

Oral Histories on the Former West Elmwood Neighborhood (the neighborhood across the tracks) or the present day Huntington Industrial Park

Joseph Caffrey

In his interview, Joe Caffrey remembers the integrated neighborhood he grew up in, what it felt like to be displaced from that neighborhood and his continued connection to the black community through his work in community development and housing. His family owned a house in the neighborhood across the tracks right next to Mashapaug Pond at 103 Pacific Avenue.

[Joe's interview is not yet available online. It should be up on the repository soon, however].

Richard Chatowsky

Oral history interview with Richard Chatowsky about the Mashapaug Pond community, Providence, R.I. Born in Providence in 1942, Chatowsky takes the interviewer on a mental history walk around the perimeter of Mashapaug Pond, describing in detail his childhood memories of the area and its people.

<https://repository.library.brown.edu/studio/item/bdr:240455/>

William Guy

William Guy describes growing up near Mashapaug Pond, his native heritage, and the neighborhood. His father owned a home in the neighborhood and so did his grandfather.

[William's interview is not yet available online. It should be up on the repository soon, however].

Ed Hooks

Ed Hooks grew up in the West Elmwood area in the 1940s and 50s; his paper route helped him memorize the shape of the land and the social and cultural cartography of the neighborhood—which he details in his interview with Holly Ewald and Anne Valk. Ed is an important figure in Providence; an avid community historian, he has been instrumental in collecting historical information on Mashapaug pond (and especially the industrial park) and he wrote a history of the Providence NAACP.

<https://repository.library.brown.edu/studio/item/bdr:240490/>

June and Ralph Simmons

One set of siblings was interviewed: June Simmons-McRae and Ralph Simmons, whose early years were spent in West Elmwood, which became the industrial park area. Both Ralph and June were struck by the ways that the development of the industrial park meant that the actual space in which they grew up—a space that contained many memories—was effectively gone.

Ralph's Interview:

This interview discusses Simmons' experience growing up in the area that is now the industrial park and his family history. He discusses various cultural aspects of living by the pond - games, baptisms, and so on. He discusses the changes in the area and what it was like to live there from the 1910s to 1930s.

<https://repository.library.brown.edu/studio/item/bdr:317863/>

June's Interview:

June Simmons-McRae discusses what it was like to be a very young child living in what is now the industrial park area. She discusses the community feeling of the area, what the houses and people were like. She also recalls the hurricane of '39. She discusses the connections made in that area and the ways they continue today even after the destruction of the homes. She discusses what it was like to move back to Providence and go back to the industrial park area after the renewal, as an adult.

<https://repository.library.brown.edu/studio/item/bdr:317868/>

William (Bill) Simmons:

Professor Simmons of Brown University, anthropologist and historian, gives a detailed description of his childhood (late 1930s through 1940s) in Reservoir Triangle neighborhood. He talks about his hobby collecting arrowheads and other Indian artifacts, and the marked social contrast between the East Side (College Hill) and the rest of working-class Providence. He describes the shock he experienced returning home after decades living in California—noting the decline in public education and workforce skills, the loss of industrial employment, and resulting effects on city neighborhoods. He also points out the possible link between present-day Narragansett Indians in the Mashapaug area and their ancestors living there in pre-Colonial times.

<https://repository.library.brown.edu/studio/item/bdr:240506/>

Dave Talan

Oral history interview with Dave Talan about the Mashapaug Pond community, Providence, R.I. Born in 1948, Talan has lived in the Mashapaug Pond area since childhood. He served many years as president of the Reservoir Triangle Neighborhood Association, as well as director of the local Little League. He describes in depth his involvement in public projects, including the preservation of open space at Mashapaug Pond, school reform, and sports coaching. He shares, in a very articulate way, his insights on the history of the area over a 50-year period.

<https://repository.library.brown.edu/studio/item/bdr:240487/>

Interviews with People with ties to what is now the industrial park (but who did not grow up there):

Sharon Conard-Wells

Sharon Conard-Wells, the executive director of the West Elmwood Housing Development Corporation, speaks about what brought her to community activism and housing development. She has lived in the West End since the 1980s and has since moved out of the neighborhood. She shares the stories of some old-time neighborhood members.

[Sharon's interview is not yet available online. It should be up on the repository soon].

William Greene

Willie Greene speaks about the Seaconke Wampanoag Tribe, growing up in Providence and East Providence, visiting Mashapaug and the neighborhood across the tracks.

[Willie's interview is not yet available online. It should be up on the repository soon].

Jason Martin

Jason Martin, a city planner, reflects on his grandma's neighborhood. She lived near the railroad tracks just north on the railroad tracks off of Huntington Avenue. He explains how the history of architectural preservation has changed, the development of the city since the beginning of the 20th Century, industrial growth and residential change. He also describes how community development has moved towards block by block redevelopment from the whole-scale clearance of 1960s urban renewal schemes.

[Jason's interview is not yet available online. It should be up on the repository soon].

Tall Oak Weeden

Tall Oak Weeden is a Native American, member of the Narragansett tribe, born in Providence in 1936. He relates his family background, and discusses the early history of Narragansetts, Mohicans, Pequots and others living around Mashapaug Pond. He describes to the treatment of both Native and African Americans during past eras as a kind of slavery. He discusses his spiritual beliefs, and his hopes for a renovation of the earth based on a re-assertion of Native American values, a closer kinship with Creation.

<https://repository.library.brown.edu/studio/item/bdr:240488/>