

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
WITH
BAXTER HOBGOOD

18 OCTOBER 1995

MURFREESBORO, TENNESSEE

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

INTERVIEW #QMS.130

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

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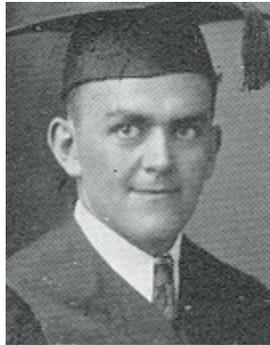
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ABSTRACT



**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH
BAXTER HOBGOOD**

Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW #QMS.130

FORSYTHE: This tape is part of the Q.M. Smith collection designated as QMS. 1995. 130. This is Regina Forsythe. I am interviewing Mr. Baxter Hobgood. Today is Thursday, October 19, 1995. The interview is being conducted in the home of Mr. Hobgood located at 214 Tyne Ave. in 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 okay with you, Mr. Hobgood?

FORSYTHE: Do you remember going to chapel as an MTSU student?

HOBGOOD: Yes, I do. It was a regular thing. I think when I first started it was a matter of every day at 10:00 a thirty minute chapel program. Then, it was cut down to three a week. Finally, it was eliminated all together. It was usually some faculty member who conducted the morning worship service or whatever you wanted to call it. There was no question about the fact that there would be prayer and reading of the Bible. There was still such things as the YMCA and YWCA and such organizations on campus that might put on programs. Every Sunday afternoon we held vespers. If the weather was pretty in the spring or the summer, vespers was held on the campus. If you were really good and behaving yourself not getting too close to your girlfriend, you could spend an extra thirty minutes on campus before calling the girls in. It was usually about 6:30 or 7:00. She rang that cow bell and they came from vespers. The other dormitory had not been built. I came out there first in 1926.

FORSYTHE: Do you know anything about the Bible that was used during chapel, where it came from or anything?

HOBGOOD: No. Usually there was a Bible that stayed right there on stage.

FORSYTHE: Can you tell me about the first library that was in Old Main?

HOBGOOD: That was on the top floor. I carried books from the old library to the new one built in front of Old Main. We got a gang together and when the new library was completed, we moved those books from the top floor of Old Main to the new library. I always hated that building had to be torn down.

FORSYTHE: Do you have any stories you can tell me?

HOBGOOD: The "All's Quiet on the Western Front" result was that it was just accepted by the audience with the complete insistence on the part of those who had done the job, those who had seen it worked that day, that the dramatic society must be named the Buchanan Dramatic Club forever. Of course, things happen and they are changed. So, it was named for Ms. Buchanan after that play and because of that play. I took everything she offered. I would have taken more had she offered. She was a very sweet and yet demanding personality. You sensed in every kind word that she had to say that she also meant business. She wasn't wishy-washy or anything of the sort. I remember to this day that she would always say, "Do not talk to the person in front of you...talk to the person in the back row." If someone has come to hear you talk and they are under your captivity, do the job. Do them the courtesy of speaking directly to them in such a way that they can hear you.

FORSYTHE: What did you do after you graduated from MTSU?

HOBGOOD: My first job was to spend two hours early in the morning at Old Central High School, the one that burned. The rest of the day I spent as principal of McFadden Elementary School. I viewed my work at McFadden as the greatest learning experience of my lifetime in education. The one who had been principal the year before was there. She gave it up because she said she was tired of whipping them all. The only thing wrong was they didn't have anything to do. I got to working with the football team and basketball and baseball both in the school and in the community. Things were going nicely. I always remember the former principal coming to my door and saying, "I got you this time. Your good friend, Mr. Wilburn Douglas is in the office. You've got to go in there and lay-in on him. He spoke back to me this morning. He did not submit to something I told him to do, and you must whip him." I walked in and there was a little paddle there. I turned to him and said, "Wilburn, what in the world did you get me in trouble like this for? It's not you in trouble because you can whip me all over this room if you want to! I'm in trouble because I have to lick you!" He told me to get it over with. He told me to take the paddle and do it as hard and as long as you think you ought to. Well, I gave him a pretty good one. When I finished, he took a little key chain out of his pocket and started waving it around, and on the end of it was a pair of boxing gloves and an inscription, "Light Heavyweight Champion, U.S. Marines." He had been in the Marines with the Marines thinking he was older than he was. Those boys went on into Central High School the next year and became really good football players at the high school. Their coach was R.N. Jobe. Joe Black Hayes, who became General Neyland's favorite, captain of UT, was on the team. There was not a captain like Joe because Joe refused to join a fraternity. He wouldn't have anything to do with fraternities, and they didn't like that. Neyland's favorite captain of all time, Wilburn Harris I was talking about, went to Florida and created his own concrete mixing company. He had gone out one morning with his machine that was pouring concrete to block off several lines they needed to close in this Florida city, but he had to get down inside the place where he was working, and someone else drove another load of this concrete mix up there. Not realizing Wilburn was down there, the guy dumped every bit of it on top of him. Before they could get him out, he was gone.

