

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
WITH
MABEL PITTARD

24 SEPTEMBER 1995

MURFREESBORO, TENNESSEE

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

INTERVIEW #QMS.106

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
MABEL PITTARD**

Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW #QMS.106

FORSYTHE: This tape is part of the Q.M. Smith Collection designated as QMS.1995.106. This is Regina Forsythe, I am interviewing Mrs. Mabel Pittard. Today is Monday September 25, 1995. The interview is being conducted in the home of Mrs. Pittard located at 309 Tyne Street in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. 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, Mrs. Pittard?

PITTARD: Fine.

FORSYTHE: What is your full name?

PITTARD: Mabel Jesse Baxter Pittard.

FORSYTHE: What is your birth date and birth place?

PITTARD: April 2, 1911. Lawrenceburg, Tennessee.

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

PITTARD: Newell Baxter. He was a teacher in Lawrence County, I do not remember all the little schools he taught. He was also a rural mail carrier.

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

PITTARD: Emma Ogle Baxter. She was a teacher in Gatlinburg, Tennessee before she married. She was later a homemaker.

FORSYTHE: Do you have any siblings?

PITTARD: Six. Hollis, who is deceased; Polly Cantrell, a homemaker here in Murfreesboro; Irene Royster, a homemaker in Spartansburg, South Carolina; Ruth Kennedy, a housewife in Gloucester, Virginia; Bill Baxter, he was a caterer in Chicago; Joe Baxter, Waco Texas. I am number seven. Polly also went to school at MTSU, but only for one year.

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

PITTARD: Homer Pittard. A teacher.

FORSYTHE: Do you have any children?

PITTARD: Two. John Pittard is an attorney here in Murfreesboro and also a member of the city council. Anne Pittard Smith is my daughter who is a homemaker in Crossville, Tennessee.

FORSYTHE: Did your children attend MTSU?

PITTARD: Both my children did. My son completed his degree, but my daughter did not. He went on to the University of Tennessee in law school.

FORSYTHE: What years did you and your husband attend MTSU?

PITTARD: We both graduated in 1936. I did not have enough money to go straight through college, so I would teach a year and save up money, and then go to college the next year. It took me six years to finish college. The last two years I was there, I got a work studies scholarship, and then I was able to attend school full time. When my husband finished high school, he went into the CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] Camp for about two years. Then he came back here, enrolled in college, and did his four years. That is why we both finished at the same time.

FORSYTHE: Why did you chose to attend MTSU?

PITTARD: It was a state supported school and did not cost as much to attend as the private schools did. I could have had a scholarship to Tennessee College because I was salutatorian of my high school class, but it was just too expensive. I am glad I did not go there, because I met my husband here.

FORSYTHE: Where did you two meet?

PITTARD: We met in the MTSU library. I worked in the library as a student worker.

FORSYTHE: Tell me about working in the library.

PITTARD: At that time, a student would come to the desk and ask for a certain book. Students were not allowed to go back into the stacks to find books, like they do today. They would look up a book that they wanted, write down the name of it, and bring the information to the desk. We would then go get the book for them. I met my husband one day when he came in asking for a book. It was the old Murphy building. Miss Murphy was the librarian. Isa Lee Sherrod Freeman was the assistant librarian. I more or less broke the rules once. I took Homer back into the stacks, he wanted to go back there, and I let him go. I do not think I was

supposed to do that, but Miss Murphy did not punish me. Mrs. Freeman has accused us of courting back in the stacks.

FORSYTHE: Is that true?

PITTARD: Well, it may have been! Homer was interested in writing, while he was in college. He helped put out the Midlander, the year book, for a year or two. He wrote quite a bit for the campus newspaper, Sidelines.

FORSYTHE: Did you both belong to the school Writer's Club?

PITTARD: Yes. At one time Homer wrote a play and I wrote a play, and we produced them in the auditorium. I do not know where that play is today, I can't remember what they were about. At least we were both ambitious enough to write a little one act play and produce them in the auditorium. I mostly wrote poetry in the Writer's Club, while Homer wrote prose. Dr. Philip Mankin was a sponsor of the Writer's Club.

