

Basic Detail Report

Title Interview with Ruth Mantak

Date 2016 December 8

Primary Maker Ruth Mantak

Description Oral history interview with Ruth Mantak who was interviewed by

Debra C. Ruel on December 8, 2016 for the Connecticut Bar Foundation's History

of Connecticut Women in the Legal Profession Project. Topics Discussed: -

Family Background: Ruth Mantak discusses her family. She grew up in Old

Saybrook, Connecticut, and moved to Plainville in October 1941, just before

Pearl Harbor. Her father was a superintendent of schools. - College Education:

Ruth Mantak attended Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, New York. Ruth

majored in mathematics. - Early Career and Decision to Study Law: After college,

Ruth spent two years in Washington, D.C., working for the Army Map Service. In

1954, Ruth returned to Plainville and decided to attend law school in Hartford.

She was accepted to UConn Law School. - Law School: In her class at UConn Law

School, there was only one other woman, Patricia Smith. Ruth took courses such

as contracts, torts, real property, constitutional law, conflict of laws, and

evidence. She was admitted to the bar on August 16, 1957, and married on

September 7, 1957. - Early Employment: Initially, finding employment as a

female lawyer was difficult. After marrying and moving to Albany, New York,

then Pittsburgh, Ruth volunteered at Legal Aid in Pittsburgh and passed the

Pennsylvania Bar exam. She handled her father's estate after his death in 1956. -

Challenges for Women Lawyers: Ruth encountered societal resistance to women

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in law. - Entry into Politics: In 1969, she was nominated to run for Town Council

in Bloomfield, becoming one of the first two women elected to the council that

year. - Opening Her Own Practice: In 1973, Ruth opened an office with William

Zeman in Hartford. On January 1, 1979, she co-founded an all-women law firm,

Mantak, Christensen, and Ruhe, with Barbara Ruhe and Jane Christensen. Her

practice included divorce, closings, estates, and collections. - Women's

Movement: She was involved in the women's movement in the 1960s and early

1970s, working to get women elected to office and appointed as judges,

advocating for the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). She was part of the National

Women's Political Caucus. - Balancing Work and Family Life: Ruth found that

having her own practice allowed her flexibility to balance work and family

responsibilities.

Dimensions Duration: 8 Minutes, 53 Seconds