



A Portrait of Life in Northwest Reading

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*Written by Penn State Berks Students: Miguel Colon
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MAH629

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Acknowledgements

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"A Portrait of Life in Northwest Reading," a community report, was written by Keanny Rosario and Miguel Colon. It follows the model of a community report from the University of Kansas Community Tool Box, a free, online resource for those working to build healthier communities and bring about social change. (<https://ctb.ku.edu/en>). As stated on the Toolkit website,

it's important to understand community – what a community is, and the specific nature of the communities we work in. Anything we do in a community requires us to be familiar with its people, its issues, and its history. Carrying out an intervention or building a coalition are far more likely to be successful if they are informed by the culture of the community and an understanding of the relationships among individuals and groups within it.

Keanny and Miguel, as part of an independent study with me at Penn State Berks in the spring 2017 semester, researched and wrote this community report as part of the Schuylkill River Trail (SRT) Revitalization and Litter Reduction project, a collaborative, multi-partner, community-engaged effort to revitalize a section of the Schuylkill River Trail in northwest Reading and to work with neighborhood residents to reduce littering behavior in the neighborhood. The project is built on cross-cultural collaboration and communication. In both process and outcome, the project aims

to bring diverse communities in Reading together to build understanding and to create a beautiful public space.

Concerted work over two years with various community partners ranging from the city's Department of Public Works (DPW) to the Olivet Boys and Girls Club to the Schuylkill River Greenways led to the creation of the "Friends of the Schuylkill River Trail in Northwest Reading" community group, involving neighborhood residents, local politicians, and Penn State Berks faculty and students.

Overall, the SRT project is ongoing but has already led to several positive outcomes: swaths on both sides of the trail have been cut; vistas to the river have been opened; pathways to the river have been enlarged; and the historic Kissinger's Lock is visible again. The trail is more secure, safe, clean, and enjoyable. Outcomes also include five litter cleanups since Spring 2016, Boys and Girls Club children's participation in water testing and litter education with Berks students, engagement with community (Friends of the SRT), and a Nature Festival on the SRT attracting 125 Northwest Reading residents.

Interviews with numerous individuals were an important component of Miguel and Keanny's research, and I extend my gratitude to them for providing time in their busy schedules to work with Keanny and Miguel. Further, thanks go out to all the members of the FSRT, the city of Reading, my colleagues involved with the project at Penn State Berks, and Michelle Hnath, the program assistant for The Penn State Berks Center for Service Learning and Community-Based Research; Dr. Paul Esqueda, Sr. Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, Penn State Berks, and Dr. R. Keith Hillkirk, Chancellor, Penn State Berks.

Introduction

The hardest part of writing anything is simply starting. Finding the right words to convey the life experiences of others in a meaningful and honest way is difficult task, with no shortage of pressure to tell it well and accurately. Everyone has a story to tell which adds to the much larger community chronicle. We were entrusted to tell the perspectives of local residents and leaders as a way to begin to understand the Northwest Reading community (which includes all of District 5 and part of District 6, within River Road, W. Buttonwood, N. Front, and Washington Street). Our work follows the Community Toolbox to understand the vital importance of understanding a community prior to engaging in community engagement efforts.

We were tasked to uncover the real Northwest Reading, from the oldest of history books to the most informal accounts. To speak with community leaders and everyday residents was a true pleasure and informative. It was insightful, heartwarming, and truly a gift to connect with so many individuals that are invested in the growth of their community. We wanted to present our research as fairly and as objectively as possible, but because we gathered information from several different perspectives, it was difficult for us to create a cohesive narrative that encompassed all of them. With that, we present our narrative to the community that made this project possible.

It's important to note that neither one of us was born in the city of Reading; however one of us, Miguel, moved to Reading at the age of seven and has lived in the city ever since. The other author, Keanny, was raised in New Jersey in a small suburban neighborhood. We are also both of Latino descent, and are both very proud of our heritage. We approach the writing of this narrative with different perspectives and experiences. It would be naive to believe that our

personal opinions don't play a role in the formation of this narrative; however, we have sincerely tried to remain objective. We refrain from telling our perspectives and only report what we have been told in the interviews and what we could find and assess in historical records. In other words, we offer narrative more than analysis.

All in all, it has been a privilege for us to write this community narrative. Limited by time and resources, this narrative is surely incomplete. Yet it is a start, and we hope this project helps further the growth of this community that possess so much potential.

Chapter I: Physical Infrastructure

Historically, the most vital and noticeable construction through the Reading area has been railroads. As part of the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad (P&R), incorporated in 1833, much of the town has been covered with railroads until the P&R railroad filed for bankruptcy protection in 1971. The railroad in the Northwest Reading neighborhood runs along the Schuylkill River, which leads to the neighboring cities of Pottsville, Pottstown and Philadelphia. This railroad was also located directly next to Parish Steel (later Dana Corp.), becoming vital to the neighborhood's industry. (ReadingPa.gov, n.d.)



This railroad has been an important part of the neighborhood, as it was used by the Reading Iron Company and Carpenter Technology in the transport of

iron and steel, and Reading Anthracite Company in transportation of anthracite from the northern Coal Region counties to Reading and the southern states. A passenger line to and from Philadelphia in 1833 made the neighborhood a hotbed for railroad use (ReadingPa.gov, n.d.).

