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Protestant Ideology and the Arguments for Sign Language in Late Nineteenth-Century Schools for Deaf Children

I am proud to be a Deaf man, am very delighted with the divine gift of ASL, and, indeed, enjoy reading texts in English.

—Patrick A. Graybill, “Another New Birth” (emphasis added)

Deaf people often used biblical language to emphasize how the schools converted them from ignorance to knowledge, from isolation to community, from no language to ASL and English, and from heathenism to Christian redemption.

—Christopher Krentz, *A Mighty Change*

THE American School for the Deaf opened in 1817 with the initial mission to provide deaf students with a language and knowledge of God so they could be saved. As the previous chapter shows, Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet argued that teaching sign language to students and delivering the school’s curriculum in sign language was the most effective way to achieve this goal. Appealing to audiences who held mainly Protestant beliefs, Gallaudet’s speeches supporting sign language were often filled with biblical references and metaphors. His successes at the American School for the Deaf helped garner backing for deaf education nationally and influenced many other area schools not only to open but also to use sign language to teach deaf students. This method, known as *manualism*, was the primary means of teaching deaf students in the United States in the first half of the nineteenth century. In the latter half of the eighteenth century, the manualists’ teaching practices, like those of Gallaudet, were



Edward Miner Gallaudet. (Gallaudet University Archives, Washington, DC)

challenged by educators who argued that deaf American students should learn to speak and read speech only, a practice known as *oralism*. In late nineteenth-century America, pure oralists did not want sign language to be used in schools for deaf students, which would have had the effect of eradicating the use of sign language completely. As the number of schools for deaf people in the

United States increased to serve an ever-growing population, the use of the oral method of instruction gained in popularity. Discussions on language use crept into debates on deaf education, causing some deaf community leaders to argue for the protection and continued use of what they called “the natural language of the deaf”—sign language. The arguments of late nineteenth-century manualists, who by this point were *combinists*,¹ continued to reflect the use of religious themes and references, much as Gallaudet’s arguments had done in the early half of the nineteenth century.

Such arguments show that both practitioners and supporters of sign language used Protestant ideology. “Pure manualism” was the use of sign language only, without any instruction borrowed from oral approaches. However, by the latter half of the nineteenth century, many schools that were traditionally manual were incorporating oral approaches to instruction for some students who would benefit from them—especially those students who had recently become deaf and still had some or all of their ability to speak. This practice of using both the manual and the oral approach was known as the “combined method.” Educators’ arguments in favor of the combined method or the preservation of sign language were often evident in the *American Annals of the Deaf*, which was first published in 1847 and focused on deaf education. Both oralists and manualists, as well as those who became combinists, subscribed to and published in the *Annals*. I focus here on publications by the son of Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, Edward Miner Gallaudet, who argued in the *Annals* for a combined system of instruction that employed the best practices of both oralism and manualism. Like his father, Edward Gallaudet made use of religious themes and references in his advocacy. He is also one of the most recognized leaders of the deaf community in the latter half of the nineteenth century because of his assistance to it and his endorsement of the use of sign language. His efforts culminated in the opening of the Collegiate Department of the

Columbia Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, later named after his father, in 1864.

The biblical language used in the arguments for sign language by deaf community leaders such as E. M. Gallaudet and Philip J. Hasenstab, an instructor at the Illinois Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, reflects the worldview of those who valued the use of sign language, a perspective that continued to find its way into deaf education. Thus, the Protestant ideology that began with T. H. Gallaudet's curriculum and pedagogy in the first permanent school for deaf students in the United States continued to surface in late nineteenth-century arguments for sign language use and even emerged in early twentieth-century school publications.

Late Nineteenth-Century Methods of Teaching Deaf Students

In the United States, more and more schools for deaf students opened in the late nineteenth century, but the educators who ran them did not agree on teaching methods. Some of them even argued for the end of sign language use. More opponents of sign language and manualist instruction methods emerged in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Very few oralists (i.e., those who believed that the best means of teaching deaf students was with no sign language) started making noise prior to 1850; however, later in that century, through suggestions at conferences and in presentations and publications, the oral method of instruction was touted by many as superior to the manual method. Early evidence of the oralists' arguments surfaced in Horace Mann's effort to challenge the use of sign language in the education of deaf students. In the 1840s, Mann, influenced by the oral methods used in Germany, argued for educational reform.²

In an 1848 article, Lewis Weld refers to the 1844 conversation occurring about possible advancements in the instruction of deaf people by Europeans who were using the oral method. Like Mann, Weld had traveled to Europe to observe the teaching practices

there. He was the principal of the American School for the Deaf at this time and hoped to bring back a number of improvements in teaching methods.³ Weld summed up his observations by stating "that whatever improvements had been made in those institutions during the previous twenty-seven years, they had not surpassed, if they had equalled, [*sic*] those of our own American institutions."⁴ He disagreed with Mann that the oral methods they had both witnessed in Germany were superior to the manual methods the U.S. schools were still using. However, between Weld's European visit in 1844 and his "American Asylum" article in 1847, a change in instruction methods occurred in the U.S. institutions. In that article he mentions what may have marked the beginning of the combined method at the American School for the Deaf: a successful shift in emphasizing "articulation and reading on the lips" for those students who lost their hearing after they had learned to speak.⁵ For Weld and for the American School for the Deaf, sign language was still the optimal choice for instruction.

