

An Interview with

J. Garland Smith  
January 29, 1977

Interview by  
Mrs. Frances M. Oberschmidt

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Oral History Project  
Brookhaven and Vicinity

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Interviewee: James Garland Smith  
Interviewer: Frances M. Oberschmidt

Title: An interview with James Garland Smith, January 29,  
1977 / interviewed by Frances M. Oberschmidt

Scope Note: The Lincoln-Lawrence-Franklin Regional Library  
System conducted oral history interviews with local  
citizens. The interviewees included long-term residents  
of the Lincoln, Lawrence and Franklin County areas.

OBERSCHMIDT: What is your name?

SMITH: J. Garland Smith.

OBERSCHMIDT: Address?

SMITH: Brookhaven.

OBERSCHMIDT: Were you born here?

SMITH: Not in this house, but about a mile up the road.

OBERSCHMIDT: Your telephone number?

SMITH: 833-6950.

OBERSCHMIDT: Date of birth?

SMITH: December 30, 1907.

OBERSCHMIDT: What education did you have?

SMITH: High school and four (4) years college.

OBERSCHMIDT: Where did you go to college?

SMITH: Mississippi State.

OBERSCHMIDT: What was your specialty?

SMITH: Bookkeeping mostly - general Business Education.

OBERSCHMIDT: Occupation after you graduated?

SMITH: Well, mostly I've been raising cattle.

OBERSCHMIDT: Have you traveled very much?

SMITH: Not, except World War I, I mean II, World War II.

OBERSCHMIDT: What countries did you travel in?

SMITH: Well, North Africa first, Morocco, Algiers, Tunisia,

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and from there to Italy.

OBERSCHMIDT: I had a brother-in-law that went in at Salerno on the Po Valley. Would you have been in - I believe the Second (2nd) Army?

SMITH: I landed at Salerno. We first went to Sicily and then after the invasion at Salerno, we landed there.

OBERSCHMIDT: Don't want to go back, I'm sure?

SMITH: Well, I'd like to look over the situation, to see if there are any changes.

OBERSCHMIDT: What is your wife's full name?

SMITH: Gladys Breeland Smith.

OBERSCHMIDT: What is her birthdate?

SMITH: December 13th.

OBERSCHMIDT: 19--?

SMITH: Well, I won't tell 19--what?

OBERSCHMIDT: I won't ask that!

SMITH: I'll put it the same as mine; she don't let me know much.

OBERSCHMIDT: Where was she born?

SMITH: Let's see - I believe it was Meridian. I'm not sure, either there or Poplarville - I think it was Meridian.

OBERSCHMIDT: Do you have any children?

SMITH: No.

OBERSCHMIDT: What is your father's full name?

SMITH: Benjamin Paxton Smith.

OBERSCHMIDT: Do you know his birthdate?

SMITH: December 10, 1871, I believe.

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OBERSCHMIDT: His occupation?

SMITH: Farming, mostly.

OBERSCHMIDT: Your mother's full name.

SMITH: Alice Della Allred.

OBERSCHMIDT: Birthplace?

SMITH: I believe it was in, out on the river, Covich County.

OBERSCHMIDT: Do you know her birth date?

SMITH: January 17, 1879, I believe.

OBERSCHMIDT: Mr. Smith, they tell me that your old home-place is just a short distance from here. Do you remember anything about it?

SMITH: Well, the first thing I remember was being around there, because that's where I lived all my life - from a little kid up until after World War II. Really, most of the time that was my headquarters. It's a log house, even though you can't tell it looking at it, because it's been covered with siding - I guess you call it weatherboarding or something, on the outside and in the hall. Inside, sealed with dressed lumber, which I understand, it was dressed by hand by slaves way back there. And this house was built somewhere in the 1830's because my grandmother was born there, I understand. She was born in 1837, so that's as close as I can come to when the house was built. I do understand that the north part - rooms which used to be some more buildings, kitchen and all to the back - was built first, then later, I don't know how much later, the south addition was made. I imagine a good long while afterwards.

OBERSCHMIDT: Did they have what they called the "dog trot" division?

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SMITH: Yes, they had a "dog trot" they called it, through the middle of it. It's still open. That used to be the favorite place for us children to play, the dogs with us. Of course, we always had plenty of dogs - several of them around.

OBERSCHMIDT: I understand it's one one of the oldest houses in the county.

