

Deaf Founders of Schools for the Deaf

By Rev. J. M. Koehler

THE PUBLIC OPINION column of THE SILENT WORKER for February, 1926, contained a list of deaf men who established Schools for the Deaf, compiled by the late Rev. J. H. Cloud. I called his attention to several errors and omissions, suggesting also that some of those mentioned in the list could not properly be considered the founders of the schools with which their names have been popularly associated.

In reply, Dr. Cloud proposed that I, myself, prepare a corrected list "in the interest of historical accuracy," promising his help. This I finally agreed to do. Unfortunately, his subsequent illness prevented me from again getting in touch with him concerning the matter; and a few months later, alas! he passed on, into "the rest that remaineth."

*Doubtless unto him is given
A life that bears immortal fruit.
In such great offices as suit
The full grown energies of Heaven.*

Meanwhile, I had been collecting data from all available sources of information, carrying on a large correspondence to clear up doubtful points and verify conclusions. The results of investigation are presented here.

Dr. Cloud's list is practically the same as others that have appeared in papers for the deaf from time to time, repeating the same errors, omissions and improper credit. These errata have been due in part to faulty tradition and in part to unreliable records. In preparing this article I have made free use of the *American Annals of the Deaf* and the *Histories of American Schools for the Deaf*, published by the Volta Bureau, in 1893, and edited by the late Dr. Edward Allan Fay. The volumes of the *Annals* are a treasure-house of information about the deaf; lack of proper indices makes the *Histories* somewhat inconvenient for reference. Indebtedness to both is acknowledged here; also to all those who, in reply to requests, have furnished information or indicated sources thereof.

This article is not to be construed as implying criticism of Dr. Cloud. On the contrary, he was fully advised of my view-point and agreed with it. I can but regret that his untimely passing has deprived me of reliance upon his wide knowledge and judicious criticism in carrying out a plan in which he was deeply interested, and in which he would have co-operated had he been spared to the work that needed him. This article is written merely to rectify mistakes and misinformation. There are no prejudices nor antagonisms to serve; nor is controversy desired. What shall be said here has been carefully considered, and every statement examined with a view to an altogether true presentation of facts.

The list compiled by Dr. Cloud is appended here. The asterisks and numbers refer to the notes below.

- *1 1844, Indiana, William Willard.
- 1846, Georgia, John L. Flournory.
- 1861, Kansas, Philip A. Emery.
- 1868, Arkansas, Joseph Mount.
- *2 1869, Nebraska, W. H. French.
- 1870, Oregon, William S. Smith.
- 1870, New England Industrial, W. B. Sweet.

- 1875, Chicago Day School, Philip A. Emery.
- 1875, Cincinnati Day School, R. P. MacGregor.
- 1875, Central New York, Alphonso Johnson.
- *3 1876, Western Pennsylvania, A. Woodside.
- 1878, St. Louis, (Gallaudet), Delos A. Simpson.
- *4 1880, South Dakota, James A. Simpson.
- *5 1882, Scranton, Pa., J. M. Koehler.
- *6 1883, New Jersey, Peter B. Gulick.
- *7 1884, Utah, H. C. White.
- 1884, Northern New York, H. C. Rider.
- 1885, Florida, T. H. Coleman.
- 1885, New Mexico, L. M. Larson.
- 1890, North Dakota, A. R. Spear.
- * 1912, Arizona, H. C. White.

*1 The first Deaf Founder of a School for the Deaf of whom there is any record, was James McLean, a reputed graduate of the New York (Fanwood) School, who in 1841 gathered a few deaf children at an unnamed place in Parke Co., Indiana. It was a private undertaking; but in 1842, the Legislature made an appropriation of \$200.00 to aid him. This action aroused great interest throughout the State, and a year later a tax of two mills was imposed "to support a deaf and dumb asylum."

About this time, 1843, William Willard, a graduate of the Hartford School and a former teacher at the Ohio School, appeared in Indianapolis to establish a private school. Great enthusiasm for the project was aroused, a public meeting held and support guaranteed. There is nothing to show that Willard knew of McLean, but the State-wide interest aroused by the efforts of the latter, augmented by the zeal to forward Willard's project, came to a head in 1844, when the State took over the latter's school and authorized its incorporation. Mr. Willard is acclaimed as the founder of the Indiana School. It is a question, however, whether that honor does not more properly belong to McLean. He is not mentioned after the appearance of Willard and nothing more can be learned about him. It does not detract from the honor accorded Willard to give proper credit to McLean; nor does it seem invidious to suggest that they be considered co-founders of the School.

