

Shelbyville Main Street Project

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

Interviewer: Mark Mefford

Date: 9-12-95

Interviewee: William Proctor

Running Time: 46 minutes

Side One

COUNTER

000

INTRODUCTION

014

BACKGROUND: BORN MARCH 13, 1919 IN SIMPSONVILLE.

050

LIVING IN SIMPSONVILLE AND SHOPPING IN SHELBYVILLE.

089

EARLY SHELBY COUNTY TRANSPORTATION.

180

SATURDAY NIGHTS IN SHELBYVILLE.

205

WORKING AS A DEPUTY IN SHELBYVILLE.

250

WORKING IN THE TAX COLLECTOR'S OFFICE.

420

DECREASE IN PROPERTY OWNED AS FARMS.

430

CHANGES IN SHELBYVILLE'S APPEARANCE.

Side Two

010

SHELBYVILLE'S UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS: GOOD LAND, FARMERS.

036

CRIME IN SHELBYVILLE.

198

END.

An interview with
WILLIAM S. PROCTOR
Interviewed by Mark Mefford on 9-12-95
Transcribed by Susan McMullan Groves on 9-2-97

What is your full name? William S. Proctor

When were you born? March 13, 1919.

Where you born in Shelby County? Simpsonville, Kentucky.

What are your parent's names? My father's name was Clarence Herman and my mother's name was Edna Stone Proctor.

What did they do for a living? My father was a civil road engineer in the county for about 30 years and my mother was a housewife.

Did you have any brothers or sisters? I have one sister that lives in El Paso, Texas. She's married to a Lieutenant Colonel and they're retired out there.

Are you married? Yes, sir.

Do you have any children? Two children. One son and one daughter.

Do they still live in this area? Uh, my daughter lives in the Louisville area off the Westport Road. This is her 31st year of teaching school at West Middle School. And my son has his marine license and he works sometimes in the oil fields when he wants to. Right now he's at home taking care of the farm. We farm about 250 acres. He takes care of the farm and the cattle. He'll go out to the oil well in the ocean and stay for two months at a time and then he'll come home and work on the farm.

Growing up in Simpsonville, how often did you come to Shelbyville? Did you all come here to do your shopping? Did you ever come here? Well, every Saturday night if we could find somebody to ride with. We didn't have any...back in those days we didn't have much money. If you had thirty or forty cents in your pocket you'd do just fine. One guy had a car and we'd all go together to get enough gas to come over into town and shoot pool. Had a bowling alley then. We came about once a week. I got into politics in 1954 and I've been in politics ever since. I ran on the sheriff's ticket with another fellow, Mr. Woods, then I ran for high sheriff then after that, why, after about 12 years in the sheriff's office I took a job as the state correction and parole officer. I had five counties. Then I got interested in this job and the former PVA, they were called tax commissioners then, he said he was going to retire so he gave me a job as his deputy for a year and then I ran for that office and I won and I've been in here, let's see...21 years. I haven't gotten shot yet.

Besides coming to town on Saturday night, did you all come here to do your shopping? No, my father had a store and we shopped there. I'd come to town, I had a little Model T Ford and I'd come up and buy my tires and batteries up here from Biagi. They got a store down here now. A nice store. They've been here for fifty years, I guess. He sold tires and batteries. That was the only place you could find a tire to fit a Model T Ford. So, one day I drove my Ford up there and I asked him if he had a tire that would fit and it and he said that he had four. He said he'd give me a good price on the whole set and I told him that I didn't have that much money. "How much you got?" he said and I told him I had seven dollars and he said, "You can buy one tire." So he put that one on and then said, "Now what am I gonna do with all these other three tires left?" That's the first car I had was a Model T Ford. Have you ever seen a Model T Ford? Yes, sir. They're nice. You know what they're worth now? Did you come in town by this street right back here? I came down 60. There's one sitting out on the lot as you came in but you probably missed it. That one I had I made spending money just going around doing things for other people. They were building new roads up for 60 here all the way through here and it got real muddy and the Lincoln Institute is a black junior college in Simpsonville... now the federal government took it over and they take underprivileged kids that have been in trouble and take them to school there, anyway, off by the insurance agency down there, my little car was the only thing that could go through that mud and I'd get fifty cents a trip hauling them down there. A lot of insurance customers down there. Anyway, Mr. Biagi said, "You might as well put all these tires on there, they're brand new tread and you can just use them and pay me when you want to", and that's what I did. I paid him so much per week. They were at seven dollars each.

