

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
WITH
REBECCA LOVELL

11 SEPTEMBER 1995
MURFREESBORO, TENNESSEE

INTERVIEWED BY REGINA FORSYTHE
FOR THE Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
INTERVIEW #QMS.091

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
REBECCA LOVELL**

Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW #QMS.091

FORSYTHE: This tape is part of the Q.M. Smith Collection designated as QMS.1995.91. This is Regina Forsythe. I am interviewing Mrs. Rebecca Lovell. Today is Monday September 11, 1995. The interview is being conducted in the home of Mrs. Lovell at 921 Rucker Lane, Murfreesboro, Tennessee. The tape of this interview along with the transcripts of this 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 Mrs. Lovell?

LOVELL: Yes.

FORSYTHE: What is your full name?

LOVELL: Molly Rebecca Wilkinson Lovell.

FORSYTHE: What is your birth date?

LOVELL: February 18, 1932. I was born in Winchester, Tennessee.

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

LOVELL: Horace Wilkinson. He was a quarry foreman, a farmer, a saw mill owner, a bee keeper, he did a little bit of everything.

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

LOVELL: Mary Alice "Mamie" Holder Wilkinson. She was a housewife. She was a school teacher before I was born.

FORSYTHE: Do you have siblings?

LOVELL: I now have one sister, Betty Jean Wilkinson Vanhook and one brother, Dan Franklin Wilkinson. I lost a sister named Patty Caroline Wilkinson. She died at age 23 and was a graduate of MTSU.

FORSYTHE: Did all your siblings attend MTSU?

LOVELL: Yes, all of received degrees from MTSU.

FORSYTHE: What was your husband's name?

LOVELL: Dan Shurbet Lovell.

FORSYTHE: Do you have any children?

LOVELL: Step-children.

FORSYTHE: Did anyone besides your brother and sister attend MTSU?

LOVELL: My mother went there. She did not get a degree, but went long enough to get a teaching certificate. She was there in the 1920s when it was called Tennessee Normal School.

FORSYTHE: Did she ever talk about it?

LOVELL: I remember that there was only one dorm, Rutledge Hall. She said that she would have to spend the entire summer riding a train from Winchester to Murfreesboro.

FORSYTHE: Why did you choose to attend MTSU?

LOVELL: I suppose for economy, convenient, and because my mother had come.

FORSYTHE: What years did you go to school here?

LOVELL: 1950-1953, but I graduated in the 1954 class.

FORSYTHE: Why did you wait a year to graduate?

LOVELL: I finished school at Christmas time and there was not another graduation until the spring of 1954. I got a job teaching in the meantime. I lacked one course which I had to do by correspondence to complete my major in Home Economics.

FORSYTHE: Your major was Home Economics?

LOVELL: Yes, but I also had a major in Social Science.

FORSYTHE: Why did you choose those two majors?

LOVELL: In high school I had majored in home economics and I enjoyed it and liked it. I liked to sew and cook so I chose home ec. My main purpose was to get a teaching certificate. I really wanted to be a teacher. I knew from the first day of first grade, that I wanted to be a teacher. I was so thrilled to be in school. I went

home that very day and told my mother that I wanted to be a teacher. I think it is remarkable to set a goal that early and stick with it.

FORSYTHE: What memories do you have of being a student at MTSU?

LOVELL: I remember how we used to catch rides to town. All we did was cross the street, there on Tennessee Boulevard and Bell Street, and wait on the corner. The local people would come along and give you a ride. They would stop and pick you up, even if you had a suitcase to take to the bus station. We had absolutely no fear, we trusted everybody. Nothing ever happened. That is one thing that I remember that has certainly changed.

FORSYTHE: How would you get a ride back to campus?

