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A. P. Smith
Interviewee

Box 368

Monticello, MS. 39654
Address

Prisilla P. Johansen
Director
Lincoln-Lawrence-Franklin
Regional Library

9/30/78
Date of Agreement

Development of Lawrence County School System, Monticello, MS.

Development of State School Transportation Department.
Subject of Tape(s)

Lincoln-Lawrence-Franklin Regional Library
Oral History
Data Sheet

FULL NAME A. P. Smith
ADDRESS Monticello, MS PHONE 587-2400
BIRTHPLACE New Hebron, MS DATE OF BIRTH October 8, 1899
EDUCATION Oakdale School, New Hebron, MS; Mississippi College, Clinton, MS; Mississippi Southern College, Hattiesburg, MS

OCCUPATION Teacher; County Superintendent of Education; Supervisor of Transportation, State Department of Education; Director of Department of School Building and Transportation, State Department of Education.
TRAVELS Williamsburg; Washington; Philadelphia; Boston; Lincoln, Nebraska; Denver, Colorado; Canada; The western states.

SPOUSE'S FULL NAME Ina Lee Smith
BIRTHPLACE Bogue Chitto, MS DATE OF BIRTH July 29, 1905
OCCUPATION Teacher; housewife

NUMBER OF CHILDREN Three (3)
NAMES OF CHILDREN

Elizabeth Smith
Marilyn Smith
Margaret Smith

FATHER'S FULL NAME Archie Pipkin Smith
BIRTHPLACE Unknown DATE OF BIRTH August 6, 1870
OCCUPATION Farmer
MOTHER'S FULL NAME Magnolia Williams
BIRTHPLACE Silver Creek, MS DATE OF BIRTH January 9, 1877
OCCUPATION Housewife

MAJOR NATIONAL AND/OR LOCAL EVENTS OF IMPORTANCE DISCUSSED
Development of Lawrence County School System; development of state school transportation status.

INTERVIEWEE'S AREA OF INTEREST AND/OR CONTRIBUTION TO THE COMMUNITY

August 23, 1978
Barbara White
INTERVIEWER

Lawrence County Library
PLACE OF INTERVIEW

A. P. Smith
INTERVIEWEE'S NAME

An Interview with

A. P. Smith
August 23, 1978

Interviewed by
Barbara White

Mississippi
Department of Archives and History
and the
Lincoln-Lawrence-Franklin Regional Library
Oral History Project
Monticello and Vicinity

WHITE: This is an interview with Mr. A. P. Smith, Monticello, Mississippi, August 23, 1978. Interviewed by Barbara White. Mr. Smith, what is your full name?

SMITH: A. P. Smith.

WHITE: When and where were you born?

SMITH: New Hebron, Mississippi, October 8, 1899.

WHITE: Is this where you grew up?

SMITH: Yes, ma'am.

WHITE: What was your father's name?

SMITH: Archie Pipkin Smith.

WHITE: When and where was he born?

SMITH: He was born August 6, 1870, and moved to New Hebron at an early age, probably about two (2) years. As to the exact place of his birth, that is not known.

WHITE: What kind of work did he do?

SMITH: Farming.

WHITE: What was your mother's maiden name?

SMITH: Magnolia Williams.

WHITE: When and where was she born?

SMITH: She was born at Silver Creek, Mississippi, January 9, 1877.

WHITE: How many children were there in your family, Mr. Smith?

SMITH: There were nine (9) of us.

WHITE: Where did you first attend school?

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SMITH: At Oakdale School, a little school about one (1) mile northwest of New Hebron.

WHITE: Can you describe the building for us?

SMITH: It was a small, three (3) room frame building with three (3) teachers.

WHITE: Can you describe an average school day for me?

SMITH: Well, back then we did not get to school too early in the morning, probably around eight-thirty or nine o'clock. During the winter months we spent some time getting fuel for the heaters and we recited classes during the day. Usually we were let out in the afternoon around four o'clock.

WHITE: Does Oakdale School still exist?

SMITH: No. It was destroyed by a storm in fact, years ago.

