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Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet: Benevolent Paternalism and the Origins of the American Asylum

Phyllis Valentine

Editor's Introduction

Early accounts of deaf history glorified the achievements of hearing men like Pedro Ponce de León, the Abbé de l'Épée, and, of course, Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, the cofounder with Laurent Clerc and Mason Cogswell of today's American School for the Deaf. As individuals, they were portrayed as selfless and giving and thoroughly committed to the well-being of deaf people. Surely these interpretations contain some kernel of truth, but as more study occurs, as critical eyes examine more closely what these men did and believed, their actions become more ambiguous, as Phyllis Valentine's essay indicates.

Valentine argues that Gallaudet and his successors at the American Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb (the American School for the Deaf) in the early and middle decades of the nineteenth century were paternalistic. Her view questions the widely held belief that this period was a golden era for deaf people, a time when they and their language were fully respected and equal partners with hearing people and spoken language in the residential institutions. Valentine's interpretation is that American Asylum principals, at least, viewed deaf people as children, and they saw their role as that of a benevolent father, stern but fair and morally correct.

Valentine examines this paternalism historically, showing that Gallaudet's views reflected those of the upper middle class, Protestant, New England society of which he was a part. Like other political Whigs and evangelical Protestants of that era, Gallaudet believed that he knew what was best for people less fortunate than himself. Whigs believed they had both a right and a duty to guide (or dictate) to their social inferiors, including deaf people. Evangelical Protestants thought

they could hasten Christ's return to earth by spreading the gospel and converting the heathen—whether Indians, for example, or deaf people—to Protestant Christianity.

Valentine is careful, however, to distinguish between the paternalism of Gallaudet and his immediate successor as principal, Lewis Weld, from that of later principals, especially Collins Stone. Gallaudet's paternalism, she argues, was benevolent, even if inappropriate for students who were often eighteen to twenty years old. By the time Collins Stone became principal, the paternalism remained, but it was rooted in negative attitudes toward deaf students. In a sophisticated argument, she suggests that there may have been social-class reasons for this. The earliest students at the American Asylum often were, like Gallaudet, from the upper class. Later, their backgrounds were overwhelmingly in the working class.

Valentine finds little evidence that students at the American Asylum resented its paternalism. She hypothesizes that the reason might be that it was better than the alternative they faced, that is, no education and no social interaction within a community of deaf people. Few students could afford private alternatives to the American Asylum, and school administrators could, and did, dismiss students for breaking behavioral rules. It may also be true, however, that historians simply do not have access to the private feelings of deaf students from the nineteenth century. Whatever negative impressions they may have held have not been preserved.

THOMAS HOPKINS GALLAUDET always believed that the deaf people who were his students at the American Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb should be treated like his own children: with a father's kindly watchfulness and firm authority. During the winter of 1816 while he was in Edinburgh, Scotland, preparing to become administrator of the American Asylum, a homesick Gallaudet wrote to his friend Dr. Mason Cogswell: "I long to be in the midst of my deaf and dumb *children*, for such I mean to consider them" [italics added].¹ Once he returned to the United States, paternalism continued to be Gallaudet's lifelong disposition toward hearing-disabled pupils. For the next thirteen years, from 1817, when he began serving as principal, until 1830, when he resigned, Thomas Gallaudet's perspective never changed. In his role as guardian to younger children, paternalism may have been appropriate; but Principal Gallaudet also maintained this posture toward former pupils who grew up,

graduated from school, took jobs, married, and established families of their own.²

Fortunately, Thomas Gallaudet's paternalism was benevolent. Many graduates of the American Asylum remarked about the extraordinary kindness of this man, of his gentle nature and inoffensive manner. Certainly he did not assume that deaf people were his social or intellectual inferiors. Instead, he took every opportunity to declare them as fully valued as hearing people in the human family. They are, he emphasized to New England audiences, "bone of your bone and flesh of your flesh."³

The singular limitation that Gallaudet recognized in deaf persons was their inability to interpret correctly everyday events. They live, he emphasized, "encircled with all that can render life desirable; in the midst of society, of knowledge, of the arts, of the sciences, of a free and happy government, of a widely preached gospel; . . . [and yet] are lost in one perpetual gaze of wonder at the thousand mysteries which surround them."⁴ Without the concerned solicitude of hearing persons, Gallaudet believed uneducated deaf persons were doomed to spend their lives as victims of superstition. As principal of the American Asylum, he worked tirelessly to provide them both secular and religious training.⁵

Time enhanced rather than blurred the importance of Gallaudet's bearing toward his deaf students. More than thirty-five years after the American Asylum was founded, a report of the directors carefully restated his earlier view: "The principal should be in fact, the *father* of the *family* and be so situated that the children could have access to him at all times" [italics added].⁶ Between 1830 and 1870, during the administrations of the three principals who succeeded him—Lewis Weld, 1830–1853; William Turner, 1853–1863; and Collins Stone, 1863–1870—paternalism continued as the American Asylum's guiding principle of governance.

