

Collection #  
M1486

**FEROL MEEKER  
PERU, INDIANA CIRCUS  
ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPTS, 1959-1962**

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## **COLLECTION INFORMATION**

**VOLUME OF  
COLLECTION:** 7 Folders

**COLLECTION  
DATES:** 1959, 1962

**PROVENANCE:** Unknown

**RESTRICTIONS:** None

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**ALTERNATE  
FORMATS:**

**RELATED  
HOLDINGS:** M1346 John Hanners Circus Research Collection  
P0248 Peru, Indiana Negative Collection

**ACCESSION  
NUMBER:** 0000.1256

**NOTES:** Additional interviews or parts of interviews will be added to  
this collection as they are digitized and transcribed.

## HISTORICAL SKETCH

The Great Wallace Shows circus was established in 1883 by Peru, Indiana livery stable owner Benjamin E. Wallace (1847-1921) and his partner James Anderson. At that time it traveled overland by wagon, touring Kentucky and Virginia. By 1886 Wallace had put his circus on rails, and the show grew year-by-year. In late 1906 Wallace successfully purchased the equipment and name of famous German animal trainer Carl Hagenbeck's circus. The popular Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus out of Peru, Indiana became a major rival to Wisconsin's Ringling Brothers Circus, also established in 1883. Hagenbeck-Wallace would outlive its creator, when in 1921 it was absorbed into the American Circus Corporation owned by Ed Ballard, Jerry Mugivan, and Bert Bowers. The expansive Peru circus winter quarters farm is today a National Historic Landmark.

Ferol Meeker (1901-1977) was born Ferol Elizabeth Friedline in Monroeville, Indiana. As a young woman she worked as a public school teacher there. In 1925 she married George Meeker, a young dentist joining his father's practice in Peru, Indiana. The two subsequently lived in Peru. In later years, George was president of the Miami County Historical Society. He and Ferol frequently collaborated on local history projects. They published several pamphlets and worked for many years to preserve Miami County history.

Ferol served in multiple service organizations, including the Indiana Sesquicentennial Advisory Committee, and was instrumental in the creation of the annual Cole Porter Festival in Peru. She had also set her sights on preserving Peru's significant circus history. In 1964 Ferol visited the Circus Hall of Fame Museum in Sarasota, Florida, looking for ideas towards starting a similar institution in Peru. On the way back, she was involved in an automobile accident in which both of her legs were broken. Her recovery slowed but did not stop her philanthropic efforts. She eventually retired to San Antonio, Texas, where she died in 1977. However, in the mid-1980s, the Circus Hall of Fame was moved to the circus winter quarters in Peru, where it remains today as a testament, in part, to Ferol's efforts.

Interview Subjects:

**Horace Cook (1893-1968)** - Peru native, neighbor to Benjamin Wallace, later president of Miami County Historical Society.

**Harry Sarig (1889-1976)** - Personal secretary to Ed Ballard, secretary-treasurer for the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus, manager of West Baden Springs Hotel.

**Harry West (1869-1964)** - Peru native, co-owner of West & Stevens Stationery and Book store.

**Joe Hodgini (1895-1998)** - Youngest of 14 children in the famous Hodgini Circus Family. Comedy bareback rider on Peru-based shows. In later years, developed a popular dog act.

**Frank J. Richardson (dates unknown)** - Peru native, worked two seasons with Sells-Floto Circus maintaining light plant.

**[Clarence] Pat Kramer (1894-1961)** - Peru native, worked on various circuses throughout the 1930s such as Hagenbeck-Wallace, Cole Bros., and Parker & Watts.

**Wilbur Mitchell (1881-1967)** - Peru native, worked in the cook tent and sold concessions at various times on circuses and in downtown Peru before becoming a clothing salesman.

Sources:

Materials in the collection

“Ferol Meeker is doing her best to help Peru,” *The Kokomo Morning Times*, Feb. 9, 1966.

## SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection consists of transcripts of oral history interviews conducted by Ferol Meeker in 1959 and 1962. Mrs. Meeker was interested in preserving the personal histories of locals who had worked on or near the various circuses that wintered in Peru in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. At the time, the amateur circus that would become a popular annual event in Peru was in its first years. It is not mentioned in these interviews.

In the interviews, Mrs. Meeker refers to the “Indiana historical program,” elsewhere the “Indiana historical library” as a partner in the project. However, no documentation of the project could be located in the institutional archives of the Indiana Historical Society. It remains unknown whether the IHS was involved in the creation of the interviews.

The nature of the technology used to capture the interviews was such that the tape abruptly runs out and the interviewer had to pause to change it. For this reason, the narration often starts in the middle of a story, or the tape will suddenly end while the subject is speaking.

Additionally, the quality of the recordings after nearly sixty years is extremely poor in some places. A high-pitched squeal throughout the Sarig recording makes it particularly challenging to listen to. The processor/transcriber has made every effort to produce faithful and complete transcripts. However, digital audio files of the transfers are available in the Reading Room upon request.

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Horace Cook transcript

Harry Sarig transcript

Harry and Georgia West transcript

Joe Hodgini transcript

Frank J. Richardson transcript

Pat Kramer transcript

Wilbur Mitchell transcript

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Box 1, Folder 3

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Box 1, Folder 5

Box 1, Folder 6

Box 1, Folder 7