

Meekins, Daniel Victor ^[1]

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by David Stick, 1991

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Daniel Victor Meekins, newspaper editor and publisher, sheriff, postmaster, and county official, was born at Sunnyside on the northern end of Roanoke Island, the son of Daniel and Rowena Homer Meekins. His father was a farmer and a fisherman; both parents were natives of Roanoke Island, as had been their ancestors since the colonial period. Educated in the public schools on Roanoke Island, young Meekins moved in 1916 to Norfolk, Va., where he attended Norfolk Business School and worked in a shipyard before entering the U.S. Army. Discharged from military service at the end of World War I, ^[2] he returned to the Norfolk area. There he gained his first experience as a newspaperman, first in advertising and then as a reporter.

In 1922 he was hired by W. O. Saunders, editor and publisher of the *Elizabeth City Independent*, where he remained until 1927, serving during the later years as associate editor of the newspaper. Like so many other natives of the Outer Banks region ^[3], Meekins harbored both a desire and a sense of obligation to return to his homeland once he had received an education and professional experience elsewhere. He made the move in 1927, just in time to reestablish his identity and residency and to submit his name to the electorate as a candidate for sheriff of Dare County ^[4]. Elected in his first bid for public office, he served as sheriff ^[5] from 1928 until 1946.

Meekins met Catherine Deaton, a talented musician, music teacher, and daughter of a Mooresville newspaper publisher, on her first visit to Roanoke Island in the summer of 1929 and proposed to her the next day. They were married that winter, and throughout their married life they continued to live at his family homestead on the western shore of Roanoke Island overlooking Croatan Sound.

Dare County ^[4] was without a newspaper, and in 1935 Meekins decided to provide the people of his home area with a paper of their own, founding a weekly publication he called the *Dare County Times*. At the same time he set up a small job-printing shop in rented office space in Manteo, but the equipment was inadequate to handle the larger-format newspaper, and for years it was printed in Elizabeth City. He later acquired a used press large enough to print the paper, built a shop to house both the printing business and the newspaper office, and expanded the publishing venture to include weekly newspapers in nearby counties: the *Tyrrell County Tribune* in Columbia, the *Hyde County Herald* in Swanquarter, the *Pilot* in Belhaven, and for a brief period the *Seashore News* in Nags Head. Acute shortages of newsprint brought on by World War II, as well as increasing difficulty in putting out newspapers with a shortage of available help over a relatively wide geographic area, resulted in consolidation of the papers in 1949 as the *Coastland Times*.

With his service as sheriff terminated in 1946, Meekins waited less than two years before getting back into local government. He was elected to the Dare County Board of Commissioners and served as chairman from 1948 to 1950 and again from 1958 to 1960.

His writing style, reflected in both the editorial and news columns of his papers, was straightforward and earthy, most often with short words rather than long ones, simple sentences rather than complicated ones. His penchant for using words and phrases common in spoken English but seldom seen in print served to enrage those who considered some of his writings "filth" while titillating others. His papers were seldom overburdened with formal editorials, but his editorial views were often made clear in his news stories. When he championed a project or an idea he did so wholeheartedly, and when he disapproved he was never reluctant to attack with vigor.

For nearly thirty years Meekins devoted a considerable part of his time to developing closer ties among the small counties on the southern side of Albemarle Sound, and he was a prime mover in the formation of the Southern Albemarle Association in 1935. He served as secretary of the association for several years and later as vice-president and president (1949–50). He was probably as responsible as any individual for the network of modern bridges that connect the Outer Banks and Roanoke Island, an area he liked to call "The Walter Raleigh Coastland," with the interior.

Meekins was a Thirty-second-degree Mason ^[6], a Shriner, an Oddfellow ^[7], a Rotarian, and a Ruritan. He served as secretary of the North Carolina Cape Hatteras Seashore Commission ^[8] (1941–44), was an organizer and for many years secretary of the Fessenden National Memorial Association, and was active in the Kill Devil Hills Memorial Society, serving as both secretary and vice-president.

In addition to his newspaper publishing and job-printing activities, he was engaged in a number of business ventures, ranging from insurance and real estate to billboard advertising and the sale of office equipment and supplies. For many years he wrote a column for his papers, "The Old Sea Captain and the Drummer," which attracted a wide following. In 1950 he assembled the most popular of the columns and published them in book form with the subtitle, "Salty Dialogue

from the Land of Wind and Water."

Throughout his adult life Meekins was active in the [Democratic party](#) [9]. He was an organizer of the first Young Democrats Club in Dare County and was a delegate to the 1956 Democratic National Convention in Chicago. In 1962 he was appointed postmaster of Manteo, and two years later, at the time of his death, he was president of the Association of Eastern North Carolina Postmasters.

His wife worked closely with him in the publishing and printing business, helping with both the writing and office management. They had two sons, Roger P. and Francis W.; and a daughter, Mrs. Boyce W. Harwell.

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Photographs by Daniel Victor Meekins. East Lake Raid, Outerbanks History Center, Flickr Photostream. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/obhc/sets/72157627438430780/> [12] (accessed September 22, 2014).

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