Here one may properly raise the question as to what constitutes a Founder. The definitions given by the Dictionaries, and accepted for the purpose of this article, are:

1. One from whom anything has its original or beginning.
2. One who fixes on sets firmly on a foundation.

It would seem that in the case of Indiana, McLean comes under the first and Willard under the second definition. The writer does not presume to decide between them. A way out of the quandary has been suggested already.

In connection with the definitions above given, it will surprise others, as it did me, to learn that E. M. Gallaudet disclaimed being the Founder of the College. The information comes in a letter from W. C. Ritter, deaf Supt. of the Virginia State School for Colored Deaf-Mutes, and was advanced to support his own disclaimer of the title.

On a visit to the School at Newport, Va., Dr. Gallaudet is quoted as saying: "Mr. Ritter, this is your monument

as the College is mine. We do not lay claim to being "Founders" *per se*. We did not furnish the money to build—we guided the funds appropriated, to their proper use. *I am not the Founder of Gallaudet College*" (italics Ritter's).

With due deference to the modesty implied, the disavowal cannot be accepted in the face of historical evidence to the contrary. The status of President Gallaudet is immutably fixed; as is that of the shy Mr. Ritter.

While these notes are not intended as complete histories of the Schools listed above, nor biographies of the persons named as Founders, necessary data is given to sustain the argument involved.

*2. NEBRASKA. Although W. H. French, or DeCoursey French, as he signed himself, claims over his own signature to have established this School in 1869, all records mention a Lutheran minister of Omaha, Rev. H. W. Kuhns, as having taken the initiative, in 1866, French not appearing on the scene until 1869, when he was appointed Principal of the School, being also a member of the Board of Directors, *Ex-officio*. From the account of the Nebraska School, written by former Supt. J. A. Gillespie for the *Volta Histories*, it appears that the efforts of Rev. Mr. Kuhns were at first directed to securing legislative aid for the education of Nebraska deaf children in the Schools already established in neighboring States. In 1867, the Legislature provided for a State School. Credit for this is given to a Prof. Jenkins, a teacher in the Illinois School, later Superintendent of the Kansas School. The Legislature located the School at Omaha, but, queerly enough, appropriated no money for it. In 1869, to quote Supt. Gillespie, "Through the efforts of Wm. M. DeCoursey French * * * and others, \$6000 were appropriated and a Board of Directors incorporated. Mr. French was named for Principal and *Ex-officio* member of the Board. Rev. Mr. Kuhns was the Secretary of this Board. Mr. French's connection with the school ended several years later. Mrs. Ota Blankenship, writing about the School in the *Nebraska Journal* (Jan. 1921) says, "After struggling along after the experience of all new schools, Mr. French and his sister left." (The sister was the matron of the school).

In 1888, Mr. French opened a day school at Dubuque, Iowa, with the avowed purpose of securing the establishment of a State School for that section. It was known as the Eastern Iowa School, and was "supported by contributions, fairs and exhibitions." The effort failed, and the school was discontinued in 1893. He claims to have secured the passage of an act of Legislature in Wyoming, 1885, providing for a State School and the erection of building, if twelve pupils could be obtained. A building was erected at Cheyenne, but either the requisite number of pupils could not be secured or the Legislature refused further appropriation—statements are conflicting—and the building was devoted to other uses.

I am advised that there is not now any school for the deaf in Wyoming.

*3 WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA. No warrant exists for giving Archibald Woodside the title of Founder. This Institution grew out of a day-school established in 1869 through the efforts of Rev. J. G. Brown, D. D., a minister of the United Presbyterian Church in Pittsburg, and his Sunday School Supt., Joel Kerr. Their interest had been aroused by the appearance one Sunday of a colored deaf and dumb boy. They enlisted the aid of Mr. Woodside and other adult deaf-mutes in giving the boy instruction. Enquiry developing other deaf children, the Pittsburg Board of Education established a day-school with Mr. Woodside and his sister Sarah as teachers. Later on, benevolent persons provided a boarding home for children living at a distance from the day-school. In 1875, James H. Logan, a graduate of Gallaudet College became Princi-

pal of the School and set about to obtain State aid for an incorporated Institution. The Legislature responded to the appeal, appropriating \$16,000. The Institution was located at Turtle Creek, a few miles out of Pittsburg. Mr. Logan was Superintendent and his mother, matron. In 1879, Mr. Logan resigned to accept the position of Professor of Mineralogy in the University of Pittsburg.

If a deaf man is to be accorded the honor of founding the Western Pennsylvania Institution, Mr. Logan would appear to be entitled to it. Mr. Woodside, however, established a day-school in Allegheny City, in 1875, under the Board of Education. This was discontinued upon the opening of the Turtle Creek Institution.

