

HISTORY NOTE: Historic photos continue to provide a view of our past

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September is back to school time for many in Minnesota. Families take pictures of children on that all-important first day returning to the classroom.

Newspapers and television stations also faithfully document the start of classes or bring stories and video of the school experience to the greater community throughout the academic year. That has long included Minnesota students with disabilities.

The Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities is continuing its work to document the Minnesota disability community's past. A second collection of historic media photographs was recently collected and posted on the council's website.

Council staff has been working with staff at the Minnesota Historical Society to find and bring forward the images.



Mechanic Arts High School

While the series of photo albums is meant to illustrate progress in attitudes and media coverage over time, it's interesting to note how many pictures are from educational settings. The second collection contains 60 photos with captions that are presented by decade from the 1900s to the 1990s. Some captions were changed to utilize current terminology. The work was done by Jo Erbes, Stephanie Boucher and Brian Anderson. The Minnesota Historical Society has granted permission to have its images used online for the project.

One striking point with the photos is how learning has changed. A 1905 picture from the Gillette Hospital in St. Paul shows boys learning in the classroom and in the work room. This shows the early emphasis on children with disabilities being taught useful skills, to be able to support themselves.

Other pictures show the Michael Dowling School in Minneapolis, which has long served children with disabilities, and remains open today. Another school depicted, the Lindsay School in St. Paul, has been gone for many years. The school was named in honor of one of its funders, because part of the funding was donated by Mary Helen Lindsay from the Weyerhaeuser forest products family.

Another St. Paul school is also depicted. Mechanic Arts High School closed in the 1970s, after being one of the city's more high-profile high schools. Another picture shows students using

wheelchairs in 1949. Students were identified as Joe Hill, Bernadette Reich, Margaret Smack, and Gene St. Martin.

Mechanic Arts, which was located where the state's judicial center is now, was more accessible than other St. Paul high schools. See the pictures and more [here](#).

Access Press is interested in reader submissions for the monthly History Note column, to complement the articles written by Luther Granquist and other contributors. Submissions must center on events, people and places in the history of Minnesota's disability community. We are interested in history that focuses on all types of disability topics, so long as the history has a tie to Minnesota. We are especially interested in stories from Greater Minnesota. Please submit ideas prior to submitting full stories, as we may have covered the topic before. Contact us at access@accesspress.org or 651-644-2133 if you have questions. The History Note is a monthly column sponsored by the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities.