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Downeast Recording Library for the Blind Inc.: Why It Is, What It Is, Where It Came From, Where It's Going

Downeast Recording Library for the Blind, Inc.

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"UP TO LIGHT"



**DOWNEAST RECORDING LIBRARY
FOR THE BLIND INC.**

**Where Sound Shapes a Future
When Sight Fails**



“Long is the way
And hard, that out of hell leads up to light.”

John Milton

University of Maine
RAYMOND H. FOGLER LIBRARY



Gift of

Downeast Recording
Library for the Blind

**DOWNEAST RECORDING LIBRARY
FOR THE BLIND INC.**



Why it is ...
What it is ...
Where it came from ...
Where it's going ...

CAMPBELL STREET — PORTLAND, MAINE

WHY IT IS

In this miracle-age of science, many of man's old ills have been laid to rest. But some, pressing on into the present out of "long ago and far away," haunt today as persistently as they haunted all his yesterdays, their bad ghosts still unlaidd by latter-day knowledge.

One such haunter of history is the handicap of blindness. Riding rough-shod over all countries and colors, blindness dangles its own sword of Damocles above rich men and poor, strong men and weak, black, yellow, white, the learned and unlearned. No respecter of any of the seven ages of man, it besets all from infants to ancients.

A 1953 United Nations survey put the world's blind at better than six and a half million people. In 1961, United States' blind came close to 400,000 — 50 percent over 65 years of age, but 10 percent under 21. In 1962, at least 9000 of United States' blind were children under seven. And 17,500 were in school.

For the young blind, the road to learning falls even shorter than for others of being a royal one. Yet education — in itself a kind of seeing — becomes a still more crucial need for those who can absorb it and in so doing reach up to turn on for themselves the bright light of the mind's eye, the light of learning.

"The mind is its own place," wrote Milton, "and in itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven."

WHAT IT IS

The present with its science does have more answers than the past to the question of how best to educate the blind. One such modern answer — magnetic tape recording.

Downeast Recording Library for the Blind, Incorporated, transfers the textbooks Maine's young blind cannot see to tape recordings they can hear, enabling them to live at home while learning alongside the sighted in public schools and in college.

A non-profit voluntary service unique in Maine in the field of education for the blind, it puts books at the blind student's beck and call statewide, offering a kind of seeing and a way of learning



not yet to be had in many parts of the country. Through its recording team of more than 70 men and women volunteer readers, Downeast Recording Library offers Sound-Sight.

This modern adjunct to education for the blind is a big seven-league-boot step ahead of older methods that segregated the sightless from the sighted world in which all must in the end compete.

In the late 1700's, a Frenchman named Valentin Haüy found blind people could learn to read by feeling their way over big raised letters of the alphabet. The school he opened in Paris was the very first.

A blind teacher in that school went on to invent a system of dots. The teacher's name was Louis Braille. And the touch method that bears Braille's name remains in use throughout the world.

But eight times faster than Braille, far more likely than live readers to be around when wanted, tape-recorded textbooks today take blind students the quickest way known for them to diplomas and degrees, in short to the learning that brightens their dark, that boosts their chances for successful competition in the world of those who see. Best estimates now place over 50 percent of blind U. S. school children in public schools. Only 47 percent (as of 1962) still attended special schools for the blind.

A dynamic, "on demand" service, Downeast Recording Library sends its reels of knowledge spinning statewide from its studio home on Campbell Street, Portland. Its neat, white, clean-lined building, new in 1963, is a functional cinder-block structure measuring 30 by 50 feet, features four soundproof recording studios clustered round a central open workshop area where studio controls are housed. Morning, afternoon and evening recording sessions permit a workload of twelve readers per day.

Volunteering their time (two hours a week per person) and their reading talents, Downeast's recording team boasts among its dedicated members some who donate special skills besides — a foreign language, for instance. It is English mostly. But French, German and Spanish are read here too.

For Downeast Recording Library spans all educational ages and stages as well as all parts of the state of Maine.

To flip four switches for listening in to the readers of four studios at once is to let loose into the central workshop a fantastic medley — a montage of sound that can mount from "Rabbit Hill" and "Dick and Jane" storybooks for six-year-olds, to "The American Handbook of Psychiatry" for the college graduate student seeking a Ph.D., and to as technical a tome as Helmholtz's "On the Sensations of Tone," the Bible of acoustics. And the good German emanating from Studio Four is the contribution of a retired school superintendent from West Germany.

Said one university student, commenting with keen appreciation on the excellent quality of his DRLB tapes, "These people aren't reading bedtime stories. It's pretty tough going in places."

This, then, is Downeast Recording Library for the Blind, where 1500 feet of tape and three hours of read-aloud time make a reel; and where eight or nine such reels of tape make a textbook for an eager seeing ear. It is a place where textbooks arrive and tapes depart. It is a service that strives to meet in Maine a growing need as more and more young blind look a challenge in the eye, take on life and learning in a sighted world.

A private agency, Downeast Recording works in close conjunction with the Eye Care and Special Services Division, State Department of Health and Welfare. That Division's director,



C. Owen Pollard, is a member of DRLB's Board of Directors. In all future years, his successors will be likewise.

"Dirigo," Maine's motto, fits beyond all doubt this scene of homestate service. For Downeast Recording Library for the Blind has put Maine well up in the forefront of those by whom the new in education for the blind is being so successfully tried. Several students using its textbooks-on-tape have made the honor roll in public high schools.

