

JACKSONVILLE STATE UNIVERSITY

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JACKSONVILLE, ALABAMA 36265-9982

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

TELEPHONE: (205) 783-5632

Gift and Release Agreement:

We Hester Smith and John Ingram
(Interviewee) (Interviewer)

Do hereby grant permission to Jacksonville State University to copy the tape of the interview conducted at Mrs. Smith's home on the date(s) of September 24, 1985 for the oral history collection being compiled at Jacksonville State University.

This collection will be maintained by Jacksonville State University for research into the history of Northeast Alabama and the South. We further grant researchers permission to quote from the interview on this tape.

Hester L. Smith
(Interviewee's signature)

Date 9/24/85

P.O. Box 252
(Address)

Anniston, AL 36202
237-2895
(Telephone)

John Ingram
(Interviewer's signature)

Date 9/24/85

P.O. Box 174
(Address)

Arch, AL 35016
(205) 586-2589
(Telephone)

INTERVIEWEE BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Name: Hester Ledbetter Smith M/F Female
Address: P.O. Box 252 Anniston AL 36202
Phone number(s): 237-2885
Approximate age or date of birth: 84 - May 10, 1911
Mother's Name: Jessie Ledbetter
Father's Name: W.L. Ledbetter
Places lived and when: Anniston, Alabama

Education: Anniston City Schools (H.S.), B.S. Jacksonville Normal School

Religion: Baptist

Business, political and social memberships (past and present) member of National Sporting Goods Society

Present occupation: Owner of Sporting Goods Distributing Co.

Former occupations: Teacher, Postal Worker

Special Skills: Dealing with people in business

Major Accomplishments: Very successful business feature article in the Sporting Goods Dealer, member Jacksonville Alumni lifetime member

National Events in which interviewee has participated: - NONE -

Local Events in which interviewee has participated: - None -

National born U.S. citizen? Yes/No

Naturalized Citizen: Yes/No Date: _____

Country from which he/she emigrated: _____

Documents, photographs, and artifacts which are in the possession of the interviewee: WJ Forms, H.S. Diploma, Magazine Articles, Etc.

Individuals recommended by the interviewee who might be candidates for an oral history interview: _____

Additional information: _____

SPELLING PAGE

Parents: Josie Ledbetter and L.L. Ledbetter

Sisters: Ellabell, Josephine, Hildegarde, Doris,
Virginia, and Louise

Education: Anniston Day School - Grace Episcopal Church
Jacksonville Normal School

Husband: Claudous Sellars Smith

Children: Doris Claudette Smith and Carol Jean Smith

Employment: Blue Mountain Mill
Weaver School
Saks School

Teaching Materials: Hectograph

John Ingram
9-27-95
HY of Am Women
Dr. Marshall

ORAL HISTORY PROPOSAL

The person who I am submitting to be interviewed is Mrs. Hester Smith. Mrs. Smith is a distant relative, but a close friend of the family. She has spent most of her adult life as a teacher and a business woman. Mrs. Smith was one of the first females to obtain her teaching certification from Jacksonville State University. In 1947, Mrs. Smith and her husband opened up their own business that would grow into one of the more successful businesses in the Anniston area. I want to focus my paper on what it was like for women in the work force when she first began working. I also want her opinion on how conditions and opportunities have changed for women in the work place over the last several decades. Her views of education and the business world will also be expressed in the paper. Mrs. Smith is a living example of the "woman behind the man."

beside - maybe - is she a business partner?

ORAL HISTORY QUESTIONS

Background:

1. Name
2. Date of birth
3. Place of Birth
4. Parents (occupations)
5. Brothers and/or sisters
6. Marriage (when, where, and how you met)
7. Children
8. Education (High school and college)

Main Questions:

1. Did you have a job when you were in school and what was it like?
2. Did your parents need you to work to help support the family?
3. Were women encouraged or discouraged to work during this time period?
4. What encouraged you to attend Jacksonville State University? How did you pay for school?
5. How did you become involved in the establishment of Alpha Xi Delta sorority? What opportunities did women students have as opposed to male students?
6. Why did you choose education as your field of study? Were there more opportunities for women in education? Why?
7. Was it a stereotypical role for women to become teachers at this time? why or why not?
8. Where were you employed as a teacher? What age groups did you teach?
9. What were the physical appearances of schools when you were teaching?
10. Tell me what it was like to teach during the Great Depression?
11. Did the female students have the same curriculum as the male students? (Differences and Similarities)
12. Was the male curriculum more vocational and the females more domestic?

