

Lee Shriver

- Narrates a slide show of slides showing changes in Olathe architecture
- Growing up in Olathe
- Olathe Schools
- Profession as a Letter Carrier
- Olathe fires
- Urban renewal
- Changes in Olathe
- Future vision for Olathe

Lee Shriver

(DVD starts mid-sentence; it is of Lee Shriver explaining slides that he is showing)

...Birch is in the center of your picture you can see the courthouse just up in the upper left hand corner; mostly what you see in this picture has been torn down.

(Slide advance) This was taken just before urban renewal started, this is an aerial view of downtown Olathe; this was taken about 1966 just before urban renewal got started.

(Slide advance) I wanted you to see Santa Fe, this was Santa Fe Street as much as I grew up with it. This was the intersection of Kansas Avenue and Santa Fe; the county jail is in the left hand corner. See the county jail?

(Slide advance) Now look at the difference, that's the way Santa Fe looks today; quite a change from when I was a little boy.

(Slide advance) This is off the top of the courthouse we are looking east on Santa Fe, Santa Fe Street.

This one? (Pointing and helping with a laser pointer)

No that's Park Street. There's Santa Fe. Go up Santa Fe. You don't see any Dillon's store. The football...high school football fields up...way up...right there. There is the Olathe High School football field that's where Dillon's is today. You don't see any McDonald's up there.

So where would the school be, today?

High school would be a block north, be right over in there. That's Kansas City road and right down there where that house is, come on down that'd be where the first national bank is today. Kansas City road was the main highway into Kansas City, that's why it's called Kansas City road. This was before I-35.

What year do you think this picture was?

Oh gosh, that was probably back in the...in the early 50s

(Slide advance) There's Santa Fe today all widened up, quite a difference in the street.

(Slide advance) there's Snappy's drive in. what do you think is there now instead of Snappy's drive in?

McDonald's?

Nope

Taco Bell?

(Slide advance) ***(Next slide and everyone gasps, Lee doesn't indicate what is there now)***

How old is Mom's kitchen? How long has Mom's kitchen been there?

Oh gosh it's been there quite a while, it's been there a good 20 years; it's been there a long time.

(Slide advance) This is Olathe's first hospital this is at Santa Fe and Cooper Street. This is where all three of my kids were born.

(Slide advance) This is the main entrance of the Olathe hospital. What do you think is there now on that corner?

Santa Fe and Cooper?

Santa Fe and Cooper, (clicks slide): Walgreens

(Slide advance) There is the second Olathe hospital it's torn down. It was out there by the FAA control tower.

(Slide advance) There is the present Olathe hospital.

(Slide advance) There's the Washington school we had three grade schools in Olathe; we had Washington, Central and Lincoln. Lincoln was for the colored kids or the black kids; nobody could ever tell me why we had a separate school for the black kids in grade school because when we graduated to junior high then all the black kids and the white kids went to junior high and senior high together. But I've never been able to find out why we were segregated.

(Slide advance) This is the high school football field.

(Slide advance) Dillon's is there now near as I can figure when you walk in the main door of Dillon's you are walking in on about the 50 yard line.

(Slide advance) There's the present Washington school out on Ridgeview.

(Slide advance) There's the FAA control tower, this was taken probably in the mid-50s. See there's no Ace Hardware out there; there's no mid-American Nazarene college.

Does everyone know where this is located today?

This is over by Big Lots, by I-35.

Santa Fe and I-35.

I have a question. How do you get these aerial shots from that long ago?

I borrowed the slides, I don't know who took them.

Oh, you don't know who took them? I mean they're elevated, there aren't buildings...

No it's taken from an airplane.

So is that I-35 that the cars are on?

It's I-35.

(Slide advance) This is the frontage road, along I-35; this would be north of K-radio. That's the B & B café. Look at the far left corner, you see the price of gasoline, 21 cents a gallon. I can remember gasoline as 15 cents a gallon.

