

Disability History Association Podcast
Interview with Michael Hudson
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Caroline: Hello, and welcome to another episode of the Disability History Association Podcast. My name is Caroline Lieffers, and it's my pleasure to have Michael Hudson as my guest today. Michael is the Director of the Museum of the American Printing House for the Blind, which is in Louisville Kentucky. Michael, thank you so much for joining me today.

Michael: Thank you. I'm glad to be here.

Caroline: Good to have you. So, for those who aren't in the know – what exactly is the American Printing House for the Blind?

Michael: So, APH – we're very fond of our acronyms in the blindness field – APH was founded in 1858 to emboss books in raised letters. And over the last hundred and sixty odd years the company just has grown and evolved as the field of education for people who are blind or visually impaired has changed. And so today we are about 279,000 square feet of manufacturing, research, and development space. And we, our primary market is kindergarten through twelfth grade, and so we translate and emboss textbooks in Braille. We print large-type books, textbooks in Braille—I mean, in large type. We record books downstairs, we call them talking books, and then we make just an incredible variety of educational aids, varying from, you know, calculators that talk, to globes that you can read with your fingers to these really cool Velcro kits that help kids learn the way that light bounces off things. You know, yeah, pretty cool. So, you know, science, math, physical education, Braille education -- anything that that a kid has to learn, we make those. And then we make all kinds of adult products as well. So, so that's APH.

Caroline: That's impressive. So APH has a museum. When was the museum established and why?

Michael: So about 1990, I guess some folks in our marketing department started realizing that nobody at APH ever threw anything away [both laugh] and that it was this really old company. And we had kind of just had our finger in everything that had been going on over the last, you know, a hundred and at that point thirty years or so. And so they, they started gathering things together in one of the older wings of the building. And eventually in 1994 we opened up our museum. And so it, it to this day, really the, the mission of the Museum of the American Printing House is to create encounters with objects and ideas that tell the story of literacy and learning for people that are blind or visually impaired.

Caroline: So what are some of the exhibits that you have on display in your galleries that create these experiences for people?

Michael: Sure, so, so you know, we, I mean we could talk about that for forever, by the way, because that's my, you know, that's what I love, is how you tell stories with things. But for instance we have probably better than forty different Braille writers from all over the world that show how Braille writer design has evolved over time. We have exhibits on math, how you teach math, you know, starting with some of the early what are called arithmetic slates, like a Taylor Slate, which was this, kind of, an aluminum board and it has these little star-shaped holes in it. And it comes with these little metal types that have symbols, different symbols on each end. And by rotating that type in that star, star-shaped hole, you change the meaning of the, of the symbol it's supposed to

represent. And so by using that – they're in a grid, so you could set up a math problem the same way that someone with a pencil and paper might set up a column of figures to add them together. You could do the same thing here only you're using a little tactile symbol. And then, you know, we have a tactile geography exhibit with, you know, the kind of highlight of that exhibit is this big 30 inch globe with exaggerated relief cast into it, so you can get your arms all the way around the world and, you know, explore Micronesia or South America or whatever you're interested in.

And then we have exhibits on technology, you know, how, how you go from preparing an embossing plate to make a Braille book. Originally those were done literally on a machine called a stereograph machine and you would sit there and type the dots onto a metal plate by hand, you'd have the book, you know, on a little stand there and you'd be literally translating as you go, up to the way it happens now where you're basically just using a software package, and literally you can take the, you know, a digital text file and put it into that software and "whoop" it'll translate it. It's not perfect, you know, like Google Translate is not perfect, but it's still very much, very much faster than it was back in the old days. So that kind of gives you a sense of what we do.

And then we also kind of, you know, we have a lot of visitors who have no understanding of the blindness field, and so we have one exhibit that's just stocked with goggles that illustrate various kinds of vision loss, and then we have a phonebook and some stacks of Campbell's soup and some other types of household things, and we ask the visitor to put on a pair of the goggles and then try to accomplish a task that, you know, people do every day, only under the condition of some sort of vision loss, you know, like macular degeneration or glaucoma or something like that.

Caroline: Wow, that's really fascinating and extensive. I, I now want to go to Louisville and check it out [both laugh].