LOVELL: I guess we walked back. I remember walking a lot on East Main Street. I don't recall there being a pick-up spot up town. I do not remember how we got back after we rode the bus back. I guess we got a taxi. I remember one fun night in the dormitory, with my studious friend Marguerite Sherly Cleek. She was always wanting to study and we always wanted to have some fun. She wanted to be left alone in her room. We decided we would pester her and aggravate her and not let her study one night. She got really provoked with us and said, "All right, if you come in this room again, I am going to pour water on you." We decided we would go down and ask the house mother to come and knock on her door. The house mother was Mrs. Sullivan. Mrs. Sullivan cooperated wonderfully with us and she went up and knocked on Marguerite's door. Marguerite answered, "All right, are you ready for your verdict?" She opened the door with the water in her hand and just barely discovered in time that it was the house mother instead of one of us. I remember Miss Mary Hall. I have lots of memories of her. I had a course under her, how to teach social studies. We had to come up with a term paper. I was nearing the end of my four years there and was getting ready to start teaching. I recall the note that she wrote on that term paper. She gave me a "C" and I was really provoked with Miss Mary for giving me a "C." Now, that I have taught thirty years, I understand why she did it and appreciate it. She wrote, "This writing is terrible. You're going start to be an elementary teacher very soon. Get busy and learn how to do manuscript writing before you become a teacher. C". I remember some of the outfits that Miss Mary would come to class in. She had a lavender dress and had no concept of what was in style and what was not. This dress looked like she had got it at an antique store. She had worn it so much that it faded pink under the arms. She had an artificial purple corsage that she wore with it. She would get decked out in all sorts of jewelry. I remember her purple earrings. She had another wine colored dress, which was trimmed in satin. She had shoes to match both dresses. I remember her system of cards too. She had cards with everyone's name on. She would use that card system to call on particular individuals in class. I remember how nice she was to my blind friend Ester May Davis, who was also a student there. Ester has talked many times, in later years, about how nice Miss Mary was to her, and how she took a personal

interest in Esther. I also remember another teacher really well, Miss E. May Saunders. When I went to elementary school I never had any musical background. I never had a music lesson in my life, until I got to college. Three hours of music fundamentals was required for an elementary teaching certificate. I know that if Miss E. May Saunders had ever learned who I was, I would have never gotten out of elementary music. I was scarred to death in that class. She also had a card system that she used to call on people. I recall one final test, my question was to stand up and descend the scale from high do down to low do, twice. Of course, she fooled with me for a minute and then told me that I could sit down. I got a "C" for the first quarter, a "B" for the second quarter, and the last quarter I got an "A." I still think if Miss E. May had ever learned who I was, I would have never passed the class. We would plead with her to play classical music every day, that way she was occupied, and we would not have to get through the fundamentals. She was quite aged at the time and thought that we just loved to hear her play classical music. The music department was down stairs in the old administration building. She had it named, "Fingal's Cave." I think it had something to do with music. I also remember that I needed three quarters of chemistry to get my home economics degree. I had chemistry in high school, so I guess that saved me. I must have got in the dumbest class that ever was. My teacher was Dr. Eldred Wiser. I decided I would take all three quarters during the summer time. I made three "A"s in chemistry. That is a fond memory. He graded on the curve, so I'm sure that if he had not done that, none of us would have ever got out of there.

FORSYTHE: What do you mean by a "card system?"

LOVELL: They would write your name on an index card and use that system for the role. Instead of looking in the grade book to find your name, they would just use the cards. At the end of the day they would stop at a certain place and start the next class meeting with the student they had stopped at. You always knew in Miss E. May's class when you were going to get asked a question, because you knew who was before you.

FORSYTHE: What do you remember about chapel?

LOVELL: We had to go to chapel and were assigned seats. We went once a week. Q.M. Smith always presided and it was very difficult to understand what he had to say. He announced what was happening during the week.

FORSYTHE: Do you remember the Bible readings?

LOVELL: I know we always had Bible readings. We would open the assembly with Bible reading. I am sure the freshman had assigned seats. By the time we were seniors I think we had the option of attending or not. The assembly was in the Old Main auditorium.

FORSYTHE: What was registration like?

LOVELL: We wrote out the schedule we wanted to take on a form and would go to see each teacher in the particular building that they were in. They would sign the card, if there was room for us in the class.

FORSYTHE: You lived in the dormitory?

