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INSIDE DEAF CULTURE

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Silenced Bodies

At first glance the Maryland School for the Deaf looks like an elite preparatory school. Large brick buildings surround a campus of smooth green lawns and carefully cultivated flower beds. Massive old elms shade every corner of the campus. At the center of campus stands an old Revolutionary-era military barracks that once housed young deaf children. A water fountain is located nearby, with sidewalks stretching in every direction, linking one building to the other, from the high school building to another for parent education, from the elementary building to the career education training center across the street. On one side of the campus are dormitories where the boys and girls live during the week. The campus occupies two long blocks in the heart of historic Frederick, one of the oldest cities in the state.

Looking closer, there are more hints of the long history of the school. The front of the campus is bordered by a tall, black wrought iron fence punctuated by large brick columns, framing the entrance to campus. There once stood a tall and imposing building behind the fence, but it has since been torn down and replaced with a newer, more modest brick building. Built shortly after the school was founded in 1868, the Old Main Building stood nearly a hundred feet tall, adorned with white-painted turrets and a black slate mansard roof.

Until the late 1960s, most deaf children in the United States were educated in separate schools like the Maryland School for the Deaf. Nearly every state in the country had at least one school for deaf children, and some states had several. The story of these schools is in part about the history of deaf education in the United States, but it is also about deaf children being brought into the care and responsibility of "asylums" and "institutions." The schools were first built in the early nineteenth century as a response to the problem of what to do about deaf children living among hearing people. At first schools deliberated over how to take responsibility for deaf boys and girls, what they should do while they were in school, and how they should interact with their teachers and other caretakers in the school. But quickly it became a problem of "bodies," how to control and manage the lives of deaf children within the school.

Though the Maryland School was built later in the nineteenth century, its architecture and design were typical of many schools for the deaf that were built earlier. The stately Old Main Building at the Maryland School for the Deaf housed the school administration as well as classrooms and sleeping quarters. It was torn down a hundred years after it was built because by the 1960s, buildings of this type had begun to fall out of favor.[1] They were too large, too old, and too reminiscent of an older style of education. In 1950, almost 85 percent of all deaf children attended schools for the deaf, but by 1988, the number had dropped by more than half to 40 percent.[2] By 2002, the number showed more decline, with only 27 percent of all deaf and hard-of-hearing children attending "special schools or centers."[3] The rest attend public schools in "mainstreamed programs," where they are educated with hearing children.

Deaf people in the United States are divided between those who grew up at a time when schools for the deaf were the expected means of receiving an education, and those who were born after

the 1960s, when their parents could choose between a residential school or living at home and attending a local public school. It is still customary for older Deaf people to introduce themselves to each other by which school they attended: "I'm from Berkeley," meaning from the original campus of the California School for the Deaf founded in Berkeley in 1868, or "from St. Mary's," a Catholic school for the deaf in Buffalo, New York. The younger generation are more likely to say they went to a "mainstreamed high school" in their home state, which could mean any one of a large number of small programs for deaf and hard-of-hearing students located in a public school. Of the smaller number of Deaf people who attend modern schools for the deaf, they often follow tradition and refer to the school's location as being where they are "from."

The long history of schools for the deaf, lasting nearly 180 years, has left an enduring legacy in the Deaf community. Though now two generations removed, it is a powerful and conflicted legacy, such that Deaf people find it hard to talk about the past and the future of deaf schools without a great deal of emotion.

Some Deaf people will say they believe in special schools and relocate near one so they can send their Deaf children there. At the same time, others intensely dislike special schools and will refuse to send their children there. For some, the intensity of their feelings is personal. Their own experiences as children in such schools has left an indelible impression on their adult lives. They remember the oppressive environments of their classrooms and dormitories, the long separation from parents and family, and living for months with other children without love or affection from adults. One Deaf woman remembers what she calls the petty and irrational rules of her dormitory supervisor, who required that toothbrushes be lined up in the bathroom and shoes be placed directly in front of clothing cabinets. Every aspect of her school life was regimented; punishments were meted out on a regular basis for small and large infractions. She was more fortunate than most in

that she had Deaf sisters at the school, but she deeply missed being with her family at home. Today, she says her experience as a child influenced her decision not to send her deaf children to a special school.

Another Deaf woman remembers a brutal "house mother" who locked her charges in a dark closet as punishment. Memories of schools for the deaf in the 1940s and 1950s are almost universally about irrational punishments, moving about in groups, standing in lines, fighting to get a second helping of dessert, waking in the morning to flashing lights and banging on metal beds, sharing showers and sinks. One Deaf man described his residential life with other boys as a "Lord of the Flies" existence, where there were hierarchies of status among the boys, and punishments exerted from within the group of Deaf boys, as well as by their caretakers. He admired his younger Deaf brother who had emerged as a skillful leader at the school; with this brother's "protection," he fared better than some of his friends.