This usage continued well into the 20th century, even after the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad Company was renamed the Reading Company in 1923. The reason for the name change was to streamline the company's corporate structure after World War I, when the railroads were no longer under government control and lines were becoming electrified. This period right after World War I was the company's best years. However, industrial railroad use decreased significantly after World War II when the demand for anthracite fell sharply (ReadingPa.gov, n.d.).

For the next two decades, this decline slowly ate away at the Reading Company's profits, until the Reading Company finally filed for bankruptcy in 1971, and sold all its railway lines to Consolidated Rail Corporation (Conrail), and subsequently the Reading lines were sold to Virginia-based freighter Norfolk Southern in 1997, including the rails in Northwest Reading (Alecknavage II, 2003).

In or before the first decade of the twentieth century, much of the railways in the area were abandoned. One can see remnants of these former lines running through neighborhood streets, such as Buttonwood Street. Since then, many of the other abandoned lines have been paved over, while others that have not are largely grown over with brush. According to former Reading mayor Tom McMahon, mayor of Reading from 2004-2012, the Norfolk Southern rail is still active and used once a week (T. McMahon, personal communication, March 13, 2017).



Another

major infrastructure fixture in northwest Reading is the Schuylkill River Trail, a 140-mile trail that extends from Pottsville to Philadelphia. One mile of the trail runs through Northwest Reading along River Road, with its entrance behind Baer Park. On this section, one can see remnants of the former Schuylkill Canal, a historic canal that was in operation from 1825 to 1931. The beautiful Kissinger's Lock (Lock 45), which officially ceased boat traffic in 1945 (Wenrich, 2009; Youker, 2009), also is preserved along the river.

Roads

There are two bridges in the neighborhood: the Schuylkill Avenue Bridge which interchanges with the Warren Street Bypass and into Glenside, and the Buttonwood Bridge from Reading to West Reading. The Schuylkill Avenue Bridge was a large undertaking as part of the Warren Street Bypass extension. The bridge had been around since the 1910s as a river crossing, but had not been connected to any major road. Before 1950 when the extension's construction began, Schuylkill Avenue was a dead end from Warren Street. The bridge's construction was met with opposition, as it cut through a residential area (Glenside), whose residents did not want housing values to drop because of heavy traffic. Despite the opposition, the extension was completed in 1957 (Go Reading Berks, 2013).

The Buttonwood Street Bridge was opened in the early 1930s, but was largely neglected in its history. According to the *Reading Eagle*, no major work had been done on the bridge since the 1970s until recently. In fact, both bridges had major deterioration problems. As of this writing, both bridges have been under renovation to repair the structural damage, forcing the Buttonwood Street Bridge to close temporarily for repairs (Migdail-Smith, 2015).

We have observed that many roads in the neighborhood have largely been neglected as well, as they are worn and rough to drive over. Aside from the major roads like Buttonwood Street and River Road, many of the roads are extremely narrow and were widened in order to simply make room for the two bridges.

Parks



The largest park in Northwest Reading is Baer Park, located on Clinton Street directly in front of Northwest Elementary School. According to the Berks History Center, the park was built in 1938, and the fieldhouse was built from the remains of the Berks County Prison at Penn's Common after its closure in 1932 and its subsequent teardown in 1936 ("Berks County Prison in Penn's Common (City Park Annals – Part III)", n.d.).

The other main park in Northwest Reading is Lauer's Park, built

by Frederick Lauer largely as a place of worship for him and his fellow German residents in the neighborhood, and one section has a recreational area for the community as a whole. After his death in 1883, the park was converted into a baseball stadium where semi-professional teams practiced and played into the 20th century (Kuhn, 1992). This baseball park predates all of the professional baseball stadiums nationally, including Baker Bowl (built in 1895) and Forbes Field (built in 1909), two fields commonly referred to as the earliest official baseball fields built (Go Reading Berks, 2012).



One long-standing fixture in the neighborhood is the Clinton Street swimming pool. The original pool was built by the men and boys of the Olivet Boys Club in 1921. The Olivet Clinton Street pool was the first desegregated pool in the city. (Hunsicker and Hoffman, 2016) Originally, girls were not allowed to be members of the club or to swim in the pool, although there are many photos showing girls in the pool. The pool became an extremely popular site for many athletic events such as swimming, diving, and water polo (Unruh, 2016). Today, the Clinton Street pool is one of the only pools in Reading.

Chapter 2: Patterns of Settlement

According to the Berks History Center, foreign settlement into the area began during the late 1700s with an influx of Germans emigrating directly from Germany, either due to family already here or because of the rise in industry into the city. This was a trend that began slowly at the turn of the 19th century and continued well into the Industrial Age. The Reading Railroad and the establishment of many manufacturing companies such as Thomas A. Willson & Co., better known as Willson Goggles, and Carpenter Steel Co., now formally known as Carpenter Technology, were among the factors leading to this migration (Albright, 1948).

The Rehr family was among the first German families that settled in Reading. Coming from Germany in the 1850s, William Rehr, I and his son Lambert (who became much more well known in the city as President of Penn National Bank, which later became National Penn Bank) were housing contractors who became known for building most of the homes in what is now Northeast Reading, and subsequently, many homes in the Northwest section as well (Reading Eagle, 1925; W. Rehr III, personal communication, March 8, 2017). Much of the land on both the Northeast and Northwest areas of Reading had gone undeveloped until the 1800s, mainly because there were many hills with steep inclines that made it difficult to build homes at the time (W. Rehr III, personal communication, March 8, 2017).

