU?

HOWARD: No.

FORSYTHE: Did anyone else come to MTSU?

HOWARD: Not until this summer. My daughter decided to go to college.

FORSYTHE: What degrees do you have?

HOWARD: I have a bachelor of music education and a master of music, both in piano and in theory of music. Also I have a PhD in music theory and music history.

FORSYTHE: Where is your bachelor's from?

HOWARD: Murray State University, in 1938.

FORSYTHE: Why did you decide to go to Murray?

HOWARD: It was close and one usually goes to a local college. It was just seventy five miles from home. I could go there and go home each weekend, which I did most of the time. I guess, there is really no other reason. Also it was very inexpensive in comparison to having to go a long distance away.

FORSYTHE: Did you major in Music?

HOWARD: Yes.

FORSYTHE: Did you have a minor?

HOWARD: History

FORSYTHE: Where is your master's from?

HOWARD: I got that from the American Conservatory of Music, in Chicago, 1940.

FORSYTHE: Why did you go there?

HOWARD: I received a very substantial scholarship from the university to come there and of course that is the reason I went there. Also, it was at that time, a rather prestigious school for music. Conservatories up until around 1950 were the so-called centers where you would go to study specialized fields like music. By the fifties, during the war, universities began to move into the area of teaching the field of music. So they became specialists in music also, so slowly the conservatories disappeared. The closest one that was very well known was the famous old Cincinnati conservatory, which was this place to go to study from all the south-land. They usually went to Cincinnati, but I went to the American Conservatory in Chicago which was at that time a very prestigious school.

FORSYTHE: Did you have to do a thesis?

HOWARD: I did actually a thesis in theory in the form of original composition. I did some chamber music for piano, clarinet, and cello. The other thing, I didn't have to do any written work. Then on the piano part, I had to give a recital the size of which would qualify as a jury, so to speak, a rather substantial program, including a concerto and so forth.

FORSYTHE: Where did you get your Ph. D.

HOWARD: It was from the University of Iowa, at Iowa City, I got that in 1950. I went to Iowa because I wrote to many schools and Iowa's letter sounded the most sensible and sounded the most interesting. Second, I did not want to go to a university which was in a large city. I had experienced four years of life in Chicago and that was enough of big city life for me. This was in a small town and I thought that would be much better, and then I learned happily after I got there, that it was one of the finest of the big ten schools in the realm of creative arts, it still is. It is a real cultural center for the arts, all the arts, especially for writing. In the realm of music, it had the prestige of being the only government supported field of composition west of the Mississippi river. And, there they subsidized at one time as many as fifteen composers, who did nothing but perform and compose their own music. So you can see it was a great creative atmosphere, I did not realize that at the time. I went there because it was in a small town, also it was the smallest of the big ten universities. Yet I knew it was a good music school. I enjoyed it tremendously there. I enjoyed life in Iowa, it is a wonderful place.

FORSYTHE: Did you do a dissertation there?

HOWARD: Yes. I did, in the realm of theory, an original composition, what you call creative dissertations. I did two or three chamber works for woodwinds, and I did two orchestra pieces, eventually a large orchestra work of perhaps fourteen minutes length - one movement work for clarinet and bassoon as a double concerto with orchestra. This was my major thesis project that took me nine months to write, and so forth. Then in the musicology realm, I did some research on what we call music printing. I went back and studied printing in the medieval period, as best I possibly could with wood blocks, a type of printing of music, as early as 800 when the so called staff was developed. Music printing on wood blocks being pressed onto the parchment was the way they transported music from one area of Europe to another, so I made a study of some of those techniques of wood block printing.

FORSYTHE: Why did you choose to study music?

HOWARD: Well I think it was almost a joke the way I got into it. I went off to college and had no particular aim in mind at all, because I really had no major that I was especially interested in. So, I went to college to take a general course as people usually did in those days. As a matter of fact, there are many more people in those days that went to college simply to take general courses, with no major in mind when they arrived. They would select a major while they were there. So, I went to take a general course, and I have often laughed, during the days of registration, in one great big corner of the gymnasium, there was so much confusion. I didn't know what to do, and I asked someone where should I go next. He said, "What do you want to study?" I said, "Just take a general course, I know that I do want to take some piano lessons because I had studied piano through high school and before and like to play. " He said, "Well why don't you go talk to that fellow." It turned out that fellow was head of the Music department, and he signed me up as a major. I didn't realize. I think it must have been six weeks before I realized I was a Music major, but I was enjoying the course so much that just stayed with it. I had no idea that I would get into that field. I eventually wound up with a Music Education degree, which would equip me for teaching, band or chorus in high schools or elementary schools. But when I got out, I of course was offered this scholarship, to go work on my masters, which I did. It propelled me into the area where I could get into college if I could, so I ultimately did. I taught privately around Chicago for a couple of years, and taught some at the conservatory where I had been. I was on the faculty as an adjunct for a while. After two years of that I got a job at the University of Mississippi

teaching theory and history and so forth. From then on I was a college teacher.

