

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
WITH
JOHN S. HOLMES, JR.

6 OCTOBER 1995

MURFREESBORO, TENNESSEE

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

INTERVIEW #QMS.119

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Albert Gore". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'A'.

ALBERT GORE RESEARCH CENTER

MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

EDITORIAL NOTICE

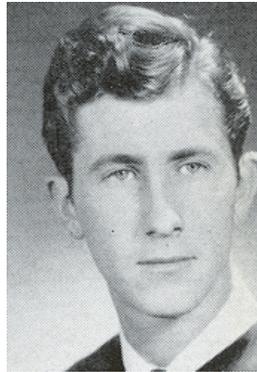
This is a transcript of a tape-recorded interview conducted by the Albert Gore Research Center at Middle Tennessee State University. The original recording and associated materials are archived at the center, whose collections may be accessed in person or via the web site gorecenter.mtsu.edu. After a draft of this transcript was made, the interviewer, or in some cases another qualified staff member, reviewed the draft and compared it to the tape recordings. In a few cases, the interviewee also contributed editorial corrections. This final transcript incorporates the corrections and other changes suggested by the interviewee and interviewer. The transcript follows as closely as possible the recorded interview, including the usual starts, stops, and other rough spots in typical conversation. The reader should remember that this is essentially a transcript of the spoken, rather than the written, word. Stylistic matters, such as punctuation and capitalization, follow the *Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th edition. The transcript includes bracketed notices at the end of one tape and the beginning of the next so that, if desired, the reader can find a section of tape more easily by using this transcript.

RESTRICTION

The interviewee has donated her or his copyright in this interview to the state of Tennessee through Middle Tennessee State University and has agreed that use of the recorded interview and transcript shall be governed by the director of the Albert Gore Research Center.

Researchers may read, quote from, cite, photocopy, and download this transcript without permission for purposes of research only. Publication is prohibited, however, without permission from the director of the Albert Gore Research Center.

ABSTRACT



**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH
JOHN HOLMES, JR.**

Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW #QMS.119

FORSYTHE: This tape is part of the Q. M. Smith Collection designated as QMS.1995.119. This is Regina Forsythe, I am interviewing John Holmes. Today is Friday, October 6th, 1995. The interview is being conducted in the home of Mr. Holmes, located at 1010 East Northfield Boulevard, Murfreesboro Tennessee. The tape of this interview along with a transcription of the interview will become a 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 Mr. Holmes?

HOLMES: Yes

FORSYTHE: What is your full name and birth date?

HOLMES: John Sherwood Holmes, Jr. September 12, 1927.

FORSYTHE: Your father and his occupation.

HOLMES: He was John S. Holmes, Sr. He was the bursar at Middle Tennessee State University. My mother was a student here when he was a student, and they ended up marrying. There was quite a difference in their age. They got a house across the street on Tennessee Boulevard.

FORSYTHE: Your mother and her occupation.

HOLMES: She was Ivy Graham, she was a housewife. In later years she taught grammar school at Florence between Murfreesboro and Smyrna, a one-room school house. There were eight grades in one room. She taught there for ten years. She was a lot of fun, an interesting gal. All my ancestors are from West Tennessee but my mom and dad came here for the school.

FORSYTHE: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

HOLMES: One sister, Betty Graham Holmes. She graduated from MTSU and went into teaching. She is in Virginia.

FORSYTHE: What is your wife's name?

HOLMES: JoAnne Mitchell Holmes. She was teaching school when we married. She resigned after we married.

FORSYTHE: Did your father talk about going to MTSU?

HOLMES: Yes. He came from Huntington Tennessee in the Western part of the state. He grew up on a rural farm. He had first gone to college, I don't really understand it but there was a book written about my father by someone out here at the college, I don't know why he chose MTSU. He had been to a school in Bowling Green, Kentucky, before he came here, I don't believe it was Western Kentucky, I believe it was Bowling Green School of Business or something like that. He left there for some reason and went back to his home, and this school was opening and he ended up here. He told me some tales about how when he got here (he was around thirty five or forty years old when he got here) he lived in houses along Main Street, people just took in students. I guess this college started before Memphis State did, but the reason he came here must have been because they needed someone to do the bookkeeping.

FORSYTHE: Did your father ever say why he started working at MTSU?

HOLMES: The story, as I heard it from, Miss McHenry, who was President Jones' secretary, was that President Jones and my father became friends. He arrived off the train at the college, and he was the first student because his name was on the top of the admissions list. Q. M. Smith was also on that list. I know he had spent time at this business college, but I don't know how he fit it into his curriculum here. But he got some credit for work he had done elsewhere and he was hired while he was still a student. I am kind of fuzzy on how many years he attended school, I assume that he did graduate here. He got started as the bookkeeper for the college while he was still going to school.

FORSYTHE: When did he retire?

HOLMES: He was there about fifty years. I think he retired around 1952.

FORSYTHE: What memories do you have of your father?

HOLMES: He was a fine, interesting man. He was about forty five years old when I was born, so we didn't have exactly a son and father deal like playing baseball like that. By the time I was old enough to be buddies with him, he was sort of over the hill. He and I didn't have a lot of the father son relationships but we did some traveling together. We used to make some short summer trips to Red Boiling Springs. He liked to go for the sulfur water, and I liked to go just to get out of town. We had a good time over there. He came to Murfreesboro in 1912 and we didn't take long trips, you couldn't because the roads were no good. He had a nice big car, and we would drive to his home in West Tennessee, or to Knoxville, and that was a trip for us. He was a happy fellow, and he did have one characteristic, he was crippled in his right leg. It might have been polio. I will have to speak about his people very hazily because I never met the people much, other than his

mother ended up finishing out her years here in Murfreesboro. He had a brother I know, there is a picture here of my father and his brother and his mother and father, and maybe his grandmother. I think.

