

DOWN A silenttrail

More than 120 years ago, the government delved into the family lives of members of the deaf community. Discover why and how the information collected can help you with your research for both hearing and deaf relatives today.

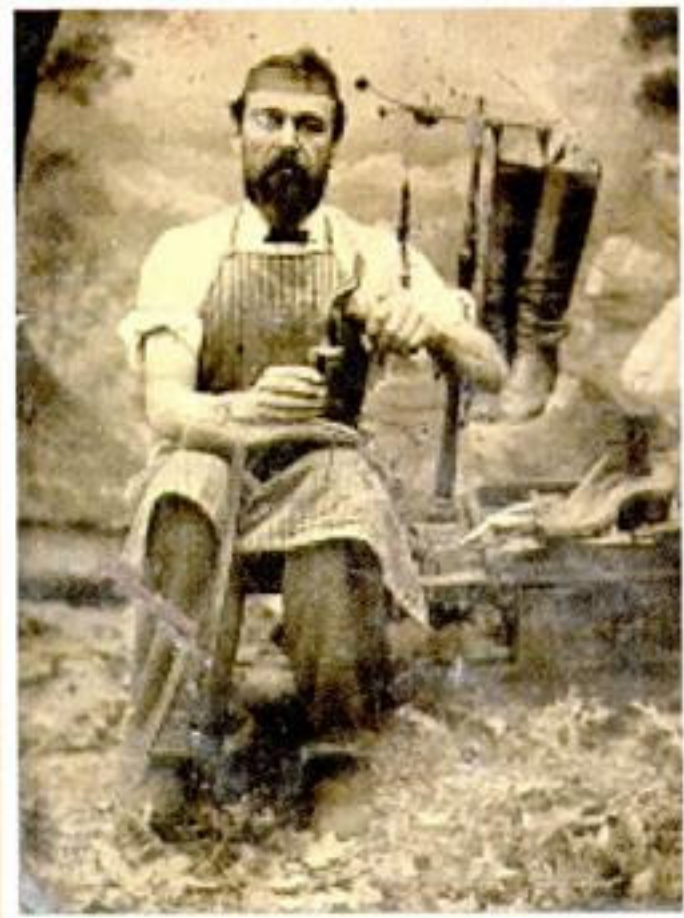
BY C. A. FANARA

MEET RICHARD NORRIS, A SHOEMAKER from 19th-century Virginia. He supported a family. He attended church. But unlike many other people in the 19th century, Richard Norris was a deaf man who used sign language.

You may have come across a relative in your family history research identified as “deaf and dumb,” “deaf mute,” or, unfortunately, sometimes as “imbecile.” But if you failed to delve a little further into the life of that deaf relative, you may have made a huge mistake — the deaf world has rich genealogical collections that you may not know about.

Let me explain: when I say our deaf world, I’m referring to institutions and organizations that hold records specifically about the deaf. Resources about our deaf relatives in the United States can be traced back to the foundation of the first school for the deaf in Hartford, Connecticut, called the American Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb in 1817 (now the American School for the Deaf).

Back in the 1800s, deaf children and even some deaf adults would attend state schools for the deaf because this was often the only education available to them. By the start of the 20th century, enrollment in state schools for the deaf began to decline as other educational systems, such as tutors and oral schools for the deaf, became more widely available.



NORRIS AT WORK:

Richard Norris was a shoemaker, a father, and he was deaf. A unique record trail helped uncover more family details.



State schools and other specialized resources and fields of study, however, meant that numerous records were generated on behalf of the deaf. The most valuable may be a circa 1890 special census on deaf marriages. Other records can be found at schools for the deaf, state archives, the Gallaudet University Archives, and in deaf journals and newspapers.

My Interest

It was one of my clients who wanted to know all about Richard Norris, his ancestor, and whether there were other deaf members in his family he didn't know about. All the client knew was that Richard Norris had two deaf daughters, Fannie and Mary. Fannie was the mother of my client's favorite grandmother, whom he called "Drandma."