WHITE: Were you there when it happened?

SMITH: Yes, ma'am. I was one of three (3) blown from the building.

WHITE: Was anybody injured?

SMITH: No, no one was hurt.

WHITE: Where did you attend high school?

SMITH: New Hebron.

WHITE: Would you tell me about your college education?

SMITH: I went to college at Mississippi College at Clinton, MS, and secured a Bachelor of Arts degree from that institution.

WHITE: When did you begin teaching?

SMITH: I believe my first teaching experience was about 1916.

WHITE: What qualifications were needed to become a teacher at that time?

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SMITH: There were no written qualifications. If you could secure a teacher's license, you could teach. In fact, that was a requirement, because you had to have a license to draw your salary.

WHITE: How did you get the license?

SMITH: The license was secured through the County Superintendent of Education's office on the basis of an examination given the applicant.

WHITE: This was an academic examination that you took?

SMITH: Right.

WHITE: I see. Where was the first school that you taught?

SMITH: Sills School in Lawrence County.

WHITE: Were you the only teacher?

SMITH: No. I had one (1) assistant teacher.

WHITE: How many students did you have?

SMITH: Oh, I'd say thirty-five (35) or forty (40).

WHITE: Could you describe the school?

SMITH: It was a small frame building with no interior equipment. We had the old-fashioned wood stove and the chalkboards. No artificial lighting and very little was provided through the building because the building had very few windows.

WHITE: How many grades and what courses did you teach?

SMITH: We offered courses through the eighth grade and taught the subjects that were required by the County School Board at that time.

WHITE: What was a teacher paid in those days?

SMITH: Classroom teachers drew approximately sixty (60) dollars and I remember as principal, I received a hundred (100) dollars per month for a

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six (6) month session.

WHITE: Six (6) month session.

SMITH: Yes.

WHITE: Did many children drop out of school?

SMITH: We had very few drop out because the enrollment was small at that time.

WHITE: How many years did you teach and where did you teach?

SMITH: I think my teaching experience would add up to about thirteen (13) years. I taught one (1) year at Sills, one (1) year at Arm, six (6) years at Union, three (3) years at the agricultural high school at Mendenhall, and two (2) years in Smith County.

WHITE: Was it during the time that you taught that you met your wife?

SMITH: Yes. During my second year of teaching which was at Arm, Mississippi, my wife was one of the three (3) teachers and we were married after school closed that year.

WHITE: What was her maiden name?

SMITH: Ina Lee Smith.

WHITE: Where was she born?

SMITH: At Bogue Chitto, Mississippi.

WHITE: And when was she born?

SMITH: July 29, 1905.

WHITE: How many children did you and your wife have?

SMITH: We had three (3): Elizabeth, Marilyn, and Margaret. Elizabeth is principal of the Monticello Elementary School.

WHITE: So she's following in your footsteps. After your thirteen (13)

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years of teaching, what did you do?

SMITH: I aspired to become County Superintendent in my home county of Lawrence, where I ran for the office during the summer of 1935.

WHITE: Would you describe your campaign and tell me what issues you campaigned on?

SMITH: Well, during that time you were expected to get acquainted with all the voters in the county and let them know something of your qualifications and what you expected to do if you were elected. I campaigned on the principle of improving the school system, the buildings, and transportation, better teachers and improved salaries for teachers.

WHITE: What qualifications were needed for this post?

SMITH: There were no required, specified qualifications. However, it was expected that the County Superintendent of Education would be the best trained person in the school system of the county. Consequently, his qualifications were equal or better than that of the best principal teacher in the county.

WHITE: How long did you hold this post?

SMITH: Three (3) terms or twelve (12) years.

WHITE: So you finished in what year? 1948?

SMITH: 1948 was my last year.

WHITE: I see that you were County Superintendent during the Depression. How did this affect the schools?

SMITH: The matter of securing the required number of teachers was a problem, and providing ample funds for running the schools, for the salaries of teachers and for transporting the children was really the most acute

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problems that we had at that time.

WHITE: What was a teacher paid at that time?

