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# INTERVIEW WITH BARBARA AND JAMES MEEK

Transcribed by Mim Eisenberg/WordCraft, November 2007

**ELAINE GRAYBILL:** Today is October 25th, 2007, and I'm interviewing James Brace Meek and Barbara Wynn Meek at their home at 803 South Mercer Avenue in Bloomington, Illinois. My name is Elaine Graybill, coordinator of the Illinois State University Oral History Project, for which this interview is being conducted. James Meek is a grandson of David Felmley, who was president of Illinois State Normal University for thirty years, from 1900 to 1930. James's mother, Ruth, was President Felmley's daughter. Both James and Barbara are going to be answering my questions.

Well, the first question, and this is something we ask everyone, just to provide the basic historical information, is what year were you born?

**JAMES MEEK:** I was born April the 19, 1921.

**BARBARA MEEK:** And I, in '22, February 10.

**GRAYBILL:** Okay, 1922. And where were you born and raised?

**JAMES MEEK:** I was born in Carrollton, Illinois, on a farm that the family has, and I was raised in Carrollton, Illinois, until I went to the University of Illinois.

**GRAYBILL:** And, and Barbara, where were you—

**BARBARA MEEK:** And Galesburg [Illinois] was my hometown, and then graduated from Galesburg High and went to the University of Illinois.

**GRAYBILL:** Okay. Well, then, the next question, let's start with you, Barbara. What can you tell me about your parents, including their educational backgrounds and the kinds of work that they did?

**BARBARA MEEK:** My father was a college professor and registrar at Lombard College, which was in Galesburg and subsequently merged with Knox. And his department was finance.

**GRAYBILL:** What was his name?

**BARBARA MEEK:** Winfield Curtis Wynn.

**GRAYBILL:** Okay.

**BARBARA MEEK:** And he went to University of Michigan.

**GRAYBILL:** Okay, just like your grandfather.

**BARBARA MEEK:** And my mother was Laura Wynn, and she graduated in dietetics at the University of Illinois in 1916.

**GRAYBILL:** Okay, all right, so you come from a very educated family, then.

**BARBARA MEEK:** Yes.

**GRAYBILL:** Okay. And then how about your parents, and their names and their educational backgrounds?

**JAMES MEEK:** My father was born and raised in Carrollton, Illinois, where the family owned farmland. He went to University of Illinois and took agriculture. I think he graduated in 1910, then went back to the farm and practiced agriculture. My mother, Ruth Felmley Meek, was David Felmley's—she was the oldest of three children. She went to the University of Illinois, and that's where she met my father. She moved to Carrollton and lived on the farm.

**GRAYBILL:** Let me just get your father's name first.

**JAMES MEEK:** Alva Brace.

**GRAYBILL:** Alva?

**BALLARD:** Alva Brace.

**GRAYBILL:** Okay, A-l-v-a?

**JAMES MEEK:** A-l-v-a B-r-a-c-e, Brace.

**GRAYBILL:** Okay, all right. And, Barbara, did you have something to say?

**BARBARA MEEK:** Yes, Jim's mother went to ISNU—

**GRAYBILL:** Oh, she did?

**BARBARA MEEK:** —for two years, then went to Illinois for two years to complete her—

**JAMES MEEK:** I should have said that.

**GRAYBILL:** Well, that's interesting. Okay, now, there's another question I was going to ask you way down the line, but I'll just ask you now: Was she raised as a kid on campus, the president's child? Was that her childhood, being on campus?

**JAMES MEEK:** [unintelligible].

**GRAYBILL:** Okay, so it was natural that she would have attended for two years, and then she went two years at the University of Illinois. Okay, all right.

**JAMES MEEK:** I think she may have been born in Carrollton, though, because I think Grandpa's family—

**BARBARA MEEK:** But then [cross-talk; unintelligible].

**JAMES MEEK:** But, see, he was in Carrollton, Illinois, and was superintendent of the schools, and [unintelligible] schools, and then he moved from Carrollton to ISU. That's how we ended up here in Bloomington, actually.

**GRAYBILL:** Okay. So then she was just a child when they moved to Bloomington, then.

**BARBARA MEEK:** Yes.

**GRAYBILL:** Let's see, he started in 1900 as president of ISNU.

**JAMES MEEK:** Yes.

**BARBARA MEEK:** No, he was in math.

**GRAYBILL:** Oh, but he was a professor first, that's right, so it was before then. Okay, that's right.

**JAMES MEEK:** He came up here—

**GRAYBILL:** That's a good point, Barbara. Thank you.

**JAMES MEEK:** —to teach mathematics or something.

**GRAYBILL:** That's right, that's right.

**JAMES MEEK:** He was in charge of the Carrollton schools, though.

**GRAYBILL:** Okay.

**JAMES MEEK:** That's where he met his wife and everything down there.

**GRAYBILL:** Okay, all right. And what was her name?

**JAMES MEEK:** Laura Stout, I think it was.

**GRAYBILL:** Laura?

**JAMES MEEK:** I think that was it.

**GRAYBILL:** Okay. Stout? Okay. And was she a schoolteacher?

**JAMES MEEK:** Actually, I don't think so. Actually—I don't know. I think she may have been a student, and then she got some way into the school system, but anyway, they were married down there.

**GRAYBILL:** Okay. And did you know her? Was she still living?

**JAMES MEEK:** I never knew her very well because she died before I was—

**GRAYBILL:** Very old.

**JAMES MEEK:** Yes.

**GRAYBILL:** Okay, all right. I didn't realize that his wife died.

**JAMES MEEK:** I did not know her very well at all. In fact, she may have died before I was born.

**GRAYBILL:** So he outlived his wife, then, by a few years.

**JAMES MEEK:** Yes.

**GRAYBILL:** Okay, all right. Well, that's too bad for him. Well, let me ask you a few more questions about your own biographies. How many brothers and sisters did you have?