Michael: Well you know what, what's cool is that a lot of people come to the Printing House and they're curious about how we do the things we do, but they're also a little nervous. You know, because of that, you know, what we call the veil of blindness, you know. Among disabilities if you, if you do a survey, you know, the number one feared disability is always blindness, you know, greater than heart disease. So this is something that people are afraid of. I mean sighted people are. And, and so, one of the things that we, that we discover is they come in kind of nervous and uncertain, but they always leave amazed at what's possible when you just adapt things. And that's all the printing house really does. You know, we just adapt things so that people can do whatever that they wanted to do already. We've just got to do it in a different way.

Caroline: Mmm-hmm. For people who can't make it into Louisville, do you also have online exhibits?

Michael: We do a little bit. Our website, which is aph.org/museum has a lot of our exhibits on there. So that, say, for instance, all of our audio wands – and by the way our, we try our, you know, our exhibits are tried, we try to design them so that anybody can enjoy them, so there's lots of things to touch and listen to. Almost all of our labels are on the reading rail in both print and Braille and in audio wand format, and so all those audio wands are, the audio recordings are posted on the internet. And there's a lot of details on there. There's also a lot of, like, reference information, annual reports that are scanned in, things like that. We have a really large library called the Migel Library. It's probably the largest collection in the world of nonmedical, information on nonmedical aspects of blindness. And we're scanning that stuff in as fast as we can. It's all posted on the Internet Archive in a, in a number of accessible formats. And so there are links to that library there as well so you can get to a lot of things without having to actually come to Louisville.

Caroline: That's really much appreciated for researchers as well. So thank you for doing that.

Michael: And are you, are you familiar with Open Library at all, the way it works?

Caroline: Oh, I think I've stumbled into it accidentally, but I would love for you to tell me a little bit more about it.

Michael: So here's the cool thing about Open Library, OK? Open Library kind of also part of the Internet Archive. But say you have a physical copy of the book. OK? So you can scan it in. Normally under copyright rules if it was still in copyright you couldn't make it available on the Internet. You know, a lot of our stuff that's available on our Migel Library site is there because it's out of copyright. But if it's in copyright, the way Open Library works is they will have that one copy of a digital copy of your book, which corresponds to your physical copy, and they can loan that one book out over the Internet.

Caroline: Wow. That's fascinating, OK, wow.

Michael: And so you can borrow it for say five days or whatever. And then of course if you don't return it yourself manually, it'll "whoop," you know, automatically go back into the kitty. But that's going to allow libraries like ourselves to have all these really specialized collections, to make them available for loan. And you could use them from a computer anywhere in the world. And for researchers that's just, you know, I mean it's like candy, right?

Caroline: Absolutely. This is, this is going to be really life changing for a lot of researchers, especially if they don't have to wait for the books to go out of copyright to become accessible to them.

Michael: Yeah, yeah. And now only one, you know, say we have one copy of the book on the shelf, only one researcher can be using it at a time. But when you're using these really, when you have these really specialized collections that, you know, there may only be four or five researchers at any one point, you know, really working on that, on that topic. So it's, it's really, you know, we're just scanning as fast as we can.

Caroline: Wow. That's tremendous. Are there any special treasures in your collection that you might want to tell people about?

Michael: Oh, absolutely. How much time do we have? [Both laugh]. But I'll tell you about you about, I'll tell you about our number one thing that we just got. And it is an 1829 copy of what's called the *Procédé*, which is "the method." And that is Louis Braille's original publication of the Braille, his Braille system. [**Caroline:** Oh wow.] And it's embossed in raised letters. And there are only six copies of this book that we know of anywhere in the world, only two in the United States. And we think that our copy, which is on display in our museum—we built a new exhibit that opened in 2017 called "A Boy Named Braille," and it features that book. And of course it's, you know, it's in a case where, you know, the light is normally off and when you step in front of the case the light comes on for a few seconds so you can look at it, because it's that kind of a precious thing. So that's pretty exciting. That's kind of like the Bible if you want to think about it, for people that are blind and visually impaired, that book.

