

Shelbyville Main Street Project

An Oral History Project of Shelbyville, Kentucky's Main Street

Interviewer: Mark Mefford

Interviewee: George Ann Carpenter

Date: date

Running Time: 41 minutes

Side One

COUNTER

- 000 INTRODUCTION
- 010 BACKGROUND: BORN NOVEMBER 10, 1910, IN EGYPT, SHELBY COUNTY.
- 030 EDUCATION: SHELBYVILLE HIGH SCHOOL, UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY.
- 040 OCCUPATION: TEACHER AT CLARK STATION, OTHER SHELBY COUNTY SCHOOLS.
- 115 RETIRED 1975. MEMBER DAR, DAUGHTERS OF AMERICAN COLONISTS, DAUGHTERS OF 1812, SHELBY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY.
- 155 WILLIAM SHANNON DONATED 50 ACRES IN 1700s.
- 170 DOWNTOWN FOUNTAIN.
- 176 MOVING THE FOUNTAIN FOR THE INNER URBAN.
- 190 SHELBYVILLE CHURCH STEEPLES.
- 217 MAIN STREET CHANGES.
- 225 GENERAL DENMARK SHOT AT ARMSTRONG HOTEL.
- 251 SITOKWA FROM NEW YORK.
- 277 DRY GOODS: LAWSON'S, LINCON'S, LHERMAN'S.

- 310 SHELBYVILLE ICE FACTORY.
- 320 CHANGES IN DOWNTOWN: STEWART'S COLLEGE, OTHER COLLEGES.
- 378 SHELBY COUNTY GRIST MILL.
- 420 EARLY SHELBY COUNTY COURTHOUSES.
- 440 SHELBYVILLE IN THE GREAT DEPRESSION.
- 455 WORLD WAR II IN SHELBYVILLE.

Side Two

- 000 LIVING EASTER DISPLAY.
- 050 CHANGES IN TEACHING: LESS DISCIPLINE.
- 115 MORE ON SHANNON.
- 130 END.

Interview with
GEORGE ANN CARPENTER
interviewed by Mark Mefford
transcribed by Susan McMullan Groves

What is your name? George Ann Carpenter and I was named after my father whose first name was George and my maternal grandmother, whose middle name was Ann.

When were you born? November 10, 1910

Where you born in Shelby County? Oh, yes. I'm not right, well, uh, I'm not right sure whether I was... I lived in a part of Shelby County called Egypt which is off of the Dover Road. But I'm not sure whether my mother went to her parents house in Christianburg when I was born. But anyway, I'm not sure. There's nobody left in the family to tell me. I lived on the farm down in the part of Shelby County called Egypt from the time I was born until we moved in the March of 1917 to where I live now. And I've lived where I am now since 1917 with the exception of part of one year. My mother had to go to Asheville, North Carolina for her health and we all went down there except for my dad cause he was working here and couldn't leave. He would come down Thanksgiving and Christmas and so on to visit us and my sister married down there. Her husband came down... the man who became her husband... came down and they married there and then they came back. So it left my mother and myself and my younger brother. When school was out, why my younger brother came back to Shelbyville and stayed with a cousin up near Smithfield but my mother and I boarded with a family that we had rented a home from until school started back here in Shelby County and then we came back to Shelby County. I went through high school in Shelby County in the building that is now West Middle School. That was the high school.

Was that Shelbyville High School? Shelbyville High School. After I finished high school, I went to the University of Kentucky for two years, up until... I graduated in 1928 and I went until 1930 and I got a job teaching school down on the Shelby-Jefferson County line at a little community called Clark Station. It was a two room school and I taught grades one through four. My friend, well the daughter of a friend of my mother, Eleanor Frazier Smith, she was at that time, taught grades five through eight. While I was at the University of Kentucky, I took all the art I could take, you know. So one day, I think it was every week, now this I'm not sure of, we traded and I would go into the grades five through eight and teach art and she would come in my grades one through four and teach music. So, we traded down there and I boarded down there with a family... the Chappell family... and walked to school from their house, which wasn't very far. There were children from Jefferson County and Shelby County too.

