

# Shelbyville Main Street Project

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

*Interviewer:* Mark Mefford

*Date:* 8-23-95

*Interviewee:* Val Owens

*Running Time:* 19 minutes

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**Valoise Owens**  
**Shelbyville Main Street**  
**Oral History Project**  
**Interview was conducted**  
**by Mark Mefford**  
**August 23, 1995**

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**11:00 AM**

**Mefford:** Why don't you start by telling me your full name.

**Owens:** Valoise Clemmons Owens

**Mefford:** When were you born?

**Owens:** July 14, 1943.

**Mefford:** What are your parents names?

**Owens:** My father is Charlie Clemmons, he is deceased. My mother is Beulah Chambers Clemmons.

**Mefford:** Do you have any brothers or sisters?

**Owens:** I have three sisters, one older and two younger and I have one brother.

**Mefford:** Do any of them still reside in the Shelbyville area?

**Owens:** All of them.

**Mefford:** All of them?

**Owens:** Yes

**Mefford:** What kind of occupations are they involved in?

**Owens:** My oldest sister is a dietitian at Shelby Manner Nursing Home and I have one sister that works for Wakefield-Scearce Gallery, before then she worked for Mark J. Scearce's Jewelry Store on Main Street. My other sister lives in Bagdad in Shelby County and she's just a farmers wife. She helps her husband on the farm. My brother lives here and he works out of town.

**Mefford:** What is your occupation?

**Owens:** Assistant Vice President at Republic Bank and I'm on the City Council.

**Mefford:** Do you have any children?

**Owens:** I have three, all grown. Two daughters and one son.

**Mefford:** Do they reside in Shelbyville?

**Owens:** Two of them do.

**Mefford:** Where did you go to school?

**Owens:** My first year in elementary, I went right up the street here on Bradshaw. But I only went there one year and then the new school on High Street over in Martinsville. I went there until the 8th grade and after 8th grade I attended High School, I graduated from Lincoln. Then I have about a year and a half at Kentucky State University.

**Mefford:** You said that you grew up in the downtown area, is that right? Here on Bradshaw?

**Owens:** That's right.

**Mefford:** What are some of your early memories of the downtown area? Some of the things you remember doing as a child?

**Owens:** I remember going to the movies.....seeing a movie on Saturday. I was only allowed to do that on weekends. It was nice. I will never forget the shopping. Main Street, I thought, was really nice to shop. There was a variety of stores to choose from. There were two ten-cent stores, J.J. Newberries and Valents 5 and 10. I remember just as

well...and of course everybody just loved Lawson's Department Store, and the jewelry store. We had two jewelry stores, Mark J. Scarce and across the street Lowray's Jewelry.

**Mefford:** Did you all get most of your things in town, did you have to go to Louisville?

**Owens:** Yes, my parents shopped strictly here in Shelby County for everything.

**Mefford:** Was that because they didn't want to travel or did they want to support local business?

**Owens:** I just don't think they ever thought about going out of town. No, we could have easily gone out of town, but my parents never did.

**Mefford:** What was the name of the movie theater? Do you remember?

**Owens:** No, I don't. I don't remember the name, let me think. No.....it was something.....Theater, but I really don't remember.

**Mefford:** Do you remember how much it cost to see a movie?

**Owens:** Like 35 cents. I can remember, I think it did go up to 50, yeah. Cheap movie.

**Mefford:** So how often did you go to town, of course you lived in town, how often did you go to Main Street and shop and things like that?

**Owens:** I probably went every day for something.

**Mefford:** You just went up there, not necessarily to buy anything, but to go .....

**Owens:** Well, really.....you know how you need things for school, supplies and there were very few time that.....of course the grocery store, A&P store, and I'd go to the store for my mom.

**Mefford:** Is that were you did all your grocery shopping?

**Owens:** Yes, we did our grocery shopping at the A&P. Did everything on Main Street.

**Mefford:** Did you always pay in cash?

**Owens:** Oh yes. We always paid in cash.

**Mefford:** Did you ever have to take any credit?

**Owens:** No.

**Mefford:** Weekly or monthly?

**Owens:** No, no. We went to the grocery store every Saturday.

**Mefford:** Is that right?

**Owens:** Yes and maybe went back for a loaf of bread or a small items like milk during the week. Now, I don't think they ever had a grocery bill. I don't ever remember it.

**Mefford:** When you went up there....

**Owens:** Cash-money. Yea.

**Mefford:** What other businesses do you remember going to consistently, like the A&P?

**Owens:** Nancy Lou Shop.

**Mefford:** What was that?

**Owens:** It was a little children's shop right at 6th and Main, where H&R Block is located. There was a children's store and that's where my mom would shop for clothing, back-to-school, Christmas, Easter....go to the Nancy Lou Shop.

**Mefford:** Did they have boy and girl cloths.

**Owens:** Yes, boys and girls.

**Mefford:** And shoes?

**Owens:** I think, I think they had shoes, I'm pretty sure they did but they didn't go up to a very large size. Yes, I can remember, they did have shoes because I out-grew the shoes.