**JAMES MEEK:** I have one brother.

**GRAYBILL:** One brother.

**JAMES MEEK:** And no sisters.

**GRAYBILL:** And what is your brother's name?

**JAMES MEEK:** He's passed on now, but David.

**GRAYBILL:** David, okay, named after your grandfather?

**JAMES MEEK:** Yes. He was named for our grandfather. He went to the University of Illinois, and he graduated in business and went to work actually for the Illinois-Iowa Power Company and then actually went with the—what was the name of the company here in Decatur?

**BARBARA MEEK:** Illinois Power?

**JAMES MEEK:** Illinois Power. But he was quite involved and very well educated. He's been gone now for a few years.

**GRAYBILL:** Has he? I'm sorry. Well, Barbara, what about you? Did you have brothers and sisters?

**BARBARA MEEK:** I had one sister, a younger sister.

**GRAYBILL:** And what's her name?

**BARBARA MEEK:** Janet McClelland.

**GRAYBILL:** Okay. Did she go to college, then, too?

**BARBARA MEEK:** Yes, also University of Illinois. Galesburg girl. And then she married the grandson of a Knox president—

**GRAYBILL:** Oh, really?

**BARBARA MEEK:** Tom McClelland.

**GRAYBILL:** Okay, so you have a lot of presidents in your family.

**BARBARA MEEK:** We really do.

**GRAYBILL:** Well, that's really an amazing thing.

**BARBARA MEEK:** Interesting that all four grandparents have college degrees.

**GRAYBILL:** It is, and back in those days.

**BARBARA MEEK:** And that was a long time ago.

**JAMES MEEK:** And actually, Mildred's family was her mother's—Kappa mother, was she?

**BARBARA MEEK:** Yes.

**GRAYBILL:** Now, who was—?

**BARBARA MEEK:** [unintelligible] roommate.

**GRAYBILL:** Who was Mildred, then?

**JAMES MEEK:** That was David Felmley's daughter, other daughter.

**BARBARA MEEK:** [unintelligible],

**GRAYBILL:** Okay.

**JAMES MEEK:** She's no longer here, of course.

**GRAYBILL:** And she was your house mother at your sorority at the University of Illinois?

**BARBARA MEEK:** No.

**JAMES MEEK:** No.

**BARBARA MEEK:** Roommate.

**GRAYBILL:** Oh, your roommate, okay. And is this how you met the family, then?

**JAMES MEEK:** Not really.

**BARBARA MEEK:** Yes, I guess it truly was. They came over here on the interurban, the two girls, to spend weekends at the president's home.

**GRAYBILL:** Okay, and then you came with them?

**BARBARA MEEK:** Yes.

**JAMES MEEK:** We didn't know, not at that time—we didn't know each other. We met each other at the *Illio* over there.

**BARBARA MEEK:** But it was Aunt Mildred who really introduced us. She wanted a sorority pin.

**GRAYBILL:** And what sorority was that?

**BARBARA MEEK:** Kappa Kappa Gamma.

**GRAYBILL:** Okay, all right. But then you met later, in a different way?'

**JAMES MEEK:** Both of us worked on the *Illio*, which was the yearbook over there [at the University of Illinois].

**GRAYBILL:** Is that *Illio*?

**JAMES MEEK:** Yes. Barbara was on the editorial staff. She was women's editor, and I was the business manager.

**GRAYBILL:** Oh, really?

**JAMES MEEK:** [Laughs.]

**GRAYBILL:** Did you both graduate—well, let me get into your high school and college educations, then, before we go much further down this road. Okay, what about you? You told me before, but let's get it back on tape.

**BARBARA MEEK:** Graduated from Galesburg high school and went directly to Illinois and graduated in 1943.

**GRAYBILL:** What degree did you have from Illinois?

**BARBARA MEEK:** Bachelor of Science.

**GRAYBILL:** Okay, and what was your field?

**BARBARA MEEK:** In dietetics.

**GRAYBILL:** Okay, all right. Like your mother, then.

**BARBARA MEEK:** Yes.

**GRAYBILL:** Okay. And then what about you with high school and college?

**JAMES MEEK:** I went to high school in Carrollton, Illinois, and went to the University of Illinois in engineering, took civil engineering, and then went directly into—I was in the advanced military over there, and then I did have to go through OCS [Officer Candidate School] because of World War II, because all the camps and everything were filled with people coming back, and one of the requirements was go to

summer camp for three months, so I had to go through OCS at Fort Belvoir. And then we got married the day I got my commission at Fort Belvoir.

**GRAYBILL:** Wow. [Laughter.] That was quite a day, huh?

[cross-talk; unintelligible]

**JAMES MEEK:** That's when nobody could travel, and there was about five people there. [Laughs.]

**GRAYBILL:** Where were you married?

**JAMES MEEK:** At Fort Belvoir.

**GRAYBILL:** At Fort Belvoir. Now, where is that? I don't think I know.

**JAMES MEEK:** It's out—

**BARBARA MEEK:** Alexandria, Virginia. And then I went directly into the service, and we were together for a short period of time; then I went overseas, to the South Pacific, to the Mariana Islands, where I helped build the B-29 runway there on Guam, and then I went on over to—after that, why—after these B-29 runways were taken care of, I went on over to Okinawa [Japan] and spent a year there, too. I was overseas for almost two and a half years.

**GRAYBILL:** Oh, dear. And you didn't see him that whole time?

**JAMES MEEK:** No.

**GRAYBILL:** Oh, that's a long haul, isn't it?

**JAMES MEEK:** I would cover troops, and they did an excellent job in doing this construction, building the runways and everything.

**GRAYBILL:** And you were in the Navy, then, I take it?

**JAMES MEEK:** No, I was not in the Navy. I was in the Air Force.

**GRAYBILL:** Oh, in the Air Force, okay.

**JAMES MEEK:** I was in the Corps of Engineers attached to the Air Force.

**GRAYBILL:** Okay, okay.

**JAMES MEEK:** And we built the runways, and then we were all set to go to invade Japan. The orders were written. I know within about, oh, I'd say within six weeks of invading the southern—we were going to be invading the island right south of Tokyo, that island, and that's when they dropped the atomic bomb, and that saved more lives than you will ever know.