Until the 1860s, sign language was the primary method used to educate deaf people.⁶ Around that time, campaigns to replace sign language with lipreading and speech regained momentum and coincided with social and cultural changes occurring in the United States. A younger generation of educators was influenced by theories of evolution and argued that sign language was inferior to spoken language.⁷ In 1867 the first private oral school opened in New York City.⁸ Soon after, Alexander Graham Bell appeared in the United States and began holding exhibitions at the Boston School for Deaf Mutes in 1871.⁹ As an opponent of sign language, Bell offered educators of deaf people another pedagogical option, "visible speech," which was "a system of universal alphabets, originated by A. Melville Bell."¹⁰ Bell's father "pioneered the use of 'visible speech,' a system he invented, which correlated all speech sounds with particular visual symbols as a way to assist deaf children to learn to speak."¹¹ Taking the method his father had devised,

Bell claimed he could teach deaf children how to perfectly position their mouths to produce clear sounds. Not surprisingly, Bell promoted oralism; he recommended that deaf students learn to speak and lipread rather than use sign language. Holding exhibitions, Bell asked deaf students to speak in front of audiences to demonstrate the successes of his oralist method. In reality, many of Bell's successful students were children who had become deaf postlingually, that is, after learning to speak, and had retained some of their speaking ability.¹² In spite of this issue, Bell's oral arguments and pedagogical methods made an impact on schools for deaf students in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In 1891, the *American Annals of the Deaf* recorded a total of sixty-two public schools and fifteen private schools for deaf children in the United States, serving 9,232 deaf students. These schools subscribed to one of three teaching methods: oralism, manualism, or a combined method. Very few (if any) of these schools truly subscribed to manualism by this time. The *Annals* recorded that the majority of these *private* schools were oral schools; however, the majority of these *public* schools claimed to subscribe to a combined method of teaching. Ideally, the combined method took the best of the oral and manual methods to help all students to learn sign language and written English and to offer some of them training in speech and/or lipreading. However, many of the schools that claimed to subscribe to the combined method actually favored oralism and actually practiced little or no manualism, according to E. M. Gallaudet: "[I]t will be seen that the Combined System as it exists in America today includes schools where the pure oral method prevails."¹³ True proponents of the combined method recognized that not all students benefited from learning speech or lipreading, but some of them, occasionally those who became deaf later in childhood, became skilled speakers and lipreaders with practice. While the combined method continued to make use of sign language in the

classrooms for deaf students, strictly oral schools removed sign language altogether or relegated its use to religious training and chapel services.¹⁴ Although this use of sign language may seem like a contradiction to the definition of a purely oral school, it is this specific use of sign language—for religious training—that problematizes the oral versus manual debates. On this point, E. M. Gallaudet found common ground with oralists: He argued that deaf students should continue to have religious training and chapel services in sign language regardless of the chosen method of instruction. Before examining his arguments for a combined method that emphasized sign language, let's explore the shift in deaf education that emerged in the mid-nineteenth century, which placed greater emphasis on speech and lipreading.

Oralism, Homogeneity, and Eugenics

In the United States, late nineteenth-century arguments opposing sign language and viewing deafness as a deficit were influenced by a desire for a national identity marked by spoken English, theories of evolution, and scientific thinking—stark contrasts to the manualists' earlier arguments grounded in Protestant theology. The deaf community in that era came under threat by oralists, who viewed the use of sign language as evidence that deaf individuals were excluded from American society. Schools for deaf Americans became sites where these arguments played out. Oral schools based their teaching methods on the goal of bringing deaf students into American society and helping them develop their intellect through the use of speech. For many who supported the oral method, speaking English was an important symbol of national unity.

After 1865, when the United States was recovering from the effects of the Civil War, Americans began to place emphasis on a unified identity. Oralism became a product of this national climate. Seeking homogeneity through language and culture, oralists

argued that deaf Americans needed to learn to speak English in order to assimilate. It was partly this thinking and the influence of theories of evolution that bolstered the oralists' resolve.

It is no coincidence that oralists gained ground in the latter half of the nineteenth century, for it was in 1859 that Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* was first published. Darwin's theory of natural selection provided an ideology for the oralists' arguments, whereas the manualists' contentions were often founded on a Protestant ideology. Baynton explains that fueling the oral movement in the late nineteenth century was an American culture that "thought in terms of scientific naturalism, especially evolutionary theory."¹⁵ Darwin's theory was used to justify the oralists' view that sign language was inferior to speech. It was common thinking at that time that humans relied on sign language before they mastered speech.¹⁶ Manualists interpreted this view in Protestant terms: Sign language was an original language, and its users were "closer to the Creation," not inferior.¹⁷ However, oralists associated sign language with lower evolution or "inferior races."¹⁸ They argued that deaf students needed to learn spoken English and lipreading; otherwise, they would be viewed as animals or savages. Contradicting the Protestant view of the manualists, post-Darwinian oralists of nineteenth-century America viewed sign language use in evolutionary terms:

In an evolutionary age, language was no longer an inherent attribute of the human soul, one of an indivisible cluster of traits that included reason, imagination, and the conscience, conferred by God at the Creation. It was, instead, a distinct ability achieved through a process of evolution from animal ancestors. Sign language came to be seen as a language low on the scale of evolutionary progress, preceding in history even the most "savage" of spoken languages, and supposedly forming a link between the animal and the human.¹⁹

Considering sign language as a sign of a lower stage of evolution, oralists garnered support for the oral method of deaf educa-

tion. Their claims appealed to the desire to bring deaf people “up” to a human level with the use of spoken English. Oralists gained support by using evolutionary theories to suggest that sign language was a primitive form of communication.

One of the strongest proponents of the oral method was Alexander Graham Bell, for whom speech reflected the value of being human.²⁰ Although he had a hard of hearing mother and a deaf wife, Bell wanted to see an end to sign language and deafness. Using his notoriety and wealth from inventing the telephone, Bell supported the oral method and the end of sign language.²¹ His opposition to manualism served as the culmination of the oralists’ argument—deafness threatened a national identity, evolutionary thinking showed sign language to be inferior to speech, and advancement in scientific thinking demonstrated that deafness indicated a deficit. Combining his interests in eugenics and deaf education, Bell argued that the nation would face a “great calamity” due to the high rate of intermarriage among deaf people.²² After conducting his own investigation of the records of several American schools for deaf students, Bell presented his findings to a meeting of the American Academy of Sciences at New Haven, Connecticut, in 1883. Bell concluded from his study that intermarriages between congenitally deaf adults would result in “a deaf variety of the human race” that would be “a defective race of human beings.”²³ His conclusion echoes both the concern for a unified national identity and the evolutionary lens that influenced his analysis. Bell perceived problems with creating a law that would prevent deaf individuals from marrying each other; he claimed the result would be sexual promiscuity and illegitimate children. Instead, he proposed preventive measures that included the elimination of residential schools, sign language use in schools for deaf children, and deaf teachers in deaf schools.²⁴ Bell wanted to dismantle the American deaf community that had emerged from the schools where manualism and Protestant ideology were intertwined.