We also have a copy of, from 1786, of the first book done in raised letters. And raised letters were the system that was initially developed in France by this guy named Valentin Haüy. His book was called the *Essai*, "the Essay," on Education for the Blind. We have a copy of that book on display as well. We, we have, as I said, an enormous Braille writer collection beginning with Frank Hall's original Hall Braille Writer from the 1890s. And then we have examples from the United States,

from France, from Germany, from Switzerland, Yugoslavia, Australia, England. And every one of these Braille writers is interesting because it seems as if there was always some uncle with an engineering background [Caroline laughs] who had a, you know, somebody in their family who was blind and thought to themselves that they could build the better mousetrap. And so the, the different mechanical principles that are used for these Braille writers are just fascinating. But in 1951 a guy named Abraham who was working at the Howe Press for the Perkins Institution invents the Perkins Braille writer, okay? Have you ever seen one?

Caroline: No, I have not.

Michael: OK, so the Perkins Braille Writer is the, is the, gosh, how to put it—it's the Cadillac of Braille writers, OK? [Caroline laughs] And more, it was so successful, and mainly it was so successful because you could literally throw it down the stairs or use it to chock the wheels of an eighteen-wheeler [Caroline laughs] and it would, it would still write, OK. And all these other designs were either too heavy or be, you know, they would break. But the Perkins is just perfect. And so more Perkins Braille Writers have been manufactured than in, than all the other Braille writer designs combined. So we, we have Perkins out on the rail where, you know, our visitors can write their name in Braille and it's one of the, it's one of the favorite things that people do while they're here at the museum.

Caroline: Oh, that sounds like so much fun. So, I mean, you're kind of talking about this but I'd love for you to say more about it -- how has education for the blind and APH's work changed over the years have there been -- other than new Braille writers emerging -- have there been other shifts in how blind people are able to access information?

Michael: Yeah, absolutely. And a lot of it had to do with a law that was passed in 1879 here in the United States called the Act to Promote the Education of the Blind. And what it did was it created a federal fund that kids who were legally blind anywhere in the United States could draw on to have their books and educational products made here at APH. And that funding has been critical to provide, you know, so that we could do the research and development we needed to do to kind of advance the field along. But you know initially, it's all about getting books. There aren't enough books in raised letters and so our, you know in the early days what we were really working on was more books and then better books. You know, moving away from raised letters to Braille. [Caroline: Yup.] You know, coming up with devices that you needed to both read and write Braille. Today, you know, it's all about technology. So, so for instance today some of the things we're working on are, are what are called refreshable Braille display. Okay, so refreshable Braille display has been around a long time and our collection, we have all kinds of great ones. But basically what they are is kind of a computerized display that raises pins into the patterns of the Braille dots. And so when you connect that to a computer, you know, say, for instance you could go to the website of the *New York Times* and you wanted to read the, you know, the big news story that was on the front. And you would connect your refreshable Braille display to your computer and it would basically drive the pins and, and raise the letters, I mean raise the characters in the Braille dots. [Caroline: Yeah.] So anything that's out there in basically a text file or a word file or any of that stuff is now accessible to somebody who has one of these, one of these displays.

We also make, or are experimenting with indoor navigation. So you're familiar with using a GPS device to get around the roads, right? And those are all connected to satellites, but satellites don't help you inside buildings, the concrete, you know, that our buildings are made out of, interferes with the signal. So how could you use a similar type of idea to maneuver inside a building, the same way that you, you know, maneuver the highways. So that indoor navigation -- we have an app for your cell phone called "Nearby Explorer" and so it uses these beacons and stuff that you would put around at, at important landmarks inside the building and guide you, you know to them. It's not

perfect technology. We're still, you know, at the beginning kind of experimenting with how to do it. But it's the kind of thing that is going to not just help people who are blind or visually impaired; it's going to help everybody. You know, think about when you went to a hospital the last time, and how hard it was to navigate this complicated building. So you know it's, the kind of thing that, you know, like everything, when you make it better for one group usually you make it better for everybody.

But, but you know this story of education of the blind is also dominated in the United States by mainstreaming. So throughout the twentieth century, most kids who are blind or visually impaired stop going to a residential school—and by the way there's a whole story behind that that we won't go into right now. And they start going to their local schools. And so that makes the job of educating that kid a lot more challenging. Because instead of, you know, having say, ten kids in the tenth grade, they're all blind or visually impaired, they're at a school, state school for the blind where the teacher has been there for twenty years and is very experienced and knows their Braille, Now they're being taught largely by general education teachers who have no special background in blindness and they probably meet a few hours a day or a few hours a week with a TVI, Teacher of the Visually Impaired. And so it's, it's made our job here at the printing house much more challenging as we try to develop the tools that those teachers are going to need to teach that kid.

