

James D. Christensen  
Carpenters Local 308  
Cedar Rapids, Iowa

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Interviewer: Merle Davis

IOWA LABOR HISTORY ORAL PROJECT  
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DES MOINES, IOWA

Merle Davis: This is an oral interview conducted by Merle Davis. The date is Thursday, August 5th, 1982 and I'm in Cedar Rapids, Iowa talking to James D. Christensen. And Jim, what's the address here?

James Christensen:

D: What's the zip code?

C: 52406, I believe it is.

D: And Jim, what's your title?

C: I'm a business representative.

D: That's with local what?

C: I'm a business representative for the Local 308 in the Cedar Rapids area.

D: How old are you?

C: I'll be fifty-six my next birthday, December.

D: And what year were you born?

C: 1926.

D: And where were you born?

C: Center Point, Iowa.

D: Where's that?

C: Oh, that's just eighteen miles north of Cedar Rapids.

D: And where was your father from originally?

C: Down around

D: What was his occupation?

C: Farmed.

D: And where was your mother from originally?

C: She was from around Urbana, Shellsburg, in that area.

D: Did she ever have a job outside the home?

C: Yeah, she used to work for people housekeeping and that type of thing.

D: How many children were in the family?

C: There were three of us.

D: And how many years did you go to school?

C: I went twelve.

D: What year did you finish?

C: 1945.

D: What sort of work have you done since you got out of high school?

C: I drove trucks, I worked on the farm a little at the start and worked for several different people. And then I drove on a rock quarry, the truck, and I worked for produce and drove a truck there for a little bit. Went into the service in '46 - I went in there in early '45 right after I graduated really, and then I came out in '46 and went back on the farm for a while, left there and went to a federal seed corn company and worked there till I got married and I was in a filling station working at that time and then I went to work for Leppinger, a sheet metal shop here in Cedar Rapids. I stayed there until '50. This was in '47 at , I went there and I worked there till March of 1950 and started in the carpenter trade then as an apprentice.

D: Why did you enter the carpenter trade?

C: Well, I had a twin brother that come out of the service and started with my cousin at Shellsburg carpenter work and he decided he wanted to come to Cedar Rapids and work as an apprentice. So he

was here while I worked at Leppinger's and I decided if he could be a carpenter and earn that kind of money, I could too. So that's how I started.

D: What sort of pay did you get when you started?

H: I started at 55 percent of the scale and I got a dollar and twelve and a half cents an hour.

D: The scale was about \$1.90?

C: Yeah.

D: Was there any difficulty entering the apprenticeship program?

C: No, not then, all that you needed to have - you were indentured to the employer at that time and you needed to have an employer that needed an apprentice or was able to take one. I don't remember if it was a certain number, I think after two journeymen then they had to take an apprentice and I forgot the number you made up. It seems to me it was five or six and you could have another apprentice. But I started in housing and so I was an apprentice then for R.C. Dollinger, Dick Dollinger was the name.

D: Was there any difficulty entering the apprenticeship program - did you have to know somebody, or be a son-in-law or anything like that?

C: Well, I didn't think so and I guess I wasn't aware that you could make it if you could have although my uncle Walt Stapler was a business agent at the time, so that made it kind of easy to get in. It didn't make it easy to get along with him, but it made it easy to get in.

D: In certain trades, I know people in the Quad Cities in the bricklayers trade there, you had to be a son in the first place was to get in. Was that true with the Bricklayers here?

C: Oh yeah, you bet. There was father and son generation. Yeah, you had to be a relation to 'em in order to get in. But it

wasn't that way with the carpenter's trade so much. I guess it would help and I did have an uncle that [was a business agent], you know.

D: Now, how was your apprenticeship program handled? Through the union or how?

C: Well, you didn't have an apprentice committee like they do today, but the business agent pretty much took care of the contractors in relation to the apprentice through the contractor. You always were assured of work because the contractor, if he had one journeyman, he had to keep an apprentice to work under him. You were always assured of work and you stayed there with that contractor for four years unless one or the other couldn't get along too well. If that happened then you'd go to your business agent and they'd go to the officers and review what was the problem and then they'd work it out from there. And sometimes they would move you.