Did they last very long? Oh, yeah, they'd last five or six years. They were real tough tires.

How much do you remember gas costing back then? Gas was about 18 cents a gallon. And you could run a long way on a gallon. It was a real light car and pretty good size Ford. When I went to college at Western, I drove it down there. That was 1937. Another boy and I just jumped in it one day and took off down there and drove down to Bowling Green. We got there at 10:30 that morning and it used to be the courthouse was sitting in the middle of the block and we went the wrong way. That was the first time I'd ever been there and the cop ran out there and stopped us. In the Model T Ford, the hotter the motor would get, the better it would run. But, when it gets a certain temperature, you can turn it off but you can't start it right back again. You've got to let it cool off. So, it was boiling hot so he said, "We've got to get this thing off of here and now you've gone around this way and blocked all this traffic", and I said, "Sir, this is the first time I've been here and I just made a mistake. That's the reason I'm coming down here to college so I can learn how to drive around here". So, he said, "Well, we'll just push it up on the sidewalk", and we went back in about an hour and we started it back up.

Did you have to crank it? Yeh, it had the crank on the front. You had to crank it.

Did someone have to sit in the car and give it gas when you were cranking it? Well, you had to stop it then. We always did cause we didn't want it to blow up. But, it had to be real hot before it won't start. You'd drive out the gas tank and have to get gas, why, it would start up but I'd sat there in the middle of all that traffic and kept it going I knew what would happen. Finally cleared out all the traffic and we pushed it off and anyway it was a lot of fun. So, we got home safely, which was a wonder. It was a Friday afternoon and I didn't have much gas but he had a dollar and I know that would take us home. Put a dollars worth of gas in it and started home down 31W and we got down to Cave City and it started knocking... the motor did... and I thought that we wouldn't make it. It had a hand brake on it and when you pulled that brake back halfway it put it in neutral so I just pulled that thing back at the top of a hill and it must have been half a mile and at the bottom of the hill there was a sign that said 'garage' and I coasted right on in that garage. About five or six men were sitting around in there chewing tobacco and smoking and the guy walked up and said, "What's the matter?" and I said, "Well, she started knocking up there", and he said, "Uh oh, I know what it is. I fixed one yesterday. Your main bearing has gone out." I asked him if he had one and he said no. Another guy told him to go down to his old Ford and get one out. So, he went down there and took one off. All I had was sixteen dollars and I had a check with me from my bank account but they didn't know me from Adam and I didn't know if they'd take a check or not. So I told that before he started I'd have to give him a check and he asked me if I had any money in the bank and I told him yes sir and he said, "Okay, we'll take your check". It took three hours and he took it all apart and put that back in. It's got oil around those bearings and it was stopped up... that's what happened. He took a bailing wire and ran through all of that and cleaned it out and run gas through it and a brush and it ran better than it ever did. So, he put it back together for sixteen dollars and I paid him and when I got to Louisville it just started pouring down rain. We didn't have a top on it so we pulled in a filling station down there and waited about two hours and finally got home. It was an experience.

Did most people have cars around Shelbyville? Yeh, most everybody. You know you could buy a brand new Model T Ford for \$350.00. No tax. Most people had cars. A lot of Dodges then. Nice cars. Open two seat Dodge cars. They had curtains in one of them. Well, I don't know. They all had some kind of car. You could get a used Model T for \$25. That's what I paid for mine. Twenty five dollars? Well. An old couple lived out there in the country and I used to rent some pasture for them and pasture some calves and I kept begging them to sell it to me and he said, "No, it was dad's and it's gonna sit right there until we're gone" and finally one day and I told him I needed it real bad cause our gym out there at Simpsonville High School had gotten real dilapidated and I wasn't going to be able to play in it so we had to go eight miles down the road everyday for practice and I told him we had to have that old Model T to travel in and he said, "Well, you go on and take it and drive it and if you like it, give me twenty-five dollars for it".