At the same time there are those who believe they were "rescued" by schools for the deaf, and their memories are of leaving behind unbearably lonely homes for an environment of friends and adults who could sign and communicate with them. One eighty-year-old Deaf man we interviewed lost his mother when he was five and was sent to live with his hearing aunt on a family farm during the Depression. He hated the summers of grinding labor, but worse, he could hardly bear the oppressive solitude among his hearing relatives. His Deaf father rarely visited, leaving him entirely in the care of relatives who were exhausted from hard farm labor and had little left to give him. From 1928 to 1940, when he left for Gallaudet, he lived at his school from September to June, and returned to his aunt's farm only during Christmas and in the summers, even though the farm was but a thirty-minute drive from the school. For him, the school became a respite and the closest semblance of family that he could imagine.

Others remember seeing deaf children who were not sent to a school for the deaf, but stayed at home instead. Living and working in the family, they used only home signs, or gestural communication, and lived a life of dependence on their parents. Nathie Marbury remembers in her childhood home in Pittsburgh seeing a girl silently watching from a window of a neighboring house but never joining the children in play. Years later as an adult, she discovered that the girl was deaf and had been kept in her room at home. To this day, Marbury wonders if her own life might not have turned out as well if she hadn't enrolled in the Western Pennsylvania School for the Deaf at the age of six. Born into a large family where there were few resources for each child, Nathie credits the school with giving her the possibility of an education.

Even in the modern context, schools for the deaf continue to "rescue" children, particularly adolescents who struggle to succeed in public schools. Even at a time when distances are short, and information is easy and readily available, isolation still happens. Instead of being caused by geographical remoteness or family income, isolation can be caused by neglect, indifference, or simply lack of expectation. It is not uncommon to find ten- or eleven-year-old deaf children who arrive at schools for the deaf barely literate, knowing not even how to spell or write their last names.[4] Deaf children can still fail to be educated even when surrounded by children or adults.

Deaf people describe schools for the deaf as places where they lived, and indeed, they were designed as such: as buildings where every function of the child was given a designated space. As Deaf children moved from their sleeping quarters to their classrooms to the dining halls, they were imprinted with a strong sense of where they were, and why they were there. The memories of such rigidly organized schools is palpable, but what they also reveal is a sense of belonging with other children who sign, and whose lives are remarkably like their own. When Nathie Marbury contemplates the

possibility that she could have been left behind to live in a room alone, as her deaf neighbor was, it is enough to bring tears to her eyes.

It would seem that schools for the deaf today find themselves in a precarious existence as they carry their nineteenth-century legacies into the twenty-first century. At the end of the nineteenth century, there were eighty-seven schools for the deaf throughout the country.[5] Since that time, over a third of them have closed, and a few others will probably close soon. Despite a pattern of decline, however, some deaf schools have experienced a revival in enrollments. Maryland School for the Deaf, and the California School for the Deaf (since relocated to Fremont), have both had increases in enrollment and are among the largest of such schools. To be sure, they are careful to represent themselves not as "institutes" but as "special schools" or "centers," as they seek to reinvent themselves in a new era of deaf education.

The first school for the deaf in the United States was founded in Hartford, Connecticut, at the urging of Mason Cogswell, an influential philanthropist who wanted an education for his deaf daughter. Disappointed at his daughter's progress with a tutor and intrigued by reports of successful schools for the deaf in Europe, Cogswell formed a committee of fellow philanthropists and civic-minded colleagues to explore the possibility of a new institution in America for the education of deaf children. He enlisted Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, a member of his intellectual circle, to travel to Europe to study methods of educating the deaf, and bring back recommendations for instruction at the school. Gallaudet traveled first to England but when he failed in his attempts to visit the Braidwood Schools there, he went instead to Paris where Abbé Sicard invited him to observe the national school for the deaf that he directed on the rue Saint-Jacques. Gallaudet knew that

Abbé Sicard had taken over the directorship of the school from the Abbé de l'Epée, whose reputation in deaf education was known throughout Europe and in America.[6]

At Saint-Jacques, Gallaudet met Laurent Clerc, a deaf former student at the school who had become a teacher, and decided that instead of attempting to learn entirely the methods employed by Sicard and Clerc at their school for the deaf, he would persuade Clerc to return to the United States with him and guide the school's formation. Clerc agreed, a decision that set the course of deaf education in the United States. The failure of Gallaudet to learn from the Braidwoods, who espoused a strictly "oral" philosophy of education, and his subsequent meeting with Sicard and Clerc, who promoted the use of signs in education, is credited with the early establishment of sign language in American schools for the deaf.[7] Clerc introduced the French educational method at the American School for the Deaf in Hartford, and through his travels in New England with Gallaudet, he fostered the use of sign language in other schools for the deaf, including at the New York Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb, which opened in spring of 1820, and the Pennsylvania Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, which opened in the fall of the same year.[8] Soon other states followed their example: the Kentucky Asylum for the Tuition of the Deaf and Dumb opened in 1823, then similar schools in Ohio in 1829 and in Virginia in 1839. Maryland School for the Deaf was the twenty-seventh state school to open, in 1868.[9]

