

Shelbyville Main Street Project

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

Interviewer: Mark Mefford
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Interviewee: Juanita Stivers
Running Time: 38 minutes

Side One

COUNTER

- 000 INTRODUCTION
- 015 BORN: JULY 30, 1927.
- 033 HUSBAND OWNED MARATHON SERVICE STATION ON MAIN STREET.
- 037 EARLY MEMORIES OF SHELBYVILLE: THEATER, SHOPPING, CHANGES
ON MAIN STREET.
- 144 EDUCATION.
- 160 TOBACCO FESTIVAL.
- 176 TRANSPORTATION: GOOD ROADS, INNER URBAN.
- 192 RELIGION: CHURCH OF GOD.
- 205 JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES, MORMONS IN SHELBYVILLE.
- 220 WORLD WAR II IN SHELBY COUNTY.
- 245 MARATHON SERVICE STATION.
- 328 GATEWAY: SELLING INTERNATIONAL TRACTORS.
- 360 SELLING REAL ESTATE.
- 395 MAIN STREET AS A TWO-WAY STREET.

420 SHELBYVILLE'S ANTIQUE SHOPS.

Side Two

010 SHELBYVILLE'S CHANGING SOCIAL DYNAMICS: LESS CENTRAL ACTIVITY.

030 COLONEL SANDERS.

045 END.

JUANITA STIVERS

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Oral History Project**

**Interview was conducted
by Mark Mefford
1995**

Jaunita Stivers

Interviewed by Mark Mefford

Where were they from: My parents were from Henry County.. Is that right? Uh huh..Well why don't you start by telling me your full name? Juanita Stivers.

when were you born? July 30, 1927.

What were your parents names? Geneva and Dewey Johnson.

You say they lived in Henry County. My dad did.

What was his occupation? He was a farmer.

When did you move to Shelby County? Well I guess when, well this is all confusing because I lived with my grandparents. My Mother died and lived with my grandparents, there fore I moved to Shelby County 68 years ago.

Have you been married? Uh huh

How many children do you have? Five

How many of them still live in the Shelby County area? All of them

Have you worked around the house all your life or did you work somewhere? No I've never held a job, in the last few years I've worked with different ones, staying with people, but, no public job.

What kind of work was your family involved in? Your husband. Well, he began in the service station at 2nd and Main Street.

What was the name of it? Marathon, which is now the Catholic Church building, some sort of building and then he went to twenty years later I guess, he started with Gateway to the old south, which was an International Tractor outlet. And then he went into buying real estate and selling it. So that's where we are now, into the real estate and rental, some rental, not too much. The city's buying most of that.

In the downtown area? Uh huh.

Well what are some of your early memories of the downtown Shelbyville area? Did ya'll go there to trade and shop...did you go there for social activities? Yes

I don't remember any social activities except the Theater, which was, I believe that's where an antique Mall is now.

Do you remember the name of the theater. I guess it probably was

the Shelby Theater, I'm not sure.

How much did it cost to go see a movie?

Well I can remember one time when two of us could get in for a quarter. It was just one of those, I don't know what kind of movie it was, one Thursday night or whatever...didn't have any trouble getting quarters.

What kind of place did you all shop at for groceries and drygoods?

Well Lermans and Lincolns and Lawsons and groceries we had Kroger and A & P store downtown. And then there was the Blakemore Grocery downtown, you know, the kind of individual.

So, did you all patronize all three of those groceries?

Uh huh...wherever.

Did these groceries take credit?

the Blakemore Grocery would, of course the A & P and Kroger didn't. They didn't? no

Did you all buy on credit?

At Blakemores we did, not all the time.

How far away from downtown did you all live at that time?

Well at that time, I was out in the country, I wasn't married then, I was out in the country, but then after we married, I guess it was mostly we lived on Washington Street.

Well when you lived in the country, how did you get into town did you all have a car?

Uh huh.

Was the road very good?

Yeah

was it paved?

yes, I lived out at Chestnut Grove and yeah, we had a good road.

How often did you all come to town? Once a week for shopping maybe?

Possibly, once a week, during the second World War I remember there would be times when there'd be maybe two or three weeks before we'd get in.

With the gas rationing?

yeah with the gas rationing, tire rationing, everything...shoes, everything was rationed.

Well, growing up on the farm how much did you all buy, how much did you all grow out there?