(Slide advance) There's Lincoln school that was for the black kids. That was out on west Spruce Street, just west, you know where the underpass is on Spruce Street, it's just two blocks...a block west of the underpass.

Where was that B & B Café located?

It was out on the east side of I-35. It was just...it'd be about a half mile east of Santa Fe Street on the frontage road.

(Slide advance) There's what took the place...now this church; is not on the same place that the Lincoln school is it's to the west of Lincoln school, but that is what is out there today.

(Slide advance) Here is the very first courthouse in Olathe, it happens to be where the administration building is now.

(Slide advance) This is the courthouse that I remember, this was built for 36,000 dollars back in 1892, \$36,000 wouldn't make a down payment on the basement.

(Slide advance) I put this in so you could see the beautiful courtyard off the courthouse upstairs and you could also see main street Olathe.

I have a question.

Yes sir.

Was there any discussion or resistance to tearing that down when they did and build a new courthouse? Or was it just a foregone conclusion that progress was...?

They just said we outgrew it sir. There wasn't any discussion to it, they just simply outgrew the courthouse, so that's the reason they built the new one.

(Slide advance) This is the east side of the Johnson county courthouse, this was probably in the 40s, those two cars probably represent the entire sheriff's office of Johnson county; you've got to keep in mind the county wasn't very big back then, 60 years ago.

(Slide advance) Here's the finished product, this was the new courthouse they built it in front of the old courthouse then they tore the old courthouse down and made a parking lot out of it. Then as the county grew they added more courthouse when we got the eight story tower. Already this has changed; they've closed this entrance off.

(Slide advance) This is what it looks like today.

(Slide advance) This is the old gazebo, as I remembered. You get arguments from the old timers that they built the new one, but they didn't build it in the same place as the old one.

(Slide advance) This is the Johnson County jail, this is unique, this was located behind the City Hall there on Cherry Street. The sheriff lived up in front and the prisoners were jailed in the back, that way the sheriff was never late to work.

(Slide advance) There is what's there today, after they tore the old jail down. This is just across from City Hall on north Cherry Street.

(Slide advance) This is City Hall built in 1910, the jail sits there on that corner today.

(Slide advance) This is the entire fire station and police department offices for the city of Olathe.

Where is that located?

That's located on Santa Fe Street that's where the jail is today, that's on west Santa Fe.

(Slide advance) There's the present police department, see how much bigger it's grown from the original. And then the fire department's out there behind, in fact there's several fire stations scattered around the city.

(Slide advance) There's the entire paid...this was taken in '62, this was the entire paid fire department and police department. See the sirens on top of the City Hall? Whenever they had a fire, they blew the whistle. We had what was called volunteer fireman, and the whistle called the volunteer fireman and it was kind of like the old keystone cops, if you've ever seen the movie the keystone cops, they came from all over town and no wonder they didn't run over somebody.

(Slide advance) Here is the swimming pool that I swam in, it's down there where Millbrooke is now. They tore it down.

(Slide advance) There's the present pool, in fact they've changed it a little bit, I need to update my slide.

(Slide advance) There's the 100 block of west Santa Fe, the City Hall sits on there today, that's the Hotel Olathe, that's what it looked like when I was a boy growing up.

How many hotels did Olathe have?

Olathe had 1, 2, 3, let's see Avenue Hotel, Hotel Olathe, I think there...and the...a...there were three hotels in Olathe all together.

There was one hotel where Hickock [Dick] and Smith [Perry]...

This is the one, this is the one where they stayed.

They stayed?

Yes, sir. That's where they stayed. I don't know whether it was on their way out to western Kansas or on the way back, but they stayed in this hotel.

(Slide advance) There's what that block looks like today although the trees have grown up. You can see the five plaques on the wall up there, we're known as the city of governors: we had three governors, Governor Hodges, Governor St. John, and Governor Anderson; Governor Anderson is still alive. They were the three governors from Olathe, that's why we're called the city of governors. The other governors I can't think of their names, one was governor of Idaho and the other was governor of Missouri.

