

# Shelbyville Main Street Project

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

*Interviewer:* Mark Mefford

*Date:* 8-17-95

*Interviewee:* Harold Saunders

*Running Time:* 26 minutes

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## Side One

COUNTER

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INTRODUCTION

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COUNTY.

BACKGROUND: BORN FEBRUARY 7, 1921 IN WADDY, SHELBY

031

GROWING UP IN SHELBY COUNTY: SHELBYVILLE ON SATURDAY NIGHT.

060

EDUCATION: HENRY CLAY HIGH SCHOOL.

065

OCCUPATION: LAWYER, JUDGE.

080

CHANGES IN SHELBYVILLE: CHANGING MARKETPLACE.

116

CHANGES IN APPEARANCE: FEW CHANGES

125

CHANGES IN THE LEGAL PROFESSION

200

CHANGES IN LAW ENFORCEMENT

210

FORMER SHELBYVILLE MAYORS

235

DECLINE OF THE DOWNTOWN: SHOPPING CENTERS.

285

SHELBYVILLE'S UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS.

357

CONCLUSIONS: DISAPPROVAL WITH THE LINE OF QUESTIONS

400

END.

INTERVIEWER'S NOTE: AFTER THE INTERVIEW, JUDGE SAUNDERS EXPRESSED HIS THOUGHTS ON THE INTERVIEWER'S LACK OF INTELLIGENCE AND THE BASELESSNESS OF THE INTERVIEW.

**JUDGE HAROLD SAUNDERS**

**Shelbyville Main Street  
Oral History Project**

**Interview was conducted  
by Mark Mefford  
1995**

**JUDGE HAROLD SAUNDERS**

INTERVIEWED BY MARK MEFFORD

8-17-95

Q. Why don't you start by telling me your full name?

A. Harold Saunders

Q. When were you born

A. February 7, 1921.

Q. Were you born in Shelbyville?

A. Waddy out in Shelby County.

Q. What were your parents names?

A. My father was named Clifton L. Saunders. And my mother was Nova Young Saunders.

Q. What did your father do for a living?

A. He at the time he retired was a rural mail carrier, early life he was a farmer.

Q. Did your mother work?

A. No. Full house wife on the farm. She died early.

Q. Did you have any brothers or sisters?

A. One sister.

Q. Does she live in the Shelby county area?

A. yes.

Q. Are you married?

A. Does it make a difference?

Q. Do you have any kids?

A. Yes. I've been married and I still am, but I don't want to get into that. I've, we've get along and that's fine. And, I have two children, yes.

Q. Why don't you tell about some of your early memories of Shelbyville?

A. I want to tell you about the kids, I don't care nothing about that. Well, their pretty well known, the ? particularly.

Q. What do you remember about growing up in Shelbyville?

A> Well, Actually, I didn't grow up in Shelbyville. I grew up my young life out in the country. We didn't come to town to often but, come to town on Saturday night in the summer.

Q. What all did you all do when you came to town?

A> Went to the picture show or shot pool.

Q. How many movie theaters were there?

A. One.

Q. Do you remember the name of it?

A. Maybe I'll think of it later, right at the moment I can't.

Q. Well, where did you shoot pool at?

A. Well, there were three or four pool rooms back then. Dooley's, Donahue's, Osbornes' and a fancy one up at (Taylor? can't make out) that they called the old Hitching Post.

Q. Did you all do most of your shopping in Shelbyville?

A> Well, yeah, of course in those days, there was stores in Waddy and Bagdad and you could get pretty good set up store at Peytona. All the cow feed, in back in the thirties and forties, there were pretty good set of stores around. So, the hardware stores, you could buy clothes, groceries, but generally speaking where they did their heavy shopping would be here in town.

Q. Did you all have a car?

A. Yeah.

Q. What were the roads like coming into town?

A. There, they still remnants of them left really.. the cut offs running through Peytona, up the other side there on the west, I could show you parts of the old road that are still there as they were then. US 60 went all the way through there....there have been some , eliminated curves, stuff like that, but it was there okay.

Q. Do you live in Shelbyville now?

A> I live out in the country...Scotsdale (?)

