

Disability History Association News

Fall, 2021

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Editorial

It must be close on three years ago that the Disability History Association decided that the terms of office for board members should be three years. With a decade already under my belt, it was time, past time, for me to move on. “No desperate rush”, someone said, and within minutes of me offering to bow out, I found myself reviving and editing DHA News, the Association’s newsletter instead. Three years further on, however, it really is time to hand over to new energy and ideas, and so this issue is my swansong. It has been fun, I appreciate all your contributions, and I hope you will give your wholehearted support to the incoming editor once appointed and to whom I will pass on your messages in the meantime.

In this edition we have a diverse range of material. But first we begin with the sad task of remembering Dan Wilson who died earlier this year, but also a happy celebration because Dan is remembered in our community in the most positive and fond terms.

We welcome back Nancy Hansen and Lynn Rose, both of whom have written in earlier issues. Nancy writes with concern about developments in Canada, while Lynn reports on her visit to Mogadishu earlier this year and shares some of her heart-warming photographs. Thomas Tajo gives his personal insight and experience of echo-location, a skill that means independence for people living with slight loss. And just in case you might think that we are losing sight of the past in this edition, Ros Oates takes us to Renaissance England and the experience of hearing loss at that time. Finally, I introduce Martin Atherton’s new book on deaf lives in Lancashire, England, 120 years ago.

Awards feature strongly in this edition. The winner and honourable mention of the 2021 book award are announced – congratulations to Stefanie and Natan. And the Journal Article award that also goes to Stefanie in a DHA first. Additionally, we introduce Sam and Yakov as 2021 conference award winners and Sam gives us his conference report in this issue. Look out for 2022 award competitions here and online.

Iain Hutchison

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A tribute to Dan Wilson from the Disability History Association community

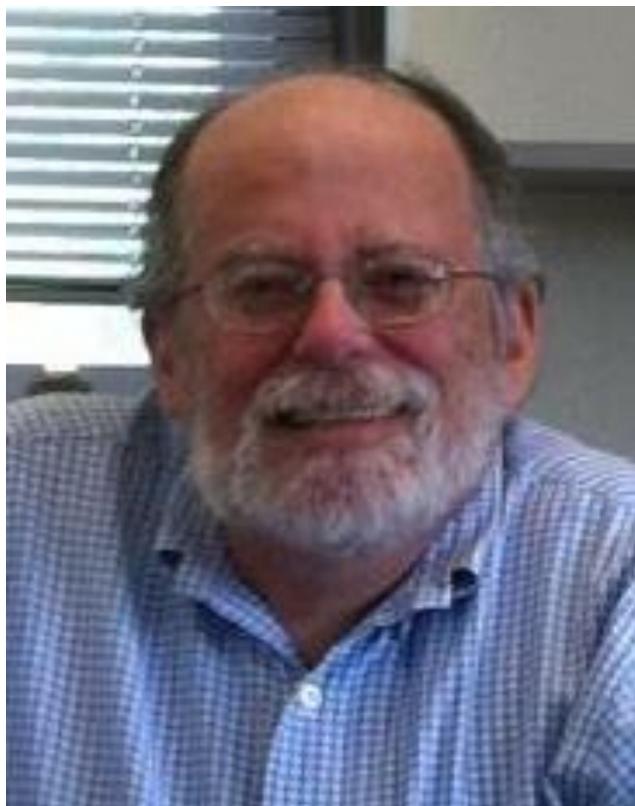


Photo caption: Color photo of historian Dan Wilson, smiling.

Historian **Daniel J. “Dan” Wilson** (1949-2021) was a founding member of the DHA and a longtime contributor to the field of disability history. His spouse, Carol Shriner Wilson, recently shared the sad news of his death: Dan died at their home in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania on June 11. Dan grew up in Wisconsin and attended the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater for his undergraduate studies. Drawn to American history, he pursued a PhD at Johns Hopkins University and taught on their history faculty after graduation. In 1978, Dan headed to Pennsylvania to teach at Muhlenberg College, where he offered courses in American social, cultural and intellectual history, histories of the US across the 19th and 20th centuries, and the history of disease, medicine, and public health. He retired from Muhlenberg in 2018.

Dan’s scholarship increasingly centered on epidemics, especially polio in the United States. His attention to individual people’s lived experience of polio offered an important counter-story to standard social histories of medicine, which valorized researchers and cures. Instead, Dan detailed the everyday brilliance of polios - crowdsourcing knowledge to navigate an inaccessible

world, organizing activist campaigns for disability rights, and identifying post-polio conditions that physicians and medical researchers had not realized existed. He was an active member (and often Board leader) in Post-Polio Health International and Lehigh Valley Center for Independent Living.

Dan's important works in disability history include:

- *Polio: Biography of a Disease* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2009);
- *Polio Voices: An Oral History from the American Polio Epidemics and Worldwide Eradication Efforts* (Edited with Julie K. Silver, M.D. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007);
- *Living with Polio: The Epidemic and Its Survivors* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005).

His many other written works and videos are available to researchers through the [Pennsylvania Polio Survivors Network](#).

Those who knew and regularly worked with Dan will remember him also for his vast and often quiet service to our organizations and fields of study. Dan played pivotal roles in the success of the H-Disability listserv and the creation of the Disability History Association. (A history of the DHA, co-written by Dan, appears in our [Spring 2020 issue of the DHA Newsletter](#).) Dan regularly volunteered for the hard and usually thankless tasks. As just one example, in 2003 and 2004 he drafted materials to establish the Disability History Association, helping identify procedures and protocols that other organizations used so that we would not have to "reinvent the wheel." As a member of the Advisory Board to the *Encyclopedia of American Disability History*, Dan consistently made time to brainstorm approaches to difficult subjects, identify potential authors, write entries, and provide thoughtful, constructive feedback to submissions. Many of us in disability history have workshopped drafts of our books, articles, and conference papers with Dan. He was an excellent sounding board.

Some of Dan's colleagues within the disability history community offer additional memories:

Cathy Kudlick: I first met Dan in 2002 at the NEH Summer Institute convened by Paul Longmore and Rosemarie Garland Thompson. Dan was always this quiet force, agitating with Paul, Sandy Sufian and me to make disability history a thing. That's where we talked about forming the DHA, but first the discussion list that became H-Disability. Dan had this quiet sense of being grounded but occasionally little sparks of anger and passion showed through, which added extra heft to when he called for something to be done or to be different. I appreciated conversing with him about the fraught borderland between

disability history and history of medicine, and of course, epidemics. I'll miss that. I had this feeling he had a lot more to say.

Iain Hutchison: I first invited Dan to undertake an H-Disability review in 2010: <https://networks.h-net.org/node/4189/reviews/5495/wilson-denecke-walking-isnt-everything>. He wrote a couple more reviews in the years up to 2018, after which he flourished as an active supporter of H-Disability reviews, producing several reviews with dedicated commitment and in very short time - it seems that he enjoyed the relaxation that retirement brought for him to indulge in reading for true pleasure and to pen his thoughts on disability history scholarship. He will be missed for so many reasons.

Sandy Sufian: Dan was a person with such integrity and his scholarship was top notch. I remember spending time with him at AAHM over the years and looked up to him re: the ability to cross over history of medicine and disability history positions with such grace and depth. More loss during a year full of so many losses. May his memory be a blessing.

Susan Burch: Dan was a generous, thoughtful, and always reliable colleague and friend. His signature qualities – gentleness, a commitment to equity, skillful storytelling, and hopefulness – motivated many of us to seek out his collaboration on projects. In large and everyday ways he also taught us that kindness and critical insight can coexist.

Over the past decade, when Dan and Carol would visit Vermont in the summertime, we would often meet up for lunches. These reunions typically unfolded into hours of conversations about scholarship, the field of disability history, teaching, and mentoring. I count myself as incredibly lucky to have known Dan. He will be deeply missed.

Katherine Ott: He was a true mensch. I know his students loved him, too. Dan gave the Smithsonian National Museum of American History his wedding photo for the polio exhibition: [NMAH | Polio: Photo Album \(si.edu\)](#)

Penny Richards: I don't think I ever met Dan in person, or even spoke with him on the phone one-on-one, but we were co-editors of the H-Disability listserv for many years. (I should look up how many. About five?) It could be a frustrating gig, but he was a GREAT co-editor, completely reliable, and flexible, and wise whenever editorial wisdom was required. You know how, when some names show up in your email inbox, you automatically tense up and brace for a problem? "From:Dan Wilson" was the opposite of that for me. I would smile

and relax when his messages appeared, with extra celebration when he was announcing a new publication of his own. And whenever I saw his name come up in other contexts, I knew I was looking at a project in very good hands.

A number of other colleagues collectively added that his work has strongly informed their own. We thank and miss him.

A celebration of Dan's life was held at Egner Chapel, Muhlenberg College, on Sunday, October 10. The service can be joined at <https://portal.stretchinternet.com/muhlenbergcollege/portal.htm?eventId=661214&streamType=video>

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Wilson Grant for Scholarly Projects at Muhlenberg College or to the [Lehigh Valley Center for Independent Living](#).

Special thanks to Carol Shriner Wilson for collaborating with us on this tribute.

Thomas Tajo – and the art of echolocation

Thomas Tajo is the president of newly founded, international, non-profit Vision Inclusive. This is an organisation which sees disability as an inherent part of human diversity. At par with that of race, gender, sexual-orientation, etc, it consequently seeks to bring together people with and without so-called disabilities in an equal partnership to build an inclusive future where differences are enjoyed and diversity is celebrated, and not merely tolerated.

Thomas is an independent researcher, Blind Echolocation and Inclusive Mobility instructor, a disability activist and inclusive art consultant. He was born in the foothills of the Himalayas to an aboriginal/tribal family in north-east India, and became blind at the age of 8 or 9 due to Optic Nerve Atrophy, following which he taught himself to echolocate. He left home at the age of 13 or 14 to go to a boarding school for the blind that was 500 kms away in Shillong and later went to New Delhi to pursue higher studies. Since then he has lived independently. Following his high-school education, he earned his Bachelor degree through distance learning and he followed this with a Masters degree.

He now lives in Belgium and, for several years, he has been travelling across the world lecturing in various universities and scientific forums. He has been giving echolocation and mobility lessons and workshops to organisations for the blind, families of blind children, and to both individuals and groups of blind children and

adults. He teaches in English, Hindi and Dutch. Here Thomas explains echolocation, its history, and his journey to pushing boundaries and attaining independence.



