



Disability Studies and Architectural History

Info: REPAIR delivered this presentation on October 29, 2020 as part of SAH Connects. Our presentation focuses on Charles Thompson Memorial Hall, a historic Deaf social club in St. Paul, Minnesota. Charles Thompson Memorial Hall was built by a Deaf architect, Olof Hanson, and features architectural design elements that are particularly useful to Deaf community.

Video Runtime: 1:25:57. [Presentation about Charles Thompson Memorial Hall begins at 42:25 and runs until 59:40.]

Panelists: Aimi Haimraie, Perri Meldon, Sarah Pawlicki, Laura Leppink. Moderated by Gail Dubrow.

CHRISTOPHER KIRBABAS:

Hello, everyone. Thank you for joining us online for today's program presented by the Society of Architectural Historians, as part of its year-round, SAH Connects programming. My name is Christopher Kirbabas, Director of Programs for the SAH. There are a few housekeeping items. Please ask any questions using the Q&A feature at the bottom of your Zoom screen. You can upvote questions you would like answered by clicking on the thumbs up icon near the question - that will bring the question to the top of the list.

Please feel free to use the chat feature for comments and sharing useful links. This webinar is being recorded and the video will be available online a few days after the event. We will send an email to everyone when the video is available. SAH will email a link to the video recording along with the saved chat, including any links and a link to a brief survey.

Please complete the survey which will help SAH plan future programs. If you require AIA credit for this webinar, I will provide a link in the chat room during the webinar to a form for you to complete and return to the SAH office. We will also include this link in our follow-up email to you. SAH has licensed AVA Software to provide closed caption for this and future SAH Connects webinars.

The transcript will appear on your screen to make any adjustments to the transcription. Please click on the up arrow on the Closed Caption button at the bottom of your Zoom



screen. If you do not need the closed caption transcript, you can click on “Hide Subtitle.” Any additional adjustments such as font size can be made in the Subtitles settings.

I would now like to introduce the moderator of this webinar, Gail Dubrow, a Professor of Architecture and History at the University of Minnesota, who will introduce the panelists.

GAIL DUBROW:

Welcome. I'll serve as moderator for this SAH Connects session on Disability Studies and Architectural History. This one-and-a-half-hour session is intended to explore the meanings attached to disability and their expression in the built environment. Our hope is that it will open up new lines of inquiry for architectural historians. Presenters and participants will consider key concepts in research and pedagogical methods for integrating histories of disability and efforts to pursue disability justice in the built environment. The discussion highlights the importance of disability activism as well, as it relates to design.

Our first speaker will be Aimi Hamraie, an Associate Professor of Medicine, Health & Society, and American Studies, at Vanderbilt University, where they also direct the Critical Design Lab. Their 2017 book “Building Access: Universal Design and the Politics of Disability” offered the first critical history of the universal design movement in the United States. Aimi is also host of the Contra* podcast on Disability and Design, which I highly recommend. Their presentation is on knowing, making, and disability.

Our second presentation will be by Perri Meldon, a Ph.D. student in Boston University's American and New England Studies Program, where she examines federal land management through the lens of public and environmental history. She has worked with the National Park Service since 19- since 2017, as part of several projects to tell fuller stories of American places and people, including work on civil rights sites, as well as those that introduce disability history to online audiences.

Her work on memorialization and historic preservation has been featured in American Quarterly, the AAIHS Black Perspectives Blog, and the AHA Perspectives Daily Blog. Her presentation is on disability rights and the National Park Service.

And our third presentation by the team of me, Sarah Pawlicki and Laura Leppink is on disability justice and public history. The case of Thompson Memorial Hall, which is in Saint Paul, Minnesota.

Sarah is a doctoral candidate in the University of Minnesota's History Department, on Dakota lands, with minors in Heritage Studies and Public History and Native American and



Indigenous Studies. She studies the intersections of 17th-century religious practice and labor history on the eastern Atlantic seaboard of what is currently known as the US.

Laura recently received her M.A. in Heritage Studies and Public History with an emphasis on historic preservation at University of Minnesota. Her current work as a research assistant with me on disability justice, public history, and placemaking, combines her passion for activism through history work, with her continued advocacy for recognizing the power of place and historic preservation.

Each presentation will be approximately fifteen minutes long, after which panelists will ask a few questions of one another. Following the three presentations will open to audience questions and comments, so please enter your thoughts as they come up, so that they don't get away from you, into the chat, which will be moderated by Carla Yanni.

So first, Aimi.

AIMI HAMRAIE:

Thank you so much for that introduction, Gail. My name is Aimi Hamraie. I am Associate Professor of Medicine, Health & Society at Vanderbilt University. I am joining you all from the original homelands of the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Shawnee, and Yuchi peoples: Nashville, Tennessee. And I'm going to talk about the field of research around disability studies and architecture. And I thought I would just kind of give, like, a historical overview of how this field of research has emerged.

It's very recent. It overlaps with architectural history in interesting ways. And it also, you know, departs from some of the conventions of architectural history. And I'm actually, instead of showing slides, which I've been doing already for several hours today, I'm going to show books, because these are the books that I have in my home office as I'm working from home during COVID.

So before I do that, I want to just say a few things about this field. The first is that, so I am a historian of accessible design, and accessibility is a practice that cuts across design at all scales and in pretty much all fields. And so the same people who are building practices of accessible architecture are also working on industrial and product design, and graphic design. Often web design, sound design, all sorts of things. And so it's really an interdisciplinary field on the level of practice. And because of that, the field of accessibility research in the humanities is also very interdisciplinary and it cuts across, you know, not just kind of some of the traditional divisions within the field of history, let's say. So there are folks who are doing design history with architectural history, even if those are separate



formations typically, and have separate theoretical bases and vocabularies and things like that.

The second thing I want to say is that accessibility is a very recent phenomenon and we are all, kind of, part of its history. We are living through its history. Many of us lived through the world before the Americans with Disabilities Act and have watched the built environment shape and changed in the intervening twenty years. So, you know, this is part of, like, our own bodily experiences, whether you identify as disabled or not.

And it's very much about contemporary history in the making. And so this affects some of the methodologies that are used to study the history of access. And of course, there are people doing great work on much older histories of, for example, like classical treatments of disability and things like that. But what we think of as the field of accessibility research is a little bit more contemporary.

And then the last thing is that there are intersections with other fields of study that are very important, and I just want to give a shout-out to Carla Yanni, who invited me to be on this panel. I met Carla as a graduate student when she was the co-director of a social science research council dissertation development, like a fellowship for graduate students that was on the intersections of the history of science and the history of architecture.

And a lot of the work that I'm going to talk about is actually influenced by this intersection because when we're talking about disability, we need to be able to think critically about histories of science and medicine, and how knowledge that is produced in the name of and for disabled people shaping the built environment. So, I'm going to talk about a couple of different categories of research. And of course, not all of this happens in books, but books are handy things to kind of hold up and describe.

