

Shelbyville Main Street Project

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

Interviewer: Mark Mefford

Date: 7-26-95

Interviewee: George Franklin Pigg

Running Time: 32 minutes

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An interview with
GEORGE FRANKLIN PIGG

Interviewed by Mark Mefford on July 26, 1995

Transcribed by Susan McMullan Groves on September 27, 1997

What is your name? George Franklin Pigg.

When were you born? 23rd August, 1933.

How long has your family lived in the Shelbyville area? Several hundred years.

What are your parents name? Jesse and Sarah Martha Washburn Pigg.

What did your dad do for a living? He was a telegraph operator for the L&N Railroad for 37 years.

What is your occupation now? I'm a barber.

Has this always been your line of work? No. I worked for General Electric for five and a half years supplying parts and before that I was in the military.

What branch? U.S. Army.

What year did you serve in the Army? I was on active duty from 1953 to 1955 and in the active Reserves from 1955-1961. First Sergeant.

Are you married? No. I've never been married. Didn't find nobody to have me.

Well, uh, tell me about your early memories from when you were a child. Any special memories of downtown? What was it like in downtown? Well, when we came to town especially on Saturday. We got here about six o'clock at night then went to the barber shop and sat for two or three hours waiting for a haircut and then went to the movies till about eleven and got out on the street. Streets were still crowded with people. Everybody came to town on Saturdays then to socialize or get their groceries. We live in Bagdad and then we'd head home about twelve in a Model A Ford...a rumble seat. We'd have an old blanket to keep them warm in the backseat...in the rumble seat of that Model A Ford.

How many brothers and sisters did you have? I had two sisters and a brother. There were four of us.

Did you all come together as a family? Yes.

Mother and father and all of your kin? Six of us all together. My brother and I had to ride in the rumble seat and the rest of them set up front. In the wintertime, we froze to death.

When you all got to town did you stay together or did your parents go one way and you all go another? We went and got a haircut and went to the movie house by ourselves and then we found them after we got out of the movies. They was either up to Lerman's or somewhere socializing.

What's Lerman's? It was a department store here.

Is it still here? No. It's gone.

When did it close...do you remember? It closed about six or seven years ago.

What did you all do while they were at Lerman's? You said you saw movies, do you remember any movies in particular? Oh, we always watched all the old-timers. The Westerns with Gene Autrey or.... Those were the movies at that time. It was generally a Western though.

Did you all eat at any particular restaurants? No. We never did...we always ate at home. I might get a hamburger at Dewey's Pool Room here late at night if I had the money. Buddy Harrod's hamburger joint was downtown.

How much could you get a hamburger for? You could get a hamburger for a dime and a Pepsi for a nickel. Cost you fifteen cents for a hamburger and a Coke or a Pepsi. I'm a Pepsi man.

Did you see everyone in town on Saturday night on Main Street? Oh, yeh. Everyone. Everybody congregates here. Streets were just crammed full on up till one or two o'clock in the morning. The barber shop then stayed open until sometimes two or three o'clock in the morning just taking care of everybody at that time that was getting ready to go to church on Sunday morning.

How much did it cost to get your haircut and a shave? I'm not sure what...I wasn't old enough to get no shave and, uh, back there then haircuts were about a quarter or 35 cents.

Where did you go to school? I went to school in Bagdad. Bagdad, Kentucky. I graduated in the class of 1951.

Did the school have any functions or did everything socially in the school center around Shelbyville and downtown? Well, most of the things at the school at that time was basketball. That was the biggest thing every Tuesday and Friday night. As a teenager we had a skating rink here in Shelbyville and we came twice week to skate. High schoolers or somebody that had a car would come.

Was there anywhere downtown that was a center of activity in particular? Was there anywhere you could be sure to find a group of people? The pool room at that time was

completely crowded.

Can you remember the name of any of them? Dewey's and, uh, oh, I can't think of what the other one was.

Where you kids allowed to go in the pool room? Well, we never did...most of the time we always went to the movies. When we got out of the movies we were ready to go home.

Did they serve alcohol at the pool room? They served beer sometime.

Were there any annual fairs in the downtown area? The only one that I can think of is the Tobacco Festival back years ago. That was an all day affair and everybody from the whole county would come to the Tobacco Festival. The center of town was closed off and they had a parade and a king and queen contest. Back then in those days that was the thing to do...it was an all day affair. They had a dance contest and different kinds of contests in the main square.