13. What group, male or female, had the most attending school? Which group had the highest graduation rate?
14. Tell me about some of your most memorable moments as a teacher?
15. What are some of the major differences in education now as opposed to when you were teaching?
16. What caused you to leave teaching?
17. Tell me about the transition from school teacher to business woman? (Hard ,easy, etc.)
18. Did you ever regret leaving teaching?
19. What type of business did you own?
20. When did you start this business and why?
21. What was your role in this business?
22. What was working with your husband like?
How did the two of you work out the working arrangements and organize your job?
23. Had the roles of women in the work force changed much from the time you were a child to the time you began working in the business?
24. Was it discussed or assumed between you and your husband who would travel around and sell the sporting goods?
How did people in the community respond to your work while raising a family?
25. Tell me about trying to raise two children while working in your business?
26. Did you teach some of the same ideas and principles on your children as your parents did to you? Why or why not?
27. Was it common place for women to be working and raising children at the same time?
How did you balance between housework and domestic work?
28. How much responsibility did Mr. Smith take in raising the children?
29. Was it common for men to help with the domestic work?
30. How have the roles of women in the work force changed since you began working?
31. What are some of the biggest differences between the roles of

men and women today as opposed to 40 years ago?

32. If you could change one thing about women's roles in society, what would it be?

Very good
questions

OK!

**Hester Smith Interview
by John Ingram
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ORAL HISTORY PROJECT: Mrs. Hester Smith

John Ingram

History of American Women - HY 436G

Dr. Suzanne Marshall

December 4, 1995

Jacksonville State University

Hester Smith
"A Woman Ahead of Her Times"

Everyone has individual beliefs about different events in his or her own lifetime. Mrs. Hester Smith is a great example of a woman who had beliefs that were, for the most part, ahead of her times. Mrs. Smith's opinions and attitudes about education, women in the work force, and life in general are very stern and forceful. She is an excellent example of an independent lady. No where in her body or mind is there a streak of meanness. This is a lady who is very kind, caring, and intelligent. Mrs. Smith had goals she wanted to accomplish in her lifetime, and she had her mind made up on how she was going to accomplish those goals. Mrs. Smith is a lady of few words who seems to be extremely focused on whatever task she intends to undertake.

Mrs. Hester Ledbetter Smith was born to Josie and L.L. Ledbetter on May 10, 1911 in Anniston, Alabama near the community of Weaver. She is currently eighty-four years old. In addition to Mrs. Smith, her parents had six more daughters: Ellabell, Josephine, Hildegarde, Doris, Virginia, and Louise. The eldest child, Ellabell, died when she was just an infant. The girls' mother, Josie Ledbetter, liked to sew. To complete the articles that Mrs. Ledbetter was sewing, she had to use a type of poison. When Ellabell was a mere infant, she climbed on top of the sewing machine and drank the poison.¹ Hester never knew her sister

¹Mrs. Hester Smith of Anniston, Alabama, interviewed by author, 24 Sept. 1995, Anniston, tape recording, Jacksonville State University Oral History Collection, Jacksonville, Alabama

Ellabell. Mrs. Smith's oldest living sister, Josephine, is currently in a nursing home in Alexander City, Alabama. Mrs. Hester Smith is the legal guardian of Josephine because she was deemed unfit to take care of herself in 1965. Mrs. Smith has been the guardian ever since. Hildegarde currently lives in Auburn with her husband, who works with the federal soil conservation. The youngest sister, Louise, also lives in Alexander City with her husband, who was the superintendent of Alexander City schools for several years.²

Mrs. Smith's family was like many rural, southern, white farm families in the early twentieth century. Her family was centered around a farm. The farm put food on the table and money in their pockets. Everyone in farm families had to do his or her chores on the farm. Many times it was a difficult task to provide for the entire family.³ The Ledbetter's bought and sold cattle and used some of the dairy cattle to sell milk and butter. Each child in the family worked on the farm at jobs ranging from milking to raising various types of vegetables. Most of the free time of children in the twentieth century who lived on farms was spent doing farm work. Children would work before and after school doing their personal farm chores. Everything that was done was completed as a group effort. The work did not earn much

(Hereafter known as Smith interview.)

