

Shelbyville Main Street Project

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

Interviewer: Mark Mefford

Interviewee: Bill Hundley, Sr.

Date:

Running Time: 28 minutes

Side One

COUNTER

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An interview with
BILL HUNDLEY, SR.

Interviewed by Mark Mefford

Transcribed by Susan McMullan Groves on September 25, 1997

What is your name? Hang on, I want to be sure and get it right now. Do you want me to go by J. B. Hundley? That'll be fine... J.B. Hundley. I, J.B., of my own free will and accord do hereby and continue in the interview with this young man in regards to the history of the past. How's that? That's fine.

When were you born? I was born November 7, 1894. I lived my life in Shelby County and marched over four or five counties.

What were your parents names? Joseph Sydney Hundley was my father and ----- Rankin Hundley was my mother.

What kind of work did your father do? He was various jobs at different times. He was a farmer at first and then he moved to town and drove a tank wagon for the Standard Oil Company. It had four horses. He'd have to go to Lexington and come back from up there and they only paid \$40 a month.

What kind of work were you involved in? I worked on jobs just as quick as I picked them up and I, uh, went to work for a fellow named John M. Casey, who had a store there... a tin shop. I done tin work for five or six years. After that time, why... in the meantime, I got married and after I got married, why, I worked for Kentucky Utility company as a power plant engineer. I left the power plant engineer and I went to Jeffersonville, Indiana and I worked for the governor as a guard. They had a depot there... what they called a depot. It had clothes for the soldiers. Then I got married in November the 29th, 1917. I got married to a girl by the name of Stella Lynch and we lived together for seventy-two years... married life. She passed away here awhile back. She was a wonderful woman... made a good wife and took care of me all the times I was out working... took care of things. So, that's about all there is to that.

You say you lived in Shelby County your whole life, did you ever live in Shelbyville itself? That's where I lived. In town.

When you were growing up, what do you remember about the town? Was there the horse and carriage and things like that? What did the town look like? It was just a country town then.

Just a town where farmers would come and get their trade and things like that? That's pretty much why it's here.

Did they ride horses? They came on horses and some in buggies.

Did they come in town Saturdays to do most of their trading? Saturday was the big day. Stores stayed open till about ten or eleven o'clock at night.

Did they come up during the week very much? Oh, at times. If they needed something they'd come in.

When did cars start coming into town? Well, the first car I remember coming in town was in 1909. It was an automobile over here owned by a fellow. It was 2 cylinder. Transit on the side. I don't remember what kind of automobile it was.

Where did you go to school? Shelbyville. My old school they tore down. It was over on College Street. They've got a school there but my building is gone.

You told me you went to Texas and Mexico to chase Poncho Villa. What year did you all leave? 1917.

Who organized the expedition? Well, we were in the National Guard and got called in to federal service. I was already in the outfit and they called us in to federal service and swore us in and we went to Fort West, Texas.

How did you get there? Train. They got him out of the way and we didn't really have nothing to do with it.

So you didn't catch Poncho Villa then? No. He got killed later though.

So you all came back after he was killed? Yes he was killed. I had a problem with the heart and not fit for military duty so they discharged me and I came back.

What do you remember about Shelbyville during WWI? Did anything change around here? Well, it was awful tore up with all the boys going to the Army, you know. But the business was just about the same, you know, with grocery stores, hardware stores.

Did you still see a lot of horses around at that time? All horses.

What were the twenties like in Shelbyville? Well, they were similar.

What changes came with the Great Depression and the 1930's? Well, I really don't recall any of the Depression cause I was busy all the time and never had any opportunity to get out of anything I wanted so it wasn't too bad.

Was there a lot of people out of work in Shelbyville? Well, as far as I know they weren't. If you had a job you kept it.

Well, say, during the 20's and 30's, what kind of businesses were there downtown? What were some of the names of the grocery stores you went to and things like that?

