

Rosa H. Halpen

Rosa H. Halpen, who entered the Rochester School for the Deaf (originally the Western New York Institution for Deaf Mutes) when the doors first opened in 1876, was also the school's first graduate. She went on to become a well-loved master teacher and writer of the first history of the Rochester School for the Deaf (RSD).

Her Background and Early Years

Rosa Halpen was born in South Grove, Illinois to parents who had emigrated from the United Kingdom. Her father, John was born in Ireland. Her mother, Elizabeth J. Hampton has been listed in most records as being born in Scotland. Elizabeth J. Hampton likely grew up in Scotland, her father's homeland. According to family history, John and Elizabeth were married in 1849 in England, where Elizabeth's mother was from.¹

John and Elizabeth's oldest daughter, Mary was born in Liverpool, England in 1850. She was followed the next year by Elizabeth (Bessie) who was born in Scotland. By about 1853, the Halpen's had immigrated to New York, where their third daughter, Katherine (Kate) was born. It was reported that by about 1854, the family had recognized their oldest daughter Mary was Deaf. Years later, Rosa noted that Mary became Deaf due to "uncertain reasons, perhaps a severe cold."²

By 1860, the family added another daughter, Jane (called Jeannie) and had moved to South Grove, Illinois. At this time, Illinois was "rather sparsely settled by pioneers. Miss Halpen has said that at night they sometimes heard the howl of wolves. Her older sisters remembered having seen Indians." There, Rosa was born on January 8, 1861. Mary, meanwhile, had begun attending the Illinois School for the Deaf in Jacksonville (from 1863-1870). Rosa, who was born hearing, initially attended the public schools in Sycamore, Illinois.³

By 1870, the family had added its last child, a boy named William (Willie) born about six years after Rosa. At this time, the family was living in Cortland, Illinois where Rosa's father worked as a farm laborer. The 1870 census lists Mary as "Deaf

¹ Most of this information is from ancestry.com and related federal/state census information found there. A few census forms also record Elizabeth Hampton Halpen as being born in Ireland.

² Various census documents from ancestry.com and Mary Halpen's enrollment record from the Illinois School for the Deaf. Quote was from Rosa H. Halpen's recording of Mary's marriage to Samuel Kee in the US Special Census on Deaf family Marriages and Hearing Relatives (1888-1895).

³ Most of this information from TCF's (Thomas Carlaw Forrester) preface "Rosa H. Halpen, The Author," in Halpen, Rosa H. (1936). History of the Rochester School for the Deaf. Rochester, NY: Rochester School for the Deaf. Mary's schooling reported in the US Special Census on Deaf family Marriages and Hearing Relatives (1888-1895) and her enrollment record from Illinois School for the Deaf.

and Dumb” but not 10 year old Rosa. However, Rosa became Deaf soon after, contacting spinal meningitis between 10 and 11 years of age. There seemed to have also been two other infants who were born and died in the Halpen family before being named (perhaps between the years of Rosa and Willie’s birth). Rosa recorded later that one infant had died of the croup while the other died of “congestion of the lungs.”⁴

Rosa’s father, John Halpen, likely died between 1870 and 1880 because Elizabeth Hampton Halpen appeared as a widow living in Rochester NY in the 1880 Federal Census.⁵ Apparently, the family had moved soon after Rosa became Deaf (in 1871 or 1872) choosing Rochester because Rosa’s uncle, John Hampton lived there. Elizabeth Halpen was listed as working as a seamstress.⁶

Rosa was first enrolled in the New York Institute for the Deaf (Fanwood) in 1873 or 1874. At that time, Rosa seemed unfamiliar with sign language despite having an older Deaf sister who had attended a school for the Deaf. She writes of when she first entered Fanwood:

“...I was sitting at a table in the dining room of the deaf and dumb institution at Washington Heights, NY. I was a stranger without an acquaintance in the great school. All about me at the table, hands were waving, and I knew that every gesture was significant, but none had any meaning to me. I felt friendless and very lonely. Just then, through the dining room to her seat opposite mine, came Miss Hamilton. I can see her now as she glanced at me and smiled...”⁷

In another early memory at Fanwood, Rosa wrote about fellow student, George S. Porter who went on to become editor of the Silent Worker, which began:

“It was about the year 1874 that he and I were fellow students at Fanwood and had the good fortune to be pupils of that dearest and best of teachers, the late Miss Hattie E. Hamilton.”⁸

⁴ Noted by Rosa H. Halpen in her record of Mary’s marriage to Samuel Kee in the US Special Census on Deaf family Marriages and Hearing Relatives (1888-1895).

