

Ohio Deaf History Month (ODHM) – March 13 to April 15

The State Library of Ohio Board proclaimed the period beginning March 13 and ending April 15, 2023, as Ohio Deaf History Month and encourages Ohio libraries to display materials and host deaf awareness activities to highlight the significance of the many outstanding contributions made by Deaf and hearing pioneers, particularly in Deaf Education. Listed below are some of the accomplishments made in the Deaf Community.

384-322 B.C. **An ancient Greek philosopher, Aristotle** says those "born deaf become senseless and incapable of reason." His words echoed throughout Europe until the 1500s.

1520-1584 **Pedro Ponce de Leon** was a Spanish Benedictine monk who is often credited as being "the first teacher of the deaf."

1755 **Abbe' Charles Michel de l' Epee** established the first school for the Deaf in the world, Paris, France. He, "Father of the Deaf," demonstrated that deaf people could develop communication with themselves and the hearing world through a system of conventional gestures, hand signs, and fingerspelling.

In 1814, **Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet** visited his family in Hartford, Connecticut. Looking out the window, he noticed his younger brothers and sisters were not playing with another child. When he went out to investigate, he learned that this young woman, Alice Cogswell, was deaf. He didn't know how to sign, and he tried to communicate by pointing to his hat and writing H-A- T in the dirt. She understood him, and he was inspired to teach her more. Her father, a wealthy doctor, Mason Cogswell, subsequently financed Thomas' trip to Europe since there were no schools for deaf children in the United States then.

1785-1869, **Laurent Clerc**, born in La Balme, a village in France. He became deaf at the age of one from falling off the chair by the fire in the kitchen of his home. The fire left a scar on his cheek. He lost his sense of smell and hearing. He began his education at twelve because his family learned of a deaf school in Paris. His first teacher and mentor was Jean Massieu, a pioneering deaf educator who taught at the National Institute of the Deaf in Paris. Later, he worked under Abbe' Sicard at the National Institute of the Deaf in Paris. Then later, he met Thomas Gallaudet in London in 1815, when Abbe' Sicard introduced Gallaudet to Laurent Clerc, a teacher, at a town hall where they gave a presentation about their school in Paris. Then later, Thomas Gallaudet bought Laurent Clerc by boat to come to the United States, and he was the first deaf teacher at the American School for the Deaf on April 15, 1817.

April 15, 1817, **Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, Dr. Mason Cogswell, and Laurent Clerc** established the first American School for the Deaf in Hartford, Connecticut. The school's name was "**Asylum for the Education and Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb.**"

Alice Cogswell was the first deaf student taught by Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet at the American School for the Deaf.

1787-1851, **Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet** attended Yale University, earning his bachelor's degree in 1805, graduating at the age of 17, with the highest honors, and then earned a master's degree at Yale in 1808. He engaged in many things, such as studying law, trade, and theology. Later in 1814, he graduated from Andover Theological Seminary and attended there for two years. He declined several offers from the pastorate due to ongoing concerns about his health.

He co-founded the first permanent institution for the deaf education in the United State, and he became its first principal. When it opened on April 15, 1817, it was called "**Connecticut Asylum for the Education and Instruction of Deaf and Dumb Persons,**" but it is now known as the **American School for the Deaf** in Hartford, Connecticut.

His father, **Peter Wallace Gallaudet**, was a personal secretary to US President George Washington when the office of the President was in Philadelphia. He married one of his former deaf students, Sophia Fowler, in 1821. They have eight children together. Just days before his death, he received an honorary Doctor of Laws degree from Case Western Reserve College in Cleveland, Ohio.

1827 **Colonel Smith's School for the Deaf** opens in Tallmadge, Ohio.

On October 18, 1829, **Ohio School for the Deaf** opened. The name of the school used to be called "Asylum for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb," then changed the name of the school to "Ohio Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb," then changed the name of the school to "Ohio School for the Deaf."