FORSYTHE: I have read the articles about Dr. Mankin being fired by Q.M. Smith. Do you know anything about that?

PITTARD: He was one of my favorite teachers. He was accused of improper teaching. For example, he might take a poem about a dog going to heaven. Someone in class might say well dogs do not go to heaven. He would answer, "How do you know that they do not go to heaven?" He would take poetry that was maybe a little risqué, or atheist in its terms. He was just trying to make us think. He was not saying that he believed these things. Students went off and said that he was an atheist. I never viewed him in that perspective. I thought he was just trying to make us think. He was let go for that reason. It would not happen today.

FORSYTHE: What other memories do you have of being an MTSU student?

PITTARD: At that time you had to be in the dormitory by nine o'clock at night. If you went to the library or some club meeting, you had to check in the dorm by nine, because they would lock the door. If you were not there by nine, you were locked out. That was really embarrassing to have to knock on the door and be admitted. You would get a demerit for it. We could not even go to town without permission. We could not leave the dormitory any time, without signing in and out. We had a monitor in the dormitory who would go around and make sure we turned our lights off at a certain time. They were very strict on us. It is not like it is today. The monitor was a student. We elected her, it was an honor. She did not get paid. Our monitor was Buleah Davis. I play bridge with her today and I still kid her about being frightened of her.

FORSYTHE: Did you live in Rutledge Hall?

PITTARD: Yes. My favorite teacher over there was Miss Monohan, who taught history. She was a Catholic. I grew up in Lawrenceburg that was very conservative and Protestant. They did not think too much of Catholics. When I was a child in elementary school, Al Smith was running for President. Word got out in Lawrenceburg, that the Catholics were going to take over the country and that they were all ready accumulating guns in the basement of the Catholic Church. When I walked home that afternoon from school, I would get near that Catholic Church and I would start running. You see a child is easily impress with things like that. When I went to college and found out that my teacher, Miss Monohan, was Catholic, I learned tolerance. That was the main thing that she taught me. One day she was walking in the rain with an umbrella towards Rutledge Hall. She lived there too. I was coming from Rutledge Hall towards Old Main, walking in the rain because I could not even afford to by an umbrella. Half way over there she stopped me and said, "Mabel you will catch a cold. Here, take my umbrella." Here she was an old gray haired lady who tottered when she walked. I said, "Miss Monohan, I won't take your umbrella." She answered, "Indeed you will." She made me take it and walked on in the rain. She was just a real Christian and a fine lady. We all loved her. The boys particularly loved her. She liked the boys, too. I think maybe better than the girls. She was a wonderful teacher. She and Dr. Sims were perhaps my two favorite teachers.

FORSYTHE: Tell me about Dr. Sims.

PITTARD: He taught history, also. He had a good sense of humor. If I was a few minutes late getting into class, he would look up and say, "Miss Baxter, I'm glad you made it." We all liked him because he had a good sense of humor. He knew a lot of history and made it interesting.

FORSYTHE: Do you remember going to chapel every week?

PITTARD: Oh, we had chapel in the auditorium. We had prayer, and pledged allegiance to the flag. We had a devotional. One of the things I remember about it, was Coach Faulkinberry, the football and basket ball coach. A young lady on the basketball team became pregnant by him and he committed suicide. They had his funeral there in the auditorium. There was not a dry-eye there among the students. They really loved him. I do not think a man would do that today, but back in the 1930s for a girl to get pregnant, that was just really a disgrace. And it was a disgrace for the man who was responsible for it. That shows you how much change has taken place in our culture. I do not approve of it today, but I do not think suicide is the answer.

FORSYTHE: What was you major at MTSU?

PITTARD: I majored in English and Math. At that time it was unusual, they would just let you major in whatever you wanted. Today if you chose to go into math, you have to put science with it. My majors were English, Math, and History. They let me

take what I wanted to. You do not usually put math with English and history. I stayed away from science and just took what I had to in it. I did not have a background in science. I went to college with very little science. Students always take the subjects that they can excel in.