From there, I was taken up the street to Briggs and Howard....yes, Briggs and Howard, I think when I out grew the Nancy Lou Shop shoes that were I got my shoes.

**Mefford:** Were any of these places segregation when you growing up.

**Owens:** No, no. Do you mean have black employees.

**Mefford:** No, were there places, the movie theater, for instance.....

**Owens:** Oh, it was separated. The whites downstairs and blacks up.

**Mefford:** Where there any other stores where you had to go in the back.

**Owens:** No, I never experienced that. I guess it was but I never experienced it. I can remember the drug store had a fountain, and we couldn't sit on the stools, but I never tried. I probably didn't buy ice cream there, because I went to Bond Ice Cream, further down on Main Street.

**Mefford:** For that reason?

**Owens:** No, it wasn't for any reason. It was for the walk, just to walk down there and it was home made ice cream.

**Mefford:** Was there any animosity, like at the movie theater?

**Owens:** I don't remember it.

**Mefford:** When you went to school over here in Bradshaw later up in town, were they integrated at that time?

**Owens:** No...no,no.

**Mefford:** Segregated? Do you ever go to an integrated school in Shelbyville?

**Owens:** No, I didn't.

**Mefford:** Where you living here during integration?

**Owens:** Yes.

**Mefford:** Do you have any memories about it?

**Owens:** I remember that there were a few children that did leave the black school and go the white school but I don't think there was ever a problem.

**Mefford:** Yeah.

**Owens:** Now, I think I would have remembered but I don't think there was a real problem. This town.....we just never really had any problems like that.

**Mefford:** Did you all own a car when you lived down here? Did you walk down most of the time?

**Owens:** Of course I walked.

**Mefford:** When you went to the grocery, did your parents drive the car?

**Owens:** No, we walked to Main Street. And the grocery boy would bring them down here if you wanted.

**Mefford:** Oh, is that right. Well, no reason to drive.

**Owens:** Didn't have to.

**Mefford:** Do you know anything about changes in transportation around here since you've grown up?

**Owens:** Well I had to walk to school and now children don't know what it is to walk to school. You know, they have school buses to pick them up, but during my time in elementary, I had to walk, my parents had to take me or I had to go in a taxi. A lot of times I went in a taxi, you know, when the weather was bad.

**Mefford:** How do you think the appearance of the downtown area has changed since you were growing up?

**Owens:** Oh, it has changed quite a bit.

**Mefford:** Obviously the store fronts.....

**Owens:** Yes, all the store fronts have changed pretty much.

**Mefford:** Has the general appearance, besides the store fronts, changed a great deal?

**Owens:** Well, I guess. Some of them have the little, what you call it,.....

**Mefford:** Awnings?

**Owens:** Yes, awnings, of course it's all been repainted. Main Street looks nicer, you know, but back then it wasn't that bad, just....it wasn't that bad.

**Mefford:** Most of the buildings still there?

**Owens:** Yes, pretty much. Yes, all the buildings remain.

**Mefford:** When you were growing up was Main Street one way or two way?

**Owens:** Two ways.

**Mefford:** When did they make it one way with Washington Street.

**Owens:** I really don't know the date, you know, I don't remember that. But I do remember when traffic was able to go both ways. And I thought it was so odd when they changed it and made it one way. I have a hard time just watching.....just seeing them going that way because I wasn't driving myself. I wasn't driving, but it still was unusual.

**Mefford:** Since you weren't driving, you might not know, but do you remember any parking problems in the downtown area when you were growing up?

**Owens:** Well most of the people that went to Main Street to shop, parked right here in this parking lot.

**Mefford:** Oh, is that right?

**Owens:** Yes.....yes.

**Mefford:** Well, a lot of these businesses we've talked about are gone, in fact, most of them are gone. When did they start closing down? Did they close down all at.....with in like a 5 year period, or did they just start falling off one by one?

**Owens:** They started falling off one by one over a long time. It didn't happen just all at once.

**Mefford:** Why do think they started closing down?

**Owens:** Well I think a lot of them were older and probably died out, you know, and the families didn't keep them going and the shopping centers coming in, that knocked the business from Main Street.

**Mefford:** You work downtown, don't you? Is the bank you work at downtown?

**Owens:** No, it's in Village Plaza.

**Mefford:** Oh, is that right?

**Owens:** Yes. They were one of the first shopping centers we had, Village Plaza.

**Mefford:** So do you all get a lot of business out that way?

**Owens:** Well, I can't say we get most of the business. Our business is all over.

**Mefford:** Is there a downtown location of your bank?

**Owens:** No.....no.

**Mefford:** Do you think it matters where the bank is located?

**Owens:** No, I don't think it matters.

**Mefford:** Do you think that's why there are banks downtown instead of retailers? There are a couple of banks.

**Owens:** Yes, there are a couple of banks. I really don't think the bank makes the difference, whether it's in town or out. What ever that customer is comfortable with.....and we're a friendly bank.

