

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

SUSAN CURRY

RESOURCES FOR EDUCATION AND ACTION FOR COMMUNITY HEALTH
IN AMBLER (REACH Ambler)

Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by

Lee Sullivan Berry

at

Susan Curry's home
Ambler, Pennsylvania

on

20 December 2013

(With Subsequent Corrections and Additions)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This oral history was conducted as part of a joint project of the Chemical Heritage Foundation and the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine. This project was supported by the Office of the Director, National Institutes of Health under Award Number R25OD010521-01.



THE CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION
Center for Oral History

Title of the Research Study: Resources for Education and Action for Community Health in Ambler

Protocol Number: 817669

Principal Investigator: (name, address, phone and email) Frances K. Barg, PhD, Anatomy Chemistry 141-2, 215-746-1830, fran.barg@uphs.upenn.edu

Co-investigator: (name, address, phone and email): Jody Roberts, PhD, Chemical Heritage Foundation—315 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, PA, 215-873-8281, jroberts@chemheritage.org

Emergency Contact: (name, address, phone and email): Frances K. Barg, PhD, Anatomy Chemistry 141-2, 215-746-1830, fran.barg@uphs.upenn.edu

FINAL RELEASE FORM

This document contains my understanding and agreement with the Chemical Heritage Foundation with respect to my participation in the audio- and/or video-recorded interview conducted by Lee Berry on 20 December 2013. I have read the transcript supplied by the Chemical Heritage Foundation.

1. The recordings, transcripts, photographs, research materials, and memorabilia (collectively called the “Work”) will be maintained by the Chemical Heritage Foundation and made available in accordance with general policies for research and other scholarly purposes.
2. By signing this document, you will grant, assign, and transfer to the Chemical Heritage Foundation all right, title, and interest in the Work, including the literary rights and the copyright. Participants retain the right to copy, use, and publish the Work in part or in full until their death.
3. The manuscript may be read and the recording(s) heard/viewed by scholars approved by the Chemical Heritage Foundation unless restrictions are placed on the transcript as listed below.

By signing this document, you are agreeing that this constitutes your entire and complete understanding.

(Signature) _____ Susan M Curry _____
SUSAN CURRY

(Date) _____ March 29, 2014 _____

OPTIONAL: If you wish to place the following restrictions on the use of your interview, please indicate below:

Regardless of any restrictions that may be placed on the transcript of the interview, the Chemical Heritage Foundation retains the rights to all materials generated about your oral history interview, including the title page, abstract, table of contents, chronology, index, et cetera (collectively called the “Front Matter and Index”), all of which will be made available on the Chemical Heritage Foundation’s website. Should the Chemical Heritage Foundation wish to post to the Internet the content of the oral history interview, that is, direct quotations, audio clips, video clips, or other material from the oral history recordings or the transcription of the recordings, the Chemical Heritage Foundation will be bound by the restrictions for use placed on the Work as detailed above. Should the Chemical Heritage Foundation wish to post to the Internet the entire oral history interview during your lifetime, you will have the opportunity to permit or deny this posting.

The Chemical Heritage Foundation will enforce my wishes until the time of my death, when any restrictions will be removed.

This interview has been designated as **Free Access**.

Please note: Users citing this interview for purposes of publication are obliged under the terms of the Chemical Heritage Foundation (CHF) Center for Oral History to credit CHF using the format below:

Susan Curry interview by Lee Sullivan Berry at Ambler, Pennsylvania, 20 December 2013 (Philadelphia: Chemical Heritage Foundation, Oral History Transcript # 0818).



Chemical Heritage Foundation
Center for Oral History
315 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106



The Chemical Heritage Foundation (CHF) serves the community of the chemical and molecular sciences, and the wider public, by treasuring the past, educating the present, and inspiring the future. CHF maintains a world-class collection of materials that document the history and heritage of the chemical and molecular sciences, technologies, and industries; encourages research in CHF collections; and carries out a program of outreach and interpretation in order to advance an understanding of the role of the chemical and molecular sciences, technologies, and industries in shaping society.

ABSTRACT

Susan Curry moved to Ambler, Pennsylvania in 1998. Wanting to live sustainably, she joined Alliance for a Sustainable Future, took a master's degree in environmental studies and psychology, and joined the newly founded Ambler Environmental Advisory Council (EAC), a committee appointed by the Borough of Ambler Council. This prompted her attendance at Borough Council meetings. She also won a grant to develop policies to manage the care of the trees downtown.