While the deaf community had been viewed as a collective group early on in the nineteenth century, it was in Christian terms. Thomas H. Gallaudet's description of deaf Americans was that they were heathens, thus emphasizing the need for the salvation of an individual's soul. The oral method offered deaf Americans an opportunity to learn to speak and lipread, skills that oralists argued would allow them to interact and to participate in society at large. Historian Douglas C. Baynton thoroughly examines the context of the emergence of oralism in American schools for deaf children: "Oralists likened the deaf community to a community of immigrants" because "the use of sign language encouraged deaf people to associate principally with each other and to avoid the hard work of learning to communicate in spoken English."²⁵ The oralists offered a shift in thinking in the latter half of the nineteenth century that considered deaf Americans who used sign language as outsiders to the American culture, which was partially defined by spoken English. This argument was in line with anti-immigrant thinking in the latter half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century.

Manualism Supported by Protestant Practice and Theology

The change in national climate in late nineteenth-century America caused deaf community leaders to protect sign language use at the most fundamental levels—at the schools for deaf children. Carrying on his father's mission, Edward Miner Gallaudet entered the field of deaf education and became an advocate of sign language use and a leader in the American deaf community. In 1850, he became the first superintendent of the Columbia Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind, which was funded by Amos Kendall, a prominent Washington philanthropist. In 1864, President Abraham Lincoln signed a bill allowing the Columbia Institution to grant college degrees, and the school divided into two departments, the second of which

was the National Deaf-Mute College. Edward M. Gallaudet is most widely recognized as the president of this first college in the United States for deaf students. In 1893 the name was changed again, this time to Gallaudet College in honor of Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet.²⁶ Since 1986, the school has been recognized as Gallaudet University. The long legacy of the Gallaudet family in deaf education in the United States is the preservation of the deaf community and sign language despite the efforts of oralists like Bell. Edward M. Gallaudet's opinions on deaf education were valued by the deaf community just as much as his father's were. And with changing pedagogical philosophies, Edward M. Gallaudet deviated slightly from his father's original teaching methods.

As Edward M. Gallaudet's experiences grew and his exposure to the oralists' teachings persisted, he began advocating a combined method that purported to best accommodate individual students' needs and abilities. He held that students who were capable of speech should be allowed the benefit of the oralists' techniques to improve their articulation. He warned, however, of the danger of enforcing this method of teaching on all students inasmuch as many would never learn a language at all if oralism were the only technique employed. He recognized that many deaf students would never be able to articulate speech and would best be served by instruction in sign language and written English. Edward Gallaudet argued that at the center of the combined method was deaf students' goal of becoming productive members of society and forming their own religious convictions.²⁷ The only way they could achieve these goals, according to Edward M. Gallaudet, was through the continuous use of sign language—even if it were in addition to oral practices.

The American deaf community faced oralists at home who found great support from their peers abroad. In the late nineteenth century, it was clear that manual practices were in the minority on an international front. Leaders in the education of deaf students met at the Milan Congress in 1880, an offshoot of the

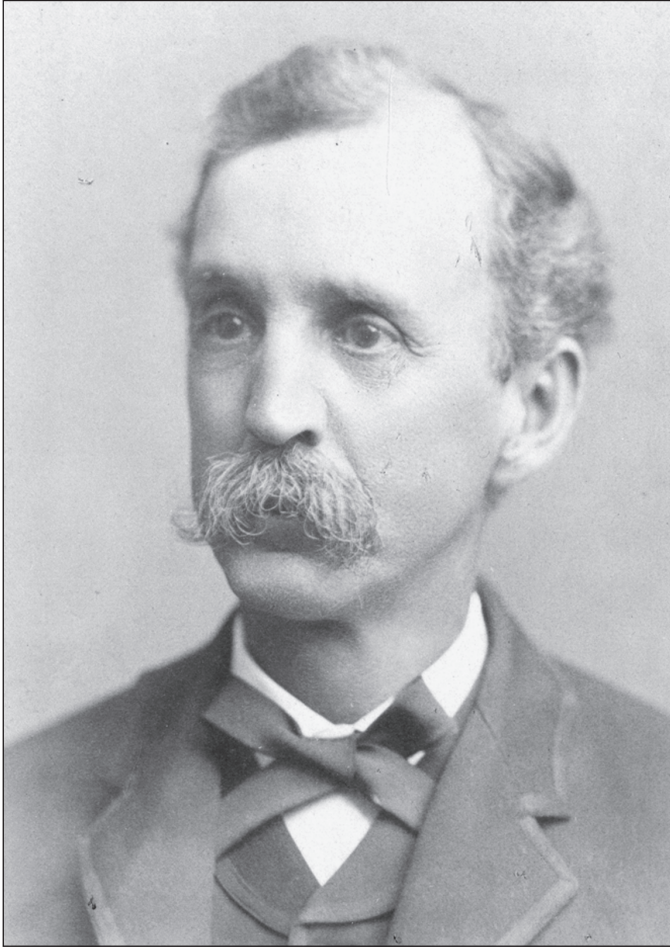
International Congress for the Improvement of the Condition of Deaf-Mutes held two years earlier. Brothers Edward and Thomas Gallaudet Jr. were two of five U.S. representatives at the Milan Congress. Among the five U.S. delegates, James Denison, principal of Kendall School in Washington, DC, was the only deaf representative in attendance. At the conference, a motion was passed valuing speech over signs:

The Convention, considering the incontestable superiority of speech over signs, (1) for restoring deaf-mutes to social life, and (2) for giving them greater facility of language, declares that the method of articulation should have the preference over that of signs in the instruction and education of the deaf and dumb.²⁸

The delegates from the United States cast five of the six votes against the motion. Although the American deaf community was being attacked by proponents of oralism at home and abroad, its members were also becoming a community with leaders willing to fight for the preservation of sign language.