FORSYTHE: What did students do for fun?

PITTARD: We studied a lot. I belonged to the Writer's Club. I joined the Agriculture Club, not because I was interested in agriculture, but because they had hay rides. We went on hay rides out on Mr. Hutchinson's farm. It was close to Riverdale High School. We would go out there on picnics and hay rides. We had dances in the old gymnasium. We did not have them often, but we did have a few.

FORSYTHE: What did you do on the weekends?

PITTARD: We went to church and studied. I did not get to go home but only three or four times a year. I had to go by bus, Greyhound, and that was expensive. If I had to choose between buying a meal ticket and going home, I would buy the meal ticket.

FORSYTHE: Can you describe how the class rooms looked?

PITTARD: The enrollment was just six or seven hundred students. There would not be over 15 or 20 students per class. The teachers did not have overhead projectors, they used the blackboard. The math teachers used the board. We sat anywhere we wanted to, we did not have assigned seats. The teachers knew nearly every student, because the enrollment was small. I was there during the depression years. They did not always have enough money to pay the teachers. Dr. Lyon had a special fund that he raised. A teacher could come to him and borrow money if they needed it to get by. Many times there checks were cashed by a bank at a discount. For example if a teacher got a check for \$200 dollars a month, which would have been a good salary at that time, the bank did not exactly trust the state of Tennessee and not knowing how long they would have to hold that check, they would discount it 25 percent. If the teacher needed the money, he or she was willing to accept it. The bank got the 25 percent because they had to hold that check for some time.

Students did not have cars at that time, and only a few faculty members had automobiles. We walked everywhere. I have walked for the State Teachers College to the First Baptist Church many times.

FORSYTHE: What do you remember about President Lyon?

PITTARD: We loved him. He was really wonderful. When I was a freshman, I first began to go see him in his office and ask for a working scholarship. He said, "I'm sorry, this is the depression and we have all the students we can take care of." Then a month or two later I was in there again. I kept on for two years, and finally when

I was a Junior he gave me a job working in the library. I have been eternally grateful to him all of my life. I was able to go two years straight, without having to stop and teach school for a while, to save up money. I taught school in a little community in Lawrence County known as Brush Creek, and two or three other one or two teacher schools.

FORSYTHE: Tell me about your husband.

PITTARD: He was captain of the football team his senior year, and he helped put out the Midlander and the Side lines. After he graduated, he became principal of the McFadden School for ten years. He was principal at Central High School for four or five years. It is really interesting to know that he went to Dean Beasley and said, "If I were to go to Peabody College and get my doctorate, do you think I might get a job out here?" This was in the late 1930s. Dean Beasley replied, "Homer, you do not need to do that. It cost so much to support your family and it will be expensive to go to school up there. You better just stay where you are as principal of Central High School." It was not too pleasant being principal of Central High School. It still may not be, over at Riverdale and Oaklands. At that time, instead of being on drugs and involved in sex, the students were involved in pranks. He would go to school one morning and all of the windows would be broken out. They would do damage. That was the kind of pranks that they did for a lark. I could see that Homer really wanted to get out of that situation. I said to him, "Well you just go to Peabody College and get your doctorate." He already had his masters degree. You may not believe this, but he hitchhiked to Nashville, the two years he worked on his doctorate. He had afternoon and night classes. He held on to his job at the high school. When he graduated, we did not have enough money to buy a return bus ticket back to Murfreesboro. We took some of our choice books that we had kept from college days and when we got to Nashville we went to a book store and sold them. We had enough money to buy our lunch at the Crystal hamburger and then enough money left to buy a ticket back home. That was how poor we were. After he graduated, he got a job at MTSU. Q.M. Smith is the one who employed him. The happiest time of my husband's life was at the State Teacher's College, later MTSU. He really enjoyed that, and was there for 20 years.

FORSYTHE: Did he have any favorite stories that he liked to tell about the school?

