

Shelbyville Main Street Project

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

Interviewer: Mark Mefford

Date: August 15, 1995

Interviewee: Mose Ellis, Jr.

Running Time: 24 minutes

Side One

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Meford: Why don't you start by telling me your name.

Ellis: My name?

Meford: Yes.

Ellis: Mose A. Ellis, Jr.

Meford: When were you born?

Ellis: I was born April 30, 1922

Meford: What are your parents names?

Ellis: My parents are deceased. My father's name was Mose A. Ellis, Sr. And my mother's name was Elizabeth Glenton Ellis. I have uncles and double cousins. I have two of them left. Do you need my uncles names?

Meford: No that's all right. What about any children? Do you have any children?

Ellis: I've got three kids myself. Of course they're all married. My daughter just married lately.

Meford: do they still live in Shelbyville?

Ellis: Yeah, my daughter does and one son lives in Shelbyville. The other son lives in Jefferson County.

Meford: Louisville?

Ellis: Yes

Meford: What were your parents occupations?

Ellis: My father worked for the street car line, I don't know if you know that or not.

Meford: The interurban line you mean?

Ellis: yes. He worked for that and my other, she done housework. Ironing and stuff like that. That's all

Meford: What did you do for a living?

Ellis: I worked for Western District Tobacco outfit for about 15-20 years. That's over on the other end of town. Then I left them and went out to the sheet metal outfit in the western part of town. I worked there for 23 years and I drove a truck, rode one, and then over in the western district as a fork lift operator. After that I come on in here, back to town, and had a heart by-pass surgery. After that I retired and come on in here and sit on my hind part. I've been living here 35-40 years. I was born and raised here you know. I had a brother but he died sorta of young like. He abused his body with alcohol. His name was Walter Ellis and he was four years younger than I was. That's all I can say on that situation.

Meford: What are some of your early memories of down town Shelbyville?

Ellis: Down town Shelbyville, they used to have, they used to be stores on both sides of the street. They had, what do you call it, stores on both sides of the street. They had a barber shop in that area down about two doors on the other side of that second stop light down there. Now on up in town, there was a bank on 6th Street and there was a pool

hall.....oh...on up there was a place that had fancy dresses like and they called it....well I can't remember. Well I'll tell you now.....it aint' nothin now. There's two banks up there now, Shelby County Trust and Citizens Union. Citizens Union won't be there long, they're building a big three story structure on the west end of town. They're gonna move all that out to one building. I've lived right here except for my three years in service and I been right here ever since. Downtown, used to be rushin but now a days there ain't nothin down there. They got a restaurant up there on the other side of the second light. They got a restaurant on the right side of the street and they got some antiques and all that kind of stuff up in town.

Meford: What kind of things did you all used to do down town when you were growing up?

Ellis: We used to shoot pool and I'd go to the golf course and caddie when I was young. I finally learned how to play. When I put the golf clubs down I didn't play golf. Of course we never had no trouble in Shelbyville.....never.....until just here lately. We got these old drug dealers coming in here. In fact, they done destroyed the town.....you might as well say.

Meford: Do they come in from somewhere else or are they local people?

Ellis: They coming in from somewhere else. They got the east end of town and they just pushin.

Meford: How long has that been going on?

Ellis: On that's been going on for several months. I'm pretty sure it has, yeah, several months.

Meford: When you said that you went to the pool hall and the golf courses and things like that when you were growing up, were they integrated or segregated?

Ellis: The pool hall was segregated and the golf course was segregated also.

Meford: Did you caddie out there?

Ellis: Yes, I 'd caddie out there for several years. Now you can play if you black. You have to be invited.

Meford: Was there much hostility to integration?

Ellis: No...no...no....we didn't have no problems. I'd go up town and I didn't know I was black until I looked at my skin. They treated me just like I was there boy's friend. We didn't have no problems until the drugs started taking over. Of course they got the police over here now. I used to lay down and go to sleep at night and leave the door open. You didn't have to lock it. What you gonna lock it for? Now you better lock it! I'm telling you! You better lock your door!

Meford: Do you think crime is rising now/

Ellis: Oh yes, its rising! It's a rampage. Yes sir.

Meford: Where did you go to school?