How long did you teach there? Well, I taught there, let's see, there were four years when it was a two year school and then they took one room away and it was just one room and I taught one year then in grades one through five. Meantime, in the

summertime, I was going back to University taking, you know, classes so I could... and I finally after a good many years I finally got my AB degree in 1945, I think it was, from the University of Kentucky. Then I still went to school, well, when I left Clark Station, I came to the Shelbyville school and I taught grade four. Well, first I taught art for a little while because they didn't have an opening. And then one of the teachers married and I got her position as teacher in grade four. Well, I stayed there for, oh my goodness... well, until around 1956 or '57, I'm not right sure. In the meantime, the building that is there now was built and they put me in the room where the library was and I was giving up what free time I had taking care of the library. So I thought well, I better go on and get my library certificate so I went back to the University and took 39 hours of library science. And I became librarian there at Northside. Well, it was still a pretty hard job because I was still the librarian at Northside and Southside. I spent two days at one and two days at the other and then one day I alternated. So I decided I would get a position somewhere else and I went to Jefferson County and was the librarian at what was then Durrett High School, I'm not sure what it is now.

That's where they have Male High School now. I think so. I believe that's right. And I stayed there for four or five years. Then I found out that there was an opening, you know, here so I became... I hope I'm getting all of this straight... I became librarian at what is now East Middle School. In fact, I set it up from scratch. I believe that I had come back though and I was working at... I'm not sure that I'm giving this to you correct... it seems to me like I came back and worked in the Shelbyville school and went from to the East Middle School. And I set it up from scratch. I know I got books from Southside and from Northside that were not, you know, used. So, I set that library up and I stayed out there until 1965. I was at Louisville for four years... from 1957 to 1962... or something like that, I'm not quite sure. Then I stayed out there at upper elementary until I retired. In the meantime, one summer, instead of going to the University of Kentucky, I went to Art School in Chicago to the Academy of Fine Arts and took art. I had a cousin who lived and taught there and so I stayed with her. They were living in Chicago and had a good position at Marshall Field's and I lived with her and her sister. They were first cousins.

So did you retire in 1975? 1975, yes.

What have you done to occupy yourself the last twenty years? What do I do now? Oh my goodness, well, I cut grass all summer long and I belong to the DAR. In fact, I was district director and had a state office at one time. And I belong to the Daughters of the American Colonies and I belong to the Daughters of 1812. I also belong, well, I'm a charter member of the Shelby County Historical Society and I'm also a member of the Kentucky Historical Society, in fact, I had a district director's job with the Kentucky Society at one time for oh, four years, and with the other people in the organization we traveled around Kentucky and I also belong to the Henry County Historical Society because I have roots up in Henry County. My grandmother Carpenter was from that area. Now I'm librarian for the First Baptist Church here in town and I'm also librarian for the Shelby Baptist Association. So, I still keep busy. Oh, and I'm on the Fountain

Committee. In fact, I'm one of the original members of the Fountain Committee. We restored it.

Yes, I interviewed Roseella Davis. Oh yes. Well, we're going to celebrate the hundredth birthday.

Oh, is that Friday? Yes, this Friday. The 15th.

Well, it sounds like there's a lot of heritage here in Shelby County area. Did you have family in all the Revolution and War of 1812 and everything else? Yes, that's right?

Did they come from Shelby County? Well, uh, no, uh, my mother's people came from Fairfax, Virginia and they moved from there to South Carolina. As I say, my grandmother's people came...and I'm not exactly sure...but they lived in Henry County for a period. My grandfather Carpenter lived in a little town called Mortonville not too far from Versailles. In fact, there's a Carpenter Road up there so I guess they must have, you know, lived there for a long time. And there's still...well, there were several years back...some Carpenter relatives up there but I've lost track of them.

Can you tell me anything about the history of Shelbyville or Shelby County area? Oh, yes, yes, yes. Well, back in the 1700's, a man by the name of William Shannon owned fifty acres here where Shelbyville is now and he donated where the parks are...where the fountain is and where the soldier is and where the courthouse is and in front of the Methodist Church. They all belong, as I understand it, to the county. Somebody told me I'm wrong but I'm not sure. But anyway, I know several years back there was a drugstore right there on the corner where the soldier, you know where the soldier's monument is, that was a drugstore right there on that corner and they wanted to turn that part of the...into a parking lot but found they couldn't do it. If they tried to do it, it would go back to the Shannon family.