*4. SOUTH DAKOTA. James A. Simpson had nothing to do with the beginning of this school. It was established through the joint efforts of Mrs. D. F. Mingus, *nee* Jennie Wright, a sister-in-law of Mr. Simpson, and the Rev. Thomas B. Berry, Rector of the Episcopal Church at Sioux Falls, who had formerly been a teacher at the New York (Fanwood) and Maryland Schools and who later was associated with Rev. Dr. Thomas Gallaudet in the Church Mission to Deaf-Mutes. This was in 1880; and the school was supported by subscriptions and donations. Rev. Mr. Berry acted as Principal, with Mrs. Mingus as teacher. In 1881, Mr. Berry resigned his parish to accept a call from New York. Mrs. Mingus also left Sioux Falls; and Mr. Simpson, then a teacher at the Iowa Institution, was appointed to the charge of the School. Under his administration the school grew and prospered. He continued in charge for some twenty-five years or more, until politics forced him out. Before his advent, in 1881, several public spirited citizens of Sioux Falls, aided by Eastern contributions, donated a site of ten acres and erected a building for the School, out side the town limits. Here Mr. Simpson started his work; and in a few years had the satisfaction of seeing the wooden buildings replaced by fine and commodious stone structures. The distinction of Founder would seem to be his, under the second definition of the word as given above.

*5. SCRANTON, PENNSYLVANIA. This school was opened in 1880, not 1882 as listed. The date given in the list, was undoubtedly taken from the very erroneous account in the *Volta Histories*. It was established as part of the City's Public School system by the Board of School Control, and so continued until 1883, when a movement for the establishing of an Oral School led to its closing. Meanwhile, Mr. Koehler was confronted by the same problem that met day-schools elsewhere—the problem of board for out of town children desiring admittance to the School. In 1881-2, he interested prominent citizens in calling a public meeting to consider the matter of establishing an institution. At that meeting committees were appointed to find a location; obtain subscriptions for a building and support; and decide the method of instruction to be adopted. A splendid site was donated; some \$20,000 pledged; but the question of method was not so readily decided; and the final result is seen in the present "Pennsylvania Oral School."

*6. NEW JERSEY. Peter B. Gulick had nothing whatever to do with the establishment of the School at Trenton, except as he among many others signed petitions for Legislative action, and used what influence he may have had towards securing it. He did not initiate the movement; nor had he anything to do with the school after it was established. The legend of him being the Founder probably grew out of his own vociferations. I, myself, recall his story of the "great work" he did.

*7. UTAH. The School was established by law in 1883. H. C. White's connection with it began in 1884. I recall Rev. Dr. Thomas Gallaudet telling me about enquiries from Salt Lake City for a teacher, and that he had joined others in recommending White. The good doctor had

hoped to have him as an ordained assistant in the Church Mission, and was much disappointed when White decided to accept the call to Utah.

The following extracts from a letter by Supt. F. M. Driggs give the salient facts of Mr. White's work in Utah:

"The school was opened in August, 1884. It was conducted as a day-school for two years. In 1886, Mr. White opened a home for the pupils upon his own responsibility and depended upon the parents, a generous public, and county aid for its support.

In 1888, the legislature assumed the obligation of maintaining the home. In 1889, Mr. Metcalf succeeded Mr. White as principal. The fact is that Mr. White had nothing to do with the preliminaries looking toward the establishment of the school.

He was the first principal and the first teacher. He did assume a grave responsibility in opening a boarding house for the pupils, for such an undertaking might have meant a great financial loss to him. However, he did not lose any money.

Mr. White became very bitter when superceded by Mr. Metcalf, so bitter that troubles arose, an investigation was held and Mr. White was removed as head teacher during Mr. Metcalf's first year as principal.

1889 was my first year with the school as supervisor of boys. Because of the tribulations that year I remember Mr. White very well.

Much praise is due Mr. White for his efforts to keep the school during those early years when it required money and courage. Few would have assumed the responsibility, but knowing as he did, the real value of an education to deaf children, Mr. White and his good wife, who was also deaf and a graduate of the Ohio school, kept the light burning until its rays fell upon the mountain peaks where it was seen by those in high places—then succor came. Glory to the pioneer who makes the trial!"

*8. ARIZONA. Mr. White's experience here was similar to that in Utah. Going there, in 1912, with his daughter Harriet, he made effective a law requiring the State University to provide instruction for deaf and blind children on the petition of five parents. Mr. White found the pupils, and the School was opened. As in Utah, he set the school firmly on foundations already laid. Full credit is given him for his good work by the present Principal, Howard Griffin. He remained there a year, leaving under much the same circumstances as attended his departure from Utah. Of brilliant intellect and dauntless energy, his erratic temperament militated against continued usefulness in his chosen fields; and he deserved a better end than that which finally befell him. However, he will go down in history for the part he had in setting up the schools at Ogden and Tucson, although he may be called their Founder only in the secondary sense of the word.

