

A HISTORY OF THE TEAMSTERS IN GEORGIA

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The International Brotherhood of Teamsters first appeared in Georgia during the early 1930's in the form of Local 450. Obtaining their first contract in 1932, Local 450 represented drivers working for Yellow Cab in Atlanta, and its brief history reflects the experience of many small local unions who were unable to establish and maintain a model of organizational viability.

Local 450 followed the desires of the Yellow Cab drivers who made up its membership and defended their territorial rights to the most desirable cab stands. Cab drivers who worked for companies other than Yellow were not permitted to join the Local because of the jealous manner in which this territory was defended. This exclusiveness combined with a decline in membership left the Local with depleted strength; Local 450's actions caused it to self destruct. The International picked up the Local's charter, and its members were absorbed into Teamsters Local 728, which had been chartered as a freight haulers local shortly after the chartering of Local 450.

After Local 728 had been chartered, a construction local also came into existence. Local 891 was chartered just before the beginning of World War II, and it also proved to have an ephemeral existence. Unable to create a lasting base of organization, this Local could not overcome the challenge of short-term jobs, fluctuating business volume and multiple employers. Additionally, it did not have contracts calling for dues check-off. It, therefore, had the burden of collecting members' dues on the job sites. It had a few permanent contracts involving heavy-duty hauling, but it was unable to create a lasting base of organization utilizing the techniques of traditional building trades unions. Its charter was taken up by the International in 1955, and its few hundred members were acquired by Local 728.

Local 728 initially represented truck drivers engaged in long distance and local freight hauling, but the Local quickly expanded its jurisdiction by organizing warehouses,

dairies and, after the end of World War II, the car hauling industry.

Two men were to play critical roles in the emergence of Local 728 as a leader in the Georgia labor movement. Robert C. (R.C.) Cook was a driver with Complete Auto Transit and Weldon L. Mathis drove for Huber and Huber Freight Company. In 1945, Local 728 had two business agents, W.T. Archer and Paul Hall, who became embroiled in legal difficulties. Archer left the employ of the Local and went to work for the Laundry Workers Local in Atlanta. Paul Hall went to prison, and the Local was placed under trusteeship by the International. Lee Kruggle was appointed trustee of the Local. After his release from prison, Hall worked for the Teamsters in Savannah, Georgia, and he later moved to a Teamster position in Jacksonville, Florida. In the late 1940's, Weldon Mathis went to work as a driver for Complete Auto Transit. It was while in the employ of Complete Auto Transit that he first became friends with R.C. Cook who was also employed there as a driver.

Before the trusteeship of Local 728 was lifted, there was a call for local union elections, and R.C. Cook drew Weldon Mathis into the ranks of the Local's activists. He encouraged Mathis to join a slate of members running for local union office. Also included on this slate were Joe Vaske and Gene Hale. The slate supported Lee Kruggle in his candidacy for the Presidency of Local 728 on the basis of Kruggle's promise that he would not take any position on the other races for local union office. Kruggle kept his word.

On June 1, 1951, the trusteeship of Local 728 was lifted. The Local Union elections held just prior to this date resulted in Lee Kruggle being elected President. R.C. Cook was elected Secretary-Treasurer. The terms of the three local union trustees were staggered into terms of one, two and three years. Weldon Mathis was elected as the trustee serving the three-year term of office. The Cook-Mathis slate defeated individuals who had served under the trusteeship of Lee Kruggle. These individuals were viewed as do-nothings by the membership, but they continued to serve under Kruggle's relatively passive administration of the Local. The President of the Local served as the business agent and President Kruggle determined that the trustee serving the three-year term should additionally serve as the local's assistant business agent.

Local 728's office was located in downtown Atlanta at 85 Poplar street and the Local paid per capita tax to the International on approximately 900 members. The union had a one-room office, and there was a meeting room that could hold between 40 – 50 people. After about one year, the Local moved its offices to a location on Spring Street in

Downtown Atlanta. Local Union Meetings were held on Sundays, holding separate meetings for white and black members on alternate weekends. The practice of holding racially segregated local- union meetings predated the trusteeship of Lee Kruggle. While he disapproved of this practice, Kruggle did nothing to change it either in his tenure as trustee or local union president; he was of the opinion that white members would not attend meetings with black members.

