

students learn these stories. The additional programming available at the IAAM deepens the potential of this museum to be a transformational community asset, particularly for African American families seeking to uncover and share their own histories. I was encouraged by the “Finding Family” exhibit, which included an opportunity to share family stories using the multimedia recording tools available inside the Story Booth. Indeed, IAAM is helping its visitors thoughtfully engage with, and create their own, community-controlled narratives. It was especially inspiring to witness the “Golden Group” (approximately twenty Elders dressed in matching t-shirts) participate in a genealogy workshop; participants are reclaiming their stories for themselves, their descendants, and for the benefit of our greater American story.

A closing piece of advice for visitors: the IAAM has good accessibility for those with mobility needs, but parking near the building is extremely limited. Also, advance ticket purchase and appointments are still recommended, especially during peak visiting times. Finally, as you plan your first trip, you may as well go ahead and plan for a second one. The remarkable stories being shared at the IAAM cannot be sufficiently consumed in one visit.

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*File/Life: We Remember Stories of Pennhurst.* A project of the Institute on Disabilities, Temple University, College of Education and Human Development. Jonathan Atencia, David Bradley, Harold Gordon, Ramona Griffiths, Cecilia Lee, Jacob Lee, Danielle Moore, Frank Orr, Biany Perez, Nicki Pombier, María Teresa Rodríguez, Margery Sly, and Lisa Sonneborn, Community Archivists and Collaborating Artists. April 20–23, 2023, Arch Street Meeting House, Philadelphia; July 25–27, 2023, The Russell Senate Office Building, Washington, DC; additional sites to be determined.

Angelina. Ellen. Nicholas. Silas. These are names of four of the twenty-eight individuals featured in a temporary, traveling exhibition called *File/Life* about people who lived at The Pennhurst State School and Hospital in Spring City, Pennsylvania, and who had intellectual, developmental, and other disabilities or bodyminds deemed atypical in the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> Community archivists, all of whom are disabled (including two former Pennhurst residents) or are family members of disabled people, curated this exhibition with collaborating artists. The central question explored by community archivists and collaborating artists was, “can a[n institutional] file ever contain a life?”—inspiring the title of the exhibit. This

<sup>1</sup> For more on language related to disability, see Sami Schalk, “Disability,” in *Keywords for Gender and Sexuality Studies*, ed. Keywords Feminist Editorial Collective (New York University Press), <https://keywords.nyupress.org/gender-and-sexuality-studies/essay/disability/>.

exhibition models the kind of accessible, community-driven historical interpretation that allows us to begin to answer that question for people incarcerated at Pennhurst.<sup>2</sup>

*File/Life* is one of several recent public history efforts and publications focusing on Pennhurst.<sup>3</sup> It expands the public's understanding of what Pennhurst was beyond the two main touchstones that most people know, more fully humanizing the stories of the people who lived at the institution. Most people who have heard of Pennhurst are familiar with it because they have seen reporter Bill Baldini's 1968 NBC exposé *Suffer the Little Children*. Baldini showed the world how poorly the people who ran Pennhurst, which operated between 1908–87 and institutionalized over ten thousand disabled people—many against their will—treated individuals in their care.<sup>4</sup> People are also familiar with the site as a controversial “haunted asylum” (which is how it is marketed), thanks in part to many billboards in the region.<sup>5</sup> *File/Life* shows us how much more there is to learn than what the documentary and fright attraction suggest. That said, I would have liked to have seen the exhibition include more details on the larger context of institutionalization in the United States and how it was influenced by eugenic philosophies, racism, ableism, and more. Such an addition may have been helpful for visitors who are unfamiliar with that history. Institutions like Pennhurst were everywhere, and their legacies are still with us.<sup>6</sup>

2 I do not recall the exhibition using the word “incarcerated,” but it is often used in contemporary disability history and disability studies literature to refer to the nature of settings like Pennhurst. For more on this term as it intersects with disability and institutionalization, see Liat Ben-Moshe, Chris Chapman, and Allison C. Carey, eds., *Disability Incarcerated: Imprisonment and Disability in the United States and Canada* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), especially Chris Chapman, Allison C. Carey, and Liat Ben-Moshe, “Reconsidering Confinement: Interlocking Locations and Logics of Incarceration,” 3–24, [https://www.liatbenmoshe.com/\\_files/ugd/601380\\_ebf66c36584a4e648cbd545fo8890968.pdf/](https://www.liatbenmoshe.com/_files/ugd/601380_ebf66c36584a4e648cbd545fo8890968.pdf/).

