



DEAF HISTORY International

An Association for All Interested in the Study, Preservation, and Dissemination of Deaf People's History

No. 39

The DHI Newsletter

SUMMER 2009



7th INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON DEAF HISTORY
AUGUST 2009 STOCKHOLM, SWEDEN

Guided Tour of the Manilla School for the Deaf

7th DHI Conference a Success!

Welcome Reception at the City Hall



7th INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON DEAF HISTORY
AUGUST 2009 STOCKHOLM, SWEDEN

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The DHI Newsletter

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Notes from the Editor



The recent 7th DHI Conference in Stockholm, Sweden was a resounding success! A total of 211 participants from 31 countries attended this 5-day event (see breakdown on page 9 of this newsletter). Special thanks must go to the hard-working committee of the Swedish Deaf History Society (SDHS) who made the conference a spectacular and memorable experience.

Before I travelled to Sweden, I asked several people to write about the conference for our *DHI Newsletter*. Only a few were willing to accept my invitation to do so which is still good. In this issue, I hope that you will enjoy the following articles: "Our Eyes and Minds at the 2009 DHI Conference in Sweden" by E. Lynn Jacobowitz and Adonia K Smith (USA), and "New Perspectives in Researching Deaf History" by Corrie Tijsseling (The Netherlands). Two more articles about the conference by Breda Carty and Susannah Macready (Australia), and Yerker Andersson (USA) will be published in the Fall issue.

Gunilla Wågstrom Lundqvist and Tomas Hedberg (conference co-coordinators) recently informed me that the SDHS is now working on putting together all the presentations in PDF Format for electronic distribution next year to the conference registrants. They would like to remind the presenters to submit their full articles by October 15th, 2009. Any revisions to these articles must be submitted no later than December 1st, 2009.

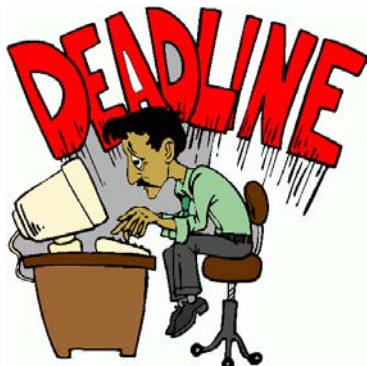
At the conference in Sweden, it was announced by our DHI Bureau that the British Deaf History Society and Deaf History Scotland won the bid to host the 2015 DHI Conference in Edinburgh, Scotland UK. Don't forget that the next DHI Conference will be held in Toronto, Canada (July 24–29, 2012).

Quite often people asked me how the Deaf History International (DHI) organization came into being. Fortunately, I know the answer because I was in attendance and was a plenary speaker at the First International Conference on Deaf History, held at Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C. in 1991. Realizing that there was no updated article about DHI's history, I felt compelled to write a short account about it. I was able to locate some original documents and interview a few individuals about their early involvement. Now that I have finished the article, you can find it on pages 4–5 of this newsletter.

ADVERTISEMENTS

The *DHI Newsletter* welcomes advertisements for inclusion in its publication. The content of all textual advertisements should be related to the field of Deaf history and the educational purposes of the newsletter.

The rates are \$100 for a full page and \$50 for a half page. There is no charge for ready-made graphics. For further information, contact the editor.



**FOR
FUTURE ISSUES**

The Deaf History International Newsletter welcomes Deaf History-related submissions of news, articles and essays, book and film reviews, images and photographs, newspaper clippings, conference and workshop announcements, websites, and other readings of interest for possible inclusion.

Please submit them to the editor by the following deadlines:

DHI ISSUES	SUBMISSION DEADLINE	DISTRIBUTION DATE
SPRING	March 15	April 15– 30
SUMMER	June 15	July 15 – August 15
FALL	September 15	October 15 – 31



President's Column

By Douglas Bahl (USA), DHI President

We have just concluded our 7th Deaf History International Conference which was held from August 4th through 8th in Stockholm, Sweden. It was again just excellent and stayed true to our reputation of "small but mighty." This year's DHI Conference had 211 registrants from 31 countries in attendance. On behalf of the DHI Bureau, I want to extend our ultimate gratitude to the Swedish Deaf History Society under the leadership of Tomas Hedberg and Gunilla Wågstrom-Lindqvist for doing a great job in putting the conference together. We also wish to express our appreciation to conference speakers, attendees, and interpreters.