Was that in the fall? In the fall, yes. It was about September or October...somewhere in there. The later part of the fall.

Were there any tobacco warehouses in the downtown area? Well, not directly in the downtown but two or three streets over.

How did tobacco affect the downtown area? During cutting season did you have less of a crowd and when they came to sell it did they have a bigger crowd? I guess it was a big crowd...the warehouse took a world of people to unload it. A lot of times people would bring tobacco in and it would sit for two or three days...their truck would sit on the street before they could ever unload it. They'd line up...the trucks would line up to go in and unload and it would take a world of people to unload it at that time.

Was downtown...did anything change around Christmas holidays or Thanksgiving holidays? Well, I couldn't say for sure.

Did anything special go on? Not that I can think of. It could've been. Of course I lived in Bagdad and we didn't always come over for special occasions...they could've had extra things.

So when it got real cold in the winter you all usually didn't come out? Only when it was necessary. We had that Model A Ford and it was almost too cold to ride in the back of that.

Did you all go to church in Shelby County? At Bagdad Methodist Church. I had about fifteen years perfect attendance.

When did you break it? When you went off to the Army? Yeh. Well, we moved to town and that was about when I broke off my perfect attendance.

You mentioned your car when that you drove to town. Did you all have that the whole time you were growing up? No. We had... that was only in the thirties. In 1940 we got a closed in 1940 Ford. All it had then was one little heater right up in front on the passenger side and it didn't throw out much heat. It wasn't much better than the Model A Ford as far as staying warm. You were just on the inside of the vehicle is all that was.

When you got downtown, did you all park the car or did you drive around a little bit to check the... to see who was here? You could hardly ever get a parking spot. Most times my dad would drop us off in front of the barber shop and he'd drive around till he found a place to park. Everybody at that time would go to the A&P store or to Kroger... they was both up in town. They'd buy their groceries and have them sacked up then they'd put their names on them. They'd sit there and there would be different sacks for thirty, forty or fifty people have to pack there groceries away from there. When they got ready to go home then they'd come in and pick up there groceries and leave.

When you came to town it wasn't just for social reasons. You'd do your shopping and everything else? Most of thing was we came down for was to get our haircut and to get our groceries.

Was A&P the only grocery store down here? Oh no, there were several. Bill Kemper had one, Kroger had one, Mr. Dinkler, and, uh... those are the ones I can think of right off. Blakemore's. Those were right in the middle of town. There were several other little stores on the side streets.

So you all would just leave your bags at the front of the store there with your name on them? On the inside of the store. On the inside of the store like where the shopping carts are now in stores there was a big area there where people could leave their groceries until they got ready to go home.

Did everyone who came to town drive a car at that time? Well, yes, in Shelbyville. Now in a lot of small towns like Bagdad, Waddy and stuff a lot of people came to town in horse and buggy back in the middle to late thirties. But in Shelbyville they came to town in cars.

Does the railroad cut through downtown anyway? There are two railroads that have tracks right on the edge of downtown. The Southern and L&N both.

Did that affect Main Street or downtown? I don't know whether they... no, it didn't affect downtown because they were both three or four streets away from downtown.

Did a lot of people live in town here in Shelbyville? At that time all of the buildings up over... all of the buildings had apartments and everybody... there wasn't no outside

subdivisions, you know, in the downtown main area. There wasn't no outside subdivisions back in the thirties and forties.

How did people who lived in town make a living? At that time they had a Lee-McClain Clothing Store that employed several. At that time that was over the A&P Company and, uh, then you had your barber shops and all your hardware stores and the railroad and there wasn't no big employment. Later, about 1950, Roll Forming came in at the southern part of town. They were the big employer at that time.

Did a lot of people drive to town to find work? I know that, living in Bagdad, we had one lady that brought a car load of women in everyday to work at the clothing factory.

Do you think that was very common? Well, I couldn't say for sure, but most people back at that time... there were a lot of farmers at that time. Every farm had tenants on them that milked cows and raised tobacco. Had a world of farmers.

Was there a newspaper in town? Yes. At that time there were two newspapers.

Do you remember the names of them? The Sentinel and The News.

