

# Shelbyville Main Street Project

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

*Interviewer:* Mark Mefford

*Date:* 8-17-97

*Interviewee:* Bill Stout

*Running Time:* 42 minutes

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## Side One

### COUNTER

- 000 INTRODUCTION
- 010 BACKGROUND: BORN 1924.
- 035 WORKING AT THE WATER AND SEWER COMMISSION.
- 043 EDUCATION: SHELBYVILLE HIGH SCHOOL.
- 058 EARLY MEMORIES OF SHELBYVILLE: CROWDED SATURDAYS IN THE DOWNTOWN.
- 065 SHELBYVILLE WATER SERVICE.
- 125 SHELBYVILLE WATER OFFICE AND PLANT.
- 205 EARLY SEWAGE TREATMENT.
- 256 OTHER CHANGES IN SHELBYVILLE UTILITIES.
- 360 RURAL WATER SERVICE.
- 400 CHANGES IN READING WATER METERS.
- 470 CHANGES IN WATER SERVICE BILLING.
- 517 SON WORKS AT WATER PLANT.

Side Two

- 020        CHANGES IN SHELBYVILLE'S DOWNTOWN. U.S. 60, ETC.
- 060        DOWNTOWN MERCHANTS; STOUT'S STORE BURNED.
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Charles William Stout  
Shelbyville Main Street  
Oral History Project  
Interviewed by Mark Meford  
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Meford: Please state your full name.

Stout: Charles William Stout

Meford: When were you born?

Stout: 1924

Meford: What were your parents names?

Stout: Charles Duvall and Laura Craig.

Meford: Did they live in this area?

Stout: Yes.

Meford: What did your father do for a living?

Stout: He ran a grocery store.

Meford: Did your mother work in the grocery store?

Stout: Intermittently, she just helped out.

Meford: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

Stout: I have a half brother and two half sisters. No full brothers or sisters.

Meford: Did they grow up in this area?

Stout: Yes, and they are all gone now. One sister is here but the other is in New York.

Meford: Are you married?

Stout: My wife has been gone 18 years the day before yesterday. She passed away of a heart attack.

Meford: Do you have any children?

Stout: Yes, I have 4 children.

Meford: Do they still live in this area?

Stout: My youngest son still lives with me and a daughter lives in the county and one son in Frankfort and one son in London.

Meford: What was your occupation?

Stout: I worked for the city, the sewer and water commission.

Meford: How long did you work there?

Stout: 36 years.

Meford: Are you retired now?

Stout: Yes, I retired in 1986.

Meford: Did you start working there in the 1950's?

Stout: Yes, I went to work in 1950.

Meford: So you have lived in the Shelbyville area all your life?

Stout: Yes.

Meford: Where did you go to school?

Stout: Shelbyville. I was raised on 9<sup>th</sup> and College Street in Shelbyville and the old grade school was diagonal from where we lived. Shelbyville had two schools. It had the high school and the elementary school. I went to school, way back when they called it

Shelby College, I think it used to have a big observatory on the top of it but that was before my time. I don't remember that. Then I went to Shelbyville High School and about the time I got out of high school, I had to go to the army and that ended my schooling.

Meford: What are some of your early memories of downtown Shelbyville?

Stout: I think about this, especially on Saturdays, you couldn't find a parking space anywhere in the downtown area. The people came and stayed all day and the men would go to the pool room and the women would talk outside and they would go home and do their afternoon chores and come back. The town stayed open late. There was a lot of family owned and private business. Now, that's all gone. Before the preservation people here got into it, there have been so many pretty homes destroyed in Shelbyville. Almost everything from 4<sup>th</sup> and Main Street this way, the houses are practically gone and there was some big pretty houses, on Washington Street also. When I went to work with the water company we had 1250 water customers, now there is around 4500 or maybe more. We had an old water plant over at Clear Creek. In 1894 the city built a water system. There are water mains in the streets of Shelbyville that were laid in 1894 and there is a corner stone up in the park that has their first water storage. It was an old stand pipe that stood on top of the hill over where about the country club golf course. This corner stone came out of it. The city ran it (I don't know what the date was) and they sold it to Kentucky Utilities, I think they sold it for \$1 and the Kentucky Utility Company had a water plant, a gas plant (they manufactured gas), and a power plant over on Clear Creek. The power plant generated electricity as late as 1937 when they had the flood. I think they generated electricity for WHAS. The anti-trust thing came along and KU sold the water systems to Kentucky Water Service Company in Sommerset. Western Kentucky ended up with the gas. In 1955 the city bought the water system back and its been well managed and its been a money making thing. I don't if you would say that it accumulated cash but their assets are fairly great. Back in those days, if we pumped three hundred fifty thousand gallons of water a day, that was a great big day for us and now it's more like 3 million gallons a day. That's about all I know on the water system. It as regulated by a 3 man commission appointed by the City Council and they ran it independently of the city. I think now that's been changed. I think now the city controls it. I'm not sure just how that is. I know the r re done the bond issue to get back involved in it.

