When Grassroots Advocacy Sparks Grassroots Preservation

Working alongside Advocates, Archivists, and Curators to Document the Historic Experiences of People with Disabilities

SAA Austin
August 2019
Sierra Green
Heinz History Center
Heinz History Center

Heinz History Center, 2012
Photo by Rachellynn Schoen
“Western State Strikers Bear Parental Wrath,” Pittsburgh Press, April 30, 1975
Western Pennsylvania Disability History & Action Consortium Founding Members

• ACHIEVA
• Community Living and Support Services (CLASS)
• Institute on Disabilities at Temple University
• National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)
• Polk Center
• Senator John Heinz History Center
• Transitional Paths to Independent Living (TRPIL)
• United Way of Southwestern Pennsylvania
Western Pennsylvania Disability History & Action Consortium Mission

The mission of the Western Pennsylvania Disability History and Action Consortium is to preserve and honor the historic struggle of Western Pennsylvanians with disabilities to attain human and civil rights. The Consortium educates the public about disability history in order to improve community access, participation and equal opportunity, and to ensure disability rights through existing and new policies and laws.
Western Pennsylvania Disability History & Action Consortium Governance

Governance

• Project Director: Mary Hartley
• Steering Committee: Founding organizations + community members
  • History Center staffers: Anne Madarasz (Curatorial Division Director) + Emily Ruby (Curator)
  • Cross-disability membership

Award-winning

• Hervey B. Wilbur Historic Preservation Award from the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities in 2019
Themes that have Emerged
Pursuing Preservation and not Collecting as Goal

- Gathering and Sharing Information about Collections

10. Type of Historic Materials
   Please indicate the types of historic materials held by you or your organization. Check all that apply.
   - Personal Writings (e.g., diaries, published and unpublished works, correspondence).
   - Materials related to the **found**ing and operation of a residential facility or care establishment, such as constitutions, mission statements, meeting minutes, annual reports, newsletters, correspondence, photographs, and other administrative records.
   - Materials related to the **found**ing and operation of a community service agency or advocacy group, such as constitutions, mission statements, meeting minutes, annual reports, newsletters, correspondence, photographs, and other administrative records.
   - Audio or visual recordings of speeches, presentations, panel discussions, training. Interviews with individuals, families, service workers.

11. Populations Represented in Historic Materials
   Please indicate which of the following disability groups are represented in the historic materials held by you or your organization. Check all responses that apply.
   - People with developmental or intellectual disability.
   - People with physical disability.
   - People with mental health disability.
   - People with vision disability.
   - People with hearing disability.
   - People with speech disability.
   - People with medical conditions that have largely been eradicated, such as polio, scarlet fever, tuberculosis.
   - People who were incarcerated or placed in institutions by the criminal justice system.
   - Other (Please Specify)

12. Use of Historic Materials
   Have you or your organization used historic materials related to people with disabilities within the last 10 years? Check all responses that apply.
   - As part of public education, community outreach, media relations, or advertising.
   - Available for research purposes to researchers or the general public.
   - Available to people doing family roots/genealogy research.
   - As appointments that decorate organizational offices, meeting rooms, and/or hallways.
Pursuing Preservation and not Collecting as Goal

- Gathering and Sharing Information about Collections

Collections that concern reporting of abuse in institutions:
- Bob Nelkin Collection of Allegh Co. Chap. of the Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (ACC-PARC) Records
- Ray Sprigle Papers and Photographs

Collections that concern people who are blind:
- Blind and Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh Records and Photographs
- Leonard C. Stalsey Papers and Photographs
- National Council of Jewish Women, Pittsburgh Section Papers

Collections that concern state institutions:
- Allegheny County Institution District Books, 1940-1977
- Bob Nelkin Collection of Allegh Co. Chap. of the Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (ACC-PARC) Records
- Cemetery diagram of the Allegheny County Home for the Insane and Tuberculosis Sanatorium, 1920
- Dixmont State Hospital Records and Photographs
- Register books of the Allegheny County Hospital for Insane Patients, 1900-1935
- Western Pennsylvania Hospital and Dixmont Hospital Records, 1848-1918
- Woodville State Hospital population account ledger, 1922-1941

Collections that concern people with mental illness:
- Allegheny County Institution District Books, 1940-1977
- Association for Mental Health Affiliation with Israel records [manuscript]
- Cemetery diagram of the Allegheny County Home for the Insane and Tuberculosis Sanatorium, 1920
Pursuing Preservation and not Collecting as Goal

- Preserving Collections according to Community Members’ wishes

Bridget Malley, Shannon McCarty (CLASS), Sierra Green, and Emily Ruby (curator) during visit to Community Living and Support Services (CLASS), June 2019
Photo by Tina Calabro
Coordinating amongst Repositories

Illustration of Polk Center grounds
Polk Center, 90 years : a pictorial history of Polk Center in Polk, Pennsylvania
Coordinating Amongst Repositories

Rail-shipped food receipt, 1905
Polk Center Receipts, MSS 1181

Medicinal supplies receipt, 1905
Polk Center Receipts, MSS 1181
Coordinating amongst Repositories
Learning how Community Members See and Describe Themselves and Their Records

Pioneer Education Center students playing volleyball, 1972
Pittsburgh Public Schools Photographs, MSP 117
Offering Our Institutional Strengths, Even When They Expose Our Shortcomings

• Strengths
  • Space
    • Meetings
    • Events
  • Megaphone
    • Exhibits
    • Publications
    • Public Programs
    • Learning Programs
  • Collections
    • Care
    • Curation
    • Access

• Shortcomings
  • Space
    • Accessibility challenges:
      • Programming
      • Exhibits
  • Megaphone
    • Exhibits
    • Publications
    • Public Programs
    • Learning Programs
  • Collections
    • Accessibility
  • Progress made, progress needed
Offering Our Institutional Strengths, Even When They Expose Our Shortcomings

John Paul Deley speaking at Treasures in the Archives with ASL interpreter and open captioning, November 2018
Photo by Kat Neidig
Offering Our Institutional Strengths, Even When They Expose Our Shortcomings

- **Strengths**
  - Space
    - Exhibits
    - Meetings
    - Events/Programs
  - Megaphone
    - Exhibits
    - Publications
    - Public Programs
    - Learning Programs
  - Collections
    - Care
    - Curation
    - Access

- **Shortcomings**
  - Space
    - Accessibility challenges:
      - Exhibits
      - Events/Programs
  - Megaphone
    - Exhibits
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    - Public Programs
    - Learning Programs
  - Collections
    - Accessibility
  - Progress made, progress needed
Born of, Led by Community Members
Conclusion

When a museum has the honor of building trust within a community, committing to collaborative, long-term preservation benefits everyone. This type of preservation begets a rich and deep knowledge exchange- one that values lived experiences alongside professional expertise.