Joe Black, who lives here now, brought me news about it. That was terrible to realize that kind of thing could happen.

FORSYTHE: So, you were teaching at Central High School in the mornings and was principal of McFadden at the same time? Was that common to do that?

HOBGOOD: Mr. Mitchell who was city superintendent and principal of the high school had been out to that teacher's college at that time and had judged a lot of debates and speaking contests that I happened to be in. He had studied his own faculty situation, and he knew he was going to lose some. Actually, he almost made my position for me when I came here. He was looking forward to having someone who was eventually going to replace good, outstanding teachers that were going to take over working being done in speech and some coaching, the girl's basketball coach. I was kind of hoping I could get into Murfreesboro because I'd been offered some other places. I came in one Thursday afternoon and Mr. Lyons say me in the hall and said, "Hey, Hobgood, John Jolly is in the office and wants to speak to you." I said, "Fine, fine, but would you mind telling me who John Jolly is." I didn't know who he was. He wanted to offer me a job.

FORSYTHE: How long were you at both places?

HOBGOOD: I stayed there until 1940. Then, I was offered assistant high school supervisor for Middle Tennessee. Miss Mary Hall was assistant elementary supervisor and they needed an assistant for high school. Mr. Clayton James had been, the offices were located at the university. That was just a six month job. The rest of the time you could come in and go to school to further work on your master's or your doctorate or whatever you're working on or you could teach some classes or both. I did that for awhile and then the war came along and because of a terrific back problem, they wouldn't have me. They wouldn't pass me for health reasons, but they would let me teach with the aviation cadets at Middle Tennessee Teacher's College. I think I told you that as long as Mr. Smith knew that you were trying to get into a military service, everything was alright. But, if he thought you were trying to escape it, watch it, because you would be gone in five minutes. But, when he knew you were trying your very best to get in, that was all he wanted. He got his injury...I don't know if you've learned or not, but he could not speak very distinctly particularly when he got excited, and this was caused by a bullet he got right in his vocal chords. As soon as the second one started, he tried to get in and kept trying. He just wouldn't quit. He kept trying to get in, but they always politely turned him down. They turned me down as far as going into anything that required a uniform, but they let me teach one class and regular classroom work, and they let me coach the boy's baseball team and the girl's basketball team during the duration.

FORSYTHE: Do you know anything about Q.M. Smith's involvement in the civil defense of Rutherford County? He was civil defense coordinator during World War II in Rutherford County.

HOBGOOD: I don't know much about that, but I do know that he gave every extension to me because of double position, I sometimes got more gas than some other people. He paid much attention to the war and contributing in any way that he possible could. He would actually tell me, "Now Baxter, "If you get in Nashville and see any soldiers that were coming through Murfreesboro, pick them up." He told me not to wait for them to get to the bus station. As a matter of fact, I stopped at the bus station one night and started shouting, "Anybody want to go to Murfreesboro." He was just getting a little visit, he was still in his uniform and recognized me and called out to me, "Hey Mr. Hobgood, I'm going." I brought him on to Murfreesboro. Mr. and Mrs. Smith insisted on attention to the war no matter what you were doing. Some people never did go all out for Mr. Smith because they didn't know him mainly. They might have questioned him in something, but when you knew the man, you just had to respect him and appreciate him. He was wonderful to me. I think [Smith was] to anybody, but they had to be willing to work in the war effort.

FORSYTHE: What effect did the war have on the school system here?

HOBGOOD: I never did see any radical effect that if had on the secondary school. Young people liked to say they weren't behaving themselves because they knew they had to go to war. I can't say that I observed that. It could be because a good part of my work in high schools was done in the field. The supervisor knew that if things weren't going right , their report to the state department would be none too good...Some may have been behaving themselves because the inspectors were coming in. I was never conscious of that feeling. Some of them were ready to go as soon as they could get out of there. I heard many of them say that as soon as they got cleared to go, they would go.

FORSYTHE: What did you do after being a superintendent of high school.

HOBGOOD: Mr. Mitchell was principal of the old high school when it burned in 1944, the spring of '44. That just about ruined him. He had given so much of his life to the program. He had to give up both jobs. They called me and asked me if I would take it. I just about took it, but I remembered that I had promised the governor that I would do the first research work for establishing a teacher's retirement program. For some reason they wanted me to do it. I did the original research work, with a lot of help from the Tennessee Education Association staff, for the retirement system that was built up by the state for teachers. He wanted to get it started and we did. During that time, some person on the faculty who had just taken charge of the program at Central High School (I believe Mrs. Williamson).

