

Shelbyville Main Street Project

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

Interviewer: Mark Mefford

Interviewee: Mary T. Hall

Date: 8-16-95

Running Time: 38 minutes

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Meford: I'd like for you to start by telling me your full name.

Hall: Mary Taylor Hall

Meford: When were you born?

Hall: Where?

Meford: When.

Hall: July 7, 1913. My husband Evert Hall died 4 years ago this past month. We came to Shelbyville, we'd been living in Bagdad, and we came to Shelbyville in 1949 and started our own business here.

Meford: What was that business?

Hall: Hall-Taylor.

Meford: Funeral Home?

Hall: Funeral Home.

Meford: What were your parents names?

Hall: My parents names were Alma and James P. Taylor.

Meford: What was your fathers occupation?

Hall: My father was a farmer. I grew up on the farm.

Meford: So your mother did the work that went along with the farm?

Hall: We were a large family and we lived on a farm and I learned to do farm work and I enjoyed the farm. I really think alot by not growing up on a farm. Of course today is quite different.....quite different, but we found amusement back on the farm. We had good apple trees and swinging grape vines and books. We had alot of enjoyment on the farm.

Meford: What kind of crops did you all grow?

Hall: Well the regular thing, tobacco, corn, grain, my father ran a dairy. We had stock like hogs, and chickens. I remember several years ago she raised turkeys but the last few years she did not. That was a good income.

Meford: Is that right?

Hall: Yes. But we had all the good things I guess in the way of food and though we were a little short changed sometimes we felt terribly cheated because we didn't have the money to buy bologna and store things and yet we were having ham, chicken, all kinds of fresh vegetables, fruit, milk, butter, and cream.

Meford: Yea.

Hall: But we felt so underprivileged, we didn't feel very privileged because we couldn't have that junk food all the time we wanted. That's growing up.

Meford: I guess so.

Hall: I think of that real often now. The things we were having then and we didn't really enjoy are the things we want now.

Meford: Yea, and they say you can't have now. That kind of stuff is bad for you anymore. I don't care, I like it anyway. Well, tell me, how many kids did you have?

Hall: How many what?

Meford: Children?

Hall: I just have one. Martha Layne.....she graduated here in Shelbyville High School and is a graduate of U of K.

Meford: What did she get her degree in?

Hall: Home Economics. That was about the time home economics first came in and really it's a good thing. Of course she was into everything. I know she was on the, I can't remember the name of the UK newspaper, but she wrote for that. What is that called?

Meford: The Kolonel. With a "K".

Hall: Yes, she used to write for that. Her first year of college was in Lyndonwood, St. Charles, MO. It was a girls school and she came home that summer planning to go back for her second year. When she got here, a friend of hers who had dropped out, who had one year of college, said "I'll go back to school if you'll go to college at UK". So I had to go up and get her enrolled the very last day you could possibly get in but she graduated from UK. She was KIA Omega and very active in things in school. Of course you probably know all this, that year was a busy year, she was a contestant in the Maid of Cotton Contest, she was also on the staff of The Kentuckian, the annual. She was one of the attendants to the queen and she was in the derby festival. She was married in July and graduated in May.

Meford: Close to your Birthday, I guess?

Hall: Pardon ?

Meford: Close to your Birthday?

Hall: Yes. The third of July she was married. Then she taught school while her husband attended dental school and she taught school in Jefferson County at Fairdale and then she went into teaching in Versailles and that's where she was when she got involved in politics.

Meford: Tell me about when you were growing up in Bagdad, how often as a farming family did you come to Shelbyville?

Hall: Very seldom. My mother and dad would come to Shelbyville more often than I did but to come to Shelbyville was quite a treat. I played basket ball, was on a basket ball team, I played basked ball and that took care of most of my travels and then visiting my friends there in Bagdad. We didn't come to town very often.

Meford: Unhuh. Did you or your parents come here shopping weekly or was there somewhere closer to Bagdad?

Hall: Well we had grocery stores in Bagdad but they would come to town twice or three time a month.

Meford: So you moved here in 1949.

Hall: My husband and I moved here in 1949. Shelbyville has changed alot since then.

Meford: What are some of the things you remember about when you first moved here in 1949? What were some of your initial impressions?

Hall: Well I don't know. My ties to Bagdad held for along time. Of course I was quite happy in church work and then Martha Layne was in high school and we were quite active in school. Participated in all school events. I know we followed the teams, we followed

everything that went on. There was a time when I know every child in high school and all the parents. But its not that way today.