Paternalism—a posture of omniscient authority in the presence of dependent persons—was not unique to Thomas Gallaudet; it was a socially endorsed attitude of authority figures toward their dependent charges, employed widely throughout nineteenth-century antebellum America. In middle- and upper-class families, not only children but white women, who were considered too delicate for strenuous work and too emotionally fragile to cope with reality, seemed to require constant assistance from men. Employers, such as managers of textile mills in industrializing America, who felt a strong



Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, often called the “father” of American deaf education, was indeed paternalistic. Photograph reproduced from a daguerreotype circa 1842. GALLAUDET UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES

sense of personal responsibility for the welfare of their workers, and slaveholders—men and women who justified bondage with stories of their chattels' supposed "childlike" mental incapacity—were also paternalistic. Even abolitionists had trouble treating uneducated blacks as social equals. Jacksonian or Whig, Federalist or Jeffersonian Democratic-Republican, all endorsed paternalism.⁷ Both President Andrew Jackson and President John Quincy Adams's secretary of war, P. B. Porter, equated Indians with children. As they became more helpless, Porter explained, "it would seem to be not only the right but the duty of the government to take them under its parental care."⁸ Finally, in an extreme statement of paternalism, Henry Clay, Whig presidential candidate, declared that "the entire American people are entitled to the care of a paternal government."⁹

Thomas Gallaudet had many reasons to believe that paternalism was an appropriate ideological approach to uneducated and unchurched deaf people. These included his family's social status as old-line Connecticut gentry; a concept of Christian benevolence toward less fortunate human beings that he learned from Timothy Dwight, president of Yale during Gallaudet's undergraduate years; a passion for missionary work among "heathens" that he acquired during clerical studies at Andover Seminary; the postmillennial evangelical fervor engendered by the Second Great Awakening, which influenced his life; and finally, the social elitism endorsed by other New England Whigs who shared his world view.

Gallaudet was the oldest in a family of fifth-generation descendants of Thomas Hooker, a Puritan divine who had led pioneers out of Massachusetts Bay to found the colony of Connecticut. These credentials established a place for him among the early republic's gentry class. In the early nineteenth century, Americans were beginning to move toward a more egalitarian, democratic society with an expanded political franchise that included most males, regardless of their class origins. But in New England, and Connecticut in particular, democratization moved more slowly than farther west, and society remained more hierarchical. In Connecticut's colonial past, Gallaudet's family background would have guaranteed him a position in the standing order—that older ruling class of magistrates, merchants, and clergymen—to whom the lower social orders had routinely deferred. Even in antebellum society, however, Gallaudet's gentry class was often still able to maintain its dominion over lower classes, because paternalism remained appropriate between individuals at different levels of Connecticut's hierarchical society.¹⁰

Thomas Gallaudet had entered Yale in 1802, the youngest in his class. There he came under the influence of Timothy Dwight, Yale's president, one of the most charismatic religious leaders in postrevolutionary New England. Dwight indoctrinated young Gallaudet with the concept of benevolent Christian paternalism: a conviction that all human institutions, whether family, school, church, or civic, should replicate the divine government that God had instituted over mankind, thereby mimicking the Heavenly Father's role with his earthly children. Implicitly, Dwight believed that less-fortunate Americans should willingly defer to the paternalism of a select, highly educated, and socially prominent few whom God had chosen to lead them. Thus the Christian paternalism that Thomas Gallaudet learned from Dwight was the rationale for a still-vigorous social order in early-nineteenth-century Connecticut.¹¹

Once graduated, Gallaudet experimented with careers in law, business, and academe before deciding to become a Congregational minister. By the spring of 1815, he was a recent graduate of Andover Seminary. He had prepared himself there to preach the gospel and was mulling over an appointment to the pulpit of a congregation in New Hampshire when his neighbor, Dr. Mason Cogswell, approached him with a different suggestion: to direct the first school for deaf persons in the United States.¹²

Cogswell was a highly respected physician in Hartford. After his beloved daughter, Alice, had been deafened, he invited a small group of prestigious friends to spearhead a public drive to establish an American school for deaf children. The men he had invited were leaders in Hartford—businessmen, professionals, and clergymen—who believed it was their duty to act as community stewards of benevolence and wealth. They had modified the older Calvinist doctrine of stewardship—a conviction that God had entrusted wealth to fortunate people to carry out individual acts of charity in the world—to emphasize support for corporate charities like the American Asylum, and by the early 1800s Hartford quickly became an important center of organized philanthropy in Connecticut.¹³

Gallaudet readily accepted Cogswell's offer. The career change the latter suggested was not as drastic as it might first appear. In truth, Cogswell only asked Gallaudet to shift focus from gospel ministry among hearing people to proselytizing Christianity among deaf people. It was not a long leap. At Andover Seminary—a seedbed of evangelical Christian activity—Gallaudet had been fired with a desire to preach Christianity to the heathen. Many of his fellow seminarians

established foreign missions in Hawaii, Africa, and Asia, and Reverend Gallaudet sometimes officiated at ceremonies marking their leave-taking, while he himself chose to stay closer to home. Nonetheless, he believed he was bound by the same injunction from Christ as his far-flung colleagues to convey the news of salvation to every creature on earth. As principal of the American Asylum, Gallaudet envisioned himself a missionary to “heathen” deaf people who had never before heard the Christian message of salvation.¹⁴

In a letter to a fellow clergyman, Gallaudet left no question about his purview of the Hartford school, which stood

on missionary ground. . . . No other object than the salvation of the souls of the pupils can be named as of the highest moment; and to accomplish this object a very solemn responsibility is devolved upon all who are concerned in the affairs of the Asylum.¹⁵

With references to familiar biblical passages, Reverend Gallaudet craved “a cup of consolation, for the deaf and dumb who heretofore had been wandering in a moral desert, from the same fountain the Hinddo, the African, and the savage are beginning to draw the water of eternal life.”¹⁶ In another reference, he was a shepherd “for those poor lambs of the flock who hitherto had been wandering in the paths of ignorance.”¹⁷ These metaphors—water bearer to thirsty sinners or shepherd to a hapless flock—established powerful analogies between Reverend Gallaudet’s function as chaplain to unchurched deaf students and the savior whose life he emulated.

Gallaudet’s desire to convert deaf people to Christianity was born in the Second Great Awakening—an evangelical religious enthusiasm—that called a backsliding generation of Protestants to renewed spiritual passion. Gallaudet experienced the compelling, emotional immediacy of the Protestant revivals that swept Connecticut in successive waves, beginning in 1798 and ending in the 1830s. With great fervor, evangelicals “looked forward to that delightful day, when the earth shall be filled with righteousness and peace,” as Reverend Gallaudet described their effort to Christianize every aspect of American life.¹⁸ Concerned with a myriad of social problems—financial support for Hartford’s widows, aged and impoverished laboring classes, the conversion of “heathen” Jews and Indians to Christianity, and the colonization of former American slaves in Africa—evangelicals were also interested in educating deaf persons.

This drive for social reform resulted from the fusion of evangelical Christianity with postmillennialism. Certainly millennial theology had always been important in Puritan New England. It was as old as primitive Christianity; colonial Puritan divines from Increase Mather to Jonathan Edwards had preached that a thousand years of blessed peace on earth—a millennium—would be initiated by Christ's return to earth. But, after the Second Great Awakening, great evangelical leaders such as Timothy Dwight, grandson of Jonathan Edwards and the major architect of Connecticut's revivals, were convinced that "the advent of Christ is at least at our doors."¹⁹ Urgently, he and other postmillennialists began preaching that Christ would return to earth once all peoples in all nations were converted to the gospel. Evangelical Protestants, including Thomas Gallaudet, fervently believed they could hasten Christ's Second Coming by converting every heathen to Christianity.²⁰

Nowhere is his acceptance of postmillennialism more obvious than in the sermon that Reverend Gallaudet delivered in 1817, upon the opening of the American Asylum. He assured his audience:

Every charitable effort, conducted upon Christian principles . . . forms a part of the great system of doing good, and looks forward to that delightful day when the earth shall be filled with righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. . . . While, therefore, my hearers, I would endeavor to excite an interest in your hearts in behalf of our infant establishment, by portraying its advantages . . . permit me to place before you the purest and noblest motive of all, in this and in every charitable exertion—the tendency it will have to promote the welfare of the Redeemer's kingdom.²¹

Gallaudet anticipated that deaf individuals who converted to Christianity because of what they learned at the American Asylum would advance the approaching millennium.²²

Just as Gallaudet assumed audiences would accept his religious message because it was addressed to a society in which a general assent to Protestant Christian values was taken for granted, he also assumed they shared his allegiance to American Whig political culture. Philanthropists, clergymen, businessmen, and professionals who listened to Gallaudet were far more likely to be Whigs than Jeffersonian Democratic-Republicans. Most evangelical Protestants became Whigs. Daniel Howe, historian of Whig culture, has even theorized that the rise of the missionary spirit that accompanied the

Second Great Awakening accounts for the “aggressive didacticism” of Whigs. They became crusaders for temperance, antislavery, and missionary societies, focusing their energies on the collective redemption of society. Numerous Whigs like Gallaudet, who had been educated at Princeton or Yale—schools with an evangelical perspective—chose careers in teaching, because they believed education was the most practical conduit for their religious zeal. They had studied Scottish “common sense” moral philosophy, the most coherent expression of an integrated Whig value system, and like nearly all men who graduated from American colleges between the last decades of the eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries, they endorsed the ethical absolutism of Whiggery.²³

Whig leaders like Gallaudet never doubted their ability to bring about the secular and religious redemption of deaf people. Just as older colonial traditions of deference toward “natural” social superiors began to weaken under the weight of antebellum economic and political change, Whigs insisted that only they—the intellectual and social elite—could effectively lead the people. To them, interference in the lives of others was proof of an individual’s love of virtue.²⁴

Through moral education Whigs believed they could teach young Americans the social values they cherished: obedience, self-discipline and orderliness, frugality, modesty, honesty, punctuality, charity, love of country, fear of God, deference to adults, and reverence for private property. Early-nineteenth-century commentators warned that moral education was vital to the preservation of the American nation. One writer explained that the fragile American form of government—republican democracy—absolutely required the constant vigilance of virtuous citizens. “As ours is emphatically the free country of all the earth,” he wrote, “we are more exposed than any other country to have our liberty used as a cloak for licentiousness.”²⁵ Training for citizenship through education became even more important during the decades preceding the Civil War, while fractious political parties took shape, and suffrage for white males became nearly universal. Whigs believed the survival of antebellum American society hinged on how its peoples were socialized.²⁶

Deaf persons presented a challenge to Whig-evangelical Protestant educators, but Reverend Thomas Gallaudet clearly articulated his approach to moral education in 1821. At a sermon delivered at the dedication of the American Asylum’s first campus, he said, “If it is to be one of the leading objects of this institution . . . to prepare them [deaf people] to sustain the various relations, and discharge the various

duties of life, with credit to themselves and comfort to their friends . . . this is best accomplished, by leading them to seek first, the kingdom of God."²⁷ Salvation was always Gallaudet's primary goal, but he also recognized that religious education would teach deaf students to behave properly—by Whig standards of behavior—in society. Gallaudet explained to his audience that "the influence of the truths of the gospel will have an important and salutary effect . . . (on) the government of the pupils."²⁸

His opinion was endorsed by his successors, Weld, Turner, and Stone. Beginning in 1817, Reverend Thomas Gallaudet required pupils to attend chapel services twice daily during the school week, catechism on Saturday, and both twice on Sunday. The results were stunning. Forty years later, Principal Collins Stone exalted that "prayerless ones [pupils] are the exception."²⁹