Local 728 was never segregated. Membership was open to people regardless of race. Dual seniority lists were not maintained, but R.C. Cook remembers that "it was pretty close to it (dual seniority) in a way." According to company hiring practices in local freight hauling, white workers were employed as drivers and checkers. Although there were a very few black drivers, black workers were typically employed as stevedores at a lower rate than those white workers classified as drivers and checkers.

While this situation was the result of conscious hiring practices on the part of companies, it should be noted that the Local had not protested such practices. The cornerstone of this discriminatory treatment of black workers was classification seniority. Seniority was not company wide; contractual job rights based on seniority resided within a single job classification. In the event of layoff, a black stevedore with ten years of seniority could not bump a white checker with six months on the job. In addition, the Local's collective bargaining contracts allowed employers to establish the qualifications for job assignment. Employers were given the sole authority to determine both job qualifications and assignment. Lee Kruggle admitted to his new executive board that this clause was included in the contract to prevent blacks from being employed in the job classifications of checker or driver. Blacks were to be used as dock workers only.

The only exception to this was the job classification of caller. This was a time when no freight-handling equipment existed for unloading trucks. As a checker would work a truck, he would have a person in the truck who would call the names off each box; this individual was classified as a caller. The position required an employee who could read and paid an extra ten cents per hour. Black employees who could read were given this assignment.

The disparate treatment which resulted from classification seniority was created through collective bargaining. When this treatment was eliminated, this was also

accomplished through collective bargaining. Upon assuming office as Local 728 President and Secretary-Treasurer, R.C. Cook and Weldon Mathis put the industry on notice that this situation had to change. The primary vehicle for this change was the city-wide agreement with the Atlanta Truck Operators Association. The demise of classification seniority occurred between 1952-1954, during R.C. Cook's first term as President of Local 728. During this two-year period, Cook and Mathis gradually began to break down employer job assignment practices. The result was that when it came time to renegotiate the city-wide agreement in 1954, the practice of employing blacks as drivers had come into existence and had receive some acceptance.

One example of this acceptance was the experience at Akers Motor Line. Cook and Mathis viewed the company's owner, John Akers, as a reasonable employer. He concurred with the union view that racially restrictive employment practices were both inappropriate and wrong. Mathis knew that Pierce Jones, a senior Akers employee, wanted to drive a truck. He and Jones met with Akers's terminal manager. Mathis put him on notice that Jones would bid on the next driver opening that arose and he expected Jones to be put on as a driver. It took about one year to break down the company's resistance, and to destroy their argument that Jones was not qualified to drive a truck.

Company-wide seniority replaced classification seniority in the agreements negotiated with local freight haulers. R.C. Cook had a difficult time with both the companies and some of the white membership. But many of the white members agreed with R.C. that restricting seniority to a single job classification was wrong, and that it was bad for the union. It was Cook's conviction that classification seniority also retarded the union's ability to represent its members and to organize the unorganized. Subsequent events were to prove the veracity of this belief.

The Presidency of R.C. Cook

A series of events which were to change the future course of Local 728 began with the resignation of Lee Kruggle as Local Union President. Kruggle resigned to take a position with a company – Terminal Transfer, representing that company in grievances. Local 728 by-laws said that in the event that an officer of the Local was unable to finish a

term, the executive board of the local would appoint a replacement subject to the approval of the membership. Gene Hale was Vice President of the Local and he wanted to be President. The Executive Board met and selected Hale as the Local's next President with Weldon Mathis as Vice President. The membership turned down this Executive Board recommendation by a margin of about five to one. The representative of the International Union who was handling the meeting called the Executive Board back into session. This time the Executive Board selected R.C. Cook as President and Weldon Mathis as his replacement as Secretary-Treasurer. This recommendation was carried back to the membership, who were still meeting and it was approved nearly unanimously.