Q. Where did you go to school?

A> Henry Clay High School in Shelby County. It's in the east end of the County.

Q. Where did you go to college?

A. Transylvania college at Lexington University of Louisville.

Q. What is your occupation? What kind of occupation have you been involved in?

A. I've practiced law from 47-72, then 72-92, I was Circuit Judge, then to now, I've just been around.

Q. What kind of changes have gone on in Shelbyville since you've been coming to town?

A> Well, theres been a bunch of flea markets, theres nothing downtown anymore. Flea markets and law offices is about all that's left or going on downtown. So it's big change there, oh theres been tremendous change from when, from my high school days and even later than that. OF course, after ..back when I was in service in 41 and 42 and then I was gone about four or five years, and there was some change then but uh, a lot of.. you couldn't

...all the stores stayed open till seven o'clock on Saturday night the town was just full of people. Then, everybody came from everywhere to shop and visit and clear out the late??? (Can't make out)

But now, of course, it's dark on Saturdays and Sunday's.

Q. When did people quit coming downtown on Saturday?

A. Oh, I don't know, it would be a rough estimate, I don't know. When I first started practicing law here in 47, we even stayed open a little while on Saturday nights. Get the work done on Saturday nights to do their business for the country people. I would say 65 or about then, roughly.

Q. When did the entertainment, things like the movie theater and the pool hall start shutting down?

A. The pool room up until four or five years ago were still here. The movie theater hasn't been here for years, later, there was an outdoor theater out here and uh of course back in the old days when they had movies out in the country towns, Bagdad on Tuesday night at Cropper, Pleasureville, they'd pull up and sit on a box car, westerns...but that's been a long time. Still, the old theater here that's been years thirty forty years anyway..

Q. Did you use the interurban very much?

A. I remember it, I remember it, uh, it came out Louisville, I remember riding it on occasion, I remember it, but it has been a long time.

Q. Well, you say your farmer was a farmer for part of the time. After the war, was he involved in farming.

A. No.

Q. Well, I heard some German POW's were used as farm laborers, have you heard anything about that?

A. I've heard they were, I wasn't here of course, but I heard that some German POW's were used. In fact, I'm sure they were, reliably heard they were.

Q. How's the appearance of the downtown area changed...does it look much the same as it did?

A. A whole lot...of course there was a move underway a few years ago to spruce the downtown buildings up...the fronts and all that sort of thing. And, a lot was done on that. To try to keep everything from moving out, but they moved out anyway. SO, they're still looking...I'd say it looked better than it did, not a lot different though cause...not a lot.

Q. What kind of changes happened in the legal profession since you've been here in Shelbyville?

A. Law changes all the time, what do you mean changes in the legal...

Q. Well, is there anything you do differently now than you did

when you first opened your practice or when you were judge?

A. Well, lots of things different, lots of things...the things, it depends on you know, your perspective which side of the street your on, so to speak. But, uh, you have a, everyones pampered now...they pampering kids, they causing 90 percent of the problems and its just...whether that be in schools or whether it be in law, or whatever. And of course, the rules of practice differ, but that's before the modern thing and more they have all kinds of new equipment that their using, electronic stuff, computers and we don't use computers here, I didn't have them and I don't believe Judge Stuart has them yet, at District Court, they don't have them, but the recorders still take the cases the old fashioned way. But, there have been many, many changes in the Court System since...lets see, in 1970's they had what was called the Judicial Articles that changed the whole system. Administrative offices of course they kind of dictate to the local courts what to do. But, hum...a lot different.

Q. How's the crimes changed...are there any crimes that occur a great deal now that didn't used to in the 60's?

A. Oh, yes, people don't have any fear of the law anymore, you know they just as soon go and get a ? or a slap on the wrist and go on about their business. Jails are air conditioned, private telephones for each prisoner and recreation areas all that sort of thing. And as long as they can live better in jail than they do outside, they don't care much about serving some time. It's just, that the jails are getting crowded, I realize that but um, they have changed. To my way of thinking it's worse.