So the first is that very foundational to the field of disability studies starting in the 1970s and 80s, is the distinction between medical and social models of disability. And the medical model said, you know, that disability is an impairment that we diagnose and the social model was all about diagnosing society for being inaccessible and really the role of built and social environments in shaping disabled people's experiences.

And so a lot of the early work on disability in the built environment was shaped by this model and came out of the field of geography, but was talking about architecture and urbanism. So, for example, Rob Imrie, his book "Disability and the City." This is from – let's see where it's from - 1996, so fairly early on. Imrie is a very important scholar of disability in the built environment, and the cover is kind of like blue and yellow, and it shows some wheelchair access symbols, and this sort of, like, line drawing of a globe.



This is a book that really took a, kind of, structural perspective to the experience of disability and also situated it within policy. Much older than that, a book that I use as a primary resource is this one called "Design for Independent Living" by the architects Ray Lifchez and Barbara Winslow, who taught a disability studio at the University of California, Berkeley.

And the cover of this book has these images of disabled people in the disability rights movement of the 1970s and the thesis of this book is to look at all of the design adaptations that disabled people themselves have created. So on the cover, there's an image of a man in a sling that he created himself to get out of bed.

There's a woman who is pulling, like, a really long thread to turn a lamp on and off. There's a woman who uses a wheelchair who's nursing a baby. There's a person writing with like an adapted pen. There are some folks hanging out outside having fun, and they use power wheelchairs, et.. So this is a really important book for me in the history of architecture and disability, because it is an architect's, or two architects' attempts, to capture the ways that disabled people themselves act as designers in the built environment.

And then to translate for other architects why this matters. And it's a very political book actually. Its tone is very anti-assimilationist and it tells architects, like, all you're trying to do is normalize disabled people. And actually what you need to do is pay attention to disabled people's design interventions. So this is from 1978.

And then a book of political theory that's very important is Marta Russell's book, "Beyond Ramps: Disability at the End of the Social Contract." And the cover has an image of the Constitution and it's on fire. And this is a book of political economy. And it- the title "Beyond Ramps" implies going beyond the social model that we can't just rest on transformations to the built environment as, like, the end-all be-all of disability politics.

And this is from 1998, which is eight years after the Americans with Disabilities Act was passed. And it still is not having a very big effect on disability employment and law, and so there's, like, a pushback against these architectural models.

So the next set of books that I want to talk about came out very, kind of, close to the same time. So for a long time there were very few architectural histories of accessibility or design histories of accessibility. And then I'll kind of show these in the order that they came out.

Jos boys wrote a book called "Doing Disability Differently." Jos Boys is a feminist architectural theorist. This book came out in 2014, and the cover shows a woman wheelchair user with her back to the camera, looking outside a glass window over a nice landscape.



This was an attempt to theorize accessibility, drawing heavily on disability studies and other forms of work, phenomenology, critical design. And one reason why this is significant is that Jos Boys was one of the people who led, kind of like, a feminist turn in architectural practice in the seventies and eighties and then incorporated accessibility into her work, so there's a kind of lineage of feminists and disability architectural criticism.

The next book that came out was mine, "Building Access: Universal Design and the Politics of Disability," from 2017. The cover shows these anthropometric drawings of wheelchair users extending arms into space with dimensional notations. And this is from the "Architectural Graphic Standards," which is the handbook of architectural visual representation, visual rhetoric. And I use this and other, kind of, objects and images throughout my book to talk about how transformations in science, scientific knowledge, and also technologies shaped and were shaped by accessibility throughout its history.

And so that's where the title of "Knowing and Making" comes from, that I'm arguing that making and designing is always contingent upon these ways of knowing. Very soon after this book came out was Elizabeth Guffey. So, Elizabeth Guffey is a design historian. She also used to be the editor of "Design and Culture," and she's a disabled scholar. She wrote "Designing Disability: Symbols, Space, and Society."

And the cover shows a bunch of parking spots with the disability access symbol painted on the ground. This is a book about the history of the international symbol of access. It's really beautiful. It was published in 2018, and it also has one of the only histories of the wheelchair that I know of. So it's really useful for that.

And this is an example of what I was talking about before, in terms of the convergence of design history and architectural history here. They're really, kind of, treated through each other. And there's a lot of great stuff in here about Victor Papanek, the industrial designer, and how his work was shaping the architectural codes. And also Selwyn Goldsmith, the British disabled architect, who wrote architectural codes as well, and adopted ones from the US, and then critiques them.

And then, more recently, I believe this one came out in 2019. Yes, Bess Williamson's book, "Accessible America: A History of Design and Disability." This has a cover with these, kind of, different colored, like, graphics of curb cuts and other, kind of, accessible streetscapes. And this is a book that uses a history of technology perspective to talk about accessibility and the issue of American identity as it relates to access.

So all of the books I was just talking about: mine, Elizabeth's, and Bess' have an emphasis on American histories of architecture and the built environment and looking at the



trajectory of post-World War Two transformations to bodies, and how this also affects built environments. So thinking about veterans and people who survived polio, and Bess' book also has really good treatment of transportation access. So here we also see some of the relationships between architectural and design history, history of technology, and then urban history as well.

And then a great edited volume, also edited by Jos Boys that has- this is from 2017, but it has essays from, like, kind of like, everybody, like a lot of people who work in this field is called "Disability, Space, Architecture."

And the cover has these like artistic representations that draw on the Vitruvian Man, but then show, like a, kind of hulk-like body builder sort of body. A more slender body conjoined, like a body, with like, two upper bodies and then one where like the top is, kind of like, disconnected from the rest of the body. And this is part of, kind of like, the theme of cultural studies of disability and norms and architecture.

And it builds on a previous volume of "Gender, Space, Architecture" also from Routledge. Okay, so the last few things I'm going to show are about the broader field around accessibility and how some of the folks who are working in related fields, like history of science, science and technology studies, have drawn on accessibility theory or produced it in really important ways.

So, my favorite, my favorite ever academic book is this one, Michelle Murphy's "Sick Building Syndrome and the Problem of Uncertainty." I've probably read this book like twenty times. It's like completely falling apart. But this is a book about activism, feminist activism, to highlight the issue of multiple chemical sensitivities in built environments. And so it's like a history of the skyscraper. It's a history of the body in the 20th century. Yeah, I see the comment in the chat about listing these books, and I can definitely provide the lists later or type them into the chat. But so this book doesn't use disability studies explicitly, but it is a work of disability studies because it's about disabled people, kind of, forming a consciousness around shared experience and organizing in the built environment.

Barbara Penner, who is an architectural historian in the UK, she wrote this great book that's the history of the bathroom, and the cover shows a very, at the bottom, like this very red modern bathroom. And then at the top, kind of this, like Dutch blue and white porcelain bathroom. And this book has quite a bit about the evolution of accessibility standards for restrooms, and it puts them in a conversation with social norms of gender, hygiene, all sorts of stuff like that. So again, not using disability studies explicitly, but contributing to disability histories of architecture.



