

Shelbyville Main Street Project

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

Interviewer: Mark Mefford

Interviewee: Edwin Hall

Date: 8/9/95

Running Time: 32 minutes

Side One

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EDWIN HALL

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**Interview was conducted
by Mark Mefford
1995**

EDWIN HALL

INTERVIEWED BY MARK MEFORD

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- Q. What is your name?
A. Edwin Hall
- Q. When were you born?
A. 1919
- Q. How long have you lived in Shelbyville?
A. All my life. 76 years.
- Q. What are your parents names?
A. Curtis P. Hall and Nancy W. Hall
- Q. What did your father do for a living?
A. Well of course, he was in the lumber business. He passed away in 48. But, I sold the lumber business out about 8 years ago. It had been in the family for 103 years. Started out with my grandfather, then my father, then myself.
- Q. Did your mother work?
A. Mother passed away at nin...she passed away several years back. She was 99 years and 6 months old.
- Q. Did you have any brothers or sisters?
A. None living.
- Q. Did they stay in Shelbyville?
A. No. My brother moved back to Shelbyville, but he stayed in Florida most of the time.
- Q. You're married aren't you?
A. Yes.
- Q. How many children do you have?
A. Three children and six grandchildren.
- Q. Are most of your children staying in Shelbyville?
A. Shelby County yeah.
- Q. What's your occupation?
A. Well I guess you'd say I'm retired now. Except for rental property. But, I do a little farming, got about 70 acres of land in the country. Been married 56 years.
- Q. What are some of your early memories of Shelbyville, the downtown Main Street area.
A. I can remember where we're sitting here right now was Hollanback restaurant.
- Q. What is it now?
A. Well, it's a restaurant, bar, it's been several things in between. And next door was a pool room with a bowling alley or pin alley upstairs. Hardware store on the corner and bank next door, savings and loan next door.
- Q. What were some of the names of the places?
A. Well Hall, Pool and Ruff was up on the corner next to the Court House. Baldwins Jewelry and Sanders Pool Room on back to the restaurant then Long Restaurant, Citizens Bank, Kroger, Rothschilds, Coal and Company and Ransdalls Drug Store and that's all. And there was also a inner urban electric streetcar down through the middle of Main Street, down to 2nd Street and then turn around from and went from here to Louisville. There was a

brick street out there then. Main Street was two way. Used to have grocery stores, hardware stores, movies and everything was downtown. Wasn't all that out thing. Some people used to come downtown that was fortunate enough to have two automobiles, they'd have one of their neighbors to bring their car downtown and park it on the street and then they'd go home, come back and sit on the street and talk all night. See what was going on and talk to people.

Q. Did that happen just on weekends or every night?

A. Mostly on weekends. Then the old hospital was up on Clay Street. Kings Daughters Hospital started out way back there then.

And Western union and a postal telegraph office back then and a two passenger railway on the Southern Railway and the CNO and the L&N all stopped down here. And they also went to Bloomfield, Kentucky from here. From Taylorsville.

Q. What part of the downtown area was the center of activity if there was any?

A. Well I guess this uh block between 5th and 6th was. This building here has got a pretty good sized I guess you would call it, a ballroom upstairs that they used to have dances in and give dancing lessons during the week. And across the street, they have a straight across the street they had a big open room upstairs, up there, that they played basketball in, had dances, and later on it was turned into a clothing factory, that has now moved out to the edge of town out there. It was...Lawsons Store was across the street for a long time had all kinds of floor covering, furniture, draperies and everything for anybody.

Then go, all the banks main offices were right here at, or this area right here. Spread out like they are now.

Q. What kind of things went on here on Saturday night or Saturday day?

A. Well, over there back of the fountain used to have Jockey Day about once a month. And all the time during the week too, especially on Saturdays why they'd trade dogs and horses, mules, and guns and everything else over there. They had several poultry places here in town where you bought fresh eggs, cream and eggs and things like that. NO more around here anymore. And then, we had the silent movies here at the Grand Theater down there where they started out with no music, just all reading, playing the piano, everything to go along with that.

And then uh, down on the corner of 7th and Main, we had the old Layson Hall which was an old Opera House. Different stars used to come in here from, I guess they called it back in those days

to put on a performance and people would come from round different places in the County and everything to see that. A lot of the farmers came into town on Saturday night and go down to the barber shop and take a shower or a tub bath cause didn't too many of them have running water out on the farm.

Q. Were there any annual fairs or festivals?

A. Oh yeah. They always had a county fair on the less see, I believe it will be the hundred thirty some odd year this time and then for a good many years, we had the tobacco festival that would

go on for...oh it would start on Thursday, Friday and Saturday. Have a big parade and a coon drag and a dance and things. They had Renfro Valley and different places like that go all day and all night. People would come in here everybody would decorate up all these fancy floats and two years it rained it out both years and it kind of cooled it off and then it wasn't long until they didn't have it anymore.

