
To Lighten Doubt and Drive Away Despair: Historic Sources and Current Resources at The New York State Library

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ABSTRACT

THOMAS H. GALLAUDET, an American born pioneer educator for deaf children, lobbied vigorously in several states for funding to establish a national school for the deaf in Hartford, Connecticut. On the occasion of Gallaudet's 200th birthday celebration, the New York State Library prepared an exhibit and published a bibliography that was representative of the library's research collections. The bibliography is particularly useful to historians, professional practitioners, and other persons seeking information about hearing impairment. This article will highlight important sources of information and the current state of technology at the New York State Library.

INTRODUCTION

Established in 1818, the New York State Library is the largest state library in the nation and is the only state library which qualifies for membership in the Association of Research Libraries. Now in its sixth home, the State Library has more than 6 million items covering many subject areas in print and nonprint formats. It is a leader in the use of technology in information services, with an online public catalog, an electronic reference station, access to more than 700 databases, and modern telecommunication and photoduplication services supporting information needs of state government, libraries, and individuals in New York State. In 1987, to mark Thomas Gallaudet's 200th birthday, the New York State Library prepared an

exhibit and published a bibliography (see Appendix) highlighting historic and current resources related to deaf education in New York State.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The New York State Library was the brain child of Governor DeWitt Clinton. Elected governor in 1818, Clinton had previously served as mayor of New York City, where he established a reputation for promoting cultural and literary institutions. In his first speech to the State Legislature delivered on January 2, 1818, he drew on this record to encourage the establishment of desirable agencies for public betterment. His speech led to legislation establishing the New York State Library, with the State Assembly and State Senate passing bills in April 18 and April 21 of that year.

By 1819, the State Library was ready to provide service when the State Legislature convened (Roseberry, 1970, p. 2). The library's collection on opening day included 669 volumes and nine maps, with materials related to laws and statutes, political economy, classical literature, history, travel, and biography (Roseberry, 1970, p. 6).

Prior to becoming governor, Clinton had been a force for deaf education in New York City. He actively supported the establishment of the New York Institution of the Deaf and Dumb and served on its first Board of Directors (New York Institution of the Deaf and Dumb, 1818, p. 2). The school's charter was dated April 15, 1817.

The beginnings of the New York school were rooted in the efforts of Mason F. Cogswell, a Hartford, Connecticut, physician, to establish the nation's first school for the deaf. Cogswell became interested in deaf education on behalf of his daughter, Alice Cogswell, whose deafness resulted from a severe illness. Alice attracted the notice of a young minister, Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, who urged Cogswell to obtain a teacher who could provide a formal education for his child. In 1815, Cogswell raised money to send Gallaudet to Europe to study deaf education methods. One year later, Gallaudet returned, accompanied by Laurent Clerc, a deaf teacher from the Institut Royal des Sourds-Muets at Paris (Hall, 1931, p. 111). Together, Clerc, Cogswell, and Gallaudet campaigned for funds to establish a free public school for the deaf at Hartford, and Alice Cogswell became its first student (*National Cyclopedia of American Biography*, 1893, vol. 8, p. 207).

The three men lobbied vigorously in the New York State Legislature to receive funding for a school for the deaf in Hartford. One such visit is reported in detail in an article entitled "The Deaf and Dumb" in *The Albany Daily Advertiser* of November 12, 1816:

Mr. Clerc, the interesting deaf and dumb gentleman, who lately arrived in this country from France, being on a visit to this city, accompanied by Dr. Cogswell, of Hartford, and the Rev. Mr. Gallaudet, many of the Members of the Legislature, and of the Ladies and Gentlemen of this city, met in the Assembly Chamber in the Capitol on Saturday Evening, to witness the advantages the unfortunate part of our race, who are deprived of the faculties of hearing and speech, may derive from the system of instruction of deaf and dumb persons now practiced in Europe.