This piece of nineteenth-century history leaves out the more important story of how these institutions were built in the first place. The first schools for the deaf in Hartford, New York City, and Philadelphia were built as part of the same impulse that gave rise to new prisons, hospitals, schools for the blind, and free public schools for poor children.[10] In Philadelphia beginning in 1800, philanthropists and civic leaders began to form societies to study how to handle the city's growth, and the problems that came with an influx of

children and adults into the city. Residents in colonial cities like Philadelphia and Hartford complained that they found themselves increasingly living in small, crowded areas alongside "ex-slaves, unemployed immigrants, vagrants, criminals, juvenile delinquents, poverty-stricken derelicts, and a raft of uneducated children," raising the question of how they should respond to the problems facing cities that were growing larger each year.[11] One response was to separate the different classes of individuals—deaf, blind, insane, criminal, and sick—and organize them into separate institutions so that special forms of rehabilitation and education could be applied to them. Like institutions for the blind and asylums for the insane, the first schools for the deaf in the United States were given the same designation, as asylums and institutions to house deaf children.

Not only did city leaders believe that afflicted individuals should be removed from their surroundings; they also believed that the different classes of disabled and deviant should be kept separate from one another. Women and men should be separate, as should petty criminals from more violent criminals.[12] By the same extension, they also believed deaf children should be educated separately from hearing children.

The idea of categorizing and identifying children by a shared physical or mental trait is entirely accepted now, but as David Rothman observes, it was a uniquely nineteenth-century development. Before what he calls the "discovery of the asylum," colonial America had no such plan of segregation for these categories of "infirmities."[13] Deaf children, as were children who were blind, poor, and otherwise disabled, were generally tolerated and allowed to live among their families and neighbors. If education was provided, it was provided individually and according to family ability. When Mason Cogswell's daughter was deafened from scarlet fever at the age of two, he employed a tutor for her, and she continued to live in the household. But when her progress was slow, Cogswell began to explore European approaches.[14] In their rapidly

expanding cities, whether Hartford, New York City, or Philadelphia, the city leaders sought a solution for the increasing number of deaf children—as well as blind and poor children—living among them. Michael Ignatieff describes their commitment to institution building as guided by a common belief that there should be a "social distance between the confined and the outside world."[15]

The Pennsylvania Institution for the Deaf and Dumb was established in 1820, three years after the American School for the Deaf was founded in Hartford. It may not have the distinction of being the first school for the deaf in the country, but its early history is equally notable. Through the copious writings of its board of directors, particularly by one of its enthusiastic members, Roberts Vaux, we have an exceptional view into the beliefs and motives of the nineteenth-century designers of education for deaf children in special schools.

The idea of an institution for the deaf was first presented to the citizens of Philadelphia by Thomas H. Gallaudet and Laurent Clerc, who were on a speaking tour on the subject of their newly opened school in Hartford. Speaking in the city on December 7, 1816, they impressed enough individuals that "great interest was aroused" and a committee of leading citizens of the city agreed to meet for the purpose of exploring the possibility of a similar institution in Philadelphia.[16] Because there was reluctance to compete with the school at Hartford, plans were delayed a few years. At the time, David Seixas, a Jewish merchant and inventor who had been dabbling in philosophy, came across the work of the Abbé Sicard, and by his own initiative persuaded a few deaf children he had seen playing in the streets to allow him to try educating them. A small classroom in his home came to the attention of those city leaders who had been contemplating an institution for the deaf, and he was invited to meet with them to discuss those plans.[17]

The philanthropists and leaders who appointed themselves the

first board of directors of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Deaf and Dumb were among some of the most prominent and well-known individuals in Philadelphia and throughout the United States. Roberts Vaux, a Quaker and active reformer, was invited to join because at the time he was spearheading efforts to build a public-school system open to all children, including the poor, in the city of Philadelphia. A prolific organizer, Vaux also sat on the boards of the Philadelphia Prisons Society, the Association of Friends for the Instruction of the Poor, and the Pennsylvania Abolition Society.[18] The president of the board was the Reverend William White, who was elected the first bishop of the Episcopalian Church in America. Also on the board was Horace Binney, a Quaker and practicing attorney, who was at one time considered for appointment to the U.S. Supreme Court, but he declined, citing his desire to remain in Philadelphia.[19] Jacob Gratz was a member of a prominent Jewish family in Philadelphia, and as with other members of his family and his colleagues, sat on a number of boards of societies and organizations.[20] Franklin Bache, who later replaced Reverend White as president of the board of directors, was a distinguished physician and an active member of the city's Temperance Society.

