

**Oral Memoirs**

**of**

**Walter Smith**

An Interview Conducted by

John Settle

March 2, 2013

History Harvest

Spring 2013

*University of Central Florida Public History Center*

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## **Interview Histories**

Interviewers: John Settle

Transcriber: John Settle

The recordings and transcripts of the interview were processed in the offices of the Public History Center, University of Central Florida, Sanford, Florida.

## **Legal Status**

Scholarly use of the recording and transcript of the interview with Walter Smith is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on March 2, 2013.

## **Abstract**

Oral history of Walter Smith, interviewed by John Settle on March 2, 2013 for the UCF Public History Center's History Harvest. In the oral history, Smith discusses how he found information about the History Harvest, what it was like going to school at Westside Grammar Elementary School in the 1930s, his attendance at Seminole High School, and the football season.

## **Walter Smith**

Oral History Memoir

Interviewed by John Settle

March 2, 2013

Sanford, Florida

0:00:00

### **Introduction**

**Settle** Okay. It's Saturday March 2<sup>nd</sup> [2013]. We're here at the History Harvest event at the [UCF] Public History Center. My name is John Settle. I will be interviewing Walter [Smith]. Walter, if you'd just tell us again how you heard about our event.

**Smith** One of your cohorts, Ashley Vance, was having lunch at the Corner Café downtown. She was talking to Michael, the owner. Michael said, "Well you oughta talk to Walt Smith, 'cause he grew up in Sanford." So he called me. And I talked briefly with Ashley. Afterwards, once I got a hold of her, later that day, I told her, "Yes. I went to school here."

0:00:45

### **Memories of school**

**Smith** We used to have some real mean hot volleyball games out here underneath the oaks. Of course, it was always a chore to run up to the auditorium and back down again for major events. But it was hard to keep your mind on your studies when it was springtime and the wide-open windows and no A/C [air conditioning]. You could either get sleepy or get distracted by what was going on outside. But it was a good school. I gotta say, the marble steps were actually cupped out, because of the foot traffic that went up and down 'em all the time.

That was, I think, the first high school we had here in Seminole County. And the first hot lunch cafeteria was financed by the Woman's Club of Sanford. It was down at the east end of this building. It was a separate wood-frame building. Back when I was growing up there was, like, 12 and a half thousand people, and most of the parents knew who you belonged to. You couldn't get into too much trouble, because even if you ran as fast as you could, you'd never beat back home before they knew what you'd done. And retribution was coming, of course.

**Settle** Do you want to tell us what years that you went to school here?

**Smith** Well it was—uh, let's see I graduated from high school in '46. So go back nine—four years—no. Four, eight—eight years before '46 and that would be about it. 'Cause you—you had the junior high school, which was seventh and eighth [grades], and this was sixth and seventh, and the elementary school—Southside—was one through four.

0:03:09

**Items contributed for digitization**

**Settle**

And do you want to tell us a little about some of the items you brought today to have digitized?

**Smith**

Yes. Mother was quite active at a lot of activities in town. But it was — this was an album that I made up for our 65<sup>th</sup> high school reunion. And looking at it and some of the studies, scrapbooks, and papers, I found an article about two of the first attendees at Seminole High School. And Gladys[sp] Morris, who married Herman Morris, who was my principal in junior high school, as well as high school. And Elizabeth Lynch she was a math teacher, and one of the best I've ever run into, because she could explain plane geometry and solid geometry simply where you understood what the heck she was talking about. And real good background.

0:04:28

**New school building**

**Smith**

When they built the school — the new school — the one I just showed you. They had — the auditorium was down at the end. In fact, that's part of it. But also — also in here we had the — hold onto it for a minute. That was when it was torn down — the auditorium. And before it was a lot of the alumni came back, and had a final get together and gab session with the rest of 'em.

0:05:13

**Hurricanes**

**Smith**

But what I was gonna tell you about the high school was when they got it built, before the students even got into it, they had a hurricane come up. You know, we have those every now and then. And the city and the city fathers in their wisdom said, "Well, heck. That's the strongest building we got here, unless it was the old ice plant, and that can handle a number of people. So y'all come here and use it as a comfort station, as well as a place to get away from the hurricane."

0:06:01

**Ice plant**

**Smith**

And, which reminds me that's the reason why the old ice plant, here in Sanford, was the largest in the state, because they were icing down so many bunkers and railroad cars, as well as trucks that were going back and forth in the winter time. And they were shipping out a hundred car loads of celery a day from [station] company, celery pre-cooling plant my dad used to be comptroller for. And even back in high school, mid-40s, I remember Dad writing a check to the [Duda] brothers for the celery for that year — \$1 million. So yes, we had an awful lot of celery 'round here. In fact, Palucci — Dad put him on the cuff for a botch car of celery cuttage that he put in his china dishes. Chun king china doll and the rest.

0:07:12

**People of Sanford**

**Smith** But there are a lotta good people here in Sanford. I used to kid the Western Union guy – the manager – that we just didn’t have any need for him around here, because if something happened in town between the phone, and the rotary system, and the woman’s grape vine, they’d know about it way before he would. And it[?] would go from that.

0:07:43

**School football team**

**Smith** This was – this was – let me get it out of here. I kept it, ‘cause at one time I was on the football team. That was the ‘46 – I of the ‘46 team. And we used to get in practice for football by working on the little spur line – I railroad section gang. And old Mr. Lumnack[sp] – always had chewin’ tobacco in his mouth – he says – got us together one mornin’ and says, “Boys, y’all gonna have to slow down a little bit. I can’t find ties fast enough.” We were layin’ a hundred ties a day, and that was back before they had those automatic tampers where you had to take it all out and put it all back manually and then tamp it down. But it got us in shape.

**Settle** This was working on the railroad?

**Smith** Yeah. It was a section gang in the summertime before we got into fall school.

**Settle** But it was for conditioning for football?

**Smith** Yeah that was one way to do it. Then our coach was Hank “Goose.” “Goose” they called him. It was his nickname, ‘cause he had a long – he was a tall guy, but had a long, slim neck and it remind[sic] you of a goose, so people nicknamed him “Goose.” But he was an ex-pro baseball player, and the first year he was coach, our team made it all the way to the finals. And darn near won the thing. But like I say, it was a good town to grow up in, because the people cared about the kids – theirs and yours too – and they pretty well kept us from getting into too much trouble.

0:09:56

**Closing remarks**

**Settle** That’s great. Is there anything else you wanna say?

**Smith** Y’all come...

**Settle** Okay, I guess we’re gonna stop it now, if that’s okay.

*End of Interview*