²Smith interview, 24 Sept. 1995.

³For life on the family farm see, Mrs. Eloise Manly interviewed by Beth Neal, 4 Nov. 1993, Jacksonville State University Oral History Collection, Jacksonville, Alabama.

individual reward.⁴ Mrs. Smith can remember vividly that the girls were prohibited from doing one job on the farm, plowing. Farm accidents were very common on farms in the early twentieth century. These types of accidents often maimed or even killed. This added tremendously to the mortality rate of women and children. The reason for this is because the males were often the ones doing the plowing.⁵ Mr. Ledbetter did not allow his girls to use a harrow or plow. Once when Mrs. Smith was eight years old, she climbed on the harrow and started plowing the fields. The harrow overturned, but Mrs. Smith was fortunate to have jumped off the harrow before she was injured. However, she was not so fortunate once her father got home and realized what had happened.⁶

Each one of the six girls in Mrs. Smith's family finished State Normal School. There was no question in any of the children's minds if they were going to get an education or not. All six girls got their degrees and became teachers. Mrs. Smith's mother always wanted to become a teacher, but she never got the opportunity. When her children were old enough to go to school, they went to become teachers. Hester felt that her mother wanted to live her dreams through the lives of her

⁴for children's work on the farm, see Mrs. Annie W. Glenn interviewed by Terrie N. Cook, 17 Feb. 1994, Jacksonville State University Oral History Collection, Jacksonville, Alabama.

⁵Marlyn Irvin Holt, "From Better Babies to 4-H: A Look at Rural America, 1900-1930, Prologue, (National Archives, 1992, 245-255)

⁶Smith interview, 24 Sept. 1995.

children.⁷ It was not uncommon for women to become teachers at this time in history. Three quarters of women who entered the professional work force in the 1930's were teachers.⁸

Mrs. Hester Smith was a very smart and gifted student when she was in school. She had to be smart and gifted to achieve the things she did in school. Mrs. Smith attended grammar school at Anniston Day School. This was a private school that was located where Grace Episcopal Church is currently located off of Quintard Avenue in Anniston, Alabama. She attended the Anniston Day School through the sixth grade, which led to her attendance at Anniston City School. At this time, the school was a private, segregated school, that required each child who attended to pay tuition. This school was not integrated until her youngest daughter Claudette attended the school in 1966. Mrs. Smith graduated from Anniston City School in 1928 when she was seventeen years old. What makes this so unique is that she turned seventeen twenty days before graduation. In today's society, she would have graduated high school a year ahead of time. After graduating high school, Mrs. Smith went on to attend college at the State Normal School in Jacksonville, Alabama. At this time, new coeducational institutions set admissions quotas for women. This only allowed women to constitute five percent of

⁷Smith interview, 24 Sept. 1995.

⁸For statistics about women entering the work force, see Alice Kessler-Harris, Women Have Always Worked, (The Feminist Press: New York, 1981)

any class.⁹ Mrs. Smith was able to get her teaching certification in a year and half. She was only eighteen years old when she first started teaching. In the summers during breaks, Mrs Smith would go to school and take education classes. She took every class that was offered in every subject. History, Math, Science, English, Home Economics, etc. were all subjects that Mrs. Smith was certified to teach.¹⁰

After college, Mrs. Smith married the late Claudous Sellars Smith. Mr. and Mrs. Smith had become acquaintances while in college. It was not until the two started teaching at Weaver School that they began to date. Teachers would open booths at local school fairs to raise money for their respective schools. Mrs. Smith was hanging pea vines in her booth when Mr. Smith came over and volunteered his help. There was not much for people who were dating to do . Mrs. Smith was only nineteen years old when she started dating Mr. Smith. When she and Mr. Smith would go to the movies, they would have to go with a house mother who carried a flashlight and made sure that nothing out of the ordinary was going on.¹¹ Mr. and Mrs. Smith were married in 1931 when she was only twenty years old which was not uncommon at this time in history. Often times women would marry directly out of high school because a lot of women would not go on to college. Most middle-class women quit school as soon as they were married.

⁹Alice Kessler-Harris, Women Have Always Worked.¹ #

¹⁰Smith interview, 24 Sept. 1995.

¹¹Smith interview, 24 Sept. 1995.