When I was a child there was a saying that was echoed by everyone around me, that blindness means inherent incapacity. That blind people cannot move about freely and independently on their own. Consequently, I came to imbibe the message that I had to rely on others for my daily movements. Unquestioningly, I came to rely on the capacities of others instead of my own. The belief in my inherent incapacity as a blind person degraded beyond any imagination. Let me share a personal anecdote to

illustrate this.

During the winter school vacations, in the late 1990s, I was travelling from the city to the remote Himalayan village in north-east India where my parents lived. I was in the company of two young, sighted girls. I felt comfortable taking their arms during the journey. But there came a time when I had the urge to obey nature's call. I became unbelievably embarrassed thinking about asking them to take me to the loo.

Since I was also a little infatuated with them, I felt that I was already looked down upon as a blind person incapable of travelling independently. It would not make a nice impression to ask them to take me to the loo. I was forced to control the urge to relieve myself. I held on for so long that I almost had an accident, which would have been even more embarrassing. So what I did was to mentally justify why I should ask for their help to go to the loo. I rationalised that it would be less embarrassing to ask for help than to accidentally succumb to the pressure. So, finally, I subjected myself to the humiliation of asking for help.

The shame associated with my fear of being identified as “disabled blind” is not an isolated phenomenon. Many blind and partially sighted people around the world seek to resist being negatively labelled with a disabled identity, imposed upon to them by ableist cultures. They often refuse to use useful assistive tools and technologies, such as the white cane, because of the traditional cultural image of “disabled blind” identity that is popularly associated with it.

A few years back, there was a survey in Norway of blind and partially sighted youths on cane-use. The study found that about forty percent of the participants had canes, but they did not use them. They were afraid of stigma that was associated with the cane. Rejecting the use of the cane, with the aim of resisting negative disabled blind identity, we limit our own movements. We forego the benefits that cane-use brings, consequently reducing our own freedom. However, as we know, identities are not fixed immutably, nor are the limits to our intellectual and bodily capacities.

Take, for instance, women in patriarchal cultures. Popular belief under patriarchal cultures was that women were only equipped with capacities for domestic chores, nurturing children and caring for relatives. Patriarchal cultures held that the capacities of women were inherently limited to

carrying out domestic chores. They were seen as lacking the bodily and intellectual capacities needed for pursuing professions and occupations beyond the domestic sphere. Consequently, many girls and women subscribed to these patriarchal cultural beliefs. They unquestioningly embodied domestic identity, occupying the roles and positions assigned to them, so doing injustice to themselves and their own abilities. By abiding by the limits prescribed to them. By failing to explore and develop their potential. In the process, they also transferred this injustice to other girls and women by not supporting those who had ambitions and desires beyond the confining walls of their homes.

Just as the roles and identities of women are not immutably fixed, as we were made to believe under patriarchal cultures, the capacities and identity of the blind are not immutably fixed. Neither are the representations of the tools and technologies associated with blind people. Take, for instance, the cane. The cane is traditionally seen as a symbol representative of disabled blind identity, an identity that equates to inability to engage with free and independent movement. But I perceive the cane as a tool of independence and a symbol of freedom. When I am gripping my cane in my hands, I am embracing my freedom and independence in my palms. I am not holding on to my shame and embarrassment. In fact, I relinquish any shame and embarrassment in order to hold the tool of my independence, the symbol of my freedom. How many people can say that they hold their freedom in their own hands?

As I moved about while growing up, everyone I came across echoed the idea that to be blind means to be incapable of free and independent movement. But no one quite knew where this belief came from. No one knew where it began, and who originated such a notion. It was simply a conviction that was echoed by people around the world like parrots, a universal “fact”, an unalterable objective reality because the same belief was echoed by people across cultures and regions. Consequently, it made it incredibly difficult for people to avoid embodying the inherently incapacitated blind identity that is prescribed by traditional cultures. That is how most of the blind organisations around the world came to be founded within the limited philosophy of blindness, with their limited view of the capacities of the blind.

It was rooted and derived from popular traditional cultural belief in the inherent incapacity of the blind, which made them resistant to seeing blind people differently, as people invested with abilities beyond their

consciousness. It made them reluctant to adopt new skills and techniques with which blind people were not traditionally associated. This includes moving beyond traditional navigation or mobility and orientation techniques like that of short canes and sound-localisation training. It excludes use of the Long Cane and Echolocation, and techniques that exponentially expand the spatial perceptual capacities of blind and partially sighted populations.

For years, I unquestioningly subscribed to the popular cultural belief in the inherent incapacity of the blind. I not only came to embody disabled blind identity, but I also helped to sustain and propagate the traditional belief in blind incapacity. I was not only unjust to myself and my own abilities, but I was also unjust to other blind and partially sighted individuals, discouraging many blind friends from exploring capacities not traditionally associated with their bodies and from exploring techniques not sanctioned and supported by the traditional blind organisations.

Echolocation - what is it? Many animal species, such as bats and dolphins, use echolocation. Bats send out ultrasound, or extremely high frequency sounds beyond the range of human hearing, into the environment. Using the information that is contained within the returning echoes, they use this to detect and recognise things and to map the environments around them. Dolphins use infrasound, or extremely low frequency sounds, which are transmitted into the environment. They use the information that is contained in the returning echoes to perceive objects and navigate under water. They complement their limited vision with acoustic perception in the form of echolocation.

I not only use Echolocation, but also teach other hearing people, both blind and sighted, to learn Echolocation and to employ sounds within the range of human hearing to echolocate. Blind and partially sighted individuals are taught to produce sharp, crisp tongue clicks. The palatal clicks serve as the echo-signal. The information contained in the returning echoes of the palatal clicks are processed and interpreted by the echolocator to obtain spatial information for navigation in real-time.

How did I come to learn Echolocation? A few years back, I heard about a blind person who was teaching Echolocation in Belgium. I went to meet him. He gave me a couple of exercises to see if I could perceive the information correctly - which I easily did. I immediately understood the potential of Echolocation and how it can be developed into a complete

pedagogy to improve the navigation skills of blind and partially sighted populations. As a result, I embarked upon my own journey of teaching Echolocation with myself as the case study to develop an advanced navigation pedagogy involving the use of Echolocation and to improve and change the landscape of navigation for blind and partially sighted populations.

However, it was easier said than done. I went home and started experimenting, teaching myself basic exercises and acquainting myself with the principles of acoustics. What I realised over time, after months of practicing and using echolocation, is that the principle of echolocation is pretty simple. Any hearing person can easily learn to echolocate, especially in quiet environments with little distraction. But using echolocation for movement outside the home, in busy environments, with road traffic noise and distractions, requires a whole other level of skills. These skills involve progressing beyond Echolocation and learning to correctly interpret the acoustic information contained in the echoes.

The employment of Echolocation for practical use in daily navigation requires not only learning to trust our hearing. But to trust what we hear really is there out in the world; it is not a figment of our imagination. More importantly it requires the guts and daring to become comfortable with skills that are unusual and little known to the public.

So, learning to echolocate required me to constantly touch things I heard with Echolocation in order to confirm that what I heard really existed out there in the world. That way I gradually came to build trust in my hearing, to the point that my confidence in the information I obtained from hearing while echolocating is automatic and absolute. I echolocate and hear the information contained in the echoes. Today, I unquestioningly know they are there. Then I immediately put the information into use to guide my movements.

I think of Echolocation as an existential conversation, a conversation between existing beings. When I echolocate, I send out questions into the world; questions that ask, "Are you there?" That is how I detect if there are objects and obstacles around me. I ask, "Where are you?" That is how I obtain information about the distance and direction of the objects around me, to move towards something or to orient around it.

Then I ask, "What are you? Are you tall or short, are you wide or narrow?"

That is how I get information about the shapes and sizes of the things around me through the echoes of my palatal clicks. Further, I ask, "What are you made of?" That is how I get information about the nature of material things. That is how detailed the conversation is that I have with the objective world, through echolocation. Through Echolocation, the objective world discloses so much information about itself. The echoes in echolocation provide voice to the mute world, of the material world, to talk back to me. That is how echolocation enables the non-verbal objects to verbalise. With echolocation, you begin to realise how much the objective world has to tell - if we only provide the voice to it.

In giving voice to the objective world in the form of Echolocation, I also realise that information about the objective world has always been there. It was I who did not know the way to talk to it. I did not know that I had the power to communicate with the objective world, that I had the language to listen to the objective world. To allow the objective world to disclose to me what I needed in order to glean useful information that is essential for my freedom and independence.

Through Echolocation, I came to understand my body differently. From the popular belief in the inherent incapacity of the blind body to that of someone vested with unknown potential. Potential that is waiting to be uncovered, tapped, and used. It has completely transformed my perception of my own body and identity. I no longer see my body to be inherently incapacitated. I do not see myself as a disabled blind person with an identity that is immutable and unalterable.

Through neuroplasticity, neuroscience tells us that functions and structures of our brain are not immutably fixed. They can change through use and training. For all my life, I thought that the capacities of our bodies and senses were immutably fixed. I was taught to think so by the traditional cultural beliefs that masqueraded as the unalterable objective scientific truth. The limited view of blindness and the belief in the inherent incapacity of blind people of popular cultural belief came from times and societies before modern science discovered the incredible potential that our bodies and brains have. The incredible potential that is inherent to the biological systems - that manifests in the form of plasticity.

Thus popular cultural beliefs about disabilities and blindness are only stereotypes. They are not founded on unalterable immutable objective scientific truths. They have yet to be updated and upgraded. Organisations

and institutions founded on a limited view of blindness as inherent disability have to lay new foundations to their philosophies. Only that way can they catch up with current scientific understanding of the potential that is inherent to the human body, to provide services that are scientifically sound and up-to-date. To impart cutting-edge services that do justice to the functional capacities of the non-visual senses of blind people and those with varying visual abilities. Unquestioningly believing in the inherent incapacity of the blind that was echoed by popular culture, I did not know that I had potential capacities to expand and extend my sensory perceptions. Echolocation has amply disproved this.

