The Story of Mr. And Mrs. Deaf:
Deaf American Historiography, Past, Present, and Future

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Abstract

This paper offers a review of deaf American historiography, and proposes that future scholarship would benefit from a synthesis of historical biography and critical analysis. In recent deaf historical scholarship there exists a tendency to privilege the study of the Deaf community and deaf institutions as a whole over the study of the individuals who comprise the community and populate the institutions. This paper argues that the inclusion of diverse deaf figures is an essential component to the future of deaf history. However, historians should not lapse in to straight-forward biography in the vein of their eighteenth and nineteenth-century predecessors. They must use these stories purposefully to advance larger discussions about the history of the deaf and of the United States. The Deaf community has never been monolithic, and in order to fully realize 'deaf' as a useful category of historical analysis, the definition of which deaf stories are worth telling must broaden. Biography, when coupled with critical historical analysis, can enrich and diversify deaf American historiography.

Key Words

Deaf history; historiography; disability history; biography; American; identity.

L'histoire de «M et Mme Sourde »: l'historiographie des personnes Sourdes dans le passé, le présent et l'avenir

Résumé

Le présent article offre un résumé de l'historiographie de la surdité aux États-Unis, et propose que dans le futur, la recherche bénéficierait d'une synthèse de la biographie historique et d'une analyse critique. Il existe une tendance au sein du travail académique récent sur l'histoire de la surdité à privilégier l'étude de la communauté Sourde et des institutions Sourdes, et de négliger l'étude des individus qui constituent la communauté et qui peuplent ces institutions. L'auteur montre ici que rien n'est plus important pour avancer l'histoire des personnes sourdes que l'inclusion d'une diversité de figures sourdes. Cependant, les historiens doivent éviter la tendance – au risque de ressembler à leurs prédécesseurs du 19ème et 18ème siècles – des biographie simples. Ils doivent plutôt utiliser ces récits de façon délibérée pour avancer des discussions plus larges sur l'histoire des personnes sourdes et l'histoire des États-Unis. La communauté Sourde n'a jamais été monolithique, et pour mieux mobiliser cette appellation en tant que catégorie d'analyse historique, la définition des histoires Sourdes qui méritent d'être racontées doit être élargie. La biographie, lorsqu'elle est combinée à une analyse historique critique, peut enrichir et diversifier l'historiographie de la surdité aux États-Unis.

Mots clés

La surdité; l'historiographie; la biographie; États-Unis; identité Sourde.

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This paper offers a review of deaf American historiography, and proposes that future scholarship would benefit from a synthesis of historical biography and critical analysis. The use of historical biography, once a preferred method of recording deaf histories, has waned in contemporary scholarship. In recent deaf historical scholarship there exists a tendency to privilege the study of the Deaf[1] community, and deaf institutions as a whole, over the study of the individuals who comprise the community and populate the institutions. The term 'Deaf community' refers to a group of individuals with a shared language, American Sign Language (ASL), a shared history, and shared perceptions and ideologies cultivated from their experiences as individuals who do not hear. Douglas C. Baynton, Jack R. Gannon, and Jean Lindquist Bergey explain, "[j]ust as geographical and cultural conditions that isolate populations have led to the creation of distinct spoken languages, so has the physical and social condition of not hearing led to the creation of Deaf communities and sign languages" (Baynton, Gannon, and Bergey, 2007, p. 2).

Recent contributions to deaf American historiography, such as Douglas Baynton et al's (2007) *Through Deaf Eyes: A Photographic History of an American Community*, Melvia and Ronald Nomeland's (2011) *The Deaf Community in America: History in the*

[1] The use of the word "deaf" with a lowercase "d" connotes the physiological condition of deafness, rather than the cultural identity of being "Deaf", where a capital "D" is used. According to Carol Padden and Tom Humphries in *Deaf In America: Voices From a Culture*, this convention was first proposed by linguist James Woodward in 1972, and adopted in ensuing years by the Deaf community (1988, 2). The distinction and choice to employ one form of the word over another is confusing at times. Alternating between the two forms is not a typographical oversight in this paper, but reflects a conscious choice. Generally I have elected to use "Deaf" when referring to the community, or in instances where a particular author preferred that form of the word. Otherwise I have tried to de-politicize the word and keep it within the vernacular of the time period I am examining, and thus I have used "deaf".

Making, and David F. Armstrong's (2014) *The History of Gallaudet University: 150 Years of a Deaf American Institution,* are valuable reading for those who want to understand the Deaf community as a larger entity, as well as its structure, and its tenets.