Curry moved to Ambler just as a five-year review by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) of the remediated asbestos piles found everything all right. She had not previously been aware of the asbestos hazard. She feels she lives too far from the piles to be affected, and asbestos-caused diseases are too slow-growing to harm her. She worries about demolition of the Borough's remaining older buildings, which have asbestos siding. Curry talks about her role in the establishment of the community advisory group (CAG) when the EPA listed the BoRit Superfund site on the National Priorities List, and she explains the structure and workings of the CAG.

Curry describes the CAG meetings, with their occasional disputes among the different interests represented. She believes that most people are not sure there even is a risk from the asbestos; others feel that every fiber must be removed entirely; the West Ambler citizens, closest to the piles, generally do not attend meetings. To complicate matters, there is apparently a change in the science regarding asbestos fibers.

Curry thinks the EPA's hundred-year-storm standard for remediation is not adequate; she wants EPA to use a five-hundred-year storm standard. She had belonged to the Removal and Remedial Monitoring workgroup of the CAG and thinks that they should be requiring the EPA to test the ground under the pond, which is now having the water removed and cleaned, for all kinds of toxic substances. She praises Salvatore Boccuti's aerial photos of the site; information is also available from the EPA's weekly reports; from the on-site coordinator, Eduardo Rovira; and from the website. Her ambition to produce another report from the CAG was rebuffed.

The Ambler movie theater renovation was the big attraction for Curry. She agrees that the town is vibrant; in fact, parking is a problem now. All of this is a result of good community efforts and strong local leaders, like the current Borough Manager. She believes asbestos is not a concern for most people. She hopes for progressives on the Borough Council. Curry wants Ambler to be a self-sustaining community.

Asked what lessons Ambler has for other communities, Curry stresses the importance of establishing a CAG, getting aerial photos, demanding quarterly tours of the remediation. Communities should research previous Superfund sites. Be sure the EPA does not define too small an area for the site boundaries. Make use of Technical Assistance Services for Communities (TASC) for gathering and interpreting information. Curry finishes her interview with a few more thoughts about Ambler's experience, a few more worries about DEP's permitting process, and a lot more hopes for an increase in the Borough Council's interest and role.

INTERVIEWER

Lee Sullivan Berry earned a master's degree in medieval studies from the University of Notre Dame, and a bachelor of arts degree in religious studies from the University of Pennsylvania. As a staff member in the Center for Oral History, Berry conducts background research and oral-history interviews, edits transcripts of completed interviews, and coordinates with interviewers and interviewees to finalize transcripts. She was the lead interviewer for the REACH Ambler project and has presented her work at meetings of the American Society for Environmental History and Oral History in the Mid-Atlantic Region.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background Information	1
<p>Director of Project SEED. Moved to Ambler in 1998. Description of living requirements. Ambler dead but close to partner's job. Knowledge of history. Wanted to revitalize town.</p>	
Initial Forays into Local Politics	5
<p>Joined Alliance for a Sustainable Future. Back to school for master's degree in environmental studies and psychology. Helped activate the Environmental Advisory Council (EAC), an appointed committee of Borough of Ambler Council. Wrote grants to fund EAC activities. Began to attend Borough Council meetings. Won Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) grant to develop policies for downtown tree management.</p>	
Asbestos Awareness	9
<p>U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) five-year review of remediated piles; said everything all right. Citizens for a Better Ambler (CBA) and Sharon McCormick. CBA segues into community advisory group (CAG); members vetted by EPA. Structure of CAG; Borough Council low interest in membership. Mayor Wahl. No concerns for her health. Many houses with asbestos siding; demolition or renovation dangerous to environment. Feels she is too far from site and too old to care about danger.</p>	
Dissension in the Ranks	13
<p>Learning about EPA's plans, sometimes after the fact. CAG meetings sometimes contentious; several interest groups represented. Sharon McCormick's dominance. Different opinions about risk level and amelioration of risk. Most not sure there is any risk. West Ambler uncomfortable at meetings, so does not attend; wants park. Change in science of asbestos hazard. Input not particularly welcomed by EPA. Wants asbestos gone, as does McCormick.</p>	
EPA's Function	17
<p>Uses worst-case standard for remediation: Curry wants five-hundred-year storm as standard. Removal and Remedial Monitoring workgroup wants land under pond to be tested. Competition among Superfund sites for funds. Getting information from aerial photography from Salvatore Boccuti; EPA's weekly reports; occasional newspaper press release; on-site coordinator Eduardo Rovira. Website good but overwhelming. Dispute with McCormick.</p>	
Ambler Today	22
<p>Movie theater renovation big attraction for Curry. Town becoming vibrant; has restaurants. Parking a problem now. Good community efforts and strong local leaders. Likes Borough Manager. Asbestos not a big problem; food sustainability her hobby. Hopes for progressives on Borough Council; wants trees properly cared for and improvements to natural park.</p>	