Q. Did anything special go on in the downtown area at Christmas time?

A. Yeah, they'd have the lighting of the Christmas lights. They'd get started about 5 or 6:00 in the afternoon I think and then they'd bring the horses, and all the stores are decorated and lit up and they've got concession stands around. They have the horses and carriages up here from Louisville to take all the kids and everything want to. Take them on a ride around the two blocks here.

And, then, we have a dogwood festival. They have a Dairy Festival.

I guess that's about all I remember right now.

Q. What kinds of things go on during the Dairy Festival?

A. Well, they have it out to the Fair grounds. They have a free luncheon, and have several different types of contest and things like that. Who can milk a cow the fastest, or something. The City and County officials are in it, competing against each other. Who can eat a chocolate Sunday the most chocolate Sunday. And I think they have a little Miss Dairy Princess and Dairy Prince they pick out.

Q. What kinds of changes have their been in transportation? In the downtown area?

A. Well, when I talked with you before about all these things on Main Street, why there was parking on both sides of the street and on Main Street. And, traffic went both ways. And several years back why they put Washington Street which used to stop up at 11th Street, they put it up all the way through out to the Fair grounds and opened it up out the east end of town down here. And, uh, so now it's Main Street is one way east and Washington Street is one way west. And now the far end, the east end of town by the bridge used to have and ice plant there, its all torn down and gone now. And across the street from that was a building where they burnt the coals and stuff and made gas for the ole gas lines in the city that's all gone now since they've got it piped in here from other places.

And talk about the this flood we had downtown the other night the water got up, back there in those days why it got so high down there that we'd run it through the old Ice Plant. Old Colonel Sanders who started KY Fried Chicken had his office down there then and he came down there and decided to swim around and get his books out of there then and they had to pull him out he liked to have drowned.

I worked at Hall and Davis Company, a lumber yard back at that time we had to get boats and go pile, put up our lumber, put

it all back up in the yard it was all floating out. So, Shelbyville has come a long way of course now we've got all the industries around us, surrounding counties so anybody wants to work, they can get a job.

Q. Where was your family's lumber mill located at?

A. 217 7th Street which was on 53.

Q. Was it located there as long as you can remember?

A. Well yeah, yeah.

Q. What do you remember about the saw mill from when you were growing up?

A. Now, that's not a saw mill, its a lumber building supply business.

Q. Lumber yard?

A. Yeah, building supplies. WE started out with horses and mules and when I was still in high school, the 30's we still had one horse and wagon left, and then we got over into trucks. And I had a pony, several of the rest of us had ponies here in town till a Senior in High School up until about 1937. We used to ride all over town, everywhere...you couldn't do that now, but we had a big time with that riding around ponies and automobiles both.

But, uh, the lumber business has changed a whole lot, back in those days you had to sell a lot of salt to pack meat with out in the country and hogs, lime, and stuff like that which you sell very little of any now. All got to be a different ball game.

Q. Do you remember much about the great depression in town?

A. No, I was kind of young, I've heard a heard very little about it at the house, but my dad and his partner Mr. Davis at that time decided that they would live on \$125 a month down at the lumber yard, so that's what they did to get through the depression.

And, of course in those days if you go look in the refrigerator at my house then you could hardly find enough to make a sandwich. But three times a day, you had a good meal on the table, it was just the difference in the way everybody was cooked and raised then. Most of the women stayed home and got the children off to school and that was pretty well straightened out in life instead of working and letting somebody else raise em.

Q. What do you remember about the war in Shelbyville area?

A. Well it was about like every place else I reckon. My brother went and I went. We both went. And uh, I made Africa, Sicily, and V-Day, and Normandy, Omaha Beach, and in June or sometime July, I got hit pretty good there in France, so I came home and stayed in the hospital for about two years. And uh, but, that's when they took the rails up out of the Street out here, on Main Street to send the iron in, steel in for scrap iron. And, uh, of course they had rationing on tires and gasoline and all those things and a lot of people couldn't hardly get by and a lot of others managed to get a hold of a lot more than they needed I reckon. So that's the way it usually goes.

Q. This is off Shelbyville, but did the troops worry about

invading Japan?

A. Well of course I wasn't in the Japanese part, I went the other way. This stuff the news media and everybody is criticizing the man for dropping the bomb, he ought to have dropped it a month sooner. That's a bunch of stuff...Those people, the Germans they would have used it, the way they treated the Germans treated the prisoners, the Japanese, uh uh. Of course, a lot of you fellows don't you all don't hardly know about any of that, your age. A lot don't know what you're talking about. Just like my son went to Vietnam, well hell, nobody gives any...thinks anything about that that. IF they'd been over there, they'd think something about it!
(Laughing)

Q. How did, do you remember anything about police patrols in the 20's, 30's 40's?

A. Well, back when I was a kid this is going way back, about 1929, my dad was Mayor. And, up there on Magnolia Ave. about 2:00 every morning, that's where we lived, you'd hear this tapping on a post. That was a walking police. The police walked to town then. They only had two or three and they walked to town and that tapping on that post let my dad know that they had passed through. And then later on after that they had a police department was over here where the fire department both was over where Shelby County Trust Bank is now. And they had a red light out here on one of these poles in the center of this block between 5th and 6th. If they got a call or something over there, they'd flip a switch and this red light bulb would come on the police would know to go to the police station and see if they was supposed to go check on somebody. Well of course they started out with walking and then they started out with a Model A Ford I think they had.

