

[from **The HeART of Deaf Culture: Literary and Artistic Expressions of Deafhood**
by Karen Christie and Patti Durr, 2012]

The Chain of Remembered Gratitude:

The Heritage and History of the DEAF-WORLD in the United States

PART TWO

Note: The names of *Deaf individuals* appear in bold italics throughout this chapter. In addition, names of [Deaf](#) and [Hearing](#) historical figures appearing in [blue](#) are briefly described in "Who's Who" which can be accessed via the Overview Section of this Project (for English text) or the Timeline Section (for ASL).

"...we were isolated in the midst of society; today we are reunited...Today we have united our intellects, our efforts, our lights; today we constitute one body; all of us...today, we who were not, ARE!" [Claudius Forestier](#) (1838, from [Mottez](#), 1993)



Top to Bottom: We are the Same (2011), Understanding Deaf Culture (2010) © Nancy Rourke

From Deaf Schools to Deaf Communities: The Emergence of Deaf Leaders/Activists in France and the United States

In 1834, three Deaf teachers along with seven other alumni of the Paris School formed one of the first social organizations of Deaf people--the Deaf Mute Committee. The three educators, *Jean-Ferdinand Berthier*, *Claudius Forestier*, and *Alphonse Lenoir* proposed a banquet in order to honor the anniversary of the birth of *Abbé de'L Épée*. Because of the importance of this event, this first banquet has been described as the "birth of the Deaf-Mute nation" (*Mottez*, 1993) and a "first step in developing a conscious Deaf history" (*Quartararo*, 2002).

While Paris seemed to have a community of Deaf people and Deaf artisans prior to this, they did not appear to gather for organized events. The founding of the Paris school led to lifelong connections between graduates. With the establishment of the Deaf-Mute Banquets, which became annual celebrations, the French Deaf community members became aware of their connections: their shared past, their need for fellowship, and their future goals. *Ferdinand Berthier* became not only a leader in the establishment of the Deaf Mute Banquets, but a biographer Deaf ancestors and one of our first true activists.



Ferdinand *Berthier* © Nancy Rourke 2012

Berthier had come to the Paris School in 1811 when he was about 8 years old. *Jean Massieu* and *Laurent Clerc* had been *Berthier's* role models and mentors. As a young student, *Berthier* was reported to have asked his teacher how he could "become a genius like *Clerc*" (Hartig, 2006). *Berthier* became a gifted student, who was by the age of 13 recognized by *Clerc* as the brightest pupil at the school just as *Clerc* was leaving to America. *Berthier* was a gifted artist and one of his student drawings was presented to the King. At age 20, he drew, "The man and the snake" in which a snake slithers from a man's mouth, clearly symbolizing the sinfulness of speech.¹

In addition to knowing them personally, *Berthier* wrote a biographical sketch of both *Massieu* and *Clerc* as part of his biography of *Sicard*. In the sketch of *Massieu*, it is clear that *Berthier* admires *Massieu's* intellect while feeling that he lacked particular social skills that would make him a "gentleman" (Hartig, 2006). In his sketch of *Clerc*, *Berthier* finds a true role model, both socially and intellectually.

At the time of the establishment of the first Banquet, *Berthier* and others had been struggling for a number of years with the direction the Paris School had been taking since the death of *Sicard* in 1822. Questions concerning the role of sign language and Deaf teachers had arisen. One director with clear goals favoring oral education, *Désiré Ordinaire*, was hired. Also during these years, a true ally of Deaf people, *Auguste Bébien* was forced out. *Bébien* was one who openly criticized the Paris Schools' neglect of the students, neglect of natural signs, and pathological attitudes of the Director and the Board. In 1830, *Berthier* had written to the King of France on behalf of Deaf students, teachers and community members to express support for rehiring of *Bébien*, *Berthier's* former teacher and colleague. This was followed by a letter from sixty students at the school protesting the unprofessionalism of many Hearing teachers and their inability to understand sign language (see Karacostas, 1993). As a result, the administration was furious and expelled three of the students.

At the time of the first Banquet, **Berthier** and the other Deaf instructors at the Paris School had been demoted to tutors or teacher's assistants. The rationale for this was that these instructors could not teach speech and lipreading which was now declared a vital part of the Paris School's curriculum.

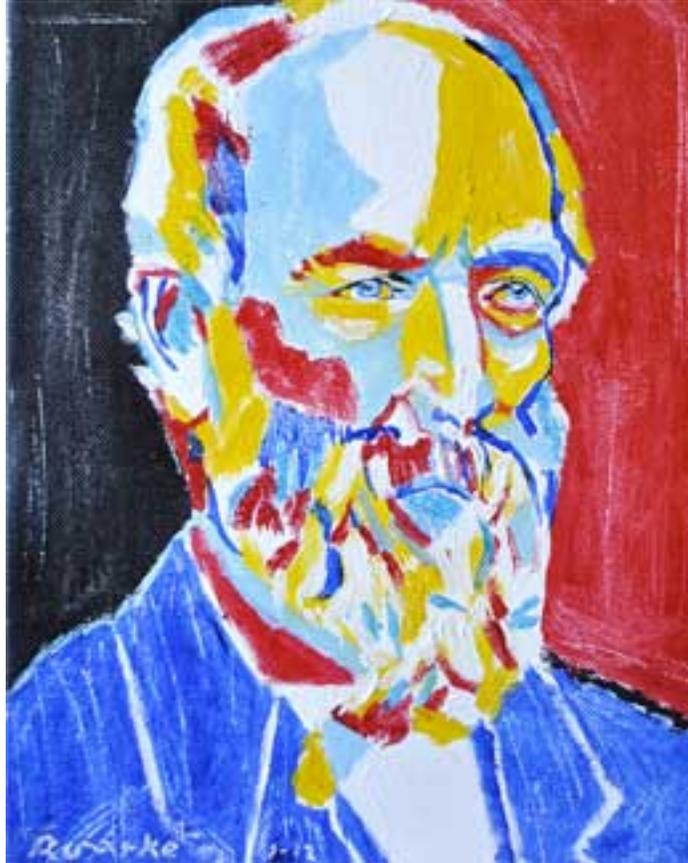
By creating the Deaf Mute Banquets, **Berthier** and others established a tradition in which they could celebrate sign language and their community in the face of oppressive threats. This celebration included Hearing guests. While **Désiré Ordinaire** "refused to have anything to do with the banquets," the following Hearing non-signing director of the Paris School was invited.²