Q. So you thinks theres more crime now than...

A. Yes.

Q. What kind of crimes, any special ones stand out in your mind that used to occur that you don't see much of anymore?

A. Used to occur... always been stealing, always been fighting and theres always been a little robbery, occasional killing, but still its just more of it and worse. Of course, communications has a lot to do with that. You hear about everything that's done these days. In the old days, you didn't, sometimes you didn't know everything that went on in the world.

Q. When you were a judge, did you see a rise in amount of drug related arrests or do you think there is now?

A. Consistently rose in the whole 20 years.

Q. Is it just the stuff grown locally or was it stuff brought in form elsewhere?

A. Both...the distribution points, the same people brought it...all they'd get was the runners, they never would, I'd say they never got a real...the top boys never did come into my court.

Q. In the 50's and 60's was there a lot of marijuana being grown in the country?

A> No, not that I know of. There was marijuana being grown here for years...see this was a marijuana County you know, hemp, but still a lot of it hemp grows all over the county, around Hempridge and that area. But as far as that's concerned, I don't, there was probably some growing around but not much, and in the 50's and 60's that was a little bit later before they started on that, I believe.

Q. How's the, you might not know this, but how has the policing changed in the last thirty or forty years?

A. Well, lets see, in 1954 and 58, I was Mayor of Shelbyville and at that time we had four policemen I believe or five including the chief. WE had two police cars, one was to run all the time and we had two night police and three day and now I don't really know, but I'd say we have at least 25 or 30 police cars at least. Evidence car, oh theres all kinds trucks that they use and they have I don't know how many, but I know theres a lot more policemen than we used to have, but how many more, I don't know. But, I do know that theres at least four or five times as many as there were when I was Mayor.

Q. Are there any other Mayors you think that have had a significant impact on the downtown area, the appearance of it, rejuvenation or anything like that?

A. Other than what was all the mayors have had some impact, was not only an impact back then, but the Mayor before me was Matthews, he was Mayor for many years, but in those days it was kind of known as a retired farmers town and that's the way they wanted to keep it. And, I had just gotten back from the service and it wasn't for jobs and so I ran on a platform. I didn't run on my name, I ran on a platform and I won easily based on that and we tried to do something, but of course I didn't have the majority of the council and we got a few things done. WE bought the water company and sold the gas company which was great and turned out good. Built a few new streets, anyway, since that time Mayor Puckett has done a lot for us and before that Doctor Porter...it was just, all the Mayors have consistently tried to cure improve the downtown, regardless of what the businesses have sold out. Through no fault of that.

Q. What caused the ...

A. Marshall Long was Mayor, of course he was very progressive. I'd say that all the mayors that have served have been proactive and promoted the downtown.

Q. What has caused the decline of business in downtown?

A. I'd say the shopping centers. Theres no question about that.

Q. When did the shopping centers crop up, when did they start?

A. Well, as I recall it was kind of a two step situation. We started out, you had an A & P Store downtown, we had the A&P store downtown and Winn Dixie and of course Didens (?) and those stores were in the downtown area. And the clothing factory was downtown

and all that was and the first move technically out of downtown was the A&P. The old A&P grocery store. Well with that move, that started happening right then and everybody recognized it I think.

But, they didn't move that far. They moved to the edges of town so they could get parking. parking was a problem, and it's still a problem, it always has been a problem. And to this day, we preach it in 1954 and we preach it today is for people that have businesses downtown, don't park on the street! But, they get here first in the morning and take up all the parking spaces. The people will go to Louisville and walk five blocks or ten blocks, but they come here to town and they wont walk two. If they have to go down here to one of these parking lots, they wont do it. But, anyway, I recall that Kroger came in down here on the east end of town. And, the A & P moved to the east end of town. Winn Dixie went out to where the Hardware store is out there now, all which were shopping centers they were just at the edges, they went out away from the downtown where they could get parking. And since then of course, they've gone on out to Krogers and the Governors Square and across the way and to Winn Dixie to Tommy Howers place and of course later over there to McGinnis' place across the road. Now they've really, they follow of course the Walmarts and all that, and I've been told theres to be another big Walmart they're putting up twenty acre development out here on the interchange.

