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Signs of Culture: Deafness in Nineteenth-Century America

Rebecca A. Rourke '90
College of the Holy Cross, edwards.rar@gmail.com

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**SIGNS OF CULTURE:
DEAFNESS IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICA**

Rebecca A. Rourke

Advisor: Ross W. Beales, Jr., Ph.D.

Readers: Diane Bell, Ph.D. and Rev. Joseph Bruce, S.J., M.A.

The Fenwick Scholar Project

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And lastly, to the spirit of Helen Keller, who inspired a nine-year-old girl to take her first tentative steps into the world of deafness....

PREFACE

The search for Deaf culture in the nineteenth century has not been easy. The roots of the culture are located there, coinciding with the creation of the residential schools for the deaf. Such schools gave the Deaf population a place to meet and share ideas, for the first time in American history. The close and sustained contact generated cultural development. The roots are all there; the challenge has been to decipher them.

Deaf culture is, after all, just beginning to receive attention from a twentieth-century perspective. Researchers are investigating the Deaf experience of the late twentieth century and have seemingly discovered the culture. The fact is that the culture has been there for some time; hearing investigators have only just started to notice it. An abundance of research on the twentieth-century manifestations of the culture is appearing now. The nineteenth-century roots, however, have been largely overlooked.

Certainly, the educational battles have been well documented. The war between the manualists and the oralists has been well covered.¹ I am interested in more than education. I am concerned with why the battles started in the first place. Why did hearing educators begin to fear Sign and switch to oralism? What did hearing people

¹Manualists are those educators who believe that deaf children should be instructed through the use of Sign. Oralists, by contrast, reject Sign because they believe that its use interferes with the acquisition of correct English. They therefore propose to teach deaf children by lipreading and articulation. The battle between the two methodologies has been best covered in Harlan Lane's *When The Mind Hears*.

think of deafness? How did Deaf people's impressions of Sign differ from those of the educators? Did Deaf people have a sense of themselves as a cultural group, different from hearing people in a more significant way than mere hearing loss? These are the cultural issues with which I have been concerned.

The existence of Deaf culture in the twentieth century I admittedly take as a given. Twentieth-century researchers, both Deaf and hearing, have proven the point. I have tried to outline the salient points of their arguments as best I could; still, I could not spend the bulk of my time in the twentieth century. My focus was on the nineteenth-century experience. I will try to clear up any instances of confusion for the reader here.

The most obvious indication of the treatment of a culture is the use of the word "Deaf." The capitalized word is a cultural symbol, similar to the way that we capitalize other such groups as "Americans" or "Irish." It is a sign of respect as well as an act of distinction. The term "Deaf" refers only to those people who consider themselves a part of Deaf culture. Thus, Deafness is a choice predicated not only by the existence of hearing loss, but also by how one chooses to react to the loss. Will one adopt a hearing approach and learn to speak, investigate hearing aids, try to fit in to the hearing community? If so, one cannot be a member of the Deaf community. Such a response makes one a member of the oral deaf community instead, a group that generally prides itself on its ability to assimilate into hearing society. Signing is

usually disdained. However, if one learns Sign and searches out the company of other Deaf people, reacting to the hearing loss with unique adjustments, than one can call oneself Deaf. It is therefore entirely possible to be physically deaf without being a part of Deaf culture. Method of communication revolves around this issue of membership. As Susan Rutherford, an anthropologist studying Deaf culture explains, "What makes Deaf people a cultural group instead of simply a loose organization of people with a sensory loss is the fact that their adaption includes language."² American Sign Language is an indicator of cultural identification.

The argument is still brought up, however. Can we really call Deafness a cultural phenomenon? Do Deaf people truly possess a culture? Or do they constitute instead a sub-culture in the American landscape? I myself have chosen not to use the word "sub-culture." It is not the preferred designation in the Deaf community. I would take my cue from the Deaf community whenever possible. For me to do otherwise would be to impose my hearing notions upon the Deaf experience. I refuse to treat this topic with any kind of paternalism. Therefore, I have followed the example of Jerome Schein, who explains that while "sub-culture" may indeed only denote that the culture is embedded in a larger culture, it connotes something entirely different. "It connotes inadequacy," writes Schein, "something that is beneath (i.e., inferior to) the majority

²Susan D. Rutherford, "The culture of American deaf people," *Sign Language Studies* 59 (1988): 129-147, quoted in Jerome D. Schein, *At Home Among Strangers* (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1989) 6.

culture of group."³ Deaf people have historically been viewed this way by the American public. I will not continue to perpetuate such ideas. Deaf people deserve better treatment. The word "sub-culture" will therefore not be used to refer to the Deaf community in this paper.

Furthermore, "sub-culture" is believed by many people working in the field to be an inaccurate description. William C. Stokoe, who did the first groundbreaking linguistic study of American Sign Language in 1965, holds that the term is incorrect. He writes, "However it is designated, though, the culture under discussion is included in a larger culture, which nonetheless cannot interpenetrate it. Although the Deaf community contains as little as one one-thousandth of the total community, the respective languages and cultures influence one another in only relatively minor ways."⁴ Although the two groups reside in the same physical space, the fact does not necessarily make the one a sub-culture of the other. Deaf culture springs out of a completely different physical experience. It is, then, in many ways different from the culture shared by the hearing members of a society. Sub-culture, according to Stokoe, is therefore a misleading term.

³Jerome Schein, *At Home Among Strangers* (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1989) 14.

⁴William C. Stokoe, "Dimensions of Difference: ASL and English Based Cultures," *American Deaf Culture*, ed. Sherman Wilcox (Silver Spring: Linstok Press, 1989) 56.

The search for Deaf culture has therefore been an interesting journey through the nineteenth century. I have tried to structure the paper in a way that would balance this journey in logical steps. It is not entirely chronological. Instead, it is thematic. I have attempted to compare the experiences and opinions of the Deaf and hearing communities. The structure acts like a mirror, holding one up to the other and investigating the image reflected as a result. It begins therefore with a more detailed discussion of culture, both generally speaking and in reference to the Deaf community. Then we begin our trip into the nineteenth century. It begins with Sign language, the starting point for Deaf culture as well. First the hearing outlook is discussed. Then the hearing reaction to deafness itself is investigated. The two issues, we will see, are interrelated. The way that hearing and deaf people regarded Sign indicated, in many ways, the way they would view Deaf people.

I turn to the Deaf community next. Deaf ideas of Sign and deafness are discussed. We can begin to see the differences between Deaf and hearing opinions. To get a better understanding of these differences, I bring the opinions together in the sections on poetry and sound. The cultural clash can be read clearly in these two confrontations.

With the differences apparent, the next question is: how did nineteenth-century Deaf people survive in a hearing world? They lacked the modern conveniences that Deaf people today take full advantage of to cope with a hearing world. Still, some of

the solutions remain the same. The point is taken up for consideration in the sections on stories from Deaf culture and the subsequent solutions. The two biggest and most unique solutions of the century were the idea of the Deaf state and the reality of Gallaudet University.

The founding of Gallaudet University in many ways signalled both the arrival and the decline of Deaf culture in this country. The university was a haven for and a symbol of Deafness. But it also indicated to many hearing people that the Deaf community was becoming too different from hearing society to be tolerated any longer. A concern for assimilation was expressed soon afterward. Oralism began to rise as a serious movement. It succeeded in changing the face of deaf education in 1867 with the founding of the Clarke School of the Deaf in Massachusetts. Educators saw this move as progress. In fact, many social historians, including Alice Felt Tyler, interpreted it in the same way.⁵ These people did not understand the situation from

⁵Tyler described the situation in this way: "Although best known for his work with the blind, [S.G.] Howe was not indifferent to the cause of other defectives...In 1844 and 1845 he joined Horace Mann in a fight to introduce in schools for deaf mutes a new method of instruction by which these afflicted children were taught to speak rather than to use the manual language. [E.M.] Gallaudet clung to the older methods, and it was with great difficulty that Howe and Mann won approval for their reform." Alice Felt Tyler, *Freedom's Ferment* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1944) 298. The legacy of the oral victory is clearly seen here. The deaf children are immediately described as "defective" and "afflicted." Tyler assumed that the oral proposal was a sound reform, and that a reform meant progress. Gallaudet, therefore, was simply stubborn and standing in the way of progress. No attention was paid to the possibility that the change, however well meaning, was a disaster for the Deaf community, and opposed by its members. Clearly, the history of the Deaf has too often been written by the

the Deaf point of view. To the Deaf community, the rise of oralism meant the end of Sign. It was viewed as a deliberate attack on the culture and on Deaf people. But, then as now, the opinion of Deaf people in such matters as their own education was disregarded. Cultural suppression was the result. Such has remained the case until quite recently.

This history is therefore meant as a reconstruction of sorts. It is a recovery of the cultural experience of Deaf people. I hope it will add to the Deaf community's understanding of itself, if studying history can be interpreted as a process of empowerment. I have tried to make this history as Deaf as possible, intending to make it a record of the nineteenth-century experience from the Deaf point of view. I also hope, however, that it will add to the understanding of hearing people as well. Hearing people can come to realize the origins of their attitudes toward deafness and see how such attitudes have been harmful to the Deaf community. In the end, I hope that this paper will inspire more cross-cultural communication and better cross-cultural understanding.

hearing.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the nineteenth century, signs of Deaf culture can be seen surfacing and coalescing. Deaf people entered the century isolated and without educational opportunity. By mid-century, numerous schools had been founded, many with state financial support as well as private benefactors. Educators dreamed of a college for deaf students and their wish came true in 1864. The manual method of teaching, using Sign along with manual English, was preferred and extolled by educators and deaf people alike. The power of Sign was both recognized and appreciated at this time.

Such educational support gave deaf people the courage to admit to their cultural identification. Deaf people began to realize the extent to which they identified with one another and viewed themselves as a unique group. The sense of culture was just beginning to develop. The evidence is clear; the schools provided a sense of community where the culture could be formulated. Signs could be used freely, sound could be investigated fully, and sight could be sharpened expertly. Newspapers catering to the Deaf needs, arising from Deaf editors, sprang up around the country, offering Deaf people a way to stay together, reminding them that they were not alone. Eventually, these feelings of belonging and group identity grew into movements for a national deaf organization and a deaf state. A deaf consciousness of cultural difference was growing throughout the century. It had reached a public height in 1864 when the

college was founded. By this action, Deaf people, their needs, and their language burst onto the national scene. There, in the nation's capital, Deaf people gathered and signed comfortably. The college symbolized the abilities of Deaf people and the capability of their language. Deaf culture had arrived in the public eye with Sign as its most prominent feature. It was the proudest moment of the culture in the nineteenth century.

Unfortunately, it was also the darkest hour. Throughout the century, a minority voice had fought against the use of Sign, believing that it would lead to the formation of a Deaf culture. The same events that Deaf people viewed so warmly, these opponents viewed with a fearful eye. In effect, they proved the worst fears of the opponents involved; the events demonstrated that, indeed, a Deaf culture had formed in the United States. This development was interpreted as highly negative since it meant that deaf people would remain separate and "other," instead of integrated into the society as a whole. The only way to put an end to this separate quality of Deafness was to abolish Sign. Sign inculcated this feeling of clannishness since only limited numbers of people understood it. By destroying it and teaching only English, Deaf people would be empowered to interact with the whole community of people, deaf and hearing alike. The educational philosophy known as oralism arose. In this system, Sign would be prohibited and all teaching would be done through lipreading. Deaf children would be taught how to lipread as well as how to speak. These skills would make them more "hearing" and enable them to fit into hearing society. Importantly,

they would also ward off the further development of a Deaf culture or, worse still, a deaf variety of the human race.

The battles raged on throughout the rest of the century; educators continued to quarrel. Their arguments affected the lives of real deaf people. In the nineteenth century, just how many people were actually involved? The deaf population of the United States in the nineteenth century can be difficult to determine. Various authors reported on the numbers throughout the century. John R. Burnet, a Deaf author and graduate of the New York Institution, reported that in 1830 there were approximately 6,100 deaf persons in the country.⁶ By 1840, the number had drastically increased. It was reported in the government census that the population was 7,664, but it was widely believed "that this estimate fell considerably below the real number at that time."⁷

Records on the school age population were easier to uncover. In 1883, Jasper Williams reported that 7,155 pupils were attending the 55 schools then open in this country. There were 481 teachers, 209 men and 272 women; of these, 154 teachers were deaf. Thirty-six of the schools employed the combined system, defined by Williams as a method using signs and fingerspelling. Ten schools taught by strict oral

⁶John R. Burnet, *Tales of the Deaf and Dumb, with miscellaneous poems* (Newark: B. Olds, 1835): 1.

⁷Anonymous, "Miscellaneous," *American Annals of the Deaf* 1 (1848): 131.

methods, and nine used only manual methods, all Sign, no fingerspelling.⁸ The world situation at this time showed a trend toward oralism. "Of the 362 schools throughout the world," wrote Williams, "191 use the oral; 78 use the combined; 28 use the manual; 15 are changing gradually from signs to the oral, and 52 are not described."⁹ The oral trend was gaining speed in the 1880's, spurred by the Milan Convention's proclamation in 1880--"Long live speech!" The Convention was an international meeting of instructors of the deaf. Most of the participants were hearing and European. In Europe, the oral movement had taken root before it reached American shores. Thus, the Milan Convention's final proclamation was a testament to the strength of the new movement and a signal to the Americans that oralism would soon gain an even stronger hold in the United States.

In adjustment to this oral rise, most American schools were using the combined method, employing "every known device" to teach deaf students.¹⁰ In 1891, there

⁸Jasper N. Williams, *A silent people dwelling in a world without sound: all about deaf mutes* (Detroit: J.N. Williams, 1883) 62.

⁹Williams 63.

¹⁰Edwin Allan Hodgson, *Facts, Anecdotes, and Poetry, relating to the Deaf and Dumb* (New York: Deaf-Mutes' Journal Print, 1891) 6.

were over 73 schools for the deaf with over 8,000 students in attendance.¹¹ The estimated deaf population at that time was 40,000 people.¹²

Early in the century, until roughly 1860, the entire population would have been primarily Deaf. Schools taught by the manual method; children would have learned Sign as a first language. By learning Sign, deaf children would have been acculturated into Deaf culture. This slow progression into the culture would have been supported, to some extent, by the school teachers, since they learned Sign from the older students and taught their students using it. They realized that Sign, in many ways, helped generate Deafness. The fact did not daunt them, however; they expected deaf children to be Deaf. Along the way, they also wanted them to learn English and communicate with hearing people. Deafness did not have to result in total isolation.

The population changed by 1865, At this time, at least one small private oral school was in operation, in Chelmsford, Massachusetts. Instead of learning Sign, deaf children were being schooled using only spoken English. The children were taught lip-reading and articulation. They were instructed using the mode most comfortable for hearing people, namely, speaking instead of signing, on the theory that learning speech would enable them to fit in with the hearing population. The goal of oralism was assimilation. Deaf children were supposed to be absorbed into the hearing community

¹¹Hodgson 4.

¹² Hodgson 20.

and become acculturated consequently. A separate Deaf identity was roundly discouraged. Participation in the hearing world was encouraged.

Oral schools recognized the possibilities of Deafness. They knew that deaf students could become part of the wider Deaf community. Through their educational practices they tried to prevent such a possibility from becoming a reality. To choose hearing society required a rejection of Deaf society in the view of most oralists. Edward Fay, an investigator into the marriage patterns of the deaf community in the nineteenth century, commented on the situation at the end of the century.

In the "segregate" exclusively oral schools also, the first of which in America were established nearly thirty years ago, signs are used as little as possible, reunions of former pupils are not held, associations and conventions of the deaf are discouraged, newspapers or other periodicals intended especially for the reading of the deaf are not published, and the pupils are urged after leaving the school to shun the society of the deaf and to associate only with hearing people.¹³

Oralism proposed that submersion and isolation in the hearing community would help deaf people to become acculturated more quickly. They would join the hearing world more readily if there was no other choice. Hence, the schools discouraged contact among the graduates, fearing that close contact would lead to a Deaf community. For assimilation to succeed, deaf people needed to live in isolation from one another. Any close contact could lead to an unwanted union of Deaf people.

¹³Edward Allen Fay, *Marriages of the Deaf In America* (Washington, D.C.: Gibson Brothers, 1898) 25-6.

After 1867, when Clarke School for the Deaf, an oral school in Northampton, Massachusetts, opened, the Deaf community was effectively split into two separate camps. The oralists assimilated into hearing society and the manualists comprised the Deaf community and spearheaded the growth of the developing culture. Deaf people, earlier having formed one cultural unit, were torn apart by hearing educators. Educators, through their methodological battles, succeeded in splitting the deaf community into pieces. Deaf culture became more embattled since even deaf people scoffed at it. Oral deaf people learned, with praise from hearing teachers, to pride themselves on their speech skills. Speech, advocated by hearing teachers as superior to Sign, was soon perceived in the same way by orally trained deaf people. They viewed Sign as a crutch that the less intelligent relied upon for communication. Sign gained a maligned reputation as a poor gestural version of English, inferior to speech and English, losing the image it had at the beginning of the century as a wonderful teaching tool and an important language. The condemnation of Sign by deaf people, such as John Carlin, the painter and poet, was particularly harsh. Since Sign had been introduced as the language natural to deaf people, its rejection by some of them threw doubt on its legitimacy, both as a natural language and as a teaching device. Dissension among deaf people did the larger deaf community a disservice because it further isolated and fractured a minority group.

The positions became more extreme by the end of the century. As Fay stated, oralists tried to fit into the hearing society. They tried not to stay in contact with one another. Mabel Hubbard Bell, Alexander Graham Bell's deaf wife, would refuse to acknowledge the presence of other deaf people in a room. She preferred to associate only with hearing people. As deaf people joined with hearing people, the pressure on Deaf people mounted. The pressure to conform grew stronger. But, despite, these attacks, Deaf culture did not disappear. It, like Sign, vanished from the public eye.¹⁴ Deaf culture was driven underground but it did not die.

Edward Fay provides good evidence of the continued existence of the culture. His statistics on marriages between deaf people demonstrate that as the century wore on, Deaf people drew closer together. Early in the century, marriages were rare, primarily because deaf people lived in relative isolation from one another. From 1801-1830, Fay records only ten marriages between deaf partners. In the years 1831-1840, 37 such marriages were reported. This increase can be explained by the opening of the schools in the United States which brought deaf people together in unprecedented numbers. Marriages resulted between many former classmates.¹⁵

The increase continued unabated throughout the century, in spite of the oralist rise which sought to limit connect between deaf people. By the end of the century,

¹⁴As late as the mid twentieth-century, signing in public marked the user as mentally retarded. Sign's public image had reached an all-time low.

¹⁵Fay 14.

from 1881-90, 1,017 marriages were reported by Fay. The percentages were astounding. Fully 85.5% of all marriages by deaf people were to deaf partners. Only 10.5% of the couples had one deaf and one hearing partner. Deaf people married other deaf people with astonishing regularity.¹⁶

Fay reports that the percentages of intermarriage in the deaf community were higher among students who had entered signing schools than among those who had attended oral schools.¹⁷ Obviously, oral schools succeeded in their assimilation goal to some extent.

Still, Fay believed that "when opportunity occurs the strong attraction of mutual sympathy draws the deaf together; community of feeling breaks down the barriers that parents and teachers have taken so much pains to erect, sympathy grows into love, and love results in marriage."¹⁸ Even orally trained deaf people, it seemed, could find contentment in the Deaf community, if they but chose to enter it. Parents and educators, in Fay's view, feared the development of the Deaf community and through oralism sought to prevent it. But deaf people experienced a "community of feeling" that could unite them in spite of this outside interference. Fay found it easy to believe

¹⁶Fay 15.

¹⁷Fay 27.

¹⁸Fay 29.

that deaf people would prefer the friendship and partnership of other deaf people.

Three simple reasons were offered:

1. Where both husband and wife are deaf they are united by the strong bond of mutual fellowship and sympathy growing out of their similar condition....
2. They are able to communicate with each other with perfect ease and freedom.
3. The most intimate social relations and sympathies of both, outside the domestic circle, are with the same class of persons.¹⁹

A common bond, easy communication, and mutual friends inspired deaf people to marry one another. They had more in common with one another than they did with hearing people. It was no wonder to Fay that they overwhelmingly chose, as a direct result, to marry one another.

The oral rise could not stop the trend. Deaf people continued to seek out and marry deaf partners. The culture was accordingly strengthened by the unity of the members. By marrying one another, Deaf people choose to remain in community and live in a separate culture. Hearing people were not let in easily. They were not chosen as partners in marriage so they were left out of the most intimate circles of Deaf culture. Often they did not even associate with Deaf people socially. Community ties were rarely established. By marrying among themselves, Deaf people drew together more tightly, creating a cultural entity that hearing people could not readily penetrate. The culture became ever more separated from hearing culture. Deaf people, rejecting

¹⁹Fay 121.

the oralist option, closed the community to hearing people and withdrew largely into the accepting circle of Deaf culture.

The cultural landscape of the nineteenth century was therefore a rather confusing one from the point of view of Deaf people. Originally, there existed hearing culture and Deaf culture. The oralist movement fractured the Deaf community, creating deaf people educated to live in the hearing world. Deaf people were divided, living either as Deaf people in Deaf culture, or as deaf people acculturated into hearing society. The groups were set against one another, each viewing the other negatively. Deaf people thought the oralists were fooling themselves; they did not believe that hearing society ever truly accepted speaking deaf people as equals. Oralists felt that Deaf people were inferior since they used an inferior language, Sign. The two camps were divided by an educational split and were never able to reunite.

Such a split continues until the present day. Signing and oral deaf adults still do not agree on how to define deafness or respond to it. Some strict oralists will define their signing peers as "rude," "animalistic," or "unrefined." They view themselves as superior. The hearing teachers inculcate this attitude in the students, praising those who utilize their residual hearing to the best effect. To hearing people, it is a badge of distinction; it is better to be hard of hearing than to be deaf. Even young deaf children in signing programs quickly learn that hearing is more appreciated. I was once acquainted with a Deaf, nine-year-old girl. I happened to see her one day

and began signing with her. A mutual acquaintance came up in the conversation and I asked her to say hello for me. She frowned. "I don't know that I will," she signed. "He doesn't like deaf people anymore." This young boy had learned that people in authority, relatives and teachers, responded better to him if he acted more hearing, listening with the help of his hearing aids and trying to speak clearly. Associating with Deaf people would hurt his image.

This Deaf girl was not pleased that her friend had rejected her according to the hearing standards of hearing loss. He was going where she could not follow and where she would not be entirely welcome; his rejection proved the point. The incident demonstrates the tension in the community currently. It highlights the problems that signers have with oral deaf people. Such people make them feel inferior and reject them in the same way that hearing people do. They are not real Deaf people. Even this young girl realized the distinction when she said, "He doesn't like deaf people." The boy, in her opinion, was no longer really Deaf. He had turned against Deaf people. A different cultural choice had been made.

To signing Deaf people, oralism thereby represents a negative choice. It means rejecting a comfortable form of communication and trying to pass as hearing. An issue of cultural awareness, as opposed to merely squabbles about communication method, has arisen. Orally deaf people seem culturally incorrect to Deaf people; they do not behave in an acceptable Deaf fashion.

The educational clashes of the nineteenth century have thereby left an indelible mark on the Deaf culture of the twentieth century. The deaf community changed from a united cultural entity into two separate groups, residing in two different cultural worlds. In a minority group, such a split was particularly devastating. It created unnecessary tensions between people who needed support to survive in a world often inconsiderate of their needs. Deaf people needed unity, not separation. Oralism changed the face of nineteenth-century deaf education. In time, it also changed the landscape of Deaf culture in the twentieth-century. The culture became much more of a conscious decision, lines between Deaf and non-deaf being drawn more clearly. Oralism devastated the Deaf community, but it also provided the culture with an "other" to define itself against. The option of hearing membership gave Deaf people a new understanding of what it meant to call oneself Deaf and what membership in Deaf culture required. These cultural considerations are still issues today, more than one hundred years later.

1: CULTURAL THEORY

Once again, the assemblage came to order. The testimony before the Massachusetts State Board of Charities was coming to a close. Both sides, oral and manual, faced one another for the last time on February 12, 1867. They were no closer to burying their differences than when the Board had commenced its hearing on January 24. Both sides still hoped to persuade the Board to their point of view. Reverend Collins Stone and William Turner, representing the manualist side of the American School for the Deaf, waited tensely while Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe fielded questions from the Board. They feared his strong personality would influence the Board to his favor.

"Now, Dr. Howe," Mr. Branning, a Board member, began, "are we to understand that you would discountenance association between deaf-mutes?"

Stone frowned. The American School encouraged interaction between the deaf children. In this way, they could learn informally from one another.

Howe, however, only nodded. "Entirely," he replied. He paused, collected his thoughts, and then added, "But mind you, I would not discountenance association between them and other persons. I would endeavor to prevent the effects of their infirmity by bringing them into relations, as close as possible, with ordinary persons, so that their infirmity should be, so to speak, wiped out of sight." He smiled as he finished. How could the Board fail to see the wisdom of his arguments? Surely the negative effects of deafness could only be alleviated by preventing deaf children from congregating together. Hearing people could save them from themselves!

Stone's face clouded and Turner shifted uncomfortably. Howe's voice rang with conviction. The Board seemed impressed. Together, they had tried for two weeks to sway the Board against oralism. Deaf children needed close contact; they needed to know that there were other people like them in the world. They needed to know they were not alone. Their infirmity, Turner had previously argued, would be lessened by such contact. They would learn to behave socially and form lasting friendships. Such social situations would allow them to reach outside themselves, in effect, lessening their deafening isolation. But their arguments did not seem to have an effect. The Board

seemed close to making a final decision and Stone feared the results. He left the hearings with a heavy heart.

Months later, the Board announced its verdict. As Stone feared, in May 1867, the Board proclaimed that Massachusetts should found its own school for the deaf, employing the method of oralism as Howe had recommended. Sign language would be forbidden. Deaf teachers would not be welcome in the classroom. Drawing heavily on Howe's testimony, the Board explained its decision. "The morbid tendencies, however, are not strong--certainly not irresistible--at least with the blind. They are educable, like all tendencies and dispositions, and by skillful management may be turned to advantage. Certainly, however, they ought to be lessened, not strengthened, by education. Now they are lessened, and their morbid effects corrected in each individual by intimate intercourse with persons of sound and normal condition--that is, by general society; while they are strengthened by associating closely and persistently with others having the like infirmity."

Howe had argued for lessening the effects of infirmity. The Board set its mission as one of eliminating "morbid tendencies." Obviously, the Board had been persuaded by Howe's argument. Evidently, they too perceived a different quality about deaf people. They called it "morbid," meaning either the nature of a disease or of a mental condition that was somehow unwholesome or sickly. At any rate, these tendencies were perceived as different and unnatural. They were not at all common

to the spirit of hearing people. Hence, deaf people should associate only with hearing people to rid themselves of this awful character.

What the oralists of 1867 noticed was the fact that deaf people were no longer just people who could not hear correctly. Another dimension had been added. They called it "morbid tendencies." Twentieth-century investigators have recognized it as Deaf culture. Deaf people, living together in schools, had discovered bonds of unity that led them to develop another way of being, a Deaf way of living. Their way involved embracing their deafness, instead of mourning the absence of hearing, and adjusting to it, most visibly by using Sign instead of speech to communicate. A new culture had developed in the schools created by hearing people. But those same hearing people did not know how to react to this new expression of Deafness.

The notion of Deaf culture is therefore not new; however, it is fraught with intangibles that make defining it a difficult task. Questions arise immediately: what is meant by "Deaf"? How does a biological condition help create a culture? And what is "culture"? To begin, the word "deaf" is a multireferent term.²⁰ Its usage can accommodate a range of hearing loss, from moderate to total. Further confusing this terminology, many people who identify themselves as culturally Deaf, may, in fact, suffer only slight to moderate deafness. Some Deaf people are regularly surprised by

²⁰This problem was recognized in the nineteenth century as well. In Fay's report on marriages of the deaf population he reported, "The term 'deaf,' in its widest application, includes all degrees of imperfection of hearing" (Fay 7).

the fact that their Deaf friends can hear well enough to use a phone with an amplifier. What emerges from this seeming contradiction is a clear fact: degree of deafness is not a qualifying condition for inclusion in Deaf culture. Decibel loss is insignificant; what matters is a person's attitude toward that loss. Ease and acceptance connote correct cultural behavior and allow one to call oneself Deaf.²¹

Next, a biological condition does not in itself generate a new culture. Many deaf people do not consider themselves members of Deaf culture.²² Indeed, they consider themselves members of hearing culture, rejecting Deaf culture entirely. Physical limitations, then, do not create a culture. There must also be an awareness of shared values, beliefs, and practices. Thus, personal attitude is the key ingredient. Culturally Deaf people refuse to see themselves as defective hearing people. They do not treat their deafness solely as a medical condition to be solved by bigger and better hearing

²¹Labelling oneself Deaf is also, to a certain extent, a political statement. Such a position identifies one as a member of a linguistic, cultural minority and rejects the view of deafness as a strictly medical condition.

²²There are about 500,000 Deaf people in the United States. Several million people suffer some degree of hearing loss; these do not consider themselves Deaf. It is therefore quite possible to be deaf without being Deaf.

aids or cochlear implants.²³ Rather, their deafness becomes an integral part of who they are, a positive, rather than a negative, characteristic.

The most obvious indication of this personal alignment is the use of American Sign Language (ASL). ASL is a full-fledged language, with its own unique grammar and idioms.²⁴ Because it is entirely visuo-gestural and created by Deaf people, it is

²³Many Deaf people do not know their decibel loss, nor do they care to know. Cochlear implants have received much attention in the Deaf community. In fact, the National Association of the Deaf has gone so far as to issue a public statement on them. It reads, in part, "The NAD takes the position, further, that clinics performing implant surgery need to cease projecting to the public an image of deaf people as unhappy, fearful, maladjusted, and in desperate need of the faculty of hearing. Such negative stories create misconceptions and inappropriate attitudes toward deaf people which tend to linger and to overlook the fact that many deaf persons lead happy, successful lives" (Quoted in Schein 232). Many Deaf people do not wish to be hearing; some are curious about what it would be like. The NAD takes a very cautious position in response. Furthermore, doctors agree that cochlear implants are not for everyone. Most say that the best candidates are people who were deafened later in life and therefore have a clear memory of sound. These people have typically not adjusted well to their deafness. They have high motivation to relearn the skill of hearing. They will work the hardest at learning how to interpret the electrical impulses that the implant provides. Finally culturally Deaf people, in the majority of cases, are convinced that hearing would in fact destroy an important part of who they are. They are not interested in hearing. I. King Jordan, the Deaf president of Gallaudet University, stated as much in a recent interview with 60 Minutes [April 1990], to the obvious disbelief of the hearing reporter.

²⁴For more on the nature of Sign and its linguistic properties, please see William C. Stokoe, Carl Croneberg, and Dorothy Casterline, *Dictionary of American Sign Language* (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet College Press, 1965). Also consult Edward S. Klima and Ursula Bellugi, *The Signs of Language* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979).

well suited to accommodate their needs.²⁵ Other sign systems were invented by hearing educators and therefore follow English word order.²⁶ Their use forces Deaf people to mold their communications into a hearing language, namely English. It may be gestural English, but it is still English. Using ASL, instead of English, means that a Deaf person rejects societal attempts to impose hearing language and, by implication, hearing culture, upon them. Since language is a major transmitter of culture, imposing English upon Deaf people is a way to make them more hearing. After all, most hearing Americans use English. Deaf users of English would be welcomed into the hearing mainstream, out of Deaf culture. To choose ASL therefore represents a choice to be Deaf.

Finally, "culture" itself is a difficult term to define. To discuss Deaf culture, a working definition of culture is helpful to establish. Clifford Geertz suggests that

²⁵ASL was created by Deaf people in the nineteenth century. It began as a combination of languages. Laurent Clerc brought French Sign Language to this country. Deaf children from Martha's Vineyard, where there was once a sizable Deaf population, added the Vineyard Sign Language to it. Deaf children from other parts of the country added their own home signs. The result, after a period of years was American Sign Language. ASL has since moved away from its French roots; the two languages no longer resemble one another.

²⁶Such sign systems include SEE-1 (Seeing Exact English), SEE-2 (Seeing Essential English), and LOVE (Linguistics of Visual English). Many of these systems are ludicrous in the extreme. They combine the sign CAR and PET to form the English word "carpet", instead of using an available ASL sign (Higgins 99). The only reliable hybrid is PSE or Pidgin Sign English, which is a combination of English and ASL. IT uses ASL signs and English word order. English natives sign it more "English-y" and Deaf users sign it more "ASL-like."

culture is not simply a set of social behaviors, like traditions and habits; rather, it is the underlying rules that govern these behaviors.²⁷ The customs of a community arise from its culture and are reflections of it.²⁸ Each community, small and large, in turn, has varying customs and traditions because they arise from different cultures. People belonging to a variety of cultural groups may live within the same community area. The cultural life of the community is informed and enriched by the variety of cultural groups living within it. A national community, for instance, develops its traditions from the cultural experiences of the members. The culture that dominates wields the most influence in terms of standardizing the traditions the community follows. For example, the United States has a sizable Jewish population, but the majority of the American people are Christians of one denomination or another. Therefore, Christmas, rather than Hanukkah, is the more celebrated holiday in the country. Industries like television and greeting cards cater to it. People around the country have public, ritualized ways of celebrating it, including buying Christmas trees, stringing lights, and

²⁷Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973) 44.

²⁸For a definition of community, I have turned to Carol Padden, who draws her understanding from George Hillery. He defines "community" in the following way: 1) A community is a group of people who share common goals and cooperate in achieving these goals. Each community has its own goals... 2) A community occupies a particular geographic location. The geography of a community determines the ways in which the community functions. 3) A community has some degree of freedom to organize the social life and responsibilities of its members. [Carol Padden, "The Deaf Community and the Culture of Deaf People," *Sign Language and the Deaf Community* (National Association of the Deaf, 1980) 91.]

singing carols. The rules that govern this traditional behavior in the American community spring out of the cultural experience of the majority of the members.

Diverse peoples thereby develop various cultures because culture is a creation that rises out of historically lived experience. Europeans, for instance, have a sense of timelessness and respect for the past that informs their culture. It is precisely because their countries have such long histories. Furthermore, boundaries tend not to be as important as nationalistic feelings. The feelings often existed in the region long before the borders were drawn up on the map. European nationalism tends to have more to do with feelings of belonging than it does with geographical space. The history of European wars will bear this fact out.

Americans, on the contrary, have a different historical experience. American culture is obsessed with the idea of frontiers, offering the chance to move out and get rich. This feeling arises directly out of historical experience; Americans felt they had a right to the land, the whole of it, no matter who had previously claimed it. Americans therefore developed a strong sense of territoriality and private property as a result. Differently lived historical experiences went into the formation of the cultures. Such experiences hinge on essential factors such as climate, geography, biology, and social structures. Since the possible combinations of these elements are nearly infinite, peoples all over the globe evolve their own particular cultures. People react to their surroundings in different ways; these surroundings affect their culture and

their history. Europeans live crowded together on a relatively small continent. A sense of land as a factor in nationalism did not have an opportunity to take root. The limited land supply did not support such a feeling. Americans, by contrast, had a huge expanse of land seemingly at their disposal. Their nationalism could arrive in conjunction with a definite feeling of landedness. Different combinations of factors caused the cultures to develop along radically different lines. No one solution to how to live represents the only one, or even the best one, possible. A culture, then, can aptly be described as a historically generated set of symbols that allows us to meaningfully order our lives. These cultural meanings take on very specific forms; as Clifford Geertz explains, "not just 'marriage' but a particular set of notions about what men and women are like."²⁹ Cultures thus reveal the multiplicity of ways human beings find to order their lives.

Language therefore plays a prominent role in forging an understanding of a given culture, itself being a direct product of that culture. Quite inadvertently, then, the way a language is shaped and organized reveals much about the way its users order their own lives. Word choices also reveal what is important to the culture and what is not. The state of the environment is important to certain Eskimo tribes, for instance; hence, they have some twenty different words for specific kinds of snow. Americans do not have a need for that kind of specificity; American English contains simply the one

²⁹Geertz 52.

word, "snow." To describe it more specifically, English adds on adjectives. Users can choose to be as loose or precise as they desire. American Sign Language works in a slightly different way. There is, for instance, only one basic sign WIND, but it can be modified in its execution to describe breeze, storm, and hurricane. Direction, force, and speed can all be expressed in one sign by the style of execution. The language is more concise and precise than English, in some ways, because it is spatial. The hands can connote a variety of information all at the same time and the eye can record it all. English adds words because it, unlike ASL, cannot act in three dimensions.

The differences between an oral and a spatial language reveal themselves in other ways in the lives of the users. In telling a story in English, a speaker can let information build as the story proceeds. A story might begin, "Jonathan and Kathleen had fallen asleep on the couch when, suddenly, Jonathan's parents, who had driven up to take him to his grandparents' house, burst into the house and saw them together." The information about the parents, what they were doing while the couple slept unknowingly, was added into the story. It was not known at the outset, nor did a listener expect it to be. English does not work that way; it works in a linear fashion. In ASL, the story would be ordered quite differently. ASL users construct the set because the language is spatial. Different points in space will designate the location of the different actors. Jon and Kate would have been in one spot, perhaps to the signer's right, and the parents would have been on the left. The action would proceed

back and forth between the two groups until the left had met the right at the instant when the parents walked into the room. It is more important in ASL to know where people are and who they are. What they are doing that is so interesting is introduced after the former has been established. This rule of the language derives from the deafness of the users. They rely on sight, so they order the world visually, paying careful attention to all details. The culture reacts to this visualness by directly incorporating it into the language, ASL.

Words are not the only symbol that a culture relies upon; others include "gestures, drawings, musical sounds,...or natural objects like jewels--anything, in fact, that is disengaged from its mere actuality and used to impose meaning upon experience."³⁰ It must be stressed that these symbols do not have extraordinary meaning in and of themselves; culture is not a magical power that lends ordinary objects extraordinary significance. Rather, culture is the "context" in which these meanings can be gradually discerned. After all, the same symbols may be employed in different cultures to invoke different meanings and responses. A diamond ring, for instance, is just a ring. Within American culture, when worn on a certain finger, on the left hand, it symbolizes engagement. The ring might not have the same symbolic meaning in a different culture. Cultural context enables us to understand the meaning of the symbols employed. The symbols can only be the means through which one

³⁰Geertz 45.

approaches a culture; they are not the ends in themselves. Confusing the two results in a skewed understanding of the culture under study.

The culture under investigation here is Deaf culture. Given this definition of culture, can it be demonstrated that Deaf culture exists? The answer is a resounding "yes." Deaf people, due to the influence of their biology, organize their lives in a way that is markedly different from hearing culture. They are hypervisual, paying great attention to visual detail.³¹ Their language, ASL, accordingly makes greater, and more specific, use of spatial relations. In fact, since they use their eyes to take in much of the information that hearing people receive through their ears, at least one Deaf author has suggested that perhaps a better label for the culture would be "Seeing."³² Undoubtedly, then, deafness results in a situation that can provoke the generation of a new culture, one ordered along visual lines.

Furthermore, Deaf culture has a long and extensive history in the United States. Indications of the early lives of deaf and deafened individuals occasionally appear in the historical records of the colonial period. A Deaf culture cannot be asserted to have existed at this time, since deaf people lived, for the most part, in isolation from one

³¹Oliver Sacks coined the term "hypervisual" to describe the cognitive processes of Deaf people in *Seeing Voices* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989) 74.

³²Ben Bahan, "Notes from a Seeing Person," *American Deaf Culture*, ed. Sherman Wilcox (Silver Spring: Linstok Press, 1989) 32.

another.³³ For the same reason, a uniform sign language probably did not exist; there was no community of users to build it.

This situation began to change in the early 1800's. At this time, an interest was taken in educating deaf children in America. (Previously, wealthy Americans sent their deaf children abroad for study.)³⁴ The impetus for action came when Mason Fitch Cogswell of Hartford, Connecticut, decided his deaf daughter, Alice, needed a qualified teacher. Finding none in America, he became determined to start a school of his own. Sending his neighbor Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet abroad in 1815 to study European methods, he secured the necessary funding for the school from both private and public sources. Gallaudet returned in 1816, bringing Laurent Clerc, a Deaf Frenchman, who volunteered to work with Gallaudet at the fledgling school. In 1817, the American School for the Deaf officially opened its doors.

At this point, it becomes legitimate to speak of a history of Deaf Americans and, more importantly, of Deaf culture. Clerc brought French Sign Language to the school-

³³The exception was the thriving Deaf community on Martha's Vineyard, reported beautifully in Nora Groce's *Everyone Here Spoke Sign Language*.

³⁴Francis Green, for example, sent his deaf son to the Braidwood Academy, in Scotland, to be educated in 1780. The school taught using the oral method. Green was satisfied with the method and crusaded to get such a school founded in America. To this end he published a pamphlet about his son's positive experience in 1783 entitled *Vox Oculis Subjecta*, the Latin motto of the Braidwood Academy, "the voice governed by the eye." Later in life, however, Green turned against oralism, possibly due to the regression of his son's speech. He turned his attention to the cause of manualism. (Lane 110.)

children; they added their home signs to it, and the Vineyard Signs, and created the hybrid American Sign Language. The school also provided a place where deaf children and adults could meet as a community and exchange ideas. They could communicate freely and establish their own common language. Now, deaf children could receive an education and some job training. With education, a sense of independence formed, enabling them to work to support families of their own. A viable Deaf culture began to emerge by 1840.

Deaf culture thus has a long history in this country. Unfortunately, it is a history that has largely been overlooked. Most histories of the subject stress the educational battles of the nineteenth century and/or are highly anecdotal, rather than analytical, in nature.³⁵ Stories from Deaf culture are just beginning to creep into mainstream (i.e., hearing) circles. These studies of culture, however, focus primarily on the late twentieth-century experience.³⁶ One could easily get the impression that Deaf culture is a new phenomenon, only recently having come into existence. In fact, it is an old phenomenon with a lengthy history. It is not being created now; it is just being recognized. By neglecting the historical aspect of this culture, readers are deprived of a full appreciation of Deaf culture. Understanding the history of a given group adds

³⁵The exception to this rule being Harlan Lane's *When the Mind Hears* which tells the story of the educational battle from the Deaf point of view, adding an extra cultural dimension to the discussion.

³⁶Such works include *Deaf In America*, *American Deaf Culture*, and *Sign and Culture*.

to our understanding of their present beliefs and actions. Furthermore, a present-minded focus ignores the basic origins of the culture. Twentieth-century Deaf cultural standards should be interpreted in light of their nineteenth-century beginnings. In this way, we can understand how and why the culture has changed and grown. Only by investigating these historical roots can a richer, fuller understanding of Deaf culture arise.

Knowledge of the past can shed new light on the cultural present. The study of Deaf culture is particularly interesting, therefore, since the firmly anchored present can lead us back into a past that will then further illumine the present and hopefully the future. Of course, approaching Deaf culture requires abandoning old perceptions in favor of radically different ones. First, the language of Deaf people is visuo-gestural, American Sign Language. The use of such a form of language implies that an entirely different set of standards to govern the use of the body. Basically, Deaf people will tend to be more readily physically expressive since their language depends upon it. Hearing people can be less expressive since their oral language does not require physical enhancing to convey meaning; their gestures simply enhance or emphasize their words. Signs, however, require additional body language and facial expression to clearly express the full meaning of the user. The use of such a form of language implies an entirely different set of standards to govern the use of the body. ASL brings a unique system of cultural patterns simply by its gestural nature. Its users can be

expected, therefore, to hold different cultural values from people who communicate with an oral/aural language.

Second, Deaf culture is predicated on ordering the world primarily through visual channels. The language is the most obvious sign of this orientation but there are others. For instance, people tend not to be known by name in Deaf circles, but rather by a physical attribute or style of dress. Name signs reflect this tendency aptly.³⁷ In a crowded room, a Deaf person gets the attention of friends not by shouting, but by waving emphatically in their direction or staring and waiting for eye contact to be made. Even technical aids, such as TTY's and light flashing alarms, reflect this dependence on vision.³⁸ In fact, some informal polls reveal that many Deaf people would rather lose their hands than their eyes.³⁹ Since degree of hearing loss is not

³⁷Name signs reflect a quality of the individual. They are usually invented by another member of the community. Father Joe Bruce is usually referred to as DEAF PRIEST, rather than by his name in Deaf circles. My name sign, given to me by my Deaf "little sister" was a R thrown straight up by my head. It reflected both my name, Rebecca, and my hairstyle, spiked.

³⁸TTY is an abbreviation for teletypewriter. A TTY is a keyboard device which is attached to a telephone. Rather than speak, one types messages in order to hold long distance conversations. The device was invented in 1964 by a Deaf man, Robert Weitbrecht. The new name in use for the machine is TTD, telecommunication device for the deaf. In Deaf circles, the old name is still often used, primarily because that is what the Deaf inventor called his creation.

³⁹*An Introduction to American Deaf Culture: Values*, videotape. The answer surprises many hearing people who would assume that losing hands would mean losing communication ability. As one Deaf man stated, "If I lost my hands, I would simply sign with my shoulders." He placed greater emphasis on sight.

necessarily a factor toward admittance into Deaf culture, this visual ordering must be a key ingredient of Deafness. It follows, then, that Deaf people live in a culture drastically different from the culture common to seeing and hearing people.

Third, the Deaf community does not inhabit its own separate state. Rather, it is scattered throughout the United States.⁴⁰ Deaf culture is therefore a distinctive, though minority, culture within the larger American culture. The two are distinct and separate entities, but they share the same physical space. Deaf culture in the United States is therefore recognizably American, just as Deaf culture in France is uniquely

⁴⁰It should be noted that Deaf culture is not one that relies upon the proximity of its members. The culture can be said to exist though its members live in relative isolation from one another. Deaf people live throughout the country but the feeling of Deafness transcends this separation. Deaf people do enjoy each other's company, however, and will often travel great lengths to visit other Deaf people. Crossroads, a bar in Boston, Massachusetts, now has a "Deaf night" every Thursday and Deaf people will come to it from as far away as upper Vermont. Yet, despite this communal feeling, Deaf people do not choose to live together in one location. The reasons are complex. Small Deaf communities do form in large cities, but this phenomenon is unknown in rural areas. Some Deaf people do not move due to economics; they are afraid they will be unable to find a willing employer if they move. For many, they stay where they attended school, or they return to their home states. Also, Deaf children are usually born to hearing parents. They spent their lives with hearing people and often do not meet Deaf adults until they are sent to residential schools, if then. The adult Deaf community is, to a large extent, set apart from the Deaf children. A community consensus to live together in one area is impossible to obtain, and is generally opposed by hearing teachers and parents. The culture compensates by not placing much emphasis on geographical considerations for membership. Essentially, the culture exists in spite of the scattered nature of its members.

French. It interprets the American experience from a Deaf point of view.⁴¹ In spite of the fact that the Deaf community is scattered throughout the country, Deaf culture retains a uniform character; it is possible to speak of an American Deaf culture.

Fourth, the culture, unlike many others, is not one that people are necessarily born into. Most deaf children have hearing parents. They do not usually encounter actual Deaf culture unless or until they enter a residential school for the deaf. Then, Deaf children of Deaf parents introduce them to the culture, often by teaching them ASL. Slowly, they become acculturated. Sociologists hypothesize that Deaf culture is one of the few in the world where children are the predominant carriers of the culture.⁴²

Deaf culture is unique in that it is a culture that deaf people may choose to join. They become exposed to it and then make a conscious decision about whether to join. This decision is particularly true in the case of orally trained deaf adults. Unfamiliar

⁴¹A tendency to interpret the American scene in this way can be best demonstrated through a story from the nineteenth century. A school teacher was asking a Deaf child about the life of George Washington. The child eagerly began to launch into the story of the cherry tree. He explained that George took the hatchet in his left hand, and hid it behind his back. When questioned by his father, he produced the hatchet in his left hand and said, "I cannot tell a lie; I chopped down the tree." The teacher praised the student for telling the story so well, but asked why he had placed such emphasis on Washington's left hand. "He must have held it in that hand," the child replied. "He needed his right hand to sign to his father!" Anonymous, "The Silent Schools of Kendall Green," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, 69 (1885): 185.

