

Shelbyville Main Street Project

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

Interviewer: Mark Mefford

Date: 8-2-95

Interviewee: George Harris

Running Time: 40 minutes

Side One

COUNTER

- 000 INTRODUCTION
- 010 BACKGROUND: BORN MARCH 5, 1910. PARENTS: HENRY & BERDIE HARRIS.
- 036 EARLY COUNTY FAIR AT THE HEMPBRIDGE RAILROAD STATION.
- 058 ACTIVITIES AT THE FAIR: HORSE SHOWS, CARNIVAL.
- 072 OCCUPATION: RESTAURANTEUR, PAWN SHOP OWNER, CAR LOT OWNER, SEPTIC TANK TRUCK OWNER.
- 076 FARM'S RESTAURANT
- 110 1956: BUILT A FILLING STATION.
- 140 EDUCATION: ON COLLEGE STREET.
- 145 SNEAKING THREE COWS INTO THE SCHOOL OVERNIGHT.
- 161 INDIAN BURIAL GROUNDS. (UNMARKED)
- 175 EARLY MEMORIES OF THE DOWNTOWN AREA.
- 183 EARLY TRANSPORTATION: HORSE AND BUGGY.
- 185 APPLEJACK: SOLD APPLES ON MAIN STREET.
- 203 UBERG'S SALON & PROHIBITION.

- 215 FATHER ON THE POLICE FORCE.
- 243 INTER URBAN.
- 260 THE GREAT DEPRESSION IN SHELBYVILLE.
- 303 RETURNING FROM WWII IN 1945.
- 331 END OF SIDE ONE

Side Two

DRIVING TOUR OF DOWNTOWN SHELBYVILLE.

George Harris
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Oral History Project
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Meford: What's your name?

Harris: George Harris

Meford: What year were you born?

Harris: March 25, 1910 on the corner of 4th and Main.

Meford: What were your parents names?

Harris: Henry and Birdie Harris.

Meford: What did your father do for a living.

Harris: He was a policeman, bartender and the chief of the fire department.

Meford: All at the same time?

Harris: No, during different times.

Meford: Did you live at that same place on 4th and Main?

Harris: We lived there until I was about 10 or 12 years old. We moved down the street to 3rd and Main.

Meford: Did you live in that building or on top of a business?

Harris: No this was just a brick house on the corner, where I was born, just across from the Christian Church on 4th and Main. And then we moved down to a great big brick house on 3rd and Main, just a block down.

Meford: Do you have any other family living in the Shelbyville area?

Harris: Do I have any?

Meford: Did you at that time?

Harris: Yes, I lived with my mother, brother and sisters. We all lived there at 3rd Street and then I had uncles living in town here. Uncle Jack Mann and his family and then I had my grandmother. She lived right down the street when I was a kid. Right below the new post office.

Meford: How did the fair get started.

Harris: The old fair got started, the first one was held at the Hemp Ridge Rail Road Station.

Meford: Where is that now?

Harris: It's about 4 or 5 miles up the highway and up to the railroad station. You turn at 4 miles. Saturday night after the fair my granddaddy and his brother, my granddaddy's name was Sanford Glen and his brother John Glen and some Middleton fellows and Guthrie fellows got up and went to the Armstrong Hotel on 6th and Main and they all got drunk and they decided to open a fair. So Monday morning they went out to the edge of town, the town didn't come any further than Brown Avenue then. They went out to the edge of town and they bought 21 acres of ground out where the fairground is now for \$6.00 per acre. They went to LaGrange and bought lumber and come over here and build the first fair. I've got stock in it right now. I have a share of stock. My Aunt Sue gave it to me when she died.

Meford: What did they build there when they first started?

Harris: A big amphitheater and Clover Hall and all that stuff. It burned. A kid burnt it down one time. They build another one there since then.

Meford: About what year was it that they did all this?

Harris: I don't know, I couldn't tell you the year. How old is the fair? 125 this year, so it was a year before then. A year before the first fair here.

Meford: Did you go to the fair much when you were growing up?

Harris: Yeah, I went all time.

Meford: What all did you do there?

Harris: Nothing. Just go out and fool around. We was kids. We used to get tickets to go. They gave the stockholders tickets and we used to go when we was kids.

Meford: Did they have shows at the amphitheater?

Harris: They had horse shows and cattle shows and different things. They had a carnival there all the time.

Meford: Do they still have the carnival and horse shows out there?

Harris: Oh yeah!

Meford: There's a horse show there this week isn't there?

Harris: That's not the fair but they got one there. They had the fair a couple of weeks ago.

Meford: So this has been going on ever since those fellows...

Harris: Yeah, ever since.

Meford: Has the fair always been a center of activity for like the downtown area? Did the downtown people go to the fair.

Harris: Oh yeah! They come from everywhere and bring horses.

Meford: Your retired now, but was your occupation or occupations?

Harris: Well I come out of the army and opened up 8 places of business. I opened up a restaurant, a pawn shop, car lot, septic tank truck, a colored restaurant, the Hornets Club (I built it), two beauty parlors, and used car parts all at one time.

Meford: Well, lets start with the first one. You said you had a restaurant?

Harris: Yes, Farmers Restaurant over on Equite Street in Shelbyville. It's still there. They have turned it into an old folks home now.

Meford: What kind of food did you serve?

Harris: WE served chili and all kinds of food like that. WE had beer there too.

Meford: Did you ever have to throw anybody out?

Harris: Ever now and then you'd get one.

Meford: Did you all get a lot of business at lunch or dinner time?

Harris: Well around 12 o'clock when they'd get out of the warehouses and come over there and eat. Then after 6 o'clock to about 11 o'clock is when they'd drink the beer.

Meford: Would they come over to get supper and some beer?

Harris: Yeah.

Meford: How much did a beer cost back then?

Harris: We got 15 cents a bottle for it.

Meford: Is that right? What kind did you serve?

Harris: Oechsels 92 and Sterling.....I believe.

Meford: What would it cost for you to eat a meal over there?

Harris: Oh, about 50 or 60 cents.

Meford: Not to bad!

Helen: The stock he was talking about, he inherited it from her, she lived with us for about 12 years before she passed away. She was Ms. Sue Glen and at this time they came and took her picture, it was during fair time, and she was the oldest living fair attendee and she had been to the fair so many time. I thought maybe I could see on there what year that was. I can't tell.....I've got the write-up on it someplace but I don't know where it is.

Meford: It looks like 34? 54 maybe? Yeah, 54 is what it is.

Helen: Okay, that was in 1954, so that would be.....40 some odd years ago. She was like '89 then and they came and took her picture because she was the oldest living.....

Meford: Now what was her name?

Harris: Miss Sue Glen.

Helen person: Miss Suzzie Glen.....Miss Suzzie Catherine.

Meford: After the restaurant, what was your next place of business?

Harris: Well I moved from there and build a service station.

Meford: What year was that? Just about?

Harris: 1950. I don't know. Do you know, Helen? About 56? I run the restaurant and I got out of there and I went down there and run that fillin station. I run it one year and then I built that big pawn shop next to it . I run it and then I had a boy run the septic tank truck for me. I had the restaurant down town----the colored restaurant-----down on Bradshaw. The city board had it tore down now. A beauty parlor behind it and then I had the Hornet's Club in Martinsville. It's still up there. I built it and there was an apartment behind it and they turned it into a beauty parlor.

Helen: The building on the corner of 6th and Washington, across from Mark Scearce's Gallery, where Carpet Colors is. That used to be the old post office.

Harris: Not that, the next to it. The two next to it, we've got those buildings now. The one where the printing shop is and the one next to it was the old post office.

Helen: What was on that corner?

Harris: Biagi had place there most of the time.....tires. Science Hill School was there. When I was about 15 or 16 they caught 5 of us around that Science Hill and we ran into the post office and that Ms. Poynter come in on us and made us come around to her house and she called the police and they made us work around the court house after school. We were about 16 and they made us work around there for 6 weeks....after school. We were going around there after night to see them girls at the girls school. Yeah....I was 16 years old. That was a long time ago.

Meford: Did a lot of girls from out of town come and go to school there?

Harris: Yes, a lot were from out of town and some of them was from town.

Meford: Where did you go to school?

Harris: I went over here to grade school over here on College Street. If you've got time, we'll go and I'll show you all around this town.

Meford: Okay.

Harris: Well, that was where I went to school and after I got out of 6th grade I went up here to the High School, the one across the street. I went over there to it. I didn't

graduate. I got kicked out in the third year of high school. Five of us put cows inside the school one night and they messed the school up.

Meford: You took some cows and put them in the school?

