

From Aristotle To Gallaudet

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"Living things deprived of their hearing are not capable of education!" These startling words were uttered over 2000 years ago by the Greek philosopher Aristotle (384-322 B.C.). Attitudes towards the deaf have come a long way since Aristotle's time; or have they? I recently read an excellent article by S. H. Mitchell, "The Haunting Influence of Alexander Graham Bell" (*American Annals of the Deaf*, June 1971). Seems that the great teacher and friend of the deaf feared a "deaf variety of the human race." The good Mr. Bell advocated laws to prevent marriage between the congenitally deaf; he feared schools and organizations for the deaf because they brought the deaf into contact with each other; he even feared that the deaf would have their own language (wonder if that's why he was such a staunch oralist). I found the article to be of particular interest, having just left the employ of Ma-Bell. I don't think Dr. Mitchell realizes just how haunting the old so-and-so's influence still is! But then that's material for another story!

Anyway, with two such surprises at hand, what more do the pages of history hold? I've jotted down some notes which I thought DEAF AMERICAN readers might find of interest. I make no claims for being historically complete, but I think what is here will be of interest, maybe even provide a surprise or two! Our story begins 50 years before Columbus discovered America:

1443-85—Rudolph Agricola of Groningen, professor at Heidelberg, was the first Renaissance scholar to take an interest in the deaf. He refuted Aristotle's statement and proposed a set of principles for education of the deaf.

This is the earliest significant historical note I could find relating to the deaf. Surely the deaf must have been up to something for 1500 years since Aristotle's time, but not much appears in the books. Saint Bede does mention Bishop John of York (7th Century) who teaches a "deaf-and-dumb" youth to speak, but this is regarded more as a miracle than a tour de force.

1501-76—Jerome Cardan, a famous Italian mathematician and physician, made an observation which was perhaps the most important ever made for the deaf. Cardan recognized that signs could be used to represent abstract ideas (not merely gross thoughts such as "me hungry," "you go," etc.). This of course, was Aristotle's fallacy; he could only conceive of aural images representing abstract ideas. Cardan urged teaching the deaf to read and write.

1520-84—Pedro Ponce de Leon, a Spanish monk from Valladolid, was the first oral teacher of the deaf. His practice was limited to the deaf children of nobility.

1524?—Pierre de Ronsard, first deaf poet, was very popular in the French courts.

1526?—Juan Fernando Navarrete, a Spaniard, was the first known deaf artist; the Spanish called him "El Mudo."

1550—The first known treatise written on the deaf. It was authored by a Spaniard known as Lasso. The treatise was written concerning one of Pedro Ponce de Leon's students, Don Francisco, brother of the constable of Castile.

1581—A meeting of physicians was held in Vienna. Deafness was considered and it was decided that "dumbness" was a result of deafness, not an independent affliction. This was a significant step forward in understanding the nature and psychology of the congenitally deaf, as well as the nature of language acquisition in the hearing.

1600-74—Jean Rudolph Camerarius, German writer, made the first known survey of the deaf.

1604—Saint Francis de Sales gave communion to the deaf for the first time. Prior to this the deaf were considered "unsavable."

1616-96—William Holder, brother-in-law of Sir Christopher Wren, a noted musician, clergyman, Fellow of the Royal Society and teacher of the deaf.

1616-1703—John Wallis a famous Oxford mathematician, (I remember studying "Wallis' formula" in high school) was also a teacher of the deaf!

1620—The first known textbook on teaching articulation to the deaf was published in Madrid by Juan Pablo Bonet. Bonet tried to show that the letters of the Roman alphabet were pictorial representations of the lips when pronouncing "A" (you have to lay the "A" on its side), the letter "B" resembles the lips together when pronouncing "B."

Bonet supplemented his oral approach with a manual alphabet and signs. Hence Bonet was the first teacher of the deaf (to use total communication! Bonet's book was the vanguard of books relating to deafness. Soon after its publication many more books were published.

1624—Camerarius published his historic survey on the education of the deaf.

1626-87—Dalgarno, a Scotch master of a private grammar school at Oxford and teacher of the deaf.

1653—John Wallis published a grammar of the English language which he suggested might be used to teach the deaf to speak.

1659—William Holder began teaching Alexander Popham, deaf son of Admiral Popham.

1660—Wallis began teaching Daniel Whaley, son of the mayor of North Hampton.

1664—Death of Don Luis, deaf great-

nephew of Don Francisco and the constable of Castile. King Philip IV of Spain had made him the first marquis of Fresno.

1667—Franz Mercurius Van Helmont (son of the famous chemist Jan Baptista Van Helmont) published a work on speech. His thesis was that the letters of the Hebrew alphabet were pictorial representations of the lips and tongue. Helmont used his theory to teach speech to the deaf. This book is of note because it contained the first pictorial representations of the speech organs ever published.

