



## **Statement Regarding Smithsonian Desire to Collect Adaptive Mobility History**

The Smithsonian's National Museum of American History is committed to documenting the experiences of disabled Americans. One aspect of this story is how vehicles and adaptive technology have empowered individuals with disabilities through freedom and mobility. Transportation has played a major role in redefining the identity of disabled Americans, the social construction of disability, and public perceptions. A century ago, many persons with disabilities were confined to their homes or institutions. Adaptive transportation has enabled access to public spaces, employment, recreation, and the thrill of the open road.

Mark Mullen, a project assistant in the museum's Road Transportation department, spent the last year researching this topic. On July 23, 2013, Mullen presented his preliminary research findings at a museum colloquium and is now working on a collecting initiative. Documenting this story through research materials, oral histories, periodicals, photographs, video, and objects will inform museum staff along with current and future researchers. Small objects, examples of adaptive technology, hand cycles, and vehicles are key components that will help tell this national narrative. The Smithsonian plans to share this story with the public through web essays, blog postings, and social media. Objects will be preserved in collections for future museum purposes.

Driver Rehabilitation Specialists and mobility equipment dealers have been the key to empowering individuals with disabilities through access to transportation. The Association for Driver Rehabilitation Specialists (ADED) has played a crucial role in advancing legislation, developing technology, and training disabled drivers. Without these efforts, disabled Americans would have much less access to the freedom and opportunity our country provides. ADED, its membership, and its affiliates can do a great deal to advance the Smithsonian's endeavor to narrate the story of empowerment through mobility. The annual conference in Buffalo on August 2-5, 2014 is an excellent opportunity to facilitate this partnership. Mark Mullen will attend the conference August 2- 4 to explore the exhibits and product demonstrations. The event is an ideal opportunity to collect research materials, oral history interviews, small objects, and examples of adaptive technology.

Smithsonian curators use a variety of criteria to select objects for acquisition. Completeness of the collection, storage constraints, historical significance, educational uses, and provenance are used to determine how desirable an object is for the collection. To discuss objects and stories for possible collection, individuals should contact Mark Mullen, project assistant in the Division of Work and Industry, by email at [mullenm@si.edu](mailto:mullenm@si.edu) or phone at (901) 490-3881 during normal business hours. Roger White, associate curator of Road Transportation, is an additional contact. He can be reached at [whiter@si.edu](mailto:whiter@si.edu) or (202) 633-3925.

Through incomparable collections, rigorous research and innovative public outreach, The National Museum of American History explores the infinite complexity of America and the American experience. The museum helps people make sense of the past, understand the present, and shape a more humane future. The online exhibit Everybody: An Artifact History of Disability in America is one example of how the Smithsonian uses objects to tell the story of Disabled Americans. It can be found by visiting [www.everybody.si.edu](http://www.everybody.si.edu). The museum is currently renovating its west exhibition wing developing galleries on business, democracy, and culture. For more information visit [www.americanhistory.si.edu](http://www.americanhistory.si.edu)