*"(..there have been) hearing-speaking people...(who) have wanted to suppress the language of deaf mutes...And yet deaf mutes have said to their speaking brothers: 'come among us: join us in our work and in our play: learn our language as we learn yours.'" **Berthier** (1840, from **Mottez** 1993)*

Ferdinand Berthier was a Deaf ancestor who was also a prolific artist, writer, orator, teacher, leader, and activist. When oralism threatened his job, his language and his people, **Berthier** found a way to promote and strengthen the bonds of Deaf people. As **Mottez** states, (1993 p. 151) "Thus, the Deaf Mute nation was not born directly with the **abbé de L'Épée**, or shortly thereafter. It was born when his legacy was threatened and when Deaf Mutes themselves had to defend it."

SECOND AMERICAN GENERATION: The Spread of Deaf Schools and Deaf Community

In America, the organization of the Deaf community also grew from the graduates of the schools for the Deaf coming together to recognize and honor a common history. This occurred in 1850 with the planning of a tribute to the aging **Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet** and **Laurent Clerc**.



Thomas Brown © Nancy Rourke 2012

Thomas Brown, who had attended the Hartford school and met his future Deaf wife there, proposed the tribute. It was said that "in his graphic language of signs, that his spirit could find not rest, until he had devised some method of giving expression to the grateful feeling that filled his heart, and which the lapse of years served only to increase. He had but to suggest the thought to others of his former associates, when it was eagerly seized and made the common property of them all" (Barnard, 1853, pg. 193).

Brown had been a student of both **Clerc** and **Gallaudet**. As one of the "earliest and most intelligent pupils," he had considered becoming a teacher himself.³ **Brown**, who had a Deaf father, Deaf sister, Deaf nephews and Deaf children himself, took over his family farm in Henniker, New Hampshire after graduation. His wife, **Mary Smith** had come from Chilmark, Martha's Vineyard and had numerous Deaf and Hearing relatives. It was noted that in the area around where Brown lived, there was quite a community of Deaf folks, numbering about 44 in all.

The tribute to **Gallaudet** and **Clerc** was held in Hartford on September 26, 1850. A gathering of over two hundred alumni and two hundred students from Hartford attended..."was probably the greatest (gathering of Deaf people), in point of numbers that ever took place anywhere in the world." Like the first Deaf Mute Banquet in France, the celebration marked not only the recognition of a common history, but also seemed to stimulate thoughts about the future of Deaf people.

Brown and his committee raised six hundred dollars and presented to **Gallaudet** and **Clerc** each a silver pitcher and platter. Engraved on the pitchers were ships representing **Gallaudet** and **Clerc**'s voyages as well as illustrations of the Hartford School. **Gallaudet** was thanked for procuring for Deaf people "...the blessings of education..." and **Clerc** for leaving his homeland because he was a "lover of his kind."



Laurent Clerc in later years © Nancy Rourke 2010

The celebration after the formal presentations to [Gallaudet](#) and [Clerc](#) were described in Barnard's writing (1852, pg. 205): "Former friends and fellow-pupils met again, after years of separation, with countenances, in many cases, so changed as to be barely recognizable, to recall 'old times' and old scenes; to exchange fragments of personal history; and to brighten a new the chain of friendship and gratitude that bound them to one another, and to the institution in which their true life began. And it was most pleasant to see the joy that beamed from all their faces, and gave new vigor and animation to their expressive language of signs."

"We all feel the most ardent love to these gentlemen ([Laurent Clerc](#) and [Thomas Gallaudet](#)) who founded this Asylum, and to these our earliest instructors. This gratitude will be a chain to bind all the future pupils together. Those who succeed as pupils will be told of the debt of gratitude they owe to the founders of the American Asylum. Our ship, moored by this chain of remembered gratitude, will float safely hereafter..."
Fisher Ames Spofford (1850, in [Barnard](#) 1850)

Within a year of the tribute, [Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet](#) had died. The first formal society of Deaf people in America was formed and named in [Thomas Gallaudet](#)'s honor--the New England Gallaudet Association (NEGA). [Thomas Brown](#) would be one of the founders of "a society in order to promote the intellectual, social, moral temporal and spiritual welfare of our mute community..." NEGA under [Brown](#)'s leadership would begin publishing one of the first newspapers for Deaf people, The Gallaudet Guide and Deaf Mute Companion. Additionally, [Brown](#) called for a national convention of Deaf people, which eventually led to the founding of the National Association of the Deaf in 1880. [Thomas Brown](#) lived a long life, having been educated by the first American generation of teachers, [Laurent Clerc](#) and [Thomas Gallaudet](#) themselves. He became an activist and organizer of Deaf people, had a Deaf son who became a well respected educator, lived through the Civil War and died just after the establishment of the first national organization of Deaf people. As we will see, the National Association of the Deaf was established just in time.

While the Deaf school system across the United States allowed many Deaf Americans to be educated, job discrimination and other inequalities remained a common experience of Deaf people. **John J. (Henry) Flourney** was a Deaf man who recognized and experienced such limitations, and thus proposed the idea of Congress supporting the establishment of a Deaf colony or commonwealth.