Although, Gene Hale continued to serve as Local Vice President and Assistant Business Agent, he harbored considerable resentment as a result of the election of Cook and Mathis. Hale combined with a group of white drivers in an attempt to split the Local's over the road drivers from the city drivers. His disruptive behavior and failure to perform assigned duties cause R.C. Cook to fire him from his position as Assistant Business Agent. Hale, of course, continued to serve a Local Vice President. Charges were preferred by a member asking that Hale be removed as Vice President. R.C. Cook excused himself as chairman of the committee hearing the charges, and the hearing resulted in Hale's removal from office. Hale took the union to court and the presiding judge directed that a second hearing be held on the grounds that R.C. Cook should not have excused himself a chairman of the hearing. Although the second hearing resulted in the same decision as the first, Hale kept the union in court for over a year.

It was during this early period in his Presidency that R.C. Cook renegotiated classification seniority with the Atlanta Truck Operators Association and with employers the Local had under contract who were not members of the Association. There was no way that this unjust situation was going to be tolerated under the administration of R.C. Cook and Weldon Mathis. They carried the day over employer reluctance, the vested interests of white members and the practice of segregation prevalent in the south. This denial of worker rights was put to an end.

Those who predicted doom and the demise of the Local because of this action could not have been more incorrect. At this point in time, the Local represented bargaining units containing approximately 2,500 employees, but only 900 of these workers were members of Local 728. Eliminating classification seniority and providing people with the

kind of representation they desired caused a dramatic increase in the membership of the Local through both internal and external organizing. The initial increase in Local 728's membership was the result of non-members covered by existing contracts signing up. Cook and Mathis were committed to the philosophy that the best way to represent and give security to current members was to actively organize the unorganized and diversify the types of workers the Local represented. Rather than build up the size of the Local's treasury, Cook made a financial commitment to organizing and the Local was not reluctant to organize outside of freight hauling, warehousing and car hauling. The advent of contracts containing dues-checkoff provisions played a critical role in establishing the financial viability of the Local Union and this action gave the leadership the financial resources with which to pursue their organizing goals.

This financial and philosophical commitment paid off. From 1952 to 1965, Local 728's membership grew from 900 to nearly 9,000. In addition to organizing in the freight hauling and car hauling industries, the Local organized dairies, warehouse, grocers and companies such as Atlanta Gas Light and Kraft Foods. Another view of the dramatic and positive changes that were made during the early years of the Cook administration can also be seen by focusing on the issue of race. Merging what had been the separate white and black Local Union meetings change the manner in which contracts were ratified. The earlier practice was to have the white membership meeting first vote on whether to ratify a new contract. The vote of the black membership followed this. The numbers of each vote were then combined in totaling the ratification vote.

As trustee of Local 728, Lee Krugge had created a Colored Division and appointed Gid Parham as chairman. Parham was employed as a driver at Southeastern Motor Express and was one of the few black members of the Local employed as a driver. Parham recalled that Krugge had created this dual meeting structure to stimulate attendance. Kruggele also appointed a chairman and secretary of each separate racial grouping. Parham had no authority to settle grievances or in any other way to represent workers. He merely had the title of Chairman of the Colored Division. The Colored Division was an informal part of the structure of the local union. It did not exist anywhere in the Local's bylaws, and its purpose was never specified. Gid Parham did not recall it as being anything but benign, but its existence was inconsistent with the type of Local Union R.C. Cook was building.

Organizing the Unorganized

R.C. Cook took Gid Parham away from driving a truck when he hired him as an organizer in 1954. Parham was not hired to organize only firms that employed a mostly black work force. He was an exceptionally talented organizer regardless of the racial makeup of the work force he was attempting to organize. Joe Vaske was also hired as an organizer and as an Assistant Business Agent in 1954. Vaske was employed as a warehouseman and had been a job steward for several years. He was elected the Local's Recording Secretary in 1951. Parham and Vaske were in the forefront of the successful organizing drives that broke the Local's stagnation after R.C. Cook became President.