(Slide advance) This thing I put in for just a little amusement. This was put up by standard oil, it was put up at Kansas and Santa Fe Street, it was not quite out in the middle of the street; people had Olathe written on it, you can see the standard oil light bulbs up on top. People clipped this things when they made left turns, they'd get too close and clip it. The only reason I happened to remember this, because I was too little to, I remembered only for the simple reason that my mother happened to hit it one day, and she said a word that I won't repeat, and that's how I happened to remember that she hit that thing.

When did they take that out? Do you remember?

They took it out in the early 40s, they took it out before it got chipped down.

(Slide advance) This is where the present City Hall sits, the 100 block east Santa Fe, this is what that looked like when I was growing up before they...urban renewal bulldozed that block.

(Slide advance) I need to update my slide, they turned that into a bank and now it's the City Hall.

(Slide advance) This is west Park Street between Kansas Avenue and the Santa Fe railroad track, this is back when the...19...I can't read the date 18 something—1898; chamber of commerce got all excited in Olathe wanted a picture of this for the newspaper and called it "Cruising the Fe" that was something the teenagers were doing several years ago, cruising the Fe, well they got a block off on the deal. Up there if you can read it, it was meals for 15 cents, I often wondered what kind of profit they made on a 15 cent meal.

(Slide advance) This is the same street, this is pretty much how I remember it, the administrative building would be on across the street up there.

(Slide advance) This is what that block looks like today, there is the administrative building.

(Slide advance) This is the 100 block of north Kansas on the west side of the street, headed toward Santa Fe you can see City Hall down there clear at the end. This was the first block that urban renewal bulldozed, by the way.

Is that white building on the end just an empty building now?

The light building?

Yeah, the white building.

The cream colored building down there?

The one I'm pointing at Casey?

The one that Mr. Williams is pointing at.

This one that he's pointing at? That's a restaurant No, it's occupied. That was the Triangle Café and later on became as the White Way Café.

The cream colored building down there is the Avenue Hotel.

Right here? (Using a laser pointer)

Yeah, that's the Avenue Hotel.

(Slide advance) There's what that block looks like today.

(Slide advance) Here's main street Olathe, this was taken back in the 30s just looking at the cars. But this is...

(Slide advance) Oh there's what I remembered, this was taken in 1966, this is Main Street Olathe; this was just before urban renewal took over. I'll show you what urban renewal did to this street.

(Slide advance) It is very pretty, isn't it? Urban renewal was a disaster as far as I was concerned. It was supposed to rejuvenate Olathe and they just tore down all the buildings...and never did...Olathe never made a comeback.

(Slide advance) There is what is on that block today, is the Johnson County Administrative Building.

(Slide advance) Here is north Cherry Street looking from Santa Fe up to a...what would be the administration building up Cherry and Park Street. Down here...just past these...common on right there, no come down, come down, back this way...you had it...

Where? (Using a laser pointer)

The theater, see the canopy sticking out? There you got it, right there.

That was the...we had two theaters in Olathe, that one cost 15 cents to go to the show, the other one around the corner right on the next block cost 20 cents, nobody could ever tell me why there was a nickels difference in the two shows. I practically grew up in that show there, I never wanted to get to be an adult because adults had to pay 35 cents to go to the show. What does it cost to go to the show now?

Seven fifty, eight fifty

Eight fifty?

And it depends on if you go earlier in the day.

Here I fussed about 35 cents.

(Slide advance) There's the same block in 1966.

(Slide advance) There it is today, the only difference is the trees have grown up a little.

(Slide advance) Here is the Grange Store. I thought you'd be interested in going inside an old fashioned grange store.

(Slide advance) These are refrigerators, they called them ice boxes and stoves.

(Slide advance) More stoves.

Do you know what those things are on the side of the picture?

Right here? (Using a laser pointer)

Over, right there...kids have any ideas?

Washing machines?

You're right, those were washing machines.