Did they cover the whole county or did they specify around the downtown area? Oh, yeh, they covered the whole county. They had correspondence with each little area. Most of the time it was a woman correspondent that sent in all the news of the community of that certain area. Every little area had a correspondent with the newspaper. Whatever happened in that community she would call it in or mail it in, what have you, and next week it showed up in the paper. Most everybody that died at that time, their picture would be with their death. Now they don't do that anymore. You just have a little column when somebody dies. At that time, they showed everybody that died and showed a picture of everybody that died. That would run in the paper.

Do you remember anything about the Great Depression here in town? I was born during the Depression and it was tough for us. My dad worked for the railroad at the time and, uh, in 1930 he got laid off and my grandfather run a store in Hempridge and he had an extra house and my mom and dad moved back to Hempridge in 1930 when he got laid off from the railroad and my dad raised the crops and worked around... he was a trapper. Did a lot of trapping and made guns. He was a gunsmith. In 1933, we lived in Hempridge... that's where I was born. He was still laid off and he got called back. I was born August 23 and was called back in December of '33 at Pleasureville at forty dollars a month. Forty dollars a month. My sister was born in January of '36 and after that we moved to... he got transferred to Louisville. We were living in Louisville during the '37 flood. We moved to Bagdad during the '37 flood. My dad got a job back here and we moved back during the '37 flood. It was tough. My dad didn't make any money back during the Depression. It was hard. My mom and dad and four of us kids and forty dollars a month. Things didn't go around that far.

Did you and your brothers find any work? I worked every since I was five years old. I had a paper route in Bagdad and made a dime a day. I delivered about four miles and made a dime a day delivering papers back in 1939. I started in May of '39 and I turned six in August. I walked four miles and got a dime a day delivering papers. I got three old people that I started hauling coal and kindling for at fifteen cents a week. But in the winter time I made a dollar and a nickel a week and I thought I was rich. Summer time I mowed yards with that old type reel mower for most of them I got a quarter to mow there yards that would sometimes take a whole day cause the grass would be so high and it was a pretty good sized yard. I'd get a quarter for all day work. My brother and I...my dad worked for the railroad, uh, the railroad men would always want blackberries and in the early forties at that time the railroad men would come by and leave orders with my dad for blackberries and the railroad men would give us fifty cents a gallon. That was big money. We would have orders of anywhere from ten to thirty gallons. We'd always sit in summertime and pick blackberries.

Did your sisters ever have any work? No, they, uh, more or less stayed home and helped our mother at the house.

You mentioned your father was a traveler part time, I guess. Where does he sell pellets too? At that time he would ship his pellets off to, I think, St. Louis or somewhere or places he had the biggest shipment of pellets to and get rid of them.

What do you remember about World War II in the downtown area? Do you remember any changes? Back in there everybody was very patriotic. You had...if you had a soldier in the Service, everybody that had somebody in the Service they had have, uh, banner with a star on it. Everyone that had a person in the Service had an emblem in their windows...a banner in their window with a star on it. Like a lot of people would have three sons in there and they'd have a blue star but if their son got killed it would be a gold star that got put in there. If you saw them in the windows you knew that they had a person in the military. People was...during WWII, we were fighting for our life. It's not like the wars today...we just take for granted that nothing is going to happen to us. At that time we didn't know in WWII whether we was going to be taken over or what was going to happen.

Do you remember any special things happening in Shelbyville during the war? Were there services held or anything like that? Well, let me tell you this. On the grounds...the courthouse grounds...right on the far corner away from the courthouse, they had great big placards with all the GI's names. All the guys that have served up on these big plaque boards. One of them where Veteran's Memorial is and one of there where the church yard is. Great big, huge, placards. Everybody's name was on it. There were about 800 or more from Shelby County that served.

Is it still there? Oh, no. They tore it down and, uh, done away with. It was taken down and stored at the fairgrounds there and when the amphitheater burnt it was stored in the amphitheater and when that burnt it burnt that placard.

After the Great Depression and World War II, how did downtown Main Street change from when you had grown up until the time you went in the service? Well, that was the era of the introduction of the television. Television changed the world. People met here on Saturdays and during the week to, uh, get together. When television came out that did away with people coming out. People just stayed home and watched television.