⁵ In all census reports after 1880, Elizabeth Halpen lists herself as a widow. There is some confusion because in the Special Census on Deaf family Marriages and Hearing Relatives (1888-1895) completed by Rosa Halpen in 1890 she notes both “parents are living.” This may simply be a mistake or John Halpen may have remained in Illinois permanently separated from his wife.

⁶ TCF, *op. cit.*, preface, and letter from Rosa H. Halpen to Miss Hamilton that appears in (1884, September) *Rochester Daily Paper for Our Little People*, 5, (11).

⁷ Remington, Carolyn. (1965) Vibrant Silence. Rochester, NY: The Lawyers Co-operative Publishing Company, pg. 129.

⁸ Halpen, Rosa. (1928, July). *Silent Worker*, 40, (10) pg. 423.

In 1874, two of Rosa's sisters married: Bessie married Jesse B. Wing in Sycamore, Illinois, and remained living in Illinois. In the summer of 1874, the oldest sister, Mary, married Samuel Kee, a Deaf man in Rochester, New York. Samuel had attended New York Institute for the Deaf (Fanwood) a number of years earlier. They settled near Samuel's hometown in Argyle, New York.⁹ The 1875 New York Census states that Samuel and Mary were "Deaf and Dumb" and had an infant daughter. Mary's sister, Rosa, who was listed as "Deaf," was living with them. By this time, Rosa was clearly able to communicate with her Deaf family members.

The First Students: Rosa At The Rochester School for the Deaf

On October 4, 1876, Rosa entered the newly opened Western New York Institute for Deaf Mutes (later, the Rochester School for the Deaf) as the 9th student, one of 20 inaugural students.¹⁰

At her graduation in 1884, it was said that she transferred to RSD "at the instance of Dr. Anderson, president of the University of Rochester, who still continues to take a very kindly interest in his protégé."¹¹ Most likely, it was to be nearer to her family who were living in Rochester, as her mother escorted her the first day of school.

Rosa later wrote of her first day at RSD:

"I was eager to go to the new school, for I knew that I should find three dear friends whom I had known in the school I had attended in New York City, called Fanwood. These friends were Mr. and Mrs. Z. F. Westervelt and Miss Hattie E. Hamilton...that morning I found there quite a number of the boys and girls I had known at Fanwood, and this served to make me still more at home."¹²

Additionally, Mrs. Harvey Peet from Fanwood became the school's matron. Rosa described the school atmosphere as being like "a very happy family." She related how the school continued to expand and its move three years later to its present location. In addition, she told of the 'radical change' that Superintendent Westervelt pursued promoting the Rochester Method. In retrospect, she wrote

".... It meant a great and radical change when signs were forbidden and all were required to use English spelled on fingers or spoken. For a long time it seemed as if signs could not be done away with...again and again...the forbidden language was brought into use...The struggle was long and hard

⁹ US Special Census on Deaf family Marriages and Hearing Relatives (1888-1895).

¹⁰ Rosenberg-Naparsteck, Ruth. (2002, Winter). The Rochester School for the Deaf, *Rochester History*, 64, (1), pgs. 1-23 and the Rochester School for the Deaf Archives Enrollment Book.

¹¹ (1884, June). *Rochester Daily Paper for Our Little People*, 4, (264).

¹² Halpen, Rosa H. (1926, June). Reminiscences of Early Days. *Rochester Advocate*, 4, (2), pgs. 1-2

before victory over sign making was won...a great debt of gratitude can best be paid by steadfast and unswerving loyalty to the Rochester Method..."¹³

Yet, even in her faithfulness to the Rochester Method, she was described as late as 1922 as being "an excellent signmaker" in the *Silent Worker*.¹⁴ Rosa felt that RSD was "the right place for me, and remained so for thirty-eight years" (which included her tenure as a teacher).