**GRAYBILL:** Really?

**JAMES MEEK:** Because that would have been nothing but a tremendous bloodbath over there had we invaded Japan.

**GRAYBILL:** Yes. Well, you know that firsthand, then, don't you?

**JAMES MEEK:** Yes, I do. And believe me, it's very, very fortunate that the United States discovered the atomic bomb before the Germans. They were all working on it. We overseas really didn't know anything too much about it. We had rumors and everything like that. But that was actually developed primarily out there in Chicago.

**GRAYBILL:** At the University of Chicago.

**JAMES MEEK:** Well—

**GRAYBILL:** [Enrico] Fermi.

**JAMES MEEK:** Yes, in that little place right south of there. I mean, that's where some of the major experiments were done. But dropping that bomb did two things: It shut that war down—the first bomb didn't do it; they dropped one three days later, and that's when they—and it saved the invasion of Japan.

**GRAYBILL:** Do you remember when you heard about the bombs being dropped? Do you remember how you heard that—

**JAMES MEEK:** Oh, we heard that right away.

**GRAYBILL:** Did you?

**JAMES MEEK:** We heard that right away.

**GRAYBILL:** And how about you? Were you worried about him when you heard about that?

**BARBARA MEEK:** You worry, but you are so certain that tomorrow it will all be over and he'll be back home again that it kind of was a dream.

**JAMES MEEK:** But, see, people criticize dropping the bomb, maybe, but that did two things: Number one, it established the United States as a major power, and it saved the invasion of Japan.

**GRAYBILL:** Well, that's something.

**JAMES MEEK:** We were then six weeks from invading Japan.

**GRAYBILL:** Oh, gosh. Well, thank goodness for that. And then was it long before you came home, then?

**JAMES MEEK:** I was overseas for, oh, at least another six months.

**GRAYBILL:** Oh.



**JAMES MEEK:** Well, it depended on how much time you spent over there and everything else. I was in the Corps of Engineers, and we were the first people in after the Marines. I never shot anybody all the time I was in the service. We carried arms. We worked all night and everything, building the runways and everything, but—and I don't think anybody ever shot at me.

**GRAYBILL:** Well, then, you were certainly a fortunate person.

**JAMES MEEK:** I realize that.

**BARBARA MEEK:** And still we fight.

**JAMES MEEK:** Man's an animal. [Laughs.]

**GRAYBILL:** It seems almost unbelievable, doesn't it? Well, see, I grew up in the Vietnam era, and that's what I think, too. I think—

**BARBARA MEEK:** That's right.

**GRAYBILL:** Yes. So you must have a lot of feelings about what the country does—

**JAMES MEEK:** We actually were separated about two and a half years.

**BARBARA MEEK:** Yes.

**JAMES MEEK:** Then I came back from service—

**GRAYBILL:** And where did you live during that time?

**BARBARA MEEK:** I went back to Galesburg, and they were desperate for Home Ec teachers, and so the fact that I was a dietician opened the door to be a teacher, and so I taught junior high school home economics, where I had been once a student. I was never sure that the teachers who were still there didn't wonder what in the world I was doing back in school because I'd been gone about four years.

**GRAYBILL:** Okay. So, then, when you came back, then where did you live? What did you do, then, when you came back?

**JAMES MEEK:** Fortunately, I was in ROTC, and, [as] I say, I was taken out of school my senior year, in April, I think it was, and I didn't have to go back to college. I had to stay up a couple of nights to finish [unintelligible] and things like that, but I did graduate without taking final exams and didn't have to go back to college the way some people did.

**GRAYBILL:** Wonderful. That's good.

**JAMES MEEK:** That was very fortunate. And then when we first came back, why, I think I worked in Jacksonville for a very short period of time—

**BARBARA MEEK:** Well, you rejoined Felmley-Dickerson.

**JAMES MEEK:** I had worked for Felmley-Dickerson Company summers prior to the war and everything.

**GRAYBILL:** And was that your brother's company?

**JAMES MEEK:** No, it was my uncle's.

**GRAYBILL:** Your uncle's.

**JAMES MEEK:** John Felmley.

**GRAYBILL:** That's right, because your brother was a Meek, too, yes.

**JAMES MEEK:** John Felmley, David Felmley's son's company.

**GRAYBILL:** And when did he establish that company?

**JAMES MEEK:** He went to Illinois. John Felmley went to University of Illinois, and he was a DU over there and quite active over there.

**GRAYBILL:** Now, what does DU mean?

**JAMES MEEK:** Delta Upsilon, I think.

**GRAYBILL:** Oh, okay, he's a Greek, okay. Okay, I got you.

**JAMES MEEK:** Anyway, he went to work after he graduated from Illinois with the J. L. Simmons Company. He knew Ellen Simmons. He met her in college. They were a big construction company out of Decatur, I think it was. And he ran the Bloomington office of it, and then he branched off for himself. I mean, I think one of the original things was the downtown State Farm office, the one downtown, the red brick [cross-talk; unintelligible],

**GRAYBILL:** Okay, the fire building.

**JAMES MEEK:** Yes. Then he did an awful lot of other work over here. I had worked with him summers as a carpenter's apprentice, and I went to Richmond, Virginia, one summer and worked down there, and then I worked in Springfield, and then I went to summer school one summer at Illinois to get so I could graduate earlier. Anyway, I went to work for John Felmley. It was almost a predestined thing when I got out of the service.

**GRAYBILL:** Okay. So you moved to—

**JAMES MEEK:** Well, actually, I worked in Jacksonville and Springfield, and then we lived in Champaign and had built a house over there and everything else, and then we moved here to Bloomington, Illinois, and then John Felmley was—he was killed.

