

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW  
WITH  
VIRGINIA WOODFIN

26 OCTOBER 1995

MURFREESBORO, TENNESSEE

INTERVIEWED BY REGINA FORSYTHE  
FOR THE Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT  
INTERVIEW #QMS.137

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

ALBERT GORE RESEARCH CENTER

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MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

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## ABSTRACT



**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH**  
**VIRGINIA BLACK WOODFIN**  
**Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**  
**INTERVIEW #QMS.137**

FORSYTHE: This tape is part of the Q. M. Smith Collection designated as QMS.1995.137. This is Regina Forsythe, I am interviewing Mrs. Virginia Woodfin. Today is Thursday, October 26, 1995. The interview is being conducted in the home of Mrs. Woodfin at 1320 Richland Place, 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 researchers. Future researchers may include portions of this interview in their publications. Is that all right with you Mrs. Woodfin?

WOODFIN: Yes, it is.

FORSYTHE: What is your full name?

WOODFIN: Virginia Black Woodfin.

FORSYTHE: And your birth date?

WOODFIN: August 1st.

FORSYTHE: What year?

WOODFIN: 1910.

FORSYTHE: And your birthplace?

WOODFIN: Murfreesboro, I guess you say, but it was out in the country. I was a country girl.

FORSYTHE: What was your father's name?

WOODFIN: Eugene Black.

FORSYTHE: What was his occupation?

WOODFIN: He was an insurance agent and a federal land bank agent.

FORSYTHE: What's your mother's name?

WOODFIN: Frances Love Black.

FORSYTHE: That's why your daughter's name is Love. What work did your mother do?

WOODFIN: She was not physically able to [work]. She did volunteer work with the Red Cross and church.

FORSYTHE: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

WOODFIN: Had one sister.

FORSYTHE: What was her name?

WOODFIN: Jean Marie Black. She was married to Ben Hall McFarlin.

FORSYTHE: That's a familiar name, McFarlin. What was your husband's name?

WOODFIN: John [Woodfin].

FORSYTHE: What was his occupation?

WOODFIN: Funeral director. Lawyer and Funeral Director.

FORSYTHE: What are your children's names?

WOODFIN: Love Woodfin Beasley is the oldest one, John Benton Woodfin is the son in the middle, Frances Woodfin Follis is the third one.

FORSYTHE: You had three children.

WOODFIN: I had three children.

FORSYTHE: Tell me what you remember about being at the Tennessee State Normal College.

WOODFIN: That was my experience at school. There were strange things about it. Of course somebody said, "Well did they have a parking area for cars?" I said, "No cars." They had a stable where the horses could stay in. We came in a horse and buggy from the country to go to school. They kept the horse. Some children would ask me, "What is a livery stable?" I said, "It's a little hard to explain, but I think you would call it a little horse motel."

FORSYTHE: That is a good description.

WOODFIN: That's where my pony, Star, who lived to be 37 years old stayed. I had a little pony and buggy I drove to school.

FORSYTHE: How old were you?

WOODFIN: I was seven. I was barely seven.

FORSYTHE: How long did you go to school there?

WOODFIN: Just that one year. A family moved there that lived on the next hill and they were in college. They said they would take me rather than have me go through the country in a little buggy. So they took me back and forth for awhile.

FORSYTHE: So were you still going to school here?

WOODFIN: Well I didn't stay at this school, I went to the city school. When I was here there were only three buildings on the campus. There was a girls dormitory [Rutledge Hall] which is still there. There was no boys dormitory. Just past the girls dormitory was the kitchen and dining room. All the people who lived there ate there. Then there had to be a place for the horses, of course. And they had a furnace heating system. I think that was the only buildings on the campus. No ball field, no anything of that kind. It's hard to believe now, that it was like it was.

FORSYTHE: That was first grade?

WOODFIN: I remember my teacher quite well. I loved her. When the student teachers came in, I thought they were too young. I don't remember many of the people who were in the first grade with me. Not many of them are living. I'm eighty five, so not many of them are still living. I don't know where the ones that are would be. This was just the same as it was then, all those steps up. My last class in college was in the same room as I started in the first grade.

FORSYTHE: Was it? Was that on the first floor or the basement? Where was that room at?

WOODFIN: I guess it was the second floor. You had to go up one thing of steps.

FORSYTHE: Go up these steps and then go up one more?

WOODFIN: This would be the first floor and that would be the second and that is where it was.

FORSYTHE: That's funny. Tell me about your college days. What years were you here in college?

WOODFIN: I just went a short time. My husband, well we were engaged and he was a senior in law school in Cumberland University. He was seven years older than I. He didn't want to wait to marry until I got out of college, because it would have been a good many years. We were married and I did a lot of volunteer work and other things.

FORSYTHE: Was it in 1928 when you were in college?

WOODFIN: Yes.

FORSYTHE: Tell me about your first grade teacher, Lucille Foust.

WOODFIN: Lucille Foust. She was a Miss. She was not married.

FORSYTHE: What do you remember about Miss Foust?

WOODFIN: She was small, very small. She was very full of life and we loved her. The student teachers who were under her seemed to love her.

FORSYTHE: What kind of desks did you sit at?

WOODFIN: You see a few of them now. They were all built on a long ramp. I don't know how to explain them.