How has the post office and other city services changed? I noticed they have a post office that's pretty new down here, where was the post office when you were growing up downtown? It was down here on the corner of Seventh Street down here. Before that it was right across the street here on Sixth Street. That was the post office right across the street in those two buildings there was the post office back in the thirties up to maybe the early forties and they built the post office down here on the corner of Seventh street and Main. Then where the new post office is now, which has been there for about seven or eight years, that was where Pearce automobile agency and garage was for years. From the time I was a little boy I can remember that's where Pearce Ford Motor Company used to be.

How about banks. How have they changed? They have changed all together. Up until twenty years ago we had old bankers that were so tight they didn't want to lend money out. Mr. Randolph and Charles Randolph and them they were so tight they didn't want to loan out any money. Then when they all died off the young ones got in and started lending money out. Back here... I'd say ten years ago or so they got too loose and some of the banks had to consolidate. Farmers & Traders especially had to sell out. Another bank had to take them over cause they was over extended. They was loaned out.

When you came to town on Saturday nights, did you see a lot of police around? Yes. All we had then was walking patrol. You didn't have no car patrol on the police. You had three or four that would stand around. At that time, you didn't have but about four or five. Chief Jones and Jake Drummet and, at the time, Tom Moffett and, I think, about three patrolmen or another. The police department was right downtown. The police and the fire department were where the Shelby County Trust Bank is now.

What kind of fire department did they have then? Did they have a couple of engines? They had about one engine.

Was it volunteer? No, it was a regular thing. About four people worked there. It wasn't much of a fire department then.

Enough to get by? Enough to get by.

Was there a lot of crime in the downtown area? Not that I know of. At that time, you didn't have crime like you got today. Blacks and whites almost stayed in a separate place. And, uh, if, uh, at that time, Jake Drummet had the bluff running on everybody. He was a

patrolmen for almost 40 years and he killed one colored guy that was running away from him.

Shot him? Shot him. Jake was a crack shot.

What had the guy done, do you remember? He was running down Sixth Street down here and he wouldn't halt and Jake shot him.

What part of town did the blacks hang out at? They had about two areas: Martinsville and down on Clay Street...two different areas that they had. They had their own areas and you had black areas and you had white areas. White people was up in town and blacks stayed in their area, of course, they had honky tonks and places they went to in their areas. You didn't have the mixture of blacks and whites like you do today.

Did you ever talk to them or see them? Did you know them personally? I grew up in Bagdad and some of my best buddies was black and we played together.

You went to school with them? No. They went to Whitney Young where Whitney Young is now and they didn't come to school with us at that time. At that time, we didn't associate together but we played together in the summertime. A fellow by the name of Ben Murray was one of my best buddies when we was growing up.

Did the blacks do anything different on Saturdays...I know you all didn't do anything together but did they do anything that you all didn't do and vice versa? I have no idea.

What did the women do when they got downtown? Did they do anything different from the men? A world of men went to the pool room and the women, they all got together and talked and set in the cars and talked and, uh, go to Lerman's and Lincoln's and places like that...shopping, things like that.

After you got back out of the service and came back, how had the downtown area changed? You didn't all congregate on Saturday night like we did back earlier than that.

Had the appearance of it changed? No. The appearance of the downtown hadn't changed. You just...at the time, like, Lerman's and Lincoln's and grocery stores like that, instead of closing up...staying open until twelve o'clock at night, they was closing earlier. When I first got home from the service, they was closing at maybe eight o'clock. Then later on they dropped it down to six and then finally...

-----END OF SIDE 1-----

You say the appearance hadn't changed much but that a lot of things going on has. Nowadays, does anything happen downtown on Saturday nights? It's dead even during the day on Saturday.

Where do people go? Do they stay home or do they go out anywhere? They stay home...most of them, of they...like your shopping and stuff, you got all your shopping centers on the outskirts of town. Like Kroger and Wal-Mart, they're all on the outskirts of town and there's nothing here downtown except on Saturdays when people from out of town come in to go the antique malls.

When did the antique malls start coming around? Well, we've had one...Wakefield-Scarce Galleries that had been here for years. Then in the last eight or ten years, other ones have cropped up and have taken up most of the Main big buildings on Main street.

Do they do good business? I have no idea. I don't look at their books.

Have you ever lived in another town...I know Bagdad...but away from Shelby County besides being in the service? No. Not since 1937. We only lived...the only other place we lived was when I was just a real small kid and we lived in Pleasureville and Louisville for about three years. The rest of the time I've lived in Shelby County.