3 See, for example, multiple articles in the recent special issue “Exploring Disability History in Pennsylvania,” *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 89, no. 3 (Summer 2022); Dennis B. Downey and James W. Conroy, *Pennhurst and the Struggle for Disability Rights* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2020); Diana M. Katovitch, “Who Should Tell the Story? The Pennhurst Haunted Asylum and the Pennhurst Museum in Public History,” *History@Work*, June 7, 2022, <https://ncph.org/history-at-work/who-should-tell-the-story-pennhurst-haunted-asylum/>; and James W. Conroy and Katrina N. Jirik, “Origins of the Pennhurst and Memorial and Preservation Alliance,” May 24, 2022, <https://ncph.org/history-at-work/pennhurst-memorial-and-preservation-alliance/>.

4 “About File Life Stories,” Temple Institute on Disabilities, <https://disabilities.temple.edu/programs-services/media-arts-culture/file-life-stories/about-file-life-stories>.

5 Sarah Handley-Cousins, “Ghosts are Scary, Disabled People are Not: The Troubling Rise of the Haunted Asylum,” *Nursing Clio*, October 29, 2015, <https://nursingclio.org/2015/10/29/ghosts-are-scary-disabled-people-are-not-the-troubling-rise-of-the-haunted-asylum/>; and Katovitch, “Who Should Tell the Story?”

6 For more on the history of institutions and disability in the US, see Steven Noll, “Institutions for People with Disabilities in North America,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Disability History*, ed. Michael Rembis, Catherine Kudlick, and Kim E. Nielsen (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 307–24; Kim E. Nielsen, *Money, Marriage, and Madness: The Life of Anna Ott* (University of Illinois Press, 2020); Susan Burch and Hannah Joyner, *Unspeakable: The Story of Junius Wilson* (Durham:

Unlike most visitors, I didn't start by going through the exhibition, although it was hard not to, given the reverent but inquisitive energy in the galleries. Instead, I first ventured upstairs and joined exhibition collaborators and other members of the public for a conversation captioned using communication access real-time translation (CART) and American Sign Language (ASL).<sup>7</sup> The conversation provided collaborators with an opportunity to talk about why and how they got involved with the project, and it gave the attendees an opportunity to share how people who ran institutions like Pennhurst affected their lives. Many comments were raw and disturbing. If this one-hour conversation couldn't convince someone of the vital importance of telling disability history, I don't know what could.

The exhibition itself, made possible with support from The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage and led by Temple University's Institute on Disabilities, was up for just a few days in Philadelphia and has also been in Washington, DC.<sup>8</sup> Community archivists and collaborating artists selected twenty-eight files/lives to feature.<sup>9</sup> Community archivists and collaborating artists saw *File/Life* as an opportunity to highlight the lives of and restore agency to disabled people at Pennhurst while it was in operation by reading between the lines of the files created by non-disabled doctors and administrators. In addition to the accessibility features noted earlier in this review, organizers also offered relaxed viewing hours, AIRA descriptive technology (a visual interpreting service), and on-site ASL interpretation during the exhibition's run.<sup>10</sup>

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University of North Carolina Press, [2007] 2015); Susan Burch, *Committed: Remembering Native Kinship in and Beyond Institutions* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021); Anne E. Parsons, *From Asylum to Prison: Deinstitutionalization and the Rise of Mass Incarceration after 1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018); *Lost Cases, Recovered Lives: Suitcases from a State Hospital Attic*, The New York State Museum, 2004, <https://www.nysm.nysed.gov/press/exhibition-willard-suitcases-opens-nys-museum-jan-17th>; and Jorge Matos Valdejuli, "The Racialized History of Disability Activism from the 'Willowbrooks of this World,'" *The Activist History Review*, November 4, 2019, <https://activisthistory.com/2019/11/04/the-racialized-history-of-disability-activism-from-the-willowbrooks-of-this-world/>.

7 For more on the need for effective captioning, see Joseph Grigely, "Inventory of Apologies," in *VoCA Journal*, December 7, 2020, <https://journal.voca.network/inventory-of-apologies/> and Roman Mars, "Craptions," 99% *Invisible*, May 1, 2023, produced by Chris Berube, <https://99percentinvisible.org/episode/craptions/>.

8 Future exhibition sites may be announced. The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage has funded at least one of other disability-related exhibition in Philadelphia: *Common Touch: The Art of the Senses in the History of the Blind*, The Library Company of Philadelphia, April 4–October 21, 2016, available online here: <https://commontouch.librarycompany.org/>.

9 You can read profiles of the community archivists at "File Life Stories," Temple Institute on Disabilities, <https://disabilities.temple.edu/programs-services/media-arts-culture/file-life-stories>.