Edward Gallaudet frequently presented and published on the virtues of the combined method, citing the significance of sign language in the deaf community and the benefits of the oral method for some students. In a speech delivered to the Second Congress of the British Deaf and Dumb Association in Glasgow in August 1891 and published in the *American Annals of the Deaf* in October 1891, Edward Gallaudet echoes his father's use of religious themes, references, and reasoning to support his argument. He concludes his speech by quoting from scripture, specifically Mark 7:37: "It was said in proof of the divine beneficence of our Saviour's mission upon the earth: 'He hath done all things well, for he maketh the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak.'"²⁹

Speaking in front of a large assembly of educators of deaf students in Great Britain and Ireland, Edward Gallaudet, like his father before him, acted as an ambassador for the American deaf community. It is also important to note the impetus for Edward



James Denison. (Gallaudet University Archives, Washington, DC)

Gallaudet's invitation to speak at the conference. In his biographical account of Gallaudet College he notes that

I made the address on the combined system of educating the deaf before a large assemblage on the evening of August 7th. My invitation to address the Congress was suggested by Mrs. Francis Maginn of Belfast who was a student in our college a few years earlier and, at the time of my visit to Glasgow, a missionary to the deaf-mutes of Belfast and vicinity.³⁰

Once again the intertwining of Protestant theology and deaf education is evident in this student who went on to become a missionary to other deaf people, continuing T. H. Gallaudet's work of saving the "deaf heathens." Edward Gallaudet's speech was published in both the *Annals* and the *Silent World*, where it reached an even wider audience. Readers of these periodicals were involved in the American deaf community and were thus particularly interested in the education of deaf children.

As mentioned earlier, Edward Gallaudet explored the benefits of both the manual and the oral methods of instruction, stressing that the manual method alone afforded more opportunities to deaf people both in education and religion than the oral method alone. He claimed that "by the practice of the manual method alone, with no aid from the oral, the entire body of the deaf can be so trained and educated as to become intelligent, happy, self-respecting, self-supporting, God-fearing members of society."³¹ He also addressed the oralists' concerns that sign language would separate deaf individuals from a unified national identity. For Edward Gallaudet, the deaf students' religious beliefs and practices demonstrated their membership in an American society that still valued Protestant theology even with the advancement of evolutionary thinking. In addition, he wrote that "the gift to the deaf of the language of signs and the manual alphabet is of far greater value and comfort" than speech and lipreading.³² Early manualists like T. H. Gallaudet referred to sign language as a gift that God gave deaf people. His son Edward also spoke of sign language in terms of a gift, as did many manualists of his time because, for them, sign language was a manifestation of divine providence. Weighing the benefits of signs against speech and lipreading, Edward Gallaudet continued to use religious references as his father had done several decades earlier.

For example, a central theme in Edward Gallaudet's argument for the combined method is the importance of the moral life of deaf students and the role that religious training plays in

this. In support of his emphasis on manualism, he quotes oralists who claim that, without sign language, deaf students' moral states would be challenged. For Edward Gallaudet, then, part of the value of sign language is its significance in religious teaching and moral training. Appealing to the oralists in the audience, he cites the work of "a disciple of [Samuel] Heinicke, the founder of the oral method" and a name that would be familiar to the audience—Moritz Hill.³³ After a long career spent instructing deaf students in Germany, Hill compiled his reflections and views on the various methods used to teach deaf students. Edward Gallaudet quotes Hill in order to show the important advantages of the use of sign language, that is, the manual method. In this quotation, Hill, who was traditionally associated with the oral method, points out that it is important that sign language be used in the religious training of deaf students:

[I]t is particularly in the teaching of religion that the language of pantomime plays an important part, especially when it is not only necessary to instruct, but to operate on sentiment and will, either because here this language is indispensable to express the moral state of man, his thoughts, and his actions, or that the word alone *makes too little impression on the eyes of the mute* to produce, without the aid of pantomime, the desired effect in a manner sure and sufficient.³⁴

Hill recognizes that, in order to reach the souls of the deaf students in his care, sign language would have to be used because the spoken word is ineffective in religious teaching. His concession with regard to the effects of sign language compromises Hill's purely oralist standing. Hill expresses what many supporters of sign language maintained, that the true invocation of pathos for deaf individuals is through their natural language, sign language. Although Hill's explanation of the use of sign language in religious training is similar to Thomas Gallaudet's early nineteenth-century mission to teach sign language to deaf American students, Hill did not view sign language in the same way as manualists in

the United States. To illustrate Hill's stance on sign language, Edward Gallaudet quotes Hill's more complete opinion of sign language:

[I]t must be remembered that in his school, as in other oral schools where his views prevail, the language of signs is nothing more, to quote his own words, than "a very imperfect natural production, because it remains for the most part abandoned to a limited sphere of haphazard culture."³⁵

Expressing disagreement with Hill on this latter view of sign language, Edward Gallaudet reminds his audience that sign language has been carefully developed for many generations. He also disagrees with Hill's claim that sign language is needed to teach deaf students religion and maintains that Hill's opinion of the use of sign language is similar to that of oralists who align deafness and sign language use with less evolved species like apes.³⁶ Edward Gallaudet presents evidence from oralists to demonstrate his thorough knowledge of the oral method and to indicate that he does not dismiss the oral method entirely. He appeals to them by citing a leading oralist whose teachings many oralists are familiar with. This strategy demonstrates his attempt to persuade pure oralists in the audience that it is in the best interest of all deaf students for religious training to be conducted in sign language, thus ensuring the preservation of sign language among deaf students at oral schools.