Clerc's speech, read by Thomas Gallaudet, strongly urged that one school be established: "I think one Institution for all is best. As it will be large and pupils numerous, there will be great emulation among them, and they will become better instructed." He concluded:

Gentlemen and Ladies, I ask you a favour, it is to be so generous and liberal as to distribute your benevolence to the Deaf and Dumb of your own town and of all the other States; but far from us be the thought of wishing to demand funds inspite of yourselves! We invite you to consult your heart and means and so give what you can.

A question and answer period followed, and a committee of five men—the mayor, the Rev. Mr. Chester, the Honorable Jones Platt, James Kane, and Harmanus Bleeker—was appointed "to devise means for aiding the seminary intended to be founded in Connnecticnt [sic]." The committee met on November 10, 1816, and the newspaper account concludes with their resolution:

At a meeting of the committee appointed by the meeting in the Capitol, last evening, to devise means to aid in founding a Seminary in the state of Connecticut, for the education of the deaf and dumb; Resolved, that the committee recommend a subscription paper in the following form, to circulate in this city:

Feeling disposed to encourage the benevolent institution about to be established at Hartford, in Connecticut, for the education of deaf and dumb persons, the subscribers engage to pay to Dr. Mason F. Cogswell, or to such agent as he shall appoint, for the benefit of said institution, the sums set opposite to their names respectively, and as it is stated that the money will not be wanted till the first day of May next, the payment will be deferred till that time, when a suitable agent will collect the monies subscribed.

—A copy, H. Bleeker, Secretary.

Ultimately, however, Gallaudet, Cogswell, and Clerc were unsuccessful in their efforts to generate support in New York State for a national school at Hartford. In a letter to Cogswell, January 14, 1817, Laurent Clerc writes: "Ah! my worthy friend, man proposes and God disposes, the meeting this afternoon has decided in favour of another Institution here; . . ." (Root, 1924, p. 86).

RESEARCHING THE EXHIBIT

On the occasion of Thomas H. Gallaudet's 200th birthday, the New York State Library prepared an exhibit and bibliography for Deaf Heritage Week. The theme "Deaf Heritage Week—The New

York Connection" was selected and a small segment of the State Library's research resources were highlighted (the bibliography appears in the Appendix).

Researching the exhibit and preparing the bibliography proved to be challenging. Older documents often used what now appears to be archaic terminology, which might seem at odds with modern sensibilities. Moreover, the vast research resources offered by the State Library made it difficult to select materials for the exhibit and the bibliography while staying within the space limitations. Materials selected for the exhibit and the bibliography, which complement each other, are therefore representative of the wide variety of research materials and services available at the New York State Library.

As our research progressed, the association of Gallaudet and Cogswell, their connections with Upstate New York, and the early development of deaf education in New York State became a natural focus. There were considerable evidences of the Cogswell family ties to Albany. Alice's sister, Mary, writes about "heeling it and toeing it" at an Albany social function in a letter to her mother dated January 8, 1818. And her brother, Mason F. Cogswell Jr., came to practice medicine in Albany and married Lydia Bradford, the daughter of the minister of the Two-Steeple Dutch Reformed Church (Root, 1924, pp. 84-86). Cogswell descendants still live in Albany and are prominent in local affairs.

Our research into New York State's role in the development of deaf education led us to the name of Levi Backus. Born deaf, Backus, a native of Hebron, Connecticut, was among the first students to attend Gallaudet's school at Hartford. After leaving school, he learned printing and eventually relocated to the town of Canajoharie, New York, where for some years he taught at the nearby Central Asylum for the Deaf (established in 1823). However, in 1836, this school closed and Levi, with the support of friends, established a newspaper, the *Radii*, in the winter of 1836. From the outset, Backus identified his publication as being printed by and for deaf mutes—the first of its kind in the country, if not in the world. He printed the title of the paper in the manual alphabet, carried news articles of particular interest to the deaf community, and often promoted the cause of deaf education and the rights of disabled persons in his editorials.

In 1838 and 1839, Backus petitioned the State Legislature for funding to distribute his paper free of charge to all deaf persons in the state. In his 1839 petition to the New York State Assembly, Backus expressed the hope that deaf readers would view the *Radii* "as a beacon, stimulating their energies and calling into action latent powers which they evidently possess" (Report of the Select Committee

on Petition of Levi S. Backus, *Documents of the State of New York*, 1838, no. 263; 1839, no. 160).