Our elected officers from the DHI General Assembly are: Vice-President Peter Jackson (United Kingdom), and Members-at-Large Corrie Tijsseling (The Netherlands), Jon Martin Brauti (Norway), Gordon Hay (United Kingdom, re-elected) and Helmut Vogel (Germany, re-elected). I would like to thank outgoing DHI Bureau members, Jochen Muhs (Germany), Ali Behmanesh (Canada) and Annemieke Van Kampen (The Netherlands) for their service to the DHI Bureau in the past three years.

As cooler weather is setting in, I am reminded that fall is approaching and winter is close behind. It's time for you to renew your DHI membership dues. Many of you have been faithful in this regard and your timeliness is much appreciated!

This year Kevin Heston, our new webmaster, plans to have the DHI website built and fully available by the end of December, 2009.

Current Members of the DHI Bureau



Douglas Bahl (USA)
President (2006–2012)



Peter Jackson (Great Britain)
Vice-President (2009–2015)



Edna E. Sayers (USA)
Secretary/Treasurer (2006–2012)



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Gordon A. Hay (Great Britain)
Member-at-Large (2009–2012)



Corrie Tijsseling (The Netherlands)
Member-at-Large (2009–2012)



Helmut Vogel (Germany)
Member-at-Large (2009–2012)

A Short Account of the Origins of Deaf History International

by Clifton F. Carbin (Canada)

“Deaf History is a fascinating subject and interest has grown tremendously....”

Peter W. Jackson, Deaf author and editor of several publications pertaining to British Deaf History.

DEAF HISTORY INTERNATIONAL (DHI) owes its establishment to a group of interested people at the First International Conference on Deaf History, which was held at Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C. USA (June 20–23, 1991). This conference evolved from a suggestion made by Harlan Lane, a professor at Northeastern University in Boston. In the summer of 1989 at a meeting of professional and amateur historians engaged in the study of Deaf History during The Deaf Way Conference, he urged those attending to consider holding their own international meetings from time to time.

As an upshot, the Department of History at Gallaudet University expressed an interest and took the initiative to establish a planning committee for the First International Conference on Deaf History. Its two professors, John V. Van Cleve (also department head) and John S. Schuchman, stepped up to the plate in a huge way to plan and coordinate such an event. In attendance with them at the first formal meeting on September 6, 1990 were other invited organizers from Gallaudet, including Yerker Andersson (professor of Sociology and president of the World Federation of the Deaf), Clifton F. Carbin (holder of the 1990–1991 Powrie V. Doctor Chair of Deaf Studies), Jack R. Gannon (special assistant to the President for Advocacy), Joseph Kinner (associate professor of History) and Ausma Smits (assistant professor of History). Also, present were Harlan Lane (professor of Psychology and Linguistics, Northeastern University) and Cheri Sussman (Gallaudet interpreter).

A number of conference participants at the First International Conference on Deaf History met and decided that a formal organization with an election of international officers was needed to form an entity to “encourage the study, preservation and dissemination of Deaf people’s history” and to hold subsequent conferences. This vision was accepted with much enthusiasm. As a result, an elected committee was set up to lay the groundwork. Members of this group were Christian Barral (France) and Jack R. Gannon (USA) as co-chairs, Mary Malzkun (USA) as secretary, Günther List (Germany) as treasurer, Igor A. Abramov (Russia), Serge Briere (Canada), John Hay (Great

Britain), Harlan Lane (USA), Hans Roehl (Germany), and Ausma Smits (USA).

The credit for the actual establishment of DEAF HISTORY INTERNATIONAL goes to Ausma Smits (USA), who untiringly did the “plowing and planting” to make it all happen. She called the meeting of historians at The Deaf Way Conference, drafted the Bylaws, set up groundwork committee meetings, and invited some key individuals for consultation and feedback.

DEAF HISTORY INTERNATIONAL was the committee’s choice of a modern name for the newly formed organization, rather than using the common ending “.... for/of the Deaf.” Its Bylaws were proposed, reviewed, revised and tentatively approved by the committee members who convened while attending the First European Deaf History Conference in Rodez, France (July 6–12, 1992). *The DHI Newsletter* was first published in 1993 with the Spring/Summer issue and Ausma Smits (USA) was the editor. At that time, its masthead and logo were designed by DawnSign Press, an American company that was owned by a Deaf entrepreneur, Joe Dannis.