Students were rarely physically coerced to behave properly. Thomas Gallaudet had been convinced early in his career by Timothy Dwight that children responded far better to moral suasion than to violence. Only moral suasion—submission to the will of authority, gained through the affection of a child for his guardian—could produce happy, productive, and controlled students. With this approach, self-discipline was internalized in the child, and morality inculcated by example, as well as by precept.³⁰

To illustrate the effectiveness of this approach, Gallaudet often told the story of a disobedient new student who delighted in disrupting worship services. After the boy had been reprimanded several times but showed no remorse for his rudeness, the clergyman resolved to try an approach other than verbal reprimand. Gallaudet summoned the boy to his office and began to pray to God for forgiveness of the boy's sins; minutes later the youngster began to cry softly, displaying genuine remorse for misdeeds, and he left Gallaudet's office, evidently with a changed heart, because he never misbehaved at chapel again.³¹

Years after his death, Gallaudet's eldest son explained the psychological impact of this form of discipline on children:

When I did wrong, I would have rather taken a whipping at his hands than to have him call me to his study for a kind and serious talk, convincing me of my fault, making me ashamed of what I had done, and leading me to repentance and a better mind.³²

Among educators this technique was called "soft" pedagogy, a method of using shame rather than physical coercion to internalize

discipline in children. Young children approaching adolescence rarely questioned its appropriateness; but older adolescent boys sometimes did.³³

In 1822, Gallaudet received an urgent letter from the board of directors alerting him "that a spirit of disobedience and revolt exists among the pupils to an alarming extent."³⁴ Several boys were surreptitiously leaving school at night and returning intoxicated. To stem the rebellion, the directors requested that Gallaudet and the teachers "assemble the Scholars in the course of this day and manifest to them their decided disapprobation of their conduct, and . . . impress the minds of the guilty with a sense of the evil of it."³⁵ Despite Gallaudet's pleas, the rebels continued to create trouble for more than a year. Many eventually were dismissed from school because they would not submit to its discipline. These young men were between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five years, and most were obviously too old to readily accept "fatherly" guidance. As Gallaudet discovered, paternalism was not always an effective approach to students who considered themselves adults, and in the American Asylum's early years students' average age at admission was nearly eighteen years.³⁶

Deaf pupils encountered paternalism not only in school, but ever afterward as alumni. In 1842 Principal Weld stopped at the Boston home of a former student where a group of Hartford graduates had gathered to greet him. Later he explained to asylum directors that he had used the evening as "a pleasant opportunity not only of inquiring of their welfare, but also of communicating to them once more, such advice and instruction as I hope may do them good."³⁷

Although every principal at the school was paternalistic, not everyone copied Thomas Gallaudet's benevolence. Paternalism itself remained a constant, but the attitudes of administrators toward deaf pupils at the American Asylum—a rationale for paternalism—did change. Lewis Weld's idea of paternalism was closest to that of Gallaudet, whom he succeeded in 1830. Both men were authentic Connecticut gentry, and both graduated from Yale only a few years apart. Weld came as close as possible to achieving absolute social equality with the founders of the asylum when he married a Cogswell daughter. Former students never questioned that his paternalism was motivated by kindly regard. One Hartford student wrote home that Lewis Weld "watched over us like a father who takes a strong interest in the welfare of his children."³⁸

Principals William Turner and Collins Stone, who followed Gallaudet and Weld, were, however, neither cut from the same cloth nor inspired by the same idealism as their predecessors. In part, their

altered perspective resulted from individual personality traits, but in a larger sense, their change in attitude also reflected the different times in which these two men served the American Asylum.³⁹

Despite the fact that William Turner graduated from Yale only one year after Lewis Weld, he became principal more than twenty years later, in 1853. In the interim years, between the late 1820s and mid-century, as states increasingly guaranteed education for more indigent deaf persons, the overwhelming majority of pupils were his social inferiors. Earlier, during Gallaudet's tenure, social difference had not been a significant issue: the 1817 and 1818 classes were filled with students whose parents or friends could afford hefty, yearly tuition fees of \$200 and traveling expenses for pupils from states as far away as Maryland and Virginia. Not every early student was genteel, but a significant number were: Alice Cogswell, whose house was next door to Gallaudet's; George Loring, who was scion of a wealthy Boston Brahmin family; and Mary Gilbert, whose father was a prominent judge in Hebron, Connecticut. Charity students did not become a majority until after 1828, when New England states agreed to support them with public funds.⁴⁰

By the time William Turner became principal, however, the social disparity between himself and his charges was obvious. In 1854 correspondence with a professional colleague he bluntly explained that "most of these unfortunate objects of State bounty belong to the poorer and less enlightened portion of the community. Consequently their friends are not able to do much for their education, nor to appreciate very highly its advantages."⁴¹ The conclusion that Turner expected his correspondent to draw was straightforward: because deaf persons were unable to evaluate correctly their educational needs, they ought to defer to Turner, whose intellectual training and social position were superior to theirs. A change in the social mix of students at the American Asylum between 1817, when genteel children socialized with Gallaudet, and 1854, when Turner was directing the "less enlightened," had altered the social perspective of its principals.⁴²