PITTARD: People referred to him as "Little Homer" when he was on the football team. He organized alumni associations throughout the nation. He had one in Washington D.C. He started by teaching Psychology, and after two or three years they gave him the alumni work. The last five years that he was out there, he was director of University Relations. That meant that he was responsible for Alumni work, the foundation, and public relations. He helped organize the foundation. He was one of the first persons who started it.

FORSYTHE: You were telling me about the first Midstater?

PITTARD: Yes, he put that out, and served for many years as the director of the Southern Association of Colleges. He would go to different universities and colleges and evaluate them, when they were applying for membership in that. He did that for about five or six years during the time he was Alumni Director.

FORSYTHE: What about the book he wrote, The First Fifty Years?

PITTARD: Q.M. Smith asked him to do that.

FORSYTHE: Can you tell me more about Q. M. Smith?

PITTARD: At that time, my husband was teaching at the MTSU, but I was teaching here in Rutherford County. His wife and I were good friends, we played bridge together. Q. M. Smith was a good administrator. It was Dr. Scarlett who moved the college up to university status. He was responsible for that. He was also the one that began to recruit out-of-state students. Q. M. Smith was good about promoting faculty member. When Scarlett came here, he began to employ people from other states and universities, who had doctorates. He was the one that elevated the college.

FORSYTHE: Let me ask you what you remember about several faculty and staff members. Bettie Murfree?

PITTARD: She was a little lady, about five feet tall. She just sailed through that library working. She was a very dedicated individual.

Other members of the faculty that were there when I was was Dr. Golightly in psychology, Miss Ordway in English. I loved Miss Ordway. She came to my wedding when Homer and I married. Phil Mankin came, too. Anne Ordway lived out here on a farm and grew daffodils. She was a lovely lady.

FORSYTHE: What do you remember about Dr. Golightly?

PITTARD: What I remember about him was that he would stand up there and say, "Let a child unfold like a rose, do not squelch them, don't correct them, do not punish them. Let them unfold just like nature intended them to." He said, "I have a daughter, Bonnie. I never punish her. I never correct her. She is just growing up and unfolding the way nature intends her to do." Years later, Bonnie Golightly went to New York. Are you familiar with the film, Breakfast at Tiffany's? I did not agree with his philosophy. Did you know after my husband wrote The First Fifty Years, she called him up one night and was drinking. She said, "Homer Pittard, I have read The First Fifty Years, and you did not mention my daddy's name anywhere in there. He was an outstanding professor at that university. The

next time I come to Murfreesboro, I'm coming over to kill you." My husband knew she was drunk. She could not kill him now, because he is already dead.

FORSYTHE: Do you remember Neal Frazier?

PITTARD: Because the college was small, we knew all the faculty. They knew us and were interested in us as individuals. Today a teacher may have 60 or 70 students in a class, and not even know at the end of the semester who the students were. My professors knew every student that they taught. We were close to those teachers. Frazier taught Bible. He was a real gentleman.

FORSYTHE: Miss Schardt?

PITTARD: I had French class under her. She was a sponsor of Tau Omicron. I was a member. She and Hester Rogers were sponsors of that. She was really smart in French. She could reel it off coming and going. I could read it, but I never learned to speak it. She wanted us to learn to speak French, but I never could.

FORSYTHE: This is a continuation of the interview with Mrs. Mable Pittard by Regina Forsythe on September 25, 1995. What do you remember about Hester Rogers?

PITTARD: She was an art teacher, but I was never good in art. I really did not have her as an instructor.

FORSYTHE: Miss Mary Hall?

PITTARD: I got a lot of good ideas about how to teach from her. She gave us some really practical information. I have used that a lot in my years of teaching, especially while teaching in the small country schools. Later, I got a job in the city teaching eight grade math. I could not use her methods for that. She would give us methods of how to motivate the students. Miss Mary was a real character. I was invited to join the Delta Kappa Gamma, an honorary organization for teachers. Miss Mary was one of the founders when it was organized in the state of Tennessee. One of our favorite jokes about her was that late one afternoon she was rushing up to the Woman's Club where we were going to have initiation. She was driving too fast going up East Main. The police stopped her, and she said, "I'm Mary Hall and I am trying to get to the Woman's Club in time for a program." The police officer replied, "I do not care who you are lady, you are going to pay this ticket." Someone remarked that when she got to heaven that she would say, "Now Saint Peter, I'm Mary Hall." She did have a high opinion of herself, but she deserved it.