**GRAYBILL:** Oh, really?

**JAMES MEEK:** He drowned.

**GRAYBILL:** Oh, no. I didn't know that.

**JAMES MEEK:** Yes.

**GRAYBILL:** Was that out at Lake Bloomington?

**JAMES MEEK:** No, he was going to his daughter's wedding, and he went out there, and I did not go with him. We had built the Caterpillar plant over in Peoria, the big Caterpillar plant. They're on a highway. You can see it. And we were turning it over to Caterpillar during the time that we'd have to go, so Barbie and I did not go to the wedding. And John went out there. He went fishing in the morning. Some way, he fell in the water, and whether he hit his head and knocked himself out or—nobody ever did find out exactly what happened, but he drowned.

**GRAYBILL:** What a tragic thing.

**JAMES MEEK:** It was tragic.

**GRAYBILL:** Oh, my goodness.

**JAMES MEEK:** And that's when we were actually building Bloomington High School, the original Bloomington High School up here and everything. Anyway, I was kind of shoved into the whole thing—I mean of running the whole thing then.

**GRAYBILL:** Yes, and that was after you were married, after the war, in the late 40s.

**JAMES MEEK:** Oh, yes, we—

**GRAYBILL:** Or was in the 50s that that happened?

**BARBARA MEEK:** Yes.

**GRAYBILL:** In the 50s.

**JAMES MEEK:** Yes, it would be. Yes, it would be.

**GRAYBILL:** Okay, because you lived here.

**JAMES MEEK:** It would be, yes, yes.

**BARBARA MEEK:** Because John was born in Champaign.

**JAMES MEEK:** Yes.

**BARBARA MEEK:** And he's 56 now.

**GRAYBILL:** That's your son, John.

**JAMES MEEK:** Yes.

**GRAYBILL:** Yes. Well, let me get us back to—we want to follow a chronology here, so you moved to Bloomington-Normal in 1956, you said.

**JAMES MEEK:** 56 or '7, '56 or '7. Which?

**BARBARA MEEK:** '6.

**JAMES MEEK:** Okay, '56.

**GRAYBILL:** '56. And then is John your only child or do you have other children?

**BARBARA MEEK:** No, we have two daughters.

**GRAYBILL:** Oh, okay.

**BARBARA MEEK:** Suzanne is director of drama at Centennial High School in Champaign, and Patricia is a stay-at-home mom with two youngsters.

**GRAYBILL:** Okay, so you have several grandchildren, then.

**JAMES MEEK:** Yes.

**BARBARA MEEK:** We have six.

**GRAYBILL:** Six grandchildren? Okay. And what are your daughters' last names?

**BARBARA MEEK:** Suzanne Aldridge, A-l-d-r-i-d-g-e. And Bob is a Normal boy and graduated from Wesleyan. And Suzanne was born here, and—I've forgotten how old she is. 50.

**JAMES MEEK:** She's 50.

**BARBARA MEEK:** I should know. I can't [unintelligible].

**GRAYBILL:** And then Patricia. What's Patricia's last name?

**BARBARA MEEK:** Hess.

**JAMES MEEK:** Hess.

**BARBARA MEEK:** She's [married to] Wendell Hess, who has been associated with Wesleyan. Both girls—

**JAMES MEEK:** Wendell—he was acting president and everything out there for a short period of time.

**GRAYBILL:** That's right. I'm familiar with his name, yes. Okay.

**BARBARA MEEK:** And both girls, Wesleyan.

**GRAYBILL:** Okay.

**BARBARA MEEK:** And both in education.

**GRAYBILL:** Really. So you have more teachers in the family, then.

**BARBARA MEEK:** Yes.

**GRAYBILL:** Well, so then you were here, and you were then working for Felmley-Dickerson, and did you become head of the company after your uncle died?

**JAMES MEEK:** Well,—

**BARBARA MEEK:** Yes.

**JAMES MEEK:** Yes. Actually, it was the John Felmley Company originally. Ray Dickerson was an engineer who was in Champaign, who worked for the company, and that's where the Felmley-Dickerson part came in. And after—he actually left the company and went with some people in Springfield, formed the CIB and everything down there. After John's death, why, I kind of came in charge. That was, as I say, right when we were building the first part of Bloomington High School—I mean, the main thing. Just—it worked out.

**GRAYBILL:** Now, was your grandfather ever involved in the company in any way?

**JAMES MEEK:** No.

**GRAYBILL:** Okay.

**JAMES MEEK:** No, John Felmley, now—as I say, he was David Felmley's son. He went to University of Illinois, and he was the one that founded the Felmley-Dickerson [unintelligible]. He was John Felmley of Felmley-Dickerson.

**GRAYBILL:** And, then, he was your mother's brother, then.

**JAMES MEEK:** He was my mother's brother.

**GRAYBILL:** Okay, all right. Well, let me see—

**JAMES MEEK:** He was the one that was killed—he unfortunately drowned.

**GRAYBILL:** Oh, yes.

**JAMES MEEK:** And nobody really knows exactly what happened.

**GRAYBILL:** And for his daughter—what a horrible thing for her to—oh, dear. Well, let's see, we haven't talked much about your mother, have we, since I turned the recorder on, your mother, Ruth?

**JAMES MEEK:** She went out here to Illinois State.

**GRAYBILL:** That's right. You said she went there.

**JAMES MEEK:** Yes. She went to University of Illinois, where she met my father. They were married about in 1910, plus or minus.

**GRAYBILL:** Okay. And what was her degree in? Did you tell me that? Was it a teaching degree?

**JAMES MEEK:** Yes.

**GRAYBILL:** At U of I. Okay.

**JAMES MEEK:** My father was in agriculture.

**GRAYBILL:** That's right. I think we have talked about that.

**JAMES MEEK:** The families were involved in farming.

**GRAYBILL:** Okay, that's right.

**JAMES MEEK:** He was in agriculture, and they settled in Carrollton, Illinois, on the family farm, which has been in the family for many, many years.