Take, for instance, allothetic navigation, ability associated with vision. Allothetic navigation is the ability to use distal spatial information for movement, use of spatial cues that are beyond the reach of our gross body parts. It is popularly understood, even in scientific circles, that blind people cannot perform allothetic navigation. But echolocation can allow the user to obtain spatial cues over a long distance, even tens and hundreds of meters. For instance, you can hear a large building from hundreds of meters. You can hear a large tree from ten to twenty meters. Echolocation gives echolocators the ability to obtain spatial information from far beyond the reach of the longest usable cane, so enabling blind people to obtain distal spatial information to perform allothetic navigation and shattering the popular belief in the inherent incapacity of blind people to perform allothetic navigation.

Nothing is fixed in the universe, not even the fundamental particles that are the building blocks of all physical existence, neither the functions and structures of our brain, nor the world around us. This includes our identities and capacities. They are not immutably fixed. Today, I no longer have to subscribe to the belief in the inherent incapacity of the blind, and I no longer have to unquestioningly embody the immobile disabled blind identity that I abhor.

Believe me, what a relief that is!

Thomas teaching Echolocation in Mannheim in Germany and Shillong, India. And cycling in Belgium - by Echolocation, of course.



Ableism Under the Guise of Choice

Nancy Hansen

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I am a privileged disabled white straight female academic, very happily married with an excellent post in the Academy. I am a life-long disability rights advocate. I tell you this, not to boast, but rather to provide context. Despite all my advantage, I am very nervous.

We are living in an era when disabled people have more human rights protections than ever before. I live in a country (Canada) that, until recently, was recognized as being at the forefront of disability rights acquisition (Braswell, 2021). Yet, I have never felt more vulnerable as a disabled person. Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD) is controversial, particularly for disabled people, resulting from recent judicial decisions mandating wider access to medically assisted death (CanIII, 2019; SCC, 2015). The changes to MAiD legislation have greatly increased eligibility, decreased restrictions in that death need no longer be at hand, and individuals may want to die after a three-month waiting period (CACL, 2020).

An Act to amend the Criminal Code (medical assistance in dying)

As of March 17, 2021, persons who wish to receive MAiD must satisfy the following eligibility criteria:

- *be 18 years of age or older and have decision-making capacity*
- *be eligible for publicly funded health care services*
- *make a voluntary request that is not the result of external pressure*
- *give informed consent to receive MAiD, meaning that the person has consented to receiving MAiD after they have received all information needed to make this decision*
- *have a serious and incurable illness, disease or disability (excluding a mental illness until March 17, 2023)*
- *be in an advanced state of irreversible decline in capability*
- *have enduring and intolerable physical or psychological suffering that cannot be alleviated under conditions the person considers acceptable (Canada, n.d.)*

The revised law creates a two-track approach to procedural safeguards for medical practitioners to follow, based on whether or not a person's natural death is reasonably foreseeable. This new approach to safeguards will ensure that sufficient time and expertise are spent assessing MAiD requests from persons whose natural death is not reasonably foreseeable, while easing procedural safeguards in those cases where natural death is reasonably foreseeable.

This approach to safeguards differs from the previous law, under which only persons whose natural death was reasonably foreseeable were eligible for MAiD. New safeguards now apply to persons whose natural death is not reasonably foreseeable. These safeguards seek to address the diverse source of suffering and vulnerability that could potentially lead a person who is not nearing death to ask for MAiD.
(Canada, n.d.)

Bill C-7 (MAiD) legislation scares me, and questions my worth and value as a person. It is a real demonstration of my tenuous space and place in society — that can change in an instant. Ableism lies just below the surface.

Much of what is understood about disability in the broader society comes from myth, misconception, fear and ignorance. Disability is not a fate worse than death (Hansen, 2021). Why is it easier to access medical assistance in dying in many jurisdictions than it is to access supports and services to live with dignity? (Peters, 2020)

When can we move beyond understandings of disability that are associated with fear and loathing, utility and burden? Good Palliative seems to have been swept aside in favour of perceptions of economic utility. Although it is rarely, if ever, articulated as such.

There is irony here. “Equity, diversity and inclusion” is not a catch phrase. It takes dedicated hard work and a substantive shift in perspectives of difference and value.

Bill C-7 in its current form provides the framework for further legal challenges.

It is 2021. We must move beyond highly subjective, simplistic, one-dimensional understandings of disability.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Nancy Hansen, Ph. D. is a Professor and Director of the Interdisciplinary Master’s Program in Disability Studies at the University of Manitoba. She is a human geographer and her research interests in disability studies are varied, including disability in spaces of culture, education, and experiences of disabled and LGBTQ communities in post-conflict areas. She is co-editor of two disability history books.

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“Same Blood Same Bone Same Life”: Disability Advocacy in Mogadishu

Lynn Rose

Director of Research and Disability Studies, American University of Iraq, Sulaimani

The Center for Gender and Development Studies (CDGS), at the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani, works with disability advocacy organizations in recognition that social justice, and social injustice, is intersectional. In my role as, CGDS Director of Research and Disability Studies, I visited three disability advocacy organizations in Mogadishu, Somalia’s capital, during the third week of March, 2021. I met first with SODEN, the Somalia Organization for Disability Empowerment Network, which is composed of disabled and nondisabled people working together. Next, I visited Al Basir, the Mogadishu School for the Blind, a residential school which is run by blind people for blind people of all ages and at all educational levels. After that, I was hosted by the Somali Disability Network, an advocacy network of people with disabilities from several Somali organizations who focus on economic and legal reform. This is an overview of the situation of people with disabilities in Somalia and a summary of the three organizations. All three organizations are eager to work internationally; their contact information is below.

The proportion of people with disabilities is higher in the Global South in general, especially in war-torn areas, than it is in the developed world. In Somalia, and especially in Mogadishu, the proportion is especially high, and increases every day. Since 1991, Somalia has been involved in civil war and constant terrorism.



The photo shows a long beige building on a paved road. The building is riddled with bullet holes and is heavily damaged. There is laundry hanging from some of the several clothes lines. Two people sit on the sidewalk, under the shade of one of the

trees, and a red tuk-tuk is parked on the street under another tree. This is the former American Embassy.

The terrorist group Al-Shabaab has been very active since 2009, and there is a constant array of crimes associated with endemic poverty, such as organized street crime. “Bombings and shootings are still commonplace, but open warfare has ceased for now. A major shortage of food and thousands of refugees have put enormous stress on the few government offices that are able to function,” warns a travel site (<https://wikitravel.org/en/Mogadishu>). An Australian travel site (<https://www.smartraveller.gov.au/destinations/africa/somalia>) details some of the health risks: malaria, dengue, yellow fever, filariasis and leishmaniasis, polio, HIV/AIDS, cholera, hepatitis and meningococcal disease. “Medical facilities in Somalia are extremely limited,” the site warns.

A recent needs assessment by the Somali Disability Network found the following:

3.3 Lack of Access to Health Care

People With Disabilities and other Minority groups experience numerous difficulties when it comes to accessing health care services. These are some of the main impediments they face:

- Conflict and insecurity makes it difficult for aid agencies to access vulnerable communities.
- Lack of adequate information regarding the health status of minority groups.
- Lack of adequate transport infrastructure including land routes and water routes.
- Insufficient numbers of health centres including Mother & child Health and Tuberculosis clinics in minority areas.
- Minorities in urban areas observe that their concerns are not given much consideration when establishing health centres. They say that local authority staff do not report serious health conditions in camps and sites where most minorities reside.

The full needs assessment is available upon request from Somali Disability Network (SDN); contact details are below.



Here we see a brightly hand-painted advertisement for an all-purpose pharmacy which shows, clockwise from top right, a circumcision, a blood pressure measurement, an injection, a bullet wound being treated, a pack of tablets, two boxes of medicine, five capsules, and another injection. In the center, we see a wine glass with a black snake wrapped around its stem, peering into the red contents. These pharmacies, which are plentiful, seem to take the place of standardized healthcare facilities.

Life can be challenging for anyone in Somalia, and vulnerable people live precariously. The number of deaths of at-risk people—people with disabilities, women, the elderly, and orphans—is, unsurprisingly, very high.



A four-story building, labeled in faded letters as a bank, is shown here. It is missing its external walls and windows. A pile of rubble and some sparse foliage is in front of the ruined building. The ruined bank reflects the ruined financial situation. Very few people use cash, as there is too much danger of theft. Business is transacted over the phone.

Compounding these problems, Somalia witnesses rural-urban migration patterns along with many other African societies. Agriculture is increasingly difficult to maintain, which forces the rural population to become nomadic, but the land can only serve so many nomadic units. Environmental crises threaten both the agricultural and the traditional nomadic culture. When the grass dries and the water decreases, the nomadic units, organized as rivaling ancestral tribes, move on to more suitable areas. But because of an increasing shortage of such areas, tribal war results. Tribal war can also result from land-grabs by whatever clan has become the most powerful. The minority clans suffer from trauma and stigma. When the men are killed in such wars, any surviving women and their children have no option but to go to Mogadishu. There are camps for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and refugees, but the women who end up in the camps do not understand settled life, and receive no training. Without family except for their own children, they have no support, often going into town to beg, but of course they do not understand the urban system either, and they find stiff competition. The city infrastructure—or what there is of it—is barely equipped to serve the general population, and totally unequipped to handle people with special needs of any sort. Refugees and IDPs who arrive in Mogadishu and environs have no legal status, thus are ineligible for the sparse legal aid. Rape and other forms of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) is common. The

women who flee the camps to try surviving in the city live on less than 50 cents a day.



In this outdoor scene, on a dirt road, a gloved and fully covered woman—only her face is showing— holds up a sign in front of her with a telephone number on it. She is on the left in the photo; a man with glasses on the right holds a plastic bag and a phone in his left hand; he looks down at the phone. Between the two people is another woman, fully covered with only her face showing, looking off to her left. Behind them is corrugated metal serving as a wall. Most beggars sit along the street, holding their phone number up to passing cars. This Syrian woman was a newcomer, without a place in the street to claim.

In addition to the endemic problems of Somalia, such as poverty and land mines and civil wars, there has been a lot of looting and killing as a result of the COVID

lockdowns, which prevented people from earning enough money, such as by selling firewood, for basic support.



This photo shows a large quantity of firewood on the cement sidewalk of a dirt street. A faded pink peeling plaster wall is behind the wood. A man walks from the left side of the photo toward the right while a boy walks the other way. We see the back of a woman in a doorway behind the wood, on the right side of the photo. Most homes in Mogadishu do not have inside kitchens, so people cook over a wood fire outside their home.

One can also see a great deal of vibrancy, hope, abundance, and beauty in Mogadishu.



In an outdoor covered building, eight men stand, preparing fish; two hijabi women are seated. The long workbenches are covered in fish in various states of preparation. The ground is awash in blood and fish parts. This is the most bustling place in the city.

The disability advocacy organizations that I visited in Mogadishu —SODEN, Al Basir, and the Somali Disability Network (SDN), were astounding islands of determination within an environment more conducive to despair.

SODEN: “We ignore the challenges.”

SODEN serves people with disabilities of all types, and focuses on advocacy, education, and legal reform. I met with the Operations Manager, Relief Officer, Program Coordinator, and Deputy Chairman of SODEN on a sunny, warm March morning. After hearing about the cyclical, endemic, increasing, and heartbreaking problems, I asked how they found the courage to keep working amidst such challenges. The operations manager just shrugged: “We ignore the challenges,” he said.

Founded in 2011, this organization works in four areas, with the overall goal of accessibility. Advocacy and human rights is their main focus, followed by capacity building, legal rights, and poverty relief. They fight for accessible public education institutions and public places such as hotels, some of which have been made accessible as a result. They work for accessibility with Open The Door, another advocacy organization. They pressure the government to implement the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which was signed in 2019, focusing on Article 3, which talks about accessibility in private and public spaces. They are pressuring the government to finalize the Disability Act, which has gone through three stages of readings. They are still waiting for

Parliament to pass it. As for poverty relief and humanitarian work, the organization distributes wheelchairs and canes, especially to the IDP communities. This World Disability Day 2021, they were able to distribute white canes to 45 blind people.

SODEN carries out capacity building by empowering people with disabilities, teaching them their rights, such as how to ask for reasonable accommodation. They help people to seek scholarships, and they support schools for the blind and schools for the deaf, of which there are four, altogether, in all of Somalia. They also provide and facilitate vocational training for adults: literacy, tailoring, computers, cooking, mobile repair, and manual skills, and they train trainers.

In addition, they have plans for radio programs to talk about community rights and to sponsor dialogues with politicians. They hope to start a program of sports, including football, for disabled youth. The members of SODEN are unfazed by the barriers. "Within ten years, we will do this."

SODEN is trying to connect with international disability networks. Information about the organization is available on their website: <https://www.somalidisability.org>, and they are also available by email: Soden@somali.disability.org Several of the members are fluent in English.



Five people, all wearing masks, stand outside on pavement in front of some bushes. There are three men, one of whom holds a white cane and wears dark glasses, and two women, both in hijab. This is the SODEN staff, plus the author.

Al Basir School for the Blind: “We have to rely on miracles until we don’t need them anymore.”

Members of SODEN told me that Al Basir School for the Blind was a center for education and advocacy, carried out entirely by blind people, and they recommended that I visit. I was very happy to meet with the administrators and many of the students. “We have to rely on miracles until we don’t need them anymore,” says Mr Ismail Ali, the principal of Al Basir School for the Blind. Mr Ismail gave me an overview of the history of the school, after which all of the students introduced themselves briefly, and then I met with the board members.

Before the founding of this school, there was no systematic education for blind students in Somalia. Mr Ismail studied at the Nairobi Blind School until 2010, when it closed because of interference from Al Shabaab. He returned to Mogadishu and was part of the impetus for founding Al Basir in 2011. Now the school’s principal, he is also an advocate and a role model, working toward the day when human rights will replace miracles.

Mr Ismail is not deterred by Somalia’s many challenges. He seeks to resolve underlying causes of misery for people with disabilities who live there. As mentioned, Somalia is among the most dangerous places in the world due to poverty, terrorism, and political unrest, and environmental disasters disrupt the stability of the outlying areas, driving many people, especially people with disabilities, to the capital city. Disabled women are especially vulnerable, especially to SGBV, and because of this, Mr Ismail goes beyond teaching to advocating for inclusive education, and he goes beyond supporting the immediate plight of women to advocate for long term change, for example by speaking out against Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). He also teaches blind people how to navigate with a cane so that they can leave the confines of their homes.

The accomplishments of Al Basir were instrumental in the Education Department in Somalia’s response to the needs of blind students by providing Braille exams. The 2020 group, the fifth class from the nominee’s school, completed their exams in Braille. Without this school, there would be few if any blind students graduating, and no need for Braille.

Al Basir is residential: students sleep two to a bed in dormitories. Everyone eats together, as family. All of the teachers work on wages so low and infrequent that they can be considered volunteers; at my visit, they had received no wages (which would have been \$150/month) for seven months. Unsurprisingly, the teachers are transient. Students come from all over Somalia, or are sometimes dropped off by their parents, as was the case with two small boys, brothers, whose parents had no resources for them. When I visited, there were 60 students in residence. The number fluctuates. No one is turned away. The rent for the building is paid for by donations, most of which come from the board members and from the Somali diaspora.

The Principal of Al Basir, Mr Ismail Ali, was named a 2021 honoree of the D-30 Disability Impact list: <https://auis.edu.krd/CGDS/blog/mr-ismail-ahmed-ali-named-2021-honoree-d-30-disability-impact-list>.

The directors of Al Basir would very much like to be in contact with other disability empowerment organizations, and they welcome any international contact. Mr Ismail is available by email and on WhatsApp (his English is fluent):

Ismailahmedali26@gmail.com. + 252 0615884760 There is also a short video on the students taking their first Braille exams:

<https://www.voanews.com/episode/blind-students-somalia-take-first-national-exams-braille-4690591>



Four people—two men wearing dark glasses and two women wearing hijab, stand on a tiled floor against a turquoise wall. All four wear masks. Three of the four people hold white canes. This is some of the staff of Al Basir School for the Blind, plus the author.

The Somali Disability Network: “Same blood same bone same life.”

The people at Al Basir recommended that I visit the Somali Disability Network, who graciously hosted me the following day. The Somali Disability Network is an umbrella

organization of 14 disability advocacy organizations. Formed in November 2020, they join forces to conduct workshops, build capacity, and advocate for the rights of people with disabilities. Individual organizations, when they are scattered, are not as effective as the collective. “Because we are united, we are stronger, and the base of our morale is high,” the network’s Chairman told me. Working in larger numbers also allows more visibility, and has facilitated a small amount of support from the UN. Specifically, the Somali Disability Network would like to see the principles of the UNCRPD implemented. They also recognize that research is needed, and that it is more possible to carry out under an umbrella of cooperation. People with psychiatric disabilities, of whom there are many, are not part of the organization, though the network members recognize the discrimination. People with mental illness are not recognized by the government as disabled, and, as almost everywhere in the world, there is a lot of stigma against mental illness. This organization includes the oldest disabled person in Somalia, Mr Abdu Omar, who has been an advocate of disabled people since 1983.

As for economic empowerment, they believe that people with disabilities must gain confidence, and that role models are important, especially those of disabled people who have jobs. They also believe that the government should initiate a quota system, as it has (30%) for women. They support education, including university education, reaching out to the villages. They distribute goods when they are able to, hold monthly meetings, and celebrate International Disability Day.

A board member who devotes herself to disabled women’s issues recognizes the many challenges and is determined to overcome them with her outspoken sense of justice. Women with disabilities, she points out, have an especially hard time. She seeks to spread awareness about the rights of women with disabilities through training, even though education is commonly seen as a waste of time for disabled women. She aims to be involved with all 35 schools controlled by the government in order to advocate for equitable education.

Like the other organizations, the members of the Somali Disability Network simply persist in doing the right thing against the formidable challenges. They do not understand why people with disabilities should be discriminated against. All people, says the organization's president, are essentially the same—men and women, disabled and nondisabled: “We all have the same blood, same bone, same life.” Indeed, Somalia has an advantage over other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa in that people with Albinism are safe here. Indeed, I saw Albino people relaxing with their friends in the Bazaar, at the beach, and downtown. In neighboring countries, they are deeply persecuted, their body parts sought as magico-medicinal ingredients.

This organization is eager to reach out to international organizations, especially for cooperation on doing research about PWD. “We welcome 100% anyone who tries to help.” Their contact information is below; they are fluent in English.

<https://sdn.org.so>

Email: Somali.disability.network@gmail.com or info@sdn.org.so

Mobile: +252 615841666 / +252 615082492



Nine people—seven men and two women in hijab—stand behind a long table. Everyone wears masks. Five people hold canes or crutches; one man uses a wheelchair. These are the members of the Somali Disability Network, plus the author.

Sign Language, Deafness and Exclusion in Renaissance England.

by Rosamund Oates

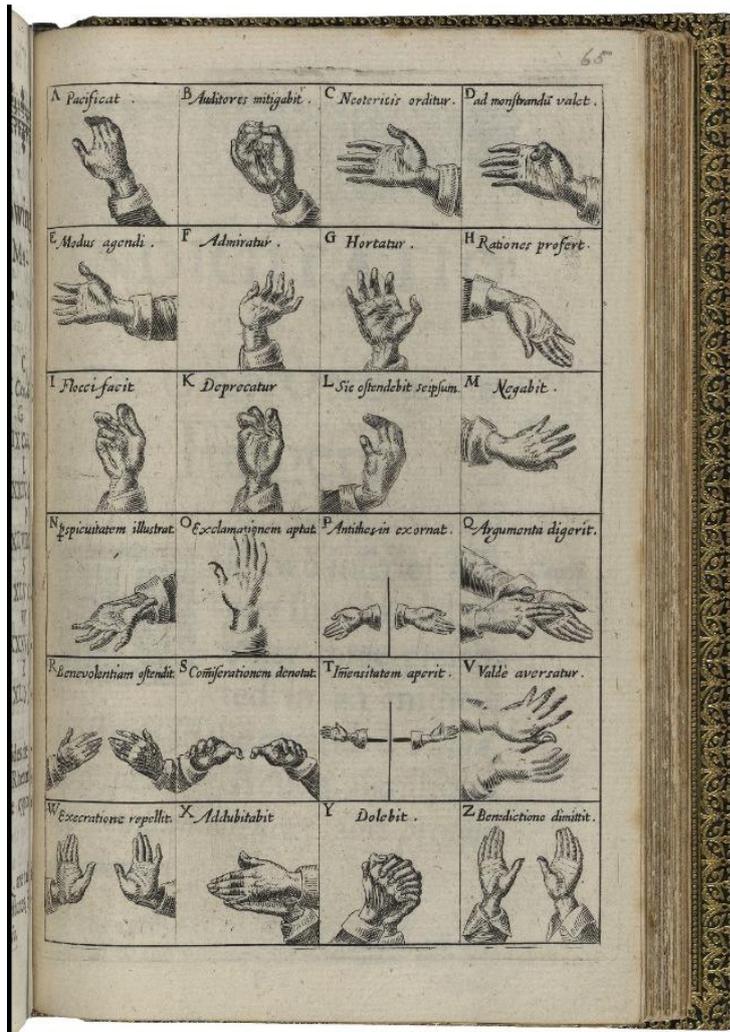
Ros is a Reader / Associate Professor in Early Modern History at Manchester Metropolitan University. Her expertise is in early modern culture, and she has recently been awarded a Leverhulme Fellowship to work on the project: 'Silent Histories: Deafness and Hearing Loss in Early Modern England'. She leads an interdisciplinary research cluster, 'Cultures of Disability'. Recent publications include: 'Speaking in Hands: Early Modern Preaching and Signed Languages for the Deaf', *Past and Present*, ed. with J. Purdy, *Communities of Print: Readers and Their Books in Early Modern Europe* (Brill, 2022) and *Moderate Radical: Tobie Matthew and the English Reformation* (Oxford, 2018).