Meford: Well how many children would you estimate graduated in your daughter's class?

Hall: You know, I can't remember. Of course I have the annuaI up there, but I'd say it was less than 100. Less than 100 in her class.

Meford: So, school played a big role in the community?

Hall: Yes, it did in our lives especially.

Meford: I have a child in school right now.

Hall: Because she was active in school and all, and all the events. It seemed like to me it was a meeting everyday. "Mother, we have such and such meeting this afternoon after school", and then of course during basketball season and football season we followed them when she was a cheerleader. The school played a big part, in fact, Shelbyville has changed alot during the last few years.

Meford: I'll bet it has.

Hall: It has really changed. When we first came to town, Main Street was two way, if you can imagine that today. Life has changed, as I say, there was a time when it seemed like you knew everyone, you knew every child in school. The county has grown so much, the town has grown. Go through the telephone directory and there is so many names in there and it's all changed. Really, I think my impressions of Shelbyville, I used to think was so pretty to drive down Main Street, pretty trees, and I know the trees have gotten older and I think they are so butchered by the utility trucks. I know that they have to protect the wires and things like that but there should be some way they could take care of that and not have the trees.....you don't notice it so much in summer time when they are leafed out but in the fall the trees, what used to be pretty trees are just horrible looking things. I would say that I would be willing if the utility companies would say "this tree needs to go out" we pay for half or even take it out rather than cut my trees. This is all up and down Main Street. Another thing about Shelbyville that I notice, there used to be signs hanging out over the sidewalks, like you see in these old towns, and I can't think of the.....I was on this committee. I remember Louie Martin was chairman of it and one of the things we did was have all the signs taken down and everybody was very cooperative. I don't think you'd see a sign hanging out over the street if you went down through town.

Meford: No

Hall: That was a big improvement. We got the signs all made and they could put it on the front of the stores or some place like that but not hanging out. They were very cooperative. I know that was one big improvement in downtown. Those buildings are really pretty when you can see them. That was one big improvement in Shelbyville.

Meford: When did that happen?

Hall: I don't know.....I really couldn't tell you, I'd have to look that up. I could get the time for you, I know the person who was chairman of that committee.

Meford: That's all right.

Hall: When we used to meet, that was one of our goals, to get those signs taken care of.

Meford: Good.

Hall: That's been a big improvement.

Meford: I'll bet.

Hall: The thing about downtown, I seldom go downtown now. Because downtown is lawyers and antique places. As far as to shop, you don't go downtown to shop.

Meford: Are there merchants left?

Hall: No. There was a time when you could go downtown for most anything you want. Now you have to go to the shopping center or St. Matthews. There's nothing to go downtown shopping for.

Meford: When there were merchants down there, was parking a problem?

Hall: Well, for a while we had parking meters, and I don't know what the parking problems are now. Usually when I go down there, I go to someplace like the gallery and go to their parking lot or there is one parking lot across from the gallery, if you can find a place in there. So it isn't easy to find parking downtown.

Meford: Was traffic a problem when Main Street was still two way?

Hall: I don't believe it was as big a problem then as it is now. Of course there is so much more traffic. We have a problem, this way. I sit out here sometimes, it seems like 5 minutes or more waiting for this traffic to get through town. That's one thing that I wonder if there's something they could do about it. These big trucks go through here. Now the other day, I started out and there were three big trucks, those huge big trucks, and I thought I'd see where they were going. Well one of them turned off, it went all the way through town and it turned off on that highway that goes toward Eminence.

Meford: 55?

Hall: That's 55? I get 55 and 53 confused.....but you know out at the other end of town. Well, why couldn't that truck have gone down 64 and crossed over.

Meford: Seems like that would have been faster.

Hall: To me, that is one thing our city needs to look into.

Meford: Maybe a bypass?

Hall: To get those huge trucks.....if they go north, towards Eminence, go up 64 and across there instead of going through town, the residential section. You'd be surprised, I was sitting in Bistros one day, lunch, and I just watched the big trucks go through and when they go through you can't see the top for the length of that huge truck. Everything is shut out except for the side of that huge truck. Because on the other side of the street are pretty buildings, if you can see them. But you don't see a thing for the side of that.....so that's one thing that I thin our city fathers need to look into. There is no occasion, that I can see, for a big truck going down Main Street, cause what's down here for that truck to go to? It could come across over there, if it's at this end of town they are taking something, they can go across there.....that exit to Shelbyville. That's one thing I'd like to see something done about--big trucks. Now the traffic, I know there's alot of factories out this way and I guess alot of people are going to go to Eminence or something to work there. After noon from about 3 o'clock to about 6, the traffic is really heavy on Main Street. Now if those people, the only place they could be going, they don't live downtown, all those people. They either have to go out 55 or on toward Frankfort. It seems to me that that would be, I don't like to take people's rights away from them, but it just seems to me like it would improve the city. Get those folks off Main Street.