By contrast, the earliest histories of the deaf relied almost exclusively on individual biographies to tell their history, rather than on the broader Deaf community. In both cases, where mention is made of specific deaf individuals, the focus tends to be on elite members of the community to the exclusion of the rank and file members who constitute the majority Deaf community.[2] This paper argues that the inclusion of more diverse deaf figures is an essential component to the future of deaf history. However, historians should not lapse in to straight-forward biography in the vein of their eighteenth and nineteenth-century predecessors. They must use these stories purposefully to advance larger discussions about the history of the deaf and of the United States. Incorporating biographical elements in deaf historiography lends agency to the deaf historical actor, whose distinct experiences should be acknowledged and understood. Biography also affords nuance to deaf history, since it demonstrates heterogeneity within the historical Deaf community. The Deaf community, like other minority communities, has never been monolithic. Robert A. Scott writes, "[t]his community is large, very active, and extremely cohesive. For its members it supplies a context in which they preserve a keen sense of separateness from the hearing community." However, Scott goes on to say that "this community is divided into strata

[2] Harlan Lane's (2004) biography of John Brewster Jr. in *A Deaf Artist in Early America: The Worlds of John Brewster Jr.* is an accomplished synthesis of biography and critical analysis, however, given that John Brewster Jr. was one of the most prominent portrait painters in early America, he can hardly be counted among the rank and file.

and cliques based upon common lines of social differentiation in our culture, such as age, sex, education, and ethnicity, as well as along lines of differentiation unique to the world of the deaf, such as those based upon preferred modes of communication, like signing, speaking, and lipreading"(Scott in Higgins, 1980, p. 9.)

Deaf sociologists Carol Padden and Tom Humphries confirm such stratification exists in the Deaf community and observe, "Even within the population of Deaf people who use ASL, not surprisingly, there is enormous diversity. Large communities of Deaf people in Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Edmonton, Alberta…have their own distinctive identities. Within these local communities there are actually smaller groups organized by class, profession, ethnicity, or race, each of which has another set of distinct characteristics" (1988, p. 4.) Considering this, in order to fully realize 'deaf' as a useful category of historical analysis, further exploration of such stratification is essential. Additionally, the definition of which deaf stories are worth telling must broaden. Biography, when coupled with critical historical analysis, can enrich and diversify deaf American historiography.

Deaf American historiography has struggled to find an audience outside of deaf and disability studies circles. As such, a disservice has been done to both deaf history and American history. Deaf history exists on the margins of scholarly debate, and so is short-changed since its contributors and critics, that is, those who propel scholarship, are relatively few. Yet, deaf history is powerful in its capacity to enrich and illuminate the study of American history with a new lens, and thus, so too is the corpus of American history shortchanged by its resistance to embrace deaf histories into the larger national narrative. In short, greater attention must be paid to deaf historiography, and more must

be demanded of this scholarship in order that it may assume its rightful place in the fore of American historiography. Just as American history benefited tremendously from the inclusion of categories such as 'race' and 'gender' in historical analysis, so too can American history benefit from 'deaf' as a useful category.

These challenges notwithstanding, an impressive body of literature on the American deaf experience has nonetheless been cultivated over the last two and a half centuries. The following is a historiographical review of literature which discusses the origins of the Deaf community in America. The majority focus is on sources which describe the relationship between schools for the deaf and the history of the Deaf community in America, as this is the topic of greatest concern and attention in deaf historiography.[3] The sources discussed herein are predominantly organized chronologically in the order which they were written, to demonstrate the evolution in style and substance of deaf historiography over time. Enmeshed in this review is a proposal to stimulate new scholarship through a synthesis of historical biography and critical analysis to further develop 'deaf' as a useful category of historical analysis, and to capitalize on the utility of incorporating deaf history in the study of American history writ large.

[3] Owing to space constraints, the following works are noted here, but not discussed at length in this historiographic review: B. St. John Ackers "Historical Notes on the Education of the Deaf" (1880, 163-171); Sari Altschuler " 'He That Hath An Ear to Hear': Deaf America and the Second Great Awakening" (2011); Benjamin Bahan and Hansel Bauman "The Power of Place: The Evolution of Kendall Green" (2008); Jane Berger "Uncommon Schools: Institutionalizing Deafness in Early-Nineteenth Century America" (2004); Betty Miller Unterberger "The First Attempt to Establish an Oral School for the Deaf and Dumb in the United States" (1947, 556-566); Phyllis Klein Valentine "A Nineteenth Century Experiment in Education of the Handicapped: The American Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb" (1991, 355-375); Phyllis Klein Valentine "Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet: Benevolent Paternalism and the Origins of the American Asylum" (1993).

The First Wave of Deaf Historiography?