Knowledge was power, according to Backus, who felt that, in an age of progress and invention, education and information sharing promoted by his newspaper could “raise us to an equality” with the rest of the world (*The Manual Alphabet* [broadside], 1839).

The spirit of emancipation and advocacy for deaf education embodied in Backus’s writing, as well as the support granted to him by state government, were common themes in many of the early documents assembled for our exhibit. Typical of these items, most of which came from the Library’s Manuscript and Special Collections section, is a twenty-three page poem entitled *The Deaf and Dumb* by Moses Y. Scott (1823). The poem was published as a pamphlet in 1823 to benefit the New York Institution for the Deaf and Dumb. Like Backus, Scott foresaw suppressed genius in people who were deaf and pleaded for education as a key to liberate them. He wrote, in part,

O, could I pierce the mystery of their mind!
 Could I that hidden luminary find,
 Whose struggling rays at times glance forth so bright,
 Despite the cloud that would conceal its light;
 Then might I see some heavenly spirit there,
 To lighten doubt and drive away despair!

DEVELOPMENT OF THE STATE LIBRARY

Historical and literary curiosities such as Scott’s poem, the letters of Alice Cogswell, and the records of early legislation concerning the establishment of deaf education, are but one facet of the New York State Library’s collection and services. Just as deaf education has developed and grown through nearly two centuries, so too has the New York State Library expanded to meet the changing information requirements of a diverse society.

Successive directors have built the library’s collections and services to a point far beyond DeWitt Clinton’s original vision. Three directors in particular have shaped the modern library. The first of these, Henry Augustus Homes, librarian from 1862 to 1887, developed major collections in political science, American history, biography, and scientific patents. He sought donations of collections and implemented an exchange program among domestic and foreign libraries, and he indexed and calendared many major manuscript collections.

Melvil Dewey, director of the library from 1889 to 1906, is widely recognized for his leadership in library technology as well as his advancement of the profession of librarianship. During his years at the library, he instituted subject libraries, establishing the medical,

the education, and the legislative reference libraries. He inaugurated services to the blind, as well as traveling libraries—the beginnings of library extension and statewide library services in New York State.

When James I. Wyer took charge in 1908, the library's collection exceeded 900,000 items. Less than three years later, the disastrous Capitol fire of 1911 reduced this treasure house to ashes. It fell to Wyer to recreate the State Library in its new quarters across the street from the old Capitol. In carrying out this task, Wyer followed his vision of the State Library as a "great central reference and lending library adequate to the great University system of the State, serving each of the thousands of institutions in the University according to its needs and through them serving all the citizens of all the cities and villages and towns of the State" (Roseberry, 1970, pp. 104-05). By 1930, when the library had surpassed the 1 million volume mark, Wyer could take justifiable pride in saying it was "once again, since its destruction in 1911, a noble library" (Roseberry, 1970, p. 104). When Wyer retired in 1938, the books, manuscripts, documents, and other collections so tragically decimated in 1911 were restored to their former greatness, setting the stage for the State Library of today (Paulson, 1978, pp. 576-79).

SPECIAL SERVICES AT THE NEW YORK STATE LIBRARY

Overseen by the Board of Regents of the University of the State of New York and managed by the State Librarian and Assistant Commissioner Joseph F. Shubert, library services at the state level are organized into two major branches—the Division of Library Development and the Research Library. These two units perform a variety of activities, including consultant services, aid to local libraries, chartering and registering of public libraries, and technical processing and reference services.

Of special interest is the Coordinated Outreach Services Program. Authorized by Chapter 718 of the *Laws of 1981*, this program provides state funds for those public library systems which serve blind, aged, physically handicapped, or institutionalized patrons. The funding can be used to expand existing services or to initiate new services to meet the needs of these special populations.