FORSYTHE: This is a continuation of the interview with Regina Forsythe of Baxter Hobgood on Thursday, October 18, 1995. Please keep telling me about the teacher's retirement.

HOBGOOD: Of course, it was just a start, and it's a long story. How he came to think of me, I don't know because he didn't know me. I don't want to spend too much time on that, but his wife knew me and she had run across a problem she had had in her teacher's

association. She was high up, one of the state's top officers. She ran across a situation where there was a little revolt in the schools across the states. They started saying, "Why should we send any amount of our money to a state organization just to keep state organizations going? Why not just keep it all here and spend it on ourselves?" I don't whether they had a point or not, but I had seen something I thought might be of help to Mrs. Cooper if she would push it in right at that moment. So, I said to them, "Mrs. Cooper, why don't you meet immediately, not today, not yesterday, not tomorrow, but the day before yesterday. Why don't you advocate right now that the PTA become the PTSA? She asked me what I meant by SA. I told her Parent Teacher Student Association. She said that might take there mind off of it for awhile. Anyway, I told her it might work to a degree. I told her she should try. Well, she tried it, and that was the last word as far as I'm concerned about keeping all the money and not funding state organizations. She told her husband about this of course and they got interested in my doing the research work for the retirement, and they actually praised my work. We got a small program started, and then the Judge Wiseman came in and introduced himself to me and said, "Listen, this program is good, but it's not what it should be. Let's consolidate every retirement program in state government and call it the Tennessee Consolidated Retirement Program for teachers, government workers, government organization. Then they will really be getting something for retirement. He became chairman of the committee to do that and kept me on the committee for five years. The teachers of Tennessee don't realize they really owe Judge Wiseman for the things he did for their retirement system. It's one that pays good retirement. I never did draw any of that money, but when inflation started the retirement system really paid off.

FORSYTHE: Do you know Q.M. Smith's involvement with the retirement system?

HOBGOOD: He was on the committee too. He was not in a position to push it like some of the others, but he did some good work. Mr. Smith would not take a position unless he could do some good work?

FORSYTHE: So after five years with the retirement board, what did you do then?

HOBGOOD: After the research I did for the governor, I came back and took over the job of city superintendent and principal of the high school. Well, we had no high school. We bought the old Tennessee College and set up a high school program there for awhile. We had no equipment, no money for equipment, just surplus equipment. With less than \$1,000 dollars we equipped the old Tennessee College building with enough seats for about 650 students and started school. We got along all right. We had problems. We didn't have enough toilet facilities, but we got along. We had some pretty good programs going.

FORSYTHE: Is that old building still used?

HOBGOOD: It's been torn down now. That is where Central Middle School is now.

FORSYTHE: How long did Murfreesboro not have a high school?

HOBGOOD: They got a high school the next year, not a building of their own. A few went to Cox Memorial, down by old Chriclow. They had a few classrooms at McFadden. State Teachers College let them have a few classrooms down on the first floor.

FORSYTHE: Tell me about your career as a superintendent.

HOBGOOD: I worked as a city superintendent and high school principal for around ten years. When Dr. Homer Pittard came as my assistant I went to the city board and told them if we were ever going to be a city system it was time. We were getting to the place it was time to move in that direction. If they were ready, I was ready to say let's divide because I'm getting to the place to have to declare my loyalties either to the high school or to the city system. I have to favor one or the other, even in financial matters. That just isn't going to work, let's divide and let the county take over my school and I'll go with the city, which they agreed to. Before I had taken the job of superintendent and principal I had sent Mr. Mitchell a message that I hoped it got well quickly and when he did, he had a job waiting for him. We would both have a job, I'd be his assistant or he'd be my assistant, we will work it out. But, he didn't make it.

FORSYTHE: What can you tell me about Reeves Rogers School?

HOBGOOD: Well I wouldn't want to get into present day practices of Murfreesboro City Schools. They have some fine people working in those schools now and that is their strength having fine people to carry on the program. During the time of my superintendency we built Mitchell Neilson Elementary, Mitchell Neilson Primary, Hobgood Elementary, Bradley School, and Reeves Rogers Elementary.

FORSYTHE: Do you have anything else, any stories you can tell me.

HOBGOOD: There is no end to the stories that might interest you and make into a story. You're not doing a documentary detail. You are planting the idea and if someone wants to go and look into what you have done, it would be up to them to complete the story I think that is a wonderful piece of work. I was so interested in reading the comments of the Smith children in the MTSU Magazine.