Harris: Yeah, we took three cows up and put them in the High School. One of them got away from us and we got the other two. There was Apple Anderson, Curry, Bob Guard and lets see.....myself, five of us and we caught them that night and took'em up there and put'em in school.

Meford: How did you get caught?

Harris: They caught us, hell, they knew who was doing all that stuff.

Meford: You got kicked out of school for that?

Harris: Yeah, I got kicked out. I went to Simpsonville School for one semester.

Meford: Well, lets see, you said that you owned the Colored Restaurant down there. Did you run the Colored Restaurant or did you just own it? I owned it and rented it out.

Helen: Did you tell him about those Indians being buried out there?

Harris: That was out here on Eastview, I can show you where it is. There are 4 graves there, two of my grandfathers and grandmothers or uncles was buried t here and two Indian boys. Two come up the holler, there wasn't no railroad then, and they come up that holler there, that branch and they shot and killed them and brought them up there and their daddy made'em come up there and bury them. They are buried right in the yard out there, I can see where it is, just at the edge of town.

Meford: Is it marked?

Harris: It was marked but it ain't now. They've done put a driveway over it.

Meford: What do you remember about the Main Street area when you were growing up?

Harris: As a kid ? I can tell you more about it if we can go where I can show it to you.

We just played around up in through there. I can tell you a whole lot if we ride by it.

Meford: Okay. How did people used to get around town when you were growing up?

Harris: Buggy.

Helen: Tell him about that old guy named Apple Jack that used to come up in his cart.

Harris: Yeah, he used to have a cart and pushed it around town selling apples. He lived out at the edge of town. Apple Jack.

Meford: He pushed a cart around selling apples?

Harris: Yes.

Helen: Across the street, over here, Mr. Long.....those big brick pillars across the street, in his back yard that is a shed and that old cart is back there in shed. It was an old wooden thing that you pushed.

Meford: Is that where Charles B. Long 's house is?

Harris: Yes.

Meford: What exactly was Apple Jack's name?

Harris: It was just Apple Jack, that's all we ever heard.

Meford: What did he sell apples for? How much did he get?

Harris: I don't know.

Meford: Did he sell many apples or

Harris: Yeah, he had a place right at the end of town where he sold them and then he pushed them around town. I had a picture here of the house where my mother was born and it showed them making the brick for the house down in the yard. They were making

the brick. I don't know where the picture is, I asked her a while ago. I guess it's here somewhere. My dad worked in the saloon, and I can show you where that was downtown. He worked in the saloon and the town went dry. That was a long time ago....I was about 6 or 67 years old. The town went dry and Mr. Newburg went on as Chief of Police. The town went dry on Saturday night, Mr. Newburg went on Monday as Chief and my father went with him. My dad worked in the saloon and he took him with him, my dad was a great big fellow 6'2" and heavy.

Meford: How did your dad patrol when he was a policeman?

Harris: He walked.

Meford: How many people were on the police force at that time?

Harris: I think three.

Meford: Did they each take an 8 hour shift?

Harris: I reckon.

Meford: Was there much crime?

Harris: There was a little, I don't know. I remember one thing, this was later on in the years when my dad was on at the fire department. He was chief of the fire department. I saw a commotion up here, I can show you where that was too, I run up there and this fellow had shot Snooks Mitchell in the pool room there. He shot Snooks and they took him over to the fire department. My dad worked at the fire department and I can show you where that was too, and he took him over there and he kept saying, "Take my shoes off, take my shoes off." They took his shoes off and he died three minutes later. This man that shot him, I forgot his name now. Right next to home, there on the corner, Ms. Jessie had a livery stable. It ran beside the house and around back of it. Next to it, Albert Catlett had a blacksmith shop and next to the blacksmith shop was a little building there where they made hats and all, it was a Millinery Shop. I believe Ms. Zilard owned it and then next to that, I can show you.

Helen: Right next door is where the old, it wasn't a trolley station but what was it?

Meford: The interurban.

Helen: Yes. Right here when this house was built the interurban station was on the corner. This was vacant and this house, well it used to be like a farm, this great big brick house next door and this was part of it. When we bought this, over there in the back yard there was this great big, it was like an ice cellar. Way down deep in the ground. It was all lined with rock, great big rock. At one time it had a roof over it and really was the ice cellar for this farm house. All this was farm land. We filled it in because we didn't want the children falling over in it. This house is close to 100 years old and I'm sure the ice cellar, next door is well over 100 years.