Like his father, Edward Gallaudet subscribed to a Protestant theology that placed a high priority on learning and teaching the gospels. If all educators of deaf students—whether manualists, oralists, or combinists—viewed sign language as the best method for teaching religion to deaf students, then the early manualists' arguments that sign language was a gift from God would be sustained. Early manualists were Protestants who believed that sign language was "a language closer to God and nature than speech, uncorrupted and pure, more honest because more direct as a

means of emotional expression."³⁷ For Edward Gallaudet, sign language was quite useful in religious services in order to convey "clear, vivid, and often eloquent expression, incomparably superior to anything the pure oral method can furnish."³⁸ For him, sign language provided deaf Americans with a natural and easy means of communicating. As mentioned earlier, sign language was referred to as "a gift to the deaf" and intertwined with religious references by Edward Gallaudet throughout "The Combined Systems of Instruction." This view of sign language epitomized his view of education, which was more than simply preparing for a vocation. Based on his alignment of sign language with morality, religious training, and even salvation, Edward Gallaudet's perception of education included a higher cause: the shaping of students' character. If pure oral schools were to persist, deaf students would not learn sign language and, as a result, would have neither a strong grasp of practical knowledge nor a foundation in religious teachings. In addition, purely oral schools would produce deaf individuals who would be unable to participate in either American society at large or a deaf community. He claimed that "[t]he most serious criticism which may justly be brought against the *pure* oral method is that it *cannot* be successfully applied to all the deaf."³⁹ As mentioned earlier, not all deaf students are capable of speaking and lipreading. These are skills that come easier to some than to others. For this reason, Edward Gallaudet opposed pure oralism but saw value in it when it was combined with manualism.

Maintaining that the best elements of both oralism and manualism could be combined, Edward Gallaudet argued, in "The Combined System of Instruction," for pure oral schools (of which there were many in the late nineteenth century) to include the use of sign language. However, his article was just as much for pure manualists as it was for pure oralists. Persuaded by his counterparts in Europe and cases in the United States, he acknowledged that those deaf students who were capable of learning speech in

fact benefited from doing so. At the core of the combined system, he claimed, was the desire to provide an education that best met the needs and capabilities of the individual student. The use of both methods, he asserted, would demonstrate that educators of deaf children were following the example of Christ in the gospels. Edward Gallaudet concluded his thoughts by reflecting on the service of educating deaf children in Protestant religious terms:

Following his benign examples, let us in his spirit go forward in the work we have to do, striving with singleness of purpose, and with every means coming to our hands, so to train those whom "the finger of God hath touched" that they may at length, with ears indeed unstopped, hear the welcome, "Well done, good and faithful servant," and with tongues made musical for the melody of Heaven join in the harmonies of the life that knows no imperfection and no end.⁴⁰

Like his father, Edward Gallaudet emphasized that it was imperative to teach deaf people in sign language so that they, too, could know God. At the heart of this idea was also his concern for their religious state (salvation, in Protestant terms). In Protestant theology, in order for deaf people to experience their ears becoming "unstopped" and to be able to anticipate life in Heaven, they would need to know God and repent of their sins. According to Edward Gallaudet's emotional and ethical appeal, to deny the deaf students sign language would be analogous to denying them entrance to Heaven and the miracle of hearing and speaking.

Like Edward Gallaudet, other educators also expressed their own concern for the religious training of deaf students. For example, in 1892 the Reverend Philip J. Hasenstab argued for all teachers of deaf students to be knowledgeable about religion in order to foster the students' spiritual development: "It is not sufficient merely to teach a child to read and write, but he must be educated, *i.e.*, led forth out of the darkness into light. . . . This means to secure him the blessing of becoming an intelligent human creature in all possible ways, physical, mental, moral, and



Philip J. Hasenstab. (Gallaudet University Archives, Washington, DC)

spiritual."⁴¹ Hasenstab argued that it is the instructor's duty to teach students the "truth as taught in the Bible."⁴² He thus represented the views of many deaf educators who were also ministers. His personal religious beliefs, like those of Thomas and Edward Gallaudet, influenced his particular emphasis in deaf education: religious training. Hasenstab wanted to ensure that deaf students would know right from wrong and become followers of Christ's teachings. As an advocate of the combined system, Hasenstab insisted that instructors use whatever method was necessary for deaf students to receive religious training: "By all means find

some proper channel through which to pour new ideas into his soul. He should be so prepared that he will minister as well as be ministered to."⁴³ The spiritual state of the deaf students was so important to him that he supported whatever method—oral or manual—would help them learn the gospels and become practitioners of them. Like Edward Gallaudet, Hasenstab advocated religious training for deaf students; however, unlike Hasenstab, Edward Gallaudet supported sign language as the most sufficient conveyor of religious training for all deaf students.

To show how ingrained this idea of sign language use is to the saving of deaf souls as expressed by Edward Gallaudet in the conclusion of "The Combined System of Instruction," I offer a look back at snapshots from the American School for the Deaf reunion in 1850. More than two hundred former students gathered on September 26, 1850, to recognize and celebrate the work of Laurent Clerc and T. H. Gallaudet to teach sign language to deaf students in the United States. In expressing their gratitude, the former students and their teachers stood up and signed their appreciation for the efforts of these men in teaching them about the gospels:

Thirty-three years ago, the deaf mutes in this country were in darkness of the grossest ignorance. They knew not God. They knew nothing of the maker of heaven and earth. They knew nothing of the mission of Jesus Christ into the world to pardon sin. They knew not that, after this life, God would reward the virtuous and punish the vicious. They knew no distinction between right and wrong. They were all in ignorance and poverty, with no means of conveying their ideas to others, waiting for instruction, as the sick for a physician to heal them.⁴⁴

Attributing the manual instruction that Clerc and T. H. Gallaudet brought to those deaf students in the Hartford area with the aim of saving of their souls, alumni in their presentations at the reunion overwhelmingly mentioned the instruction of and in sign language with their journeys from "darkness" to "light." In his remarks to T. H. Gallaudet, former student and teacher George H. Loring signed the following:

It is fortunate and it was also by a kind dispensation of Divine Providence, that you adopted the best method of instruction of the deaf and dumb. By this method we have been instructed in the principles of language, morality and religion, and this education has qualified us to be useful members of society.⁴⁵

Citing many of the manualists' arguments, Loring acknowledged that the use of sign language in the schools was a key element of the deaf students' religious training. At the same time he expressed a common manual viewpoint that sign language use and advocacy are intertwined with the Protestant perspective that sign language is a gift from God.

