

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

**SALVATORE A. BOCCUTI**

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

Transcript of an Interview  
Conducted by

Lee Sullivan Berry

at

Salvatore A. Boccuti's home  
Ambler, Pennsylvania

on

8 January 2014

(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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto:fran.barg@uphs.upenn.edu)

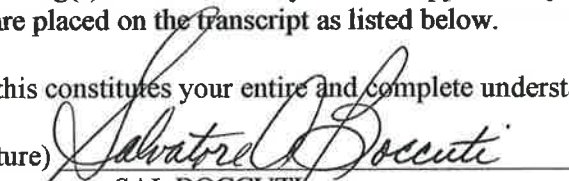
FINAL RELEASE FORM

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 6 January 2014. 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)

  
SAL BOCCUTI

(Date)

3/31/2014

**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:

Salvatore A. Boccuti, interview by Lee Sullivan Berry at Ambler, Pennsylvania, 8 January 2014 (Philadelphia: Chemical Heritage Foundation, Oral History Transcript # 0814).



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

**Salvatore A. Boccuti** grew up in Ambler, Pennsylvania. His father was a tailor, and his mother became a court crier in Montgomery County. He practiced accounting for a number of years but sold his practice to become an aerial photographer; his pictures of BoRit Asbestos Area are found on the Ambler community advisory group's website. As a child he played on the White Mountains of Ambler and played baseball on the field that preceded the post office building. On St. Francis Day, he watched fireworks shot from the piles. He has not contracted any asbestos-caused diseases, and feels he would have by now if he were going to.

Boccuti notes Sharon McCormick's fight against a developer who proposed to build a seventeen-story high-rise on what is now the BoRit Asbestos Area. Sharon's public commitment helped to inspire him and when the CAG was formed Boccuti wanted to help. He was a co-chair of the CAG and has served on several of the work groups, currently the rules group. He describes some of the CAG's organization and explains the communication procedures between the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the citizens of the several municipal entities involved. Boccuti discusses remediation at the BoRit site, regretting that the asbestos will not be removed entirely or its chemical structure altered. He believes that it will be capped as the White Mountains were, and that the site will also remain useless for development. He is hopeful that the reservoir, currently being drained, will be cleaned up and refilled to be used as a waterfowl preserve.

Boccuti points to the long latency period for asbestos-caused disease, and says that those who have not yet sickened are not likely to do so now. Nightlife is returning; housing is sold before fully built; good restaurants are increasing. Revitalization brings other concerns, namely road structure and parking, but Boccuti is not concerned about present contamination. He does say that the EPA does not do air testing, which causes worry about capped asbestos becoming airborne in the future. He would like to see BoRit become a mixed-use area, but is not optimistic; he says the EPA will do what it wants. When asked what lessons Ambler might provide for other communities, he stresses the importance of good and strong leadership; continual oversight by citizens; and in-depth knowledge. He loves Ambler, which he characterizes as a very nice and safe town, and he hopes for continued growth.

## **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

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Biographical Information   | 1  |
| <p>Grew up in Ambler, Pennsylvania. Attended Roman Catholic schools. Accounting degree from Drexel University. Continued to live in Ambler. Sold accounting business to pursue aerial photography. Mostly commercial photography; documentation of construction; mainly malls. Pictures of BoRit Asbestos Area on community advisory group (CAG) website. As a child played on White Mountains. Baseball field where Post Office is now. Fireworks shot from piles on St. Francis Day.</p>   |    |
| Getting Involved   | 7  |
| <p>Joined Ambler community advisory group (CAG) at its inception. Sharon McCormick driving force. Wanted to help, to know what was going on. Details of CAG organization, communications between citizens and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Stakeholders from different municipal groups. Working groups. Was chair of future plans group; co-chair of CAG; now on rules committee. Time-consuming. Sought from EPA information about their methods and their results. Disseminated information to citizens by website and individual representatives. Those nearest asbestos aware of hazard, others not.</p>   |    |
| Remediation  | 9  |
| <p>Removal means removal of threat, not of asbestos. Some asbestos removed, but most capped and planted. Same will happen to BoRit; reservoir will be drained, the bottom cleaned, and water returned. Long latency period for asbestos. Would prefer vitrification of chemical change of structure; fears capping will fail. Difficult to develop in Ambler because of asbestos. No concerns about living in Ambler; has lived there all his life. Worries that capped asbestos could become airborne, but EPA does not do air testing. Concerned about road structure, parking. Nice town, now developing well. Blames malls for previous decline. Thinks asbestos main problem for further development; other chemicals involved too. Would like mixed use for BoRit site, but fears it will be fenced off and useless, like previously remediated piles.</p> |    |
| General Thoughts   | 15 |
| <p>CAG still meeting. McCormick brings up something every meeting, but no changes. EPA will do what it chooses; best practice at lowest price. Thinks different municipal groups have worked well together. Lessons for other communities: find leader like McCormick; do research, communicate. Keep up with what is going on. CAG a good thing. Rules committee of CAG just controls functioning of CAG. Advent of nearby malls main reason for decline in town's economy; Keasbey &amp; Mattison Company's closing secondary blow. Ambler does not want stigma of asbestos contamination; glad to see remediation done fast. His biggest hope: continued growth; biggest concern: getting rid of asbestos. Ambler safe place to live now.</p>   |    |
| Index  | 22 |

## INDEX

### A

Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, 8  
Ambler  
    South Ambler, 6, 12, 14, 17, 19, 20  
    West Ambler, 10, 12, 14, 21  
Ambler Boiler House, 20  
American Legion Post, 10  
asbestos, 6, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 18, 19, 20, 21  
asbestosis, 7, 11

### B

Baltimore, Maryland, 2  
Boccuti, Nicola (paternal grandfather), 1, 2  
BoRit Asbestos Area, 5, 6, 7, 11, 12, 16, 17, 19, 20  
    Kane Core, 15  
    Wissahickon Park, 11, 15  
Borough of Ambler, 8, 9, 18

### C

CAG. *See* community advisory group  
Cione, Carmella (maternal grandmother), 2  
Citizens for a Better Ambler, 9  
community advisory group, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 21  
Conshohocken, Pennsylvania, 3

### D

Del Buona, Madelena (paternal grandmother), 2  
Drexel University, 3

### E

Emmett, Edward A., 9  
EPA. *See* U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

### G

Gambone, Felix (maternal grandfather), 2

### H

Hilltown, Pennsylvania, 4

### I

Italy, 2

### J

Jampo, John, Jr., 10

### K

Keasbey & Mattison, 2  
King of Prussia, Pennsylvania, 3

### M

Maple Glen, Pennsylvania, 19  
McCormick, Sharon, 7, 9, 16, 18, 20  
mesothelioma, 7, 10, 11  
Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, 2  
Mynaugh, Msgr. Charles B., 4

### N

Nicolet Company, 19  
Norristown, Pennsylvania, 1, 2, 3

### P

PADEP. *See* Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection  
Parkinson's disease, 2  
Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, 8, 17  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 4  
Pope John Paul II, 4

### R

remediation  
    vitrification, 12



## **S**

Sons of Italy, 6  
St. Francis Society, 6  
Station Square, 20

## **U**

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 7,  
8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20  
Upper Dublin Township, 8, 9, 17, 18

## **W**

Whitemarsh Residents Organization, 8  
Whitpain Township, 8, 10, 17, 18  
Wissahickon Park, 11, 18  
World War II, 4