Meford: Do you remember anything about the great depression? How did the town change during the depression, the 1930's?

Harris: In the 30's, I was 20 years old and I don't remember.

Meford: Were you working when you were in your 20's?

Harris: No. I worked a little in that grocery store over on the corner, Headdens Grocery. I worked over there a little bit, but not much. I took a trip to Ohio and stayed a month. I went hitch-hiking. A painter came by we knew up here at the pool room, we used to hang out at the pool room, Roger Grimes and he said, "let's take a trip." I went on home, I lived across from that store and I met him on the corner. I got a clean shirt, didn't tell my

mother nothin. I just told her I'd be back later. I put my clean shirt in my pocket, this was after the Derby when I was 20 years old because it was the year that the prison burnt in Columbus, Ohio. We was in town and went by there when it burnt. I put a clean shirt in my pocket and clean underwear and we hitch-hiked and caught the trains and went to Canton, Ohio. He had a sister that lived there and she's married a fellow named H. A. Trel. He worked for the Canton Hardware Company and he was a revenue man. You know, catch bootleggers and all. He was a revenue man. We stayed there for a month and he lived at 1126 Bellflower Avenue, Canton, Ohio. I remember those numbers...1126 Bellflower Avenue.....I never did forget'em. I got a job helping a feller down the street paint a house and got \$35 and I come back home.

Meford: When did you go in the service?

Harris: 1942.

Meford: Did you come back to Shelbyville when you got back?

Harris: Yeah, I come right back home.

Meford: Is that when you started the restaurant?

Harris: Yeah. I won money in the army shooting dice. I never drank any or smoked cigarettes, never had one in my mouth in my life. But I shot craps.

Meford: Did you make a lot of money that way?

Harris: I started shooting dice. I started with Harry Flood on the corner of 6th and Main at the Armstrong Hotel. I started in there and learned how to do it. My dad at that time, I believe he was chief of the fire department. He might have been on the police force, might have been. My mother's cousin was the police judge and he married my mothers niece and was the police judge and Flood had me helping him keep the police off him. Oh lord, that was a long time ago.

Meford: Well, we've got a few minutes, why don't we take a drive around town and take a look.

SIDE II

Meford: Well we'll just drive.....

Harris: Right down Main Street and we'll come back up Washington Street.

Meford: Now, we're starting from 1210 Main Street at your house.

Harris: Yeah, 1210. Well that's were I went to school. Right down here and Igleheart built that. That's the funeral home now.

Meford: Hall Taylor Funeral Home?

Harris: Yes. Mr. Igleheart, he was a tobacco auctioneer, he built that. That's where I went to school.

Meford: We're going east, right?

Harris: Yes, east on Main.

Meford: That's the only way you can go, right?

Harris: That's right. There's the school. I went to school there.

Meford: It's Shelby County West Middle School now.

Harris: There's the telephone pole right there that I climbed one time. The professor was coming up the street and another boy and I saw him when we was way down the street. We climbed that pole and he went on by. Old man Muntz.....he never did see us.

Meford: Are you cool enough?

Harris: Oh yes it's getting cooler. I had about 50 houses here in town and have sold them all and I've just got these on 6th Street now. There's were we got the cows, right around the corner here.

Meford: Right on 10th and Main?

Harris: Yeah, right on 10th and Main. There is a garage, right around the corner there. We got 'em. Bob Guard had an old dodge turn car, we rode in it and we drove them up there and one got away. This used to be a pool room on the corner and there was a car dealer there at one time.

Meford: On 8th and Main ?

Harris: Yes, 8th and Main.

Meford: We'll pull over here.

Harris: I was standing right in front of that pool room.

Meford: Where Pickles Great Subs and Burgers is now?

Harris: Yes, that was a pool room there and I was standing in front of it one morning, about dinner time, and a big feller was standing there clicking that thing. He said he was looking for a hamburger shop a "White Castle". I stood there and talked to him for a while and he said "This is a good place, a lot of people come by here, I believe I'll open me of my own. So it was the guy that opened Jerry's Drive In Restaurant and the first one he ever had was I the hole there. Right the other side of that Pickles place there was part of a garage there. It was a livery stable, where that window is and there was a little building settin there and he rented that. I helped him build the sign and helped him to work, put the sign up and helped him build the counters and all and fix it all up and worked the first week for him with the hamburgers. 6 o'clock in the morning till 12 o'clock at night.....12 hours....7 days. I think that was in 29', I believe it was when he opened up. He opened that one up and he went to Frankfort and opened one just as you cross the bridge in Frankfort on the left across that bridge. He opened a place there and then he went up east somewhere, met this girl and got married and opened up Jerry's Drive Inn's.