⁴²Donald F. Moores, "Communication--Some Unanswered Questions and Some Unquestioned Answers," *Psycholinguistics and Total Communication*, ed. T. O'Rourke (Washington, D.C.: American Annals of the Deaf, 1972) 2.

with Sign, they have considered themselves a part of hearing society for all their lives. Suddenly, they have been introduced to a different culture that treats their hearing loss in a markedly different way. An option, one that many orally trained adults have never seen, appears. As children, their parents' educational decision had influenced their lives. As adults, they can choose which culture they wish to enter themselves. To Deaf people, the common success story is about a deaf person who discovers Deaf culture, and decides to become Deaf. It is a success story to Deaf people because they believe that deaf people were meant to be Deaf. To live any other way is to be lost in the hearing world.⁴³

Since children transmit the adult Deaf culture to their fellow classmates, Deaf culture is one that recreates and re-energizes itself with each new generation.⁴⁴ Stories are retold and games are replayed; another group of school children learns what

⁴³Carol Padden, "The Deaf Community and the Culture of Deaf People," *Sign Language and the Deaf Community*, ed. Charlotte Baker and Robbin Battison (National Association of the Deaf, 1980) 97-8.

⁴⁴Children transmit this culture by passing on ASL. Sometimes it is a children's version, not as sophisticated as the adult version. This experience is similar to the ways that hearing children use English saying, "I eated the cookie," instead of using the correct "ate." The Deaf child's ASL remains ungrammatical. Yet ungrammatical ASL resembles ASL more closely than it resembles English. Hence the need to have more Deaf teachers in the schools, to guide the children as they learn ASL, and correct their mistakes.

it means to be Deaf.⁴⁵ The first, and arguably most important, aspect of Deafness that the children learn from one another is ASL. ASL usage is the most important characteristic of any Deaf person because it automatically identifies the users as a member of Deaf culture. Deaf children of Deaf parents are native signers; ASL is their first language. They are responsible for informally teaching it to deaf children of hearing parents, thereby introducing these children to the culture to which they will potentially belong as adults.

Currently, these Deaf adults hold some very definite beliefs about themselves and their culture. They regard ASL with extreme reverence and are violently opposed to any professional attempts to change or tamper with it. ASL is a central value to the culture. Its members therefore assert that "to reject ASL is to reject the deaf person."⁴⁶ A Deaf person's identity is tied up in her/his language. Attempts to mold ASL into a word order that resembles English tend to be viewed as attacks on the legitimacy of Deaf culture. Using sign systems, like SEE-1 or SEE-2, instead of ASL, demonstrate a basic disrespect for Deaf people and their culture.⁴⁷ After all, if one

⁴⁵See in particular the chapters "Learning to be Deaf" and "The Meaning of Sound" in Carol Padden and Tom Humphries' *Deaf in America: Voices from a Culture* for a twentieth-century position on learning about deafness.

⁴⁶Barbara Kannapell, "Personal Awareness and Advocacy in the Deaf Community," *Sign Language and the Deaf Community* (1980) 112; Paul C. Higgins, *Outsiders in a Hearing World: A Sociology of Deafness* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1980) 100.

⁴⁷See note 26.

truly respected the cultural group, one would agree to communicate in a manner acceptable to the group.

The use of ASL with hearing individuals is therefore a problematic issue for most Deaf adults. Since ASL was disdained by the hearing community, particularly by educators, for so many decades, Deaf adults may be suspicious of the intentions of hearing outsiders and may be unwilling to share their language with the "hearies." One Deaf woman explains:

It is important to understand that ASL is the only thing we have that belongs to deaf people completely. It is the only thing that has grown out of the deaf group. Maybe we are afraid to share our language with hearing people. Maybe our group identity will disappear once hearing people know ASL.⁴⁸

To guard against this possibility, hearing people are held at arm's length until they prove themselves to the Deaf community. A situation called 'diglossia' arises. Diglossia is a kind of code switching. Deaf adults, signing among themselves in ASL, will consciously switch their signing to an English word order when a hearing person joins them. Diglossia represents a way for Deaf people to protect their language from any negative outside influence.⁴⁹

⁴⁸Barbara Kannapell, "Personal Awareness," *Sign Language and the Deaf Community* (1980) 112.

⁴⁹James Woodward, "Sociolinguistic Research on American Sign Language: An Historical Perspective," *Sign Language and the Deaf Community* (1980) 122.

Diglossia serves a larger function as well. It allows Deaf adults to define their own culture, as opposed to allowing hearing people to impose their definitions of deafness upon them. By switching to English in the presence of hearing people, the Deaf community visibly asserts that ASL is at the center of their culture. The center cannot be open to everyone or it risks losing its importance; essentially, hearing people cannot stand at the center of Deaf culture. Furthermore, signing "English-y" reveals that Deaf people understand that English is the language of hearing people. It is entirely appropriate to sign in that manner with hearing individuals. It is not, however, appropriate to sign like that with other Deaf people; hence the switch back to ASL when hearing people leave a room. Diglossia allows Deaf people to signal what cultural standards are operative in different social situations. They, not the hearing people, do the switching. Deaf people decide how much of the culture others will be permitted to share. Such self-definition helps maintain necessary cultural identity and boundaries.⁵⁰

Signs gather importance in other ways in the deaf community. Generally speaking, stories of the supposed origins of individual signs abound. It is not particularly important that these stories be factually correct; rather, it is important that the signers believe that their language has ordered, rational components that can be

⁵⁰James Woodward, "Sociolinguistic Research," *Sign Language and the Deaf Community* (1980) 122.

explained to outsiders.⁵¹ A good example of this belief is the naming ritual. In Sign, names do not have automatic translations. Initially, they must simply be fingerspelled in English. Eventually, a name sign will be adopted for an individual, usually based on her/his personal traits. For instance, a person may be overweight when introduced in Deaf centers. A name sign may develop around the physical characteristics of this person. Even if the excess weight is lost, the name sign will stick. It has gained the weight of history. The name sign remains because its creation had a specific reason, even if that reason is no longer apparent. Such is the case, Signers contend, for the whole of their language.

The use of a visuo-gestural language has other implications as well. Just as signs are believed by their users to have certain origins, so, too, Deaf people hold that all hand gestures must connote some visual meaning.⁵² As the hands are used for language by Deaf people, they become endowed with a certain blessed quality. They are not to be mistreated or used frivolously or ineffectually. "Talking with the hands," as hearing people understand it, is discouraged in the Deaf community.

Likewise, Deaf people have different cultural rules regarding the use of the mouth that stem from their experience of language. Historically, Deaf people have

⁵¹Carol Padden, "The Deaf Community," *Sign Language and the Deaf Community* (1980) 96.

⁵²Carol Padden, "The Deaf Community," *Sign Language and the Deaf Community* (1980) 96.

disdained any mouth movement while signing. The mid-nineteenth-century Signing masters, like Laurent Clerc and E.M. Gallaudet, always insisted on signing with their mouths completely closed. This style was considered more aesthetically pleasing. In the late nineteenth century, as growing attempts were made to teach deaf children how to speak, more mouth movement became permissible, eventually supplanting the use of Sign entirely. This trend has been reversed in the twentieth century. Deaf people generally consider speaking an inappropriate cultural behavior.⁵³ Speaking is, after all, a hearing behavior; hearing educators have forced deaf children to learn it. Therefore, only a minimum amount of mouth movement is currently permissible. Exaggerated mouth movement is forbidden as it is interpreted as mocking Deaf people and their values.⁵⁴

If the use of Sign renders mouth movement obsolete, it encourages a freer use of the body. Facial expression plays an integral part in ASL's syntax/grammar. The speed or slowness with which a sign is executed contributes significantly to its meaning, indicating emotion, tone, or inflection. As these attributes are essential to Sign's greater meaning, Deaf people are much less self-conscious about the use of their bodies; they realize that their "body language" adds substantially to their language.

⁵³Carol Padden, "Deaf Community," *Sign Language and the Deaf Community* (1980) 96.

⁵⁴Carol Padden, "The Deaf Community," *Sign Language and the Deaf Community* (1980) 96.

Since Sign uses of the entire body so extensively, Deaf people also tend more readily to express emotion. Their hands quickly reveal their emotions and facial expressions change fluidly to add more meaning to their Signs. In fact, some psychologists theorize that gestural language is inherently more expressive than vocal language because body language tends to "reveal unconscious and repressed feelings."⁵⁵ This linguistic necessity creates special problems in America. Culturally speaking, Anglo-Americans are usually subdued in terms of physical expressiveness. They are not given to big, expansive gestures and dramatic physical movements. When confronted with the highly animated language and public behavior of Deaf people, hearing viewers may react nervously. Their discomfort arises from the public action of a different set of cultural standards.⁵⁶

It would seem that the confrontation between Deaf and hearing cultures creates negative impressions. In fact, this is not always the case. Deaf people also gain some very positive features from this part of their culture. Due to the interaction of their language with body language, Deaf people tend to gain a heightened sensitivity to the body language of hearing people. This addition proves quite beneficial; since most hearing people are unfamiliar with Sign, a large communication gap develops between them and Deaf individuals. The Deaf person, more attuned to the hearing person's

⁵⁵McCay Vernon, *Psycholinguistics* (1972) 14.

⁵⁶Higgins 127.

every gesture and movement, will be better able to facilitate communication and ease embarrassed tensions. Of course, this sensitivity may also backfire. A Deaf person is usually more sensitive to any disparities between a person's verbal and body language. Responding to a hearing speaker's body language instead of the verbal cues, a Deaf individual may be quicker to perceive a person's true feelings and react to them, instead of the polite social pleasantries.⁵⁷

Still, despite their complicated relationship, Deaf and hearing cultures continue to try to learn how to co-exist comfortably. Obviously, misconceptions on both sides linger. Even these erroneous perceptions stem from the historical experience of the two groups. To reach any understanding of both Deaf culture and the hearing response to it, it is imperative to understand the historical experience of both groups and investigate the complicated ties that bind the two together.⁵⁸ Yet, these ties are not merely historical in nature. They operate under the rubric of culture. A simple historical model will not help us to truly understand why both groups have developed such specific ideas about the other. To uncover the roots of the current situation, an exercise in ethnographic history is necessary.

⁵⁷Vernon, *Psycholinguistics*, 16.

⁵⁸After all, they must necessarily be bound together. The idea of a specifically Deaf culture is meaningless if there is not a group of people around who are not deaf. Similarly, hearing ideas of what deafness means are irrelevant unless the sense of hearing means something to its possessors; otherwise its loss would go unnoticed.

Ethnographic history means searching the historical record with an eye toward discovering not only what or why an event occurred, but, more deeply, what its occurrence meant to the people involved.⁵⁹ The question the ethnographic historian asks is: how did the historical actors themselves interpret their actions? It is impossible to accomplish this task without first deciphering the cultural rules by which those actors played.⁶⁰ Since cultures likewise evolve over time, comprehending present-day rules may not necessarily help in interpreting past standards. Still, such knowledge will provide at least a tentative blueprint to begin deeper investigations.

Simply put, ethnographic history requires combining the skills of the anthropologist and the historian. It means interpreting historical documents within the light of the culture of the author who wrote them. The driving belief of the discipline is that historical actions cannot be fully understood if they are removed from the cultural context in which they originally occurred. It implies that language itself, the written words recorded for posterity, is not to be taken at face value. Rhys Isaac elaborates:

A culture may be thought of as a total language, or system of communication. More than just words, it comprises also gesture, demeanor, dress, architecture, and all the codes by which those who share

⁵⁹Rhys Isaac, "Ethnographic Method in History: An Action Approach," *Historical Methods* 13 (1980): 44.

⁶⁰Isaac, "Ethnographic Method," *Historical Methods* 13 (1980): 44.

in it convey significance to each other. Sentences in a given language cannot be translated unless, as we say, we "know" the language.⁶¹

In this case, the task is to understand the languages of two cultures, Deaf and hearing, to see where the lines of communication between them break down, and why.

The questions are myriad. Why could the two cultures not co-exist happily? How did Deaf people in the nineteenth century view themselves? Did they consider themselves a unique culture? How did they view hearing people? Did the hearing majority fear the difference of deafness or accept it? Why was Sign disdained in some hearing circles? The answers to these questions are buried in the nineteenth century. Uncovering them will require the cultural sensitivity of the ethnographic approach to history. Hopefully, these answers will promote greater cultural awareness as the two groups weave an uneasy way into the twenty-first century.

⁶¹Isaac, "Ethnographic Method," *Historical Methods* 13 (1980): 44.

2: SIGN LANGUAGE: FACT OR FICTION

The best friends of the sign language will not deny that it is immeasurably inferior to English, and it follows that the culture dependent upon it must be proportionately inferior.

S.G. Davidson, 1899

Many friends of Sign in the nineteenth century did not in fact believe it inferior to English, nor did they consider Deaf people inferior for using it. Nonetheless, Davidson's point still contains an important truth. Deaf people, by mid-century, had developed a culture centered around and displayed by their use of "the sign language," ASL.⁶² Not only had Deaf people organized themselves culturally by this time,

⁶²When writers, educators, and Deaf people themselves referred to "the sign language," they were talking about American Sign Language. "The sign language" was always the language of signs that did not follow English word order. What were called

hearing people noticed it too. Whether judged to be inferior or not, hearing educators and observers recognized that Deaf people were noticeably different from hearing people.

This understanding on the part of the hearing community, especially educators, had evolved over the course of the century. By the time Davidson wrote, the fact of the existence of the culture was considered undeniable. Educators had spent the century battling about methodology in large part due to this recognition. Manualists embraced the culture; oralists, like Davidson, viewed it as inferior and peculiar. Throughout the century, then, observations had been made about Deaf students by their hearing instructors which slowly led to an inevitable conclusion. As early as 1847 it was noted that a young deaf child "learns to make good use of his eyes; and forms habits of observation, in regard to sensible objects,...more lively and accurate" than those of a hearing child the same age.⁶³ The hyper-visibility that would so impress researchers one hundred years later was readily observable in schools across the country. In many cases, those "habits of observation" were necessary to supply

"conventional signs" or "methodical signs" were those signs added to "the natural or universal language of signs" in order to make it look like a visual presentation of English. It was almost always acknowledged that this was strictly a teaching device; Deaf people were not expected to sign in this manner in daily life.

⁶³Lucius H. Woodruff, "Primary Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb," *The American Annals of the Deaf* 1 (1847): 47-8. The date may be mid-century, but remember the first school, American School for the Deaf, was not founded until 1817 and it opened with only 8 pupils.

important information, such as the approach of moving carriages or trains; other times they simply promoted a good eye for detail, which could prove a marketable job skill in areas such as printing.⁶⁴

By far the strongest reaction by hearing people to the newly discovered cultural differences was their view of Sign or the sign language. Educators noted "a strong tendency to grimace in the natural language of the deaf and dumb"; Deaf students were reported making "distorted features" and "uncouth expressions."⁶⁵ Hearing instructors were outraged by such behaviors, claiming that they "greatly offend good taste."⁶⁶ No one seemed to understand the reasons for this "offensive" behavior. Finally, in frustration, a hearing teacher cried out, "...why is it necessary to outrage good taste in order to give effect to signs, more than to add strength to speech?"⁶⁷ As no true linguistic investigation had been conducted on Sign in the nineteenth century, no one understood that in fact the countenance of the signer added a great deal of meaning to the language. Instead, a necessary part of the language was called offensive by hearing viewers. These hearing people believed that Sign should more

⁶⁴Most deaf boys at this time were taught printing; noticing fine detail was indeed a marketable skill to overcome hiring prejudice.

⁶⁵Lucius H. Woodruff, "Primary Instruction," *Annals* 1 (1847): 47-8.

⁶⁶Lucius H. Woodruff, "Grace of Expression," *Annals* 2 (1849): 193.

⁶⁷Woodruff, "Grace," *Annals* 2 (1849): 195-6.

closely resemble spoken English in its deliverance, i.e., less visibly animated, without "rude gestures" and "singular grimaces."⁶⁸

The deeper problem here was that signers just did not act like hearing speakers. Their behavior, necessary to their language's syntax, was interpreted as rude by hearing observers using hearing standards. Deaf people, due to their linguistic difference, acted in public in a way that hearing people could and did not. Violating usual American standards for public gesture, they were deemed rude. Their teachers, consequently, were warned not to learn Sign from their young students. Crucially, they were also told not to imitate their facial expressions or mannerisms, for, if they did, "the signs would become vulgar and awkward."⁶⁹ Educators believed that by refusing to indulge in such needless behaviors they would teach their Deaf students the correct way to sign. In fact, efforts by the students to continue to sign in their own way were to be soundly discouraged: "Those contortions of the countenance and of the body in which so many of our pupils indulge, should be prevented in every possible manner, as half ludicrous and half disgusting..."⁷⁰

⁶⁸"Institution New: Origin, &c.," *Silent World* 6.8 (1876): 6. For more on nineteenth-century American standards of acceptable public gestural behavior, see Karen Haltunen's *Confidence Men and Painted Women*.

⁶⁹Samuel Porter, "4th Convention of American Instructors of the Deaf and Dumb," *Annals* 9 (1857): 8.

⁷⁰L. Rae, "On the Proper Use of Signs in the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb," *Annals* 5 (1852): 23-4.

A strange paradox emerges here. Sign was at once quickly embraced as the best tool available for teaching Deaf children and simultaneously vilified as "vulgar" and encouraging "offensive" behavior. The obvious cultural clash is neatly captured here, hinging on linguistic differences. The linguistic differences between English and Sign led to different public behaviors by the users. The Deaf way of signing was disdained by a hearing audience which, interpreting the necessary facial expressions using hearing standards, pronounced the results unacceptable. A battle ensued to impose the majority's culture upon the minority. Hearing teachers subjected Sign to severe criticism and altered its deliverance to fit their standards of acceptability. Deaf students would have been the perfect people to teach Sign because they were native users of the language but they were called "uneducated."⁷¹ Surely, hearing adults could not be expected to learn a language from an uneducated Deaf child! According to the hearing educators, the children were signing incorrectly anyhow. It was up to the hearing instructors to teach the Deaf population how to Sign gracefully and correctly. For instance, J. Jacobs, a hearing instructor, commented, "Signs in the order of the words, should and can be made, not in a dull, imitative, mechanical, or "methodical" manner, but with the spirit and significance of colloquial signs."⁷² Educators would teach

⁷¹Porter, "4th Convention," *Annals* 9 (1857): 8.

⁷²J.A. Jacobs, "Preface to an Unpublished Work," *Annals* 9 (1857): 137.

deaf students the best and proper way to sign. The cultural majority judged the minority too inept and ignorant to be competent users of their own native language.⁷³

Luckily for the nineteenth-century Deaf community, not all hearing educators held this negative view of the sign language. A wide variety of opinions and theories about Sign, its use, and its nature existed throughout the century. Sign was hailed by some people as a universal language, by others as the only natural language, and by still others as an inferior version of English. The debate became more complicated when the concept of sign systems was introduced. Educators quarrelled about either respecting the dignity of the language or forcing it to conform to an English word order. Through it all, Deaf people held their own view of their language and continued using it regardless of the storm of controversy surrounding it.⁷⁴

Though no formal linguistic studies were conducted concerning Sign, many observers commented on what they felt were its salient features throughout the century. In 1851, John Carlin, a deaf painter and poet, offered a system which divided signs into four types: "the natural, the verbal, the pantomimic, and the individual."

⁷³In fact, Deaf children fluent in ASL but not in English are still regularly told that they lack language skills and/or competence. Deaf signers now recognize the importance of facial expressions and body language and Sign their own way. Complaints about hearing signers being unintelligible or mumbling still arise because the hearing signers simply do not use enough facial expressions. They persist in believing that their hands can do all the talking.

⁷⁴Please see chapter five for more on Deaf views of Sign.

Of these the verbal is the most necessary and appropriate to the pupil's faculty of comprehension. It is eminently qualified for defining all necessary abstract words and the principles of the English grammar. The natural signs, by their beauty, grace and impressiveness, have a tendency to encourage his predilection for them and excessive indulgence in their use, and, by their being mostly superfluous, to retard his intellectual progress. The pantomimic are sometimes useful in depicting passions and imitating others' actions for his edification,--yet his teacher should be extremely sparing and circumspect in their use at school. The individual, with a few exceptions, are wholly superfluous and nonsensical.⁷⁵

By verbal signs, Carlin meant those that followed an English word order. These would include created signs that did not exist themselves in Sign. For instance, Sign contains no translations for the English words "the," "of," or the verb "to be." To teach English grammar, Carlin implied, verbal signs would be needed to fill in the terms missing from Sign's vocabulary. They would need to be created artificially, by hearing instructors to transliterate English into a visual form. He wanted the words to have signed equivalents because he believed that Deaf students would best understand English, at least initially, if it was presented in a visual form.

Natural signs referred to those regularly occurring in the sign language, excluding most verbal signs. The natural signs were also presented in the grammar unique to Sign; they did not follow English word order. Although, Carlin conceded, such signs were beautiful, they were also dangerous. Their beauty, and ease to form, seduced the young deaf mind and drew it away from the better language, i.e., English.

⁷⁵John Carlin, "Advantages and Disadvantages of the Use of Signs," *Annals* 4 (1851): 54-5.

Natural signs were therefore to be avoided, lest they "retard the [deaf child's] intellectual progress."

Pantomimic signs were basically imitative and/or iconic in nature. In other words, to explain that a dinner companion had noisily slurped his soup all evening, the signer would imitate the action accordingly. Carlin evidently found these signs to have their uses, particularly with regard to capturing emotions, but cautioned against relying too heavily upon them. He probably believed that they were not an example of language but rather a way to communicate a situation to a Deaf student who lacked good language skills. To rely on them as a teaching device would result in pushing students away from English.

Carlin's system of categorization made value judgments about the kinds of signs then in use. Although all were employed by Deaf students and their teachers, some types were considered better than others. Verbal signs were "better" than pantomimic. By inference, those deaf individuals who employed verbal signs regularly and fluently must have been held, at least in Carlin's estimation, as "better" people. The polish of their language revealed their intelligence and worth to society. Those deaf people who best understood, and therefore most often used, pantomimic signs must necessarily be less educated and less intelligent. The users of the natural signs were placed in the trickiest position. They were recognized to be using a language, one acknowledged as beautiful and graceful. The problem with it, from this point of view, was its inferior

nature. English was simply better. Users of "the sign language" may have been using a language, but they were using the wrong one. Their choice reflected their inferior nature.

Carlin's system was not the only one available. Other observations about the nature of Sign were made throughout the century. In 1848, in *The American Annals of the Deaf*, the newly created magazine for anyone--hearing or deaf--interested in deaf education, articles began appearing about Sign itself.⁷⁶ Charles Turner contributed an article entitled "Expression" that commented extensively on the link between signs and facial expression. He wrote, "Again, expression not only necessarily accompanies certain signs, but moreover with the same sign, a change of expression may essentially modify its signification..."⁷⁷ While others were mocking excessive expression as ridiculous and unnecessary, Turner had noticed the very real fact that expression plays an important role in Sign. He also recognized that the same sign, executed with different facial expressions, can produce a variety of meanings. Probably unwittingly, he had noticed a linguistic property of Sign that researchers would not formally recognize for another one hundred and twenty years. None of this suggests that signs themselves are inadequate transmitters of knowledge; it simply suggests that expression

⁷⁶*The American Annals of the Deaf* began publishing in October 1847 and continued until 1861. Publication was interrupted by the Civil War, but resumed in 1868 and continues until the present day.

⁷⁷Charles P. Turner, "Expression," *Annals* 1 (1848): 78.

is needed to augment their meaning, similar to the way tone of voice enhances oral language. Turner captured his observation neatly by writing, almost apologetically, "Without wishing to detract from the merits of the noble language of signs, we may safely assert, that it owes its main force and beauty to the accompanying power of expression."⁷⁸

Turner's remarks seemed to provoke more consideration of the topic from other educators. In the same year, J.A. Ayres offered his thoughts on the subject to the *Annals*. At mid-century, he was to express an ambivalent attitude toward Sign that would, in many ways, characterize the rest of the century. It would, after all, be a century that would see the renewed interest in sign systems and the more devastating rise of the oralist movement. Ayres captured the attitude:

It is true that this language, so wonderful in itself, is yet imperfect and limited when compared with the excellences of speech. It has not all the convenience of oral communication. There are times when the hand and the eye are both occupied so that discourse to which the ear might be open must be laid aside by those for whom the eye performs its double office. It is also a language requiring more effort, more exertion. In extreme languor and debility, when even the gentle whispers of speech are wearisome to the exhausted body, gesture with its life-like expression and energy, is an effort which requires a yet greater stimulus. It lacks also in many cases, that clear and mathematical precision which is the highest recommendation of any language. Based as it is upon imitation and not upon any fixed and arbitrary standard, its precision depends in a great degree upon the skill of him who uses it. Yet with all these deficiencies and many more, it is a language capable of cultivating the understanding, refining and drawing out the emotions of the soul and

⁷⁸Turner, "Expression," *Annals* 1 (1848): 78.

meeting to an extent scarcely realized by those unacquainted with it, all the wants and exigencies of life. It is withal a beautiful language...⁷⁹

On the one hand, the language is derided as wearisome and lacking in precision and clarity. On the other, it is hailed as revelatory and beautiful. How can this apparent contradiction be explained?

Actually, the clue is in the first sentence. Ayres implies that this sign language could be wonderful if only people did not possess the languages of speech. Speech, in a strict value judgment, is considered better than signs. Particularly noteworthy here is the early indication of confusion between modes of communication and actual language. It emerges in Ayres' opinion that the trouble with Sign is not really its inferior status as a language. He calls it a wonderful language in itself. The trouble with it is the medium of communication, the hands. The hands are not as good for transmitting language as the vocal cords, the argument goes. They cannot engage other tasks while they speak, they distract the eye, and they tire more quickly than the voice. For all of these reasons, Ayres offered, speech is a far superior creation than Sign.

This assertion represents a problem with Ayres' comparison; namely he compared a language to a mode of communication. He refers to Sign as a language but compares it not to another language like English, but rather to a mode, speech. Speech, however, is not language. It may be a convenient method for people who can

⁷⁹J.A. Ayres, "An inquiry into the extent to which the misfortune of deafness may be alleviated," *Annals* 1 (1848): 222-3.

hear, but it is obviously not so practical for those who cannot hear. A practical, convenient form of communication for the Deaf community must necessarily take a visual form. Developing an argument pitting language against a mode is faulty because the mode a language takes must be suited specifically to its users. Ayres was a hearing man; he was therefore attached to a spoken form of language for his own use. His error lay in assuming that his form of language was uniquely better than any other form. The emphasis placed on speech here would grow over the century into a reason to ban Sign from the classroom altogether. Speech and language would become equated and, together, would be considered superior to an unspoken, manual, and inferior "language." A dangerous train of thought began to emerge as early as mid-century.

In fact, Ayres came very close, perhaps without realizing it, to dismissing Sign as a language in this passage. He declared that it is "based upon imitation and not upon any fixed and arbitrary standard," its precision therefore varying according to the skill of the individual user. Ayres implied that Sign lacks any sort of a grammar or syntax. Although entirely untrue, believing it would mean that Sign could not possibly be considered a legitimate language. Language skills may vary from user to user, but the utility or nature of the language itself should not. Ayres may have called Sign a "language in itself," but his own observations suggest that it was not perceived accordingly.

Yet, somehow, in spite of all these deficiencies, Ayres concluded that Sign was a "beautiful language." In its own way, it was "capable of cultivating the understanding" and "drawing out the emotions of the soul." Sign could be positively categorized this way because it had been shown capable of reaching deaf students in these ways. Their intellects responded to Sign; they could interact through it with their teachers and each other. Since Sign was "wonderful in itself," it was also wonderful and beautiful for its primary users. Speech, though, remained for the majority of language users, so it must be better than Sign. Sign could therefore be considered beautiful in its own limited way and deficient overall. This tense compromise between the two opposing viewpoints was not to last. By the end of the century, Sign was rejected, even for use within a limited sphere. If speech was better, the logic would dictate, then it was better for everyone. Sign's beauty lacked any place in formal education.

Ayres' conflicting, but for him resolvable, themes coalesced in this brief passage. Sign was granted a viable, albeit limited, position in Ayres' arrangement. It could be both language and non-language, beautiful and dangerous. Of course, this pronouncement constituted a hearing judgment; Deaf users had little input into the way educators viewed them. Views of the Deaf community and its language varied from school to school. By sitting in judgment on Sign, Ayres was in part acting as a judge of the Deaf community. Their language was beautiful but not standardized; it had

limited usefulness since most people spoke and would therefore be unable to understand it. By attempting to demonstrate the drawbacks of Sign to the audience, he subtly promoted instead the superiority of speech and, therefore, of hearing. The implication is clear: it is considered better to be hearing (by hearing people) than to be deaf. The obvious corollary quickly followed. Using speech is better than using Sign since it is associated with the higher, more valued quality of hearing. The subtle message is: if you cannot be a hearing person, at least speak like one. By the end of the century, reaching a crescendo in the 1880's, oralists would have shut Sign out entirely, promoting only speaking, thereby advocating the practice of attempting to acculturate deaf children as hearing.

Remarkably, not all educators demonstrated such an uneasiness with Sign's nature as did J.A. Ayres. A researcher most interested in Indian sign languages, Colonel Garrick Mallery, reported his findings about sign languages in 1882. Mallery believed that the sign languages of various Indian tribes, combined with the sign language used by "deaf-mutes...constitute together one language--the gesture speech of mankind--of which each system is a dialect."⁸⁰ He therefore believed that his observations about one sign language were applicable to all sign languages. Although it is now known that no universal sign language exists, this idea was common in the

⁸⁰Colonel Garrick Mallery, "The Gesture Speech of Man," *Annals* 27 (1882): 75-6.

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁸¹ Still, Mallery's comments are useful because, though sign languages differ from country to country, researchers suspect that certain elements are common to all of them (limited numbers of handshapes, positions, and their subsequent combinations, for instance.)

Mallery's studies and findings were corroborated three years later by W.P. Clark in his book, *Indian Sign Language*. Essentially, the book is a dictionary of Indian signs from several tribes. In the introduction, Clark offered detailed information about the structure of these sign languages, delving into their specific grammars and idioms.⁸² A value judgment about these differences is lacking; the tone instead is simply explanatory. Clark may have dealt with Indian sign languages, but many of his remarks are germane to Sign as it is used by Deaf people. He commented:

It will be observed that the articles, conjunctions, and prepositions are omitted, and adjectives follow the nouns. Verbs are used in the present tense, nouns and verbs are used in the singular number, the idea of

⁸¹J.R. Knowlson, "The Idea of Gesture as a Universal Language in the 17th and 18th Centuries," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 1965.

⁸²The book lacked pictures; as such all of the signs were described meticulously in English.

plurality being expressed in some other way. Abbreviation is constantly practiced. An Indian in closing or terminating a talk or speech wishing to say I have finished my speech or conversation, or, I have nothing more to say, simply makes the sign for DONE or FINISHED.⁸³

Clark's observations still have relevance today. Sign has evolved over time but some elements have remained constant. Articles are, for the most part, omitted entirely and many prepositions remain unsigned. The concept of a conjunction exists but often a sign that would not translate neatly into English is used. The sign FINISH, for instance, is often used in place of the word "and." Adjectives may be placed either before or after the noun; there is no one correct way to place them.

Clark commented that verbs were used in the present tense. This point is exceptionally interesting since, in Signed conversations today, most verbs are still executed in the present tense. It is possible to indicate verb tense in Sign; it is simply not done redundantly as it is in English. In Sign the tense is indicated once at the beginning of the conversation, and not repeated again unless the tense changes. For instance, if a conversation starts by discussing yesterday's events, a Signer might begin YESTERDAY ME GO MOVIE ME, in English "I went to the movie yesterday." Discussing the rest of the evening, the verbs would be signed in the present tense, since YESTERDAY previously indicated the discussed events had taken place in the past. To move the conversation into the present the signs NOW or TODAY could be made

⁸³W.P. Clark, *The Indian Sign Language* (Philadelphia: L.R. Hamersly & Co., 1885) 18.

and for the future WILL or TOMORROW.⁸⁴ Since such devices as these already existed by the late nineteenth century, Sign would seem to have functioned with a high degree of sophistication.

Other devices, by Clark's account, would seem to have been in use in the nineteenth-century. He noted that the plurality of nouns was expressed differently in a sign language than in a spoken language. Today, a variety of ways exist in Sign to provide a plural form of a noun. The Signer can add a specific number, either before or after the noun. Similarly, a quantifier like SEVERAL or A-FEW may be added in the same way. Finally, the noun itself may be repeated and moved through space. For instance, the sign TREE when moved from left to right becomes TREES. In this sense, an entirely separate sign for both "tree" and "trees" does not exist; one grows out of the other. One language adds an "-s," another employs motion, but both are fully capable of expressing an idea of plurality.

Finally, Clark noticed the Indian use of the sign FINISH.⁸⁵ The sign FINISH is still used extensively in Sign. Deaf children will use it in this same abbreviated fashion, answering a question like YOU RETURN BOOK YOU? (Did you return the

⁸⁴Obviously Signers are not limited to these four choices. Any applicable sign could be selected.

⁸⁵Most interestingly, he used capitalized letters to spell a word representing a sign. This convention is still used today to the same purpose. I do not believe that Clark originated this practice. Still, it shows the recognition of the dilemma of trying to capture a signed word in two dimensions without implying that exact translations from language to language are possible.

book?) with FINISH (I did it.) It can also be used as a conjunction meaning "and" or "then" or as an indicator of past tense (i.e. FINISH READ meaning "have read.") FINISH must have been employed frequently in Indian sign languages to have attracted Clark's attention to the linguistic device. Today, its role in ASL has been expanded to include more sophisticated usages.

Clark provides excellent, early linguistic notes on the nature of Sign in the nineteenth century. He goes even further by providing brief reference to the topic of idioms in sign language. He wrote:

I have also noted some of the metaphors and idioms which are in constant use, and these metaphoric idioms, if I may so call them, are very important. I might say a knowledge of them is absolutely essential to a correct understanding of the language.⁸⁶

These idioms were pertinent to Indian, not American, culture. They would not have been in use in Deaf circles. Still, idioms cannot be limited to any one sign language. Though unrecorded here, Deaf Americans must have employed metaphors and idioms of their own. Clark correctly asserted that understanding a foreign language requires an understanding, no matter how tentative or uncertain, of the metaphors employed. Metaphors are often untranslatable or can only be fully understood within the context of the original language. A young deaf boy, for instance, once told me that my hair

⁸⁶Clark 20.

reminded him of a tree.⁸⁷ The comparison made no sense in English, but was perfect in Sign. It is impossible to appreciate truly a language if a knowledge of idioms, or of how a language works to create them, is lacking. Clark's observation holds true one hundred years later.

Great attention was also paid to grammatical details such as facial expression and speed of execution.⁸⁸ Mallery emphasized the role of facial expression, even noting that the same gesture could be applied to "diverse conditions of facts" by changing the expression used when executing it.⁸⁹ Clark likewise described the place of speed of signing in contributing toward meaning. "Rapid and vehement signs," he said, "have the same force in this language that such a manner of utterance would give in speech, while a languid and slovenly method of making gestures would exhibit weakness and worthlessness, just as it would in a vocal language."⁹⁰ Rapidity in Sign is akin to anger, urgency, or intensity in vocal language; metaphorically speaking, it is possible to "raise one's voice" in Sign. Slowness usually implies nonchalance, sarcasm, or

⁸⁷When the boy first met me, I had a curly perm. It slowly died and four months later, my hair was in its naturally straight condition. Noticing it, he signed, "Your hair is like a tree." I asked him what he meant. He proceeded to make the sign TREE near his head, and chop it down with his other hand until the "branches" fell flat on his forehead.

⁸⁸Mallery, "Gesture Speech," *Annals* 27 (1882): 84.

⁸⁹Mallery, "Gesture Speech," *Annals* 27 (1882): 78.

⁹⁰Clark 17.

carelessness. A variety of expressions and tones are possible in Sign just as they are in a oral language.

The concept of rapidity enters the descriptions in another sense. Mallery suggested that while "separate words maybe comprehended by persons hearing them without the whole connected sense of the words taken together being caught,...signs are more intimately connected." He believed it was more difficult to isolate a single sign outside. The context of the viewed sentence or discussion. He probably formulated this idea because, in fluent conversations, the signs all seem to blend together. In fact, this phenomenon is no different from speakers running words together, "you know" becoming "y'know," but uninitiated signers find the experience, when transferred to the hands, more disconcerting. Unwittingly, he did touch on a grammatical fact. Often, signs incorporate more than one fact, thus they can be "more intimately connected." Rather than signing "three years" in two pieces as is done in English, Signers can incorporate the three into the sign YEAR itself. Some skilled Signers can sign two signs simultaneously, one on each hand. Such devices do give the impression of Signs being more connected to one another; in fact, English words build on each other as well. Signs simply accomplish the same thing in a radically different way. Hearing viewers or signers are taken aback by the combinations because they are unfamiliar with the possibilities of construction; they are beyond their normal, English linguistic experience. In many cases, hearing signers, unless they have Deaf parents,

do not employ all these devices because of their unfamiliarity. As Clark wryly noted in the case of Indian sign languages, "To become...accomplished, one must train the mind to think like the Indians."⁹¹ To become fluent and accomplished in Sign, one must learn to think Deaf.

While neither investigator brought up the notion of "thinking Deaf," the possibility was hinted at in Mallery's work. He postulated that Sign, "when highly cultivated," approaches a "rapidity on familiar subjects that exceeds that of speech and approaches that of thought itself."⁹² A crucial distinction is drawn here: speech is not equated with thought (and thereby language.) The deaf population, for centuries, was considered unable to think because they could not understand speech. But here this old equation was rejected; speech and thought were recognized as two separate entities. This separation leaves open the possibility for different kinds of thought, kinds not dependent on the structures of speech. Hearing people express themselves through speech and therefore incorrectly assume that it is necessary for thought.⁹³ Mallery, by disassociating the two concepts, reminds readers that deaf people can think though they may be unable to speak. If speech can be said to influence hearing thinking, than

⁹¹Clark 17.

⁹²Mallery, "Gesture Speech," *Annals* 27 (1882): 81.

⁹³This association has generally been true. The Greeks and Romans, for instance, left deaf children on the hillside to die. They were believed to be uneducable because they could not hear spoken language.

Sign can equally influence Deaf thinking. Mallery recognized Sign's capacity to act as a vehicle of thought.⁹⁴

Perhaps it was this possibility of "thinking Deaf" that splintered the hearing educational establishment's view of Sign. After all, Sign had a different syntax than English and required different facial expressions. Now, it seemed to inspire a different culture and different thinking. Many educators decried this differentness and tried to find ways to make Sign more like English. Using English-like signs would certainly promote more hearing like behavior, enabling deaf students to fit in better in a predominantly hearing world. Other educators believed that Sign was a complete language; teaching English by translation would help the students better understand two languages and cultures. The bicultural approach would guarantee that the Deaf students would fit comfortably in both worlds. Finally, a third group despised all sign systems as interfering. They all distracted the deaf child from learning English. This group began by urging strict control over the sign language usage in the classroom and promoting the extensive use of fingerspelling or dactology. This group became the promoters of oralism, teaching by lip-reading and articulation, by the 1870s.

A definition of the various types of signs appeared in the *Annals* in 1851. Natural or colloquial signs were the signs of the Deaf community itself. They were the

⁹⁴For a further discussions of the connection between Sign and thought, see Hans Furth's *Thinking Without Language*.

signs that comprised nineteenth-century ASL. Arbitrary signs referred to the signs that were invented, generally by hearing teachers, for English words that had no corresponding sign among the natural signs. An arbitrary sign today (although this terminology is no longer used) would be MC DONALD'S. It was created because a need for such a sign existed. If a sign is not invented, probably because the concept is not used enough to warrant one, the word is simply finger-spelled. The arbitrary signs were then combined with the natural signs and arranged in English word order. Appropriate signs were invented to indicate English grammatical devices, such as verb endings and prefixes. The resulting sign system, a hodge podge of languages, was called methodical or systematic sign. Adherents believed in using methodical signs extensively in classes "because they express the idea[s] clearly and teach the proper order of words in sentences."⁹⁵

Educators like J.A. Jacobs believed that methodical signs helped deaf children understand English better. The children could not hear English, but it could be presented to them visually. Once having a signed understanding of it, the teacher could then introduce the students to written English. The deaf students would learn to associate the methodical signs with a precise English word. Their reading skills, teachers theorized, would improve because they would learn to think, through signs,

⁹⁵L. Rae, "Second Convention of American Instructors of the Deaf and Dumb," *Annals* 4 (1851): 29.

in English. Natural signs could not accomplish this task because they followed a different order from written English. As Jacobs proclaimed, "...can there be any doubt that a mute can read faster in significant signs associated with the words, than in arbitrary and numerous characters abstractly associated with the ideas, if that were possible?"⁹⁶

But Jacobs, and other educators, did not reject colloquial signs entirely. Such signs could be used effectively to teach subjects like history and science; they were thought to possess particular power in teaching religion.⁹⁷ Colloquial signs did not need to be banished from schools for the deaf; they simply could not be used to teach English. Their different syntax and style would only confuse the deaf student. Still, at least in some educational circles, colloquial signs had a definite, albeit limited, place.

The issue appeared settled. Colloquial signs worked here, methodical signs worked there. But beneath the surface issue, how to teach English successfully to deaf students, lurked a much deeper concern. It appears in William Cochrane's account of his first day as a teacher of deaf students, printed in the *Annals* in 1871.

I was very much surprised when I found that the signs did not follow the order of the words, but were transposed in a manner which seemed to me to be entirely useless, and to bring unnecessary confusion to the mind of the deaf-mute. Immediately there came the queries, Why this jargon? Why this mutilation of our mother tongue? Does it help the deaf-mute in gaining a knowledge of the English language? Is it any aid to him in

⁹⁶Jacobs, "The Experiment Explained," *Annals* 7 (1854): 174.

⁹⁷Jacobs, "Preface to an Unpublished Work," *Annals* 9 (1857): 137.

his attempts to become acquainted with written language? And I asked the question, Why do not the signs follow the order of words?⁹⁸

From this brief account, it becomes clear that the real issue was the concern about preserving English, not teaching it. The trouble with Sign was that it was different from English, in a seemingly negative way. Sign was not accepted as a real language, equal to English. The signs seemed "transposed," from English word order, in an "entirely useless" way to this new teacher. The teacher obviously believed that Sign lacked formal structure or the so-called transpositions would not have appeared so useless. The order of signs could only confuse the mind of the deaf student, in Cochrane's view. Why? The deaf students could not hear the order of English words; in the nineteenth century, they would not have been bombarded with representations of visual English in the forms of closed captioning, comic books, magazines, or billboards. Exposure to Sign would essentially represent the extent of their exposure to language. Correct signing, including following Sign's own grammar, would be essential because it would give the students a common knowledge of a native language. Exposure to one language could give them a linguistic base upon which to build. Only someone already knowledgeable about and fluent in English could find Sign confusing because only they would possess another language with which to confuse it! The deaf student obviously does not qualify. Hearing people's complaints about Sign tend to

⁹⁸W.A. Cochrane, "Methodical Signs Instead of Colloquial," *Annals* 16 (1871): 12.

reveal more about the hearing world's foibles than about any real educational concerns for the deaf students. Hearing teachers, not deaf students, find Sign confusing, difficult, or useless.

More subtly, such complaints also reveal the ideas that hearing people held about the way that deaf people should be. Deaf students should have minds of hearing people; they should be more comfortable thinking in English than in Sign. Sign should confuse them as much as it does hearing people. Their hearing minds, trapped behind deaf ears, should likewise judge the grammar of Sign "entirely useless." These ideas demonstrate a common idea held by hearing people, both then and now: namely, deaf people are just hearing people with broken ears. Deaf people should therefore be just like hearing people. They should hold the same interests, share the same culture, and speak the same language (in this case English.)

Not speaking, or signing, English challenges this belief. Signing ASL reveals that Deaf people are not the same as hearing people; through their own use of language, they order their world differently.⁹⁹ Signing ASL demonstrates that Deaf people are comfortable with their deafness. Their minds are not confused by their lack of English at all. Deaf Signers are therefore dangerous, to a certain extent, to the hearing establishment. They visibly contradict all the ideas that hearing people hold

⁹⁹Our language itself controls how we think about issues as much as we control our own language.

about deafness. Furthermore, they reject the notion that English is superior to Sign. Signers may have felt embarrassed using Sign in front of hearing speakers, having internalized some of the hearing world's ideas, but they never allowed Sign to die. They continued to Sign, even privately, in the quiet conviction that their language was legitimate.

Cochrane's questions provide further insight into the deeper concerns active here. He asked, "Why this mutilation of our mother tongue?" With this loaded question, the issue of the true nature of Sign becomes clear. Using Sign results in the mutilation of English. This observation would mean that Sign was not really considered a language; it may have been called "the sign language" but a term like "mutilation" implies that some hearing people believed it to be merely a bastardized form of English. By banishing Sign from the classroom and replacing it with a methodical sign system, hearing educators struck a metaphorical blow for English. Deaf students used and preferred a language that mutilated English, the mother tongue. Preserving linguistic purity became a growing concern for their hearing teachers. The movement to push Sign out of education was not concerned with improving teaching techniques but rather with emphasizing the importance of English. An intolerance of linguistic difference begins to creep into the discussion of Sign's role in deaf education.

This intolerant attitude did affect the attitudes of some deaf people toward sign language. John Carlin, the deaf painter, commented extensively on the subject,

concurring with Cochrane at every point. He, too, would completely dispense with colloquial signs, in spite of their beauty, grace, and flexibility. His reasoning: "[Such signs] always appear barbarous--outlandish--jargon-like, when literally translated in words." Naturally, any language, when translated in this fashion, would appear this way in another language, but this basic fact was overlooked. The point presented instead was that Sign was lacking in correct (i.e., English) grammar. This lack made for an unsettled mind, in Carlin's estimation; signing in English would eliminate this problem. It would also eliminate the "grimaces" and "laryngean creakings, extremely disagreeable to the ears" accompanying the use of colloquial signs because "a systematized mind regulates all things."¹⁰⁰ Carlin suggests that a deaf mind cannot be truly organized except through the use of English. Sign could only confuse and disorder the deaf person's mind because it is in itself disorganized and "outlandish." English, by contrast, was ordered and rational; its use would encourage such characteristics to mark the mind of even the deaf user. A condemnation of Sign by a deaf man was particularly devastating. It reinforced the notion that only by learning English could a deaf person succeed in the world--not necessarily spoken English, as Carlin himself did not speak, but written and signed English. Fluency in anything else, especially Sign, was unacceptable.

¹⁰⁰John Carlin, "Words Recognized As Units--Systematic Signs," *Annals* 11 (1859): 16.

Sign, then, was apparently condemned, not for its lack of instructional quality, but rather for supposed inferiority. Hearing prejudice rejected Sign, believing that it ruined the purity of English. This prejudice was cloaked in the language of education's methodological concerns. Hearing educators, and a few deaf ones as well, claimed that using Sign in the classroom would interfere with the deaf child's acquisition of English. J.A. Jacobs stated the position succinctly: "As long as colloquial signs are made an instrument of instruction, they cherish the order of thinking natural to the mute and make for him the acquisition of the arrangement and grammatical connection of written language difficult, and almost impossible."¹⁰¹ And again: "You wish to teach him to write in the English arrangement, and do so by explaining the meaning of the written words, by an arrangement of ideas and expression the very reverse!"¹⁰² Even a deaf adult agreed: "If, after the first or second years, signs were rigidly excluded from the classroom, and their use in general conversation discouraged, the pupil would leave school with a much fuller knowledge of English, and better fitted to fill his place in the world."¹⁰³ The methods suggested ranged from strict signed English to exclusive fingerspelling, but in each case, Sign itself was banned completely. The seeming best

¹⁰¹Jacobs, "Preface," *Annals* 9 (1857): 137.

¹⁰²Jacobs, "The Relation of Written Words to Signs the Same as Their Relation to Spoken Words," *Annals* 11 (1859): 71.

¹⁰³Jasper N. Williams, *A silent people dwelling in a world without sound: all about deaf mutes* (Detroit: J.N. Williams, 1883) 66.

interests of the deaf student required it. The logic was clearly infallible. Sign's grammar would interfere with the ability of the deaf student to learn English. Signs represented the natural order of thinking to the deaf student; since the language is so natural for them, they would never attempt to learn English unless Sign was excluded from the schools. The more they sign in English, the more natural thinking in English will become. Sign will then be abandoned as inferior and unnecessary.

Many educators rejected Sign under the guise of concern for the English skills of their deaf students. The true reason lay in their determination to preserve English in its purest form. Their strong opinion, however, was not the only one. Other educators disregarded methodical signs, preferring to teach strictly in the Sign language. Their reasons were also clear; methodical signs misinterpreted the true nature of the sign language. Signs, these educators proposed, did not represent words; they represented things and ideas directly, the same way that English words represented concepts.¹⁰⁴ Signs, by this view, were their own symbols, not visual icons for English words. The use of methodical signs is essentially redundant; since Sign is as complete a language as English, there is no need to invent a third "language" to bridge the gap between them.¹⁰⁵ One can simply be translated into the other, Signs into

¹⁰⁴L. Rae, "Proper Use," *Annals* 5 (1852): 30.

¹⁰⁵Methodical signs, like modern day sign systems, did not represent an actual language themselves. They are simply an invention, a teaching tool.

written English and vice versa. Methodical signs were therefore considered "cumbersome and complicated."¹⁰⁶

The biggest problem of methodical signs, according to their primary detractor, Harvey P. Peet, was their profound unnaturalness. Remembering the order of English words must be easier for the deaf student than the order of methodical signs. The methodical signs seem ordered to a hearing signer, familiar with thinking in English, but unnatural to a deaf student, familiar instead with the order of Sign. Peet explained, "The order of words may seem natural, or at least, appropriate to them. The arrangement of his signs in the order of English words must always seem unnatural to the deaf-mute...What then is the gain by the use of methodical signs, in this respect, to balance the immense labor of inventing or learning signs for so many thousand words?"¹⁰⁷ Peet pointed out that methodical proponents invent signs to represent specific English words. These signs must be unnatural to the deaf students because they are completely alien. They often represent words that Sign is already capable of expressing--the translation is simply not perfectly precise. Needless repetition of concepts results. This outcome confuses deaf students because it uses their language incorrectly. By creating an amalgam of two languages, the deaf students lack exposure to either one in its grammatically correct form. Peet, and other supporters, argued that

¹⁰⁶L. Rae, "Proper Use," *Annals* 5 (1852) 29.

¹⁰⁷Harvey P. Peet, "Words Not Representative of Signs, But of Ideas," *Annals* 11 (1859): 5-6.

keeping the two separate, and using Sign to teach English, would help deaf students to distinguish better between them. In effect, the students would gain fluency in two languages.

But, proponents of methodical signs argued, Sign lacks signs for specific English words. Translations from one language to another could therefore not be made so easily or readily. Methodical signs represented a way to improve the basic deficiencies of Sign itself. Peet responded with a convincing argument against the idea of word-for-word translations. Such a technique always makes the translated language look silly and debased. A teacher would never presume to have students translate a Latin classical text into English in pure English word order. The result would be ungrammatical English. English to Sign translations should be approached in the same manner. Grammatical differences in structure and nuances of expression should always be taken into account.¹⁰⁸

Furthermore, Peet noted that, in truth, the only people benefited by signing in English are hearing educators. They, after all, are already familiar with both English and Sign. Most comfortable with English, it benefited them because doing so meant they would not have to learn a whole new language, just new symbols for the language they already possessed. Supposedly, signing in English would help deaf students because it would teach them English and thus enable them to communicate in the

¹⁰⁸Peet, "Words," *Annals* 11 (1859): 6.

language of the majority. Overlooked is the fact that most hearing people have no knowledge of Sign, executed in English or otherwise. Knowing Signed English will not allow a deaf student to communicate with the majority of hearing people. Peet responded to this contention thusly: "Let Mr. Jacobs make his signs in the order of words for the Lord's prayer...to some intelligent man, entirely unacquainted with signs, and he may recognize what he seems in danger of forgetting, that making signs is not exactly the same thing as conveying ideas."¹⁰⁹ Such a task is better left, sympathetic educators claimed, to the natural language, Sign.

By natural language, educators meant that Sign was the "native language" of all people. "It is the language," Peet elaborated, "to which all men instinctively have recourse, when they cannot avail themselves of words."¹¹⁰ Further clarification was provided by W. Turner, who stated, "Natural signs are those which would be made by man in a savage state--signs prompted by the wants of an individual; an acting out of the idea."¹¹¹ Natural language of signs, it would seem, was a highly elaborate and abbreviated form of charades. It was both instinctive and pantomimic, possessing a long history, dating back to the origins of humanity. Arguably it had been the first language to which developing humans had availed themselves. As humans discovered

¹⁰⁹H.P. Peet, "Elements of the Language of Signs," *Annals* 4 (1851): 83.

¹¹⁰H.P. Peet, "Elements," *Annals* 4 (1851): 83.

¹¹¹Luzerne Rae, "Second Convention of American Instructors of the Deaf and Dumb," *Annals* 4 (1851): 28.

vocalization, their need for signs disappeared; hence the abandonment of gestural language and the advent of verbal.¹¹² This transferral also explained why people could not understand this natural language upon first viewing; it was instinctive, but deeply buried. Deaf people were put in touch with it readily because their hearing loss cut them off from verbal language. The long overlooked language, recovered by Deaf people, was also different from verbal language because of its lack of contact with the verbal one. They had not developed in tandem, hence "natural signs and words are never precisely parallel."¹¹³

The natural language of signs may have represented objects and desires, but it was not limited to physical concerns. The language, supporters claimed, was capable of greater sophistication. Through the use of devices like allegory and metaphor, Signs could convey moral and intellectual concepts.¹¹⁴ It was a natural language but was able to transcend physical concerns to discuss intellectual matters. Even religion was not beyond the reach of Sign. In fact many advocates contended that it was even more powerful than oral languages. Collins Stone, president of the American School for the Deaf, was a particularly strong defender of Sign in this regard. In 1848, he proclaimed:

¹¹²Mallery, "Gesture Speech," *Annals* 27 (1882): 80.

¹¹³John R. Burnet, *Tales of the Deaf and Dumb, with miscellaneous poems* (Newark: B. Olds, 1835) 29.

¹¹⁴H.P. Peet, "Elements," *Annals* 4 (1851): 93.

We are free to express the belief that in producing an immediate and strong impression, and in stirring the emotions of the human soul, this language, perfected as it now is by science and skill, has vastly more power than any oral language ever constructed by human ingenuity: and for this reason:--it has more direct access to the heart.¹¹⁵

Stone was not a believer in methodical signs; his praise of the language as "perfected...by science and skill" implied that the use of the language on a more regular basis--in schools for the deaf across the country--had a refining influence. The emotional power of Sign could then be maximized to discuss successfully very abstract ideas. In fact, since the whole body works to produce a proper physical response to passionate feelings, Sign's capacity to uplift the soul was, at least in Stone's opinion, greater than any spoken language.

Sign's tremendous capacity for expression was not lost on its detractors. Its power was simply considered too dangerous; young deaf children would be too readily attracted to it and less likely to want to struggle with unfamiliar English. But Sign's advocates heartily denied such charges. Sign could be cultivated to teach English, much in the same way a hearing student uses English to learn a foreign language. The goal of these teachers was not to get the deaf students to think in English and use it exclusively. Their goal was to provide the students with a solid knowledge of English, using Sign as a translating tool if necessary. They expected them to think in the

¹¹⁵Collins Stone, "On the Religious State, and the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb," *Annals* 1 (1848): 146-7.

language that they were most comfortable with. Such a situation would not mean that the students had actually failed to learn English. As one educator commented, "But may there not be a very good knowledge of a foreign tongue, while yet the mind does not use it in meditation?"¹¹⁶

Such educators did not worry that Sign would interfere with a deaf student's English skills. Nor were they worried about losing or denigrating the purity of the English language with Signs. The teachers did not expect Deaf children to think or act like hearing children. They respected their unique language and embraced it as a way to teach their own. After all, having Deaf students translate an English passage into Sign adequately proved that they understood the written word; translating Sign into English demonstrated that they could write the language as well. "What folly to reject or despise an instrument of such value, both as a means and test of knowledge!" supporters cried.¹¹⁷

These hearing teachers did not expect their students to be hearing; they expected them to be Deaf. They anticipated that the Deaf students would prefer Sign and, importantly, they respected that preference. Instead of fighting it, they used it as a vehicle to introduce students to written English. Signing English would not help Deaf students communicate with the hearing world, but writing grammatical English would.

¹¹⁶J.R. Keep, "Signs in Deaf Mute Education," *New Englander* 26 (1867): 515.

¹¹⁷Keep, "Signs in Deaf-Mute Education," *New Englander* 26 (1867): 515.

Letting this thought be their guide, these teachers did not find the fact that their students thought in Sign disturbing. Since many of them preferred Sign as a result of their deafness, it was expected. Since the teachers considered Sign a true, natural language, the situation was not threatening. Sign was the linguistic equal of English and deserving of equivalent respect. Its users could therefore comfortably be afforded the same respect. If a Deaf student than used Sign to decipher English, it was not viewed as a weakness but a strength. Such activity displayed a growing fluency in two languages and a willingness to learn them both well. Teachers applauded this budding bilingualism.¹¹⁸

Former students spoke warmly of the system. James Burnet, a graduate of the New York Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, viewed the rejection of methodical signs as the school's strong point. He described the philosophy as rejecting "all signs which are not colloquial among the pupils, which do not represent ideas but words, and which are not the work of the deaf and dumb themselves, but devised by the teacher to render the language of signs parallel to that of speech."¹¹⁹ Burnet obviously appreciated the

¹¹⁸"Now, the signs which the deaf and dumb associate with words are, for the most part, just such aids to knowledge and enjoyment, and even greater, than are the roots of words. Our conclusion then is, that so far as expressive signs intervene between words and thoughts, in the minds of the deaf and dumb, they are a benefit rather than an injury, giving language more life and power than it has to other persons." J.R. Keep, "Signs in Deaf-Mute Education," *New Englander* 26 (1867): 514.

¹¹⁹Burnet 86.

respect his hearing teachers accorded his language. They looked to the pupils, many of them native users of the language, to refine their understanding. The teachers also tried to use the language as the students did. In this way, the children saw their language treated respectfully and seriously. The teachers demonstrated that the Deaf children had something valuable to offer the hearing community; their education became a two way street with lessons to be learned on both sides. Deaf students thereby learned that they too could be teachers. Burnet took the support to heart and offered his own list of helpful hints to hearing persons learning Sign, the most important being, "Cultivate the faculty of IMITATION."¹²⁰ Deaf students in this environment felt confident enough to tell their teachers they needed to be more Deaf!

Manualists, embracing the natural language of sign, implicitly recognized the reality of Deafness. This new culture did not frighten them or provoke them; they simply accepted it as a result of the use of Sign. In fact, the teachers themselves sought to understand Deafness so they could teach their students more successfully.

¹²⁰"Endeavor, as far as in you lies, to forget words and think only of things, become for the time dumb, if you would converse with the dumb.

"Study the spontaneous expressions of the feelings and passions in the countenance, and in those gestures which nature prompts us to make, whenever words seem inadequate to the full expression of our feelings or thoughts.

"Form in your own minds clear and well defined ideas of the forms, qualities, and uses of these objects, and of the characteristic circumstances of those actions, which you would represent by signs.

"Cultivate the faculty of IMITATION."

Burnet 17.

In their enthusiasm, however, these educators struck upon the idea that Deafness was a universal condition since Sign was a universal language.

3: "THE HALF KNOWN LIFE"

The sign language is a most wonderful and facile instrument for conveying thought to the minds of those who cannot hear. It is pre-eminently a language of ideas, and is capable of portraying every shade of thought and feeling. In fact, it may be called the universal language.

Edwin A. Hodgson, 1891

The idea that Sign constituted a universal language flowed directly out of its image as a natural language. If making Signs was a native feature of all people, then all people must make the same signs. Colonel Mallery explained the theoretical beginnings of this universal language:

With the voice he (original man) could imitate distinctively but the few sounds of nature, while with gestures he could exhibit actions, motions, positions, forms, dimensions, directions, and distances, with their

derivatives and analogues. It would seem from this unequal division of capacity that oral speech remained rudimentary long after gesture had become an efficient instrument of thought and expression.¹²¹

Gesture was the one language that all people shared, in historical terms. Since all people have had this somewhat instinctive recourse to signs, then signs must have necessarily constituted a universal language. Deaf people have better success at manipulating this language because they deal in it on a regular basis.

Since Deaf people were generally more fluent in Sign than hearing people, it was believed that Deaf people from different countries could readily understand one another upon meeting.¹²² As Peet put it, "But two persons accustomed to communicate ideas in pantomime, though perhaps natives of opposite sides of the globe, and with sign dialects the most diverse, will readily exchange all familiar ideas at their first meeting."¹²³ Part of the key to this almost miraculous ability to communicate so easily lies in the fact that the participants were Deaf. They had diverse Sign languages, here believed to be merely different dialects. Communication could arise in spite of

¹²¹Mallery, "Gesture Speech," *Annals* 27 (1882): 89.

¹²²Samuel Akerly, "Observations on the Language of Signs," *The American Journal of Science and Arts* 8 (1824): 350. Akerly was a proponent of this theory. He commented, "Philosophers have discussed the subject of a universal language, but have failed to invent one, while the savages of America have adopted the only one which can possibly become universal. The language of signs is so true to nature, that the deaf and dumb, from different parts of the globe, will immediately on meeting, understand each other. Their language, however, in an uncultivated state, is limited to the expression of their immediate wants..."

¹²³H.P. Peet, "Elements," *Annals* 4 (1851): 83.

these facts because the people were Deaf; they were used to struggling to make their wants known through elaborate pantomime. To survive in a hearing world, they had to cultivate the skill of pantomime. Signs were not in fact universal; in signing together Deaf people just made it look that way.

Nonetheless, the idea that Sign was a universal language persisted in both Deaf and hearing circles. A theory of sorts developed around the concept. Basically, educators hypothesized that certain elements of Sign were common to all the dialects. These elements included "expression of the countenance, such gestures as are naturally prompted by strong emotion, and the imitation or delineation of the actions, motions, and outlines of objects."¹²⁴ In fact, these elements could just as equally comprise the necessities for successful pantomime. But there is some limited truth to the nineteenth-century notion that Sign was a universal language. Some elements are common to all Signs. In terms of the deep structure of language, only so many hand positions and shapes are available.¹²⁵ Each language may employ different ones, but the number itself is finite. The languages are not universal, but some elements very well may be.

This interpretation, of course, is not what the proponents of the nineteenth-century ideal imagined. They assumed that there was "no English or French or Spanish or German in this idea language"; the language was supposed to be "universal, and

¹²⁴H.P. Peet, "Elements," *Annals* 4 (1851): 83.

¹²⁵Please see Oliver Sacks' *Seeing Voices* for his discussion of linguistic theories, particularly the ideas of Noam Chomsky.

mutes of different nationalities can converse as readily as those of the same."¹²⁶ Now researchers have proven this notion false. Each Sign language is influenced by the oral language of the nation and therefore all are different. The interesting point about this last nineteenth-century observation is the author's reference to the "mutes." It would seem to this author that the important aspect of these people was not their hearing loss, but their vocal silence. The language, it would seem, developed to give these people a voice.

More is revealed further in the author's remarks. He adds,

My mother was a mute and I learned the language of signs as soon as I did the English. My wife is a mute and I have spent my life among mutes. Signs and motions have been gradually built into a system which is now entitled to be called a language--the language of motion--a pantomime of ideas. Some mutes are taught to speak, but in rare instances.¹²⁷

In fact, the author was Thomas Gallaudet, the son of Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, co-founder of the American School for the Deaf. With a Deaf mother (Sophia Gallaudet did not speak), he learned Sign as a native language. Later, he used this talent and interest to found a parish for deaf Anglicans in New York City, St. Ann's. It is very interesting that Gallaudet did not take note of the hearing loss in his comments; the term "deaf-mute" was in vogue at the time. He calls his mother simply "a mute," not

¹²⁶T.H. Gallaudet, Jr., "The Language of Deaf-Mutes," December 3, 1883, *New York Tribune*, 5.

¹²⁷T.H. Gallaudet, Jr., "The Language of Deaf-Mutes," December 3, 1883, *New York Tribune*, 5.

noting her deafness at all. Perhaps since he was a native Signer, to him, she was not deaf. They communicated quite readily. Most hearing people find deafness so disconcerting because they do not know how to communicate with a deaf person. The only difference that he could find between himself and his mother was that he could speak with his voice and she could not. Hence, she was only a mute. Her deafness was never an impediment to their relationship.¹²⁸

He obviously appreciated this language, Sign. He talked candidly about its new status as a language. He remarked observantly that it had formed into a system "gradually," recognizing that a language evolves over time. By his day, he felt that Sign had at last reached the point of development that it deserved to be called a language. Of course, by the end of the century, the oralists would contend that the exact trouble with Deaf people was the fact that they did not speak. The language they did use, Sign, was not really a language; it was only poor English. Deafness was blamed as the cause for this deficiency. But to Gallaudet, deafness had given rise to a wonderful new language, Sign. Deaf people therefore were not inferior to hearing people; they just spoke differently, hence they were "mute."

¹²⁸In *Deaf In America: Voices From A Culture*, Padden and Humphries relate a story of a young hearing boy who does not realize that he is not like his Deaf parents until he goes away to school (22). Like Gallaudet, he did not realize that deafness was considered a barrier in communication until learning the fact from hearing outsiders.

Gallaudet seems to have had a particularly positive view of deafness. His attitude was probably the result of his upbringing. Having a Deaf mother, he was given a positive image of deafness. He was also shown that hearing and Deaf people could successfully interact. The bridge between the two groups seemed to be Sign. It worked so well that Gallaudet assumed that it would be the key to any future relationships. Gallaudet was a unique case. He had a Deaf mother. How did other hearing people view deafness?

A very wide variety of opinions existed concerning deafness and deaf people. It was largely felt that pleading the cause of helping the deaf community to the public was difficult because deafness was, and still is, an invisible handicap. There were, and still are, far fewer blind persons in the United States, but their handicap is very public and easily noticeable. Mobilizing funds has been considerably easier. Nineteenth-century educators agreed that "in its effect upon the mind [deafness] is vastly more calamitous than blindness," but lamented that the cause did not receive the attention it deserved.¹²⁹ When they did get a chance to deliver opinions in a public forum, how did hearing educators--those who had the most contact with deaf people--present them? What did they believe to be true about deafness?

¹²⁹J.H. Pettingell, "What the Bible Says of the Deaf and Dumb," *Annals* 26 (1881): 238.

The thinking was by no means uniform; opinions abounded. If one generality can be established, educators concurred that deafness was not a positive quality. It was not a "good thing" to be deaf. Not that it was condemned as an evil quality. Deafness was not inherently bad and being deaf did not make anyone a bad person. The approach instead reinforced the notion that it was better to be hearing. Deaf people were therefore to be pitied for their loss, as well as the setbacks that resulted from it.

The prevailing idea seemed to be that deaf people were not inferior to hearing people in terms of mental capacity. Obviously, hearing educators believed that deaf students were able to learn or time would not have been devoted to trying to teach them. However, deaf students did arrive at schools generally much less prepared than their hearing counterparts. The trouble lay not in any mental inferiority, but in lack of exposure to language. Most deaf children remained unexposed to any form of language so the only things they knew about were physical objects which they were able to observe regularly. Their reasoning abilities were limited simply because they lacked a language in which to reason.¹³⁰ Educators from Thomas Gallaudet to A.B. Hutton repeated the theme. By the time Gallaudet University (The National College for Deaf-Mutes) was founded in 1864, Amos Kendall, patron founder of the institution, felt confident to proclaim, "It is a great mistake to suppose that deaf mutes are in general inferior in capacity to children having all their senses in perfection. The inferiority is

¹³⁰W.H. Coming, "Belief in God Connatural to the Mind," *Annals* 6 (1854): 137.

not in the want of capacity, but in the want of its development."¹³¹ The obvious goal of the teachers was to develop that untapped capacity.

Educators may have been convinced that they could do great work toward helping lift deaf children out of mental poverty, but they also had a keen awareness of the great implications of their chosen profession. A strong current of paternalism was evident in their thinking very early on. This paternalism affected the views of the deaf students profoundly. In 1857, the *Annals* published a short essay by John Emerson, a young deaf man. The excerpt read:

The noblest beings of earth are those who assiduously devote themselves to their own reformation and the great object of ameliorating the condition of the suffering and degraded poor, so that they may also be elevated into higher life, and learn their duties to God and themselves. Such may be not improperly called the saviors, the redeemers or elevators of the human race. They glorify their God at once with noble thoughts, noble words, and noble deeds! Such good-doing actions are ever fragrant with the sweets of pure love and are truly acceptable to God.¹³²

If such passage is any indication of the way hearing educators viewed their profession, it is evident that they held themselves in very high regard. They were "saviors" and "redeemers," performing the holy work of God. Such posturing situated the deaf students in the inferior position, as persons needing to be saved and elevated by a higher being. While such actions may have glorified God, and certainly the teacher, they simultaneously demeaned the deaf students. A hierarchical situation arose,

¹³¹Williams 80.

¹³²John Emerson, "A Short Essay on Progression," *Annals* 9 (1857): 108.

whereby deaf students were subjected to the assumed superiority of hearing teachers, who were alone capable of elevating them to a better life. The main message was that deaf people could not make it in the world if not for the benevolence of good-hearted hearing people.

Such people generously gave of their time to try to reach the minds of deaf students and touch their souls. This last was a crucial good. A devastating factor of deafness, to many hearing educators, was not the lack of communication with other people, but rather with God. Collins Stone lamented that "the light of divine truth never shines upon his path; that even in the midst of Christian society, [the deaf person] must grope his way in darkness and gloom."¹³³ Deaf people were heathens in a Christian society; they needed a kind teacher to lift them into the light of religious society. Informing deaf students about religion was viewed as more important than teaching them about literature or history, in Stone's opinion. It was this wild, heathen, gloomy quality that most separated deaf people from hearing people. Hearing teachers could restore them to society by giving them the Christian faith.

On the other hand, though deprived of religion, deafness also shut out many temptations. When finally exposed to the influence of religion, they were quick to embrace it. "It is rare indeed," stated J.A. Ayres, "that the claims of religion and the

¹³³Collins Stone, "On the Religious State, and the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb," *Annals* 1 (1848): 136-7.

reasonings of morality fail to secure the ready assent both of his heart and his understanding."¹³⁴ Religion had this effect, not because deaf people were inherently more religious, but because they had less exposure to lies, falsehoods, and temptations, since they were cut off from free communication with the hearing world. Seemingly, deafness released people from noisy, hearing distractions. It therefore resulted in greater piety, and more communion with God. Of course, this view also removed deaf people from the realm of earthly concerns. Thus, deafness resulted in an otherworldly communion, beyond the ordinary experience of hearing teachers.

This example illustrates part of basic tension about deafness in the nineteenth century. Hearing educators viewed it as simultaneously limiting and freeing, bad and good. The drawbacks were quickly recognized, but then someone would note what they believed was a positive addition. Edward Miner Gallaudet believed that the polarity of these positions stemmed from the mindsets of the two different educational approaches. On the one hand, deafness was thought of as "an abnormal state of being. Dumbness was considered as a positive quality, the presence of which rendered its subject a monstrosity."¹³⁵ The only way to combat it was to teach deaf students how to speak; spoken language would help develop the mind of the deaf students, in spite

¹³⁴J.A. Ayres, "An Inquiry into the Extent to which the Misfortune of Deafness may be Alleviated," *Annals* 1 (1848): 224-5.

¹³⁵E.M. Gallaudet, *Tenth Annual Report of the Columbia Institution for the Deaf and Dumb*, 44-5.

of their very deafness and dumbness. "Hence all labor," Gallaudet remarked, "was directed primarily to the education of the mute from his supposed abnormal state and his induction as far as possible into the normal condition of speaking persons."¹³⁶ By such methods, educators could restore their fallen deaf students to the society of the hearing world.

On the other hand, some believed deafness to be a neutral quality. "The deaf-mute," Gallaudet explained, "was deemed to be a normal creature; that is to say, perfect of its kind, although lacking some of the powers of other men. Dumbness was regarded as a negative quality; inability to speak constituting no obstacle to a full and vigorous mental development."¹³⁷ Since dumbness had no inhibiting factor, teachers did not devote time to abolishing it. Instead, they embraced Sign as a way to communicate with their Deaf students, concentrating on their development as Deaf people, using Deaf means.

Educators on both sides of the issue did, in fact, have their own encouraging stories to tell. Stories circulated about the joy that the deaf voice brings to the hearing ear. A magazine printed the account of the effect of a deaf boy's first words to his hearing father. The boy had been sent to Clarke School in Northampton,

¹³⁶E.M. Gallaudet, Report, 44-5.

¹³⁷E.M. Gallaudet, Report, 45.

Massachusetts, the first oral school in the country. He had been there for several months when his father came to call on him.

The boy saw his father coming, and stretching out his arms, ran to meet him, saying at the same time, "Father." It was the first word the father ever heard him speak, and it quite overcame him. He could scarcely refrain from tears. His heart overflowed with joy--joy that it was permitted him at length to hear his dear dumb boy speak and call him father.¹³⁸

The narrator of this tale likens this father's joy to be akin to the joy that God must feel "when one of these dumb children of His, breaking at length the guilty silence so long observed, lifts his eyes and heart toward heaven and says, 'Father.'"¹³⁹ The silence of the deaf boy was construed as "guilty," as if to labor under dumbness was to live in a state of sin. Speech set the boy free and restored him to an original state of grace. The result was the tearful joy of his father and his God.

The story emphasizes the power of speech, not on the speaker himself, but upon those to whom he speaks. The father was overjoyed. The reaction of the son seems of little concern here. The real priority lies again with the hearing father. Detractors of the oral method noted this fact. An educator remarked:

The excessive desire which some parents feel that their deaf-born children should be taught to speak, arises, we are persuaded, from a wish to forget or conceal from themselves the terrible fact that their children are deaf. But though, by the trickery of artificial speech, they may appear less deaf

¹³⁸Anon., "The Dumb Speak," *Deaf Mutes' Friend* 1.6 (1869): 172.

¹³⁹Anon., "The Dumb Speak," *Deaf Mutes' Friend* 1.6 (1869): 172.

to them, they are none the less so to themselves. A silence, such as finds no image for comparison, reigns and must reign in their souls.¹⁴⁰

The opponents' opinion is clear. Learning speech gratifies the parents, not the child. It helps the child seem more like the parent; the child will communicate and interact in the same way as the parent. But pretending the child is not deaf does not make it true. The child, signing educators reminded, remains deaf. A deaf child knows that she/he is deaf and will know it even if speech is acquired. Deafness as silence is a very hearing image, reflecting mainly what hearing people imagine deafness is like, but the point is well taken. Even when using speech, deaf people still consider themselves deaf.

Parents may like to imagine otherwise, but other hearing people will know that a child is deaf. They will discriminate against that child later in life. The point of speaking, according to parents and teachers, is to enable the deaf child to fit more comfortably into the hearing world. It is unquestionably an admirable goal. But nineteenth-century signing educators denied the possibility. Oral teachers asked deaf students to consider hearing partners in marriage, to enter the hearing world fully. But signing teachers knew that the idea was a pipe dream; deafness was a stigma difficult to overcome. "What would he then do to prevent intermarriage among the deaf," questioned a Sign advocate, "while the very advocates and teachers of the German

¹⁴⁰Keep, "Signs in Deaf Mute Education," *New Englander* 26 (1867): 517.

system obstinately refuse to marry deaf girls, and thus early foster in the breasts of their pupils disgust and hate against their hearing comrades."¹⁴¹ From the signers' point of view, the oral message seemed to be "try as hard as you can to be hearing and still you won't fit in." Rather than put deaf students through this illusory process, these educators sought instead to allow their deaf students to be Deaf. They wanted them to accept their deafness, reasoning that if they accepted it, others would find it easier to accept them. "On the whole," they concluded, "a mute, if not taught to speak, but well-spirited, is a more useful member of society than the speaking one who is dull-minded."¹⁴² Signing Deaf students with nimble minds would surely impress viewers more readily than those who could only parrot hearing conventions.

But signs carried their own stigma because they stood out and brought attention to the difference of Deafness. An example is provided by a story that the *Annals* carried in early 1859; it had already appeared in several newspapers.

The keeper of a country tavern near Mount Pleasant, Virginia, has two deaf and dumb daughters, who often carry on animated conversations by means of signs. Last week, two nervous travelers who had been shown to a good room, did not stop to enjoy the comfortable fire and bed, but silently decamped, leaving on the table money for their supper, and a note stating that in consequence of signs made at the supper table by the

¹⁴¹F. Rotter, "Letter," *Deaf Mute Journal* 6.21 (1877): 3. The oral system is also referred to as the German because the system originated in Germany. It was institutionalized by Samuel Heinicke who founded a school using this method in 1778.

¹⁴²F. Rotter, "Letter," *Deaf Mutes' Journal* 6.21 (1877): 3.

young ladies, they did not think it safe to go to bed, and therefore paid their bill and took their departure.¹⁴³

Hearing viewers, like these two travellers, were not used to seeing signs made regularly. They were exceptionally foreign, hence they provoked this nervous reaction. Then as now, Deaf people made hearing people nervous. Their animated, yet silent conversation disturbed them because it was out of the realm of most hearing people's ordinary experience. It seemed that either choice, speaking or signing, carried its own set of drawbacks. Hearing people reacted poorly to either one.

Deafness itself was a difficult stigma, regardless of communication preference. Even educators persisted in believing that deafness disqualified otherwise capable persons from many jobs. Deafness even prevented people from accepting positions in schools for the deaf! The following was reported from the Indiana Institution for the Deaf and Dumb in 1854.

But from the first it was foreseen by the trustees that it would be necessary to appoint a person who could both hear and speak, to superintend the affairs of the asylum. They very properly thought, that however intelligent and well trained a deaf-mute might be to give instruction to his brethren in misfortune, yet by his infirmity he would be separated at a great distance from the talking community, and thereby in a great measure disqualified for transacting successfully and with dispatch the miscellaneous business of an institution like this.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³Anon., "Easily Frightened," *Annals* 11 (1859): 63.

¹⁴⁴Thomas McIntire, "Indiana Institution for the Deaf and Dumb," *Annals* 6 (1854): 149.

Deaf people could be teachers at asylums like this one, but they could not be administrators. They could only have a limited role in deciding how the students should be taught. A kind of nineteenth-century "glass ceiling" existed at the schools. Former students were welcomed back to teach, but their own former teachers did not believe them capable of running the school themselves. In some areas hearing people would always know best.¹⁴⁵

Many educators did not see any harm in limiting the ambitions of their students. Since they assumed that deaf people could not compete successfully in most instances with hearing people, they geared their educations to prepare them to fill their position in life. In this way, deaf students were considered overqualified and better educated than their hearing counterparts. It would seem that deaf education, in many cases, was not geared toward truly lifting the students into parity positions with their hearing peers. Even the teachers themselves could not accept the notion that the deaf population was the equal of the hearing in every way. Deaf teachers could instruct their brethren in misfortune but had nothing substantial to offer to hearing instructors. Hearing teachers felt they understood deafness better than deaf people! **Precisely** what kind of understanding did hearing people possess about deafness? At the base

¹⁴⁵Gallaudet's Deaf President Now Strike fulfilled a need to show that deaf people are capable of conducting their own affairs, do not need hearing people to do that for them. Today the ratio of deaf to hearing teachers in such schools is higher than it was in the mid-nineteenth century and in most places deaf administrators are still unknown.

of all their ideas, most hearing people believed that deafness was a remarkable calamity, more so even than deaf people knew. Thus, Camp observed, in 1848,

(The deaf and dumb) are not aware, themselves, how great is their misfortune, and if they were, they have no voice to proclaim it. They can utter no complaint, and make no effort to extricate themselves from their pitiable condition. The benevolent must search them out, and afford them that relief, which they cannot ask for themselves. They are in a condition of entire, and hopeless dependence.¹⁴⁶

Some basic characterizations arise from this passage. Deafness was a "pitiable condition" that deaf people could not escape without the great benevolence of hearing people. Deaf people were in a "condition of entire, and hopeless dependence" upon the goodwill of hearing people. A power relationship was set up here, one that elevated hearing people into a far superior position, and marginalized deaf people absolutely. It was implied that they would be unable to act in the world at all if hearing people were not there to help and show them how.

Somewhat ironically, even this conception did not approach the truth of the matter. "In many other respects," wrote Camp, "it is impossible for us to conceive, how great is the misfortune we are considering."¹⁴⁷ Deafness would always be just beyond the understanding of fully hearing people. Of course, this fact only made the condition all the more frightening. Deaf people missed out on voices, music, and song,

¹⁴⁶Henry B. Camp, "Claims of the Deaf and Dumb Upon Public Sympathy and Aid," *Annals* 1 (1848): 214.

¹⁴⁷Camp, "Claims," *Annals* 1 (1848): 214.

and a host of other pleasures that hearing people could enjoy. On top of all of this loss, they also could not speak, thus they were cut "off from two of our chief sources of enjoyment."¹⁴⁸ All of this reveals very little that is unknown about the physical condition of deafness. It is true that deaf people cannot hear many of the sounds that hearing people enjoy and they are cut off from vocal conversation. These facts remain true in the twentieth-century. What it does reveal, however, is how highly these activities are valued by hearing people, then as now. Deafness frightened hearing people because they could not imagine living life without sounds. Deafness was all the more calamitous because deaf people did not understand all that they were missing! Hearing people obviously feared the loss of the sense of hearing. They projected their own fears onto deaf people and thereby assumed that they must suffer from their loss. The consideration that perhaps deaf people have other forms of enjoyment did not seem to occur to them, because as hearing people, they could not imagine it.

This conviction, that deaf people must be unhappy and mourn their loss, continued in the face of evidence to the contrary. Confronted with deaf people who did not fit their image of deafness, some educators searched for other reasons to mourn.

Generally, they do not regard themselves as the subjects of misfortune. "I do not wish to be pitied," said a deaf-mute when he found himself an object of commiseration. They do not seem conscious that they are an unfortunate class of persons. And in truth, were they in the majority; were this a world of deaf-mutes, it might almost be a serious question

¹⁴⁸Camp, "Claims," *Annals* 1 (1848): 214.

whether the language of signs, or of the articulate voice, would, in itself be preferable; so graphic, and beautiful, is the former, in comparison with the latter. But as it is, as Providence has given the language of the articulate voice to the many and the language of signs to the few; the deaf and dumb are unfortunate; if for no other reason because they are in the minority.¹⁴⁹

Here, there were hints of deaf people who did not seek pity. Yet this lack of self-pity was interpreted as misdirected. Obviously, they could not understand how unfortunate they really were and for that reason alone they should be pitied!¹⁵⁰ But even the author realized that argument was weak, so he chose another. He acknowledged that signs were beautiful, implying that it was a shame that more people do not understand them. If for no other reason, then, deaf people should be pitied because they are a minority. They could be viewed as an "unfortunate minority."

Such a view unconsciously reveals much about nineteenth-century American society. If people who comprise minority groups are to be pitied, what does this say about the majority? It suggests that the majority was intolerant of difference, both physical and linguistic. It suggests that the majority would never allow the minority to fit in because to do so would mean that the majority would lose its higher position in society. The minority also could not be let into a higher status because that would

¹⁴⁹Camp, "Claims," *Annals* 1 (1848): 211.

¹⁵⁰"Unfortunate" is a description that reappears frequently in the historical literature. Even in an account of a fully interpreted Episcopal mass (even the songs were rendered in Sign) and the writer notes that the deaf persons "enjoyed the exercises very much," they were still called the "unfortunates (who) are members of Grace Church." *Deaf Mutes' Friend* 1.6 (1869): 184.

mean that whatever difference made them a minority in the first place was not that important after all. Then, possessing that quality would not mean as much, either. If deaf people were not pitied, basically, it would have meant admitting that the sense of hearing was not necessarily of eminent importance. Any wavering on this point would weaken the majority's position of cultural and social authority. Therefore, minority groups had to at least be pitied for their minority status.

But there were some places where deaf persons were not a minority: namely, at schools. Here, they comprised a clear majority. It was clear from their educators' accounts that they revelled in their time there.

It is not surprising that, gathered as they are, in our institutions, from their distant homes, they should form a happy community by themselves. There, their condition is one of darkness and solitude. Here, a new world opens upon them. They find themselves in a new home, with every convenience and comfort provided to their hands. They find sympathy and fellow feeling, from those in like circumstances with themselves...New views of what they are and of what they can be, rise before them, and they cannot but be happy.¹⁵¹

Home life often involved mental isolation, since not many parents knew Sign or even the manual alphabet. But at school, everyone knew Sign. Children who entered school without knowledge of Sign were soon taught it by their fellow students. No one was left isolated. Students soon enjoyed and treasured their school time more than their home time because there everyone understood them. A sense of community also built

¹⁵¹Camp, "Claims," *Annals* 1 (1848): 211.

up because everyone else was deaf too. They were no longer different, as they were at home, but the same. They fitted in with everybody else, sometimes for the first time in their lives. "A new view of what they are" was presented to them: they are Deaf. It became a characteristic that no longer isolated but rather bonded them, in "fellow feeling" to their schoolmates. In school, children discovered that they were not deaf and alone; they were Deaf and in community. At school, they could take the first steps into a new culture. Truly, "they cannot but be happy."

Still teachers clung to the belief that, instead of a period of self-discovery, the schools offered a place where the young deaf child could "forget his misfortune...surrounded by those who are in the same condition with himself."¹⁵² The children were, evidently, so happy to have playmates that they forgot how gloomy they were supposed to be. Yet, teachers encouraged the children to form lasting friendships. Since they were almost sure to be isolated and/or separated later in life, teachers correctly felt that the deaf adults would need such support systems.¹⁵³

Simultaneously, however, hearing instructors wished their students would develop good manners and dispositions, characters pleasing to hearing visitors ("...we would banish from the midst of them all that detracts from the pleasing impression, which is, in general, made upon visitors; and would send forth our pupils into the

¹⁵²Lucius H. Woodruff, "Primary Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb," *Annals* 1 (1847): 49.

¹⁵³L.H. Woodruff, "Grace of Expression," *Annals* 2 (1849): 194.

world, possessed of pleasing manners...")¹⁵⁴. Their descriptions suggested that drawbacks existed to gathering deaf children together in one place. Teachers desired the students be sent into the world "as free as possible from disagreeable peculiarities."¹⁵⁵

By articulating such a desire, teachers revealed their assumption that it was feasible for deafness to result in such peculiarities. An educator elaborated on this point: "Let the mute by conscious endeavor, free himself from offensive peculiarities of countenance and manner, and he cannot but respect himself the more, as he sees that he has awakened more regard in those around him."¹⁵⁶ Since hearing visitors were referred to earlier, the others here may well have been, in large part, hearing individuals. To free oneself from "offensive peculiarities of countenance" would seem to suggest the Deaf style of Signing that involved a good deal of facial expression. "Peculiarities of manner" appeared to indicate hearing displeasure at other Deaf mannerisms (freer physical expression and contact, pounding for attention, etc.). Apparently, hearing teachers picked up on the subtle ways that deaf students became Deaf and they tried to discourage them. Deaf signing styles were discouraged. Signing by any hearing teacher stressed a controlled character, lacking any hint of excessive

¹⁵⁴L.H. Woodruff, "Grace," *Annals* 2 (1849): 196.

¹⁵⁵L.H. Woodruff, "Grace," *Annals* 2 (1849): 196.

¹⁵⁶L.H. Woodruff, "Grace," *Annals* 2 (1849): 197.

expression. Students were expected to follow the example, to learn how to act, though deaf, in a pleasing hearing manner. They did not want deaf students to engage in any behaviors that would separate them even more fully from the hearing community. Proper hearing appearance, even in a deaf student, was highly valued.

Hearing educators and visitors evidently noticed the behavior patterns of an emerging culture. Negative labels were attached to such characteristics, but they were nonetheless recognized as existing in the schools. Hearing people who were exposed to these behaviors and differences on a regular basis tried to discourage them. They urged the deaf students to free themselves by very conscious effort from them. They essentially asked the students to be less Deaf. These teachers, however, were clearly familiar with deaf students. How did other observers less familiar with deaf people react?

By the second half of the century, the best place for the uninitiated to see culturally Deaf people was Gallaudet University. Many of the students there had attended schools for the deaf all their lives. Such students were undeniably Deaf. Did they attract only negative commentary? A Washington correspondent for the newspaper the *Boston Advertiser* set out to find out. He observed the commencement proceedings in the summer of 1869, and wrote his personal observations for his northern readers. His subjects were Deaf; "they spoke with fingers and hands and arms

and face and eyes and bodies."¹⁵⁷ Their entire bodies delivered their orations in a very Deaf style. But this reporter was not offended at all by such behaviors. In light of the force of the language around him he recalled, "it was you, the spectator, who was deaf and could not hear, dumb and could not answer." He saw the advantages of the languages well; President E.M. Gallaudet was able to converse with students sitting in the audience quite readily in Sign. Small deaf children could follow such commentary better than he, a hearing adult.¹⁵⁸ It seems this reporter found the process more enlightening than intimidating. He got a glimpse into what it was like to be deaf and unable to understand the conversation of those around you. He did not begrudge Deaf people their form of communication or their language since it obviously afforded them a ready ease of communication.

As the commencement afternoon wore on, he tried to listen with both his eyes and his ears. For, unlike the case in most vocally delivered speeches and addresses, the college provided a voice interpreter, Professor Pratt, for the benefit of the non-signing.¹⁵⁹ Yet the orations were delivered "with such force and elegance and intonation, that deaf as you were to his words, you could hardly help hearing many

¹⁵⁷Anon., "Deaf Mute College", *Deaf Mutes' Friend* 1.7 (1869): 195.

¹⁵⁸Anon., "Deaf Mute College," *Deaf Mutes' Friend* 1.7 (1869): 195.

¹⁵⁹Anon., "Deaf Mute College," *Deaf Mutes' Friend* 1.7 (1869): 195.

ideas."¹⁶⁰ By the end of the day, he reported with pride, "I had progressed so far in my involuntary study that I could frequently catch the drift of what was spoken to my eye before I heard what was spoken to the ear."¹⁶¹ Signs added new, fresh meaning to words. The reporter appreciated the addition of these new interpretations and, it would seem, enjoyed trying to recognize Signed passages before the words were spoken.¹⁶² Evidently much impressed by the end of the day, he commended the graduates and wished them well. "They do not need to fear the future--," he wrote, "they are as well fitted, intellectually, to grapple with the world's problems as are other young men of their age. There was no shadow on their faces--they were as confident and as full of hope as other college graduates are."¹⁶³ In his view, these Deaf young men were the equals of their hearing peers. They were ready to compete and cooperate with them on equal terms. This premise depended, naturally, on whether the hearing population would accept them as equals.

¹⁶⁰Anon., "Deaf Mute College," *Deaf Mutes' Friend* 1.7 (1869): 195.

¹⁶¹Anon., "Deaf Mute College", *Deaf Mute's Friend* 1.7 (1869): 196.

¹⁶²Many hearing people discover that words, often heard, take on new meaning when presented in Sign. A nun working at Holy Cross College once told me that a sign interpreter was provided at a religious studies conference that she attended. Though she knew no Sign, watching the signs, she said, added deeper meaning to the spoken prayers, many of which were already familiar to her.

¹⁶³Anon., "Deaf Mute College," *Deaf Mutes' Friend* 1.7 (1869): 194.

According to other sources, there was no reason to do otherwise. "Deaf-mutes," by one contemporary source's summation, "are simply persons who, from some natural defect or as the result of disease, cannot hear and, consequently, are unable to speak; in all other respects they are like unto other men and women, mentally, morally, and physically, better or worse, according as they are controlled by education and other circumstances."¹⁶⁴ Deaf people, by this definition, were not inferior to hearing people. They resemble other men and women in every way except one: they could not hear. Parents therefore should not treat their deaf children with "false sympathy" and spoil them by indulging their "wayward passions." Parents should simply treat them as they would any other child, loving and disciplining them accordingly. Of course, the parent should also learn the manual alphabet and teach it to the child when she/he is old enough. Creative communication skills will be needed, but "morbid affection" on the part of the parent should be ultimately avoided.¹⁶⁵ Such a view may not have accorded deafness a cultural status, but at least it did not demean it.

A more positive viewpoint, like this one, was also able to find some actual advantages to deafness. A sibling wrote to the *Deaf Mutes' Friend*, detailing the advantages possessed by a deaf-mute brother:

My deaf-mute brother knows nothing of my annoyance in hearing the small black dog down the street barking at every passer-by, waking me

¹⁶⁴Anon., *Deaf Mutes' Friend* 1.6 (1869): 178.

¹⁶⁵Anon., *Deaf Mutes' Friend* 1.5 (1869): 138.

at early dawn or just when I have fallen into my first sleep at night. The air is full of sounds, some pleasant, many most disagreeable, and while the deaf-mute is deprived of much pleasure, he is also spared much pain.¹⁶⁶

In certain instances, a hearing person might wish to be left undisturbed by sounds, but the option was not there. One could not shut one's ears like eyes. Deafness, when faced with these moments, did not seem entirely bad. Hearing people were not always happy with what they heard, so it could not be asserted that deaf people were always to be pitied for their inability to hear. Each condition, the author implied, has its benefits and its drawbacks. The passage rightly concludes, "Perhaps it is well to remember this sometimes when it seems a hard thing to be deprived of hearing."¹⁶⁷ This view of tolerance and acceptance was not the one that held sway by the end of the century. By the 1870's, oralism was on the rise in the United States and rapidly winning converts. Strangely, the oralist argument hinged to a great extent on the fact of the existence of a Deaf culture. The oralists attempted to show that by allowing deaf people to gather in schools and use Sign, they became different, slowly bonding

¹⁶⁶Anon., *Deaf Mutes' Friend* 1.6 (1869): 184.

¹⁶⁷Anon., *Deaf Mutes' Friend* 1.6 (1869): 184. An incident that occurred here at Holy Cross provides a good example of the drawbacks that even hearing can bring. A Deaf sister of one of my roommates was staying with us. She was sleeping in her sister's room with her sister's roommate. The phone rang very early in the morning and the roommate bounded out of bed to answer it. She stepped on the Deaf visitor's bed in her haste and woke her. "I'm sorry," she said. "I didn't want the phone to disturb you, too." The girl looked up in bewilderment. "I can't hear the phone. I woke up because you stepped on me!" Sometimes, it is not such a bad thing to be deaf after all!

together into a separate cultural group that rejected hearing people and their language.¹⁶⁸ All these events were depicted as entirely negative. Deaf culture was a foreign entity to be feared and destroyed. The hysteria reached a frenzied pitch when Alexander Graham Bell warned against what seemed to him the real possibility of a formation of a deaf variety of the human race in a pamphlet of the same name in 1884.¹⁶⁹

The sometimes extreme feelings of oralism are best captured in this acrid passage from an article in the *Annals* in 1878:

And yet after all our sedulous care, they obstinately persist in not understanding and not writing English, and shunning those who do; in

¹⁶⁸ Anonymous, "The Perversity of Mutism," *Annals* 18 (1878): 262.

"The American system of deaf-mute education is a failure. Tried by its own standards, it is condemned. Its object is "to restore the deaf -mute to society"--that is, to enable and encourage him to take an equal place in the society of hearing and speaking people. But in fact it only inspires him to with a stringer and more exclusive affinity for other deaf-mutes. It strengthens the spirit of clannishness which leads him to seek their companionship, not for the passing moment merely, but for life, and to be interested in tidings and of what concerns them, not in occasional correspondence merely, but in broad sheets of small type devoted to such intelligence."

¹⁶⁹ The pamphlet that appeared was entitled *Upon the Formation of a Deaf Variety of the Human Race*. In it, Bell called for a variety of measures to prevent this formation from occurring. He thought the most effective way would be to forbid marriages between deaf people, but he knew that such a law would never be passed in the United States. To bring about the same result, he suggested mainstreaming deaf children into classrooms with hearing children. In this way, the deaf children would be isolated. They would be forced to associate only with hearing people. As a consequence, they would most likely marry a hearing person. Naturally, they would be taught using the oral method. Sign was simply too likely to encourage deaf people to associate with one another.

talking in signs; in attending deaf-mute conventions, reading deaf-mute papers, and marrying deaf-mutes.