Flourney, a graduate of the Hartford School, was from a wealthy family in Georgia. Later in life, he helped to establish the Georgia School for the Deaf, and unsuccessfully ran for office. His proposal for a Deaf state was one of the first public responses to discrimination and advocacy for separatism. In 1856, he wrote:

"...we do attest that we are capable of many (things) of which the prejudice, and sometimes even malignance of our hearing brethren deprive us!!" John J. Flourney (in Krentz, 2000)

Toward the end of these "Golden Ages" of the Education of Deaf people in America, we would see the establishment of a National Deaf-Mute College (which later became Gallaudet College, and now is Gallaudet University). In 1864, Congress had authorized the institution to confer college degrees with President Abraham Lincoln signing the bill into law.⁴ At the inauguration of the college, John Carlin who was given the first honorary degree, said:

"On this day, the 28th of June 1864, a college for deaf-mutes is brought into existence. It is a bright epoch in deaf-mute history. The birth of this infant college, the first of its kind in the world, will bring joy...Is it likely that colleges for deaf-mutes will ever produce mute statesmen, lawyers, ministers of religion, orators, poets, and authors? The answer is: They will..." John Carlin (in Krentz, 2000)

The Age of Oralism : Attempts at the "Unmaking" of the Deaf Community, Culture, and Sign Language⁵

While most schools for the Deaf offered some form of articulation instruction for students who would benefit from it, there was a growing movement in Europe to ban natural sign languages from the classrooms, dorm rooms, and Deaf children's lives in order to enforce the exclusionary, assimilationist practice of the oral-only method known as oralism.

Following the Civil War in the United States, there was a renewed desire for national unity which eventually impacted views toward Deaf people and sign language. This focus on nationalism meant that cultural and linguistic diversity were seen as threats. Immigrants and foreigners were treated with suspicion until they became assimilated. The goals at schools for Native Americans included the suppression of Native American cultural traditions and languages in favor of educating students to behave like White Americans and use only English. Along with this came the importance of creating citizens who could contribute and smoothly assimilate into the labor class.

Because of the cultural climate of the time, Social Darwinism became an attractive philosophy. As an idea, this meant that there were "civilized" people who were considered superior to others, but they needed to compete with those who were less civilized or less desirable. Eugenics resulted from actions, by the government or individuals, related to "improving the human race"; promoting stronger and "more perfect" individuals while doing away with people who would not be thought of as those who are "fittest" and should "survive." Such people consisted of those who were poor, mentally ill, physically different, of nonwhite ancestry and Deaf. Signing became viewed as something uncivilized, inferior and primitive. Additionally, it was believed that by using sign language Deaf people became a group "isolated" from the wider Hearing community.

Over the next few decades, teachers at Deaf schools became caught up with these ideas and began to advocate for the exclusive use of articulation.⁶ Whereas **Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet** and the first generations of educators of Deaf students in the United States focused primarily on how sign language facilitated Deaf people's religious and educational knowledge, the concerns of the post antebellum age

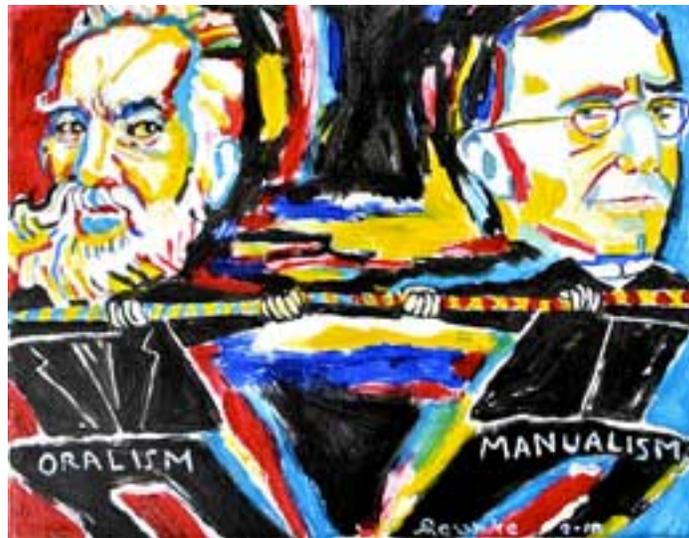
related to building a more unified country, which most thought could only be achieved with spoken English. As Branson and Miller (2002) suggest this meant that the education of Deaf students had a different purpose than that of the education of Hearing students: "Speech and not knowledge was beginning to dominate the deaf child's education" (pg. 168).

In 1867, the Lexington School for the Deaf, which was promoted as the first permanent pure oral school in the country, opened in New York City. This was soon followed in 1869 by the Clarke School for the Deaf in Northampton, Massachusetts.

Additionally, around this time a few segregated Deaf school programs were established to educate African American students such as the North Carolina State School for the Colored Deaf and Blind (1867) and the Maryland School for the Colored Deaf and Blind (1872).

As Baynton (1996) notes, in 1860 almost no Deaf students were taught by oral-only methods. Yet, by the end of the First World War (around 1918), oralism was the philosophy which dominated eighty percent of the schools, and maintained its hold until well into the 1970s. In addition, the number of Deaf teachers fell from almost half of all teachers to barely one tenth, many of whom were tracked into teaching multiply handicapped Deaf students or vocational trades (Lane, 1992).

It was the Milan Conference of 1880 that cemented this powerful shift from the Golden Ages of Deaf Enlightenment to the Dark Ages of Oralism.