Internal and external organizing quickly doubled the membership of the Local. Joe Vaske and Gid Parham both stated that ridding the Local of any vestiges of segregation played a major role in the successes of their organizing drives. Additionally, R.C. Cook expressed the belief that the passage of a "right-to-work" law by the Georgia legislature assisted rather than hindered the Local's internal organizing in the early 1950's. He feels that this law kept the Local on their toes and caused the leadership to be extremely sensitive and responsive to member concerns.

The major impetus in Local 728's efforts to organize the unorganized was catalyzed by a fifty cent per hour increase that resulted from the negotiation of the Southeastern Area Freight contract in 1955. Before becoming part of this regional effort to bargain collectively with trucking contractors, Atlanta drivers were earning an average of \$.50 per hour less than neighboring states. The hourly differential was even greater when compared with drivers in the Central States. General President James R. Hoffa advised Cook to do away with this differential by spreading the hourly catch-up increase over a six-year period. But Cook remained adamant that since drivers in Atlanta were doing the same work as those in Nashville and Knoxville, they were entitled to receive the same wage rate. Cook also saw the differential as a major hindrance to organizing. Cook remembers that "the membership was ready to strike and stay on strike" to end this inequity. Weldon Mathis recalls the organizing assistance provided by the IBT's Warehouse Division when it was under the direction of Harold Gibbons. Gibbons told national companies who were resisting the organization of their Atlanta facilities to expect roving pickets from Atlanta at their other warehouses throughout the United States.

Employers facing the possibility of picketing on a national scale also looked at the possibility that these picket lines would be honored by other Teamster Locals. The potential of such a nation-wide shutdown often helped to intimidate even the most recalcitrant employers. Another form of International assistance came from General President Dave Beck in the form of a \$20,000 organizing grant. Before it was made unlawful by the Labor-Management Reporting and Disclosure Act of 1959, the Local also most effective use of the hot cargo clause in organizing.

The ability of Local 728 to organize and bargain collectively was positively affected by the negotiation of the first national freight hauling agreement, an event which Gid Parham called “the greatest thing in the world.” While the benefits to the union and the membership of the city-wide freight hauling agreement cannot be denied, the power of the local union was still limited because it was dealing with nation-wide companies. A local strike was of limited effectiveness as a company could merely divert freight to another city where Teamsters were not on strike. The national freight agreement rectified this situation by providing a unified contract with supplements and riders to take care of local or regional customs and idiosyncrasies.

The success of local union organizing depends on the philosophy and commitment to organizing of the local leadership. R.C. Cook and Weldon Mathis had a strong commitment to organizing as the tool with which to build Local 728. It must be candidly admitted that some local union officials do not want new members. New members become new voters who have the potential for changing the political makeup of a leadership’s constituency. The history of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters reveals incidents of new locals being chartered when a local leadership was unwilling to participate in organizing the unorganized. This was not the case in Georgia.

Weldon Mathis summed up the organizing philosophy of Local 728 during this era when he stated: “Every new company we organize is insurance for the companies we already have organized. Every new member we organize is insurance for the members we already have organized.” Under this philosophy, the added revenue that new members represent made it possible to add more organizers and this action should perpetuate growth through organizing.

After successfully organizing most of the freight haulers in the city of Atlanta, Cook turned his eyes to companies and drivers outside Atlanta. He coordinated his organizing

efforts with other Teamster locals in the southeast.

In one significant organizing success, he met with James Ryder, chairman of Ryder Freight, a holding company. The Teamsters were making Ryder's life difficult, and he realized that he was not going to have any peace unless his drivers had the chance to vote on representation. He told Cook that he would cease to vigorously combat the organizing drives of the various Teamsters locals if a time limit was agreed to. A time limit was established for each city in which a Teamster local was trying to organize Ryder Freight. Ryder joined with Cook in holding meetings in places such as Charlotte, Greenville, Jacksonville, Miami and Tampa. Ryder lived up to his word and drivers employed by Ryder voted for Teamster representation. The Southern Conference of Teamsters and the International assisted in these organizing campaigns.

