

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
WITH
IRENE BALDWIN

11 OCTOBER 1995

MURFREESBORO, TENNESSEE

INTERVIEWED BY REGINA FORSYTHE
FOR THE Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
INTERVIEW #QMS.124

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
IRENE BALDWIN**

Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW #QMS.124

FORSYTHE: This tape is part of the Q. M. Smith Collection designated as QMS.1995.124. This is Regina Forsythe, I am interviewing Mrs. Irene Baldwin. Today is Wednesday, October 11, 1995. The interview is being conducted in the home of Mrs. Baldwin located at 1810 Jordan 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. Baldwin?

BALDWIN: Yes.

FORSYTHE: What is your full name?

BALDWIN: Irene Bennett Baldwin.

FORSYTHE: What is your birth date and birth place?

BALDWIN: August 8, 1912 Iuka, Mississippi.

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

BALDWIN: William Thomas Bennett. He was a lawyer.

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

BALDWIN: Eugenia Josephine Davidson Bennett. She was a school teacher.

FORSYTHE: Do you have any siblings?

BALDWIN: I had one sister but she is dead. Her name was Katherine Bennett.

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

BALDWIN: Edward Brasswell Baldwin. He was a professor at the university.

FORSYTHE: Do you have any children?

BALDWIN: One. Edward Brasswell Baldwin, Jr.

FORSYTHE: What memories do you have of Q. M. Smith?

BALDWIN: I mentioned his voice. That is one of the things I think of when I think of him, at first. We came here in the fall of 1939, which is a long time ago. My husband was brought in to fill the place of two or three others, so he [taught] history and geography. Mr. Smith was very cordial with new people coming in. We liked him and we liked his wife, Laura, very much. We got to be good friends with Laura. In fact, we got to be such good friends with them, that when Nancy Jean, the eldest child was born I went to the hospital with Laura, because he was in bed with the flu or something, I've forgotten what. My husband and I went to the hospital with Laura to have her first child.

The other incident that you have mentioned was something. . . When we came, my son was three years old and very active. He was very outgoing. At one time he was in the university's main building. His father's office was over there. He had been with his father and had gotten away from him. He was running up and down steps making a lot of noise. This incident was told by Q.M. and he laughed about it afterwards. He could scare you to death with that voice and stern face. He came out of his office and said, "Young man, quit doing that, you are making too much noise in here." Edward replied, "You act like you are the boss of this place." Q.M. replied, "I am." Edward said, "Oh" and he left. Q.M. thought that was funny.

FORSYTHE: Do you have any other stories about Q.M. Smith?

BALDWIN: No, I'm sure there are many. If someone would mention something I'd probably remember, but I do not remember anything off hand. I was so busy with a three year old when we first came, and trying to learn people here in Murfreesboro. I do not remember anything outstanding, except that Q.M. was very social minded. He encouraged Laura to go to parties and have parties. It was just every day life.

FORSYTHE: Why did you and your husband come to Murfreesboro?

BALDWIN: He was offered a better job here. He was in Florence, Alabama and he was teaching history there. The geography teacher here left, and my husband was brought in to take the geography teachers place. When he came they needed another history teacher too, so he taught some geography and some history. He eventually, of course, became chairman of the geography department. He did not teach history any more.

FORSYTHE: What years did your husband work in the university?

BALDWIN: From 1939 to 1970. I can't remember when he became chairman.

FORSYTHE: Did you attend school at MTSU?

BALDWIN: I got my master's here and got my Bachelor's degree at Peabody College.

FORSYTHE: What years did you attend MTSU?

BALDWIN: I can't remember. My MA was in education because I was teaching school then.

FORSYTHE: Let's see if you remember some people. Robert Abernathy?

BALDWIN: Oh dear yes, everyone that went over here remembers Bob. I remember him making jokes, telling great stories. He was a good public speaker. I enjoyed him very much. I'm a very good friend of his wife's now.

FORSYTHE: Will Bowdoin?

