

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
WITH
WILLIAM WINDHAM

8 SEPTEMBER 1995

MURFREESBORO, TENNESSEE

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

INTERVIEW #QMS.087

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
WILLIAM WINDHAM**

Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW #QMS.087

FORSYTHE: This tape is part of the Quintin Miller Smith Collection designated as QMS.1995.87. This is Regina Forsythe. I am interviewing Dr. William Windham. Today is Friday, September 8th, 1995. The interview is being conducted in the Gore Research Center Room 111, of the Ned McWherter Resource Center. The tape of this interview along with a transcription of this interview will become a part of the Q. M. 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. Windham?

WINDHAM: Yes.

FORSYTHE: What is your full name?

WINDHAM: William Thomas Windham

FORSYTHE: What is your birth date and place of birth?

WINDHAM: December 29, 1925. Jasper County, Mississippi.

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

WINDHAM: Frazier Wilson Windham, he was a farmer and a self taught electrician.

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

WINDHAM: Lenora Read Windham, she was a housewife, still living.

FORSYTHE: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

WINDHAM: Two sisters, Betty Windham Roberts, and Sara Windham Bassett

FORSYTHE: What is your wife's name?

WINDHAM: Her name is Westy Tate Windham.

FORSYTHE: That is an unusual name.

WINDHAM: It was taken from Westmoreland.

FORSYTHE: What was her occupation?

WINDHAM: She was a housewife and a part time teacher, she taught at MTSU, she taught sociology.

FORSYTHE: Do you have any children?

WINDHAM: Yes, Diane Windham Shaw, William Thomas Windham Jr., and Rebecca Bates Windham.

FORSYTHE: Did anyone else in your family work at MTSU

WINDHAM: No.

FORSYTHE: Why did you choose to work here?

WINDHAM: Well, I had a good friend on the faculty here, Dr. Robert Corlew, and I was on the faculty at Virginia Tech. Dr. Corlew called and said there was an opening here. I didn't see much future in history at Virginia Tech, primarily an engineering school, so I came over for an interview and did get it in 1955.

FORSYTHE: What years did you work here?

WINDHAM: From 1955 to 1989.

FORSYTHE: When you came in '55 did you interview with Q. M. Smith.

WINDHAM: Yes I did. I came through here on a Sunday afternoon, I was going down to Mississippi to visit my parents. I had been told by Dr. Corlew or Dr. Parks, that I might have a little difficulty understanding him, and so I was a little apprehensive. I came to his home, one Sunday afternoon and he received me very graciously. we went into the living room, and we talked and I could hear him just as clearly. I had no trouble at all understanding him. That was a very pleasant interview, and I was quite impressed with him.

FORSYTHE: What degrees do you have?

WINDHAM: I have a BS in chemistry, from Illinois Tech in Chicago, and I have a MA and Ph.D. in history from the University of Alabama.

FORSYTHE: Why did you switch from chemistry to history?

WINDHAM: Well I got my degree during World War II. I was in the naval officer program and I had to choose engineering or science as a major, so I chose chemistry. I had some chemistry courses in junior college, which I liked. So I got my degree and

commission at Illinois Tech in 1946. After the War I worked as a research chemist for Masonite Corporation in Laurel Mississippi. But I did not really enjoy that type of work. I was not really fond of lab work. I thought I wanted to teach. I had played basketball in high school and in college, and I coached a team in the service in Japan. I also coached an industrial league team, so I decided that I wanted to go back and get a degree and teach history in high school and coach basketball. I chose the University of Alabama and I went over there and got a masters. I decided to get the doctorate because I got a fellowship beyond the masters, so I decided to be a college teacher.

FORSYTHE: What were your job duties when you were hired here?

WINDHAM: I came as an assistant professor and I taught Western Civilization and American history, primarily lower division for a while. Then I began to develop some graduate courses.

FORSYTHE: What different positions have you held?

WINDHAM: Well, assistant professor, then associate, then full professor. In '78 I became the department chair. I served eleven years as the department chair.

FORSYTHE: How has the History department changed from '55 to '90?