At first sight it seems that prelingually deaf people, and those who lost the ability to speak vocally, were condemned to exclusion and marginalisation in Renaissance Europe. In 17th-century England, a lawyer put it like this: “prelingually deaf people were ‘looked upon as misprisons in nature, and wanting *speech*, are reckoned little better than *dumb animals*’.” As Elizabeth Bearden has written in her magnificent study, *Monstrous Kinds*: ‘linguistic capacity was a benchmark for personhood’ in much of Western Europe.¹

¹ Throughout I use the term ‘deaf’ rather than ‘Deaf’ because in the renaissance period the contemporary focus was on the ‘audiological condition of not hearing’, with limited evidence of any shared Deaf culture beyond the use of manual signs. However, I would appreciate the thoughts of DHA members on this question! Carol A Padden and Tom Humphries, *Deaf in America: Voices from a Culture* (1988), pp.2-4.

My research into deafness in renaissance England, however, suggests a more nuanced approach to speech and deafness than often portrayed in contemporary legal and literary sources. Despite the apparent restrictions in Tudor and Stuart England, prelingually deaf men and women married, made wills, inherited property, raised families and held down jobs. Often, they were so integrated into their local communities, that their deafness or hearing loss was rarely – if ever – mentioned. Instead, these men and women, their families and friends (hearing and deaf) communicated using manual signs, which contemporaries saw as a legal, and eloquent, form of speech.



John Bulwer, *Chirologia* (1644). © Folger Shakespeare Library (CC BY-SA 4.0)

Renaissance Europe inherited a legal tradition which portrayed prelingually deaf people – known by contemporaries as ‘deaf and dumb’ - as legally incapable. This was further reflected in medical and anatomical texts. Aristotle, for example, argued that since hearing was the chief sense of learning, deaf people were less clever than blind people. Other authors argued that speech was a prerequisite for abstract thought. This led to the belief that deaf people could not understand the world around them and therefore they could not be held responsible for their actions (much like an infant or someone deemed ‘insane’). In a handbook for magistrates from the 17th century, a legal scholar, Michael Dalton, advised Justices of the Peace that if ‘a

man born deaf and dumb killeth another, that is no felony, for he cannot know whether he did evil or no'. It was the same reasoning that meant in 16th and 17th century England, prelingually deaf people were ostensibly barred from marriage (they could not express consent vocally), from receiving sacraments in Church (they could not express their understanding of the faith in speech) and from writing a will.

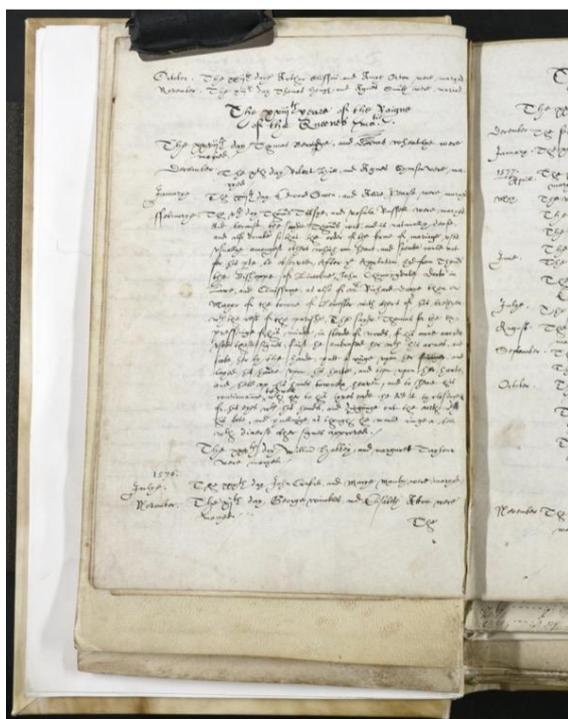


Magnus Hundt, *Antropologium de hominis dignitate* (Leipzig, 1501). Wellcome Institute, U.K Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0).

The reality, however, for many prelingually deaf people, was very different. The exclusionary perceptions of deafness, speech and reason were challenged by a range of legal, medical and theological writers. At the same time as Michael Dalton was writing, an English anatomist, Helikiah Croke, argued that: 'nature hath armed a Man, although he be deaf, with Reason and Understanding for Invention'. In this period Protestant and Catholic ministers started to argue that deaf people were saved by God – even if they couldn't hear the service or sermon. As Martin Luther concluded in 1519, 'if preaching does not infuse the spirit, then he who hears, does not differ at all from one who is deaf'. And through the 16th and 17th centuries,

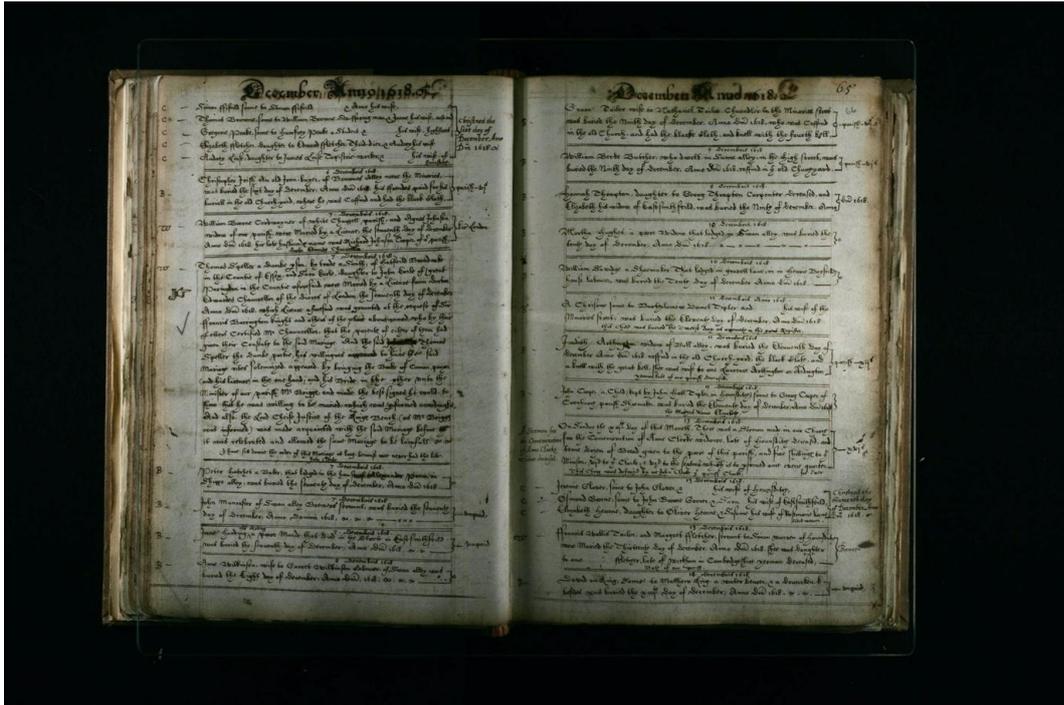
Churches in England, Ireland, New England and across Europe made accommodations to allow deaf people to take part in their services.

This recognition was achieved when contemporaries realised that deaf people *could* express themselves, thereby demonstrating their understanding of the world . Sometimes, this was through vocal speech but increasingly it was through the use of manual signs. In 16th-century England, Protestant preachers argued that sign languages were *more* eloquent than vocal speech, allowing people to express divine mysteries that could not be captured in mere words. Perhaps, therefore, it is unsurprising that it was the Church in England that was at the forefront of the legal recognition of manual signs as a valid form of speech. Marriage ceremonies were a place where the spiritual and secular collided: it was a legal contract and in pre-civil war England almost all marriages took place in the Church of England. The most well-known sign language marriage took place in Elizabethan Leicester. The local bishop, the bishop's legal advisor, and Leicester's mayor were asked to judge whether the prelingually deaf man, Thomas Tilsey, could legally consent to get married. Following a consultation with Tilsey's neighbours and local parishioners, it was agreed that Tilsey could marry Ursula Russel using a form of sign language which was recorded at length by the churchwardens. They wrote that 'for expressing of his mind, instead of words, of his own accord, [Thomas] used these signs :first he embraced her [Ursula] with his arms, and took her by the hand, put a ring upon her finger and laid his hand upon his heart and then upon her heart, and held up his hands towards heaven, and to show his continuance to dwell with her to his life's end, he did it by closing of his eyes with his hands and digging out the earth with his foot, and pulling as though he would ring a bell, with diverse other signs approved'.



Parish Register of St Martin's Leicester, DE 1564/5 © Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland.

Nor was Thomas Tilsey's marriage unique: unusual, but not unique. Throughout the 16th and 17th centuries, deaf men and women got married in the Church of England. Often, though not always, they were granted special licenses by the local bishop. In 1618, a deaf man, Thomas Speller, married Sara Earl in central London, with the churchwardens noting that 'we never had the like before'. In 1631, another prelingually deaf man, George Blunt of Bridgewater in Somerset, was granted a license to marry a widow, Christobel Cox, and a few years later, both of the prelingually deaf brothers, Edward and William Gostwick, got married, with Edward marrying Mary Lytton, a 'Lady of a great and prudent family'.



Parish Records of St Botolph's Aldersgate 1558-1625, © London Metropolitan Archives U.K.

By 1624 – only a few years after Michael Dalton told Justices of the Peace that prelingually deaf people were to be treated like infants – manual signs were accepted as a legally-valid form of speech and as evidence that deaf people were rational. The leading Church of England lawyer, Henry Swinburne, advised clergy that 'that which cannot be expressed in words may be declared in signs' and therefore 'they which be dumb and cannot speak, may lawfully contract matrimony by signs, which marriage is lawful, and availeth not only before God, but before the Church'.

This is not to suggest that the renaissance period was a golden age for deaf men and women, but instead offers a more nuanced reading of the literary and legal texts which suggest the complete exclusion of prelingually deaf people. Instead, as my research has shown, those same people were part of their communities, often using their natural language, sign, to express their beliefs, hopes and fears and to assert their legal and spiritual personhood.

In Search of Community and Pedagogy: Compiling a Crip COVID 19 Syllabus

by Jiya Pandya, Princeton University



In the spring of 2021, a full year into Zoom University, I was feeling the strain of having to explain to colleagues and faculty around me that they needed to think about and provide various modes of access to peers and students that were obvious and necessary amidst a global pandemic. At the same time, I was feeling optimistic about my Gender and Sexuality studies classroom and our collective learning about the longer genealogies of race, medicine, and welfare that had led to the moment we were witnessing. I was trying to find ways to remind myself that, despite the absence of a significant crip community in my workspace, I was part of a broader set of experiences, and that these experiences were central to my political and pedagogical aims. What emerged from this was the [#CripCOVIDSyllabus](#), which became a way for me to navigate my own isolation, provide resources to students who might be feeling similarly, and to share with them the centrality of crip experience, experimentation, and representation to pandemic life.

As a way to find community from a distance, compiling information on crip, mad, ill, fat, and disabled thinking about the pandemic was both reassuring and challenging. I felt seen and heard in other people's words and images in ways that I was missing in my immediate surroundings. For instance, the [Creaky Joints Twitter chat](#) on racial justice protests and accessibility spoke to my own tension between anger and precarity last summer. Oaklee Thiele's [My Dearest Friends Project on Instagram](#) and the zine [Three Ways of Unpeeling Time](#) put together by Kim Fernandes, Riddhi

Dastidar, Janani Vaidya, Sonaksha Iyengar, and Shazia Salam offered solace by making relevant and personal conceptualizations I encountered largely in academic texts. The process of crowdsourcing for the syllabus itself introduced me to a wide network on Disability twitter that was in constant conversation about crip pandemic life and led me to connect with wonderful people like [Áine Kelly-Costello to discuss long-COVID and our changing relationships to disability](#).

Simultaneously, I was reminded of and introduced to epistemologies and methodologies I had not previously been intentional about centering. [Finn Gardiner](#), [Kitty Striker](#), and [Claudia Cortese](#)'s articles on the linkages between fatphobia, triage, eugenics, and Social Darwinism drove home the extent to which fatness can feel disabling and the complicated feelings this generates in conversations about vaccine access. Salonee Bhaman, Rachel Kuo, Matilda Sabal, Vivian Shaw, and Tiffany Diane Tso put together a beautiful booklet called [Asian American Feminist Antibodies {care in the time of coronavirus}](#) which provided materials like mutual aid anti-racist donation lists, a note to neighbors, and community care worksheets that I printed and used in my immediate network when I did not have the words to explain what I needed and what I had to give. Melissa Kapadia's conceptualization of "[illness methodology](#)" and Aimi Hamraie's [Accessible Teaching](#) document shaped my own research and pedagogical practices during the pandemic, holding me accountable in tangible ways to the values I was professing.

As a pedagogical exercise, the syllabus allowed me to fill gaps in the limited discussions of disability we were having in the classroom, pushing the point that disability was an expansive and complex category and that ableism was an ever-present axis of power. When I first taught with it last spring, I encouraged my students to choose four pieces from one or multiple thematic sections of the syllabus, mixing media so as to make sure they engaged with spoken and visual communications. Ideally, they had to read two articles, listen to one podcast (or watch one video), and look through one social media post on a platform of their choosing. Once in class, they presented about what they had engaged with to the rest of the group. This system worked well, and we had a robust conversation about access needs in cross-disability spaces, the longer colonial history of eugenics and ableism, problems with disability identity as a framework, and intersectional logics of power as essential to crip analysis. Their lecture reading for the week included selections from Alison Kafer's *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, and we were able to draw connections between her political-relational model and its applications to the pandemic where disability is ever-present even as disabled people are rendered disposable. While this assignment was useful for the aims I had set out to accomplish, I created this syllabus for educators to use as they please, whether it acts as an archive from which to source specific pieces for a course or enables small-group modes of learning. I am sure there are many other pedagogical uses and would be curious to learn from those as well.

Even as it provided me value this past year, the #CripCOVID19Syllabus is only one of the many archives centering disability experience and representation that folks have worked so hard on this past year. [Daisy Holder](#) is in the midst of collection work for her Covid Disability Archive which promises to have so much texture and nuance

for quotidian disabled life. Alice Wong's [Disability Visibility Project](#), from where I started compiling this syllabus, is a treasure-trove of fierce, critical, prescient writing and thinking on disability, COVID, and activism. NYU's Center for Disability Studies has a well-organized and well-resourced collection being put together by faculty and graduate students, [which itself links](#) to a variety of other archives. One place to find information on all these various collections is Aimi Hamraie's [Twitter thread on COVID-related disability compilations](#).

As such, this syllabus aims to be one of many documents which provide lasting testament to the myriad forms of crip, disabled, mad, fat, and ill worldmaking in the face of situational and systemic crises. It is clear that such witnessing is essential, not only for our communities, but also for those that stand in solidarity with us, care for us, and learn from us. If you encounter or use this compilation for any reason, I hope it provides a sense of collectivity and helps in educating those around you about disabled survivance, resistance, and liberation.

Book Review

Living, Learning and Working: Deaf Life in Lancashire in 1901 *by Martin Atherton*

Academic historians are all too familiar with the well-trodden path of securing a book contract with a mainstream press. The outcome can be highly satisfying, but the journey can have its frustrations. Then there are questions about how well your book is publicised and marketed. And the price, often dictated by focus on academic libraries where a small number of books might serve a substantial number of readers over the years, is pitched so that it is beyond the budget of many prospective individual purchasers. There are, of course, always exceptions to such outcomes, but ...

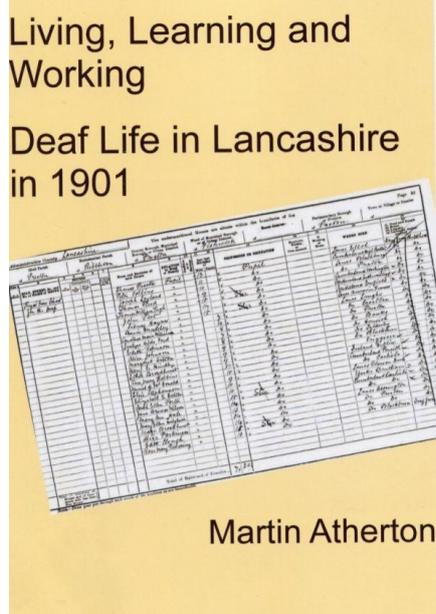
Living, Learning and Working has followed a different path. Dr Martin Atherton retired recently from Central Lancashire University and he has been using his new-found freedom to compile a book that arises from his training as an historian of deaf history and his role as a lecturer in deaf studies – and also through his passion for his home locality in the large county of Lancashire in the northwest of England. His research has been a personal project that he has been keen to bring to an early conclusion and he has therefore elected to self-publish, a route that has given him ongoing control of his work, and publication in super-quick time.

The basis of his research is data contained in the 1901 England & Wales census, a decennial exercise that gathers data from every household in these two countries (and with a similar, parallel exercise being conducted in Ireland and Scotland). The study is focussed on Lancashire, but, as Atherton explains, the county has geographical boundaries that have not only changed over time under different regimes of administration, but with boundaries that have varied under differing

definitions. This gives a sense of the challenges of undertaking a wholly-inclusive survey.

Add to the mix the differing circumstances and definitions of hearing loss, how deafness was recorded by enumerators, or not recorded if information on hearing impairment of a family member was withheld by household heads, and how deafness itself was variously categorised, means that historians of disability and deafness will immediately be conscious of the challenges in tracing a precise historical picture. Atherton acknowledges this unsolvable conundrum, writing that, 'As the various Registrars General note in their reports on the decennial censuses, defining deafness was a very subjective exercise that relied solely on each individual's personal perception and experience and so the reported numbers were accepted as inaccurate' (p. 9). However, Atherton goes some way to achieving a fairly realistic overview by looking specifically at reconstructing lives of non-verbal deaf people, or, in the language of 120 years ago, used in the census, 'the deaf and dumb'.

Living, Learning and Working is structured around seven chapters. The first chapter discusses the problem of identifying people with hearing loss in the census returns, despite this being a quite specific topic of enquiry in the gathering of the census data. Chapter two then explores the county of Lancashire; in doing so it shows that this large county did not only consist of dreary mill towns of the booming textile industry, but also had large cities (Liverpool, Manchester and Salford), diverse industries, rural hinterlands of fertile agricultural production but also windswept hills and moors, coastal communities that developed as seaside playgrounds (notably Blackpool), and had a population that was constantly changing through in-migration but also out migration. So the scene is set for the three themes of life, education and employment that are the dominant focus of Atherton's research.



The 'Living' section of the book begins as a statistical and demographic study of the 1901 census. From the official census report, published after the enumerators had

done their work and their house-by-house surveys had been evaluated on a national basis across England and Wales, general trends across Lancashire are juxtaposed against data specifically on people entered as 'deaf and dumb'. Atherton is candid that much of his analysis involves elements of speculation; we should not be fazed by this because the report itself, especially where it discusses sensory impairment, employed elements of judgement and conjecture. One finding was a lack of social networks among adult 'deaf and dumb' people and this is given as a probable reason for modest rates of marriage. Additionally, we know that in certain quarters deaf-to-deaf marriage was discouraged. However, the figures for 'deaf and dumb' women in employment compare well with the rates for women generally, perhaps because of the convention that women should discontinue work upon marriage. 'Living' moves, in its latter pages, from demographic quantitative data to some qualitative individual cases and this gives insight to the importance of living and environmental conditions that might have a bearing on the likes of congenital deafness.