WHERE IT CAME FROM

Dilemma. Dream. Drive. Downeast.

For Donald W. Loveday, it was a natural progression just about like that when loss of his own sight in the mid-1950's forced to a finish his lifelong career as a radio station engineer. He turned the end into a beginning.

Out of a dream born of equal parts drive and dilemma came Downeast Recording Library for the Blind. Putting to fresh use his engineering know-how, the project took, along with talent, some doing. It took energy and courage and at the start of it, just plain friends.

First readers were a few of these. (Notably, earliest of all, Shirley Long Severn and Arthur Owens, both currently serving on Downeast's board of directors. "Without these two I would have given up long ago," Loveday once said.) First "studio" was a small room adjoining his home. First equipment was that which he had collected in the course of a former hobby — "ham" radio. First "student" was a high school freshman.

This was 1956. A room, a reader, a student.

Word spread. The idea worked. The need grew.

In 1962, Downeast Recording Library for the Blind was incorporated.

More and more people volunteered to read, till it was clear that Loveday's "leaps and bounds" library needed more room to work in before it could "work" more people.

1963's new building was the gift of A Friend. Local chapters of Beta Sigma Phi International Sorority gave one thousand dollars for its furnishings.

From morning into night, Downeast Recording's Loveday kept on taping — and talking. With his Guiding Eye Dog, Bess, aiding and abetting mobility in blindness, he spoke to other clubs and church groups. Along with volunteer readers, donations and interest mounted.

In the mind of the man who lost his sight and found a new direction in helping others in a similar plight, the heady sky-high climb of Downeast Recording Library in a few brief years is still just the start.

The ill wind that blew him blindness will blow good in many directions before its upward swirl is done.

Downeast Recording Library's founder Don Loveday serves now not only as its Executive Director but also as its most clear-sighted guiding light.

WHERE IT'S GOING

At present 95% educational, Downeast has its sights fixed on a future that will beam its own special brand of sunlight the whole circle round, of Maine's blind.

Its beginning years have tended to "first things first" — to the



firm rooting in Maine soil of an invaluable service in the teaching of the young so afflicted.

A vigorous youngster itself, the organization comes now to its growing-up years, its reaching-out years — and so to grips with the clear truth that to fulfill its highest potential it must grow up to serve not the young alone but all ages of blind, reach out to all lives capable of being enriched by its touch.

In addition to textbooks-on-tape, Downeast Recording Library's goal is reel-on-reel and hour-after-hour of good listening, to books both current and classic, on a free lending library basis, for Maine's adult blind, many of whom may have gained their education before they lost their sight.

The DRLB accent, supplementing the talking books program of the Library of Congress, will be on Maine — books about it, books by its authors, concerts by its musicians, plays produced on its summer and winter stages, humor that happens here both in word and in deed.

For Downeast, the “Three R’s” are different. They are Readers, Room, Revenue.

More and more volunteer readers have come forward. Room for them to read in has been built into the new studio. Revenue to grow on must still be found.

These are the newest known facts and figures. 140 Maine children can be helped towards education. 150 adults can be aided in vocational rehabilitation. In all, 2000 to 2500 Maine people stand to gain a dimension in living through DRLB growth.

Textbook tapes are purchased by the student if he can afford them, by the state for the student if he cannot (and a Federal-State grant of \$6000 for equipment in 1963 showed further official approval of the project). This trickle of income earned by output keeps DRLB’s life blood flowing. But for growth, it must depend on private donations.

Such donations will be needed to buy hundreds of reels of recording tape, to keep present equipment in good working order and round it out with new, to keep pace with building maintenance as time goes by, and the salary needs of a skeletal paid crew.

Money given to Downeast Recording Library rates maximum deductions under Internal Revenue Service regulations; it is a tax-exempt educational institution.

Says the American Federation for the Blind: “Work for the adult blind in the United States is based on a system of cooperation between public agencies, federal and state, and private agencies both national and local.”

Neither competing with nor repeating the work of any other group working to benefit the blind in Maine, Downeast Recording Library is the first private agency ever to work as partner to Maine’s public agency, the State Department of Health and Welfare, which welcomed its birth and wishes it swift, sure progress.

But Downeast Recording’s friends are the heart of that matter.



“This is Margaret Chase Smith. Speaking for the moment not as a senator but as a Maine citizen wanting to be counted among the friends of Downeast Recording Library for the Blind. What *is* Downeast Recording Library? So new that question is often asked. So needed a new building bears witness to its worth. A building that *quadruples* today the output of one year ago . . .

“Downeast Recording Library — a voluntary educational service unique in Maine — transfers textbooks to tape, lets Maine’s young blind *hear* their way through school and college. Easy? No. Our great English poet John Milton told us so in words of one syllable when he wrote this line: ‘Long is the way and hard, that out of hell leads up to light.’ Milton knew, because he too was blind.

“At a time when his handicap is on the increase, education is more needed than ever before. Downeast Recording Library began six years ago with one student, one reader, one purpose. Today over seventy men and women volunteers read in its studios two hours a week to help blind Maine boys and girls lead themselves ‘up to light’ — the light of learning. And thereby to the brightening life of the mind. Downeast Recording Library’s home is Portland, its scope statewide. I believe its friends should be legion. And I am proud to count myself one of them. I am always proud to see Maine take care of its own.”*

*A message tape-recorded by Senator Smith for broadcast on all-Maine radio.