

# Shelbyville Main Street Project

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

*Interviewer:* Mark Mefford  
*Date:* 9-7-95

*Interviewee:* Dotty Gordon  
*Running Time:* 23 minutes

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## Side One

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Dorothy Gordon  
Shelbyville Main Street  
Oral History Project  
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Meford: Why don't you start by telling me your full name?

Gordon: My name is Dorothy Spalding Gordon.

Meford: When were you born?

Gordon: March 28, 1917.

Meford: When did you move to Shelbyville?

Gordon: Let's see.....I moved to this location November 30, 1940. Before that I just worked you know, around in town. I worked at Newberry's Ten-Cent Store, the drug store and I just worked around until I took my beauty course in Shelbyville. I took my beauty course at Shelbyville Beauty School. They had one over the Lincoln and Lerman Stores on Main Street. Frances Adams and Ruby Brown were my instructors.

Meford: Were there a lot of students that went there?

Gordon: There was seven in my class, and then we only had to six months to beauty school. Then we took the state boards and then there was a girl from Shelbyville that worked at Harrodsburg and I went up there to relieve her for a week. I like

Harrodsburg.....it was 1940 and I liked it so well that I went to another shop and ask for a job. This lady needed me only while her operator was gone. I got me a job in Harrodsburg. At that time there was no transportation from Harrodsburg to Shelbyville and I'd have to go to Danville and get a train back to Shelbyville on the weekends. I got homesick, I hadn't been away from home so I come down on the train one Saturday night, and I thought, well I'll go around and ask Ms. Roberts on 6<sup>th</sup> Street, who had a beauty shop, I'll go around there and ask her for a job. I came in and she had been sick and she was going to have an operation when I ask her. She said, "I'm gonna sell my shop." So I went home and I ask my daddy if he could lend me the money ( he was a farmer) so then I said I could rent that building down there and so I thought Dr. Morris at Southville owned this building and he was our family doctor. So I went up there and I ask him would he rent me this building, just this side. I didn't want the upstairs yet, just this building. He said, "Well, nobody has ever been successful in that building. They don't stay. Even I was down there and it's war time you know. I don't know about that. I've been your family doctor for a long time and I wouldn't want you to make a mistake." I said, "Oh but I'm gonna be successful." So I talked him into renting me the building. I said I'd pay him \$20 a month if you'll rent me this building. That was big money then and he said, "well....." and I said, "I've got to stay here a month so I can pay you \$20 because I just have to stay there. I can't pay in advance." He said "well....." and I said, "There is another catch to it. I lack \$100 from having enough money to buy the beauty shop from this lady. If you'll lend me that \$100, I'll write it down and I'll pay you \$30 a month for three months plus the rent and on the last month I'll give you \$10 and that will make my \$100(no interest)." He said, "Okay, I'm gonna rent it to you. You are determined." So he rented me the building and I moved in this building on my mother and daddy's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary. I was 23 years old.

Meford: Where did you grown up at?

Gordon: Here in Shelby County. I got my early education down at Finchville. That's where my family had lived. So anyway, from that day on, I did shampoos and set for \$.50, perms were \$2.00, hair cuts were \$.35 and I'd work late, it made no difference.....I was gonna be successful! I was determined! That's why I say that if young people make up their minds.....I'd wanted to be a beautician ever since I was big enough to stand in my mothers chair and comb her long hair. I knew I wanted to be a beautician. My daddy always said that if you want what other people have, you've got to work and you can have it too.

That kind of made me a workaholic. I always had my goals set high. I worked hard, day, night, any time and I hired a little girl to work for me and from then on I just kept working and pluggin. I had customers from Eminence, Henry County, there was only two shops over there at that time. There was just one a Taylorsville, and they came from Spencer County and everything because I really hard and I knew how to style hair. I would do their hair the way they wanted it or if they wanted something difference, I would take their face and I went to all the beauty shows and found out the latest in hair styling and I wanted to be successful. So I say that any young person that's wants to be successful, can be. They can be successful.

Meford: Were you married at that time?

