

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
WITH
KATHERINE HOLDEN

26 SEPTEMBER 1995
MURFREESBORO, TENNESSEE

INTERVIEWED BY REGINA FORSYTHE
FOR THE Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
INTERVIEW #QMS.110

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
KATHERINE HOLDEN**

Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW #QMS.110

FORSYTHE: This tape is part of the Q. M. Smith Collection designated as QMS.1995.110. This is Regina Forsythe, I am interviewing Mrs. Katherine Holden. Today is Thursday, September 28, 1995. The interview is being conducted in the home of Mrs. Holden located at 129 Park Circle, Murfreesboro, TN. 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. Holden?

HOLDEN: That's fine.

FORSYTHE: Let me get your full name.

HOLDEN: My name is Katherine Butler Holden.

FORSYTHE: What is your birthday and birth place?

HOLDEN: January 17, 1918. Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

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

HOLDEN: John Murphy Butler. He was a banker and a merchant. He sold field seed, salt, and everything to farmers back in those days. He was also president of the bank here.

FORSYTHE: Which bank was that?

HOLDEN: National Bank then the Stones River Bank. I think there were two banks back then before the depression took its toll.

FORSYTHE: Where was the merchants store?

HOLDEN: It was called House and Butler and was located on the west side of the square.

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

HOLDEN: Lillian Whitefield Butler. She was a housewife.

FORSYTHE: How many siblings did you have?

HOLDEN: I had two brothers and two sisters. My brothers are deceased and one of my sisters is deceased. One of them is still living. She will be ninety years old in September 8 [1995].

FORSYTHE: What are all their names?

HOLDEN: John Murphy Jr., James Overton, Elizabeth Leslie, and Lillian. She just had the one name.

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

HOLDEN: Rollie M. Holden. Hardware merchant.

FORSYTHE: What are your children's names?

HOLDEN: Aurelia Lillian, Jane Elizabeth Holden Jennings, Leslie Butler Holden O'Brien and Rollie M. Holden Jr.

FORSYTHE: Tell me what you remember about being a student at the Campus School.

HOLDEN: Well, it wasn't the Campus School in those days. The college was referred to as the "Normal." It was a Demonstration School at the Normal. I entered the first grade in 1924. What I remember of that are two teacher's names, Miss Jackson and Mrs. Frizzell. We were the Demonstration School so the student teachers could demonstrate on us. We learned French sentences. I don't think we ever spoke French, but bon soir [Good Evening] and we sang Fere Jaques and other French songs. It made an impression on me because I still remember those. I remember one spring we went out to about the science building is, and we had a garden out there. Which was real interesting.

FORSYTHE: What did you grow?

HOLDEN: To tell you the truth I don't know, I just don't remember. I remember going out there, I don't know if it was flowers or vegetables or what. It was real interesting, I remember that.

FORSYTHE: How big was it?

HOLDEN: Well they grew things out there. We just had a plot out there. They used to grow things about where the Science Building is.

FORSYTHE: Did you have your individual plots or was it the school's?

HOLDEN: No, we had little plots. Other than the fact we went out and enjoyed that's about all I remember at that age and stage. I went to summer school out there one

summer and we did that. The first grade room was on the southeast corner of Old Main on the first floor and that section was the Demonstration School at that time. I was there for four years. At that time, of course, Old Main, the cafeteria, Jones Hall, and Rutledge Hall were about the only buildings out there other than the gymnasium and the power plant. They built the old library at that time right in the middle. What is that new building that is out there now?

FORSYTHE: Peck Hall.

HOLDEN: Well they built that [old Library] about that time. I remember Mr. Woodmore, T. B. Woodmore, he came over here and his family lived in the basement. He was on the business staff out there for years.

FORSYTHE: So there was an apartment in the basement?

HOLDEN: An apartment in the basement.

FORSYTHE: Do you know where it was located in the basement?