Drandma had passed on to my client story after story about Richard Norris and Fannie. Because Richard was born in 1833, I turned to the special census on deaf marriages to see if there was information on him. Richard would have been 47 in 1890, which made him a prime candidate for this special census.

The special census itself has an interesting history. According to the 1889 *American Annals of the Deaf*, a proposal was presented before the 1890 census commissioner, the Honorable Robert D. Porter, recommending that the 1890 census takers bring a separate form to give to deaf persons, which they could send back to Edward Fay, editor of the *Annals of the Deaf*. A deal was reached that included adding a new column to the 1890 census record for indicating whether a person was sufficiently deaf as to not be able to hear loud conversation; notes were also to be taken regarding the cause of deafness. This information was later copied by hand onto cards.

According to Ulf Hedberg, director of the Gallaudet University Archives in Washington, D.C., another, separate inquiry intended to study deaf marriages was being sent to deaf schools and members of the deaf community beginning in 1889. Various people gathered the information: school administrators, scholars, and even Fay himself.

The purpose of the separate inquiry was to determine

whether Alexander Graham Bell's theory that deaf marriages would produce deaf offspring was accurate. It was believed that if Bell's theory was correct, new legislation banning marriage between deaf people might be enacted.

More than 4,000 of the deaf marriage inquiries and cards were returned to Fay, who collected and analyzed the data along with information provided in the U.S. federal census from 1890.

Hands On

Hedberg, whose team at the Gallaudet University Archives has been working with the deaf marriage inquiries, was able to provide me with the one completed by Richard Norris. That's when I discovered the breadth of family information each contained.

Hearing relatives of the deaf person were included in each of the inquiry's questionnaires. Richard Norris's completed questionnaire documented his family, his hearing parents and sibling, plus all birthdates and other pertinent data. I learned about an uncle who served in the Civil War and that Richard had six children rather than just the two we knew of.

Of the six children, two were listed as being deaf: Mary and Charles. Fannie was 3 years old at the time of the questionnaire, so her father may not have known yet that she was deaf since the family was said to have communicated via sign language. While Richard's wife was not deaf, her parents and siblings are also included on the document.

The questionnaire notes that Richard attended school in Virginia, which translates into the Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind at Staunton, Virginia.

State schools for the deaf were a crucial part of the deaf person's life and the deaf community. Their school records often include much more information than those of a regular hearing student, which normally contain only the student's name, birth date and birthplace, and the name of his or her parents.

Knowing this, I requested Richard Norris's record from the Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind. I had no idea

Did Fay Prove Bell Wrong?

Statistics from Fay's deaf marriage questionnaires showed that only about 8.67 percent of children born to two deaf parents were themselves deaf. Fay also concluded that marriages between two deaf individuals were happier than marriages between one hearing and one deaf partner. Nonetheless, numerous states had eugenics laws that called for the sterilization of various groups of people with "socially undesirable" habits or traits. Included in these groups were deaf persons.

what the record would show because information varies from one state school to another. I was delighted when I received it: it contained Richard's marriage information, his death date, what he died of, where he was buried, and the names of his deaf children (Mary, Charles, and Fannie), each of whom also attended the school.

Why You Should Look

As a researcher, it's easy to overlook a deaf child in the family. A deaf child may not have been enumerated with the family if he or she was in a state school. The deafness of a person living with other relatives may be missed: on census forms in 1830 and 1840, the column indicating deafness was on the second page; in 1850, 1860, and 1870, written notations ("deaf and dumb," "deaf mute," even "imbecile") were made. Each of these could indicate that other, richer family records may be available.

Fay's collection isn't perfect. While he notes in his 1898 publication *Marriages of the Deaf in America* that the collection is "more or less complete," there are still plenty of omissions. For example, schools for the deaf were segregated, and it doesn't appear as though Fay studied families of the children in schools for deaf African Americans. And while according to the Department of the Interior's Abstract of the Eleventh Census, in 1890 there were more than 40,000 persons

labeled as "deaf and dumb" in America. Fay received questionnaires regarding just under 4,500 deaf marriages; it's estimated that 30,000 people were included in the returned questionnaires.

However it never hurts to look. If there is a deaf relative in your family tree, dig a little deeper, find out if and where that person went to school and if a deaf marriage questionnaire was submitted. You never know what you may find — about both your deaf ancestor and hearing relatives.

C. A. FANARA lives in Madison, Wisconsin. She is a genealogical researcher specializing in deaf genealogy and a published author. She can be reached at alibgt@earthlink.net.

Copy
118-13
Coke

no 2951

Marriage Record
of
Richard Norris and Eliza McPherson

1. Date of Marriage: 1895
2. Place of Marriage: New Union, Alabama
3. Name of bride: Eliza McPherson
4. Name of groom: Richard Norris
5. Date of birth of bride: 1873
6. Date of birth of groom: 1873
7. Name of children: Mary, Charles, Fannie
8. Date of death of children: Mary 1895, Charles 1895, Fannie 1895
9. Name of parents of bride: John McPherson, Mary McPherson
10. Name of parents of groom: John Norris, Mary Norris
11. Name of witnesses: John Norris, Mary Norris, John McPherson, Mary McPherson
12. Name of officiant: John Norris
13. Date of record: 1895

QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED BY MARRIAGE

1. Full name of your father: John Norris
2. Name of your mother before marriage: Mary Norris
3. Was your father related before marriage? No
4. Was your mother related before marriage? No
5. Give any other details known relating to parents: for example names of death, date of death, age at death, etc., where possible
6. Date of marriage: 1895
7. Name of bride: Eliza McPherson
8. Name of groom: Richard Norris
9. Date of birth of bride: 1873
10. Date of birth of groom: 1873
11. Name of children: Mary, Charles, Fannie
12. Date of death of children: Mary 1895, Charles 1895, Fannie 1895
13. Name of parents of bride: John McPherson, Mary McPherson
14. Name of parents of groom: John Norris, Mary Norris
15. Name of witnesses: John Norris, Mary Norris, John McPherson, Mary McPherson
16. Name of officiant: John Norris
17. Date of record: 1895

DETAILS DETAILS: Richard Norris's questionnaire includes details about other family members, including the number of children Norris had (6), how many were deaf (2), plus each child's name. Names and birthdates for Norris's siblings are also recorded, as are the number of them who were deaf (0 — Norris was the only child in his family who was deaf).

Resources to Check

Special Census on Deaf Family Marriages and Hearing Relatives, 1888–1895. Keyed through the Ancestry World Archives Project, this collection, consisting of the questionnaires returned to Dr. Fay, will be searchable and viewable this summer at Ancestry.com. Search by individual, spouse, and parents. Add the What's Happening at Ancestry.com widget to your Ancestry.com homepage to find out exactly when the collection becomes available.

Deaf Journals and Newspapers. Find out which deaf journals and newspapers are indexed and available via the Gallaudet University Archives online database <<http://archives.gallaudet.edu>>.

You'll also find records for students who previously attended Gallaudet.

State Schools for the Deaf. Richard Norris's alma mater, the Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind, had a newspaper called the *Virginia Guide*. Their 15 June 1911 issue, page 5, featured a small article about Richard's daughter Fannie and her marriage to Grover Cleveland Poole and a mention that they had moved to Grover's hometown of Raleigh, North Carolina. Look for information about the school your deaf relative attended to help you track down older records you don't know about. State archives may also hold records.

DeafBiographies.com. Created by genealogist Amy Johnson Crow, CG, the site features biographical information about deaf Americans through the early 20th century. Richard Norris's 1850 census record appears on the site. You'll also find information about certain schools for the deaf.

Defective, Dependent, and Delinquent (DDD) Non-population Census Schedules. Non-population schedules that often included detailed information about deaf persons, both institutionalized and living at home. Access them through NARA; a few are also digitized and accessible from Ancestry.com.

Names of pensioners for revolutionary or military services.	Ages.	Names of heads of families with whom pensioners resided June 1, 1840.	Names of pensioners for revolutionary or military services.	Ages.	Names of heads of families with whom pensioners resided June 1, 1840.
FRANKLIN—Continued. LEVERETT. William Winchester	80	Daniel Gardner.	FRANKLIN—Continued. ERVING. Asa Albu	87	Asa H. Albu.

Non-Population Options

BY JANA SLOAN BROGLIN, C.G.

THERE'S MORE TO THE CENSUS than just population schedules. Look through the following non-population schedules to see what else you can learn about your family:

- **Mortality.** Mortality schedules were compiled from 1850 through 1885 and recorded deaths that occurred during the year preceding each census. The 1850 schedule asked for name, age, sex, color, if married or widowed, place of birth, occupation, month of death, cause of death, and number of days ill. Information about the parents of the deceased appeared on later schedules. Causes of death listed in the 1860 mortality schedule for Ohio, for example, include putrid, sore throat, congestion of brain, black tongue, worms, black jaundice, teething, and lock-jaw. Minnesota also has a mortality schedule for 1900. These schedules can be helpful in areas where there are no death certificates, provided your ancestor died during the 365 days prior to the census date. Check Ancestry.com for available records.
- **Veterans (Special 1890 Census).** An act dated 1 March 1889 called for a special census in 1890 that included the names of Union soldiers or their widows, regiment, date of enlistment and discharge, address, and any physical ailments or disabilities brought about by service. While this census was intended to be of Civil War Union veterans, it also contains soldiers from the War of 1812, the Mexican War, and the Confederacy. Schedules were arranged alphabetically by state; only schedules for half of Kentucky and for all states that appear alphabetically thereafter survived the 1921 fire. Find the the Special 1890 Census schedules at Ancestry.com by searching "A Census of Pensioners" in the Card Catalog.
- **Slaves.** Taken only in 1850 and 1860, these schedules list the owner's name or the person with whom the slave lived; number of slaves owned; number of slaves manumitted; whether deaf-mute, blind, insane, or idiotic; and whether the slave was a fugitive from the state. Ancestry.com has the 1850 schedules available for 17 states plus the District of Columbia and 16 states plus the District of Columbia for the 1860 census. Search the Ancestry.com Card Catalog for "slave schedules" to find them quickly.
- **Agriculture.** The census included an agricultural schedule from 1850 through 1880. Farms had to meet various acreage and production requirements to be included, and the 1880 schedule has more than twice as many questions as the 1870 schedule. An example from the Fulton County, Ohio, schedule for M.R. Brailey in Swan Creek Township indicates that he had 40 acres of improved land and 500 unimproved acres on a farm valued at \$5,000. He had a horse, "milch" cows, sheep, and swine; grew wheat, Indian corn, Irish potatoes, and 15 tons of hay, but no peas, rice, rye, or oats; and produced 400 pounds of butter, but no cheese. Some of these schedules have been filmed, but few are currently indexed. Access these through the National Archives.
- **Manufacturing.** As early as 1810, an accounting was made of people involved in manufacturing, though in 1810, information was simply added in notes, and most schedules from this time have been lost. No manufacturing schedules were created in 1830 and 1840. The years 1850 through 1870 saw the name changed to Industrial Schedules. In 1880, the name reverted to Manufacturing Schedule and included information on 12 industries. The 1885 decennial census also included manufacturing data.
- **Defective, Dependent, Delinquent (DDD).** This schedule was included in 1880 to collect data to aid the government in budgeting for the building and maintenance of institutions and prisons, among other things. You'll find information about people incarcerated in prisons and jails, people considered deaf, the blind, the mentally handicapped, homeless children in institutions, and paupers and indigents. Ancestry.com currently has a portion of the South Carolina DDD; to find it, visit the Card Catalog and search for the keyword "non-population schedules."
- **Social Statistics.** These schedules are found from 1850 through 1870 and 1885 and were not gathered in all states. Statistics dealt with wealth, public debt, taxes, schools, libraries, newspapers, churches, wages, paupers, and criminals. Only 35, including the Dakota Territory and Washington, D.C., exist. These do not list names. Access these through the National Archives.