WINDHAM: Of course it has changed in terms of size. The department grew rapidly, and I am not sure how many they have there. It is somewhere in the twenties. But when I came there was not really a History department, there was a department of social sciences. Dr. Norman Parks headed this department which included economics and sociology, political science, and history. I have seen the department develop as an independent unit. That happened in 1963. Dr. Corlew probably told you about this. It became a separate department in '63. So, for the first eight years I was in the department of Social Sciences.

FORSYTHE: Where was that department located?

WINDHAM: We were in Old Main. We came over to the dramatic arts building in '63. Then, I am not sure about these dates, but I think we moved to Peck Hall in 1968.

FORSYTHE: Where in Old Main were you?

WINDHAM: Up on the second floor, I don't recall the room numbers.

FORSYTHE: Were your classes also on the second floor?

WINDHAM: Most of them. There were some down on the first floor, but most were on the second floor.

FORSYTHE: How many students were in your class?

WINDHAM: Well I had some large classes with forty students or more, usually thirty to forty. I taught Latin American history for a while and I remember having 45 students in a class, an upper division class which is really too much for an upper division course.

FORSYTHE: I want to ask you about some of the people in the history department. Dr. Sims.

WINDHAM: Dr. Sims had already retired when I came. I was given his old office. He would come around from time to time and get to know us. I did get to know him, although not too well; but I did chat with him several times. He had a great sense of humor, he was always cracking jokes. He wasn't fully retired, he was still teaching a little bit when I came. He had not retired completely and he was very friendly and outgoing, and for his age he seemed to have a lot of energy. Mrs. Sims was a very gracious Southern lady, I was impressed with her.

FORSYTHE: Norman Parks.

WINDHAM: Dr. Parks is one of the most brilliant people I have ever known. He was just extremely sharp, and he was an excellent teacher. He had a lot to impart to students. He used the Socratic method. He asked questions in class. He could lecture too. He was so knowledgeable in many areas. He was just a brilliant man. Of course from time to time, people in history thought we should be separate because we were growing and becoming rather large. I guess we had the largest enrollment in the department, and Dr. Parks didn't want to see us split up. But the time came that we were so large that we needed to break away, and that did come in 1963. Dr. Corlew was appointed to head the new History department, so we were with Dr. Parks eight years. I maintained contact with him, and he went on to chair the Political Science department, and so did sociology. Dr. Parks headed the Political Science department for several years. I saw him quite often on campus, and I have maintained contact with him since he retired. He is still very alert. He lost his wife this year which was quite a blow. They had been married over sixty years, he is a very remarkable man.

FORSYTHE: Dr. Corlew.

WINDHAM: Dr. Corlew is why I came here. He and I had become friends at the University of Alabama. We were in graduate school together and I got to know him at Alabama. He had informed me about the position here in the department of Social Science in 1955. I came here and Bob and his wife were very kind to my wife and me. We both had young children and they were about the same age, so we became very good friends over the years, very close friends. Dr. Corlew was a very fine chairman. He was fair. He was always available. He meant a lot to me and to my career here. Then he became the Dean and eventually vice president. He did an outstanding job in each of those capacities. I have been very fortunate

to work under him and to be his colleague and friend all of these years. To me he is one of the outstanding members of the faculty for the last forty or so years.

FORSYTHE: Dr. Charlotte Williams Allen.

WINDHAM: I knew her, she was already on the staff here. She too was a very brilliant person, very impressive intellectual credentials. She taught political science. I have maintained contact with her since she retired. I was always very impressed with her and her knowledge of Tennessee politics. Her father was a judge here, and she knew so many people who were involved in politics. She knew the governors and leaders of the legislature, I really enjoyed that.

FORSYTHE: Clayton James.

WINDHAM: What a marvelous and wonderful man he was. He was one of the most decent, kindest people I have ever met. He was teaching sociology when I came here, and he became dean of students. He was a very kind Dean, helpful to many students here at MTSU. You can't say anything unkind about him. He was such a gentleman. You could never get him to proceed you through a door, he would always insist that you go first. Clayton and I were involved in a program called the Danforth program. It was established by the Danforth Foundation, the people who had the Ralston-Purina company. The program was designed to improve faculty/student relations on college campuses in America. The Danforth people appointed what they called Danforth Associates. The associates were to hold meetings in their homes with students and other faculty members to have discussions on current events and important issues. There would be regional conferences. We belonged to the Tennessee-Mississippi-Kentucky conference. We often went to Berea College in Kentucky. We had meetings with other faculty members and we talked about current problems facing people in academia. Anyway, Clayton and his wife were Danforth associates. My wife and I became Danforth associates along with Lane Boutwell and Wink Midgett and his wife. The people we met in this program were among the best people on campus. Morally and intellectually, they were just the tops. So we got to know Clayton and his wife that way, and I still see his wife occasionally. She's a wonderful person.

FORSYTHE: Lillian Gray.

WINDHAM: Lillian was not here too long. She came here when she had been active in this profession for many years. I think she came from Athens College and she taught sociology. She was a very gracious lady. I really enjoyed talking to Lillian. She gave me a copy of an American Heritage volume. This is a very fine work on American history. I still have that volume, because she died shortly after I got that copy from her before I was able to return it. She was a very capable person, a very friendly person.

FORSYTHE: Robert Martin.

WINDHAM: Robert Martin taught economics. He was a very friendly person. Bob Martin was popular with the students, he had very big classes. I didn't get to know Bob that well socially. We were not together too often but he was always very friendly and cordial to me.

FORSYTHE: Billy Mac Jones.

WINDHAM: Billy Mac taught history with us. He had been a coach I believe. I think he had coached at Vanderbilt. He was a tall athletic gentleman, and he was a Texan. Billy Mac loved history and he was a very friendly person. He went on to become a college president. He was there for several years. He attended a special program to train administrators. I think it was somewhere in the West, I am not sure. But he trained to be an administrator and he became a university president. He was always very friendly toward me.

FORSYTHE: Eugene Sloan.

WINDHAM: Gene taught in our department when I first came here. He didn't teach very long. Gene was a very good writer. He had done some journalistic work on the maneuvers that were done here during WW II. I didn't get to know Gene that well. He was very knowledgeable about current affairs, especially about Tennessee. I was impressed, Gene was a very fine person.

FORSYTHE: Barton McCash.

WINDHAM: He was one of our top instructors, in fact, Barton may have been our best classroom teacher. He came to us in the early 1960's from the University of Georgia. He was very knowledgeable in the area of southern history. He published a book on a leading Georgia politician, Thomas Cobb I believe. He and his wife later did a book on Jekyll Island, a famous club there. Bart was an outstanding scholar. He and I became very close. He was interested in sports. He enjoyed the University of Georgia football team. I followed Alabama's football team so we were big rivals on the football field when they met. Bart and I became good friends. When I was department chair, Bart served as the department chair of lower division studies, the teaching assistants. He did a fine job in whatever he did. His death was a tremendous loss to the department. He would have been an outstanding department chair. He was just a very fine colleague and a brilliant instructor.

FORSYTHE: James McBroom.

WINDHAM: Jim taught sociology. I don't think I knew him many years. In time, he became the chairman of that department. Jim was a very friendly person. My wife worked with him in the department of Sociology. She was impressed with him.

FORSYTHE: Roscoe Strickland.

WINDHAM: One of my dearest friends, Roscoe was already here on the staff when I came. We got to be very good friends. He was primarily in European history, and students liked Dr. Strickland very much. He had a remarkable background. He had degrees from the University of Pennsylvania and Duke University. He was well trained in his profession, and students seemed to like him. He headed important various committees. He was elected to be the first or second faculty senate president. I am not sure whether he was first or second, but he set the tone for faculty senate president. I looked up to him and admire him very much.

FORSYTHE: Can you tell me more about the faculty senate?

WINDHAM: Faculty senate came up as a result of a self study. I wish I could give you the exact dates on these things, it was somewhere around 1960 that we launched the faculty senate. I think I was the third president, Bob Womack and Roscoe Strickland were the first two. The faculty needed a voice in university governance, and it took the senate a while to find its place. The senate has been active since that time in getting across to the administration the views of the faculty. Frankly it hasn't had that much authority, but it has been an advisory body to the president. the presidents who have been here since we have organized the senate have tried to incorporate the senate in university governance. The present condition of the senate is something that I can't really speak to., I don't know really today how much influence they have. But we have had some very fine people in the senate, and they have helped to set forth the views of the faculty on various issues.