D: In the old days it would seem the apprentice was indentured to the contractor and so you had to work for that one contractor. Now, that's changed hasn't it?

C: Well, yes but if that contractor was found not to be giving that apprentice a complete carpenter training - in other words, you'd catch him down in the forms and the mud continuously not really getting the opportunity to go on in other things, then they would come in and make a switch. I don't know how many times that ever got done, but it was possible if they had that guarantee that in a case where an apprentice wasn't getting educated like he was supposed to, see, they could make the change then. But for the most part you stayed with the contractor for a full four years and it seemed to me there was a plan then where you had to get so much, at least roughing and finishing and that kind of thing. I don't know if there was a record kept, but if there was I don't have it.

D: Later it seems that the union handled all of it and they'd work for various contractors?

C: Yeah, they indentured to the - well, they don't use the word indentured. They are placed from the union to the contractor

until the contractor is done with him or that job is done or whichever and there's no more journeymen or apprentices left, they'll have to move him to another one.

D: Now, when did this change occur would you say approximately?

C: I don't know.

D: Approximately what years? Was it in the '60s?

C: I'm thinking it was in the late-60s, I guess I don't remember what year to put on it.

D: Did you have classes too?

C: Yes, night classes.

D: Who handled those?

C: Well, they would have an instructor usually with each -

D: A high school teacher?

C: Yeah, they would take the job on in the evenings taking carpenter classes, apprentice classes.

D: Nowadays who handles that?

C: Well, nowadays the union has a coordinator that coordinates and they have instructors for different year apprentices, then all years were together. But I think when I went there was about twenty-five, it was probably the biggest class that had ever occurred there. And now, not today, but not too far back in the past here they had probably twenty-five or thirty in one class in one year.

D: When you took your apprenticeship training, were you taught much about safety problems?

C: Well, we weren't as conscious of safety as we could have been I guess. We didn't go into a great length on it, there was

some discussion, I think it was more between the students than it was class work.

D: When you learned about safety would it be on-the-job basically?

C: It would have been on-the-job, yeah. Safety come up later, in the later years. We didn't even think about safety as they do today, handrails and all of that, you had a certain amount of handrails, but I mean . . . Well, I gotta say this too, I was on housing where the safety hazard wasn't maybe quite as great as it was out on commercial jobs so I might have missed some of that too as far as safety was concerned.

D: When did apprentices start to learn more about safety, when did the system change?

C: That had to have been in the '70s. I would think probably early '72 or '73 or '74 in there that it really got to where safety was part of the safety occupational and they were concerned about it.

D: Did OSHA make a difference with that?

C: Well, I think they made everybody more aware than they were, yeah. I would say so, yeah.

D: What sort of things did a carpenter have to be careful about?

C: Well, carpenters have got quite a bit of scaffolding, it's one of the menaces in all fields - I don't care whether it's housing or it's commercial, scaffolding's a big, big item, how it sets and whether it's tied down or tied in or, you know, in whatever location. And I think this was back when they used to make the old wood scaffolding and even when it changed to metal rings or metal brackets, it still was a safety - I think when we used talk about scaffolding, we really were considering the safety all the way through. We used to have ladder jacks we put up alongside the building and really it was nothing more than a two legged horse, and

some of 'em would be probably six foot high, that would just lean against the building and they laid planks across that. But if you had 'em too high you would 'x' brace 'em. We always considered our safety and that, but we never handrailed nothing like that, you just walked out there - it wasn't but a wider plank, some were single and some were double or something like that.

D: Were people ever hurt?

C: Oh yeah. There were.

D: What caused the injuries?

C: Falls, bad fractures. Somebody not watching what they were doing on the scaffolding. I just read last week the old century engineering building down here was built in 1913 and they have a picture and a small newsletter item talking of how that building collapsed. And an architectural man, I think he was twenty-six years old at the time, was waiting for a bus, but he was going to Mount Vernon. And he looked back at that building and he said in effect that they were going too fast and where he'd slow it up with his , and if they kept it up it was gonna fall. And they were capping the fifth floor up when it fell. That was November 1913. That was one of the first formed concrete jobs in this area and they were in for the dollars. They went with an out of town firm and they were making too many pours, setting up too fast on each floor and evidently not putting enough shoring onto each floor as they moved up with the new concrete.