SMITH: The salaries of teachers would range from, classroom teachers from thirty-five (35) to sixty (60) dollars. However, I think that the best trained teachers at the time were probably paid as much as seventy-five (75). Principals, of course, would receive slightly more than that.

WHITE: What was the Superintendent's salary per year?

SMITH: Their salaries, I think the best salary would be one hundred twenty-five (125), one hundred fifty (150) dollars per month.

WHITE: I see. And what did the County Superintendent of Education make per year?

SMITH: For the entire session of twelve (12) months, twenty-four hundred (2400) dollars. With no travel.

WHITE: No travel. What were your duties as Superintendent?

SMITH: Primarily, to secure the best qualified teachers possible and provide transportation for the children, And in addition, to provide libraries for the different classrooms.

WHITE: How do you feel that the Lawrence County schools compared with other schools in the country?

SMITH: Our schools compared favorably with other schools. In fact, our county was one of the few counties that had complete consolidation at that time.

WHITE: Were there any problems involved in the consolidation of the schools?

SMITH: Yes. There's always the problem of giving up the little school.

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Everybody wanted to maintain their school and the matter of giving up the school and deciding where the new school will be located was an acute problem.

WHITE: How many schools were there in the county?

SMITH: We had seven (7) white schools and eighteen (18) colored schools.

WHITE: Why were there so many more colored schools than white schools?

SMITH: Consolidation for the colored schools had not been perfected at that time. We had one (1) large consolidated school in Monticello and gradually the other schools were being consolidated.

WHITE: I see. What were the buses like? What was your transportation system like?

SMITH: Our children were transported in vehicles with wood bodies in the main. (Part deleted by Mr. Smith.)

WHITE: How much did a bus cost at that time?

SMITH: Approximately two thousand (2,000) dollars - the improved bus with the steel body.

WHITE: I see. How did World War II affect the schools?

SMITH: The matter of securing ample vehicles was a problem because the war resulted in fewer vehicles being made available for school purposes. And then it was difficult to secure as many teachers as were necessary for the schools.

WHITE: What did you feel, looking back on your three (3) terms as superintendent, were your most significant achievements?

SMITH: I think, improved salaries for teachers and better transpor-

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tation for children would rank as our best. We were beginning to see the cafeteria installed in the various schools which was a very decided improvement over the old lunch bucket deal.

WHITE: What were you unable to achieve that you would have liked to?

SMITH: I would like to have seen longer school terms for our students, better salaries for all the teachers, and better libraries and cafeterias or lunchrooms in all the schools.

WHITE: After you had completed your last term as Superintendent of Education, what did you do then?

SMITH: I was offered a job managing Superintendent J. M. Tubb's campaign for State Superintendent of Education, which I accepted.

WHITE: What was that campaign like?

SMITH: Well, Mr. Tubb had a very active opponent and the matter of him getting acquainted with all the people in Mississippi, meeting in the various places, making speeches and familiarizing the people with his plans for the schools after he was elected as State Superintendent of Education. And of course my job, primarily, was scheduling him for the various areas of Mississippi so that he might be seen in every section of Mississippi and get acquainted with all of our voters.

WHITE: And he was successful in the election?

SMITH: He was successful and was elected.

WHITE: What job did you then hold?

SMITH: After Mr. Tubb was elected, I was offered the job as Supervisor of Transportation in the State Department of Education.

WHITE: I see. And what were your duties at this job?

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SMITH: I was expected to supervise the purchasing of school buses and the operation of those vehicles in the various counties of Mississippi.

WHITE: Did transportation improve considerably at that time?

SMITH: Yes. At the time I became Supervisor of Transportation, only a small percent of our children were transported to school in buses with all steel bodies. Before I left the State Department of Education, I was very happy to see steel school buses acquired and put into operation in all of our counties in Mississippi.

WHITE: How many years did you hold the job as Supervisor of Pupil Transportation?

SMITH: I would say it was about twelve (12) years¹ that I was Supervisor of Transportation; then I was promoted to the job of Director of the Department of School Building and Transportation.

WHITE: I see. Well, what can you tell me about school buildings at that time?