While Gallaudet had married a deaf woman and Weld had a deaf sister-in-law, William Turner did not respect deaf persons as his equal. Testifying in an 1853 court trial involving an American Asylum student, he told the judge that deaf pupils required his guidance because they had developed a sense of innate inferiority to hearing people. "As a class, they [deaf persons] are easily intimidated," he asserted, and they "are credulous . . . and submissive."⁴³ A more

sensitive educator, Harvey P. Peet, principal of the New York Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, later contradicted Turner. Peet thought deaf people only *appeared* credulous because often they were forced to accept the first explanation offered them; a wider range of opinion was especially difficult to obtain from hearing people. In William Turner paternalism disguised misunderstanding; certainly he did not focus, as Thomas Gallaudet had, on the communication problems deaf persons faced, but preferred, instead, to label each deaf individual psychologically maladjusted.⁴⁴

The social, educational, and religious background of Collins Stone, who became principal in 1863, appears, at first glance, to mimic Thomas Gallaudet's and Lewis Weld's. Born in Guilford, Connecticut, where his Puritan-gentry ancestors were well respected, Stone graduated from Yale in 1832 and became a teacher at the American Asylum the next year. He studied theology with Reverend Dr. Hawes, minister at the same Center City Church in Hartford that Gallaudet and Weld had attended. But Stone, who was younger than either Gallaudet or Weld, had never been exposed to Timothy Dwight's ideas. Thus, without evangelical optimism about the untapped capacities of all people or a vigorous ethical grounding in benevolent Christian paternalism, Stone sometimes vacillated between cloying pity and judgmental arrogance.

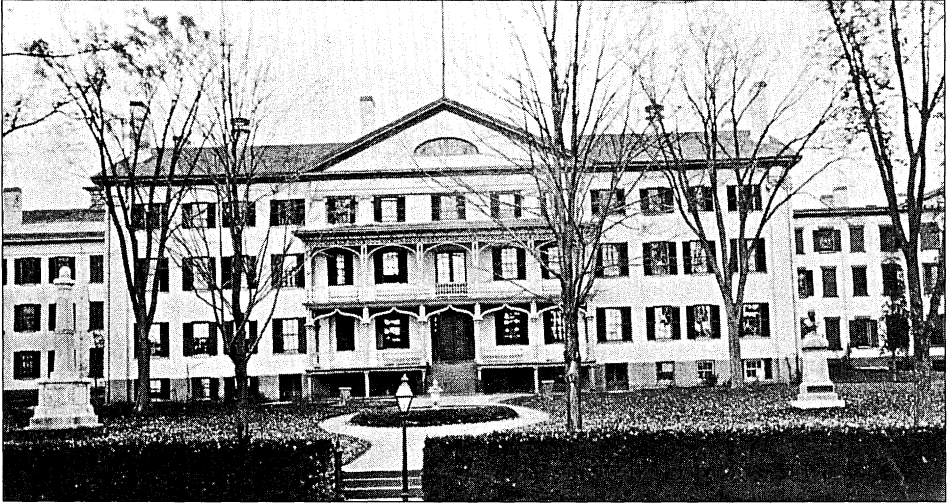
In truth, Stone was much more ambivalent about deaf people than other Hartford administrators. At one moment, he characterized deaf children who first entered school with the same kindly paternalism that Gallaudet or Weld might have shown, describing one as "so helpless and so dependent upon care and aid which only genuine benevolence will render him, that he should never be left to those who feel only a mercenary interest in his improvement."⁴⁵ At another moment, Stone callously characterized uneducated deaf persons as "mere animals" whose calamity had depressed them to subhuman levels of spiritual awareness—a remark that revealed a discouraging reversion to pre-Enlightenment assumptions about deaf people as savages who could never attain full humanity.⁴⁶

Collins Stone was never filled with Gallaudet's idealism. He thought of himself as an administrator, never a pioneer. In one obituary a contemporary eulogized Stone as having a "cautious temper and matter-of-fact common-sense" that would never allow him "to be captivated by any visionary scheme or tempted into venturing upon untried novelties."⁴⁷ During his years as principal, Stone concentrated on improving the internal administration of the asylum. The

board of directors, which changed the system of administration, gave Stone absolute control over its internal management; in carrying out their mandate, he focused on the need for order.⁴⁸ "Order is indispensable to such a community as ours," he emphasized, because it encouraged "quietness . . . and correct decorum."⁴⁹

Historian Christopher Lasch has offered, in a thought-provoking article about the social values that early-nineteenth-century American asylums encouraged, a perspective on Stone's attitude. Lasch has suggested that the introduction of discipline, that "uniformity of regimen" that professional administrators imposed on asylum inmates, largely obliterated the humanizing influences that had made these institutions possible in the first place. Administrators like Stone eventually "dehumanized" their charges by confusing efficient administration—a benefit to the institution, itself—with submissive student behavior, which likely did not enhance the individual self-expression of pupils. If Lasch's speculation is correct, the shift in attitude between the administrations of Thomas Gallaudet and Collins Stone illustrates his point. Gallaudet believed his first obligation was to convert deaf students; social control was only a secondary benefit of religious instruction. Stone reversed that emphasis, putting social control first. He rejoiced that deaf persons were "peculiarly susceptible" to feelings of religious obligation: "At the American Asylum it is used very effectively to control the deaf who may never have been subjected to the least restraint before."⁵⁰ Although its emphasis changed, paternalism as an ideology remained constant from the administrations of Gallaudet through Stone. The same ideology served both Gallaudet's focus on saving "heathen" deaf souls and Stone's preoccupation with their earthly discipline.⁵¹

Did most pupils at the American Asylum accept, or at least tolerate, this paternalism? This question is difficult to answer in the absence of many written memoirs from Hartford alumni that contradict the perspective of school administrators, whose letters and papers have been preserved in manuscript repositories. Some students, like Jane Newcomb, an 1825 graduate, obviously believed that she and her schoolmates had benefited from years at the American Asylum. In a letter published by the directors in their annual report, she praised the benefit to most pupils who "have undergone a great change in their appearance, characters and manners since they came here, and (after graduation) . . . feel themselves esteemed and needed anywhere, to go abroad as useful men and women."⁵² Others, like Thomas Brown, class of 1827, encouraged his classmates to



