

Madison Historical: The Online Encyclopedia and Digital Archive for Madison County, Illinois

Edward Hall Oral History Interview

Lesley Thomson-Sasso, Interviewer

Quality Meats, Edwardsville

April 19, 2017

Lesley Thomson-Sasso (LTS): This is Lesley Thomson-Sasso, interviewing Mr. Hall at Edwardsville Quality Meats April 2017. So the butcher shop has been in Edwardsville since 1947. So it's like a staple of the main street. Would you consider this shop a legacy of the post-World War II economic boom?

Edward Hall (EH): Yes it, it definitely probably would be.

LTS: Um, is there any like I know that the original owners, we're now on the third owners of the butcher shop

EH: Right

LTS: Um, but the original ones that um first purchased it, was there any history passed down as to why they decided to have a butchery here in Edwardsville?

EH: Not really, I mean at that time, you had two or three, four small grocery stores, but you didn't actually have the butcher shop.

LTS: Okay and so they saw the need and then decided...

EH: Yeah, Yeah.

LTS: A lot of press touts this place, like I found a lot of old ah, newspaper ads from the 1960s and 70s, that advertised, um, like the classifieds for the butchery, and they said that this was always considered an old fashioned meat market.

EH: Yeah

LTS: So, can you a little bit, extrapolate on what does that mean?

EH: Well everything's done more in the older way, versus the new way of cutting open boxes with the meat already cut, we still have swinging beef, we still cut our own pork, our own chickens, it doesn't come from the manufacturer straight here ready to go into the case.

LTS: Okay. So what is um, for those that don't know...what would be swinging beef, or like the way that the meat is processed?

EH: Well...it comes it comes in like in sides and quarters and gets broke down from there, so that's that's

the biggest deal there. Here.

LTS: That makes it old fashioned?

EH: Yes.

LTS: Okay.

LTS: Okay, what what's the difference then would you say...is that the only difference that's this butcher shop has versus like a grocery store?

EH: Not really. Ah, you're biggest advantage is you can cut things the way people want 'em cut things more custom cut to order, ah we've got the means where we can age beef which they don't do in a grocery store, which makes a better quality of meat.

LTS: Okay. What does the aging process do?

EH: It just breaks down the tissue

LTS: Okay, and then it makes it...

EH: More tender.

LTS: More tender so, okay. Interesting

LTS: The other part of the ads that I thought were interesting from the 60s and 70s was it always advertised that Edwardsville Quality Meats were home killed beef.

EH: Okay.

LTS: So what does that mean?

EH: Well, years ago, now we don't do it anymore, but years ago we actually cut up beef for farmers that killed it themselves at home.

LTS: Okay.

EH: They'd have somebody come out or they'd kill the beef, slaughtered, and bring it in to us, we cool it and age it and then cut it up, which doesn't happen anymore.

LTS: Okay, so you have like a distributor that you get all of your meats from and then you...

EH: Right Right Right

LTS: So now a little bit about yourself, so you grew up in Edwardsville

EH: Correct

LTS: Your entire life?

EH: Yeah.

LTS: What was your first image of this butcher shop when you were little? Do you remember it, or...

EH: Not really, a lot of it. I remember coming in here as as little kid, you know.

LTS: Okay, um, what made you want to work here?

EH: Well, when I was 15, um, they offered me a job because two months later I was going to be 16, and I was a kid, you know, wanting to expand, buy a car, and stuff like that

LTS: Sure.

EH: So I worked here the daytime, worked next door at the Widley [Wildey] at night.

LTS: Oh wow, what'd you do for the Widley [Wildey]?

EH: Usher.

LTS: Usher?

EH: Mm-hmm

LTS: So you've seen a lot of change then, over the course of time in Edwardsville.

EH: Oh yeah. Yeah.

LTS: So when you started first here as - when you first started here, um, what's the process of becoming a butcher like?

EH: Clean - you start as cleanup and then just gradually work your way up through it-- through back then it was a 2 year apprence - apprencieship.