These women were expected to make homemaking and childrearing their careers.¹²

C.S. and Hester had two children while they were married. These children were born in a period known as the "Baby Boom." Most couples had three or four children during this time. The Smiths were unique in that they had only two.¹³ The youngest child, Doris Claudette Smith, is currently forty-five years old. Claudette, as she prefers to be called, loved to attend school like her mother. She got her undergraduate degree from Jacksonville State University and would eventually go on to the University of Alabama to get her master's degree and work on her doctoral degree. When Claudette was young, she told her mother that she wanted to become a middle school teacher because that's when children are at their most influential ages. She wanted to be able to make a difference in some children's lives. Claudette was only two classes from getting her doctoral degree when she came home to become a teacher. "I can tell you one on Claudette. She came home from school one day and told her father that she was through with school and she was ready to get a job. Her father said you will go back to school and get your doctoral degree because your sister finished law school at Alabama."¹⁴ She felt that if she got her doctoral degree, she would not be able

¹²Carol Berkin and Alan Brinkly, American Voices, (Scott Foresman: Glenview, 1992) 78 —

¹³Carol Berkin and Alan Brinkly, American Voices.

¹⁴Smith Interview, 24 Sept. 1995.

to get a job on the middle school level. Claudette is currently employed at Arab Junior High School as a Physical Education teacher.

The oldest daughter, Carol Jean Smith, is currently forty-seven years old. She also loved to go to school. Carol Jean got her undergraduate degree from Jacksonville State University and went on to attend the University of Alabama's school of law. Carol Jean lives in Montgomery, where she works as an Assistant to the Attorney General. Neither daughter has ever been married.¹⁵

It is obvious that Mrs. Hester Smith has had her share of hours of work for her family. As it has already been stated, Mrs. Smith worked mainly on the farm when she was a child. This was very common throughout society. Most families that lived in the Anniston area based their income on agriculture. It was extremely common to see young women working on the farms in the 1920's. A 1928 study showed that farm women spent an average of sixty-three hours a week working on the farm.¹⁶ Women mainly worked on the farms because there were not many other types of jobs available for women. There was a pipe foundry very close to Mrs. Smith's home that supplied some employment for the community. This foundry mostly employed men due to the very hard labor. In other words, it was not feminine work. Most women worked on the farm or had other types of jobs. More than eight

¹⁵Smith Interview, 24 Sept. 1995.

¹⁶Marilyn Irvin Holt, Prologue.

million women throughout society remained in low paying female dominated occupations such as domestic worker, secretaries, typists, and clerks.¹⁷ A lot of women worked in their families' homes while they were in school. After high school most of the women in the community got married and had children. The primary role of the female was to take care of the home. There were a few women who were employed outside of the home in the Anniston community. These women were employed at the Blue Mountain Mill, which was a cotton mill in the early twentieth century. Today Blue Mountain Mill is a thread making mill. Mrs. Smith had strong convictions on women's employment. She felt that every female should work.¹⁸ She did not believe that a family could rely on the male's income alone. Mrs. Smith was not alone in her feelings about women's employment. Women needed to work because money was scarce, and most families could not depend on one income alone. If women did even small jobs, it added to the families' welfare.¹⁹ Women needed to work in order for the family to be established.

Mrs. Smith has a strong educational background. She enjoyed school when she was attending mainly because there was nothing much else for females to do but attend school. When Hester attended the State Normal School in Jacksonville, Alabama, the women who attended focused primarily on school. Male students

¹⁷Carol Berkin and Alan Brinkly, American Voices.

¹⁸Smith interview, 24 Sept. 1995.

¹⁹Manly interview, 4 Nov. 1993.

had other activities such as sports. As a whole male and female students were treated equally. There were more females in the educational field of study than there were males. A big reason for this is that most men went directly to work out of high school. At this time in history, it was primarily the females' role to become teachers. Teaching was considered more of a "ladylike" profession.²⁰

Once Mrs. Smith graduated from college, she got her first teaching job at Weaver School. Her multiple certifications came in handy because she taught first grade. The first grade curriculum covered all of the basic subjects. When she was first employed, Mrs. Smith was the only first grade teacher in the school. The first class she ever taught had seventy-five children in it. Today the student teacher ratio is around nineteen students per teacher. In the grammar school grade it was not uncommon to have one teacher per grade. Mrs. Smith still keeps in touch quite often with one of her first students, Mr. Howard Waldrop. Mr. Waldrop currently sits on the Calhoun County Board of Education and has been the chairman of the Alabama High School Athletic Association. Mr. Waldrop is really quite well known in Alabama's educational system. Mrs. Smith, jokingly, credits Mr. Waldrop's success to his first grade teacher who started him off on the right foot.²¹

The Great Depression was a time in which Mrs. Smith was

²⁰Smith interview, 24 Sept. 1995.