Once constituted, the board quickly became involved in the design and planning of the new institution, even though none of them had any personal knowledge of deaf children, or had a relative who was deaf. Instead they were motivated both by philanthropy and the eagerness to participate in the redesign of the city of Philadelphia. In one of the board's first statements, authored by Roberts Vaux and signed by each member of the board, they proclaimed:

> Among the various efforts of Philanthropy and Learning, to enlarge the circle of human happiness and knowledge, none, perhaps, should rank higher than those which have been directed to the discovery and application of means for the instruction of the deaf and

> dumb . . . [and we are] Desirous . . . of extending the benefits of instruction, and with it the incomparable solace of rational social intercourse to that portion of our fellow beings who are deprived of the faculties of speech and hearing.[21]

They believed that they were helping deaf children gain an education, but more grandly, they were building, one institution at a time, a massive system to address the changing composition of American society. As board members served on other boards, plans and ideas were exchanged among the different institutions. Roberts Vaux introduced to the school many of the same ideas he had used in designing the public school system in Philadelphia, in particular his fondness for the Lancasterian model of education. Students would be taught in groups and supervised by "monitors" or teachers who would sit at the head of the class, replacing the individual tutorial arrangement that was in place during the colonial period. Because so many children needed to be grouped together in a classroom, strict control of behavior was required to maintain order.[22] Education not only introduced new skills, but it was also, first and foremost, intended to instill a code of moral conduct among children, especially among the poor or immigrants, whose upbringing was considered less than ideal.

Shortly after the school opened, the board decided that providing instruction alone was not sufficient; the children would also need to live at the school so that the totality of the institution's effect could be impressed on them. Deaf children who were wont to run without inhibition in the street would be brought into the institution and taught the proper manner of conduct both in their learning and their social behaviors. As with the plans for building orphanages, prisons, and other institutions, the new school was to command control of the entire body of the child, not only to educate, but also to feed and house—to turn the child into a being of intelligence and proper conduct. A new "asylum" would be erected such that "the pupils may be suitably accommodated, since

it is indispensably necessary for the well-ordering of the establishment that the children be more withdrawn from publick intercourse, and that a seperation [*sic*] of the sexes be more rigidly enforced."[23] Further, on admission, parents or guardians were required to affix their signature to an agreement as follows: "Whereas the Pennsylvania Institution for the Deaf and Dumb has admitted (my son, daughter, or ward, as the case may be) into the asylum, for the purpose of instruction, and has also agreed to educate (or educate, clothe, and maintain, as the case may be) him or her, during the time he or she may remain under its care, free of charge to me, I hereby relinquish him or her to the sole control of the said institution."[24] In a city facing rapid population growth, institutions were seen as a means of managing its unfortunate citizens, in order to repair their condition and instill in them all manner of appropriate behavior.

One of the board's first actions was to appoint David Seixas the new principal of the school. He had become well-known in Philadelphia for his efforts with deaf children, and given his familiarity with the ideas of the Abbé de l'Epée, the directors believed him to be an ideal head for the new school.[25] Even with Seixas at the helm, the directors continued to meet frequently to discuss details of the new institution, from the appointment of teachers, to the design of its buildings, to how the children would be fed and clothed. They wrote frequent directives to Seixas regarding the hours of schooling, the size of the classrooms, and the curricula to be taught.[26] A Women's Committee was constituted to work with the matron who supervised the girls' living quarters.[27] An equally distinguished group of Philadelphia women served on the committee, including Roberts Vaux's wife, Margaret Wistar, also from an active philanthropic family, and Rebecca Gratz, the sister of Jacob Gratz.

Once installed as the head of the board's education committee, Vaux impressed on the directors his ideals for equal education for all, including the poor. The institution would be open to all deaf

children, those with the ability to pay tuition and those who were indigent. At first, the school was supported by "subscriptions," or private contributions from wealthy Philadelphia citizens, but the directors soon recognized that private contributions alone would not be sufficient to support the school, and that if they were to hold to the ideal of an education for poor and disabled children, the state would have to be persuaded to contribute regularly to the school's treasury. In January 1821, two board members, accompanied by David Seixas and six of their students, traveled to the Pennsylvania legislature in Harrisburg and after a short presentation, succeeded in convincing the state to begin supporting the institution. For those without the ability to pay, the state would provide $160 per child per annum for a term of schooling not to exceed three years. The school admitted twenty-five students in its first year of operation, and after only one year, enrollment grew so quickly that their original quarters became too small, and the school relocated to another building in the city.[28]

Barely a year after the Pennsylvania Institution for the Deaf and Dumb opened its doors, the board of directors was delivered a shocking accusation. The mother of Letitia Ford, a fourteen-year-old admitted to the school as an indigent, complained to a member of the board that the principal, David Seixas, had been "taking hold of and pinching [her daughter's] thighs, taking her by the nose and ear and pulling them," and then "made her (the daughter) an offer of a dollar and also to give her fine cloths from which she could only believe that he mediated the seduction of her daughter."[29] In just a few years, David Seixas had achieved a not small amount of celebrity and accolades for his work at the school, so the accusation was wholly unexpected. Deciding the complaint was serious, the board appointed a committee of its lawyer members to conduct an investigation.[30]