FORSYTHE: Did he ever talk about the school?

HOLMES: Yes. Across the street on the Boulevard is where they built a house, and the house is still there. He talked about the college and how it got started and how he was admitted to the school. I don't recall to much. He came to the school as a freshman and was almost the same age as the president.

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

HOLMES: He was a big man, tall, rather impressive in his size, I remember my memory of him starts at his returning to Murfreesboro as president of the school. My dad's office was on the bottom floor of the administration building you went in the back door and walked down the stairs, and right straight into his office. By then he had become the bookkeeper of the school, and the purchasing agent. He was the registrar and a man of all trades. He worked very closely with the students. One thing that reminds me of Albert Gore, as a student, my dad took care of their financial needs, so I remember him talking specifically about assisting Albert Gore get through college.

FORSYTHE: What years did you go to school there?

HOLMES: '47 to '50

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

HOLMES: I had a good time, I was not a tremendous student. I had a lot of friends from Murfreesboro. I had a real good time, we went around and did various things. I was manager of the football team, baseball team, and basketball team. It was a grand place for me. It has changed so much it is unbelievable.

FORSYTHE: Can you tell me more about going to chapel?

HOLMES: It was at 11:00, Thursday morning. Dean Beasley would conduct it and Q. M. would make the closing remarks, so he was very active in that. It was mandatory that you attend, and I frequently didn't show up.

FORSYTHE: What happened when you didn't show up?

HOLMES: I don't think anything too dreadful. We had a lot of things to do out there, work, conducting athletic activities, washing uniforms. I was out there and my daddy was out there, and I was under his nose all the time. They would get me once and a while, and my friends would do it and not get caught.

FORSYTHE: How did you become the manager of the teams?

HOLMES: I was good friends with the coaches. Bubber Murphy came there the same time I did. I had known Bubber when he was a student. Since I lived across the street I became very knowledgeable of the faculty and students. I knew where the cafeteria was, and they used to give me cookies all the time. Back then the cafeteria was where the alumni building is now, that was the cafeteria. Then I would wander up to the Main building. At the time the only buildings that were there were the cafeteria, the boys and girls dormitories and the main building, the library, Lyon hall was down near Main street, the science building, and that was it. It was a peaceful collection of buildings. When I started to school in 1946 they had about eight hundred students, that was about the size it was. There were two groups of people there, those who had just come out of World War II and those just out of high school. You sort of stuck with your age group or you meandered into the older students.

FORSYTHE: Tell me about some of the people who were working here, Dean James?

HOLMES: He was in charge of the correctional activities on campus. He was always telling jokes. He had a very droll voice. He would call the young men in for disciplinary talks and most of the men that were in trouble were ex-GI's. He also taught a class.

FORSYTHE: B. B. Gracy

HOLMES: He was sort of like my second father. Our house was on the corner of Eaton Street. You went through the lot past the Moffitt House and just beyond that was the house owned by Mr. Gracy, so he was a close neighbor of mine. He was an extremely active man, he did everything, and I used to just follow him around. He had three children, and we sort of played together. There were some sort of interesting people out there, one of them was Philip Mankin. He was an unusual person and had some unusual ideas, about life and things like that in general. He ended up being a professor at Vanderbilt. I used to enjoy talking to him. We would sit out on the benches on campus, in the shade. I just remember some of his ideas were different than some of the others. I don't remember too much in general. Mr. Gracy was also very interesting. He had a lot of different ideas about different subjects. Nooby Freeman was a good friend of my dad's. He fit a pattern of people that had grown up in the country. My dad was a pretty snappy dresser. As I recall, he was older than most of his associates and he was some what impaired being crippled. He couldn't do everything that everybody else did. He loved football and he would attend all the games here. We had a lot of fun. Every other year we would drive to Cookeville and attend the Middle Tennessee, Tennessee Tech game, and we had a lot of fun doing that. He intermingled with the students much more than they did when I came along, but the student relationship with the faculty was even closer in my day than it is today. You

knew every teacher on campus even though you might not have class with them. It made a nice school.

FORSYTHE: Do you remember Miss Mary Hall?

HOLMES: Yes. I went to her for piano lessons, but I never learned to play. My friend always went with me and he learned to play. When the time came for the recital, my friend went on in my place. He was Russ Faulkinberry, his father had been football coach. Unfortunately one of the sad moments occurred on the campus with Coach Faulkinberry. He was a very successful head football coach, he coached everything, but he committed suicide. Russ Faulkinberry, his son, grew up to be a big boy and a lifelong friend of mine. We went off to high school together in Chattanooga, and he went to Vanderbilt to play football.

FORSYTHE: Why did you go to Chattanooga to go to school?

HOLMES: The high school in Murfreesboro burned. Training school had two years of high school in those days, grade one through ten. When I graduated from the 10th grade at Training School, then I went to high school down on Maple street where the electric co-op is now. It burned right when the classes were graduating. World War II was going on and everything was in a turmoil. We didn't know if we were going to have school. The college had just about closed down, the enrollment was so low.