

“This is a Place We Made:  
Centering Place in Disability History”  
July 24, 2025

Essential Links (Video and Transcript)

**Recording:** [On the NCPH YouTube Channel](#)

**Transcription:** [Transcript of recording provided by Birnbaum](#) (Rich text file, can be opened by Microsoft Word, Google Docs, LibreOffice Writer, or TextEdit)

Project information and background

- Meldon, Perri, “[Interpreting our Disabled Heritage: Disability and the National Park Service](#),” *History@Work*, 16 March 2021.
- Meldon, Perri, “[The NPS Disability History Handbook: Collaboration, process, and community](#),” *History@Work*, 7 December 2023.
- Brian, Kathleen, and Perri Meldon, “[NPS Disability History Handbook](#),” *Public History News*, Vol. 3 No. 4, 9.
- “[Disability in Place](#)”: [Table of Contents](#)  
(Note: the forthcoming publication and this presentation were outgrowths of work that began with the National Park Service).

Presenters

1. Introduction by Stephanie Rowe, Executive Director, National Council on Public History
2. Kathleen Brian, project editor  
*Kathleen Brian is Core Faculty in the Honors College at Western Washington University.*
  - [Faculty page and contact information](#)
  - [Native Land Digital](#)
3. Nicole Belolan, project author  
*Nicole Belolan is a public history consultant and independent scholar based in South New Jersey.*
  - [Bio and contact information](#)

4. Gail Dubrow, project author

*Gail Dubrow is a Professor of Architecture, Landscape Architecture, Public Affairs & Planning, and History at University of Minnesota. She is a Fellow of the Society of Architectural Historians and a Distinguished Professor of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture. She is the author of two award-winning books: Sento at Sixth and Main with Donna Graves; and Restoring Women's History Through Historic Preservation, edited with Jennifer Goodman. She is currently writing a book on the earliest architects of Japanese ancestry in the United States.*

- [Seattle Disability Activism Historic Context Study](#) (Dec, 2024)

5. Petra Kuppers, project author

*Petra Kuppers is a disability culture activist and community performance artist who teaches at the University of Michigan. Her latest academic study is the award-winning Eco Soma: Pain and Joy in Speculative Performance Encounters (U of Minnesota Press, 2022, open access).*

- [Touching Time: Minnahanonck/Roosevelt Island](#) (video)
- [Anarcha Project](#)

6. Caroline Lieffers, project author

*Caroline Lieffers is an Assistant Professor of History at MacEwan University in Edmonton, Canada. Her research examines histories of disability and American imperialism.*

- [International Journal of Surgery](#) (primary source)
- [Marks Artificial Limbs Advertising Book](#) (primary source)

7. Sarah K. Pawlicki, project author

*Sarah Pawlicki is a public historian currently working as a women's history researcher at American Conservation Experience. Sarah earned a PhD in History at the University of Minnesota in 2023, with subfields in Heritage Studies and Public History and Native American and Indigenous Studies. Their research interests include religious heterodoxy, labor politics and practices, and mutual aid.*

- [Bio and contact information](#)

8. Perri Meldon, project manager and former NPS Disability History Fellow

*From 2017-2025, Perri assisted the National Park Service with deepening and enriching place-based disability history interpretation. She is completing her PhD in American Studies at Boston University, and she serves as coordinator of the*

*ACE Mellon Humanities Postdoctoral Fellowship Program.*

9. Michael Rembis, project author

*Rembis is Director of the Center for Disability Studies and an Associate Professor in the Department of History at the University at Buffalo. His most recent book is Writing Mad Lives in the Age of the Asylum (Oxford UP).*

10. Sarah F. Rose, project author

*Sarah F. Rose is an associate professor of history at the University of Texas at Arlington, where she founded and directs the Minor in Disability Studies and is faculty advisor for the Texas Disability History Collection. Her book, No Right to Be Idle: The Invention of Disability, 1840s-1930s, came out in 2017, and she has recently co-edited, with Jaipreet Virdi and Mara Mills, a special issue of Osiris on disability and the history of science.*

- [The Hawks Nest Tunnel Disaster](#)

11. Bess Williamson, project author

*Bess Williamson is Associate Professor of Design Studies at North Carolina State University. She is the author of Accessible America: A History of Disability and Design (2019).*

12. Hannah Zaves-Greene, project author

*Hannah Zaves-Greene, a scholar of American Jewish history, received her PhD from NYU, where she also focused on disability, gender and sexuality, and legal history. Her research is supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the New York Public Library, and her forthcoming book, Able to Be American: Disability in U.S. Immigration Law and the American Jewish Response, is under contract with the University of North Carolina press.*

Miscellaneous Projects and Resources Mentioned in the Program

- [Smithsonian Institution's EveryBody Exhibition](#)
- [Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley's Disability Rights and Independent Living Movement Project oral histories](#)
- [The Texas Disability History Collection](#)
- [Crip/Mad Archive Dances film](#)

- [History of Angel Island Immigration Station](#) and the article [Vault #5: Keepers of the Gate](#)
- [Jewish Women's Archive oral histories](#)

Questions and Discussions from the Chat with presenter follow up

From Cindy Wu (any pronouns): I'd like to ask about the relationship between the work we're doing here and access on an economic level re: gateway towns just outside NPS sites that are very reliant on tourism to stay afloat. Many of these towns have a cost of living that is prohibitive for the very people who live there and provide services for NPS visitors. How do we address this? I don't have any easy answers, just a heightened sense of accountability because I know I'm part of the problem as a frequent NPS visitor

Response from Sarah Pawlicki (she/they): I think about this often too, Cindy! I wonder if part of this is a way of thinking how to practice mutual aid in a community that we're just passing through temporarily. I usually think of mutual aid as something that flourishes when you're embedded in a community, but what does it look like to be in that kind of relationship when we are just passing through?