Library services and programs are developed with an Advisory Committee consisting of library staff, community service providers, and recipients of the library services. To receive Coordinated Outreach funding, a plan of service and a report of accomplishments are submitted annually to Library Development. These reports reflect

the diversity of library services provided to the hearing-impaired community.

Assisted by State grants, public libraries in New York State purchase and loan communication equipment as well as books on hearing impairment. Personnel in these public systems demonstrate assistive listening devices and provide sign language classes for staff and members of the community. Working with community organizations, they co-sponsor programs ranging from screening for hearing loss to inviting students from schools for the deaf to celebrate Deaf Heritage Week with performances of jazz, dance, sign language, and mime. In addition, they publicize services by conducting library orientations and tours, publishing brochures and bibliographies, and speaking at community functions (New York State Library, Division of Library Development, 1985-).

CONCLUSION

The New York State Library, under the current direction of Jerome Yavarkovsky, has a research collection of more than 6 million items with major holdings in law, medicine, the social sciences, education, American and New York State history and culture, the pure sciences, and technology. Its information resources include manuscripts, government documents, periodicals, newspapers, microforms, and patents. In addition to its reference and research services which support the work of New York State government, the State Library also serves as a resource and referral center in the New York State Interlibrary Loan (NYSILL) system and operates a regional library for blind and visually handicapped individuals.

The State Library is in the forefront of library technology to access and control its collections and resources, to develop and expand telecommunications networks, to provide access to electronic systems (online library catalogs, CD-ROM databases, online databases, and bibliographic databases such as OCLC and RLIN). Its leadership in the use of computerized information systems led to its being a test site to provide access to the online computer research files of the Library of Congress—access which is now provided to all state libraries. As the State Library offers new avenues for researchers to access the collections in various parts of the state and country, it also has innovative programs to encourage on-site use of its resources, including the Research Residency Program, which promotes the use of its collections in scholarly research.

The development of these and other services are the results of 174 years of growth, change, and leadership. The library continues to expand its services, to incorporate new technologies, and to provide access to all citizens of New York State.

APPENDIX

Deaf Heritage Week—The New York Connection
December 6-12, 1987
A Selected Bibliography

Thomas H. Gallaudet, born December 10, 1787, was an American born pioneer educator of the deaf. He lobbied vigorously in the New York State Legislature for deaf education. His efforts to obtain funding from New York State for a national school in Hartford, Connecticut were a catalyst to establish the New York Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb. The New York school was chartered April 15, 1817 by the New York State Legislature.

This bibliography and accompanying exhibit represents a small segment of the New York State Library's research resources for historians, professional practitioners, and other persons seeking information about hearing impairments. The asterisks indicate items which were on display at the New York State Library.

1. **An Act to Incorporate the Members of the New York Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb, Passed April 15, 1819*, New York (State) Laws, Statutes, etc., New York: E. Conrad, 1819, 23p., N 040 B72.
2. **An Address Delivered on Behalf of the New York Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb, Before the New York Forum; at the Conclusion of a Volunteer Debate for the Benefit of Said Institution, December 13, 1818*, Sylvanus Miller. New York: E. Conrad, 1819, 15p., N 040 B203.
3. **American Sign Language; A Comprehensive Dictionary*, Martin L. A. Sternberg. New York: Harper & Row, 1981, 1132p., H 001.56 S839, 81-29829.
4. *Aural Habilitation*, Mark Ross. Austin, TX: PRO-ED, 1986, 55p., C 362.428088 R825, 87-032300.
5. **Biographical Sketch of Mason F. Cogswell, M.D. of Albany, New York*, William Sprague. S.L., S.N., [1865], 8p., Z 285.I73 Zb86.
6. **Circular of the President and Directors of the Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb. And the Petition to the Mayor, Aldermen and Commonality of the City of New York, with Their Favorable Report and Patronage*. New York School for the Deaf. New York: E. Conrad, 1818, 16p., N 040 B72.
7. **Commemorative Exercises, and a Recital of the Steps which Led to the Founding of the New York Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb, 100th Anniversary of the Granting of its Charter, April 15, 1917*, New York School for the Deaf. New York: printed by the pupils of the school, [1917], 20p., E 371.912 N532 73-9603.
8. **Cognition, Education, and Deafness: Directions for Research and Instruction*, David S. Martin, ed. Washington, DC: Gallaudet College Press, 1985, 232p., C 371.912019 C676, 86-25481.
9. **Courses of Study Academic and Vocational*, New York School for the Deaf. White Plains, NY: The School, 1937, 60p., E 371.912 N5586.
10. **The Deaf and Dumb*; a poem ... written and published for the benefit of "The New York Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb," Moses Y. Scott. New York: Elam Bliss, 1819, 23p., N 040 D80.