Gordon: No, I was single until I was 35 years old. When I was 35, I married Hubert Gordon and he was sheriff then. But anyway he went on to Stewarts to work later on and we had a real good life. He was a detective before he was at Stewarts. It's been a long time for me to remember all this. Out here on 6<sup>th</sup> Street, are you ready to hear what happened to the buildings here on 6<sup>th</sup> Street.

Meford: Yes.

Gordon: Down on the other corner, Biagi's was on the corner, just a little tire place.

Meford: The Washington Street Corner?

Gordon: Yes. That's west I reckon. No, that's east, on that other corner. And then we had an optometrist on 6<sup>th</sup> Street, then we had a dress shop, we had a shoe shop, a children's shop, we had a Dr.'s office, an express office, a bakery, a Dr.'s office, another beauty shop down the street, another shoe repair shop, we had two shoe repair shops.

Meford: Do you remember the names of any of them in particular?

Gordon: Biagi's was the shop over there, Dr. Tremble was there, Mary's Frock Shop was Catherine Rucker, and Mr. Tuchman had a shoe shop, Nancy Blakemore had a children's shop, Sally Lee had a Beauty shop, Dr. Smith was the doctor that was out here, and the bakery was out here on 6<sup>th</sup> Street, there was an express office down on the corner and then Brown and Whitman Shoe Shop was next door. We had a little print shop across the street. I think that was all that was on 6<sup>th</sup> Street. That was a lot of business. There was apartments over all those buildings and they were people that was real nice people and they were friendly and Shelbyville was a freindly place. It was a good place to be in business and continue on. I don't think I'm going to retire any way soon unless my health.....the doctors think I'm better off working than I am if I were sitting at home because I love people. I didn't take many vactions, I wasn't away from the shop very much, I just stayed with it. It was my life! I have no children and I just.....I have two step daughters that are real good to me. I have three grandchildren and have great

grandchildren of my husband's people. We just get along fine, they call me "Granny" and I love than.

Meford: Well, that's nice. When you moved here in 1940, what kind of stores do you remember going to and shopping at? Groceries and cloths and things like that?

Gordon: Well, we didn't have to go anywhere. The A&P and Kroger was right up town in the next block. There was another grocery store down the street. We had drug stores here where you could buy cards, you know like birthday cards or anything up town. Now you can't even buy a birthday card up town. It's real sad to me. If you want to run out and get a sympathy card, anniversary card or whatever, you've got to get in your car and drive to the other end of town. See, here you can live up town, I go to the First Christian Church at 4<sup>th</sup> and Main, and you could walk to church. The Baptist Church was in town and it burned many years ago. Everyone was your friend. You could go up the street and you wouldn't think about going up and not stopping and speaking to people. You had time then to say, "Hello. How are you?" and listen to the answer. Now, everybody may say "How are you?" but by the time you can tell them how you are, they're far, far away.

Meford: What kind of things did people do socially in the 40's when you opened your shop?

Gordon: Let me see. We had a picture show, we called it a picture show. Now we call it a movie. It was across the street. We went to the picture show and you just didn't do very much. Not everybody had an automobile. The boys would use their fathers car or something. It wasn't like it is today. No televisions.

Meford: No air conditioning?

Gordon: Oh no! We had fans. That was a big deal with air conditioning. We didn't have gas furnaces or nothing. I had a heater in here to heat and I had a hot water heater that I had to light.

Meford: Did you have to do that every morning?

Gordon: Well, you'd light it and let the water get hot and then you'd have to turn it off because it wasn't thermostatically controlled.

Meford: Was it gas?

Gordon: Yes, it was gas.

Meford: So, if you wanted warm water, you had to plan ahead?

Gordon: I'd light it every morning, you know, every morning then leave it on till noon. When I heard it popping and cracking, I knew it was hot and I could turn it off a while. Then you could go back and light it again. Things were different then.

Meford: Yeah.