Well, I used J.J. Ramsey and Sons...it was an old store. R.A. Camel was an old store...a nice, big store. Rothschilds was a clothing store and, uh, let's see what else. I don't recall anything special about it. There were several blacksmith shops and, uh, livery stables...there were a whole lot of livery stables here. In 1911, I believe it was, nightriders came in here and were scraping peoples plant beds. Ever heard of that?

I know who they are but I didn't know they came to Shelbyville. Then they had the soldiers in there...the company soldiers out of Frankfort. They kind of broke it up.

Did you ever see any nightriders? Yes.

Did you know any of them? No. Well, not now I don't. One of them got killed, they said, over there around Jacksonville. A fellow named of Duncan killed him—shot him off his horse. But they never did prove that he was a nightrider but he thought he was anyhow. His name was Haysdeth and the man that killed him was Duncan.

Did they ^{have} influence on the local tobacco market? Did the nightriders break up the monopoly? They broke it up.

What was the general feeling in town about the nightriders? Did people support them? Oh, as far as I know they were on their own. They come in and boarded and I don't know where they stayed.

What were the roads like in town? Were they paved like they are now? No. They were...the roads were owned by the county and they had toll gates and it would cost you a dime to go through those toll gates with a horse and wagon. You paid the dime and you could go through and that would go toward the fund to keep the road up.

Were the roads out in the county gravel? Gravel. Not blacktop like it is.

Were they in very good condition? Well, for the time being they took a lot of abuse by the people, you know, with horse and buggy, wagons and freight wagons.

What do you remember about World War II here in Shelbyville? Well, it just took all our boys, that's all I can tell you about that.

Were there any parades or memorial services or anything for the boys? Well, my son was in WWII. He was in the Battle of the Bulge. He got out of that and went across to Germany, got tore up in Germany and then come home.

Did you ^{know} anything about the German POW's here in Shelbyville? Prisoners of War? Yeh. I remember they had a camp out here and a bunch of them were in it but they lent them out to farmers to harvest tobacco because the young people was all gone. So they went out and helped the farmers with what they needed to do and I think it worked out

pretty well. They had something to do besides sitting and crying all the time. Those prisoners had tents.

When the boys came back did they have a parade for them or anything? They had a parade here a time or two.

How did Shelbyville change in the 50's and 60's? Well, it just began to change from the horse and buggy to the automobile.

Did they pave the roads? Well, they patched them up a little better than they were but they wasn't no high speed roads.

How did the downtown area change or was it the same from when you were growing up? What was different about the downtown area? They had groceries, you know, and all kinds of groceries and, uh, can goods and stuff like that. We had one confectionery in town—fountain, you know, which was pretty nice. We had, oh about that time we had a picture show...one of those picture machines, we called it. They charged you a nickel to get in. Show it on a reel a film, you know. Of course the county fair was every year. About the same, you know. Products that the country was brought in, horse shows...that sort. Fairgrounds are still in operation. They had...one thing they had here and I don't remember all that well, but, they hung some niggers here.

About when did they do that? Well, one of them was about nineteen five or six.

What did they hang them for? Well, I think, it wasn't...they weren't guilty. They tried them in court and that didn't do it then a mob when up there one night and got them out of jail and took and hung them.

Where'd they hang them at? On the railroad bridge over there across ^{clear} creek. Like you go down Jail Hill and cross the railroad over there and that's the bridge that they hung them on. There was a whole bunch...that was the earliest. There was another bunch they took out of the jail and hung some of them. Both of them...one of them got away and the other one they killed him...well, they just killed him. So, the other one, they...I remember hearing they hit him in the head with a hane(?). A hane(?) was part of the horses gear with a hook on the hane(?) and it went right through his skull. It was bad deal. So, uh, one of them...when that rope broke, he got away. He turned up in the Army in World War I. He got killed in the Army and his mother got seventy-five thousand dollars from the Army. Made her comfortable the rest of her life. That's a true story.

What was his name? Do you remember? Marshall, I believe.

Are there any other incidents like that one? Well, there might be some but I don't remember. What I remember is what I told you.