Caroline: Can you tell me a little bit more about what makes the Museum of the American Printing House for the Blind -- as a museum -- different from other institutions?

Michael: Well I think it probably has to do with the irony that all of these things that are the, kind of the meat and potatoes of our collection, they were all made to be experienced with senses besides vision. And so, think about the irony of a museum where, what if we put all that under glass, where it couldn't be touched.

Caroline: Yeah that wouldn't work so well. [Laughs]

Michael: That would be ironic. Yeah, so, so we have, our, our touching rules are much much different than those of a typical, you know, art or history museum. Instead of having to justify why something can be touched, in our museum it has to be justified why it can't be touched. So in general we divide all of our artifacts into three categories. One category would be Education Collection that can be touched, you know, to destruction. Mid, middle category would be something that we have many examples of and so we can put one copy out to be touched. And finally, in a very small category, would be the things that are one-of-a-kind and we can't allow people to touch them. But in those circumstances we really try hard to come up with a reproduction that can be touched. For instance most of our raised letter books are, are very rare. And so we will make reproductions of a page from the book so that, so that somebody can touch that and see what it, see what those raised letters felt like.

And then we're also always experimenting with, you know, audio and, and, different kinds of, of tactile things, but I have, you know, there are a lot of original artifacts that are literally out where they can be touched. But why not? If you have ten of this one model of Braille writer, why is it wrong to put one out where it can be touched? And, you know, we, we use a microcrystalline wax, Renaissance wax, we wax things, and we, we, you know, we're always trying to make sure that we're not getting any damage. And by and large people are very respectful to the objects that are here. They're appreciative that we put them out and they don't abuse them. But you know we just think it's very important that, that, you know, these things be accessible.

Caroline: You're preaching to the choir. Absolutely. So, take me a little bit about this process that you go through when you design an exhibit for your galleries. How are you ensuring that everything

is accessible and is going to work for your audience?

Michael: So we, we work in a team. We have a curator who is, you know, researching the story and identifying, you know, I would say we always start with the story first. We want, we want to tell a story, and so we're, we're, we're doing research on it. Then you're going to look at your collection and see what do we have in the collection that illustrates the story because, in the end, we are a museum. And we are, we are arranging encounters with authentic things. I mean that's why you go to a museum, right. I saw the Liberty Bell, right? The Liberty Bell was this important thing, and you want to arrange encounters with those things. And we have a, a graphic designer who is, you know, trying to look at, at the images that you've, you've selected and the, and the type fonts. You know we're going to make sure that all of our type fonts are in large print. If we have images, we have to decide, do we need to have descriptions of those images? And how is it going to be lit? Because for a lot of people who are low vision you want to, you know, low light situations like you might encounter generally in museums are a problem for them. But, but museums don't like a lot of light because light damages, so that there's a, there's a balance there.

And we're going to have a fabricator who is going to work with the curator and the graphic designer to figure out what case work needs to be built. But when you're looking at the artifacts you're always thinking how do I, what can I put out that can be touched? For instance, on the "Boy Named Braille" exhibit we had really one artifact – one – we had the *Procédé*. So, Louis Braille, the inventor of the Braille system, he lost his vision from an accident in his father's leatherworking shop with a tool called a serpette. Now a serpette is a very sharp leather-cutting tool. So I found one online that more or less looked exactly like the kind of serpette his dad might have had in the tool, in the thing. I sent it down to our, our machine shop. They took the edge off of the serpette. And then the fabricator and I worked on a cradle that would hold it on the rail so that there was no danger of anybody cutting themselves, but they could still touch. Then another aspect of the story was that Louis had already learned of the shapes of the letters before he actually went off to school because his father had, had, hammered upholstery tacks into a piece of wood and the shapes of the letters. So we created that down in the shop. So we were always looking for ways that we could create imitations. He, Louis invents this code called raphigraphy, which basically is the letters that sighted people use only made out of dots. You had a whole little typewriter called a raphigraph, or, I'm probably butchering that, but, so we found online a, some wonderful person who had created a computer font of Louis's letters. So we had those printed downstairs on a special printer made by this company called Roland that embosses by putting coats of, multiple coats of ink onto the page until it builds up relief. And then we took it to another machine called a thermograph, which takes a piece of plastic and puts it over the top of that original pattern, heats them up, and you get a nice plastic model of the original, and so that was out there. So, I guess, you know, it's, it's just, it's teamwork between the storyteller and then the, the fabricators who are, who are kind of charged with, with, with figuring out how to, how to put the exhibit together.

