

NO.55 SPRING 2000
BENE LEGERE
 NEWSLETTER OF THE
 LIBRARY ASSOCIATES

- [9 Millionth Acquisition](#)
- [University Librarian Steps Down](#)
- [Disability Rights & Independent Living Movement](#)
- [Free Speech Movement Cafe](#)
- [Isabel Allende Dinner](#)
- [Rosberg Reading Room](#)
- [Class Campaigns](#)
- [Carl Sagan: A Life](#)
- [Paramount Theatre Archives](#)
- [Recent Gifts](#)
- [Calendar of Exhibits](#)

The Library Associates

Join more than 6,000 other friends, book lovers, alumni, and faculty who recognize that the influence of a great research library reaches beyond the university it serves to the many communities of which it is a part.

Library Associates receive complimentary copies of the quarterly newsletter *Bene Legere*, as well as invitations to special occasions at the Library. For more information on the Library Associates program, please write or telephone: The Library Development Office, Room 188 Doe Library, University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720-6000; telephone (510) 642-9377. Or, [check our website](#).

THE DISABILITY RIGHTS AND INDEPENDENT LIVING MOVEMENT

Susan O'Hara, Regional Oral History Office

"Helpless cripple attends classes at UC," proclaimed a headline in the *Berkeley Gazette* in 1963. Time was to prove the irony of the title, and the article became a treasure in one of the Bancroft Library's newest collections.

In November 2000 the Library will open the *Disability Rights and Independent Living Movement* archive, an ongoing series of 50 oral histories and an extensive collection of written records and photographs of the earliest leaders and organizations in Berkeley. First of its kind in subject matter and in its depth, the collection is a research platform for scholars and a primary historical resource of national significance.

The "helpless cripple"--Edward Roberts--not only was the first person with a severe disability to live on campus as a student but also was to become the first to direct the California Department of Rehabilitation in Sacramento. Indeed, Berkeley--both the campus and the city--was to become the symbol of the worldwide disability movement by 1975.

Berkeley is unfailingly cited as a pioneer in the movement by persons with disabilities for legally defined rights and control over their own lives. No longer content with limited life opportunities, nor willing to be defined solely as medical patients, disabled people in several cities nationwide shared the willingness to challenge authority, discard received wisdom, and effect societal change that was the hallmark of the 1970s. Blue-curb parking spaces, accessible buses, sign-language interpreters, ramps to buildings, brailled elevator buttons, and much more, were to become ordinary within a short few years.

Not surprisingly, the disability movement paralleled other movements for equity and civil rights by and for racial minorities, women, and gay people. From our vantage point 35 years later, it is apparent that these movements, taken together, have changed the social, cultural, legal, and even architectural landscape of the nation.

During the pioneering 1960s in Berkeley, a dozen disabled students, all wheelchair-users, followed Roberts' lead and lived at Cowell Hospital on campus (now the site of the Haas School of Business). In those days, a hospital was deemed the only "safe" place to house disabled students. In the course of



Don Galloway, manager of blind services, and Ed Roberts, executive director of the fledgling Center for Independent Living, in 1974 on the Berkeley campus.

that explosive decade, these students experimented with radical changes in their daily lives, articulated a new philosophy of independence, and raised their experience to a political cause on campus and in the community. In the midst of the campus maelstrom of free speech, civil rights, and anti-war protests, these students refused to be seen as helpless medical patients. They profoundly changed the rules of living with a disability.

By 1972 the students had moved out into the community and created new institutions, run by and for people with disabilities. The first two of these organizations, the *Physically Disabled Students' Program* on the campus and the *Center for Independent Living* in the community, soon attracted national attention and drew several hundred people with disabilities to Berkeley from across the country. This early migration became the nucleus and the strength of the community that, for many, came to symbolize the independent living movement. Many other disability organizations developed--with focuses on legal resources, employment, computer training, parenting with a disability, recreation, and more.


Fifty of these early leaders and founders of disability organizations are the narrators (interviewees) of the collection's oral histories, some of which are as long as 25 hours of taped conversation. These narrations reveal a lot about the atmosphere of these times, covering the grassroots politics, the unstinting belief in "the cause," the seat-of-the-pants management, the funding sources and crises, the national connections, and the progress and the legacy of this high-energy and sometimes chaotic movement. In addition, the project archivist has collected more than 200 linear feet of the narrators' personal papers and organizational records. These will be indexed to the file folder level and described in finding aids to help researchers.

The idea for a project to document these historic events germinated for nearly 15 years before funding was secured to make possible a significant effort. Initially suggested by Susan O'Hara, then-director of the campus *Disabled Students' Residence Program*, a few initial oral histories were completed through the leadership and funding efforts of Willa Baum, director of the Bancroft's Regional Oral History Office (ROHO).

By 1995 the historical importance of the events in Berkeley and beyond grew increasingly evident. Adding to the urgency, several early leaders had died. Further, the archival records of key institutions and individuals were scattered in basements and attics, inaccessible for research and study. Bonnie Hardwick, then-curator of Bancroft collections, joined with Willa Baum and Ann Lage, deputy director of ROHO, as well as several key members of the disability community, to support the idea of a comprehensive collection at Bancroft on the disability movement. The **National Institute on Disability Research and Rehabilitation (NIDRR)** generously funded the three-year project in 1996.

Special thanks are due to the donors to this effort over the years: the **Prytanean Society**; **Raymond Lifchez** and **Judith Stronach**; and **June Cheit**, whose generous donation in memory of her sister, Rev. Barbara Andrews, allowed ROHO to develop the grant project. In May 2000 **NIDRR** awarded Bancroft a three-year grant to document the origins of the independent living movement nationwide.

By fall 2000 the *Disability Rights and Independent Living Movement* collection will be available in the Bancroft and at other selected libraries around the country. Within two to three years, most of the oral histories, many of the documents, and the finding aids for the collection will be available on the Internet in the *Online Archive of California*.



To inaugurate the collection, on November 3, 2000, the project will host a symposium in the campus' Pauley Ballroom on the disability movement in the context of other post-World War II movements. Among others, historian-participants will include Ruth Rosen, professor at UC Davis and author of *The World Split Open*; Waldo Martin, history professor at Berkeley and editor of *Civil Rights in the United States*; and Paul Longmore, history professor at San Francisco State University and specialist in disability movement history. Katherine Ott, curator of the National Museum of American History at the Smithsonian Institute, will give a slide presentation entitled, "Ed Roberts' Iron Lung and the Greensboro Lunch Counter: Capturing the Icons of Social Movements." All are welcome.

[\[top\]](#) [\[prev\]](#) [\[next\]](#)

[HELP / FAQ](#) | [CATALOGS](#) | [COMMENTS](#) | [HOME](#)

[Copyright](#) © 2005 by the Library, University of California, Berkeley. *All rights reserved.*
Document maintained on server: <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/> by the [Library Development Office](#)
Originally published Spring 2000. Server manager: [contact](#)