FORSYTHE: What issues did you deal with when you were president?

WINDHAM: For one thing the senate was involved in working with committees. The senate was deeply involved in appointing committee members. From time to time, we would have a committee on committees. I served on that committee at least twice, and we would revise the committee system. In general the senate wanted to have more voice in running the university and to let the faculty know what the interests were. They were always involved in getting more pay for the faculty. Also the senate was involved in trying to reduce teaching loads. When I came here we taught on the quarter systems and we taught fifteen hours each quarter. The senate did play a role in reducing the teaching load to twelve hours.

FORSYTHE: Did you have to do other projects in addition to teaching?

WINDHAM: Yes. Of course when I first came here we did not emphasize research and writing that much. MTSU is primarily a teaching institution, we were to train teachers. That changed over the years, research became important. Faculty were expected to do something like that and in recent years that has been emphasized more and

more. Of course we had committee assignments, and in time we were divided into schools, colleges. There were other things for the faculty to do. When we developed a graduate program we had people who were in charge of the graduate program who had to direct the teaching assistants.

FORSYTHE: Did they have to give lectures outside of the classroom?

WINDHAM: Yes, we were called upon to talk outside the university, to clubs and organizations, and at history conventions. We have an organization in Tennessee, Tennessee historians, we meet once a year; and professors give papers at those meetings. We have the Southern Historical Association. Over the years a number of our members have given papers at the Southern Historical meeting. People wrote articles for journals and book reviews, so the faculty did give lectures outside the classroom. Some produced articles and books.

FORSYTHE: Newell Moore.

WINDHAM: Dr. Moore joined the faculty in, I guess, January of '55, and I joined in September of '55. He was senior to me by a few months. He was a good friend of mine. Dr. Moore was extremely well read, he may have been the best reader among my colleagues. He read extensively in his field of expertise. He was always up on the latest development of historiography in the twentieth century. He bought new books when they came out, and he underlined passages and marked passages in his books. He had a great sense of humor. He enjoyed telling anecdotes in his classroom about leading figures like president Eisenhower or Truman and was always telling stories about leading politicians, also Tennessee politicians. I enjoyed his anecdotes and jokes. He also liked to tell us about his cars. When it was time to buy a new car, he would prepare us by telling us what was wrong with his car, if he had a leak or something. We knew that he was getting ready to buy a new car. We kidded him about this a lot. He was extremely well read and he was a good instructor.

FORSYTHE: Ernest Hooper.

WINDHAM: Another dear friend of mine. Ernest came a few years after I was here. Ernest was teaching at Yankon College of North Dakota. I did not know him. But he came shortly after I came here, and he and I became good friends. My wife and his wife became good friends. We always thought very highly of the Hoopers. He was a very fine teacher, very meticulous. He knew some of the top scholars in the south. He had gone to the University of North Carolina for his doctorate. That institution had produced a great number of scholars, and he knew most of them. He liked to tell stories about the past in Murfreesboro. He grew up here, and he could tell so many stories about the people of Murfreesboro. He would sometimes repeat the stories. He would say, "Bill have I told you about so and so?" and sometimes I would say yes. Sometimes I wasn't sure, so he would tell me again.

FORSYTHE: Harry Green.

WINDHAM: Harry was one of our students. He came from Lebanon and I believe he was in economics. I had Harry in some classes. He was ambitious to be a professor, and he became one. I have lost contact with him, but I remember that he was a very good student. He had an ambition to be in college work. I think he became a college administrator, but I am not sure about his career.

FORSYTHE: James Huhta.

WINDHAM: James came here sometime in the 1960's, another University of North Carolina product. Jim was a very dynamic young man when he came here, very ambitious. He was a good teacher and sort of a dramatic type of teacher. He went on to develop a program in Historic Preservation. He taught himself that field really. He helped to develop that profession in this country, and as you know he heads the center for historic preservation. He is extremely well known in that field. He and Dr. McCash and I were interested in improving teaching in the department, and we developed a team teaching concept. One year, we taught about one hundred students, the three of us, in a large classroom in Peck Hall. We gave two lectures a week, and we broke them into smaller groups for the third session. We tried that for one year and it was very interesting. Jim would lecture on the colonial period, Dr. McCash would lecture on the civil war period, and I would lecture on the American west. We divided up the material in this fashion, and we had some top students in that large class. We enjoyed it very much. I was very fond of Jim and very impressed with him. He is one of our top assets.