D: So it wasn't set then?

C: Well, I thought of that too as I was looking at this item, but you've gotta remember back - you built everything by hand, you didn't have steel forms and that type of thing, you had to make forms from one, by ship laths and one, by materials and two, they had to be all two inch shoring joists and stuff underneath to carry it. And you must have had a bunch of people to work on it, you know, compared I guess to what we have to have today. And I don't know how they could have gone too fast with each floor considering how many parts they needed to saw by hand and put up by hand. If I

had known that we was gonna do this, I would have brought one of them, had that copied.

D: You worked with house building and construction too?

C: I worked in housing. I started the apprenticeship in March of 1950 and my actual time started August, 1950. And I apprenticed for Dick Dollinger two years and he was kind of an older guy and he kind of got in a position where every plan didn't suit him, he just wouldn't take it until he got low enough on work. And then I went to work for Freddy Borschville and he built houses. He had three or four floor plans and he put up - he had two gangs, a finish crew and a rough-in crew and we put up like twenty houses in six months with them two crews and finished 'em out.

I finished my apprenticeship with him and I stayed with housing then until the '60s. And in the latter part of the '60s work got - well, it got to where you couldn't get financing very easy and people just quit building. So then I went into commercial work.

D: Was that much more dangerous then, commercial work?

C: It could be, I guess I never noticed the difference.

D: A carpenter's a skilled tradesman, who determined how fast you worked and the quality of your work?

C: A lot of contractors want it good and fast. Most of the time you can't have both. You can get a lot of people to work fast, but not good. A good mechanic who works steady and is interested in what he's building and you've gotta remember that most all carpenter work is custom work, it's all hand built, every piece of it - especially back in the '50s, earlier days beyond my time, but until we got a lot of shop stuff coming out. But as far as I know, the cabinets and all that were custom built, built to fit whatever area you was in. I gotta think that 85 percent of carpenters in this town was really for quality where today we don't have the time for quality, we're overlooking that, that's one of our problems we've got today.

D: There's been a change then has there?

C: Oh yeah, the economics has made a change. Nobody's got the money or time to fool around and take excessive time.

D: When did this change occur?

C: I guess maybe the change has been coming on for twenty years probably, but it's just been slow enough that a lot of us have not really taken a great notice. Take the housing for instance, housing when I was an apprentice in '50 - I make this statement, I think it was pretty close to being a hundred percent union. And we have an awful tussle to get 20 percent and probably less now. I think a good bit less, I'm not quite sure what I get. That's our wages, or our times don't fit the housing anymore at all.

D: That's here in Cedar Rapids? 80 percent non-union?

C: I'd say so, easy.

D: That's carpentry work.

C: Yes.

D: That's putting up new buildings or remodeling old or -

C: That's doing new work and remodeling. In most cases we're down to twenty percent at least, down that low.

D: What's brought that on - prices?

C: Yeah, prices, different methods in - I like to think that the reason is brought on by the money market - the contractors themselves didn't have financing available to 'em and really were more interested in building than they were financing. And all at once, we ended up working for the finance company, or the people that financed the money. Brokers and people like that, they seen where their market was available, that they could sell a lot of homes if they had a way of financing for each individual and they worked on it harder than the contractor. The contractor wanted to take his cut, do his work and be the owner that way. I think this

is a big turnaround and they finally got into the market where they found out that they could get the same house for less money or almost and that's where your quality went with it.

D: Where do these non-union people who are doing carpentry work come from? Are they moonlighters or are they full time, non-union people or what?

C: I remember one time being in the lumberyard and picking up some lumber, and one of the contractors at that time brought in a guy that he wanted to go to work for him and he bought him enough tools to get him started. And so you might say he made him an apprentice there. And when that person got good enough, so that he could see that he could make better money, he could very likely join the union. If he didn't work out too good, he got fired before that and went on in another trade. And then if demand got too high then they would discourage him some way and then they would get a new person to fill in.