The committee members approached the matron, Mary Cowgill,

and asked if she had observed any improprieties in the principal's conduct toward his students. She confessed that she had, but had to date been reluctant to inform them. Beginning her account, she explained that "going one morning into the chamber of the girls before breakfast [she] received a complaint from Letitia Ford . . . that David Seixas had during the night just past visited that chamber . . . and particularly had come to the bedside of [another female pupil] Catherine Hartman and herself, placed his hands on the bed and taken hold of her leg, that Catherine Hartman her bedfellow whose foot he had also taken hold of, was excessively alarmed." In response, the matron had the lock on their door repaired, and a bedstead propped against their door.[31]

A few months later, in May of 1821, another student, Eliza Williams, "on coming down stairs to tea from the schoolroom, where she had been detained by the Principal after the dismissal of the class, on account of some misbehavior, appeared greatly agitated and immediately after tea complained with expressions of disgust against David Seixas, of his having kissed her." The matron called in another student who had been with Eliza and claimed the student confirmed the account. Shortly after, despite her precautions to lock their chamber door, the girls again complained to the matron that Seixas was entering their rooms at night without a candle. The cook, whose bed was in the same room as the girls', gave an account: "She soon discovered it was Mr. Seixas from the light of the lamp in the street and its being a clear starlight night, he came in very quietly, was undressed above his waist but she was not sure that he had his pantaloons off, from his silent tread she was sure he had no shoes on—he looked about the chamber and soon left it, closing the door after him very carefully."[32]

The next obvious course of action would be to interview the female pupils to determine if in fact their accounts were consistent with the matron's, but none on the committee or the board could understand the pupils at all. The students signed but the directors

did not. They were entirely dependent on the matron for any information from their deaf charges: "Aware of the difficulty that would occur in obtaining testimony from those of the unfortunate pupils of the Institution whom they intended to examine, if dependant [*sic*] altogether upon their own means of eliciting it from them determined to call in the aid of the matron, whose superior knowledge of the requisite signs would render this part of their duty much more satisfactory themselves as well as to the board." Through the matron, the committee posed questions to Letitia Ford, but she seemed unable to understand all the questions they wanted to ask. "Finding she could not comprehend other questions stated to her recourse was had to signs which by the same means she most expressively showed us that David had visited the girls' chamber at night that he came to the bed of herself and bedfellow Catherine Hartman at night and first placed his hand under the clothes on C. Hartman and then placed it over to her, after which he walked round the foot of the bed and attempted to turn down the clothes which he seized hold of, when he hugged and kissed her."[33]

Brought before the committee and the board to answer these accusations, David Seixas was outraged at the students' "inventive slanders." Yes, he had entered their chambers, but it was for entirely innocent reasons. He had once kissed the hand of Eliza Williams, upon praising her for her good progress in his classroom, but nothing more. But "while she wore a smile on her face, her heart was wrinkled with anger," because she shortly after gave the matron the impression he had gone further. As for his forays into their bedchambers at night, he had noticed on several occasions that they had left their candles burning, at great danger of fire to themselves, so he had entered their rooms to put out the candles. On one occasion, he had opened their door long enough to throw a pint of water inside the rooms to quiet the girls because they had been making noises in their chamber, but under no circumstances

had he ever conducted any sort of impropriety toward them, certainly not hugging or kissing them. Seixas was indignant: "Those pupils had been by me generally collected from the alleys and courts of our suburbs, their parentage was lower than humble and obscure and in some cases, it originated in the dregs of society. Already before their entrance into the Asylum, I had fed many, clothed some and instructed all. I had rescued them from a stage of vagrancy, I had raised them to partial habits of mental and physical industry, I beheld them elevated by the labours that resulted from my own personal sacrifices . . . Who cultivates a vegetable—who rears an animal, a brute—and yet feels not a kindred like sensation?" Seixas admitted to no more than an "affectionate vigilance" for his pupils, and was bitterly disappointed to find they had turned against him with "suspicions of criminality."[34]

Upon receiving the report of the investigative committee and Seixas's response, the board began to deliberate whether Seixas should be dismissed from his duties as principal.[35] Immediately the board divided in half. On one side were those who believed Seixas had no cause to enter their bedrooms at night in the first place, and more, that there was enough evidence he may have conducted himself inappropriately with respect to hugging and kissing the girls. On the other side were those who believed Seixas was entirely innocent and had acquitted himself by explaining inconsistencies in the female pupils' accounts of their interactions with him. Seixas argued that after the matron was informed of Letitia Ford's mother's complaints, she began to regard him differently, viewing even innocent actions on his part as potentially perverse.

