

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.088

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.088

FORSYTHE: This is a continuation of the interview with Dr. William Windham. Today is Friday, September 8 1995. This Interview is designated as QMS.1995.88. Jerry Brookshire.

WINDHAM: Brookshire, yes. Jerry came to us with a very good background. He had a Ph. D. from the University, from Vanderbilt University. His specialty was European history, modern European history. Jerry is one of those low-key type persons. He doesn't say a great deal, but he's thoughtful and he thinks before he talks. Jerry was not what I would call an outstanding teacher. He didn't have a great deal of charisma in the classroom, but he was thorough, very thorough, and he knew his material, and he wanted his students to know it, and he was one of the most dedicated people I've ever known. Jerry was always available in his office. He stayed late in his office, and you could always count on Jerry being around to talk to students. He was available to students. I really appreciate that about him. He also was very good on committee work and on assignments I gave him which involved taking some leadership roles, and I could always count on Jerry coming up with a very good report, a good study. He has a very good sense of decency about him and integrity. He's a person of good integrity and a person of decency and high moral standards. He was a fine person and I know his family. He has a very fine wife and two unusually fine young sons. So Jerry's a great addition to our department, and he's becoming a scholar. He's done research on British history, and I think he's going to do a book, or has done a book on British history soon. If he hasn't done it, he will do it soon I think. He's a very fine person in every way.

FORSYTHE: Okay, Robert Abernathy.

WINDHAM: Robert Abernathy, well, he was not in my department. I knew him as a member of the faculty. He was, well I forgot what his assignments were, but he was an unusual character. I remember that. Great sense of humor and he enjoyed telling stories. Sometimes the stories were a little bit off color, but people understood that and knew him. He was in great demand as a speaker, I understand. He made talks at high school commencements, and meetings, and conventions. He was quite a speaker evidently. I didn't know Bob that well. I knew him when I saw him on campus, and he was extremely well known for his wit and for his stories.

FORSYTHE: Okay, Joe Nunley.

WINDHAM: Joe Nunley, a very fine person. Joe was also a good storyteller, and he was quite interested in the history of this area and the history of MTSU, especially of the people that he came here with, the World War II generation. Joe also was interested in sports. He helped to organize a group called the Rail Birds that were big supporters of the baseball team. I was in that group with Joe. Joe wrote poetry, and some of his poetry was quite, quite clever. He was just a very popular person. Everyone liked Joe Nunley. And he was one of the greatest supporters of MTSU we've had. He loved this institution, and the people here loved him.

FORSYTHE: Can you tell me more about the Rail Birds?

WINDHAM: Well the Rail Birds go out and support the baseball team, and some of them even go to other campuses to see them play. And on occasion they've had a barbecue or something for the baseball team, and they give out awards to the team. Joe Sawyer is a very important member of that group, and so is Frank Lee. Those two come to mind, Dan Scott. People have fun at the old ballpark, you might say, supporting the team.

FORSYTHE: Can you tell me about Joe Sawyer?

WINDHAM: Yes, Joe and I have something in common. We are both University of Alabama graduates, and both big Alabama football fans, and so we commiserate together when Alabama loses. We always talk about Alabama football when we get together. As I mentioned, Joe is a big supporter of the Rail Birds. He likes baseball as well as Alabama football. Joe is well known on the campus. He is well liked, and I always enjoy talking to Joe because I know that we can talk about Alabama.

FORSYTHE: Frank Lee.

WINDHAM: Frank Lee, he's another University of Alabama person. He's from Alabama. Frank's a very bright person. He has a very great sense of humor, a dry sense of humor. I think he is extremely knowledgeable in his field of expertise, criminal justice. He runs that department, and he too likes Alabama football and he is a member of the Rail Birds, so I see him occasionally. We talk football and baseball. He lost his wife recently and so I can certainly understand what he is going through. But I consider him a good friend and I think he is one of our top professors.

FORSYTHE: Dan Scott.

WINDHAM: Dan Scott, yes, Dan Scott is a good friend of mine. He chaired the chemistry department for a number of years. I've gotten to know Dan at

church. He and I attend the same church. We go to the baseball games, and Dan also likes football. We support MTSU football. Dan has sort of a dry sense of humor. Dan also is very candid. He doesn't mind saying what he thinks. So I appreciate that in Dan. Just a very fine person and I know his wife and she's also very fine. I enjoy my association with the Scotts.

FORSYTHE: Hillary Parker.

