

Sign Language: The Spread from Europe to America

Anna Brant

Senior Division

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When I first heard the theme for National History Day, I automatically thought about sign language. I was eight years old when our close family friends had a daughter born with down syndrome. She was not expected to talk until she was six years old. Between the months of six-eight, she started learning sign language to communicate with her family. I babysat Carlee often when I grew older, so I learned signs that she used often. I chose to do this topic because it was interesting to me and I could relate it to my life. The topic relates to the theme of communication in history because sign language has a long history, and its advocates have struggled to defend its use as a legitimate form of communication. Millions of deaf people have used sign language to communicate and it is key to their understanding and their quality of life.

To start my research I first used the school library to find a book on deaf history. I found the book *Inside Deaf Culture* by Carol Padden and Tom Humphries. This book started my knowledge of the history of how everything started. Secondly, I used the Library of Congress online to find primary sources and extra information. Another thing I did was watch certain videos with even more information. I stored all of my sources in my annotated bibliography. Taking many hours, I researched the history of sign language. For class, I put together a rough draft of my project explaining where sign language first started and who were the main significant people.

Using my draft of information, I started writing a script for a documentary. I created a separate document to record my script and pictures I planned on including in my documentary. Once I had enough information, I started recording my project on iMovie on an Apple computer. After difficulties on the computer, I restarted the process on iMovie on my iPhone. After I was prepared, I started recording my interview with

Mindee and Carlee Rowan. Next, I used my video editing skills from making youtube videos in the past to complete the documentary. After many hours of recording and editing, I finished my project.

My historical argument is, the establishment of using hand signs or sign language is an example of communication because it opened a door for deaf people to experience the world of education. Sign language advocates have had to fight to establish sign language as a legitimate means of communication.

Imagine not being able to talk to your good friends or family. Without sign language, the deaf could not talk to others. Sign language provided people with the most amazing gift of language and thought. There was no organized form of communication for the deaf until the 18th century. Sign language is like a spoken language but for a different culture of people.

Primary sources

Alexander Graham Bell with Helen Keller and Annie Sullivan at the meeting of the American Association to Promote the Teaching of Speech to the Deaf, July, in Chautauqua, N.Y. [, Printed Later] Photograph. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <www.loc.gov/item/00649950/>.

This photograph shows how Alexander Graham Bell worked with Helen Keller and her teacher on learning the deaf language even if it was the oral way.

Bell, Alexander Graham, and Annie M Sullivan. Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Annie Sullivan. 1892. Manuscript/Mixed Material. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <www.loc.gov/item/magbell.12800104/>.

This is the letter between Alexander Graham Bell and Allie Sullivan about the deaf awareness conference they were hosting in 1892. I will use this to explain how many people believed in teaching the deaf orally instead of with signs

Bell, Alexander Graham, and Edward M Gallaudet. Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Edward M. Gallaudet, March 2. March 2, 1891. Manuscript/Mixed Material. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <www.loc.gov/item/magbell.17710214/>.

This letter is Gallaudet writing and saying the senate approved the grant for the school. They received a total of \$3,000, he says he is surprised by this.

Bell, Alexander Graham, and Edward M Gallaudet. Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Edward M. Gallaudet, undated. Undated. Manuscript/Mixed Material. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <www.loc.gov/item/magbell.12300115/>.

In this letter from Alexander G. Bell to Edward Gallaudet, Bell talks about education, marriage, genetic aspects for deaf people. He also talks about the Convention of American Instructors for the Deaf.

Bell, Alexander Graham, and Edward M Gallaudet. Letter from Edward M. Gallaudet to Alexander Graham Bell, March 1. March 1, 1891. Manuscript/Mixed Material. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <www.loc.gov/item/magbell.17710210/>.

In this letter between Alexander Bell and Edward Gallaudet (8 pages), the first part of a few letters describe a grant Gallaudet wants to open his school for the deaf (February 12, 1891). Alexander and Edward write how they don't know if the senate will approve of this and how much the grant will be. Letter delivered March 2, 1891

Bell, Alexander Graham, Edward M Gallaudet, and Thomas Gallaudet. Letter from Edward M. Gallaudet to Alexander Graham Bell. 1887. Manuscript/Mixed Material. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <www.loc.gov/item/magbell.17710204/>.

This letter from Edward Gallaudet to Alexander Gram Bell addresses speeches and schools for the deaf. Another subject heading is a correspondence between the two.