Meford: When did these trucks start coming through?

Hall: Well they come all day.

Meford: Yeah, you mentioned when you moved here there wasn't as much traffic.

Hall: No you didn't have that.

Meford: When did.....

Hall: I'll tell you what we had when we moved here, there was a train. That's one of the reasons we have these trucks, er, trains. When we moved here over on 8th Street, have you seen Chatham Station here in town? That little station was over by the railroad. We had trains. I'm sure delivered alot of stuff. But I don't remember the big trucks on Main Street years ago, as many as there are now.

Meford: When did they make Main Street two way? Do you remember? I mean one way.

Hall: Main Street one way.

Meford: When did they make it one way.

Hall: I'm not very good at remembering dates.

Meford: Oh, I just wanted a rough date.

Hall: That would have been after 1960.

Meford: Is that right?

Hall: Around then we moved up the street to this place, I believe it was in 1960. I'm trying to think if we had the.....it would have been between 1959 and 1960.

Meford: What kind of places did you used to shop for what ever you needed when you moved here in the 50's? What kind of places are no longer here?

Hall: Lawsons. That's what I miss and I think everyone misses it. You talk with most of the people who have been here several years and they'll tell you that they miss Lawsons. At Lawsons you could get most anything you wanted. And like if I needed a mirror hung, or I needed a drapery rod, if you needed carpeting or anything you would go to Lawsons and get that done. He has excellent service. And in the clothing line, he carried good clothing, good brand clothing, household things, anything you wanted, Lawson's had it. That store is no longer there and I really miss it. There is nothing, with all the other stores we have, nothing has replaced them.

Meford: You can't get that kind of service anywhere?

Hall: Pardon?

Meford: You can't get that kind of service anywhere?

Hall: No

Meford: Wal-Mart sure doesn't have it.

Hall: No. There's lots of things at Wal-Mart I'm sure, but they don't come into your home when you want to things like that and then the quality of stuff. There is not the quality that Mr. Lawson had.

Meford: When you moved here, where did you do your grocery shopping?

Hall: At the supermarkets.

Meford: Were they in town or on the outskirts of town like they are now?

Hall: Well at one time, they were all in Shelbyville now there out in the subdivisions, not subdivisions but places like Middleton.

Meford: How have the stores that have opened up on the ends of town affected the economy of the downtown area? Like Wal-Mart and the big groceries on that side of town?

Hall: Well so far as I know, I can't think of any store that, well, yes, over at the gallery we have a two shops, a mens shop and a ladies shop but they don't carry everything you see. As far as I know those are the only two clothing places. As so far as household things, now we have a place like Making Ends Meet that has drapery materials and upholstery material and things like that. That is down on 7th Street but when it comes to really shopping downtown, I think the antique shops are mostly it.

Meford: How long have they been there.....the antique shops? Have they always been in the downtown area?

Hall: Oh no, alot more have come in. See on Main Street there are several and over on Washington. We have alot more antique shops now than we used to have. Someone said something about going downtown and I said I'm going to take a walking tour of Shelbyville one of these days. They laughed at me and I said to this person "well do you know where" (I named a shop, there have been a couple of ladies shops to come in but they didn't stay long because the business just wasn't there. People had already started going out of town, you see.) I ask if she knew where this one particular.....she said no.....I said I think you need to taking a walking tour with me. But, I just, about all we have downtown now, I say, are antique places. Antiques and lawyers offices and I said so far I haven't needed either. I don't have to have them very often. Of course there is a restaurant, Bistros, excuse me, I'm horse of a morning. Bistros is a good restaurant. Science Hill has a restaurant.

Meford: Do both of those serve dinner or just lunch?

Hall: They both serve dinner and lunch. We probably had more little restaurants earlier before that but these are really better than the ones we used to have in town.

Meford: Well earlier, you mentioned some city officials, what are some other people in local government that had a big impact on the downtown area.

Hall: Well the last few years, I haven't been keeping up with it. I suppose those with the Chamber of Commerce, have had alot to do with what goes on downtown.

Meford: Yea. You mentioned church earlier, do you go to church around here?

Hall: Yes, I belong to The First Baptist. That's out across from the fairgrounds.

Meford: Have you always gone to that church?

Hall: Yes. The First Baptist Church was downtown on the corner where the park is and it, the roof collapsed so we had to build out here. So that was one thing that has changed. All the churches were downtown. When you stop to think about it, Shelbyville has changed alot in the last few years. There has been big change.

Meford: When you were growing up did the church serve as a social center? Not growing up but when you moved to Shelbyville in the 50's did the church serve as a social center ? Did activity center around the Church?

Hall: Well, I thought so, but of course the people that were not associated with the church probably didn't realize it and didn't know it but I felt like that it offered quite a bit of recreation and interest. Of course now the Christian Church is still down there and it has the Childtown connected with it. The First Christian. And then there are somethe Methodist Church is still down there. Those things haven't changed to much. I do think though, that the First Baptist Church being out here, that has changed.

Meford: Is there a Catholic Church in town?

Hall: There is a Catholic Church, that is down by the east end of town. Across from the shopping center. Well I don't know what's down there now, it changes alot. Different places have gone in there. One of them is a car part place. There was a Dollar Store and they moved out. I think there is still a laundromat there. But it has changed.

Meford: What kind of changes have gone on in the business here in 30-40 years?

Hall: What do you mean? All business or just our business.

Meford: The funeral home business.

Hall: Well my husband and I came here in 1949 and we have, the other business had been here, he had worked for the other business before he started his own. We have had a very satisfying, in other words, it was not to large and it was just what we wanted. In fact, this was more of a calling to him than a job. I tried to get him to stay with education. He came to Shelby County from Georgetown College. He graduated in June and came to Shelby County that fall. He was only 21.....to teach and coach basketball at Bagdad. So then after he started a young man from Bagdad who dropped out of school as a junior, he got him to come back and finish his high school. Well that young man gets connected with the firm that is here now and became associated with the business. They were real close friends so Evert got interested in the funeral business. He wanted to quit has school teaching and go to embalming school. I said, oh lets stay with education, please stay with education. No, he wanted that badly. So he got has license and worked with the other firm for several years. It was more or less a calling with him. I still wanted him to stay with education.....go back to school and become a college professor or something. That was my goal for him. No.....he wanted this. He liked to help people. It was more or less a calling with him. When we lived at Bagdad, he took care of everything and everybody and also worked here. So when we came here we still had a great business from that area. That was his life. The two of us, we hired a man that helped us, but our business was just about the size we could handle. Then he had his stroke and I've sorta had a battle since then. For a long time he didn't want to give up, he couldn't carry on the work like he did but he had someone else here with me and I thought it was an interest for him. So I held on as long as I could and I've kept it together for over 7 years because it give him an interest, it was something he started, something that was growing when he had his stroke. So it has been a little bit hard for me and with the, you know how things are in a small community, it was always being talked that we were selling, that we were going out of business. For a long time, he said, Mary why do you want to sell it? I don't know if you know anything about a person with a stroke but they feel like they have lost lots of self esteem. Why do you want to sell.....I could see that it was therapy for him.....just to know he had the place and could come down and sit in the office. We went on with it until he got to where he just really couldn't do that. The business has just gradually deteriorated. Then when he died, my grandson, Steve, do you know him? Have you met him?

Meford: No, I just met him.

Hall: Well, he is a Georgetown graduate and then he got a law degree from UK and he was working with a law firm in Lexington. He decided he wanted to move here and run the business. Big Daddy wouldn't want you to come here and do that. Evert didn't want anything to be a hardship on anybody else and he would just take it. Ambulance calls for 24 hours. We didn't get paid for ambulance calls, we just did it. But he didn't want to see

anyone else go through that and I said Big Daddy wouldn't want you to. But he said this is what I want and he gave up (well he does probate now and different things like that) but he loves, he is a whole lot like his Big Daddy, he loves people. And if he could go do something for somebody that's what he likes. So here we are. I'm hoping now that the business will grow some and as I said, he was always worried that I was selling, was selling. People see me and say "Oh Mary, I'm so sorry your selling, what will we do". I say I don't know anything about selling. It's been a little bit of a battle. I don't know what he'll do with it but he's got it and seems happy with it. He's very active in community things.

Meford: Does he live here in town?

Hall: He lives next door. I helped him buy the house. I just have two grandchildren. Marla and Steve. She's with the Wildcats now, I hope she gets back OK.