**GRAYBILL:** Okay, and I do remember that now. I'd like to talk a little bit about your grandfather. I guess you were a small child, and I wonder if I can pick your—

**JAMES MEEK:** I was nine years old when he died.

**GRAYBILL:** And do you remember very much about him?

**JAMES MEEK:** Not a terrible amount, because at that time, why, I lived in Carrollton; he lived up here. Transportation was not all that good. The roads weren't all that good. And I remember coming up and visiting, and certain things.

**GRAYBILL:** Tell me what you remember. I have a few questions. Let me just tell you what they are, and maybe they'll prompt some other memories. What did he look like? How did he dress? Did he teach you things? Did he talk about Illinois State Normal University? Did people like him? And do you remember anything about his final illness and death? And anything you remember. Maybe that'll prompt some memories.

**JAMES MEEK:** There's a picture of him in there. He was a very well-kempt man, and as I say he—he liked to fish.

**GRAYBILL:** Oh, he did?

**JAMES MEEK:** I remember that. I never got to fish with him because he used to go up to Canada. I don't know if it was Canada, but up north. And he loved to fish, and I was too young to go out on boats with him.

**GRAYBILL:** I see.

**JAMES MEEK:** But I do have the little revolver that he used to shoot when he got a big— either a muskie or a large fish—why, he would shoot it. [Laughs.]

**GRAYBILL:** Probably to put it out of its misery, huh?

**JAMES MEEK:** Not only that, some of the fishing equipment wasn't what it is today, where you have the nets and everything to take them in.

**GRAYBILL:** Oh, so he could get it out of the water.

**JAMES MEEK:** [Laughs.]

**GRAYBILL:** Yes, I got it. Okay. I get it now. [Laughs.]

**JAMES MEEK:** But anyway, he loved to do that, and I do remember when I went up there, he used to go down—I probably shouldn't say this, but he used to go down Old Main down there, and he had a double-barreled tin shotgun, and he would shoot pigeons. [Laughs.]

**GRAYBILL:** He's a man after my own heart. [Laughs.]

**JAMES MEEK:** First of all, they're a dirty bird.

**GRAYBILL:** Yes.

**JAMES MEEK:** [Laughs.]

**GRAYBILL:** Oh, please can we say it, then? [Laughs.]

[cross-talk; unintelligible]

**JAMES MEEK:** He used to go down there and shoot these pigeons off the cupola of the Old Main.

**GRAYBILL:** [Laughs.]

**JAMES MEEK:** I remember going down there with him, and I couldn't understand what he was doing exactly. [Laughs.]

**GRAYBILL:** Oh, boy. That's good. [Laughs.]

**JAMES MEEK:** As far as—I don't remember them coming to Carrollton very much. Now, my grandmother—I don't remember her at all, hardly. But there was a bunch of stories running around how he was a very thrifty man, and there was a story that they had a train wreck up north of town, and he went out to the train wreck and took the velvets off of the seats and made erasers out of them. [Laughter.]

**BARBARA MEEK:** And Jim's mother told me [cross-talk; unintelligible].

**GRAYBILL:** Oh, my gosh. [Laughs.] Oh, boy. [Laughs.]

**JAMES MEEK:** I really didn't know him really, really well because I was not around him, hardly, that much.

**GRAYBILL:** Yes. Well, it sounds like you do know quite a few things about him.

**JAMES MEEK:** I do. I do.

**GRAYBILL:** And probably your family talked about it quite a bit, I imagine.

**BARBARA MEEK:** And there's a family likeness—

**GRAYBILL:** Oh, is there?

**JAMES MEEK:** —that runs clear through.

**GRAYBILL:** Really.

**BARBARA MEEK:** You'll notice the nose particularly.

**GRAYBILL:** Okay. I'm a little penned in here, but after we get done, I'll take a look at the picture you have.

**JAMES MEEK:** But he did have prostate problems. I didn't know it then, but I know it now, but he had prostate problems, and actually that's what ended up killing him.

**GRAYBILL:** Oh, was it? Yes, the history book that I read didn't say what it was.

**JAMES MEEK:** I'm sure it didn't, but that's what it was.

**GRAYBILL:** Yes, yes. And did you see him at the end? Do you remember that?

**JAMES MEEK:** I remember coming up to the funeral, and I was nine years old, and I remember they had the visitations there. You didn't have the facilities you have now. Yes, I came up there. And he's buried in Carrollton.

**GRAYBILL:** Oh, is he?

**JAMES MEEK:** Down there with my parents. His wife is down there.

**GRAYBILL:** Now, do you remember there being a lot of people at the visitation? Do you remember that?

**JAMES MEEK:** I can't. I was nine years old.

**GRAYBILL:** Okay.

**JAMES MEEK:** [Laughs.]

**GRAYBILL:** Well, as a little boy, did you understand what it meant that he was president of the university?

**JAMES MEEK:** Not really.

**GRAYBILL:** Okay.

**JAMES MEEK:** [Laughs.]

**GRAYBILL:** Everybody's grandfather was president of a university, right? [Laughs.]



**JAMES MEEK:** Not really, but I think you can understand that.

**GRAYBILL:** Sure, I can, yes. Kids just assume that it's normal—no pun intended.

**JAMES MEEK:** I didn't realize his importance, I'll be honest with you, until actually I go and read about it and so forth.

**GRAYBILL:** Now, what about his simplified spelling? Did he expect his children and grandchildren to use that?

**JAMES MEEK:** No, not to my knowledge.

**GRAYBILL:** But were you aware of that?

**JAMES MEEK:** I was aware of that, and he tried to go ahead and simplify the spelling, and [laughs] it didn't quite take. [Laughs.]

**GRAYBILL:** You can't blame him for not trying. I mean, I've read a lot of things about how he—and I've read documents that [cross-talk; unintelligible].