Retired fire chief William Rehr III noted that before the influx of Latinos beginning in the 1950s and continuing to this day, most of the residents in Northwest Reading remained German, while Northeast Reading was being populated more by Polish and Irish immigrants by

the turn of the 19th century. The early Latino settlers were coming directly from Puerto Rico and Mexico (W. Rehr III, personal communication, March 8, 2017).

Since the 1980s, the Latino migration into the city and the neighborhood appeared to come from New York. As Reading Classic Bike Club Vice President and frequent community organizer Rich Rodriguez states, he moved to Reading from the Bronx in 1986 upon word from relatives already residing in the city that there was more gainful employment and affordable housing (R. Rodriguez, personal communication, April 3, 2017). The downfall of the Dana Corp. (Miller, 2010) and Hershey sites (Levy, 2007), in addition to the decline of historic small brick-and-mortar businesses, would partly explain how Northwest Reading started to become a more transient community. This resulted in employment shifting outside the neighborhood and ultimately outside of Reading. As William Rehr III states, much of the neighborhood was primarily populated by older individuals above the age of 60 who were retired when the housing market in Reading was primarily homeownership. It began to change when the trend shifted towards tenancy, which has shaped the neighborhood into a working class community (W. Rehr III, personal communication, March 8, 2017).

Tom McMahon notes that many homeowners and landlords do not live in the city, and many not even in the state. In his research conducted with Our City Reading, a local nonprofit organization focused on renovating homes in Reading, McMahon found that some homeowners and landlords live as close as Wyomissing or Leesport, while others live as far away as Florida. This presents an economic disconnect that has led to many problems, including homes that are poorly maintained being sold above market value. McMahon recalled a trend in the 2000s where “slumlords” would skirt around legal housing requirements and rent a single house to multiple families, taking advantage of the Hispanic community as many of these houses were rented to undocumented immigrants who were left with little

choice. While parents worked and children went to school in the daytime, few (if any) were present in the household during the day when housing inspectors would come around, and in the night, these families would sleep on temporary bedding. This process was violating the ordinance that was put in place to minimize casualties and deaths in the event of a disaster, such as a fire. During this period, there were a number of fires in the neighborhood where multiple families died in the same house because of the overcrowding (T. McMahon, personal communication, March 13, 2017).

Chapter 3: Commerce and Industry

Historical Commerce and Industry

According to Theresa Guiles, a longtime resident of the Northwest section, Reading as a whole was an industrial and manufacturing town throughout its history. Northwest Reading was no exception, as evidenced by the GoggleWorks (former site of T.A. Willson Spectacle Works), the former Dana Corp site, the Lauer and Barbey breweries, and, by far the largest business in Northwest Reading historic or present, Carpenter Technology. Guiles' own family had owned Mike's Tavern on Exeter St. from its beginning in 1920 as a grocery store before the end of Prohibition until its sale to Pete Cammarano in 2010, who continues to operate the tavern (T. Guiles, personal communication, March 8, 2017).

Throughout its history, Carpenter Technology purchased large portions of land within the neighborhood as it expanded. Just one block away from Mike's Tavern is the Carpenter Employee Relations building, which Guiles recalls used to be residential homes. Across the street from the tavern and her house is the Carpenter Laboratory, which used to be the Riverside Fire House (T. Guiles, personal communication, March 8, 2017). One of the first purchases Carpenter made in its expansion was the House of Good Shepherd, a Catholic school for "wayward" young women, and was famous (or infamous, depending who was asked) for its architectural design reminiscent of a French gothic cathedral. The land was bought in 1970, and the cathedral was demolished three years later (Go Reading Berks, 2014).

Much of the Carpenter facility was built by the famed Reading architecture and engineering firm Muhlenberg Brothers, as was the

Berks History Center and parts of the T.A. Wilson building (H.H. Robertson Company, 1921; Splain, 2006).

Current Commerce and Industry

When looking at the neighborhood from a satellite view, the most prominent feature within the Northwest Reading neighborhood is Dana Memorial Park (as labeled by Google Maps) along Clinton Street. This was the site of Dana Corp., and was demolished after Dana closed the plant in 2010. This area was more recently under construction as a water treatment facility before the builders went bankrupt and were forced to abandon the property. (T. McMahon, personal communication, March 13, 2017) One can still see the incomplete girders for the foundation of this proposed building construction right next to the Olivet Boys and Girls Club's swimming pool. However, much of the area is completely barren otherwise. Satellite views of this acreage show a large patch of sand and gravel in the midst of natural greenspace.

As of this writing, the City of Reading has proposed a number of projects in order for businesses to open in this area, such as the Schuylkill Avenue interchange, which would make the area more accessible from roads. There is currently no way of entering the area except through a detour on the Schuylkill River Trail, as it is fenced off from the rest of the neighborhood (Go Reading Berks, 2013).

When Dana Corp. left Reading in 2010, much of the land in the Northwest section of Reading now belongs to Carpenter Technology, the fourth largest employer in the city as a whole. With employment of about 2,300, Carpenter Technology is currently the leading employer and industry within the Northwest Reading neighborhood (Greater Reading Economic Partnership, 2016).