As the board deliberated in executive session, several motions were made, each failing until a motion to dismiss Seixas only for having improperly entered the girls' chamber at night passed by a narrow margin.[36] The board's decision to release Seixas from his employment drew calls of outrage from the Philadelphia community. Newspapers and pamphlets were published in his defense, and friends rallied to his support. Citing the narrow majority vote,

his supporters claimed he had been dismissed on indefensible grounds. Some charged that anti-Semitism had caused his harsh treatment and disregard for his many accomplishments both for the school and for the community at large. As a further show of support, Seixas's friends and sympathizers helped to found a rival institution, the Philadelphia Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb, which lasted only a few years until the state legislature declined to provide funding for the asylum, instead favoring the Pennsylvania Institution for the Deaf and Dumb.[37]

Roberts Vaux complained later in a confidential letter to a friend that he still believed Seixas had committed wrongdoing, and that those on the board who were "showing mercy to Seixas . . . could not do justice to the helpless and exposed beings under his charge."[38] Seixas had undermined public trust in his new institution, and for this Vaux was deeply shaken.[39]

The nineteenth-century institution was a means of education as well as a separately organized *place* of education. It was conceived as a way to remove the afflicted—the deaf, the blind, the insane, and the criminal—"from the streets" where they were wont to wander without constraint, and place them in more regimented environments. As they met to make plans for the school, the directors of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Deaf and Dumb immediately began planning how to raise funds for a new building.

Indeed, Rothman describes reformers of New York and Pennsylvania, including Vaux and his contemporaries, as greatly occupied with the details of the architecture of their institutions—the rooms within, the ways in which the occupants would be separated from one another, and how they would travel between the different parts of the building: "Unlike their predecessors, they turned all their attention inward, to the divisions of time and space within the institution."[40] They viewed the design of buildings as "one of the most important of the *moral* sciences," since it was believed

that controlling the movement of bodies within space would be the means by which rehabilitation would be accomplished.

Vaux's ideas for the Pennsylvania Institution for the Deaf and Dumb were borrowed freely from his participation in the planning of other institutions. While serving on the board of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, Vaux was also deeply involved in the planning and design of a new penitentiary for Pennsylvania. Through his research and correspondence with reformers in England and elsewhere in Europe, he devised a plan based on the idea that the best path to rehabilitation was to enforce a rigid physical separation between criminals. While other states proposed enforcing silence and prohibiting communication among criminals, Vaux wanted actual physical separation. Ryon traced Vaux's commitment to this system to his Quaker heritage: "Thoughts of beating and chaining their fellowmen repelled them, and they believed the silent meditations of the meeting house would be matched in penitentiaries where inmates could not disturb one another. They trusted in the power of association, good and bad, and argued that a prisoner who saw and talked only to pious, dedicated visitors chosen by the state or by private organizations would feel their influence."[41]

Vaux's sentiments about the correct treatment of prisoners were not much different than his beliefs about how to educate deaf children. As the directors planned who should be employed in the institution, they sought individuals of "moral deportment . . . benevolent dispositions and a philosophic cast of mind."[42] Education would be carried out in a new building that would separate female and male students, and spaces would be designated within the school for sleeping, eating, and education. Likewise, as with his plans for inmates in the new penitentiary, Vaux insisted that the Pennsylvania Institution for the Deaf and Dumb deem it "absolutely necessary by law to forbid corporal punishment in the asylum." Instead of flogging and other forms of physical abuse, Vaux and his contemporaries conceived of a new future shaped by

changed environments—in the design of buildings, in the correct choice of teachers and caretakers, and in the planning of a healthful and moral educational curriculum.[43]

Nineteenth-century institutions for deaf pupils retrieved deaf children from their homes around the city and in neighboring areas, indeed "rescued" them, but once brought to the institution, began to regulate their movements in the interests of education and rehabilitation. Where once deaf children and young adults had lived among their neighbors, working alongside family members and other members of their community, they were now removed from homes and workplaces and brought to new places of association. As they were identified as "deaf and dumb" and brought into the institution, they became "inmates" and objects of study. Shortly after the Pennsylvania Institution for the Deaf and Dumb appointed Seixas as their principal, they also appointed two "respectable" physicians who would attend to their pupils in the school. From the start, as the institution brought children into its care, there began a set of practices designed to name, identify, medically classify, and rehabilitate the deaf pupils.[44]

It is perhaps ironic then that so soon after the school opened its doors and admitted its first class of deaf pupils, there was a scandal over *bodies.* It is hard to determine from the record whether the principal of the school, David Seixas, in fact "indecently" touched the female pupils under his care. Crucially we have no direct report of what the deaf female pupils experienced, except when mediated through the matron and others' accounts of their "pantomime," most of which Seixas vigorously refutes. In his own words, though, Seixas does admit to an "affectionate vigilance" for his students; he admits to kissing their hands and expresses sentiments of "attachment." He did visit their rooms as they slept, though as he says, to be sure their candles were not left burning. He did touch them in their beds, but only to reassure them that he was vigilant in their care.

What could have compelled Seixas to collect the deaf children

he saw playing on the streets outside his shop those few years before? Was he drawn to pursue the Enlightenment question of whether a human being exists before language, and before training brings it into being? Did he see in the deaf children the possibility of answering age-old questions about the relationship between the senses and the mind? Or was he drawn to their exoticism, the mesmerizing difference of their gestural language? Did he wonder at their playfulness and liveliness despite the fact that they live without sound? Once he began to care for them in a captive community, did his gaze become more proprietary—and sexualized?