Oh, is that right? Right. So, and the fountain was built in 1895 and it was out in the middle of the street so the horses could be watered and that sort of thing. At one time, we had an inner urban railroad that came through Shelbyville with the tracks and several other things so they had to move the fountain to where it is now.

Oh, so they moved it to get the inner urban. From the middle of the street, uh huh. It went to Louisville. In fact, I used to...in the summer after school was out I used to get on the inner urban and go visit an aunt for about a week. The car barn was down near, well, around where the Catholic Church is, I'm not just exactly sure where it was. As I say, on the corner there was a drugstore. In the back of where the soldier's monument is was the First Baptist Church. The first building, so far as I know, I don't remember it, it was before my day, was a brick building and it had a tall steeple and somehow or another a fire got started in the steeple and part of that whole section of Main Street burned. Part of, you know, part of the way down. It was a tall steeple and some man that was seeing the fire talked to one of the members of the church and said, "Well, I see your fire started up

there in the steeple and it's so high you can't put it out." We seem to like steeples, we have a too tall steeple, in fact it was blown down here several years ago. After that church burned then another church was built there and it had great big columns kind of like the courthouse and the roof fell in on that church. It got, I guess, in bad shape and so they had to, and in fact, the woman that was the organist was practicing the organ and it didn't hit her, but dust and everything was all over her hat...cause she always wore a hat.

I guess they were lucky no one got hurt. Right. Well, of course, now, I don't know what the stores are there now where the church was. At one time, over in the part of the park where the fountain is, there was a building where farmers could bring their fruit and vegetables and things in the summertime and sell them and I also think there was something of the same kind over in the park in front of the Methodist Church. Of course, Main Street has changed a lot.

What are some of the changes? Well, uh, it's hard to...right on the corner where Tracy's store is, you know where that is, that was a hotel—the Armstrong Hotel and governor, oh no, what was his name...General, well, I'll think here in a minute. Isn't that awful? He was shot and killed there. It was a governor? No, he wasn't a governor, he was a General. Benhart! General Benhart was shot and killed there at the Armstrong Hotel. And a little further down the street, I think now there's something out over it now with a red canopy, you know where that is, that used to be, at one time was a livery stable. And then it became, I think it was where the picture show was. On this street, up here somewhere maybe the end of the bank between there and the church, there was another picture show. There were two picture shows. Where Northside is, at one time, there was a college. In fact, the old building where I started school was the building that was the college. It was called the Shelby College, I believe. And it had an observatory and a, oh, what was the machine that you looked at the stars with? A telescope? A telescope up there and they said it must've been a good one cause when the stars or something or you know or something, why, people would come from all over to see the telescope. Of course, when I went to school there, that part of the building had been taken off and covered up. But, it sat way back, I mean, you know, Northside is just a little bit from the street but this sat further back. There was a large yard and as I was a child, there used to be a thing that came from Chatauqua, New York...the Chatauqua, and it lasted about a week and we always had season tickets and we'd go and see plays and famous musicians and you know, all that...speakers.

What time of year was it? Well, it was in the summertime and they had a tent and that's where it seems to me like I heard the old famous singer...I can't even think of his name now but he was very famous at that time. My father, at that time, from the time I was a little girl and we lived back in Egypt until he retired after 35 years or so, he was county tax commissioner. He took the assessments for people. And when he first started, I know he had to get and ride in a horse and buggy all over the county to take the assessments of the property. He was, well, he stayed for the whole time and had all this stuff at the courthouse later and I know after school I used to go up to the courthouse to wait sometimes to go home and I'd make paper airplanes and I'd sail them up and down the

down. And I have an uncle, one of my mother's brother's who taught Latin, Greek, and English there at Stuart's College.

So there were three colleges in town? Oh, yes, and there was also a school, I think, I've forgotten now, where the library is at one time. And then there was... I believe it was a church school and I believe it was the Presbyterian Church and then of course they moved to where they are now there on the corner. Then there used to be, when I was going to school at what is now Northside Shelbyville Grade School, why there was little store there and we used to go maybe and buy candy and other little things right there on College Street. Those were fine homes up there. Some of the, you know, the best families in town lived there near College Street. Do you know where the Casey-Stanley house is? No. Well, now you know those three buildings there, the senior citizens and the Stratton Center... well, next to it, I don't know what that building is, and that's right on the corner and on the corner right beside it is this two story brick building that's right on the street. That's called the Casey-Stanley house and our governor, A.O. Stanley, was born there.