Socialisation among deaf people was at its most vibrant among young people because many of them spent their formative years in residential deaf schools. The next section on 'education' is therefore a key theme. Between deaf people, school offered the greatest opportunity for socialisation, 358 'deaf' young people being resident at Lancashire's three deaf schools in 1901. Their experience was, however, heavily impacted by the onslaught of oralism following the infamous 1880 Congress that advocated the banning of signing in favour of articulation, and by the 1893 Act that introduced compulsory education for deaf (and blind) children up to the age of sixteen. The linguistic evangelism of the oralists was nonetheless impeded by the reality of the needs of 'deaf and dumb' students and signing prevailed beside the oralist crusade during this period.

Post-schooling meant entering the world of work. Atherton cites Joseph Griffin and Charles Jenkins, two school pupils who were placed with a stonemason and not returned to their parents who were considered problematic. Was this intervention beneficial, did the lads have any say in the matter, and what does the 1911 census let us know about the longer term outcome? In the 1901 census there were 1,822 deaf people (990 males and 832 females) classed as of working age and therefore mostly eligible for employment. In exploring the 'deaf and dumb' in work, Atherton shows the role of deaf schools in facilitating introduction of teenage students to apprenticeships and trades, making use of the likes of networks of philanthropic supporters of deaf organisations. While acknowledging that not all 'deaf and dumb' students graduated to regular employment, he highlights several successes into skilled trades ranging from textiles to shoe manufacturing, metal trades, bookbinding and numerous others such as glass manufacture in the town of St Helens. The deaf schools provided socialisation among 'deaf and dumb' signing young people that was largely disrupted when they attained sixteen years of age (or sooner), giving rise to the question of 'What happened next?' By tracing some of these students in 1901, and in some cases following them up in the 1911 census, insight to individuals, whose paper trail is otherwise weak or non-existent, is established. This is pursued further in the penultimate chapter which uses the town of Preston as a case study.

The numbers of 'deaf and dumb' in Preston are clearly delineated into two groups because of the presence of one of Lancashire's three schools for deaf children, the Royal Cross School. From over 2,000 'deaf and dumb' in Lancashire, there were 102 individuals in Preston – sixty-seven in the school, two in the workhouse, and thirty-three 'in the community'. Royal Cross School is examined in detail, then the lives of 'the thirty-three' are traced, particularly in the sphere of employment. Of Preston, Atherton concludes that 'there were many worse places ['deaf and dumb' people] could have found themselves in 1901' (p. 188). Eighty-four percent of Preston's 'deaf and dumb' were in employment compared to fifty-five percent across England and Wales, and many of these, male and female, were in skilled or semi-skilled occupations such as textiles, printing, cabinet making and cobbling. Some occupations are suggestive of benefits having resulted from industrial training offered by deaf schools, but Atherton proposes that in adulthood 'deaf and dumb' people were dispersed across the community with little opportunity to socialise with their deaf peers. However, deaf people (differing modes of communication aside) have challenged notions of a 'deaf community' and it is reasonable to suspect that 'deaf and dumb' people who were well integrated into outside employment opportunities may have had perfectly satisfactory circles within hearing society, and although few of the Preston sample married, communication hurdles were not so difficult to overcome.

Atherton concludes his book by drawing some comparisons between 1901 and the early twenty-first century. In 1901, the area had industries such as textiles, coal mining, paper production and rope making, all of which disappeared during the latter twentieth century. Deaf schools that provided industrial training also disappeared, while by the 1970s outdoor deaf missionaries were replaced by local government social workers. Within the deaf world, education mostly favoured oralism while welfare was promoted by using medical models of 'cure', even when deaf people increasingly asserted themselves through a cultural identity. While in recent times there have been positive advances in communication technology, and BSL (British Sign Language) has enjoyed an increased profile, Atherton concludes that '... life has certainly not improved since 1901 and deaf people are still seen as incomplete at best and formally defined as disabled at worst.' (p. 203)

This study shows the substantial amount of information on deaf experience that can be gleaned from the decennial census enumerators' returns and the post-census formal analysis and report. But it also highlights that the census fails to deliver comprehensively on individual lives (albeit not the purpose of the census) so that we are left to indulge in speculation where the census, and other sources, leave unanswered questions. Nevertheless, *Living, Learning and Working* addresses a range of questions while also making clear the challenges of reconstructing deaf lives 120 years ago, - and the challenges facing deaf people at the dawn of the twenty-first century which, the author asserts, are not affirmed by a century of 'progress'.

Living, Learning and Working can be purchased directly from Martin Atherton: martinatherton26@gmail.com, cost £10 UK, €20 Europe, \$22 USA and Rest of the World, all including postage.

DHA Awards

DHA Conference Award Winners – Fall 2021



Sam Brady.



Yakov Ellenbogen

The Disability History Association is pleased to announce the two winners of the Fall 2021 Conference Award: Sam Brady and Yakov Ellenbogen. Sam Brady presented a paper entitled “A small leap for disabled man’: The athlete-led evolution of the sports wheelchair and adaptive sports” at the British Society for Sport in History conference in August 2021, where it won the inaugural Sporting Inequalities Prize for the best paper on an under-researched area of sport history. Yakov will be presenting a paper entitled "Cut Off from His People? Circumcision, Disability and Marginality in Medieval Ashkenaz” at the American Jewish Studies conference in December. Congratulations to Sam and Yakov! Sam’s conference report appears below, and Yakov’s will appear in a future issue of the newsletter. Both reports will also appear on the DHA website.

‘A small leap for disabled man’: The athlete led evolution of the sports wheelchair and adaptive sports

Samuel Brady, University of Glasgow

After attending a year and half of Zoom-based talks and virtual conferences, I was delighted to be able to present in-person at the British Society of Sports History annual conference on 26 and 27 August 2021. Held at St Mary’s University in Twickenham, London, this was an open-themed conference with speakers covering a variety of topics around sport, physical recreation and culture from a historical perspective. The Disability History Association Conference Award helped in covering my travel, accommodation and attendance costs for this conference – as originally my excitement for an in-person conference was dulled by the reminder of their associated expenses!

My paper was entitled “‘A small leap for disabled man’: The athlete led evolution of the sports wheelchair and adaptive sports” and was based on my PhD research into the social, political and technological history of the sporting wheelchair, undertaken as a joint collaboration between the University of Glasgow and the National Paralympic Heritage Trust. My research concerns the evolution of sports-dedicated wheelchairs as distinct technical objects separate from medicalised or everyday wheelchairs. In doing so, this history explores the athletes who modified their hospital wheelchairs for competitive advantages, establishing a cottage industry which made and sold specialised sports wheelchairs, and the growing professionalism which separated Paralympic sport from the medical institution. The paper presented at this conference explored the early sections of my research, briefly detailing the origins of user-customised wheelchairs, and the ways athletes used this to challenge the rules of the games themselves, which were initially designed by able-bodied doctors and physicians.

The quote in the title of the paper – ‘A small leap for disabled man’ – was a line taken from one of the oral history interviews I have conducted during my PhD. I felt it encapsulated how I currently understand the history of sports wheelchairs: devices initially made by and for disabled people, in order to improve technologically-stagnant medicalised wheelchairs and advance wheelchair sports as an athletic endeavour. Wheelchair-based sport originated as a new form of rehabilitation after World War II, and the rules of the sport were designed by medical professionals accordingly. Many athletes, however, were keen to move these sports beyond the control of the medical institution. Technological innovation acted as a site of resistance for these athletes, as increasingly specialised wheelchairs enabled improved performance, which in turn facilitated the shift away from sport as only a means of rehabilitation. Furthermore, as athletes modified their wheelchairs for sport, making them faster, lighter and more responsive, they found these changes also benefited everyday wheelchair use, leading to improved lightweight everyday wheelchairs.

This paper was a new piece of writing, developed alongside some initial chapter writing for my PhD. The paper utilised a mixture of quotations from my oral histories and images gathered during my research. Utilising oral histories in this research has been vital in order to represent the experiences and perspectives of these individuals, as this historical narrative is under-represented in broader sporting and disability history.

The conference was a fantastic opportunity to meet other academics and independent researchers in the history of sport, and to present my research to a new audience. My paper was well received, and I was fortunate enough to receive the conference's 'Sporting Inequality' Award. This award is designed for any research into under-developed areas within sports history, primarily around topics of gender, sexuality, race and disability. As the only paper concerning adaptive, para or disabled sport, I feel honoured to have received this award, particularly given the quality of other papers. As a recipient of the award, I have been invited to publish my paper in the society's journal. I hope this opportunity will broaden the awareness of this research and this historical narrative more generally. Furthermore, I had a fantastic social experience at the conference, finally meeting in person other PhD students I had made contact with during the pandemic, as well as getting the opportunity to explore a part of London that was new to me.

Without the financial assistance given by the Disability History Association, I wouldn't have been able to cover the costs of this conference, and for their support I am very grateful. This conference was a fantastic opportunity, and I hope it helped to emphasise the importance of disability history within other fields, such as the history of sport.

Forthcoming! DHA Public Disability History Award

The next DHA Public Disability History Award competition will be announced shortly. Check in on the DHA website to obtain full details once they are posted.

http://dishist.org/?page_id=1230

The basics are, however, as follows:

WHAT - The Disability History Association (DHA) is excited to announce it will soon be accepting applications for the second biennial (every two years) award that recognizes public disability history projects. This award spotlights projects that exemplify DHA's mission to foster expansive historical studies of disability and disabled people. This award recognizes excellent disability history work intended primarily for broad audiences (not academic audiences) and is meant to further the project's reach and goals.

AWARD AMOUNT - \$200 US

PROJECT TYPES - The project may take various forms, including—but not limited to—publications, documentary films, digital projects, exhibitions, or public programs such as an educational workshop on disability history.

Disability History Association - Outstanding Article / Book Chapter Award, 2022

The Disability History Association (DHA) promotes the relevance of disability to broader historical enquiry and facilitates research, conference travel, and publication for scholars engaged in any field of disability history.

The Disability History Association takes pleasure in inviting entries for the Article / Book Chapter Award, part of its 11th Annual Outstanding Publication Award that also includes a separate Book Award.

In calling for article and edited collection book chapter submissions for the 2022 award, the award committee welcomes entries that feature new and original history of disability scholarship. To be considered, submissions **MUST** have significant historical content.