And then there are a few books, two books that are about hearing and technologies of deafness, that are drawing on the same theoretical frameworks that all of these other books are doing, but they're applying them to technology. So, a recent one: "Hearing Happiness" by Jaipreet Virdi, has a yellow cover and there's a woman holding this, kind of like long cone up to her ear, as like an early hearing aid.

And then an ethnographic text, "Made to Hear" by Laura Mauldin, that shows, like, a small child against a red background. And then their ear has these lines, kind of, like, concentric circles breaking up from it. So these are works that come from science and technology studies and the history of technology. They're asking a lot of the same questions about norms of the body and how it shapes the material environment, and then how disabled people reject or accept those.

I have two more. So, one is this book by Elizabeth Petrick called "Making Computers Accessible." This is an example of how accessible architecture and accessible web technologies and software converge historically, and some of this history is in my book as well. The way that architects took up the standards that web designers were using for usability and try to apply them for universal design in architecture. So there's a kind of like conversation that's happening there that could only happen in the 1990s with the introduction of the personal computer. And this cover shows someone typing on a keyboard with their feet.

And then, finally, a very good and accessible recent book that just came out: Sara Hendren's "What Can a Body Do? How We Meet the Built World." Sarah is a design researcher and an artist and she teaches at an engineering school, and she's someone I've learned a lot about design from in her practice. And she has a very, kind of like, artistic way of moving through the world and thinking about these things. And this book highlights a lot of the design interventions that she's been part of.

And they're not really architectural, but they are spatial. So things like building podiums for people's short stature, for example, and all of these books are in the same field. And so what that means is, circling back to what I said at the very beginning, it's an interdisciplinary field, and it's a field where conversations are happening across design at all scales.

And there are some similarities, in kind of like, how they discuss the politics of citizenship and things like that. And then there are also some pretty significant differences in terms of, like the political projects that they're doing, and kind of what they think accessibility is for and who it's for. So I will stop there and I'll type of these books in the chat so that you will have them. Back to you, Gail.



GAIL DUBROW:

Thank you, Aimi. We're going to hold some questions until we've heard the three presentations to make sure there's adequate time. So Perri, I'd invite you to speak now.

PERRI MELDON:

All right. Please let me know how screen sharing looks and if my volume is okay for me speaking. Can everyone see the PowerPoint? Okay.

I'm going to leave it as is. I know you can see it on the left-hand side, the slides, but I'll need that to navigate as I'm also reading the text. So first off, thank you all for the invitation as well as joining this afternoon. It was great to hear from Aimi. I follow them on Twitter, and learn a lot from them there, as well as in their book. So it was great, I was grateful to learn about other texts as well to join them on a panel.

So my name is Perri and I am a Ph.D. student at Boston University. My presentation today is based on my three years and counting with the National Park Service to broaden the accessibility and interpretation of people with disabilities, past and present, who are represented by and work for the federal agency.

It is my honor to participate in that process, and today's presentation will mostly be based on my 2019 master's thesis, which traced the history of the NPS accessibility program, as well as a case study, where I collaborated with the home of Franklin D. Roosevelt National Historic Site in New York. Since that time, I have continued working with the National Park Service in various capacities, as they consider place-based history and how to tell the stories of people with disabilities, as well as those perceived to have disabilities in the past.

The text on this slide asks a question. What is more important: historic preservation or accessibility? The answer is "Yes." I heard this joke posed in the fall of 2018 by Ray Bloomer and accessibility specialist with the National Park Service. Bloomer, who is blind, launched his historic preservation and accessibility training with this semi joke. The training was held at Salem Maritime National Historic Site, and aimed to assist staff with striking a balance between maintaining historic integrity of 18th century structures with the need for people who use mobility devices, audio visual equipment, and other tools to access a world that both inadvertently and intentionally contains barriers for people with disabilities.

I use the phrase people with disabilities as an umbrella term to refer to people with sensory, mental, physical, and intellectual conditions that can be acquired or



developmental. So, in this presentation, I'll be discussing one particular agency, but the Park Service has in many ways set a precedent for other federal agencies, museums, and historic sites in how they approach accessibility, and their interpretation of disability history is fundamental to the National Historic Landmarks Program and the National Register of Historic Places.

So in presenting on this history, as well as the case study of the home of FDR, I'll be describing how the NPS engages with disability studies and its future directions as they continue to find ways to embrace the history and culture of disability in the US.

Through my work with the National Park Service, I have come to believe that every site has a disability story to tell. For example, the majestic Yosemite Hotel, which is seen here on the left at Yosemite National Park, formerly known as the Ahwahnee Hotel. For those who are familiar, it served as a recovery center for wounded soldiers during World War Two.

Harriet Tubman, who is believed to have lived with epilepsy, established a home for the aged in Auburn, New York. And you can see the home up on the top right in New York, where the National Historical Park is based, and Gettysburg, as with all battlefields where American soldiers have fought domestically and abroad, are sites where people acquired physical, cognitive, and sensory disabilities. And you can see a monument from Gettysburg in the bottom right.

So why does it matter that they contain disability stories? I believe it's not enough to make places physically accessible or provide programmatic access, such as exhibits or wayside markers or audio-visual equipment. Rather, the inclusion of disability stories and representation of people with disabilities in the past, including those perceived to have disabilities, through site-based interpretation, or perhaps a nationwide disability history theme study, will help foster deeper connections with and welcome diverse visitors to parks, museums, and historic sites.

To convey this point, I collaborated in 2018 with the home of FDR as a case study, dedicated to portraying the former president's life. The staff at the home of FDR also interpret Roosevelt's polio diagnosis in 1921 and the ways it impacted his life thereafter. Roosevelt's wheelchair and other assistive devices are on display throughout the home. Furthermore, the home of Franklin D. Roosevelt is one of the only national parks that explicitly interprets disability history already.

Although other sites may refer to the existence of people with disabilities in the past, either those who lived at or passed through these places, the home of FDR must grapple directly with FDR's lived experience as a disabled person.



I will admit that I chose low hanging fruit with the home of FDR. FDR as the only president with a visible disability, has several sites dedicated to his personal and political life, ranging from Georgia to the Canadian border. From each of these sites, I gleaned lessons on how to represent disability or confront issues of accessibility. And although I had a lot of material to work with, I came to learn that all sites contain tangible and intangible traces of disability history that enrich the site's interpretation. On the slide, there are two images.

The left: the photographer has taken a snapshot from the balcony that overlooks FDR's sunken living room. Because the living room is at a lower grade than the rest of the house, FDR would use a ramp to descend into the space. Today, visitors do not descend the small flight of steps or use FDR ramp. Rather, they were quite innovative.