WINDHAM: Hillary Parker, such a nice gentleman. Hillary headed the Campus School for a number of years, and all three of my children went through the Campus School, so Mr. Parker is important to my family. Also I've seen Hillary at the church I attend. He's a member there. He doesn't get up very much anymore because his health is not very good, but he's always such a kind person and very friendly person. I admire him very much.

FORSYTHE: Homer Pittard.

WINDHAM: Homer Pittard, another gentleman who had a tremendous sense of humor, and he had a great way with his pen. He was a fine writer, very clever writer. Homer was a very, very big person. He had been a football star at MTSU, and he just enjoyed history very much. He was not in history, he was in education, the Department of Education, but he loved history and he wrote on history. He wrote Civil War history. He was very good. He did some fine research, and I enjoyed reading what he did.. He enjoyed the history of the University, and he was a fine addition to our faculty. The Campus School very appropriately was named for Homer Pittard. He did so much to promote education in this area.

FORSYTHE: Bealer Smotherman.

WINDHAM: Bealer Smotherman, I didn't know Bealer all that well. I had contact with him from time to time. I thought he was a very capable person. He was in the forefront in pushing media on campus. He was a photographer. In fact, I used to buy some cameras from Bealer. I could always count on getting a good camera because Bealer knew cameras and he would sell you a good one. He had a good price. I was impressed with the Aerospace Program which he organized and led for a number of years. One of my students, Wally Maples, got into that area and became the chairman of that department. Wally recently stepped down as chairman of that department. But Bealer was an important member of the faculty and the Aerospace Program became nationally known thanks primarily to his efforts.

FORSYTHE: You mentioned Wally Maples.

WINDHAM: Yes, one of my good students from years back. Wally went on to head the Aerospace Department and he added to what Bealer had done and made the Aerospace Department nationally known, and today it has a great reputation, I think, across the country. Wally is an unusually good person in many ways I would say. He was a good staff member and a good teacher and a good chairman. I'm very proud of Wally Maples.

FORSYTHE: Okay, Howard Kirksey.

WINDHAM: Dean Kirksey. Dean Kirksey was a very impressive figure. When I came here, I guess he was Dean of the faculty. I remember our first year, he and his wife called on my wife and me. We were renting a little house on Harrison Avenue. They came over to see us. They wanted to make us feel welcome, and I was impressed with that. It meant a lot to us for them to show that interest in us. That was the kind of person he was. He was a very learned man in many ways. He was well read. He had more than book learning. He had everyday common sense. He knew a lot about human nature, and he had a good sense of humor. I thought that he was an unusually good leader for the faculty. I taught his son. He had a son, Grayden, who went here and Grayden was one of my outstanding students. He went on and got a degree, I think a doctorate in chemistry, and became a professor at Memphis State where he still is I guess. But Dr. Kirksey was truly an outstanding academic leader, and I was impressed with him, greatly impressed with him.

FORSYTHE: Bill Keathley.

WINDHAM: Bill Keathley, another very gentle person, a very kind gentle person. He was dean of students here a long time and he was the kind of person that students could relate to and could like. I thought the world of Bill Keathley. He was a gentleman, a true gentleman and he had a good background in every way. He was, I thought, a top member of our administration, and the kind of person that we needed here. I knew his children and talked with his sons, and they're fine people. His wife was an outstanding person in many ways.

FORSYTHE: Neil Wright.

WINDHAM: Neil Wright. He headed the Music Department for many years. Didn't know Neil all that well, but he was a very friendly person. Everyone liked Neil. He had a good sense of humor, and I remember seeing Neil with his pipe on the campus. He didn't get in a big hurry. He took his time, dear time, and Neil helped to develop here a good music department I think. One of the members of that department is my best friend, Dr. Phil Howard, who was on the faculty for many years. He and Neil were good friends and I got to know Neil better through Phil Howard. But I always

liked Dr. Wright. Well he didn't really have a doctor's degree come to think of it. I liked Neil, and his wife Margaret was outstanding too. She was a teacher and fine musician. So the Wrights meant a lot to MTSU.

FORSYTHE: Phil Howard.