HOLDEN: Seems to me there were steps on the southeast side that went down there. He lived in it for a number of years. He had two children. Both are deceased now, of course, he is too. I remember Bock's Tea Room. Carolyn Bock was in my class and her parents had the house on Tennessee Blvd. and Ewing, that brick house there. Behind there he rented out apartments or something and he opened Bock's Tea Room. I remember going over there and getting food. I remember they introduced Baby Ruth candy about that time. You know, different things make an impression on you. Other than that I don't remember. Everything was in Old Main. The business office was to the right as you went in there. The president's office was on the left. There were all the classrooms. I don't think anybody had offices then. I don't think teachers had offices like they do now. We stayed there for four years. Then in the fall of 1928, they consolidated with East End Grammar School, which was located on Main Street. As you go out Park Circle, if you will look at that vacant lot across Main Street you can see some steps still there. That was where East End Grammar School was. Behind it was Kerr Field where Central High School played football. It's hard to remember when you go back on that. The two houses on the east side of there and another on the corner were there then. A lot of those other houses hadn't been built back then, cause it was back in the 20's. We stayed at East End until after Christmas. That was 1929, after Christmas. Then we moved into the present building of the Campus School. Sometime during that time they decided it wasn't nice to be demonstrated on so they changed it to Training School. It stayed Training School up until I was in the '60's or somewhere, late '50's, '59 or '60's somewhere like that. They didn't like the idea of Training School because it was a connotation of delinquency or something so they changed it to Campus School then. Are you interested in the new building, the Campus School?

FORSYTHE: Yes, I am.

HOLDEN: Well, we moved in there. They had the big rooms, and each one had a workroom. It was something. We had plenty of space. Down in the basement at that time they taught home economics. They taught cooking and sewing. Then on across the hall the boys had manual arts. In grammar school I took several years of cooking and sewing, half a year each. Then right in the middle of the basement down there was an open space that was just sport columns. When we moved there in those days, everybody had skates. Everybody skated on the sidewalks. So we all brought our skates to school and at recess that was the skating rink. We circled around that. It was a lot of fun. I remember another thing, the stage. They allowed us to go up to the stage and some of the boys found out about it and they would climb up those steps and walk across the stage up there. You shouldn't be doing that so they had to stop that in a hurry. At that time, as I said, they demonstrated on us. They gave us all sorts of tests. When we were in Old Main, every time we turned around they would give us IQ tests. We moved over there in the 5th grade and I had Catherine Johnson. I remember her very distinctly. I liked her very much. She was a real good teacher. She liked me evidently, thought I was smart. At the end of 5th grade they got this idea to promote all those in the 5th grade to the last half of the 6th grade. This was for the following year. The ones in the 7th that were sort of slow they put them down. They put us all in the same room. If you can imagine. Educators do silly things, I found out over the years. That was my first experience with something that did not work. Mary Frances Snell, that was her first year out of college. I think she was about 19 or 20. She was real young. The ones that they set back from the 7th grade, well these great big boys, rough as they could be, she had a time. I think she gave up teaching for a little while, after that. We went through that year and then they decided that wasn't a good idea. I had taken half of the seventh grade and the next year came around and they just put me in the eighth grade. So, I ended up skipping a whole grade. I graduated from Campus School in 1931.

FORSYTHE: Where did you go after Campus School?

HOLDEN: I went to Central High School for four years. When I graduated from high school in 1935 I went back out to MTSU as a freshman. At that time there were about 500 students. I had an old car, that my parents didn't drive. They depended on me to drive. All my brothers and sisters were older and left home. I had a car and I would drive out and park in front of Old Main. No parking problem whatsoever back in those days. There wouldn't be over a handful of cars out there. Even with all the professors. As I said, I think Q.M. Smith came about that time. I'm not real sure whether he was there that first year.

FORSYTHE: 1938 is when he got here.

HOLDEN: Well he was there one year, cause I just went two years out there. P. A. Lyon was president when I first came out there. I remember that Q. M. came in about that time. Of course, his wife Laura was secretary over at the Campus School for a number of years. I went to MTSU for two years and I transferred. I graduated from Randolph Macon Women's College in Lynchburg, Virginia. After that I came back again for a business course. I took it under Wink Midgett. I took shorthand, typing and accounting. I remembered him because he played football for TPI, was a quarterback, a real good football player. The football field about that time was about where the science building is now.

FORSYTHE: What year was it when you came back?

HOLDEN: I graduated in 1939 and 1940.

FORSYTHE: So it was 1940?