Robert Patterson, (1848-1942), Teacher and Principal. He was born on December 11, 1848, in Oakley, Fifeshire, Scotland. In 1852 his family immigrated to the U.S. They later moved to Ohio. He went to Ohio Institution (Ohio State School for the Deaf) in 1859. He went to Gallaudet College in the fall of 1886 and graduated in June 1870. He taught at Ohio Institution in the fall of 1870 to 1890 then he became a principal from 1890 to 1921. He and Superintendent **John W. Jones** wrote a book titled, "Ohio Institution for the Deaf Course of Instruction, 1896," outlining the course of instruction for the school and shops, and it also served as a manual for the teachers.

In March 1864, **President Abraham Lincoln** promoted Ulysses S. Grant to the rank of Lieutenant general. General Ulysses Grant was tone-deaf. He had no sense of rhythm and could not march correctly. Grant had grown up in Brown County, Ohio, and on his way to Washington, D. C. in early March to begin his new command, he stopped in Columbus, Ohio, and stayed with Governor David Todd. As the military escort made its way past the Ohio Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb, a line of deaf students saluted the general and the soldiers accompanying him by waving handkerchiefs. Grant bowed his uncovered head to the crowd,

and his carriage then stopped at the school. Superintendent George L. Weed stepped forward with Robert Patterson, a deaf student, and as Patterson signed his address congratulating Grant for his success, Weed spoke words to the audience. The great soldier graciously accepted the heartfelt message presented by the deaf student.

On April 8, 1864, **President Abraham Lincoln** signed the charter for the **Columbia Institution for the Deaf and Dumb to National Deaf-Mute College**. The same day the US Senate passed the thirteenth amendment to abolish slavery in America.

On April 29, 1865, President Abraham Lincoln's body was laid in the Statehouse in Columbus, Ohio. The deaf students at the Ohio Institution joined thousands of local townspeople in paying their last respects to the slain president.

Dr. Edward Miner Gallaudet was involved in a historic debate with **Alexander Graham Bell** over ASL and Oralism at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, D.C., in 1886. Both men did not win the argument. At the **Milan Conference in 1886**, the delegates voted to support oralism in the school system. After that, many teachers supported Bell with Oralism. AND Sign Language was banned in the U.S. Oral Schools for a century.

On November 14, 1892, The **Cleveland Day School for the Deaf** was opened by John H. Geary. He was deaf and also was the Principal of the School.

Robert P. McGregor was deaf, and he was born in Ohio. In 1880, the National Association of the Deaf-Mutes, which is now called the National Association for the Deaf (NAD), hosted its first conference founded by him in Cincinnati, Ohio. He was the first president of the NAD (1880-1883).

Robert P. McGregor was the Founder of the first Ohio Home for the Aged and Infirm Deaf in 1896 in Westerville, Ohio. The name was called **Columbus Colony Elderly Care, now Inniswood**.

In 1915, **St. Rita School for the Deaf** opened. St. Rita School for the Deaf is an independent Roman Catholic school located in the village of Evendale, near Cincinnati, Ohio.

Art Kruger has been called the "architect," "guiding light," "father," and "wizard" of the **American Athletic Association of the Deaf (AAAD)**, which he co-founded in 1945. He used to work for the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company in Akron, Ohio, back then.

Frances Woods was born deaf, and she was from Ohio. She was a dancer. She was married to **Billy Bray**, who was hearing, and he was a dancer. They both travel to dance in nightclubs and hotels nationwide and beyond. Robert L. Ripley, of "Ripley's Believe It or Not!" Fame called them "The Wonder Dancers."

The merger of the **Ohio Deaf Motorists Association** and **Ohio Federation of Organizations of the Deaf** set the pattern for a strong group in Ohio on October 3, 1959. Later they changed the name to become **Ohio Association for the Deaf (OAD)** in 1961.

The birthplace of the **Registry Interpreters for the Deaf (RID)** was at Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana, on June 16, 1964.

Frederick C. Schreiber became deaf at the age of six. He graduated from Gallaudet University in 1942, and became actively involved in local, then national, Deaf politics. At the National Association for the Deaf (NAD) 1964 convention, he was elected Secretary-Treasurer, an unpaid position. At the 1966 convention, the position of Executive Director was created, and he was unanimously elected. He was a leader and advocate. He and his wife used to live in Akron, Ohio, where he worked for the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company.