FORSYTHE: N. C. Beasley?

PITTARD: He was Dean. We all tip-toed around him. They did not have vice-presidents. They had the president and then the deans. A dean was a very important job out

there. During the depression years, a student could go to him during registration and tell him, "Dean Beasley, I just do not have the money to register. Will you let me go ahead and register and I'll pay you by the month?" He would accommodate the students. I'm sure there was money that he never collected.

FORSYTHE: Did you student teach?

PITTARD: I did my student teaching over at the Campus School. I taught English. I had really planned to be an English teacher. Anne Ashley was my supervisor. When I worked in the city, I was teaching English. Finally the day came when no one would teach math, this was eighth grade. They gave it to me. I was a math minor. I inherited the math and found it much easier to teach. You can check a student's paper easier. The answer was right or wrong. You did not have to give partial credit like in history or English if they get part of the fact correct.

FORSYTHE: Bonnie McHenry?

PITTARD: She was a tall stately lady. Very dedicated to Dean Beasley.

FORSYTHE: What did you do after you graduated?

PITTARD: I taught school in Alabama the first year. Then I married and came up here. I tried to get a job, this was in the late 1930s, and they would not give me one. They said that this was the depression era and we are not giving but one person in the family a teaching position. Then the war broke out in 1941 and men began to leave their positions as teachers. I was able to get a job teaching then. I taught at McFadden, Crichlow, Mitchell-Nelson, and Central Middle School.

FORSYTHE: Since you were in Murfreesboro during World War II, do you remember anything about Q.M. Smith being a Civil Defense coordinator?

PITTARD: Well, my husband joined the Civil Defense. He had an arm band for it. He registered just like all men were required to do, but we had one child by then. He was deferred for maybe six months. He was also principal of McFadden. Then he got his second notice to report for duty, and he went to B.B. Carr who was the board member who had hired him. He said, "I have been informed to report to the selective service board." Carr replied, "Now listen here," (my husband was over six feet tall and weighed over two hundred pounds), "I can not find another man in Rutherford County that can control those kids over there at McFadden." It had a bad reputation. He told him that he was not going to allow him to go. Carr went to the board and said, "Give him six months deferment, which will allow me a chance to find someone to take his place." They deferred him for six more months, and by that time the war was over. My husband never felt very good about not serving, but I was happy.

FORSYTHE: What was it like living here at that time?

PITTARD: We did not have a car, we had to walk everywhere we went. Soldiers were all over the place. Maneuvers took place in this area. Rations were hard. I think I bought more sugar with that stamp book than before I had it. I was afraid not to use it. We got a gas ration, but since we did not have a car, it did not do us any good.

FORSYTHE: You told me you wrote three books, what are they?

PITTARD: "The History of Rutherford County," "A Pictorial History of Rutherford County," and I updated the book about the First Baptist Church. I won the William Davis Award for volunteer of the year. It was for my work with the historical society. I was president for two years and I wrote a lot of articles that came out in the Rutherford County Historical Society publications.

FORSYTHE: What about the Cannonsburgh Award?

PITTARD: I have won that twice. It was awarded for what they considered to be the outstanding article of the year. I won it on an article on the Coleman Scouts and the other article was "A Yankee in Rutherford County." It was about a Yankee who was stationed here at Fortress Rosencrans.

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

PITTARD: I think MTSU is one of the most outstanding universities anywhere. It really has made progress. I'm glad to see that they have updated the entrance requirements. It used to say 15 or 16 on your ACT score and you could get in. Now it has to be 19 or 20.

My husband was a deacon in the Baptist church. He was a Sunday school superintendent. I worked in the library at the church. He was involved in Boy Scout work. Q. M. Smith was also, and they were doing Boy Scout work at the same time. My husband led a troop.