So you've had a couple of governors from Shelbyville-Shelby County. Well, oh yeah, Martha Layne Collins. Well, down the road from where I lived, at one time there was a mill. A gristmill. In fact, there were gristmills all over the county. Down here off of Seventh Street there used to be a mill. The Old Mill Shop? There was a mill there. Long's mill.

Charles Long? Uh-huh. That family. And, oh, then there's several roads in the county that have mill in their name and there were mills, you know, gristmills. When my sister married, she married a man whose family owned the home down on Bullskin Creek where governor Isaac Shelby had one time lived, I believe, well, that doesn't sound right. Well, anyway, oh isn't that awful? My memory isn't working very well. Well, anyway, they lived there a long time. Oh, that's not Isaac Shelby, that's not right. He lived in Shelby County, didn't he? Well, maybe that's right then. Well, I can't remember. Out on Eminence Road was where Squire Boone had a fort. He was the brother of Daniel Boone. Oh, and of course Science Hill was a girl's school and my sister went there. Took viola lessons from Miss Harriet Poynter. As I recall, in the first one or two grades they took little boys but, you know, they didn't go past about the third grade. They were all girls. And there were several schools out in the county. There was one down there in Finchville. I don't recall the name of it. I should be able to tell you some more things but right now I can't think. Oh, the first courthouse that was built was log. In fact, the first two courthouses that were built were log.

What happened to them? Well, they were torn down and a brick one was built and then it was torn down and then I think around 1911 or somewhere around the early 1900's the present courthouse was built. And the jail, of course, was built. At one time, I think there was a jail over where the fountain is... along in there somewhere.

Do you remember anything in particular about Shelbyville during the Great Depression? Well, I really don't.

hall! My uncle, my mother's brother, was county clerk and so I played in those two offices and his daughter was county clerk after she was his assistant. When he retired, why she became the county clerk. She's out at Crestview now and will be 100 this January. But, Shelbyville has changed a lot. Although where all those antique stores where there were dry goods stores.

What were some of the names of the dry goods stores? Lawson's dry goods, oh, I can't think of the other one right now. Bertie Hedges used to work there. Poor Bertie is not able to do anything any longer but I can't think of the name of it. Lincoln's? Lincoln's! Lincoln's and Lerman's! Lerman's was one of them and Lincoln's was the other. Yeh. And Lawson's store and across the street on the other side, where one of those bistros or that other thing there was a Hallenbach... what they had, they had those stools where you could go and get your soft drinks and your ice cream and that sort of thing.

Did you all spend a lot of time down there? Oh, yeah, yeah. And right on the corner next to the courthouse there was also a store. They served the same thing... it was Goodman Brothers, I believe, and then later it became, you know, they closed that part of it. And there was a barber shop down near Sixth Street, not right on the corner but I think up one store. Crane's the barber shop, but there used to be one of those things, you know, that looked like a stick of candy that turned, you know, you've seen that. I can't think of what they're called. I think there is a name for it but it was there and it stayed there even after the barber shop left for awhile and then they finally took it down. Now you know where the Community Theater is, don't you? At one time that was a garage.

What was the name of the garage, do you remember? I don't remember. And down this end of town, I think right next to, real close to the creek, there was an ice factory and you could go and buy your ice. Did they draw their water from the creek? I really don't know. But I remember there was an ice factory down there. How would you buy it... in blocks, big blocks of it? Yeh, uh huh. Fifty pounds. And then there was one on Third Street you could buy ice, I guess, later, I'm not just not sure about that. Oh dear, I ought to be able.... Of course, this end of town has changed. The homes. There were some beautiful homes on this side of the street further down by that coin laundry, down along there, there were some beautiful old brick homes with a big yard. Oh, they were all homes and there were some good, you know, some beautiful homes on this side... where Papa John's is. And they tore them all down? Yes, they tore them all down.