Well, we had a garden and we took our wheat and corn and stuff to the Smithfield Mill, they had a big mill there and we had our own flour and cornmeal. That was made at Smithfield Milling Company.

DO you know where Smithfield is? It's in Henry County, its not too far from Chestnut Grove not over 5 or 6 miles.

Are there any other stores that we haven't talked about that we should for any reason? Drug Stores or
Well, Smith McKinney's was there since before I guess I was born, but its moved into the other quarter of ...you know where the park is, well that was the corner drug store right there for years, it just moved, oh I don't know just a few years back out into the shopping center.

So it's still operating in the other end of town?
Smith McKinney's, uh huh, theres two of them, but they're all closer to the hospital I guess.

The one that was in town, did they just have sell drugs and pharmasuticals or did they have a lunch counter or sodas?
I can't remember whether Smith McKinneys or not, but Begleys did but that was on the other corner down on 6th Street where the Traceys Furniture Store is now. They had a counter and then there was Bradburys and Scoefields which was across the street which also had the counter.

Were any of these places that we've talked about the drug stores or the groceries or movie houses segregated in any way?
Possibly the theater, I believe the upstairs, the balcony part was, but I'm not sure.

Were there any places that women weren't allowed to go into?
The pool room, there was a pool room, it was part of the Liberty National Bank now, and I don't think women were allowed in there.

Weren't allowed or just didn't want to go?
Well, I don't think they were allowed in there, I mean they could go in for food or something but as far as just going in there I guess to play pool or whatever. I tell you who owned that was uh, Hewlitt was his last name, Hardin's pool Room. His daughter is Marshall Long's wife now. Claudette Hulett, he just closed up a few years ago. It was Claudettes daddy that had the pool room, he had it I guess all his life.

Let me see if I can't think of anything else. There was a little dress shop on the corner of 6th Street kind of caticornered to the drug store, a little.

Do you remember the name of it?
The Nancy Lou Shop. She was a Blakemore, she was Nancy Blakemore and that's who she was married to. And uh, there was Lawsons on that side, that was men's shop, a real nice men's shop.

Well, I'm trying to think, there used to be a book store by the Court house the last building, (can't make out comments)
I can't remember now where we got our books, our school books,

there was a little ole place on that side and I cannot remember the name of it.

It was on the North side of Main Street?

uh huh...and all the school books, we got all of our school books there. Hawthorne road...I can't think what that was, I remember Santa Claus always being there.

Maybe it was dry goods or something like that?

No, seems like it was, no I don't remember what it was, toys and mostly underwear...but it was a big store and I can't remember what else they had.

Did you all have to buy your books for school?

Huh.

Where did you all go to school?

I went to Glenairy out by Chestnut Grove out on Smithfield Road.

Did you all have to come to Shelbyville to buy books for school?

Did everyone have to come out?

Uh huh...I guess everybody had to buy their books until they got into High School of course, but that was all...I wish I could think of name of that school principal...I just can't remember.

Do you remember anything about any annual events like the tobacco festival or the fair?

Yes, yeah I remember the tobacco festival.

What kind of things went on at the tobacco festival?

Well there was the King and Queen chosen from the highschool and I can't remember who it was the year I graduated, I don't know who the King and queen was.

Did they elect seniors usually?

Yeah, I think so, possibly.

Did the whole town participate in the festival or just the students mostly?

Oh yeah, the whole town was blocked off and everybody participated. The fair, I don't know, I can't remember too much about the fair other than just going to it.

Rides, games, and uh they had the horse shows then, but I wasn't too involved with that. Mine was mostly just the rides I guess.

You know, I mentioned that the roads were good coming to and from the country, were the roads in town good, was there a lot of cars in town?

Yes, but there was a place to park when you got up here, I remember during the second world war when that there was used to be a streetcar from Shelbyville to Louisville, and I can remember that during the second world war that they took the track up for metal.

Tracks were steel?

Uh Huh, for steel for metal.

Took all the track up and filled it back in with asphalt.

Uh huh.

Wonder why they closed that thing down?

I don't know, I never did know, I don't remember that, I mean I cant remember seeing the streetcar, I just know that the track was there running down Main Street. I think I'm right on that.

Did you all go to church in town?

uhhuh What church did you attend.

Well part of the time in town, I went to a little church on Clay street, I don't know what it was called, Church of God maybe or Church or Christ, I'm not sure what it was. We went out in the country to, we went out to a Baptist church in the country.