Caroline: I'm learning so much from this conversation, but tell me more as well about your programming. Do you have special training programs, for example, to ensure that your interpreters are familiar with how to make things more accessible in a museum?

Michael: So we do a lot of that. In fact yesterday our accessibility coordinator Maria Delgado and I went over to another museum here in town called Locust Grove, it's a historic site, and we've been doing a number of training programs over there for their staff on how to make a visitor who's blind or visually impaired, you know, make their experience better. So yeah, we kind of constantly are training our own staff about how to do audio descriptions, how to use the various accessible parts of the exhibit, how to make sure that, you know, people know they are there and how to access them.

Our museum has -- I think last year we did forty-four different education programs [Caroline: Oh

wow]. We do a monthly program here at the Printing House. For instance, coming up in March is my favorite one of the year. It's called Braille Readers Theater. We've been doing that now for seven years and basically it's a little theater troupe that, that does readers theater, which basically means they've got their scripts there, they're in Braille. But other than that it is, it's all hammy local theater, you know, anybody who's ever done community theater would recognize exactly what we're doing there. [Caroline laughs] This year we're doing *Charlotte's Web*. [Caroline: Oh, okay!] Yeah it's going to be great, it's the first children's theater piece that we've tried. But our actors are really, they're all members of the community who are blind or visually impaired and they love it. So that's, that's our program for March. And we, you know, we do programs for Veterans Day where we look at, you know, the impact of blinded veterans on the history of orientation and mobility, which is how people get around – long canes, dog guides, that sort of thing, you know. And then we do, we do, you know, just standard little museum programs where we teach you how to make a tactile Christmas card. So you know it's, it's really all over the place. Our educators go out into the schools and do outreach programs. We do a lot of programs for Scouts. Because the Boy Scouts and the Girl, Girl Scouts have these badges and stuff that are, that deal with diversity and inclusion. And so we participate in that. We do a lot of museum programs.

Caroline: Well, you're clearly a model for accessible and inclusive practice, not just for people with visual impairments but it seems like lots of different members of the community.

Michael: And that's part of our, that's part, that's one of our five main goals is, is to participate in the local and the regional and the national conversation about accessible museums because everybody is struggling with that. And, you know, it's a, it's a challenge because the, the culture, OK, of museum studies tells you that you shouldn't do any of this stuff, right? [Caroline laughs]

Caroline: Touching the objects? [laughs]

Michael: Right? You want low, and, and, and you know, museum people, archives folks, you know, they're, they're sensitive to the opinions of their peers. I know when I started here thirteen years ago, I came from a very traditional museum background, and I thought these people here were all nuts. You know the, you know, cases opened up so people can put their hands in them, and they are artifacts out where they can be touched. And, yeah, it was just a real culture shock. But of course now I'm, you know, I've drank the koolaid I guess you could say, and I'm a total convert. But it's, it's a challenge when your, you know, your graduate degree tells you don't touch, low light, you know, those sorts of things.

Caroline: Do you also make efforts to have interns, or staff members, or people on your board for example, who are from the blind community?

Michael: We do. We do. Although, I mean, we started our internship program about five or six years ago. We've had a summer intern every year since. And our first intern, we were very lucky, we found this wonderful young lady who happened also, she had a museum – her undergraduate degree was in museums and she had, she was a low vision person herself. But it is not always easy to find interns who also have a visual impairment. But I think it's really important to do that. We, we have, I think our board has two of the twelve, maybe, are folks who also have vision loss. And my boss, Gary Mudd, who is Vice President of Community and Government Affairs is blind himself. And so those are, you know, we're never really going to get where we need to be until we make sure that we have folks at the, who are making the decisions, who also come from the consumer groups.

Caroline: That's a nice way of putting it. So for other museums that are trying to, if you will, like, un-learn everything that learned in their museum studies programs and think a little bit more about

accessibility, are there resources that you can recommend to help them on their journey?

Michael: What I'm going to tell you is, it is, it's going to sound really simple. But, but it's my philosophy on it. You know, typically we're scholars. What, what is our first step? We think we can check a book out, or we can buy a book, and read a book about it, right? I, I refute that.