LTS: And so cleanup help is just...?

EH: Everything.

LTS: Everything, ok. Um. Why do you think that the butcher shop has remained a staple on the main street of Edwardsville? What about this place makes it?

EH: Probably the quality of the service.

LTS: Okay.

EH: You know, that's what you've gotta do, to stay in business. This type of business is quality and service.

LTS: Okay. What types of particular services do you think people love about the shop?

EH: Um, gettin' things personally cut the way they want, and if there's something that they know they want in advance where they give us an order, we.. we make sure to do everything we can to get it in.

LTS: Oh. Okay. Um, the butcher shop--so, what um, about what year did you start?

EH: 1965.

LTS: 1965. Okay. So um, I found some old ads again, from the 60s and 70s when it seemed like it was really starting to boom would you say that was like when it really began to pick up steam, or was it always popular since the 40s?

EH: It was always pretty popular, from what I can remember, even as a kid, coming in, here with my parents.

LTS: Yeah, and what did your parents like about the shop? The same things?

EH: Well, my dad raised beef too, and they would bring beef in, have it kept and processed here, and then for like your pork, and your lunch-meats and stuff like that my mom would come in up front ya know?

LTS: Okay. So they had--so your family, so when you said um [phone rings in background] that you thought that you wanted to be a butcher your father and mom [phone rings] were like - they were supportive.

EH: Oh yeah.

LTS: And did you keep the the [phone rings] cattle business as well?

EH: No no. That was my dad's hobby really, we didn't have a lot of cattle, he just raised 4 or 5 a year for something to do.

LTS: Oh okay. Um, and what part of Edwardsville was that?

EH: Ah, the North end of town.

LTS: Okay

EH: Out North.

LTS: So in the 70s I see that the butcher shop has always had a kind of community outreach, that they helped support like the Lion's Club, and things like that. Do they still do that?

EH: They do, they do support a lot of your non-profit organizations like that, some of those clubs have got to the point where they don't even have enough members now, you know. They just - your VFW's your legions and stuff just won't have any members.

LTS: Yeah, um, do you think that outreach was important at the time for the butcher shop to maintain its customer base and things like that?

EH: Yeah.

LTS: Okay, I saw also in the 70s that they started accepting food stamps here. So, like was that like a big deal, were other businesses in Edwardsville doing that as well, or...?

EH: I would say probably all - anybody that that handled food probably everybody got into it about the same time.

LTS: Okay - so it wasn't perceived as anything like different or controversial, it was just the status quo of the area?

EH: No, no. Right.

LTS: Okay. Um, so I noticed also that in the 70s you also started to diversify products, like you started selling pies, um, things like that, is there any reason why the market began to change away from just the meats?

EH: Well, probably just to do more one-stop shopping.

LTS: Okay, like how much competition, um, I'm not from the area, I'm originally from New Jersey, and I'm now at Edwardsville taking classes, but I noticed that Edwardsville like the downtown area has a couple grocery stores, so how much competition was there in the 70s and 80s?

EH: Well you had 5 or 6 stores downtown

LTS: And was there any point that this place was in danger of closing? Or did they always? Never? Just always had that solid customer base? That's great!

EH: No. Yeah.

LTS: How have seen the town of Edwardsville change around the butcher shop working here everyday you've probably saw Main Street?

EH: Well, Main Street is just been fantastic with what they've did with Main Street, and like on a Saturday morning, Main Street is busy up here especially when the farmer's market opens up.

LTS: Yeah. And um, what was it--was it always like that? Since you remember growing up here?

EH: Saturday was always a busy day - you know because most people had Saturday off, and a lot of times, back in those days, you didn't even have anywhere to go shop on Sunday 'cause everybody was closed.

LTS: Okay. And now, you used to work at the Wildey, and so you saw the Wildey, like, open and then it's closed, and now it's run by National Park Service, what were some of your favorite memories of

working at the Wildey? Because it has such a great legacy like you know?

EH: Well it's just - I mean, it was enjoyable, because we were all young kids, all the same age, you know it wasn't hard work, wasn't nothing physical to it, you know? And it was a good place just to enjoy yourself and still get paid.

LTS: Any favorite movies or shows.

EH: Not really, I didn't I didn't watch many of them even when I worked there. That was a busy place too on the weekends, you know

LTS: Oh sure, and now you know, it's a little bit revitalized and they have cheap shows, and so you see that--that's cool.

LTS: Um, what is your most popular product that you sell?

EH: Bratwurst.

LTS: Bratwurst. Um, has this changed over the years? Or has it always been?

EH: Well, when Fred and I bought the business in 1980, we were the first ones in the area to even make Bratwurst.

LTS: I read that, and I read that originally, was it popular, or not so much?

EH: People didn't know what they were.

LTS: Really? Because there's a pretty decent size German population around the area, so they weren't...

EH: They weren't really--it wasn't that big.

LTS: No?

EH: But see, when you say "around the area" some of that too, like your German population might be up around Highland, and a little bit more rural than what Edwardsville was at that time.

LTS: At the time, when did you um, first create the or first make the Bratwurst?

EH: 1980.

LTS: In the 80s you said, and then when do you think it peaked, or it still is popular but when do you think people started to say ...

EH: It took off pretty quick. As far as people, but we gave a lot of 'em away just for people to try, you know. But it took off pretty fast.

LTS: Okay. Is there anything special to the way that you make the Bratwurst?

EH: Well, we've got our seasoning and our own formula.

LTS: Okay.

EH: Which is - everybody's is different, you know.

LTS: Right. And is there anything--I don't want you to give away a top secret [laughs] but is there anything different about it as opposed to like, the Bratwurst you would just get at Schnucks' or Field's Foods?

EH: I would say they're spicier. They're not hot, but they've got they're spicier than even what Johnstonville's is. You know.

LTS: And people like that - you know, yeah. Um, so now, one of the things I read too is that hunters could come and bring their deer here to be butchered. Was this common? Was this something that was unique?

EH: That was started back in the...I would say...either probably mid-80s when it become pretty popular.

LTS: Okay, um, was this unique just to this butcher shop in this area?

EH: Yeah, um, so of your other meat markets did it like when you got out in the rural area. You know like Highland, Grantfork, and places like that. But for a city butcher shop it was unique.

LTS: How many - how many deer do you know would come in during the season? Do you have a lot?

EH: We've had ah, deer is water related.

LTS: Okay, right.

EH: You know, and we've had real good years, where we might get 400...450 in. We had one year where we had an ice storm and the second season we didn't even open up.

LTS: Oh wow.

EH: You know, so that it's it's very weather-related.

LTS: Yeah, um, what um, [PHONE RINGS] I can just wait until it's done. [WAITS.]

LTS: What types of products do people want from the deer?

EH: A lot of salami, a lot of summer sausage, deer sticks, and quite a bit of deer bratwurst.

LTS: What's a deer stick?

EH: Just like a Slim Jim.

LTS: Ah, and so you do the whole process here, so you can dry it, and season it ... oh wow....Oh

interesting.

EH: Yep.

LTS: [door opens] So, I have to ask to ask about Herbie [laughs]

EH: Okay

LTS: Because I'm not from here so I don't know. Um, he's been apparently this icon of the butcher shop, was stolen 3 times, um, I guess they finally removed the ladder that was next to the Wildey.

EH: It was a fire escape, see, so all they's did was walked up this big white fire escape and it was right on our roof.

LTS: Okay, um, so how did Herbie get his name? What's his ...

EH: The way I remember to understand to understand it, is they had like a contest, and just picked a name.

LTS: Okay, so that was, so nothing ...

EH: Right

LTS: I heard--or I read that he even survived the hurricane back in 1981, I guess he was just

EH: Tornado

LTS: Tornado, yeah, he was just tipped up on his side. Um, did the business sustain any damage?

EH: Very little. We were very lucky. Um, just a couple window lights, and just little things like that we were very lucky.