The American Asylum for the Deaf, Hartford, Connecticut, about 1875. It was more than an educational institution in the nineteenth century, providing a socialization experience grounded in conservative and paternalistic attitudes toward deaf people. GALLAUDET UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES

embrace the parent-child paradigm, “to ever remember them [instructors and administrators], and love the great and good institution with *the sincere love of children*” [italics added].⁵³

Certainly the socialization of students, which linked morally absolute ethical values with submissive behavior, did not encourage students to question paternalism’s merit. In fact, deaf pupils at the American Asylum were seldom encouraged to think of themselves as self-actualizing individuals at all, although they had persevered against formidable odds to become educated. After twenty-five successful years as an institution, the American Asylum’s directors claimed undivided credit for an illustrious past in which “many hundreds of the unfortunate have been relieved, reclaimed, educated and prepared in various degrees for usefulness and happiness, as the light of human knowledge and divine truth has been *poured into their minds*” [italics added].⁵⁴ Directors and teachers of the Hartford school considered students vessels rather than active participants in their education.

Students were sometimes enthusiastic about their teachers. One former pupil of William Turner's praised his classroom method:

He was always reaching out after something better in the way of instruction. . . . He was extremely genial, and it was a real pleasure to sit under him. He had a way of making the most onerous tasks interesting, or of exciting the ambition of those engaged therein.⁵⁵

When students did complain about their teachers, it was usually to a parent after they returned home. Principals dismissed these comments as the whinings of uncooperative, morally flawed children. In 1851 Principal Turner wrote to the father of a complaining boy:

You ask me, Sir, to let you know what is the trouble, if any. I answer, there is not [*sic*] except what James had made for himself—and I am sorry to add, that it is because James has thought more highly of himself than he ought.⁵⁶

Realistically, if deaf pupils at the American Asylum did resent paternalism, they could not have voiced their objections without jeopardizing their opportunity for an education. Perhaps for this reason, most never did. In the first decade, indigent deaf individuals were largely forced to rely on the benevolence of the asylum's directors for financial aid. Most poor pupils received no monetary assistance from this fledgling institution. In 1819 Massachusetts pioneered free education for a limited number of its deaf residents, but it was a decade later before every New England state, with the exception of Rhode Island, guaranteed schooling to deaf indigents. Even after 1829, however, faculty and directors still controlled pupils' access to education. On the recommendation of Hartford administrators, even state beneficiaries could be dismissed because of poor academic performance or unruly behavior.⁵⁷

All of which suggests two explanations for a paradox in the education of deaf people at Hartford. Historians agree that the direction of change in antebellum American society and political suffrage was away from deference toward authorities and toward individualism. If Jacksonian society encouraged individualism in its citizens, why did the American Asylum succeed so well as a paternalistic institution?

First, the Hartford school likely succeeded so well precisely because deaf people were well aware that previous *laissez-faire* atti-

tudes toward them had produced devastating results. Before the American Asylum opened in 1817, uneducated deaf people had been forced to fend for themselves at the margins of society, illiterate and indigent, often dependent on their families or communities for financial support. Only lucky individuals from wealthy families had traveled to Europe to attend schools for deaf students. From the beginning of colonial settlement in seventeenth-century America, deaf people had belonged to a dependent class of persons that included those who were orphans, widows, aged, blind, infirm, and insane.⁵⁸ Possibly deaf people who recognized that individualism had previously failed them were willing to accept, if not embrace, paternalism at the American Asylum. Second, it is just as likely poorer deaf students saw no viable alternative to the American Asylum until after 1867, when legislatures in New England offered their beneficiaries a choice of schools. Even then, deaf persons still had no legal or moral means for expressing their possible objections to paternalism. They could only hope that wherever they encountered paternalism, it would be infused with the same kindness that had marked Thomas Gallaudet's administration.

Notes

1. Thomas H. Gallaudet to Mason F. Cogswell, Edinburgh, Scotland, January 11, 1816, in Heman Humphrey, *Life and Labors of Reverend Thomas H. Gallaudet* (New York: Robert Carter and Bros., 1857), 49.

2. With the exception of present or former pupils, Gallaudet treated all other deaf adults as equals. He was companionable and relaxed with deaf colleagues who taught at the American Asylum; especially was this true in his relationship with Laurent Clerc, a Frenchman who was always both his social and intellectual equal and with whom he shared credit for the early success of this school. In his private life, Gallaudet chose to marry one of his early students, Sophia Fowler, who raised their children and provided him with a comfortable home where both entertained their numerous deaf friends during a long, happy married life together. See Edmund Booth, "Mr. Gallaudet's Portrait," *The Silent World* (September 1871): 13; Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, "Private Journal," December 10, 1847, to August 20, 1851, unpublished manuscript. Thomas Hopkins and Edward Miner Gallaudet papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; Amos G. Draper, "Sophia Gallaudet," *American Annals of the Deaf and Dumb* 22 (July 1877): 170–183; Harlan Lane, *When the Mind Hears* (New York: Random House, 1984), 167–270.

3. Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, "A Sermon on the Duty and Advantages of Affording Instruction to the Deaf and Dumb," in *Tribute to Gallaudet*, ed. Henry Barnard (Hartford: Brockett & Hutchinson, 1852), 184.