Circular. 1876. Manuscript/Mixed Material. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <www.loc.gov/item/magbell.19510205/>

This is a photo of how oralism was seen back then and how it was taught. I used this to further understand how the method worked.

Keaveney, Arthur, and John Madden. "Lucius Pinarius, Quintus Pedius: Their Degrees of Kinship with Julius Caesar." *Latomus*, vol. 47, no. 2, 1988, pp. 354–357. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/41540884. Accessed 21 Nov. 2020.

This gave me information on the first-ever deaf person recorded in history Quintus Pedius

Schmidt, J. R, photographer. Deaf & dumb children of St. Rita's School, Cincinnati, singing Star-Spangled Banner. Photograph. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <www.loc.gov/item/2016826637/>.

In this photo, kids from the St. Rita's School in Cincinnati are signing the star-spangled banner, this is in 1918 when deaf kids had access to education even without hearing.

Thornley, Mary. Milan, Italy 1880. Gallaudet University, 1994.

This painting, Milan Italy, further describes how oralists felt about ASL and how they wanted it gone. The painter used 1808 another painting but about Napoleon's troops shooting at unarmed Spaniards as a base for this painting.

Veditz, George William. Preservation of the Sign Language. 1913. Video. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <www.loc.gov/item/mbrs01815816/>.

This film is all in sign language, made in 1913 after the Milan conference signs were banned, this film of a speech in sign language described how L'Eppe created the FSL and how people adored it but it was ripped away by people who thought they knew all about sign language. The oral method is really the worst, as long as a deaf man exists there will always be signs.

Secondary Sources

Hardin, Belinda J., et al. "Family-Centered Practices and American Sign Language (ASL): Challenges and Recommendations." *Exceptional Children*, vol. 81, no. 1, Fall 2014, ppl. 107–123. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1177/0014402914532229.

This article explains the importance of the decision that they make of which communication their deaf child is to use. The purpose of the article is to compare and contrast the differences between at-home study and professional education at an ASL school. The at-home study is considered good because family is always around and can teach you, but less education is learned after basic processes are taught.

Jay, Michelle. "History of American Sign Language." Start ASL, Michelle Jay
<https://www.startasl.com/Wp-Content/Uploads/StartASLlogoFinal.png>, 6 Nov. 2020, www.startasl.com/history-of-american-sign-language/.

This article gave me tons of information on the history of American sign language about Thomas Gallaudet and Laurent Clerc. I use this source mostly in the paragraph about the start of sign language in America.

Jay, Michelle. "History of Sign Language – Deaf History." Start ASL, Michelle Jay
<https://www.startasl.com/Wp-Content/Uploads/StartASLlogoFinal.png>, 19 Oct. 2020, www.startasl.com/history-of-sign-language/.

I used this article in all of my paragraphs, it gave me info on the earliest people who started their own version of recorded sign language and compared sign language to oral language and who thought which was better for teaching students.

Mirzoeff, Nicholas. "The Silent Mind: Learning from Deafness." *History Today*, vol. 42, no. 7, July 1992, p. 19. EBSCOhost,
search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=f6h&AN=9207203964&site=ehost-live.

This article gave me the knowledge of the first people to think of deaf communication and that a Greece man named Plato was the first one to ever write about sign language. Also in the article, it introduces us to a very famous person in the sign language world Abbe Charles Michale de L'eppe who opened the first actual school for the deaf in 1771

Padden, Carol, and Tom Humphries. *Inside Deaf Culture*. Harvard University Press, 2006.

In this book, the development of deaf culture is explained. Examples are given of people who were struggling with education and how they came to learn sign language and how to communicate. It explains how the early 19th century ASL schools shaped the way deaf people live their lives in future generations to come.

Traynor, Robert. "The International Deafness Controversy of 1880 – Robert Traynor." *Hearing International*, 12 Jan. 2018, hearinghealthmatters.org/hearinginternational/2016/the-international-deafness-controversy-of-1880/.

This article gave me information on the Milian Conference due to the fact that there were no accessible primary sources on this.

"Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet." – Gallaudet University, www.gallaudet.edu/about/history-and-traditions/thomas-hopkins-gallaudet.

I used this article for extra information on Thomas Gallaudet and Laurent Clerc. This explains their time in Europe and the opening of their Asylum in 1817 and how they got to the point where they could both understand each other in English and in sign language