Were the roads pretty good out in the county? No, most everything was just gravel roads. Pot holes most everywhere. Then bushes and things would scratch your car up.

Were the roads in town in Shelbyville very good? They were paved and all. Most of them were paved...the main roads...and they were pretty good. Had the concrete sidewalks.

When you would come up here on Saturday night, what kind of places would you come to? What would you all do? Oh, we played pool. There was a little theater down here so we'd go to a picture show.

What was the name of the pool hall? I know where it was but I don't...let's see...I don't remember.

You went to the picture show? Yeh and the name of it was "The Strand". It was pretty well packed all the time. Fifteen or twenty cents was all it cost.

What other kinds of things did you all do? Well, that's about all. About ten or eleven o'clock we'd go home. Aw, you'd walk up and down the street and talk to a bunch of people. Girls...try to find a pretty girl.

When you became a deputy in 1953...1954...where your deputies much the same as they are today? It's all together different.

What kinds of things did you all do as a deputy? Well, I don't remember of any dope at all. A lot of people would drunk, you know, and fight and steal. I had a lot of experiences in the sheriff's office. I don't have all day to tell you about that.

Did you all have a car? No. We'd furnish our own car and our own gas, our own uniforms, our own guns, our own ammunition, our own badge. We didn't have...there was only four of us. I worked night and day at it. They've got about eight or ten now and their uniforms are furnished, and radios, and cars. Things have changed. The tax structure. A lot of people moved into Shelby County...a lot of changed tax structure. It was \$130 million tax assessment in 1937 and now I don't know what it would be. We have about four or five new houses every year. Moving out of Jefferson County, most of them. Then they come in here with these factories, we've got a lot of factories, and they move in here from Michigan a lot, Illinois, Florida.

Have these factories generated a lot more revenue for the county? Yeh. They create a lot of jobs. These factories cost a lot of money...thirty, forty, fifty million...and they all pay taxes.

Did the county give them any kind of tax break when they first came here? Well, they did some of them. Some of them...the city would finance them...it's called a bond issue and they were tax free. They had to pay on the...well, if the bond issue was a million dollars, they'd pay a thousand a year on it. That part...that's deferred tax, the other part would be the amount that they'd pay on the bond issue. When they got it all paid for then the whole thing was one and they pay on it. They've created a lot of jobs for people.

But, we've got new ones coming in now. I don't know about the name of it... technologies something. I think the last one was the potato chip factory. They make low fat, low cholesterol potato chips.

Well, what kind of changes have you been involved in? Well, when I first started the assessment was about \$130 million and about ten or twelve new houses a year and the highest of them would be about \$25,000.00. I remember the sheriff I worked for told me, "I'm gonna build my new house, Red, and I don't know if I'm doing it right or wrong but it's gonna cost me \$25,000. I've got to borrow that. Don't you think that's too much for a house?" I told him I didn't know but that it sounded pretty high to me at that time. Now a lot of them are \$300,000, \$500,000, \$600,000. There's a man that's got a house in the high part of the county in the Knobs and it's right on top of the highest knob. It's about five stories high and it had about \$10,000 tax bill. But he struck it rich. He and his wife both went to the University of Kentucky and studied electronics. He was interested in that ever since he was a little boy and he got into all kinds of electronics he'd sell and he got a little business started and he'd sell these things... computers... then he went into all this other electronics and he's worldwide now. The guy made 5 million dollars in the first year. About three months ago I was talking to him and he'd sold a big order to China and he had to go over there and set it all up. What he does, he's got his own airplane but he leases one when he flies a pretty good piece and he goes over there and corrects all the mistakes. It's interesting. Well, now the assessment has been increased to something like \$200 million. Anywhere from \$80 million to \$250 to \$350 million. Back in those early days it would \$20 million and that was high. Of course, we've got a lot more people. And everything goes high, you know. Then they passed that bill that everything had to be assessed at a hundred percent. That's impossible to do, we all know that. Johnson County tried to do that. I remember that old guy, his name was Pickelscheimer. They ran him out and he came back and ran again and won and then he retired. He just wanted to show them that he could run and win. They came out there and went all over that county. I talked to one of those boys out there and he told me it was ashamed that they go around on all this hillsides and mountains and people would be sitting in little trailers on concrete blocks and clothes hanging on the line and they didn't have any money and half of them don't have any jobs. It was just hard to do. But, I guess they'll work it out. Somebody is going to get shot. It's serious. We're right here close to Louisville, see. I-71 to the north of us and I-64 goes right through. But where I live, we're just 20 minutes from Louisville and people like to come out here and buy 6 acres or 5 acres or 10 acres and build them a house and they can have a horse. We're losing thousands of acres of farmland every year to construction... residential. I can get on 64 where I live and I can hit one stop light and I'll be on Broadway in 25 minutes. Everybody wants that. They want to be about that far away from Louisville. That's the reason they're all moving out here. I've got thirty new neighbors... thirty new houses close to where I live and I know about four or five of them. All of them say that they are so happy that they wouldn't move back for anything.