In the early 1960's there was a move in the trucking industry to pay dockers, checkers and drivers at the same rate of pay. This was combined with an effort on the part of freight hauling contractors and warehouses to do away with the job classification of helpers who had no duties other than to load and unload trucks. Helpers were predominantly black workers; many of whom were functional illiterates. The job of checker involved checking the freight, signing all bills and making certain that the helpers properly loaded the trucks.

If workers classified as helpers were to retain their jobs in freight hauling, they would have to be able to perform the functions of the position of checker. This classification demanded basic literacy skills in reading, writing and arithmetic. R.C. Cook and Weldon Mathis intended to protect the jobs of members classified as helpers who had the seniority that would give them job security but not the required literacy skills. Thus, in 1960, Local 728 formed a school to teach all interested members basic literacy skills free of cost to the individual member. While some individuals refused to admit that they needed these skills and lost their jobs, many successfully completed the training offered and were able to retain their employment and maintain their standard of living.

The Chartering of General Teamsters Local 528

In many metropolitan areas, Teamster local unions are divided according to the types of workers they represent and organize, e.g., over the road freight hauling, city

delivery drivers, warehouse workers or construction. This was not the situation in Atlanta because the number of workers represented did not warrant or justify such a structural differentiation. While Local 728 had organized drivers of all types, warehouse workers, as well as workers not employed in transportation, the numbers had not been great enough to warrant any change in local union structure.

By 1965, the Local numbered over 8,400 members and these numbers made the administration of the local unwieldy. Cook and Mathis felt that Local 728 had become somewhat stagnated and that splitting the Local would allow for greater emphasis to be placed on organizing. Cook and Mathis believed that multiple local unions, smaller in size, could better serve the needs of the membership. They believed that such a structural evolution would prevent institutional aging and stimulate growth through organizing the unorganized. They had a philosophical commitment to splitting a local union whenever there were enough members to sustain the existence of two separate locals.

The ability of the Local to organize suffered because of the complexity of administering contracts covering a myriad of employment environments. Additionally, many of the members wanted the Local split. Both freight haulers and warehouse workers felt that their interests could be better represented in separate locals. Cook and Mathis conferred with both Jimmy Hoffa and Dusty Miller, and a decision was made to divide Local 728 into two separate entities: a freight-hauling local and a miscellaneous local. These became Truck Drivers and Helpers Local 728 and General Teamsters Local 528. R.C. Cook chose to go with the newly charter local. His preference was based upon the recognition that this miscellaneous local would have to be more involved in organizing than the freight hauling local.

Truck Drivers and Helpers Local 728 had jurisdiction over freight hauling and delivery drivers in the cities of Atlanta and Savannah. General Teamsters Local 528's jurisdiction extended to everything in Georgia except the above. Its jurisdiction also included car hauling. Local 728 was given jurisdiction over everything in Savannah, not just freight. The logic behind this action dictated that the Local should have enough activity in Savannah to justify keeping a full-time office. Weldon Mathis became President of Local 728 and R.C. Cook became president of Local 528. The respective Secretary Treasurers of the two Locals were Al Johnson and Joe Vaske.

In 1964, Dusty Miller had approached Cook with the proposition that either he or Mathis come to work for the Southern Conference of Teamsters. Cook and Mathis discussed the offer and they decided that Mathis would take the position. But Mathis indicated that he would do so only if he could continue to reside in Atlanta and continue as Secretary-Treasurer of Local 728. This action was to make the beginning of the two divergent paths that these two individuals would take. Cook chose to remain a local union president in Atlanta, while Mathis began his rise through the IBT's regional and international hierarchy.

When Mathis took the position with the Southern Conference, he could not longer hold the position of assistant business agent with the local, and Rudy Pulliam was hired in his place. Pulliam had been working as a driver for Terminal Transport, and he was later transferred by the IBT to a local in Birmingham, Alabama. He eventually left the union and went to work for trucking management.

The philosophical commitment to organizing the unorganized as an essential component of representing current members continued after the merger. For instance, Georgia Teamster commitment to and participation in the Alliance for Labor Action paid dividends in the form of successful organizing campaigns for several years after the Alliance had died.