D: Have you ever had any problems here with union carpenters who dropped out of the union and then worked non-union?

C: Always, that's always a problem. If for any reason you get a carpenter mad or discouraged or unhappy about the way things are going and he drops out for some reason, he's one hard cookie, if he leaves the union, he never needs the union again. So he's content and happy to work for a lesser wage. He was before he come in, he just figured it was a good time to come in and he got a little more money and he took advantage. So he dropped out following a dispute or dropped out for that dispute and went on his way. It's always a problem.

D: When were you first exposed to unions?

C: Well, when I joined the Carpenters. I guess I've gotta back that up too because before I went into the service I worked at a LaPlant Choate then which was Allis Chalmers in later years and they had a union there. And I had to join there before I went into the service so I knew a little about unions, but I guess I don't even remember it because I didn't even consider it - only that they

said that it'd just be nice if you belonged. That's kind of the way they put it. But Leppinger's, when I worked there, Dale Leppinger himself got up on the desk one night, on one of the workbenches and this was after some people had an at the curb.

D: That was the sheet metal place?

C: Yes. And Mr. Leppinger got up and was telling us how good we had it and we didn't have to pay dues and we didn't have this, we had a month paid holiday and this type of thing and give us nine hundred reasons why we shouldn't ever have started a union in our company. I can't remember exactly what his speech was 'cause this would have had to have been back in '48. So that's kind of where I - and I didn't really give it a lot of thought then 'cause I wasn't getting pushed around and if I had been, I suppose I'd have hollered, but I was generally satisfied. And I stayed generally satisfied even after I got into the Carpenters and joined the union. And when I joined I was primarily interested in learning a trade for a livelihood, something I would always have to fall back on. But I got more involved and went to more meetings and become an officer and I was president and I went to vice-president.

D: When were you president, do you remember?

C: I don't know the first time that I was president, I don't remember what year that was. It's back in the early '60s somewhere. I think around '62, if I can remember right.

D: How long have you been business agent?

C: I've been business agent - it was two years last March.

D: When you entered the trade they didn't have any women in the trade, did they?

C: No, no. Women didn't want to work in a trade like that too much. You could read about it somewhere, but it wasn't like downtown, no.

D: Were there any restrictions against women that you know of? Written restrictions?

C: No, not that I know of.

D: Did you have any minorities?

C: No.

D: Blacks, Mexicans?

C: No.

D: Now, later on did you get any women in the trade?

C: Not minorities, I don't think there was any carpenters. I take that back 'cause I know of one Indian from Tama that worked at the trade. There were several colored laborers that were darn good people. Me working with them in our business? No, I wasn't that closely associated with any of 'em.

D: Now later on, say in the '60s, '70s - did you have any women or minorities entering the union here?

C: In the '70s I think a few of 'em joined and came here for a while and pretty soon you looked up and they weren't there. And then pretty soon we'd see a few more faces. And pretty soon you wouldn't see them, you'd see them two years. But I know that there wasn't a lot of - in the late '70s and early '80s there were several Indians and quite a few colored.

D: Was there any resistance in the local here to having women or minorities join?

C: No, not in our local.

D: I suppose you probably got the talk about women in it, that they couldn't handle it or something like that.

C: I think you always get that kind of talk, you know really.

D: But they weren't kept out of it or anything?

C: No. It hadn't been too long ago, I can't remember exactly when - we had about six in this local and 1260, Iowa City's local,

together. But we worked this area and I think we've got two now, two women.

D: The other ones just dropped out?

C: Yeah. They done a pretty fair job too. We've got one gal yet that

D: And about how many members do you have in the local now?

C: The local's down to 518 now. That's everybody, the retirees and all, that's the total local.

D: Do retirees stay in the union?

C: Yes.

D: Do they have the same dues?

C: No, they have a reduced rate of dues that they pay themselves unless they've been in the trade thirty years and are age sixty-five. Local 308 has been fortunate enough to be able to pay the dues for 'em when they're sixty-five and have been a member at least fifteen years in this local.

D: That's just a local by-law, you have here that if they've been in that long that the local union will pay their dues.