SMITH: I wouldn't be surprised. I'm not sure just how old it is, except, my grandmother lived there. I don't know when my great-grandfather, Benjamin Paxton got the place really, but it's somewhere in the 1830's I imagine.

OBERSCHMIDT: Is it called the old Benjamin Paxton place?

SMITH: Yes, that was the Benjamin Paxton place.

OBERSCHMIDT: Did he have slaves?

SMITH: Yes, he had slaves. I understand that about the time of the Civil War, he had about sixty (60), I think. I don't know how he started out as a young fellow.

OBERSCHMIDT: Could you tell me anything about - did they live in a little village back of the big house?

SMITH: Over across the road, north of the house, they had what they called the quarters and they had several cabins there. They were down when I first remembered, even though the foundations - a lot of them - were still there. The sandstone where they had the sill on I guess, especially you could tell also because of a little mound - because dirt would be worn away from where the yard was. Under the house would be a little higher. You could tell where several of these had been. There was a spring there

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that they could run down the hill to get water for the quarters. The main house, well they used to get water from a spring too, but it was a spring south of the house on down another hill. It was a few houses around the home there. One or two at the back, I think some of the household help lived in. Another house southeast of there, somebody lived there; I guess they cared for the houses or something like that. I'm not sure.

OBERSCHMIDT: Was this house on a road?

SMITH: Yes. It was called the Buie-Mill Road later, I supposed - it was on a road to start with. The road that eventually went by, they called it the Buie-Mill Road because down on the river or creek or somewhere, the the Buie's, some Buies had a mill. I suppose a grist mill.

OBERSCHMIDT: How far was it from the old Wire Road or Jackson Military Road?

SMITH: My home?

OBERSCHMIDT: Yes.

SMITH: Well, at that time, the road didn't follow the present road here. It crossed the creek and went - came out at Virgil Case's on the Old Wire Road. That's really the Buie-Mill Road now.

OBERSCHMIDT: Now, tell me about the Wire Road. What had you heard about it as a child?

SMITH: Well, my daddy and some of the old people usually called it the Wire Road and some called it the Jackson Military Road. I've heard that Jackson - Andrew Jackson - had it mapped out or marked as a closer way to use for military purpose, campaign, I suppose, to New Orleans. He wanted

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a second way to go down besides the river - I think - or something like that.

OBERSCHMIDT: Wasn't he the one that fought the Battle of New Orleans?

SMITH: Yes.

OBERSCHMIDT: I have gotten some word that he used a wire to stretch, to make the road straight. Have you heard anything about, if this is true?

SMITH: I never heard that. I always just thought maybe it was a telegraph wire. Maybe that was my idea about it, I really don't know, except it was just called that. I was thinking maybe a telegraph wire ran down the road. Might of been later years, way later than when we used it as a military road.

OBERSCHMIDT: Do you know where this road - where did it start and where did it end?

SMITH: No, I'm not sure where it starts and ends.

OBERSCHMIDT: Some said it was from Nashville to New Orleans and it came through Auburn and Liberty. Do you know whether the military road went through those areas?

SMITH: I kind of believe it went through Liberty - seems like I've heard it called that - a few of the old people called it the Liberty Road - I guess going down that way or something.

OBERSCHMIDT: What mode of travel did they have along in that day, did you hear your folk tell?

SMITH: I imagine mostly wagons, mule - ox wagon perhaps. Of course, a good many rode horseback traveling.

OBERSCHMIDT: Where would they stay at night?

SMITH: Well, course, in those days, most anybody would take some-

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body in, but they had some inns or taverns or something along that road I understand and one of them is down about three (3) miles south of Loyd Star - run by some East, a fellow named East. There was another one up Old Red Star that another East ran, I understand.

OBERSCHMIDT: Brothers?

SMITH: They were brothers. I have heard, it was still another brother had an inn up in Copiah County somewhere, but that's more or less hearsay.

OBERSCHMIDT: Nothing left of those sites?

SMITH: No, I don't think, except there is part of an old building down on McCall's Creek, it's said to be a part of the old inn. Most of it has been torn down and I think made a tenant house or something out of it.

OBERSCHMIDT: How'd they take care of that?

SMITH: Jack Smith owns the place now - Sambo Smith's brother who lives there.

OBERSCHMIDT: Would that be the Jack Smith that had the saw mill?

SMITH: No, that's not the one.