Are they from Louisville? Yes. Everyone of them.

Do many people commute to Frankfort? Not that I know of.

Even further away... does anyone come from Lexington? Yeh. We have quite a few that go to Lexington. We've got a lot going for us here. Our tax situation looked real good. One of the lowest in the state until they added some new taxes like occupational tax and 100% assessment on real property. We just got through raising the assessment. \$34 million right here in Shelbyville. In 1993 we raised it about half that much and then turned around and they made us raise it 32%. I told them that was too much and that they don't need that much but they said that we had to raise it \$32 million then. Well, if we did that, it wouldn't be near 32%. It would only be like 10 or 12%. But our property here is selling for about 14% each more every time it sells. In 1992 and 1994, we had two or three sales—ones that sold in '92 sold again in '94 sold for a 14 % increase. That's the reason you can't keep it at 100%, see. You can get it to 100% okay but if you take those counties where they don't have those sales, they're going to stay there. But we have 13 or 14 hundred sales here per year. Houses and farms. Every time we sell we go up anywhere from 10 to 14%... average now is about 14. That's one of the changes. It used to be that whatever you had on the book that's what you sent to Frankfort the next year and maybe there might be 10 or 12 new houses. You didn't have to worry about it. Now it's a battle to get it certified.

It seems like a lot of farm land is going residential and commercial? Yeh, it is.

Do you think the kids around here will start going into farming like they used to? No. There's not much profit off of farming right now. Probably about as bad as it has been except for the Depression. To make money to pay for a farm from the farm is almost impossible. Most people that have farms now have outside jobs. They work at night or something.

It's a lot of land to pay taxes on to, huh? Yeh, that's right.

How do you think the appearance of Shelbyville has changed over the years? It's changing for the better every year. We've got two or three organizations and now you have to meet all the requirements before they let you build anything or go into business or put up signs and especially the northern part of the city where the black people live. I'd say half of them, the city has purchased those houses and torn them down and loans from federal government have allowed them to build new houses...real attractive houses...and they own them. After you get them built, the people own them and it's their responsibility to keep them up, clean, etc. They've done a good job. I got lost over there the other day. They've changed one of the streets to one way and I got lost. But it's really attractive over there from what it used to be. It used to be terrible. Some of those houses they remodel if they just need a lot of work on them.

The appearance has changed and they have better streets and better roads and this eastern part of the city used to be pretty rough looking and they've changed that a lot. They've remodeled some old buildings and they really look nice. Yeh, appearances are really a whole lot better than what it was. I guess the ladies on these boards today want to do it right. Everybody's cooperating.

Are there still many retailers downtown? Retailers? Yeh, some of them drew out on account of Wal-Mart but most all of the retailers are still here. Just a few of them retired and died and... but generally speaking there as many retailers... there may be more now. Wal-Mart is getting ready to move. They have just a regular store out here but they're going super now. They purchased some land on Highway 55 and it'll be about a quarter of a mile off of I-64. State's putting a four lane road through there. Yeah, Wal-Mart is going to move and they're going to have a Superstore out here. It'll have everything. They purchased 20 acres of land to build it on. In 1996 they'll be building it. They're going to have everything that you can think of. I think there will be a branch bank in there too. Groceries, farm supplies, yard supplies, clothes....