10 Relaxed viewing hours sometimes go by other names such as "relaxed mornings," "relaxed openings," "relaxed experiences," or, in the case of the Long Island Children's Museum, "friendly hours." Museums typically design them with people in mind who prefer to experience spaces with fewer or less intense sensory experiences. Sound and lighting may be turned off or down, for example. You can learn more about AIRA on its website: <https://aira.io/>.



Panels depicting portraits of some of the people who lived at Pennhurst featured in *File/Life*. (Photo Credit: Alex Cantonese, Each + Every)

The first room showcased introductory material and stories about several people who had lived at Pennhurst. The community archivists used first names only because, as they explained in the exhibition, “most of the stories told in FILE/LIFE are of people who are no longer living,” which means that “we cannot ask them if they would want to be represented in our work.” They also used first names only “out of respect for any descendants who may still be living.”<sup>11</sup> Each profile included a summary of what we know about these individuals based on their institutional file. Primary sources documented their family history, what kind of medical diagnoses they had, what skills they had and what hobbies they cultivated, the things they did to defy Pennhurst staff and ableism more generally, how they interacted with other people, and more.<sup>12</sup> Profiles also included reproductions of primary sources associated with each individual as well as multiple ways to access the material (tablets, Braille, recordings on headsets, etc.). It would have been more engrossing to view original documents and artifacts, but since exhibition collaborators wanted, understandably, to redact personally identifiable information, this was not possible.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> “What are the Archives” panel in *File/Life*.

<sup>12</sup> When the exhibition website is active, full profiles and primary sources are available there.

<sup>13</sup> Lisa A. Sonneborn, e-mail message to author, October 23, 2023. Primary sources used for the exhibition can be consulted here: The State Archives: Human Services, Department of (previously Department of Public Welfare) “Office of Mental Retardation,” Pennhurst Center Patient Files,

The second room included an opportunity to watch short films made by and with the community archivists, accompanied by verbal description, open captioning, and ASL interpretation. Film content was unique and varied. In one, community archivist and fiber artist Danielle Moore created a film in which she read sources aloud from Mae's file. Mae, a deaf and blind Black woman, entered Pennhurst in 1922 and died there in 1957. The film featured Moore embroidering decorative embellishments onto reproductions of primary sources from Mae's file. Moore explained that she "really wanted to focus on color, and . . . the dichotomy of being blind, and . . . the existence of color, and . . . the potential that was taken away [from Mae] by being institutionalized." We learn from Mae's file that upon her death, since she had no family, the institution sent her body to the state anatomical board for research purposes.<sup>14</sup> Like many people who lived at Pennhurst and similar institutions, other people exercised power over Mae even in death.

The exhibition also included stories of resistance. In another film, community archivist Jonathan Atencia discussed Clarence, a child who had been at Pennhurst. Clarence ran away twice in 1925 and escaped successfully in 1930. He worked on a farm and served in World War II. To learn more about Clarence's experience, Atencia interviewed fellow community archivist Harold Gordon, who lived at Pennhurst from 1979 to 1983 and who had also escaped. Later in the film, Atencia reenacted running away from Pennhurst, using what remains of Pennhurst as the setting. "What did freedom feel like?" Atencia asked Gordon. "I was happy," Gordon responded.<sup>15</sup> Many of the stories featured in the exhibition explore the lives of people who spent time at Pennhurst not only while they were institutionalized but also before and after they were there.<sup>16</sup>

For visitors who prefer to digest the exhibition material at home, whether because there was a lot of content, the content was emotionally heavy, or they process materials better in other formats, the online component of the exhibit includes primary sources, panel text, and videos.<sup>17</sup> Visitors can access this material via a QR code on the free exhibition guide published in English and Braille. One interactive component allows you to build poems using words from documents associated with five different files and gives you an opportunity to imagine or rewrite histories. Out of respect for the people who lived at Pennhurst, the online

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1908–1961, Sub-Group RG-023-AMRT-PENN, Series RG-023-AMRT-PENN-1009, Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg, PA.

<sup>14</sup> When the exhibition website is available, the full video can be viewed there.