Gordon: Finally, after many years, I had that Neon electric sign put out front and it was on 24 hours and then you parked on each side of the street. We heard something screeching and Webb's Truck Line had got on the sidewalk and pulled the sign off the building. I just cried and cried because I owed for the building. I bought the building in 1948, eight years later. Nobody had to sign my note or nothing. I just bought the building. I went off crying. They said, "Well what's the matter?" I say, "Reed Webb's Truck Line has tore my sign down. We had it 10 feet from the sidewalk." I called the mayor and Reed Webb said I didn't have it up high enough. So sure enough, when they checked the real reading, it wasn't high enough. It lacked 6 inches. So I was crying and Mr. Randolph said, "Now don't you cry no more." He had the insurance for the building

through The Armstrong Agency and he said, "Now, don't you cry no more. When you put a sign on your building, attached to your building, it becomes a part of the building and I'll have it repaired for you." The insurance company paid to have my sign replaced. I think it cost \$240 and that was an awful lot of money. I had had just a little tin sign out there that Mr. Bob Craig, the minister, had fixed for me and put "Dotie's Beauty Shop" and I was so proud of that. But when I got that electric sign, and that's the same one that's still out there.

Meford: The same sign?

Gordon: Yes.

Meford: Do you leave it on all night still?

Gordon: No. It has a time clock on it. I have it on from 8 in the morning till about 3. Did you notice if it was on when you came in?

Meford: It was on. Yes.

Gordon: It goes off about 3 or 3:30 in the evening. We close at 4:30.

Meford: Yeah.

Gordon: Neither one of us want to work at night so we close.

Meford: You mentioned a few stores that you worked at like Beagley's and another one?

Gordon: Beagley's and Shelby Theater and Bradbury -Scofield Drug Store. I didn't work at Beagley's, it was Bradbury-Scofield because Beagley's wasn't here at that time.

Meford: Where was Bradbury-Scofield's?

Gordon: It was down here on Main Street where Jones financial place is and we had pool room in town, we had two or three pool rooms. I didn't work at them but they was pool rooms in town. I worked at Newberry's Ten Cent Store. It was over there where Tracey's is, they own the building now. I guess those were the only places I've ever worked.

Meford: Of those stores that you mentioned, have they all closed down now?

Gordon: Yes. There's nothing up town. Like I said, if you want a pair of hose you go the Wal-Mart or where ever. Shoes, there's not shoe shops here. We've had a shoe shop up on Main Street, Briggs Shoe Store and then Rrothchilds was up there and they had men's cloths. I don't know if they make those cloths anymore. They are very expensive cloths.

Meford: When did these stores cloths? Did they close all at once or just over a long period of time?

Gordon: Uh.....well you see.....6<sup>th</sup> Street burned. All those buildings burned. Mark Search always wanted to go antique. At one time he wanted to close 6<sup>th</sup> Street and make a Mall out of it and I would not. I was from Shelby County and I thought Shelby County needed a place to go thorough to the streets. He always wanted it to be antiques downtown. But I was for the county and I wanted it closed in where they could all.....so then the mayor said he'd make 6<sup>th</sup> Street one-way, which way did I want it? I said to let them park over there on the other side, not under my sign. They made it so that they could park on one side of the street.

Meford: When was it made one way?

Gordon: When they tore my sign off. I cried so much, they did that to help me out. Mr. Bob Matthews was the mayor and he said that the cars were getting wider and he said that

we'd just make it one way and which way did I want it? I told them to park on the other side.

Meford: Well. How about that. Do you know what year that was?

Gordon: That might have been 1950 or 52.....something like that. It was probably 1952 cause I remodeled this building and mad this in one room and in 1948 I'd bought the building and the Ramsey brothers worked it over for me. When the building was sold in 1948, it was sold at auction.

Meford: Oh really. Did you go to the auction and bid on it?