**Mefford:** Well sure.

**Mefford:** Do you go to church here in town?

**Owens:** Yes, Clay Street Baptist.

**Mefford:** Have you always gone to that church?

**Owens:** No, I grew up in the church just down the street.

**Mefford:** Yea, I saw that.

**Owens:** I grew up in that church.

**Mefford:** The Church of God?

**Owens:** Yes.

**Mefford:** And your new church, Clay Street, is downtown?

**Owens:** Right.

**Mefford:** Do you think religion has a big influence on the downtown area?

**Owens:** Well it may for some, where it's walking distance. You still have a lot of people.....some of them don't drive and some of them are past the age and don't want to drive, you know, older people. Yes, I think so.

**Mefford:** Do this serve as a social center for the downtown area? Beyond Sundays?

**Owens:** I don't think so.

**Mefford:** You mentioned you worked with city government, what kind of changes have gone on in city government? Has it stayed consistent in the way they do business?

**Owens:** The way they do business.....would follow the same rules and maybe they are more involved now, but since I've been on the council and listened to the things that happened before I got on the council, I think it was handled in the same manner.

**Mefford:** How long have you been on the council?

**Owens:** About seven and a half years. Of course, everything has changed. The policies and all have gotten deeper.

**Mefford:** Does the council pay attention to the Main Street area, the downtown?

**Owens:** Sure.

**Mefford:** What kind of things do they do in regards to the Main Street downtown area?

**Owens:** We're always trying to improve Main Street and if you notice around town, the sidewalks are being.....well pretty much doing them over and we want the businesses and everybody to participate in it and the upkeep of downtown. So downtown is the council's main concerns, I mean, that's one of the main concerns because we want our town to be nice. People coming into town, we don't want it trashed and all that. We want to make a good impression, first time into a town. There is nothing any worse than entering a town with trash and debris.....that's a really bad impression, so, yes, our concern is downtown.

**Mefford:** Are you all involved in trying to get more businesses to locate downtown?

**Owens:** We are. We are involved in trying to get more businesses downtown and keep the ones we have downtown.

**Mefford:** Do you think there is a big amount of tourist that come through downtown Shelbyville?

**Owens:** Yes, I think there is.



**Mefford:** What's the draw?

**Owens:** Our antique stores.

**Mefford:** How long have those been around?

**Owens:** They've probably been around about.....we have more now than we've ever had so I think we've had more in the past ten years. On Sunday's and weekends, it's really busy. You'd think that every store on Main Street is open. Some of the restaurants are open on the weekends, on Sunday especially and it's nothing but the antique stores and it draws people. Of course, I think Wakefield-Scarce Gallery draws a lot of people at certain times. November, when they have their opening, the Christmas opening, that's when we have more people than ever on Main Street.

**Mefford:** Yea

**Owens:** Yes

**Mefford:** Wakefield-Scarce has been around for a long time. It sounds like it has a big influence on the economy. Is it one of the biggest drawing forces in the downtown area?

**Owens:** I think it is. I think it is, because when you leave town and meet new people and they ask you where your from.....they relate, when you say Shelbyville, that's the first thing.....

**Mefford:** Is that right?

**Owens:** Wakefield-Scarce Gallery, yes.

**Mefford:** Are there any other kinds of policies the City Council is thinking about downtown.....talking about zoning.....

**Owens:** Yes, signs.

**Mefford:** New business.....new signs?

**Owens:** Yes.

**Mefford:** Just trying to keep the appearance looking sharp? What kind of lines for historical preservation do you have for the downtown area? Do you try and keep it like it is?

**Owens:** Yes.

**Mefford:** Like the 40's and 50's? When it was a thriving business town?

**Owens:** Yes.

**Mefford:** When you were brought up do you remember many businesses downtown that were owned by women?

**Owens:** Well, I don't remember that many. The one that comes to mind was "Maties" and that was the colored shop for women and she owned her shop. Well the Lad and Lassie shop were owned by two women. Those are the only two that come to mind.

**Mefford:** What about today, are there a lot more women in business downtown?

**Owens:** It could be, yes. Especially with the antique malls.

**Mefford:** Sure.

**Owens:** Yea.

**Mefford:** In your church, is it generally.....is it segregated, I don't mean by.....

**Owens:** Yes, we are of all race. We have regular attendance. They don't belong, but they come there every Sunday, I mean they're there when some of the members aren't there. They feel comfortable. They keep coming back so I know their comfortable. Our doors are open and welcome to everyone.

**Mefford:** What do you thing is unique about the Shelbyville area?

Owens, Valoise

**Owens:** I think the people and I think it is a warm town. We make everybody welcome.

**Mefford:** Yes.

**Owens:** A warm friendly town.

**Mefford:** Well, I think that's about all the questions I have. Is there anything you'd like to add that I haven't ask you or any memories or experiences that I haven't ask you about?

**Owens:** No. I don't think so.

**Mefford:** Well it was good talking with you.