That's strange cause there's some of the other openings downtown that they'd tear homes down? I just don't know. You know where the old post office is? Yes. Well, where that was at one time, in fact, uh, I remember that building, was another college. Stuart's College. And it sat back. It was a big building and before the, what's now the West Middle School, why, the children went there to high school for a little while. In fact, that's where my sister went... part of the high school and then when they completed the high school which is West Middle, why, they moved up there. That Stuart's College was turned into sort of an old folks home or something of that kind but it finally was torn

Were you at UK at that time? Well, when was the Great Depression exactly? It started in 1929 and went up during the '30's. Well, yes, I guess maybe that's the reason I didn't go but two years to UK! Then the rest of the time, you know, I went to summer school to get my degree. And I'd go on Saturday. There were several of us from here in the county that would get together and go to Saturday classes until I finally got my degree.

Do you remember anything about World War II? Well, yes, my brother was at WWII and he was sent to Europe and then after it was over, well, he had some jobs and then they called him back when the Vietnam War...he stayed in the Reserves and then they called him back so he decided he just better stay in so he did and he was stationed all over different places. He was in Japan and he was in Texas and out west...Arizona, Fort Watchuga and up near Chicago. When he was in Chicago, my father went up to visit him and to visit these cousins that were up there and on the way back we stopped in Shelbyville...no, in Simpsonville to get a loaf of bread and dad went across the street to get it and when he came back across he was hit by a car and killed. I never will forget that. I found his hat and a shoe and I heard somebody say, "Up here!" and up the road there by that little church, why, there he was spread out in the middle of the road. It was a...but anyway, Bill, as I say, decided to stay in and then he was finally sent to Germany and while he was there, I went over there and visited him. I didn't fly, I went over on an ocean liner...the Holland America. Was it one of the old ocean liners? Well, it was a Dutch ocean liner and I never will forget, my poor roommate was seasick the whole time. She never got out of the bed hardly and it didn't bother me a bit. I had the best time!

How long did it take to get across the ocean? Well, it was about...seems to be close to 10 days or something like that. And my brother and his wife met me in France and the French were so stinky they pretended they couldn't speak any English and wouldn't help you any. So, when I came home I decided I'd get the boat in Holland and at that time, the World's Fair was in Belgium and so I went to the World's Fair in one day and got on my way the next. So you had to go back to France, huh? No, I didn't have to back to France. I never will forget...while I was visiting my brother, I took a little tour to Denmark and I met a woman there and when I was in Belgium and walking to the World's Fair this woman in a building said, "George Ann!" and it was the woman that I had met over in Denmark! Can you imagine? It takes a little doin'! Well, we had planned to try to get together and I guess she just happened to see me going down the street! I had planned at one time to go to Japan, I had a cousin who was there also and I tried to get a job teaching and I came down with rheumatic fever and spent eight months in bed, so I never did get to Japan.

-----END OF SIDE ONE-----

Well, shall I start over there? No, just keep on going. Well, living pictures of Easter and it was down in the sanctuary in the front of the church and it was almost a box...like something, oh, almost thirteen feet long and six or seven feet deep and ten feet high and there was a frame all around it and the scenery was in the back part and in the front there

was what you call a scam, which was a type of cotton material and when you turned the lights on outside and turned those off inside you couldn't see through the scam. Then you turned the outside ones off you couldn't see. We had the Lord's Supper and I painted the... I looked at, what was it, was it Michelangelo's painting of the Lord's Supper and I copied that as a background and we had a real table and real men seated at the table. Then we had Christ at the Garden of Gethsemane and I painted that scenery—a garden with a, you know, a trail that you could see, and then we had Christ when he rode the donkey and I made the donkey. The men made a wooden frame and I made the donkey out of paper mache' and he sat on it and I painted that scenery and then, of course, when he was carrying the cross I painted another scene. And when he was on the cross, why, this one man was on the cross but the two others... the thieves, you know, on either side, I painted them on the background. Then we had the tomb and I painted the tomb and the stone that was supposed to be rolled in front of it I made out of a box and paper mache'. And we did that several years and I positioned all the people and helped them dress and made it all seem real. I had kind of hoped we'd do it again but I don't know whether we... oh, and when I was teaching school around here at Northside, why, one year we had what we called 'Living Pictures of Famous Paintings' and I did those completely. It was in a small of something like six feet high and we had little girl who kind of served as Pinky and a boy... Blue Boy... and feeding her birds. In fact, two of the children that were feeding her birds are both married now. One of them is Charles Long's wife and the other one is, oh, it was one of the Shannon girls.

