

# Shelbyville Main Street Project

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

*Interviewer:* Mark Mefford

*Interviewee:* Byron Crawford

*Date:*

*Running Time:* 21 minutes

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**BYRON GARRISON CRAWFORD  
INTERVIEW**

Interviewed by Mark Mefford  
Transcription by Susan McMullan Groves

**Full Name:** Byron Garrison Crawford

**When were you born?** December 9, 1945 in Stanford, Kentucky in Lincoln County. I moved to Shelby County in 1975, I believe.

**What did your parents do in Lincoln County?** They were farmers. My dad was a lifelong farmer and my mother worked for the Whirlpool manufacturing plant in Danville and she also worked for awhile as a bookkeeper for a farm supply store in Stanford.

**What are their names?** Gilbert and Lucille.

**What drew you to Shelby County?** Well, we had lived in Louisville off and on for a long time. We'd lived in Cincinnati. We liked Louisville and we'd lived all over Jefferson County but our children were very young... I have four children... and we lived about three blocks from a model school. The home we bought was because it was so close to that model school and about the time we moved here busing was beginning in Jefferson County. I had covered much of it and it was a violent kind of time and um, I knew people who were high up in the school system and some of them had expressed great fears to me about the quality of education in Shelby County... I mean, in Jefferson County. I had already been looking for places to move out here because I wanted a little place in the country. I was a country boy and I wanted a place in the country. Uh, then our oldest son who was in first or second grade was going to have to be bused all the way down to Watterson Expressway and then down I-65 to west Louisville before daylight and I was just determined that I was not going to do that. Um, Watterson had just made the list of one of the ten most deadly highways of the United States and I didn't think an experiment was worth that. So, that was an impetus for me to come. Added, uh, plus I had already been looking for places here before that fact and I like Shelby County. I like Shelby County and you asked what drew me here and it wasn't so much that... I could've moved anywhere for that matter, but I would've, uh, probably moved to Shelby County anyway. It was... it had, uh... I liked the countryside and I liked the people. I thought the quality of life that they had sought to maintain here was a pleasant mix of their heritage and what new development they had was, I thought, done in thoughtful manner.

**I see your already anchored to Jefferson County by your work, isn't that right?**

Yes. I was, uh... I had moved to Louisville the first time in 1966 and I was a newscaster at what then was WAKY radio. It was a big rock n' roll station there. I was very young. Then I went from there after, I guess, I stayed there for four years or something like that. I went from there to WCKY in Cincinnati and was the newscaster there. Then I came

back in 1973 to WHAS radio. I worked in radio for a year and then moved to television and worked until 1979 when I went to the Courier-Journal.

**And that's where you work now? The Courier-Journal? Yes.**

**And you write columns? I write the Kentucky column for the paper.**

**Is it in every edition... the state editions as well as the Louisville?** It's in all the Kentucky editions and sometimes it is in some of the Indiana editions. It's in the Indiana editions on sort of an irregular basis when something that I write might appeal to the readers in southern Indiana plus it's also, uh, most recently carried in the Kentucky editions of the Cincinnati Inquirer, uh, on the weekends. Saturday and Sunday they carry my column. I don't know... this tape is for the ages and that may not last for... (laughing)... a lot of this might be impermanent material. I don't know if you take everything... the transcript of this verbatim or not, but it may be impermanent. **But at least on this day you are published in Cincinnati!** Yeh, on this day... at this time... I'm appearing in the Cincinnati Inquirer's Kentucky edition.

**When you moved to Shelby County in the mid-70's, what were some of your affects of Shelby County? How did Shelbyville affect your life? Now did you live out in Bagdad?** I moved to Bagdad, yes. How did Shelbyville affect your lives living in Bagdad? Did you trade here or did you ever come here at all for any reason? We came to Shelbyville to trade and we also went to Frankfort. But it shifted our... it's funny how when you live in our community, you get a sense of... you have sort of an invisible compass that points you in some direction. When we lived in Bagdad, we used to make a lot of trips to Frankfort to shop. But now we make very few trips to Frankfort and now that I live in Shelbyville, we make most of our trips to Middletown or Shelbyville, of course, to do our shopping. So, you know, a shift of eight or ten miles there sort of makes you the satellite of some other community. But we've shopped a lot in Shelbyville. Our children went to school after they left elementary school they came to middle school in Shelbyville. So, we had a lot of activities going on here... Little League and all that.

**So it served as kind of a social center? Oh yes.**

**What do you remember about Main Street when you moved here? Was it an economic center or was it more antiques?** Well, I think, when I came here that Lincoln's and Lerman's was still operating. Andriot's was still operating... nice men's clothing store. But it had... there were a few stores that had closed and there were a few empty storefronts then. And fairly soon after that things began to change. Fairly soon after Lincoln's and Lerman's closed then the face of Main Street began to change to a lot of the antique malls and so forth.

**When you first moved here where there several antique malls already here or did they start to come...?** Really they have pretty much come here since I came. Of

course, the, uh, Wakefield-Scearce Galleries has always been a famous drawing card here. As soon as I moved to Shelbyville... Shelby County... I told people that I lived near Shelbyville they'd say, "Oh, do you eat at the Science Hill Inn?" and "Do you ever go the Wakefield-Scearce Galleries?" and I had to always tell them that I didn't make frequent visits to the stores (laughing) because to come up to the place... they're not the kind of place you take four kids to have a hamburger after church. But I thought it was a beautiful little town then and I travel all over the state so I have some idea of what each little looks like.

**How was Shelbyville different from other towns...the Main Street and the other small towns that are Shelbyvilles size? How does it compare with other towns?**

Well, of course, every little town has its own personality and I think Shelbyville is a fairly typical Bluegrass Kentucky small town. It has some intangible kind of quality that it absorbs from the farms around it... the horse farms as well as the tobacco and dairy farms. It had those beautiful old homes on each end of town and um, of course, it doesn't have the town square as such, but then it has a focal point of the courthouse and the little park here. You know when you're in downtown Shelbyville. Not... I think other than that... I don't think that it... you know, I think it's comparable in many ways to a place like Winchester or Versailles... those towns.

**Are there any Louisville people that you may have interviewed or spoken to over the years that you identify strongly with Shelbyville? Business people or anything else?**

Oh my goodness, yeh. There are a lot of people that have roots here. In fact, just a week ago, I interviewed Libby Hancock who is the daughter of a fairly noted Kentucky author, Janice Holt Giles, who wrote a number of books... historical fiction... novels primarily. And Libby married a Shelby Countian. They lived on a farm just west of Shelbyville... out toward Finchville. Almost every month I will interview someone who has a connection with Shelbyville. When I did the story on William Ellis from Eastern Kentucky University who is the author of a number of books and a prominent historian and researcher on the Kentucky River and other important places... he is from Shelbyville. I went to Murray State University and studied speech there and broadcasting and my professor there... and at that time the tennis coach, Dr. James Harris, is a Shelbyville native. He went to Eastern after that and became head of their communications department. I think he's now retired. The list just goes on and on of people that I have run into. When I interviewed William Shatner about his saddle horse business and I told him where I lived, he was familiar with lots of people in Shelbyville... Red Crabtree and the Bennetts and other... Harris, Don Harris and other prominent people who are from this area. Simpsonville, Shelbyville region. So, you're constantly coming up... I interviewed the Letterman's... the famous sort of 50's singing trio... and of course, the group has changed over the years but when I interviewed them back in the mid-70's, one of them had an aunt or someone who lived in Shelbyville. You're constantly running into those types of situations. Shelbyville has produced a wealth of well known people if you compiled a directory of them over the years. Sure enough...governors and everything else. Yes.