Meford: Where was the office and plant located when you started working there in the 50's.

Stout: We had one room in Ms. Guy Morton's house. That the brick house just this side of the Presbyterian Church and Ms. Morton had the upstairs and she rented out for a beauty parlor on one side and we had one room and an old wood garage out back on Washington Street and the Water Plant was over on Clear Creek. We moved from Ms. Morton's down across from the Christian Church and then the Municipal Building was built and we moved there. The water plant was moved down to Guist Creek and its been updated about four times. They've added capacity and more capacity so it would be more efficient.

Meford: When was it moved over the Guist Creek?

Stout: I don't remember the date it went to Guist Creek. It was about 1932 or 34 we had a drought and I can remember walking as a child up Clear Creek just right out in the middle and no water in it. There are a series of little dams down Clear Creek. Southern Rail Road had a dam. That was back in the steam engine days and they had their water tank and there was Old Mill dam on old Jail-Hill Road. L&N railroad had a dam at 8<sup>th</sup> Street and then the water company and a dam at the old water plant. Later, Lake Shelby came and one of the first steps after the drought they built Mary Ross lake which is out at the golf course. Then, a little later in the late 40's, they built Lake Shelby and they came over to town and they build a 200,000 gallon water storage tank which is the one that's in the center of town. It was so dry that they hauled water out of Louisville in tank cars to keep people in water. I don't know how they distributed it but I know it came in tank cars to the water plant. They thought they had solved their problem when they got more water storage and more raw water capacity. The town never did run out of water but it came so close it scared the devil of you. As progressed there's been, I know how many tanks they have now. When I left there was a two hundred thousand, a three hundred thousand and a five hundred thousand gallon tanks and I don't know if they've done anymore after that or not. I haven't stayed to much in touch with them. Ever once in a while they will call me when they can't find something. It was kinda hard back in the beginning. We didn't have any equipment to work with and we never had any machinery. Everything was done by hand. We didn't have a lot of help. Most time there was two water plant operators, a manager, an office worker, and two men in the winter and three men in the summer. We pretty much took care of it.

Meford: So, if there was a break in the main, you had to dig it up my hand?

Stout: Yes, if it was concrete we had a local contractor that would break the concrete for us. We had some time back in those days! We didn't mind it. It was just ever day living then. I think now they would probably frown on it.

Meford: They probably have a few back-hoes now.

Stout: I know they have two up there and I don't know if they got rid of the third one or not.

Meford: How did you take care to the sewage when you first started working.

Stout: The City Water Park took over the City Sewer Park and that was after the city acquired it and then they consolidated and was the Water and Sewer Commission. There was an old tank sewage plant that was build back in the 30's. Previous to that there was, to my knowledge, there was 3 huge septic tanks that took care of that. None of that was in that existence when I came into the picture. Back in the public works days they built a whole lot of the sewage plant and it was a crude thing. The sewage went in one end, came out the other and what settled was kept and what came out the other end went into the creek. It was chlorinated and that was it. The regulations, especially the sewage treatment really got tuff. Every year the EPA people add more. I don't know if you've seen it, but they have a real nice sewage treatment plant out there.

Meford: Where's it at?

Stout: It's out 10<sup>th</sup> Street in town and the road forks and about 2 blocks over you take the right and that's Kentucky Street and you go over the railroad and the County Road Department is on the left and then the next drive is the sewage treatment plant that goes back. You can't hardly see it from the road back in there. There is a young fellow, Tom

Doyle, is the Sewer Plant Superintendent, Tom is an awful good boy and he's a smart one. In fact he went to Western and he studied "Sports Medicine" and he was with the Mets. He just got some much traveling and Tom had worked for us in his off season. Tom was awful good help and he finally came back full-time. He's gone up which is well deserved of Tom, he's a good boy.

Meford: We've talked about some of the changes in water and sewage like the moving from one reservoir to another and the upgrading of the plants and the moving of sewage treatment. Are there any other changes that went on?

Stout: I think originally they called it the Shelbyville Water and Electric Board or something like that and it seemed, at that time, everything that went into the ground was designed with the present in mind not the future needs. There's been quite a bit of upgrading on the water mains, fire protection mainly. They have reached way out with their water system. As far as I know, Gene Faust is the manager now and Gene is a very knowledgeable person and he's worked himself pretty good. He's nobody's fool. I don't know how many people they've got working for them now. My youngest son, he's downstairs now, works for the water plant and I think he got off at 3 this morning. He's trying to catch up. He's either working, hunting or fishing. He's looking forward to squirrel season Saturday next.

Meford: I was too but I think it's to hot.