FORSYTHE: Fred Crawford.

WINDHAM: Fred is a very dear friend of mine. He came shortly after I did. He came from the University of Kentucky. He didn't have his degree at the time, but he did get it eventually. We share an interest in sports, especially baseball. He is a Dodgers fan and I am a Tigers fan, so we kid each other about our teams from time to time. We also share an interest in music. My late wife formed an organization called the Great American Sing-Along, and I have been heading that organization for the past several years. and This organization is non profit. We have received support from the Tennessee Arts Commission, but we are primarily self sufficient. We have about twenty five or thirty people in this organization and we meet once a week at Saint Mark's church and practice. We do all sorts of songs, then we go out to nursing homes and the Veteran's hospital and we sing and get the patients to sing with us, and a lot of time they know these songs. This is a form of musical therapy that my wife thought would be helpful to patients in nursing homes and the VA hospital. Fred has been a member of our organization, he really enjoys singing. We kid him a lot. We have a song like "Davy Crockett", that has about twenty verses, and Fred says let's do all of them. But he has been a fine supporter of this organization, and that has meant a lot to me. He is a fine teacher.

FORSYTHE: Bob Womack.

WINDHAM: He is one of the top professors that I have known here. he is just an all- around person. He is very active in the horse industry, he has written books on horses. He is also active in the Civil War, in terms of writing about the war and doing research. We had a Civil War roundtable here years ago and Bob was a member of that. Bob is one of the most original thinkers that I have encountered here. He was sort of an iconoclast, he would raise issues in his classes that most people were afraid to raise. I admired him for that very much because he wanted students to think and to embrace the possibilities and to encounter new ideas. Bob is still going like the energizer rabbit, he just won't quit. But he is a top notch professor and a good friend of mine.

FORSYTHE: Were you on the roundtable?

WINDHAM: Yes.

FORSYTHE: You just gave lectures?

WINDHAM: We would meet and would talk on a certain aspect. I talked on the civil war in Texas, Dr. McCash talked on a specific topic that he had done research on, Dr. Womack had done research on the Civil War in Tennessee. In fact, he has written a book based on a number of diaries and letters that he uncovered.

FORSYTHE: Thelma Jennings.

WINDHAM: Thelma joined the faculty shortly after I did. She was a protege of Roscoe Strickland and he was very fond of her. Thelma became one of our top teachers in Southern history. She produced a book eventually on Southern history. Thelma was a needed addition to our staff, we didn't have too many women. Thelma added a great deal to our department. I still see Thelma. She was very much interested in our graduate students. She helped with our TA's and they were very fond of her.

FORSYTHE: Paul Monico.

WINDHAM: Paul had a marvelous sense of humor, and he was a good teacher, I think he went on to become a department chair or dean somewhere. Paul was an unusual teacher and he would reward students who gave good answers in class with a Moon Pie. He had a great sense of humor and a good personality.

FORSYTHE: Norman Ferris

WINDHAM: Norman is one of our top faculty members, he is just outstanding. Norman came to us in the early 1960's. He had a very fine background, he is from Emory.

Norman was perhaps our best research scholar. He was also active in the faculty senate, he became president of the faculty senate. He also headed the organization of University faculty members in Tennessee. In fact he became very active in the national AAUP. He was a leader of our chapter and was active on the national level. He was an outstanding professor in other areas. But his strength was in publishing. He has published a number of books. He and I had several things in common, we were both in the navy, and he loves sports. His team was the Chicago Cubs, and my team was the Detroit Tigers. I was in Chicago in 1945 and so was he, and he got to see one of the World Series games.

FORSYTHE: Fred Rolater

WINDHAM: Fred came some years after I was here. He came from a small school out west. He has a Ph.D. from the University of Southern California, and Fred was a very friendly person. He added a lot to the department. He became our first Fullbright scholar. He spent a year in Japan as a Fullbright scholar. Fred has become a very fine teacher. He is still very active.