

Press Release

## Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet's socially progressive views on deaf education, interracial education, and women's issues

Monday, September 10, 2007

Today is the 156th anniversary of the passing of the co-founder of deaf education in North America, Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet.

A rare book printed in England in 1835 contains a journal account of a visit to the famous school for the deaf that Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet co-founded in Hartford, Connecticut. The account of the visit to the school by Edward Abdy shows how the Hartford school was far ahead of the times in its educational philosophy.

Not only was T.H. Gallaudet open-minded and forward-thinking enough to accept deaf people's natural sign language as a valid and worthwhile means of communication, but the Abdy book shows us that the Hartford school was also one of the first racially integrated schools in North America.

The book by Edward Abdy is titled:

"Journal of a residence and tour in the United States of North America, from April, 1833, to October, 1834"

Chapter 7 contains the account of his visit to the Hartford school ([Scanned version](#)) ([Text version](#)) :

QUOTE (indentation added):

THE day after my return to Hartford, I went to the Deaf and Dumb Asylum with Mr. Wells, the treasurer. I had had a cursory view of the establishment on my former visit. On entering the house, we found several visitors there, and were ushered into a room, where some of the pupils were taking their morning's lessons from a deaf and dumb teacher, who received us with great politeness; and invited us, by signs, to be seated. The class had been two years in the establishment, and were receiving instruction in grammar.

The manner in which they wrote on boards affixed to the wall their answers to his questions on the meaning of words, and explained the distinctions between the relative pronouns, shewed that they had made great progress during that time. Their hand-writing was good, and generally correct in point of spelling.

Among them was a black boy, or rather a mulatto, who had been sent by the State of Massachusetts to the Asylum. As it is very unusual to see the different colors thus harmoniously mixed in a place of this sort, I felt anxious to know whether any proof of the supposed difference of intellect between the two races was to be found here. There had been two or three instances of a similar kind in the house before. It was probably through the influence of the superintendant, who is a very liberal man, and at the suggestion of his brother, whose mind has long been thoroughly cleared of the "perilous stuff" of prejudice, that such a departure from a general rule was permitted.

I wrote down on a piece of paper the following question, and put it into the teacher's hands: "Is the black as intelligent as the white?" He directly wrote with his pencil, "No, Sir! he has a pretty good mind." I wrote again: --"Is it so with all the blacks?" The answer was, "No, Sir!" Thinking he might suppose I asked if they all had pretty good minds, --I added: "I mean, is the black race inferior to the white?" "No," was his reply.

On asking an elderly woman who appeared to be the matron, whether any repugnance or feeling of displeasure had been shewn, on his arrival, towards the colored boy by his companions, "not the least," she replied, "on the contrary, they all crowded about him when first he came, and seemed highly delighted with him. He is a great favorite with all of them, and more beloved than any of the others."

## UNQUOTE

The school for the deaf in Hartford, in fact, may have had the most progressive policy on interracial education than any other school in America at the time. An exhaustive search of Internet databases shows only one other school in America, [the Moravian school in Frederickstown, Pennsylvania](#), which at one time had a similarly progressive policy. There is also [a source which gives a vague reference](#) to the possibility of some Quaker schools at the time which were west of the Appalachian Mountains being racially integrated.

The 1888 biography of T.H. Gallaudet written by his son Edward Miner Gallaudet (see re-release below) explains that T.H. Gallaudet was very advanced in his thinking on social issues. As a young man he participated in debates, condemning the institution of slavery. Later, as principal of the Hartford school, [a black woman named E.M. Thompson lived with his family in his home](#) for a time, and apparently he encouraged her to become a teacher in Africa. He corresponded with others on the topic of establishing a school in America to train teachers to go to Africa.

He was also involved in the first "teacher's convention" in America, which took place 1830 in Hartford.

Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet was progressive on women's issues, too, being actively involved in a women's school in Hartford, and even filled in as the temporary director for a few months after he had retired from the school for the deaf. In [an address given](#)

[upon the opening of a new building at the school](#), he said nothing about the teaching of manners, but instead discussed deep issues of educational philosophy.

Truly, Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet was a man who was, in many ways, 150 years ahead of his time.

Addendum (Sept. 10, 2007):

It should be kept in mind that T.H. Gallaudet formally retired from the job of principal of the school for the deaf in Hartford in 1830 and Edward Abdy visited the school after [Lewis Weld](#) had taken his place. Abdy specifically mentions Weld as being: "a very liberal man...whose mind has long been thoroughly cleared of the 'perilous stuff' of prejudice..."

While further research is required to better understand Abdy's journal account in the context of the history of the school, it is clear that T.H. Gallaudet had a strong influence on his successor's policies and that Weld was carrying over many of the policies of T.H. Gallaudet's administration.

Also note that "Heman" is the correct first name of Heman Humphrey (not "Herman").

Re-Release

Saturday, September 8, 2007

Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet  
(Dec. 10, 1787 -- Sept. 10, 1851)

*Click on image above to enlarge, or [CLICK HERE](#) to print out.*

Monday, September 10, 2007 will be the 156th anniversary of the passing of the co-founder of deaf education in North America, Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet.

In his honor, we present for the first time in Internet history, a complete version of his 1888 biography, "The Life of Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet," written by his son, Edward Miner Gallaudet.

The following PDF file of the book can be downloaded in about 60 seconds using broadband (Adobe Reader required):

[http://gallyprotest.org/life\\_of\\_thomas\\_hopkins\\_gallaudet.pdf](http://gallyprotest.org/life_of_thomas_hopkins_gallaudet.pdf)

Also available for downloading is the 1852 book: "Tribute to Gallaudet" by Henry Barnard, which (starting on PDF page 105) contains an autobiographical essay by American deaf education co-founder, Laurent Clerc:

[http://gallyprotest.org/tribute\\_to\\_gallaudet.pdf](http://gallyprotest.org/tribute_to_gallaudet.pdf)

Gallaudet University is named after Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet. There was a strong paternalistic element involved in T.H. Gallaudet's social and educational philosophy (following the mores of that era), with the unfortunate precedent of a benefactor-beneficiary relationship being created along with the establishment of the Hartford school in 1817. This flaw, however, was later expiated by a formal act of the US Congress.

In 1908, [the governor of the State of Indiana proclaimed](#) that the Indiana School for the Deaf is not a charity, but that it is to be regarded as educational institution as a matter of the moral equality of deaf children and hearing children.

Then, as E.M. Gallaudet clearly explained, in 1901 it was officially declared by an act of the US Congress that the the Columbia Institution (Gallaudet) is *not* a charity. (See PDF page 14 in the [transcript of his 1911 speech.](#))

It follows, then, that the Board of Trustees of Gallaudet is not the final political authority over university matters, and that the Institution exists as a matter of the constitutional guarantee of [equal treatment under the law](#). Accordingly, as an official part of the education system, deaf citizens of America possess the moral and legal authority to direct the governance of educational institutions which serve them.

(On the issue of equal treatment, see also: [Noah Beckman's November 2006 interview](#) with National Public Radio.)

T.H. Gallaudet's greatest accomplishment was the fact that he noticed the value and importance of sign language in the education of the deaf, and that, by enlisting the participation of Laurent Clerc, the education of the deaf in America was, following this pro-sign philosophy, put on a firm foundation.

As Heman Humphrey remarked about T.H. Gallaudet, his life-long friend: "In the best sense of the term he was a great man. He had talents of a high order."

*Photos of grave site in Hartford, Connecticut:*

<http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=22302>