Ellis: I went to school at Lincoln Institute to high school and I went to grade school there on Bradshaw Street and was there until I got through the 8th grade and went to Lincoln for 9th, 10th and 11th grade. I never had a minutes problem. I never had no problem at all. They talked about problems with integration, I didn't know what that thing was. Of course, I used to go down to Mr. Bigs and play with there kids and everything and they'd come in and have jelly and jam sandwiches and we just got along like two peas in a pod.

No problems at all. Here lately, they've just got these drugs and things.....they don't know what's what.

Meford: How did you get to school when you went to Lincoln Institute?

Ellis: At Lincoln Institute we had a bus. It was privately owned. The school around on Clay Street, the students just walked. We didn't have all them kind of days like snow days and all them kinda days. You better go to school. If you tell you mama that your sick, you better by sick. That's right! If she found out you wasn't sick, she's jack you hind quarters up. I got so many woopings when I was a kid, it was something else.

Meford: What do you think has caused all these changes with children?

Ellis: These drug people over there in Martinsville. Pushin them drugs on them kids and so forth. Drugs are gonna be the united nations to this community...I'll tell you!

Meford: When you were growing up, do you remember an businesses that were owned by blacks?

Ellis: Yeah. The clothing store over on 10th Street. Owned by a fellow by the name of Matthew Dennis. He owned the cloths store. I remember buying a sweater from him. He sold cloths until he passed away I guess.

Meford: Is there any other businesses?

Ellis: No that the only one. Then they had a pool hall down on Clay Street that was owned by a black man. A fellow by the name of Louie Brown. Them is the only ones.

Meford: You've talked about it here and there. Tell me about the biggest changes in the down town area.

Ellis: Everybody is going out of business. That's what it is.

Meford: When did that start happening?

Ellis: All of this year and all of last year. Every now and then one will drop out, another will drop out and I told my neighbor that after a while, ain't nobody gonna be downtown.

Meford: What's causing it?

Ellis: I don't know. There ain't no business down there.

Meford: Well, besides the stores being closed, how's the appearance of down town changed?

Ellis: It really hasn't changed all that much. The buildings didn't. There used to be a hardware store, two hardware stores. They went out of business, they just left.

Meford: What do you remember about the interurban that your dad worked for?

Ellis: It just came to town and turned around down here at the church and went on back to Louisville. My dad worked there for 15-20 years. His health got bad and it finally killed him.

Meford: Did he drive the car.

Ellis: You know he rode for nothing.

Meford: When did it shut down?

Ellis: The street car? It was back there before WWII.

Meford: Where there an civic clubs in town?

Ellis: Well, I belong to the Masonic Lodge. That's the oldest one I know of.

Meford: What is it called?

Ellis: The Masonic Lodge.

Meford: Oh, The Masonic Lodge.

Ellis: Yeah.

Meford: Is it located here in town?

Ellis: Yes, it's down on Clay Street. Yeah.

Meford: What kind of activities do you all do?

Ellis: I don't have any right now but before long we'll have St. John's Day.

Meford: Do you go to church around here?

Ellis: Yes sir. That big church you pass coming into town, on 60. It sits right down across from that mall on the east end of town. Clay Street Baptist Church. I've been a member there for years. It used to be on Clay Street but they finally sold it.

Meford: What's gonna happen with all the, talking about kids and drugs, what's going to happen?

Ellis: What's going to have to happen is for them kids not to bring them drugs in here. The police seem to be scared, they just seem to be scared.

Meford: Do you remember anything about early police patrols in town?

Ellis: Oh yeah. They used to have walking beats. Bill Strange and old man Tracy. They used to walk and now they ride.

Meford: Was it better when they walked or do you think it's better when they drive?

Ellis: When they walked, back then them people didn't have no problems. Didn't have not problems at all.

Meford: Do you think they were closer to the community when they were on foot?

Ellis: Oh yeah! They'd stop and talk with one another. Yeah. Now they getting back to that. The police now, they get out and walk and leave the cars parked. They stop and talk with so and so or just anybody and they don't have any problems.

Meford: What do you think makes Shelbyville unique?

Ellis: Well, it's a crazy mixed up town, I'll tell you! I don't know. There ain't no more farm land. They've taken that and made these big houses out of it. I just don't know.

Meford: Is there anything else you'd like to add.

Ellis: No, there ain't nothing I'd can add.

Meford: Well since I don't have anything else to ask you, I appreciate you talking to me.

Ellis: That's all right. No problem