Disability History Museum

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The goal of the Disability History Museum, a virtual-only project, is to foster research about and understanding of the experience of people with disabilities over time. It is a project of Straight Ahead Pictures, Inc., a 501(c)(3) organization responsible for the Beyond Affliction radio series.

The web site contains four sections: About; Library; Education; and Museum.

The About section describes the Digital History Museum and the people and organizations behind it. It acknowledges donors and offers opportunities to contribute financially.

The Library is, I think, the most important section for readers C&RL News. It contains collections of documents and visual stills associated with the cultural and social history of people with disabilities. Most of the records were produced in the United States from 1800 to the present.

Materials can be searched by limiting to a library collection [documents or visual stills], if desired, or across the entire site using the Site Search box. In addition to collection type, search facets include format [e.g., Advertisement, Comic Book, Government Document, Manuscript, Newspaper, Photograph, Postcard, Sheet Music]; source; keyword [by word(s) or by frequency using a word cloud]; and date. An alphabetical keyword list of terms used is provided.

In addition to the searching described above, browsing is available by selecting a collection and/or topic from drop-down lists, or by source of material. Sources include archives, libraries, and private collectors. A list of organizations is available at http://www.disabilitymuseum.org/dhm/lib/sources.html. Materials are to be used for limited personal as well as educational or scholarly purposes only.

The Education section is the next most extensive one. It includes lessons with associated study guides and teaching tools (primarily essays). A helpful glossary of terms is also provided.

The Museum section proved disappointing. It consists of the following:

“Museum exhibits coming soon... Please visit our museum shop.”

The shop offers the opportunity to order Beyond Affliction: The Disability History Project and FIT: Episodes in the History of the Body documentaries.

While the Education and Museum sections of the site are to me peripheral [I will be glad to reconsider if museum exhibits are added], the primary source materials in the Digital History Museum’s Library are an excellent resource for people doing research in this area.