Although published as a collection in 2009, Ferdinand Berthier's essays as compiled in *Forging Deaf Education in Nineteenth-Century France: Biographical Sketches of Bébian, Sicard, Massieu, and Clerc,* were originally written in the 1830s and 1840s, and therefore constitute some of the earliest histories of formal deaf education. As evidenced by Berthier's collection of biographies of pioneers in deaf education, many of the earliest histories of the deaf took a biographical/narrative form. The editor of this collection, Freeman G. Henry, argues that these biographies fit nicely within the intellectual landscape of the nineteenth century when the French historical discipline was undergoing a process of hybridization of sorts. He claims that this new era of history, which included biography, "established parameters that would accommodate aesthetic as well as personal, patriotic, and philosophical agendas" (2009, xi).

As this review will bear out, the tendency towards biography/narrative in deaf history persisted throughout the nineteenth century. Berthier's biographies are noteworthy for the emphasis they place on the deaf individual as an historical actor with agency. Though leading figures in the Paris Institute for the Deaf, the influence of the men from Berthier's biographies is easily felt in American deaf education history, since the first permanent school for the deaf in the United States was modeled after the Paris Institute. Laurent Clerc, the subject of one of the biographies, was a co-founder of the Connecticut Asylum for the Education of Deaf and Dumb Persons, later renamed and henceforth referred to in this essay as the American School for the Deaf (ASD). Berthier himself was a pupil and later an instructor at the Paris Institute, and he elected

to canonize these men, who so influenced him, through historical biography. A such, Berthier's works are canonical rather than critically analytical.

If an argument is to be found in this book, it comes from editor Freeman G. Henry who explains that his purpose in translating and assembling this collection of biographies was to "foster a greater understanding, not only of the development of a language and culture in France, but also of the extent to which the histories of the two countries (France and the United States) are truly intertwined" (xi). In other words, Henry argues that the early history of deaf education, language, and culture in the United States is inextricably linked to the history of deaf education in France.

Historians not only have access to Berthier's biographies of these influential deaf leaders, but thanks to the efforts of Harlan Lane (2006) who edited and compiled *The Deaf Experience: Classics in Language and Education*, we also have access to some of their original writings. This collection of seminal works in deaf history was published in 2006, but the edited and translated works contained therein were written between 1764 and 1840. The essays in this collection are the works of Saboureux de Fontenay, Pierre Desloges, Charles-Michel de l'Épée, Jean Massieu, Roch-Ambroise Sicard, Roch-Ambroise Bébian, and, of course, Ferdinand Berthier. It is difficult to know where to place this edited collection in deaf historiography. Certainly many of the essays in this collection are historical in nature, and thus it could be argued that they comprise some of the earliest histories of deaf education in France. They are also partly biographical in nature, which suits them being categorized among the early biographical histories of the deaf. Taken in the abstract, these essays describe the experiences and sentiments of the aforementioned men and their various roles in the French deaf education system.

However, it might be equally useful to conceive of this collection as it appeared in 2006. As a collection, the utility of these sources lies in their collective ability to overturn the 'pathological' model of deafness and its history, which editor Harlan Lane argues dominated the history of the deaf since the late nineteenth-century, and replace it with more contemporary models of analysis. Lane proposes that histories which incorporate social models of deafness, and which are mindful of the embodied experiences of being physiologically deaf, are the best approaches through which to describe the historical deaf experience. As a collection, these essays demonstrate that at least as early as the eighteenth century, the deaf defended themselves against marginalization and the 'pathological' charges levied against them. They asserted their agency through the use of education and the written word, and this helps explain why appreciating the significance of early deaf education is germane to understanding the history of the deaf.

As evidenced by the literature thus far discussed, histories of deaf education written in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century were primarily produced in France, where formal education for the deaf had a longer tradition than in America. Indeed, the very model of American deaf education was premised on the French model, which co-founder Reverend Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet imported to the United States by way of Laurent Clerc, who was previously affiliated with the Paris Institute for the Deaf as both a pupil and instructor. Ira Derby's (1885) *The History of the First School for Deaf-Mutes of America* is likely the earliest formally published history of American deaf education. Specifically it focuses on ASD in Hartford, Connecticut. Derby's history was devised to satisfy the curiosity of the lay public as to how the deaf were educated, and as to how such a system of educating the deaf came to be. Considering its age, and the

audience for which it was written, it is necessarily narrative in structure. Within this narrative are biographies of both Gallaudet and Clerc, thus affirming their "founding father" status in deaf historiography.