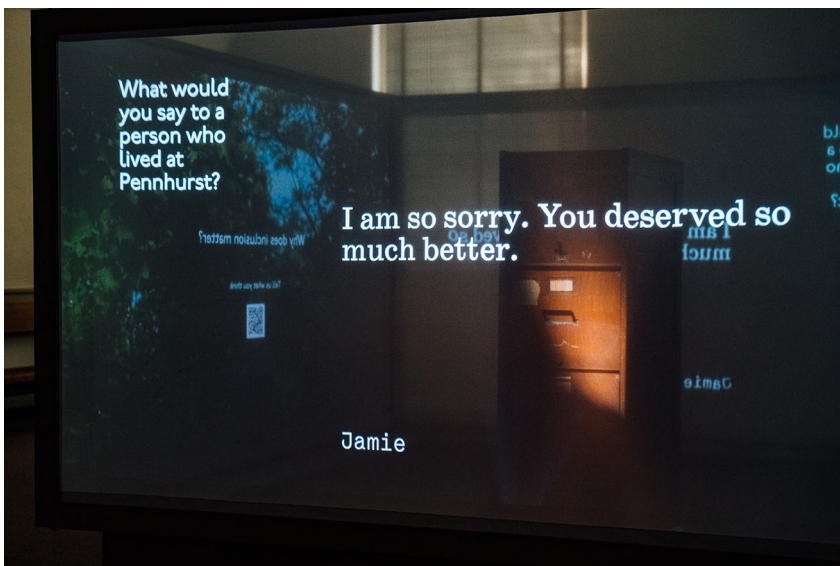
<sup>15</sup> Video on website.

<sup>16</sup> See other books about institutionalization that do just that such as those by Burch and Nielsen cited above.

<sup>17</sup> For more on access copies and other alternative forms of access in academic and museum settings, see American Anthropological Association, "Presentation Guidelines for Success & Accessibility," <https://americananthro.org/accessibility/presentation-guidelines/>.



Tablets and headphones that enabled visitors to engage with *File/Life* content in different ways. (Photo Credit: Alex Cantonese, Each + Every)



Snapshot of a frame from a *File/Life* film. (Photo Credit: Alex Cantonese, Each + Every)

material is accessible only during the exhibitions and for a few days afterwards. I do wish the exhibition was up for a longer period of time so I could spend more time learning from it onsite, but the fact that it is travelling means it will reach more people in more places.

“Can a file ever contain a life?” No, but community members telling these stories can breathe new life into these files and lives. Furthermore, these histories can

expose and challenge historic and ongoing ableism, eugenics, institutionalization, and more.

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*Glenn Kaino: Aki's Market*. Japanese American National Museum, Los Angeles, CA. Glenn Akira Kaino, Artist; Joseph Fellows, Lead Digital Designer; James Taylor, VR Engineering; Gideon Webster, Lead Fabricator; and the *Aki's Market* project team. June 30, 2023–January 28, 2024. <https://www.janm.org/exhibits/glenn-kaino>.

Little Tokyo in Los Angeles, California, is currently experiencing some gradual shifts in its landscapes, including the closure and disappearance of some Japanese American legacy businesses, as a result of the June 2023 opening of the Little Tokyo/Arts District regional connector station of the LA Metro. Amidst these changes, a virtual, imaginatively reconstructed 1957 corner store welcomes visitors at the Japanese American National Museum. This mesmerizing exhibition by artist Glenn Akira Kaino invites attendees to contemplate transgenerational memories of dislocation and engage in dialogues about the past and the present, the personal and the collective, and the static and the dynamic.

Once visitors step into the exhibition room, they encounter an empty space reserved for its virtual reality experience, “The Store,” along with some art pieces by Kaino. The exhibition then extends to another space for more collaborative artworks and to a theater showing a documentary about Kaino and the making of the exhibition. There are no designated sections or designated chronologies to follow, and visitors are encouraged to start their journey from any point. During the entire experience, visitors hear echoes of the song *Sayonara*, with a warm and embracing whisper of “*sayonara, mata kinasai* (Goodbye, come back again)” and “*sayonara, mata kuruyo* (Goodbye, I will be back),” inspired by the conversation Kaino used to have with his great-grandmother Toshime Hosozawa. In his zine *AKI2 K*, which is distributed in the exhibition, the artist explains these phrases as “an accent that is an artifact of the diaspora” which “represents a unique generational line.” Saying goodbye and manifesting the intention to come back signify the main theme of this exhibition: the transgenerational memories of dislocation particularly after the Japanese American incarceration experience.

*Aki's Market* was inspired by the store Kaino's grandfather Akira Shiraishi (the artist's namesake) had in East Los Angeles, serving both Japanese and Spanish-speaking communities. Initially, Shiraishi's dream was to attend Occidental College and become a football player, which was hampered by the incarceration experience. Kaino's art pieces, *Taken Inventory (Keep Stock)* and *Taken Inventory (Endless Field)*, tellingly demonstrate the forceful detachment of a young man's aspirations. According to Kaino, the two mirrored shelving units contain “an