LTS: And how did the rest of Main Street?

EH: It got hit pretty bad.

LTS: Yeah. What businesses do you remember...?

EH: A lot, there was 4 or 5 maybe more than that, feet of the Wildey got blowed over, out back yeah.

LTS: Okay, and then most of these other businesses that are on the opposite side they're different now than they were back then, or have any ...

EH: Other than other ah, like Eker's Barber Shop, they've been around for years too.

LTS: Ok. Um, so now the ownership of the market has switched

EH: Correct.

LTS: Um, and so all the butchers have kept their jobs, so they haven't brought anybody new in.

EH: Correct

LTS: Some of the new changes are going to include more of like a "farm-to-table" feel, and they are going to work in collaboration with the Goshen Market? So, where you can buy like fresh picked vegetables, um, are you excited about the changes, and do you think it's going to bring new appreciation to the business?

EH: I think...change is good.

LTS: Yeah.

EH: You know, you get to my point, or my point in life, where you've got a good business, it's a successful business, but you just don't go for the changes you know what I'm saying, you don't reach out for 'em, because changes take more time and more time and more and more employees.

LTS: Right, what's your favorite part about working here?

EH: Customers.

LTS: The customers. You've know most of 'em...

EH: Years.

LTS: Years, their entire lives, that's cool.

EH: Their kids, their grandkids, you know.

LTS: Yeah. What do you hope that the legacy will be from the shop?

EH: I would say, really just keep what you've got the good service, the good quality, and make some improvements. You know, as far as reaching out to more things that people want. You know, more prepared foods, more anything will bring more people in the door.

LTS: Yeah, do more people, does it seem like there's more of a demand for prepared foods?

EH: Oh yeah.

LTS: So something that's like quick that they don't have to...

EH: There's some things now that the that we're going to go ahead and start eliminatin' and try to bring in something more prepared. You know, we're not getting rid of any of the butcher shop part of it, but you've gotta get in more for easy easy things to...

LTS: So what things do you think they're gonna start to eliminate?

EH: Well, it's it's your type of lunch meats and stuff that was with your older generation, and now you're

big thing with your younger people like ham, turkey, roast beef, and salami. So, some of these other loaves and stuff like that need to be eliminated and bring in maybe more salads, maybe like a 3 bean salad, baked beans, stuff like that.

LTS: And then you're going to work with the farmers of the Goshen Market to get like the fresh products.

EH: Yes. That's the way we understand it, yeah.

LTS: Ok. Yeah, that's an interesting concept, it's different but it's good.

EH: It is, yeah.

LTS: And that'll sustain year-round right as opposed to just in the summer time just when they have the farmers market?

EH: That's what I'm thinkin' yeah.

LTS: Okay. Why do you think that the community of Edwardsville like 70 years later, still holds this butcher shop in such value?

EH: History.

LTS: The history of it?

LTS: Yeah. Okay, and just generationally been here for years, that's cool.

LTS: So I have to ask, right, so you said sometimes change is good, but the doors still are from the 40s.

EH: Oh yeah.

LTS: And so most of the building still is the same.

EH: Yeah.

LTS: That's cool

EH: Yeah, there's been no--nothing major as far as - you might get a different piece of equipment or something like this, but nothing major has had to be changed this far as build this or build that.

LTS: And the new owners don't want to change any of?

EH: Ah, I think that there's right now - they're gonna try to go like a little bit more technology, and stuff like that, you know, computers, and stuff like that - as they get settled in and get going.

LTS: How do you feel about that?

EH: It's probably good.

LTS: Okay

EH: You know

LTS: It's very cool to come in here, you know, not being from here, growing up there was a butcher shop by my house so I remember my mom used to go and get um, fresh meats from but it closed in I dunno probably the 90s, so it's interesting to see something that's sustained and something that hasn't changed it's a great um, vibe, so it's really cool.

EH: Yeah. Yeah.

LTS: Thank you very much for your time.

EH: Okay!

LTS: I appreciate it!

EH: Thank you!