Rosa wrote reminiscences of her early years at RSD mentioning a marriage between staff members at the school and how the students were involved:

"The supervisor of the older girls was Miss Mary Palmer...In time it became evident that Mr. Diemer and Miss Palmer had become very good friends. Later we were told there was to be a wedding at the school, they being the contracting parties. This created a state of agreeable excitement, the more so that the older girls and boys were given the agreeable task of decorating the dining-room where the wedding was to take place. It was mid-winter, and the boys gathered evergreen boughs and, with the help of the girls, arranged them so effectively the room presented a most festive appearance. This was the first wedding many of us had attended and naturally it was an event in our lives."¹⁵

Information about Rosa during her school years is sketchy, but the *Rochester Daily Paper for Our Little People* (later, the *Rochester Advocate*) which began in 1881 provides brief tidbits about her time as a student. Her activities included teaching Sunday school, involvement in a missionary organization, and various outings. In one, there is a brief note about her skill as a dressmaker and how much the other girls admired her.¹⁶

One tragic incident that happened just before the launch of the *Rochester Daily Paper for Our Little People* was the death of her Deaf sister, Mary. Still living in Argyle, New York area, Mary had given birth to three little girls, Lottie, Lizzie, and Mary. In 1881, Mary apparently died of a morphine overdose administered by a physician.¹⁷

¹³ *Ibid.*, pg 2.

¹⁴ Who's Who in the Deaf World (1922). *Silent Worker*, 35 (3), pg. 119.

¹⁵ Halpen, *op. cit.*, pg. 2.

¹⁶ Journal for Tuesday, April 5th. (1881, April). (Later, the *Rochester Daily Paper for Our Little People*).

¹⁷ From the US Special Census on Deaf family Marriages and Hearing Relatives (1888-1895) on Mary Halpen and Samuel Kee.



Rosa Halpen and class (1899) from the Rochester School for the Deaf Archives

The First Graduate and Early Teaching Career

In 1884, eight years after the opening of RSD, Rosa H. Halpen became the first graduate of the high class. During the graduation program, Rosa presented her graduating essay, "George Eliot as a Woman and as a Writer." The essay focused on how Eliot was able to realistically and sympathetically, portray a great number of different kinds of people from various walks of life.¹⁸

In presenting the diploma, the president of the Board of Trustees stated, "After completing the regular term appointed for pupils in this Institution, on account of excellence of scholarship you were appointed by the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Hon. Neil Gilmour, to a three years supplementary course under the conditions of the Legislature of this state providing for such a special appointment. You have finished the special term and have creditably passed examinations in literature, mental and physical science, and mathematics, and are entitled to all the privileges that pertain to graduates of an academy."¹⁹

It was reported that a woman artist who witnessed the graduation, offered Rosa an apprenticeship in drawing. However, at that time Rosa had planned to go to live with her sister in Northern Illinois and secure work as a compositor in a printing office. It appears she had trained as a typesetter at RSD.

Rosa spent the summer after her graduation in Genoa, Illinois with her sister, Bessie. In a letter to Miss Hamilton at RSD, she mentions that she had visited her childhood home:

¹⁸ see (1884, June), *op. cit.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.* See also 1881 Western New York Institute for Deaf-Mutes' Principal's Report in the Documents of the Senate of the State of New York, Volume 3 (1882). Albany: Weed, Parsons & Company Legislative Printers.

"This town (Sycamore, Illinois) is the place where I lived when I was a little girl. It has grown so much, I only remember a few of the people. I have been to see the house where I lived. It is empty and it looks just as it did the day we went away. It does not seem possible it was twelve years ago."

Rosa was expecting to soon return to Rochester.²⁰ So her plans to find work in Illinois did not pan out. By October, Rosa had taken over teaching for Mr. Sutherland who had left RSD to study at Yale. It was noted, "When a new teacher comes to take his place, she will help teach in the kindergarten."²¹ During this time, Rosa lived with her mother, her sister Kate and her brother Willie.