FORSYTHE: How did you start taking music lessons?

HOWARD: I was eight, and we lived in an extremely isolated area of Kentucky. There was nothing there, it might have been two hundred years earlier as far as the amenities of life, but there was a little town six miles down the river. We had to go by boat, there were no roads into there. My mother found a woman who could teach piano. She took me there about once every, seems to me we went once a month, most of the time, some times we went every two weeks, went down to [?] to take piano lessons. I practiced at home, of course due to my mother seeing that I did. She was a good organized German woman, and she saw that I got to that piano. When I went to high school, I went at that little town. There happened to be a woman who had been teaching at some other part of the country, and had decided to come back home and live there with her family. She was a fine pianist and a superb piano teacher. I found her and I had four years of wonderful study with her. Anyway, she was the finest teacher I ever had.

FORSYTHE: Did you play in any bands?

HOWARD: Yes, when I got in college, I took up the clarinet and played in the band through those years, and did my stint in the marching band. When I came to MTSU, I sat in on a string class with students and learned the cello well enough to be able to play in the little orchestra here. I played well enough to have some kids come over and play little string quartets at our home and things like that. I enjoyed that so much. To me the cello is one of the magnificent instruments.

FORSYTHE: Why did you choose to teach music instead of going into the industry?

HOWARD: There was no music industry then, first place, the recording industry wasn't known so to speak. They made recordings, but the music industry, as we know it today, did not exist when I was young, only in New York and Hollywood. But do you mean into performance or something like that? Well I never was really a performer. To me, I never felt good enough to do professional playing in the classical world. Second, I didn't really like that. My nature was not so much one to be into any kind of show business, or any kind of entertaining or anything, my nature was not that way. Whereas the other, I like the reading about it, I liked the study, I like to talk to people about music. You know I loved to teach it, that aspect I was very lucky to be in that. I guess that is probably just because of my make-up and my nature, I preferred to teach music to other people,

in this sense, I was glad to get into college level. In that one sense, you can teach more advanced materials and you can keep learning yourself which is the reason I worked on a doctorate. I had no need to get a doctorate. For example, I was teaching in a little college in Arkansas, Hendricks College, and I had a good position. I liked to live there very much. It was such a nice area, and pretty, but I just felt that I needed to know more and I was more or less marking time. I had been teaching five or six, or seven years, at that point. I took a leave of absence and went to the University of Iowa on the assumption that I was just going to take some classes and learn something. But after a semester, a teacher came to me and said, "Listen, you are taking all of these courses and passing them, why don't you sign up for a degree." And so I did, why shouldn't I? I wrote back to my college that I would have to give up my leave of absence. I was very flattered because the president wrote back and said, "No, we will extend it another year." At that time I had received a teaching fellowship at Iowa and was able to support myself a second year. Eventually I wrote to him and said, "I must be honest. When I get out I will not return to Hendricks because frankly I had to go home. I intended to spend the winter with my parents, was one thing, the other was that I needed to find a job that would pay more money. Hendricks was a wonderful school but it was a private school and was really having difficulty being able to pay salaries. I had hoped to try to get on my feet, I had spent everything I had on my doctorate.

FORSYTHE: Where is Hendricks located?

HOWARD: In Conway, Arkansas, thirty miles north of Little Rock. Originally a Methodist endowed school, it has since become a standard liberal arts private school, it is a very good one. I suspect it has around fifteen hundred students, a fine atmosphere, and excellent. They take only the ten percent from the high schools. Only the ten percent of the best students will come so it is a very fine school.

FORSYTHE: Did you start teaching there right after your master's degree?

HOWARD: No, as I said I taught two years privately in Chicago. Then I taught at the University of Mississippi two years. Then I taught one year in Virginia, in Shenandoah Valley, at a private girl's school, Mary Baldwin College. I went there at the request of someone who was wanting to build up the theory department. I also wanted to live in that beautiful part of the United States. I still think it is one of the prettiest parts of the United States. It was really a one year job, but I wanted to do that. Then I went to Hendricks and stayed there three years. Now I have about, what is this, a two, five, seven, eight years of teaching and felt I wanted to go back and learn more. I went back to work on my doctorate.

FORSYTHE: Do you remember your job interview?