Most of the major employers are located outside of the Northwest Reading boundaries. In fact, the Northwest neighborhood mostly has small family owned shops. Sofrito's Gastropub and Mike's Tavern are

well-known to both neighborhood residents and nonresidents. Sofrito's, a small pub situated on the street corner of a residential neighborhood, has 80 reviews on Yelp, the most out of any other business located in Northwest Reading (Yelp, n.d.).

There are a number of "bodegas," or Hispanic convenience stores, in the area, including Olivares Grocery and Tavaies Grocery Store on N. Front St., Dominican Grocery on Greenwich St., La Antilla on W. Douglass, Ralph's Food Market and La Macorisana on Oley St. (pictured), Misael Deli on W. Oley St, among them. Almost all of them are family-owned, and employees are often family and friends in the area. (A. Garcia, personal communication, March 13, 2017)

There are also a number of hair salons in the Northwest Reading area that contribute to the local economy. These are also Latino family-owned and run, usually by women. Examples include Maggie's Dominican Hair Salon located on W. Greenwich St. and D'Clase Unisex Salon on Schuylkill Ave, both founded and operated by Dominican women Maggie Buros and Angela Sosa, respectively. (A. Sosa, Personal communication, May 5, 2017; M. Buros, Personal communication, May 5, 2017).

Sun Rich Fresh Fruit, a fruit processing facility, and Hydrojet, an industrial machining and prototyping company, have been recent industrial additions to Northwest Reading, having both initiated manufacturing facility construction in 2007 ("Resolution 17 - 2007," 2007; "Resolution 74 - 2007," 2007). Our City Reading credits Al Boscov and their organization as the main entity responsible for bringing them to the Northwest Reading neighborhood (Our City Reading, n.d.).

Chapter 4: Current Demographics

Compiling demographic data specifically for Northwest Reading was difficult. We were unable to find census data that targeted only Northwest, so the information below refers to Reading as a whole. In 2000, the population in Reading, Pennsylvania as a whole was 81,291. According to the Census Bureau, the majority of Reading was non-Hispanic white at 48.27% of the population. The Hispanic population was 37.3%, and the Black/African American population was 12.2%. About 2.23% of the population identified themselves as a different racial group (CensusViewer, n.d.).

In 2010, the population in Reading increased to 88,082. The Hispanic percentage of the population increased to 58.2%, thereby becoming the majority population of the city. The non-Hispanic white population decreased significantly to 28.7%, while the black/African American population stayed relatively the same at 13.2% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). According to District Six City Council member John Slifko, the populace in the Northwest section of Reading is estimated to be around 5,000 residents (J. Slifko, personal communication, March 18, 2017). However, census data doesn't collect population numbers within specific city regions.

The American Community Survey, which calculates estimated populations over a period of five years, reported a population in Reading of 88,057 in 2015. In 2015, the Hispanic population continued to increase with a total 61.2% within the city, while the non-Hispanic white population decreased to 25.9%. According to the American Community Survey, the black/African American population has also decreased over the past five years to 9.3%. About 2.4% of the

population identify themselves as a combination of different races (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015).

In 2015, a little over a third of the population (34.4%) were 19 years old or younger, about 35.4% were between the ages of 20 and 44, 20.6% were between 45 and 64, and 9.6% were 65 years old or older (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015).

Chapter 5: Formal Community Groups and Organizations

The Northwest Reading neighborhood comprises a few formal community organizations. Both Opportunity House and the Children's Home of Reading are considered health and human service organizations. They provide individuals who face difficult life circumstances with a chance to improve the quality of their lives. Our City Reading is a nonprofit advocacy organization whose mission is to provide first time home buyers with stability, bring high quality job opportunities to the area, and enhance the overall quality of life in Reading.

Opportunity House

Opportunity House started in November 1984 as an outreach of local churches that used church basements to house homeless people. The organization then bought a permanent location on 430 North 2nd street in 1986. Since then, Opportunity House has added additional services which include the Second Street Learning Center, the Children's Alliance Center, and the Supportive Services for Veteran Families (Opportunity House, n.d.).

By the mid 1990's, Opportunity House began teaching independence skills to low-income adults by providing lessons on life skills, money management, and case management. Around the same time, Second Street Learning Center was established as a daytime program, and by 2000 it had become the only 24/7 community childcare center in Pennsylvania. In 2004, the Children's Alliance

Center was created to partner with other organizations so that children would always have a safe place to live. In 2012, the Supportive Services for Veteran Families was established to assist veterans who were at risk of homelessness (Opportunity House, n.d.).

Children's Home of Reading

Children's Home of Reading (CHOR) was founded in 1884 when the City of Reading opened a daytime nursery to help single mothers. It began on Franklin Street (outside of Northwest Reading), but expanded to the "Home for Friendless Children" on Centre Ave in 1888 when the nursery began caring for parentless children (The Children's Home of Reading, n.d.).

The Home for Friendless Children was renamed the Children's Home of Reading in 1947, as its services through the Depression and the World Wars broadened, including mental health counseling, temporary housing, education, and more recently, drug counseling. A number of community-based organizations branch out from the Children's Home, including the Berks Parents Services Collaborative Program, a committee established in 1991 to assist mothers with alcohol and drug issues (The Children's Home of Reading, n.d.).