Response from Cindy Wu (any pronouns): This is an excellent question. I've contributed to gofundme requests when something comes up in that community, which I keep in touch with over Facebook. But there needs to be more than that.

Note: Facebook group is Our Terlingua (community outside of Big Bend National Park)

Response from Alice Wershing: Also there is an article from 2004 in *Disability Studies Quarterly*

From Thomas Hummel: Picking up on the prior mention of ephemerality: what contemporary ephemera are reflective of the disability narratives of our current historical moment that are not (yet) being told?

Response from Gail L Dubrow: TH - Sites of protest in urban public space offer a good example of the power of ephemeral occupation to activate social change.

From Alice Wershing: is anyone exploring the Asian American community and Angel Island?

Response from Alice Wershing: I just found an article in the [Journal of American Ethnic History](#), 2024

From Jane Becker: Wondering about sources. How can we understand the perspectives of people with disabilities who may not be verbal or literate?

Response from Alice Wershing : @Jane Becker I'm also wondering about people using technology who are non speaking

Response from Petra Kuppers: Jane, I love your question - and that is where embodied transmission is so important. Often disrupted, by so many mechanisms, it is still something that can create knowledges and had them on through generations.

Post event Response from Nicole Belolan: Many of the people I have studied are likely verbal or literate. But in many cases, surviving primary sources associated with their lives are objects as opposed to written documentation. Studying objects, or material culture or visual culture, to tell disability history stories can often highlight previously unconsidered perspectives.

Post event response from Kathleen Brian: I want to underscore the great promise in the methods described by Petra and Nicole, above, and then briefly pick up on Alice's response to Jane's question. One of my go-to scholars for this kind of work is Erin Manning: <http://erinmovement.com/>. I first encountered her work when I read *The Minor Gesture*: <https://www.dukeupress.edu/the-minor-gesture>. With caveats - I have critiques of the production choices, among other things - I will also recommend a podcast called "The Telepathy Tapes." It takes non-speakers and unreliable speakers as a starting point and engages with precisely the questions you're asking here.

From Alice Wershing: For those of us who don't have regular access to scholarly journals, what suggestions do you have for locating sources?

Response from Sarah Rose: Go to your public library and inquire about interlibrary loan. Policies vary, but....

Response from Kathleen Brian (any/all): I'm also going to put the link to the *Disability Studies Quarterly*, which is completely open access journal and a really important journal for anyone, I think, who is doing disability studies from within the geopolitical territory of the United States: <https://dsq-sds.org/>.

Response from Caroline Lieffers (she/her): Or if you live near a university, you may be able to access their collections (including electronic articles, books, etc.) on-site. You can also email authors - they will sometimes email you copies of their work. I'm always happy to help, too.

Response from Bess Williamson: I would also say that most local history museums and archives have aspects of disability history - looking at institutions,

schools, medical history. Then seek out the disabled people as much as possible. Noting that these can also be traumatic/difficult histories.

Response from Noah Zaves-Greene (he/him): Many local public libraries offer digital access to all of the major databases for academic journals (and newspapers!). If your library doesn't, certain major libraries like the Boston Public Library and New York Public Library offer "digital library cards" with variable residency requirements that provide full access to their electronic resources, including academic journals and e-books.

Post event response from Kathleen Brian: I would also underscore that many scholars share their work outside of academic, peer-reviewed journals. I'm thinking of the Disability History Association's blog and podcast, but there are others, too:

DHA Blog ("All of Us"): <https://allofusdha.org/>

DHA Podcast: <https://dishist.org/podcast-2/>

From Amber's iPhone: I wonder if one of the authors would speak to something "positive" or "uplifting" found in their research. I think sometimes narratives around disability can be not so positive

Response from Sarah Rose: My great-grandfather put up a billboard on Route 3 in New York and eventually got workers' compensation 20 or so years later after the accident at the New York Rangers School. My grandmother's memoir said "in glaring figures, detailed down to the penny the money he felt he had coming from the New York State Compensation Board."

Response from Sarah Pawlicki (she/they): A student in a class I co-taught told me about [Beechtree](#), a collective created by the disabled lesbian activist Connie Panzarino, and I thought it was tremendously inspiring.

Response from Sarah Rose: Also, the Blind Workers Union did sit-down strikes in Brooklyn in 1937 and got National Labor Relations Board recognition. That was the third example that I gave in the entry. But, it's complicated afterwards for both examples that I gave.... Typical historian's answer!

Response from Hannah Zaves-Greene (she/her): I think this also speaks to my question regarding how disability can be constructive rather than necessarily and entirely destructive. Impairments and illnesses afford us innovative, different, and diverse ways of moving through the world, engaging with it, understanding it, experiencing it, and so forth. I find that inspiring, because it rejects the notion that there's one "right" or "normative" way of exploring and conceptualizing the world and our place within it.

Response from Bess Williamson: This is a small anecdote from my research that I enjoyed.. I knew the DC metro was designed to be accessible but I didn't know its opening was delayed at the time of the Bicentennial because elevators were not complete. Eunice Fiorito, a blind disability activist from NYC, staged an impromptu protest at a nearby stop to the National Mall (Gallery Place) to draw attention to this while she happened to be in town for political meetings.. I never stop being awed by the creativity and steadfastness of disability rights activists!

Post Meeting response from Nicole Belolan: I don't know that I would call it positive or uplifting, but many of the stories of disabled people I have worked with are about ordinary people living their lives just like anyone else. I think it's important to remember the ordinariness and pervasiveness of disability. You can find many of those stories in sources from the 1700s and early 1800s!