**JAMES MEEK:** I have, too. And, again, I think I've been told more about it than I actually— hands on, in other words.

**GRAYBILL:** Yes, yes. Did you get the feeling that people liked him?

**JAMES MEEK:** Oh, I think he was well liked.

**GRAYBILL:** Was he?

**JAMES MEEK:** Yes.

**GRAYBILL:** And the family—I mean, was he [cross-talk; unintelligible]?

**JAMES MEEK:** I think in the family he was well liked.

**GRAYBILL:** Yes, okay.

**JAMES MEEK:** Otherwise he couldn't have done what he did. I mean, he had to be well liked to be there thirty years.

**GRAYBILL:** Yes.

**JAMES MEEK:** His house was—well, there's a church there now where the house was.

**GRAYBILL:** Oh, really? What church is that?

**JAMES MEEK:** What church is that out there?

**BARBARA MEEK:** Methodist.

**JAMES MEEK:** It's a Methodist church.

**GRAYBILL:** Is it the one that's right by that parking lot?

**JAMES MEEK:** Yes.

**GRAYBILL:** By the Bowling and Billiards Center?

**JAMES MEEK:** Yes.

**GRAYBILL:** Oh, so that was where his house was?

**JAMES MEEK:** His house was on the south side of that. Down at the base—there used to be a Traction station of the Illinois Traction [System], right down there where the president's office is now. That used to be a turnaround down there.

**GRAYBILL:** Really?

**JAMES MEEK:** Oh, yes. Used to [be a] turnaround for the tracks there, and it went from there down to Bloomington and then—I could pick it up there and go to Carrollton, or went to Carlinville.

**GRAYBILL:** Now, was that the same as the Interurban?

**JAMES MEEK:** Yes.

**GRAYBILL:** It was. Okay.

**JAMES MEEK:** Interurban, Traction or whatever [unintelligible].

**GRAYBILL:** Okay, all right.

**JAMES MEEK:** And the main place on ISU was where—the building that houses the president now.

**GRAYBILL:** Oh, okay.

**JAMES MEEK:** And there was a turnaround. You'd go down there, and you'd get on it, and you'd go down to Bloomington and then go to various other little towns.

**GRAYBILL:** Really? So that was the station.

**JAMES MEEK:** Yes.

**GRAYBILL:** Wow. I never knew that. Okay, well, that's interesting.

You know, he made a lot of contributions to the University, and I'm going to talk about that in a minute, but what do you think your family felt was his major contribution just to the world or to life?

**JAMES MEEK:** I think that he probably is—in reading and knowing what has happened out there—he was the one that—University of Illinois was starting up just about the same time. Of course, they had much

more money and everything like that. They started out out there as a teachers college, so to speak, and he developed that to where it was really—they really developed into a source of teachers. Now they've diversified and you can get degrees practically in any field you want, and you can get doctorates and everything like that. But at that time, he was the one that developed that actual people that went out and did the teaching in the schools—I mean, the women. There were men there, but I think primarily the women were the ones that were doing some of the teaching. Now, the men might have gone into administration and everything, but I think he was the one that developed the college. At the same time the University was growing, why, he developed the teaching part of Illinois State.

**GRAYBILL:** And the family knew him better than anyone, I'm sure, so that you know his commitment—

**JAMES MEEK:** I didn't know at the time.

**GRAYBILL:** Yes, but your mother and—

**JAMES MEEK:** Yes, yes.

**GRAYBILL:** They saw his commitment to teaching.

**JAMES MEEK:** Yes.

**GRAYBILL:** Yes, okay.

**JAMES MEEK:** And he was quite committed to that place. And then, as I say, he ended up, toward the tail end, having rather a—that's before they had radiation and everything like that.

**GRAYBILL:** Oh, yes. What a shame, that he probably could have been saved, lived longer. But he worked until almost the end, from what I—

**JAMES MEEK:** Oh, he did. He did.

**GRAYBILL:** —what I read.

**JAMES MEEK:** He did.

**GRAYBILL:** A few weeks after he resigned, he died.

**JAMES MEEK:** That's right. No, that's the truth.

**GRAYBILL:** There are a few things that he was instrumental in starting, and so I'm just going to tell you these things that I read in the history book, and tell me if you know anything about them in terms of your grandfather. There's summer school, and he developed the lab schools.

**JAMES MEEK:** I did know that.

**GRAYBILL:** Did you? Okay, so what do you know about that? Anything in particular?

**JAMES MEEK:** Not too much, no.

**GRAYBILL:** Okay, but you were aware of that.

**JAMES MEEK:** Yes.

**GRAYBILL:** And then music, the music program at Illinois State Normal. He hired the first full-time music professor, and that was a very—

**BARBARA MEEK:** I didn't know.

**GRAYBILL:** Didn't you know? His name was—there's a building named after him now. [F.W.] Westhoff, Westhoff. He hired [cross-talk; unintelligible].

**BARBARA MEEK:** [unintelligible].

**GRAYBILL:** Yes.

**JAMES MEEK:** I remember the name.

**GRAYBILL:** Yes, okay. And it said he was very proud of that. And then business courses. Were you aware of that, that he was responsible for business courses starting up at the University?

**JAMES MEEK:** I was not aware of that, no.

**GRAYBILL:** Okay, all right. And so you have a grandson there in finance now, don't you?

**JAMES MEEK:** Yes.

**GRAYBILL:** This is a good point to tell about him. What's his name?

**BARBARA MEEK:** Clifton Aldridge.

**JAMES MEEK:** Our daughter's son.

**GRAYBILL:** And he's a finance major?

**BARBARA MEEK:** Yes.

**JAMES MEEK:** Yes.

**GRAYBILL:** A senior, did you say?

**JAMES MEEK:** Yes.

**BARBARA MEEK:** And he is certain that ISU is the finest business school in the world.

**GRAYBILL:** It's a good one.

**JAMES MEEK:** He's been a happy camper out there.

**GRAYBILL:** Good.

**BARBARA MEEK:** He's a Sigma Chi, so he has the social life of a fraternity, and he's our tall— we have very tall children, but Cliff is six-nine [6'-9"].