Q.Q. What year was that about?

A. Oh, thirty four or thirty five, somewhere in there. My brother came home one night and went to bed and was asleep and he came up there and knocked on the door and they arrested him for speeding through town. That's how long it took them to get him.
(Laughing)

Q. What kind of changes happened in town during the 50's

A. Well, you've got all your, all your Walmart's the worst thing that ever happen to any community. They came in out there and it started breaking everything up. And then, the as far as the downtown merchants you've got, that's the worst thing we've got in downtown Shelbyville now is absentee ownership. These guys all live out of town or somewhere else where it used to be the people that were in business owned these buildings and some that were...you could keep everything up in good shape in downtown and we just don't have it anymore. OF course I guess the biggest change in the 50's when that started and coming on up through the 60's And tobacco was beginning to get scared on it which we might still have to be scared yet, used to be everywhere you go out in the County and see all these barns and lights and all lights on at these dairy barns, well there are very few dairy ones left in

Shelby County now. And so, then we start getting these different industries in here and that's, and now they're claiming we're getting too many industries. But, I'm on the Vice President of the Shelby County Industrial Foundation and fellows named Bobby Hudson and Jess Puckett and myself I'd say have done helped with some others have done as much as anybody to get the industry in here. But its given everybody, so that everybody's got something to jobs now. Which it wasn't that way before.

Q. When did all these business begin moving out of the downtown area?

A. Its hard for me to tell you the year, but when they built Governors Square on the East end of the town and Midland Shopping Center on and Village Plaza on the west end of town, that's when they all started moving out. In other words, everybody get out in the parking lot out there and walk a hundred yards to a store, downtown, any downtown they don't want to park unless they can walk in the front door.

Q. What kind of...when did the absentee ownership start?

A. It started about the time that Joe Southerland, about the time those subdivision started, oh, not subdivisions, those shopping centers started opening up, that was about the time that some of the fellows that owned the buildings or rented the buildings, business, they sold out and sold the buildings off to other people and uh, they just don't it just don't work that way too good.

Q. Well, you've talked a little bit about Walmart, what has been the effect of things like Walmart has had on the community? Other than the businesses moving out of downtown?

A. It's happened in every community they've moved in to! They uh, when they've run everybody else out of business well then their prices are not as competitive as they used to be.

Q. Do you go to church around here?

A. Presbyterian.

Q. Here in town?

A. Seventh and Main Street. First Presbyterian

Q. Does the church serve as a center for social activities?

A. Well they've go Al A non, Alcohol Anonymous, some kind of abuse, I don't know all of em that, they use the church annex to meet in every week. And uh, they've got pretty good I guess you'd call it social activity.

Q. Has the role of the church definable in the community?

A. I'd say that's true of all churches. DO you go to church? Easter or Christmas? or what (laughing...)

Mark: Well, I used to go every Sunday, and I just kind of got out of it now.

Ed: Looks like you can take your children, plumb on up through high school, and once they go off to college why that looks like

that's about the end of it. Some of them come back though, but not many.

Mark: Oh, I will, when I went to college, I started going to church, but the minister of this church moved away and I just never found another church to go to. That was about a year or two ago.

Ed: You know your not supposed to go to church for the minister. Your supposed to go to church to worship the Lord, so it don't make any difference who the minister is. Which church do you go to?

Mark: Well, my parents are from Louisville, so when I'm in Louisville, I go to church with them to Southeast Christian Church. That great big one.

Ed: Yeah, theres some of em here got...that's stylish, they've got to drive all the way down there to get with the big thing now...hah, hah...and if that minister passes away or something happens they'll probably get that thing paid for. HAH HAH

MARK: I live in Clark County and when I'm there I usually go to a little church called Antioch Christian Church. It's about as big as this room.

Ed: That's fine...that's good.

Q. what do you think makes Shelbyville unique?

A. Well of course I've lived here all my life and uh, I don't know but I don't ever care about living anywhere else but Shelby County. A lot of these which is amazing to me, I've asked that question myself some of these people that have come in here with these factories that have been moved in here, sent in here from California, New Jersey, New York, and everywhere else and live in subdivisions, those places. Some of them have passed up promotions because they didn't want to leave Shelby County. But, we've got a good park system now, the schools in pretty good shape you've got, everybody's crazy about golf I reckon we've got plenty of golf courses, swimming pools, fair and the horse show and the community theater, I guess you've got a little bit of everything for different people want, whatever they want to find to do, they can find it.

Q. Well, is there anything else you'd like to add about the community that I haven't asked you? Any memories that you have that you'd like to talk about?

A.A. Now, the only thing I regret is that I didn't keep a diary, cause I tell a lot of others that live as long as I have haven't been as blessed as I have or had as much fun as I've had, well, they've got nothing to worry about.

Q. Well I thank you for your time, hope it hasn't been too much trouble.

A. Nay