What I say is, identify people in your community that come from the group that you wish to improve your offerings to. And that could be people from a minority group. It could be people from a gender that you're not reaching. It could be people from a disability group that you're not reaching, that you want to reach. Identify the people in your community in that group that like your topic. If you are a weaving museum find some people who are Deaf or hard of hearing who love weaving. And bring them into your museum and sit down and talk to them about their museum experiences, experiences they've had in the past, and what they like about your museum, and what they would like to be able to do and, and what some of their experiences have been that have been barriers to them feeling welcome in your museum. And that conversation over a cup of coffee, and taking them on tours, and talking to them about what they like, and what's, what's fun and educational and exciting about what you're doing and what is not – what are the barriers – will help you come up with some changes. We, I call it, "Just Ask." And I think if you sit down with your target group and, one on one, and have conversations you will, you will come up with five things that you can do that are not going to break the bank and not going to change everything you do but are going to improve your relationships with that group and help them to enjoy what you're doing. So – simple. Talk. Talk to your folks.

Caroline: Just get that conversation started. Yeah.

Michael: Yeah, yeah. And meet them. Because, you know, in terms of blindness, you know, blindness is a kind of a, it, it has a high and profound impact on people's lives. But it is relatively rare. And so you may not know anybody that's blind or visually impaired. And so you're going to make all kinds of incorrect assumptions about both what they want, and also about their lives and how they perceive things. And so until you get to know them as individuals, as people, and understand the obstacles, you're not going to be able to make your museum more accessible for them.

Caroline: That makes a lot of sense. I'm also interested in this question of what your museum and APH has done for Louisville. I mean, we're talking about museums engaging in communities, and has APH's presence in Louisville changed the city over the years?

Michael: Yeah, that's a good question. That's a good question. I know that right now we have what we call our Accessible Cities Initiative here inside the company. It's not in the museum, it's actually bigger – it's under our president Craig Meador – but, he wants to make Louisville the most accessible city in the, in the, in the United States. [Caroline: Interesting] And so, you know, you know part of that is our, is Nearby Explorer and, and working on ways to make, you know, the city streets more accessible. You know, we are part of another thing called the, let's see, the Louisville Cultural Accessibility Association which is, we're partnering with the Center for the Arts and Actors Theatre of Louisville to do training sessions for staff of other museums and cultural sites here in town about how to make their programs more accessible for people with all kinds of disabilities.

You know, one thing that's true about APH is — APH is here, the Kentucky School for the Blind is right next door to us, and then there's a workshop, LC Industries, back behind, they're kind of an employment, vocational educational place that's close. So, I mean, if you live in our part of Louisville you're very familiar with seeing people who are blind or visually impaired on the streets.

And I think that goes a long way towards breaking down a lot of barriers. You know, when your neighbors are blind or visually impaired themselves, you, you understand a lot more about their lives and, and, and you identify them as, as people rather than as their disability. You know that's Bill, that's Sue. That's not, "the blind guy." They're people. And, and when we get to that point where we identify people as people rather than as their disability then we're really starting to get somewhere. I think, I think the Printing House has helped in, in starting to bridge that gap.

Caroline: To pivot a little bit toward researchers, I mean, what I find so fascinating about your museum is it's relevant for a lot of different histories. There's blind history, obviously, the history of technology, book history, the history of education. I mean the list goes on.

Michael: Yeah, for a specialized museum there are, there are a lot of little things in there.

Caroline: Absolutely. And I assume that you do allow researchers to come and use your facility. You mentioned a library. What are some of the things that researchers in our audience might want to know about? Do you have an archive for example?

Michael: We do. We do. In fact over the last ten years we have really acquired some really important collections as we have started to partner with some of the other major blindness organizations. And they've seen the value of archiving their papers here at the printing house. You know, for instance I went up to the Carroll Center in Boston. Thomas Carroll was this very important mid twentieth-century rehabilitation guy who kind of invented blindness rehabilitation for older folks. [Caroline: Oh, OK.] It, it never occurred to anybody that someone who lost their vision later in life might need some rehabilitation training. You know, how do you keep cooking, how do you clean the house, you know, how do you maintain, you know, how do you move around? As opposed to just sitting at home.