11. *Diagnosis and Treatment of Hearing Impairment in Children; a Clinical Manual*, by Dennis G. Pappas. San Diego, CA: College Hill Press, 1985, 268p., C 618.920978 P218 86-23153.
12. **A Discourse in Commemoration of the Life, Character, and Services of the Rev. Thomas H. Gallaudet, LL.D., delivered before the citizens of Hartford, January 7th, 1852*, Henry Barnard. Hartford, CT: Brockett & Hutchinson, 1852, 62p., C 362.49 G166.
13. *A Discourse Pronounced By Request of the Society for Instructing the Deaf and Dumb, at the City Hall in the City of New York, on the 24th day of March, 1818*, Samuel A. Mitchell. New York: E. Conrad, [1818?], 32p., N 040 B72.
14. **Discours composé par Clerc et lu par M. Gallaudet a l'examen des élèves de l'aisle établi dans le Connecticut devant le gouverneur, et les deux chambres de legislature*, Laurent Clerc. Geneva, Paris: J.J. Paschoud, 1818, 32p., N 362.4 C629.
15. *Early Intervention for Hearing Impaired Children: Oral Options*, Daniel Ling, ed. San Diego, CA: College Hill Press, 1984, 271p., C 362.428088 E12, 85-31411.
16. *Education of the Hearing Impaired Child*, Frank Powell...et al. San Diego, CA: College Hill Press, 1985, 162p., C 371.912 E24, 85-29090.
17. **Elementary Exercises for the Deaf and Dumb*, Samuel Akerly. New York: E. Conrad, New York Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb, 1821, 374p., C 371.912 A31.
18. **Facilitating Classroom Listening: A Handbook for Teachers of Normal and Hard of Hearing Students*, Frederick S. Berg. Boston, MA: College-Hill Press, 1987, 214p., C 371.912 B493, 87-032241.
19. **Father and Daughter: A Collection of Cogswell Family Letters and Diaries, 1772-1830*, Grace McClure Dixon Cogswell Root, ed. West Hartford, CT: American School for the Deaf (1924), 128p., Z 610.92 qC67r.
20. **Gallaudet Encyclopedia of Deaf People and Deafness*, John V. Van Cleave. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1987, 3v., R 362.420321, qG165, 87-011229.
21. **A Guide to Colleges for Hearing Impaired Students*, Mary Ann Liscio, ed. Orlando, FL: Academic Press, 1986, 472p., R 378.73 qL769, 87-21062.
22. **Guidelines for Libraries Serving Persons with a Hearing Impairment or a Visual Impairment*, Roundtable for Libraries Serving Special Populations. New York: New York Library Association, 1987, 31p., C 027.663 qN532, 87-54722.
23. *Hearing Disorders in Children; Pediatric Audiology*, Frederick N. Martin, ed. Austin, TX: Pro-Ed, 1987, 488p., Cataloging in Process.
24. *The Hearing-Impaired Child in School*, Raymond H. Hull and Karen L. Dilka, eds. Orlando, FL: Grune & Stratton, 1984, 200p., C 371.912 H435, 85-39235.
25. *Hearing-Impaired Children and Youth with Developmental Disabilities: An Interdisciplinary Foundation for Service*, by Evelyn Cherow, ed., Noel D. Matkin, and Raymond Trybus, guest eds. Washington, DC: Gallaudet College Press, 1985, 394p., C 362.42 H435, 86-25513.
26. *The Hearing-Impaired Employee, An Untapped Resource*, Georgene Fritz and Nancy Smith, coordinators. San Diego, CA: College Hill Press, 1985, 141p., C 658.3045, F919 85-27128.