Ambler's Lessons for Others	26
<p>Establish a CAG. Get aerial photography. Demand quarterly tours of remediation. Compare other Superfund sites; evaluate their success; consider the probability of treatment failure. Control boundaries of site; do not accept EPA's boundaries. Use Technical Assistance Services for Communities (TASC) for information.</p>	
More about Ambler	28
<p>Used TASC to ask about toxic seepage into wells. Want Army Corps of Engineers to evaluate berm around pond. Questions about air sampling after remediation: what techniques, what frequencies, what distances between samples, etc. Worries about Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection permitting development of private land; much land with asbestos-containing waste. Borough Council's role. BoRit site more extensive than remediated area; insufficiently treated.</p>	
Index	33

INDEX

A

Alliance for a Sustainable Future, 4
Ambler
 West Ambler, 14, 32
 West Ambler Civic Association, 32
Ambler Boiler House, 30
Ambler businesses
 Ambler Theater, 3, 21
 Trax Café, 9
Ambler Gazette, 20
Amento, Peter, 20
asbestos pile, 5, 9, 10, 28
Aversa, Mary, 8

B

Baigis, Judy, 9
Benigno, George, 31
Birch, Leslie, 9
Boccuti, Salvatore, 19
BoRit Asbestos Area, 9, 10, 15, 27, 28, 29, 30
Borough of Ambler, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 20, 22, 24, 27, 29, 31
 Environmental Advisory Council, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, 25
 Manager, 6, 8, 20, 22
Borough of Ambler Council, 6, 7, 8, 10, 20, 29
Bresnan, Joseph, 7

C

CAG. *See* community advisory group (CAG)
Chase, Gordon, 16
Citizens for a Better Ambler, 9, 20, 29, 31
community advisory group (CAG), 10, 12, 13, 15, 18, 19, 20, 21, 23, 27, 28, 30

D

Daniels, Gail, 3

DEP. *See* Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection
Dougherty, Bernadette, 9

E

EAC. *See* Borough of Ambler:Environmental Advisory Council
EPA. *See* U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

F

Five Points, Pennsylvania, 25
flooding, 17, 25

H

Heckelman, T. Jack, 4
high-rise [project], 9, 10
Hoffman, Lynn, 10, 21
Holland, Melinda, 10, 12

J

Johnsville, Pennsylvania, 1

K

Kaiser, Karen, 7
Keasbey & Mattison Company, 3

L

Lapinski, Anna Lee, 11
Lear, Sue, 10

M

Maxion, Marian, 10
McCormick, Daniel, 29
McCormick, Sharon, 10, 13, 17, 26, 29
Morgan, Diane, 21

N

Norwich University, 5

P

Pennsylvania Department of Community
and Economic Development, 8
Pennsylvania Department of Environmental
Protection, 9, 28, 29, 31
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 3
Project SEED, 2

R

Radnor Township, Pennsylvania, 3
Rose Valley Creek, 2, 15, 17, 24, 25
Rovira, Eduardo, 19

S

Saurman, Mayor George T., 31
Sorg, Mayor Jeanne, 11
Sustainable Ambler, 4, 11

T

TASC. *See* Technical Assistance Services
for Communities
Taylor, Rick, 7
Technical Assistance Services for
Communities, 26, 27, 28

U

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 10,
11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 26,
27, 28, 29, 30
Superfund site, 5, 10, 17, 21, 26, 28, 30
National Priorities List, 5
U.S. Navy, 1
Union Institute and University, 5

W

Wahl, Mayor Charles T., 11
Weir, William T., 31
Whitpain Township, Pennsylvania, 10, 11,
23
Wise, Florine, 14, 32
Wissahickon Waterfowl Preserve, 10
Wiswall, Stuart, 27
World War II, 18