OBERSCHMIDT: Mr. Smith, how about tell me something about your education starting from the first impression you had of school days.

SMITH: My first school was Old Loyd Hall. That's west of my old home about a couple (2) of miles. We used to walk every day there and back. At that time, there were no gravel roads. We used to enjoy walking through the mud on the way back home. At the time, I believe it was an eighth (8th) grade school. Later on, after I got up about the sixth or seventh grade, something like that, we transferred and went to Red Star School - over here at Loyd Star - later they consolidated and called the School Loyd Star. At

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the old school we had some pretty good times there. Especially, one thing I remembered was a biscuit war.

OBERSCHMIDT: A what?

SMITH: A biscuit war. During World War I, we'd save all our biscuits out of our lunch - our mothers, I imagine, wouldn't have liked that if they had known it. After we'd eaten everything else, we'd get out and throw biscuits at each other; that's called a war.

OBERSCHMIDT: Playing like war.

SMITH: Playing like war.

OBERSCHMIDT: Most boys liked to play cops and robbers or Indians or something like that.

SMITH: We used to play that some and we played what we called "rabbit and dog" too. Some of them would be the dog, bark like a dog, and chase the other one on over to the woods. Sometimes, we'd be so far away when the bell rang for books, well, we wouldn't hear it and get into trouble.

OBERSCHMIDT: What did the teacher do to you?

SMITH: We'd have to stay in a little while next recess.

OBERSCHMIDT: How far did you walk to Red Star School?

SMITH: Red Star? I'd say Red Star was about a couple (2) of miles.

OBERSCHMIDT: You'd get together and walk through the woods?

SMITH: No, we walked the road at that time. When I started to Red Star, this road had been changed here, and there was gravel on it. But the Old Loyd Hall Road - it was a dirt road. The school, Loyd Hall was named after a fellow who came down right after the Civil War - T. R. Loyd. He estab-

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lished the school. He taught there many years. In fact, he came down as a private tutor to my daddy and Rufus Applewhite and Dr. Applewhite - R. R. Applewhite. Had a private tutor and he taught in my old home in the north room for a few years. Then finally, some more got to coming in and going to school, later he established the school. That's where the present Loyd Star got it name, from Mr. Loyd.

OBERSCHMIDT: What kind of games did the girls play then?

SMITH: Well, those days, we didn't have much to do with them; I don't know.

OBERSCHMIDT: No baseball then?

SMITH: They played - we had what we called town ball - we had our game of town ball and the girls did too.

OBERSCHMIDT: How'd did you play that?

SMITH: It's similar to baseball, except you'd - to get anybody out, you'd hit them with the ball instead of getting any of them at the bases.

OBERSCHMIDT: We used to play dodge ball. You'd draw a ring and you could play in the ring, and if you got hit, you'd have to get out of the ring and you were out of the game. Similar to that?

SMITH: Yeah, we played something like that, too. Then later on of course, after basketball began to come in - when we got up about the sixth or seventh grade. I never saw a basketball until then. Country schools didn't play it for a good long while. Another thing we used to like to do was, there was a little drain down below the school, outside - we'd get down there and skate in the mud. We'd get plenty muddy.

OBERSCHMIDT: Your mamas would get you then I bet. What type of festivities did you have during your school days?

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SMITH: You mean, classes we had?

OBERSCHMIDT: Field day or programs?

SMITH: They used to have in school what they called Field Day.

Kind of, I reckon, a contest, something all the schools of the county would have. They'd have some kind of a program and have some kind of a prize to see who was best. They used, of course, to have races, foot races, and jumping and such as that; that was a big part of it.

OBERSCHMIDT: That was a big day then. When would you have it?

SMITH: Well, they usually had it in the district among the schools around. The ones I remember, one or two at Grange Hall school which no longer exists. Then they'd have the county field day - then they go to all schools.

OBERSCHMIDT: What church did you go to?

SMITH: I went to Bensalem Presbyterian Church.

OBERSCHMIDT: Where was that?

SMITH: At Caseyville.

OBERSCHMIDT: How did you go there?

SMITH: When I was small we went in a buggy or surrey - horses and buggy. Then after about 1914, I believe it was, my daddy got a car and we went in the car most of the time unless the road was too bad. We'd have to go some other way.

OBERSCHMIDT: Caseyville, I'm told had a Camp Ground.