The staff there, they developed a glass balcony where visitors can look down and see a replica of FDR's ramp. In this photo, the camera also captures the guardrails that surround the balcony, built without impeding on the room's historic integrity. In the second photo on the right, there is a close up shot of FDR's living room, with his wheelchair at the center of the photo. The wheelchair is surrounded by other chairs, a writing desk, and other features of the family living room.

While we have plenty of examples for how FDR lived his experience, it would not have been representative for most people with physical disabilities, let alone people with polio at the time he lived. His class, race, and gender were critical to the services he received and accommodations that were both created for him, and that he constructed.

Acknowledging the privileges that FDR had begins with acknowledging how many disability things, "disability things," a term that Smithsonian curator Katherine Ott calls them, had at his disposal. But the absence of objects or access features in a historic built environment also has the power to reveal the experiences of people with disabilities in the past. Despite the impressive collection of tangible disability things at the home of FDR, I found myself less interested in them and more in the traces of disability material culture.

I believe it is these that we must consider as so often the histories of marginalized populations, and those who have been othered due to their race, ethnicity, class, and gender, their stories are embedded and hidden within places. Their marks can be transient or ephemeral. For example, at FDR's retreat at Top Cottage, a short drive from his family home, there contains a gem for those who notice it.

The photo on this slide depicts the veranda of Top Cottage. In the bottom left of this photo, I bring your attention to a mound of dirt that sits just below the edge of the veranda floor.



At all other edges of the veranda, the ground is roughly two feet below. FDR would not have been able to descend from the veranda with his wheelchair because of this drop.

But the mound in the left-hand corner is what remains of his ramp made of dirt. In the absence of a proper ramp, his staff packed dirt to allow him to move with relative ease into the backyard. I'm sorry, I don't have a better photo, but this photo can at least capture how this earthen ramp has eroded since his time. It's not noticeable at first, but we must train ourselves to notice these disability things in the built environment.

Of course, there are serious challenges in interpreting disability history in the built landscape. We must engage with material and immaterial evidence of how disabled people, as well as those perceived to be disabled, navigated the world around them. This means that today we must sift through that which is transient and permanent.

And how can we place disability? A concept that has shifted temporarily and geographically? A question that I have continued to return to in this work is how do we historically situate disability as both an identity and medical diagnosis with regard to gender, race, class, and ethnicity without re-pathologizing disability today? To answer this question, I have chosen to prioritize interpreting disability as an identity first and a medical diagnosis second.

Beyond the fact that this is generally the accepted framework for understanding disability today, it also acknowledges the shifting nature of disability, both geographically and temporally. Cultural representations continue to uphold stereotypical interpretations of disability, requiring pushback against the perceived, quote unquote lack of- that non-disabled people assume of disabled communities. This lens recognizes that elements of race, gender, ethnicity, and class have all been historically pathologized by power-holding white, Western, heteronormative populations with enduring legacies.

Disability is often the shared denominator for people who both historically and today are not guaranteed the full rights of citizenship. According to some scholars, disability is the ultimate marker of intersectionality. This is not to suggest that the diagnosis of disability is not real. Certainly, disability is a social and cultural construct, but it is also a real lived experience for one fifth of the American population today.

Furthermore, disabilities can be invisible or invisible. And while the saying goes that anyone who lives long enough will become disabled is true, it is also factual that people who are lower income and nonwhite face higher percentages of disability than those who are white and financially comfortable. Recognition of the structural conditions that shape the lives of



people with disabilities and, at times, create disabling circumstances, are essential to interpreting American disability history.

Furthermore, my readings of American disability history are infused with the current moment, and I cannot separate myself from that. As the pandemic wears on, this time period will have debilitating effects on those who contracted the coronavirus and to their loved ones. The virus is known to have long term health impacts, including lung, heart, and brain damage. This is not to mention the deleterious mental health issues that are exacerbated by social distancing, isolation, and loss.

And as we witness one, after another, heartbreaking act of white supremacy and police brutality, we must remember that those who survive these acts of violence, like Jacob Blake will live with permanent scars. Blake, now paralyzed from the waist down, is now a disabled black man.

So, what does that mean moving forward as they age? I encourage you to pause and acknowledge the traces of disability history in our built environment. These include barriers, modes of access, and the structural conditions that shape a culture's attitude toward disability. This also means recognizing modes of resistance whereby people with disabilities claim and make space for themselves. And at all steps in the interpretive process, from the time you decide to explore a site's disability history to the time it is interpreted for the public, we must consult with people with disabilities. This may be with folks from the National Center on Accessibility or the NPS Accessibility Program. This could be with folks from a nearby independent living center. As you all likely know, visitors like to quote unquote, see or hear themselves in the stories told and depicted at sites. And they want those stories told right. Likely they'll be happy to have been contacted and offer feedback.

And there are risks to not interpreting disability history. These could include allowing myths surrounding disability to perpetuate, or that the silencing may be interpreted as disability being something to be ashamed of or not addressed. And misrepresenting the experiences of people with disabilities or perceived disabilities can influence attitudes toward people living with disabilities today.

As for the National Park Service, they have begun to endeavor initial steps toward a theme study. In collaboration with the NPS' Accessibility Program and National Historic Landmarks Program, the NPS Park History Program began discussions for a handbook on American disability history and culture. Handbooks like theme studies, but significantly shorter in length, are intended as in-depth guides on themes with any particular subject in American history. These handbooks are especially useful for NPS staff who seek to deepen their



interpretation and understanding of a park's history, and they can lay the groundwork for an NHL theme study and identifying sites of significance. On this slide, there is an image of the front cover of "All In! Accessibility in the National Park Service" 2015 to 2020.

The booklet developed by the National Park Service to enhance access for diverse visitors. On the cover of this booklet, there is a white man and his service dog facing away from the camera as they stand atop a boardwalk and look at sand dunes and evergreen trees. As you may have noticed, this document expires in 2020, so it is time for the Park Service to renew its commitment to ensuring accessibility during and beyond the pandemic. Thank you.

GAIL DUBROW:

Thank you so much Perri. All right. Our final presentation was prepared in collaboration with Sarah Pawlicki and Laura Leppink, and it focuses on disability justice, public history, and placemaking: the Case of Charles Thompson Memorial Hall in Saint Paul, Minnesota. And if we could get the presentation up there.

LAURA LEPPINK:

Can you all see that? Okay.

GAIL DUBROW:

This slide features a black and white historical photograph of the Charles Thompson Memorial Hall, a four-story brick building featuring a flight of stairs up to a small entry porch, framed by columns and a railing. It was built in 1915 by Deaf architect Olof Hanson as a social hall for the Twin Cities Deaf community.

For the past 35 years, my work's focus has been on diversity, equity, and inclusion at historic sites and buildings in the US, beginning with work preserving places significant in women's history, I went on to work with Japanese-American, LGBTQ, and other underrepresented communities, and even while developing intersectional approaches to the work with my colleague Donna Graves.