(Slide advance) Now we come out...the Grange Store burned in 1936; that's why you got the opening there between the tall buildings.

Right here? (Using a laser pointer)

Yeah that all burned out in '36, this is pretty much the way I remember this street.

(Slide advance) And this is what it looked like after urban renewal came through.

(Slide advance) This is pretty much the way I remember Park Street, this is 100 East Park, going...we're just east of the administration building going down the next block. These ole fellas standing on the corner, if I can get that cleared up, we called...us kids called them the spit and whittle bunch. Those ole fellas would...they'd stand on the corner to pass the time of day and they never heard a soul. Or they'd sit on the park bench over in front of the courthouse and whittle...whittle away on wood.

(Slide advance) This was taken in 1957, the reason I know that's because of the bunting up there. When Olathe was a hundred years old. There's the Trail...well, you can't see it, we'll see it in another picture.

(Slide advance) Here is what it looks like today, except the trees have grown up.

(Slide advance) Now you can see the Trail Theater up there, the Trail, that's the one that cost 20 cents to go to, that's pretty much what I remember the street when I was growing up.

(Slide advance) There it is today.

(Slide advance) Now this isn't the grocery store Bill Kramer was talking about, but this is the grocery store, there was two of them in town...or three of them. You could call up and order your groceries and they would fill the order and delivery the groceries to you. This was the last load of groceries to be delivered in Olathe, that's Clarence Carver with the white hair, and his brother, Bill Carver.

(Slide advance) We'll go inside the grocery store for a second, you can see the apples were in bushel baskets.

(Slide advance) This is right across the street from the administration building we're going down the south side of 100 East Park.

(Slide advance) There it is...the bank's already moved away it went down to Cherry Street.

(Slide advance) The building along the corner there, Cook's paint, was my folks' hardware store, they had a Shriver hardware uptown, that's the reason I know quite bit about uptown, I practically lived uptown.

What street is this?

Park Street, 100 block East Park. The cream colored building up there clear up at the end of the block that'd be where the administration building is today.

(Slide advance) That's what that block looks like today.

(Slide advance) We talk about having a community building, we had one; this is an old church just south of the hardware store, on Chestnut Street across from the library. That was a community building, they had political rallies in there, they had dances, you name it, they had it in that building. And that building, there was nothing wrong with it they just tore it down for the heck of it.

(Slide advance) And that's what they made out of it...a parking lot.

(Slide advance) Here's the first school house in Olathe that was located on the northeast corner of Loula Street and Water Street.

(Slide advance) There's the first Olathe North School, only we called it Olathe High School.

How old?

That was built in 1927.

When did they first have a high school? Was that it?

A...no this is the first school and I think it was everything: grade school, high school, everything in this building. Then they built...well, I'll show you where the high school was we're coming up to it.

(Slide advance) There's the gymnasium, it was the high school gymnasium. It was between the junior high and the high school buildings.

(Slide advance) Now here it is, this is the junior high when I went to it, and when my mother graduation from it in 1922 it was the high school building. Then they built...outgrew it then they built the high school in 1927, this became the junior high school.

(Slide advance) This was the shop building or the industrial arts building.

(Slide advance) There's another picture of it.

(Tries to advance the slides a couple times) I'll be darned, okay, that's it. I had a picture of Central school in there...but....

(The slide show concluded and the interview began)

You had a picture of the Eagle...Eagle's Club I think it was, that's now all the way out by Lakeshore almost, by Lake Olathe now isn't it?

Yes, that's correct. It's out by Olathe Lake out on Lakeshore, that's right.

How far away did you live from you parents hardware store?

We were about five blocks away, we were just west of the Santa Fe tracks a block.

What was it like growing up in Olathe? What kind of things did you get to do?