²¹Smith interview, 24 Sept. 1995.

employed. She knew what a horrible condition the nation and the world was in so she tried to do everything she could for the children with whom she came in contact. Often times, Mrs. Smith would work for four or five hours a night preparing lessons for the next day. It is hard to find that type of dedication and caring in today's educational situation. Mrs. Smith remembers using a wooden hectograph to make copies for children in her class. The hectograph used a jelly-like substance that would make a repetitive number of copies. Apparently the hectograph was not a common instrument used by teachers. According to Mrs. Smith, there were not many teachers who put in four or five hours each night. "The good teachers tried to think of every way imaginable to help the children learn."²² Mrs. Smith's students were her main priority, not receiving a pay check every month.

She can remember a child in her class who smelled so bad that she could hardly stay in the room with him. Mrs. Smith went into town and bought him some new overalls and underwear to wear. The next day at school, Mrs. Smith brought a tub of warm water to bathe the boy in. When she went to give the child a bath, she noticed that his clothes were sewed around him into one big article of clothing. "The clothes were not sewed to his body. They were sewed around him so he could not take his clothes off. I had to use scissors to cut the clothes from the boy so I could Bathe him."²³ There was no way for this child to take his

²²Smith interview, 24 Sept. 1995.

²³Smith Interview, 24 Sept. 1995.

clothes on and off each day to take a bath. There was another student in her class who seemed to be absent a good bit from school. Mrs. Smith was concerned about the child so she did some investigating on her own and found out that the boy's father was keeping him out of school to help him make sour mash or moonshine. The bootlegging business was a very lucrative business at this time. This particular child came from a broken home. Mrs. Smith said that it was very uncommon to see the broken home at this time in history. Once a couple took the vows of marriage, those vows were taken seriously. Marriage was sacred, and not many people dared to break the bond of marriage.²⁴ During the Great Depression many schools closed, and unfortunately Mrs Smith's school was one of the schools. She volunteered to teach school on her own to the children in the community. She loved these kids because she surely didn't love the pay. She taught roughly thirty kids and got paid only one dollar per student. Some families had to pay Mrs. Smith by other means, such as with chickens, eggs, bread, etc.²⁵

Mr. and Mrs. Smith left the Weaver School to take a job at the nearby community of Saks. At Saks, Mrs. Smith taught first grade, three junior high English classes, and a girls' Physical Education class. The schools had roughly the same appearances as the schools of today. "Most of the schools had one classroom per grade. In some cases, there were more than one grade per

²⁴Smith interview, 24 Sept. 1995.

²⁵Smith interview, 24 Sept. 1995.

classroom. Mr. Smith had three junior high grades in one classroom."²⁶ Mr. and Mrs. Smith taught together at Saks, and eventually Mr. Smith became the principal. Mr. Smith had the duties of principal, teacher, and basketball coach. In many school systems today, spouses are not allowed to work together at the same school if one of them is in an administrative position. Mrs. Smith had no problem whatsoever in working under her husband. She would volunteer to help him in any way she could. Hester and C.S. was a great example of a husband and wife team. Mrs. Smith can remember taking the boys' junior varsity B team to games while her husband took the A team to a different place. "The first place I ever took the team was to Wellington. I won this game and, as a matter of fact, I never lost a game as a coach."²⁷ Mrs. Smith did not take it easy on her student athletes. One of Mr. Smith's star players had to do a book report that day or he would not be allowed to travel with the team to play in the game that night. The boy read the book in one day, and Mrs. Smith said that he gave one of the best book reports she had ever heard.²⁸

When Mrs. Smith was teaching, she remembers that there was relatively an equal number of boys and girls attending school. In the early grades, the curriculum for boys and girls was the same. Each student had to take English, Math, Reading, Science,

²⁶Smith Interview, 24 Sept. 1995,

²⁷Smith Interview, 24 Sept. 1995.

²⁸Smith interview, 24 Sept. 1995.