The June 1885 edition of the *Rochester Daily Paper* gives an example of Miss Halpen's classes at RSD: She teaches from 9 to 3:20, which includes seven different time periods. The students in these classes primarily worked on journal writing, reading, and calisthenics. While there is a closing note that students should be encouraged at home over the summer "to talk by spelling," it is also clear that students do communicate in the classroom "in such language as they have at command."²²

The 1887 edition of *Rochester Daily Paper* published a chart showing the activities and students in one section of Rosa's Kindergarten classes. (Rosa Halpen also taught three periods of the D Kindergarten Class and 2 periods of the C Class in similar subjects):²³

KINDERGARTEN DEPARTMENT.					
REPORT OF THE B CLASS.					
NAMES.	Date of Birth.	Years at school here.	Elsewhere.	Age at which hearing was lost.	Deafness total or partial.
August Klein.	Dec. 15, '73.	7½ years.	none	*Born Deaf.	Total.
Frank Englert.	Dec. 13, '75.	Three years.	none	*Born Deaf.	Partial.
Verne Roblee.	April 18, '74.	Seven years.	none	1½ years.	Total.
Charles Smith.	June 6, '77.	Four years.	none	Five years.	Total.
Frank Thayer.	May 22, '77.	4 years 1 mo.	none	*Born Deaf.	Total.
Walter McMaster.	Feb. 20, '75.	Five years.	none	*Born Deaf.	Total.
Rosa Barnes.	June 22, '76.	Four years.	none	*Born Deaf.	Total.
Florida Hall.	Sept. 1, '76.	Four years.	none	*Born Deaf.	Total.
Louisa Klein.	March 9, '75.	Four years.	none	Six months.	Total.
Clara Lafler.	August 12, '76.	3½ years.	none	*Born Deaf.	Partial.
Gussie Peck.	July 29, '74.	Five years.	none	Three years.	Total.
Bloumie Thiese.	May 11, '74.	7 years 1 mo.	none	Three months.	Total.
9:00—9:50	Lip Reading Miss McNair.				
9:50—10:30	Journal writing and study Miss Halpen.				
10:30—11:10	Speech Miss McNair.				
11:10—11:50	Kindergarten Work Miss Willey.				
2:00—2:40	*Language Lessons Miss Sutherland.				
2:40—3:20	Language Lessons continued Miss Halpen.				
3:20—4:00	Penmanship, Drawing and Language. Miss Halpen.				

*Language lessons consist of: Monday, Letter writing and composition; Tuesday, Natural History; Wednesday, Object Lessons; Thursday, Object Lessons; Friday, Child's Book of Language.

²⁰ (1884, September), *op. cit.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² (1885, June). Report of Miss Halpen's Classes. *Rochester Daily Paper for Our Little People*, 5, (228).

²³ Kindergarten Department. (1887, June). *Rochester Daily Paper for Our Little People*, 7, (234), pg. 673. Also for an explanation about the "method of naming" classes at RSD, see (1890, December). *Rochester Daily Paper for Our Little People*, 11, (84), pg. 187.

Like many teachers, Rosa showed an interest in her students beyond the classroom. Students often were reported as visiting with teachers at their homes or being taken on various excursions. In *Rochester Daily Paper for Our Little People*, it notes one of these excursions in 1886.

“Last night Emma Keyes went home with Miss Halpen. She stayed to tea and played marbles and blew soap bubbles till it was time for her to come back to the Institution. She had a very pleasant time.”²⁴

One of the Women of Gallaudet

At some point, Rosa learned that the National Deaf Mute College (later Gallaudet University) had finally begun to accept women students on an experimental basis in 1887. At first it was reported that she felt she likely missed the opportunity to attend college being 27 years old. However, she was apparently encouraged to attend by RSD, and Dr. Westervelt wrote glowingly of her abilities to President Edward Miner Gallaudet. Fortunately, she also was able to afford the cost as she had been employed as a teacher. While Rosa had missed being among the first group of women students in the ‘experimental phase of coeducation’ beginning in 1887, she was able to skip the introductory class, thereby joining that initial group in the freshman class in the fall of 1888.²⁵ Rosa joined Agatha Tiegel and Alto Lowman among others boarding in the President’s House on Faculty Row at Gallaudet. At this time, there were no dorms for women students.