Surely this can only be utter perversity or original sin.¹⁷⁰

The passage ironically outlines the nature of the Deaf community and culture of the nineteenth century: intermarriages, using Sign, preferring to associate with other Deaf people, and keeping up with the interests and activities of the Deaf community. All of these activities were virulently condemned as signs of "utter perversity." The war on Deaf culture had officially begun.

Hearing educators, on both sides of the educational debate, recognized the preeminent importance of Sign in the development of Deaf culture. Some welcomed its use and others rejected it, but all admitted that it influenced the formation of a new culture. Thus, educators argued among themselves as to the right way to teach deaf students. Should the language and the culture be encouraged or stymied? No one, it seemed, thought to ask the Deaf population its opinion about the situation. Apparently, hearing educators assumed that they understood deafness well enough to make those decisions themselves.

But while hearing educators debated the nature of deafness, Deaf people themselves constructed their own images of their condition, their culture, and their language. Their observations were markedly different from those held by hearing

¹⁷⁰ Anonymous, "Perversity," *Annals* 18 (1878): 262.

people. Consequently, they add much valuable information to the search for the roots of Deaf culture.

4: HAPPY GRADUATES

That deafness is a great drawback cannot be denied, but it can be over-come to a great degree.

Jasper N. Williams, 1883

Often have I been asked if I were happy, and if I wished to speak and hear. I have answered that I was as happy as any man, and that I have never wished very much to speak and hear. The persons who asked me these questions said, that if they were in my situation they should be very unhappy. All the living creatures God has made are happy on account of his benevolence. Are deaf-mutes excepted? No.

A graduate of the Ohio Institution, 1849

Deaf people viewed their supposed infirmity with a much different eye than hearing people. They tended to refer to their condition as a "drawback" or an

inconvenience rather than as a calamity or a misfortune. They did not consider themselves infirmed, helpless, or incapable.¹⁷¹ In fact, many Deaf people felt confident about their ability to provide a living for themselves. They did not deny that they enjoyed the company of their Deaf peers, nor did they view this association as negative. Such companionship gave them pleasure and, as the anonymous "graduate" states, enabled them to live happily with their deafness. How was it that Deaf people were confident that their deafness could be successfully overcome?

Primarily, Deaf people emphasized the importance of education. Uneducated deaf people suffered greatly, Deaf people realized. Without education, they could not communicate readily with others or find decent employment. Such uneducated deaf people were considered, even by Deaf people, to be the "most utterly miserable and pitiable of all human beings."¹⁷² As Deaf people ordinarily shunned pity when directed toward them, the use of the word "pitiable" here indicates the depth of their feeling on this point. As a deaf author, Jasper N. Williams, explained, "Education is a great gain to anyone, but to the mute it is everything. Without it he is utterly

¹⁷¹"Proceedings of the 1st Convention of American Instructors of the Deaf and Dumb," *Annals* 3 (1850): 10.

¹⁷²Williams 2-3.

helpless; with it he is quite able to take care of himself."¹⁷³ Education was cherished by Deaf people because it would set them free, granting them independence.¹⁷⁴

Education was not to be limited to the schools for the deaf. Many Deaf people, who later attended such institutions, urged parents to try to teach their deaf children at home. Mary Waldo became deaf at the age of two and a half from scarlet fever. The incident was a cause of extreme distress to her parents, but they did not abandon her. They took turns trying to teach her at home; her father finally succeeded in demonstrating the relationship between written words and objects by writing the word "CAP", fingerspelling it, and producing the object itself.¹⁷⁵ She then entered the school more prepared than some of her fellow. Waldo urged parents to undertake early education. "I see no reason," she wrote, "why their minds should be left an utter waste, all the years before this time."¹⁷⁶ Parents, according to Waldo, should strive to educate their deaf child at home and find ways to communicate with her/him. Parents should never despair simply because their child is deaf.

¹⁷³Williams 2-3.

¹⁷⁴Education also raised the expectations of Deaf people in terms of livelihood. When Williams wrote in 1883, he believed that deaf people could not practice law. But by 1891, E.A. Hodgson, another deaf author, reported at least two deaf men were practicing law very successfully. Education opened the horizons of many deaf people, literally and figuratively.

¹⁷⁵Mary Waldo, "Early Home Instruction of Deaf Mutes," *Annals* 11 (1859): 146-7.

¹⁷⁶Waldo, "Early," *Annals* 11 (1859): 149-50.

Once in school, exposure to the language of signs would help develop the mind of the deaf student. Exposure to Sign led the deaf child to "acquire the power to think, and put his thought into gestures."¹⁷⁷ Attending school and thus learning formal language had only a positive effect on the young deaf child.

Culture develops his reasoning faculties, and he becomes graceful and graphic in communicating his ideas. He carves his images in the yielding air--he lights them up with his radiant countenance, and they are no longer fragmentary and distorted outlines, but symmetrical and beautiful types of thought and feeling.¹⁷⁸

Culture, as used by this author, would seem to refer to the quality of community found at the schools. Being surrounded by other deaf people, all signing the same language, would seem to exert a positive influence on the deaf child, stimulating mental development. Better thinking creates better language skills; the deaf child's use of Sign is soon enhanced. The poetic language used to describe the process in this account underscores the belief that Sign was an extremely graceful language, a very effective teaching tool lending order and power to the thought of its users.

Deaf adults were generally quite grateful for this education. A poignant account by a graduate recounts this fact.

Education, by making intelligent and capable citizens of us, has placed us under new responsibilities. We are required to bear our share of the

¹⁷⁷*Fortieth Annual Report and Documents of the New York Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb, To the Legislature of the State of New York for the Year 1863* (Albany: Comstock & Cassidy, 1864) 70.

¹⁷⁸*New York Annual Report*, 70.

burdens of society, and should consider it a privilege so to do. It is our duty to add, by our labor, to the aggregate wealth of our country, and to be examples of respectful obedience to the laws, which afford to us security of life and property in the same degree as to our speaking and hearing fellow-citizens. And inasmuch as we owe to the sympathy and efforts of others most that we possess to make life pleasurable, we should ever be ready, with heart and purse, to aid, as far as lies in our power, anyone who less fortunate than ourselves, may stand in need of help.¹⁷⁹

This passage speaks, not of helpless dependence or lowly positions in life, as the hearing tales did, but rather of the social responsibilities of capable deaf citizens. Deaf people should respect the law and love a country that protects their rights on an equal basis with the hearing citizens. Entirely lacking is any conception of deafness as a debilitating handicap; in fact, this young man urges deaf people to be charitable to the less fortunate.¹⁸⁰ A certain amount of gratitude is extended to the hearing community for educating the deaf community so generously. A sense of dependence may creep into the statement. Still, in the final analysis, education empowered the deaf people and allowed them to believe in themselves as capable, intelligent human beings.

After all, according to another graduate, there was no reason for Deaf people to feel otherwise. Deaf people do not feel unhappy because they cannot hear and hearing

¹⁷⁹W.W. Angus, "First Anniversary of the Alumni Association of the High Class of the New York Institution for the Deaf and Dumb," *Annals* 11 (1859): 203.

¹⁸⁰In Catholic masses I have attended, the Deaf congregation prays for "the alcoholic, the poor, the homeless, the addicted and the handicapped"--and they are most clearly not referring to themselves. The attitude is still the same.

people who believe otherwise are "greatly mistaken."¹⁸¹ Deaf people can still enjoy many other pleasures in life, in spite of their hearing loss. By virtue of their education, the pleasure of reading is theirs to enjoy. This graduate proclaimed, "The civilized world abounds in books, periodicals, and newspapers. He has access to them. Thus he is happy."¹⁸² Such publications also allowed Deaf people to keep up with the same information hearing people possessed. The ability to read them was particularly important since Deaf people could not get such information by word of mouth, as illiterate hearing people could. Reading was then not only pleasurable but a crucial activity as well.¹⁸³

¹⁸¹Graduate of the Ohio Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, "The Happy Educated Mute," *Annals* 2 (1849): 191.

¹⁸²Graduate, "Happy," *Annals* 2 (1849): 192.

¹⁸³Deaf adults today read, on average, at a third-grade reading level. This statistic includes those people who have had schooling up through high school. The graduates of the nineteenth-century schools, however, cherished reading as a pleasurable activity. Was the educational method of the nineteenth-century that superior to the system today? It is hard to judge. I would suspect that it is true, however. In the nineteenth-century, before the educational split, Deaf children were encouraged to use their fluency in ASL to help them learn English. This approach is no longer used. ASL is banned from most classrooms as a "lower language." Most teachers do not know it fluently. They teach using Pidgin Sign English, which puts ASL in English word order. As a result, children see neither language in its grammatically correct form. Fluency in written English therefore suffers. Nineteenth-century educators kept Sign and English separate and the children were urged to learn both correctly. From the writing samples that I have, and admittedly they are not many, the students gained a much better knowledge of English using this nineteenth-century system.

Incredible pleasure was gained by Deaf people through their eyes. In the opinion of several Deaf people, "the most important of the human senses is sight." With sight, Deaf people were able to enjoy beautiful scenery, mountains, lakes, wild flowers. With sight, they could work at printing, farming, construction. This young graduate went so far as to exclaim: "If all people except for the deaf and dumb were blind, the former would be more useful to the government and interests of their country."¹⁸⁴ To Deaf people, it seemed that hearing people placed far too much emphasis on the sense of hearing. The truly great sense, in Deaf opinion, was sight. Sight afforded pleasures and abilities to every Deaf person. Possessing it, Deaf persons could not help but be happy.

As nineteenth-century deaf education was heavily steeped in religious inspiration, every attempt was made to pass on Christian religion to the deaf students. Educators, many of them Episcopal ministers, wanted deaf children to know that their souls had been saved by Christ. As such, many graduates expressed joy at being able to worship God freely. Signed religious services naturally helped bring the Deaf person closer to God. Sight also played a strong role in this effort. As the Deaf students admired the beauty of the world, the more they also admired "the goodness, power, and wisdom, of the Being who made them."¹⁸⁵ The worship of God stressed to the Deaf student

¹⁸⁴Graduate, "Happy," *Annals* 2 (1849): 191-2.

¹⁸⁵Graduate, "Happy," *Annals* 2 (1849): 191-2.

that God was essentially good; the beauty of creation seemed to prove it. Thus, Deaf students were taught to trust in God. They did not fret over their deafness because they knew that God gave them access to other kinds of pleasures. God did not leave them sorrowful. Finally, they hoped for the day when "in another world, (they) will be happy forever with the angels, and there (they) shall hear and speak."¹⁸⁶

To a certain extent, such thinking was very much hearing inspired. "In heaven, you will no longer have to suffer under the terrible infirmity of deafness, but you will be restored to a more perfect physical state." It implicitly assumed that deafness was something from which Deaf people wanted to be free. This assumption, as the two graduates inform us, was not necessarily true. As one wrote, "I have never wished much to hear or speak." Still, faith in God did undoubtedly help many Deaf people in life. Even if they had no desire to hear, deafness must have caused stressful situations at various times--misunderstandings, accidents, difficult communications. Trusting that even deafness was a part of God's greater plan may have been a source of strength during such trying incidents. In heaven, there would be no such misunderstandings. Faith may have simply reminded the Deaf person to remain hopeful.

Culturally speaking, the final word on how Deaf people seemed to view their condition was offered by J.R. Burnet, a graduate of the New York Institution. He wrote, "Their misfortune is not that they are deaf and dumb, but that others hear and

¹⁸⁶Graduate, "Happy," *Annals* 2 (1849): 192.

speak. Were the established mode of communication among men, by a language addressed, not to the ear, but to the eye, the present inferiority of the deaf would entirely vanish..."¹⁸⁷ Burnet highlighted several important points to Deaf culture. He placed no value judgment upon the ability or disability to hear. Deafness was not a misfortune; the trouble was that everyone else could hear. The true trouble with deafness therefore became not its existence as a physical condition or its members' status as a minority. The real problem was its isolating effect linguistically. Deaf people constituted a linguistic minority in the United States. Their problem lay in the fact that their language was known by so few people. Burnet points out that if everyone signed, deafness would not be a hindrance to full and equal participation in society. Since everyone else speaks, Deaf people are excluded on the basis on their language, not their inability to hear.¹⁸⁸ Such a description challenged the notion that hearing itself was the key issue. It raised the issue of linguistic difference and lack of linguistic tolerance and diversity. Burnet's observations are still tenets of Deaf culture

¹⁸⁷Burnet 47.

¹⁸⁸Deaf joke about (EAR)TH and (EYE)TH illustrates the point of linguistic separation neatly. The joke describes a lonely Deaf boy who has a difficult time understanding hearing people. English baffles him; he is more comfortable in Sign. A man tells him that there is a planet where all the habitants are Deaf and use Sign. Would he like to go? The boy naturally answers in the affirmative. When he arrives on the planet, he asks the residents its name. "It's EYEth," they tell him. "and if anyone is born on this planet with the strange ability to hear, we send them to your planet, EARth." The pun on the name of the planets highlights the Deaf feeling that they are a linguistic minority on a world designed to accommodate hearing people.

today. Deaf people believe that they constitute a linguistic minority, not a handicapped group. Burnet's point demonstrates the existence of such Deaf thinking early in the nineteenth century. Definite signs of culture slowly emerged.

The most prominent marker of this culture was Sign itself. By using it in preference to English. Deaf people signalled their membership, by their choice, in the emerging culture. Sign, like other Deaf characteristics, was held up to mixed, and often critical, reviews by hearing educators. Some of these opinions certainly affected the perspective of Deaf people. John Carlin, for instance, began to believe that Sign was vastly inferior to English. Was Carlin's view the rule or the exception in the Deaf community? How did most Deaf people view this sign of culture?

5: "THE NIMBLE JEST"

These delicate shades of thought flit through the mind so rapidly that they almost escape observation, and if observed are soon forgotten, unless they are associated with something more permanent and tangible. Thus by giving signs to such immaterial ideas, we may be said to give them a body.

J.R. Burnet, 1835

Gesture is the first and most natural means by which any passion seeks expression, and hence the developed language of signs becomes much more graphic in its delineation of the emotions than spoken language can be. It is to the latter what pictures are to written description. In this language of "action, action, ACTION" all the arts of oratory are cultivated and the nimble jest goes round.

The Deaf Mute Pelican, 1872

As these two quotes indicate, Deaf people viewed Sign with a great deal of respect. Burnet commented that Signs gave thoughts a body, both figuratively and literally. The second quote, taken from a school newspaper, emphasized the emotional power of Sign. It was considered equally suitable for intellectual expression as well. Obviously humor, "the nimble jest," was not beyond its grasp.¹⁸⁹ Sign, in the eyes of at least some of its Deaf users, seemed a wonderful, versatile, and convenient language.

The Deaf community cherished Sign; they believed "that perhaps all the deaf, and certainly the vast majority of them, receive untold aid and comfort through the sign-language."¹⁹⁰ Sign offered deaf people a way to communicate easily and comfortably. The process began as children. Deaf children would invent home signs, informal signs of their own creation to denote the objects in their homes and the people in their lives. Initially, the signs will be rather crude, but over time they usually become more graceful.¹⁹¹ Generally speaking, individuals will be marked in signs "by some accidental peculiarities of features, dress, or manner...and these signs will

¹⁸⁹Perhaps an example of a "nimble jest" would be that offered by Amos Smith, Jr., "Freedom of speech, may it never be restrained, except by mut(e)ual consent." (Laughter and cheers.) "Proceedings of the Convention of the New England Gallaudet Association of Deaf Mutes," *Annals* 9 (1857): 76.

¹⁹⁰A.G. Draper, "The attitude of the adult deaf towards pure oralism," *Annals* 40 (1895): 54.

¹⁹¹Burnet 18-9.

generally remain after the peculiarities which gave rise to them have passed away..."¹⁹² These signs were obviously highly personal. Different deaf children created different signs. Still, the home signs provided the users with a way to communicate, at least minimally, with their families.

The children took these signs to school where they were exposed to the more formal language of Sign. This exposure cultivated the signing skills of the deaf child. The schools had the effect of standardizing the language as well; home signs were discarded and current Signs accepted. The languages from school to school were fairly similar, reflecting only regional dialects, since most of the teachers had received their training at the American School. Sign teachers, like Laurent Clerc, believed it was important for teachers to learn Sign before entering the classroom so they could "correct the awkward Signs of the pupils."¹⁹³ Teachers who knew the language then played an important role in promoting and maintaining its stability across the country. They, along with Deaf signers, taught it correctly to the Deaf students who entered the schools knowing only home signs. Maintaining the language seemed to have been an important goal to Deaf teachers like Clerc. Only by correcting poor signing could a correct, grammatical system emerge to confer a true linguistic status upon ASL. Deaf people wanted their language to receive that kind of formal, respected recognition.

¹⁹²Burnet 20-1.

¹⁹³Samuel Porter, "4th Convention of American Instructors of the Deaf and Dumb," *Annals* 9 (1857): 9.

At mid-century, the idea that Sign constituted a real language seemed to exist in the minds of many Deaf people. By the end of this century, the view had changed somewhat. Doubt began to creep into many discussions of Sign. J. Williams, a deaf author, simultaneously described Signs as "perfect language in themselves" and lacking any syntax.¹⁹⁴ But, though it had no syntax, it was possible to learn it fluently. In fact, he was sorry that hearing people did not take the time to learn Sign. "It is a pity," he wrote, "that they are not more generally understood, but this cannot be hoped for, as it takes too long to learn them...Five years of constant practice are required to enable a person to use them readily and understandingly."¹⁹⁵ Sign was a language without a grammar, perfect but unknown, learnable but structureless. A blend of contradicting ideas appeared. A tension between Deaf and hearing perspectives arose. Williams tried to ease the situation with a compromise. Signs could have their place among the Deaf community, while they should be avoided in hearing circles. The reasoning? "Our signs are all very well among ourselves, but they are the worst kind of heathen Greek to people generally, who are inclined rather to ridicule them than to endeavor to understand their meaning."¹⁹⁶ Though Sign was most suitable for the Deaf

¹⁹⁴Williams 65.

¹⁹⁵Williams 65.

¹⁹⁶Williams 64.

community, it was unacceptable in public since hearing people would inevitably mock Deaf people for their outlandishness, instead of recognizing their own unfamiliarity.

This ridicule apparently backfired. Instead of forcing Deaf people to abandon Sign entirely, it persuaded them to hide it from hearing eyes. Hearing ridicule drove Deaf people closer together; it did not cause them to give up Sign and join the hearing community. The hearing attitude basically helped to form the Deaf community, which gradually evolved into its own culture. Two separate worlds, hearing and Deaf, exist now as a result. If more hearing people knew Sign there would be less reason for Deaf people to insulate themselves from hearing influences. Greater cultural exchange could occur and Deaf people would be more integrated into public life. Early on, hearing viewers, laughing and staring at Sign, rejected that path. To save themselves, Deaf people created a world of their own, where their language predominated. An identifiable culture began to emerge.

The explanation was clear. Nineteenth-century Deaf adults could describe it. Conventions for Deaf people proved it; Deaf adults sought each other's company to meet people who were more like them, who understood them, who spoke their language. Deaf people at the time spent between five and fifteen years at deaf schools. The friendships and community formed there needed to be recaptured, hence the conventions. An organizer explained the feeling.

When at home, we are widely scattered, and must carry on conversation with our speaking brethren by the slow and laborious process of writing,

but here we meet and our language of signs is brought into full play. Thought flashes from mind to mind, and we feel elated, so much so, indeed, as to forget our misfortune. We listen (with our eyes) to addresses in our own well understood language.¹⁹⁷

United in a group, Deaf people could leave their deafness behind. Conversation was not an awkward, uncomfortable experience. They could participate freely, their deafness no longer a barrier. The language of signs made this experience possible. Thought could flash quickly from mind to mind, no one was left out. Deaf people cherished their "own well understood language" because it made situations like the conventions possible.

Deaf people so enjoyed the free and unrestricted use of their language that they would brave any weather to gather together. Meetings and conventions were important because they afforded an opportunity to forget deafness and feel welcome in a place where everyone fit in. In Boston, therefore, when an annual meeting was held in spite of a severe snow storm, two hundred Deaf people attended. The building was kept open all night, in case travellers arrived late due to the poor weather. Those already there "did not disperse till eight o'clock the next morning."¹⁹⁸ Finding a place to be understood was rare. Deaf people always made the most of the time they could share in groups, arriving early and staying late indeed.

¹⁹⁷President Alphonso Johnson, "Empire State Association of Deaf Mutes," *Deaf Mutes' Friend* 1.9 (1869): 258.

¹⁹⁸*Deaf Mutes' Friend* 1.2 (1869): 51.

Understanding and conversation brought Deaf people together. Sign played a crucial role in generating this new culture. A community of users developed around it and they did all they could to meet regularly, signing extensively and lucidly. Since Sign was rejected by the hearing community, it could not comfortably be used in public. Not wanting to be left without a language or forced to use a static written English, Deaf people banded together around Sign. Its use made them feel less deaf, as it facilitated easy communication between them. No deafness exists among Deaf people, signing together. Yet simultaneously, it created a feeling of Deafness among them. As their deafness was minimized, Deafness arose. The ready talks and the power of Sign united Deaf people and bound them closer together. Among hearing people, deafness would be a difficult barrier to overcome. Communication would be hard to conduct. But with Sign, barriers of separation fell away. Language empowered people and, united together, they could begin to appreciate their Deafness.

While deaf people began to explore the possibilities of Deafness, they started to celebrate it more publicly. Poetry by Deaf people, describing their experience of both hearing loss and Deafness, appeared in a variety of magazines, including the *Annals*. Hearing people wrote poetry about deafness, too. Their poetry further illuminated the understanding that hearing people held about deafness in the nineteenth-century. Taken together, the poetry represents a forum where cultural ideas could meet and clash. As

such, the poetry offers us a window onto the emerging Deaf culture and the initial hearing reaction.

6: POETRY: CULTURAL CONFRONTATION

In poetry, I read words syllable by syllable. It is proper to state that, notwithstanding my congenital deafness and my having no idea of syllabic sounds, I studied several years ago the principles of versification. In this study, I found it necessary to learn as many syllables as could, and their accents,--they all being spelt letter by letter, on the fingers,...

John Carlin, 1859

Miss Caroline Park made signs for a poem written by Alfred B. Street. Professor Peet read the exquisite verses, but he might have saved himself that labor, for all who saw the spiritual face, the sparkling eyes, and perfect gesticulation of this young lady, understood the sentiment of the poem without hearing the words--the mere husks of thought.

New York Institution, 45th Annual Report

John Carlin was certainly an enterprising man. He not only took the time to learn how to read poetry fruitfully, he also wrote it himself. From the vantage point of the twentieth century, this information is unusual. Many Deaf school children today intensely dislike poetry because they do not understand it. If they have never heard sounds, the rhythm and rhymes escape them. Often their limited English vocabulary frustrates their enjoyment of either reading or writing poetry. But Carlin evidently found poetry of crucial importance. He was determined to conquer its formidable obstacles.

Park, meanwhile, translated a written poem into Sign. The results, by this account, were breathtaking; the words of the poem took on a new life. Park may not have created an original piece, but she did offer an original interpretation. In Sign, Deaf people could enjoy poetry as well as any hearing person. Twentieth-century Deaf artists have revived this idea. Many Deaf poets, like Patrick Graybill and Dorothy Miles, are now creating Sign poetry. Deaf people are finally creating original works in their native language.

It would seem that in the nineteenth century this option was left unconsidered. Reference to practicing Deaf poets creating Signed works do not exist.¹⁹⁹ If anyone was working privately on such materials, showing them only to family or friends, they

¹⁹⁹A Deaf acting troupe, the Ravels, are mentioned briefly; precisely what they performed is unclear. Also, a deaf actor performing a one-man show, Geo. Fox, is mentioned. The extent of his career is unknown.

would be lost to researchers. Signed poetry cannot be captured on paper. English translations would not capture the spirit of the original because Sign poetry is performed in three dimensions. With no way to preserve it adequately, early works must necessarily be lost.

Though they did not work in Sign, there were poems written by Deaf authors. Written in English, many of these poems dealt with issues of deafness.²⁰⁰ Many poets wrote of their attempts to formulate conceptions of sound, and their attitude toward their deafness. Much of it was frank and highly emotional; references were made to both Sign and speech. The poetry tried to deal with the realities of being Deaf in a predominantly hearing world, and the subsequent difficulties. Hope, however, was never entirely abandoned. If nothing else, Deaf people took comfort in their faith in God.

Hearing people as well wrote poetry about deafness. Theirs differed markedly from the Deaf efforts. The majority of the poetry was religiously flavored; Deaf

²⁰⁰My sample includes 80 poems: 49 by hearing authors, 29 by Deaf poets, and 2 by deaf-blind poets. A prominent Deaf poet working at the time, James Nack, did not discuss issues of deafness in his poetry. His works are therefore not covered here. Furthermore, I have chosen to deal with Deaf poetry. Poems were also composed by deafened authors, many lamenting their condition, wishing to hear again. People who become deaf later in life are a unique and separate group. Time precludes discussing their perspectives on deafness, which are, generally, more hearing than Deaf. I have therefore selected the poems which I believed offer a representative sampling of the views of nineteenth century Deaf people. I use excerpts from the poems in this chapter. The poems are presented in their entirety in Appendix A.

people, hearing people believed, could communicate more purely with God since they were undistracted by earthly noise. The condition was thereby romanticized to a great extent. The rest of the poetry stressed the pity that deafness evokes in hearing people. This poetry reveals a great deal, not only about what hearing people thought of deafness, but what they thought about themselves.

Presented together, the poetry becomes a forum of cultural confrontation. Ideas that each group held about the other, and themselves, are exchanged. The cultural gap that separated the two groups is clearly demonstrated by the way they wrote about one another in their poetry.²⁰¹ A sampling of representative ideas reveals that hearing and Deaf views of deafness differed dramatically. The selection has been divided as much as has been possible along thematic lines. The themes include religion/romanticism, pity, and acceptance.

When hearing poets discussed deafness, they tended to do so in a romanticized manner. The most common way to romanticize the condition was to endow it with excessive religious feeling. The idea was captured perfectly in the anonymously penned, "The Dumb Boy's Best Friend." The subject of the poem, "a little deaf-mute boy" tells a group of curious children that his best friend is God. The children laugh; "God is the Friend of all," they explain. They question him repeatedly, but still he

²⁰¹A certain amount of guesswork has gone into deciphering these poems. Some are unsigned so the status of the author is unknown. I have used my own judgment to determine whether the author was hearing or deaf.

responds "God." The author concludes gladly, "Oh, happy! I fain would know / The secret of thy love, / Learn my affections to bestow / On that Best Friend above." Deafness resulted in great piety, according to this author. A young deaf boy could teach hearing people the way to greater faith.

Other hearing authors stressed this direct connection between deafness and holiness. Lydia Sigourney, one-time teacher of Alice Cogswell, daughter of Mason Fitch Cogswell, whose deafness inspired him to found the American School, described deaf children as "Hermetically seal'd / To sounds of woe and crime / That vex and stain the pilgrim soul / Amid the snares of time..." in her poem "La Petite Sourde-Muette." Similarly, the unknown author of "Compensation" proclaimed, "Oh, blessed! ye have never heard; / Your minds by mercy here are sealed / From half the sin in man revealed." To be deaf was to receive God's special mercy. It protected one from much sinful influence and thereby enabled one to live a purer life. Deaf people could then show hearing people how to be more religious in nature and faithful to God. This envy of the religious piety deafness bestowed did not in any case cause hearing people to covet deafness for themselves. A very romanticized conception of what it means to be deaf emerges.

Deaf people described religion in a very different way. It was a comfort when the hardships caused by deafness became overwhelming. Religion was not something that came along with deafness; lack of hearing did not result, according to Deaf poets,

in hearing God's voice all the louder. Anna B. Bensel, author of "A Voice to the Deaf," described sitting in a church, frustrated by a seeming inability to reach God: "But through the silence deep that pressed me close, / No word of comfort on my spirit broke." Just when bitterness overwhelmed her, God heard her cry and responded.

He heard and answered: on my heart there fell

Peace like a benediction after prayer;

While to my soul the voice Eternal spake

A message sweet and rare.

Religion undoubtedly comforted her. It did not descend on her automatically nor was her relationship with God one that required no work whatsoever. Deafness was not always easy to bear, prayer not always easy to sustain. Religion became a well earned comfort.

James Montgomery concurred. In "Deaf, And Yet I Hear," he wrote, "Yet hath my heart an inward ear, / Through which its powers rejoice; / Speak, Lord, and let me love to hear / Thy Spirit's still, small voice." God speaks even to the deaf person because He could speak directly to the heart. Once there, the Deaf individual did not need ears to hear. Religion provided a comfort because prayer was a more direct form of communication than Deaf people could usually receive. And God could speak as well to the Deaf person, through the Spirit, as to the hearing person. God never forsakes them.

Religion therefore reminded Deaf people that hearing was not the only way of being. The message comes through in "A Voiceless World":

Though on the ear and from the tongue

No words of sweetness roll,

The heart has its own melody,

The music of the soul;

'Tis like the far-off symphony

The spirit hears alone,

Which swells beyond the walls of time

In anthems round the throne.

The author, though Deaf, writes gleefully that "the heart has its own melody," one that does not require ears to hear. It is akin to the music of angels in heaven. God pours forth a blessing enabling Deaf people to be happy even without ears to hear. Soon enough, in heaven, Deaf people will hear the song of anthems around them. But till then, happiness is theirs like music in the soul.

The view is different from the hearing view of religion since Deaf people did not think of a religion as their only source of happiness. Hearing people thought of deafness as a condition that left deaf people alone and isolated with God. Deaf people, however, viewed deafness as a condition that they need God's help to sometimes

endure. An active relationship, rather than a passive one, was implied by Deaf authors. Their religion was also an area in which they felt equal to hearing people. God could speak to them just as well as the hearing people. And there were many social occasions where Deaf people felt ill at ease around hearing people. Awkwardness arose when communication was difficult. With religion, Deaf people could gain a sense of themselves as unhindered by their deafness in a communicative role. God did not discriminate on the basis of hearing loss.

Religion was not the only tool used by poets to try and romanticize deafness. When Deaf poets disputed religion as a vehicle to glamorize deafness, romance itself became a vehicle for hearing poets. The poem "To A Beautiful Mute" held that deafness placed people above earthly concerns. Without hearing, the deaf woman was free of "dreams of worldly folly, / And its creatures." Part of the beauty of this woman was her otherworldly quality. She was far removed from "worldly folly" because she could not hear it; her deafness placed her on the ultimate pedestal. The author dedicated the poem to her but cautioned, "Yet read them not; / Cursed be the art that e'er refines / Thy natural lot." An extreme position, the poet urged his beloved to remain uneducated to preserve her true naturalness.

Deaf people urged education. "The Mute Sister" by J.S. Brown brings the point across. Brown's deaf sister died when he was a small boy. Being deaf himself, his parents were unable to explain adequately why his sister had left him.

I asked my mother where my sister was,
With tears starting in her upturned eyes,
She pointed to the calm, blue sky,
As if to say my sister there had gone.
Oh! how from day to day, I watched the sky;
And as the sun sank down, I hoped that on
His last bright, glorious beams, she would still
come.

They could not explain and he could not understand. The concept of death is difficult enough to explain to a child. But the deafness made it more difficult. The parents could not speak of heaven and God, comforting with soothing tones, but merely point to the sky. He had used home signs with his sister but without her they were ineffectual. The pain and isolation that deafness can cause are captured in this poem. Lack of education is indeed not a blessing but a profound curse. The lack of a formal sign system was devastating to a family, and especially to the deaf child.

The inconsolable sadness of a deaf child passed away; the adult reflected back on the experience, recapturing its trauma for a wider audience. But what of the daily lessons, inconveniences, and hardships that a deaf adult must face? Judge Simmons broached the subject in his "Deaf!" He admitted, "I often think it must be sweet, / The tone of happy birds to hear," but comforted himself with "Alas! I hear not--yet I see."

His deafness occasionally saddened him, but he was very happy that he was not blind instead. Vision was a cherished sense. He explains:

'Tis best to bear what heaven wills
And thankful be it no worse
And in this thought I comfort find,
Though deaf, I am not dumb, nor blind.

Blindness, to the Deaf mindset, would seem the worse calamity. The eyes were of utmost importance. A certain resigned acceptance also characterized his remarks. Discontent would seem counterproductive, acceptance bringing peace.

Acceptance did not mean there were no regrets. Simmons was sorry that he could not participate more freely in social events. They would have been a great source of pleasure to him, but he avoided them nonetheless. "Because it is a pain to think / That I, unwittingly, may be / A weary trial, and a tax / On patience, strength, or courtesy." Deaf people did not want to feel that they were trying the patience of their hearing companions. They did not wish to be public spectacles. The Deaf community formed out of this feeling. If hearing people would be inconvenienced by deafness, the Deaf people would simply associate with one another. They could receive companionship and sociability without the feeling of self-consciousness.

Among each other, Deaf people also did not have to contend with the pity often bestowed on them by well intentioned, but misdirected, hearing people. Deaf people

did not desire pity themselves; an occasional poem written by someone who went deaf later in life presents a theme that implies otherwise. Their situation, however, is entirely different from that of the deaf born. They can remember sound and therefore regret their own loss. The deaf born have no memory of sound to haunt them, so that they do not regret their loss; deafness to them is a natural state of being. As such, they do not seek pity for what they are and have always been. In fact, they seem to pity others, the blind specifically. Simmons' poem mentions twice his gratefulness at not being blind. Deaf people are very grateful for their eyesight, since they rely upon it so heavily. They, therefore, cannot imagine being without vision. The theme was expanded on in "Address of the Deaf and Dumb to the Blind." Their pity is clear, as well as the realization that deafness is in fact the more debilitating condition.

Poor hapless ones! to whom the morn
Still comes, but brings no light;
To whom the evening comes, but brings
To you no deeper night.

Yet we were more unfortunate
Than ever were the blind!
Your darkness is but of the eye,
But ours was of the mind.

The rest of the poem reminds the reader of the pity that they, like deaf people, must necessarily feel for blind persons. Yet it simultaneously tells readers that uneducated deaf persons are more unfortunate than even the blind child. Blindness simply cuts the child off from visual contact; deafness cuts the child off from human contact and communication.

An important use of past and present tense occurs in the second stanza quoted here. The darkness of the blind children was described in the present tense; the darkness of the deaf children was described in the past tense. Deaf people "*were* more unfortunate" than the blind students ever were. The darkness of blindness *is* only of the eyes; deafness *was* a darkness of the mind. Deafness, the author implies, may be overcome by education. The darkness may be lifted from the mind. No amount of education can lift away blindness; the eye will always remain dark. Since blindness cannot be overcome as deafness can, blind individuals, at least from the Deaf perspective, deserve more pity.

Hearing authors, however, insisted that deaf people themselves deserved much pity. The poem "The Deaf and Dumb" makes it quite clear. The deaf persons in it are described as "cheerless," "sad," "poor," "hapless," and "mournful." The author beseeches the readers both to "Pity the deaf and dumb!" and "Assist the deaf and dumb!" Such a sad group of people deserves the liberal assistance of the hearing majority. Only with such aid can the deaf community survive in the world. Hearing

intervention was required and, of course, could only be inspired by the sight of such a pitiful group of people. The author summarily concludes:

And while we thus deplore their lot,

May that great God be ne'ver forgot,

To whom we owe that we are not,

Like them, both deaf and dumb!

This paternalistic attitude put Deaf people in an inferior position. It placed hearing people in a self-serving, superior position, which only hurt the feelings and damaged the self-esteem of the Deaf population. An important truth, explaining the origins of this paternalism, arises from this stanza. It was obviously important to hearing people that they were not deaf. Deafness constituted a degraded state, at the very least a stigmatized position. Hearing people should be thankful, not so much for their hearing, but that they were not deaf. Being thankful not for what one is but for what one is not is a heavy handed way of degrading those who are different from the majority. Deafness connoted loss of status and competence. It was a condition to be undeniably pitied.

Mothers therefore pitied their deaf children. One hearing mother, in "The Dumb Child," describes her sorrow at her little girl's inability to hear soft lullabies or other human voices. Truly, she is sorry for her girl's deafness and the loss that it entails, including the loss of communication with her family which the mother accepts with an

"Alas! this lovely temple closed must be, / For He who made it keeps the master key."

Despite such distance, the mother believes that the family remains close. She admits that she had feared that "her father would not care for her." But, evidently, he does and remains with them.

Yet, in spite all of this, the mother remains saddened. In fact, it is herself she pities more than her child. She writes,

Oh, if she could but hear

For one short hour, till I her tongue might teach

To call me Mother, in the broken speech

That thrills the mother's ear!

Alas! those sealed lips never may be stirred

To the deep music of that holy word!

She would like the girl to speak for her own sake, because she longs to hear the child call her "Mother." Another mother with a deaf child echoed the sentiment in "Our Silent Ones": "I tried to hide from my pained heart they tongue would / never say / To me the loved word "Mother" till time should pass away." These mothers pity themselves as much as they pity their deaf children. Since the children are deaf, they cannot fulfill the dreams of these mothers adequately. The children, through no fault of their own, simply are not good enough. Not speaking is no disappointment to a deaf

child, but it is an incredible disappointment to a hearing parent. Self-pity operates to some degree in the thinking of these mothers with the sad deaf children.

The idea that deaf people are inherently saddened by their loss and should therefore be pitied because of it is so ingrained in hearing thinking that, often, hearing people are bewildered when confronted with a deaf person who fails to fit this stereotype. S. Adams Wiggin confronts this quandary in "A Mystery."

No speech, no unstopped, listening ears;
 No voice of children sweetly falls,
 No soft-toned music charms to tears,
 No charming bell to worship calls.

And yet--I cannot tell you why--
 My silent neighbor's blithe and gay;
 He does not sit and weep and sigh
 His little span of life away.

The author concludes that God has answers for everything, including deafness; in heaven, all will be revealed. The deaf soul will understand why it was deaf on earth and the hearing soul will know why deafness did not result in endless sorrow. Wiggin cannot seem to understand it in this poem. He wonders how anyone, deprived of the blessing of so many beautiful sounds, could possibly be happy. Obviously he himself

could not have been. Wiggin expected deaf people to be sad, but his neighbor was not. He did not "sit and weep and sigh." In fact, he seemed quite cheerful. Such behavior was a mystery to Wiggins, and, in all likelihood, to many other hearing people as well.

What hearing people, like Wiggins, tended to overlook was that the ears did not have the monopoly on producing pleasure to the human soul. Deaf people did not feel isolated from pleasure because they could see! "The Deaf and Dumb Child's Christmas Carol" explains it well.

I cannot speak, I cannot hear,
 But I can feel and think,
 And mine eyes are filled with the joyfulness
 That hand to hand doth link,--
 While round and round
 The dancers bound,
 And laugh and shout--and I see the sound,
 Though silent to me
 All the noise and glee
 Of the dance, the round-game, and revelry.

Deafness, by this boy's account, does not necessarily bar anyone from participating in celebratory events. The sounds of Christmas may be sealed from this boy's ears, but as he says, "I see the sound." The happy noise is captured by the eye. Sound reveals

itself to the eye and vision replaces sound for the deaf child. The poet reaffirms the idea in a later stanza: "All tell me there's something outside of my ears; / But my life's in my eyes,-- / Oh, thank God for the prize!" Sight provides pleasures. For the deaf born who know no sound, the experience is enjoyable. They are happy.

In fact, in trying to imagine sound, Deaf people resort to visual imagery. In "O! What Is Sound?", a young poet searches for a way to understand the music his sister plays on the piano.

And then delighted I have gazed
 As on a vision'd scene of bliss,
 And all my thoughts were heavenward raised;
 Is music, sister, ought like this?
 And oh, the beauteous star-lit sky,
 Sparkling rich in blue and bright--
 Is surely full of harmony;
 Is sound as lovely as its light?

The sights are beautiful but he knows that they are different from sound. He knows that sound will "(defy) my vain conjectures all; / To me that fount of joy is sealed." The analogies he creates are only comparisons; they cannot capture the real thing or convey to him the true nature of sound. This fact does not mean that he has no understanding of sound; he recognizes both its beauty and its emotional power. Deaf

people do have some notion of what sound is and they do know that various actions create sounds. This deaf boy obviously knew that much, but he wanted to know more. He realized that he could not but this did not mean that he was inconsolably distressed. "That fount of joy" may have been denied him, but "that" is a very specific word. Not all joy was denied; just the pleasure of musical sounds.

A clear dichotomy emerges in this poetry between hearing and Deaf views of deafness. Hearing views tend to revolve around the idea that deaf people deserve hearing pity and require help to function in the world. Most hearing poets assumed that deaf people were saddened by their loss and recognized that life would be better if they could hear. Since the concept of deafness would be useless without the reference point of hearing with which to compare it, much of the poetry reveals a great deal about hearing people. They cherish hearing themselves and would be sad and depressed if they lost it.

This reaction would be understandable, but it is incorrect to project this reaction onto people who were born deaf. Those who were born deaf have no memory of sound, so they have nothing to regret. They have not lost anything so they cannot be despondent about their hearing loss. The pity that hearing people pour out is, by and large, misdirected. The pity that parents felt was, in many ways, sincere, but also very self-serving. They regretted the child's deafness because of what they, as parents, would miss: baby's first word, singing lullabies, reciting nursery rhymes. Just

newborn, the child did not, and could not, live up to parental expectations, nor could he/she. It was reason indeed to feel sorry.

Hearing people therefore expected rather specific behaviors from deaf people. They expected them to be sorrowful and lonely. They assumed that deaf people lived in silence, were silent, and did not understand the concept of sound. They felt that, since they were so sheltered, they would be closer to God. Their reward was not on earth at all, then, but strictly in heaven. Deaf people needed to be taught this special relationship and teachers were happy to comply. Hearing teachers saw enlightenment as their special duty. A feeling of paternalistic benevolence blossomed which, naturally, deaf people were expected to receive gratefully.

Deaf people, it seemed, had different ideas. Their poetry spoke of different concerns. For the most part, they were not sad and morose. They were glad for the life they had. They did not feel regretful about their deafness because they could see. Vision and its advantages were stressed repeatedly in their poetry. The poetry emphasized the positive qualities of vision as a channel to replace hearing ("with my eyes I hear"). Deaf people relied heavily on their vision and relished in its pleasures.

Certainly deafness was no easy condition to bear all the time. When it became difficult, Deaf people often turned to religion, though not the hearing version, wherein religion was instantaneous for deaf people because they were in constant communion with God. Their religion was one which required faith and attention, but it was a great

comfort. In it, Deaf people knew that the distinctions between Deaf and hearing fell away. With God all people were good and equal. Faith was open to all and therefore a comfort to many Deaf people when their deafness seemed difficult to bear.

Finally, Deaf people lived fairly average lives, no more or less sad than those of hearing people. Deaf people may have lived without sound but they did know what sound meant. They knew that it existed and they understood its power and attraction. They were not entirely soundless. Deaf people, therefore, did not quite fit into the pigeon hole that hearing people created for them. They did not quite fit the image.

Since hearing people had one image of deafness and Deaf people another, it was inevitable for the two positions to collide. The issues and concerns were outlined in the poetry. Deaf people embraced vision and exuded happiness. The roots of Deaf culture began to show--use of home signs, hyper-visibility, acceptance of deafness--and hearing people did not exactly know how to react. By their views of deafness in this selection of poetry, it would seem that Deaf cultural displays caught them all a bit off guard. But the issues were displayed in a public forum and they would not simply go away. The cultural growth would only continue and cultural clash could only come to a greater pitch. The end result of this cultural clash would be the educational battle in the last years of the century. Oralism, the method of teaching deaf children through lipreading, would come directly out of the hearing community's nervousness about this

emerging Deaf culture. The poetry prophetically revealed the lines of this future confrontation.

7: THE GREAT SOUND DEBATE

...in my own case, as nearly as I can judge, words do not pass through my mind as movements of the vocal organs, but as sounds. After more than forty years of total deafness as any human being ever was afflicted with, I cannot be positive on that point; for all other reminiscences of sound have long since faded from my memory. Still the reading of any lively piece of poetry causes the words to ring in my ears.

J.R. Burnet, 1859

Poetry was not the only medium through which Deaf and hearing communities exchanged views of deafness. With his words, Burnet set off a two-year debate in the *Annals*. Burnet contended that, though deaf for many years, he could still hear an inner voice reading while his eyes skimmed a book. He claimed to have a mental voice, a

clear memory of sound. The article appeared in the *Annals* in January 1859. Immediately, hearing educators wrote back to contradict him, correcting him by saying that he did not remember sound, but rather the mechanical sensation of speaking.

It would seem to be a small issue, a deaf man claiming to remember the sound of the spoken word. But hearing educators pounced upon it with a lively ferocity. In fact, the issue may have been much larger than it would first appear. Burnet, in a manner of speaking, had offered a challenge to the hearing establishment. He contended that he understood sound. Hearing people had long believed that deaf people had no conception of sound at all. In 1848, an author to the *Annals* asserted:

We have often been asked the question by visitors; have the deaf and dumb any idea of sound? We have answered; they have no more idea of sound than the blind of colors. As the idea of sound can be imparted to the mind only through the sense of hearing, those who are totally deaf must therefore be wholly destitute of any such idea. They may know much about sound; may know how it is propagated; its laws of transmission may be familiar to them, and still they may and must be entirely ignorant of its nature.²⁰²

The crux here is not only are deaf people ignorant of the nature of sound, but, according to hearing beliefs, they must be. Sound remains the province of hearing people. Deaf people, no matter how many theories they have read or the number of ideas they hold, cannot claim to understand sound in any serious way. The strenuousness with which hearing opponents contradicted Burnet's assertion reiterated

²⁰²W.W. Turner, "Music Among the Deaf and Dumb," *Annals* 2 (1848): 1.

the point of the poetry. Deaf people are supposed to "dwell in silence," by hearing reckonings. Culturally, claims to the contrary could not be tolerated.²⁰³

Burnet's assertion was accordingly attacked immediately. The editor of the *Annals*, Samuel Porter, took the step of interjecting his own comments into Burnet's article. The topic was evidently of such importance that a reply could not wait until the next issue of the magazine. Porter shot back:

We, believe, however, that what he retains, is the greater part of what most people ordinarily perceive in the melody and the flow of verse. The lines seem to them easy or rough, lively or solemn, or stately, or smooth or harsh, more in reference to movement in utterance than to sound in the ear...The correspondence of sound (so called) to sense, aside from the direct imitation of sound itself, has relation to the utterance more than to the ear.²⁰⁴

Essentially, Porter contended that hearing people do not read in the way that Burnet described. Hearing people do not carry an inner voice, but when reading recall the motions of utterance, the position of tongue to teeth, instead of sound. Deaf people certainly did not read any differently. They most assuredly did not read by remembering sound.

Burnet seemed a bit taken aback by such a strong reaction. By July 1859, he replied to the *Annals*. Now he claimed instead that he could still hear an inner voice

²⁰³Padden and Humphries discuss the same issue from a twentieth-century perspective in *Deaf In America: Voices From A Culture*.

²⁰⁴John R. Burnet, "Is It Easier for Deaf Mute to Spell Words Mentally or to Regard them as Units?", *Annals* 11 (1859): 23.

because he became deaf later in life. He had been deaf for over forty years; nonetheless he said, "...semi-mutes have the same faculty of internal speech which those who still hear possess, and which laborious instruction in articulation cannot impart to those who are totally deaf from birth or early infancy."²⁰⁵ Burnet had backed down from his previous assertion of his "total deafness" to claiming "semi-mute" status instead. He probably assumed that this clarification would explain his inner voice better and grant it greater legitimacy.

In fact, it did not. Porter did admit then that many hearing people read with an inner voice, but derided it as an unnecessary habit.²⁰⁶ He still clung to the belief that the important connection was motion, not sound.