Meford: What streets are we between here? We're on Main?

Harris: We're between 6th and 7th on Main. These were all houses and business in here. The Kentucky Utilities used to be here.

Meford: Here in the furniture shop?

Harris: Yes, right in there. Those two buildings, I used to own them and I sold them.

Meford: What did you have in there?

Harris: I had a music store in here, I didn't have it myself, I rented it out and rented the other one out up there for a restaurant.

Meford: Did people live up on top like they do now?

Harris: Yeah. I owned that for a couple or three years and I sold it to a Ritter down at Simpsonville. I believe he still owns it. I'll go on up the street a little piece and I'll show you. The livery stable was right here, right where this building is now, that was the livery stable. It had horses and all in there and this was, an old man had a shop there and the Armstrong Hotel was on the corner here. The Armstrong Hotel, it burned down.

Meford: Oh yeah. When did it burn down?

Harris: I don't know, I was in the army I think. The pool room was here, the bank over here. Let me show you up here at the corner.

Meford: Okay. Pull in here?

Harris: Yeah, pull right in here and I'll show you. This was Haragson-Smith Store. Haragson-Smith run this and sold cloths. There's the Court House and that next to it was the drug store and where them post are, that was the drug store. Next to it was Polsey, she had a confectionery shop there. Next to it was Essie Sander's pool room, where those big post are.

Meford: Where the Hayes Law Offices are?

Harris: Yeah and next to it, down the street from it, Hollowback run a place for years and years and years. Not this was Smith McKinney's Drug Store. Old man Grant Smith run this.

Meford: Where Hickman Law Offices are now?

Harris: Well, that's about all on here.

Meford: It's about 513 West Main going west.

Harris: The fire department is right where the bank is now.

Meford: What bank is that?

Harris: Shelby County Trust. The fire department is right there. Look.....slow down just a little and I'll show you. And down in this basement there's a hole to go down in that basement, Pop Marsh had a fruit market down in under there and Newburg Saloon was right here and there was a grocery store here.

Meford: 418 Main?

Harris: Yeah, and a grocery store there and across the street over here was John M. Casey Store and next to it on the corner was Ruben's, Old Man Ruben had a store. Next to it, right here on this one was a dry goods store. Next is the pool room where the man got shot, I was tellin you about, in that pool room there.

Meford: What streets are we between now?

Harris: We're between 4th and 5th. Right down the street, there used to be a barber shop down here. And right over in here there was a house that set back in the yard. Pull over here just a minute. Right in here, right back in through there was an old house there, an old place back I there, my Daddy was born in there. Several years back. This was a old house, old red brick sitting here that was a rooming house there. Right in there where that is and I was born right on the corner, right down there where that white car is setting.

Meford: Close to the new Post Office?

Harris: Yeah, across from that, I was born right there about, I don't know, about 30-40 feet back from there and right next door to it, at that time, Jesse had a livery stable and it run back and turned there and went back Washington Street. There was a big livery stable there and the blacksmith shop was here and there was a store there that sold, you know, hats and dresses and stuff. Made hats. It was right in here. Sam Ports Pool Room was right there. Right here where the windows are was a grocery.

Meford: Right where this church is?

Harris: Yes, right where the church is now.

Meford: The First Christian Church?

Harris: Yeah. The Christian Church sat way back then. It had a big yard in front of it. They build on to it and fixed it all up.

Meford: Well the road probably got a little wider.

Harris: Yeah. All right, we can go on down. They had an open air picture show, where there was no top on it, right in there too. That sat back, all that has been built on to here. Old Man Nift run a chicken house right here.

Meford: In the 300 block?

Harris: Yeah. All this in here, my grandmother lived here, Procter lived here and here's where I moved from up there. I moved right here, right in there where that is right there. Wainscott had a grocery store there and later Bill Headen. I worked there for Bill Headen. There is an alley running right down through here and had a blacksmith shop right on the alley that run right through there.

Meford: By Ray's Furniture?

Harris: Bond lived here and there was a filling station right there.