Stout: That's what he thought. He got a new shotgun for his birthday and he's anxious to try it out. He'll have to show you his deer head he's got down there mounted. I couldn't kill a deer for anything in the world. I just think their so pretty and I don't care for the meat. He fusses at me because I won't eat the meat. I don't care for any kind of wild meat. I like fish but, but not rabbit, or squirrel or anything like that. He fusses at me and says, "you won't eat deer but (I like beef) you'll eat beef and I don't see how you stand that."

Meford: How wide was the water company's service when you started working there?

Stout: When I started the company, this way it came to the Masonic Home and it went to the South Winds Restaurant that way and north and south it stayed in the confines of Clear Creek. Now, they go way down below Finchville and West Shelby Water District came from highway 55 to the Jefferson County line to west of us. The North Shelby Water Company came on and they run from Jefferson County to Franklin County to the north of us and East 60 Water District came in and they run from Franklin County to North Shelby to the water treatment plant out this way. It's narrowed the room for growth for the Shelbyville Water Company. They can't go north, west, or east but three is some territory to the south that they can move into. It's gotten to where most of the rule people have water. The west district got there water from Shelbyville, the north got their water from Shelbyville and the east district gets their water from Frankfort. The demand has risen and now north Shelby gets it from Shelbyville, Louisville and Frankfort. West Shelby is tied into Shelbyville and Louisville. I don't think there is any problem with any water supply now for anyone. They built the Guist Creek Lake and it has 325 surface acres and that's a big lake for us. We've never really, in my life time, hurt for water because we did build the lake. Most of the dams that were in Clear Creek are gone. The Southern dam is still there, the L&N dam is gone, the water plant dam, erosion has gone around it and lowered that pool of water. Lake Shelby dam is still good

up there and on further up, it never entered into any water picture, Mr. Thomas was a tremendous property owner and he had a dam on Clear Creek for his own use.

Meford: Did you deliver any water out into the country?

Stout: No

Meford: Not to cisterns or anything?

Stout: No. Over the years that as regulated as to who could have the water tower outlets. Well now you put a quarter in and got so many gallons, well back then you filled your tank and they charged you so much for a tank full of water. Someone wanted to sell water and they wouldn't let them and I think they went to the Public Service Commission and they shot the City down and allowed another one to come on and this one come on and it got so much on that some of them dropped out. There were too many in to it. Now, to my knowledge I only know of one person that is almost full-time delivery anymore. The farmers have their own tanks if they need water but used to be that you'd see them lined up in some of these places to get water and of course they put the coin operated measures in and they could get water anytime day or night. The City never did distribute any water that way.

Meford: When you first started working for the water company, how did you check the water meters or water usage?

Stout: We read the meters ever two months. We read half one month and the other half the next. Contrary to a lot of people's belief, we did read the meters. The only time we didn't read meters was when it got so cold that we couldn't raise the tops on the meters. I don't remember how many times we have the complaint that, "you never read my meter." We had one guy that would put a rock on top of his meter just to see if we would read his meter. We knew him pretty well so we'd always put the rock back on top.

Meford: Well, since you've retired, do they still read meters?

Stout: Oh yeah. They do that on a monthly basis. When I first started, I went to work in November of 1950 and Mary Louise McCoy came to work I believe in January of 1951 and we read the water meters and you always were one up on your book. There was a two year record on each customer, each page in the book and it was for two years. You read the meter and subtracted the previous reading from the present and you put it over in the units. That went into the office and Ms. McCoy would go through and check our subtraction and make sure that it was right and then she had a chart and she could look at 24 units and how much the water was and how much the sewage was and how much the tax was and the total. She would in long hand write that on each meter page for that period. She would then go to the typewriter and she would type each bill individually with that old typewriter. They had a carbon and we kept the carbon and the original went out to the customer. Then she would put the original in an envelope and put a stamp on each one. That was a marvel and she had her hands full. She did all that and the book worked and answer the phone. She was the only one in the office.

Meford: I guess they worked that poor woman to death.

Stout: They got a computer and hired a lady, Kay White and Kay's there now. She's an awful nice lady and very smart and knowledgeable about computers. They hired Kay to help Ms. McCoy. When we did get computers, my conception as an old country boy, I thought I'd see this piece of machinery come in where the wheels were gonna turn and when we got one it didn't have anything that turned. Between computers and the old

hand billing, we did get a billing machine. It looked like a big typewriter. It eliminated a whole lot of her work and we started billing on post cards which eliminated envelopes. Then we went to computers and Ms. McCoy wouldn't have anything to do to the computer. She retired a few years before I did. It's kind of amazing that she done all she did. The day she retired, it was kind of a black day for me because she didn't get any recognition what so ever and it was more like she walked out like she was going home from work and never did come back after that. She still lives down at the other end of town.