And so Father, so Father Carroll started a rehab center up there in Boston, which is now called the Carroll Center that works with people who lose their vision later in life. And so his papers, you know, Father Carroll was involved in every major endeavor in rehabilitation in the mid twentieth century. He was the chaplain for the Blinded Veterans Association. And so he was really an important part of their experience, of all these folks who came back from World War II with serious eye injuries. So his papers are just a gold mine for anybody who's interested in that sort of thing. And so we have his papers here. We also have the papers of the Orientation and Mobility Division of AER. So we have all these major collections. We have a reading room. We have, our Collections Manager Anne Rich is always, always willing to talk to people who are working on aspects of this, and can kind of identify, you know, what parts of our collection might be in your area of research. And we can pull those things and you can use them in our reading room.

Caroline: Oh, that's tremendous. Well you know I think now everyone should go to Louisville and check out your museum. [Both laugh] But for people who can't, do you have traveling exhibits for people that want to bring a piece of you to their institution?

Michael: We do. We do. We have four traveling shows. Three of them are kind of just tabletop exhibits. One is about Braille writers, historic Braille writers. One is about what we call the War of the Dots, which was a big debate in the late nineteenth, early twentieth century about what code to use, what tactile code to use. We have one about the historic residential schools. Most of the states had their own, you know, state school for the blind and it kind of looks at the history of those. But our major show is called "Child in a Strange Country: Helen Keller and the History of Education for People Who are Blind or Visually Impaired." And basically what "Child in a Strange Country" does is it looks at that, that communication barrier, and, and uses Helen, who's, you know, the one blind person that so many people know, as kind of a portal if you want to think about it that way, to

explore the story. And so it, it's about 2500 square feet when it's all set up, so it's kind of a, you know, needs a, a moderate sized museum or library to host it. The other three exhibits are fairly small, just about anybody could host them, and information on borrowing those exhibits is on our web site – again, aph.org/museum.

Caroline: Excellent. If I can put in a plug for your website as well, I checked out your online exhibits and your “Narrator Jukebox” is fantastic.

Michael: Yeah. Yeah. So, so one of the cool things – in 1936 we started recording audio books for people who are blind or visually impaired for the, basically for the Library of Congress. And even today we are the largest vendor, supplier of audio books, they call them talking books. And so downstairs in our studio we have eleven recording studios and have all these great narrators who have worked here over the years. You know, almost every, you know, back in the 1950s every television anchor in, in Louisville was, had a side gig, you know, moonlighting at the American Printing House for the Blind. These are all names that, you know, if you are blind or visually impaired and you grew up reading our books, you know all these people. So the jukebox is just a little clip of each one of, of really just a few – thirty or so – of our, of our narrators over time - just some of the ones who maybe were the most prolific readers.

Caroline: And I can imagine it's a bit of a blast from the past when people listen to a narrator that they remember from their childhood or something like that.

Michael: Yeah, yeah. And you know, we have people call all the time and they're like, yeah you know, I had this book that I really loved, you know, when I was growing up in 1965 and could I get a copy of it? [Laughs]

Caroline: Aww!

Michael: Yeah, it's great. It's great.

Caroline: Fantastic, fantastic. So before I let you go, I want to ask what's next for you? What's the museum working on these days? Any new projects or goals that you're trying to achieve?

Michael: I'm, I'm, I'm going to be honest, Caroline, we have a secret project that we are working on, but I cannot tell you what it is.

Caroline: Wow.

Michael: We're actually under a, you know, those nondisclosure agreements, but, but it, it's going to be big. And I think we're going to announce it this summer, and we're probably going to be looking at building a new building here on site, so that when you come -- right now our, our museum is located in the original 1883 building, the first building that was built here on the site. And it's kind of cocooned inside of fourteen different structures that make up the Printing House. But if this, if this project comes to fruition, and it's very exciting, then we might be building a new building on the front of us, and so your portal into the whole building would be the museum. [Caroline: Wow] So, fun, fun stuff.

Caroline: All right. Well, we'll have to stay tuned for this announcement. You've got everybody in suspense. [Michael: Yeah!] [Both laugh] It's great. Well, Mike, I want to just thank you so much for your time today. It was wonderful to talk to you. As I said, I encourage everyone to check out your museum website at aph.org/museum. So thank you for your time.

Michael: Thank you, Caroline.

Caroline: Thanks to everyone out there for listening or reading the transcript. Please join us again next time! Bye bye!

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