Our City Reading

Our City Reading (OCR) was founded in 1999 by Al Boscov. The nonprofit was started to combat the problem of abandoned properties throughout various parts of the city. In Northwest Reading, a number of developments have taken place under OCR. The organization primarily purchases properties that are abandoned or unfit, refurbishes them, and sells them to first-time homebuyers who live and work in Reading. According to their website, OCR's projects in the area include the GoggleWorks Apartments, an expansion of the GoggleWorks, and (according to Tom McMahon) a playground

for Northwest Elementary School. Our City Reading has also been instrumental in bringing a number of businesses to the Northwest Reading area, such as Sun Rich Fresh Fruit and Hydrojet, as well as the surrounding area including KVP Falcon and Quaker Maid Meat in the Shillington area (Our City Reading, Inc., n.d.).

Chapter 6: Informal Community Groups and Organizations

The Reading Schwinn Classic Bike Club is a local organization focused on collecting and riding vintage Schwinn bicycles. It has been a fixture in the Northwest Community since 1995, according to Rich Rodriguez. However, it was a largely insular collective for many years until Pancho Rosa became President of the club in 2008, with Rodriguez being his Vice President. Both Peña and Rodriguez were active in the local Northwest Reading community before joining the Bike Club, including organizing Little League games at Lauer's Park and local basketball games. As executives of the Bike Club, they began to push the Classic Bike Club to participate in more community efforts, such as joint events with the Reading Bike Hub, a nonprofit bike shop in downtown Reading, and in the Northwest Reading area, becoming involved with the Friends of the Schuylkill River Trail, a community group formed in November 2016 to pursue the revitalization of the Schuylkill River Trail section in NW Reading (R. Rodriguez, personal communication, April 3, 2017).

Kelley Coates, the former community outreach director at Neighborhood Housing Services, provided a list of local community groups that existed during 2006. Organizations in Northwest Reading included the Outlet Area Neighborhood Organization, Centre Park Historic District Neighborhood Organization, Center City Community Organization, Northwest Neighborhood Association, Bethany Area Neighborhood Organization, 15-1 Neighborhood Organization, Dare 2 Care, Greenwich Seed Neighborhood Organization, Community Hope of the 6th Ward, and the Reading

Elderly Housing Crime Watch. However, currently only three of these organizations still exist. These groups are spearheaded by community leaders and are formed to allow residents to take control of their neighborhood and provide the community with support.

Recently, many residents choose not to participate in local community groups anymore. Peggy Harter, a Northwest Reading resident since 1966, noted the drastic change of community involvement within Reading. Community groups, most notably the Baer Park Association, would host events and fundraisers benefitting their neighborhoods. However, many of these community leaders moved out to the suburbs. Since then, to her knowledge, few residents have maintained or created those types of informal groups (P. Harter, personal communication, March 17, 2017). We were unable to locate any other groups.

Chapter 7: Formal Community Institutions

The largest and most ubiquitous community organizations are related to the religious congregations situated within the Northwest Reading section (J. Slifko, personal communication, March 18, 2017; T. McMahon, personal communication, March 13, 2017). According to Father Garcia of St. Margaret's Catholic Church, many informal groups, such as youth groups and charity groups, have been directly and indirectly operated by churches, while others utilize the church as a networking hub in order to mobilize the community. Garcia spoke of his church's current efforts to have an official youth group, but they are having trouble, as most of the people interested in running it are adults. (A. Garcia, personal communication, March 13, 2017).

Similarly, former city mayor Tom McMahon states that City Council and the local city government are increasingly working with churches to mobilize various communities, as they are valuable resources in efforts to reach out to local residents (Personal communication, March 13, 2017).

Historically, a major institution in the neighborhood had been the Reading Railroad YMCA on 6th Street, which had been a staple of the community from 1896 until its closing in 1969, moving to Washington Street in downtown Reading. The former YMCA building is now the Hope Rescue Mission, a homeless shelter (Kelly, 2016).

Here are some notable examples of current formal institutions:

Berks History Center

The Berks History Center was founded in December 1869 when local Reading residents and community leaders saw a need to collect historical documents and objects for reminiscence and education. Meetings were held on 6th street outside of the neighborhood, and the Historical Society did not have a dedicated building until 1904 at 519 Court Street in downtown Reading. With all the objects and documents being collected by the Historical Society, they grew out of their building. Construction for a new Berks History Center building began in 1928 on Centre Ave, and was completed in October 1929, where the Center stands to this day. Requiring more space in 2008, the Historical Society purchased and renovated the former M&T bank building located directly behind the Center, turning it into the Henry Janssen Library (“About Us”, n.d.).

GoggleWorks Center for the Arts

The GoggleWorks is located in the building that was once Thomas A. Willson and Co., the world’s first manufacturing facility for optical glasses. The business became famous for patenting the process for creating shatterproof glass in 1876. Keeping with their reputation for having impeccable safety standards, T.A. Willson and Co. began making safety glasses, and through the 1900s, a variety of safety equipment, such as ear protectors and gas masks. By 1939, T.A. Willson and Co. became Willson Products, and was developing aviator goggles and oxygen masks for fighter pilots during World War II.

When the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) was passed in 1970, which required employers to provide safe working conditions for workers, Willson Products increased their manufacturing of safety eyewear products (Park, 2010). In 1989, Christian Dalloz bought

the company. However, they closed in 2002, when the company restructured its industrial base to consolidate its worldwide production, with products in 75 countries.

