

College of the Holy Cross

CrossWorks

Bulletin of American Jesuit Activity for the Deaf,
The

Newsletters

4-15-1944

The Bulletin of American Jesuit Activity for the Deaf, April 15, 1944

Jesuits of Weston College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://crossworks.holycross.edu/dca001-bull-ma-1944>



Part of the [Catholic Studies Commons](#), and the [Disability Studies Commons](#)

Repository Citation

Jesuits of Weston College, "The Bulletin of American Jesuit Activity for the Deaf, April 15, 1944" (1944).

Bulletin of American Jesuit Activity for the Deaf, The. 1.

<https://crossworks.holycross.edu/dca001-bull-ma-1944/1>

This Newsletter is brought to you for free and open access by the Newsletters at CrossWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Bulletin of American Jesuit Activity for the Deaf, The by an authorized administrator of CrossWorks.

THE DACTYLOLOGY BULLETIN

WESTON COLLEGE, WESTON, MASS.

APRIL 15, 1944.

HISTORY OF ST. IGNATIUS' CIRCLE ST. ANDREW - 1930-1944.

The three enthusiastic Juniors who held the first meeting of St. Ignatius Circle for the Deaf, at St. Andrew on Thanksgiving Day 1930 and gave their full attention to Brother Rosenecker, S.J. as he explained the alphabet, could not have foreseen the eager reception that awaited their enterprise for Christ. Not only would the future Juniors of St. Andrew generously carry on their work but they would find many supporters in our houses of higher studies, especially Weston and Woodstock. The three who attended the first meeting were soon joined by others and it was decided that the number should be limited for the time being. They held their half-hour meetings on Thursday afternoon. Brother Rosenecker prelected new signs; they practised; frequently a sermonette was given - and the all too short meeting was over. Toward the end of the year, on April 16, 1931, eight Rhetoricians, now well advanced in the signs held their commencement exercises. The exercises consisted of an Academy (prayers, poems, dialogue, etc.) for twelve Poets who would carry on the following year. From this academy developed the practice of holding an Annual Thanksgiving Academy to which all the Juniors are invited. The diary of the first year reveals a "wonderful interest on the part of all".

However, the most important matter in this little history is: How did the circle begin? Whose idea was it? I think that the following paragraphs will answer these questions very well. They are excerpts from a reply which Fr. Ralph Lynch, S.J. sent us when he was asked to give us some details about the circle's inauguration.

"Part of the germinal flame was curiosity to learn, part was the perennial yearning of youth (in seminaries) to be about the business of saving souls. Through my first three years at St. Andrew I had worked up a terrific thirst for languages, especially modern. One August day in 1930, on the way in from a sweaty handball game, I stopped off at the kitchen to say hello (in passing) to my good friend the cook. The cook was Fr. Paul Rosenecker. While we were passing the time of day, he happened to accompany some remark with a gesture, but not the kind of a gesture one would expect as a natural expression in signs. This led to my questioning him how he came to do it, and he told me his story. He knew the sign language because his parents were deaf-mutes, all their friends were deaf-mutes, and he had to learn it for these two very good reasons. Well in no time at all, I felt my thirst for language making its eager claims and there we were teacher and pupil with the kitchen as the scene of the first competent sign language lecture at St. Andrew. Honestly, all I was thinking of at the moment was to learn something new, something quite fascinating. But Brother didn't waste time. Before I got out of the kitchen that afternoon, he had sold me the apostolic merits of this new found fancy of mine. Sure, Brother, (I promised him) I'll get a gang of the fellows together and we'll get Fr. Rector's permission to have you teach us. During that chat, of course, he told me all about Fr. Purtell and how glad he'd be to see us get into the work. That night or maybe the next day he gave me Fr. Galvin's booklet about the deaf, to win me over (I surmise) to a more spiritual appreciation of the problem.

"Fr. Rector, Rev. William Devlin, gave us the green light and I went about rounding up such fellows as I thought would be willing to

get into the thing. Before the year was over we had quite a large number interested and left a lot of successors to take over the following year.

"That first year Fr. Rector let us send away for several copies of Fr. Higgins. The diary tells you pretty much how we spent our time. We were very anxious to learn, but never actually met any deaf people as the later years did.

"Last year I made my retreat at St. Andrew, and my brother Frank showed me the vast accumulation of diaries the good fellows have compiled on deaf-mute work up there. It is really a fine and thrilling thing to read. God bless them all and their zeal. I once heard a confession in signs. It was full payment for any work I put into learning them."

The following year was a year of successful probation for the deaf-mute work at St. Andrew, although they had to carry on without the help of Br. Rosenecker. As the green leaves turned to gold in the following Autumn, the number of dactylogologists increased and so did the urge to be about the business of helping Our Lord's deaf. "After six classes by approval of Fr. Rector and by instigation of Fr. Purtell" (as the diary has it) the Juniors rounded up all the deaf they could find and assembled them in St. Peter's School Hall in Poughkeepsie for a sermon in signs. Eight deaf attended this first meeting, the first of many meetings, for this practice has continued to the present day. However in spite of letters sent to the Pastors in neighboring parishes and in spite of frequent canvasses, the number of deaf whom the Juniors have instructed has not varied a great deal from that day. Several of this original flock did not come after a couple of years for various reasons. One man, Mr. Bowdren, apologetically confessed that he could not regularly make an eighty mile trip for the meeting. Therefore, for fourteen years, the signers at St. Andrew have been devoting themselves to a small group, in spite of the fact that the meeting attendance has ranged from one to eight and several times no one appeared. This lack of apparent results was accepted cheerfully as is shown, for instance, by this excerpt of 1934-35: "Meeting in city. No one present except Mr. Daily, Mr. McGrath, Mr. Finster and Mr. Moffitt all of the Society."

Since Fr. Purtell suggested that the Juniors visit the deaf at their homes to show that they were interested in them and thus encourage them to attend the monthly meetings, a band of Juniors began to hike to the city on Thursday mornings. Great benefit has resulted from this practice for the deaf and for ourselves. Also these morning walks have at times been used for zealous canvassing.

We can conclude with the present state of our sign language activity. There are now about twenty-five dactylogologists at St. Andrew. Our chief aim is to acquire a knowledge of the signs that will prove useful when with God's grace we are ordained as priests. The meetings of the circle are held once a week during recreation after dinner. During another recreation those who wish may practice the signs in bands about the grounds. In accordance with our secondary aim, we help as much as we can eleven adult deaf in Poughkeepsie, only six of whom for various reasons can be called "regulars" as far as our meetings are concerned, but these six have been an unfailing inspiration for the past twelve or thirteen years. They are appreciative, patient and kind and are a great source of consolation. For example, after some Juniors saw the hard-working Mr. Thomas; his whole body weary and aching after an attack of pleurisy, light us at the mention of Our Lord crucified, Shelley's Skylark had nothing on their soaring spirits.

Surely God has blessed all the acts of generosity and self-sacrifice hidden between these lines, acts not only of the limited number of signing enthusiasts but also of all the Juniors of the past years who by their interest, encouragement and assistance have kept alive at St. Andrew a burning zeal for Our Lord's beloved deaf-mutes.

-Philip McGovern, S.J.