C: Yeah.

D: What sort of rights do retirees have? Do they have any voting rights in union meetings?

C: No, not in the offices or working, anything in the working trade, if they don't work at the trade any longer, they can't hold an office either for the same reason, unless you're actually working in the trade.

D: So they don't have any voting rights.

C: Other than working wages and that type of thing they don't and they can't run for an office. But they can vote for an office.

D: Do you have any retirees come to the meetings?

C: Well, we may here these few years just coming up now because a lot of 'em are retiring a lot younger than they really wanted to because of the unemployment situation. When I say that I mean guys now retiring at sixty-two and they may come in. We don't get that big of a membership - about twenty-eight is the most we get to a meeting. But we've got one retiree comes to every meeting, just about, which is a poor percentage really. I think there's forty-four retirees now in our local.

D: I want to ask you about strikes, walkouts and things of that sort. I understand you haven't had very many strikes here in this local.

C: No, not really.

D: Was it in '68 you were out on strike?

C: I believe that was the year.

D: How do you account for that, that you've had very few strikes?

C: Well, I made the statement earlier that I committee we could get along with. And I think we do have a fairly good relationship with our employers we work for. We've been in the position where our employers will go to the bargaining table and say, "Well, if anybody's gonna have a raise, the Carpenters should have it." But they would haggle you right down to the last penny, right till the end and they didn't give up. So I don't think they ever believed what they said. But we most generally got somewhere in the neighborhood of what we felt we should.

D: In the '50s, how would the Carpenters feel their wages compared to the other trades? Behind most of 'em?

C: We were always kind of behind a little bit, maybe that's why we were so easy to get along with. But we were normally behind a little bit. And I guess I don't know whether the percentage is the same now or not, we're a little bit behind now.

D: Now, it happened in other towns that people talked about in the '60s when there was a lot of building going on, they called 'em wobbles, and people worked too much, got too tired and work was always there and they would just walk off. Did you have that problem here?

C: No, we don't have too many people who walked off just because they got tired of a job.

D: Say a wildcat, so it's not just one person, but they would get mad at something -the drinking water was warm or whatever, and they'd have a wildcat.

C: Very few jobs - I think we had a problem when the Duane Arnold plant down here was being built, they wobbled off of that a couple times. I can't think of any other case, there could have been, not many though, not many. And there haven't been any lately, we don't need publicity like that when we're trying to do it in a business type way, you know taking care of the business like a businessperson.

D: In Des Moines in the mid-60s there were a lot of jurisdictional fights between the trades and they got a lot of bad publicity from it. Did you have many problems in this area with jurisdictional problems?

C: No, not that I'm aware of, not that I can think of. I can't think of one place where we had any great jurisdictional disputes over anything. Maybe a little sticky stuff yet like walk-in coolers and that type of thing, we have a little problem with several trades. I suppose the biggest, the most jurisdictional would be on Millwrights which no longer - they're just we don't handle 'em so we don't get into too much of that now.

D: From what I understand Millwrights love to cause problems.

C: Well, Millwrights' and the Iron Workers' work is a whole lot alike in a lot of directions, you know, moving equipment and this type of thing and rigging. So they do have close relations and they will out cost each other for work occasionally I guess is the

best way to put that and they'll get away with it if they can. So they did have quite a few little tricky disputes.

D: But I want to get this straight now, in this area there haven't been many jurisdictional disputes that led to a walkout strike.

C: Not that I can think of, no.

D: Now, are these settled beforehand in your Building Trades Counsel?

C: They all are now. I just was trying to think - the last one I had was walk-in coolers and a lot of them jobs were so small that you don't take but two or three people out on the street for - you try to solve them right there and get it over with. And I lost one of 'em. I was trying to be a nice guy and that don't always work.

D: So you had walk-in coolers that were lined with wood inside.