Three years later, under the direction of local philanthropist Al Boscov, with the assistance of retired industrialist Marlin Miller and then-Mayor Tom McMahon, the GoggleWorks Center for the Arts opened in the former Willson Products building. GoggleWorks is a nonprofit facility that holds classes, exhibitions, and camps for adults and children of all ages involving art, music, glasswork, woodwork, and sculpting (“History”, n.d.).

GoggleWorks has been instrumental in generating tourism within the Northwest Reading neighborhood specifically, as it draws many visitors from outside the city to observe the exhibits and participate in workshops. Al Boscov also credited the GoggleWorks as the stepping stone that played a key role in the passage of other developments in the city, such as the R/C IMAX Theatre, the Doubletree Hilton, and later the GoggleWorks Apartments. Ellen Horan, former President of the Greater Reading Chamber of Commerce & Industry, stated during the building’s tenth anniversary celebration that it made Reading as a whole stand out amongst other cities in Pennsylvania, as, “The arena is a big attraction, but a lot of cities have arenas. Not many have a GoggleWorks” (Devlin, 2015).

In addition, GoggleWorks has also played a role in improving the reputation of the neighborhood, both within and abroad, as art centers in other cities such as Schuylkill Haven, PA and Alexandria, VA have looked to the GoggleWorks with interest (Devlin, 2015).

Olivet Boys & Girls Club

William “Mac” McCormack, an altruistic businessman who wanted to help working-class boys from Reading to become good citizens, founded the Olivet Boys and Girls Club in 1898. There were five Olivet Boys Clubs located around the City of Reading, which McCormack

ran and financed until his death in 1923 at the age of 57 from pneumonia. The first, stand-alone club was built at the corner of Clinton and West Oley Streets in Northwest Reading in 1910 by McCormick, then editor of the Reading Herald Newspaper. The Clinton Street Club housed two bowling alleys, billiards, game, and meeting rooms, shower baths, a shooting gallery, and a gymnasium with a stage. Later, the club added an outdoor swimming pool, and Reading's second playground, called Outdoor Fields. (Boulanger, 2016)

Today, McCormick's vision carries on. The Olivet Club has seven locations in the city serving both boys and girls. In 1990, the name changed to Olivet Boys and Girls Club and girls were able to join the club as official members. (Yatron, 2016) The club's primary goal is to provide the children of Reading with mental, physical, and social support. There are several programs offered within the clubs, which include technology programs, sports fitness and recreation, good character and citizenship, specialized initiatives, academic success, healthy lifestyles, and the arts. Each program provides children with different opportunities to indulge in their passions and foster creative thinking. The club also participates in many community initiatives and encourages their members to get involved. The club is used as a positive reinforcement for the youth and to keep them busy with productive options ("About Us", n.d.).

Chapter 8: Community Leaders

This section proved to be the most difficult to research. Formal community leaders are generally well-established and known within the community; however, in finding informal community leaders, it was largely based on subjective data from our interviews. In addition, there were a number of community leaders we could not include in-depth simply because we were unable to conduct official interviews with them, such as Deja Harris, Unit Director for Olivet Boys & Girls Club, Jeffrey Palmer, former CEO and President of Olivet Boys & Girls Club, and Pastor Mary Wolfe of Hope Lutheran Church.

Formal Community Leaders

Donna Reed

Originally from Muhlenberg Township, Donna Reed has served four terms as District 5's City Councilperson; among her roles were chair of the Public Works Committee, chair of the now-dissolved Marketing and Economic Development Committee, and member on the Administrative Oversight Committee. In addition, she has also been a member of Reading Beautification, Inc., Reading Planning Commission, and a board member of Crime Alert Berks County and the Centre Park Historic District (D. Reed, personal communication, February 22, 2017).

Much of Donna's efforts focus on rebuilding the neighborhood economically. One project in which she is involved is the extension of River Road, which would improve commercial and industrial traffic from Route 183. This project has been in development since 2011,

and in 2016, the project entered its design phase (D. Reed, personal communication, February 22, 2017).

John Slifko

John Slifko was originally born and raised in La Plata, Maryland before moving to Reading at the age of 36. He was a construction worker before discovering a talent for law and a love of public service. Beginning first as a legal advisor to City Hall, he worked his way up to become City Councilperson for District 6 (J. Slifko, personal communication, March 18, 2017).

Although Slifko's district is not only Northwest Reading, he has contributed to revitalizing the Northwest neighborhood. As councilmember, he's partnered with Donna Reed to plant trees all throughout the neighborhood to improve the landscape of the community. He's also worked closely with the Reading Shade Tree Commission on several projects, including the widening of the Schuylkill River Trail. He's also very much involved in the Friends of the Schuylkill River Trail committee, and tries to further the group's initiatives within council (J. Slifko, personal communication, April 25, 2017).

Joel Brigel

Joel Brigel was born and raised in the Mt. Penn area of Reading, and has held a number of positions in the Reading School District. He has been principal at Northwest Middle School since 2012, having previously been Vice Principal at Southern Middle School and Northeast Middle School. He has played a role in the education and discipline of middle school students in Northwest Reading, encouraging academic excellence as well as parental engagement with students (J. Brigel, personal communication, February 24, 2017).