BALDWIN: Oh yes Will, they lived right up the street. They have been very good friends of mine ever since they came here. I enjoyed him. I took classes under him when I was taking my masters. He was a great person, as Mrs. Bowdoin is too.

FORSYTHE: Joe Nunley?

BALDWIN: Yes, I knew Joe and his wife. Not really well, but I knew them and admired them.

FORSYTHE: Dean Beasley?

BALDWIN: The first night we spent in Murfreesboro, we stayed with Dean Beasley in his home. We did not have a place to stay except to go to a motel, and we did not have any money. No one had any money then. He invited us to stay in his home. We had a house that we were going to live in, but the furniture had not come, and so many things did not work out. We had to stay somewhere, so we stayed with Dean Beasley. His wife was a good friend of mine, and we belonged to many clubs together.

FORSYTHE: Clayton James?

BALDWIN: I knew him very well, his wife too. We played bridge a lot. That was the social way of entertaining people at that time, it still is. He played bridge with us, and I knew them quite well.

FORSYTHE: Tell me more about your husband.

BALDWIN: Well, of course, I thought he was a great person. He was a very nice person. He led the singing at first. When we first came here there were only about 500 students. There was not much money, so everybody had to chip in and do something. He was very good at leading singing, he sang well. He did that until they got a chairman of the Music Department. That was the end of that. He directed tours all over the United States, South America, and Europe and the Holy Land, for credit. Those tours were for students, they got credit for it during the summer. We did six weeks in Europe one time. When we went to the Holy Land,

it was six weeks too. He was a good man.

FORSYTHE: What were his hobbies?

BALDWIN: He played golf. He was a piddler, he would make things a lot. The garage is still full of wood that he bought when he retired. He was going to make something. He liked to work with his hands. He led the singing at the choir for the Methodist Church for a long time. I've forgotten how many years he led the singing at church. He also led singing at revivals, all over the county. He sang well, he had a good baritone voice.

FORSYTHE: What church did you attend?

BALDWIN: First Methodist. That is the one we belong to.

FORSYTHE: What organizations did he belong to?

BALDWIN: He belonged to the geographic societies and all those things. He belonged to the Kiwanis Club here in town, the country club also. He wanted to play golf. At one time he was a mason, but I think he dropped that.

FORSYTHE: What was important to your husband?

BALDWIN: His family, friends, and work. He was very interested in geography. He organized the department, because he was the first one. In fact, the man they have now, my husband brought him in. He was the one he wanted to follow him. He was very pleased when that man was made chairman. The Department of Geography had been part of the History Department. Ed finally got it to be a separate department, but it took a long time and several different MTSU presidents.

FORSYTHE: What memories do you have of MTSU?

BALDWIN: I have memories of classes that I had from over there that I enjoyed. I belong to the Dames Club still. I've enjoyed friendship with the ladies that I have met. The social side was what I was interested in, as well as the educational side.

FORSYTHE: Can you tell me more about the Dames Club?

BALDWIN: It is an organization of women. It was originally composed of the wives of the professors, but it changed. It takes in women professors also. We met during the school year. We had good programs to improve us. Women all need improving, mentally and educationally. We enjoyed the social hour. That was how I got to know other faculty wives as well as female professors. It is still around. Those of us who are not working belong to different clubs that have formed from it. One that I belong to and enjoy is the "Out-to-Lunch Bunch." A large group of the ladies who do not have a business to look after go somewhere to lunch. We do it

every week. There was another organization that I used to belong to until my eyes got so bad. It was called "Fancy Fingers", we would meet in homes and take our hand work and gossip. There are a lot of other clubs.

FORSYTHE: How did the campus change during the war?