In order to speak, it is not necessary to know any sound, provided, without this we can know how to move the organs. In actually speaking, it is not absolutely necessary to have any conception of sound, but it is necessary to have a conception of the motion of organs...It may hence be inferred that ordinarily, if not universally, in repeating words mentally, the more prominent part of the operation has relation to motion instead of sound.²⁰⁷

Burnet's attempt at compromise failed. Porter could not tolerate a claim by a deaf man that he possessed an inner voice. Paradoxically, he also claimed that hearing people had no need for an inner voice either. By pushing both positions, Porter seemingly

²⁰⁵J.R. Burnet, "Dactology vs. Writing," *Annals* 11 (1859): 164.

²⁰⁶Samuel Porter, "The Questions Between Mr. Burnet and the Editor," *Annals* 11 (1859): 177.

²⁰⁷Samuel Porter, "Questions," *Annals* 11 (1859): 178.

attempted to indicate that differences between the two groups were not so widespread. Hearing and deaf people could and did think and read identically. His position also held out the possibility of speech to even the deaf born. Knowledge of sound was removed from the equation; motion was the key to speech. In this way, deaf people could become even more like hearing people. Deaf people could not claim to possess knowledge of sound since that violated their image as silent individuals. But, once that notion was refuted, if hearing people did not press their advantage, they could convince deaf people that it was very possible to become more "hearing." Porter's arguments were therefore designed at once to highlight and resolve differences between hearing and deaf people.

Burnet gave up on his attempt to push for a recognition by hearing educators of the ability of a deaf person to understand sound. He never wrote of the topic in the *Annals* again. The short debate evidently attracted attention, however. In 1861, two short articles appeared, both by deaf authors, discussing their knowledge of sound. Both articles demonstrated that, though deaf, the authors had some conception of sound.

The first article was submitted by William Chamberlain, a deaf adult who frequently contributed to the *Annals*. Chamberlain described his experience of sound in this way:

All external sounds conveyed to me through the atmosphere seem to partake more or less of the nature of an invisible hand, striking, with

more or less force, on the outside of my chest. The hand, however, must be very broad and even, as the blows embrace the whole extent of lungs of which I am possessed.²⁰⁸

His understanding of sound was based on sensation of vibrations, an invisible hand striking the chest. The sensation is not unfamiliar to hearing individuals; loud concert music, for instance, can be felt as much as heard. Different sounds could evidently be distinguished in this manner, depending upon how hard the hand struck the chest. Chamberlain displayed a definite knowledge of sound, but his account was not disputed as Burnet's had been earlier. Chamberlain's knowledge was a deaf one--vibrational, external. He made no claim of understanding the sound of a voice and had only a "mechanical consciousness" of his own voice.²⁰⁹ His understanding did not infringe upon any hearing ideas or threaten them. Hearing people separated vibration from sound ("the idea of sound can be imparted to the mind only through the sense of hearing"), so, in their minds, Chamberlain's interpretation was harmless and safe because it did not approach a real idea of sound as an auditory sensation.

The second article reinforced Chamberlain's description. It was written by Henry W. Syle, a boy of fourteen. He reported that he had gone deaf at age seven following an attack of scarlet fever and no longer possessed any memory of sound. Already, Burnet's claim was called into question since he had been deaf for forty years.

²⁰⁸William Chamberlain, "Further Statement of William Chamberlain of his sensations in relation to sound," *Annals* 13 (1861): 58.

²⁰⁹William Chamberlain, "Further Statement," *Annals* 13 (1861): 58.

Syle elaborated, "...I have at present no idea of sound apart from that of vibration, and its production by some mechanical means; no conception of spoken words save what is connected with the muscular movements of the vocal organs."²¹⁰ Syle's view was legitimate and comforting to the hearing educators. Since vibrations were not equated with sound, his understanding was not too profound. He could not conceive of spoken words at all. Syle's viewpoint was deaf enough so that he did not break out of the hearing image of deafness, but hearing enough ("muscular movements") to promote an idea of similarity between the two groups. No rebuttals were issued.

For the *Annals*, the issue was settled. Deaf people were entitled to their limited understanding but could not claim deeper knowledge. Threatening ideas, like Burnet's, had to be discounted. Sound was the prize possession of hearing people; it could not be shared. A cultural skirmish was fought in the pages of the *Annals* and the Deaf side lost. The hearing majority asserted its right to control the meaning of sound.

Of course, the *Annals* was not the only magazine for deaf issues published at the time. Several smaller magazines, published by Deaf editors, were in circulation. Many of them were short lived, but at least one was available at some point in the mid- to late century. One of them, *The Deaf Mutes' Friend*, published in Hennicker, New Hampshire, dealt with this topic of the deaf notion of sound. The opinion was rendered by William Swett, a Deaf man and editor of the paper. He announced:

²¹⁰Henry W. Syle, "Statement," *Annals* 13 (1861): 60.

Deaf-mutes are often able to hear sounds, although not distinctly enough to distinguish between articulation and mere noise; and even when entirely deaf, they are sensible of the concussion or jarring produced by heavy thunder, the report of a cannon, the rumbling of heavy wagons over street pavements, beating a drum, stamping on the floor, &c., although they cannot always tell what produces the sound, or from what direction it proceeds without the aid of sight...Our own experience shows that concussions are felt, not by the head, but on the chest...²¹¹

Swett's description clearly contradicted the opinion held by the hearing editor at the *Annals*. According to Swett, deaf people could sense the vibrations produced by a variety of sources and could learn, with the aid of sight, to distinguish between them. Sight helped to clarify vibration, helping even "the entirely deaf" hear a little. Deafness was not utter silence, contrary to popular hearing belief. Deaf people could and did develop an understanding of sound.

The *Annals*, serving as a sounding board for a variety of opinions, may have thought the question was answered successfully, the monopoly still in the hands of hearing persons. But other opinions, like Swett's, appeared, describing the condition of deafness strictly from a Deaf point of view. The sound debate may have ceased being discussed, but it was hardly resolved. It was not a minor point either. Both sides reacted strongly to it. Instead, such debate continued to highlight the cultural division forming in the nineteenth century.

²¹¹William Swett, "At Work in the Flume," *Deaf Mutes' Friend* 1.3 (1869): 67.

8: STORIES FROM DEAF CULTURE

I inquired why it had not been thought best to place them among farmers in the country, or in respectable families in the capacity of chamber-maids or servants or cooks, &c., and I received the eternal answer, the fear of their being exposed to danger or seduction. These ladies, indeed, must have a poor opinion of the virtue of these poor Deaf and Dumb, if they think of them as they appear to do.

Laurent Clerc, 1848

The cultural clashes revealed in the poetry and the sound debate demonstrated the differences that had grown between the Deaf and hearing communities. Hearing people created specific images of what a deaf person was supposed to be like. Their interaction with deaf people would be guided by such images. Deaf people confronted those images every day; most hearing people had never met a deaf adult, so they were

drastically unsure of how to proceed. They could, however, stumble through a meeting and then forget about it. Deaf people did not have this luxury of escape; daily, they necessarily confronted the edgy border that separated the two cultures. A variety of anecdotes arose out of such situations. Nineteenth-century Deaf Americans had their own stories to tell about their experiences in the hearing world. Clerc's comment about the French custom of sealing deaf girls behind convent walls is only one example of the way that hearing ideas directly affected the lives of Deaf people. Many others may be offered.

To begin, most Deaf people assumed that communication with hearing people would be difficult. They knew they would have to rely upon pencil and paper "for intercourse with strangers, and even with mere acquaintances."²¹² Deaf people did not expect many hearing people to know sign language. For that reason, some deaf people advocated the use of the manual alphabet instead of sign language. Conversation could be spelled with rapidity, if one practiced regularly. Hearing people, deaf proponents assumed, would find it easier to learn twenty-six handshapes of the alphabet instead of hundreds of signs. The director of the New York Institute wrote optimistically, "And I trust that the time will come, when the ready use of the manual alphabet will be regarded as a necessary accomplishment by all persons of intelligence

²¹²*New York Annual Report* 33.

and benevolence."²¹³ That time did not arrive in the nineteenth century. The manual alphabet remained only slightly less alien than signs. Writing, though tedious, remained the most reliable way to hold a conversation with a hearing person. Deaf people expected this kind of awkwardness immediately in their dealings with hearing people.

Some Deaf people took to carrying a small slate with them to provide a ready means of communication wherever they went. Such an arrangement was fairly unusual. At least once, it resulted in a very peculiar reaction from a hearing observer. William B. Swett recalled the incident as it had happened to him several years earlier.

The next day I was able to go to work, and was much amused by the whisperings and pointings of my fellow workmen. They regarded me, for some time, as a strange person and seemed to be much afraid of my slate and pencil. One of them, who stood near me one day when I pulled out my slate for some purpose, ran away as fast as possible, showing fear on his face; but whether in fun or earnest I did not know, nor did I care, so long as there was nothing offensive in the manner. In course of time they got over this and treated me as one of themselves.²¹⁴

Presumably, Swett was the first deaf individual these men had ever met. They found him "a strange person," obviously different from other people. The slate did not promote communication, but provoked stares and fear of the unknown. One man reacted with particular emotion, running away in dread from the sight of the slate.

²¹³*New York Annual Report* 35.

²¹⁴William B. Swett, "Life and Adventures of William B. Swett," *Deaf Mutes' Friend* 1.2 (1869): 35.

Deafness was evidently regarded as highly unusual; hearing people generally had little personal experience with deaf people. When confronted with such a person, they did not know how to react. Hence, the workmen whispered and pointed at Swett, unsure of precisely what to make of him. Deafness scared them.

How could Deaf people respond to such behaviors? How did they survive in an unsympathetic world? Swett's weapon was humor. He faced each awkward situation with a sense of humor which kept him from becoming discouraged. Humor lent him the patience to wait for the hearing people to adjust to his deafness and accept him "as one of themselves."

These situations of hesitation and confusion were common in the lives of Deaf people. Hearing people can make the confrontation once and walk away, never meeting a Deaf person again. A Deaf person, however, must make them repeatedly, with each new hearing person encountered. Swett was no exception. Soon, a similar situation unfolded; after he had won over his companions, another hearing man was introduced. A new exchange occurred.

My signs and gestures and my little slate, of which I made free use in talking with my companions, soon attracted the attention of the company, to most of whom a deaf mute was evidently a new thing. One man in particular, an Irishman, who was seated in a corner, smoking a pipe, after eyeing me intently for some time, approached me, laid a hand on my shoulder, looked me in the face, and then, making a sign of the cross, he nodded, went back to his seat and resumed his pipe, apparently satisfied that it was all right. I could not help smiling at his behavior, and did not

know what to think of it, but have since concluded that it was his way either of getting acquainted or of expressing sympathy.²¹⁵

Swett had obviously been accepted by his original companions; he signed freely to them, enjoying their company. He managed to retain a sense of surprise that he attracted attention: "a deaf mute was evidently a new thing." This Irishman found it quite interesting as he stared all evening long. The companionship was lost to him, however; instead he felt sorry for Swett and expressed his sympathy. Swett did not feel sorry for himself, but accepted the sentiment in stride. His sense of humor did not desert him. After all, perhaps it was simply his way "of getting acquainted." Humor in the face of misconception allowed Swett, and surely other Deaf people, to survive in the hearing world.

Though Swett kept smiling, the Irishman demonstrably believed deafness was a condition to be pitied. Swett did not desire pity, but the Irishman, like many hearing people, assumed that deafness required a show of sympathy. Swett's deafness displayed itself by his free use of sign and gestures, as well as the appearance of his slate. Signs and gestures were indicators of deafness and attracted the requisite hearing sympathy. Hearing educators tried to use this fact to their own ends. They held annual exhibitions, open to the public, staging question-and-answer sessions with a few pupils to display the success of the signing method of education. The exhibits demonstrated

²¹⁵William B. Swett, "How I Happened to go to the Mountains," *Deaf Mutes' Friend* 1.1 (1869): 5.

that in spite of their deafness, children could be successfully educated through sign language. At the end of such exhibitions, one student usually offered a signed rendition of the Lord's Prayer which moved the hearing audience greatly.²¹⁶ Signs were used by the hearing educators to evoke sympathy from a hearing audience, as well as support for deaf education.

Hearing educators may not have seen anything wrong with using Sign for this purpose, but some Deaf people raised objections. John Carlin, for instance, objected strenuously. He wrote, "I question the propriety of making little mute girls, being non-professors in religion, to repeat the Lord's Prayer in beautiful, graceful and measured gestures before the gaping spectators. The Lord's Prayer is a solemn incense of the soul to our Heavenly Father, and not a show to court human admiration and applause."²¹⁷ Carlin viewed such exhibitions as cheap ways to curry favor in the hearing community. He believed that these displays made a mockery of prayer, turning it into a mere showpiece for sign language. Neither prayer nor Sign deserved to be treated as mere tools "to court human admiration and applause."

To Deaf people, Sign represented much more than a mark of deafness and education meant more than learning how to Sign the Lord's Prayer gracefully. Signs and education represented a way out of isolation and into community. A sixteen-year-

²¹⁶Anon., "Miscellaneous," *Deaf Mutes' Friend* 1.5 (1869): 152.

²¹⁷John Carlin, "Advantages and Disadvantages of Signs," *Annals* 4 (1852): 55.

old boy, attending American School for the Deaf, recalled the pain of his childhood, before he learned Sign and received an education.

One evening, I took a newspaper and tried to read it in imitation of my father, but I could not understand a word. So I asked my father to make signs for the word "The," but he did not know how. Some evenings, my parents, brothers, and sisters sat in a circle and spent much time enjoying themselves in agreeable conversations, while I was sitting out of the circle with my eyes fixed upon them, thinking of their intelligence and my ignorance. I sometimes felt so envious of their lives of light as nearly to burst into tears.²¹⁸

Without education, this boy could not participate in the life of the family. Surrounded by people, he was totally alone, left on the outside to envy the closeness of the other family members. His childhood had to have been a trying and frustrating experience. Once sent to the school, he encountered language, Sign, and began a formal education. These things had rescued him from his ignorance and let him partake in the "lives of light" his family enjoyed. Sign obviously meant a great deal; to reduce it to a play for sympathy seemed only to cheapen its importance.

Using it in such a way only reinforced the notion that Deaf people deserve sympathy and attention. Sign became a spectacle to gape at in public. Hearing people supported the exhibitions, and in turn the schools, but retained a host of misconceptions about deafness. Signing deaf children were adorable, but someday they would be Deaf

²¹⁸A Student, "About Myself," *The Thirty-Seventh Annual Report of the Directors of the American Asylum at Hartford, for the Education and Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb Presented to the Asylum, May 14, 1853* (Hartford: Case, Tiffany and Company, 1853) 39.

adults searching for employment. Then they would no longer seem so cute. Hearing misconceptions would hurt them in their attempts to secure employment.

The schools were aware of the prejudice involved. To combat it, many of them developed a High Class, a select group of students performing college preparatory work. They were the brightest Deaf students the school had to offer. Such students would perform strenuous academic work, proving their drive and intelligence to potential, but skeptical, employers. Yet, upon graduation, very few of these students were able to find work for which they were qualified. Many were forced to take positions well beneath their levels of ability, such as working in the mill instead of in the office. The cause for such situations was certainly not their lack of intelligence.

The problem lay in hearing perceptions of deafness. John Carlin thundered:

What is the true obstruction in their way? Prejudice? I am sorry to say that it is. The spirit is common among even the most intelligent--the most benevolent men of business, who so blindly believe that the want of hearing and speech must necessarily incapacitate a deaf-mute applicant from fulfilling his functions at the desk--an opinion as illogical as it is cruel.²¹⁹

Hearing employers were afraid to take on deaf employees, according to Carlin. They feared being unable to communicate with them or doubted their ability to complete the required work. This prejudice was blind; that is, it resulted from utter ignorance. Once educated about deafness, employers would be correspondingly more willing to hire

²¹⁹John Carlin, "Oration: Empire State Association of the Deaf-Mutes," *Deaf Mutes' Friend* 1.9 (1869): 265.

Deaf people. Until such time, Carlin wrote, "...it is hoped that all mute aspirants for the desk and high stool will patiently bide their time and wait for better luck, knowing that when it comes to them, they will be in clover."²²⁰

Carlin urged patience, believing that hearing people would slowly learn that Deaf people were capable workers. Unfortunately change of such a sort is slow to happen. The problem lay in the fact that most hearing adults had no experience with Deaf adults. Their impressions about them tended to come from very negative sources. "It has always been a subject of regret that the public impression of the capabilities of the deaf is very often formed from the worthless few who intrude their affliction for the purpose of obtaining sympathy and charity," explained E.A. Hodgson in 1883. "The industrious deaf-mutes outnumber the idle and vicious a thousand to one, but it is only their immediate friends and employers who know their worth and work."²²¹ How many hearing adults today can report their only encounter with a deaf adult was that of a peddler in an airport trying to sell them cards printed with pictures of the manual alphabet? The situation was similar in the nineteenth century. Limited experience bred prejudice and misconception. Deaf people grew to expect such employment prejudice, and often settled into the path expected of them, blue collar work. Even the schools

²²⁰John Carlin, "Oration," *Deaf Mutes' Friend* 1.9 (1869): 266.

²²¹Hodgson 11.

admitted that the best position graduates of the High Class could realistically hope for was printer.²²²

Given the sad state of affairs, Deaf people expected to encounter hearing prejudice. William Swett provides another tale. He settled in New Hampshire and soon gained a reputation as an excellent guide to the mountain trails. He worked out of a lodging house, performing guide work as well as odd jobs. A visitor from New Jersey arrived, inquiring for a guide to lead him up a particular mountain. The house recommended Swett earnestly. But, Swett reports, "On learning that I was deaf and dumb, he flatly refused to take me, adding some very uncomplimentary remarks, which were reported to me..."²²³ Swett had proved himself only to his immediate supervisors; this guest, due only to Swett's deafness, doubted his abilities at once.

The man decided he would be better going up the mountain alone. As the day wore on, he failed to return; it readily became apparent that the man was lost. Now, Swett got his chance. "I was requested to go in search of him, and at once consented, glad of the chance to show him that his estimation of the deaf and dumb was wrong, and I started off alone..."²²⁴ Soon, Swett found the man, who was positively

²²²*New York Annual Report* 30.

²²³William Swett, "A Deaf and Dumb Guide Better Than None," *Deaf Mutes' Friend* 1.10 (1869): 291.

²²⁴William Swett, "A Deaf and Dumb Guide," *Deaf Mutes' Friend* 1.10 (1869): 291-2.

overjoyed to see Swett in that instance. The incident quickly changed the man's ideas about the capabilities of the Deaf guide. "For the rest of his stay," Swett reported, "he employed me as his guide, paying me liberally, besides stating, at the close of my engagement, that, although he had travelled much, both in the Old World and the New, he had never had a better guide."²²⁵ Swett's encounter with hearing prejudice worked out positively because he received a second chance to prove himself. Unfortunately, most Deaf people never received that chance with a potential employer. Prejudice slammed the door firmly in their faces.

Deaf people grew used to such prejudice from employers. They expected to have to prove themselves time and again to hearing doubters. Some Deaf people may never have gotten jobs that challenged their actual abilities, but inevitably they were hired at least to work at menial labor or in a sweat shop. They may have been vastly overqualified but at least they were able to support themselves. Prejudice was, to some limited extent, overcome. Did prejudice affect the treatment Deaf people received in other areas? Was it limited to issues of employment? Or did Deaf people sense disadvantages in other arenas?

Assuredly, prejudice was not limited to the job market. Deaf people could see that they received unfair treatment in the legal system as well. Stories abounded about

²²⁵William Swett, "A Deaf and Dumb Guide," *Deaf Mutes' Friend* 1.10 (1869): 292.

the brusque treatment Deaf people got in a courtroom. A typical example was the case of Levi Jack, of Dixmont, Maine. The incident was reported in the *Deaf Mutes' Friend* in 1869.

Nearly a year ago, the Poor House in Dixmont, Me., was destroyed by fire and one old woman perished in the flames.

Levi Jack, a deaf-mute and one time a pupil at Hartford (American School), then an inmate of the Poor House, was suspected of setting the fire.

He was put on trial and is said to have pleaded "guilty" although, as there was no interpreter, we fail to see how justice was done. He was sentenced to be hung, but on the matter being represented to Gov. Chamberlain of Me., a board of physicians were sent to examine Jack, and pronounced him of unsound mind and not responsible for his misdeeds. His sentence has therefore been changed to confinement in the Insane Asylum for life.²²⁶

This deaf man had been arrested, charged with a crime, and tried, all without benefit of an interpreter! It is likely too that the physicians examined him without an interpreter. It is entirely possible that Jack had only a limited idea about what was happening to him and why.

The *Deaf Mutes' Friend's* editor was outraged by the entire affair. The following month, he issued a statement on the correct way for the legal system to handle deaf lawbreakers.

We hold that no deaf-mute can be fairly tried for any crime in any court unless ha has the benefit of an intelligent interpreter to translate to him and from him everything which passes between the court and the prisoner. Such interpreters, persons who are perfectly acquainted with both the

²²⁶Anon., "Miscellaneous," *Deaf Mutes' Friend* 1.1 (1869): 20.

mute language and the English, and can translate both ways with equal facility, can always be found and their services secured by application at any institution for the deaf and dumb, and one should always be sent for, no matter how small the offence, provided it requires a trial, otherwise the mute stands rather a poor chance of having justice done him.²²⁷

The editor outlined a very cogent argument for the necessity of establishing a body of interpreters. Such people needed to know both languages fluently and feel comfortable moving quickly from one to the other. Everything that passed between the court and the accused needed to be interpreted; selected statements or summaries would not suffice. Levi Jack had nearly suffered mortal consequences for his lack of knowledge. Such a mistake should never have occurred, by this editor's evaluation. The court should automatically seek out an interpreter for a deaf defendant, to ensure that justice would be served.

Stories, like the one about Levi Jack, circulated in the Deaf community. Trials without interpreters frightened deaf people, causing them to doubt the fairness of the legal system in its treatment of them. A humorous story reveals the extent to which hearing misconceptions clouded justice.

A Justice in Chicago lately sent a deaf and dumb witness to jail because he could not speak. He said that the Constitution guaranteed to every man the right of speech, and this witness must speak or go to jail. The Justice certainly lacked brains as much as the witness lacked hearing and speech; and the Justice was, to our mind, the more unfortunate of the two.²²⁸

²²⁷William Swett, *Deaf Mutes' Friend* 1.2 (1869): 53.

²²⁸Anon., "Miscellaneous," *Deaf Mutes' Friend* 1.9 (1869): 281.

Declaring that deaf people must speak or go to jail obviously represents an extreme and literalist application of Constitutional rights. The editor recognized the ridiculousness of the whole declaration. But the story, despite its absurdity, reveals the fear that deaf people had of the legal system. It could not be relied upon to provide an interpreter; it might even jail you for the fact of being deaf, as if deafness itself were a crime. Hearing prejudice and legal procedure made for a dangerous combination.

Deaf people expected certain reactions from hearing people. They expected to encounter prejudice in both the workplace and the legal system. At the very least, such encounters did not surprise. Still, they hoped for better. They sought opportunities to prove themselves. They demanded skilled interpreters in the courtroom. Above all, they kept their sense of humor. Living in a hearing world was obviously not always easy, but it was possible. Together, Deaf people faced the variety of hearing attitudes and reactions bravely and tried to create their own solutions for surviving in a hearing world.

9: DEAF SOLUTIONS

It does not matter what may be thought of anything I now say, or of my saying it in this manner, by those who do not belong to our fraternity. I write merely for those who are deeply concerned in the subject of my letter. The time may come when I shall tell the public some of our secrets, for other purposes than those which are now before me. At present, I address only you; and as there is no need for us to tell our secrets to one another, there may be little here to interest any but ourselves.

Harriet Martineau, 1834

Harriet Martineau visited the United States in 1835. When in Charleston, South Carolina, she published a "Letter to the Deaf" in the *Southern Rose Bud*.²²⁹ The

²²⁹The letter was dated March 16, 1834. It first appeared abroad in *Edinburgh Magazine*.

opening quotation is taken from her letter. Martineau herself had become extremely hard of hearing late in her life. She used an ear trumpet, a precursor of the modern hearing aid, to communicate with hearing people and recommended its use to other deafened people, believing it necessary not to allow deafness to become overly isolating. Still, Martineau felt a special kinship with other deaf people, referring affectionately to them as part of a larger "fraternity." Deafness created ties between people that were difficult for outsiders to understand. Her letter, therefore, was addressed to a deaf audience, since only they would truly understand it; they would know the unspoken secrets.

What kind of secrets could Martineau have meant? What secrets exist that only deaf people can share? As Martineau does not say, one can only speculate. Perhaps, it was the secret understanding of what it was really like to be deaf, a feeling that hearing people could never share. Perhaps it was a knowledge that deaf people share about how to survive in a world designed for hearing people. Such secrets shared would comprise a sort of "how-to" manual, tips for life in a hearing world. Since most of the world's conveniences, like alarms and doorbells, were designed around the assumption that people could hear, deaf people had to search to find their own solutions, Deaf solutions, to problems. Perhaps these secrets were Deaf solutions to life in a hearing world.

One possible solution was introduced at the first annual convention for instructors of the deaf in 1850. There, educators passed resolutions that, if implemented, would help deaf people to interact more competently in the hearing world. The convention recommended that the manual alphabet be taught in public schools around the country, as it would aid children as a mnemonic device for spelling as well as "produce great advantages to educated deaf-mutes, in facilitating their necessary communications with strangers and greatly increasing their social enjoyments."²³⁰ Educators still hoped that, with more effort on the part of hearing people, deaf people could be better integrated into the hearing world. Likewise, the convention further recommended that education for deaf children should be supported by the general public.²³¹ The better educated deaf people were, educators proposed, the better they would be able to fit into the hearing world.

These proposals, while definitely worthy and supported by Deaf instructors as well, depended in great part upon the benevolence and accommodation of the hearing public. They had to learn the manual alphabet freely and fluently; they had to support the schools willingly. The final goal was better integration, which was noble, but impossible without hearing concessions. What if hearing people were unwilling to

²³⁰"Proceedings of the 1st Convention of American Instructors for the Deaf and Dumb," *Annals* 3 (1850): 27.

²³¹"1st Convention," *Annals* 3 (1850): 37.

make those concessions? How could deaf people expect to fit in? What kind of lives could they then lead?

Deaf people addressed the issue themselves. Since neither the manual alphabet nor Sign were common knowledge to hearing people, it was exceptionally difficult for Deaf people to interact in a group of hearing people. The solution for Deaf people seemed to be to stick together. Communication was easy among them. They could enjoy each other's company, signing comfortably. Deaf people felt their unity growing, becoming something akin to Martineau's fraternity.

This much was finally outlined by an unknown contributor to the *Deaf Mutes' Friend* in 1869. This correspondent proposed a "national convention of deaf mutes" for many reasons. The article explained:

The time has come when we should prepare to secure the general advancement of our own interests as a class. Such can only be the outgrowth of thorough organization. Perhaps an union can be formed at the meeting on the principle of absolute nationality. Such an one, ably and judiciously conducted on a sound social basis and amply supported by strong combination and unity of action, would be one of the most potent instruments for the good of our whole community. Its scope would be wider and its operation more extended than ever known before. It would elevate our national character, encourage an universal interchange of sentiment and educate the taste, so that the better and more pleasing traits of our national character may be developed. Why should we not let mind keep pace with mind in the onward march toward a higher development, both socially and intellectually? Let all deaf-mutes

strive to attain that standard of equality which can be achieved by competent and well organized effort.²³²

The author suggests an organization similar to the National Association of the Deaf, to work toward the goals of the community more effectively. In fact, NAD would be founded by 1880, organizing the roles of smaller, regional groups operating throughout the country. The need for such an organization was recognized much earlier.

The author brings up several interesting points in advocating this organization. The deaf community is referred to as a "class," implying an organized body of people who hold certain views and beliefs in common. Furthermore, this group possessed its own "national character." A nationalistic feeling began to emerge. Even if deaf people were scattered around the country and widely separated, they believed they formed one coherent group. Preserving this national spirit seemed important to the author. Inculcating a belief in a national Deaf character would enable Deaf people to stabilize the culture to a large extent. It would then be possible for Deaf people to travel anywhere in the country and feel welcome by the Deaf residents there. With the same basic Sign in use in all areas of the country, Deaf people could formulate a greater sense of shared identity. This concern for a national character may have been important since, Deaf people were shut out, in many instances, from hearing society,

²³²H.C.R., "The Proposed National Convention of Deaf Mutes," *Deaf Mutes' Friend* 1.6 (1869): 189.

they could not afford to shut out one another. A defined national character would offer them a sense of security and belonging.²³³

A national organization, like the one the author described, would articulate the concerns of the Deaf community at large, giving them a unified voice. Such concerns revolved around basic issues, like education, language, and employment. National organization would help Deaf people from all parts of the country to stay in contact and meet regularly. Meeting regularly to exchange ideas would help offer new solutions to problems other areas had faced successfully. A national character would be elevated indeed. A national outlook on problems and ways of solving them would

²³³To a certain extent European deaf communities lacked that national character. They were separated to a large degree. In Britain, for instance, the sign language completely changes every 50-100 miles. A feeling of British Deafness is hard to maintain when villagers 50 miles apart cannot even find a common language. Regional dialects exist in ASL but the structure of the language does not change. Individual signs may differ, forming regional accents. In many European countries, including Germany and France as well as Britain, Deaf citizens complain that they cannot understand the signs of their fellows. For instance, "a German actor, whose company performs in mime, not in any variety of German Sign Language, complained that one of the reasons they could not perform a stage show in their own sign language was that they would not be understood when they travelled to other German cities." [Robbin Battison and I. King Jordan, "Cross-Cultural Communication With Foreign Signers: Fact & Fancy," *Sign and Culture* (Silver Spring: Linstok Press, 1980) 139.] This splintering of the language probably occurred because the oralist movement was harsher in Europe than it was in America. In Europe, the oralists closed down schools that used Sign or converted them to a strict oral method. The sign languages were used only privately by local users. After a time, the regional dialects must have taken on more and more specific forms, no longer resembling one another. In America, the manual schools never closed completely, and the different regional users stayed in contact with one another. ASL remains much more standardized as a result.

arise, binding Deaf people together ever more tightly. A national culture would be the final product of such close contact.

Though a national organization did not emerge at this time, the fact that it was seriously suggested is very important. It demonstrates a growing feeling that a national character, a class, a fraternity, did exist among deaf people even at that early date. Deaf people were beginning to view themselves as a unique class that had specific needs. An organization was needed to articulate those concerns clearly.²³⁴ As a class, they possessed a national character, a spirit that set them apart from hearing people. This character could be raised and elevated by "universal interchange of sentiment," a correspondence of ideas, into a pleasing form. A nascent sense of togetherness was quite evident, out of which the spirit and shape of culture could emerge.

A national organization may not have been chartered at this time, but Deaf people found other ways to promote a sense of unity and class. In 1859, people began to respond to the growing call for a truly Deaf newspaper. William Chamberlain described the reasons for such a move.

²³⁴In fact, many other organizations did exist. None were national in scope, as this proposed group would have been. Such groups included the American School Alumni Association (1836), the New England Gallaudet Association of the Deaf (1854), the Empire State Association of the Deaf (1863), and the Gallaudet University Alumni Association (1889).

The "American Annals" seems to be unsatisfactory to many of our members, for, perhaps, good reasons. It seems that the "Annals" are better suited to the use and benefit of the teachers. I doubt not that the publishers think so too. They kindly granted us the use of their pages until we could publish our own paper...There is a loud call for a paper of our own.²³⁵

Hence was born *The Gallaudet Guide and Deaf Mute's Companion*. The *Annals* had started in 1847 at the American Asylum in Hartford, Connecticut. It had quickly become the sounding board for the opinions and suggestions of hearing educators concerning their deaf students. Deaf people contributed articles as well, but the focus was nearly always on education. The *Annals* was a journal, not a newspaper. A newspaper, with more information about the Deaf community itself, was lacking. The *Companion* would fill this need.

Other papers followed in rapid succession. *The Mute and The Blind* also began publishing in 1859. The paper agitated for the education of Black deaf and blind children. The paper was printed by the students; their teacher, a blind man himself, acted as the editor. It was mailed as propaganda to the neighbors, to gain more support for the right of these children to receive an education. Evidently, the cause was not

²³⁵William M. Chamberlain, "Proceedings of the Board of Managers of the 'New England Gallaudet Association of Deaf-Mutes' Convened at Branford, Vermont, September 6,7,8, 1859," *Annals* 11 (1859): 211.

always well received; the masthead shows that the paper published out of three different locations over a course of five years.²³⁶

The Deaf Mutes' Friend, edited by two Deaf men, William B. Swett and William M. Chamberlaine, was published in Henniker, New Hampshire, for one year in 1869. The paper included stories from Swett's colorful life as a guide in the New Hampshire White Mountains. The stories were particularly interesting, not only because they commented on life in a hearing world, but also because they were told to Chamberlaine in Sign and then translated into English. "How well or ill this is done," Chamberlaine wrote, "is not for us to say; we will simply observe that, deaf ourself and educated at an Institution for the deaf and dumb, we can use and understand signs as well as we can the English language."²³⁷ The paper was therefore very Deaf in tone, full of translated Signed stories and tidbits about the Deaf community in New England.

Other papers followed quickly, usually with brief runs. These titles included the *New York Journal of the Deaf* (1872), *Silent World* (1871-76), *Deaf-Mutes' Journal* (1870-74, 1875-1951), and the *Deaf-Mutes' Friend*, of Wisconsin, (1897-1900). The life span of each paper may have been brief, but at least one was always available in

²³⁶"The Editor is a blind man; the compositors are deaf and dumb; the press work is performed by the blind; the papers are folded by the blind and wrapped by the mutes." The editor and teacher was Platt Henry Skinner. He and his wife taught together. The school opened originally in Niagara City, staying there from 1859-1861. In 1860, it began to move to Niagara Falls and Suspension Bridge, New York. Finally, in 1864, it ended up in Trenton, New Jersey.

²³⁷William M. Chamberlain, "Introductory," *Deaf Mutes' Friend* 1.1-(1869): 2.

the second half of the century. When a national journal was lacking, school newspapers were readily available to all alumni and friends. The school newspapers have become known as the "Little Paper Family" or the "Little Papers".²³⁸ These were published at various intervals, some monthly, some weekly. At least one school, the Rochester School for the Deaf in Rochester, New York, published a daily newsletter. Such newspapers included *The Deaf Mute Casket* (1849, North Carolina), *Deaf Mute Advance* (1870, Illinois), *Deaf Mute Mirror* (1874, Michigan), and *The Deaf Mute Pelican* (1870, Louisiana).

Together, these newspapers served a very important role in the Deaf community. Undeniably, they helped aid in the formation of the national character that generated the culture. The papers helped to overcome the scattered quality of the Deaf community. People were able to stay informed about events at their old schools, about one another, and about interesting services. Often, papers listed stores where Deaf people worked so other Deaf people could frequent them. Others listed times and places of interpreted religious services. Most papers, listed small articles of advice, such as "How to be Happy" or "Steadiness of Purpose." Other articles listed specific advice on public behavior, urging deaf people to avoid such vices as drinking and smoking. The papers thus slyly told Deaf people how to behave in public as to not

²³⁸Please consult Appendix B for a sampling of mastheads and other illustrations form the Little Papers.

displease the surrounding hearing people. Avoiding vices would make them more employable, and in a world where deaf employees were not readily hired, deaf people needed every advantage they could get. The Little Papers tried to prepare deaf people for the hearing world in which they would be expected to function.

Importantly, every paper ran spots on the lives of Deaf people around the country. A Personals column allowed readers to submit short stories of their own, wedding plans, job information, changes of address, and the like. The *Silent World* urged its readers to take advantage of this opportunity to keep in touch with old acquaintances.

We would remind our readers that we are wholly dependent upon their good nature and courtesy for the matter contained in the Personal Department. It does not take long to write and send a short item for this department, yet the shortest item about an old schoolmate or friend may be of more value than all the rest of the paper to any one of our readers. We ask, therefore, that each and everyone of our readers will consider himself and herself one of the editors of the Personal Column, and send anything, no matter how little, which may be of interest.²³⁹

Directly, the papers offered readers a way to stay in touch with one another. Deaf people read the papers to gain information about their community. The papers bound them all together. The various papers were, in a sense, vanguards of the emerging culture. They raised the lives and interests of Deaf people into a public forum, allowing them to display consciously their choice to belong to a larger Deaf

²³⁹"Personal Department," *Silent World* 6.8 (1876): 4.

community. Fostering a sense of belonging, the Little Papers offered a workable Deaf solution to the problem of cultural submersion in the hearing world.

Other Deaf people sought different solutions. Some searched for ways to utilize their Signing flair more publicly and lucratively. They sought, in some cases, to form touring pantomimic troupes. An occasional group performed on a very limited basis. On at least one occasion a "group of graduates and members of a High Class" organized and called themselves "Epsilon Sigma Society." They performed at a benefit for the Library of the Fanwood Literary Association, raising over one hundred dollars. Roughly five hundred tickets had been sold for the event, so it was evidently of some considerable interest.²⁴⁰ Epsilon Sigma Society apparently had organized only for this brief purpose; a career on the stage was not their intent.

But the Deaf Mutes' Friend reported that other deaf people submitted that it would be a possible career option. An article cited a report out of New York:

Kouponeti writes: "Since some enthusiastic mutes have started the idea of a National Convention, the New York mutes, determining not to be outdone, have hit upon an entirely new idea which, to some persons, amy appear ludicrous. It well known that mutes have a natural genius for Pantomime, and some are very skilful (sic) in arranging the signs so as to suit hearing persons, giving them a large, if not complete, understanding of what is going on. Well, some of the most skilful (sic) in this art have got it in their heads to assemble, when they leave school, and try their fortune on the stage. The idea has been in existence for some time...Should they still entertain the idea when they graduate, and assemble as proposed, it is not at all impossible that some day we will

²⁴⁰ Anon., "Miscellaneous," *Deaf Mutes' Friend* 1.5 (1869): 157-8.

have "A Great Travelling Pantomimic Troupe," surpassing even the brilliant career of the "Ravels," to brighten up the name of the Deaf and Dumb, and to show that they are of some use in the world and not akin to the lowest animals, as some ancient philosophers used to assert.²⁴¹

The report from New York indicates the great interest that at least some Deaf students had in organizing an acting troupe. The signing style would have been modified to accommodate non-signing hearing observers. Encouraged by the previous success of the Ravels, the students basically outlined the formation of an early version of the National Theatre of the Deaf, which was founded in 1966.

The students' ideas became known at the same time that a proposal for a national convention was announced. The timing is extraordinary. In both cases, the suggested developments would have led to a further exploration of Deaf culture. The convention would have promoted national unity, spirit, and homogeneity. This troupe, similarly, would have enabled the students to use their specifically Deaf skills, Sign and pantomime, in a public way. By such performances, they would bring Deaf culture closer to a hearing audience in a very non-threatening, casual way. The reporter hoped that such displays would disprove old hearing notions about deafness and reveal the spirit and "usefulness" of Deaf people. In revealing more of the beauty of the culture, the students hoped to gain more hearing people's respect.

²⁴¹"Miscellaneous," *Deaf Mutes' Friend* 1.10 (1869): 310.

To share a sense of culture, the group must have a sense that such culture exists. In both instances, it is apparent that precisely that feeling was beginning to emerge. The proponent of the national convention described Deaf people as constituting a "class" possessing "national character." The students wishing to form the pantomimic troupe recognized that their deafness lent them a positive skill in pantomime, a unique gift that they could share with the hearing world. Furthermore, they understood that modifications of style in execution would be required to bring their production to a hearing audience unfamiliar with their medium of expression and language. Differences between Deaf and hearing groups were recognized. Now, however, Deaf people also realized that they possessed talents and gifts which were unique to them alone. Such gifts could be shared on an equal level with hearing people, instead of as inferior offerings. Slowly, a sense of cultural distinctiveness began to take shape.

These Deaf solutions to living in a hearing world--the national convention, the papers, and the troupe--all shared the influence of the cultural awakening. Deaf people wanted to survive without denying their own selves. They could not become more hearing because they would never truly fit into a hearing group. The only way to survive and preserve an honest sense of self was to become more Deaf. Claiming Deafness as a positive quality, instead of a pathological condition, Deaf people organized themselves into a more unified group, with its own interests and concerns. Since, to them, Deafness was not a negative condition, Deaf people could likewise

assert their right to equality with hearing people. Deaf students showed their belief in the premise by wanting to organize the theater group around the most prominent symbol of their Deafness, Sign. Sign demonstrated the group's separateness from hearing people. The students' willingness to alter it, to make it more accessible to hearing people, demonstrated their eagerness to make their talent more accessible to all members of an audience. The culture seemed initially willing to share itself with hearing outsiders, as equals.

Hearing people did not seem as accommodating. They did not want deaf people to become more Deaf; they wanted them to be more hearing. Some difference, such as Sign, was tolerated, but when it became too "Deaf," hearing educators tried to have the students Sign in a more acceptable, "hearing" style. Assimilation was desired, not cultural distinctiveness. These Deaf solutions were therefore not entirely well received. The school papers, for instance, were tolerated since they taught the students the business of printing. The other papers were not so kindly viewed; according to some, they promoted a feeling of clannishness among deaf adults. These Deaf solutions were too Deaf for a hearing audience.

Deaf people, discovering their group identity, did not wish to retreat. They did not want to give up their new found Deafness in favor of becoming more hearing. Instead, two larger solutions show the extent to which Deaf people felt their own Deafness. The first major proposed solution was the Deaf State movement of 1856-58.

The movement caused much discussion but, for practical reasons, failed. The second solution stemmed from it, namely Gallaudet University, founded in 1864. Gallaudet represented, in many ways, a miniature deaf state. It created, and remains, an oasis of Deafness in a hearing world. As solutions, they only heightened the feeling of Deafness in the nineteenth-century, showing more signs of the new culture.

10: THE SEPARATIST SOLUTION: A DEAF STATE?

The old cry about the incapacity of men's minds from physical disabilities, I think it were time, now in this intelligent age, to explode!

John J. Flourney, 1856

It is a political independence, a STATE SOVEREIGNTY, of which I aim, for the benefit of an unfortunate down-trodden class, for they are down-trodden enough, when the human soul is denied its right because of our bodily imperfection.

John J. Flourney, 1858

John J. Flourney, by 1856, was entirely frustrated with the treatment deaf people received in hearing society. Flourney was an eccentric, educated at the American

School, and later briefly confined, by his own choice, to a mental institution in South Carolina. Still, he was a strong advocate for deaf rights, believing that deaf people were hindered in many of their ambitions by the prejudices of hearing people. Flournoy believed that deaf people would never get a fair chance to succeed in a hearing world. Their own solution would be to form a state of their own in the mid-west. Flournoy sent a letter outlining this proposal to several heads of deaf schools in 1855. The issue became public in 1856 when one hearing instructor, William W. Turner, a former teacher at American School, responded to Flournoy's letter in the *American Annals*.

Flournoy's letter was reprinted as well. He urged the deaf community to move to the West and claim a state for themselves. The deaf, he believed, were driven to this seemingly extreme move by the ill regard of hearing people. Perhaps deaf people could not perform every job on an equal basis with hearing people, Flournoy conceded. "But we do attest that we are capable," he cried, "of many of which the prejudice, and sometimes even malignance of our hearing brethren deprive us!"²⁴² The trouble with deafness was not, Flournoy asserted forcefully, that it barred people from specific job opportunities. Rather, the problem was that hearing people believed that deafness barred people from certain jobs and they treated deaf people according to this viewpoint.

²⁴²John J. Flournoy, "Mr. Flournoy to Mr. Turner," *Annals* 8 (1856): 122.

Since deaf people would never be fairly treated by the hearing majority, Flourney urged all deaf people to move out West and claim a state for themselves. Hearing people would never allow people a fair opportunity due to "disparagements of the world about a sense or two!"²⁴³ Flourney thereby announced:

Advocating, therefore, a formation out West, of a Deaf State, I wish to persevere in urging a measure by which alone our class of people can attain to the dignity and honor of Human Nature. Else our course is, (under the idea that a deaf and dumb man is of little consequence) within the circle of diffident humanity.²⁴⁴

A Deaf State would enable Deaf people to regain the sense of dignity that is lost in a hearing world. It is too full of prejudice and pity to afford Deaf people a true sense of personal dignity. In a Deaf State, deafness would not be viewed as a negative, pitiable characteristic; it would be accepted as usual and normal. Deaf people would therefore not be discriminated against and would enjoy opportunity for real career challenges. Of course, in order to offer this feeling of dignity and empowerment, all the residents of the state would have to be deaf. Hearing people would be too likely to believe that, by virtue of their hearing alone, they were better qualified to work in the state government or court system. The new deaf state would therefore prohibit

²⁴³Flourney, "Mr. Flourney to Mr. Turner," *Annals* 8 (1856): 122.

²⁴⁴Flourney, "Mr. Flourney to Mr. Turner," *Annals* 8 (1856): 122.

hearing people from settling there, including the hearing children of deaf parents.²⁴⁵

William Turner responded to this plan publicly, in the *Annals*. Turner was not as enthusiastic about the plan as Flournoy would have liked. He wrote, "Your plan is beautiful in theory....," but he believed that there were too many practical problems.²⁴⁶ Such difficulties included the problem of convincing people to move away from their homes, families, and friends. Parents too would probably be unwilling to separate from their children, even if they were hearing.²⁴⁷ He did not deny that deaf people would be capable of running a state on their own; in fact, he conceded that "they would be more favorably situated in such a community for the enjoyment of social intercourse, civil and religious privileges and the means of self-improvement generally..."²⁴⁸ But, as deaf people would be unlikely to be willing to move to a new state, these advantages, though real, could not be realized.

Deaf people in hearing society were not as maligned as Flournoy suggested, Turner asserted. He wrote, "Your idea that the deaf and dumb are regarded by hearing persons as inferior and unworthy of any place of profit, influence, or authority when

²⁴⁵Flournoy, "Mr. Flournoy to Mr. Turner," *Annals* 8 (1856): 123-4.

²⁴⁶William W. Turner, "William W. Turner to J.J. Flournoy," *Annals* 8 (1856): 118.

²⁴⁷Turner, "Turner to Flournoy," *Annals* 8 (1856): 119.

²⁴⁸Turner, "Turner to Flournoy," *Annals* 8 (1856): 118.

well educated, is, I think, erroneous. There is, I am sure, nothing but feelings of kindness entertained and expressed by the latter towards the former, and so far as there is any disparity, it is occasioned necessarily by the want of hearing and speech in the one case, and the possession of them in the other."²⁴⁹ Such cases that would exclude the deaf person from consideration in a hearing world would include politics. Even an intelligent, capable deaf person would be excluded simply because of their deafness. Yet, Turner argued, this exclusion was simply the deaf person's "misfortune, and not the result of prejudice or injustice on the part of others."²⁵⁰ Politics, and other businesses, were conducted in speech; deaf people, being unable to participate freely in hearing conversations, are sadly, but necessarily, excluded from such activities. They should seek offices and jobs to which they are more physically suited. Turner wanted to believe that the hearing community, while excluding deaf persons, was not prejudiced. Deaf people were not viewed as "inferior and unworthy" at all; hearing people them with "nothing but feelings of kindness," sympathizing extensively for their "misfortune." Deaf people inadvertently excluded themselves, Turner implied. Hearing people simply tried to include them as best, and hence as generously, as they could.

Turner obviously did not appreciate Flournoy's position. When the disagreement became public in 1856, it attracted the attention of other deaf and hearing people. The

²⁴⁹Turner, "Turner to Flournoy," *Annals* 8 (1856): 119.

²⁵⁰Turner, "Turner to Flournoy," *Annals* 8 (1856): 120.

Annals was deluged with mail on the topic of a deaf state. Edmund Booth, a deaf man and one time teacher at the American School, wrote to the *Annals* denouncing Flourney's plan in January 1858. He believed that deaf people were actually better situated in their present state in society. He explained, "I think the wiser course is, to let the mutes remain as they are--scattered and in one sense lost--among their hearing associates. In such situations they are compelled to read and write, and thus keep their minds under the educational process through life."²⁵¹ Booth believed that deaf people would be better educated if they had to live among hearing people constantly. Reading and writing would be the usual means of communication with hearing people. As such, isolation among hearing people would give deaf people an opportunity to improve their skills and better their minds.