1669-1724—John Conrad Amman, a Dutch physician of Swiss birth, one of the earliest and staunchest oralists. Amman regarded speech as something supernatural, "the breath of life resides in the voice" he writes. Unfortunately, statements such as these were his only rationale for oralism at the exclusion of all else. His works, nevertheless, were held in great esteem among early educators of the deaf.

1669—William Holder and the Royal Society published his teaching methods. Holder used a finger alphabet formed by naming the joints of the fingers by letters and touching them in succession to form words.

1680—Dalgarno published "Didascalocaphys, or the Deaf and Dumb Man's Tutor." He advocated a more "natural" way of imparting language to the deaf as opposed to the strict rules of Wallis and Holder. In fact, Dalgarno stated "I conceive, there might be successful addresses made to a Dumb child, even in his cradle."

1692—Amman published "Surdus Loquens" (The Speaking Deaf).

1694—Publication of the English translation of "Surdus Loquens."

1698-1774—Henry Baker, well-known British naturalist, poet, Fellow of the Royal Society and son-in-law of Daniel Defoe. He established a very successful school for the deaf. Actually, we must qualify Mr. Baker's success; he accepted only those students whose success was assured. He was also the first of the British teachers of the deaf who guarded his teaching methods to the point of fanaticism. In fact, Baker required a 100 pound bond from each of his students not to reveal his method!

1700—Amman published "Dissertatio De Loqueta" (A Dissertation on Speech). This was Amman's most significant work, in use until 1873. The English translation prefaced by Henry Baker was perhaps the best known work among educators of the deaf.

1712-1738—Charles Michael de l'Epée, "Apostle of the Deaf."

1715-1803—Thomas Braidwood was perhaps the best-known English teacher

of the deaf. He was the first of three generations of teachers of the deaf. He was one of those responsible for the split between pure oralists and "manualists."

1715-1780—Jacob Rodrigues Pereira was a Jew of Spanish birth; he was the first teacher of the deaf in France. His first student was his sister!

1720—Henry Baker's first contact with the deaf; he met Jane Forster, daughter of a relative of his. He later stated that "Heaven put into my thoughts of instructing her to read, write, understand, speak the English language."

1729-90—Samuel Heinicke, German educator of the deaf. A staunch oralist and the man most responsible for the schism in methods.

1742-1822—Abbe Sicard, successor to L'Epee.

1749—Jacob Rodrigues Pereira exhibited a young deaf man, d'Azy d'Etaigny, before the French Academy of Sciences. The Academy appointed a commission to study the work of Pereira. The Academy reported as follows:

We find that the progress made by d'Azy d'Etaigny justifies Pereira in hoping that, by his method, congenital deaf-mutes can not only learn to read, pronounce and understand common words, but also acquire abstract notions, and become capable of reasoning and acting like others . . . we have no difficulty in believing that the art of lip-reading, with its necessary limitations, will be useful to other deaf-mutes of the same class . . . as well as the manual alphabet Pereira uses.

For 1749, the Academy was certainly ahead of its time!

1760—Braidwood established a normal school under the auspices of a rich merchant. The merchant asked Braidwood to tutor his deaf son; Braidwood's career with the deaf was launched.

1765-1829—Dr. Joseph Watson, nephew of Thomas Braidwood and principal of the "Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb" in Old Kent Road, London, first English public school for the indigent deaf.

1771—L'Epee's first public demonstration of his teaching methods and school at No. 14 Rue des Moulins in Quartier Sainte Roche, Paris.

1772—Samuel Heinicke established a small private school for the deaf at Eppendorf.

1775—At the request of Marie Antoinette, King Louis XVI took L'Epee's school under his protectorship and granted it a small subsidy. This was the first time a school for the deaf received any governmental support.

1778—Heinicke established a school for the deaf at Leipsic under the sponsorship of the Emperor of Saxony.

1779—Emperor Joseph II of Austria established the first public school for the deaf as a tribute to L'Epee.

1780—Francis Green, an American whose son was a student at the Braidwood school, published "Vox Oculi Subjectis," a dissertation on the educational

methods of the Braidwoods. The publication of Braidwood's "secret" methods alienated Green and Braidwood and delayed the establishment of a public school for the deaf in England.

1782—Samuel Heinicke wrote one of his now famous letters to L'Epee. The reader should have no trouble in understanding why a schism of methods resulted:

No other method can compare either in point of facility or solidity with that which I have invented and now practice. For mine is built entirely on articulate vocal language, and upon taste, which supplies the place of hearing . . . my deaf pupils are taught by a slow and easy process to speak both their vernacular tongue and foreign languages with a clear and distinct voice, from habit and from understanding, just as well as those who enjoy the faculty of hearing . . . The method which I now pursue in the tuition of the deaf and dumb was never known to any one besides myself and my son. The invention and arrangement of it cost me incredible labor and pains, and I am not inclined to let others have the benefit of it for nothing. By right the publication of it should be purchased of me by some prince, and I defy all the causticity in the world to argue me out of money that I lawfully and laboriously gain. Such of the deaf and dumb as are poor, I instruct gratis, while I make the rich pay in proportion to their wealth, and I often receive more than I demand.