**GRAYBILL:** Oh, my gosh. [Laughs.]

**JAMES MEEK:** [Laughs.]

**BARBARA MEEK:** And he's [unintelligible] and happy.

**GRAYBILL:** What a wonderful thing.

**BARBARA MEEK:** And Will was married a year ago and is now in advanced work in education.

**JAMES MEEK:** But he didn't go to ISU.

**BARBARA MEEK:** He's working toward his master's to continue the teacher thread.

**GRAYBILL:** And where is he going to school?

**BARBARA MEEK:** We have teachers everywhere.

**GRAYBILL:** You have teachers and teachers. What a wonderful family tradition. Now, is your grandson very conscious of the fact of the family relationship?

**JAMES MEEK:** He's aware of it, yes.

**GRAYBILL:** Is he? Okay. I would think that would be something really special—

**JAMES MEEK:** No, he's aware of it.

**GRAYBILL:** —for a student. And what's he going to do next year? Do you know?

**JAMES MEEK:** Not for sure.

**GRAYBILL:** Okay.

**JAMES MEEK:** [Laughs.]

**GRAYBILL:** Maybe go into the family business.

**JAMES MEEK:** No, I don't think that. He—I don't know for sure.

**GRAYBILL:** Okay, all right.

**BARBARA MEEK:** They have an interesting program, a mentor in that particular department.

**GRAYBILL:** That's good.

**BARBARA MEEK:** He's very pleased with that.

**GRAYBILL:** I think the College of Business is wonderful, and as I was telling Jim—and I don't know if you were in the room, but I worked there for more than six years as Dixie Mills'—as the dean's assistant, and I'm just very proud of that College of Business. Everybody there is trying to do a really good job.

**JAMES MEEK:** I think ISU has really developed into a good school.

**GRAYBILL:** Yes, yes.

**JAMES MEEK:** I mean, their ratings are good, and you don't hear much criticism.

**GRAYBILL:** No, you don't, that's right. Well, you had talked before, and I want to get some of this on record here, about—well, you've had other close connections, and your company has done some building out there. Is that correct?

**JAMES MEEK:** Oh, we built quite a bit [unintelligible].

**GRAYBILL:** Yes, so can you just kind of do a list of some, from the top of your head—

**JAMES MEEK:** Ohhh!

**GRAYBILL:** —of some of the things that Felmley-Dickerson has built out there? Can you even begin to do that, or it's just a whole lot of buildings? [Laughs.]

**JAMES MEEK:** We've built Dunn-Barton Halls. We built all the big, tall towers out there, the original ones. And when Bob Bone was there, why, as I say, we built a tremendous quantity of work out there. We're working out there right now.

**GRAYBILL:** What are you working on now? Stevenson?

**BARBARA MEEK:** And the building right across from the union.

**JAMES MEEK:** The building across from what?

**BARBARA MEEK:** The building across from the union.

**GRAYBILL:** The student services building?

**BARBARA MEEK:** Yes.

**GRAYBILL:** You built that one?

**JAMES MEEK:** Yes.

**GRAYBILL:** Okay.

**JAMES MEEK:** We've done a tremendous amount of work out there, and still doing it. We're working on—I think it's some of the towers out there now, remodeling them.

**GRAYBILL:** Oh, yes, that's right, they are redoing them in kind of a staggered sort of arrangement.

**JAMES MEEK:** We're doing it.

**GRAYBILL:** Okay. Wow, that's a lot. So you really know the place inside and out, don't you?

**JAMES MEEK:** Yes, we have done a tremendous amount of building out there.

**GRAYBILL:** Now, what do you think your grandfather would have thought of that?

**JAMES MEEK:** I think he'd be proud of it. Of course, we've done the same thing at the University of Illinois. We built about half of that campus. [Laughs.]

**GRAYBILL:** That's amazing.

**BARBARA MEEK:** They like to build school buildings.

**GRAYBILL:** That's an amazing thing, really. The name of your company is so familiar, but I don't think people stop and think about how much of the University you've built. So we'll help them think of that now.

**JAMES MEEK:** John Felmley's been gone quite a few years, but we've never changed the name of the company. We don't see any sense in it. The company had a good reputation and everything, so go ahead and put my name or somebody's name on it—I mean—

**GRAYBILL:** It's good marketing, isn't it?

**JAMES MEEK:** We didn't do it.

**GRAYBILL:** To use the reputation. Is there anything that I haven't asked you about that you wanted to talk about? I see you have some notes here. And, Barbara, you may know some things.

**BARBARA MEEK:** There should be, in Milner Library, a little book of Grandpa Felmley's spelling.

**GRAYBILL:** Oh.

**BARBARA MEEK:** And I have seen it, and our copy has vanished.

**GRAYBILL:** Oh. Well, I'll have to—

**BARBARA MEEK:** If you happen to be over and talk to Toni or—

**GRAYBILL:** Okay, and I have another connection over there, too, Bruce [R.] Stoffel. I don't know if you know him.

**JAMES MEEK:** I don't know hm.

**GRAYBILL:** I'll remember to ask him. Yes, okay.

**BARBARA MEEK:** I was on the board of Friends of Milner and loved every minute of it.

**GRAYBILL:** Really? Really. And did you organize their book sales, or what did you do?

**BARBARA MEEK:** Oh, everything.

**GRAYBILL:** I guess they're having a book sale—

**BARBARA MEEK:** Shortly.

**GRAYBILL:** —on Saturday.

**BARBARA MEEK:** And it's amazing the number of volumes—

**GRAYBILL:** Really, that people donate.

**BARBARA MEEK:** Fine things.

**GRAYBILL:** You must be, then, a reader if you love to serve the library.

**BARBARA MEEK:** And after Lombard [College] and Knox [College] merged, my dad went into Galesburg Public Library as head librarian and one of the few men in the state—

**GRAYBILL:** Who was a head librarian.

**BARBARA MEEK:** So library is kind of in my blood.

**GRAYBILL:** Yes, it sounds like it. Well, that's wonderful. Well, do you have anything on there that we haven't talked about?