27. *Hearing Impairment: A Guide for People with Auditory Handicaps and Those Concerned with Their Care and Rehabilitation*, Kenneth Lysons. Cambridge, MA: Woodhead-Faulkner, 1984, 196p., C 617.89 L995, 85-22090.
28. *The Hearing Impaired: Birth to Six*, June Grant. Boston, MA: Little Brown, 1987, 182p., C 362.4208805 G762, 87-034683.
29. **A History of the New York Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb*. New York: The New York Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb, 1893, 65p., C 362.4 N53.
30. *Individualised Integration: Studies of Deaf and Partially-Hearing Children and Students in Ordinary Schools and Colleges*, D.M.C. Dale. Springfield, IL: C.C. Thomas, 1984, 234p., C 371.912 D139, 85-23945.
31. *Language and Learning Skills of Hearing-Impaired Students*, Mary Joe Osberger, ed. Rockville, MD: American Speech-Language-Hearing Assoc., 1986, 107p., C 371.912 qL287, 87-014445.
32. **Legal Rights of Hearing-Impaired People*, by Sy Du Bow and others. Washington, DC: Gallaudet College Press, 193p., L 346.73013 L496, 87-031462.
33. **Library Service to the Deaf and Hearing Impaired*, Phyllis I. Dalton. Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press, 1985, 371p., C 025.527763 D152, 85-26646.
34. **Life of Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, Founder of Deaf-mute Instruction in America*, Edward Miner Gallaudet. New York: H. Holt, 1910, 339p., C 362.49 G169.
35. *The Multiply Handicapped Hearing Impaired Child*, George T. Mencher and Sanford E. Gerber, eds. New York: Grune & Stratton, 1983, 480p., C 618.920978 M961, 84-30582.
36. **The Rarii* (Newspaper). Title varies: New York State Rarii and Deaf-Mutes' Journal; Canajoharie Rarii, Montgomery Phoenix. Place of publication varies: Fort Plain, Hamilton, Canajoharie, NY; Levi S. Backus, 1837-1863, MSC (Newspapers).
37. **Report of the Select Committee on the Petition of Levi S. Backus*, New York (State) Assembly, Select Committee on the Petition of Levi S. Backus. Albany, NY: 1838, 2p., D, Leg. 481.2-3 DOCAS 1059138.
38. **Rules, adopted November 13, 1818, by the Board of Directors of the New York Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb, for the Government of the School, the Monthly Committee, and the Superintendent and Teacher*, New York: Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb, 1818, 4p., N 040 B 203.
39. **A Sermon on the Duty and Advantages of Affording Instruction to the Deaf and Dumb*, Thomas H. Gallaudet, Concord, NH: Isaac Hill, 1824, 20p., Z 252 4c4.
40. *The Speech of Hearing-Impaired Children*, Andreas Markides. Dover, NH: Manchester University Press, 1983, 219p., C 616.82855 M345, 84-34465.
41. *Speech of the Hearing Impaired: Research, Training, and Personnel Preparation*, Irving Hochberg, Harry Levitt, and Mary Joe Osberger. Baltimore, MD: University Park Press, 1983, 426p., C 616.8552 S742, 84-20124.
42. *Teaching Hearing-Impaired Children in Regular Classrooms*, Peter M. Blackwell. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1983, 49p., C 371.912 B632, 84-37258.

43. *Telephone Communication and Hearing Impairment*, Norman P. Erber. San Diego, CA: College Hill Press, 1985, 185p. C 362.4283 E65, 85-35019.
44. **Turning Points in the Education of Deaf People*, Edward L. Scouten. Danville, IL: Interstate Printers & Publishers, 1984, 420p., C 371, 91209 S432, 85-25364.
45. **When the Mind Hears: A History of the Deaf*, Harlan Lane. New York: Random House, 1984, 537p., C 305.908162 L265, 85-20941.

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