Many years later, Edward Gallaudet would argue that looking back at the first permanent school for deaf children, which his father led and so many of the alumni at the 1850 reunion admired, was a good starting point for determining the necessary criteria for a model school for deaf students. In 1892 he repeated many of his earlier arguments for the combined system of instruction and continued to emphasize the importance of education. Listing what the Hartford School had done right, Edward Gallaudet mentioned the "careful undenominational training in religion, with interesting Sabbath services."⁴⁶ He also acknowledged that the Hartford School's success was evident in its continued service to deaf students. It had helped to educate many deaf Americans and preserve sign language in difficult times and maintained religious training as part of its curriculum.

Edward Gallaudet also indicated what he believed was necessary for a model school for deaf children in the late nineteenth century. Three of the twelve items he listed include references to religion. He argued that the school's leader should have religious convictions and be "prepared to inspire and develop veneration for God and the highest moral aims."⁴⁷ He also stated that, in a true combined system, students who are taught orally should have the benefit of religious services in sign language.⁴⁸ In addition, he reiterated the importance of religious teachings in this model school:

Religious instruction of an undenominational character should occupy a prominent and honored place, and this instruction should be given in the language through which alone the mind and heart of the deaf can be moved and impressed as the mind and heart of the hearing are through audible speech.⁴⁹

Edward Gallaudet's argument for a model school for deaf children continued to link sign language use to religious teaching and training. Specifically, sign language advocacy by manualists reflected the worldview they imparted to the deaf students in their schools. Even though Edward Gallaudet makes references to nondenominational religious instruction, the God he hoped deaf students would come to fear was a personal God based on Protestant theology.

Epistemology and Deaf Education: *Arizona Cactus*

As we have already seen, oralists and manualists differed ideologically with regard to deaf education. In late nineteenth-century arguments for oralism, speech was indicative of intellect. According to the oralists, deaf students exhibited a halted intellect or even a lack of intellect if they were unable to speak. Despite the oralists' grounding in new scientific thinking, deaf individuals were prospering as a result of their educations at manual and combined-method schools. One reason for this was the training they received in a trade while there. These vocational classes grew in number after the Civil War, as many schools began emphasizing industrial education and expanding the number of trades they taught.⁵⁰ At the turn of the century, more focused vocational training enabled deaf students to learn how to use the printing presses that were turning out school publications. These publications often reflected the continued connection between the American deaf community and Protestant theology even after an increase in nonsectarian and secularist practices in education. To illustrate this, I examine one such publication titled the

Arizona Cactus, from the Arizona School for the Deaf and Blind (ASDB).

The ASDB opened in 1912 in Tucson. Initially this state school was a department of the University of Arizona, and its first location was a converted residence on campus.⁵¹ The major artifact of the ASDB is its quarterly publication, the *Arizona Cactus*. In 1918 the ASDB moved to fifty acres donated by the City of Tucson and purchased eighteen additional acres before the *Arizona Cactus* was first published in 1926. The publication served many purposes. Vocationally, it gave students experience in printing and training in the trade. It also served as a newsletter with announcements for school faculty and parents who sent their children to live at the residential school. Often included in each issue were serialized historical pieces and works by students. Significantly for this study is the fact that these publications frequently included poems or writings that contained religious references and themes. Before examining the examples from the *Arizona Cactus*, I provide some historical context to better illustrate the significance of ASDB's religious writings in a time of more secularization in public education.

The first shift away from specific religious-focused instruction in schools was to nondenominational teachings, which often focused on Protestant theology as opposed to Catholic. Specific denominational tracts or teachings were forbidden at state schools at the turn of the century. In 1918 Stephen Beauregard Weeks cited an 1879 law that declared that state schools should not reflect any denominational qualities:

Another section of this law—an echo of the struggle in 1877 against the proposed union of the church and state—was the thirty-eighth, which declares:

“No books, tracts, or papers of a sectarian or denominational character shall be used or introduced in any school established under the provisions of this act; nor shall sectarian or denominational doctrine be taught therein; nor shall any school whatever receive any of the public school funds which has not been taught in accordance with provisions of this act.”⁵²

The ASDB was established after the law of 1879 was enacted and thus was subject to the law, which denied state support to any school whose publications contained religious references pertinent to a specific denominational persuasion. And after Arizona was admitted to the Union on February 14, 1912, federal grants awarded one hundred thousand acres "for schools and asylums for the deaf, dumb, and the blind," further solidifying the relationship between ASDB and the state.⁵³ To stress the separation of church and state, Weeks stated the following:

The new constitution provided that no sectarian instruction should ever be imparted in any school or state educational institution, and that no religious or political test of qualifications should be required as condition of admission to any public educational institution as teacher, student, or pupil.⁵⁴

Although we have no indication that ASDB tested students on religious matters, certain evidence suggests that Protestant theology found a niche in the moral teachings, which still held a primary spot in residential schools for deaf children. Even though specific denominational teachings may not have been presented, ASDB, like other state-funded schools for deaf students, provided religious training that was Protestant and thus emphasized that students may have personal relationships with God.

Even though Weeks clearly states that the laws called for secularization in education, he uses Protestant rhetoric to explain the leadership in Arizona that changed education for the better. Describing Governor Safford, Weeks writes, "The new governor appeared in 1869. He was Anson P. K. Safford, and from California came this new Moses, destined to lead Arizona from darkness to educational light."⁵⁵ Echoing the manualists' frequent metaphor about sign language bringing deaf students out of the darkness of ignorance and into the light of reason and knowledge of God, Weeks likens Safford to Moses, who led the Israelites out

of the desert and into a closer relationship with God. For Weeks, Safford's development of the Arizona schools and the organization he applied to the public school system was equally important.