**JAMES MEEK:** Well, in reading, I think that the—again, just in the reading, why, the University out there really seemed to develop. When my grandfather was there from—of course it was in competition with the University of Illinois; of course much more limelight got over to Illinois because of the fact that it's just a bigger institution and everything, but he was the one that actually developed the basic principles that they followed out there for many years, and then they started diversifying into other aspects of it, but he's the one that tried to develop into—if somebody wanted a teacher, they came up here to hire one.

**GRAYBILL:** Yes. I guess that was a very critical period for the school, and to be president for thirty years is an amazing thing. I think he is very well regarded and respected, and I'm so glad that Carol Struck talked to me about the fact that you would be available.

**BARBARA MEEK:** She's a delightful person.

**GRAYBILL:** She is, she is, and she said that you'd be available and that I might want to come over here with my recorder, because this is really important. Yes, she is a wonderful person. So is there anything else you'd like to talk about?

**BARBARA MEEK:** You have splendid faculty.

**GRAYBILL:** Do you know any of them in particular?



**BARBARA MEEK:** Not especially right now.

**GRAYBILL:** But you have through the years.

**BARBARA MEEK:** But the Rodericks in music.

**GRAYBILL:** Okay, right.

**BARBARA MEEK:** Favorite people.

**GRAYBILL:** Yes, yes. I guess their son is very successful and on Broadway, I think, isn't he?

**JAMES MEEK:** Yes, their son.

**GRAYBILL:** Yes.

**JAMES MEEK:** Yes, their son.

**GRAYBILL:** Right.

**JAMES MEEK:** Yes.

**GRAYBILL:** Well, do you think we're done for now? You could always feel free to call me, and I could add something to the narration that I write to go along with it, but do you think we're done with this part of it?

**JAMES MEEK:** I guess so.

**GRAYBILL:** Okay. Well, I want to thank you very much, and I'll turn off the tape recorder now.

**JAMES MEEK:** [Unintelligible] they have an excellent reputation out here now, and they have good ratings and so forth. They're just excellent.

**GRAYBILL:** Yes. There was just something in the paper yesterday.

**JAMES MEEK:** And they could grow on. I'm sure that they could grow as fast as they wanted to, but—

**GRAYBILL:** So you were personal friends, then, with Lloyd and Mary Watkins, and Bob and Karin Bone.

**BARBARA MEEK:** And with the Boschinis [Victor John Boschini Jr. and Megan Boschini],

**GRAYBILL:** And the Boschinis as well?

**BARBARA MEEK:** We didn't want them to leave.

**GRAYBILL:** Okay, yes. Nobody did.

**JAMES MEEK:** He got an offer he couldn't turn down. [Laughs.]

**GRAYBILL:** Yes, yes. Do you hear from them?

**JAMES MEEK:** No, not really.

**BARBARA MEEK:** No, we sort of—Christmas at first.

**GRAYBILL:** So you've known quite a few presidents of the University.

**JAMES MEEK:** Yes, yes.

**GRAYBILL:** Yes. And I'm just going to mention, since this is on now, that you and the Bones came over here from the University of Illinois at the same time and were social friends.

**BARBARA MEEK:** Same time.

**GRAYBILL:** Yes, yes. And he came, then, for his job or was he a professor first before he became president?

**BARBARA MEEK:** I think he was a professor first.

**JAMES MEEK:** I think he may have been.

**GRAYBILL:** I think so, too.

**BARBARA MEEK:** Now, I may be completely wrong.

**JAMES MEEK:** I never had him over there, because I was in engineering, but people really liked him at the University of Illinois.

**GRAYBILL:** Did they?

**JAMES MEEK:** Good guy.

**GRAYBILL:** And I do remember that part about how he remembered everybody's name.

**JAMES MEEK:** Oh, it was utterly fantastic.

**GRAYBILL:** Yes. So it must really mean a lot to you when you go to these ceremonies and things, whenever you get to go to the University—you know, maybe not as much now as you used to.,

**JAMES MEEK:** [Laughs.] Unfortunately, unfortunately, that's the truth.

**GRAYBILL:** Yes, yes. Well I just wanted to mention that fact about your friendships with the other presidents because I think that's really nice.

**BARBARA MEEK:** They're special people.

**GRAYBILL:** Yes. I'll turn this off again. Thank you.

**BARBARA MEEK:** And our librarian.

**GRAYBILL:** Oh, okay, Cheryl Elzy?

**BARBARA MEEK:** Yes.

**GRAYBILL:** Okay, and you're friends with her, then, if you were on—

**BARBARA MEEK:** And I met her through Friends of Milner.

**GRAYBILL:** Okay, yes

**BARBARA MEEK:** And then broke a hip, ball and socket, and it's difficult to get up the stairs.

**GRAYBILL:** Yes, and there are a lot of stairs.

**BARBARA MEEK:** There are a lot of stairs there, so—

**GRAYBILL:** There sure are.

**BARBARA MEEK:** —I'm sort of retired.

**GRAYBILL:** Yes. Well, I can understand that.

**JAMES MEEK:** The company built an awful lot of buildings out there, and still are.

**GRAYBILL:** Did you build Watterson Towers?

**JAMES MEEK:** No.

**GRAYBILL:** Not Watterson.

**JAMES MEEK:** We remodeled Watterson.

**GRAYBILL:** Oh, okay. Oh, what a job that must have been! [Laughs.]

**JAMES MEEK:** [Laughs.] A part of it. But a company in Peoria—a company in Peoria built that.

**GRAYBILL:** Okay, but you've done the other high-rises over there, or many of the other high-rise residence halls.

**JAMES MEEK:** Yes, we built the first ones over there. Not Watterson, though.

**GRAYBILL:** Okay, yes.

**JAMES MEEK:** That's [unintelligible]. [Laughs.]

**GRAYBILL:** It is? Oh, my gosh. And, you know, sometimes I've heard that it takes students twenty minutes to get out of the building if they live on one of the top floors— you know, waiting for the elevators and all that.

**BARBARA MEEK:** That's probably true.

**GRAYBILL:** Yes, yes. I wouldn't have the patience. [Laughs.] Well, thank you again. I'll turn that off.