

Rhoda Cook
Topics in History - Labor History
May 10, 1982

My interview of Willis E. Meeks, Business Representative and Financial Secretary of Carpenters L.U. 1620 was recorded the afternoon of April 29, 1982. It was conducted at the Carpenters Hall, 128 Willow St., Rock Springs. Mr. Meeks has been the Business Representative for Local 1620 for 15 years.

The interview starts with Mr. Meeks explaining how he first entered the carpenters union after WW II. He had tried to join the Wyoming carpenters union, but rules at that time stated that he had to have a relative in the union. Because there was no work in Wyoming, he then went to California where admission to the union was open. He discusses walking a picket line in California and the work in the area at that time. He then joined the merchant marines, joined the Sailors Union, and also kept his carpenters book current.

After two years with the merchant marines he went to New York and again began working as a union carpenter. At the time he went to New York there was an abundance of work. Shortly after that, Eisenhower was elected President. Under President Eisenhower, construction work stopped and unemployment began to rise. Mr. Meeks discusses how tracks of houses that had been started sat half built on Long Island to rot because of the recession.

Eventually, because of a lack of work, Mr. Meeks returned to Wyoming in 1960. Work in this state was more available because of the trona mines opening up. He got involved with union politics, first as a trustee, then as president and finally as business representative and he holds that position today.

He talks about life on the ranch at Lonetree and ranching. Because of the isolation of ranch life any event was cause for all to attend. Willis remembers going to a Republican rally when Hoover was running for President. The party chant was "Hoover, Hoover he's our man. Put Al Smith in the garbage can." Hoover was elected President and Willis also remembers travelers looking for work during the depression that followed and people at Lonetree losing their ranches because of bank foreclosure.

The latter part of the interview deals with unions today. Willis believes it will be a downhill slide for unions for a few more years and then working people will rally again. Membership is dropping rapidly and people often parrot the phrase that unions have outlived their purpose. We discussed "union corruption." Willis believes that this is media propaganda. All union officers have to be bonded and the bonding companies statistics show that union officers are far better risks than bank officers.

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We also discussed communism. Willis believes that communism can't over take a country that has unions and the right to bear arms. When asked if he felt communists should be allowed into the union he feels strongly that they should not.

NAME: Willis E. Meeks

PRESENT ADDRESS: 281 Logan, Green River, WY

1. Present profession or occupation:
Business Rep. Carpenter S.U. 1620
2. Occupations followed in the past (give dates):
Ranching, carpenter, merchant marine
3. Date of birth: 9-1-25 Place of birth: Loretto, WY
4. Date of moving to Wyoming:
5. Full name of parents (give mother's maiden name)
Jessie Ficket Meeks
William Charles Meeks
6. Names of brothers and sisters (and to whom married):
listed on back of sheet
7. Schools attended (give dates):
Loretto 1931-1938
Mtn. View High School 1938-1943
8. Places of residence in Wyoming (give dates):
Loretto 1925-1943
Green River 1960 - present
9. Military service (dates, awards, area served, rank, etc.):
3/10/44 to 6/6/46 Rheinland, Central Europe
PFC, Sergeant
10. Political offices held (give dates):
11. Political affiliation:
Democrat
12. Religious affiliation:
None
13. Marriage (spouse's name, date and place of marriage):
Madeline Mc Dermott Meeks
7-11-53 Jamaica, Long Island, NY
14. Children (names, dates of birth, grandchildren, etc.):
Linda Meeks 4-20-55
Larry Meeks 10-12-57
Lloyd Meeks 5-29-63
15. List of clubs and societies of which you are a member:
National Rifle Association

Henry Len Meeks - Shirley Bacon
Charles Meeks - Bertha Rounder
Jewel Meeks - Margaret
Mildred Meeks - George Powick
Wilda Meeks - Rex Brady
Abby Meeks - Grant Redden
Lizzie Meeks - Carl Hershey