Building a Home for the Locals

The chartering of a second Georgia Teamster Local saw further construction undertaken at the union offices which had initially been built in 1958. After renting office and meeting space in several different Atlanta locations, a decision was made to purchase property and build union offices and a meeting hall.

This construction project became financially feasible in 1955 when the southeastern area freight agreement was negotiated. Before coming under this regional agreement, trucking contractors under contract with Local 728 paid into a local welfare fund called the Atlanta Truck Operators Employees Welfare Fund. This fund was administered jointly by trustees of the truck operations and the local union and it had accumulated \$68,000. The signing of the southeastern area contract meant that Local 728 would be covered by the Central States Health and Welfare fund. The advantages of this for the Local's membership were obvious, but the question arose as to what to do with the \$68,000 that

had accumulated. There was no way in which these monies could be allocated to the members covered by the fund as the records did not indicate the amount to which each individual member would be entitled.

The availability of this money was put together with the Local's need for a permanent home and with an old estate on Lakewood Avenue which was up for sale. Local 728 purchased these eleven and one-half acres for \$27,500. The remainder of the \$68,000 was used to construct the building along with some funds which were borrowed.

The legal question of ownership was resolved by the Local's attorney, Ed Pierce. Pierce petitioned the court on behalf of Local 728 requesting that the \$68,000 in the Atlanta Truck Operators Employees Welfare Fund be set up in a trust and be used to purchase the land on Lakewood Avenue. He also asked the court to permit this money to be used to construct a building for "the purpose of people congregating and meeting anytime they wish," and he asked that the trust be permitted to rent the building to the Local Union. This rent money would be used to pay off the note on the building and for the maintenance of the building and the grounds. The initial five court-appointed trustees of this trust fund were a judge, two trustees representing the trucking contractors and two trustees representing the local union.

The impossibility of distributing the accumulated \$68,000 resulted in the petition to the court. Today, this means that the land and building at 2540 Lakewood Avenue, SW belongs to the employees of employers who were participants in the Atlanta Truck Operators Employees Welfare Fund and their heirs. The trust exists for the sole purpose of managing the property and dealing with legal and financial matters that arise. Today, only Teamster officials serve as members of the board of Trustees, but the functions of these five individuals (chairman, treasurer, and three other trustees) are still the same as they were in 1958. For instance, these trustees oversaw the additional construction and expansion of the facilities that occurred when Local 528 was chartered in 1965. They will also oversee future construction to house newly chartered Teamster Local 928.

A Changing of the Guard

R.C. Cook began to think about retirement after he had a serious heart attack in 1966 at the age of 52. He was off the job for six months. Upon his return to work, he did

his best to deal with the long irregular hours and stress of the job. But, in September of 1972 he had open heart surgery. He came to the conclusion that he would live longer and the union would be better off if someone else were in the office of local union president.

Cook retired on January 1, 1974 with one year left in his term of office. He has always been very candid about his desire to retire with time left in his term in order to give his successor the benefits of the incumbency at re-election time. Cook had great confidence in the man whom he assumed would succeed him, Joe Vaske, and he felt an obligation to give Vaske time to become acquainted with and gain control over the affairs of the Local. Cook stated that “the incumbency’s always got to affect things . . . if they are smart enough or clever enough to handle things regardless of what it is. I don’t mean to be crooked about it or anything, but they (the incumbents) have always got the advantage.”

Cook sought to line up the executive board members and other influential members in the local behind a slate comprised of Joe Vaske as the candidate for President and R. Jerry Cook (R.C. Cook’s son) as the candidate for Secretary-Treasurer. Jerry Cook was working for the local as an assistant business agent. In R.C. Cook’s own words, he generally “talked with my agents about anything that might happen to get their feeling before taking action. You have to kind of line things up.” Among those he spoke with was Hub Davis, an assistant business agent who worked out of Macon, Georgia. Davis agreed to support this slate. He stated that he had no interest in running for local union office. He did indicate that if a new Teamster local was ever chartered in Macon, he would be interested in being an officer of that local.