Weeks's use of this religious metaphor suggests that, despite the aforementioned Arizona law calling for separation between overt denominational theology and education in state-supported schools like ASDB, such statutes may not have been in widespread practice until much later in the twentieth century. As Ignatius Bjorlee points out,

The first schools of our land were religious schools. Pupils were taught to read in order that they might know the Bible. The divergent nature of our religious beliefs has made the pursuance of such course in our public schools impossible, hence the non sectarian. Moral and ethical principles are universal and through precept and example the way is paved and encouragement lent toward denominational teachings in accordance with the dictates of conscience and the word of God, as variously interpreted.⁵⁶

Although nonsectarian and nondenominational teaching was stressed, Bjorlee points out that ties to Protestant theology and ethical principles closely linked to personal relationships with God still found their way into the state schools for deaf children via moral training.

As evidence of the Protestant footprints in U.S. schools for deaf students, religious references were often found in school writings relevant to deaf lives, even at a state-funded school like ASDB. Protestant themes that emerged in the religious pieces in the *Arizona Cactus* focused on morality, the comfort of being a creation of God, and coming to knowledge through a relationship with God. Like the arguments of manualists in the nineteenth century, the religious references in the early twentieth-century ASDB publications indicate a connection between knowledge and Protestant theology. Howard Griffin reflects on what schools should inculcate in their students:

Regard for the rights of others, adaptation to the environment in which he must live, order and discipline, simple rules of ethics, fundamental principals [*sic*] of religion, all these and more are lived daily, and these together with what comes through the mastery of English and a few allied subjects, the child is pretty well balanced.⁵⁷

Griffin goes on to claim that a background in religion is important for a student to “go forward in life.”⁵⁸ For many educators in American schools for the deaf, teachings in morality were often synonymous with religious training. Even though some state schools may have practiced nondenominational religious teaching, the ASDB’s *Arizona Cactus* indicates that belief in a God that could transcend worldly troubles and sorrows was at the core of the institution’s worldview.

Encouraging moral living and a belief in God, the *Arizona Cactus* published poems with strong Protestant themes. Its first issue offered readers the poem “Just This Minute,” which states, “Just this minute we are going / Toward right or toward wrong; / Just this minute we are sowing / Seeds of sorrow or of song. / Just this minute we are thinking / On the ways that lead to God, / Or in idle dreams are sinking / To the level of the clod.”⁵⁹ The poem stresses the importance of living a moral life, and in this poem, “moral” is equivalent to thoughts and actions that reflect Christian beliefs. The poem also alludes to what Protestant followers would find familiar: Galatians 6:7. Generally associated with sowing and reaping, the verse reads, “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” The sentiment of the verse is echoed in the poem. In Protestant theology, serving God with thoughts and actions that are pleasing would bring rewards in Heaven. By featuring such a poem in the school publication, the ASDB demonstrates a religious influence intertwined with deaf education, one that encouraged deaf students to come to know God personally.

Another theme that emerges in the *Arizona Cactus* is the comfort that deaf students could find in knowing they were created

by God, which is exemplified in the poem "God Made Them All." Demonstrating the belief that all things come from God, the poem states, "All things bright and beautiful, / All creatures great and small, / All things wise and wonderful, / The Lord God made them all."⁶⁰ Students who attended the ASDB lived away from their parents and hearing siblings. Although many stories testify to the comfort deaf students found in coming together and meeting other deaf people at deaf schools, they were frequently reminded that they were unlike hearing people. A poem such as "God Made Them All" reminded the students and students' families that they were alike in that they shared the same creator—God. For some students, this Protestant belief may have brought comfort; for manualists, it reinforced the belief that deaf students were not only capable of learning but also worthy of religious teaching so they could come to know God.

In contrast, the *Tucsonian*, initially a weekly publication that later became the annual of Tucson High School, has very few, if any, references to religious teaching or religious practices among the students. Tucson High School was and still is a peer institution of ASDB. Just a few miles southeast of ASDB, it historically served hearing students in the Tucson area. Students worked with faculty to publish the *Tucsonian*, which the June 1908 issue states is "devoted to high school interests." The *Tucsonian* served as the school paper for at least the first ten years of its existence, and in 1920 it became a traditional high school yearbook—with less and less writing and more and more pictures of students. Included in each issue of the earlier weekly periodical are "editorials; a joke department and local items; interscholastic sports are discussed; amusing and entertaining stories are given considerable space, and much advertising matter is printed, just as in a newspaper."⁶¹ Articles in the early editions of the *Tucsonian* are not unlike items found in school papers of today; however, the *Tucsonian* provides a stark contrast to ASDB's *Arizona Cactus*. Instead of including poems that reflected on Protestant beliefs, editors of the

Tucsonian published poems that contemplated the surrounding desert landscape, such as "The Lone Outlaw" and "The Desert." Leah Hamilton, the Tucson High School sophomore who wrote both poems, describes the "lonely desert's treeless plain" as "long lines of burning, barren, glittering sand."⁶² Other poems such as "To the Sun," "The Coming of Autumn," and "Westward Ho" reflect students' experiences of life in the Southwest. What is more, none of these poems has any biblical or Protestant religious references, unlike those in the *Arizona Cactus*.

Protestant references surfaced throughout the early editions of the *Arizona Cactus*. Seasonal greetings often included quotes of Bible verses, and one historical piece recounting the role of deaf people in history starts with the story of Jesus performing a miracle: "One day while Jesus was preaching to a crowd of people on the shore of Galilee, some one [*sic*] brought to Him a man who was a deaf-mute. Jesus [felt] sorry for him and said: 'Ephphatha' and his ear[s] were opened and he could speak again."⁶³ This story from Mark 7:32–35 is often cited in deaf narratives. Many members of the deaf community of the day often associated the command "be opened" (*ephphatha*) with the minds of deaf people, thus the need to utilize the best method of education. This selection is also a reminder that deaf students were responsible for printing the *Arizona Cactus*. Although the quote contains some errors, it is possible that they were in the original manuscript submitted by the author, who is not acknowledged but in all likelihood was a student.