How did Shelbyville change in the fifties and sixties? I said there were hardware stores that were all different than what they are today because of the fact is, they had everything. Implements for the farmers... things like that. They carried parts for some of the old machinery they had. Thrashing machines are big separators. Have you ever seen them? No. They'd take those machines and thrash that wheat, sack it and take it to the ----.

These hardware stores aren't here anymore are they? There are hardware stores here.

When did they leave? Newberry's was one. This fellow right down here, I don't know his name, Mr. Hardware.

When did the ones you're talking about close? Oh, they burned out all that block up in there in nineteen nine. It burnt out from the corner where Smith-McKenney used to be down to what used to be Wadlington's down there. Pool room or something, I don't know. It burnt up two or three good stores. Well, it burnt up three or four.

Did most people around here make their living from agriculture at that time? Yeh. I tell you something that might be interesting to people. They raised hemp here in Shelby County. Did you know about that?

Well, I figured they had. I knew they outlawed it in the '30's and I figured they raised it before then. Well, they raised hemp and they had to break that to get the hulls.

Did they use that to make rope? Rope and opum (ropum? I couldn't tell what he said). Do you know what opum is? It's a mixture between rope and it's plaited... plumbers used it to cork pipes underground... sewer pipes.

Was there much money in hemp? Oh, I really don't know. They shipped another opum in and this market here couldn't compete with that Spanish rope.

What other kinds of crops did they grow besides the hemp and tobacco? Well, that was grown commercially and anything they grow now is mostly local markets take care of that.

Well, when did downtown merchants start to close in the downtown area? Well, that hadn't been too long. I don't know exactly when. It came gradually, you know.

What were some of the businesses that were down there? Well, Hall, Poe & Ruff.

What did they sell? They sold groceries and hardware. J.J. Ramsey's & Son burnt out in 1909. And R.A. Brown sold buggies and groceries and he had a big store there were Biagi is. He owned that but he handled buggies and things like that and then they began to put rubber tires on the buggies along about that time.

What did they use before that? Iron. It had a steel tire on them. They left that and went to the rubber tire for the buggy and it made the biggest difference in the world.

What other kinds of stores were in the downtown area? Ruben's Store...hats. The men always shopped there. They'd make you hats for running, you know. Get a hat and put it on. There was two or three around here...commercially made hats, you know.

What were some of the names of the stores, you know? Zilagr's. Z-I-L-A-G-R-T. Mr. Camel...I can't think of it right now. We had a buggy shop here at one time, I don't remember it much. They made buggies.

They worked on buggies? They made them.

Do you remember the name of it? Brown, I believe. Brown and a fellow named Randolph.

How much do you think a buggy would cost? I don't have any idea but I guess around fifty or sixty dollars. If you want a rubber tired one it would be more.

When did buggies fade away? In the 30's and 40's? Somewhere along in there.

Do you remember when the buggy place closed down where they made them? Well, it was long about that time...I don't know exactly. A fellow named of John Place made buggies. He made them from out and out. Brown would have a Columbian buggy from out of Ohio.

Do you remember the inner urban? Yeh.

When was it started? Well, I don't know. It was about 1916 or 1917...along in there.

Was it widely used? Yes it was. Until the automobile took its place.

Was that why it shut down? Too many people ^(B) driving to Louisville? Yeh. It was a very handy thing to use. People could just jump on and I think the fare from here to Louisville was very reasonable. I don't know what it was but it was very reasonable. You could not believe what they charged.

What have been the biggest changes in Shelbyville? Well, I'd say the real estate business has been the biggest change. Builders, contractors...stuff like that. There are stores like there always has been. Some of them are different. Of course we've got a fish store here where you can buy fried fish. We didn't have that when I was a boy.

When you were growing up what did you all do for fun? Played ball.

Baseball? Baseball. Football. Some of them played tennis but I never did.

Did you all fish? Well, they had boxing gloves. We didn't do much of that.

Well, I think that's about all the questions I have. Are there any stores you know that you'd like to tell me? Well, I told you about that...you might get a better picture from somebody a little older than I am but they're not here. I was going to say about them niggers being hung but it's all on the record book there at the courthouse.