Physical Education, etc. It was not until high school that students began to encounter a varied curriculum. Many of the female students during this time period took Home Economics classes. These classes helped young women to prepare for life in the home. Although these types of classes were offered, most domestic work was learned in the home.²⁹

The opinions that Mrs. Smith has about students today as compared to students when she was teaching are shared by many of her peers who taught during this period. As a whole Mrs. Smith feels that students today do not work as hard as students did when she was teaching. "Today, the parents of children are handing too much out to their children."³⁰ The childhoods of a majority of children who grew up in the middle of the twentieth century were relatively happy. Many of these children had no idea what kind of effect the depression was having on their lives. These children were not children that whined and begged all the time. Today, children want everything they see.³¹ Many parents are making it too easy on their kids. Also, children of today have so many other outside influences such as drugs, gangs, and jobs that keep them away from the focus of an education. When Mrs. Smith taught, the parents of the students did not want their children to endure as hard a life as they did. Parents of

²⁹Smith interview, 24 Sept 1995.

³⁰Smith Interview, 24 Sept. 1995.

³¹Mrs. Ethel Dobbs, interviewed by Ila Graham, 20 Oct. 1994, Jacksonville State University Oral History Collection, Jacksonville, Alabama.

children in the middle twentieth century had to work hard all their lives just to keep their heads above water. These parents had an internal motivation that they wanted to pass on to their children. One of the main ways this could be accomplished was by pushing their children to attend school.³² Parents pushed their children to be good students and made sure that they were putting forth their best effort.³³

Mrs. Hester Smith would eventually leave the educational profession. She did not leave because she was unhappy or because she felt that she couldn't teach anymore. She left because she wanted to have a family. Mrs. Smith decided that in order for her and Mr. Smith to have a family, they had to find employment that would bring in more money. It was almost impossible to raise a family on a teacher's income. It was her decision to start a business to attempt to bring in more income.³⁴

People such as the Smith's opening a business at this time in history was relatively unheard of. Very few people dared to open a business, much less own one. Most people in the area in which the Smith's lived worked in the mills, factories, or farms. not many people understood the business world and many were intimidated by it. Women especially were not often part of the business world, a world in which men dominated. A woman who worked for Boeing once said that "she never dreamed that she

³²Manly interview, 4 Nov. 1993.

³³Smith interview, 24 Sept. 1995.

³⁴Smith interview, 24 Sept. 1995,

would go to work in a business and do what was considered a man's job."³⁵ The male domination of the business world makes it even more amazing that Mrs. Smith would attempt to make a living in the business world. The first business the Smith's owned was selling fire works out of their home. They would travel to Atlanta, Georgia to buy the fire works and then return to Anniston to sell them. It was not long after the fireworks venture that the Smiths decided to begin calling on schools to sell them school supplies. They decided to do this because Mr. Smith had a lot of connections in education and they felt that they could sell to different schools. Mr. and Mrs. Smith purchased a truck with wooden rails and sold paper, pencils, and other items to schools out of the truck. Again, the business was centered out of their home. During this time, Hester and C.S. were trying every way imaginable to save money for their family. Mrs. Smith remembers eating tomato soup meal after meal for quite a long time. "Yes we ate tomato soup a lot, but we did that so we could save money." She vowed never to eat tomato soup once the family was secure financially.³⁶

It was a little over one year that Mr. and Mrs. Smith had been working in the business world when they had their first child, Carol Jean. Mrs. Smith, unlike a great number of mothers throughout history, did not find it difficult to manage a family

³⁵Susan Campbell, "What Rosie Left Behind," Wichita Eagle Beacon, (Wichita Eagle Publishing Co., July 28, 1985).

³⁶Smith interview, 24 Sept. 1995.

and a career. The business was operated out of their home so Mrs. Smith could do the mailing, filing, ordering, etc. and take care of the baby at the same time. Mr. Smith was the one to leave home to try to work up some business. Mr. Smith did his part in raising the children, but according to Mrs. Smith, it was her responsibility, and she accepted it entirely. There were occasions when Mrs. Smith wanted to be the one to call on schools, but she realized someone had to do the other work. Both Mr. and Mrs. Smith had little extra jobs to help raise money for the family. Mr. Smith would buy and sell cattle on the side to try and raise some extra money. Mrs. Smith went to work at the post office in Anniston one summer, even though Mr. Smith did not want her to. She went to the post office one day and took the test to work there. She scored the highest on the test and became the first female employee in Anniston's post office.³⁷

