

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

RUTH WEEKS

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

Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by

Lee Sullivan Berry

at

Ruth Weeks's home
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

on

14 August 2014

(With Subsequent Corrections and Additions)

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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

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ABSTRACT

Ruth Tate Weeks, aka Ruthy, was born and raised in West Ambler, Pennsylvania. Ruthy was one of eight children; her parents worked locally, and much of her extended family lived close by. Her neighborhood was racially mixed, composed of mostly African-Americans and Italians, and she did not experience or witness any discrimination. When Ruth was growing up, West Ambler was much more of a small, close knit community with several small convenience stores and deli's. These stores were frequented by the residents and many of the owners lived in or near these stores. She remembers sledding down the "White Mountains," not realizing the impact the asbestos factory would have on many people living in Ambler. Ruth married her high-school sweetheart and together, with their newborn, they moved to Germany for her husband's military service. After five years of living in Europe and California, Weeks and her children returned to Ambler.

Ruth attended classes at the Lansdale School of Business while raising her children. She discusses the community activism and involvement led by Florine Tate Wise, who encouraged her to get more involved in the West Ambler Civic Association, also known as WACA, which she founded and organized during the summer of 2003 and presided over until she relocated to Maryland. Florine was also a Stockholder member of the Community Advisory Group (CAG), where she represented the West and South Ambler Communities of Ambler Borough and Whitpain Township. Florine helped establish Citizens for a Better Ambler (CBA) to fight a proposed high-rise on Ambler's asbestos area. With the involvement of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in remediation of the site, the CBA developed into a community advisory group (CAG), and the ensuing debate over remediation caused a split between Sharon McCormick's faction, who advocated total removal of asbestos, and Florine's, who advocated capping for the community in hopes that the playground would be opened at the end of the remediation of the site.

Ruth was also involved in some of the pilot interviews for the REACH Ambler project, as many of her friends and relatives have a long history in Ambler. Ruth discusses the redevelopment of Ambler and how much it has changed since she was a resident; there isn't space for children to play and if there is a senior center, she hasn't been able to find it. She hasn't seen much assistance from the EPA and Penn to truly identify the continued risk and conditions of Ambler; she believes that asbestos continues to be considered as the "white elephant" in the room at current and future planning meetings that involved the South and West Ambler communities.

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.

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