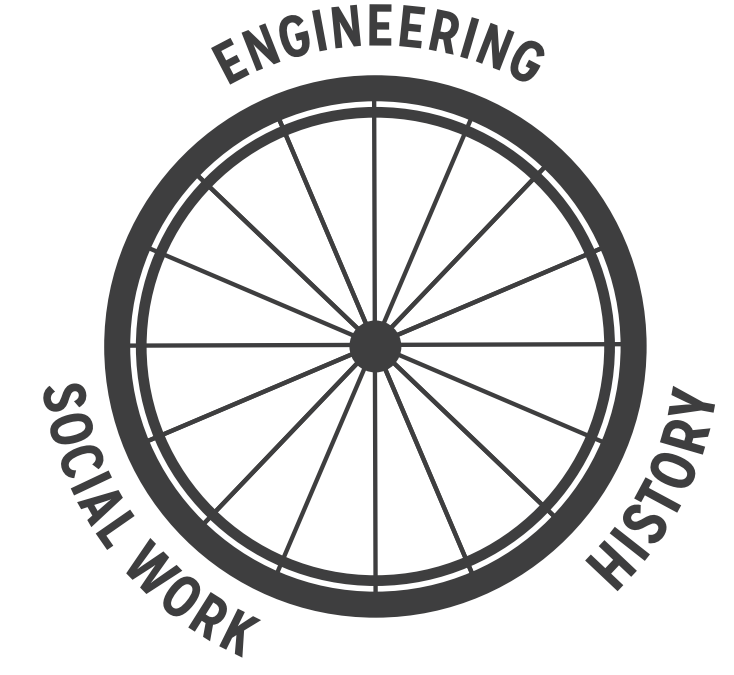


FOSTERING ACCESSIBILITY AWARENESS THROUGH “A WHEELCHAIR HISTORY OF DISABILITY IN CANADA”



www.mobilityhistories.ca



PRE - 1900

WAGON WHEEL TECHNOLOGY.
Invalid Chair, unknown manufacture.,
Canada Science and Technology Museum,
artifact no. 2013-0100. Believed to have been
used in Payzant Memorial Hospital,
Windsor, Nova Scotia.



1930s

**MODERN FORM AND FUNCTION
FOR INDEPENDENT MOBILITY.**
Wheelchair Model Premier C12673,
Manufacturer Everest and Jennings Company,
Don Mills, Ontario, post 1968, Canada Science
and Technology Museum, artifact no. 1983.0029.



1950

MOBILITY GOES ELECTRIC.
Klein Chair, electric wheelchair prototype built by
National Research Council, Canada, 1950, design by
engineer Dr. George Klein, Smithsonian Institution,
National Museum of American History (on loan to
Canada Science and Technology Museum).



1900

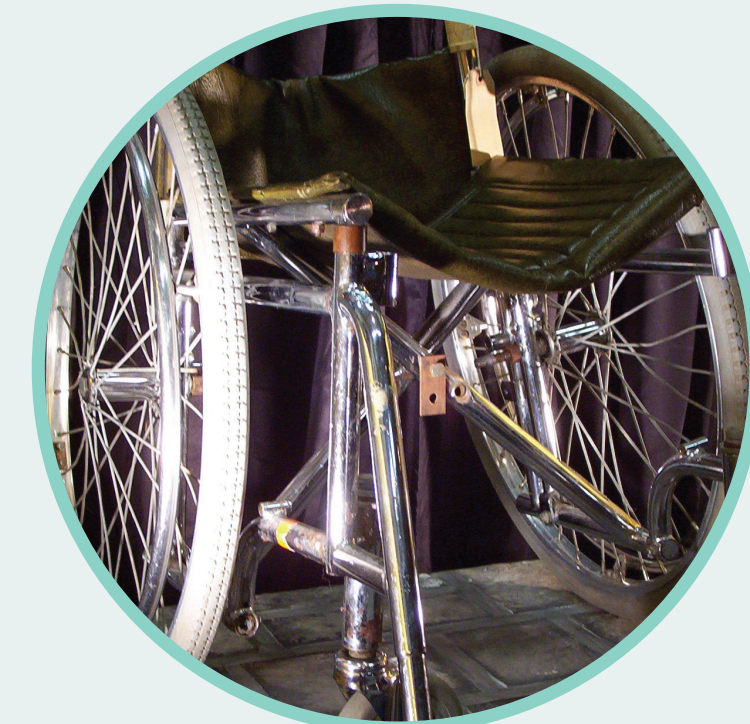
**HOME INVALID CARE ON BICYCLE
WHEEL TECHNOLOGY.**
Wheelchair, manufacturer Gendron Wheel
Company. In museum setting, City of Ottawa
Museums, Cumberland Heritage Village
Museum collection, artifact no. CM1989.037.
Originally owned by a township farm family.