As the 1888 school year began at RSD, there were several announcements in the *Rochester Daily Paper for Our Little People* about Rosa’s departure:

“Miss Halpen has her old place in school for a time. She goes to Washington to attend college about the middle of September. College opens the 17th of September.”²⁶

“This evening Miss Halpen and Philip Brown leave for Washington. Sabra Twitchell has done a good deal to help Miss Halpen in her preparations to go away. She has cut and helped to make several of her dresses. Sabra has had some experience in packing, and she went to Miss Halpen’s home Saturday afternoon and helped to pack her trunks and took tea with her...Mr. Earl Wilson...will...take the evening train with Miss Halpen and Philip Brown for Washington.”²⁷

²⁴ (1886, May). *Rochester Daily Paper for Our Little People*, 6, (202), p. 531.

²⁵ From Jones, Nancy Carolyn. (1983) *Don’t Take Any Aprons to College: A study of the beginnings of co-education at Gallaudet College*. Masters Thesis, University of Maryland. And letters from Gallaudet archives EMGallaudet Correspondence.

²⁶ (1888, September) *Rochester Daily Paper for Our Little People*, 9, (4), pg. 7.

²⁷ (1888, September). *Rochester Daily Paper for Our Little People* 9, (13), pg. 28.

In the *American Annals of the Deaf*, news from the Western New York Institution reported that, "Miss Rosa Halpen has given up her kindergarten classes to enter the National College at Washington."²⁸

Events describing Rosa's life in Washington DC were reported throughout her time via letters and notes in the Rochester school publication. During her first spring in Washington, she mentions the beautiful weather, a tour of the White House, a camp out on the Potomac, and end of the school year events. Additionally, she reports "On the fourth of March I saw Harrison and Cleveland riding together in a carriage."²⁹

Further communications that spring are given below, including a report concerning the success of the 'experiment:'

"Miss Hodges has recently received a letter from Miss Halpen telling something of Presentation day. She says: 'Kendall Green was at its best then. President Harrison with some of his cabinet were here. The chapel was crowded, and the exercises very interesting. Five students were candidates for the degree of B.A., and three for that of B.S...Everyone here seems to be of the opinion that the experiment has been a success, and that the college will continue to receive women. We shall live in the Kendall school until a new building is put up for us.'"³⁰

"Some of the older girls recently received a letter from Miss Halpen, and were delighted with her account of a ball which was given at the National Deaf mute college. It was held in the gymnasium on the evening of May 19th...Dr. Gallaudet has invited all of the students to remain in Washington until the 26th of June to witness the unveiling of the Gallaudet statue."³¹

The paper also states: "Since Miss Halpen has been in Washington she has corresponded with several of the little boys and girls, her former pupils, as well as with some of the older girls. Her letters have not only given pleasure, but have been very instructive to the children. We appreciate the interest which Miss Halpen has thus shown in her schoolmates and pupils, and the pleasure she has given to us all."³²

The following school year, she writes to Miss Hamilton three days before Christmas:

"The girls composing my circle are more interested in the work and more earnest in their efforts than ever before. We are really able to do very little

²⁸ Fay, Edward. (1888). "School Items." *American Annals of the Deaf*, 33 (4).

²⁹ (1889, April). *Rochester Daily Paper for Our Little People*. 9, (176). Also see (1889, May). *Rochester Daily Paper for Our Little People*. 9, (512).

³⁰ (1889, June). *Rochester Daily Paper for Our Little People*. 9, (229), p. 473.

³¹ (1889, June). *Rochester Daily Paper for Our Little People*. 9, (225), p. 466.

³² (1889, May) *op.cit.*

work outside of the school, we are so isolated from the outside world and our time is so taken up with our studies. So the most we can do is little things for those around us, and keep a watch over our own actions. One method of self-improvement that we have hit upon is this: as the birthday of each member comes around, the others write her a letter telling her what appears to them to be her chief fault, with the understanding that they are to help her to overcome it. I am looking forward with no little trepidation to my birthday which comes next month..."³³

In addition to her coursework, Rosa was involved with collecting information for Dr. Fay's research on demographics of the Deaf population as well as involvement with the King's Daughters. Agatha Tiegel (Hanson), the first Deaf woman who graduated from Gallaudet with a BA degree, mentioned Rosa leading King's Daughters meetings at the college. Agatha Tiegel believed that this was the only organization the women students participated in during the 1888-1889 school year.³⁴ The Society of the King's Daughters was based in Chautauqua, New York and was an interdenominational Christian organization. Meetings of this organization were also mentioned in the *Rochester Daily Paper* beginning about this time.