WINDHAM: Phil Howard. What can I say about my good friend Phil Howard. He is just a marvelous person in every way. Great sense of humor. He doesn't take himself too seriously. I do a lot of kidding when I'm with Phil and a group. I kid him about his age. I kid him about being a friend of Mozart, and he takes this very well, bless his heart. He and his wife Vera are my dearest friends and dearest friends for my late wife too. I see Phil quite often. Phil was to me the kind of person that you want to have on your faculty - good background. He had fine degrees. He had a Ph. D. from the University of Iowa, and a fine music program there. He's the kind of professor who we read about in books - the professor who may be a little absent-minded but is very brilliant. I kid Phil about being absent-minded, but I'm just as bad as he is. He's the kind of person who loved teaching. He really loved teaching and he was good at it. He loved his students and he enjoyed being with his colleagues. He enjoyed the academic life, he was cut out to be a professor, and he was a very good professor. His specialty was, I guess, music history. He was a musicologist and he knew music history. I enjoyed listening to him talk about Mozart, and Beethoven, and Schuman, and those great composers. Students liked him very much. He is just a fine person. And he loves to travel. He and his wife do a lot of traveling and they love to go out west. They love to go to Europe. They've been all over the world. He's so enthusiastic about everything he does, he's just been a joy to know.

FORSYTHE: Lane Boutwell

WINDHAM: Lane Boutwell. As a matter of fact, I wrote Lane Boutwell a note today. He had sent me an article on well known historian Gary Wills. What a fine person he is. Lane was sort of a low-key person, but so capable, so able. He helped develop our speech and theater department here. He had developed the Boutwell Dramatic Arts building. He helped design that building and he saw it rise up, and it's a great monument to him. He was another fine academic person. He's the kind of person that you want on your faculty, the kind that people admire. Students admired him and his colleagues admired him. He has a great wife, Marge Boutwell is an unusually fine person. The Boutwells have meant a lot to this university also.

FORSYTHE: I want to ask you about the President, I already talked about Q.M. Smith or you did.

WINDHAM: Yes I was very much impressed with Mr. Smith in many ways. He was an outstanding leader, very intelligent person with a very good sense of humor, a subtle sense of humor sometimes.

FORSYTHE: What about Dr. Cope?

WINDHAM: Dr. Cope, Dr. Cope was a very strong leader, I thought. He was down to earth in many ways, no pretense about Dr. Cope. You got what you saw. He could be a little bit blunt perhaps, but he wanted to do what was best for this University. I thought he was an outstanding president. I enjoyed working with him. I thought he was appreciative of what the faculty did and he was always very kind to me.

FORSYTHE: Dr. Scarlett.

WINDHAM: Dr. Scarlett came here with a very good background, very good training. He was a sort of different kind of president from Dr. Cope. Dr. Cope was rather in a way straight-forward and abrupt and kinda blunt, but he knew exactly what he wanted to do. Dr. Scarlett was more of a ,well I hate to use that word, laid-back, but he was a little bit slower and he was not as aggressive, in a way, as Dr. Cope was. Perhaps more low-key, but he wanted the best that he could for the university. He was interested in promoting here a fine university, and I thought he did. I don't think he was appreciated by some people, maybe I didn't appreciate him in some areas, but I thought he wanted to do what was right for the university. He did prove to be, I thought, a very good leader and he was a good friend. I see him occasionally.

FORSYTHE: Dr. Ingram.

WINDHAM: Dr. Ingram was a president who knew what he wanted to do no doubt about it. He was very capable and in a way dynamic. I was on a selection committee which brought him here, and I thought he was the best of the ones who applied for this position. Dr. Ingram had a strong suit and that was in terms of finance. He was very good at at managing the university's money. Some of us thought maybe he managed it too close-to-the-vest, but anyway he he was very good at that. You had to make a case for anything you wanted to buy out of the ordinary. I remember at budget meetings he was pretty tough to convince that you needed a new staff member or that you needed a new type writer even. He ran a tight ship. Frankly I wish Dr. Ingram had had a little more vision about the future of the university. He was a good manager, but there was some areas I thought that we could have moved into had he been willing to go in that direction. I won't go into that any further, but I wish he would have been a little bit more open to some new ideas and new suggestions.

FORSYTHE: You mentioned the selection committee, can you tell me a little bit more about that?

WINDHAM: Well yes, it was a committee that when you have a new president to be chosen, you have a committee. The Board of Regents sets up a committee to interview candidates. Board members are on it and faculty members are sometimes chosen, usually two faculty members are on it. I was on that committee. Dr. Roy Nicks headed that committee. He was head of the Board of Regents and this is the way they do a search committee. It's a search committee for the new president, and I was a member of that committee.

FORSYTHE: How about Dr. Prescott?