**1950
HOSPITAL PATIENT CARE.**
Wheelchair, manufacturer EDCO of Passaic,
New Jersey, United States, ca. 1950, Canada
Science and Technology Museum, artifact no.
1991.0224. Used in Hôpital de L'Assomption,
Grand Falls, New Brunswick.



1975

**WHEELCHAIR SPORTS
AND INDEPENDENCE.**
Sports wheelchair, manufacturer Everest
and Jennings Inc. New Brunswick Sports
Hall of Fame, accession number
H.F.998-21. Used by athlete Sandra
Devenney in competitions in the 1970s.



THE WHEELCHAIR IS...

- an engineered, manufactured and commercial object;
- a therapeutic and assistive technology object;
- a symbolic object.

CAN THE HISTORY OF AN OBJECT CONTRIBUTE TO PUBLIC AWARENESS OF ACCESSIBILITY AS WELL AS DISABILITY HISTORY?

THE APPROACH TAKEN

- started with an interdisciplinary project involving engineering, social work and history aimed at encouraging interprofessional conversations about the connections between attitudes, technology, and independent mobility and public awareness of social attitudes and accessibility.
- through a virtual exhibit highlighting wheelchairs in Canadian museum collections.

THE EXHIBIT WAS DESIGNED TO

- centre on the wheelchair as an artifact
- encourage comments as learning opportunities for the team and visitors
- be expandable by students to other assistive devices or to dig deeper on questions and comments
- encourage visitors to question the wheelchair and its role in increasing independence for persons with a mobility impairment

IS THE WHEELCHAIR...

An enabler or restraint? Sophisticated or simple?
Representative of a normalized body, failed body, or heroic body?
Which emphasize the person and which the impairment?

THE HISTORY OF THE WHEELCHAIR APPEARS SIMPLE

From the 1800s to the 1940s the “invalid chair” was a Victorian parlour chair on wheels. Users of the pre-1930s wheelchair were the old, the sick, and people born with congenital impairments.

There was only one major functional improvement. In the late 1800s, the wheels were lightened using bicycle technology.

In the 1930s, a lightweight folding chair appeared giving independent mobility. Yet it took World War II to supercede the parlour-chair form.

Part of the change came with a new kind of wheelchair user – people with paralysis – whose survival was the result of 1930s/1940s medical technologies, procedures, care, and attitudes turning “hopeless cases” into candidates for rehabilitation.

Yet it is only since the 1980s that wheelchair form and function has diversified to meet numerous mobility needs.

These changes were driven by changes in societal and professional attitudes, in technology, in medicine, and in the person who uses the wheelchair.

THE HISTORY OF THE OBJECT OF THE WHEELCHAIR TEASES OUT COMPLEX AND MULTI-SIDED CONNECTIONS WITHIN DISABILITY HISTORY BETWEEN...

Medical model of disability – understanding the historical emphasis on normalizing the body and the survival of persons with paralysis

Social model of disability – understanding changes in attitudes re-shaping challenges faced by persons with mobility impairments

Technology – understanding how materials, form, and function changed in response to new needs created by medical advances and by the advocacy of persons with mobility impairments

**THE EXHIBIT “A WHEELCHAIR HISTORY OF DISABILITY IN CANADA”
IS OPEN FOR COMMENT UNTIL DECEMBER 31, 2014.**

Can an exhibit make a difference in attitudes towards accessibility?
The answer depends on what we learn from visitors over the next six months.

Add your comments on the connections between technology, needs, attitudes, and behaviours as seen historically and as it affects the present.

Why was change so slow? Why did change happen as it did? What drove change? Technology? Rehabilitation and medical professionals? Wheelchair sports? Disability charities? Disability advocates? Care givers? Persons with disabilities?

What made a difference? What will make a difference for tomorrow?

CREDITS

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Partners

Canada Science and Technology Museum
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