Oh gosh, what was it like growing up in Olathe? Well, you knew everybody in town, the town was about 3,000 people, you didn't dare get in trouble because it got back to your folks. It was a small town, everybody knew everybody. We didn't have to lock the door, we had locks on our doors but we never locked our doors, we never locked our cars. Now you lock your car in the driveway, you lock your house when you leave. Our house set wide open seven days a week, even when we had the store, we never locked the house. Neighbors watched after each other, I don't how many times the neighbor lady next door turned me into my mom. Talk about a village raising a kid.

In the summertime when you weren't in school, talk about a typical day, you said you spent a lot of time at your folks hardware store. At what age did you start doing that? And what did you do? And what did you experience? Tell us what everyday life was like?

Everyday life while I worked in the store; we had the swimming pool...everything was real close to town, nothing was scattered out, like it was now. We had the swimming pool, we could go swimming a...we made a lot of our own entertainment: the kids would get together in the neighborhood, we would play softball in the street, we'd play hide and seek, we'd play kick the can, we'd sit around and read comic books, we'd play cowboys and Indians. That was back when Roy Rogers...you kids have probably never heard of Roy Rogers and Gene Autry and all that, but that was back when they were popular. Movies were cheap; you could go to the movies. Then when I got old enough I went to work in the hardware store: I clerked in the store and waited on customers, dusted, stocked, stocked shelves and stuff. It was a...typical day where you could go to the library and get books to read, like I say, everything was close in. downtown was the hub of the...hub of the town and everything wasn't scattered out like it is here in Olathe now.

How many kids did you go to school with?

How many kids? We had our first grade class was big, but I didn't know this...my first grade teacher is still alive, she's 92 years old, she said we had to split the class up. Part of us went in the morning and part of us went in the afternoon; I was in the afternoon group. But we graduated in 1956 there was 75 of us that went across the stage. How many is in your class now today?

I think four hundred...it's almost five hundred.

Do you know everybody in your class? That's not possible is it?

No.

What did you do for a living?

What did I do for a living? I was a mailman for 35 and a half years, now I work part time in a funeral home and have been there almost 13 years.

As a letter carrier what changes have you seen on the job?

Oh my gosh. There were five regular routes, and six, route six was a substitute route, and the...a...or the two sub routes and four rural routes. Now I've lost track there's over 30 some city routes, I used to know every street in town. I can't begin to tell you every street in town; there are streets I've never heard of, much less know where they are. We went from a town, gosh I suppose when I started at the post office in '57, there were probably 12,000 people and look where it's mushroomed today, over 100,000 people today. This town has just grown by leaps and bounds and it keeps growing it doesn't ever...I keep thinking it's going to level off, but now they're headed south. I go out south of town toward Spring Hill and what used to be

country where I used to hunt rabbits is all houses. So it's been a lot of changes. I remember when we got our first stop light in Olathe and it's still there; it's right over there by the administration building. I thought we were uptown! Boy that was...Kansas City had stoplights and I thought we were right uptown.

Do you remember what year approximately what year that was?

No, I don't. That was back in the...I think we got that back in the 50s. And then when we got the dial telephone line I knew we were uptown. *(Everyone laughs)* When we got the dial phone system, we were right there with Kansas City, we had dial phones.

Can you tell us a little bit about the fire? You talked about the...I mean your slides talked about the fire that tore out that one area. Can you tell us a little about where it happened and how and all that?

I don't know how it got started, that was two years before I was born, but that was 1936...and it a...the National Guard armory was in there, and I don't know what caused it to catch on fire. But, it burned out...The only reason it didn't get that one tall building was due to firewall, and it burned out the whole end of the block. And we had a big fire in the 60s that burned out *(inaudible)* the 100 block of East Park on the south side and again, they don't know what started that fire. They called it the Pember fire, because it burned out Pembers stores, and T G & Y and Park Lane sandwich shop. It... the only thing that kept it from burning the whole block out was firewalls. There's nothing left to burn up now anymore.

How has urban renewal changed Olathe in your eyes?