The award is open to authors writing across all geographic areas and time periods. The publication must be in English, and with first publication taking place between January 1 and December 31, 2021. We are conscious that some journals publish an electronic advance copy of articles that can appear a considerable time before the print copy is published; we also recognize that some journals are running behind schedule so that, for example, an article published in October 2021 might actually appear in a 2020 edition. First publication is the key criteria, but we will endeavor to be sympathetic in cases of “behind schedule” publication. If you feel that your proposed submission should be considered, but might be at risk of disqualification by definitions of “first publication,” please email for adjudication by the Awards Committee.

The amount of the award is \$200 for first place and \$100 for honorable mention.

Submission instructions will be posted on the DHA website in due course.

In the interest of modeling best practice in the field of disability history, we require that the publisher/author provide an electronic copy in text-based .pdf or .doc file compatible with screen reading software for the review committee. We understand that copyright rules apply, and we will only use the electronic copy for the purposes of the DHA Outstanding Publication Award. Manuscripts not provided in accessible electronic formats for screen reading software in a timely manner cannot be considered for the prize.

Please include the full bibliographic citation of your submission in the Chicago Manual of Style format.

The Disability History Association Board plans to announce the recipients of the DHA Outstanding Publication Award in September 2022.

Members of the DHA Board are not eligible for the award.

Disability History Association - Outstanding Book Award (2022)

The Disability History Association (DHA) promotes the relevance of disability to broader historical inquiry and facilitates research, conference travel, and publication for those engaged in any aspect of disability history. As part of the Association's 2022 Award Series, the DHA Award Committee invites entries for its eleventh annual Outstanding Book Award. The amount of the award is \$300 for first place and \$100 for honorable mention. The winning book, as well as the book receiving the honorable mention, will be announced in September, 2022.

Eligibility

Committee members welcome monographs and edited collections, provided the book is new, original scholarship and published in English. The award is open to authors writing across all geographic areas and time periods whose book was first published between January 1 and December 31, 2021. Members of the DHA Board of Directors are not eligible.

Submission Process

The deadline for submission is **May 1, 2022**. In order to be considered, please send:

1. a brief cover letter, inclusive of a full bibliographic citation;
2. four copies of the book, as well as a full bibliographic citation, to the Award Committee via Kathleen Brian at the address below; and
3. an electronic copy in text-based .pdf or .doc file format compatible with screen reading software for the review committee. The members of the Award Committee understand that copyright rules apply and will use the electronic copy for the sole purpose of selecting a winner. Books that are not provided in accessible electronic formats for screen reading software in a timely manner will not be considered for the prize.

As with the Journal Article / Book Chapter Award, submission instructions will be announced on the DHA website in the near future.

Call for Applicants:

Disability History Association Conference Award

The Disability History Association invites applications for the Spring 2022 Conference Award. This award is intended to help cover costs for virtual and in-person conferences attended between April 1, 2022 and September 30, 2022.

Eligibility: This award is open to graduate students and contingent faculty, as well as underemployed, unemployed, or community-based scholars and artists. The DHA is particularly interested in supporting those who will receive limited or no support from other sources, including their home institutions.

Applicants must be presenting on a topic directly related to disability history at a conference occurring between April 1, 2022 and September 30, 2022. Eligible conferences may be either in-person or virtual. The award may cover travel, registration, or the cost of academic memberships required to attend the conference. Depending on demand, demonstrated need, and the availability of funds, award amounts may range from \$100 to \$300.

Criteria: Applications are adjudicated based on a combination of demonstrated financial need and the significance of conference attendance for the applicant's career and the advancement of the field.

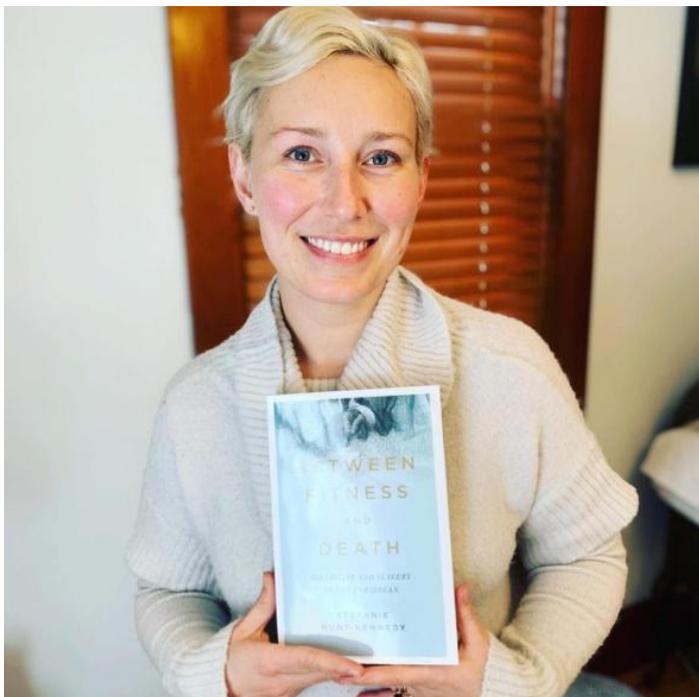
Application Materials: Applicants must write a letter of between 1-2 pages describing what conference they will be attending, the nature of their participation in the conference, and the significance of conference attendance for their career and the advancement of the field. They should also include a brief budget indicating expected costs, and how the award will help them cover these costs. If they are applying for or have received other funds to help defray the cost of attendance, applicants should indicate this in either their letter or budget.

Please submit applications to Dr. Caroline Lieffers at clieffers@gmail.com by April 30, 2022.

DHA 2021 Outstanding Book Awards

The Disability History Association (DHA) is delighted to announce the results of the 2021 Outstanding Book Award. The depth and breadth of this year's submissions, as well as of the individual works, are a testament to the continued vitality of disability history and to its capacity for expanding the historical discipline more broadly. Please join me in extending congratulations and appreciation to Stefanie Hunt-Kennedy (winner) and Natan M. Meir (honorable mention), as well as to the communities that fostered their scholarship.

Winner: Stefanie Hunt-Kennedy, *Between Fitness and Death: Disability and Slavery in the Caribbean* (University of Illinois Press, 2020).



From the committee:

Between Fitness and Death is “an insightful and powerful study” that looks to early modern “West Indian slavery and the legal exploitation of black bodies to argue that “slavery disabled the human.” It is “methodologically rich,” “elegantly and thoroughly researched, argued, and written,” and expands scholarly capacities for attending to the interconnections between disability and race. “From accounts framing monstrosity as an element of deformity to fitness tests at British slave markets, this study unravels the ways in which early modern ideas of race were tied to perceptions of disability — a systematic connection that, at its most effective, reverberated through slave laws that allowed for violence against the Black body. “Compelling, fascinating. An important contribution.”

Honorable Mention: Natan M. Meir, *Stepchildren of the Shtetl: The Destitute, Disabled, and Mad of Jewish Eastern Europe, 1800-1939* (Stanford University Press, 2020).



From the committee:

“Beautifully written and compellingly argued,” *Stepchildren of the Shtetl* “explores the ways that marginalized people came to be understood within the framework of disability.” It is an “extraordinary study of the lived experiences of Jewish outcasts — the impoverished, disabled, and chronically ill — in Eastern Europe that deftly depicts the simultaneous perception of marginalized people as forerunners of modernity and as symbols of inadequacy.” Disabled Jewish people are “richly depicted and contextualized within religious and literary meanings and histories.” As such, Meir’s is a novel contribution to the field of disability history.”

DHA 2021 Journal Article / Book Chapter Award – Winner



The Disability History Association takes great pleasure in announcing Stefanie Hunt-Kennedy of the University of New Brunswick as the winner of the 2021 Journal Article / Book Chapter Award with her entry entitled “‘Had his nose cropt for being formerly

runaway’: disability and the bodies of fugitive slaves in the British Caribbean”. *Slavery & Abolition*, 41:2, (2020), 212-233.

Observant readers will note that Stefanie has won two DHA Awards this year, something that has never previously occurred, but of course both the book award and the journal article awards are adjudicated by totally separate and independent panels. So what an outcome for Stefanie and she truly deserves double congratulations.

Comments from the judges include:

“This article adopts a sophisticated conception of debility – including discursive and legal forms of social marking and exclusion – to better understand the intersection between disability and slavery’s violence. It also does important work is broadening our histories of disability beyond the United States and Britain.”

“The making of white disability and black disability is a very important and novel subject, and this article uses rich archival sources to advance its central thesis ... It must have been difficult to research and write this, but it is very well written and I kept thinking about it long after I finished reading it.”

“An innovative study on how disability was racialised as a control and punishment regime in the eighteenth century with the consequences, in the eyes of slaveholders, to leave these slaves (if allowed to live) as impaired but still ‘ablebodied’.”

DHA Membership

Membership dues support the organization's activities and goal of promoting the study of the history of disability.

A one-year (January 1 to December 31) individual membership in the Disability History Association is thirty (\$30 U.S.) dollars. We offer a student/low or fixed income membership of fifteen (\$15 U.S.) dollars per year. The DHA also offers institutional memberships at the rate of one hundred (\$100 U.S.) dollars per year (see below), and lifetime memberships for five hundred (\$500) dollars. If you are a U.S. citizen, your dues are tax deductible.

To join the Disability History Association, please fill out the form under Membership on the website. Dues may be paid through PayPal.com, or you may send a check or money order (made payable to the Disability History Association) to the address below. When you submit the form you will be transferred to <http://www.paypal.com> where you can pay online. If you would prefer, you can simply submit your information and send a check or money order to our Treasurer:

Laurel Daen
Department of American Studies
University of Notre Dame
1047 Flanner Hall
Notre Dame, IN 46556
USA

We respect your privacy and will keep the information you provide confidential.

For questions about membership and dues, please contact Laurel Daen, DHA Treasurer, at ldaen@nd.edu

DHA News

We hope that you have enjoyed reading this newsletter. How about writing for the next one? Short articles or story pieces. New research projects. Letters to the Editor. Finds in the Archive, such as unusual pieces of disability history that you have discovered in unusual places. Photos and other visual material – with the usual permissions and credits where applicable.

Or just drop an email to say 'Hi!' – or 'Goodbye' - to Iain: iain.hutchison@glasgow.ac.uk who will pass your messages to the new editor once appointed.