What do people generally think about Wal-Mart? Everybody's crazy about Wal-Mart. Some of the merchants that it has affected don't think too much of it. Anything you want you can get out there when nobody else has it. They pull a lot of people out there. They pay a lot of taxes.

Do you go to church around here? Yeh, I go the Methodist Church in Simpsonville.

Well, what do you think makes Shelbyville unique?

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

Reason Shelbyville, Shelby County is such a good place to live, first of all you take the economics part. We have good land, good loam soil and it's real fertile, we've got good farmers that take a lot of pride in what they're doing, we have a lot churches—about 40 churches in the county, and a lot of good people that take a lot of pride in their homes and their barns. We're central to the market in Lexington and Louisville—grain markets and stuff, good roads both ways. We haven't had any scandals in the political system since I've been holding office. We always have pretty good candidates. Good roads and good streets. We have our fair share of crime. We have some bad things.

Has it always been that way? It's getting worse. In the sheriff's office, I don't ever remember anybody having any dope, growing or processing it. But now it's dangerous for the officers. They'll shoot you.

I read in the papers about this murder that happened over on Plainview, I think. Mrs. McKee? Uh-huh. Do you remember anything like that happening when you were in the sheriff's office? Were there any murders when you were in office? Yeh, we had a whole lot of things that happened. Yeh, I could tell you a lot of stories but that would take all day. One I remember though, very vividly... I was working the ball game out at Shelby County High School when I was in the sheriff's office and my aunt called me and said, "Can you come over here real quick? Roscoe, that boy that lives on your place, has been robbed." Roscoe was a hard working guy that didn't believe in the bank and he kept all his money in cash. He and his wife fell out and she left and she knew he had all this

money and she shacked up with two guys from Indiana and she told them about it and they came over here and robbed him one night. I asked my aunt, "Well, what's happening?" And she said, "He's up at my house now and he was able to get up here and I had to wipe all the blood off before I knew who he was." They had hit him over the head with a shotgun and he had a hole in his head that looked like it was about six inches long and you could stick your finger in it. But what they did, they slipped in on him and knocked on the door and he opened the door and they rushed him and pushed him backwards and another took a shotgun and hit him over his head with the barrel and knocked him down but they didn't knock him out. He's a real tough guy—he does manual labor everyday. He wasn't but about 40. He was about like Tyson, you know, so he had a lot of money and one of them said, "Take that sheet and tear it up and tie him up." The other one said, "We don't have time for that, go on and shoot him." So Roscoe figured he had to do something and he said, "Let me tell you, gentleman. I'll tell you where the money is, where it's hid and how much I've got and you can have every penny of it if you'll just turn me out that door and let me go up to my landlord's and get cleaned up a little bit." And they didn't go for that and they started fighting on him and hitting on him and all the time he was backing up real easy and talking to them until he got back to the door. He had a shotgun hanging on two nails and he reached up there and got it real quick—he was as strong as a bull and about six foot two—and he swung around and he shot one of them. One of them started running and he shot him. He shot him with a pistol. After he got his shotgun he backed up and reached over and got his pistol from underneath his pillow and the other guy started running and he shot him. He had an old wood stove in the living room and he shot through that stove pipe and got that guy right in the middle of the back and hit that vessel and he bled to death. He was almost stiff when I got there. The other one shot Roscoe twice with a pistol in the leg—right in the groin—and he didn't go down. The other guy was stopped and loading up his gun and Roscoe hit him right there with his fist and knocked him back and then Roscoe grabbed his gun and shot the top of his head off. He lived three days and it was the awfulest mess you ever saw. Blood everywhere and hair up on the ceiling where he had shot him.