A lot of people I have interviewed have talked about the decline, I hesitate to use that word, of the downtown area...the change in the downtown area...they attribute it to Wal-Mart. Now there's a Wal-Mart in every small city in Kentucky it seems like now and they're fixing to build a new one...a bigger and better one. How do you think Wal-Mart effects the downtown area or the area in general? Obviously, it's caused some stores to close and stuff like that but does it have any other type of effect on Shelbyville? Well, all of these large chains like Wal-Mart...of course the kick that people have against Wal-Mart, which may or may not be fully justified is that they take money out of the community and take it elsewhere. They don't keep turning dollars over here the way a local store would. They can also afford to buy things at ridiculously low prices because they...of course, these are things everybody has told you before. They can buy some of this stuff here... they can afford to sell some of this stuff they sell here cheaper than some of our retails merchants here can afford to buy it... can buy it... wholesale... because they buy in such volume. You know, I don't like that aspect of their business, but things... time has a way of leveling all playing fields and um, you know, if Wal-Mart is in there and they're competitive and they want to keep it up than I guess they will get their chunk of the pie at this time. But the cities change anyway. Small towns change anyway and I think they just go through these changes. You know, at the time... a lot of people forget... people have very short memories... and uh, a lot of people forget now that at the time when we were all coming to town to do our shopping you could hardly leave your car without someone putting a parking ticket on it. That not only goes... I'm not saying that specifically about here because I wasn't here then, but when small towns had all of the buying and they were divvying up the profits themselves it was difficult to shop. Traffic was bumper to bumper and there wasn't enough parking and when you did park and go to the grocery store you'd back and have a ticket on your car... while you were trying to patronize the places. So, you know, everything that goes around comes around eventually and it'll come around for Wal-Mart in time. Somebody will be reading this thirty years from now... of anybody ever reads it at all... and say well, that's the way. Your on top one day and they next day your singing the blues.

**Do you all go to church in town? Yes. What church do you attend?** I go to First Baptist Church. But I belong to Bagdad Baptist Church.

**Do you think religion plays in big role in the community?** I think religion is one of the foundations of the community.

**Do you think it serves a social role as well as a spiritual?** Well I think it guides the whole personality of the town. I think we have some very active and successful and influential African-American churches here and we have most of the other faiths represented that we have here in this area. I think that it's just... it basically underlies that whole spectrum of the community.

**What do you think makes Shelbyville unique?** Well, one thing that makes it unique is that it is in a very enviable spot of being right between the three... possibly the three major cities in the state: Louisville, Frankfort and Lexington. It's close enough... what

makes it unique in my mind is that it's close enough for people like me who work both in Lexington and Louisville. We can get to Lexington fairly quickly and yet we can go to Louisville very quickly if we need to. I can be downtown in 40 minutes if I need to and on New Circle Pike Road in Lexington in about 40-45 minutes without a lot of complications so that point makes it nice for me to live here. Plus it has had up until recently or maybe it still has all of the qualities of the small town. It's beginning to grow now and you can see the traffic is getting to be a little bit too congested for the towns' good. Houses and subdivisions are springing up everywhere and you know, when the manufacturing plants come in... as good as they are for jobs... they also bring, uh, more people and more people just bring more problems that have to be addressed. With our shifting labor force situation we, like many other small communities in farming areas have a lot of Mexican workers here that work in tobacco. That answers the problem for labor for some farmers but it also has increased the court... the criminal role because, uh, there are a lot of problems inherent with that. Housing... they can't find affordable housing and they are thrown into situations that are undesirable. So, it seems like every time you solve a problem in a city you also have two or three more created by that. I think though that I got off the mark there. The location of this town is strategic and unique, I think, especially with I-64 right here at the doorstep.

**Well, that's all the questions that I have. Do you have anything that you would like to ask?** Well, I probably said more than I should have already. What I'm interested in doing is seeing what everybody else had to say.