C: They're wood framed and they're paneled with metal and this is where the problem comes. They have a fastening device that each panel is put together and that has been jurisdictionally ours for quite a few years now. But every now and then - the tinnerns will say that it's lined with tin, it's all metal, it's ours. I've heard them discuss that if it's got a different union label that it's theirs, a Sheet Metal label if it's theirs, which doesn't make any difference either. But in the old days the coolers, the walk-ins were all wood and cork lined inside and that type of thing. They were different, the material and changes have kind of helped the jurisdictional disputes. As far as I'm concerned there shouldn't be never no jurisdictional disputes, they just settle it today and make a copy of that and send it all over the country. They don't do it that way either.

D: Have there been many problems with layoffs, say seasonal layoffs - in the wintertime were you ever laid off much or any other season?

C: I've belonged to this local since 1950 and I think it's been, we used to have an average of twenty-five to thirty-five people that would be laid off seasonally. Or like I say, the first freeze. And there were a bunch of these people who have enjoyed that, they looked forward to it. And as we've come through from '50 up through the years, our layoffs - we could work more weather than we would have earlier, see. So I think our numbers got less, but for the most part between twenty-five and thirty would always want to get laid off and could get laid off.

D: So the cold weather would come and they'd slow down and they would take it voluntarily?

C: Yeah, they had to be laid off because of seasonal work and every contractor would cut down so they would normally be out of work and they would enjoy it and they didn't want to go back to work. It wasn't like it was back in the early 1900s - if you got nine months of work then you was awful lucky.

D: I heard about that, yeah.

C: And that becomes - like when I started there was very few people that did get to work almost - I don't know what the percentage. I'll bet you it was probably ten and a half, eleven months that they'd work. And from '50 on up until the present day you can work every day of the year if the economy's right.

D: When did it start getting bad for the Carpenters in this area? The last three years, two years?

C: Yeah, two and a half years, maybe a little more. Maybe almost three years it started to get pretty touchy for carpenter work. We've had an out of work list now, a big one, for a good two and a half years.

D: Have you had many people leave the area?

C: Sure, some drop out, some leave the area and go down into the southern belt looking for work. Sometimes they catch on, sometimes they don't. But yeah, our numbers are down. I started

two years ago last March and our local had 747 members. And Monday, last meeting, I think there was 518 membership. And then people have dropped out or transferred out. In either case they're not in this area anymore.

D: Since you entered the trade, have there been changes at all in the type of equipment you use and the materials you work with?

C: Oh yeah. Because when I first started a lot of the stuff was cut by hand saw yet. We had skill saws and we done a lot of work with skill saws then, but we done a lot more work with a hand saw. And we really didn't cut headers and so we'd get 'em straight with a hand saw, we cut all that with...

D: What's a header?

C: That's a double member over a door or window frame to strengthen them out.

D: You mentioned the rafters - they use in construction sites now what they call pre-fab and they come in -

C: The pre-fab cut is built in plants and brought in, sure.

D: How long have they been doing that?

C: Well, when I worked for Kenny Borschel in '65, '67, we made our own trusses so that's the first I got into trusses. We would put the box tail on the house and the floor joists and put the sub floor down and then we would cut our rafters and our ceiling joists and all our component parts for these trusses. And then we'd lay out that on top of that new sub floor and then we'd put blocks down for the pattern and we'd make all of our trusses for that house. And as we made each truss, we'd pick it up and we'd move it over to a plow just away from the building site so that we could go on and frame the house up. And the average hours back then for that crew, I think we had about six people on that crew, about forty-four hours, for building trusses on an average house of about 1400-1500 feet. That was the first trusses and there was no shops then set up to - as a matter of fact - to build trusses, make 'em and sell 'em

as such. So I think I'm talking about there in the late '50s, I would say probably trusses come in somewhere along in the middle '60s.

D: Have been there been any other changes that you recall?

C: The materials have changed. We didn't even consider insulation in the early years. As everybody well knows, there wasn't insulation in the older homes at all. When I started in the trades in the '50s, if you put two inches of insulation above the roof, it was more than adequate, that's all you needed. The first contractor I finished with would use a three-quarter - it looked like a 'built right', what 'built right' sheeting looks like. But it was lath for the inside of the home. They would leave it three-quarter thick, no it was half an inch thick, it was half an inch thick and then the ship lath that we used on the inside of the houses was three-eighth and we . And they always said it makes the grounds for sitting on plaster different because of the outside wall and the inside wall. But that extended insulation. And now, as we've moved down the years, then it got to be three inch in the city and then it went up to four and then it went clear up to six. And now they're going to twelve. They've had a great change in insulation.