HOWARD: Yes, very well. It was with Q. M. Smith. I arrived and strangely enough I didn't contact Dr. Wright who was the head of the department. I was told, from a letter, to come directly to the Old Main building, or whatever they called it at that time. I went up those big steps and up into the hall and there stood a very tall good-looking man. I said to him, "I would like to ask you if you can help me find the office of Dean Beasley." This man said something which I didn't understand, but he also pointed to the door and I went in and met Dean Beasley. After talking with Beasley for quite some time, he said, "I would like to have you meet the president." We went across the hall to meet him and that turned out to be the president that I had already met in the hall. Mr. Smith said something to me, you know he had this speech impediment which made it very difficult for me to understand. Even though I knew him very well later, I still had problems. I think part of it was psychology on my part thinking, "I won't be able to understand him." He said something to me and I said, "I beg your pardon?" He repeated and he said, "Have a chair." That started a kind of informal relationship with us. I really grew to like him very much and got to admire him very much. All the marvelous stories that are told of him, many of them I remember very well, helped clinch the fact that I thought he was really quite a fellow. In fact, I would have put him quite high in people I have known that have clean-cut character. That made him rather unique as a person, and you remember his uniqueness. There was nothing mundane nor common place about his remarks. They were usually spiced with some real humor and usually with a great deal of common sense and thought. That was my first impression of him. There were so many stories told about him, so many that I wouldn't be a bit surprised if they were made-up. On the other hand, he was the type of person who encouraged this by his nature. I remember one or two stories, would you like to hear a few of them?

FORSYTHE: I would like to hear all of them.

HOWARD: One was, he was very forthright, and he was in command of everything. He had come here and assumed a complete role as almost a dictator. He kept his hands on everything, on hiring and firings, and on salaries, so you went to him as a great father figure. He could express himself without concern. One time one of the faculty members wrote to him and said that he would like to have a "petition" in his office. Well nothing happened and eventually the fellow went to Mr. Smith's office. Mr. Smith said, "When you learn how to spell it, I'll have it built." Another one that was an amusement to many of us, how he could speak that way to the faculty. There was a smart aleck teacher, who took his three children with

him and very strongly said, "I want you to know that if you don't give me a raise, I am leaving." Then Mr. Smith said, "Well, I wish you well" He had complete control over everything and yet he was kind. There is a story that when he was listening to a father who was complaining that his son had been flunked out of college, Mr. Smith said, "Well we did the best we could with what you sent us." Things like this were absolutely true. But one of the fine stories that I have always felt represented the man's sensitivity was the time that the State Board came here for a meeting. It was going to end in a big banquet. Now Mr. Smith and his helpers had done everything, they had never had such a banquet at MTSC at this time. Candles of a certain color were flown in from New York, a menu that was unusual in every way, the tables were decorated in a manner that they probably never had before. We all ate, and now came the time for him to get up to say something. What do you think you would say at a time like that? Obviously it was a very auspicious occasion. He said, "This is the way we eat here all the time." The Board absolutely fell over in laughter and the laughter continued. It would die down and then it would come up again. This showed me this man's keen sensitivity to any situation. I found him to be a very normal man and he was fair.

FORSYTHE: I know the music library is named after you, is there any other honor or award you were given?

HOWARD: I don't know of any other award really. I don't think of any, maybe there are a few minor things, but that is the main thing in what you call a noticeable award. I was flattered by that, in that sense, and I hope I earned it. I did work for years helping to establish that library and to stock the standard materials that were needed for research and study, when I first came here. Fortunately in the last twenty years, some of the other faculty have begun to order and get things rolling that way. At the moment we have two excellent men in our department, a theorist and musicologist both of whom know a great deal about that kind of thing. I suspect they will be enhancing the library's holdings before long.

FORSYTHE: Who are they?

HOWARD: The first one is Michael Linton and the other's name is Steven Sheron. They both came last year, this is their second year.

FORSYTHE: I know Margaret Wright had the Sacred Harp Singers, did you have any groups?

HOWARD: No. I taught only class work and piano when I came. I didn't do anything with the vocal. I did a lot of accompanying for students and

accompanying the faculty sometimes in recitals, but I didn't have anything to do with performing groups or anything like that.

FORSYTHE: I want to ask you about the buildings when you came here, start with, where was the music department located?