As principal, he has established relationships with community

organizations to provide his students with great opportunities and a safe educational environment. He works closely with the Olivet Boys and Girls Club and the Reading Recreation Commission to provide sports activities, cooking clubs, and a Girls Leadership Club. He's also worked with The Place Church, which sponsors holiday events, and the Reading Shade Tree Commission, which has helped plant trees around the school facilities to improve the landscape around the school (J. Brigel, personal communication, April 25, 2017).

Informal Community Leaders

Brad Waples

Bradford Waples Jr. is an up-and-coming entrepreneur who has lived in Northwest Reading for most of his life. He currently owns three businesses: a clothing store, a printing shop, and a marketing firm, under the name Custom It. At the time of this writing, he is currently running for the District 5 seat in City Council, as Donna Reed has chosen not to run for re-election. His father was the longtime director at the Police Athletic League of Greater Reading (P.A.L.), and inspired him to be involved and engaged in the community (B. Waples, personal communication, February 15, 2017).

For the past few years, Waples has tried to produce events in the Northwest Reading community. Many of the events are creative and art-based and encourage attendees to appreciate visual, audio, and theatrical art. The purpose of his events are both to provide a good time to local residents, and to give hope to the rising youth and foster their creative knowledge (B. Waples, personal communication, February 15, 2017).

Father Angel Garcia

Father Angel Garcia is the current pastor at St. Margaret's Roman Catholic Church on Centre Ave. Originally born in Puerto Rico and

raised in Bethlehem, Fr. Garcia was a priest at St. Peter's Church from 2003 to 2009, and has been at St. Margaret's since 2014. Having grown up about an hour away, Father Garcia has become familiar with Reading's fixtures and also its reputation across county lines. As the figurehead of St. Margaret's, the largest Latino congregation in the neighborhood, he has had his hand in helping the community by giving the neighborhood hope and wisdom in their daily struggles, as well as providing resources such as food and money when available (A. Garcia, personal communication, March 13, 2017).

Tom McMahon

As City Mayor from 2004 to 2012, Tom McMahon had been Northwest Reading's longest serving formal community leader, and even after retiring, continues to be a key figure within the community, particularly with its infrastructure developments. During his tenure as Mayor, he had his hand in the creation of the GoggleWorks and the implementation of Our City Reading. One of his most memorable contributions to Northwest Reading was establishing a home for the Boxing Club. The boxing program was created to encourage the youth to get involved in something positive instead of gang or illegal activities (T. McMahon, personal communication, March 13, 2017).

Since his retirement, he's contributed to many different projects within the Northwest neighborhood. He had assisted the principal of Northwest Elementary in fundraising for a new playground and was able to bring the Gilmore Henne team, an organization dedicated to revitalizing communities, to visit the site of the playground. He also continues to attend meetings for the Reading Redevelopment Authority to find uses for the Dana Memorial 50-acre site. He hopes to be able to provide jobs to local residents after renovations. He also regularly attends meetings in all different sectors of the local

government to help in the progression of the city (T. McMahon, personal communication, April 27, 2017).

Chapter 9: Community

Community Traditions and Practices

Formal traditions and practices in the Northwest Reading community primarily take place around religion. Fr. Garcia noted that a significant portion of the Northwest Reading population attends church regularly, and in turn, churches often become a center for community gathering rather than secularly organized events. (A. Garcia, personal communication, March 13, 2017).

Churches such as St. Mary's Episcopal Church, St. Margaret's Roman Catholic Church, Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, and Hope Lutheran Church organize many community events.

Community Attitudes

The community outlook, we have found, changes drastically in relation to both positions of power and, in part, socioeconomic status. Many of the individuals interviewed who have a positive optimistic outlook of the community hold positions of power within the neighborhood, while other residents hold more skeptical views of the community as a whole.

One aspect of this disconnect is cross-cultural. For example, Peggy Harter finds that sometimes it is very difficult to communicate with Latinos, partly because of the language barrier, but more so in terms of what she termed cultural outlook (P. Harter, personal communication, March 17, 2017).

Some of those we interviewed note that many individuals in the Northwest Reading neighborhood are pessimistic in their outlook of the community. This can be tied directly to the rise of poverty, the departure of industry, and the national trend of middle class shrinkage. It may also explain the transitory nature of the

neighborhood: with people feeling their economic situation and quality of life changing very little, and with having to often times take jobs outside of the neighborhood and the city, it would seem natural that the people living in the area would look to move elsewhere. Pete Cammarano also notes that how people feel about their community is tied directly to the availability of gainful employment close-by, especially as more of the community turns to public transportation (Personal communication, March 8, 2017)

This negativity extends to the community's outlook on the local government. The city's high Latino population is not reflected in City Council or local government. Reading in general has had a long history of representatives who have not come from the community, in terms of being born and raised in Reading, and in terms of community involvement (B. Waples, personal communication, February 15, 2017). For example, many of the residents and local community leaders have stated that the current Mayor Wally Scott lacks presence in the local neighborhood and has not pushed for development here (R. Rodriguez, personal communication, April 3, 2017). Compounding this lack of development and the seemingly slow progression of the city out of poverty, there has also been a number of scandals in the local government. Just two years ago, then City Council President Francis Acosta resigned from his position in light of a guilty plea to conspiracy and bribery (Hughes, 2015). Four years earlier, in 2011, Auditor General Jack Wagner recommended state charges against Reading School District officials after a special investigation revealed that over the course of three and a half years, they had improperly used the food service and outside caterers for \$76,000 in lavish meals for school board meetings and administrative meetings (Wagner, 2011).