D: If I understand this, from what I've read and what I've heard, over the years the percentage of the cost of a house in wages of a carpenter has declined greatly. Are you working faster or is it more efficient equipment or materials or what?

C: Both. In the first houses in the '50s, even when I started, there was wood sheeting, the sheeting, of course, would be 1x 6 on the deck. That turned to be plywood over the years and then a lath factories. And roof sheeting were 1x 6 and they converted to plywood. All the wood sheeting on the side walls was ship lath. And that became 'build right' or that type of thing in 4 x 8 sheets or 4 x 9s. And it was put on with - it could be put on - I don't know, I suppose almost easy in all three cases, in all three cases. So that was a great change there.

D: Did the union do anything to resist these changes?

C: No, if they did I'm not aware of it. I'm not aware of it. The fact of the matter is, I went to quite a few shows to learn - well, they would show you how to make box beams and stuff out of plywood and that to truss over different openings and that type of thing. And you probably would more readily than we would normally do it. Aluminum sidings, the same thing. We went from all wood siding - the old siding used to be four and a half inches. It weathered three and a half. And it would take you forever to do one side with that. And then we went to twelve-inch boards and that board would weather around ten and three-quarters to eleven inches. Each board would cover so much more that we had to gain on labor on that type of thing. And some people even went to cutting that stuff with a skill saw which was a no, no - rather than the old hand saw method. So there were a lot of changes occurred that way.

D: Does that cheapen the product? It made the house maybe just as expensive, more expensive, but maybe it was just as expensive, but it made it poorer quality.

C: I think someday we'll go to the wood siding they're taking off now, or covering up now, they'll go back and put it on later on down the line to get back to good quality. Yeah, I think it's cheapened it.

D: Did the local here ever take an interest in politics?

C: Not a great deal. We've had individuals that would get into it, but the locals themselves - they almost ignore the conversation yet if you bring it up at the meetings. They listen to you and then they go vote or do what they want to themselves. They've not really got into politics very heavy, no.

D: But there was a tradition in the old AFL unions way back, whether these individuals would decide whether the union itself was gonna get involved.

C: They didn't want to bring it up through the union at all, they just let the individual do his own thinking.

D: Did you have candidates come before a union meeting and talk to you?

C: No, not till just later years.

D: Later years - what, four or five years?

C: Oh probably the last ten years we've been obliged to let a few in to talk. And then they've gotta be kinda favorable to workers before we accept 'em, you know.

D: Like joining the apprenticeship program.

C: Yeah, right. We had a guy come in, an old guy in the last election and he was a local representative here in town. And he was telling about being a truck driver, but he'd never belonged to the union before. Them guys was mad at him just as soon as he left.

D: What sort of community projects have you taken up in your local?

C: Well, we sponsor a Little League every year. I actually can't think what the league is now, but it's over on the northwest side here. And the kids I believe are around nine or ten years old.

D: Does the local help buy the uniforms and equipment?

C: Yeah, we sponsor so much and then yeah, they have a certain cap and buy whatever else is necessary. I think it's been going up a little bit more, but so many dollars a year we give to them. We sponsor one person in the soapbox derby. We always have a fella go down the hill there. But we aren't really into big projects, we don't do that either.

D: Do you help with any buildings?

C: No, not in this local area. I don't know, Camp Courageous down there, we went down there and there was a lot of our people doing work down there, quite a bit. But we haven't done nothing like that recently, not recently. In fact it's been a good six, seven, eight years ago since we've done anything.

D: Have there been any local issues that the Carpenters have become

involved in? Say with building codes or anything of that sort?

C: No.

D: And have there been any state issues that you can think of?

C: No, not really.

D: Well Jim, I'm about out of questions. Is there something else you'd like to bring up?

C: I can't think of nothing fantastic either.

D: Well, I'm gonna turn it off now and I want to thank you very much for taking part in our history project. It was good talking to you today and I've enjoyed it very much, thank you.