There was a couple that got robbed over here in Bagdad and they were about 75 or 70 years old and they said that the guy that robbed them had long hair on his arm. Looked like a bear and she said, "If I ever see him, I'll know him." So, after he killed them, we brought them up to the funeral home and she identified him as the one who robbed them. But it was unbelievable that Roscoe could... and he told me, "Would you go over there and get my money, Red? It's a lard can full in the closet and the rest of it is in bills in my dresser drawer." So I went over in the far room where he shot that guy and I got it all gathered up. I didn't count it, I just took to the bank where he did business and they counted it and I think it was close to twenty-one or twenty-two thousand. Anyway, that was something fierce.

Things happened then, yep. I had another call this guy... it was in August, real hot weather... and he stopped in front of this house... he had a flat tire and stopped in front of this house and he went in and asked the lady for a glass of water. He was ringing wet and she felt sorry for him and she went and got him a glass of ice water and opened the screen door a little bit and handed it to him and he told her how much he appreciated it and went back to working. Directly he came back and wanted another glass of water so she gave

him another glass and when she did he grabbed her and he swung the door on open and grabbed her and tried to rape her. She got him though. She screamed and she had a little boy about that tall and he started screaming and the guy took a hammer and threw it at the boy and missed him and she told the little boy to run and get under the couch and he did and she kept on fighting him and squealing and hollering and finally he left. We hunted him all night and finally ran up on him and he was parked up by a tree and he didn't have any reverse in his car and we were going to arrest him. He had a brand new Buick and he gunned it in one of the forward gears because the reverse was out and hit this tree and bounced back and hit us and knocked the fellow that was with me down and liked to broke my neck and I told the guy, "You're going to get in or we're going to catch you." He said, "I'm not going." So, he opened the door and had an automatic shot gun and he shot five times at the back of the car and then stopped and then we started going down the road and I shot at him four times and I missed him. He got away and we looked all night for him but what finally... black people won't tell on each other. Finally, one of them said he'd tell us where he was going. He told us he was going to Louisville to certain, certain number on certain, certain street. He told us it was his sisters. So we called the cops in Louisville and told them what happened and told them the car would be full of holes where we shot him and we had missed him. Anyway, they found him and locked him up and they called us and I told them I would be right on down there in about half and hour and they said I didn't have to and that I could just come in the morning and bring the warrant. So, I took it down there at nine o'clock like they told me and they'd let him out. They had changed desk sergeants and they let him out. They didn't make a note or anything. They turned him loose. Took thirty more days to find him and found him down there in the junkyard going to get himself drunk. He was backed up against a scrap barrel. I took the constable with me and we went down there and looked for him. When we reached him he reached over in the barrel and grabbed a piece of scrap metal and the constable saw him and he had a big 45 that he carried and stuck that in his ribs and said, "You throw that metal back down in there and get on the ground or I'm going to unload this thing on you." So, we caught him and he got seventy years.

A lot of things like that happened. This guy in the sheriff's office was tough. He was like Tyson. He could eat nails and digest them. He retired and got sick and finally died but we went after a guy one time and he said he wasn't going and he was up on a bank and he reached down to get a rock and he hauled off and hit him right there through the fence with one lick. Knocked him out. So we called the ambulance and they got him. He used to train all the day cause he just liked to do it. But, I could write a book on him. But it was still a lot quieter then than it is now.

People now they won't mind killing you. That young boy that raped that old lady, I'm not sure how far he went or anything but I'm sure she fought him because she walked all the time... she was a strong lady. He just knocked her in the head with a blunt instrument or something and killed her. He took her back over there close to where she lived and laid her down. They haven't done anything with him. He was supposed to have been in a detention home then but they didn't have any room to keep him. Couldn't find a place anywhere—Lexington, Frankfort, Louisville. So they turned him out on probation. They couldn't keep him in jail.

They're in the process now of buying some land to build a new jail. They've picked out a tract but people have objected to it so strongly because they didn't want to be that close to it...it's down by the park sort of and a lot of kids walk from their homes to the park but they're still going to build over there. The county has so many over here, they may have to end up building a six or eight story jail. That would work. Leave the elevator out and let them walk up the stairs.

Well, that's about all the questions I have for you. Is there anything you want to add? Anything in particular? No. I think it's a nice thing you all are doing. It's nice to know people are concerned about things like this.