"The Deaf in History" is a short article that recounts part of Jesus's life, beginning with the healing of the deaf man, and later mentions the opening of a college for deaf students in the late nineteenth century. It ends in 1936, which would have been the current time for the author, a period when many such schools had opened all over the world.⁶⁴ It is a familiar account of the history of deaf people in the United States because the author cites the

influence of T. H. Gallaudet on deaf education. Evident in this article are the influence of religious teachings in schools for deaf students and the story of T. H. Gallaudet as the father of deaf education in the United States. "The Deaf in History" demonstrates the ability of deaf students to acquire knowledge and to use written English while attending a school that values the use of sign language among deaf students.

Conclusion

The teaching methods advocated by Edward Gallaudet and Bell at the end of the nineteenth century had lasting impacts on the deaf community. Today, many have adapted Bell's arguments to pursue scientific means to eliminate deafness. We see this with the advancement of technology and cochlear implants and with genetic testing to isolate the hereditary cause of hearing loss. This view of deafness as a deficit is contrasted by deaf community members who cite deaf people's productivity in society and life in general as evidence they are not lacking. Edward Gallaudet would not completely agree with this current viewpoint in the deaf community; however, he did support the use of sign language, especially to train deaf students in religion. For Edward Gallaudet, nondenominational religious training favoring Protestantism was important for the American schools for the deaf to maintain, and he argued that this training needed to be conducted in sign language. What emerged from this practice was the site of the sanctuary in advocacy for sign language. Because many oralists and manualists agreed that chapel services in the schools for the deaf should be conducted in sign language for all students, sign language persevered. This meant that the sanctuary became a location where, despite oralists' motives to eliminate sign language, it flourished and was transmitted throughout the American deaf community.

Notes

1. *Combinists* subscribed to and employed the “combined method,” which utilized both manual and oral instruction. By the latter part of the nineteenth century, educators of deaf students who were formally pure manualists offered those students who would benefit from it instruction in speech and speechreading.

2. Van Cleve and Crouch, *Place of Their Own*, 112.

3. Weld, “American Asylum,” 107.

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.*, 108.

6. See Baynton, “‘Savages and Deaf-Mutes,’” 93; Van Cleve and Crouch, *Place of Their Own*, 106–27; Jankowski, *Deaf Empowerment*, 22.

7. Baynton, “‘Savages and Deaf-Mutes,’” 93.

8. Krentz, *Mighty Change*, 112; Van Cleve and Crouch, *Place of Their Own*, 112.

9. Van Cleve and Crouch, *Place of Their Own*, 114.

10. Jenkins, “Professor A. Graham Bell’s Studies on the Deaf,” 117.

11. Greenwald, “Taking Stock,” 137.

12. Van Cleve and Crouch, *Place of Their Own*, 115.

13. Edward Miner Gallaudet, “Combined System,” 257.

14. The role of the sanctuary (e.g., chapel services at residential schools for deaf students in the United States) in sustaining and advocating sign language is the subject of the following chapter.

15. Baynton, *Forbidden Signs*, 9.

16. See Baynton, “‘Savages and Deaf-Mutes,’” 98; Armstrong, *Original Signs*, 16–18; Stokoe, *Language in Hand*, 55.

17. Baynton, “‘Savages and Deaf-Mutes,’” 98.

18. Baynton, *Forbidden Signs*, 9.

19. Baynton, “‘Savages and Deaf-Mutes,’” 98.

20. Baynton, *Forbidden Signs*, 55.

21. Van Cleve and Crouch, *Place of Their Own*, 117.

22. Baynton, *Forbidden Signs*, 30.

23. Quoted in Van Cleve and Crouch, *Place of Their Own*, 146.

24. *Ibid.*, 147.

25. Baynton, *Forbidden Signs*, 16.

26. Gallaudet, *History of the College*, 188.

27. *Ibid.*, “Ideal School,” 282.

28. Quoted in Van Cleve and Crouch, *Place of Their Own*, 110.

29. Gallaudet, “Combined System,” 266.

30. Gallaudet, *History of the College*, 184.

31. Gallaudet, “Combined System,” 259.

32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. Quoted in *ibid.*, 260. Emphasis in original.
35. Ibid.
36. See Baynton, "'Savages and Deaf-Mutes'"; Gallaudet, "Combined System," 261.
37. Baynton, *Forbidden Signs*, 9.
38. Gallaudet, "Combined System," 264.
39. *Ibid.*, 261. Emphasis in original.
40. *Ibid.*, 266.
41. Hasenstab, "Religious Training," 15–16.
42. *Ibid.*, 18.
43. *Ibid.*, 21.
44. Spofford, "Fisher Ames Spofford's Address," 143.
45. Loring, "George H. Loring's Address to Gallaudet," 147.
46. Gallaudet, "Ideal School for the Deaf," 282.
47. *Ibid.*, 284.
48. *Ibid.*, 285.
49. *Ibid.*
50. Baynton, *Forbidden Signs*, 97.
51. Averitt, *ASDB 75th Commemoration*, 2.
52. Weeks, *History of Public Education in Arizona*, 38.
53. *Ibid.*, 88.
54. *Ibid.*, 89.
55. *Ibid.*, 130.
56. Bjorlee, "What Does Education Mean to You?" 21.
57. Howard Griffin, "What Shall We Teach?" 7.
58. *Ibid.*
59. "Just This Minute," 7.
60. "God Made Them All," 4.
61. "Why Do We have a High School Paper?" 1.
62. Hamilton, "Desert," 5; "Lone Outlaw," 30.
63. Valentine, "Deaf in History," 13.
64. *Ibid.*