In 1978, Joe Vaske also resigned before his term as President expired. He stated that he did so in order to give his successor the benefits of the incumbency. Vaske and other influential figures in the local sought to rally support behind a slate comprised of Jerry Cook as the candidate for President and Ed Flournoy as Cook’s replacement as Local 528’s Secretary-Treasurer.

This time, Hub Davis changed his mind and indicated a desire to run for local union president. Jerry Cook and Hub Davis were very close and they decided that it would be best for Davis to be recommended to the executive board to head the local union. Jerry Cook convinced Joe Vaske that this action would be in the best interests of the local. R.C. Cook, who remained an individual with considerable influence in the local, concurred in

this choice. Davis was selected to fill the unexpired term as local union president and Jerry Cook continued to serve as Secretary-Treasurer of the local. One year later, the local held nominations and elections and Davis and Cook were re-elected without opposition.

There is general agreement that Hub Davis' record as an assistant business agent was exemplary. There is also general agreement that there was a drastic change in Hub Davis the assistant business agent when compared to Hub Davis the president of General Teamsters Local 528. Some have speculated that he could not handle authority. Others are of the opinion that the demands of his new position caused Davis to lose perspective of what was polite and appropriate. His relationships with the membership, other officials of the local, the Southern Conference and the International quickly deteriorated.

The local's assistant business agents asked R.C. Cook to intervene and to speak to Davis. Their thinking was that Cook could get to the heart of what was causing Davis' irrational and erratic behavior because of his stature and past working relationship with Davis. Cook came away from this meeting with the conviction that he had never seen a man change as dramatically as Davis had after assuming the Presidency of Local 528 and he communicated this fact to those who had asked him to talk with Davis.

The situation in the Local continued to deteriorate. At one point, Jerry Cook arranged a meeting between the agents and Davis to air existing problems. Over six hours of discussion failed to convince Davis that there was anything wrong with his leadership of the Local. Davis rehired a former employee of Local 528 who had resigned under pressure when Joe Vaske was local union president. Davis also hired a former Teamsters employee who had been caught engaging in improper conduct concerning union health and welfare funds while employed by the union in Tennessee.

At this point, Jerry Cook refused to continue to sign the local union's checks and he retrieved his facsimile signature from the bookkeeping office. As a consequence, Cook was fired as an assistant business agent by Davis for removing union property. Ed Flournoy was also discharged as an assistant business agent.

Striking back at Davis, the local's executive board hired Cook as an adviser and continued to pay him the salary he had been earning as an assistant business agent. Members of the local began to picket the union hall. Word of these events reached the International and International Representative Walter Teague was called upon to

investigate what was happening in Local 528. After a series of interviews, Teague recommenced that a committee be appointed to determine if the local should be placed under trusteeship.

Local 528 was placed in trusteeship. Joe Morgan, Sr. was appointed Trustee of the Local and he appointed Walter Teague as the administrator to run the local's daily affairs. When the trusteeship was lifted eighteen months later, the membership of the local elected Jerry Cook as president and Ed Flournoy as Secretary-Treasurer.

Changes in Local 728

At the time of the chartering of General Teamsters Local 528, Local 728 retained jurisdiction over freight hauling and all contracts and employers in Savannah. United Parcel Service was not in the picture and no one had any idea of the central and critical role that UPS would play in the future of Local 728.

When UPS came to Georgia during the period from 1966 to 1968, Local 728 had 6,500 members. Six thousand of these were employed in freight with the remainder being miscellaneous. In May of 1988, Local 728 had between 7,500 – 7,800 members equally divided between freight and UPS. During the previous two decades, there was a fifty percent decline in the number of the Local's members employed in freight. The growth of United Parcel Service is what has enabled Local 728 to maintain its total membership figure.

When UPS first came on the scene, some IBT locals did not want to represent UPS employees. Weldon Mathis did. Influenced by his tie-in with the International, Weldon Mathis saw the potential for the growth of UPS in the south.