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

WOODFIN: Not much. I wasn't too interested to tell the truth about it. Now, one of my granddaughters has her masters over there and she teaches in Nashville. Two of my grandsons graduated over there. Some of them are not living here, but we have always felt good about [MTSU]. In fact the first president was a friend of my mother and father, Mr. Jones.

FORSYTHE: Tell me about Mr. Jones.

WOODFIN: Well of course, at seven years old I wasn't too interested in what he was like. One of his daughter's taught Sunday School and I was in her class in Sunday School. I loved her, she was a dear.

FORSYTHE: What was her name?

WOODFIN: I'm sure whether it was Sarah or not.

FORSYTHE: Did you know Mr. P. A. Lyon?

WOODFIN: Oh, yes.

FORSYTHE: What can you tell me about him?

WOODFIN: Not any specific. He was just a very fine gentlemen and everyone thought a lot of him.

FORSYTHE: Did you know Q.M. Smith?

WOODFIN: I didn't know any of them well enough to comment about them.

FORSYTHE: Can you tell me about the Black House that is part of MTSU now. Did you grow up in that house?

WOODFIN: I have a better picture of it. [She got out a photo album]. These are my birthday parties in it. My family, the Black Family, were out near Walter Hill. This is something interesting, but it doesn't go with the college so I better not tell it.

FORSYTHE: We are collecting information about Middle Tennessee also, so go ahead and tell me.

WOODFIN: My great-great-grandfather was a doctor. The offices that he had built were beside the beautiful old home. He was of course, a person that regardless of what soldier it was, if he was wounded, he would take care of him. Well it happened several doctors in Murfreesboro were accused of getting information from these Federal soldiers. I don't doubt, but what they did. For instance my great-grandfather had four sons. One was my grandfather, who were soldiers in the Confederate army. Naturally, the federals would catch them [the doctors] and put them in the courthouse, the courthouse we have now, for execution. They were to be executed the next day. When my great-grandfather heard it, he couldn't sleep, he said. He heard horses hoofs. He looked out the window and there he saw General Forrest. He came in and released them. They captured Murfreesboro at that time.

FORSYTHE: So you great-grandfather was locked up in the courthouse.

WOODFIN: Yeah, to be executed the next day, along with several other doctors.

FORSYTHE: What was his name?

WOODFIN: His name was Dr. Thomas Crutcher Black. He was a doctor that lived on the Lebanon Highway. The house that they lived in was called the "Evergreen," because my great-grandfather, Dr. Black loved the cedar trees. He planted a walkway of huge long cedar trees, planted before the Civil War. He was the one that was held and released. He lived several years later My grandpa was born there.

FORSYTHE: Can you tell me stories about growing up in Rutherford County.

WOODFIN: About me?

FORSYTHE: Yes.

WOODFIN: Well, yes. There were more of ancestral homes and part of the family I visited with many of them. [looking at album]. Here is another one, it was called Whitehall. Henderson relatives lived there. One that lived here Henderson, married one of the

Blacks. I gave a program one time on "Outstanding Women" at Oaklands. It has been interesting to study the history on some of these. This is where Sarah Childress was married to James K. Polk. I know them quite well. I know what you really want is about the university, and I think I've told you about all I know.

FORSYTHE: I also want information about growing up in Rutherford County.

WOODFIN: I think maybe I told you about all.

FORSYTHE: What do you remember about the depression?

WOODFIN: We married then and it wasn't easy. We saved up dollars for what ever we needed. I don't remember that we ever suffered from it. [Referring back to the album]. This is a picture of me out in the front yard. It was called "Bridgeview", the house there, because it was on a hill on Manson Pike. You went down a river a bit and crossed a bridge where the dam is on the Manson Pike. You see that bridge and then the railroad track ran over on the other side. You could see the bridge on the old Manson Pike. So you could stand on the porch there and see three bridges, so they called it "Bridgeview."

FORSYTHE: That's a good idea to name it that.

WOODFIN: The one that was called "Whitehall" was because the family, the Henderson family, came from England and their home in England was called "Whitehall", I can't think of anything else right now.

FORSYTHE: What do you remember about living here during World War II?

WOODFIN: I was just so busy with work in the Army. I worked in the hospitals at three different places.

FORSYTHE: What did you do?

WOODFIN: Everything from making curtains and things for the rooms in the hospital to taking the entertainment. The music teacher in the high school was a friend of mine, she helped me. We got up musical programs and we took them to the hospitals and the different places. These soldiers were so far from home and sick and they needed anything that we could do for them.

FORSYTHE: Exciting times wasn't it?

WOODFIN: It was interesting. I had the opportunity to meet some fine, young people. Now I still see them. They remember me and I remember them well, too.

FORSYTHE: Tell me about Woodfin's Funeral Home. Did your husband start that?

WOODFIN: No, his father was funeral director first. Do you know where the restaurant, the Front Porch is?

FORSYTHE: Yes.

WOODFIN: Well that was my husband's father's place of business. It was not built up. There was just homes around it. When we decided that there was not enough parking places, it was too crowded, so we bought the property out by the college, where it is now. It's been about twenty years, I guess. We have added to and improved it.

FORSYTHE: What year did you move the funeral home.

WOODFIN: I believe we bought the place in 1952 and then we had to work on it all along, still doing it. My son is. My son's name is John, but in Murfreesboro he is known as Bubba Woodfin.

FORSYTHE: I want to thank you very much.