HOLDEN: Well it would have been the fall of 1939, 1939-40, that year. Since then all four of our children went to Campus School. Of course they could walk, its very nice. All of them have degrees from MTSU. Three of them have undergraduate degrees and one has two, has a Masters and Education Specialist and the other daughter has a Masters. The other fellow has a Masters. I've kept up with the university, now that they all have gotten all the degrees, I think, they are going to get. My grandchildren do not go to Campus School, unfortunately. There mothers teach at Northfield and Mitchell-Nelson. Oh, one other thing. When we moved to the new building we changed classes. Now I remember (I guess the seventh or eighth grade is when we did this) we had one history teacher, math teacher, English teacher, and geography teacher. Dr. Waller came as principal when they opened up. I guess he came, I don't know if he came to East End or not, but I remember him at Campus School, he was the first principal of the Training School. I looked back to remember the teachers later. One of my friends gave this to me recently. It is a sixth grade project from the Training School. Here is a "Junior News Banner" dated 1929. I have a column in here that I have no recollection of writing. Here is my by line. I wrote a very imaginative tale.

FORSYTHE: Was the demonstration school in Old Main on the same floor that the presidents office was?

HOLDEN: Yes, you went in past the president's office and went back down a hall. It was in the southeast corner. The post office and bank was in the basement. County tournaments would start at seven in the morning inside the gym, and they would play all day long. It was a big deal, even when we moved over here.

FORSYTHE: What did the classroom furniture look like?

HOLDEN: We had little desks with an inkwell and little slot underneath. They were not like the ones with those arm things today. There was never over 14 or 15 in a class.

FORSYTHE: What do you remember about Mamie Jackson?

HOLDEN: I do not remember anything other than that I did not particularly like her. Why? I do not know. I guess maybe it was because it was a shock to go to school. I used to have to call one of my brothers or sisters to come pick me up in bad weather. I lived on the 400 block of Main Street. In the winter, to walk across the boulevard was too cold. In the rainy seasons it would flood, and a car could not pass through. They have a good drainage system now. The only entrance to the school at that time was on Tennessee Boulevard. I did not like to use the telephone because there was a lot of noise in there, and I did not think I could hear. Miss Jackson would not call, she made me call. Maybe that was why I did not like her. I do not remember much about the other teachers until the fifth grade. My teacher was Katherine Johnson. Miss Lowe was the history teacher and Albert Gore, Sr. did his practice teaching under her supervision. He was such a cut-up. She was a prim, proper, precise and nice person. I do not think they got along too well. I was not in the class in which he did his practice teaching. The class right after mine, with two of my friends Emma Crichlow and Juanita Hine, was the one Gore taught. They used to tell me all these tales about Albert and his practice teaching days. I do not know if this is true, but the tale was that he was the only person that ever flunked practice teaching. It made a good tale anyway.

FORSYTHE: What do you remember about President Lyon?

HOLDEN: I knew him because he was a friend of my daddy's, I remember he was president. I also remember Dean Beasley, Mr. Woodmore, J.S. Holmes, Neal Frazier, and Dr. Golightly. I knew most of the professors because Murfreesboro only had a population of 8,000 and everybody knew everyone. All of the professors lived in Murfreesboro and were a part of the community, more so than the recent time since Dr. Walker was out there.

FORSYTHE: What do you remember about Dean Beasley?

HOLDEN: He was a fixture on that campus. He had a sister who was a champion basketball player. I always liked him. I went to the same church he attended and knew his wife and children.

FORSYTHE: What do you remember about Q.M. Smith?

HOLDEN: When Q.M. came there was quite a bit of controversy. I do not remember and did not get into that. I recall going to chapel. He had a speech impediment, but once he warmed up, he was a very effective speaker. I did not know him very well. I got to know his wife, Laura, because I was president of the P.T.A. over at the Campus School. That was in the early 1960s when she was secretary over there,

Parker was principal. She was very efficient and had her own ideas. Some people agreed with her and some did not. She was very much against organized athletics at a young age. She did not think that it was good for children. I agreed with her on that. The Campus School was the one that started not allowing children to go to school until age six. So many people pushed their children to start at five. I did not think that people should rush the children into school, particularly boys. They were not developed enough emotionally or maybe in skills. Later on it was better for them to have that extra year, if they wanted to participate in athletics. They would be more mature.

FORSYTHE: What do you remember about chapel?

HOLDEN: We went to chapel and listened to speeches. This was when I was a college student around 1935. I do not know whether it was required, but I remember going. I remember when Q.M. came.

FORSYTHE: Do you remember some students bringing in a trailer and putting it behind Jones Hall to live in, about 1935 or '36?