HOWARD: Well, our enclave when I came, there was really nothing here. The Wright's had been here about three years, I believe, and had begun to make little inroads in the idea that the department was a field that should be considered. They still hadn't been able to have any place to hold it. They had granted them some rooms in the bottom, in the basement of what is today, Old Main, Kirksey Old Main. They really were in the basement. What windows they had were up high, you could see people's feet go by as you stood there talking. Somebody might park a motorcycle beside your head. We had about three or four rooms. One was large enough to have some sort of a rehearsal for band or orchestra; and two other rooms, I believe for classes; and a couple of rooms that were used partly as teaching studios. They had been there three or four years and I came and stayed one year. Then we moved over to what had formerly been the old cafeteria, which now is the Alumni Building. They renovated that and now we did have two fine rehearsal rooms, two or three good teaching rooms, and I had my own private room. It was very nice. Actually, it was a pretty good atmosphere over there. We were there from '52 until '59, I believe it was. At that time they got what they call the Saunders building built. We moved over there in the fall of '59. I don't remember the dates when they built the annex called the Wright building, it must have been ten years ago, maybe sixteen years ago.

FORSYTHE: How did you feel about moving from Old Main to what is now the Alumni Center?

HOWARD: Oh, we were as happy as could be. This was unbelievable down there in the bottom and no atmosphere whatsoever. It was surrounded by students who seemed to always be down in that part of the thing with chairs sitting around everywhere. Old Main was a mess, so we were delighted to move to that, and delighted to move to this new building. There we had nice offices and good classrooms. The present building was not very successful. They had to build it, as I told before, the fact that Q.M. Smith came to Mr. Wright and said, "All of these nice things you want, such as rooms with angles for acoustical teaching, a couple of little interesting looking rehearsal halls; you will have to cut those out because we have to build a straight building because the board insists that we use much of the money to put four columns on the front. I have really taken some flak from the Board of Regents because we didn't put any on the James Union building when we built that." So, we had to do that and give

up some of the niceties, but the building was built on the lowest bid possible and it has had a lot of problems. we had not been there longer than three years until it had sagged, the doors wouldn't work properly and so forth, but never the less, we have really gotten use out of that old building and it was so wonderful to get into that after being in a much more inferior area. One thing I regret, was that when they did renovate Kirksey Old Main, back in the days of Dr. Quill Cope, they destroyed a very nice theater, or auditorium, a small auditorium in it, it seated about five hundred people, and it had wonderful acoustics and would have been just wonderful to have kept because you need large lecture rooms now, as we know so all of us wrote to Dr. Cope pointing that out, but he said that unfortunately money played a role and we needed the space for offices, and so forth and we lost that, that was a great loss for us, and it was many years before we were to get any kind of a decent auditorium which we fortunately have now in the Wright Music Building.

FORSYTHE: Vet's Village was here, can you tell me about it?

HOWARD: Well, behind what they call Jones Hall, there was a lot of open space, and they had put these little Quancit huts or whatever you call them in a row. That was utilized, I think, by almost everything as storage. It was a place for married students to live, it maybe even held some classes, and it was really something to see. But it served it's purpose, because following the war there was this tide of people coming back on the GI bill, and just flooded the campus. They hadn't ever expected such a thing, such was the case with some many colleges and universities. Even this little college of Hendricks, where I was, which had approximately when I went there, four or five hundred students, it experienced that too. It suddenly got two or three more hundred GIs coming back to go to school. We had to put them anywhere in the world, there was no dormitories or anything.

FORSYTHE: Tell me about the Airport. The one that the old hanger is part of Forrest Hall.

HOWARD: I don't remember that one, that must have been before my time. There was one out on the Old Nashville Highway where small planes would take off.

FORSYTHE: That was Sky Harbor.

HOWARD: I remember an incident there that Will Rogers was flying, as he did often, from California to New York. Coming around this plane had to put down somewhere for gas, and it put down in this little place. Well the word got out into the city that Will Rogers was out there. The cars just began to run out there in swarms. There must have been several hundred people in no

time at all, just appeared on the scene and they surrounded him. He just stood there and talked in that typical Rogers way for thirty minutes or something like that while they were filling the plane. It was the most exciting thing that had happened in this town in some time, because, do you remember the name Will Rogers?

FORSYTHE: Yes I do, he is one of my favorites.

HOWARD: He was a national favorite, everybody loved him and he became an absolute symbol of everything. I remember when he died in '36, I guess it was, the country went into absolute mourning. It was amazing, they went into a mourning that you would expect for the death of a president, or someone of tremendous significance. He was so well known and so well loved. It was really one of my joys to get to listen to that man on the radio and read his little daily remarks in the paper and things like that, and enjoy him also in movies.

FORSYTHE: Were you here when the MacArthurs came to town?

HOWARD: No, I arrived two months after that took place, but I have had it described to me many times. It must have been like the triumphal Roman's returning from their conquests. They met them out between here and Smyrna with a parade, with a group of cars and they came into town. It was decorated and festivities in general were held. It was a great event, I remember people talking about it for some time after I arrived.