It is unclear as to why Rosa Halpen participated in the two-year program at Gallaudet and did not pursue a degree. It may have been a financial decision or related to her leave from RSD. She clearly benefited from further educational experiences, made life long friends, and after this time seemed more adventurous in terms of travel.

Rosa's Later Years

Both the Annals and the *Rochester Daily Paper for Our Little People* report on Rosa's return to RSD. *The Daily paper* states:

"Miss Buckland is succeeded by Miss Rosa Halpen, who thus returns to the position she filled before going to the National College at Washington for two years. These two years of college study have been a delight to her; they have been more useful to her than most of her former years of study because she has been working for a purpose."³⁵

After returning to RSD, Rosa wrote a paper on "Number Teaching" that was presented during a teacher's meeting. Later, the paper, describing a developmental approach to teaching numbers, was published in the *Rochester Daily Paper for Our Little People*.³⁶ She placed particular emphasis on engaging the students with active

³³ (1890, January). *Rochester Daily Paper for Our Little People*. 10, 114.

³⁴ Hanson, Agatha Tiegel. (1912, December). The origin of the O.W.L.S. *Silent Worker*. 25, (3), pg. 56.

³⁵ (1890, September). *Rochester Daily Paper for Our Little People*, 1-2, pg. 1.

³⁶ Halpen, Rosa (1890, December). Number Teaching. *Rochester Daily Paper for our Little People*. 11, (84), pgs. 183-187.

examples in their early years. In one such example, adding and subtracting is taught by sending students out of the classroom and into the hall. It appears she was clearly encouraged to share techniques she had learned while at Gallaudet with the RSD faculty.

After returning from Washington, Rosa continued to live with her family. At this point, Rosa began to travel a bit more including visiting sister, Bessie, in Illinois. The *Rochester Daily Paper for Our Little People* also records a visit of Mary Kee, Rosa's niece.

"For two Saturdays past Miss Halpen has brought her little niece, Mary Kee, to school with her to spend the morning in kindergarten. The little girls have received her very cordially, and have tried to make her feel at home among them. Last Saturday morning, Jennie Avery, Myrtle Manning, and Ester Perry gave Mary a present of some Doll's clothes which they had made themselves for her doll. Mary has come to live with Miss Halpen. She is eleven years old. Though she is a little hearing girl, she spells quite rapidly."³⁷

Mary Kee's mother was Rosa's Deaf sister, Mary, who died in 1881 when this child was very young. Her widowed Deaf father raised her, and it is unclear how long she stayed with Rosa Halpen and her family in Rochester.

In January, 1892 on her birthday, it was reported that she received a photograph of the thirteen women students who were attending Gallaudet University.³⁸ Most of these women had been her classmates, and by the end of that school year, Alto Lowman would be the first of the 'experimental group' to graduate with a Bachelor's of Philosophy.

Beginning in about 1901, Rosa, her mother and her sister Kate lived with her other married sister's (Jeannie McPherson) family for a number of years. In 1902, her niece, Alice McPherson was mentioned in the school paper.

"Martha Jackson was delighted when Miss Halpen brought her an invitation from her niece, Alice McPherson, to come stay over night and help celebrate her birthday. Alice is just about Martha's age, so the girls had a fine time together..."³⁹

In 1904, Rosa along with a number of other graduates of RSD, most notably Charles McLaughlin, established the RSD Alumni Association. Until her death, Rosa was very involved with the Alumni Association often holding a number of offices, writing the

³⁷ (1891, May). *Rochester Daily Paper for Our Little People*, 11, (201), pg. 506.

³⁸ From an essay by Bertha Flynn (1892, January). *Rochester Daily Paper for Our Little People*, 12, (112), pg. 298.

³⁹ (1902, January). *Rochester Daily Paper for Our Little People*, 22, (108), pg. 325.

alumni notes for the Rochester school paper and serving on the necrology committee.