On June 8, 1965, President Johnson signed **Public Law 89-36**, establishing NTID into law at a special ceremony in the White House Rose Garden.

Malcolm J Norwood, known as "Mac" to friends, stands out in the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community as "The Father of Closed Captioning."

Robert Haig Weibrecht is the first deaf person who invented the first Teletypewriter (TTY) in 1964.

Louise Hume became deaf at the age of 14. She moved to Akron, Ohio, after she graduated from Gallaudet University. She used to work for the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company for two years in Akron. She and her husband, Boyd Hume, helped establish a successful Vocational Rehabilitation Program for the Deaf in Ohio. She established a story hour for deaf children at the Akron Library. She did a lot more to help the deaf community through the years. Also, she received a lot of different awards during her lifetime of service.

Alice L. Hagemeyer worked for the District of Columbia Public Library for 34 years. She's cited in Deaf Heritage as one of the earliest organizers of the Deaf Awareness Week (now known as Deaf Heritage Week). In 1976 she began serving as "Librarian for the Deaf Community". In 1986, she founded Friends of Libraries for Deaf Action (FOLDA).

Dr. William Stokoe, Jr. is called "The Father of ASL Linguistics".

The **Deaf President Now (DPN)** were four student leaders (Jerry Covell, Tim Rarus, Greg Hlibok, and Bridgetta Bourne-Firl) to help to protect Gallaudet University with the students from March 6-13, 1988, captured the world's attention to have a first Deaf President.

On March 13, 1988, **Dr. I. King Jordan** became the first Deaf President at Gallaudet University.

On July 26, 1990, President George H. W. Bush signed the **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)**, the most sweeping affirmation of rights for the disabled in American history, into law.

Skip Bergquist, who is deaf, had helped and worked for the Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission for many years. He was a good leader for the deaf.

Jeffrey Bohrman was born profoundly deaf and lost his sight later in life due to Usher's Syndrome. After receiving his doctorate in pharmacology, he worked as a research toxicologist for many years before changing his career to work as a leader and advocate within local, statewide, national, and international organizations serving the needs of people who are disabled and DeafBlind. He worked as a research scientist for the government. He was instrumental in establishing the Ohio DeafBlind Outreach Program at the Columbus Speech and Hearing Center and the Ohio Association of the DeafBlind. Jeff served in different capacities with the American Association of the DeafBlind. In the middle of the 2000s, the Ohio DeafBlind Outreach Program closed due to a lack of finances. He passed away on November 7, 2022.

Willian E. "Dummy Hoy, born May 23, 1862, in Houcktown, Ohio. He was not Major League Baseball's first deaf player but the game's most successful. He finished his career from 1888-1902 with 2,048 hits, 596 stolen bases, and 725 runs batted in. In the 21st century, Hoy received consideration by the Veterans Committee for induction into the Baseball Hall of Fame. (He becomes the second Deaf Player in Professional Baseball).

Troy Kotsur won Best Supporting Actor at the 94th Academy Awards for his role "CODA". He was only the second deaf actor ever to win an Oscar. His win also marked the first time. A deaf actor won an award at the ceremony 36 years ago. After his "CODA" co-star Marlee Marlin's historic win for "Children of a Lesser God," he made his mark.

Clevelander **Charles "Chuck" Williams** Has Been Fighting for Black Deaf Lives for More Than 70 Years.

The **Ohio Deaf Friends of the Library** for the 1st Annual Children's Drawing Art Contest for the Ohio Deaf History Month was established in 2021.

Artist's Statement, "much of my work depicts the Deaf experience expressed in the most appropriate form of communication: visual art. I present both the suppression and the beauty of Deaf Culture and American Sign Language as I see it: in the past and in the present. I hope this work and the understanding that may arise from this visual expression will help bridge the gap between the Deaf world and the hearing world. By Betty Miller, Artist 1934-2012.

Credit to: Ohio Deaf Friends of the Library 2025