HOLDEN: I lived at home, not on campus. There was a football player, Woody Smotherman, who was married. I do not know if he lived in that trailer which you were asking about.

FORSYTHE: What do you remember about being a college student?

HOLDEN: I lived in town, so I did not get into that much of the college life. Football was big, and we had winning teams. Unless you lived in the dormitory, you really did not get into college life.

FORSYTHE: What was it like to attend school during the depression?

HOLDEN: The depression hit Murfreesboro when I was in high school, and I was a freshman. That was when the bank closed or went broke. Nobody had anything. I had a car and I was one of the few people who did. The only reason that I had a car, was that my mother and daddy did not drive. I would take my daddy to work or drive my mother wherever she wanted to go. I started driving when I was eleven years-old. I would drive to the Campus School. You did not have to have a driver's license then. No one said anything to me. We lived on Main Street and our driveway extended from Main Street to College Street. I would back up to College Street and drive to Main Street. That was how I learned to drive. By the time I was twelve, I was driving to Nashville or anywhere else. I had to have two pillows to even reach the pedals, but I was driving. There were very few cars and very little traffic, so it was not dangerous. There were no regulations on who could drive and who could not. I never took a test, I just got a driver's license when they required one. All of my children had to go down and take the test.

FORSYTHE: How did it affect your father to have to close the bank?

HOLDEN: The way it worked, it did not hit here until 1932, despite the market crash in 1929. They had to close the bank because they did not have enough money to operate. The bank paid out between 80 and 90 percent to the depositors. It was one of those things, you could break any bank by a run on it. I do not know all of the details. My dad owned some stock. In fact, I had a little stock that an aunt had left me, and also had a little money in the bank. They took my savings account to pay off the stock holders. They took everything my daddy had, all this property. He was in the retail, House and Butler, and later reopened as the Butler Grocer Company and moved to the South side of the square. He had to start from scratch and made a living. He left my mother comfortably fixed when he died in 1941. Nobody had anything. We skated and played in each other's yards. We played kick the can. I also went to the picture show, which was a dime until you were twelve. I think it was a quarter after that. The Princess Theater was where Calvary Bank is now. It was right on the corner there. Everything was a lot simpler then than it is now. I am just amazed. No one had any money. I do not know what we paid to go to MTSU, it was practically nothing. When I went to Randolph Macon, the second year I was up there, they raised the tuition to a little over 800 dollars. That included room and board. Now it cost between \$15,000 and \$20,000 to go there. At MTSU it was very little, we were on the quarter system then.

[End of side A]

FORSYTHE: Tell me what you did after you finished school?

HOLDEN: I graduated from college with a degree in mathematics. In 1939, for a woman, you could teach. Since I did not want to teach, I went and took a business course. I got a job with the National Youth Administration (NYA). I worked with the employment service here. In those days, cooks and yard men were about the only jobs. I learned a lot. I learned how to file. Then I went out to V.A. Hospital and worked there for a short period of time. In March of 1942, Randal Ridley, who was a lawyer here, and a friend of my father's called me up and said he had been appointed chairman of the rationing board. He asked me if I wanted to work for him. He and I opened up the rationing board here in Murfreesboro. At that time, nearly everything was rationed, gasoline, sugar, shoes, tires. We issued rationing books. I knew everyone in Rutherford County, because they had to come through to get a ration book to buy anything. It got bigger as the war went on. Then they put in price control. I switched over to the office of price control. I checked on prices in every type of business in Rutherford County. Everything was at a frozen price. We would get lists and then go out and check the prices on the shelf. I learned to be a good consumer then, by looking at weight in association with price. We had some interesting experiences then. Where the present city hall is, down below there on Broad Street, that was the "Bottoms," the slum area. Town Creek flooded every spring, and that was the only time that they ever go clean out