These scandals shattered the trust many residents had in their elected officials, leaving them distrustful of the political system at the local level, and pessimistic on their outlook on life in general. As Coates describes, people began to adapt more, and in turn, started

becoming more complacent with the way things were. Residents began to think more individually rather than collectively, and from this came a sense of complacency. (K. Coates, personal communication, March 17, 2017).

These attitudes also led to the decline or outright demise of some community organizations in the neighborhood, such as the Baer Park Association, which historically organized and fundraised many community events in the neighborhood. Coates attributes the decline of community organizations to an overall individualistic and negative view of the city, combined with the economic need to work more hours. She noted that the community wants change, but having been burned in the past at the national, state, and local levels by people in power and feeling as though they are deemed as an afterthought in all three, they are weary of taking part in such change when other priorities require attention (K. Coates, personal communication, March 17, 2017).

Other individuals, however, view Northwest Reading as a work in progress that will take determination and effort to improve, as they do much of Reading and Berks County in general. Rich Rodriguez, for example, notices that there are plenty of people in the neighborhood who are more focused on themselves than their community, but he continues to organize community events around the city, as he has done for many years before becoming Vice President of the Classic Bike Club (R. Rodriguez, personal communication, April 3, 2017). Father Angel Garcia states that while he believes many adults in the city have all but given up, many of the children still see hope and prosperity, and notes that while many people come and go through the St. Margaret's parish, many choose to stay (A. Garcia, personal communication, March 13, 2017).

For these people, the city stands as a testament of survival and overcoming struggle, and they find inspiration to keep going and devote plenty of energy into shaping the community into one that flourishes. Perhaps the beauty and historical nature of the city, with

its 18th and 19th century architecture, plays a part in inspiring these individuals' desire to preserve it. (J. Slifko, personal communication, March 18, 2017).

Community Values

With all of our interviews, the consensus is that what the Northwest Reading community values more than anything is family. (J. Slifko, personal communication, March 18, 2017). In addition, quality of life, both for one's self and for family, is another aspect that is valued highly in the community. This ties into the individualistic attitudes many share, as it is comprised of the two most basic elements of Maslow's hierarchy of needs: physiological needs and safety. (J. Slifko, personal communication, March 18, 2017). It also ties into the middle class flight phenomenon: if one has achieved on some level a routine of meeting physiological needs (e.g. food, clothing, shelter), then safety needs follow. With Reading's reputation for poverty and crime, it is logical for many to leave if available resources allow, whether for job security, housing security, or simply personal security (B. Waples, personal communication, February 15, 2017).

This desire for a better quality of life has given rise to the value of work. As employment is the most basic and direct method of sustaining life, and as it is dwindling within the city, the ability to work and maintain it for years to come is extremely valuable and necessary. (P. Cammarano, personal communication, March 8, 2017).

We have found that the community also values education for the children and the future generations. As Joel Brigel, principal of Northwest Middle School states, because much of the city is in poverty and many adults do not hold high school diplomas, parents are more likely to push their children to pursue education as a means of escaping it and obtaining gainful employment in adulthood, perhaps even a way out of the city through college (personal communication, February 24, 2017).

In addition, many of our subjects note that there is currently a

pseudo-renaissance among the younger generation to become more active in the local community, attend community events, and choosing to stay rather than look to major cities for a better quality of life.

We have found in the overwhelming majority of our interviews, from politicians Donna Reed and John Slifko, to local business owners like Brad Waples and Pete Cammarano, that by far, the aspect of life the community values least is political involvement. This is not to say that the community is unaware of the political landscape, but rather that many feel jaded and unhappy with it as they feel their lives are not significantly impacted by their involvement, and in turn, choose not to. Many residents have had to accept and adapt to whatever life throws at them. For the residents of Northwest Reading, it can be draining, and has directly caused to some degree or another the shift to individualistic and materialistic thinking. The residents do so, not so much as a means of looking to a brighter day, but more as a way of carrying on (K. Coates, personal communication, March 17, 2017).

Chapter 10: Conclusion

What sets Northwest Reading apart today is the Latino community, which continues to grow at a rapid rate. Many of our interview subjects have noted that the Latino community has changed attitudes and influenced opinions in the neighborhood. John Slifko, for example, says that the importance and structure of family within the area was directly inspired by the inclusion of Hispanic and Latino culture. (J. Slifko, personal communication, March 18, 2017). In addition, they also note that the culture in Northwest Reading will continue to change as the community grows, even as residents come and go (A. Garcia, personal communication, March 13, 2017; J. Brigel, personal communication, February 24, 2017).

What we ourselves have observed is that in Northwest Reading, while individuals share many cultural and personal similarities, they can differ greatly in terms of perception. Some view the neighborhood overall as a tightly knit community, while others believe that residents generally think more individualistically.

However, one theme we found repeated through our interviews was that this section of Reading, as well as in part Reading as a whole, was misunderstood by many people outside of it, and many felt that the city garnered a reputation that was largely unwarranted (A. Garcia, personal communication, March 13, 2017). Many individuals are hopeful in the idea that the city's best days are not behind them (D. Reed, personal communication, February 22, 2017).

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