Old Debate: Oralism vs Manualism © Nancy Rourke 2010

Vive la Parole! (Long live speech): The 1880 Milan Declarations of Phonocentrism!⁷

In 1880 in Milan, Italy at the 2nd International Congress for the Instruction of the Deaf (I.C.E.D), often referred to as the Milan Conference, passed resolutions which promoted "the incontestable superiority of speech over signs in restoring the deaf-mute to society." In truth, the Congress was made up primarily of voting Italian and French Hearing instructors.⁸ These instructors overwhelmingly had worked to advocate for oral only instruction. In truth, the organizers had manipulated the entire Congress.⁹ Some of the resolutions were:

FIRST RESOLUTION

The Congress--

Considering the incontestable superiority of speech over signs in restoring the deaf-mute to society, and in giving him a more perfect knowledge of language

Declares--

That the oral method should be preferred to that of signs for the education and instruction of the deaf and dumb.

SECOND RESOLUTION

The Congress--

Considering that the simultaneous use of speech and signs has the disadvantage of injuring speech, lipreading and precision of ideas Declares--

That the Pure Oral Method ought to be preferred

FOURTH RESOLUTION

The Congress--

Considering that the teaching of the speaking-deaf by the Pure Oral method should resemble as much as possible that of those who hear and speak Declares--

The most natural and effective mean by which the speaking-deaf may acquire the knowledge of language is the 'intuitive' method..'

EIGHTH RESOLUTION

The Congress--

Considering that the application of the Pure Oral method in institutions where it is not yet in active operation, should be -- to avoid the certainty of failure -- prudent, gradual, progressive,

Declares--

That the pupils newly received into the schools should form a class by themselves, where instruction could be given by speech. That these pupils should be absolutely separated from others too far advanced to be instructed by speech, and whose education will be completed by signs.

That each year a new speaking class be established, with all the old pupils taught by signs have completed their education.

The pure oral method swept over Europe like a dark cloud and traveled across the Atlantic Ocean and spread its dark cloak over every school for the Deaf in the United States. Even the American School for the Deaf became an oral-only school. One very powerful man, [Alexander Graham Bell](#), armed with funds, a formal association, and an interest in eugenics "cleared the way for its progress from east to west" (Lane, 1984).



Misguided Benevolent© Nancy Rourke 2010

Alexander Graham Bell was a Hearing oralist educator who advocated for pure oralism (oral / aural only education), the exclusion of ASL as well as Deaf teachers from the classrooms. In addition, **Bell** tried to dissuade Deaf people from marrying other Deaf people for fear of the possibility of a "Deaf variety of the human race." He used his wealth from the telephone invention to establish the Volta Bureau, publications committed to promoting oralism, and the AG Bell Association (originally known as the Association for the Promotion of the Teaching of Speech to the Deaf). His life long work and his legacy has been to try to put forth the idea that Deaf people must learn to speak and hear so that they can be "restored to society."

*"The great object of the education of the deaf is to enable them to communicate readily and easily with hearing persons...that is what is meant by 'restoring the deaf to society.'" **Alexander Graham Bell** (from **Winefield**, 1981)*

*"...these symbols (signs) are of a nature to retard rather and advance speech...I should advocate its entire abolition in our institutions for the deaf..." **Alexander Graham Bell** (From **Lane**, 1984 and **Winefield**, 1981)*

*"We should try ourselves to forget they are deaf. We should teach them to forget that they are deaf."
Alexander Graham Bell (1884 from **DeLand**, 1922)*

*"The percentage of deaf teachers employed has steadily decreased, and must decrease still further...the employment of deaf teachers is absolutely detrimental to oral instruction."
Alexander Graham Bell (From **Winefield**, 1981)*

In a presentation to the Literary Society at Kendall Green which consisted of Deaf Gallaudet students, **Bell** (in DeLand, 1920) stated:

"It is the duty of every good man and every good woman to remember that children follow marriage, and I am sure there is no one among the deaf who desires to have his affliction handed down to his children...You have to live in a world of hearing and speaking people, and everything that will help you to mingle with hearing and speaking people will promote your welfare and happiness. A hearing partner will wed you to the hearing world. ...I therefore hold before you as the ideal marriage, a marriage with a hearing person."

As the Dark Ages of Oralism dragged on, Deaf people were not mute and passive. They had formed the National Association of the Deaf, hosting regular conventions and World Congresses working to ensure that Deaf children would get fully accessible education by pushing for sign language and Deaf teachers to remain a part of Deaf schools. Deaf people began to organize to combat attacks on their language and human rights as well as their civil liberties.



See, Hear, Speak No Deaf © Nancy Rourke 2011

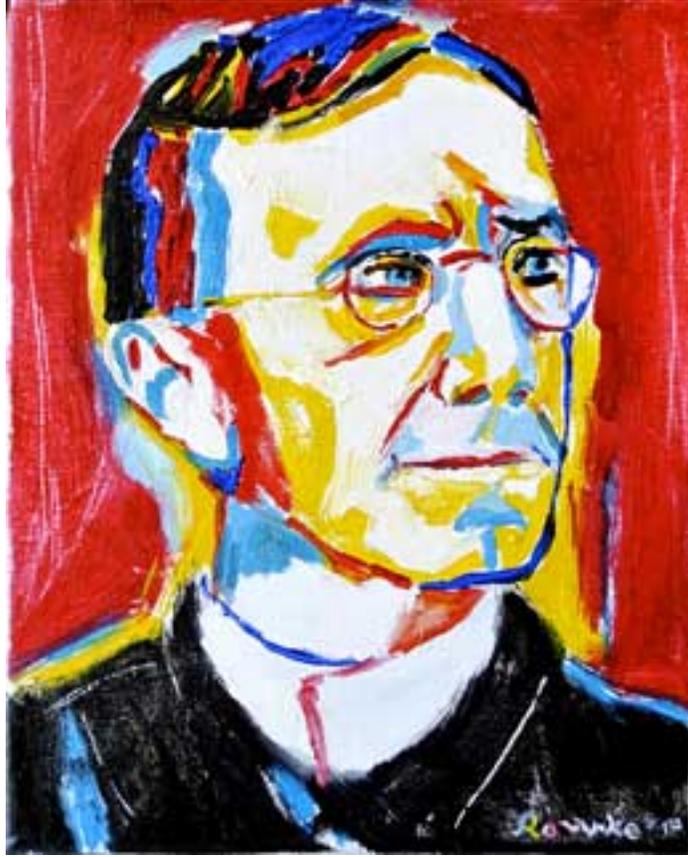
Long Live the Emancipation of the Deaf!¹⁰

"The FIRST great meeting of the class to be absolutely independent of leading strings held in other hands than their own. No superintendent or principal, no hearing teacher, had anything to do either with [the conference] program or arrangements. It was even regarded as unnecessary to provide interpreters. The members came, some from long distances, and instead of camping at some school, paid their hotel and transportation bills and possessed a new sense of independence and of sufficiency unto themselves."

George W. Veditz (1933)

The National Association of the Deaf, initially called the National Association of Deaf-Mutes was established during its first convention which ran from August 25-27 1880. The National Deaf-Mute Convention took place in Cincinnati Ohio and included Deaf people from 22 states and the District of Columbia. While many more attended, 81 individuals became members (**Cloud**, 1923). **Theodore A. Froehlich's** paper "The Importance of Association Among Mutes for Mutual Improvement" recognized "We have interests peculiar to ourselves which can be taken care of by ourselves." The conclusion of the First National Association of the Deaf Convention was the chant "Long Live the Emancipation of the Deaf!"

Some key ancestor-advocates during this long, dark period of oralism were:



This is **George Veditz** © Nancy Rourke 2010

George W. Veditz was a multilingual Deaf man who advocated tirelessly for Deaf equality and language rights. One of his most ambitious and valuable contributions was to have had the foresight to use the new technology of film to record, document, preserve and share American Sign Language. In 1910 in **Veditz's** President's Address at the 9th NAD convention and the 3rd World's Congress of the Deaf, he stated,

"We possess and jealously guard a language different and apart from any other in common use - a language which nevertheless is precisely what all-wise Mother Nature designed for the people of the eye, a language with no fixed form or literature in the past, but which we are now striving to fix and give a distinct literature of its own by means of the moving picture film."¹¹

As president of the NAD (1904-1910), **Veditz** worked with **Oscar Regensburg** and **RJ Stewart** on the NAD Motion Picture project, raising \$5,000 to film some of the best signers to preserve "the sign language" in its purest form. **Veditz's** classic presentation, "Preservation of the Sign Language" warned of the encroaching cloud of oralism.



Edward Miner Gallaudet 1865 © Nancy Rourke 2011

Edward Miner Gallaudet, the son of **Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet** and Sophia Fowler Gallaudet, founded the Columbia Institute for the Deaf and the Blind and the National Deaf Mute College [later renamed Gallaudet College in honor of his father]. He was the president of Gallaudet College for 46 years and attended both the 1880 ICED Milan Congress and the 1900 ICED Congress, where he advocated strongly for the inclusion of sign language in Deaf education and the firm belief that Deaf people be involved in determining the best method of instruction for Deaf children. **EM Gallaudet**, a native ASL signer, was one of the first to be filmed for the NAD Motion Picture Project (see the Gallaudet Video Library for this clip from the NAD Motion Picture Project).

"In the education of the deaf the aim should be to secure the highest possible development to the greatest possible number, morally, mentally, and physically." **EM Gallaudet** (from *Winefield*, 1981).

A graduate of the America School for the Deaf and professor at Gallaudet College, **John B. Hotchkiss** was also included in the NAD Motion Picture project. In Hotchkiss' "Memories of Old Hartford," he mimics an elderly **Laurent Clerc** and demonstrates **Clerc**'s bilingual teaching methods.¹²

Shortly after his death in 1923, it was written: "**John Burton Hotchkiss** learned in its purity the language of signs, the heritage of the Hartford School from France, as taught at the School by **Laurent Clerc**. This language he in turn bequeathed to generation after generations of students who flocked to Gallaudet. These signs, correct in etymology and sanctioned by tradition, the pupils of the Doctor took with them ...Thus, every gathering place of the Deaf in America felt Dr. **Hotchkiss**' teaching" (**Stevens**, 1923).

Robert P. McGregor, the first president of the National Association of the Deaf (from 1880-1883) founded the Cincinnati Day School for the Deaf and the Ohio Home for the Aged and Infirm Deaf. **McGregor** was featured in the NAD Motion Picture project demonstrating his versatility in clips giving a sermon and telling humorous stories. As an educator and advocate, he was alarmed by oralism which banned sign language and Deaf teachers from the classroom.

"What heinous crime have the deaf been guilty of that their language should be proscribed? ... By whom then are signs proscribed? By...educators of the deaf who boast is that they do not understand signs and do not want to... by parents who do not understand the requisites to the happiness of their deaf children...Professing to have no object in view but the benefit of the deaf, [educators] exhibit an utter contempt for the opinions, the wishes, the desires of the deaf. And why should we not be consulted in a matter so such vital interest to us? This is a question no man has yet answered satisfactorily." Robert P. McGregor (from Lane, 1992)

Olof Hanson was a well established architect designing Deaf friendly spaces as well as president of the National Association of the Deaf (from 1910-1913). Like **Veditz**, he advocated for Deaf people to be allowed to become civil servants. **Hanson** wrote to AG Bell asking him to help advocate for the mandatory learning of the manual alphabet in all public schools. His letter to Bell suggested, "if you would lend your assistance, either by personally addressing a convention, or in any manner you think practicable, you would do a favor, which I think, the deaf would much more quickly appreciate than your past services." Bell, however, would not perform such a service, arguing that the majority could not be expected to change for a minority (see Van Cleve and Crouch, 1989).