Well, actually, I missed something entirely, until my life was changed by visual impairment, namely that most of my well-intentioned work was not even remotely accessible to people with disabilities, nor had I considered whether people with disabilities were included in the



histories we'd worked so hard to reveal. During the past year, our team has embarked on becoming just purely learners about the preservation and interpretation of sites significant in disability history.

As this diagram in the slide indicates, we've benefited from conversations with University of Minnesota's Disability Resources Center, the Heritage Studies and Public History Program here, and the Critical Disability Studies Collective. We recently met with Herman Fuechtmann, a member of the Save Thompson Hall Committee, to forge a partnership linking our spring class' work to their preservation efforts at the hall.

Based on our learning, we've prepared a new syllabus for a graduate workshop for Spring 2021 called Disability Justice, Public History, and Placemaking. And when we are further along with the syllabus, you are welcome to share it as an open-source document.

Today we focus on one case study: Charles Thompson Memorial Hall. The choice of disability justice as a subject led us to plan for a course whose students and faculty will have a wide array of disabilities, which changed our thinking about the course to begin with.

And while we focused on case studies in the Twin Cities, we designed the course in coordination with other institutions who want to research local history. This spring, we'll be working with Chad Randl at University of Oregon in Portland, which will be running a course in tandem. And we welcome others to join us.

As we teach this subject through case studies of historic places, it's worth considering what criteria we've use for selection. We first considered the positionality of the researcher in relation to the subject. And next, we emphasized intersectionality in the sites we selected. Third, we focused on sites where active collaborations are possible, so primarily chose local sites. And finally, we preferred case studies explicitly relevant to ongoing community-based social movements to link preservation to issues of social justice.

In the case of Charles Thompson Memorial Hall, several of these categories overlap. A Deaf architect designed this social hall for ASL speakers, creating the space to fit his own community's needs. Additionally, architectural drawings by Hanson are held by the University of Minnesota's Anderson Library, making it a great site for students' primary research. This slide features three historical photographs of relatively local sites in Minnesota, one the State Prison in Stillwater. One the Canton Asylum for Insane Indians, also known as the Hiawatha Asylum. And one the Home for Crippled Children in Saint Paul.

They illustrate one range of potential choices for making disability history in institutional settings. We have chosen otherwise, in terms of our choice of site. Sarah?



SARAH PAWLICKI:

This is Sarah Pawlicki speaking. I will briefly review the history of the people behind Charles Thompson Memorial Hall and then turn it over to Laura, who will talk about the architect's specific design interventions at the site.

Charles Thompson, the Hall's namesake, is pictured here on the left. He is a dark-haired man with a mustache, wearing a suit and a bow tie.

Thompson was born March 15th, 1864. His father, Horace Thompson, was a very wealthy co-founder of the First National Bank of Saint Paul, and therefore Charles here was born into a very privileged background. Thompson entered Deaf social circles through attending the Minnesota School for the Deaf, and he married a Deaf woman, Margaret Brooks, on September 29, 1896. She is featured on the photograph to the right, wearing a light ruffled blouse and with her hair up in a bouffant style.

The newlywed couple hired a Deaf architect and Thompson's former classmate, Olof Hanson, to design their first St Paul residence. And Hanson would later also design Charles Thompson Memorial Hall. This slide shows a black and white picture of the Thompson's three-story colonial revival-style house, featuring a wraparound porch and two visible balconies.

Charles Thompson's residence was the prototype, of sorts, for the later social hall, where Thompson hosted parties, played cards, and apparently played so much croquet that he and his friends even played by night, lit by lanterns. The Deaf historian Doug Bahl described Thompson's social life by saying, quote, The people really looked up to Charles, almost as if he was the mayor of a Deaf colony, end quote.

After Thompson's death on April 22nd, 1915, his wife, Margaret, was left with his family's tremendous wealth, and she decided that a social club for the Deaf named after him would be a fitting commemoration of this life. So dedicated \$45,000 to the building's construction and left 45,000 more in trust for the social club's maintenance. This slide features two images, one on the left of Margaret Thompson, dressed in all black at the laying of the hall's cornerstone. And on the right, the program for the hall's opening event featuring music, poetry recitations and ASL interpretation.

This slide features a black and white historic photograph of Olof Hanson. He's a dark-haired man with a long mustache and is wearing a round wire-rimmed spectacles.



Hanson was born in Sweden in 1862, and he immigrated to the United States with his family around 1875. He became Deaf as a teenager, and like Thompson, attended the Minnesota School for the Deaf. Upon leaving that school, he attended the institution that Eventually became Gallaudet University, receiving his master's degree in architecture in 1889. He subsequently trained with two Minneapolis architectural firms, and then studied abroad at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. Circa 1894, Hanson established an architectural practice in Faribault, Minnesota, and later moved his practice entirely to Seattle.

Circa 1894, Hanson established an architectural practice in Faribault, Minnesota, and later moved his practice to Seattle. Charles Thompson Memorial Hall, sited at 1824 Marshall Avenue in St. Paul, was one of the last buildings Olof Hanson worked on. It was recognized as the first social club for the Deaf in the U.S. at the time of its construction in 1915. And the site was accepted into the National Register of Historic Places in 2011.

Oh, Laura, you're still muted, I think.

LAURA LEPPINK:

Yeah, Sorry about that. Hi, this is Laura Leppink speaking. I'm a white woman with blonde hair, blue eyes, and I am wearing a dark, black sweater. The aerial Google Earth image on this slide in which the West is left and east is right shows the locations of Minneapolis and Saint Paul with Charles Thompson Memorial Hall between them. When the hall was first built, the magazine, *The Silent Observer*, described its location as, quote, about midway between St. Paul and Minneapolis, and the principal car line between the two cities and turns at the corner, unquote. The location was intentionally chosen by Margaret Thompson to serve both cities, and was a prime meeting location for hearing and Deaf communities alike. Today the Route 21 local bus connects the Twin Cities, with a stop directly in front of the hall.

Within disability histories there is an untapped area of study: the ways people with disabilities modified and adapted the built environment to meet their own, and communities' needs, creating spaces far less oppressive than normative environments designed for able bodies. The hall is an example of a design that privileges sight over sound as a way of navigating space.

Adapting contemporary building technology and aesthetics to the needs of Deaf people, Hanson designed a Beaux arts masonry structure that elevated illumination and interior transparency. You can see the interior windows in Hanson's floor plans, highlighted on this slide by a red square.



The historic photo, now on the slide, shows the windows installed between rooms, revealing how the design allows members to communicate in ASL between rooms.

Another feature, which added visual communication, is the Hall's main staircase, circled in blue on the floor plan visible on the slide again. The staircase is open and wide enough for two people, allowing members to communicate between floors and to walk side by side while signing.