This completes the consideration of Dr. Cloud's list. The *Volta Histories* give a list of many "discontinued schools." Among these are some established by deaf men; and these deserve equal mention and credit along with those already noted, as the results of their work still continue. They are included in the subjoined revised list and noted by an asterisk:

REVISED LIST OF FOUNDERS.

- | | | |
|--------|-------------|--|
| 1842 | { Indiana } | James McLean. |
| 1844 | | William Willard. |
| 1846 | | Georgia, John L. Flourony. |
| * 1856 | | Lexington, Georgia, J. B. Edwards. |
| * 1850 | | Arkansas (Clarksville) J. W. Woodward. |
| * 1860 | | Arkansas (Fort Smith) Matthew Clark. |

- | | |
|----------|---|
| 1861 | Kansas, Philip A. Emery. |
| 1868 | Arkansas, (Little Rock) Joseph Mount. |
| 1870 | Oregon, William S. Smith. |
| 1870 | New England Industrial, W. B. Swett. |
| Note 1 * | 1874 New York Evening Schools, H. W. Syle. |
| 1875 | Chicago Day-Schools, Philip A. Emery. |
| 1875 | Cincinnati Day-School, R. P. McGregor. |
| 1875 | Central New York, Alphanso Johnson. |
| * 1875 | Alleghany, Pa., Archibald Woodside. |
| 1876 | Western Penna., James H. Logan. |
| 1878 | St. Louis, Delos A. Simpson. |
| 1880 | Scranton, Pa., J. M. Kochler. |
| * 1880 | Philadelphia, J. T. Elwell. |
| 1881 | South Dakota, J. A. Simpson. |
| 1884 | Utah, H. C. White. |
| 1884 | Northern New York, H. C. Rider. |
| 1885 | Florida, T. H. Coleman. |
| 1885 | New Mexico, L. M. Larson. |
| * 1886 | Evansville, Ind., C. H. Kerney. |
| * 1888 | Eastern Iowa, DeCoursey French. |
| * 1888 | Wisconsin (Oshkosh), Harry Reed. |
| 1890 | North Dakota, A. R. Spear. |
| 1892 | Cleveland, Ohio, J. H. Geary and Rev. A. W. Mann. |
| 1898 | Oklahoma, Ellsworth Long. |
| Note 2 * | 1908 Virginia (colored), W. C. Ritter. |
| 1912 | Arizona, H. C. White. |

*Discontinued.

Note 1. NEW YORK CITY EVENING CLASSES. These classes met in Grammar School No. 40, on East 23rd St. They were part of the city's Evening School system and normally under the supervision of the Principal of No. 40. Actually, they were under the sole control of Mr.—afterwards Rev. H. W. Syle, to whose efforts their inception was due. The instruction given was chiefly in matters of practical importance to those attending—in their trades and other business, especially in mechanical drawing, book-keeping and colloquial language. Special attention was given to the deaf educated in foreign schools who joined the classes in order to learn the English language. These latter were mostly Germans, of whom there was a large influx in the early seventies.

Mr. Syle resigned in 1875 to accept a position in the U. S. Mint at Philadelphia. He was succeeded by James S. Wells, a graduate of the New York (Fanwood) Institution and formerly a teacher in the Texas School, later Principal of the Baltimore School for colored deaf-mutes.

Under Mr. Syle's administration the average attendance was 35. After he withdrew the attendance gradually fell off, and the classes were discontinued in 1878. Mr. Syle had a class for German deaf-mutes, in connection with his church work in Philadelphia. The writer had charge of this class while a Seminary student. Mr. Syle had plans for public evening schools in Philadelphia, but they were not carried out, to the best of the writer's recollection.

Note 2. VIRGINIA SCHOOL FOR COLORED DEAF-MUTES. Mr. Ritter is now the only deaf Superintendent of a school in this United States, and the only one remaining in continuous control of the School he founded. It took him sixteen years of effort to accomplish his purpose. The present plant at Newport News, of his own designing, is one of the finest in the whole country.

In concluding this article, the writer can but repeat that it was undertaken in a spirit of entire impartiality. If errors or omissions have inadvertently crept in, he will be glad to be advised through the editor of *THE SILENT WORKER*. He claims no inerrability; and while proper criticism will be welcomed, he must refuse to be drawn into controversy for which he has neither the time nor the inclination.