SMITH: We had underway a plan of improving school buildings in Mississippi. I was able to see that plan continued and improved on with better school building constructed in every area of Mississippi.²

WHITE: What were some of the standards for school buildings?

SMITH: They were expected to be constructed on certain specifications which provided adequate light, adequate floor space, chalkboards, doors properly located, lunchrooms in all the schools, and other necessities that were considered needed at that time.

WHITE: Were there any other particular projects that you were involved in during these years?

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SMITH: In connection with the school bus transportation program, we were required to train our school bus drivers. Every driver was expected to receive that training and to carry a certificate showing that he was qualified to drive the school bus. And then, in addition to that, I assumed the responsibility of promoting driver education for our high school students. That was done on a voluntary basis because driver education was in its infancy at that time.

WHITE: How long did you work for the State Department of Education all totaled?

SMITH: Twenty (20) years.

WHITE: Twenty (20) years. And you held these jobs with just a Bachelor's degree or had you received a higher degree?

SMITH: In the early part of my work with the State Department of Education, I finished the requirements for a Master of Arts degree from Mississippi Southern College.

WHITE: I see.

SMITH: In Hattiesburg.

WHITE: Did you ever travel in your work?

SMITH: Yes, I did considerable traveling in connection with my work as transportation supervisor and as Director of School Building and Transportation. Our transportation program involved about eleven (11) or twelve (12) of our southeastern states and our policy every year was to have a conference on school bus transportation in one of those states. And I went from state to state during my period as Supervisor of Transportation. And then when I became Director of School Building and Transportation, I attended

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some of the conferences in other areas of the United States.

WHITE: What did you do after you completed your twenty (20) years with the State Department of Education?

SMITH: I returned home to Monticello and have been living here since.

WHITE: What major changes have you seen over the years in the field of education?

SMITH: I've seen improved vehicles for transporting our children, better buildings for attending school, better facilities, better libraries, and lunchrooms in all the schools, and improved teachers.

WHITE: How do you feel that the schools of today compare academically with those of the past?

SMITH: Well, there's a great improvement. It would be hard to compare our present schools with those back years ago. Buildings are much better, transportation is much better, and all in all the system is greatly improved over what it was back in the early years.

WHITE: What traveling have you done for pleasure in your lifetime?

SMITH: I made a few trips in recent years - the Bicentennial trip which we made during that year. We went up as far as Williamsburg, Washington, Philadelphia, Boston, and enjoyed observing many of the sights in that area. And then the most recent travel was a trip out in the West, the great West.

WHITE: Are there any other particular travels you can think of, any other particular places you visited?

SMITH: In connection with my work, I traveled most of the time in the eastern states and one trip we made into Canada. It was very interesting.

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I also made trips to Lincoln, Nebraska, and Denver, Colorado.³

WHITE: What are your hobbies or your particular interests?

SMITH: I'm not a professional gardener, but I do some gardening in connection with my wife - keeping the yard up with some shrubs and a few flowers - and I'm enjoying reading. During my experience as a teacher most of the reading I did was that which was required. I did very little reading for pleasure, so I'm enjoying doing some reading now more or less for pleasure.

WHITE: Have you been involved in much club work through the years?

SMITH: During the year 1945-46, I was elected district governor of Lions International, District 30-B in Mississippi. And during that time I was privileged to attend the National Conference of Lions Clubs in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. And during the time I made a trip to Atlantic City and New York.

WHITE: Can you recall an amusing story or incident from your career days?

SMITH: I remember very distinctly a story Mr. W. F. Bond told, that during his tenure as State Superintendent of Education he was giving an examination to a teacher for securing a teacher's license. And he asked that teacher to name the three (3) greatest men that she ever knew, and she said, "Booker T. Washington, Sears Roebuck and Company, and W. F. Bond."

WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Smith, for giving us your time. This is the end of the interview.

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(End of Interview)

(Transcribed by Claire Lambert)

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Transcriber's Notes

¹Twelve years - number changed by Mr. Smith.

²Changes by Mr. Smith.

³Mr. Smith's addition.