It was quite uncommon to see a female in the business world. Most women, if they were in business, were like Mrs. Smith and were behind the scenes. The main priority for the male was to bring home the income. When the Smith's opened their business, they followed in line with the rest of the nation in the respect of the man being the dominate figure. What made them different was that Mrs. Smith had a role in the business as well as at home. They adapted their lifestyle around the business. During this time period, the overwhelming majority of children lived in traditional families with the husband in the labor force and the

³⁷Smith interview, 24 Sept. 1995.

wife at home.³⁸

Mr. and Mrs. Smith would eventually evolve their business into Smith Distributing Co., which Mrs. Smith still owns and operates today. This business distributes sporting goods because, like the school supply venture, Mr. Smith knew and was still in contact with a number of principals and coaches in the Anniston area. Again, Mrs. Smith stayed behind the scenes to do the ordering and record keeping for the business. She was the driving force behind the business. Mr. Smith would have to refer to her for prices because she knew more about the prices than he did. Mr. Smith remained the figure head for the business. Hester and C.S. looked at this as a joint effort, but Hester realized that C.S. was the boss. This sounds very stereotypical for this time period for the women to be subservient to the man, and Mrs. Smith had no problem with this. She enjoyed working with her husband.³⁹ Gradually, the sporting goods distribution became successful. It was, and still is, a small business that never employed over three or four people other than the two of them. It was operated out of their home and would only expand into a brick add on to their garage. The company believed in quality, quality, quality. For years, the company received phone calls in the middle of the night from coaches needing special orders. It was not uncommon for either C.S. or Hester to rush a

³⁸Howard V. Hayghe, "Family Members in the Work Force," Monthly Labor Review, (U.S. Dept of Labor: March 1990, Vol. 13, No. 3, 14-19).

³⁹Smith interview, 24 Sept. 1995.

piece of equipment across the state anytime day or night. A small bedroom was kept in their house for possible buyers who were from out of town and might need a place to stay for the night. For these reasons, Mr. and Mrs. Smith have one of the most well known sporting goods distributions in the south.⁴⁰ This business has clients ranging from pee-wee football leagues to college and universities. Jacksonville State University buys a lot of their athletic material from the business.

Hardwork and dedication are what made and continues to make the Smiths business so successful. Mrs. Smith realized that they needed more income to support the family so she went right after another source of income. Mrs. Smith was aggressive in her actions, and the lack of aggressiveness is what she thinks caused women to take a lesser role in society. According to Mrs. Smith, women did not try to be aggressive, they considered it the man's role. Women thought that they were not supposed to be aggressive, it was the male's job. Women in the early and middle twentieth century did not want to do their part to help the family. Mrs. Smith felt that the women wanted to rely on men for support.⁴¹ Mrs. Hester Smith did not want to rely on one income or any male to be the main bread winner in the family. It is quite obvious that she wanted and did all she could to make a better life for her, her husband, and her family. Not all women

⁴⁰For details about Smith Distributing Co., see Roland Burke, "From School Marm to Team Outfitter," The Sporting Goods Dealer, (February 1961, 175-176).

⁴¹Smith interview, 24 Sept. 1995.

were complacent at this time like Mrs. Smith made them out to be. A majority of women in the early and middle twentieth century worked hard for their respective families. Most women that Mrs. Smith was around had a lifestyle of the man being the dominant bread winner. This is where her attitudes and feelings came from. Mrs. Smith feels that the women of today accept more responsibility than they used to. Women, as a whole, are more aggressive. The business world is no longer male dominated, and that is a tribute to the women of today and in history for taking a stand and making their voices heard in society.⁴²

Mrs. Hester Ledbetter Smith is a woman who has traveled many different roads in her eventful lifetime. Although she is eighty-four years old, her mind still works as well as it did forty or fifty years ago. By this time in their lives, most people would have retired and stopped working, but Mrs. Smith is still doing the only thing that she has ever known, work. Phones ring off the hook everyday with people wanting to buy some sort of sporting equipment from her. Mrs. Smith has never relaxed and let life run its course with her. She has always been aggressive, not timid with her life. Her views, opinions, and experiences in education and the work force can and always will be regarded as ahead of her times.

⁴²Smith interview, 24 Sept. 1995.

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