Tell me a little about some of the changes in teaching? Well, you know, I'll tell you. After I, I got real tickled hearing Marshall Long talk to... I belong to a group at church called the Young at Heart, from fifty years up, uh, anyway, he talked to us and said something about Ms. Carpenter, he remembered when Ms. Carpenter came round with that ruler and he knew he better behave himself. But anyway, I paddled them. I mean, you know, you were allowed to take them into the office and paddle them when they misbehaved. I made them stand in the corner and, you know, after I retired I thought I would substitute. I substituted two different times and I know in one class, I think I was supposed to tell some history of Shelby County or something of that kind, and half of them weren't listening and they were just sitting in the back of the room talking and I decided I'm not ever going to do it again. You couldn't even put your hand on their shoulder or he'd say, "My mother will sue you!". You can't discipline them. I think it's a shame. And frankly I don't think children are getting a lot of things they ought to get. They can't even add two and two. I know here several years back I went to Wal-Mart and bought something and gave the girl I think a five dollar bill or something, I don't remember at all what it was, and the machine had something that had gone wrong and she didn't know how much change to give me and I had to tell her. Isn't that awful?

Do you think these discipline problems are one of the reasons there getting less of an education? Parents don't discipline their children. Well, so many of the parents work and the children are home and can do whatever they want to while, you know. In fact, not too long ago, I guess it was last year sometime, some boys in the neighborhood came and set fire to hay on our farm. Burned twenty some odd bails of the big round hay bales. What

did they do it for? Well, fun. And I sure have seen changes in where I live. Behind our farm is Town n' Country subdivision and do you know where the Smithfield Road is? Yes, ma'am. Well, I go out the Smithfield Road and get to the...and where Brentwood is now was a farm and where the golf course is was a farm and beside our farm is a little subdivision called Glenview and on the other side of the farm all the way down the road is practically all subdivisions. There are hardly any farms left...not too many. And then it's built up and, you know, there used to be a church and a grave yard down the road and our historical society did a book, Graves in Shelby County, and I illustrated the book for them, anyway, I told them, "There's a graveyard down my road so let's go down and survey it" and when we got down there there wasn't a thing there. The church was gone and there wasn't a single stone there. We found one on the doorstep of a house in the neighborhood. I don't know what happened to them...where they went. Oh and, by the way, the Baptist Church at one time...when Shelbyville was first started, uh, on Washington Street, the Methodist Church had a building and nearly all the churches met there. It was the only church in town at that time. And the Baptist met there part of the time and then they...until they built the church up here on, you know, and uh...did I ever finish telling you about William Shannon and that he gave those parks? OH! I didn't tell him about how he got...what happened to him. On the corner, I told you, right next to the courthouse, there was a tavern. Oh, there were taverns all over the county...everywhere...cause people couldn't, you know, horse and buggy rides, they couldn't go far, anyway, there was a tavern and he went in that tavern. The tavern was run by a man by the name of John Felty and he went in the tavern to get something to eat and he and John Felty got into an argument. Well, friends separated them and when Shannon started to leave they got into it again and, I guess, right at the door and Shannon picked up a stone there on the sidewalk, well, there wasn't any sidewalk there at that time, but he threw it at Felty and Felty threw a dirk at Shannon and Shannon died instantly, I believe that's right and Felty died a few days later from that fight that they had. I don't know what it was over. And Shannon owned all the property and of course gave all the downtown property as I told you. He owned all the property in Shelbyville from Third Street to Seventh Street. That's as far as it went during that time. Oh, I'm sure I'm leaving out a lot of things, oh, when I first started school, we rode in a pony cart. My sister and I. And when she graduated, my brother hadn't started to school yet, why, I rode to school on a horse and we put it in one of the families opposite what is now West Middle had a, you know, where they kept their horses and that's where we kept our pony and cart across the street. And I can remember one morning when I was in high school and looked out the window one woman went to let a basket down for her mail to be put in and the mailman would put her things in this basket and she'd pull it up and we'd watch her...anyway. Well, I don't know, but I'm sure I'm leaving out a lot of interesting things.

That's about all the questions I have. I know it's hard to think of things all at once. But I sure appreciate you coming down here to talk to me.