Hanson had married a Deaf woman, **Agatha Tiegel**, who was the first Deaf woman to graduate from Gallaudet College in 1893. She was Valedictorian and addressed the issue of gender equality in her speech "The Intellect of Women" concluding with,

"There yet remains a large fund of prejudice to overcome, of false sentiment to combat, of narrow-minded opposition to triumph over. But there is no uncertainty as to the final outcome. Civilization is too far advanced not to acknowledge the justice of woman's cause. She herself is too strongly impelled by a noble hunger for something better than she has known, too highly inspired by the vista of the glorious future, not to rise with determination and might and move on till all barriers crumble and fall."¹³



Andrew Foster © Nancy Rourke 2011

Andrew Foster became the first African American to graduate from Gallaudet College in 1954 after attending the Alabama School for the Colored Deaf. Foster went on to get a Masters degree (from Eastern Michigan University), and honorary doctorate from Gallaudet University for his work in Africa. Foster went to Africa in 1957 and eventually established over 30 schools for the deaf primarily in West Africa. Existing missionary programs apparently discouraged Foster and his work so he established the Christian Mission for the Deaf. A former student from Africa said at his memorial service (Foster died in a plane crash en route to Kenya in 1987),

"It was his opinion that a deaf person living in Africa who cannot read or write was like a piece of gold lost in a remote mine. That piece of gold had to be taken out and polished in order to reflect its true value."¹⁴

There have been many other brilliant Deaf and Hearing ancestors who have seen the great potentials that Deaf signing people offer to the world and have worked endlessly to "cherish and defend...the noblest gift that God has given to the Deaf" (*Veditz*, 1913). So even though much GREAT creativity in the form of art, literature, and activism was squashed, denied, destroyed or stolen during the dark ages of Oralism, Deaf people and Hearing allies never surrendered and Oralism never won.

Resurgence and the Second Wave

The history of Deaf people has shown that the true disability that Deaf people have experienced is one of language bigotry and oppression. The recognition of ASL as a bonafide language is often hailed as the reemergence of Deaf people from the Dark tide of Oralism. It occurred during the years in the United States when the Civil Rights Movement as well as liberation movement for other disenfranchised groups began to assert their rights as full citizens.



William C. Stokoe 1965 © Nancy Rourke 2011

[William Stokoe](#), a professor at Gallaudet University, noted that the signing he was being taught to use in his classroom and that which was taking place among his students outside the classroom were completely different. This led to his analysis of that natural form of signing that was used by Deaf people outside the classroom. His initial analysis showed that individual signs were made up of smaller parts (a limited number of handshapes, locations and movements), and when recombined they created new signs. [Stokoe's](#) research was accepted as proof by linguists that American Sign Language was a full-fledged language. In 1960, [Stokoe](#) published *Sign Language Structure* followed by the *Dictionary of American Sign Language on Linguistic Principles* in 1965 which was coauthored by two Deaf researchers, ***Carl Croneberg*** and ***Dorothy Casterline***.



Top to Bottom: *Betty G. Miller* and *Clayton Valli* © *Nancy Rourke* 2011

In 1967, the National Theatre of the Deaf (NTD) was formed and sign language was seen on national and international stages. At one point, the AG Bell Association unsuccessfully tried to prevent a TV broadcast of NTD due to its use of sign language in performance. The founding of NTD led to the establishment of Deaf theatre groups at the community level that produced several important Deaf plays about the Deaf experience. It also sparked the beginning of a renaissance of Deaf expressions in 1970s-1980s as seen in the production of Deaf Visual artworks (particularly **Betty G. Miller's** 1972 solo exhibit)¹⁵ and ASL poetry (particularly **Clayton Valli's** 1980 NSSLRT Conference performance).¹⁶ The proliferation of expressions about the Deaf experience would not have been possible without first removing the stigma oralism imposed on ASL.



Top to bottom: Mask of Benevolence (2011), Oralist Child Abuse Painting No. 2 (2012 © *Nancy Rourke* 2011

Because the education of Deaf students was being deemed a failure under Oralism (see the Babbidge Report of 1965 and the Commission on the Education of the Deaf report of 1988) and because of the legitimization of ASL as a language, signing began to slip back into the classrooms across the United States under the Total Communication philosophy, which was introduced by **Roy Holcomb**. Total communication originally meant using any means necessary to communicate with a Deaf child including signing. In practice, Total Communication became "signing and speaking at the same time" with invented signed

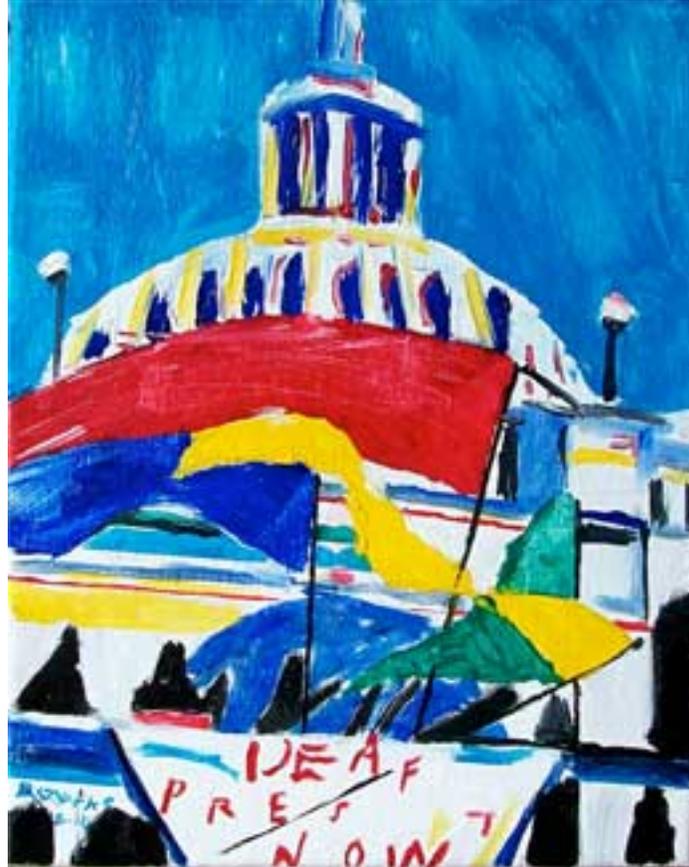
English systems. This allowed educators to essentially continue with a monolingual, piecemeal, and artificial way of instructing Deaf children. In addition, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), originally called the Education of all Handicapped Children Act (public law 94-142), pushed for mainstreaming Deaf children into public schools with little or no exposure to ASL or Deaf peers. Currently in the United States, the mainstreaming mandate and Second Wave of oral/aural only education and been threatening Deaf schools nationally.