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.*, 184–185. In 1817, promoters of deaf education were estimating that 100 deaf persons in Connecticut alone were uneducated and incapable of understanding the language, culture, and religion of their society. By 1824, Thomas Gallaudet had increased the estimate to “thousands” across the nation. See Alexander Graham Bell, “Historical notes concerning the teaching of speech to the deaf,” *Association Review* 3 (1901): 136; and Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, “Sermon delivered at the opening of the Connecticut Asylum for the education and instruction of deaf and dumb persons, April 29, 1817,” in *Tribute*, ed. Barnard, 184.

6. *Thirty-eighth Report of the Directors of the American Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb* (Hartford, Conn.: Wiley, Waterman & Eaton, 1853), 26.

7. Barbara J. Berg, *The Remembered Gate* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 77; Anthony F. C. Wallace, *Rockdale* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1972), 55; Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), 113–123; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery* (New York: Atheneum, 1971), 179–180.

8. P. B. Porter, “Annual Report of the Secretary of War, December 2, 1828,” *American State Papers, Military Affairs* 4 (Washington, D.C., 1832–1861), 4, quoted in Michael Paul Rogin, *Fathers and Children* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975), 188.

9. E. Malcolm Carroll, *Origins of the Whig Party* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1925), 214, quoted in Daniel Walker Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 19.

10. Charles Roy Keller, *The Second Great Awakening in Connecticut* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1942), 1–12; Ronald P. Formisano, *The Transformation of Political Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 22–24; chapter 6 *passim*.

11. Stephen E. Beck, *Calvinism versus Democracy: Timothy Dwight and the Origins of American Evangelical Orthodoxy* (Hamden, Conn.: Arcon Books, 1974), 43.

12. Hammond Trumbull, ed., *The Memorial History of Hartford County, Connecticut, 1633–1884*, vol. I (Boston: Edward L. Osgood, 1886), 585–586; Harlan Lane, *When the Mind Hears*, 165; Edward M. Gallaudet, *Life of Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1888), 48–54; Gallaudet family genealogy, Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet and Edward Miner Gallaudet Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

13. Paul Goodman, “Ethics and Enterprise,” *American Quarterly* 18 (Fall 1966): 442; Peter Dobkin Hall, *The Organization of American Culture 1700–1900* (New York: New York University Press, 1984), 109–110; Keller, *Great Awakening*, 5.

14. The American foreign missionary movement had actually begun at Andover in 1811. See Keller, *Great Awakening*, 94–96; and Clifford S. Griffin, *Their Brothers’ Keepers: Moral Stewardship in the United States, 1800–1865* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1960), 31.

15. Thomas H. Gallaudet to Dr. Flint and others, December 14, 1818, Archives of the American Asylum, American School for the Deaf, West Hartford, Conn. See also Oliver Wendell Elsbree, “The Rise of the Missionary Spirit,” *New England Quarterly* (July 1928): 314.

16. Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, “A Plea for the Deaf and Dumb,” in *Tribute*, ed. Barnard, 185.

17. *Third Report of the Directors of the American Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb* (1817), 8–9.

18. T. H. Gallaudet, “A Sermon delivered at the opening of the Connecticut Asylum, April 20, 1817,” in *Tribute*, ed. Barnard, 12; Keller, *Great Awakening*, 162–

187 passim. Between 1791 and 1828 Connecticut citizens established not only the American Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb (1817) but Hartford Female Beneficent Society (1791), Retreat for the Insane (1822), the first public hospital built at New Haven (1826), and prison reform (1828).

19. Timothy Dwight, *The Duty of Americans, at the Present Crisis, Illustrated in a Discourse, Preached on the Fourth of July 1798 at the Request of the Citizens of New Haven*, quoted in Ira V. Brown, "Watchers for the Second Coming: The Millenarian Tradition in America," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 39 (December 1952): 449.

20. Grob, *Mental Institutions in America*, 36–38, 48–50; Brown, "Watchers for the Second Coming," 444–449.

21. Thomas H. Gallaudet, "A Sermon delivered at the opening of the Connecticut Asylum for the Education of Deaf and Dumb Persons, April 20th, 1817," quoted in Humphrey, *Life and Labors*, 112.

22. Keller, *Great Awakening*, 123.

23. Hall, *American Culture*, 83–88; Beck, *Calvinism versus Democracy*, viii; Howe, *Political Culture*, 11–21, 33–37, 153.

24. Howe, *Political Culture*, 20–34.

25. Frederick A. Packard, *Thoughts on the condition and prospects of Popular Education in the United States by a citizen of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: A. Waldie, 1836), 1.

26. Hall, *American Culture*, 90; Carl F. Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), 5, 32, 72–82; Merle Curti, *Social Ideas of American Educators* (Totowa, N.J.: Littlefield, Adams & Co., 1966), 57–61; Michael B. Katz, "Education and Social Development in the Nineteenth Century," in *History and Education*, ed. Paul Nash (New York: Random House, 1970), 92–99.

27. Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, "A discourse delivered at the dedication of the American Asylum, for the education of deaf and dumb persons, May 22, 1821," in *Tribute*, ed. Barnard, 180.

28. *Ibid.*, 179.

29. Collins Stone, "On the Religious State and Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb," *American Annals of the Deaf and Dumb* 1 (April 1848): 144.

30. Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, "Recollections of the Deaf and Dumb," *American Annals of the Deaf and Dumb* 2 (1849): 54; Reuben A. Holden, *Yale University Presidents* (Freeport, Maine: The Bond Wheelwright Co., 1968), 58.

31. Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, "Recollections of the Deaf and Dumb," 54.