At this time also, the *Rochester Daily Paper for Our Little People* began reporting on Rosa's many travels. She often visited family and Deaf friends.

"Miss Halpen and Miss Pugh spent two delightful weeks in New York City, the guests of Miss Myra L. Barrager, teacher of the deaf-blind pupils at Fanwood. Miss Barrager and Miss Halpen were schoolmates at Fanwood before the opening of the Rochester school. One of the pleasures of the visit was meeting with another schoolmate, Mrs. J.B. Lloyd, of Trenton, New Jersey, who Miss Halpen had not met in twenty-eight years."

In 1909, Rosa's mother died. She continued to live with her sister, Jeannie and her family. In 1911, Rosa celebrated her 50th birthday and was given a surprise party at the conclusion of an RSD alumni association meeting.⁴⁰



Rosa Halpen and class (undated) from the Rochester School for the Deaf Archives

During these teaching years, Rosa Halpen maintained her commitment to RSD with her involvement in The Silent Workers/Little Workers, which supported missionary efforts, and the Lambda Phi Phi, a literary and debate organization. Rosa Halpen was one of the first girl students to join the Lambda Phi Phi Society. In later years, *The Rochester Advocate's* Lambda Phi Phi news column mentioned Rosa Halpen as being an excellent and captivating storyteller more than once.

When she turned 55 years old, she had garnered the 30 years needed for retirement. In June 1916, the alumni gathered to "give testimony of their affectionate regard for her" and shared letters "in praise of her work as a teacher and her example as a wise, steadfast friend." Yet, when the 1916-1917 school year began, Rosa was still teaching because her replacement would not be ready until October. It was written that "...those who witnessed it (Rosa's leaving in October 1917) realized it meant the

⁴⁰ (1911, January). *Rochester Daily Advocate of English and Speech for the Deaf*, 31, (108), pg. 346.

termination of a teaching career that was a valuable asset to the school and an honor to alumni who count Miss Halpen among their own.”⁴¹

Of course, Rosa Halpen did not stay away from RSD for long. In January 1917, she visited attending a Lambda Phi Phi meeting, sharing a Longfellow story.⁴² In May 1917, she dropped in on the Kindergarten class with the comment: “The teachers and children are always pleased to see Miss Halpen and wish that her visits might come a little closer together.”⁴³ During her retirement years, she often visited the school and continued her commitment to the Alumni Association.

After retiring, Rosa spent a number of winters with her sister Jeannie McPherson in Lakeland, Florida. This was quite an adventure as several times she needed to travel east to New York City and from New York City to Miami via steamer. On her way to catch the steamer on one such trip in 1922, she went first to Dr. Hotchkiss’ funeral. Dr. John Hotchkiss was one of Rosa’s professors from Gallaudet and a beloved figure on the Gallaudet campus for over 50 years.⁴⁴

In 1926, the Rochester School for the Deaf celebrated its fifty-year anniversary. Rosa attended the anniversary exercises as outlined in the *Rochester Advocate* and her photograph appeared alongside those of the superintendents and members of the RSD Board of Directors.⁴⁵ She was a guest of honor staying on campus during the celebrations where she presented to students “Reminiscences of Early Days” which was later printed in the *Rochester Advocate*.⁴⁶ During this time, the alumni honored her with a gift of \$75.00 “In recognition of the fact that she was the first graduate of the school and served faithfully as a teacher for thirty years, contributing materially to the upbuilding of the school.” Her expression of appreciation was also published, and she explained a friend had used the funds to buy her a much-desired set of binoculars. She wrote:

“I want to thank each and all of you warmly for the unexpected gift which was presented to me...She (her friend) has written the name of everyone of you on a tiny card and strung them all on a ribbon so I may know just who you are. This long ribbon with your names attached I have hung as a garland

⁴¹ Alumni Notes. (1916, November). *Rochester Daily Advocate of English and Speech for the Deaf*, 37, (9), pgs. 164-165 and Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Alumni Association: June 25, 1916. (1917, May). *Rochester Daily Advocate of English and Speech for the Deaf*, 37, (36), pg. 644.

⁴² Lambda Phi Phi. (1917, January). *Rochester Daily Advocate of English and Speech for the Deaf*, 37, (19), pg. 329.