In 1957, Dan McKnight came to Atlanta to meet with Mathis. McKnight was vice president for labor relations with UPS. McKnight told Mathis that UPS wanted to come into Georgia and the rest of the southern states. The company was in the process of seeking authority for this southern move from the various state public service commissions. McKnight indicated that this process would take from six to twelve months and that UPS was willing to recognize the Teamsters based on a card check of UPS employees once the legal authority was obtained.

UPS sought and obtained Teamster assistance in their efforts to obtain state

authority to do business in the south. Approximately eight years went by before UPS received these authorizations and began business in Georgia and the rest of the south. Before UPS began operations, Weldon Mathis, acting as a representative of the Southern Conference of Teamsters, assigned local unions to the company in Georgia, Alabama and Tennessee. A time table was established for the locals to obtain signed authorization cards and submit them to UPS.

Expecting the growth of UPS in the south to be comparable to that in the west and northeast, Mathis volunteered to take UPS in Georgia. There were many Teamster locals who did not want to get involved in representing UPS employees. They viewed UPS as a small courier operation that was alien to people who had dealt with the freight industry for years. UPS was a mail service to them and they didn't want to have to represent a small unit of from fifty to one hundred people. They would have had to learn anew everything about UPS and its operation. For instance, UPS didn't have truck; it had feeder cars. UPS didn't have truck drivers; it had package drivers. The package drivers didn't load and unload packages; they sorted packages. These packages were sorted in a hub operation. These procedures were all foreign and alien to union officers and representatives who had spent their lifetime in freight.

Many Teamster local unions saw UPS as a nuisance. But UPS had expressed a preference to be union in the south as they were in the west and the northeast and they generally approached Teamster locals in the areas in the south into which they moved. Whereas some IBT locals reluctantly accepted the representation of UPS workers or were forced to take UPS, representing employees of United Parcel Service has turned out to be a salvation for locals such as 728.

Weldon Mathis continued to serve as president of local 728 throughout these years, consistently winning re-election. After he succeeded James R. Hoffa, General President Frank Fitzsimmons asked Mathis to come to Washington for ninety days to serve as his executive assistant. As a condition of this temporary position becoming permanent, Mathis insisted that he be allowed to continue to serve as President of local 728. In spite of his policy against such duality of positions, Fitzsimmons agreed to this condition. Over the years, Mathis regularly spent time on a weekly basis in Atlanta attending to local 728 business. He was able to do so because of the high caliber of the individuals who served as local secretary-treasurer, Al Johnson and Billy Waters.

The 1980's

As stated above, local 528's trusteeship ended with Jerry Cook elected local union president and Ed Flournoy elected secretary-treasurer. The local continued to embody the philosophy of organizing the unorganized as an essential component of representing current members.

Local 528 has organized workers employed in manufacturing plants, warehouses, general utilities and people employed as bus drivers. General Local 528 negotiates and administers approximately 150 contracts. The smallest contract covers less than ten workers and the largest are Dobbs House and the Atlanta Gas Light Company with over 900 people each. Offices are maintained in Augusta and Valdosta, Georgia. This multiplicity obviously increases the complexity of the local's efforts in providing high caliber representation.

By the spring of 1988, Truck Drivers and Helpers Local 728 had reached the point at which it represented equal numbers of two relative distinct types of members: (1) those employed in freight and (2) those employed by UPS and by the newly re-named Emery and Purolator Worldwide Courier and Cargo. In addition, Mathis felt that it was time to end his dual position as president of local 728 and as General Secretary-Treasurer of the International. As a result there was another split of a Georgia Teamsters local and Teamsters Local 928 was chartered. Local 728 will continue to represent freight; Local 928 will represent workers employed by companies engaged in parcel delivery and air freight.

After over 35 years, the legacy of R.C. Cook and Weldon Mathis continues to influence the actions of the Teamsters in Georgia. There is a continuation of the commitment to organizing the unorganized as the best way of insuring the best possible representation of existing members, and again an existing local was split as the way of best achieving this revival of trade union spirit and solidarity.