LOVELL: I lived my first two years at 1017 Ewing Boulevard with Charles and Lovis Hodgins. When I was a junior, I moved into Lyon Hall. I remember my room was in the very center of the building, on the second floor, up over the porch.

FORSYTHE: What can you tell me about the room?

LOVELL: Well, it needed some new furniture. We had two twin beds, a little table which had been painted green--that was our study table, that is all I remember. I suppose we had closets, but I do not remember.

FORSYTHE: Did you have a sink?

LOVELL: I just do not remember it. We had to go down the hall [to the community bathrooms] to take showers.

FORSYTHE: What did students do on the weekends?

LOVELL: Most of us went home. MTSU was know as the "suitcase college." If we stayed over, we had fun in the dorms. I do not remember any weekend activities planned for us. Of course, not many students had cars, if any, then. I certainly did not have a car, I could not even drive.

FORSYTHE: Did you have a job?

LOVELL: I had a job for about two years reading to my blind friend Ester May Davis. The state paid me to read to her. I always tell her that she made a very poor reader out of me. I can read a page, and my concentration is somewhere else. I think I learned to do that by reading all that dull stuff to Ester.

FORSYTHE: What do you remember about the MacArthurs coming to town?

LOVELL: That was one of the highlights of my tenure there at the school. It was a very exciting day. I was living with the Hodgins at Ewing Boulevard at that time. I remember the limousine that the MacArthurs were in, and how the school turned out and the town came out to welcome them back home. I remember Mrs.

MacArthur had on a purple wool dress and it was a hot day. I was feeling for her. I was so excited about it that I collected all the newspaper articles about it and made a scrapbook. I also made pictures.

FORSYTHE: Did you follow the parade, or did you stay here in town?

LOVELL: I believe that we waited on campus. We might have seen the parade from the street and then went on over to the football field, where the speeches were held. I do not remember being down town and following the parade that way.

FORSYTHE: Did you student teach?

LOVELL: Yes, I did, in both high school and elementary. I did my high school student teaching in home economics over at the high school, now central middle school. I did my elementary student teaching at the campus training school with Mrs. Harrison, Second grade. I believe the little Smith boy, Phil Smith, was in my class.

FORSYTHE: What do you remember about Mrs. Harrison?

LOVELL: She was a nice lady, and a good teacher. She gave me an "A." I remember being so fond of her, that my friend, who was co-teaching with me, and I gave her a silver spoon as a present when we finished. Once we did a unit on pets and we just took the initiative and set the auditorium up for the pet show. Mrs. Harrison seemed so pleased when she appeared and found that we had done all of the work. The pet show was just for the parents, a culmination of our unit on pets. The kids brought their pets to school. They had written stories and poems, and learned how to care for their pet. We wrote a unit and taught the unit.

FORSYTHE: I'm going to ask you about other faculty and staff that was at MTSU while you were a student. Robert Abernathy?

LOVELL: He was a people person. He was always willing to help. He ran the students public relations office, to help you get a job. He was in demand as a speaker. Everybody loved him.

FORSYTHE: Robert Adkins?

LOVELL: I have no recollection of him.

FORSYTHE: Dean Beasley?

LOVELL: I remember Dean Beasley very well. His sister is Elizabeth Beasley Baker who lives in Winchester. She married Hamilton Baker, and he was my history teacher in high school. Baker also attended church where I went. I had a connection to Dean Beasley through them. They helped me to get admitted to the college, telling me what to do. Dean Beasley was very helpful. He was such a nice gentleman. You had to go see him to get your course of study approved for your degree. You had to see him before graduation, to ensure everything was in order. I did not have much contact with him except during those times.

FORSYTHE: Ed Baldwin?

LOVELL: He was a hard geography teacher. He did not teach me, I had Miss Ollie Green for geography. She was one of the best teachers I ever had. I learned a lot of geography from her. I did not have Dr. Baldwin. I heard he was a great teacher, but also hard.

FORSYTHE: Guy Battle?

LOVELL: I do not remember him.

FORSYTHE: James Baxter?

LOVELL: No.