Flourney brutally attacked Booth's position as overly optimistic and unrealistic. Deaf people, scattered among hearing people, are in fact less educated than they could be, Flourney countered. Deaf people often have difficulty reading English so they do not keep up in the areas of literature as hearing people do. Furthermore, hearing people, even illiterates, can gain information through their sense of hearing. Deaf people do not have this option, so if their reading skills are poor they are generally left ignorant.²⁵² A Deaf State would solve this problem. "Whereas if convened in a land

²⁵¹Edmund Booth, "Mr. Booth to Mr. Flourney," *Annals* 10 (1858): 41.

²⁵²Flourney, "Mr. Flourney to Mr. Turner," *Annals* 10 (1858): 43.

peculiarly their own," Flournoy theorized, "the concentration of reading intellects would set a beneficial example; and preaching and lectures in the sign language, and libraries of suitable books, may improve their minds and hearts, beyond what is attainable in their scattered condition."²⁵³ In fact, being scattered harmed deaf people. If they did not understand what they were reading, there was no one to explain it adequately to them. In a group, deaf people who struggled with English would have access to people fluent in both Sign and English. Such deaf people would be able to explain issues clearly to deaf people, thereby truly improving their knowledge. Living in a hearing world only inculcated isolation and ignorance.

Flournoy went on to argue that even should the attempt fail, as detractors assumed it would, a desperate need would still have been served.

We shall have proved to the other nations and our own, that deaf and dumb people are capable of many things; and to our successors in misfortune, offices and employment may be opened. They may be treated as men and women of some use to society and to the country, and respected accordingly. And this will to us be a no inconsiderable triumph; and the victory sure,....And this, we, as accountable beings who may not bury our talent in a napkin, owe to the long and harmless line of the "pantomimic generations" that are to come after us!²⁵⁴

A failure would still be a victory because it would show hearing and deaf people alike the real capabilities of deaf people. It would prove that the possibilities were not as limited as hearing people believed. Deaf people would learn not to underestimate

²⁵³Flournoy, "Flournoy to Turner," *Annals* 10 (1858): 43-4.

²⁵⁴Flournoy, "Flournoy to Turner," *Annals* 10 (1858): 45.

themselves. Most importantly, future generations of deaf people would see that deaf people were capable of a wide variety of careers; they did not have to be confined to printing or farming. Future generations would view the Deaf State as a mark of great possibilities. Flournoy's push for a Deaf State hinged on the belief that Deaf people constituted a unique class of people. He trusted that future generations would be able to build on the work of the past. Flournoy was acutely aware of the power of history, and believed that Deaf people would grow to share their own unique history, different from that of hearing people, composed of different heroes and critical events. He wanted the Deaf State to become a positive event in Deaf history, to inspire future generations with hope.

Flournoy's fervent defense of his idea only inspired more comment from the deaf community. The debate continued, proponents for both sides arguing hotly in the April edition of the *Annals* in 1858. Booth reiterated his original position, still arguing that deafness imparts natural physical limitations on people's intellectual ambitions. A life in politics remained out of the question. In fact, Booth claimed, deaf people "do not enjoy life in its fullness as do their hearing associates."²⁵⁵ Deaf people could not, therefore, be expected to get as much out of life as hearing people. They would be happier by accepting their place and learning from hearing people's good examples.

²⁵⁵E. Booth, "Mr. Flournoy's Project," *Annals* 10 (1858): 77.

John Carlin agreed with Booth. He did not believe that a Deaf State was feasible. In particular, he did not believe that deaf people were capable of completing such an enterprise. "It must be borne in mind," he commented, "that nine tenths of the whole deaf mute community in this country can not raise up the wind so as to swell the flapping sails of Mr. Flourney's scheme; besides, it is a well known fact that the majority of them show little decision of purpose in any enterprise whatever."²⁵⁶ Carlin, though deaf himself, did not hold deaf people, as a group, in the highest regard. He derided their abilities, their intelligence, and their enthusiasm. Hearing people had the above qualities in abundance; they also had a fluent knowledge of English. Hence, Carlin could see no advantage in living with deaf people in, as he termed it, "Gesturia."²⁵⁷

The criticisms were severe, but Flourney's plan had gained support in some quarters. William Chamberlain became a supporter in 1858. He had reservations, as he did not know that an entire state would be feasible to create. He suggested, instead, that several friends purchase land out West and slowly bring other deaf people aboard to form a township.²⁵⁸ Such a township would certainly face difficulties, but he believed "the benefits to be derived from one, if well regulated, are enough to render

²⁵⁶John Carlin, "Familiar Letter," *Annals* 10 (1858): 89.

²⁵⁷J. Carlin, "Familiar Letter," *Annals* 10 (1858): 86.

²⁵⁸William Chamberlain, "Letter to the Editor," *Annals* 10 (1858): 86.

such a community desirable."²⁵⁹ Contrary to Carlin's opinion, Chamberlain believed that deaf people benefited intellectually from being together in one place. "As far as my experience goes," he explained, "I have always found deaf-mutes to be greater readers, better informed and more intelligent, where there are a number of them in the same place, than when scattered, as many, if not most of them are, among the hearing."²⁶⁰ Together, deaf people could aid each other; the better educated could help the less educated to learn English and encourage the development of reading skills. Hearing people, by Chamberlain's estimation, did not take enough time in this effort so deaf people scattered in society inevitably lagged behind them.

P.F. Confer concurred. He was a young man of twenty-four who had been deaf since age ten. His family had all died leaving him with a good farm and considerable wealth. But for all that, Confer was dreadfully unhappy. Deaf people could only be sad if they lived in isolation. He clung wholeheartedly to Flournoy's idea, saying,

The deaf mutes would all be happy, as they can not now be, because they have nobody that can or will converse with them, and many people look on a deaf mute as if he were a fool, because he can not talk, and because to them deaf-mutes look so foolish, just because they can not understand them. If they were by themselves, they could be happy; but as they are separated, they are in many cases despised by hearing men.²⁶¹

²⁵⁹Chamberlain, "Letter," *Annals* 10 (1858): 85.

²⁶⁰Chamberlain, "Letter," *Annals* 10 (1858): 84.

²⁶¹P.F. Confer, "Letter to the Editor," *Annals* 10 (1858): 87.

Confer described with saddening detail the barriers that hearing people erected between themselves and deaf people. Deafness is isolating enough, but hearing society exaggerates the condition by viewing deaf people as "foolish," as if to blame and mock them for their inability to hear. True happiness could only stem from true acceptance. Only other Deaf people, Confer hinted, would ever accept a deaf person. He therefore enthusiastically endorsed Flournoy's plan and volunteered to pay for the land himself, ready to donate \$5,000.00 to the cause.²⁶²

In the following issue, Flournoy seemed grateful for the added support. He continued to elucidate his position. "It is too obvious for denial, that, while by some we are not estimated of any importance at all to society, and encounter insurmountable prejudice where we would assert an equality," he stated, "by others, we are only regarded patronizingly."²⁶³ Only a few hearing people regarded the deaf population with any kind of "respectful or affectionate consideration," according to Flournoy.²⁶⁴ The rest regarded the deaf person as inferior, treating them only patronizingly, if approaching them at all. Since hearing people held themselves as so superior, there was no room for true advancement by deaf people in hearing society. Hearing people could not even be bothered to communicate with deaf people. Flournoy considered

²⁶²Confer, "Letter," *Annals* 10 (1858): 88.

²⁶³Flournoy, "Reply to the Objections," *Annals* 10 (1858): 141.

²⁶⁴Flournoy, "Reply," *Annals* 10 (1858): 141-2.

Carlin's stance ridiculous; English was not learned from hearing neighbors because they found it too tedious and "irksome" to hold a written conversation. It was a "burden" and a "trouble."²⁶⁵ As few hearing people knew Sign or the manual alphabet, conversations with them were few and sparse. Compounding this physical barrier, the hearing attitude created a second, more formidable obstacle. Flournoy exclaimed, "Attention to us is thus exhibited as based upon inferior considerations. When we would claim equality, it offends."²⁶⁶ Flournoy seemed to imply that conversations with hearing people were few enough and some of those were marred because the deaf person was approached as an inferior. Flournoy wanted equality and would settle for nothing less.

Hearing people's opinion seemed to prove his point. Earlier in the discussion, Turner had argued that deaf people should seek to stay in the position that best suited them. Politics was a realm for which deaf people were not suited. The patronizing tone that Flournoy railed against was evident in Turner's words. It was equally evident in the words of Samuel Porter. Porter was the president of the American School for the Deaf. Like Chamberlain, he thought a better idea would have a couple of friends buy the land and move out West, welcoming other deaf people who wished to join

²⁶⁵Flournoy, "Reply," *Annals* 10 (1858): 141.

²⁶⁶Flournoy, "Reply," *Annals* 10 (1858): 146.

them.²⁶⁷ But like Turner, Porter believed that Flournoy was, on some ways, over-reacting. Deafness did produce certain "inconveniences" that Flournoy could not overlook. The majority of people could not be expected to change their language to accommodate deafness, nor could they be expected "to arrange all their business and all their amusements with a special reference to [the deaf person's] peculiar condition."²⁶⁸ Deaf people should simply learn to accept these limitations "gracefully...with a quiet resignation to the will of Providence."²⁶⁹ Flournoy, by Porter's estimation, was asking too much. Porter instead recommended acceptance of one's condition and its resulting position in society.

Flournoy was not incorrect in his assessment of the situation deaf people experiences living in a hearing world. Hearing people, even ones sympathetic enough to become teachers, did generally treat deaf people with a certain condescension. Deafness inspired sympathy and pity, immediate signs of its inferior status. Since hearing was highly valued, being a hearing person granted a feeling of superiority over people who could not hear. Flournoy correctly realized that most hearing people were going instinctively to feel pity for deaf people. They could not treat a pitied person as

²⁶⁷Samuel Porter, "The Plans for a Community of Deaf-Mutes: Editorial Remarks," *Annals* 10 (1858): 140.

²⁶⁸Porter, "Editorial Remarks," *Annals* 10 (1858): 137.

²⁶⁹Porter, "Editorial Remarks," *Annals* 10 (1858): 137.

a competent equal. As well intentioned as such feelings may have been, they would still result in discrimination.

Flournoy's plan had drawn considerable criticism from both deaf and hearing factions. The hearing detractors did not believe that deaf people required their own facilities; some of them did not believe that deaf people were truly capable of running a state on their own. The deaf critics, meanwhile, did not believe that much would be gained by such a move. The point, to these deaf people, was to learn English to fit better into hearing society; forming a state meant giving up. Integration was a goal worth fighting for, to some deaf people. They admitted that it was nice to live near other deaf people, near friends with whom one shared much in common, including a language. But separating these friends entirely into a purely deaf state was not appealing to them.

Not all deaf people agreed, however. Chamberlain and Confer welcomed Flournoy's plan. Confer, particularly, applauded it. He felt isolated and alone, and wholeheartedly supported a proposition that would promote unity among deaf people. Confer's testimony carries important weight since he did not become deaf until he was ten years old. Although he must have had a certain memory of interacting in a hearing world, he still felt lonely and longed for more deaf companions. Presumably, people deaf from birth may have lent further support to this plan. They would know that isolation more intimately.

Furthermore, the deaf people who rejected the plan were those who already felt comfortable in hearing society and possessed a fluent knowledge of English. For all of Carlin's posturing as an ignorant deaf-mute, he was in fact an educated man. He could fit into a hearing society readily. His talents as poet and painter were appreciated by hearing people. Likewise, Booth's work as a newspaper editor gained him appreciative hearing followers. These well educated, successful gentlemen obviously would not feel a need to move to a deaf state; they did not feel discriminated against. Flournoy may have been a frustrated politician, but he realized that not all deaf people could make a smooth transition into a hearing world. He also understood that the hearing world would not accept all deaf people; competence in English was a must in the hearing world. Flournoy knew that not all deaf people mastered English, though they were fluent in Sign; as such, they could not be at ease in the hearing world. They would also face discrimination that a Carlin or a Booth would never face as harshly.

Flournoy did not want deaf people to tolerate discrimination based on their hearing loss or their linguistic difference. He wanted to prove that deaf people were capable of all things hearing people could do. A Deaf state would provide this opportunity. It would also give deaf people the chance to live and work with people who could understand them and their language. Deaf people had needs for friendship that only other deaf people could really fulfill. It can be postulated that Flournoy's

plan sparked interest in some deaf people who either could or did not write to the *Annals*.²⁷⁰

The experience of isolation that Flournoy describes first hand seems typical of the experience of minority groups in the nineteenth century. Former slaves dreamed of a homeland in Africa and the Cherokees fought in court to keep their tribal lands in Georgia. Minority groups felt their concerns were not always adequately addressed by the dominant group and sought alternative solutions. Religious communities like Oneida, New Harmony, and the Salt Lake City Mormons broke away from populated areas to find a place where they could live freely, according to their beliefs. Similarly, intellectual enterprises like Brook Farm and Fruitlands sprang up in New England as people tried to put their ideals into practice. Separatist movements were a popular solution to problems in the nineteenth-century. Flournoy's Deaf State movement simply capitalized on an already popular methodology.

Separatist movements generally suffered a hard history. Brook Farm and Fruitlands both failed. The Cherokees won in court but lost in real terms. New Harmony did not live up to its name, though the Mormons did finally find peace in

²⁷⁰Margaret Winzer arrived at the same conclusion in her article on alienation in the mid-nineteenth century: "However, the interest aroused illustrates the alienation of deaf people who felt their roles were unassailable within the absolute categories of a pervasive, superstitious world view. Finding these roles intolerable, not content to remain passive and isolated within the structures of an alien society, they desired a separate deaf community to break down the isolation, lighten the monotony and harshness of life, and establish a system of deaf values and priorities." (Winzer 31).

Utah. With such a poor showing, the Deaf State did not stand much of a chance for implementation or survival. But its importance as an idea cannot be overlooked. It demonstrated the discontent that isolation bred and the desire of deaf people to be treated with greater dignity and respect, instead of paternalism. Even those who could not support a state did agree that deaf people prospered when they could remain in closer contact with one another. In their hearts, a Deaf State seemed a beautiful dream.

The idea of a Deaf State was therefore enticing in most quarters. It simply did not appear to be a practical solution to many people. The idea did not really die, however. Deaf people needed a place that was truly their own, where their language would be freely used and understood by all, where their ways would be viewed as unremarkable instead of pitiable. Such a place came into existence in 1864, when the Columbia Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb, and the Blind acquired authorization to grant college degrees. Gallaudet College essentially became a miniature version of John Flourney's Deaf State. As surely as any state would have been, Gallaudet College slowly became the center for deaf culture in the United States.

11: A TRUE PLACE OF THEIR OWN: GALLAUDET COLLEGE

In the short time of its existence, since 1864, it has exerted a stimulating effect upon our schools for the deaf, by leading the way and affording opportunities for the attainment by the deaf of the highest possible results in education.

Edwin Allen Hodgson, 1891

Gallaudet College exerted a profound influence upon the deaf community. By its mere existence, it lent a degree of respectability to the Deaf community. A college founded only to serve them signalled to the hearing community that deaf people were capable of completing a rigorous higher education while acknowledging that they needed special services, like signed lectures, to attend college that other schools did not

to provide. The existence of Gallaudet gave students a tangible goal to strive toward as they finished their high school education. Gallaudet College offered young deaf students an exemplary role model, giving them hope for their futures and a feeling that there was a place that accepted them completely and without reservation.

While John Flourney worked toward the formation of a Deaf State, John Carlin worked tirelessly for the founding of a college for deaf students. To Carlin, the reason that deaf people could not compete on higher levels with hearing peers was the fact that educational opportunities were not afforded them on an equal basis with the hearing community. Hearing colleges were designed for the hearing people; deaf students would be unable to keep up in such an environment. Carlin thought that the only solution was to open a college only for deaf students. They would gain the attention they needed and the education they deserved. In all the world, no such institution existed. By opening one, the United States would "add fresh luster to the halo of glory encircling our blessed republic..."²⁷¹ A deaf college would simultaneously aid the deaf community and glorify the nation. Carlin could see no pressing objections to the attainment of either end.

His wish finally became reality in 1864, when Congress passed a special decree enabling the Columbia Institution to issue college degrees. The person most instrumental in the passage of this legislation was Edward Miner Gallaudet. Gallaudet

²⁷¹John Carlin, "The National College for Mutes," *Annals* 6 (1854): 180.

had been brought to Washington, D.C. by Amos Kendall, the former post master general, in 1857. At this time, Kendall was the legal guardian of five deaf children. They had been abandoned in the city, and their appointed guardian fled as well, leaving Kendall, through a maze of legal regulations, with their custody. He desired to send them to school, but found that none existed in Washington. Kendall donated part of his estate, known as Kendall Green, and organized a school for them. It was incorporated in 1857 by the name of the Columbia Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf, Dumb, and Blind. Kendall had a need for a superintendent and was put in touch with Gallaudet who was working in Hartford. After some consideration, Gallaudet accepted the position.

Gallaudet almost immediately expressed the wish that the school became a national factor and expand its program to include a college. From 1862 onward, he pushed for this goal. He therefore in 1864 drew up an act that would give the Institution the authority to issue college degrees. It was introduced in the Senate in March of that same year by Senator Grimes of Iowa. The issue caused a great deal of debate. The history of the school contained a telling story:

"What is the necessity," asked Senator Hale, "of a bill conferring upon the Deaf & Dumb Asylum the power of granting degrees like other colleges? It seems to me rather an extraordinary one." He added that it shouldn't

confer degrees of the same rank as those "from the oldest colleges and universities in the land."²⁷²

Obviously, some Senators did not believe that college degrees for deaf people should be worth as much as degrees held by hearing people. The whole idea was simply too "extraordinary." Other Senators disagreed, however, arguing vigorously for the school. Senator Clark of New Hampshire argued that the privilege to issue degrees would not be abused; he was sure that only those actually worthy of holding one would receive one.²⁷³ The two sides bickered back and forth, Gallaudet nervously awaiting the outcome. Finally, the bill passed without a dissenting vote. It was signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln on April 8, 1864.²⁷⁴

Inaugural ceremonies were held on June 28, 1864. At the ceremonies, the newly created National College for Deaf-Mutes, which would officially change its name to Gallaudet College in 1894, awarded its first honorary degree to John Carlin. As the college was always Carlin's dream, he received his degree proudly and graciously, signing his acceptance speech fluently. Sign was a language he believed inferior to English, but he had a detailed knowledge of it and signed it extremely well. Thus, on June 28, 1864, his hesitancy about Sign and reservations about the abilities of deaf

²⁷²Albert William Atwood, *Gallaudet College: Its First One Hundred Years* (Lancaster: 1964) 17.

²⁷³Atwood, 17-8.

²⁷⁴Atwood 18.

people gave way to a proud and public declaration of support for the future of the new school and its students.

The inaugural day marked the retirement of Amos Kendall as president of the school. He turned the position over to E.M. Gallaudet. As he stepped down, he praised the sign language that made the education of the students possible.

If the whole human family were destitute of the sense of hearing, they would yet be able to interchange (sic) ideas by signs. Indeed, the language of signs undoubtedly accompanied if it did not precede the language of sounds. Men are created, not with a God-given language, but with a God-given capacity to make signs and sounds, and by the use of them to form a language.²⁷⁵

Kendall supported the use of Sign in the classroom, believing it to be a language as efficient as any other language, arising out of a different biologically created need. The capacity to create language being a God-given one, deaf people were shown to share in the life and love of God. They were not using a sham language as inferior beings. Rather, their language was an artfully created entity, evolved by worthy people. Kendall viewed Sign as a liberating factor in Deaf people's lives, not as a constricting, limiting language.

Kendall's sentiments were echoed by Laurent Clerc. As a Deaf man and a representative of the first school for the deaf in America, American School, he

²⁷⁵Amos Kendall, "Introductory Address," in *Inauguration of the College of the Deaf & Dumb, At Washington, District of Columbia, June 28, 1864*, in the *Seventh Annual Report of the Columbia Institution for the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind for the Year Ending June 30, 1864*, 11.

welcomed the formation of this first college. He stressed the importance of education in the lives of deaf people. "It has broken that barrier which had separated for several centuries the deaf and dumb from those who hear and speak," he signed. "It has repaired the wrongs of nature in enabling them to replace hearing by writing, and speech by signs."²⁷⁶ Education gave deaf people opportunities that would never have been possible otherwise. It enabled them to meet hearing people on more equal footing. Furthermore, it allowed deafness to be overcome in a way that satisfied Deaf people. Writing replaced hearing and Sign replaced speech. Hearing people may not have agreed; they probably would not have seen hearing as a replaceable sense. But Deaf people did; they had the tools to replace hearing as far as they were concerned and these satisfied them. The solutions to the isolation of deafness were clearly education and Sign. These two together restored the Deaf person to society and offered greater opportunities for careers and companionship.

The incoming president, E.M. Gallaudet, agreed wholeheartedly with Clerc's pronouncements. He iterated the belief that deaf people were undervalued in hearing society and neglected by employers because of the hearing belief that deafness hindered people's mental abilities. Gallaudet hoped that the mere establishment of a college for the deaf would refute this prejudicial vein of thinking. A college degree was valued

²⁷⁶Laurent Clerc, "Address by Laurent Clerc, A.M.," in *Inauguration of the College for the Deaf & Dumb*," in *Seventh Annual Report*, 41.

by hearing people; if a deaf person possessed one, the hearing employer might be persuaded to look more seriously upon an application. Gallaudet described it accordingly: "One of the designs of our college is to furnish deaf-mutes the means of obtaining that mental training and those academic honors which may entitle them to consideration in the world of letters, and allow them to gain positions of much greater usefulness and higher emolument than they can now aspire to."²⁷⁷ The obtainment of a college degree would prove the higher abilities of deaf people to the hearing society, especially employers. Gallaudet hoped that a new age of acceptance, respect, and opportunity for deaf people would dawn with the founding of the college.

The college was infused with the support of these energetic individuals. They wanted it to promote a vision of deaf capabilities and equality. Very quickly, the school gained a positive reputation among both deaf and hearing communities. In 1869, a scant five years after the college opened, the *Deaf-Mutes Friend* offered highest praise for it.

The grounds of the institution are being graded, drives and pathways cut and trees planted after a plan that will, in a few years, make this institution one of the handsomest in the United States. It is situated on a slight elevation and commands a good view of the city, while it stands in such a position as to receive the healthy and cooling breezes which come down from the Alleghenies through Georgetown Gap. Not far to the west is Howard University, the new college for "all races, sexes, and colors." Still farther west stands the venerated and venerable Columbian

²⁷⁷Edward Miner Gallaudet, "Inaugural Address," in *Inauguration of the College for the Deaf & Dumb*, in *Seventh Annual Report* 33.

College, which has been in quite good repute in its day, and still is among Southerners. It has about four hundred students at present. Faint in the distance is Georgetown College, a Catholic Institution of high standing. It is the pride of the "National Deaf-Mute College" to form one of this circle of Colleges around the National Capitol and, what is more, to be equal to any of them in its grade of scholarship.²⁷⁸

The viewer was struck by the beauty of the college and its prime location. Furthermore, the National Deaf Mute College had been situated in an ideal place, Washington, D.C. It shared the educational scene with other prominent institutions, institutions trying to aid the neglected groups in the country, women, Blacks, Catholics. All these schools enjoyed good reputations serving unique causes. The deaf community was nightly proud to have a college of its own join the circle of these other institutions. The scholarship of the college equalled that of the other schools; the deaf community demonstrated that its school was as rigorous as hearing institutions and deaf people were utterly capable of performing under strenuous academic conditions.

Hearing observers likewise praised the college's bright beginning. In 1876, President Gilman of Johns Hopkins University delivered an address at commencement, commenting on the fine nature of the young college. He concluded his address with praise.

So, as we part, my friends, let us rejoice, as patriots, that here, first in all Christendom, a college for deaf-mutes has begun where scholastic work is performed worthy of any college; let us rejoice, as teachers, at the demonstration that by the eye, knowledge may be acquired as sound and

²⁷⁸Anonymous, *Deaf Mutes' Friend* 1.5 (1869): 156.

as comprehensive as that which is ordinarily gained by eye and ear together; let us rejoice, as philanthropists, that those class of our fellow men who were once treated as miserables and inaccessible unfortunates, scarcely above the dumb animals, are now erect as men among their fellow men....²⁷⁹

Even by the standards of other university officials, Gallaudet College was performing rigorous academic work. By example, it was demonstrating that Sign could be used quite successfully as a teaching vehicle. Deaf people would learn readily and easily by its use, just as hearing people learned by lectures in English. This realization helped to lift the estimation of deaf people from the level of "dumb animals" to take a place as equals with hearing people.

Even hearing people uninvolved with the business of higher learning, as Gilman obviously was, received a good impression of the college. The school's founding caused a minor sensation in the hearing press. Several articles describing the life of the college appeared in magazines in the years immediately following the inaugural. Most praised both the students themselves and their unique language. Sign was well appreciated in these reviews. A reporter commented, "So that the sign language, instead of being an arbitrary, irrational, clumsy substitute for vocal communication, is a true language; not only the 'mother tongue' of the deaf-mute, but having its origin

²⁷⁹Edward Miner Gallaudet, *History of the College for the Deaf, 1857-1907*, eds. Lance J. Fischer and David L. de Lorenzo (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet College Press, 1983) 125.

in, and closely related to, the mental constitution of humanity..."²⁸⁰ Sign language was here introduced as a language as capable and complete as English. It was not deemed inferior at all; instead, it was called "a true language." The realization was something of a shock. The reporter went on to remark that Sign was capable of "conveying thought with a rapidity, accuracy, clearness, and grace very surprising to those who witness it for the first time."²⁸¹ Evidently, the language would make believers out of witnesses. Hearing people may have had difficulty understanding the power of Sign, but a conversation in it would lay all their doubts to rest.

Since Sign had a good public image, the college could not help but gain one as well. After all, the college taught through Sign. If the language was perceived as capable than the school would be seen as effective. Sign, as a true language, would help guide the students through the course of their studies. It could educate them as well as English could be used to teach hearing students. Reporters told tales to exactly that effect. They visited Gallaudet and proclaimed its program a rousing success.

The work of the school was depicted as beneficial both to the deaf students and to society at large. One magazine reported:

The students are continually taught self-reliance; not to feel that they are 'poor unfortunates,' to go through life ever craving help and pity,...but that, through their education, they are in good degree relieved from their

²⁸⁰Anonymous, "The national deaf-mute college at Washington," *Old and New Magazine* 1872: 494.

²⁸¹Anon., "National deaf-mute college," *Old and New Magazine* 1872: 497.

former disabilities, and placed upon an equality with other men, able to do good, honest service for society, and asking only their well-earned wages.²⁸²

The deaf students learned that they did not need to be pitied; they learned self-reliance and improved their own self-esteem. Surely, the school was beneficial for that reason alone. It made a group of long disregarded people feel equal to hearing people, "able to do good, honest service." The society profited as well. It received the benefit of having more workers in the economy, people who were willing to work for a fair wage. The school therefore inspired deaf people to test themselves and their abilities; simultaneously, it urged hearing people to accept deaf people as equal partners in society. Social progress could be achieved on both sides.

Other reporters wholeheartedly concurred. One went so far as to proclaim:

In a larger sense, well-educated deaf-mutes are missionaries. The community which instructs them is wise for itself. Time will exact the severest penalties from that nation which fails to awaken dormant intellectual powers among its people. As a class thus aroused, trained and equipped for duty, the deaf-mutes exert a vital reactive influence upon society, bringing ever nearer the day when Ignorance with all her train shall fly many other realms once considered her own.²⁸³

Society, it would appear, had a responsibility to educate all of its members, if at all possible. As the possibility of educating deaf people had proved a reality, the society could not shirk from responding with the necessary schools. Deaf people were

²⁸²Anon., "National deaf-mute college," *Old and New Magazine* 1872: 496.

²⁸³Anonymous, "The Silent College At Washington," *Scribner's Monthly* 3 (1872): 733.

therefore missionaries of sorts. Their education reflected the greater capabilities of the community at large. A society that could perform this service was capable of a great many others; by exercising the creative powers of all of its members, Ignorance in other areas could be overcome.

The hearing community therefore received a favorably impression of Gallaudet College from numerous sources. The general feeling was that the college brought satisfaction to the deaf community and glory to the hearing community. Together, the two groups could work for the improvement of the whole society. Such an institution deserved praise. Another journalist summarized it well. "The college at Washington is the only deaf-mute college in the world," the reporter wrote. "Its purpose appeals to all humanity; its success justifies the generosity of the government; its progress reflects high honor on the gentlemen identified so intimately with it."²⁸⁴

Gallaudet College had therefore begun to garner a growing reputation in the hearing community. Its reputation was spreading through the Deaf community as well. Stories about the lives of students abounded. The college exerted a great influence on the deaf community nationwide. It provided a unified center for deaf culture and further standardized Sign since the college brought students and teachers from various parts of the country together. Gallaudet had an influence in the nineteenth century

²⁸⁴Anonymous, "The Silent Schools of Kendall Green," Harper's New Monthly Magazine 69 (1884): 187.

similar to its twentieth-century role. In the twentieth century, Gallaudet has led the deaf community and kept a strong finger on the pulse of Deaf culture. The students and faculty, for instance, led the Deaf President Now (DPN) strike, believing that outside support from the wider deaf community would enable the movement to succeed. In the nineteenth-century, the role was similar; the other schools for the deaf followed the lead that Gallaudet outlined, some in remarkably detailed ways. For instance, it was reported that "Hartford has purchased a billiard table for the use of the boys; thus following the example of the Deaf Mute College at Washington."²⁸⁵ The College acted as a beacon for the other schools and the older Deaf students were role models for younger deaf students. The older students helped teach the younger deaf children how to grow up being Deaf.

The College provided the Deaf students with an environment in which to explore their deafness freely. The nonjudgmental environment allowed them to relax and unabashedly use their language. In the classroom, for example, "in the heat of an examination one will suddenly cease writing, ply his fingers until he has caught up the thread of an argument, or secured a necessary fact, and then proceed with his paper."²⁸⁶ A school like this one let the Deaf student use Sign to understand better the studies and questions under examination. No one there would find Sign peculiar

²⁸⁵*Deaf Mutes' Friend* 1.5 (1869): 152.

²⁸⁶Anon., "Silent College," *Deaf Mute Pelican* 2.2 (1871).

or distracting. A comfortable atmosphere let Deaf students learn in the way best for them.

The students also explored the concept of sound to discover its properties and learn how it worked, what it symbolized. The *Pelican* continued its discussions.

Although these youth are incapable of enjoying the phenomena of sound, many of them are exceedingly sensitive to some of the causes which excite these phenomena--such as vibration, for instance. During a late term one of them became possessed of a violin. He carried the instrument to his room and employed every leisure moment to "fill the air with the barbarous dissonance" until a professor remonstrated. Some greatly enjoy the twang of a rubber string, or of the bar of a jew's harp; and one throughout his course was accustomed to play upon a harmonica whenever he became low spirited.²⁸⁷

Deaf students investigated the quality of sound thoroughly. By playing musical instruments, Deaf students could learn more about how sound functioned and its qualities worked. Such incidents showed that Deaf students had a knowledge of sound that hearing people did not suspect. Sound played a definite role in the lives of these students. One Deaf student played a harmonica whenever he became low spirited. Music played a positive role in his life despite his deafness; presumably, he played the harmonica to break out of his poor moods. The College gave the Deaf students the chance to examine sound closely without disturbing hearing people, except the occasional professor! By so doing, they came to understand the role of sound in the

²⁸⁷Anon., "Silent College," *Pelican* 2.2 (1871).

world and incorporate it into their own world views. Though they were deaf, sound was definitely a part of their lives.

Gallaudet College became a vital part of the Deaf community. It represented a place free of preconceived (i.e., hearing) notions of deafness. At Gallaudet, Deaf people were not expected to be certain things or exhibit expected characterizations. They were just expected to be themselves. Deafness was not judged in any way and, especially, it was never viewed as a barrier to a full life or a good education. Gallaudet, in effect, became a Deaf State. Deaf people set the tone there; they were the ruling majority. Sign was therefore perfectly acceptable, along with all the physical behaviors that it brought. Being deaf was not viewed negatively, but positively. Deafness was treated as a natural condition. At Gallaudet, Deaf culture had a chance to grow, unimpeded by the stares of hearing people. Gallaudet offered a haven for Deafness in a world dominated by hearing people. In a sense, John Flournoy saw his wish fulfilled.

12: CULTURAL BACKLASH: THE ORAL RISE

It is a great blessing to a deaf-mute to be able to converse in the language of signs. But it is obvious that, as soon as he passes out of the circle of those who understand that language, he is as helpless and hopeless as ever. The power of uttering articulate sounds,--of speaking as others speak,--alone restores him to society. That this can be done, and substantially in all cases, I have had abundant proof....

Horace Mann, 1844

The voice of oralism was raised early in the century but was not given much credence. An attempt to found an oral school was undertaken in 1819, in Virginia, but it failed mainly on account of the alcoholism of the instructor, John Braidwood, of the

oralist family of teachers in Great Britain. No second attempt was made until 1865. This attempt resulted in the founding of Clarke School in Massachusetts in 1867. The delay is easily explainable. Soon after the first failure, the American School opened. Thus, the manual method was introduced in this country before the oral. It worked with such good results that it was not initially challenged.

The first serious challenge to the method occurred in 1844 when Horace Mann published his *Seventh Annual Report to the State of Massachusetts*. Mann was the Secretary of the Board of Education in Massachusetts, the first of its kind in the country. He had some excellent ideas about the path the public schools should take, including standardizing the curriculum and de-emphasizing the role of orthodox religion in public education. Mann travelled extensively abroad, spending a great deal of time in Prussia, to garner information about other educational approaches. He was very impressed by what he saw in Prussia and recommended changes in the American system accordingly.

While in Europe, Mann visited Prussia's schools for the deaf. Why he chose to investigate these schools is somewhat unclear; in his earlier annual reports, he had shown no interest in the matter of deaf education. Still, with no prior interest or experience in this area, he visited several such European schools. He summarized his findings, saying, "The schools for this class, in Prussia, Saxony, and Holland, seem to me decidedly superior to any in this country. The point of difference is fundamental.

With us, the deaf and dumb are taught to converse by signs made with the fingers. There, incredible as it may seem, they are taught to speak with the lips and tongue."²⁸⁸ He knew little of how well these students were taught; he witnessed only the method, lipreading, and its outcome, speech. The mere act of speech impressed him exceedingly.

Mann wrote highly of this astonishing new method of teaching.

That a person, utterly deprived of the organs of hearing,--who indeed never knew of the existence of voice or sound,--should be able to talk, seems almost to transcend the limits of possibility; and surely that teacher is entitled to the character of a great genius as well as benefactor, who conceived, and successfully executed a plan, which, even after it is accomplished, the world will scarcely credit. In the countries last named, it seems almost absurd to speak of the Dumb. There are hardly any dumb there; and the sense of hearing, when lost, is almost supplied by that of sight.²⁸⁹

Mann saw the process as one that highlighted the prowess of the hearing teacher. They did wonderful work that the world refused to recognize properly. They were skilled martyrs, working ceaselessly on their cause without credit. And, of course, they succeeded in bringing sound to deaf ears. Deaf people, according to Mann, lived without a knowledge of sound. But tireless hearing teachers could bring them this knowledge and lead them through it to the company of hearing society. Sight replaced

²⁸⁸Horace Mann, "Seventh Annual Report of the Secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education," *Common School Journal* 6 (1844): 75.

²⁸⁹Mann, "Seventh Annual Report," *Common School Journal* 6 (1844): 75.

hearing, dumbness was overcome, and the deaf and hearing communities were thereby happily joined.

Articulation held inestimable value in Mann's mind. Good training enabled students to obtain very good jobs. Mann saw many graduates of German schools working as "artisans or mechanics, earning a competent livelihood, mingling with other men, and speaking and conversing like them."²⁹⁰ The art of lipreading enabled the students to work successfully because they were able to communicate easily with their employer and fellow co-workers. They were able to fit into the larger group despite their deafness. Mann stressed this fact as a compelling point in his argument in favor of teaching by articulation. Deafness intimidates hearing people and few of them have the "time, means, or inclination to hold written communication with them. But if the deaf and dumb have acquired the art of reading language from the mouth of the speaker, people will converse with them willingly, and they will then have a wide school in which to carry forward their acquisitions."²⁹¹ While Mann believed that articulation would be a great aid to deaf people, he also demonstrated that the skill would be a boon to hearing people. They would be able to communicate more easily and on their own terms. Hearing people would be only too delighted to speak with deaf people so long as the deaf people could easily understand them. From the

²⁹⁰Mann, "Seventh Annual Report," *Common School Journal* 6 (1844): 79.

²⁹¹Mann, "Seventh Annual Report," *Common School Journal* 6 (1844): 80.

beginning articulation was a method that proposed to benefit both hearing and deaf parties.

The value of articulation could therefore not be underestimated. Its importance was simply outstanding and its benefits beyond the consideration of mere ease of communication. Its importance ran to a much deeper level. Mann wrote earnestly, "It has an extraordinary humanizing power,--the remark having been often made, and with truth, that all the deaf and dumb who have learned to speak, have a far more human expression of the eye and countenance than those who have only been taught to write."²⁹² The suggestion that deaf people who did not speak were somewhat less than human was ingrained in the thinking of some oralists. It seemed that to be fully human, one needed to be hearing. Deaf people could not attain that status as they could never regain their hearing. Articulation allowed them to imitate hearing people and approach their position. They could claim a larger measure of humanity. In truth, articulation made Deaf people more hearing.

Mann's report was greeted with only limited support. Most teachers of the time were firmly devoted to the manual method. They believed that Sign offered the best way to teach deaf students. Since they tended to believe that Sign was a real language, they believed that it could be used to teach English. The Deaf students resulting would be bilingual, fluent in Sign and comfortable with written English. Only a small

²⁹²Mann, "Seventh Annual Report," *Common School Journal* 6 (1844): 80.

minority believed that students would be better off learning how to speak instead. One such teacher was W.A. Ayres. His stance was not quite as severe as Mann's; he believed that Sign could be used as a teaching tool, despite its inferiority to English. He tried to pay some homage to both sides of the argument and, in so doing, probably pleased neither.

Ayres wrote to the *Annals* explaining his position in April 1849. Parents, he advised, should learn the manual alphabet and spell constantly to the deaf children. The alphabet would be the child's introduction to language. As such, it should be committed to memory as soon as possible. The alphabet should be used, Ayres wrote, in conjunction with speech. The child should become familiar with the sight of spoken English, while experiencing it physically on the hands. Conversations should be kept up continuously, informally, for, Ayres rightly noted, a child learns language by using it, not by formal instruction.²⁹³ By teaching the child themselves, parents ensured that the child learned English first since the schools undoubtedly employed "systematic signs."²⁹⁴

The actual language of signs should be neither studied nor utilized by the parents of deaf children. All parents would recognize the natural language of signs since "it is the foundation of all language" which the schools later organized into a more formal

²⁹³J.A. Ayres, "Home Education for the Deaf and Dumb," *Annals* 2 (1849): 183.

²⁹⁴J.A. Ayres, "Home," *Annals* 2 (1849): 183.

system. Ayres believed that this natural language was the original human language, understood by all people with regular exposure.²⁹⁵ Still, it was not recommended for use since it was difficult to learn, requiring "a practice and effort equal to that necessary to learn a foreign spoken language."²⁹⁶ Furthermore, since it could not be written down, it could only be taught "by the living teacher."²⁹⁷ It would be impossible for most families to acquire such a teacher, so learning Sign was not a viable teaching option for parents. Finally, Signs were inferior to English since they were not understood by large numbers of people. English was the language of the majority and would therefore aid the deaf child to a greater extent.

Ayres energetically advocated the use of English with deaf children, downplaying the importance of Sign. Yet he still wanted to believe that he was not demeaning the power of Sign in any way.

It will be said by some, perhaps that we disparage the language of signs, but we think not. We believe that we appreciate signs; that we are attached to their use we know. They are invaluable to the deaf and dumb. They are the charm of conversation, the gist of a story, the essence of pleasantry and mirth; they are beautiful in narration and fervent in prayer; and especially to a large class of deaf-mutes, whose intellects, being slow, are never able fully to appreciate written language, are they a treasure beyond price. Were we deprived of hearing and speech we would not part with them for the wealth of the world. Yet their very beauty and facility of acquisition may dispose the mind to linger about them and be

²⁹⁵J.A. Ayres, "Home," *Annals* 2 (1849): 180.

²⁹⁶J.A. Ayres, "Home," *Annals* 2 (1849): 185.

²⁹⁷J.A. Ayres, "Home," *Annals* 2 (1849): 186.

satisfied with them when the whole faculties should be bent to the acquisition of a language in which the intellect may expand to the full extent of its capacity.²⁹⁸

Ayres may have thought he was praising Sign by commenting on its beauty and capability. But, by refusing to use it, he was denigrating it. He was also planting the seeds for future oralist thinking. He calls Sign fine for "a large class of deaf-mutes, whose intellects, being slow, are never able fully to appreciate written language." Sign was a beautiful but inferior language, thereby suited only for slow, inferior minds. The argument would become a standard one for oralists later in the century, along with its corollary that Sign interfered with the acquisition of English. Sign, by oralist estimation, both slowed the brain and ruined it for any other language. Yet in 1849, Ayres and other budding oralists were not ready to go to that position. Ayres wanted Sign to retain its beauty and have a place for usage. Mann may have been ready for change, but other educators were still tentative. Others were not tentative but thoroughly opposed. Collins Stone was a long-time enemy of articulation. He took every opportunity afforded by his professional connections at the American School to refute the claims of oralists. Ayres may have wanted to support oralism, but Stone, among others, was always ready to contest it. He wrote two articles to the *Annals* in 1849, contradicting the success stories that the oralists promoted. He had little faith

²⁹⁸J.A. Ayres, "Home," *Annals* 2 (1849): 185-6.

in the method at teaching through articulation and continuously scoffed at the notion.

Still, the support for it bothered him and he felt compelled to write.

There has been within a few years, a movement in the popular mind, in favor of educating the deaf and dumb by means of articulation, although now, if we mistake not, it has materially subsided. The feeling arose partly from the extreme desirableness of the results promised by the system, if they could be realized, and partly from the extravagant stories which were in circulation of the period referred to, of its actual success. "Distance lends enchantment" to figments of the imagination, as well as to the objects of nature, and those wonderful accounts, being located in a foreign land, and claiming in some instances, a high parentage, carried with them to many minds the force of veritable facts.²⁹⁹

Stone articulated the belief that the oralists were swayed more by fantastical stories than by facts. The stories were romantic and foreign, usually German, which also meant that American ears unfamiliar with German would find it difficult to judge whether or not the pronunciation of deaf children was in fact correct. The Germans had innumerable stories of the success of oralism and the Americans were swayed by the tales which remained largely unsubstantiated. Many times, rumors were involved; "there is a man who lives in Berlin who speaks so well that strangers call on him."³⁰⁰ Stone discounted many of the claims of oralists on this basis. He believed that the interest in oralism would fade, and, in fact, was fading even as he wrote. Unfortunately, he was sadly mistaken. Mann may not have had time to devote

²⁹⁹Collins Stone, "Articulation as a Medium for the Instruction of the Deaf & Dumb," *Annals* 2 (1849): 105.

³⁰⁰Stone, "Articulation," *Annals* 2 (1849): 105.

exclusively to the oralist cause, but other reformers were willing to push longer and harder. Samuel Gridley Howe (1801-1876) was chief among them.

Howe had continually developed interests in causes: first, the Greek Revolution, next the state of education for the blind. With reference to the second cause, he was invited to become director of the Perkins Institution for the Blind in Boston in 1831, immediately after its opening. Howe became interested in the issue of deaf education while he was working at Perkins. The Institution had attracted two deaf-blind students, Oliver Caswell and Laura Bridgman. Howe taught both of them, using the manual alphabet instead of natural signs. He apparently reasoned that using Sign would require Laura and Oliver to learn one sign for every object to which they were introduced. By teaching them the alphabet, they could learn a limited number of signs and simply rearrange the combinations. Also, the alphabet would teach them English which would, theoretically, allow them to communicate with other English users.³⁰¹

Since this system worked successfully in this case, Howe decided that it should be used in all cases. He became a strong advocate of oralism, believing that Sign ruined the English abilities of most deaf students. He preferred to see deaf students taught only by speech, with fingerspelling allowed for clarification, if necessary. Like Mann, Howe had no real basis for his beliefs. His experience was with deaf-blind

³⁰¹Milton Meltzer, *A Light in the Dark: The Life of Samuel Gridley Howe* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1964) 89-90.

children, not deaf children. Furthermore, he had rejected Sign out of hand; he did not try to use it to teach Laura so he did not rightly know if it interfered with the acquisition of English. He operated under some untested assumptions.

He never tested them because of a later experience. In 1844, he and his wife took their honeymoon trip in Europe. While there, he visited several schools for the deaf. The results of the oral approach made him a convert. He returned to Boston, eager to convert the public to the necessity of instituting this new teaching method firmly in American schools. He had been instrumental in passing a bill to allow Perkins to take on deaf children too young to be sent to the American School in 1843. Now, he wanted to pass a bill in Massachusetts that would establish an oral school. Horace Mann had the same opinion. He and Howe, always friends, quickly joined forces on this issue and deluged the public with articulation arguments.

The school they sought was not founded at this time. The government of Massachusetts remained satisfied with the work done at the American School and was not convinced of the necessity to change methods. The American School sent its own delegation to Europe in late 1844 and returned refuting most of Howe's claims. As the American teachers had far more experience in such matters, Massachusetts deferred to their judgment. American School did offer articulation instruction as an option to its

students until roughly 1847, when the results, not being overly enthusiastic or impressive, caused the program to be disbanded.³⁰²

Howe was furious at this lack of change and carried on the fight for the next twenty years, jabbing at the attitude of the American School in the Perkins' annual reports. Mann struggled alongside him until his death in 1865. Howe continued to struggle without him, as a battle to prove the correctness of his dead friend's opinions. In 1865, Howe again petitioned the state legislature. Again, he was beaten back by the principal of the American School, Collins Stone, and a member of the Governor's Council, Lewis Dudley, whose daughter Theresa attended American.³⁰³

Howe refused to give up. In 1866, he learned that Harriet B. Rodgers, one of Laura Bridgman's early teachers, had opened a small private oral school in her house at Chelmsford, Massachusetts. Together, they decided to present their case to the Governor. The Governor decided to give their case a hearing and referred them to the state legislature. The legislature took the matter up in committee, specifically the Board of State Charities, in January 1867. At the end of the hearings in February of that same year, Howe had finally won. The committee recommended the founding of an oral school for the deaf in Massachusetts, swayed over in part by the successful demonstration of the method on Theresa Dudley. The school was quickly organized

³⁰²Harold Schwartz, *Samuel Gridley Howe: Social Reformer, 1801-1876* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956) 277.

³⁰³Schwartz 278-9.

and established in Northampton, Massachusetts. Rodgers was hired as the principal and the school opened in October 1867.

Even as oralists broke down the barriers in Massachusetts, the manual voice argued back. In July of 1867, an article, "Signs in Deaf Mute Education," appeared. The author, J.R. Keep, argued vigorously against the use of the oral method, contending that it was a self-serving methodology benefitting hearing instructors who would not have to study a new language in order to teach. It shut out the concerns and opinions of the Deaf community. The author wrote insistently,

But there should be some better reason for teaching articulation than that the parent may be aided in forgetting the terrible infirmity, which has fallen upon his child, or that it is easier or more agreeable for the parent to hold intercourse with him by words than by spelling and writing. The only question that enlightened parental love should ask is, what will be most agreeable to my unfortunate child?³⁰⁴

Here, Deaf people revealed their primary argument against oralism; it was constructed to be a method designed for hearing parents and teachers, not for the deaf students. Deaf people found oral communication a difficult and tedious experience. Yet, the experience of Deaf people was not taken into account in the formation of the method. It remained a method thrust upon them indiscriminately and was therefore resented. Parents exacerbated the problem by embracing a quick method, one easier for them. This author encouraged parents to seek a method suitable to the child instead. The deaf

³⁰⁴J.R. Keep, "Signs in Deaf Mute Education," *New Englander* 26 (1867): 518.

child feels isolated; an educational method should be designed to make the child feel less isolated and more included in the life of the family. The suggestion was clear; articulation could not fulfill these needs of the child at all.