Did ? play a big role in he community?

Yeah, I think so, I thinks its always played a big role in this community. Lot of churches and they're springing up more and more.

Are there a wide variety down on Main Street?

Uh huh, there are Baptist, Christian, Presbyterian, Catholic, Church of Christ, Church of God, yeah I think we have Jehovah's Witness and Mormons which we didn't have back then.

Do you know any one who attends those churches?

Yes,

Have they lived here for a long time?

They've lived here a long long time the ones that I know.

Are they Jehovah Witness or Mormons?

Jehovah Witnesses are the ones I know.

So you don't know where they went before that?

No, possibly I don't know whether they went to Louisville, I'm not sure, but I remember when my kids were in grade school, just of course they're schools were forty eight now and I remember that in grade school these little boys coming by with ...?

You mentioned world war two a couple of times, do you remember anything special besides the rationing and things like that that happened in Shelbyville.

Well, they had some of the boys from Fort Knox to come in, they had different ones that take them in their homes on weekends and I know when we were in the county we had every so often on weekends we'd take two or three of them, just let them come out sit by the fire and have dinner, what ever.

Stay a couple of nights or one night or..?

I can't remember whether they spent the night or not. I cannot remember that, I guess they had to if they were there for the

weekend, I mean that was during the really bad part of the war. I remember having three out. (cannot make out comments here)

Of course being in the country, I don't know what they had for them in town, I have no idea, cause I was just about 14 to 18, guess I was 18 when the war was over.

When did your husband open up his gas station, roughly...service station I guess.

Forty two, I guess, probably in the, let me see, probably...do I have to be exact?...maybe 42 years ago.

Was it a full service station?

Uh huh.

Did they serve anything, like groceries or snacks or anything? They had coke machines and maybe candy machines, not machines, they had the little things that you just go get the candy out. And uh, I remember the tire changer was outside and it was rough in the winter time.

Had to change tires a lot more often back then I understand... Yes, Had to change tires quite often. he did all the work by himself except when I'd go down and help you know...pump gas.

Was it a full service station?

Uh huh, little bitty thing...little bitty place.

How many pumps were there?

Two or three.

Did you have unleaded?

No, oh no we didn't have unleaded...this was regular and ethel. Ethel Gasoline, thats what it was.

Do you remember if there was a preference, did you sell mostly leaded or >??

Well it was all leaded, but it was regular...mostly regular, not too many got the more expensive gas.

Do you remember how much gas would cost back then per gallon?

Well if there was a gas war, I remember you could get I don't know if it was ever 25 cents a gallon or not. I can remember getting five gallons for a dollar - dollar fifty, thirty cents...

Not too bad!

No, that was good, and I can remember when this one salesman would come in every weekend and fill up and he say put as much as you can get in there and I never could get over 12 dollars so now...and 12 dollars wont hardly get started now...with gas.

When your husband was...did he ever hire any highschool kids or anything to pump the gas?

No, I helped him.

Did he wash the windows and check under the hood?

Yeah, oh yeah, we always cleaned the windows, oil, air in the tires. I remember one well, I guess I shouldn't tell...I won't tell this...just some ...well just this little lady, little ole school teacher came in and had this real old car, possibly a 39 Ford. She never bought gas from us, but she came in and had her tires checked, battery checked, her radiator filled, her windshield cleaned, her oil checked, I don't know what all...all the free services, and I can remember I was by myself and I couldn't do all those things with all the other cars coming in and I remember this guy, Fred Hinkle that helped me. He had to come in and help, get out of his car and help me because she wanted all the free services.

She wouldn't buy any gas?

No.(laughing)...but it was real funny...I won't mention the name.

Did you do major repairs at the service station?

No, like what?

Did you change the transmission out?

Oh, no oil change, greasing, things like that.

After that, he went to a place called Gateway and sold tractors?

Sold International Tractors and he was there for probably, I don't know 10 years I guess.

Now, did you all own it or did he work there?

He owned it, bought it, that was when he was into buying and selling...that age of his life. And the boys still work out of it, they have used tractors and a little bit of used equipment.

So do you all just sell tractors or did you sell implements as well.

Uh huh...

Was this located downtown?

No, this is just right up here, you know, the warehouse, and then the next building..

Just outside of town...pretty close to downtown.

Did you do a pretty good business out there?

Yeah, did pretty good, get tired of it he'd rather buy and sell real estate.