FORSYTHE: Emily Calcott?

LOVELL: She was a peculiar little lady. I had children's literature under her. I made five "Cs" while I was at MTSU. Miss Calcott gave me one, so did Miss Mary. I can understand why I deserved both, really well now.

End of Side A, QMS.1995.91 R Lovell.

This is a continuation of the interview with Mrs. Lovell by Regina Forsythe on Monday September 11, 1995.

FORSYTHE: Robert Corlew?

LOVELL: I remember Dr. Corlew. I had some history courses, but he was never my teacher.

FORSYTHE: Lane Boutwell?

LOVELL: I recall Lane Boutwell as being the speech teacher. I always wished that I could get up enough nerve to take his speech class, but I never did.

FORSYTHE: Catherine Clark?

LOVELL: I have a good story to tell about Miss Clark. I had not been at MTSU for just three or four days, and I needed to check out a book from the library. One of the questions she asked me was, "Do you commute?" I replied, "I'm sorry I do not understand." I did not know what the word "commute" meant, and she had to explain it to me. I remember the little library that was right in the center of campus.

FORSYTHE: What was in the basement of the library, was there an apartment down there?

LOVELL: I just remember old periodicals being in the basement. There might have been an apartment, but I never knew of it. I do not recall ever being in the basement.

FORSYTHE: Did students hang out at the library?

LOVELL: Yes. Groups would meet over there at night that wanted to court and visit. I do not ever remember it as being noisy, though.

FORSYTHE: Buleah Davis?

LOVELL: I had a class under Miss Davis. She was a really nice person. She is still living too.

FORSYTHE: Mary Dillon Scott?

LOVELL: I knew who she was, but I did not have any dealings with her.

FORSYTHE: Clifford Dennis?

LOVELL: No.

FORSYTHE: Crawford Crowe?

LOVELL: No.

FORSYTHE: Walter Herndon?

LOVELL: He taught me freshman biology. He was a very good-looking man.

FORSYTHE: Charles Hull?

LOVELL: No.

FORSYTHE: Charles Howard?

LOVELL: I vaguely recall the name, but I have no recollections of him.

FORSYTHE: Joe Black Hayes?

LOVELL: He was the coach and he taught a health class I attended.

FORSYTHE: Horace Jones?

LOVELL: I never had him for a teacher.

FORSYTHE: Robert Martin?

LOVELL: He was my history professor and oh, was he dull. What he did was read notes.

FORSYTHE: Virginia Peck?

LOVELL: She was a nice lady and was married to Dr. Richard Peck. They were a team. They both taught English.

FORSYTHE: Howard Kirksey?

LOVELL: I think he taught history for a while, and then was promoted to something else.

FORSYTHE: Belt Keathley?

LOVELL: I had classes under Dr. Keathley. He directed my student teaching.

FORSYTHE: Clayton James?

LOVELL: Dean James was a very nice person.

FORSYTHE: Virginia Muncie?

LOVELL: She was my home economics teacher. I loved Mrs. Muncie. We got along well. I had several classes under her, nutrition and cooking. She was in charge of the foods part of the program. Miss. Nelson was in charge of the clothing part. Miss Agnes Nelson had a Texas drawl. She was unmarried. I remember one dress she always wore to class. It was a rust colored dress with a whole in it. She had really skillfully patched that dress.

FORSYTHE: William Shacklett, the college doctor?

LOVELL: No.

FORSYTHE: Do you remember an infirmary?

LOVELL: Yes, but I never had to go.

FORSYTHE: John Scott?

LOVELL: No

FORSYTHE: Tommie Reynolds?

LOVELL: Miss Tommie taught me math. I had to have one math course for my elementary education certificate. She was elderly.

FORSYTHE: Ellis Rucker?

LOVELL: No

FORSYTHE: Rubye Sanders?

LOVELL: I remember that she was in charge of the orchestra. I would see her perform at the concerts. She played the violin.

FORSYTHE: Gerald Parchment?

LOVELL: I had some biology course he taught. He was bald, that is all I remember.