The first DHI business meeting was held during the Second Deaf History International Conference in Hamburg, Germany (October 1–4, 1994). It was chaired by Renate Fischer (Germany), who also arranged the use of international visual language interpreters — something for one and all to see and experience. The attendees formally voted to endorse the proposed name of the organization, DEAF HISTORY INTERNATIONAL. They also approved the Bylaws with some modifications. The following individuals elected to the first official DHI Bureau were: John Hay (Great Britain) as president, Ulf Hedberg (USA) as vice-president, Ausma Smits (USA) as secretary, Christian Barral (France) as treasurer, Igor A. Abramov (Russia), Brian Bernal (Australia), Annemieke van Brandenburg (The Netherlands), Renate Fischer (Germany) and Jochen Muhs (Germany). At that time, everyone agreed that their preferred mode of

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communication would be faxing which is a contrast to today's daily use of high-speed e-mailing.

Since then, DEAF HISTORY INTERNATIONAL has had its Bureau meetings and conferences every three years in different parts of the world. Washington, D.C. USA (1991), Hamburg, Germany (1994), Trondheim, Norway (1997), Washington, D.C. USA (2000), Paris, France (2003), Berlin, Germany (2006), Stockholm, Sweden (2009) and the next one will be in Toronto, Canada (2012). *The DHI Newsletter*, which is still being published a few times a year, is now available electronically as a PDF download to paid members only.

Any person, academic institution, school, library or organization interested in the history of Deaf people may become a member of DEAF HISTORY INTERNATIONAL. Membership includes subscription to *The DHI Newsletter* and some available discounts to triennial DHI Conferences. A note of interest — the original (1994) membership fee (in US funds) for an individual was \$20 and for an institution/organization was \$50. These amounts are unbelievably the same in 2009! Donations welcome!

If you are not yet a member, why not join today?

References

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E-mail communications (May/June 2009) with Yerker Andersson, Jack R. Gannon, Ulf Hedberg, Joseph Kinner, Harlan Lane, John S. Schuchman, Ausma Smits and John V. Van Cleve.

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Minutes of the Meeting of the Planning Committee for the First International Conference on Deaf History, September 6, 1990. Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Archives.

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**TELLING DEAF LIVES:
Biographies and Autobiographies**

**8th Deaf History International Conference
Toronto, CANADA — July 24–29, 2012**

Hosted by the Canadian Cultural Society of the Deaf



Our Eyes and Minds at the 2009 DHI Conference in Sweden

by E. Lynn Jacobowitz (USA) and Adonia K. Smith (USA)

From glorious sunrises to glamorous sunsets in Sweden, we enjoyed the sights of seaports, historic buildings, unique shops, internationally-flavored restaurants and museums. The best part of all was being able to meet Deaf people from all over the world with their different signed languages at the 7th Deaf History International Conference held August 4–8, 2009 in Stockholm. The theme was “No History, No Future.” The Conference assured us of the abundance of Deaf history and the importance of discovering even more history about Deaf people for Deaf posterity.

As a feast for our eyes and minds, there were over twenty 30-minute presentations and three keynote presentations, all delivered in the same auditorium in the spans of three days. There were no concurrent presentations at all during the Conference. The presentations were about a variety of topics such as Deaf education, Deaf research, archiving of documents, history of the Deaf world and biographies of Deaf persons. All of them were fantastically interesting but it was quite overwhelming to absorb all the information in three days. PowerPoint slide shows, films, or pictures were used in nearly all of the presentations.

Another feast for our eyes and minds were two main stage interpreters: one for Swedish Deaf people via Swedish Sign Language and the other for the general audience via international signs. There were also a good number of “side” sign language interpreters for respective countries. Believe it or not, there was no American Sign Language interpreter on the stage at the Conference! The ASL interpreters were hardly seen as they sat in the middle of a row near the back. To our big advantage and surprise, we learned a lot of international signs and it helped us better prepare for our presentation. Above all, it was fascinating to watch different languages signed throughout the Conference. With more than twenty different signed languages, Deaf participants managed to communicate well with one another through the use of international signs (yes, it’s a language!).



Smiling Faces at the Gala

Front row (left to right): David Nathanson (USA), Carolien Doggen (Belgium), Eric Lawrin (France), Mark Zurov (Germany), E. Lynn Jacobowitz (USA)

Back row (left to right): Joel Mankowski (USA), Gloria Nathanson (USA), Adonia K. Smith (USA)

A visit to the Manilla School for the Deaf that celebrated its 200th birthday was eventful. That school has the scenic splendors of a large historic building with a bay at one side. We enjoyed a folklore story being told about a Deaf boy at Manilla School who outsmarted the King, school administrators and town folks. The boy told them that he knew how to catch a fish in his mouth while diving into the water. They were amazed at his accomplishment because no one else was able to do that. Actually, he never did succeed catching the fish. He simply pulled a fish from his trunk and put it in his mouth. However, he later felt guilty and told an administrator the truth. The administrator decided to keep it a secret, wrote this story and continued receiving the King’s attention and generosity to the Manilla School.

As part of the Conference program, we had an awesome reception and visit in the gold-filled City Hall. We enjoyed a smooth sailing cruise on Delfin X touring 14 islands and a quick bay view of the Manilla School. We had a fill of laughter from a comedy-filled theater show with the Tyst group at Riksteatern. The guided tours to Northern Cemetery and Old Town were not in our original plan but we decided at the last minute to go to Old Town to shop for things for our children and loved ones. The shops were quaint and lovely. We saw Stockholm’s narrowest street, Mårten Trotzigs Gränd, with steep steps and struggled as we walked up and down on them. Horses were banned as there were a lot of cobblestones that would have made them fall. On our own time, we visited a deaf club, Stockholms Dövas Förening (SDF), and were very impressed with what the deaf club had to offer to its members. The space at the clubhouse was enormous and was filled with many wonderful historic things. We enjoyed socializing with the people there and learned more about the history of the club.



Smallest street known as Mårten Trotzigs Gränd

The Tyst group truly humored us with their skits which included skills in poetry, mime, acting and even surprises. Lynn Jacobowitz (USA) was pulled to the stage and faced the skilled swordsman who was about to put knives around her. The Master of Ceremonies stopped him on time. Lynn was quite disappointed that it didn’t happen. Later, this theater group made a knight out of Yerker Andersson (USA). He shared stories about his boyhood experiences growing up in his homeland, Sweden.

As part of the last evening gala, most of us had an amazing sight of the Vasa boat inside the museum. That boat had sunk to the bottom of Stockholms Stron and stayed there for over 330 years. When the boat was salvaged, it was found generally well preserved with very little rotten wood. Amazingly, the Vasa boat had over 700 wooden carved and colorful sculptures and four floors of small rooms. There were over 25 Deaf-friendly round tables seating eight people each with napkins and Vasa medallions for us to keep. The four-course dinners were delightfully delicious, especially the lobster appetizer.

Each person sitting at our table took turns to tell imaginary stories about life on the Vasa ship. It was hilarious to listen to their

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Our Eyes and Minds at the 2009 DHI Conference in Sweden

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fantasies. Our table partners told a story about a Deaf pirate with a monkey that uses sign language. On the ship with them were a waiting maiden, a gourmet chef, an international sign language inspector to ensure that we use proper signs, a toilet cleaner and a perverted sailor with a telescope who likes the maiden. We created so many imaginative stories about the Vasa and they made our evening fabulously enjoyable. At the end of this wonderful gala, we all bid our farewells and exchanged email addresses. We even took pictures of each table.

We are looking forward to the next DHI Conference in Toronto, Canada. The date is not yet established but it will be in the summer of 2012. The trio of Clifton Carbin (General Chair), Anita Small (Program Chair), and Joanne Cripps (Events Chair) have been working hard on the Toronto Conference for the past two years and will continue to do so in the three years left before it becomes a reality. This conference will take place at the Westin Harbour Castle in the heart of the city's spectacular waterfront. It is right next to all major attractions, including the CN Tower, Rogers Centre and the Deaf Culture Centre. The committee promised us a lot less walking.

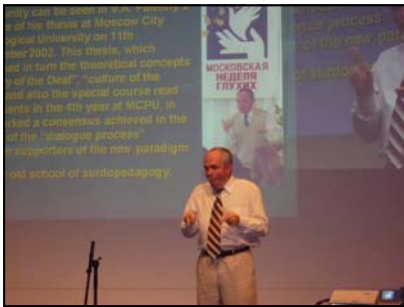
More exciting programs relating to the 2012 DHI Conference are to be announced soon.

We enjoyed, via international signs, giving a presentation entitled "No Deaf History, No Bright Future for Deaf Learners." At first, we were nervous about the delivery of our presentation in international signs because we never did it in the past. We felt so relieved that we did OK! In our presentation, we showed several picture clips from the book, "Have You Ever Seen...? An American Sign Language (ASL) Handshape DVD/Book." The DHI Conference inspired us very much and to show our appreciation to them, we decided to give a copy of the DVD/Book companion set to each of nine Deaf individuals who exhibited their love of Deaf history in their countries. We hope this gift presents that some ideas for producing Deaf history materials to benefit Deaf learners in their schools.

We enjoyed the DHI Conference in Stockholm, Sweden very much and want to thank every member of the 2009 Conference Committee for their hard work. Hosting an international conference is never an easy feat. They succeeded in every respect. They've been great to us. Our deepest appreciation to them for bestowing upon us such a wonderful time must be expressed.

2012 DHI Conference in Toronto, Canada — here we come!

Photos of Some Presenters at the 2009 DHI Conference



Victor Palenny (Russia)



Susannah Mcready & Breda Carty (Australia)



Joe Murray (USA)



Henk Betten (The Netherlands)



Melissa Malzkuhn (USA)



Corrie Tijsseling (The Netherlands)



Ulf Hedberg (USA)



Britt Karmgård (Sweden)

New Perspectives in Researching Deaf History

by Corrie Tijsseling (The Netherlands)

Again, a DHI conference took place in a beautiful city with the most ideal weather, this time in Stockholm. The conference was well organised and had an interesting program with presentations about methods and perspectives in Deaf History research by Victor Palenny (Russia), Adonia Smith & Lynn Jacobowitz (USA), Yerker Andersson (USA), Mark Zaurov (Germany) and John Hay (Great Britain). There also were presentations about specific eras and people in Deaf History, by Peter Jackson (UK), Susan Plann (USA), Edna Sayers (USA), Ylva Söderfeldt (Germany/Sweden), Anne Quartararo (USA), Henk Betten (The Netherlands), Jochen Muhs (Germany), Jörgen Nielsen (Denmark), Rita Ingvarsson & Britt Karmgård (Sweden), Odd-Inge Schröder (Norway), Breda Carty/Susannah Macready (Australia) & Edna Sayers (USA) and Melissa Malzkuhn (USA).

Also, transnational and transcontinental influences were highlighted. Joseph Murray (USA) showed the effect and importance of transnational interconnections among Deaf people in a time during which the first Deaf organisations were founded. Jon Martin Brauti (Norway) presented the results of his research about the immigration of Deaf people from Norway to America. He was followed by Arkady Belozovsky (USA) who not only explained why people emigrated from Russia but also gave a personal account of the life of a Deaf immigrant. Breda Carty & Darlene Thornton (Australia) studied the first Deaf people in colonial Australia, in a time that most immigrants were convicts from England and as they showed, some of them were Deaf. Historical research depends strongly on historical materials and the presentation of Ulf Hedberg and Diana Gates (USA) on how to preserve and restore historical materials was very welcome. Their message was clear: please, use scanners to make digital copies as much as you can. This way, historical materials become more accessible for researchers by storing them in digital databases and they do not have to be touched again, which will prevent (further) damage.

For me, as a researcher of the philosophy and history of pedagogy (education and child development), it was interesting to see how this conference showed a shift to a more interdisciplinary perspective: the use of results and theories from disciplines like psychology and child development when researching Deaf History and the benefit of results from Deaf History research for disciplines like anthropology.

Outa Toura and Anu Savolainen (Finland) presented an analysis of discursive changes in the writings of Deaf teachers and found the discourse to change from a religious discourse in 1892–1902 where the main goal was to provide Deaf children with language (in order to understand religion) to a rehabilitative discourse in 1970–1980 which focused on the integration of Deaf children and a preparative discourse in 1995–2005 with a holistic perspective on Deaf children as having a different body and different identity. It would be interesting to see whether the discourses have similarities in other areas of special education, for example the education of blind children.

Another Finnish couple, Outi Ahonen and Ulla-Maija Haapanen, used the theory of Maslow in their study of the development of personality in Deaf people during wartime in Finland. This theory seems adequate as it covers the stages from 'survival' to 'belonging' to 'self-realisation', stages that are not always passed through in wartime. It would have been useful, however, to make a distinction between 'personality' and 'identity'. The concept of 'identity' that is used very often nowadays emphasises the 'I': who I think I am, regardless of what others think about me and my choices about groups I belong to. The older concept of personality focuses on 'Me': how I think that others think about me and the question whether I do fit in and belong to a society. This shift in psychological theories and concepts of personality may not always be clear for the audience.

As an anthropological researcher, Hilde Haualand (Norway) showed how results from historical research aid in the analysis of Deaf communities and the way they are affected by societal changes. In this, she used communication technologies as an example: who invented the telephone and why, and what was its effect on the social status of Deaf people? Bell, a CODA, sought a means to make communication easier for Deaf people but the telephone was more like a backdrop as they were left out in this form of telecommunication. Haualand pointed out that when the use of the telephone increased, the number of Deaf clubs increased also. This provokes questions about the relation between communication technology and the communicational infrastructure in Deaf community. It was Cerf, who was hard-of-hearing himself, who unintentionally brought Deaf people to an equal position with hearing people in telecommunication by inventing e-mailing. Remarkably, there is now a decline of Deaf clubs.

All in all, the many presentations provoked a lot of thought about the research, methods and results of Deaf History. Here and there, anachronism could be found in small errors as using present day maps when showing travels of about 1900 or in basic errors like labelling common punishment methods from the 19th century as child abuse, a label that developed in a 20th century context. One presentation might lead to rewriting American Deaf History: Carty/Macready/Sayers found a description of two Deaf people in America, Sarah and Matthew Pratt, born in 1628 and 1640 in a publication from 1684. In Clifton F. Carbin's two books, *Deaf Heritage in Canada: A Distinctive, Diverse, and Enduring Culture* (1996) and *Samuel Thomas Greene: A Legend in the Nineteenth Century Deaf Community* (2005), the earliest account of a deaf person in America is noted. The author refers to Guilbert C. Braddock's book, *Notable Deaf Persons* (1975) which mentions a 10-year-old deaf boy in 1679. So, the earliest account is still of 1679 but the earliest birth year account is not of this boy. It seems to be that of Sarah and Matthew Pratt, who were 51 and 39 years old respectively in 1679.

For many a Deaf presenter it is a hard job to prepare a presentation, as one has to switch continuously between written and signed language. Translation issues can hamper a presentation so most Deaf presenters soak up their presentation fully in their brain beforehand to then give a signed presentation without the use of a written text. Some excel in this, insofar that they almost are performers who make the audience forget about time and cause outbursts of laughter. On the other end of the continuum, there were hearing presenters who did read out their presentations. This was disappointing, as one would expect presentations on Deaf history to be in the language of Deaf communities. Also, this reading out of texts places deaf presenters at a disadvantage. As they cannot use a written text, they might have more errors in their presentations and thus seem less professional. Interpreters too complained, as it is harder to translate from the reading out of a written text, including commas and full stops, instead from a spoken presentation with a natural language. One hearing presenter did sign which shows that it is not impossible for hearing researchers to give a presentation in sign language. Of course, it is understandable that hearing researchers may not be sufficient in sign language yet. A spoken presentation is at that stage and for that reason acceptable. But one should then definitely not read out a text but look at, and talk to the audience. Reading out a text is not appreciated at hearing conferences either. But more important, we are the people of the eye. So at least, look us in the eye. Perhaps the organisation of the next conference in 2012 in Toronto, Canada, could consider guidelines for language and style of presentations.

I hope to see you all again next time, in Toronto!

Number of Participants by Country at the 7th DHI Conference in Stockholm, Sweden (August 4–8, 2009)

Australia — 2	Finland — 9	Litauen — 1	Switzerland — 2
Belgium — 4	France — 11	Luxembourg — 1	Spain — 4
Canada — 3	Germany — 10	Netherlands, The — 11	United Kingdom — 9
Cayman Islands — 1	Greece — 1	Norway — 9	United States — 26
Cote d'Ivoire — 3	Iran — 3	Poland — 1	
Croatia — 2	Ireland — 4	Portugal — 7	
Czech Republic — 2	Italy — 7	Russian Federation — 1	
Denmark — 3	Kuwait — 3	Saudi Arabia — 6	
Estonia — 4	Latvia — 1	Sweden — 60	
			TOTAL
			31 Countries
			211 Participants

Proceedings of the 6th Deaf History International Conference (Berlin, Germany — July 31 to August 1, 2006) NOW AVAILABLE FOR SALE



Mark Zurov & Klaus-B. Günther (Eds.), *Overcoming the Past, Determining its Consequences and Finding Solutions for the Present. A contribution for Deaf Studies and Sign Language Education. Proceedings of the 6th Deaf History International Conference July 31 – August 04, 2006 at the Humboldt University, Berlin*, approx. 400 pp., Signum 2008, EUR 40,00, ISBN 978-3-936675-28-3



Contents

THE 6TH DEAF HISTORY INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE took place in Berlin from July 31 to August 4, 2006. It focused on how the European tragedy impacted Deaf People during the Second World War and particularly on the overarching theme of "Overcoming the past, determining its consequences and finding solutions for the present." The event was organized by the staff of the 6th Deaf History International (DHI), consisting mostly of members of the Interessensgemeinschaft Gehörloser jüdischer Abstammung in Deutschland (IGJAD, Association of the Deaf of Jewish Ancestry in Germany), in cooperation with the department of sign language education at Humboldt University, Berlin.

These proceedings contain the most important findings from the conference, written from a global perspective and illustrated with photos, with the aim of elucidating the history of the Deaf and associated complications, and how this history was affected by contemporary events. The authors are researchers and experts in their respective fields. Several Deaf Jewish survivors, participants in conference panels, gave first-hand accounts of their World War II and Holocaust experiences. A selection of visual material from the exhibition is reproduced here as well.

This publication is intended for all those interested in this long-neglected subject, and especially Deaf historians, Holocaust researchers, sociologists, geneticists, as well as educators and sign language researchers, in Germany and elsewhere. It offers a diverse range of interdisciplinary and interrelated insights.

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Yes, I am ordering the title „Overcoming the past, Determining its Consequences and Finding Solutions for the Present“ (ISBN 978-3-936675-28-3), edited by Mark Zurov and Klaus-B. Günther, with a price of EUR 40,00 (plus shipping and handling for non-EU-countries).

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BOOK REVIEW

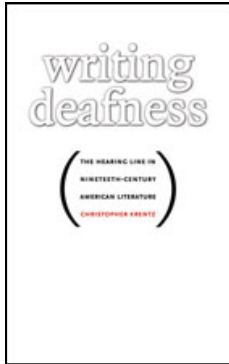
Writing Deafness: The Hearing Line in Nineteenth-Century American Literature

Christopher Krentz

The University of North Carolina Press (2007)
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Reviewed by Edna Edith Sayers, Professor of English, Gallaudet University (USA).

Christopher Krentz is the editor of *A Mighty Change* (Gallaudet University Press, 2000), an anthology of Deaf American writing from the early 1800s that includes



essays, poems, public addresses, and letters by John Carlin, Edmund Booth, Laurent Clerc, Laura Redden, and others. In *Writing Deafness*, Krentz discusses these writers and the hearing novelists of the time whose stories included deaf

characters, characters pretending to be deaf, or significant passages about silence.

Writing Deafness began as Krentz's doctoral dissertation and it is therefore aimed at the hearing academic specialist in American literature who is unfamiliar with Deaf history and Deaf people, but comfortable with incessant (and largely irrelevant) references to major Western thinkers from Nietzsche and Freud to Derrida and Said. In addition, the book's dissertation's fundamental theory of "the hearing line," which Krentz defines as the "invisible boundary separating deaf and hearing people" (p. 2) will likely seem pointless to Deaf readers, while his efforts throughout to draw parallels with African Americans and the "color line" seem severely strained. There is nevertheless a great deal of interesting information and speculation in *Writing Deafness* that make the book worth reading.

Chapter 1 discusses the writings of Clerc, James Nack, and John Burnet and their practice of using written English to reach the hearing public. It also provides a good discussion of the "conversion" rhetoric employed by this first generation of educated Deaf Americans who saw themselves as rescued from ignorance by Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet. Unfortunately, this chapter is the most affected by the problems related to the book's origin in a doctoral dissertation: it is cluttered with unneeded and unhelpful references to literary theory, African American traditions,

and off-the-point references to the theories of Brenda Brueggemann and Lennard J. Davis. What's worse, it's a missed opportunity: Clerc's writings span a half century, include some remarkable comments about sign language, and put Gallaudet's prose to shame, yet Krentz quotes almost exclusively from one early and one late public address and selects his quotations on only the topic, Clerc's ambiguous views of deaf people. This chapter can be safely skipped, as it tells us little more than what we can understand for ourselves by reading the works of Clerc, Nack, and Burnet.

