
Guide to the Phyllis Foley Oral History

Collection number: MS 3527

California Historical Society

North Baker Research Library
San Francisco, California

Contact Information:

- California Historical Society
- North Baker Research Library
- 678 Mission Street
- San Francisco, California 94105-4014
- Phone: (415) 357-1848, ext. 220
- Fax: (415) 357-1850
- Email: reference@calhist.org
- URL: <http://www.californiahistoricalsociety.org/>

Processed by:

California Historical Society staff

© 2000 California Historical Society. All rights reserved.

Descriptive Summary

Title: Phyllis Foley Oral History

Collection number: MS 3527

Creator: Foley, Phyllis, 1922-

Repository: California Historical Society, North Baker Library
San Francisco, California 94105-4014

National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections (NUCMC) Identification Number:

NUCMC 82-438

Language: English

Access

Collection is open for research by appointment only.

Publication Rights

Copyright has not been assigned to The North Baker Research Library. All requests for permission to publish or quote from manuscripts must be submitted in writing to the Library Director. Permission for publication is given on behalf of The North Baker Research Library as the owner of the physical items and is not intended to include or imply permission of the copyright holder, which must also be obtained by the reader.

Preferred Citation

[Identification of item], Phyllis Foley Oral History. MS 3527, California Historical Society, North Baker Research Library.

Interview Information

Interviewer: I first met Ms. Foley when I went to see her to ask about interviewing her mother. She is a tall, handsome, placid seeming woman whose looks are deceiving. Quoting Dorothy Parker, I believe she has a whim of iron. She is courteous, cooperative, and despite all

her problems fitted in two hours for me prior to the election and one hour following her defeat. The first two meetings were in the very early hours of the morning at her office, and the last interview held at my home in San Francisco. Although living in the shadow of her mother, she is known as a competent, hardworking, and devoted union official.

Born: September 18, 1922

Now living at her home in Belmont, California

Interviews held on: March 5, 1979, April 5, 1979, July 25, 1979

Time of Interviews: Approximately three hours

The following interview is to be read in conjunction with the interview held with Ms. Foley's mother, Bertha Metro, early this year. When Ms. Metro was interviewed her memory and her health were rapidly deteriorating. The interview was not concluded and gives a very inadequate picture of what was a full and active life in behalf of her union constituency, Local #283 of the Hotel & Restaurant Employees and Bartenders International Union.

Because of this lack, Ms. Foley consented to be interviewed on her own life, her memories of her mother, and her continuation of her mother's stewardship of the Local to which Ms. Foley was elected Secretary-Treasurer in 1974, the position previously held by her mother.

Conduct of the Interview

Extensive preparation had been made for the interview with Ms. Metro, and some of this background material was called upon in the present interview.

The union to which Ms. Foley belongs, and of which the interviewer is also a member, was (and is) in the throes of bitter factional struggles. Immediately after Ms. Foley's election to Secretary-Treasurership of Local #283 the six culinary unions in San Francisco were merged on the basis of an International policy decision. The locals were not consulted and had no vote. Therefore the opinion of the membership is neither known nor recorded.

The officers of the amalgamated locals continued in the leadership of the newly formed Local #2 with Ms. Foley becoming Secretary-Treasurer of the new Local. After a period of several years a hectic election was held. Ms. Foley ran for office with a group of incumbent officers against a rank and file slate, and was re-elected (one of the few who maintained their offices)--the balance of full-time officers being replaced by what was called a "dissident" group. Mrs. Foley cooperated with the newly elected officers. Her basis, she told me, was that they were all elected by the membership and full cooperation was necessary for the good of the union. Ms. Foley was accused of going over to the enemy by her former co-workers. Factional struggles continued. The union was finally placed in Trusteeship by the International President. This trusteeship was challenged in court and a decision reached that another election should be held under the auspices of the U.S. Department of Labor.

Just prior to this second election Bertha Metro died after a brief period of hospitalization.

Ms. Foley ran for office of Secretary-Treasurer as an independent, did little campaigning, and lost to a member of a slate.

The interview was conducted under these trying circumstances. The Interviewer, more interested in the background of women's problems, of Mrs. Metro's thinking during the thirties, and in Ms. Foley's personal reactions and experiences, did not wish to get involved in current union history although it is naturally touched on in the course of the interview.

Editing

Minor editing by transcriber. None by narrator.

Narrative Account of the Interview

We went briefly into Ms. Foley's memories of her grandparents, her parents, her childhood in Canada, and subsequent moves to Boise, Idaho and San Francisco, California.

Ms. Foley's growing up in San Francisco and her relationship to her parents, and their influence on her, was discussed, as were her mother's and father's union activities. Concentration was on Ms. Metro and her organizing activities which resulted in the unionization of the hotel maids in San Francisco. (Ms. Foley has donated some of her mother's papers to the Library and they are available to Library patrons).

We then went into Ms. Foley's marriage at the beginning of World War II, the birth of her three sons, her divorce, re-marriage, and the death of her second husband.

This is overlapped by her working as a hat check girl at dances (which were popular in those days, the era of the Big Bands) to augment the family income.

In 1955 Phyllis Foley went to work in the office of Local #283 for one day as temporary help. She stayed on, gradually assuming more and more responsibilities, and finally becoming an appointed officer of the union.

It was during this period Ms. Foley met her third and present husband, a bellman, and the first member of the union she dated.

The interview concludes with Ms. Foley's development as a union leader in her own right, her activities in behalf of Local #283, and her opinions on union policies, relations with employers, politics, and the women's movement.

Lucy Kendall

September 5, 1979

- Discrimination in employment
- Hotel & Restaurant Employees and Bartenders Internation Union, Local # 283
- Hotel Maids
- Hotels, Taverns, etc. --Employees
- Hotels, Taverns, etc. --San Francisco
- Metro, Bertha, 1899-1979
- Minorities-- San Francisco
- Trade-Unions--Officials & Employees
- Women in California
- Women in Trade-Unions