But, in 1867, the opinions and needs of hearing adults were considered. The needs of the hearing majority were weighed against the needs of the deaf minority. The majority asserted its control over the society and so its needs were considered more pressing than the needs of a handicapped minority group. As the majority spoke English, so must all the minority groups, even the one that could not hear the language at all. Articulation would promote the assimilation of this deaf minority. As such, it was viewed as a good method by a handful of well connected and well known reformers. They appealed to the parents of deaf children, longing to hear speech issue forth from dumb lips, and articulation thereby swept dramatically onto the scene in 1867. The method would not eliminate Sign completely in the coming century, but it did marginalize it to a great extent. And with the marginalizing of their language, the Deaf community found itself increasingly marginalized as well. Deaf culture, beginning to blossom, was forced underground by the attacks of the oralists.

13: ORAL VICTORY: CLARKE SCHOOL

The lack of an important sense not only prevents the entire and harmonious development of mind and character, but it tends to give morbid growth in certain directions, as a plant checked in its upward growth, grows askew. It would be a waste of words to prove this, because a denial of it would be a denial of the importance of the great senses.

Massachusetts State Board of Charities, 1867

We do not hold that it is practicable at all to teach these children to articulate; and for this reason: their recovery of articulation costs more than it is worth. All this labor to lead them to reproduce these vocal sounds does not teach them anything. It is simply labor on the emission of sound, and it is perfectly immense. It is only teaching these children this unnatural way of producing sound...The time spent in this way could be much more advantageously employed in enlightening the child's mind.

Rev. Collins Stone, 1867

In 1867, the battle between the oralists and the manualists was taken from the realm of the theoretical to the practical. Long confined to the pages of the *Annals*, the battle moved to the serious ground of the Massachusetts state legislature. The disagreement was serious because, for the first time, it would have practical results that would affect the lives of hundreds of deaf children. As such, both sides approached the showdown fully prepared for difficult debate. Strong forces were marshalled on either side. The oralists came to the meeting with Samuel Gridley Howe, head of the Perkins Institution, and Gardiner Greene Hubbard, a convert to oralism whose deaf daughter, Mabel, was enrolled at Harriet B. Rodgers' school in Chelmsford. Both men believed fiercely that their personal experiences made them experts on the topic of education. Representing the manualists were spokesmen from the American School, Reverend Collins Stone, the principal, and William Turner, a head instructor. They debated the points of their respective systems back and forth, each trying to sway the opinion of the Board of State Charities.

The opening quotes, taken from the proceedings and the final report of the meeting, highlight the basic points of difference between the two sides. The manualists viewed articulation instruction as a gigantic waste of time. It taught the deaf child how to produce a sound, certainly, but it did not provide a sense of what the sounds meant. Articulation imparted ability but not knowledge; to the minds of the manualists, knowledge was far more important. The Board, however, was finally swayed by the

arguments of the oralists. The oralists declared that deafness was more than just a hearing loss. It represented an isolated state that resulted in poor character development and other "morbid growths" unless otherwise influenced. Sign aggravated these developmental issues by its foreignness. Only the rigid use of the vernacular, English, oralists, contended, would combat these tendencies and cause deaf people to be as "normal" as possible. The differences between the two sides often seemed less about education and more about attitude, toward and about deafness.

The committee met and heard the arguments of both sides from January 24 until February 12, 1867. The arguments were conducted in public hearings, meeting six times, and recorded and preserved in a volume bound at state expense. The same themes, with only slightly varying twists, are recorded for each day. The opening day laid out the arguments of the oralists. Hubbard announced that from his experience with his child, he believed that most deaf people, including some of the congenitally deaf, could be taught articulation. He postulated that "all, without great difficulty, can be taught to read from the lips."³⁰⁵ For all of these tasks to be accomplished, it would be necessary to discard the use of Sign, and even the manual alphabet, entirely. These interfered with the acquisition of oral language tremendously, in Hubbard's view.

³⁰⁵Massachusetts Senate Joint Special Committee on the Education of Deaf-Mutes, "Appendix," *Report on Deaf-Mute Education in Massachusetts. Senate Document 265. 27 May 1867* (Boston: Wright and Potter, 1867) 7.

Hubbard believed that it took no special skill or training to teach articulation successfully; as he saw it, it required only "patience and constant application."³⁰⁶ He thought he described the situation accurately since his daughter made marvelous progress in this way. He continued, "And I know this, too, from the education of my own child, that the more that child is brought into connection with children that talk and articulate, the greater is her progress."³⁰⁷ Speaking constantly and associating only with other speakers was the oralist key to success. The solution was possible for everyone. Hubbard also proposed that, at least, every deaf child could be taught lipreading, advancing that it was easier to learn than speaking itself. A conversation ensued:

Mr. Hubbard: I should think it was more difficult to teach articulation than

to teach reading from the lips.

Mr. Dudley: Would it make a difference if lips were covered with a beard?

Mr. Hubbard: I do not think it would make very much difference; a stranger

must speak slowly.³⁰⁸

Hubbard was a believer in this method. Nothing could stop the deaf person from successful lip-reading; only practice and limited training was needed. Even an obstructed view of the lips would not hinder a good lip reader!

³⁰⁶"Appendix," 8.

³⁰⁷"Appendix," 8.

³⁰⁸"Appendix," 10.

In fact, statistics now show that only roughly 25% of all conversation is understood, even by an expert lip reader. Many English words are simply not visible on the lips and many words look identical, causing more confusion. Lip-readers are forced to fill in the blanks of a conversation by making educated guesses constantly. Any obstruction of the lips, including beards, makes the task that much more difficult. Obviously, this information was unknown to the nineteenth century opponents, but they too had a sense that the position of Hubbard was overly optimistic. William Turner, for instance, denied that the teaching of lip-reading and articulation was an easy matter. He said, "It is an effort requiring long practice, and requiring special skills on the part of the teachers."³⁰⁹ Turner knew that articulation was neither easy to teach nor to learn. He viewed the task with a degree of educational respect, including a appreciation for its difficulty. He may not have believed that it was utterly impossible, but he knew that it was a task requiring labor, perhaps more than it was worth.

Likewise, Collins Stone was not impressed with the arguments put forth by Hubbard and Howe. He answered an apparently straightforward question quite cryptically in the course of the first day's remarks. The topic under discussion had turned to intelligibility. The test subject in this regard was Hubbard's daughter Mabel. The question was put forth.

Mr. Dudley: Can strangers understand your daughter?

³⁰⁹"Appendix," 25.

Mr. Hubbard: Mr. Stone can perhaps answer as to that.

Mr. Stone: In many common things she speaks with entire distinctness; that

is a common thing.³¹⁰

The answer is strikingly enigmatic. What could Stone have meant by distinctness in "many common things?" It would appear that Stone was trying to turn the conversation subtly in a manualist perspective. Hubbard was, naturally, trying to attest proudly to his daughter's fine speech. Stone, by contrast, was trying to point out the extent of her education. His implied question was, "what kind of things is she capable of discussing?" And his own answer was, "common things." He did not deny that on these topics she spoke most distinctly; on the contrary, he admitted it. But he suggested that the time taken to teach her how to mouth social pleasantries had detracted from her over all education. Mabel knew how to talk, but Stone believed that she had nothing to say. Her talk was limited to a common sphere. By contrast, he suggested, manually trained deaf students have their minds challenged and broadened and can therefore discuss more uncommon topics far more readily and intelligibly than an orally trained child.

With this reply, Stone indicated that the real quarrel between the two groups was deeper than whether or not speech was a positive quality. Obviously, both sides could agree that speech would be good to possess, if at all possible. The issue went deeper

³¹⁰"Appendix," 9.

than this superficial level; it hinted at the direction and extent of the cultivation of the mind. The discussion of the second meeting on January 31, 1867, turned to consider this larger perspective. Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe began his comments that day by showing his support for the oral method. He was strongly committed to it and urged Massachusetts to found its own oral school. He would, however, "confine the teaching to the system of articulation in all cases where the child had his hearing during any period of his youth, and who was otherwise ordinarily bright."³¹¹ The case of the congenitally deaf was evidently unconsidered. Howe explained that he would teach English only by using English; neither Sign nor the manual alphabet would be tolerated. "The English language is copious enough to explain new words;" he continued, "and if you wanted to explain a new word, you would find words fast enough."³¹² Only English would be used to teach English; since, on one level, good English skills were the goal of the educational system, the plan seemed sound.

But deeper concerns were embedded in the argument. After all, Stone too wanted to develop English competency. The question went beyond one of simple methodology. Howe declared it openly in that session.

With regard to deaf-mutes and the blind, the unfavorable effect is very much greater, because, in the first place, say what we may about abstractions and about theories, blindness or deafness, or any infirmity of this kind, does have an unfavorable effect on the whole character. There

³¹¹"Appendix," 42.

³¹²"Appendix," 42.

can be no doubt it, else God gave us these senses without object. Certain effects grow out of these infirmities which are undesirable; and the main object in the education of these children, taken as a class, should be to counteract the effect of this infirmity; to prevent it having any influence on the character; to make them just as much as possible like other children...³¹³

The hidden concerns become clearer now. Hearing was better than deafness, since God had intended for people to hear. Ways for people to deal with deafness by embracing it, such as developing a culture, were therefore to be discouraged. They would advocate the false position that deafness could also be a natural and comfortable way of being. It was not; in fact, it had an "unfavorable effect on the whole character." These effects were multiplied when the children congregated and signed together because then they were apt to form lasting friendships and marry later in life. They would remain as a separate group for their lifetimes. Howe's concern in this regard extended to the blind. For this reason, he did not allow the sexes to intermingle at Perkins. Like the deaf, he wanted them to associate in later life with sighted, "normal" people. In the case of deafness, its effects could be overcome best if articulation was used. The deaf children would be made over in the image of hearing children, speaking and acting like all the rest. Articulation, then, was a method originally concerned with the appearances of normality. Deafness was not a normative state of being; by application of articulation, however, deaf people could be made over in the

³¹³"Appendix," 32.

image of hearing people. They could fit in with the rest of society. Science could overcome the tendency toward Deafness.

Howe had issued a strong challenge in the second session. Stone and Turner launched a spirited defense of their own method in the third, on February 5, 1867. Stone reminded the committee that, despite the great value placed on them by the oralists, words have no inherent value. "Words represent ideas to us by an entirely artificial association," he said, "simply because we have agreed that word shall represent that idea; not because it means that idea."³¹⁴ Signs, he continued, functioned in the same way. As deaf people cannot hear words, signs have a greater value to them and the association between Sign and idea are far more readily apparent to them. Sign was therefore as well equipped a language as English; vocal sounds were not the only legitimate way to develop meanings and ideas. Stone declared, "This is the fallacy, as we conceive, of the brethren who instruct by articulation."³¹⁵ English did not hold the monopoly on meaning; Stone defended the right of Sign to claim as much.

Stone also attacked the idea of teaching English by English. He explained the argument painstakingly.

You may philosophize and theorize as much as you please, you cannot teach a child a thing he does not know except by something he does

³¹⁴"Appendix," 78.

³¹⁵"Appendix," 78.

know. You cannot teach him something he does not know by something else that he does not know...You have got to teach him what he does not know by what he does know; and sounds are things he does not know.³¹⁶

Since deaf children had such limited exposure to English, trying to teach them English using English was fruitless. If a child did not understand one word, how would explaining it with yet more words help? What the children needed was a system they could readily understand to explain a system they found more difficult. Sign was easy for them and accessible. Once they knew it, English could be explained via translation. If a problem arose, Sign could be used to interpret a word or a phrase. In this way, the students could use what they did know to learn what they did not. In the end, they would be bilingual.

Sign therefore had a vital role to play in the course of deaf children's education. To forbid it was to do the deaf children a great disservice. Stone declared that "to take away their natural mode of expression is to deprive them of a great deal of satisfaction and pleasure. We think that these friends would deprive the deaf-mutes of a large amount of information and enjoyment, by taking from them their natural language of signs."³¹⁷ Stone, as a principal of a school, saw the impact that Sign had on the lives of deaf students everyday. He could witness its value firsthand, as it passed on necessary information and provided ready pleasure for its users.

³¹⁶"Appendix," 80.

³¹⁷"Appendix," 81.

Turner concurred. He disagreed with the attempt of the oralists to make Deaf children more "normal", i.e., hearing. He did not see that articulation would truly aid the children, and preferred the use of Sign. It was the language of the deaf children; accepting it meant accepting them and their deafness. He realized that these implications were present and he accepted them.

We can never make hearing and speaking persons of these deaf mutes. We can give them a measure of vocalization, imperfect, to be sure; we can teach some of them to pronounce, parrot-like, words something in the way we do; but we cannot make them understand the use of vocal language, with its articulation, its emphasis, its point. It has never been done, it can never be done.³¹⁸

Turner realized that merely teaching articulation would not make deaf people hearing. There simply was no magical way, or educational method, that would complete this transformation. It was better, therefore, to accept deaf people and their deafness, instead of spending an inordinate amount of time and labor trying to make them into hearing and speaking people. With articulation training, they could only be "imperfect", "parrot-like", imitations of hearing people, anyway. They would never actually be hearing and speaking people, so all their training went into the creation of nothing but an elaborate illusion. For whose benefit was such an illusion constructed? The deaf student's benefit? Or perhaps, more likely, its creation pleased the hearing

³¹⁸"Appendix," 98.

teacher and, in turn, the larger community. Turner rejected the whole idea and pleaded for Sign, which let deaf people be themselves, namely Deaf.

On the fourth day of testimony, February 6, 1867, Turner took the chance to contradict another of Howe's contentions. Howe believed that the deaf children were injured by association with other deaf children. Such association provoked a tendency toward isolation, meaning that upon graduation, the deaf adults would seek out each other's company and associate more with one another than with hearing companions. The schools taught them to isolate themselves. Since few people knew Sign, Howe pressed, the children had no choice but to stick together. No one else could understand them. The educational method and language choice created this overriding tendency toward isolation.³¹⁹

Turner could not understand Howe's reasoning. Deafness did not create a tendency toward isolation nor did asylums inculcate any such atmosphere. Turner could easily articulate the argument himself but he did not understand it.³²⁰ The reasoning baffled him. "The mere fact that a deaf and dumb child is brought into a community where there are other deaf and dumb children, will not make him any more

³¹⁹"Appendix," 180.

³²⁰"Their objection lies against bringing deaf mutes together in considerable numbers away from their homes, and placing them in a common building...It has been said that this intensifies their calamity; that it makes them more unlike other children than they were before; that it unfits them to associate with other people, and to engage in the ordinary business and intercourse of outside life." "Appendix," 104-5.

deaf than he was before, for he was then as utterly deaf as he could be...How, then, can that intensify his calamity?"³²¹ If anything, according to Turner, the situation improved for the child. Now the child could find a place where everyone spoke Sign and everyone could understand her/him. In the home, the deaf child was isolated. In the school that isolation ceased because communication began. What Turner did not quite grasp was the real fear of the oralists. They were afraid, not of the children becoming more deaf, but rather becoming more Deaf. Turner did not share this fear; he saw the happiness that Sign brought the deaf child. Therefore, he did not fear Deafness and could not quite understand why others did.

This confrontation of educational methods was really a test of cultural tolerance. Would Deafness be further tolerated and, to some extent, encouraged, or would it be hindered and eliminated? This issue was confronted openly in the last two sessions of the hearings, on February 7 and 12, 1867. Turner continued on his thought from the previous session. He stated flatly, "We regard these children just the same as other children. In fact, we do not regard them as unfortunate. We treat them all alike."³²² Here was the manualist opinion: "we do not regard them as unfortunate." Deaf children, by Turner's estimation, were not pitiable, sad creatures, needing hearing help and sympathy. They were children like any other children; they simply signed instead

³²¹"Appendix," 105.

³²²"Appendix," 174.

of speaking. There was nothing particularly unfortunate about his fact. Turner refused to treat Deaf children as anything other than children. He seemed to try to meet them on their terms, using their language rather than his own. Such a compromise on his part did not make him uncomfortable nor did he think that such a path harmed the Deaf children in any way. Sign, by both Stone's and Turner's, opinion helped the deaf child. Stone viewed Sign as a natural and easy way for a deaf child to communicate, defending his method saying, "...a child does not know less for knowing two languages instead of one."³²³ Turner meanwhile embraced Sign and condemned oralism as a "comparatively useless branch in the education of deaf mutes."³²⁴ Both welcomed the use of Sign and accepted too the coming dawn of Deafness as a result.

Howe could not do the same. Turner may not have regarded deaf children as unfortunate, but the oralists could not afford such an admission. After all, they had previously argued to the board that hearing, as a sense, had to be worth something, else God would not have created it. To view the loss of hearing as anything but unfortunate would be unthinkable. Certainly, it had to be unfortunate; it meant the loss of a great gift. Therefore deaf people were unfortunates themselves, deserving of hearing pity.

Howe explained:

That unfortunate class, who, by the admission of all competent witnesses, need more than any other class to have all the ties of neighborhood (sic),

³²³"Appendix," 168.

³²⁴"Appendix," 170.

of kindred, of friendship,--all the associations of family and home strengthened in an extraordinary degree by their education, in order to counteract the tendency to isolation arising from their infirmity. They are made an exceptional class; they are denied the privilege of being educated among their neighbors and friends; they are expatriated during the tender years of their youth.³²⁵

Howe purported in contradiction to the manualist approach that the deaf children constituted an unfortunate class in need of redemptive intervention by hearing people. The only way to counteract this "tendency to isolation" was to include the deaf child in the affairs of the neighborhood. It became clear that this tendency to isolation was, in fact, the tendency for deaf people to seek out one another's company. The isolation in question was the isolation from hearing people. Howe did not see this isolation as imposed by linguistic differences or caused by the fact that oral communication was uncertain at best for deaf children. Rather, he saw it as a direct consequence of the choice that the deaf children make as result of their education. They were exposed to other deaf children so, on account of their mutual deafness, they willfully chose to associate together in later life. This separate quality of Deafness disturbed Howe deeply. For this reason, he advocated oralism as tenaciously as he did. He wanted to nip Deafness in the bud; the only way to do so was to change educational methods. Oral training would enable deaf children to communicate with hearing people. Mainstreaming, educating them among neighbors and friends, would break down the

³²⁵"Appendix," 180.

culture at the roots. Lack of association and communication would break down cultural growth. Deafness would no longer result in an "exceptional class." What hearing people had in part created, by their initial educational preference, they could take away.

The committee deliberated on the topic throughout the spring. On May 27, 1867, they presented their report to the senate. They wholeheartedly recommended the opening of an oral school in Massachusetts. Thus, Clarke School was incorporated and chartered by the state in the same month. Howe and Hubbard were overjoyed. Lewis Dudley had been so impressed with the proceedings, he was won over by the argument and he enrolled his deaf daughter Theresa in the new school. He was most pleased with the results.

Howe and Hubbard had much to celebrate. They had simultaneously recognized the existence of Deaf culture and taken steps to destroy it. They recognized it by referring to the tendency of deaf people to gather together, the attachment to Sign, the "morbid tendencies," and "the peculiarities which grow out of their infirmity."³²⁶ In a backhanded way, the oralists recognized that Deaf people were noticeably different from hearing people. They acted differently and communicated differently. Unlike the manualists, they did not like what they saw. They wanted to make Deaf culture

³²⁶Samuel G. Howe, *Remarks Upon the Education of Deaf Mutes in Defence of the Doctrines of the Second Annual Report of the Massachusetts Board of State Charities, and in Reply to the Charges of the Rev. Collins Stone, principal of the American Asylum at Hartford* (Boston: Walker, Fuller, & Co., Publishers, 1866) 12-3.

disappear and remake Deaf people into deaf people, acculturated into hearing society. The best way to accomplish this task was to abolish Sign, the transmitter of culture and the predominant symbol of Deafness. By founding an oral school, they succeeded in their goal.

Coercion was necessary in the effort. Hubbard himself admitted that his daughter Mabel did not wish to speak.³²⁷ But the family refused to sign and they never learned the manual alphabet. As Hubbard stated, "She was forced, therefore, to resort to articulation if she would know anything."³²⁸ The family patiently waited for the frustrated child to reach out vocally to them; they did not try to ease her way into communication by a single gesture. But Hubbard was satisfied; Mabel spoke well.³²⁹ She had obviously learned so much. No one thought to ask Mabel what she thought about the situation.

Howe concurred with Hubbard. The opinion of the deaf children themselves were meaningless. They would prefer Sign since it was easier for them to learn. "The little mutlings won't take the pains to spell out their words," he said of fingerspelling,

³²⁷"Appendix," 202.

³²⁸"Appendix," 202.

³²⁹Note that Mabel did not lose her hearing until she was nearly five years old. Hubbard reported that "she could talk a little; she did not know all her letters, though she knew most of them." ("Appendix", 201) Her success with the oral method can be traced to her early exposure to language.

"when they can flash forth their meaning with a look or a gesture."³³⁰ All signs needed to be abolished if deaf children were to learn English. More importantly, Sign must be eliminated if the children would faithfully learn in English, and adopt that language as their vernacular. Hubbard trumpeted, "We want to teach them the English language, because we believe it is superior to the language of signs."³³¹ Only English was acceptable; its use would make the child more hearing too. The child could not be asked which language would have been preferable. English was unquestionably superior; a choice was impossible. Deaf children, like Mabel, would have to be forced along to learn the superior language but, in the end, it would be worthwhile. They would fit to join hearing society as equals. After all, Mabel would later marry Alexander Graham Bell who would tell his wife lovingly, "When I am with you dear and speak to you fully by word of mouth, I often forget that you cannot hear."³³² What higher compliment could a person want than to be considered hearing?

The oralists walked away from this meeting in triumph. The committee had agreed with their position. From this point on in the century, the tide would continue to turn against the manualists. Sign would be discouraged and looked down upon as markedly inferior to English. Alexander Graham Bell would lead the charge into the

³³⁰Howe, *Remarks* (Boston: Walker, Fuller, & Co., Publishers, 1866) 31-2.

³³¹"Appendix," 199.

³³²Alexander Graham Bell as quoted in Harlan Lane, *When the Mind Hears* (New York: Random House: 1984) 340.

twentieth-century. Edward Miner Gallaudet would battle him every step of the way but to no avail. The oralist position held fast. Something about the sight of a speaking deaf person, restored to society, captured the imagination of observers. A dark time for Deaf culture ensued.

EPILOGUE

All sides think they present invincible arguments, are covered by uncontrovertible facts, and occupy impregnable positions, and the battle promises to be long and hot.

Jasper Williams, 1883

The oralists had won a great victory in 1867. Not only did they establish an oral school, but they had won a possibly more important victory: they had won control over public opinion. By founding an oral school, they believed that they had proved that deaf people did not necessarily need Sign. They could learn to speak and act like hearing people, meeting the world on hearing terms. Oralism had once appeared to be a pipe dream, but the opening of the school showed that it was, in some cases, practical

and successful. The realm of public opinion was difficult to control, and it varied from forum to forum, one editor proposed this solution, another that opinion. But with practical results streaming in, those people who had supported oralism in theory could now bolster their remarks with tangible evidence. It was a quantum leap for the oralist movement; proof obviously helped to win new converts.³³³

Public opinion was not easy to gauge. Still, at the time of Gallaudet College's founding, the opinion seemed to favor instruction by Sign. Reporters flocked to Gallaudet and were entranced by the sight of this wonderful language. Attention was directed to Deafness and the reaction seemed favorable. But that was in 1864. With the oral rise, the tide definitely changed. By 1870, Clarke School was well on its way to producing successful young oralists. A new model of deafness was held up to the public eye. How did it compare with the manualist vision?

By the end of the century, it compared very nicely. The times were changing. Tolerance was not at a high point at this juncture in time. Immigration trends show that the American public had little trouble accepting immigrants who were fairly Americanized, like the English and the Canadians.³³⁴ They, at least, spoke the

³³³Importantly, Clarke School assumed an increasingly symbolic position in the Deaf world as well. Deaf people viewed Clarke's founding as a definite cultural blow. Today, Deaf people across the country have a variety of signs, many pejorative at best, for Clarke School. Most use the hands to portray wagging tongues. The school was physically small, but its symbolic stature was, and is, large indeed.

³³⁴John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism 1860-1925* (Rutgers University Press, 1955) 25.

Americanized, like the English and the Canadians.³³⁴ They, at least, spoke the vernacular. Language became a key issue for the country. Public opinion frowned on those immigrant groups who seemed to hold on too tightly to Old World ways.³³⁵ Learning English became a test of a group's willingness to assimilate into the American scene.

The treatment of deafness would seem to have been incorporated into this issue. Sign seemed to be a very foreign language. It was certainly not English. Deaf people who used it did not seem to act like hearing people. Deaf people who spoke, however, seemed to blend in very nicely. In an age that valued the ideal of the melting pot, Deaf people were simply not melting in quickly enough.³³⁶ Oralism gained strength,

³³⁴John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism 1860-1925* (Rutgers University Press, 1955) 25.

³³⁵Higham 25. He describes the experience of the Germans, for instance, as an example of this condition. "Then, too, the great German quarters of the midwestern cities, full of saloons, foreign signboards, and German language schools, seemed disturbingly self-contained." As the Germans began to assimilate, they became more accepted. Their initial separateness was a cultural problem for many American observers.

³³⁶The idea of the melting pot was in use in the nineteenth-century, even if the term itself was not employed. Higham explains: "Americans fashioned an image of themselves as an inclusive nationality, at once diverse and homogeneous, ever improving as it assimilated many types of men into a unified, superior people. According to this long and widely respected view, the Americans derived some of their very distinctiveness as a nationality from the process of amalgamation...In short, American nationality was emerging from a melting pot that functioned automatically." (Higham 21)

then, from this larger issue of cultural homogenization.³³⁷ Everyone was required to comply, whether or not they hear could the English language.

Yet, contrary to the oralists' hopes, the Deaf culture refused to die. Sign moved out of the public sphere since its inferior status made its users appear intellectually inferior as well. But instead of dying, it was simply used secretly, quietly, and privately. A wedge had been driven between deaf people, split into oral and manual camps. Pressure mounted, but the manualists clung fiercely to their culture, despite the ridicule. The educational skirmishes destroyed the quality of the education by splitting the teaching force in half, but still the Deaf parents sent their Deaf children to the schools. And the children taught one another, generation after generation, how to be Deaf. Despite oral attempts, Deafness lived on. By refusing to give up, early Deaf Americans ensured that the late twentieth-century inheritors of the history would see the culture finally recognized. By continuing to sign, they ensured that researchers

³³⁷Immigration trends again reveal the extent to which the oralist movement tapped into worries about the effectiveness of the process of assimilation. By 1880, people had begun to lose some confidence in the process. Immigrants were entering the country in large numbers and did not seem to be assimilating rapidly. Inner city poverty and other urban problems were linked to this lack of Americanization. "In discovering an immigration problem," writes Higham, "the social critics of the eighties might not indulge in the characteristically nativist assault on the newcomer as a foreign enemy of the American way of life; they might not speak in the accents of nationalism. But they raised the question of assimilation in a broadly significant way by connecting it with the central issues of the day. They gave intellectual respectability to anti-immigrant feelings." (Higham 39) The oralists indulged in the same type of thinking. They purported not to attack deaf people, but deaf education. The lasting, negative impact on the deaf community, however, belies the distinction.

would eventually find Sign worth studying, to proclaim it a legitimate language in 1965. Their struggles influenced Deaf history and represent the earliest signs of culture to Deaf people today.

APPENDIX A

The poetry offers enlightening insight into the cultural experiences of Deaf and hearing people in the nineteenth century. I felt that it was worth offering in its entirety to the readers.

THE DUMB BOY'S BEST FRIEND

A group of children giving way
 To happy careless joy,
 One among them at play
 A little deaf-mute boy.

"Tell us," they said, "we wish to know
 Who your best friend may be?
 On whom do you your love bestow?
 His name, now let us see."

The deaf-mute boy the pencil took,
 No hesitation showed;
 But with a bright and happy look,
 Wrote down the name of "God."

The laughing children looked at him
 With wonder in their eyes,
 The dumb boy's answer puzzled them,
 And fill'd them with surprise.

"He does not understand, they said,
 "His knowledge is but small;
 He does but write what he has read--
 God is the Friend of all."

"God is in heaven: 'tis very true
 Your best Friend is above,
 Now, name the friend on earth whom you

Above all others love."

They waited, and the deaf-mute boy
 In letters large and plain
 Wrote, while his eyes reveal'd his joy,
 The name of "God" again.

"Whom have I in heaven but Thee?
 To Thee my love doth tend;
 No one earth can comfort me,
 As Thou, my Saviour, Friend."

Oh, happy child! I fain would know
 The secret of thy love,
 Learn my affections to bestow
 On that Best Friend above.

Many sorrows thou mayest see
 "Ere thy life's journey end,
 But thou can ne'er unhappy be
 With "God for thy 'Best Friend.'"

LA PETITE SOURDE-MUETTE

Child of the speaking eye,--
 Child of the voiceless tongue,--
 Around whose unresponsive ear
 No harp of earth is rung;--

There's one, whose nursing care
 Relax'd not night or day,
 Yet ne'er hath heard one lispng word
 Her tenderness repay;

Though anxiously she strove
 Each uncouth tone to frame,--
 Still vainly listening through her tears
 To catch a *mother's* name.

Child of the fettered ear,

Whose hermit-mind must dwell
 'Mid all the harmonies of earth
 Lone, in its guarded cell;

Fair, budding thought are thine,
 With sweet afflictions wove,--
 And whispering angels cheer thy dreams
 With minstrelsy of love;--

I know it by the smile
 That o'er thy peaceful sleep
 Glides, like the rosy beam of morn
 To tint the misty deep.

Child of the pensive brow,--
 Search for these jewels rare
 That glow in Heaven's withholding hand,
 To cheer thy lot of care;

Hermetically seal'd
 To sounds of woe and crime,
 That vex and stain the pilgrim soul
 Amid the snares of time;

By discipline made wise
 Pass patient in thy way,
 And when rich music loads the air,
 Bow down thy head, and pray.

Child of immortal hope,--
 Still, many a gift is thine,
 The untold treasures of the heart,
 The gems from learning's mine;

Think:--What ecstatic joy
 The thrilling lip shall prove,
 When first its life-long seal shall burst
 'Mid the pure realm of love;

What rapture for the ear,

When its strong chain is riven,
 To drink its first, baptismal sound
 From the full choir of Heaven.

--Mrs. L.H. Sigourney

A VOICE TO THE DEAF

I sat within the church so dim and calm,
 And watched the people in their grave content
 Listening, each with eager face upturned,
 To hear the message sent.

But through the silence deep that pressed me close,
 No word of comfort on my spirit broke;
 Not e'en for me the anthem's swelling sound
 The solemn silence woke.

I turned half heart-sick towards the altar there;
 I stood alone the while the crowd pressed by;
 Then from my heart to God through all the pain
 Went up a bitter cry.

He heard and answered: on my heart there fell
 Peace like a benediction after prayer:
 While to my soul the Voice Eternal spake
 A message sweet and rare.

I raised my head: a rush of gladness thrilled
 My being through. Content, at last, I trod
 With slow steps down aisle, while heart
 Bowed with the love of God.

--Anna B. Bense

DEAF, AND YET I HEAR

To me, though neither voice nor sound
 From earth or air may come,
 Deaf to the world that brawls around,

The world to me is dumb.

Yet may the quick and conscious eye
 Assist the slow dull ear;
 Sight can the signs of thought supply,
 And with a look I hear.

The song of birds, the water's fall.
 Sweet tones and grating jars,
 Hail, tempest, wind, and thunder, all
 Are silent as the stars.

The stars that on their tranquil way,
 In language without speech,
 The glory of the Lord display
 And to all nations preach.

Now, though *one* outward sense be sealed,
 The kind remaining four,
 To teach me needful knowledge yield
 Their earnest aid the more.

Yet hath my heart an inward ear,
 Through which its power rejoice;
 Speak, Lord, and let me love to hear
 Thy Spirit's still, small voice.

So when the, Archangel from the ground
 Shall summon great and small,
 The ear now deaf shall hear that sound,
 And answer to the call.

--James Montgomery

A VOICELESS WORLD

I dwell within a voiceless world,
 Mysterious and deep;
 My tongue can shape no form of speech,
 I can but laugh and weep:

The touch may wake the sounding string,
 And lips with music thrill;
 I can but see what others feel,
 A void is round we still.

The winged lightnings o'er me flash,
 And the trembling nerve may shake;
 But the fearful silence on mine ear
 The thunder can not break;
 And yet I know 'tis God who speaks
 In the electric gleams;
 And I love the music of his voice--
 I hear it oft in dreams.

When I a mother's name would speak,
 Or hear its holy sound,
 My lips give forth no utterance,
 Mine ear is silence bound;
 But, Oh! that sweetest, dearest name,
 My soul delights to hear;
 Its melody oft thrills my heart--
 I answer with a tear.

Though, when she kneels at evening hour,
 No sound the stillness breaks;
 I know the language of her lips,
 For 'tis the soul that speaks;
 And there are other voices, too,
 Commingling in her prayer;
 I see no forms, but, ah! I feel
 The Angels hovering there.

When I the beauteous heavens behold,
 The star-gemmed milky way,
 And 'neath the flowers and bright-winged birds
 Upon the vernal spray;
 When beauty's fragrance fills the sense,
 Oh! then I long to hear,
 And know if music comes as sweet
 Upon the quickened ear.

Though on the ear and from the tongue
 No words of sweetness roll,
 The heart has its own melody,
 The music of the soul;
 'Tis like the far-off symphony
 The spirit hears alone,
 Which swells beyond the walls of time
 In anthems round the throne.

There, on my re-awakened sense,
 Shall heavenly cadence thrill,
 My loosened tongue join in the strain
 Which powers celestial fill;
 There, evermore with new delight,
 Shall praise to him be given;
 Who, in a world of silence, tuned
 Both ear and tongue for heaven.

TO A BEAUTIFUL MUTE

Tell me the star from which she fell,
 Oh, name the flower
 From out whose wild and perfumed bell
 At witching hour
 Sprang forth this fair and fairy maiden,
 Like a bee with honey laden.

They say that those sweet lips of thine
 Breathe not to speak;
 Thy very ears that seem so fine
 No sound can seek;
 And yet thy face beams with emotion,
 Restless as the waves of ocean.

'Tis well; thy face and form agree,
 And both are fair:
 I would not that this child should be
 As others are:

I love to mark her, in derision
Smiling in seraphic vision

At our poor gifts of vulgar sense
That cannot stain
Nor mar her native innocence,
Nor cloud her brain
With all the dreams of worldly folly,
And its creatures melancholy.

To thee I dedicate these lines,
Yet read them not;
Cursed be the art that e'er refines
Thy natural lot:
Read the bright stars, and read the flowers,
And hold converse with the bowers.
--Earl of Beaconsfield

THE MUTE SISTER

I had sister once, a beauteous one,
With calm, blue eyes, and slender, graceful form,
Her ear like mine was closed. She never spoke,
But when her thoughts in simple signs came forth,
In signs that I alone could freely read.
She was the only joy that cheered my way--
A path all voiceless, silent, sad and drear--
But sickness came; upon her wasting frame,
The burning fever preyed. As day by day
Her strength grew less, I by her pillow watched,
Not knowing she would leave me all alone,
She often thanked me for my kindly care.
At last, one day, she placed her little hand
In mine, and gave a long, last look, as if
To say *Farewell*--then sank in slumber deep.
She slept the livelong day, and all that night,
Nor yet at morn awoke. Then others came,
And dressed her ice-cold wasted form in white.

They put her in, I thought, a little cradle;
And this within was purely white. They placed
Her hand across her breast. She looked
So beauteous then; but still she did not wake,
Then many came, and bore my sister far away,
To place her cradle in the dark cold ground,
And though I begged them not, with cries and tears,
They threw the earth upon her gentle breast,
And left her in that dark and silent place.
Ah! then I was alone in the wide world,
I often went to sit where they had alit
My sister, hoping she would come again.
She came not, and I wet the sods with tears.
I asked my mother where my sister was,
With tears starting in her upturned eyes,
She pointed to the calm, blue sky,
As if to say my sister there had gone.
Oh! how from day to day, I watched the sky;
And as the sun sank down, I hoped that on
His last bright, glorious beams, she would still come.
As star by star came forth, I gazed and watched,
Till wearied quite, I sought my pillow, there
To weep my grief away, and dream all night
Of my lost sister. I asked my father
If I should ever see her form again.
He told me that, when I should sleep like her,
And in the ground be laid, then I should
Behold her face again. 'Twas then I wished
To sleep just like my sister, and in the grave
Be buried, that I might see her face again.
As long, long years have rolled away, I have
Been taught to hope, to meet in heaven with one
So loved on earth. But still the thought unbidden
Comes, could not He before whose throne both men
And angels humbly bow, have spared
My poor sister, that hand in hand with her,
I might have passed all through life's silent way,
To rest in one lone peaceful grave at last,
And at the resurrection morn, so soar
With mutual wing, to Heaven's eternal day.

--J.S. Brown

DEAF!

I often think it must be sweet,
 The tones of happy birds to hear,
 When from lofty bough they greet
 The sun-rays that through clouds appear;
 For I have thought that even I,
 When clouds their shadows o'er me fling,
 If cheering sunlight swept them by,
 Sweet songs of gratitude could sing,
 And, if my heart to song be wrought,
 When grateful thoughts my bosom fill,
 What melodies--by nature taught--
 From feathered choristers must thrill,
 But these to hear is not for me.
 Alas! I hear not--yet I see.

I often think, when beauty's lip,
 To music's soul is giving voice,
 And melodies appear to drip,
 How those who catch them must rejoice;
 And yet they seem the draughts to drink
 As though each one was theirs of right--
 'Twould wake my gratitude, I think,
 As of the blind restored to sight.
 I catch a trickle now and then;
 It thrills my heart, then melts away,
 And silence then might bring me pain,
 If resignation did not say,
 "Keep this reflection in thy mind,
 Though deaf, thou art not dumb or blind."

For others I can freely feel,
 And gladly strive to save them pain;
 To further, if I can, their weal,
 And all my selfishness restrain.

From social throngs I often shrink--
 That else would pleasure give to me--
 Because it is a pain to think
 That I, unwittingly, may be
 A weary trial, and a tax
 On patience, strength, or courtesy;
 And, seeming in politeness lax,
 Or gentleness or modesty,
 No; my misfortune is my own,
 And I will bear it all alone.

Ah! I have seen in days gone by--
 What gave me pain, but ne'er offense,
 And awakened many a heavy sigh--
 A titt'ring smile at my expense.
 And some of those who sport could find
 In my misfortune--me perplex--
 (And who forgot I was not blind)
 Were of the fairer, gentler!
 And I confess it pained me sore--
 They had forgotten for the time--
 That though the burden which I bore
 My sorrow was, it was no crime.
 I pray that heaven these may save
 From pains and stings like those they gave.

I am not sensitive, I think,
 Nor does my burden bear me down,
 The cup is mine and I must drink,
 Why should I shudder, flee, or frown?
 I cannot shun it, if I could,
 'Tis best the burden should be mine,
 And so it is with all life's ills,
 In fortune's frown or cold reverse,
 'Tis best to bear what heaven wills,
 And thankful be it no worse,
 And in this thought I comfort find,
 Though deaf, I am not dumb, nor blind.

--Judge Simmons

ADDRESS OF THE DEAF AND DUMB TO THE BLIND

Beats there a human heart so cold,
 So selfish and unkind,
 That can refuse its sympathy
 To the *poor helpless blind?*

E'en *we* must pity those, whose eyes
 Can never see the light:--
 The *joyous light* that wakens us
 To ever new delight.

When, with soft step, the rosy morn
 Steals through the window pane,
 And at her smile the heart leaps up
 To life and joy again.

She gives us winged messengers,
 That still unbidden fly,
 Ready in countless throngs around,
 With news from far and nigh;--

With news of all fair things around;
 And as the seasons range
 From loveliness to loveliness,
 They tell us every change.

Nay, more! she gives to see the looks
 Of sympathy and love:--
 To read the volume that points out
 The way to heaven above.

Poor hapless ones! to whom the morn
 Still comes, but brings no light;
 To whom the evening comes, but brings
 To you no deeper night.

Yet *we were* more unfortunate
 Than ever were the blind!

Your darkness is but of the eye,
But ours was of the mind.

We by the eye were taught to hear,
And blest Philanthropy,
Unwearied still, would by the touch
Instruct the blind to see.

And 'tis to aid this heav'n born plan,
That fingers fair have made
The specimens of art and taste
In this gay hall displayed.

And *we* whose hands are wont t' express
Each feeling of the heart,
The labors of those hands would give,
'Tis all we can impart.

As others pitied *us*, 'tis ours
In turn to pity *you*;
We who have learn'd to read God's word,
Wish *you* to read it too.

Although you cannot see the gifts
Your friends for you have wrought,
Nor their kind looks of sympathy
For your unhappy lot;

Nor the fair forms that through this hall
Move in a flood of light
And seems to us as *Angels* sent
On Mercy's errands bright.

Yet you can hear the accents sweet,
That from hearts warm and kind,
Plead in their kindest, sweetest tones,
For the poor helpless blind.

And many a heart will thrill, when rise
Your voices sweet and clear:--

'Tis we must then *your* pity claim,
Your song we cannot hear.

THE DEAF AND DUMB

Who is that little blooming boy?
Why do no books his mind employ?
Why does he breathe no sound of joy?
Oh, he is deaf and dumb!

And who that maid, so passing fair,
Of beauteous form, but pensive air?
Alas! her mournful looks declare,
She, too, is deaf and dumb!

Would that my language could relate
Their woe-fraught pangs, and cheerless state;
And how I pity the sad fate
Of those who are deaf and dumb!

Where healthy, youthful sports abound,
And others play with merry sound,
They walk alone, or gaze around,
As they are deaf and dumb!

Not all the melodies of spring,
To them can soothing pleasures bring:
Vainly the sweetest birds may sing
To the sad deaf and dumb!

And if their parents should be poor,
Then (though they might obtain a cure),
All their sad woes they must endure,
And die both deaf and dumb!

Must they, ye good, whose hearts can sigh
For human grief, thus must they die?
No; to the succour you will fly

Of the poor deaf and dumb!

Children, whose bosoms joyful beat
 Around the social heart to meet,
 Who can your much-lov'd parents greet,
 Pity the deaf and dumb!

Parents, who purest transports know,
 Hasten your gratitude to show,
 And aid, with liberal hands, bestow
 Upon the deaf and dumb!

You who can list to pious lays,
 And in the Church unite to raise
 The fervent hymn of heartfelt praise,
 Assist the deaf and dumb!

From heav'n may great success descend,
 And constant fruits their toils attend,
 Who labour anxious to befriend
 The hapless deaf and dumb!

And while we thus deplore their lot,
 May that great God be ne'er forgot,
 To whom we owe that we are not,
 Like them, both deaf and dumb!

THE DUMB CHILD

She is my only girl,
 I asked for her as some most precious thing;
 For all unfinished was Love's jewelled ring,
 Till set with this soft pearl.
 The shades that followed time I could not see;
 How pure, how perfect seemed the gift to me.

Oh! many a soft old tune
 I used to sing into that deadened ear,

And suffered not the slightest footstep near,
 Lest she might wake too soon;
 And hushed her brothers' laughter while she lay;
 Ah! needless care! I might have let them play.

'Twas long ere I believed
 That this one daughter might not speak to me;
 Waited and waited--God knows how patiently--
 How willingly deceived!
 Vain live was long the untiring nurse of Faith,
 And tended Hope until it starved to death.

Oh, if she could but hear
 For one short hour, till I her tongue might teach
 To call me Mother, in the broken speech
 That thrills the mother's ear!
 Alas! those sealed lips never may be stirred
 To the deep music of that holy word!

My heart it sorely tries,
 To see her kneel with such a reverent air
 Beside her brothers at their evening prayer;
 Or lift those earnest eyes
 To watch our lips as though the words she knew,
 Then move her own, as she were speaking too.

I've watched her looking up
 To the bright wonder of a sunset sky,
 With such a depth of meaning in her eye
 That I could almost hope
 The struggling soul would burst its binding cords,
 And the long pent up thoughts flow forth in words.

The song of bird and bee,
 The chorus of the breezes, streams and groves,
 All the grand music to which Nature moves,
 Are wasted melody
 To her; the world of sound a tuneless void;
 While even silence has its charm destroyed.

Her face is very fair;
 Her blue eyes beautiful; of finest mould
 Her soft, white brow, o'er which in waves of gold
 Ripples her shining hair.
 Alas! this lovely temple closed must be,
 For He who made it keeps the master-key.

Wills He the mind within
 Should from earth's Babel clamor be kept free,
 E'en that his still small voice and step might be
 Heard at its inner shrine
 Thro' that deep hush of soul with clearer thrill?
 Why do I grieve? O, murmuring heart, be still.

She seems to have a sense
 Of quiet gladness in her noiseless play;
 She hath a pleasant smile, a gentle way,
 Whose voiceless eloquence
 Touches all hearts--though I had once the fear
 That even her father would not care for her.

Not of all gifts bereft
 Even now. How could I say she did not speak?
 What real language lights her eye and cheek,
 Grateful to Him who left
 Unto her soul yet open avenues
 For joy to enter, and for love to use.

And God in love doth give
 To her defect, a beauty of His own;
 And we a deeper tenderness have shown;
 Thro' that for which we grieve.
 Yet shall the seal be melted from her ear?
 Yea, and my voice shall fit in--but not here.

When that new sense is given,
 What rapture will its first experience be,
 That never woke to meaner melody
 Than the rich songs of heaven,
 To hear the full-toned anthem swelling round,

While angels teach the ecstasies of sound!

OUR SILENT ONES

They placed my darling in my arms, I saw that she was fair,
 And in the skies bright gleams of love seemed dancing everywhere,
 Such rapture came with this new joy, God's gift from heaven above!
 Oh! how I pressed her to my heart with all a mother's love.
 My little rosebud come at last, how long I looked for thee,
 And pictured what a cherub bright this precious one might be.
 I gazed upon her soft blue eyes, and o'er her golden hair,
 Some angel-fingers seemed to stray and leave a brightness there,
 And whispering as they fluttered by, lit up her smile with gladness;--
 Oh! who could dream that morn of joy could ever end in sadness.
 We cull the rose, the flower is sweet, we guard with tender care,
 Nor fancy that a hidden thorn could ever rankle there;
 My little one! my treasure, how I watched thee at thy play,
 And listened for thy childish song, and waited day by day,
 Those coral lips were parted with laughter-loving glee,
 But never came the faintest sound of that dear voice to me,
 I tried to hide from my pained heart thy tongue would never say
 To me the loved word "Mother" till time should pass away.
 As gentle breezes softly breathed and stirred the dewy air,
 Those earnest eyes were looking at the white clouds sailing there;
 And fairer grew that lovely face and purer every day,
 Until the angels beckoned her and bore my flower away,
 And now in heaven is planted my rosebud bright and fair,
 And heavenly voices ring with hers in glorious anthems there;
 The opened ear rejoices, oh! what melody divine
 Now comes to her pure spirit where the bright ones round her shine;
 There first her tongue is loosened to praise her God and King--
 No longer silent is that voice the angels taught to sing.

A MYSTERY

Alone with life-long, voiceless night,

Alone with soundless, life-long days,
 Yet ever smiling his delight;
 Because he *sees*, gives God the praise.

No speech, no unstopped, listening ears;
 No voice of children sweetly falls,
 No soft-toned music charms to tears,
 No chiming bell to worship calls.

And yet--I cannot tell you why--
 My silent neighbor's blithe and gay;
 He does not sit and weep and sigh
 His little span of life away.

What blessing glorious hath God's care
 Bestowed upon my joyous friend?
 His days are like a vision fair,
 While love and peace his steps attend.

He is not great or rich in store,
 Save in the golden heart he bears;
 Perhaps the jewels of the poor
 Illume the crown of life he wears.

Something he has unseen, I know,
 Some veiled shrine where silence reigns;
 The temple of our God below
 Somewhere a living fount retains.

Perhaps he hears the Spirit's voice
 Chanting with tenderness and peace:
 "Rejoice! I say again, rejoice!
 God's love and mercy never cease!"