SMITH: That was at the Methodist Church - Bethel, I believe, and it was about a half-a-mile north of Caseyville itself.

OBERSCHMIDT: Did they have cottages there?

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SMITH: Have what?

OBERSCHMIDT: Cottages? People that...

SMITH: Yes, they had a few little cottages and some would bring tents and camp, and I think some covered wagons, originally. They had several little small cabins they'd rented out.

OBERSCHMIDT: Would this be like what they called Protracted Meetings?

SMITH: Yes, very much like it.

OBERSCHMIDT: Definitely a get-together. For how long or do you know?

SMITH: I imagine almost a week, I imagine.

OBERSCHMIDT: I remember going as a child with my father there one time.

SMITH: I used to go pretty often, on up until I was in my teens, or later teens, I suppose, early teens, anyway. Because one thing I remember - I shouldn't tell it I guess, but one of the preachers we had spent most of his time preaching against "True Story" magazines.

OBERSCHMIDT: That was such a thing then, I remember - they were hidden if you had one.

SMITH: I didn't know what was one. My next trip to Brookhaven, I bought me a "True Story" magazine.

OBERSCHMIDT: Did you have to hide it?

SMITH: I kept it hid in my room and read it - to see what he was preaching against, I guess.

OBERSCHMIDT: Was everybody in the community invited to go to that Camp Meeting?

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SMITH: Yes, they was all going there - just everybody went.

(Pause)

SMITH: Anyway, your daddy - Dr, Versie McRee - was up there to see some of us one night, sick I guess, or he may have just stopped by - he used to stop there a lot. (Pause) Dr. Versie stopped by, I remember. He and my daddy got to talking about some of the old school days down at Union Church - Dr. C. W. Grafton's school down there. He said, one time, they all got the itch - took seven year itch in the school and so they didn't know what to do. Anyway, three (3) or four (4) of them...

OBERSCHMIDT: This was the boarding school?

SMITH: Yes, the boys I think boarded in a private home, though, not in the dormitory at the time. My daddy, (Ben P. Smith), Dr. McRee, Hugh Applewhite, Rufus Applewhite, and Gilbert McLaurin - I believe they said it was - rented or borrowed a washpot - old washpot from a colored woman that lived nearby. Said, they had heard "poke root" would cure it. So they went down in the branch, they boiled it until it got down to thick soupy-like stuff. They smeared it all over. Said it wasn't long enough before they were on fire - they felt like the - even though it was spring - still cool weather. Said every one of them dived into the branch to cool off. He said, as well as he could remember, they got rid of that itch. Said that cured it. Said it must have been a good remedy after all. Said it sure did burn them up.

OBERSCHMIDT: Burned anything up, I reckon.

SMITH: Said they got rid of the itch. He liked to tell about that - having to take to the water because it burned. And it's so strong, I imagine

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it would be - I've heard of using it for mange for dogs, so I imagine it did have some effect.

OBERSCHMIDT: Do you know any other remedies they had that they got from the woods - old timey remedies?

SMITH: Some of them used to use mullen for something. I don't know - colds or something.

OBERSCHMIDT: That's a kind of green - like turnip greens?

SMITH: Kind of a green fuzzy big-leaf plant. Then some used may apple for something - roots I Believe - I think they used it in place of calomel.

OBERSCHMIDT: Does that crawl on the ground and have a little apple on it?

SMITH: Has an apple on it. Yes, they claim it is very poisonous, but guess they boil the roots or something and knew how much to take.

OBERSCHMIDT: Do you know of anything else? How about sassafras tea?

SMITH: They used to drink sassafras tea; especially when they'd have measles, you know, make them break out more they said, get rid of it. I drink some sassafras tea myself. I like it.

OBERSCHMIDT: I like it.

SMITH: But seems like, in later years, we don't use it much. I find instant coffee easier to fix.

OBERSCHMIDT: How about your Christmas celebration? Did you have and kind of a program at school? Or...

SMITH: Not except, we'd have a little Christmas tree usually, de-

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corated up. Sometimes they'd give out very small little presents, you know.

OBERSCHMIDT: Very little money, then.

SMITH: Not over a nickle anyway. At home we'd expect Santa Claus to come. We usually had - each one his place on a chair or something, or sometimes a stocking on it. We'd have a few things. In those days, an apple, orange, nuts, and all were something you didn't have everyday. We'd usually have a book; sometimes, some ball or something to play with.