WINDHAM: Dr. Prescott, an impressive figure. I really did admire him I had known him earlier. He was a vice-president over at Tennessee Tech and I had worked with him at the state board level. I was a member of some state board committees and I got to know him and I was impressed with him then. He really impressed me as president.. He was here only a short time. But I found that he was the kind of person that would listen to suggestions and new ideas. He was a very kind person and he was a diplomatic person. He was the type of person who could bring groups together. I remember taking a problem to him, and he was very sympathetic and tried to help work out a solution to it. He was to me just an ideal person. He would have made a great president. Sorry we didn't have him longer or earlier.

FORSYTHE: What about Dr. Walker?

WINDHAM: Dr. Walker, yes, Dr. Walker. I've gotten to know him and really have been impressed with him. He's a very articulate person. He's outgoing, he's friendly, he reaches out to people, and he seems to want to involve people in running the university and getting new ideas out and discussing them. He's been very kind to me. I have a program that I've instituted here, my wife and I did. We put in a program called the "Windham Lecture Series " about six years ago. We have a lecture every fall. We bring in an off-campus speaker. We pay a small honorarium to the speaker. We usually meet in Wright Music Hall. The lecture this year is going to be November 1 in the Wright Music Hall. There will be some publicity out on it eventually. Dr. Walker has been very supportive of this. He came to the one that we had his first year and said some words about it. That really did impress me and please me that he was that much interested in this. He's interested in promoting things like that. This lecture series is in liberal arts, it covers the whole College of Liberal Arts. We rotate the speaker among the various divisions, Social Science Division, Humanities Division, Fine Arts Division. Anyway, Dr. Walker

has been very kind in supporting that. I'm really impressed with him. I think he is going to do a lot with the university.

FORSYTHE: Okay, what have you done since you've retired?

WINDHAM: Well, what have I done since I've retired? Well, I've been involved, as I mentioned, with the Great American Sing Along. I'm president of that, I've spent a lot of time on that. I've had to write grant proposals to the TN Arts Commission and we've received several grants from them. That takes time to do all of that and to line up these programs at the VA and at various nursing homes around the community. I've also been involved with the county food bank, I'm on the county food bank board. We meet every two months. I've done a little traveling. I've been out west a couple of times. I've been on a Caribbean cruise. I have grandchildren in Pennsylvania and in Tennessee, and I go visit them occasionally. I do a lot of reading and I'm trying to do a little writing. I just did a book review for a sports publication. I try to come on campus for various events and of course I'm involved in getting a speaker each year for my lecture series. We just lined up a speaker recently and we're working now on the brochure for the fall lecture. Those are the things that I do. I keep up my interest in sports too.

FORSYTHE: I can tell.

WINDHAM: I go see the Sounds play occasionally and probably MTSU games and so on.

FORSYTHE: Can you tell me more about the county food bank?

WINDHAM: It's called the Emergency Food Bank. It works out of Patterson Center, Patterson Park. We have two employees there and we raise money. We get money from United Way, money from contributions from citizens, and we get food from Kroger (cheaply), and sometimes we get gifts. Boy scouts go out and get cans of food for us. They have a campaign once a year, and the schools, the high schools also get food for us. When that food is brought to the central location at Patterson Park, people come there and they can get food. They have to qualify. They are interviewed by a director, and if their condition is such that they need food, they are given food. It depends on whether or not they have a job, their level of income, their family and so on, their size of the family. So, we give a lot of food to people around this county.

FORSYTHE: Okay, is there anything else we should to discuss, or anyone else?

WINDHAM: Well, Regina, I can't think of anything else, I think we've covered a lot of people a lot of things here. I can't think of anyone that we've left out.

Well, there are a lot of faculty members that I could talk about, but we don't have the time to do that. Those are the ones that you asked me about, so those are the ones we talked about.

FORSYTHE: Okay, have you been given some awards or anything like that?

WINDHAM: Yes, I was one of the lucky recipients of the "Outstanding Teacher Award" when it was first introduced in 1968. The first year it was offered, I was one of the first three to get the award, Dr. Harold Spraker and Dr. Gerald Parchment were the other two. I received the award again later on when I was department chair. Those are the two that I remember. I served as senate president. And I also served as president of AAUP on one occasion. I've been on many committees. I think I've served on more committees than anybody else. I chaired the five-year-plan when we started that years ago and that was my, I guess my worst committee assignment, that was a chore.

FORSYTHE: I thank you for coming down here.

WINDHAM: Well, thank you for inviting me.