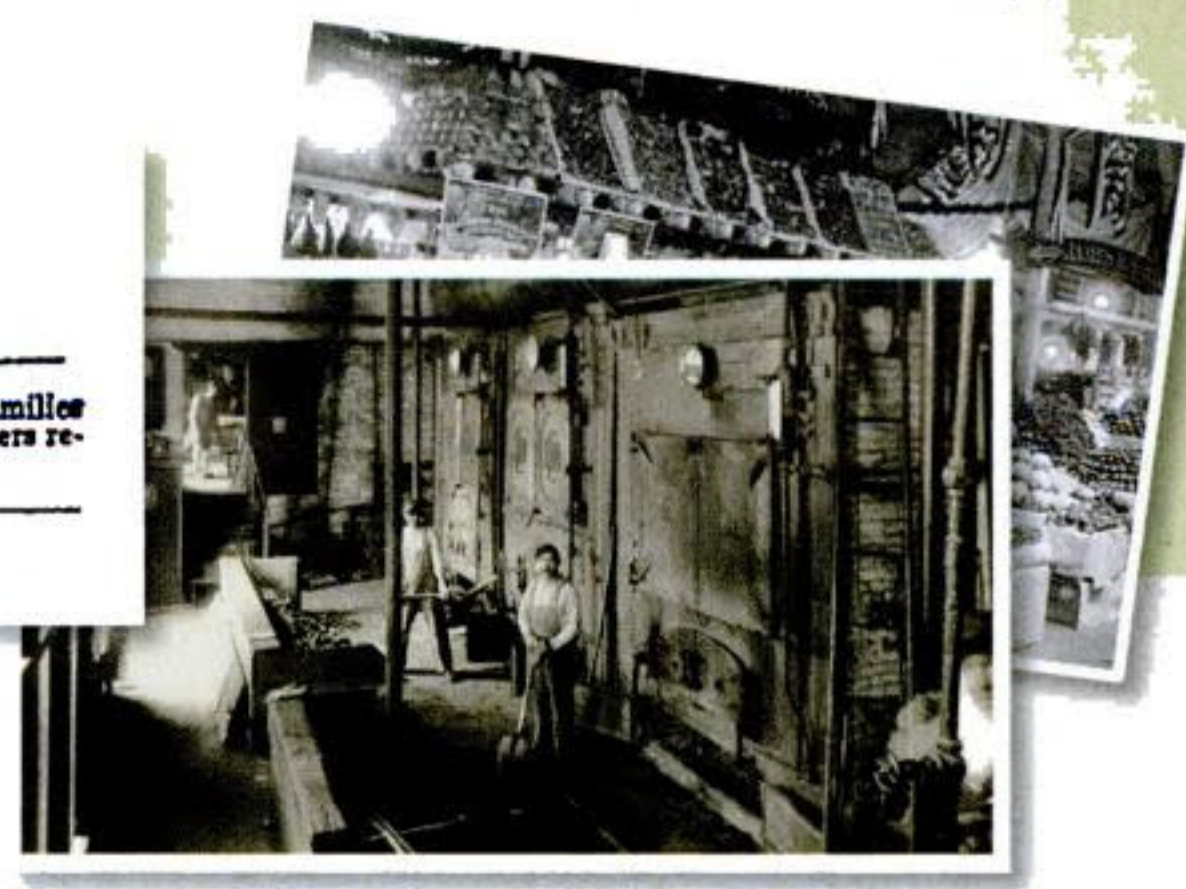


PHOTO BY JANA SLOAN BROGLIN