OBERSCHMIDT: I always got new clothes.

SMITH: My sister, a doll, of course - a doll.

OBERSCHMIDT: Did you have any family get-togethers then during Christmas season?

SMITH: No, not too much, not my family anyway. Of course, lots of times, we'd go up to my Grandmother Allred's for dinner if it was a good day. Sometimes we wouldn't; depended upon the weather a lot.

OBERSCHMIDT: How many were in your family? Your immediate family?

SMITH: Seven (7); four (4) boys and three (3) girls. Two (2) of my brothers are dead.

OBERSCHMIDT: How old?

SMITH: I have three (3) sisters living and one (1) brother living. I'm the oldest in the family.

OBERSCHMIDT: Did these brothers die young? Or...

SMITH: They died fairly young. One of them was - I don't know - killed in Chicago during World War II, and the other one, somewhere right after 1947 or 8 - killed in a car wreck near Vicksburg.

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OBERSCHMIDT: No disease?

SMITH: No disease.

OBERSCHMIDT: Did you know of any epidemic or anything in your day?  
Do you remember the flu?

SMITH: Except the flu and smallpox - I know they wouldn't let us go anywhere during that time. We stayed at home all the winter, I think, and we did that one time with smallpox, too.

OBERSCHMIDT: Was that an epidemic or just?

SMITH: Yes, it was out here.

OBERSCHMIDT: About what time. Do you remember what year that was?

SMITH: No, I don't know, just don't know about it; I was small.

OBERSCHMIDT: Before the vaccine was known so well.

SMITH: I think they were beginning to have some; seems like people didn't use it much out in the country.

OBERSCHMIDT: They had to be educated to it.

SMITH: What's that?

OBERSCHMIDT: Had to be educated to it, I guess.

SMITH: I guess so. At Halloween, some of the boys at school, in the dormitory, went down to the school house and had all the fire wood and everything else scattered all around the school room and the desks and all. They committed a good many acts of vandalism. Not bad but everything messed up in general. The next morning, Dr. Grafton found it. He called them all in and was going to punish them. So, your daddy, who was later Dr. McRee, told him, "No, I wasn't in it. Now I won't say what I was doing, but Ben

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Smith and myself wasn't in it. Now I'm not going to be punished for something I didn't do." Anyway, he stood up for the fact - he didn't have any part in it, I'm not going to punish you all." So he left them off. I guess he was - he felt he was being honest. He took him at his word that he didn't have any part of it. But they were off down town doing something they shouldn't have been doing. But they didn't have any part in that school business - messing it up and dirtying it up.

OBERSCHMIDT: Talking about town, do you know what size town Union Church was?

SMITH: No, I have no idea. Evidently a few more people, I guess, than it is now. Maybe enough around close enough for them to come in, to have a little walk into town. I imagine there were a good many like that.

OBERSCHMIDT: There was a cross road there; do you know what those roads were?

SMITH: No, I don't. Of course one of them was the Union Church - Brookhaven road, and then it's one that goes into Copiah County, and then on up into what is Highway 20 now. I think it used to go up to - let me see - what's the name - McBride. I believe the road on toward that way. Then another road that went south eventually came out down in Franklin County, perhaps Meadville or Lucien or Bude, somewhere down there.

OBERSCHMIDT: Across about where 84 is now, I guess.

SMITH: Yes.

OBERSCHMIDT: Do you know any folklore that your parents told you?

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SMITH: No.

OBERSCHMIDT: Anything that happened during the Civil War days that you could remember and tell?

SMITH: No, except one thing I remember. An old colored fellow who lived on the place, who used to live out between here and Caseyville. When the Yankees came through they raided. They came through Union Church and marched on to Brookhaven.

OBERSCHMIDT: Now was this a regular battle or skirmish?

SMITH: No, it was kind of a patrol - kind of, I guess, the war just about ended - anyway, he was living at what they called the Crawford home at the time - it has been burned. It'd become a plantation home. It's where he was born. He said he heard them coming - bell on their horse harnesses - the bell it scared him and he crawled under the steps. He said they came in, went all through the house. What he regretted about it - said they brought the buttermilk out and poured it out in the yard right by him. That was really good buttermilk and they poured it out.

OBERSCHMIDT: Just meanness.

SMITH: Meanness, you know.

OBERSCHMIDT: Just so people would starve.

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(End of Interview)

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