Chapter 2 takes up a topic that interests me very much: novels and short stories by hearing Americans that include Deaf characters or passages concerning silence. Even if you don't enjoy the work of Mark Twain, Washington Irving, and James Fenimore Cooper as much as I do, there is still much to learn about what readers of the 1800s would have absorbed from these books about Deaf people or the value of speech. I especially enjoyed Krentz's discussion of Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans*, in which he shows how themes of silence and visual communication are connected with Native Americans and nature, and how all these are presented as unsettling combinations of "desire and dread" (p. 17), "attraction and horror" (p. 118).

Chapter 3 continues this discussion of hearing authors with some samples of sentimental poems by Lydia Sigourney (who was Alice Cogswell's first teacher), a Herman Melville short story that ends with the main character's horrified cry "Great God, she was dumb! — DUMB AND DEAF!" (unintentionally funny to today's Deaf readers), and Ambrose Bierce's story "Chickamauga" about a deaf boy who witnesses that Civil War battle without understanding what he sees. Deaf studies today tends to disparage or dismiss representations of Deaf people by hearing writers as uninformed, but, having written about Sigourney myself, I agree with Krentz that a study of these writers "reveals attitudes and thinking about deafness" (130) — views of Deaf people as pitiable, threatening, or creepy — that real-life Deaf people still encounter today.

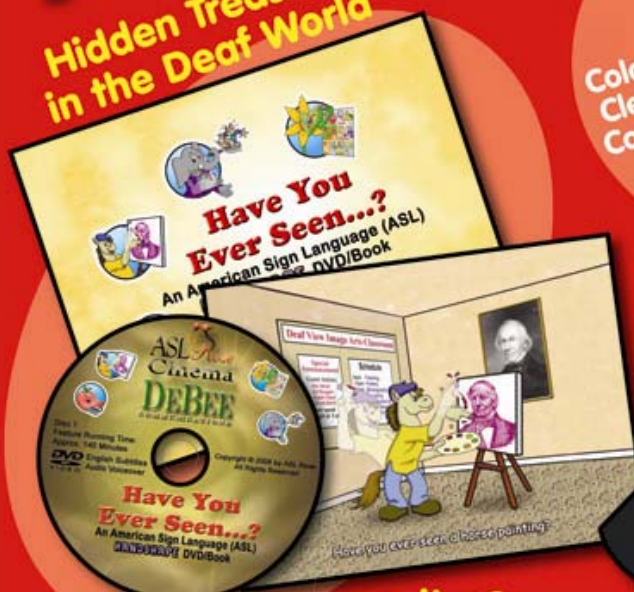
Chapter 4 will be the most interesting and intriguing part of *Writing Deafness* for Deaf readers, as it describes and discusses the "deaf double consciousness" by which Deaf authors like Carlin and Clerc sometimes accept the hearing view of deaf inferiority and sometimes challenge it. This double consciousness, I would argue, is still very much with us today, but Krentz is correct that it can be seen most clearly in these early writers who viewed hearing educators as both benevolent and paternalistic, and themselves as both liberated and infantilized (p. 150). This chapter also includes discussions of the "silencing" by Deaf leaders of women, African Americans, and the poorly educated; the exceptional autobiography of Adele Jewell; an extended analysis of the 1855 debate over a deaf state; and an all-too-brief reading of Laura Redden Searing's poem about "prejudice against the songs of crippled birds," clearly a metaphor for the discrimination she experienced as a Deaf reporter.

Chapter 5 concerns literary instances of "passing" and Krentz's unsurprising conclusion that hearing people trying to pass as deaf are funny but Deaf people trying to pass as hearing are pathetic. This chapter includes a very funny story about Mark Twain's late-deafened childhood friend, but Krentz's theory that such "humorous treatments of deafness ... make it ... less threatening to the reading public" (p. 200) is doubtful.

Because each chapter is free-standing (presumably because that's how doctoral dissertations are written), readers who want to know more about the authors in *A Mighty Change* can begin with Chapter 4, then dip into Chapter 2 and 3 if interested in the larger history of American literature of the 1800s. *Writing Deafness* leaves Deaf history with a mandate: we sorely need a major study of the writings of Laurent Clerc that is free of "dissertationese" and that places him squarely in the ranks of American educational and social reformers before the Civil War.

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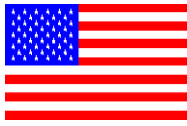
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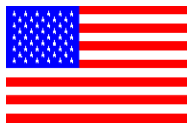
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