there. It washed everything out, including the rationing books. After the spring rains, they would all line up to get reissued rationing books. Sugar was a big thing. That was the bootlegging days, and they needed sugar to make bootleg whiskey up in Woodbury. The government was very careful about the sugar allotment. You had to be canny to get any extra sugar. There was practically no gasoline. All the construction trucks had to have tires. I did not know there were tires that big at that time. We worked six days a week, 48 hours all during the war. One Saturday afternoon, this man came in there and wanted some shoes. Whoever was waiting on him asked him, "Why do you need the shoes?" He looked up and said, "Lady, to separate my feet from the ground." I thought that was funny. I know another good tale that came out of that. I was going out to Barfield, towards Shelbyville Pike and turned off. There was a grocery store there and Mr. Roland ran it. I went to all the little grocery stores and other things all over Rutherford County. I was going out to Armstrong Valley Road. I looked up there and I saw this man and he looked old and tired. I was instructed never to pick up anyone, but I thought there could not be any harm in picking up this old man. I figured he was going up to the store at Barfield. I stopped and rolled the window down and asked, "Would you like a ride?" He looked at me and answered, "I do not know you." I introduced myself and told him who I was, and he got in the car and rode to the store with me. We were really busy up there. Hardy Moore ended up as manager. I had one assistant that also worked price control. I had a car and used my car. They gave me gas for it. Every time we checked Laverne, I always had a little extra gas, so we went to Nashville. Those were the only times we went to Nashville during that period. You just did not have enough gasoline to go anywhere. I worked until they closed the rent office in 1949. After the war they had rent control. I worked there seven years. I opened and closed that office. I learned a lot.

FORSYTHE: Tell me about the maneuvers.

HOLDEN: During the war years, Rutherford County was the location of maneuvers. We had all these woods around here. They had troops all over the place. The first time, about four o'clock in the morning, we heard all this noise going down Main Street. The tanks, the half tracks, they were all coming. That got to be a common occurrence. They would all come down Main Street. They had the soldiers all over. People today still go out in the woods with metal detectors looking for valuables in the ground. The Bottom area, a kind of red light district, was off limits to the soldiers. At Vine Street, M.P.'s were stationed there, not to let the soldiers down there. We got to know all sorts of people. The people that opened up Camp Forest up at Tullahoma lived here. The 33rd division from Chicago was stationed here on maneuvers. All the men my age were gone, so the girls just sort of stuck together. We did go to dance up Camp Forest. I just went once, and that was enough for me. I did meet a lot of the soldiers around here. Sewart Air base, located in Smyrna, was named for Alan Sewart. I knew him. Very few people knew him because his family lived here only an short time with the National

Guard. He was the first person from around here to be killed in World War II. There was a lot of activity in those years.

FORSYTHE: Did you remember seeing any prisoners of war here?

HOLDEN: As far as I know, there were no prisoners of war here. I do not remember seeing any.

FORSYTHE: Tell me about your father and his business?

HOLDEN: My father's family goes back to General Thomas Overton. He was a neighbor of Andrew Jackson's and had a farm near the Hermitage. His brother, John Overton, built Travelers Rest. He had one daughter Mariah and she married Isaac Henson Butler. They had two sons, I do not know why, but Mariah lived at Traveler's Rest at one time. Since they had some connection in Louisiana, one son, John Overton Butler, a doctor, went to Louisiana. The other son, Thomas Overton Butler, came to Rutherford County and married Cornelia Ware. She was a native of Louisiana and they lived on Armstrong Valley Road. They had eleven children--seven boys who were all over 200 pounds and over six feet, and four daughters. My grandfather was Isaac Henson, and he married Mary Elizabeth Murphy. They had six children, four boys and two girls. My grandfather died when my father was in the fourth grade. My dad dropped out of school and got a job to help support his mother. At that time, he educated himself. He went to work for Mr. House. It was Mitchell and House at one time. He worked for him until he was 28 years old and Mr. House allowed him to buy half interest in the business. From then on it was House and Butler. My father was into everything. He was president of the Chamber of Commerce, president of the Rotary Club, president of the bank. He was also on the hospital board that built Rutherford Hospital. He was instrumental in getting our first industry here, the Carnation Milk Plant, in 1927. When the bank went broke in 1932, then he stared over at Butler Grocer Company. After that, he was not really active. That took all of the wind out of his sails. He was a really good business man. He built some store buildings, bought a farm, and bought the building that Holden Hardware is in. I inherited that from my mother. That is one reason we have been able to stay on the square. He died in 1941 and left my mother comfortable. She lived until 1961. Those were the heydays back in the 1920s, cotton was king. Dad had a warehouse where they stored the cotton. He was not playing the stock market, although a lot of them did. His main venture was real estate. Some people said that if he would have lived through World War II, he would have made money hand-over-fist. He would have been the guy that went out and bought and developed things.