

History of American Sign Language

Learn ASL in 60 Days: Day 10 Course 2.4

In the early 1800's, Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, a hearing minister and a graduate of Yale University, met and became friends with a young deaf girl named Alice. Gallaudet took an interest in teaching the girl and succeeded at teaching her a few words. The girl's father, Dr. Mason Cogswell, encouraged Gallaudet to become involved with establishing a school for deaf people.

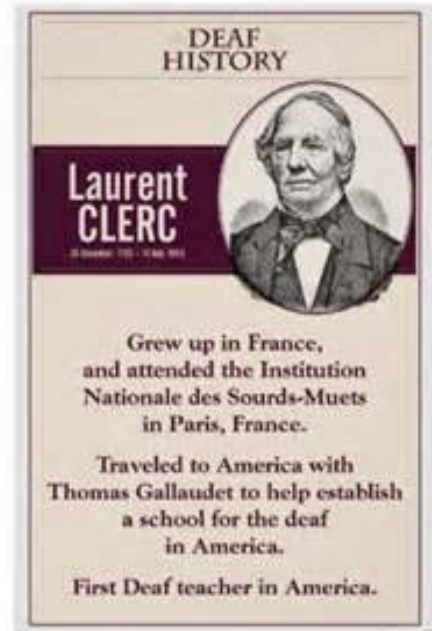
In 1815, Gallaudet headed for Europe in search of methods for teaching the deaf.

He approached other program directors, but none of them were willing to share their techniques with Gallaudet.

Fortunately, while in England Gallaudet met up with the director of a Paris school for the deaf, a man by the name of Sicard. He was there with two of his deaf pupils, Jean Massieu and Laurent Clerc who were also teachers at the school in Paris. They were in England giving demonstrations on how to teach the deaf with the use of sign language. The Paris school, which had been founded by the Abbe Charles Michel de L'Epee in 1771, was using French Sign Language in combination with a set methodically developed signs.

Gallaudet persuaded Clerc to return with him to the States. As a result, in 1817 the first American school for the deaf was established in the city of Hartford, Connecticut.

Over time, the signs used at that school, plus the signs that were already being used by deaf people in America evolved into what we now know as American Sign Language.



More resources related to ASL History:

<https://www.start-american-sign-language.com/history-of-american-sign-language.html>

<http://iml.iou.ufl.edu/projects/fall05/rosen/history.html>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Sign_Language

Quiz

1. Was Thomas Gallaudet hearing or deaf?
2. Who did meet? (hint, a girl)
3. Where did Thomas meet Laurent Clerc?
4. What school did Thomas & Clerc establish?
5. What is the name of the current Deaf University in Washington DC?

Answers

1. Hearing
2. Alice Cogswell
3. Parris at the deaf school
4. American School for the Deaf in Hartford, Conn
5. Gallaudet University