

REACH Ambler Oral History Transcript Summaries

Robert Adams, who has served as the Director of Stewardship for the Wissahickon Valley Watershed Association, contrasts revitalized Ambler today with the Ambler of his college years, describes his involvement with the BoRit Community Advisory Group, and urges residents to pay attention to the environment. He hopes that the BoRit site can eventually be more accessible to the residents.

Salvatore A. Boccuti grew up in Ambler. He describes his childhood, community change, and his role on the Community Advisory Group. Boccuti discusses remediation at the BoRit site, regretting that the asbestos will not be removed entirely or its chemical structure altered. He believes the site will also remain useless for development.

Gordon Chase grew up in England, settling in Ambler after an early retirement. Active in the BoRit Community Advisory Group, Chase acknowledges tensions created by differing opinions among members of the CAG. Chase has a positive view of Ambler, believing its citizens fight hard for what they want, but acknowledges that private interests can sometimes conflict with the public good.

Fred Conner has served on a number of local boards and committees, including the BoRit Community Advisory Group and the Whitpain Township planning commission, and is currently the chairman of the Whitpain Township Board of Supervisors. From this perspective, he talks about change in the Ambler area and West Ambler revitalization.

Gregory Cooke is an Ambler native whose family has been closely intertwined with the legacy of asbestos. He describes his childhood, personal struggles, and perspectives on the REACH Ambler project.

Susan Curry moved to Ambler, Pennsylvania in 1998. Devoted to sustainability, she has been active in local environmental projects. She describes debate at Community Advisory Group and Borough Council meetings, concerns over what she sees as apathy regarding asbestos, and frustrations with the Environmental Protection Agency and Pennsylvania Department for Environmental Protection.

Jack DelConte grew up in South Ambler. His father worked at Keasbey & Mattison, as did his grandfather and an uncle. He describes growing up in Ambler's Italian-American community and changes in Ambler through the decades.

Carol DiPietro's great-grandfather and grandfather worked in the asbestos factory. Her mother worked there as a secretary and tells of white dust visible in the air. DiPietro has been involved in conversations surrounding the BoRit Superfund site. She is proud of the friendly, walkable neighborhoods of Ambler, the town's revival, and her role on the Ambler Planning Commission.

Bernadette Dougherty grew up in Abington, Pennsylvania and became active in the Wissahickon Valley Historical Society after moving to Ambler as an adult. In that capacity, she wrote a history of Ambler. She served on the Borough of Ambler Council for two years, during which time she helped save the movie theater and the train station, two historic buildings.

Helen DuTeau is the chief of community involvement and outreach for the Environmental Protection Agency, region 3, which includes Ambler and the greater Philadelphia area. She describes her role in Ambler, EPA processes, and the way Ambler compares to other Superfund communities.

James Feeney served as remedial project manager for the Environmental Protection Agency; the Ambler asbestos piles became one of his first projects in the 1990s. He describes the unique challenges posed by asbestos cleanup

and strongly emphasizes that the piles are finished and safe. He feels no personal risk whatsoever, even when inspecting the sites.

Tim Hughes grew up in Philadelphia and now lives in Whitpain Township. Hughes first became aware of asbestos in Ambler when a developer petitioned to build a seventeen-story high-rise on one of the unremediated piles. He describes the founding of Citizens for a Better Ambler that followed, as well as continued debates and hopes for the future.

Sharon McCormick first became interested in Ambler's local politics when she opposed a merger of police departments. She increased her involvement when the Borough Council wanted to permit a high-rise on the BoRit Asbestos Area. She immersed herself in research about asbestos and the previous EPA remediation in Ambler. She continues to be actively involved in the CAG and Borough Council.

Anne McDonough is a high school science teacher in Ambler. She moved to Ambler some years ago and has seen the Borough shift from a more working-class community to a more middle-class community. She describes Ambler's environmental concerns and hopes for the future.

Beth Pilling grew up in and around Ambler. She is now a member of the Montgomery County Planning Commission and serves as its representative on the BoRit Community Advisory Group. Pilling worries that the lack of communication within the CAG, and between the CAG and the West Ambler community, has made progress difficult.

Victor Romano was born in 1932 and spent most of his childhood in Ambler. How now lives in nearby Horsham. Romano remembers playing on the white mountains as a child and describes the vibrancy of South Ambler's Italian community.

Eduardo Rovira is the on-scene coordinator for the BoRit Superfund site, a position he has held since the Environmental Protection Agency did its initial assessment in 2006. His interview focuses on the process of Superfund remediation, roles within the EPA, and his reflections on the Ambler community.

Gioia Smith first became aware of Ambler's asbestos hazard when the Environmental Protection Agency began its cleanup in the 1980s. Smith believes asbestos is still an important issue, but emphasizes that unemployment, housing cost, and lack of social opportunities for children are more important. She wants churches and neighborhood groups to come together to help solve these problems.

Ruth E. Weeks grew up in West Ambler and now lives in Philadelphia. She was involved in the REACH Ambler project as a research assistant. She describes family life, memories of her close-knit community and public spaces, and her hopes that the sense of community she remembers can someday return.

Florine Wise grew up in West Ambler and for many years was involved in community activism and revitalization in the neighborhood. She describes her childhood in Ambler, family, community changes, and racial and economic tensions. Wise founded the West Ambler Civic Association, took part in the BoRit CAG, and continues to be invested in the fate of her hometown.

John Zaharchuck is a property developer in the greater Philadelphia area. He describes what drew him to redevelop the Ambler Boiler House, convincing Ambler's Borough Council and its citizens that the property could be made safe, and the cleanup necessary to turn it into a LEED certified building where his company now has its offices.

For more information about transcripts, including complete abstracts, see <http://www.chemheritage.org/research/institute-for-research/oral-history-program/projects/reach-ambler.aspx>