⁴³ Kindergarten Notes. (1917, May). *Rochester Daily Advocate of English and Speech for the Deaf*, 37, (35), pg. 623.

⁴⁴ Alumni Notes. (1922, December). *Rochester Daily Advocate of English and Speech for the Deaf*, 43, (3), pg. 5.

⁴⁵ (1926, October). *Rochester Daily Advocate of English and Speech for the Deaf: Fiftieth anniversary Number*, 47, (1), pgs. 1-22.

⁴⁶ Halpen (1926, June), *op. cit.*

on the wall of my room where I can see it daily. Can you think of what joy it gives me to look often at this visible proof of your goodwill and kindly remembrance? How can I feel other than grateful and joyful to know I am so rich in friends?"⁴⁷

The year 1936 Rosa Halpen turned 75. It was a remarkable year for her. During this year, she completed her book on the history of the Rochester School for the Deaf. Superintendent Forrester wrote that "Her interest in the school and its welfare...has never flagged and when the subject of writing a history of the school was discussed, Rosa Halpen was the choice of Alumni for the task."⁴⁸ Remarkably, she returned to live on RSD campus in 1934 while researching the book. During her 75th year, Rosa also attended the Empire Association of the Deaf Conference in Binghamton⁴⁹ and had a visit from Agatha Tiegel (Hanson) her old classmate from Gallaudet Days.⁵⁰ In the Alumni notes, Rosa writes on turning 75:

"I wish you and all my friends could know what a surprised and happy woman I am today. Some little bird must have carried the news about that I was to celebrate my three-quarter-century milestone this week. The result has been a shower of beautiful greeting cards and lovely messages...I am deeply touched by this token of regard from my dear former pupils. It makes me wish that I could go back and live over again those thirty years of teaching, and in the light of all I have learned since then, do much better work, and be to them a more sympathetic, understanding, and loving teacher..."⁵¹

Rosa lived for a time with former RSD classmates after she retired, but in her later years seemed to have lived with her sister Jeannie in one of her nieces' houses near Medina, New York. The last event before her death reported by the *Rochester Advocate* was Rosa's attendance at the funeral of Anna Fisher, a classmate of hers from both Fanwood and the Rochester School for the Deaf.⁵²

Rosa Halpen died on April 30th 1939. Her obituary in the *Rochester Advocate* reported, "failing vitality brought on by the ripe age of seventy-eight years hastened the end." Her funeral service was in Timmerman's funeral parlor, the family

⁴⁷ Alumni Notes. (1926, October). *Rochester Daily Advocate of English and Speech for the Deaf: Fiftieth anniversary Number*, 47, (1), pgs. 4-5.

⁴⁸ TFC, *op. cit.*

⁴⁹ Alumni Notes. (1936, October). *Rochester Daily Advocate of English and Speech for the Deaf*, 57, (1), pg. 5.

⁵⁰ Alumni Notes. (1936, November). *Rochester Daily Advocate of English and Speech for the Deaf*, 57, (2), pg. 10.

⁵¹ Alumni Notes. (1936, February). *Rochester Daily Advocate of English and Speech for the Deaf*, 56, (5), pgs. 4-5.

⁵² Alumni Notes. (1938, June). *Rochester Daily Advocate of English and Speech for the Deaf*, 58, (9), pgs. 10-11.

business of one of Rosa's classmates. She was cremated at Mt. Hope Cemetery on May 4, 1939.⁵³

Notes and tributes from old classmates, colleagues, students, and friends were printed in *The Rochester Advocate* the following month. In many of the tributes, she was honored as being the first graduate who was also "a student of unusual scholastic attainments;" one of the first kindergarten teachers at RSD "whose discipline and influence were of sterling worth and were uplifting and lasting;" and a beloved friend who had "a quiet dignity and delicious sense of humor."⁵⁴

⁵³ Rosa Hampden Halpen: 1861-1939—Our First Graduate Passes. (1939, May). *Rochester Daily Advocate of English and Speech for the Deaf*, 59, (8). pg. 8.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, and Alumni News. (1939, May). *Rochester Daily Advocate of English and Speech for the Deaf*, 59, (9). pgs. 4-5.