In his classic analysis of prisons and asylums, Foucault describes institutions as creating in those who build them a new power not only to observe, but also to label and regulate the movements of individuals. Because there is an imbalance of power, where caretakers have the power to watch and the patients do not, Foucault describes institutions as channeling the sentiments of caretakers from sensations of power to ones of erotic desire for those who are watched: "They were fixed by a gaze, isolated and animated by the attention they received. Power operated as a mechanism of attraction; it drew out those peculiarities over which it kept watch. Pleasure spread to the power that harried it; power anchored the pleasure it uncovered."[45]

The imbalance of power is deepened by the fact that the watched and the observed do not, indeed, *cannot* speak on their behalf. When the directors of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Deaf and Dumb tried to interview the young women to determine whether in fact Seixas had done the things that were claimed, they found them essentially "dumb," and unable to speak. Although it would have been relatively easy to understand the girls in sign language, their testimonies were filtered through the matron, and thus reduced to hearsay. When the students were deprived of a voice of their own, David Seixas could claim that the directors had misunderstood the young women's pantomime, or that the ma-

tron was ill-disposed against Seixas. The most insidious effect of institutions designed in this way, in Foucault's words, is the silencing of those under their care. They are rendered mute. Further deepening their silence was the fact that the women were from poor families whose claim to public charity was fragile and tenuous.

Thus is the conflicting legacy of the nineteenth-century institution: it brought education to deaf children and brought them together in a sign language community, even as it made this community more vulnerable to abuses of power. The first schools for deaf children in the United States were not private or exclusive, but were built with the intention to educate the wealthy and the indigent alike. Many of these schools actively sought out deaf children isolated in remote townships and urged their parents to let them attend school with other deaf children.

Once the students came to the school, a new language community began to develop. The board of directors of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Deaf and Dumb made scant reference to the fact that their pupils were already using sign language at the time they arrived at the school because for them, signing was a given, and its presence in the school was unproblematic.[46] After dismissing David Seixas as principal, they employed Laurent Clerc, the principal of the school for the deaf in Hartford, whose position in support of sign language in the education of deaf children was known to all. The school did not see signing as controversial; indeed the minutes of the board of directors were marked by a general absence of any debate about its presence in the first decades of its founding. The nineteenth-century institution sustained language communities by providing stable access to sign language to generations of young deaf children.

Sign language communities aside, the troubling side of the legacy of the nineteenth-century institution is its design. Foucault describes asylums as organized not only by *silence*—both the oppressive silencing of its "inmates," or pupils, and the reciprocal silence

of the caretakers, usually those who are not deaf and do not sign well—but also by what he calls *perpetual judgment,* or the constant reminders to the inmates of the nature of their condition, what he calls "a sort of invisible tribunal in permanent session."[47] Roberts Vaux and his contemporaries conceived of the highly centralized design of institutions as a way for the benevolent and patriarchal caretaker to exert moral principles on those who were afflicted with disability. But as Vaux would discover to his dismay, the highly centralized form of caretaking too easily led to abuse of all types, from sexual to physical and emotional. Vaux believed good intentions could guide institutions, but Foucault argues otherwise: that powerlessness and repression were built directly into the design of the nineteenth-century institution. Their directors failed to observe within themselves the seeds of abuse that come from unchecked power over people unlike themselves.

Sadly, the troubled legacy of the nineteenth-century school for the deaf would persist into the twentieth century. In 2001, the Maine State Legislature authorized the payment of damages to a group of former students at the Maine School for the Deaf who suffered years of physical and sexual abuse. They allege that the school's isolated location on a bucolic island off the eastern coast of Maine, together with indifference from the state and its board of directors, allowed staff members to continue to inflict abuse on their deaf students, even when the children and their parents complained.[48] Other deaf schools have had similar scandals.

Foucault observed in asylums a third principle of power and control. In addition to *silence* and *perpetual judgment,* he explains what he calls *recognition by mirror,* or the act of humiliating inmates by showing them that they are not as extraordinary as they believe because others have the same condition. In a repressive asylum, the effect is to dis-empower inmates by making them feel less unique, reduced in the end to being nothing more than insane. Where the inmate may once have believed in a manic moment that he was royalty, the exaltation is lost when confronted with

other inmates who also believe themselves to be the King of France. The inmate discovers the condition (of being manic) and is deflated, or as Foucault says, "would see itself as spectacle."[49]

Paradoxically, the very same quality of recognition, in a humanistic environment, can be used to liberate. This may be what makes schools for the deaf such compelling places. When deaf students arrive at a school for the deaf and see for the first time not only deaf students but also Deaf adults as staff, teachers, and principals, or even superintendents, there is recognition of the self in the other—not necessarily as identical, but as possibles. In more simple terms, deaf children see in others ways of living that they might imagine for themselves. The child no longer feels alone, freakish, or wholly responsible for oneself—no longer royalty perhaps, but finally, human in a community of others. In her autobiography, the French deaf actress Emmanuelle Laborit tells the story of a deaf friend who discovers as a teenager that she is not, as her parents have told her, the only deaf person in the world. Enraged, she confronts her parents and asks why they gave her such a belief; their reply was that "it was for her own good."[50]