As a community hall, the building featured a stage and theatrical capabilities. It was not only popular within the Twin Cities Deaf community but attracted a hearing audience as well. The social club also owned a player piano to accompany early silent films, revealing material evidence of the way the hearing and Deaf communities came together in the space.

Artificial and natural lighting were emphasized to enhance ASL communication and lighting controls were located near the stage rather than the back of the room, since flashing lights on and off is a way to get the attention of a primarily Deaf audience. The historical photo shown on slide includes hall members in costume, as well as the stage lights which are circle in red.

A phrase from the magazine, "The Silent Worker," is particularly evocative when describing the auditorium. Quote, this is the modern way of stage lighting, and preferable to the old way of overhead border lights, especially for the Deaf to whom sight is everything.

This slide shows two images, on the left is an elevator blueprint for the hall with a red arrow pointing to a basement window. The right image shows a contemporary photo from the inside the basement, showing the amount of natural light let in through large windows.

Beaux arts buildings of this era typically have dark basements, however this was not the case for Charles Thompson Memorial Hall, since Hanson's design was driven by a concern for natural lighting, he included large windows throughout the building including the basement. With plans currently under way to remodel the hall, particularly to add ADA-compliant elevator access, it is critical to balance preserving features like exterior basement windows that contributed to making it "Deaf space," while opening up the building to access for all, including those with mobility impairments.

SARAH PAWLICKI:

As you will recall from the opening to our talk, the goal of our class this spring is to connect preservation to issues of disability justice. For that reason, we are interested in aligning our



work with the Twin Cities' Deaf community's own initiatives. Thompson Hall's need for greater accessibility and historic preservation led to the creation of the Save Thompson Hall nonprofit, the Facebook page for which is screenshot on the left side of the slide here. The organization is currently running a fundraiser selling T-shirts to raise money for the St. Paul and Minneapolis Black Deaf Advocates in the aftermath of the Minneapolis uprisings. On the right here is a picture of one of the shirts available for purchase. This black shirt features a gray silhouette of the Hall, framed by five hands doing the Black Power salute, and a pair of Black hands signing "justice" in "equality" in ASL.

LAURA LEPPINK:

This is Laura speaking again. This slide features a graphic of four hands – black hands – signing the letters BASL, which stands for Black American Sign Language.

The case study we present today reflects a site historically rooted in the Twin Cities white Deaf community. For that reason, we need to attend to the racialized aspects of deafness in a given place and time. In our view, it's critical to consider not just physical disabilities like deafness, but the ways they are socially constructed based on race, gender, and indigeneity.

The construction of social disabilities is an additional determinant for the spaces disabled people have access to. Whether that was the exclusion of Black Deaf people from Deaf social clubs, the racial segregation of Deaf schools, or high numbers of women, LGBTQ and BIPOC people that are institutionalized or incarcerated.

Mirroring social construction, actual physical construction of sites now recognized as "historic" often reflect privilege. For folks with fewer socially-granted privileges, their community spaces were frequently rented, transient, or less architecturally ornate than those of wealthy white folks.

In the face of discrimination, however, people of color, women, and LGBTQ communities fostered their own Deaf cultures and community spaces. National examples include parallel linguistic development, like Black ASL, as well as the creation of organizations like the National Black Deaf Advocates.

By acknowledging the privilege embodied in this case study we can mitigate the danger of only being attentive to a particular kind of place when doing site-based disability history work, and thereby emphasize the diverse array of sites that offer nuance to disability histories.



In reading the built environment through the lenses of disability justice and critical disability studies we can better understand the diversity of Deaf experience and broaden our conceptualization of sites of disability history. Beyond identification, understanding these frameworks is important to adequately evaluate how different historical and cultural sites uphold or refute disabling ideas, perceptions, and practices, and how we can challenge ableist conceptions of sites of disability history through narrative and interpretation.

SARAH PAWLICKI:

And finally, this is Sarah speaking again. We just encourage you all to support the community's nonprofit to make the site more accessible and inclusive for future generations of Deaf folks. So, links to donate, to contact the committee at their Gmail account, and to follow the historic preservation initiative's Facebook page, are available on this slide.

We are so grateful to be in conversation with folks involved in this justice work. The recognition that we are all interdependent, entwined in communities and partnerships, is a key part of envisioning justice and bringing it into existence, and we are thankful for Disability Justice communities for modeling this kind of generosity and reciprocity.

Thanks so much! We look forward to your comments and questions.

GAIL DUBROW:

Thank you, Sarah and Laura. So we've hit our goal, which is to have a half hour left for a robust discussion in this workshop. Carla Yanni has agreed to sort of pull things from the chat room as you put them in there, but also to scan your faces, I hope, if you have something to share. So I would just open up the conversation now, especially inviting those who've been trying to work on this issue in terms of their teaching and research, first to share with us kind of where they're headed with the work, and then to open it up more broadly.

I see some Q&A from- Carla can you help us? I see some Q&A from Chad, Donna Graves and Greg D'Onofrio?

CARLA YANNI:



Sure. Let's start with- there we go. Let's start with the question from Chad: What can be done to move forward? National themes study, any efforts underway.

PERRI MELDON

Money. There are two methods that I understand, and perhaps Gail could speak to this as well. By congressional push, or by private funding. So, with the LGBTQ themed study that came out in 2016, that came by way of foundation, which funded the National Parks Conservation Association, and they are then able to funnel that money towards a theme study. The first step- the building blocks are underway and there has been interest for at least the past three years, but the first step for the Park Service is working towards this handbook, which is definitely at work so far.

GAIL DUBROW:

Thank you. Perri knows my evil plan is that we should have a lot of money to fund a national study and I, too, look to the private funding. The Gill Foundation provided for LGBTQ research to really, not only to support national themes study, but also to provide some autonomy from Congress in terms of the content of the study, which I think is super important.

And as I look at the funding landscape up until now, charitable foundations related to disability have really employed the medical model. And so they don't see themselves as having a cultural dimension. But the Ford Foundation's recent commitment to disability justice is a very powerful inroad, I think, in terms of this kind of study. So I'm feeling very hopeful about the ways in which movements for social justice are now wrapping themselves around disability as an issue.

What do you think, Perri?

PERRI MELDON:

Oh, yeah, I have nothing more to add to what you just said.

CARLA YANNI



Thanks. Thank you for that. There's another question from Greg D'Onofrio. Did Hanson write about the design accommodations for his Deaf clients? Is specific design interventions or must these be inferred from plans, photos, and published accounts? Was Hanson drawing on established design conventions, or was he as far as can tell, innovating these design interventions? So that's a question for the three of you, I guess.

GAIL DUBROW:

Laura, Sarah, do you have a feel for it? I can say I really don't know the answer yet.