BALDWIN: Well, of course we had soldiers here. My son was four by then. He walked around the campus and the students made a pet of him. He was badly spoiled. He learned the songs that they sang. Soldiers were marching around all over the place. Everyone was very much aware of the war. I helped with the Red Cross down in Smyrna. I was what they called a "gray lady." We had outfits that were gray and we went to the hospitals and read to the soldiers or wrote letters for them. We took food to them or did something to entertain the soldiers that had been returned to the hospitals. I went to Smyrna. They had a hospital and a base there too. I also went out to the Veterans' Hospital some. My husband took our choir out there to entertain the soldiers several times. My husband taught meteorology, because of the flyers in the air force. He had to teach meteorology to them. I do not think that it had ever been taught before, and I do not think they teach it now. They had flying courses on campus. My husband took one. He soloed once. He did not go on with flying though, because his insurance would not cover it. It was exciting, but we were all well aware that it was a war. We were very active doing the things that were done for the Red Cross and the other things that came up.

FORSYTHE: Were you involved with the Civil Defense?

BALDWIN: Yes, My husband was a member of the National Guard. At one time they took a lot of the men in town and they had a bus trip all around middle Tennessee raising money for the National Guard.

FORSYTHE: Were you aware that Q. M. Smith was the Civil Defense Coordinator for Rutherford County?

BALDWIN: No, I was not aware of that. He was very, very active in the things that had to do with the war, because he was a veteran of World War I. He was very active in getting the soldiers here, and doing a whole lot for them.

FORSYTHE: What memories do you have of World War II in Rutherford County?

BALDWIN: Mostly what I have already told you. The marching, the singing of the songs as they marched, the Red Cross. I started teaching at that time. They needed someone to take the place of other teachers who had gone to the war. I taught American and Ancient history at first. That was at the sophomore and senior levels, at the city high school. After the war was over I started teaching elementary school. For several years I taught sixth grade in the city schools. I later became principal over at Bellwood Elementary.

FORSYTHE: What memories do you have of being a principal at Bellwood?

BALDWIN: It was pleasant. The students and parents were great. I thoroughly enjoyed it. In fact, I enjoyed teaching. I really think that maybe I enjoyed teaching more than being principal. I could not teach today, things have changed so. I retired in 1976. I had been teaching there for 13 years.

FORSYTHE: How did you become principal?

BALDWIN: They needed a principal and it was a new school. They thought I could do it and I wanted to try. Mrs. Bowdoin and Mr. Hobgood were instrumental in getting me to do it. I was the first principal at Bellwood. I was also instrumental in getting Bellwood to be the first Southern Association accredited school in the city. The next year all the other schools followed suit and became accredited. That was one of the things I did that I thought was good. It was a good school, I had good teachers, parents, and students. We did not have any problems with knives or guns. We had seventh and eighth grade as well as kindergarten through sixth. When the blacks came [integration] we got along just fine. The black students came by bus in the morning and arrived at 7:00am. I had to be there to greet them when they came. They would arrive and go to the cafeteria and sit down and play games. They were very well behaved. One day I was late, when I got there all the little blacks were grinning because they were there before me. The first thing this cute little black girl said, "Mrs. Baldwin, we've been good!" The children were so proud of themselves for being good without me being there to tell them to be. We did not have any real problems during integration. We had some children who were rebellious. We just did not have any problems to amount to anything. They just came and became part of the school. One girl was particularly envious of one of the white girls who had all she wanted to have. She spent her time pinching her and doing things like that, but we managed to change her a little bit. She never did get completely over it, but she improved her behavior. We just took the black children in as more of our children. That was the way we felt that we should do and hoped that they felt like they were part of our children.

FORSYTHE: What did you do after you retired in 1976?

BALDWIN: I have not done anything worth while! They asked me if I wanted to supervise teachers, and I said that if I wanted to stay in the teaching profession, I would have stayed where I was. I thoroughly enjoyed what I was doing, but I was getting old. My husband had been dead for quite a long time. I wanted to do a little traveling, and I wanted to spend time with my grandchildren. I played a lot of bridge and belonged to a lot of social affairs here in town. In fact, I've just done nothing but have fun.