Today, nearly all schools for the deaf founded in the nineteenth century have redesigned themselves and shaken off their older appearances. Some, like the Maryland School for the Deaf, have scaled down their institutional architecture and replaced their buildings with more modest structures. The California School for the Deaf moved from its original campus in Berkeley, built in 1868, to another location farther south, using the opportunity to build a new campus with smaller one-story buildings and cottages instead of large dormitories. The Pennsylvania Institution for the Deaf and Dumb moved four times in its history, increasing in size each time until it settled in 1842 on a large plot of land in Mount Airy, a then-rural outpost of Philadelphia.[51] By 1984, however, the school could no longer expect enrollments large enough to justify its

outsized campus and the number of large buildings, leading it to sell its campus and move to a smaller former military academy for boys.

Whereas institutions for the deaf once claimed the entire lives of deaf students, housing them for weeks and months at a time, many of them now have sharply reduced or abandoned their residential programs. Either students don't board at all at the school, or they go home at the end of each week if they live too far to commute daily. The common experience of deaf students prior to the 1950s, when they endured long separations from home and family, has vanished. In the twenty-first century, the body of the deaf child now no longer belongs entirely to the school—instead, responsibility for the child is shared by families, school districts, doctors, and other professionals, each competing for the child. Recognizing this, schools for the deaf now "market" themselves as a choice.

When Deaf adults talk about their memories as children, most will remember their years at a school for the deaf. These are memories of lifelong friendships that were formed in the schools, and childhoods spent together in a small community. The memories are sometimes poetic and nostalgic, as when Patrick Graybill recited a poem about watching as a child from his parents' car as they drove the long distance from his small hometown to the Kansas School for the Deaf in Olathe. As the car approached the school, he would begin to see the water tower, marking the spot of the school underneath, drawing him close to a community of friends and Deaf adults whom he remembers as having a deep and positive influence on his life. Some will talk of images of separation. Bernard Bragg tells of the emotional moment when his mother brought him to Fanwood, the New York School for the Deaf, to begin school for the first time, and then after a kiss at the doorstep,

she turned and quickly left him. Ted Supalla remembers an unexpected moment when a hearing child from the neighborhood outside the school unwittingly rode a bicycle across the campus of the Washington School for the Deaf. Through a simple act, he had pierced the school's boundaries and violated the segregation of deaf children inside the school from those hearing children living outside. Some schools for the deaf to this day have iron fences and gates, a holdover from a time when the boundaries were clear and crossing them was imagined to be dangerous.

Older deaf people recall a world where the choice was either to go to a school for the deaf, or remain home alone and isolated. Deaf men and women born during the first half of the twentieth century remember a time when all their friends graduated from a school for the deaf, so to ask where someone is "from" is to ask which school they attended, not where they were born. Younger deaf people talk about schools for the deaf as places of self-discovery. When a Deaf acquaintance was a teenager, she demanded that her parents enroll her in a school for the deaf because she had grown tired of navigating the social and psychological demands of a high school with hearing students, and she wanted to explore being deaf with other deaf teenagers.

In recent years when desegregation of public schools has been so hard fought, it seems odd to choose to be separate, but for many deaf children and their families, the choice is a conscious one, made despite a wariness about institutions and segregation. At schools for the deaf, Deaf students can sign with their principals and the office secretary. They can be tutored by the teacher's aide, and sign up for wrestling with a Deaf coach. Their teachers are often Deaf and were themselves educated at a school for the deaf, which allows them to offer shared experiences with students. Indeed, this is the most compelling characteristic of schools for the deaf: They offer education and community in sign language, and create for their students possibilities of social interaction that

would otherwise be difficult or strained in a hearing school. In their "apart-ness," schools for the deaf offer safe harbor for deaf students who find being alone—or with a small group of other deaf peers immersed among hearing people—too difficult to endure.

Schools for the deaf in the twenty-first century carry within their walls and inside their fences the legacy of an older time. Buildings have been demolished or entirely redesigned, in hopes that new spaces may lead schools to be more humane places. The boundaries of the school have become more flexible and porous. No longer are deaf children separated so severely from their families. There are experiments with educating deaf children both inside and outside school walls—as in the case of deaf children who spend half their day at a public school and return to the deaf school in the afternoons. In another experiment, the city of New York converted P.S. 47, a former public school for deaf children, into a bilingual school that also admits hearing children who use ASL (either because their parents are deaf, or they have learned ASL as a second language). The school carries out the ideal of education in a language community but does not segregate deaf children. These are tantalizing experiments because they try to reconcile the benefits of schools for deaf children with the ideals of integration. Deaf people firmly believe in the power of education to save deaf children, so the question lingers: How can deaf children be educated within a community, as Deaf people wish, without falling into the trap of the nineteenth-century asylum where their bodies are managed and rendered powerless? The answer seems almost at hand, but it requires imagination for a new generation of deaf children.