LAURA LEPPINK:

I have a little bit of an answer, so I use a couple quotes, which stem from the "Silent Observer," and a couple other magazines and publications. And so like- I also apologize. They're leaf blowing, so please let me know if it gets to be too much. And so these are, kind of, second hand accounts from the opening and otherwise.

But there is one publication that uses his architectural language, so his descriptions of place and the building within their publication. And so it's his actual words describing the building. And so we had larger chunks in it, but for time we kind of whittled that down a bit. So we have those. But also just from his plans, you can kind of see the different elements he's included, and just his use of much larger windows than normally used in Beaux-Arts masonry structures.

And also, just even elevating this basement, was less usual. And so I think a little bit of both. We really have just one- at least to my knowledge right now, have one primary document that really uses a lot of his written language. But so, I guess that's my sense right now.

In terms of, like basing it on other designs that existed at the time, Gallaudet did have an architectural program, and I'm not sure what architects out of that program at the time also, kind of, followed a similar path as Hanson, and utilized their own Deaf experience to inform their architectural design work. So, I think there's more questions to be answered from that and definitely more publications and material to take a look at, but a little of both, but definitely more is needed to, kind of, dig through.

GAIL DUBROW:



Gallaudet recently did a splendid exhibit of Hanson's work that should have more information in it, and I would say for those of us who see ourselves more as social historians of the built environment rather than purely architectural historians, Hermann Folkman, who is the historian for Thompson Memorial Hall, has done a phenomenal job of collecting material on the experience of people who use the building.

And so this combination of the architect's intentions and the actual uses of the space seemed like a really promising combination of resources for documenting the place. Sarah, did you have anything more on that?

SARAH PAWLICKI:

No, I don't think so.

LAURA LEPPINK:

I think also, I know Sarah, in that conversation, they also mentioned that they have an archive that needs help, and that they need a lot of kind of input and ways to get that organized. So, I think that could also be a treasure trove of interesting materials.

CARLA YANNI:

Great. Thank you. Another question from Donna Graves. Have any of you thought hard about or worked on places associated with cognitive slash intellectual disabilities?

GAIL DUBROW:

Could we invite Donna to talk about where she has worked on that? Because I suspect it's some really useful information. Can her mic be unmuted?

CARLA YANNI:

I think Christopher can do that.

CHRISTOPHER KIRBABAS:



Unfortunately, attendees are unable to be unmuted. Sorry.

CARLA YANNI:

It's a webinar. It's not a meeting. Correct one. All right, guys.

GAIL DUBROW:

So Aimi?

AIMI HAMRAIE:

Yeah, I can say this is sort of an emerging field of research. And, of course, there's like the history of institutionalization, which Carla has studied. That's, you know, probably many examples of environments that are hostile to mentally disabled people. But there are starting to be some moves towards creating, kind of, more sensory friendly environments and things like that. And I've been, sort of watching this unfold in terms of how reliant those architectural, like, methods and practices still are on medical models.

And so they tend to draw on, for example, understandings of autism as deficit. And, you know, I think that there are also just a lot of emerging barriers in built environments that are coming about as a result of technology and things like that, like LED lighting is extremely inaccessible for people with sensory processing disorders, for example. So this is an area where I would hope that there would be more work and I would certainly benefit from it if there was, but I don't know of any kind of radical disability approaches to inclusion, kind of in those ways.

One sort of related thing is just, sort of practices like interior design practices, and there are intersections like occupational therapy, but it still tends to be pretty medical, from what I know.

CARLA YANNI:

Can I go to the next question.

GAIL DUBROW:



Let me first ask if Perri has encountered these sites in the course of doing her work.

PERRI MELDON:

I have worked in those spaces professionally. The closest that I've come across in more of a museum setting is a very strange, possibly disturbing for some approach. In Germany, there is an assistive living community for people with intellectual and cognitive disabilities that, prior to World War Two, was more of an institutional setting. During World War Two, it actually became a so-called euthanasia center for people with disabilities, and it has since reverted back to an assisted living center.

And at that site, one can visit as a visitor and see a museum, and you are interacting in the same space with the residents. And so that is a very creative approach to it. And if people are interested, I'll drop the name into the chat.

GAIL DUBROW:

And I would also point to Anne Marie Adams and colleagues work about dementia environments, which was presented at SAH, and which is a really powerful investigation of contemporary strategies for creating environments for those who have cognitive impairment.

CARLA YANNI:

Sorry, I'm trying to pay attention to the upvoting. Here we go. From Roderick Wilson, would you comment on the conflicting impulse for a person with disabilities to not be defined by their disability versus preserving and celebrating landmarks in the history of how society accommodates people with disability- people's disability?

AIMI HAMRAIE:

I mean, I can say as a disabled person, I celebrate my disabilities and want everybody to celebrate them too. And I think that the idea that we ought not to be defined by them is an idea that's related to stigma against disability. And so, celebrating our existence and our achievements and things like that is part of making sure that disabled people get to be existent in the future.



And, you know, along with that, to think about the ways that our identities intersect with race and gender and class and also to appreciate those things and to attend to the ways that we experience oppression on the basis of those things.

GAIL DUBROW:

I would just say, personally, as someone who, over the last say, five years, has been coming to grips with visual impairment as an architectural historian. I mean, bummer, completely, in terms of functional issues, that the level of stigma we live with around disability, has constantly been a revelation to me, in terms of coming to some peace about it and celebration of my identity, as opposed to apologizing for it or feeling less alone.

So I don't know where those who are attending today are at, but I'd say it's a really big struggle, and it's no different than coming out or many other aspects of my identity that it's really taken some coming to grips on a social movement.

PERRI MELDON:

Building on what both Gail and Aimi have shared, there is an essay that I found useful called "Reimagining the Supercrip" by Sami Schalk. The term "Supercrip" is often assigned to people like FDR, Helen Keller, Christopher Reeves, where we place, culturally, people with disabilities on this- certain people with disabilities on a pedestal. Therefore, actually enhancing that sense of lack, that people with disability- assumed by non-disabled audiences.

GAIL DUBROW:

For everyone else.

PERRI MELDON:

For all. Yes, for everyone else. So I can drop the name of that- Sami Schalk- kind of building especially on what Aimi shared, that we can critique the "Supercrip" idea, but there is value as well to understanding these figures historically and culturally. So I'll drop the name of that essay into the chat.



GAIL DUBROW:

Carla, what else do we have in our Q&A room?

Carla Yanni:

Okay. From Maggie Bell: thank you for your wonderful presentations. I'm a curator with focus in early modern European history, working on an exhibition on representations of poverty in the visual arts, which intersects with disability histories. In your experiences, how have you reconciled historical terms that are no longer used with preferred contemporary concepts and terms when creating interpretive material?

So, a question about terminology and contemporary interpretive material and contemporary audiences.

GAIL DUBROW:

I think Aimi and Perri might have a little more experience than us, in trying to frame this. So I would turn to you for a response.