FORSYTHE: Wink Midgett?

LOVELL: He was in business education. I did not have an classes under him, but my friend Marguerite Sheryl Clett, really lived him. She though he put the moon in the sky.

FORSYTHE: Dr. Wiser?

LOVELL: I think I've already told the story about him. He would aggravate me. He spent his summers sitting on the porch of the science building, while his class was in the lab. He would not stay inside and help us with lab experiments. I though he should have been in there. I understand now, that he wanted us to go in there and experiment and found out things for ourselves. If he would have been in there, we would have been asking him questions constantly.

FORSYTHE: Dr. Sims?

LOVELL: I knew him, but did not have any dealings with him.

FORSYTHE: Eugene Sloan?

LOVELL: I remember having orientation under Mr. Sloan. He was a very nice man. I liked him.

FORSYTHE: Will Dunn Smith?

LOVELL: No

FORSYTHE: Bealer Smotherman?

LOVELL: When I returned to the university several years later, I took a course in aerospace under him. At that time, his wife was teaching home economics in the high school. She was a nice person.

FORSYTHE: Roscoe Strickland?

LOVELL: I remember him, but did not have any of his classes.

FORSYTHE: Eugene Wiggins?

LOVELL: Yes, Dr. Wiggins taught me English. I have not thought of him in years. I had to interpret a poem about daffodils in his class. I also had to write an essay for the title "Why pigs have wings." The whole class had to write on that topic. We were all really wondering why he picked such an absurd title. I think he wanted us to use our imagination.

FORSYTHE: Ed Voorhies?

LOVELL: I just remember what he looked like, that's all.

FORSYTHE: Joe Wilkes?

LOVELL: I had a class under Dr. Wilkes and he was a nice person. I think he died young of cancer.

FORSYTHE: Charlotte Williams?

LOVELL: No

FORSYTHE: William Judd?

LOVELL: I remember he was the registrar.

FORSYTHE: Joe Little?

LOVELL: No

FORSYTHE: Coach Murphy?

LOVELL: I knew he was the coach, but I did not have any dealings with him.

FORSYTHE: Elbert Patty?

LOVELL: I think he taught biology, but he never taught me.

FORSYTHE: Elizabeth Schardt?

LOVELL: I remember she was in charge of the honor society for girls. She had a little had that she wore a glove on all the time.

FORSYTHE: Next I'll ask you about the buildings. What do you remember about the science building?

LOVELL: The science building also housed the home economics department at that time. the home economics department was on the second floor. Chemistry was on the bottom floor, and biology was on the top floor.

FORSYTHE: What was the average size of your classes?

LOVELL: Probably twenty to thirty students per class. The lecture classes, like history, probably had more students in them.

FORSYTHE: What do you remember about Old Main?

LOVELL: It seemed to be an old building at that time. It was in need of some repairs. I was a beautiful building. I had lots of classes in it, but the class rooms were very ordinary.

LOVELL: Was the airport still there?

FORSYTHE: I believe it was called Lenoir. It is still in the same place.

FORSYTHE: What can you tell me about the school farm?

LOVELL: It was in the same location it is now. It was ver small scale.

FORSYTHE: Vets Village?

LOVELL: Yes, that was where the married couples stayed. The single students never went on that part of the campus.

FORSYTHE: Tell me about your report cards.

LOVELL: I think we just picked them up on campus. Report cards were not mailed.

LOVELL: I went three years and three summers, it was the best years of my life. High school was so structured with rules. In college I felt so much freedom. I did not have to account to anyone about every minute of my day. That was a big change from high school to college. I enjoyed college so much more.

FORSYTHE: Did you go to any of the games?

LOVELL: Yes, One of my best friends was homecoming queen one year. That was very exciting.

FORSYTHE: What about campus plays?

LOVELL: I never missed a play on campus. They were all so good. We had a student activity card that allowed us in for free.

LOVELL: I remember one Halloween, walking down the street to the corner of East Main Street and Tennessee Boulevard. I was duck and someone came along and hit me in the head with a raw egg. That was the worst thing that happened to me in college.