Well were there any special changes that went on in the tractor business that you can think of?

No, not offhand, cause I never was up there too much after that, I

was at the service station real often, but I wasn't in the business too much. And the two downtown buildings that are Lermans and Lincoln's, now that's where my daughter has the shopping mall, the one that lives across the street...I think it's a shopping center, antique mall.

Well, tell me a little about the real estate, did you all sell retail space or what kind of real estate were you all involved in? He'd mostly buy farms and tract it off in five acre tracts...he had some rental downtown for...just houses, apartments.

Did he ever sell retail space downtown? Or rent any retail space? Well, there is some now.

What kind of businesses...

Gosh, my kids would know more about that than I do...one of them is...have you ever seen the big thing...Proud Mary ... the bookstore, I haven't been in it...and uh, gosh I can't think what the other one is. Like I said, the kids take care of all that and I'm not sure, I'm not too familiar with it. I can tell more about the past than I can right now.

You said your husband sold off five acre tracts, what kind of people were buying...for homes?

Yes, homes

Did he develop homes or did he just sell the land?

He just sold the land...of course they had restrictions and all for whatever they could deal.

What are some of the changes you've noticed downtown in the Main Street area or some of the big changes?

Well, when we first had a service station down there, Main Street was two ways and that changed.

Was it more crowded on Main Street with two way traffic?

Oh yes, it was crowded and that was a change. Well of course...I can't think what else.

Well you mentioned your kids were in the antique business, when did the antique stores start opening in the downtown area?

Probably less than ten years ago, because Lermans and Lincoln's were the last two stores to leave and the one my husband bought and he died in 89. And, he bought those that year and they had just closed down. And the one next to it was, I don't know what you'd call it, was a variety store I guess, women's clothes and a little bit of everything. That's where Jackie Kennedy is now and that was probably opened a couple of three years before Sharon opened up hers. And then, Lawsons closed up which was down and that is an antique shop now.

Does it surprise you that some of the antique stores opened up

downtown?

Oh yes,

Did you think they were going to survive?
I didn't see how they would..its amazing.

SO your surprised now looking back?
Uh huh, how well they've done.

Do you think they do most of their business locally or do you feel they're from out of town to shop.
People from out of town...definitely and other states, it surprises me that they come from other states. But its...I just don't know how many there are, I mean two or three of Sharons booth renters from her have opened up their own, so kind of shows what business is doing.

What other kinds of changes can you think of downtown...when you drive down the street, the store fronts are going to be different cause...is the appearance generally the same...we've talked about the one way streets now and different stores, besides that does downtown look a lot like it used to?

It looks the same because you know, they wont let you change anything. The Historical Society wont let you change, I mean unless they approve of it, I mean the windows have to be put back just like they were. We had some windows on the back on one of our buildings...I don't know how, whether the kids knocked the windows out and of course they were beginning to rot and we had to have windows made to go back just exactly like they were.

That wasn't cheap?

No, no, and they're out again...the frame is there but the windows are knocked out, I don't know whether its birds, I dot' know what it is...or what if kids...it's real high its a tall building, second story so I don't know.

You'd think if kids threw something in there, the rock would be inside the building.

Yeah, I don't know whether the birds did it, or ran through it, I have no idea.

I know there's been a lot of people...its hard to think of them all at once.

The building changes, after you see it a while, it seems like its been there forever.

Well do you see it as much of a social center as it used to be? People used to you know we say, go downtown for one thing or another and spend time.

Oh, the town was crowded. The streets were crowded, you couldn't hardly find a place to park and now, you know, by five thirty the town is closed down. It used to up to 9 or 10 o'clock. So thats a big change. I guess everybody goes to Louisville. Yeah, thats

a big change, that was a drastic change.

You mention Louisville, what do you think people do, do they stay at home and watch TV or stay at home in the air conditioning?
I...all you have to do is go to a restaurant, I don't think anybody cooks at home anymore. Anywhere you go you have to wait usually, and of course all the theaters, like my children like to go...go down.

What do you think makes Shelbyville unique? What are the things you like to tell people about or what are things your proud of?
Well if anybody asked me if I'm someplace else and they tell me whats here, about the only thing I know to say is Colonel Sanders lives here...his wife is here. Isn't that strange I cant think of anything that makes it unique.

Probably somebody just recently coming here would probably recognize that more than I would because I've been here so long, I don't know.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?
No, I don't know of anything.

That's what I can remember.