In my life it's killed downtown. Urban renewal was supposed to start out and it was supposed to bulldoze one block, rebuild it and go onto the next block. It was supposed to get rid of some...we did have some junk buildings, granted and it was supposed to get rid of those junk buildings and rebuild. And then a...it was supposed to create parking, that's what was new building, but once the bulldozers started they never did...they never did stop. They never did redevelop the west side of Kansas Avenue, all they made it was one big parking lot. Finally they built the jail on part of Kansas Avenue. And they just went around town and bulldozed.

I may have mentioned the community building, the only thing wrong with it, it needed to be shored up inside and needed a new furnace. I was up there the night that they started tearing it down, and he swung that big wrecking ball off the tower up there and it just bounced like a rubber ball, it was so well built he like never got a crack in that wall. And there were bridge timbers up there in the top of the tower, it never should have come down, it was a tragedy.

Was there any planning involved with that? Do you know if the Federal Government planned what they were going to bulldoze and when they were going to do it?

I know what I read in the paper here, three shots of it, a...Max Evans wrote a column on it and there was some planning to it and then it got changed and a...there was some planning in the

beginning and then somebody got to hollering and squawking and they reversed themselves. They were supposed to make a mall uptown, and then...well the mall was part of what I showed you...the...that disaster they made of Park Street. That was supposed to be a mall but it didn't work out. And it just killed downtown Olathe. They're talking about bringing the town back now, but I don't know whether they...they still got the same problem they had back when they started, they don't have any parking. You go up there and you can't find a place to park in the daytime, county takes up most of the parking.

What do you think would bring downtown back? Aside from parking?

Quite honestly, I don't know whether anything could bring it back. You got no locations for business downtown, there is no locations. You got lawyers, you got title companies, you got print shops, you got to have locations for business. You've got to have something to draw that...people downtown to the business. Everybody generates out east of town, 119...you're going to be competing with 119th street out there and all those stores. You've got a mall out southwest you're competing with. I don't know what the overhead would be like if you could rent a place downtown, how much? You're going to have to pay. But your overhead can kill you if you're not careful you'd have to sell an awful lot of merchandise to pay your rent, insurance, and taxes and inventory and then make a living off of that. Quite honestly I don't see downtown coming back.

What do you think changed Olathe the most? If you picked one factor, one thing, one event?

What changed it the most? Well growth is a big one, I would say growth; the town has really taken off. It was about 3,000 people when I was growing up and the time I went to work for the post office it was up to 12,000. It started growing in the late 40s right after the war. They started building houses.

The city (*inaudible*), you'll get a kick out of this, we had the Olathe naval air station out here and the city (*inaudible*) would get all nervous and in a sweat because they talked about closing the naval air station up. They said if they did that Olathe would dry up and blow away. And they talked about that two or three times about closing the base, well they did finally close the base but Olathe didn't dry up and blow away it kept on going. But I would have to say growth is the biggest factor.

What do you think attracted all this growth? What caused people to move to Olathe?

Well, I think affordability, I think things were cheaper back then, I think that people moved out of the inner city, I think the schools came along, we got good schools. I think it's still a good place to raise a family.

What do you think one of the best things that has happened to Olathe?

The best things that has happened to Olathe? Hmm...gosh....I never thought of that. Well, the hospital for one thing. It's one of the better things that happened to Olathe. We got a *(inaudible)* of a good hospital.

Where would you like to see Olathe go next? What is your best vision of the future?

Well, I think I'd like to see it level off, you know, I'd like to see it finally reach a stopping point. You know, and I think it's going to...we've gone about as far as we can go this way *(holds his arm up on a high diagonal)* we've run into Lenexa and Overland Park, and we're going to eventually run into Spring Hill then I suppose the next area will go toward Gardner. But I think eventually we are going to stop. And I think that will be a good thing.

Why do you think people keep moving? What's the big draw?

I think the big draw is the...the housing is probably more affordable here than it is other places, I think the schools are a good drawing card, um...I think that it's still a small enough town that people feel like it's a small town atmosphere. I think that's what draws people here plus, as I said earlier, this is a good place to raise a family.

(DVD stops)