With the linguistic emancipation of their language, Deaf people began to see they were entitled to certain inalienable rights and began to take a more active and visible role in advocating for Deaf rights especially as they related to the field of Deaf education. *Veditz* stated in 1910, "Wherever the deaf have received an education the method by which it is imparted is the burning question of the day with them, for the deaf are what their schooling makes them, more than any other class of humans. They are facing not a theory but a condition, for they are first, last and all the time the people of the eye." Deaf people become conscious of their responsibility to advocate not only for themselves, but also for future generations of Deaf children. The struggle with who should decide and does decide about methods, subject matter, or even who is at the helm of the Deaf education system has become a very important topic to Deaf people and their family members.

Segregated schools for Deaf individuals continued until the last closed in 1978 (Louisiana) and in 1982 another important organization was founded. *Kristi Merriweather* describes the founding of the National Black Deaf Advocates (NBDA):¹⁷

"The founding of NBDA wasn't based on one clear-cut cause but on several factors that converged into a determined passion to forge this organization into existence. Some of the factors were historically long-standing, such as persistent systematic racism and audism in the deaf and hearing communities, which manifested itself in inequitable resources and racial disparities in education, employment, housing, legal protection, and health care. The dominant society's devaluation and marginalization of non-conforming language (whether it be ASL, Ebonics, or black deaf dialect) along with the unique black deaf cultural features also planted the seeds for NBDA's inception. Various types of resistance against oppression, exploitation, and degradation and has always been an impetus and mainstay of the Black American experience and its deaf members were no exception. W.E.B. DuBois summed the greatest problem of the 20th century as the color line (racism). For Black Deaf Americans, their challenge was the color line plus the hearing line (audism). Black-oriented organizations like NAACP were strictly combating the color line, and Deaf-oriented organizations like NAD were strictly contending the hearing line. But- who was going to address both? Where would they gather where their shared reality as a people was not going to be treated as a minority footnote? The answer would be revealed in 1981, in the form of a vision of an organization by, for, and about Black Deaf people."

Deaf President Now



Deaf President Now © Nancy Rourke 2010

Even during the Dark Ages, Gallaudet University resisted the oral/aural only approach to educating Deaf students. When the Civil Rights era ushered in the movements for self-governance and the autonomy of African Americans, Women, Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual and Transgendered peoples, Gallaudet University became the place where the liberation movement for Deaf individuals was set in motion.

Hence, in 1988 when the Gallaudet University Board of Trustees selected a Hearing non-signing woman (Elisabeth Zinser) to lead the college over two Deaf signing men (*Harvey Corson* and *I. King Jordan*), Deaf Americans had been empowered sufficiently to recognize discrimination. There had been huge efforts advocating for a Deaf President prior to the interview and selection process. When Dr. Zinser was appointed, students, faculty, staff, alumni, parents and community members protested calling for her resignation. The week-long Deaf President Now (DPN) protest peacefully and successfully resulted in *Dr. I King Jordan*'s appointment as the first Deaf President of Gallaudet University.

This was followed by other major events of cultural celebration and advocacy:

- The Deaf Way I and Deaf Way II International Conference and Festival (1989/2002)
- The Americans with Disabilities Act (1990),
- The certification of Deaf Cultural Studies/ASL Instruction in university programs
- The inclusion of Deaf characters in Television, Film, and Theatre productions;
- The increased accessibility and participation via captioning devices, pagers, and videophones; and,
- The participation of Deaf people in more socially conscious grassroots activism.

In 1989, a group of linguists from Gallaudet University asserted that the Deaf education system in America had been largely a failure. "Unlocking the Curriculum: Principles for Achieving Access in Deaf Education"

(Johnson, Liddell and Erting, 1989) became a ground-breaking document. Changes which had been implemented as a result of mainstreaming and the use of signed supported speech systems were shown to have resulted in a lack of achievement by Deaf children. After further review of research in the areas of language acquisition and education, the linguists called for educational reform which recognizes "deaf children's need for early natural language competence (in ASL) and for communicative access to curricular materials."

UNITY for GALLAUDET Protest



Coalition © Nancy Rourke 2011

After 18 years as president of Gallaudet University, **Dr. I. King Jordan** planned to retire. Gallaudet erupted with another campus-wide and community-based protest when then-provost, **Dr. Jane Fernandes** was selected over two other finalists, **Ron Stern** and **Dr. Stephen Weiner**, to be the next president of Gallaudet. All of these finalists were Deaf Caucasian administrators.