32. Edward Miner Gallaudet, *Life of Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet*, 290–291.

33. *Ibid.*, 291; Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic*, 89.

34. Board of Directors to Thomas H. Gallaudet, Hartford, Conn., August 23, 1822, Archives of the American Asylum, ASD, West Hartford, Conn.

35. *Ibid.*

36. Directors to Thomas H. Gallaudet, August 23, 1822, and Thomas H. Gallaudet to Directors, September 17, 1823, both in Archives of the American Asylum, ASD, West Hartford, Conn. The average age of students in the first 100 admissions was 17.9 years; among the second 100 admissions it was 10.1 years. See *Seventy-third Report of the Directors of the American Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb* (Hartford, Conn.: Case, Lockwood & Brainard Co., 1889), 16.

37. Lewis Weld to the Chairman of the Directing Committee, American Asylum, February 8, 1942, Letterbook 5 (1840–1852), Archives of the American Asylum, ASD, West Hartford, Conn.

38. W. W. Turner, "Biography of Lewis Weld," *American Annals of the Deaf and Dumb* (1853): 191.

39. "Weld family correspondence," State Archives, Connecticut State Library, Hartford, Conn.

40. *Fifty-first Report of the Directors of the American Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb* (Hartford, Conn.: Case, Lockwood & Co., 1867), 72ff. In 1819 Massachusetts allocated tax dollars for ongoing yearly support of twenty indigent deaf citizens at Hartford. See *Fourth Report of the Directors of the American Asylum* (Hartford: Hudson and Skinner, 1820), 5–6. By 1825, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine also had guaranteed yearly expenses to numbers of their own children who attended the American Asylum. See Archives of the American Asylum, Files 208 and 209, American School for the Deaf, West Hartford, Conn. In 1828 Connecticut again appropriated monies to the American Asylum, emulating the state of Massachusetts' generosity by guaranteeing yearly tuition and board to its indigent deaf children. See Archives of the American Asylum, File 249.

41. W. W. Turner to H. B. Wilbur, Esq., principal of the N.Y. Idiot Asylum, American Asylum, February 15, 1854, No. 54, Letterbook of the American Asylum (March 14, 1849–), Archives of the American Asylum, ASD, West Hartford, Conn.

42. Job Williams, "William Wolcott Turner," *American Annals of the Deaf* 32 (October 1877): 209–295.

43. Harvey P. Peet, "Legal Rights of the Deaf and Dumb," in *Proceedings of the Third Convention of American Instructors of the Deaf and Dumb* (Columbus, Ohio: Smith & Cox, 1853), 83. For a further glimpse at Turner's attitude, see his letter to J. J. Flournoy, Esq., American Asylum, December 6, 1855, in which he counsels this deaf man to "accept the will of Providence which has made him deaf," and resign himself to being governed by hearing people. See No. 94, Letterbook of the American Asylum (March 14, 1849–), Archives of the American Asylum, ASD, West Hartford, Conn.

44. *Ibid.*, 85. See Oliver Sacks, *Seeing Voices* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 151, for an explanation of the distinction that contemporary deaf people make between misdirected paternalism ("deaf in the mind") and an offensive benevolence that implies, "We know what is best for you."

45. *Fifty-fourth Report of the Directors of the American Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb* (Hartford, Conn.: Wiley, Waterman and Eaton, 1870), 16.

46. Stone, "On the Religious State and Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb," 134.

47. Samuel Porter, "The Late Rev. Collins Stone," *American Annals of the Deaf and Dumb* 16 (October 1871): 137.

48. *Forty-ninth Report of the Directors of the American Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb* (Hartford, Conn.: Case, Lockwood & Co., 1865), 9; *Fifty-fifth Report of the Directors of the American Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb* (Hartford, Conn.: Wiley, Waterman & Eaton, 1871), 19.

49. Collins Stone, "Report of the Principal," *Fifty-second Report of the Directors of the American Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb* (Hartford, Conn.: Wiley, Waterman & Eaton, 1868): 16–17.

50. Stone, "On the Religious State and Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb," 143.

51. Christopher Lasch, "Origins of the Asylum," in *The World of Nations* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), 3–17.

52. *Eighth Report of the Directors of the American Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb* (Hartford, Conn.: Hudson and Skinner, 1824), 34.

53. Thomas Brown, "Testimonial to Messrs. Gallaudet and Clerc," in *Tribute*, ed. Barnard, 196.

54. *Twenty-fifth Report of the Directors of the American Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb* (Hartford, Conn.: Case, Tiffany and Burnham, 1841), 8.

55. Williams, "William Wolcott Turner," 211.

56. W. W. Turner to Joel Wilkins, Esq., American Asylum, September 29, 1851, No. 25, Letterbook of the American Asylum (March 14, 1859–), Archives of the American Asylum, ASD, West Hartford, Conn.

57. Numerous examples of the discretionary powers of directors and principals are to be found in the files of this institution. See Thomas H. Gallaudet to Directors of the Connecticut Asylum, November 6, 1818; Jabez Backus Contract (1819); W. W. Turner to Hon. Secretary of State, Concord, N.H., American Asylum, March 15, 1849, No. 1 Letterbook of the American Asylum (March 14, 1849–); Lewis Weld to Captain Jonathan Pendleton, American Asylum, April 26, 1853, No. 42, Letterbook of the American Asylum (March 14, 1849–), all in Archives of the American Asylum, ASD, West Hartford, Conn.

58. Gerald N. Grob, *The State and the Mentally Ill* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1966), 4; David J. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum* (Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1971), 6; Alexander Graham Bell, "Historical notes concerning the teaching of speech to the deaf," *Association Review* 3 (1901): 136.