Meford: What does your son do for the water company?

Stout: He works at the water plant down at Guist Creek. They have 4 employees down there now and need another one.

Meford: Do you think they'll find one or is it hard to find people to work these days?

Stout: I don't know, I don't try to get involved at all with them. Especially with my son working there. I know some of my ideas are different. My ideas go back to the older ways, so unless they call be about something, I don't call them.

**Tape changed sides:**

Stout: I told Charles, he was on the board at one time and Charles is no fool, he's a pretty sharp fellow. There is a fellow named George Harris, has he mentioned him?

Meford: Yeah, I talked with him.

Stout: George has got a lot of knowledge of the older people that lived and where they lived. Ms. Scarce, did they tell you about.....

Meford: Yes, I think I talked with her.

Stout: She had a lot of written stuff.

Meford: She showed me.

Stout: She pretty much guards them and I think she's going to turn them over.

Meford: She said they would go to the State Historical Society. She was kind of torn but she decided that would be the best thing.

Stout: Her husband was one of the original Water Commissioners.

Meford: What was his name?

Stout: Bill Scarce. He was a banker.

Meford: What were some of the changes that happened in the Shelbyville downtown area?

Stout: All the small businesses are gone. If you look in the downtown Shelbyville, there is no clothing stores. There might be a furniture store or appliance stores. There was grocery stores, and back in those days the Kroger and A&P were right in the middle of town there and they've moved out. The A&P is gone. There was 4-6 pool rooms and that was the busy place. Two of them had big bars and you could get a good meal in the pool room back I those days. They would have pool tournaments and everyone in the county would come. You couldn't hardly move in the pool rooms. The houses that are gone, the house where the NAPA place is at 1<sup>st</sup> and Main Street, that used to be a huge brick home there and had a iron fence all the way around it. There was the Miss Katie Goff home and it's gone. It was a beautiful place. Big nice yard back in there behind it. All that end of town has really been ravished I think. Back in the old time, Main Street was a two-way street and all US 60 traffic went though. I don't know what they'd do now if they didn't have the interstate. My dad ran a grocery store over on Collins Street

and it was right at the edge of the colored section. He had a store and next door to him was a store and then down 2-3 blocks was another store, back over a block there was a store, right in that area of about 4 block area. Up on Main Street there was two side-by-side and over on 10<sup>th</sup> Street. Our store and most of the others was 90% credit. They bought groceries on credit and paid at the end of the week or month. But they all got forced out by the chain stores. Our store burnt. You couldn't afford to go back into the grocery business.

Meford: When did it burn?

Stout: It burnt.....I'd gone to work for the water company.....probably around 1952 or 1953, something like that. We lived, there was about that much space between where we lived and the store. Just a little walkway. My grandfather owned the store, our house and the next house that he lived in and Dad had lived in that house for 32 years paying rent so he bought the house. I think he bought the house and the store for like \$6,000. I can remember, we lived right on the corner and there was 3 sisters that were married that lived over there, Ms. Cleveland, Ms. Porter, and Ms. Tharp. You could throw a rock from our house to theirs. I can see Holly now sitting on the front porch. She always wore an apron and a bonnet and they'd be shelling beans or combing her hair (she had long hair) and there would be two or three other ladies there. Tomorrow, they'd be over on another porch talking. Every porch had a swing and 3 or 4 chairs. The ladies visit almost everyday among themselves. We had no air conditioning and I don't remember having even a fan growing up. I don't remember it ever being hot in the house. It was a big old house with high ceilings and it's still standing but is in bad shape. A lot of the childhood things I miss and think of. Our whole life growing up revolved around the old grade school and the dam. That was our swimming hole. That was about it. They finally opened a playground during the summer months. Then we got old enough to have bicycles and we'd go down to Finchville's Pickett's Dam, that was a pretty good place to swim. No one had swimming pools and there was no city pool. Back in those days, Cox's Lake is where we'd have our school picnic every year. It's a real nice place. We enjoyed. My half brother lived at Middletown for a while and they made Cox's a private lake and he had membership over there and we'd go over ever once in a while with him. It doesn't look like the old lake. It's got tennis courts and a big parking area. I think when we went down there you just parked on the edge of the road.

Meford: Now, you can't hardly see in there because of all the trees at the edge of the road.

Stout: I haven't been through there for a long time. I've been down Akin road over on the other side but I haven't been on that side.

Meford: That's about all the questions I have. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Stout: I don't know Mark. My memory.....I can't remember dates and sometimes I can't remember names. If I had my life to live over again, I think I enjoyed my working days. There was always good fellowship among the employees. Everyone worked together and got the job done and you didn't here much complaining. I don't know how they are now.

Meford: I sure appreciate your time and talking with you this morning. I hope I wasn't to much trouble.

Stout: No, I've enjoyed it!