Gordon: Yeah, right out there on the steps. My banker told me, Mr. Charlie Randolph, he said, "How much do you want to pay for it?" and I said, "I don't know." He said, "Well, you just go ahead and we'll lend you the money. You just buy it and protect yourself." So this man at the shoe shop next door (see it was sold as two separate buildings) so I went over there and talked with them and they said for me to buy my side first so we won't bid against each other. So I kept bidding on this side and I bought this side. They didn't buy their side because it brought more than they wanted to pay for it. So Miss Mary Bloomer bought the other side and then when it was sold at auction again. So Mr. Randolph let me have the money so when I went up there I told him that I wanted.....he knew how much money I had cause I had it there in the bank.....so he said for me to pay the interest for a few years and you'd be borrowing it a 4% interest.

Meford: 4? Gosh!

Gordon: He said for me to just pay the interest twice a year and keep the insurance paid and everything and he said that when I could, I could pay on the principal each time. So anytime I got any extra money I'd run up there and put it on the principal. So then I bought this side and when we married the other side was sold again at auction and we did buy. The man that bought it was a Mr. Mason and he lived in Jefferson County so, of course I lived I Jefferson County at that time so I called and asked him what he was going to do with that building next door and he said that he'd bought it for speculation and and I said, "How much do you want for it. You know all those water pipes come through my building, my basement." He said, "Heavens, I wouldn't have had that building if I knew those water pipes come through that basement." He said he would not have bought it if he'd know. He then said if I'd buy it from him and take his name off before time to show income tax, he said if I'd have him do that that he said I could have it at his last bid. So we bought it at his last bid and we had his name taken off of it. So now that's how I own the whole thing.

Meford: You say that it's empty now, but did you ever rent to anyone.

Gordon: I've never had it empty before.

Meford: Is that right?

Gordon: Yeah. This has just happened. We had an upholstery shop and he didn't even give me any notice that he was going to move.

Meford: He just up and moved?

Gordon: So, I didn't have time and when he moved out I did it over. I put in new carpeting and had the walls all repaired and everything. I'm having that upstairs apartment done over. She's been there about three years and it needed doing over. I'm having it done over now.....the man's up there working today.

Meford: There's different stores here on 6<sup>th</sup> Street wit the fire and everything but how does 6<sup>th</sup> Street look different than when it used to.

Gordon: People's attitudes is different. Everything is different.

Meford: Is that the same, even with Main Street.

Gordon: I don't know about Main Street. But here, we was always just one big happy family. You'd see people out on the street and you'd stop and carry on a conversation. Even the other beauty shop. It's all so different. Have I talked long enough?

Meford: No. Are you getting tired? We just have a few more questions?

Gordon: Okay.

Meford: You say that you go to church downtown?

Gordon: Yes, The First Christian.

Meford: Has it always been in the same location?

Gordon: Yes. It burned but they built it back where it was.

Meford: Do you think that religion plays a big role in the community?

Gordon: Oh yes.....yes. Our churches.....the Baptist church, when it burned.....they moved to the other end of town and built a bigger building and all. It's always a lot of religious people here and the horse farms at Simpsonville has been an asset to the county.

Meford: What do you think makes Shelbyville unique?

Gordon: The friendliness. The honesty of people. These girls are my friends and Jean has been with me 39 or 40 years.....the girl that works for me now. She's my right arm(I don't want her to know).

Meford: Well don't tell her. That's about all the questions I have. Is there anything you'd like to add or anything you want to tell me.

Gordon: No, I think the Lord has been good to me. He's furnished me good health. I had an implant this year and I had "shingles" several years ago (that's nerves you know). I've had the shingles and then I've had an eye operation, but other than that, I'm in good health. The Lord has just watched over me and cared for me and give me a good husband and good employees and I thank him every night and praise him for my health. I drive a nice car and have a nice home and I'm thankful for that. If it hadn't been for his help.....

Meford: Yeah.

Gordon: Before I opened my shop I had a minister, I was Baptist then, and he came in and blessed my shop.

Meford: Well

Gordon: And then on my 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, my minister here in Shelbyville came here and blessed it.

Meford: Well that's nice.

Gordon: I give the Lord credit for my success. I didn't do it on my own.

Meford: Well I sure thank you for your time.

Gordon: No, I've enjoyed it. What's your name?

Meford: Mark