AIMI HAMRAIE:

I can say, just very quickly, because I worked on such a recent history that I, for the most part, was able to, kind of, find the words that people use to describe themselves. And if they were alive, I could ask them if they weren't, I could see how they describe themselves in their writing and so some of those things are about identity first versus person first language. Do we say disabled person or persons with disabilities, stuff like that.

And then, you know, if it's slightly older terms like handicapped and crippled, etc. And, you know, the good thing about being able to do kind of interpretive scholarly work is that we can say they use this term and here are the implications of that for how disability was understood and how interventions were funded and what the social representations were and things like that.

And it is, you know, it can be kind of tricky because, you know, this thing that we call disability in our present-day sense is so shaped by the disability rights landscape and the movement landscape. And it does seem important to note the terms that people would have used previously because our conceptions of disability as a positive thing may not have



always been available. And just to name that. So like in my book, I just, you know, I just tried to name that. And a lot of the naming also comes from non-disabled people. So noting that as well.

GAIL DUBROW:

Perri, did you want to add something?

PERRI MELDON:

Everything that Aimi said, I think that self-awareness is critical in the interpretation.

GAIL DUBROW:

And to contextualize the use of the terms in their time. And based on which speaker is it from medicine, religion and so forth.

CARLA YANNI:

Yeah. And I imagine it's much harder in a museum exhibition today than in a scholarly book today. Because in a scholarly book, you can take some time, you have space, you can have an appendix, you can have an essay on terminology. There are lots of ways of handling it in a book that would be trickier in an exhibition.

GAIL DUBROW:

Submission labels really have their limits.

CARLA YANNI:

I would like Cas to have a chance to ask- to have this question heard: when looking at historic house museums, it's rare to find them that are accessible. Many of them use a photo book to portray inaccessible spaces, which is not enough. I'm looking into ways to really expand what accessibility looks like for historic house museums: 3D models, 3D printed tactile objects, etc. How can historic homes better engage with the existing



community of people with disabilities? Additionally, how can they better acknowledge the site history with disability, particularly in cases with the family or individual work to hide that disability as much as possible?

Thank you for that question.

PERRI MELDON:

With the home of FDR, what they had done is they had collaborated with both a nearby independent living center as well as a center for autism and did a weeklong training. Their staff had to do a weeklong training, and all new staff have to participate in this training. And it can be hard when it's- when you are physically unable to change the historic layout of the building.

Photographs can be necessary if you have the funds. Virtual reality can be another way to participate through your phone, but including archival material, including the written record, what shows up in the family's letters, and how they write about disability. That can be another way to engage, even if you can't make it to the second floor, for example.

LAURA LEPPINK:

You reminded me - so one of my colleagues, Elizabeth Degrenier, who graduated this past year with me, actually worked on a pretty innovative project using 360 degree images, and the purpose was to design, kind of, like a preview for people with sensory disabilities. And she partnered with the Bell Museum and AuSM, which is Autism Society, here, and, really kind of did a collaborative effort and sent it out for testing and everything.

But really- I'm so sorry about the sound- but, you know, making an immersive piece of technology that was a precursor to visiting the museum, but went to all of these different spaces while highlighting different, I guess, items, places, and things that were available. I'm going to turn this off for now, but highlighting that, where I think she took an existing technology and was able to rethink about it and was able to make a space more accessible through that technology and through a different lens.

CARLA YANNI

From Colin Fanning: Thank you to all the presenters, wonderful panel, question for Aimi and others who have thoughts: Is there anything specific you think is driving the recent



fluorescence of scholarly work on the architectural slash design histories of disability? Whether in terms of specific academic disciplinary happenings or broader cultural ones, it seems to be a fascinating historiographic moment in progress. Curious to hear your thoughts.

AIMI HAMRAIE:

Thanks so much for this question. I have asked myself this question many times in the last ten years because it did seem that there were a lot of people working on very similar work or histories at the same time. And I think one kind of institutional reason is the availability of archives. So there are some archives that, and specifically like the Bancroft Library Archive on the independent living movement at Berkeley, that were made available within that time. And also the digitization of some of the archives at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, and then the Smithsonian and Katherine Ott, collecting a lot of disability artifacts.

And related to that, I think is- enough time has passed since the ADA that it kind of became possible to start to write those histories even though they're very much in the making.

And then there's kind of a turn within disability studies, you know, like many fields, disability studies had become very post-structuralist and discursive for a long time. And there was this sort of material turn. And I think the study of architectural accessibility and accessible products and things is part of that. So, those of us who were in graduate school, you know, like, in the 2000s, early 2000s, we or mid-late 2000s, we were kind of part of that material turn. And therefore, it sort of made sense to do material cultural histories of accessibility. And then other than that, I think it's just one of those things where sometimes everyone has the same idea at once and then it, it like produces a field overnight and then suddenly, like, you know, people take off on that and do cool, new, interesting things.

GAIL DUBROW:

I share your view, Aimi, and particularly this perspective that there were a lot of postmodern literary scholars who were doing this work for a long time in many fields, including romance languages, and once engineers, designers, and other professionals, whether from law to design, got involved, it deepened and made more complex and material the scholarship. But I would look at any field that's emerged, whether it's women's studies, gender studies, queer studies, whatever, and I think you see the same combination.



You see on one hand a social movement that has profound implications and the beginnings of literature being introduced to courses on it. And then we've had disability studies or critical disability studies programs across the disciplines, and then you have scholars completely vested in the field, producing work directly in it. But with interdisciplinary implications. So it just seemed like the moment was ripe institutionally as well as socially.

CARLA YANNI:

I think it also corresponds to the spatial term in the history of science and history of medicine, which is sort of what Aimi said. But somehow or other, the spatial aspect which architectural historians often start with, comes to other fields. A little later.

GAIL DUBROW:

Yeah. They're all- they love us now. Yeah.

CARLA YANNI:

I knew if I waited long enough, I'd become popular.

GAIL DUBROW:

Exactly. But it is true that this spatial turn has affected many, many fields, even weirdly, geography, which wasn't that concretely spatial.

CARLA YANNI:

Oh, Right. Yeah. Another good example. Yeah. So, well we only have three minutes left and we have a tradition at SAH Connects to end on time. So does anyone have any concluding remarks? Apologies again about the issue with the captioning third party company. We're having some issues with that, but we will get the transcript to you later, and all of this will be recorded, and will be in the SAH Connects library.



GAIL DUBROW:

That does it perfectly. I just want to thank all the presenters and all of you who joined us today, and I think this is one of many kinds of future presentations that we'll see as the field really grows within architectural history. So thank you very much.

CARLA YANNI:

Great. Thanks to all of you. Thank you to the panelists and thank you to the attendees. And thanks to everyone who asked questions and to Christopher for organizing us.

GAIL DUBROW:

Thank you all. Bye bye.

EVERYONE:

Bye Bye.