With ears unstopped and lips unsealed
 Some day he'll greet his children dear,
 Some day in heaven 'twill be revealed--
 The mystery of affliction here.

--S. Adams Wiggin

THE DEAF AND DUMB CHILD'S CHRISTMAS CAROL

I cannot speak, I cannot hear,
 But I can feel and think,
 And mine eyes are filled with the joyfulness
 That hand to hand doth link,--
 While round and round
 The dancers bound
 And laugh and shout--and I *see* the sound,
 Though silent to me
 All the noise and glee
 Of the dance, the round-game, and revelry.

Something within me struggles oft
 My happiness to tell in sounds,
 Words--words--I strive to shout, or waft,
 Along the room--across the grounds--
 And o'er the snow
 As my playmates go;
 But though 'tis in vain since the day of my birth,
 The voice of mind
 Is ne'er left behind,
 And cries welcome Christmas and all its good mirth,

The faces laugh in the red firelight!
 Fingers, looks, actions, all speak to me;
 Antics and fun make a merry night,
 Till I fancy I hear the low hum of a sea,--
 A murmur and rush--
 Though it ends in a hush,
 All tell me there's something outside of my ears;
 But my life's in my eyes,--
 Oh, thank God for the prize!
 Which I carol at Christmas as years roll on years!

O! WHAT IS SOUND?

Sister, I would have thee tell--
 (But, alas! I ne'er can know,)
 What doth make thy bosom swell
 And thine eye to brighten so,
 When thy nimble fingers play
 Upon that instrument so long--
 The sounds are beautiful you say,
 And Rapture is the child of Song.

But what is sound, that it can bring
 Such sweet emotion to the breast?
 Oh! sound must be a lovely thing,
 It makes thee, sister, seem so blest.
 And yet, in vain, I look for aught
 That can such thrilling joy impart;
 Is music, then, a nameless thought
 That holds communion with the heart?

Or it is real--a thing that may
 Be known to sense of sight or touch?
 Ah! whither would conjecture stray?
 'Tis vain--I only know this much--
 That it is beautiful; but where,
 On earth below or heaven above,
 Shall aught be found so pure and fair,
 That may the soul so strongly move?

I've seen the broad and fiery sun
 Arising from the deep green sea,
 And again, when day was done,
 Streaking heaven's far canopy
 With a glorious crimson fringe,
 As gorgeously he sunk to rest,
 Purpling ocean with the tinge
 Of his brilliant fading crest.

And then delighted I have gazed
 As on a vision'd scene of bliss,
 And all my thoughts were heavenward raised;
 Is music, sister, aught like this?

And oh, the beauteous star-lit sky,
 Sparkling rich in blue and bright,--
 Is surely full of harmony;
 Is sound as lovely as its light?

And when the pale moon's silver beams
 Upon the stream and streamlet play,
 Surpassing beautiful it seems;
 Is this like music, sister, say?
 Alas! alas! it cannot be.
 Methinks that look of rapture now--
 That passion-gaze of ecstasy--
 That sky-ward lifted brow

Defies my vain conjectures all;
 To me that fount of joy is sealed,
 Its influence ne'er on me can fall
 Nor e'en to fancy be revealed.
 Yet shall I not unpleased behold
 The pleasure 'tis not mine to know;
 My sister's joy can ne'er unfold
 To this fond heart a source of woe.

COMPENSATION

The earth is filled with scented flowers,
 Some blushing with the hues of morn,
 And some in silent forests born,
 Pale as the twilight's fading hours;
 As bright, alas! to fade as soon.

Shall then the blossoms weep and pine?
 Shall the pale lily tell the rose,
 "Ah, me! I never know repose
 Beside that crimson cheek of thine;
 Why have not my unspotted bells
 The hue that on thy beauty dwells?"

Wiser are they; in sweet content
They turn to heaven their dewy eyes,
And read in dim or sunny skies
His love who cloud and light hath sent,
And in their differing grace displays
Some part of all His wisdom's ways.

And some there are who walk the earth
With ever overflowing tears,
And spirits bowed to dust by fears,
Because, forever since their birth,
By His will, their lips are mute,
And hushed for them are harp and lute.

My brethren, hath a sudden thought
Flashed ever in your grieving hearts,
That he whose vocal lip imparts
The wisdom he hath dearly bought,
Some compensating power is sent
To whom no gift of speech is lent?

What if for you the voice of God
Is silent in the sunny fields?
To those He loves His presence yields
A purer bliss than smiles abroad;
When in the contrite soul he dwells,
And fills with joy its darkest cells.

Ye never feel the thrill of pain
That springeth from a careless tone,
Ye cannot hear the suffering moan
Of childhood, striving to complain,
Or sorrow at their wailing cry,
Who have no words for agony.

Nor for your ears the bitter word
Escapes the lips once filled with love;
The serpent speaking through the dove,
Oh, blessed! ye have never heard;
Your minds by mercy here are sealed

From half the sin in man revealed.

But when those seals shall melt away,
And heavenly songs ye hear and sing,
Will that half hour of silence bring
Your homesick thoughts to perished clay?
Oh! will ye pine for earth's lost shore,
Or pant for heaven's sweet strains once more.

APPENDIX B

The newspapers provide an interesting commentary on the situation of Deaf people in the nineteenth-century. A glance through the mastheads demonstrates the growing awareness of Deafness as well as a concern for the condition of Deaf people in a hearing society.

The front cover of the *Silent World* proclaims its difference by fingerspelling the title instead of printing it in English letters. The letters appear to the reader as they would appear to an actual viewer. The slogan of the paper is an imposing quote from Shakespeare: "In dumb significant's proclaim your thoughts." Perhaps it was the paper's way of urging its readers not to abandon, or be ashamed to use, Sign.

The Mute and The Blind portrays a different picture. On the left is a deaf man holding up his hand in the formation of the letter "A." On the right is a blind man holding a metal representation of the same letter. Two hands shake in the middle of the page over what appears to be a Bible. The slogan reads, "Then shall the Eyes of the Blind be Opened, and the Ears of the Deaf Shall be Unstopped." The editor, P.H. Skinner, was blind himself and concerned with educating the rejected Black deaf and blind children. He fervently believed that they should have an education as well as an opportunity to know God. On the back cover of the paper, a school teacher is depicted

teaching a class of students. On the blackboard behind him is written, "There is a God." Religion was obviously a motivating factor in his mission.

Surrounding this illustration is a representation of the manual alphabet. It reproduces the handshapes as they would be seen by the viewer, palm forward. The letters are similar to the ones used by the *Silent World*; the shapes are consistent. This illustration also adds a sign for "&." Such a sign, in fingerspelling, no longer exists today.

The next paper is the *Deaf-Mute Pelican*. It was the paper of the state school in Louisiana. It claims to be "devoted to the interests of the deaf and dumb." It too contains a representation of the manual alphabet. The letters, though, are markedly different from the previous ones. They are not presented consistently. Instead, they are drawn from a variety of angles, some palm forward as the viewer would see them and others with the backs of the hand toward the viewer, as the sender would see them. Still others are shown in profile, giving a poor showing of how the letter is formed. The *Pelican* does do the service of placing both a small and capital English letter with each picture. There is only one handshape for each version, after all.

In Samuel Akerly's *Address Delivered at Washington Hall, in the City of New York, on the 30th May, 1826, as Introductory to the exercises of the pupils of the New York Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb, with an account of the Exercises, and Notes and Documents in Relation to the Subject*, there is included

illustrations of signs for numbers, one through nine. They are old signs, no longer in use today, with the exception of the signs for FIVE and THREE. This change did not affect the letters; they are still the same today as they were in the nineteenth-century.

The *Deaf-Mute*, originally *The Deaf-Mute Casket* for reasons which are unknown, was the paper of the school for deaf in North Carolina. Its cover was steeped in religious symbolism, complete with church towers and angels. The school, perhaps, was on a religious mission to save the souls, as well as educate, the deaf children. Its motto, not shown here, was a short poem.

No more are joys of social life

To lonely Mutes forbidden,

The Blind can trace by fingers touch

Their homeward path to heaven.

Obviously, like Skinner, the religious instruction of the students was important to the teachers at the school.

Two other papers, illustration of which were unavailable, had interesting slogans for their journals. *The Deaf-Mutes' Journal*, in Mexico, New York, offered a quote from Cicero: "There are more men enabled by reading than by nature." Evidently the editors wanted to remind the Deaf readers, as well as the hearing public, that deafness did not result in mental poverty. Reading could replace nature; in this case the lack

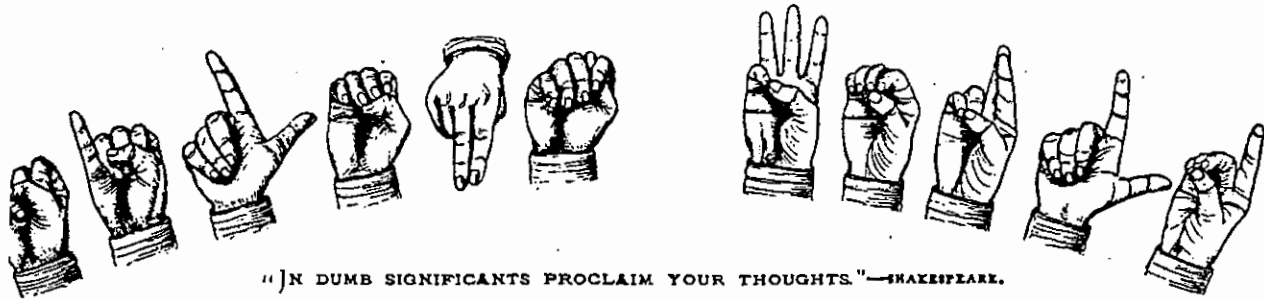
of access to information by the lack of hearing could be overcome by the ability to read.

The Deaf-Mutes' Friend, in Henniker, New Hampshire, meanwhile, was concerned with the unity of the Deaf community. Its slogan was simple: "United We Stand; Divided We Fall." The Deaf community, in the opinion of the Deaf editor, William Swett, could not afford to be split apart. Deaf people needed unity or they would be lost in a hearing world. The community was urged to make the effort to stick together. He believed that the Deaf community could offer a safe haven and a friendly home for all Deaf Americans.

Finally, an illustration is offered from an unknown source. The date is likewise unknown. It is most likely can be traced to the first half of the century. It offers just one word of advice to its viewers: "Pity the poor girl that is deaf and dumb and blind." People considered handicapped by the public were supposed to be pitied. They were deserving of sympathy and kindness, not fairness and equality. Such people were to be shielded from life; they were not to directly engage it. The words could easily have been addressed to the deaf community at the beginning of the century. Hearing paternalism worked in the exact same way.

The illustrations offer a unique insight into the Deaf community. They shed light on the issues that concerned nineteenth-century Deaf Americans. Issues of

community, education, opportunity, unity, and acceptance were never far from their minds. And, as always, Sign was always close to their hearts.



"IN DUMB SIGNIFICANTS PROCLAIM YOUR THOUGHTS."—SHAKESPEARE.

A CHILD'S FANCY.

THE following is a true incident which occurred upon the occasion of a "children's excursion" from the city to the country.]

Out from the grimy courts and narrow alleys,
The hapless children came;
Hungry for country sighs that yet to them were only
The mockery of a name
Their weary little feet have never pressed white daisies
Nor held to dimpled face
The dainty buttercup, to catch the bright reflection
Warm from the sun's embrace.

For ever have they searched for four-leave clovers,
Nor picked the violets blue,
Among the meadow grass and graceful fern leaves
Bending with pearls of dew
Look at those haggard, wan, unchildlike features,
Touched with the mark of sin;
Those tiny, worn, old-looking human creatures
With cheeks so pale and thin.

His strange, sad crowd by kindly hands was gathered,
For a brief holiday—
Far from the city's hum of trade and noise of bustle
To where the river lay.
Some laughed aloud with glee, chasing each other
O'er the green grass;
Others gazed silently, in wistful wonder watching
Cloud-shadows pass.

Suddenly, near a laughing group of children,
Floated a butterfly,
Whose gorgeous colors and light, airy motion,
Charmed every eye.
Nothing like this had ever crossed their vision;
What could it be?
One ventured this, another that suggestion,
Till suddenly

Out spake a little girl, clear-voiced and earnest,
"Oh, I can tell,
It is a flower broke loose!" and then upon them
A sudden silence fell,
The stranger who had heard the child's sweet fancy,
Turning unseen away—
Whispered "the children's Free Excursion, has proved truly
A blessed holiday!"—*Christian at Work.*

THE OUTCAST.

AS I was walking down Cathedral street, Baltimore, one cold and dry winter's day; even I had a hard time to get along facing the bearing, cutting wind. As I neared the crossing of the street, I saw suddenly upon two little wee outcast children—a boy and a

"Please don't cry, Lee," the boy said, and he put his protecting arm around the little child, "the Good Man will take care of us, Lee." And you could see by the way she caught her pretty red cheeks between her teeth that she was trying hard to choke back the bitter sobs.

These little creatures were too busy with their own big sorrows to notice me, and turned the corner of the street quietly and passed on. And I stood and looked after them, wondering what could be the matter, although a little plain thinking on my part would have made it all very clear; poverty was stinging their young hearts.

A few weeks after all this, I went down to the City Bank to get some money, and left there with three hundred dollars in my pocket-book; and when I reached home I put my hand in my pocket to find the book gone and the money gone; and therefore my confusion was very great. I made every effort to find it, and after some two weeks gave it up as hopeless.

One evening about dusk the servant tapped at my door, and said, "Two children down stairs to see you, Miss."

"What name did they say, and what do they want?" I asked.

"They did not tell me anything!" she answered.

"Then say I am much engaged this evening," I replied, and then turning to my book which was bright and full of interest.

"Please, Miss, the boy says he does so want to see you," the girl came back and poked her head in the door and said.

"I thought you understood me. I see no one this evening," I said impatiently. Then I was left to myself for awhile.

At least one hour after this two or three bold raps at my door made me say quickly "Come in!" and I expected to see my brother Roger, and I was not disappointed.

"Why, Belle, do you know how cold it is?" was his greeting.

"I feel very comfortable here," I replied.

"No doubt you do, but do you suppose it's as comfortable out in the bitter cold of this night, Belle?"

"I am sure I have no time to think about it," I answered carelessly.

"Then, at least, I hope you have feeling enough not to keep these two children waiting your movements," and there seemed so much grief in my brother's tone of voice that I looked up quickly and asked:

"What children, Roger?"

"You ought to know best; they say they have been waiting a long time to see you. When I came home I found them sitting on the cold marble steps actually shaking and they were almost purple with the cold. I spoke to them and asked why they were sitting there in the cold, and the boy said he must see Miss Belle Clifton."

"I know nothing about the children, Roger. It's wonderful if I must be annoyed by those I do not know."

Roger said not a word, but turned and left the room, and some few minutes after he opened the door and ushered in the strange children. I looked up; the book dropped from my hand, and it did seem as if I had lost all power to speak or act. I knew the children at once—Lee and her brother stood before me, certainly the last two on earth I expected to see here.

Roger led them up before the glowing grate that they might get a little feeling in their numbed limbs, and lifted the little Lee and seated her on the soft cushions of a chair; then made the boy



"Then Shall the Eyes of the Blind be Opened, and the Ears of the Deaf Shall be Unstopped."

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P. H. SKINNER,
NIAGARA CITY, N. Y.

HISTORY

Of the Columbia Institution for Deaf and Dumb and Blind in Washington, D. C.

[Continued from our last Number.]

We had now left to us no faltering or hesitation. The Lord most signally sent strangers to feed us in our extremity.— Out of darkness, he had brought light.— These providences of God seemed to be necessary to prepare us for what was to follow. Many scenes of deep and thrilling interest we might relate in connection with our school had we time and space.— Days of toil, nights of ceaseless watchings, weeks of self-denial and endurance, months of suffering and trials which few could long endure, wore heavily upon our energies. The darkness and doubts which at first envelope almost every enterprise of this kind in its infancy we keenly felt, yet we ceased not to plead the cause of these unfortunate children.

It was after months of these perplexities and struggles that the sun began to rise upon our labors. The Lord opened the heart of the benevolent and gave us favor in the eyes of the people. The press of the city began to praise our efforts, and there could be seen notices almost daily. Favorable notices of the school,—not as at first when our school was weeks without a visitor, not so now. Strangers now flock to it at all hours of the day till our time was almost incessant-

ly taken up by visitors; till we were compelled in order our pupils might have some uninterrupted hours for study to set apart one day in each week for the reception of visitors, and notices were published in all the journals of the city informing the friends of the school, that Friday was set apart as a visiting day.

The exhibitions which were given on Friday afternoon, became quite interesting as our pupils advanced in their studies. These exhibitions were usually well attended, and the manifestations of satisfaction in the rapid advancements, the pupils had made on the parts of those who had appropriated funds to the support of the school, became a delightful source of pleasure to us amid our incessant cares and anxieties.

Our school was fast coming into notice. In fact we may say it had become quite popular, and the popular tide began to move in its favor. Then came the hour of its greatest danger. With this popular tide came popular friends. In other words, those who would be popular. If to be a friend of the unfortunate would raise them in the popular estimation. They were the warmest of friends. Their names must be first enrolled among the patrons and benefactors of the school.— Such friends will always come, when the popular tide set in favor of a cause, and nothing can be too much for them to do, or at least to have the names of doing.

From among a number of articles published in the city journals in reference to the school, we clip the following from the Washington Star:

"A TOUCHING SIGHT.—Friday afternoon is now the occasion for pleasant scenes at the Deaf, Dumb and Blind Institution. For some time, the design of this Institution seemed unappreciated—many months had passed before a visitor appeared to cast a smile upon the labors of those engaged in teaching these poor children, notwithstanding notices were in

all the journals of the District. To one who chanced to stumble upon this lovely dwelling, it seemed gloomy; indeed; there were gathered a few rough, untutored children, but a handful. Some with freshly shaven heads, casting up their vacant stare, and portraying too truly their long neglected conditions. The traces of soap, and prints of the finger of some kind hand in dislodging the thick layers of filth that had accumulated during their long state of wandering, vagrancy, and the fresh layish of ointment, all spoke in language unmistakable of reform on the part of these; while on the other hand it was none the less indicative of a task little to be desired. Lonely, indeed, as it appear to the eye of the stranger; but not so to those who toiled for them night and day with incessant watching and continued self-denial; to them there was a bright and glorious future spread out before the eye of faith.

"But the scene is changed. Now, many are seen weekly flocking to witness these delightful exhibitions. Among them are generous-hearted men and sympathizing and beautiful ladies, and with the rest the children of our city are seen gathering in large numbers—though less in size, yet not least in interest and sympathy for their afflicted fellows. What can be more delightful than to see these children gather here and try to express their affection for these, their deaf, dumb and blind companions. Those who were present last Friday were delightfully surprised by one of the most interesting spectacles ever witnessed. Three young school girls came forward and presented Dr. Skinner, the principal of the Institution, with a beautiful purse well filled with gold and silver, amounting to some eight or ten dollars, which they had collected together at a little fair, at which they charged two cents admission, and where they brought their little toys and offered them for sale, choosing to part with them that they might aid in teaching these their little afflicted fellow beings.

In presenting it they simply said they had done this because they loved the little deaf and dumb and blind children.— To which Dr. Skinner replied, that he hoped their little gift would bless the hearts of the little givers as well as the little receivers. In the name of the chil-

Deaf-Mute Pelican.



DEVOTED TO THE INTERESTS OF THE DEAF AND DUMB.

BATON ROUGE, LA., SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 1870.

NO. 4

A INSTITUTION
for the
B.—Baton Rouge, La.

C AND SUPPORTED
TE OF LOUISIANA.

FFICERS.
PORTER, Superintendent.
LISH, } Teachers.
NES, } Physicians.
REE, } Physician.
FROCC, Matron.
LISH, Foreman of Print-Office.

MISSION.
and Dumb of the State,
s of eight and twenty-five,
a education, free of charge
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of two hundred and fifty
in, in advance.

SE OF STUDY.
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vary mental capacities, an
acquiring an education in
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in common schools. This
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tention.
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be admitted or retained as
unable from sickness or
pursue the course of study

ill receive instruction also
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of housework, needle and
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ANNUAL SESSIONS
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of October and close on the
receding the twentieth of
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VERNMENT OF THE
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the health and comfort of the
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RESPONDENCE.
ss letters, or letters of ind-
to pupils at the Institution,
it may be designed to place
rther information, should be

Little's Golden Shoes.
May bought golden shoes for her boy,
Golden leather from heel to toe,
With silver tassel to tie at top,
And dainty lining as white as snow;
I bought a pair of shoes as well,
For the restless feet of a little lad,
Common and coarse, and iron-tipped,
The best I could for the sum I had.

"Golden" May said, "to match his curls,"—
I never saw her petted boy—
I warrant he is but a puny elf,
All pink and white like a China toy;
And what is he that his feet should walk
All shod in gold on the king's highway.
While little Fred, with the king's own
grace,
Must wear rough brogans every day?

And why can May from her little hand
Fling bangles at her idol's feet,
While I can hardly shouter Fred
From the cruel stones of the broken
street?
I envy not her silken robe,
Nor the jewell's shine, nor handmaid's
care:
But ah! to give what I cannot,
This, this it is so hard to bear.

But down I'll crush this bitter thought,
And bear no grudge to pretty May,
Though she is rich, and I am poor,
Since we were girls at Clover Bay.
And ask the Lord to guide the feet,
So painful and coarse as those,
Till they are fit to walk the street
That runs hard by the throne of God.

"Good-bye, friend Ellen"—"Good-bye,
May."
What dims her eyes so bright and blue,
As she looks at the rugged shoes askance!
"I wish my boy could wear these, too;
But he will never walk, they say."
So May, with a little sigh, has gone,
And I am left in a wondering mood,
To think of my wicked thoughts alone.

It needs not that I tell you how
I clasped my sturdy rogue that night,
And thanked the God who gave him
strength,
And made him such a merry wight;
Nor envied May one gift she held,
If with it I must also choose
That sight of little crippled feet,
Albeit shod in golden shoes. —Selected.

Eggs.

We put the eggs safely in our
coat-tail pocket, and walked cautiously.
It recalled a piece of disreputable
carelessness on our father's part, who
once sat down on a dozen eggs, and
went up as if every egg was a bomb,
and every bomb in explosion. But
then he was a notoriously ab-
sent-minded man. His very example
was our safety. And yet we dwelt,
with some inward mirth, as we walked
to the house, on the ludicrous figure

which our father cut. Dinner was
spread as we came in. Some question
came up which diverted our thought
from the discovery of the nest—indeed
we forgot that we had eggs about us,
and drew to the table and sat down
with an alacrity which was only
equalled by the spring with which we
got up.

"Gracious!"
"Why, what is the matter?"
"Mattef enough!"
"Are you sick? Do let—"
I drew my hand from my pocket,
streaming with liquid chicken, never
to be horn, and the disgusting secret
was out! That woman was a saint!

My pockets were duly cleansed,
without one cutting word. I can
imagine the process, but I never like
to dwell upon it. Would you believe
it, the same thing happened in a few
weeks again? It did, and to the
same person! But never since then,
no never! From that day to this
we do not remember ever to have
even taken an egg from a nest.

1. When I see a man who allows
himself to be puffed up and flattered,
I know that his time will come when
he will sit down on his eggs.
2. When I see men who are robbing,
right and left, and filling their pockets
with unlawful wealth which other
men earned, I say, "You will sit down
on those eggs yet."
3. When over cunning men think
that they can outwit all their fellows,
and are exulting at the success which
their shrewdness has achieved, I say
to myself, "Fill your pockets! By
and by you will sit down on those
eggs"—H. W. Beecher.

Stick to One Thing.

"Unstable as water, thou shalt
not excel," is the language of the
Good Book. Whoever expects to
succeed in any undertaking, must
enter into it with a hearty and ear-
nest will to do his best. When a
trade or profession is chosen, obsta-
cles be they large or small, must
not be allowed to stand in the way

of mastering that trade or profession.

However much we may deprecate
the old time custom of indenturing
apprentices, the system in its prac-
tical results operated for the lasting
good of the apprentice. Generally,
it assured him a good trade and a
wholesome discipline, that fitted him
for success in business. At the pre-
sent time, many young men attempt
to acquire a trade, and after a brief
trial abandon it, because there are
unpleasant duties to perform, and
obstacles to be overcome. They
consider themselves accountable to
no one, and go and come at the
bidding of caprice, or an unsettled
mind. The result of this is to send
out into the world young men who
have not half learned their trades,
of unstable character, who drift from
post to pillar, and who succeed in
nothing but scattering along the
highway of life melancholy wrecks
of men. We would earnestly entreat
every young man, after he has
chosen his vocation to stick to it,

don't leave it because hard blows are
to be struck, or disagreeable work to
be performed. The men who have
worked their way up to wealth and
usefulness do not belong to the
shiftless and unstable class, but may
be reckoned among those who took
off their coats, rolled up their sleeves,
conquered prejudices against labor,
and manfully bore the heat and
burden of the day. Whether upon
the old, worn out farm, where our
fathers toiled, diligently striving to
bring back the soil to its pro-
ductiveness; in the machine shop or
factory, or the thousand other busi-
ness places that invite honest toil
and skill, let the motto ever be,
perseverance and industry. The
baby training of the nursery was a
good thing in its place, but it won't
answer all the demands of an active
life. This is not a baby world.

We must expect to be jostled
and knocked about in the stern
conflict, and get run over, if we are
not on the look out and prepared to
meet the duties of life with a pur-
pose not to shirk them, but to fulfill
them. A young man with a good
trade or profession, as he goes forth
in the world with his mind made up
to stick to his profession, is not
obliged to ask any favors. He will
hew his way to success, while the
unstable will grow tired, despair
and fail.

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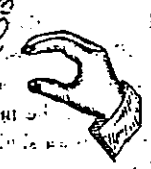

















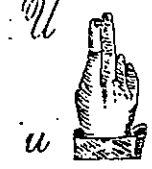
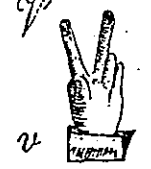


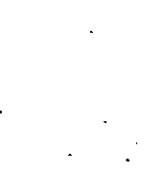



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hear a sermon, than to spend one
quarter of an hour meditating on it
when I come home.—Philip Henry

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Matthew Hale.

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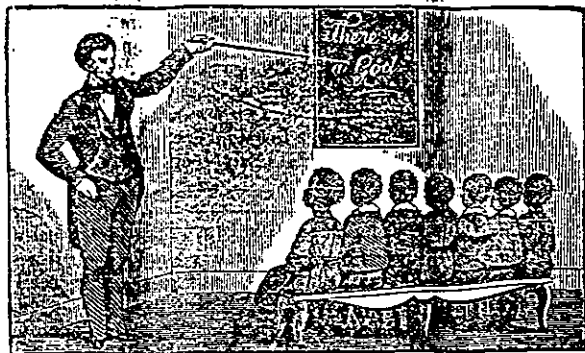
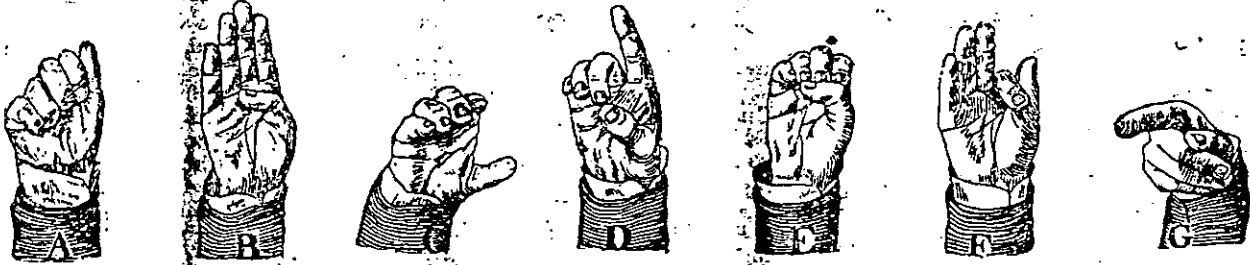
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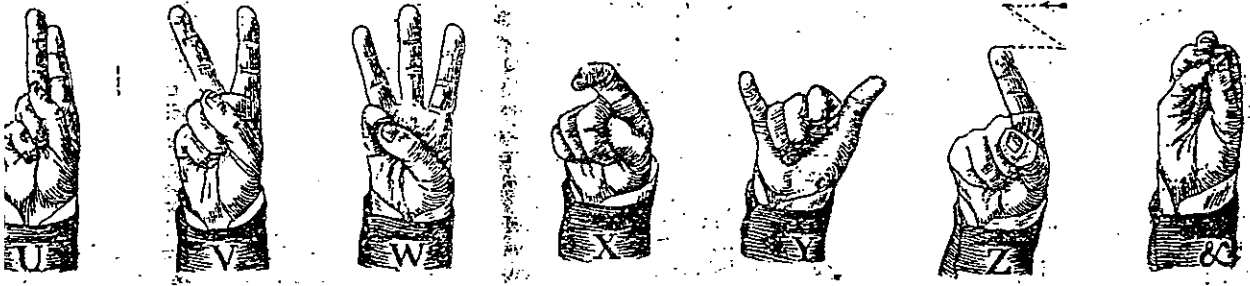
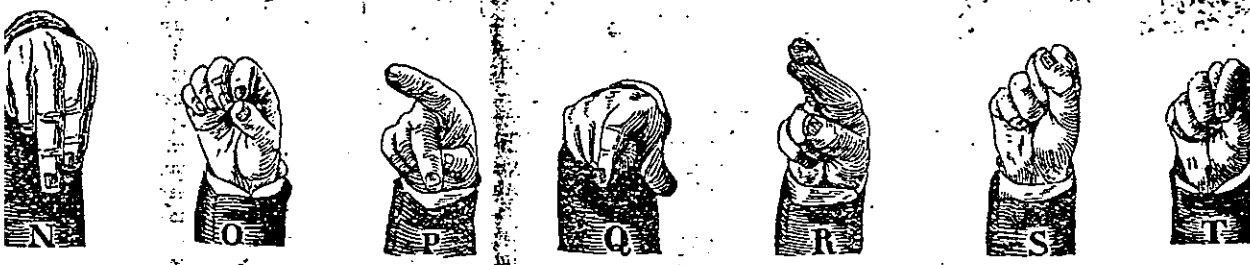
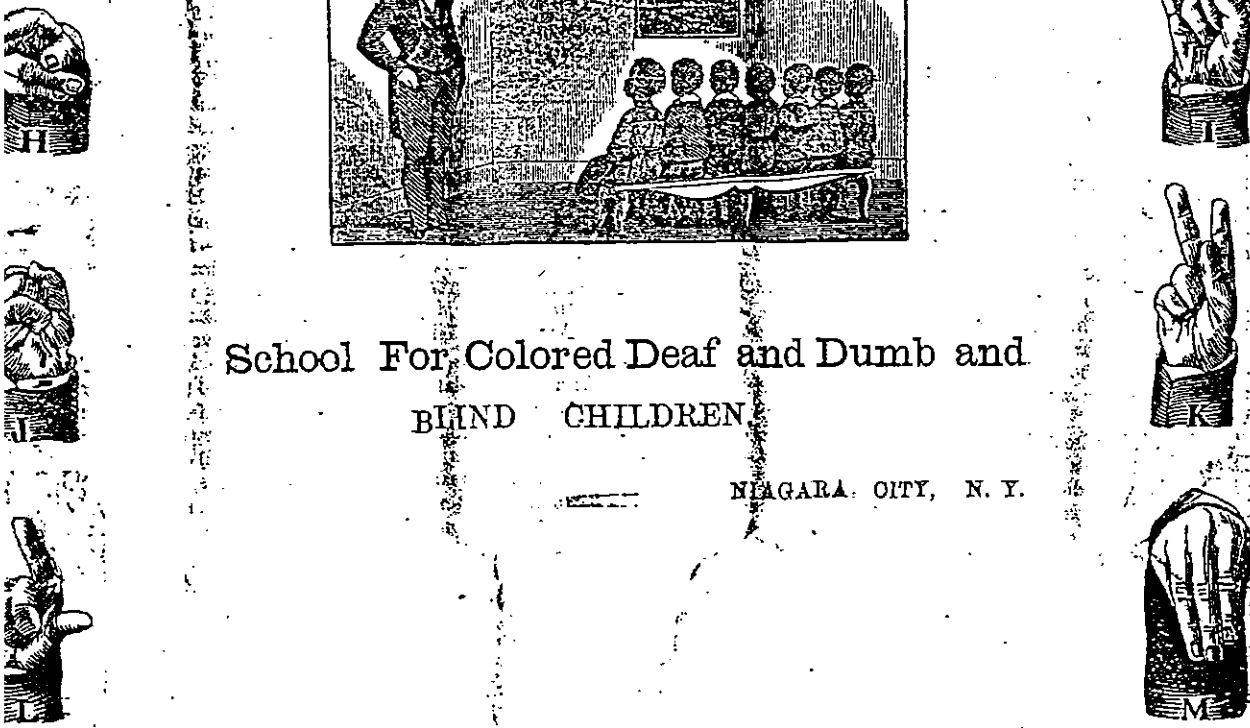
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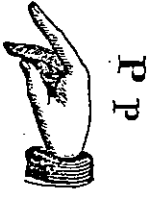
"The longer I live the more high-
ly do I estimate the Christian Sab-
bath, and the more grateful do I feel
towards those who impress its impor-
tance upon the community."—Dan-
iel Webster.



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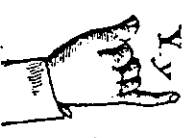
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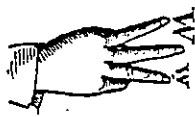
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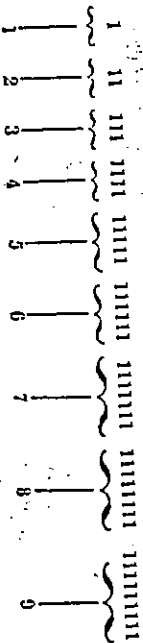
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NOTE D.

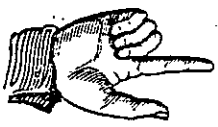
Signs for Numbers.

In teaching the Deaf and Dumb Arithmetic, signs for numbers are as essential as signs for letters, words and ideas. These signs are the medium of communication between the teacher and pupil, and produce an interchange of understanding. The natural knowledge of the Deaf and Dumb, as relates to numbers, is very limited, and does not extend much beyond the number of their fingers. The Abbe Sicard's signs for figures is far from being complete; hence Mr. David Saxe, the zealous teacher of the Deaf and Dumb in Philadelphia, adopted a plan which was an improvement, and was in practice in that city. It was adopted in the New-York Institution for a time, but soon difficultly occurred in designating large numbers. In consequence of this, Mr. Stansbury, formerly a teacher in this Institution, adopted a system of his own, which for some time past, has been in use in the School for the Deaf and Dumb in this city. The plan adopted is in accordance with the French signs for letters, one hand only being necessary in expressing any amount as high as hundreds of millions. Either hand may be employed as for letters, though in general the right is principally used. The nine digits are expressed by the fingers, and the letter O of the French alphabet stands for a cipher. After the fingers are understood to represent the Arabic characters for the nine digits, the hands are placed with the fingers extended vertically in front for units, horizontally in front for tens, downwards in front for hundreds, downwards for hundreds of thousands, horizontally for tens of thousands, downwards for millions, and upwards for millions. The whole system then consists in nine positions of the fingers, and nine positions of the hand.

The following wood engravings by Morgan, will illustrate the positions for the digits. In the use of figures, however, it is first necessary to exhibit to our pupils the power and value of the Arabic characters, which are arbitrary signs and substitutes for marks. This is done after the manner of Sicard, as follows:



1



2

3



5



7



9



4



6



8



0



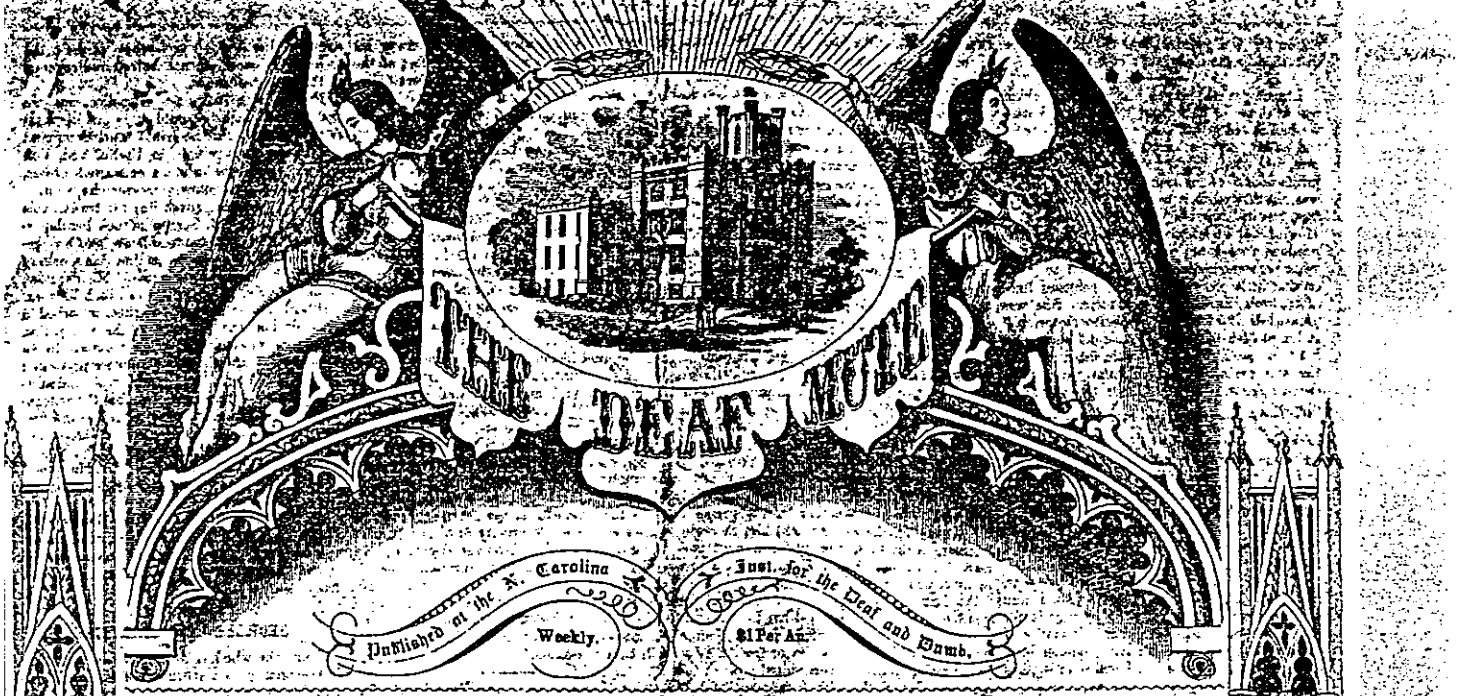
A more particular explanation and application of these signs in the practice of arithmetic with the Deaf and Dumb, is given in the following letter from Mr. Stansbury to Dr. Mitchill.

To DR. SAMUEL L. MITCHILL,

President of the Board of Directors of the New-York Institution for Instructing the Deaf and Dumb.

Knowing the interest you feel in whatever relates to the progress of science, and the cause of humanity, I embrace with pleasure the opportunity of communicating to you, a new system of signs for teaching figures to the Deaf and Dumb, invented about a year ago, while I was engaged in the institution, which has been successfully used since that time. Instead of employing both hands one alone is required; the thumb represents one, the index finger two, the middle finger three, the ring finger four, and the open hand five; the little finger represents six; to this add the ring finger for seven; then add the middle finger for eight, and the index finger for nine; the thumb resting on the palm, as in the letter H, of the manual alphabet. To indicate ten, the thumb is pointed forward; twenty, the thumb and fore-finger; and so on to the sign for nine, pointing horizontally. Hundreds are pointed down, the hand being held in front of the body. For thousands the same order is pursued as for units; only holding the hand on the right side of the body, or giving it a gentle inclination toward the right, when the sign for thousands is made. For millions, the hand is placed across the body toward the left, and the same signs made for units, tens and hundreds; the units pointing up, the tens forward, and the hundreds down.

In order to convey to the pupils, a distinct idea of the value of figures, I employed clay, formed into very small lumps, and stuck upon a board on which was drawn the representation of two hands, and the figures 1, 2, 3, &c. to 9, against the fingers; then adding one more lump of clay for the remaining thumb, to the nine lumps already on the board, I pressed them into one, and pointed the thumb forward towards it; to this was added another lump of the same size for the fore-finger, also represented pointing forward, and another, and another, to nine; when a tenth lump for the remaining thumb, being united as before to the nine, formed one of a new series, indicated by the thumb pointing down; to this, nine others of the same size were added, and when the ten lumps were pressed into one, this was placed on the right side of the body, to show that every unit in that position was so much larger than that which was in front of the body. Having done this, it was easy, by signs, to make them understand that these large lumps or thousands, were to be pressed into one to form a much larger unit, called a million, and placed on the left side of the body. The same thing may be exemplified by weights in a scale: let the units be placed on a shelf above the hand, the weights of ten times the unit, on a shelf breast high, and the weights ten times as heavy as these, on the floor; by this arrangement, the operations of addition, subtraction, division and multiplication may be readily taught. Perhaps a more convenient mode would be, to have circular pieces of thin wood, with a hole in the centre, and a wire rising from the bottom one just high enough to make a pile of ten.



VOL. II. RALEIGH, SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 1850. NO. 5.

An Interesting Story.

From Percy's Medical Times.
THE DEAF AND DUMB MUSICIAN.
BY HERMAN E. SARGENT.

In the winter of 1841, one evening visited the San Carlo, at Naples. The opera performed was that half-sentimental, half-heroic composition of Donizetti's, "Roberto Devereux." I will confess at once that I am not very fond of Donizetti's music, and I had only gone to the theatre to tick Merzani and Strepponi. After having heard these artists, I had plenty of leisure to look about the house, and to reconnoitre the audience. In one of the stalls reserved for strangers, I noticed a young man, who struck me as much by his proud bearing and characteristic face, as by the manner in which he evinced his interest for the performance. He was a man of about middle height, light curly hair, bushy eyebrows, aquiline nose, and small mouth. He had before him a volume of music, evidently the score of the opera, for his eyes were continually wandering from the book to the stage, and sometimes seemed as if riveted on the Strepponi. He kept his mouth wide open, as if he wished to inhale every note that was sung or played. I regarded him for some minutes, with always increasing interest. He turned neither to the right nor to the left, and even when the curtain fell, he gazed upon it as if the performance were still going on, and the gaudy figures of the curtain were things of life. Meantime, some friends had espied me from one of the galleries, and before I was aware of it, they had half dragged, half carried me to their box. I directed their attention to the stranger with the music before him, and they told me, that though he was there almost every evening and excited general interest, no one had been able to find out his name or his profession. I had not seen my friends for several years, and it was therefore quite natural that, instead of listening to the music, they should speak of various events that had happened during our long separation.

When the curtain dropped for the last time, we joined our *bravi* with those of the audience, and having neither bouquets nor doves with us, to offer them to the artists, we concluded to thread our way through the noisy crowd, and to continue our conversation in a neighboring *cafe*.

There we sat until nearly three o'clock in the morning, and we were just bidding adieu to each other, on the large square before the theatre, when we were startled by a strange, unearthly noise, coming from the principal entrance of the theatre. I shall never forget those sounds. They came upon us like the voices of demons. I could not possibly compare them to anything. They were low, guttural, yet piercing; sounding in one moment like the grunting of a pig, in another, like the snorting of a fiery horse. And then again we would hear sounds like the tramping of a hundred men. The night was pitch dark—not a lantern to be seen.—We suspected some fool play, and chivalrous as

we generally were, and more particularly so after the several bottles of wine, which we had vanquished, we hastened towards the spot, whence the sounds came.

On our arrival at the theatre, three men made a hasty exit, while Perozzi, a young Italian painter, and one of our party, stumbled over a human body. I had a single match in my pocket, and this once lit, it was just sufficient to let us recognize our stranger with the music book. We thought him dead, but while we were busling as to what course to pursue, he showed signs of life, and in a few minutes afterwards we succeeded in getting him on his legs. We soon found out that he was deaf and dumb, and not knowing what to do, we thought it best to return to the *cafe*, and to take our protegee along with us. Perozzi and myself supported him, and the reader can easily imagine the astonishment of our host, when we, after much hard knocking, succeeded in making him open the door, and he recognized his guests who had left him but a short time before.

However, we had no time for explanation, and begged him to reserve his curiosity for a more fit opportunity, and to furnish us with a candle and a few bottles of good wine. The stranger, fully revived by the fiery burgundy, pressed our hands repeatedly, and gave us to understand that we had saved his life. We then escorted him to his residence, which was a mile or more from the theatre, and after making him promise to call on us next day, we gave him our address, and separated for the night.

The next morning, when I was hardly dressed, I heard a knock at my door, and my "come in," not being answered, I rose and opened the door myself. Before me stood our friend of the San Carlo, true to the minute to his appointment. I asked him in, offered him a cigar, and begged him to make himself as comfortable as he could in a bachelor's hall. Our conversation was carried on by means of little ivory tablets and pencil, and his expressive gestures finished what the pencil could not do, or would have required at least much time in doing. I found him exceedingly intelligent, well-informed on all subjects, and often witty. For a long time I restrained my curiosity in regard to last night's adventure, but at last I could no longer bear it, and I asked him how it came that he, a deaf mute, should seem to understand, nay, take pleasure in music.—He smiled sadly, and begged me not to ask an explanation, because it called up in his breast feelings which he wished were buried in the depths of the gulf. "But," continued he, "I owe my life to you, and when we become better friends, I assure you that you shall have my history."

I felt a little vexed for the moment, but afterwards got over my feeling, and proposed a promenade in company with my other friends. To this he gladly assented, and we were not long in hunting up the different actors of last night's drama.—The one was fast asleep when we arrived at his house, and he grumbled not a little when I disturbed his dreams by means of several hard pushes. But no sooner had he seen my companion, than he hurried in his dress, and in a few minutes we were

now three, on the way to the other friends. Perozzi was the only one whom we found awake. He was dressed in a rich robe *de chambre*, and was engaged in filling up a view of the bay of Naples, which a sailor, as he said, had ordered of him. When I told him of the proposed promenade, he threw pallet and brush away, and dressed quickly.

We were now six in number, and the stranger, who had been a resident of Naples much longer than either of us, offered to be our *cicerone*. To his credit I must say that we could not possibly have wished for a better one. He seemed to know every thing. Every street, every alley, every square, every hut, every palace, every church, every bar relief—of every thing he had some anecdote to tell, and he seemed to be as familiar with the history of every painting and its painter as a schoolboy with his A B C, or a priest with his litany. He was evidently an artist, for no mere dilettante could have spoken with such good judgment of the merits of a work. He praised the grouping of one picture, the coloring of another, the tone of a third; he criticised the position of one figure, spoke knowingly of the foreshortening of another, and in a third he explained to us the difference of the modern and ancient school. And every thing he said, or rather wrote, was done with such a modesty, such an absence of all presumption, that with every moment we became more interested in him, and when we parted, we made him promise to repeat his visit soon.

He kept his word. He was almost daily at the studio of one, or the room of the other, and he never went away without leaving the germ of a beautiful thought, or the results of experience to arts by which to remember him. He had told us that he was an artist, that he formerly painted much, but that lately he had hardly touched his pallet, except to finish a picture he had begun five years ago. This made us naturally very curious to see the production which had required so much time, and we begged him to let us enjoy the benefit which the examination of so good a critic's work would undoubtedly confer. But his answer invariably was—

"Be patient; when it is finished you shall see it, and not before."

Thus weeks and weeks passed on. Perozzi had gone to Venice, Hildebrandt had returned to Germany, and the two others were engaged in some Government business which called them away from Naples, when one morning he came to me and informed me that the picture was finished, and if I wished to see it I would have to come soon, because early the next morning he would send it away. I asked him whether the gentleman who had bought it would not permit him to exhibit it. He told me that the picture was not sold, and that he never would sell it.

"But you told me that to-morrow you would send it away."

"And so I will," he replied, "but that does not imply that I have sold it, or that a gentleman has bought it."

This was a reproof of my hasty conclusion, and I apologized immediately; but he said that, he was not at all offended, and he only declined an expla-



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