Deaf people of color were the first to contest the omission of **Dr. Glenn Anderson**, a Deaf African-American post-secondary administrator, from the finalist pool. Their concerns about a flawed search process were ignored by the majority of students, faculty, staff and community members. However, when **Dr. Fernandes** was announced as the next president, students locked down Hall Memorial Building. **Dr. Fernandes**, referred to as JKF, was not popular with many students due to her autocratic leadership style. She had been appointed as provost six years earlier without a search process or shared governance processes. Dr. Fernandes had talked of ushering in a "New World Order" at Gallaudet. Gallaudet protesters set up a tent city on the campus, and soon tent cities sprung up across the globe in solidarity with the protesters. Even after a summer break, the protests resumed in the fall. As with the 1988 DPN protest, the protesters locked down the campus. After **IK Jordan** ordered the arrest of over 130 peaceful protesters, letters and outrage from the community, and two votes of no confidence in **Fernandes**, the Gallaudet Board of Trustees terminated her contract in October 2006.



Milestone: We Came, We Saw, We Conquered © Nancy Rourke 2010

2010 ICED: The Rejection of Milan

In 2010, the International Congress on the Education of the Deaf (ICED) during its 21st meeting in Vancouver, Canada presented along with the British Columbia Deaf community "A New Era: Deaf Participation and Collaboration" Statement. For almost 130 years, the Milan Congress resolutions of oralism stood. The 2010 ICED document stated, in part, that they...

- "Reject all resolutions passed at the ICED Milan Congress in 1880 that denied the inclusion of sign languages in educational programmes for the Deaf children / students.
- Acknowledge and sincerely regret the detrimental effects of the Milan conference..."

and further

- "Call upon all Nations to include the sign languages of the Deaf citizens as legitimate languages of these Nations and to treat them as equal to those of the hearing majority;
- Call upon all Nations to facilitate, enhance and embrace their Deaf citizens' participation in all governmental decision-making process affecting all aspects of their lives;
- Call upon all Nations to involve their Deaf citizens to assist parents of Deaf infants, children and youth in the appreciation of the Deaf culture and sign languages..."

The Second Wave



No to Eugenics, Painting No.2 (left, 2012), Struggled Puppets (2012) and Irony (2010) © Nancy Rourke

Despite the current popularity of American Sign Language (ASL) in the United States for Hearing people (i.e. baby signs, high school and college courses in ASL), young Deaf children are often still denied the right to acquire ASL at an early age. The backlash against Deaf people as an ethnic and linguistic group has been grounded in a pathological view of Deaf people which drives medical technology such as cochlear implantation and genetic engineering coupled with aggressive marketing and governmental lobbying. Thus, at a time when the language of Deaf culture has been accepted and legitimized by the majority culture, the right to be Deaf is being threatened and human cultural and bio-diversity is being endangered.

"When I lecture to my students in class, I always tell them, "You have ten years to build a mountain. Build it tall before the waves of cochlear implants, Oralism, and mainstreaming crash upon us. If you take your time and are busy partying, not building up the mountain, then the waves will wash away the little we have amassed. However, if you B-U-I-L-D a political discourse, through A-R-T and creative expression, you will be building an insurmountable mountaintop which the waves of oppression will not be able to dismantle. Then, we will survive." Paddy Ladd (2009)



Left to Right and Bottom: Precious (2010), We Must Act Together (2010) and Are We Much Different? (2010) © *Nancy Rourke*

"If we are to achieve a richer culture, rich in contrasting values, we must recognize the whole gamut of human potentialities, and so weave a less arbitrary social fabric, one in which each diverse human gift will find a fitting place." **Margaret Mead** (1935)

Endnotes

1. See Hartig, 2006 pg. 37 for a copy of the drawing.
2. *Mottez* (1993, p. 148). Mirzoeff (1995) notes that *Ordinaire's* successor was invited to the banquet.
3. One of *Thomas Brown's* sons attended Hartford and later taught at the school for the Deaf in Michigan (Lane, Pillard, and French, 2000). Further study of the Brown family tree appears in Lane, Pillard, and *Hedberg* 2011)
4. from "History of Gallaudet: The First 100 Years." Accessed 8/13/11 from http://www.gallaudet.edu/about_gallaudet/history_of_the_university.html

5. Baynton (1996) describes the late nineteenth and twentieth century rein of oralism as "...an attempt...to unmake that (newly established Deaf American) community and culture" (pg. 4).
6. Baynton (1996) and Lane (1984) present deeper analysis of the historical contexts which influenced the education and attitudes toward Deaf people and signed languages.
7. Vive la parole (Long live speech) was the phrase used at the Milan Conference which affirmed the resolutions supporting the pure oral method. Phonocentrism is the belief in the superiority of speech over other language mediums, including sign language (Bauman, 2004)
8. **James Denison**, a Deaf American educator and principal of the Columbia Institution. Denison in 1881 wrote that he had seen oral demonstration students at the 1880 Milan Congress "sign-making" among each other.
9. See Lane (1984) among others who describe this 'conspiracy.'
10. This phrase was used at the end of the first National Association of the Deaf (National Convention of Deaf Mutes) meeting in 1880.
11. See **ASL Literature: Sample Works in this Project** for **Veditz's** famous Preservation of the Sign Language presentation and **English Literature: Sample Works** for **Veditz's** 1910 President's Address.
12. See **ASL Literature: Sample works in this Project** for **Hotchkiss'** "Memories of Old Hartford."
13. See **Overview: Timeline in this Project** for a modern ASL version of **Agatha Tiegel's** graduation speech and **Overview: Text Summaries & Documents in this Project** for the complete written speech.
14. Quote and much of this information from <http://www.america.gov/st/africa-english/2010/August/20100820153657SztiwomoD0.9400751.html>
15. See **Deaf Visual Art in this Project** for a more information on **Betty G. Miller** and her contributions to the field of Deaf artistic expression.
16. See **ASL Literature in this Project** for more information on the 1980 NSSLRT Conference and other important events related to the development and celebration of ASL literature.
17. From http://www.nbda.org/history_NBDA.html accessed 8.13.11

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