That's the way it is, it just kind of started moving from downtown because of the parking and then as they went both ways and you can see the result now. But, there was an intermediate situation where they all moved from one spot, they moved further, some of them, been as many as two moves till they got where they are now. Just kept moving out further. Of course, they're picking up a lot of stuff from other communities too, Taylorsville, New Castle, Eminence, which is good I guess.

Q. What do you think makes Shelbyville unique. Any unique characteristics about Shelbyville?

A. It's a, I've never considered it being unique in the terms that I'm thinking of now, maybe your term of unique would be different from mine.

Q. Well, do you think it's a typical KY small town?

A. A little more modern...yeah, a little more modern. It's not a country town by any means. I'd say it's a little more sophisticated than most.

Q. Is it still an agricultural community?

A. To a degree, not nearly as much as it was.

Q. Do you think agriculture is going to be consistent or do you think it's declining?

A. Consistent up to a point...depends on whats going to happen with tobacco. Dairy industry is changing in some respects in that there are larger dairies and less dairies. Higher production in



cows and all that sort of thing. But, it's holding it's own, but with lesser people operating dairies. We don't have nearly the number of people operating dairies that we used to. And, tobacco farmers, of course they can do that part time. Kentucky farming is now being done by part time farmers, just a lot of hard...your also getting to group farming is not the term I want to use, where theres some people raising a lot of crops on a lot of farms and one man will raise tobacco on maybe ten farms. Keep a bunch of Mexicans on and that's getting more and more...and it may very well be we'll see the time in this county where the people will pool their cows because the equipment is so expensive. I operated a pretty good sized dairy, I don't know if it's paying off, but it's keeping a lot of people employed. I had two dairies, I combined them, I would have been tied to some big outfit ? like they do out in California, a commune type thing, they have milking thousands of cows at one place you know, a lot of people. We don't have that here yet, one man started that out here, and he's got some cows that belong to other people, but most of the people have their own cows, which you don't see too many cows over 50 or 60, but anyway, that's getting off the subject.

Q. How many migrants are their in agriculture, is it a good proportion of the agriculture being done by migrant workers?

A. The actual labor is, which may not be good.

Q. Do they live here year round?

A. Lot of them do, well, the ones we use, are migrants, they come and go, they go to Florida in the winter some of them stay, some of them stay and strip the tobacco and they'll work in construction or things like that. But see, everybody's got the impression that all the Mexicans and foreigners that are here working are directly from Mexico and that's not true, a lot of them come from Arizona and Texas, there a lot of them are United States citizens. And, they come in here, their migrant workers, but their not from Mexico...some of them are now, but they don't follow the rules anymore...they're supposed to have some supervision, but I don't think they do, they come and go as they please. A lot of them that will bring cars and li....can't make out.

Q. Well that's about all the questions I had, do you have anything you'd like to add about Shelbyville?

A. Tell me, what does this have to do with what you and I have talked about history, I mean where we've talked about building the downtown up again or are we talking about why the downtown went down. I mean it's not as if the old historians and Bondurants and all that stuff we have from old letters and old histories and things. Its' a little different than I anticipated what it's going to be.

Saunders: Sounds like, is this something Bobbie Smith is working on?

Mark: Yeah, she is the one how applied for the grant, but she

didn't form the base for the interview...she had nothing to do with the interview. As a historian, I can't come in here with a goal like to show you that the downtown area is declining or improving...I've got to ask you and let you tell me...I can't show people that the downtown area is going to be rebuilt, I've got to ask you about your experiences one way or the other and ...

Saunders: Well, what we're saying is that what you really, this interview is to make the determination about the future of the downtown area. I was under the impression that it was going to be something you know, like history that was to preserve the memories of all the histories, and the things, some of the famous things that have taken place, some of the famous events and all that sort of thing whereas, I find out, and it's all right...what you're doing is ...

Mark: So you thought what I was going to ask you was about what you'd heard about history back in the previous century...things like that?

Saunders: Well, there's a lot of things back here that happen, not in the previous century, but in previous, early parts of this century, you know, but that's with history, bits that happened, but your talking about the history of the town as it relates to the downtown area and the decline of that area, I see, I understand what you're doing now, but I just didn't understand that to begin with. It didn't make any difference.