1784—L'Epee published a complete exposition of his methods, "La Veritable Maniere d'instruire les Sourds et Muets, Confirmee par une Longue Experience." Perhaps this is a good point to note that the basic differences between L'Epee and Braidwood/Heinicke was not so much one of method as of philosophy. Heinicke and the Braidwoods were interested (aside from money!) in the deaf fitting neatly into society; they seemed to have no concept of "psychology of deafness." They wanted the deaf to at least look like the hearing. L'Epee, on the other hand, was more concerned with the mind and soul of the deaf individual. He had a remarkable understanding of the psychology of the deaf and wanted them to develop as human beings, not merely ornaments for society.

By the way, the Academy of Zurich judged the dispute between L'Epee and Heinicke and found in favor of L'Epee!

1793—Dr. William Thornton published in the "Transactions of the American Philosophical Society" an essay "On the Mode of Teaching the Deaf, or Surd, and Consequently Dumb to Speak." This was the first work published in America on deafness.

1794—Napoleon Bonaparte subsidized Sicard's school and it became the National Institute for the Deaf.

1803—Francis Green conducted the

first census of the deaf in the United States. He had "A card to the reverend clergy of every persuasion a denomination of the state of Massachusetts" printed in the Palladium, a Boston newspaper. He requested that the clergy send him the names and addresses of all the "deaf and dumb" persons in the parishes; he received 75 names.

1805—Birth of Alice Cogswell. The Cogswells were neighbors of Thom Gallaudet while Gallaudet was a student at Andover Academy. Alice was the first contact Gallaudet had with the deaf.

1807—First school for the deaf was opened in America in New York City by the Reverend John Stanford, chaplain to the Humane and Criminal Institution in New York City. The school was opened in an almshouse.

1815 (May)—Gallaudet sailed for London to study the Braidwoods' method of teaching the deaf. His trip was aimed at starting a school for the deaf in America.

1815 (June)—Gallaudet arrived in Liverpool and was spurned by the Braidwoods. Gallaudet met Abbe Sicard, who was lecturing in London.

1816 (March) — Gallaudet arrived in Paris and was cordially received by Abbe Sicard.

1816 (May) — Gallaudet returned to Hartford, Connecticut, with Laure Clerc, a deaf teacher of Sicard's school. Clerc was the first deaf teacher of the deaf in America.

1816 (October)—The legislature of Connecticut granted \$5000 to start a school for the deaf. This was the first time in America an appropriation of public funds was made in behalf of a benevolent institution.

1817—The Hartford school opened with seven students.

1818—The Hartford school was overcrowded; Laurent Clerc sought aid from the United States Congress. Henry Clay supported an act which gave 23,000 acres of wild land to the school. Ultimately the school realized a profit of \$300,000.

1818 (ca.)—Daniel Defoe published "The History of the Life and Adventure of Mr. Duncan Campbell, a Gentleman who, though Deaf and Dumb, Wrote down any Stranger's Name at first sight with their Future Contingencies of Fortune. Now living in Exeter, over again the Savoy in the Strand." This work, purely fictional, was listed in the 18th edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica as an authentic work on education of the deaf. One chapter does contain information pertaining to education of the deaf.

1821—The Hartford school was permanently established as "The American Asylum for the Deaf."

1843—Horace Mann, secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education, traveled to Europe to study different methods of education. He visited the oral method used in Germany and published a report advising its use in the United States.

1847—The first issue of the "American

Annals of the Deaf and Dumb" (October) was published at the Hartford School.

1850—The Convention of American Instructors of the Deaf met for the first time in New York City.

1867—Clarke School for the Deaf, the first "oral" school in America, opened.

1869—The Boston School for Deaf Mutes, an oral day school, was opened under the directorship of Miss Sarah Fuller. After 1877, the school was known as the Horace Mann School.

1871—Alexander Graham Bell spent spring with the Boston School of Miss Fuller's teaching his visible speech method. As a result, Bell devoted his life to work with the deaf.

Well, that brings us back to our friend and mentor Papa Bell. We have, of course, left out quite a bit of the American story. We haven't mentioned, for example, Edward M. Gallaudet, Gallaudet College, the Volta Bureau or the very important evolution of the "science of lipreading" into the "art of speech-reading." Not to mention total communication . . . or the teletypewriter network! Come to think of it, the deaf have come a long way since Aristotle's time!