Though pithy in nature and lacking an essential argument, this source is unique in that it recounts and celebrates the history of a sign-language-based system of deaf education at a time when oralism, that is, the use of speaking and lipreading, dominated American deaf education. According to the front matter of the book, this history was compiled in 1877, but was not published until 1885, five years after the 'Milan Conference' of international deaf educators declared oralism to be a superior system of deaf education as compared to manualism, that is, the use of signed languages.[4] As other works in this literature review will attest, this debate over linguistics and pedagogy for the deaf came to be one of the most contentious issues between deaf and hearing communities. For this reason, as well as the fact that it is one of the earliest published histories of American deaf education, this is a novel source.

Not long after Derby's history of elementary deaf education was published, Edward Miner Gallaudet (1895) began writing *History of the College for the Deaf, 1857-1907.* However, this history of The Columbia Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb, later renamed and henceforth referred to in this review as Gallaudet University, was not published until 1983. Edward Miner Gallaudet was the son of ASD founder Reverend Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet. It is unsurprising then that Edward Miner Gallaudet, given the momentous impact of his father's school, would elect to hand-pen the history of the world's first and only liberal arts college for the deaf, an institution

[4] For a summary of the conference proceedings and their impact, see "Milan Congress in 1880" from the Institute of Cognitive Sciences and Technologies website http://www.istc.cnr.it/mostralis/eng/pannello14.htm.

which the junior Gallaudet had a hand in establishing. As such, it is also unsurprising that this history largely canonizes Gallaudet University and the people who had a hand in establishing it. It is mostly narrative and biographical and thus follows the trends of early histories of deaf education. Indeed Gallaudet writes "[t]he college for the deaf at Washington has been so much a part of my life that in attempting to give the history of the one, I must, in a measure at least, tell the story of the other" (p. 3).

Edward Miner Gallaudet does not advance a critical argument through his work, but the source is nonetheless significant because it weaves the history of the deaf into the broader history of America. According to Edward C. Merrill, Gallaudet's history "provides a unique perspective of an important development in the history of education in the United States" and it is also "a vivid description of the times, of the personalities of prominent persons then serving in Congress and the Federal Government, of the struggle for funding, and of the effort to acquire public understanding of the needs of deaf people and the mission of the institution" (Merrill in Gallaudet, 1983, xv-xvi). In other words, Gallaudet's work of history makes a case for the amalgamation of deaf and American history.

The *Second* First Wave of Deaf Historiography

As evidenced by the histories discussed thus far, early histories of the deaf were often written by those who had a vested interest in promoting deaf education. The advantage of this practice is that it tended to privilege deaf pioneers, celebrate the accomplishments of the deaf, and depict the deaf as agents in their own history. The disadvantage, of course, is that these early histories were more promotional than

critically analytic. It was not until the early 1980s that deaf historiography adopted in any appreciable way the methods necessary to command more rigorous scholarly attention. In fact, though earlier histories of the deaf exist, many historians of the deaf demarcate the first wave of deaf historiography as beginning in the 1980s.

Deaf studies gained credibility as a scholarly field in the early 1980s owing to two seminal events in 1981: a degree-granting Deaf studies program was offered for the first time at Boston University (Bauman, 2008, p. 7), and Jack Gannon's (1981) *Deaf Heritage: A Narrative History of Deaf America* was published. Gannon's work represents the first comprehensive history of the deaf in America and is considered by many historians to be the founding text of American deaf historiography. A significant feature of the book is that its author is deaf, and because of this, the Deaf community has come to privilege this text in its history and historiography. For its meticulous research and impressive scope, Gannon's book is an important contribution. However, though there is nearly a one hundred year gap between Gallaudet's work and Gannon's work, there are some surprising continuities in methodology between the two histories, and this poses some problems. As previously mentioned, many early histories of the deaf were biographical or narrative in nature, and to a large extent, Gannon's work is no different. In this way, the first wave of deaf historiography, whether begun in the late eighteenth century as this review suggests, or the early 1980s with Gannon's work as others have suggested, is somewhat methodologically incongruent with contemporary scholarship in disability studies. Susan Burch and Alison Kafer explain that, "Academics and activists from the West have historically shared common theoretical frameworks for understanding deaf/disability identity and community...both deaf and disability

researchers and community members have relied heavily on a social model of analysis. This approach assumes that disability and deafness are shaped primarily by context, including cultural values and conventions, environmental barriers, historical periods, and resources" (2010, xvi). Gannon's work makes clear that the deaf have a rich and significant history, but leaves the door open for others to theorize and expound on that history. Indeed, Gannon himself admits that his book "is but a scratch on the surface of the history of one of America's most overlooked minority groups" (1981, xviii).

Nonetheless, *Deaf Heritage* is a germinal work in Deaf History. True, stylistically it borrows from earlier narrative traditions in deaf history, however, it also precipitates a new trend of examining notions of community among the deaf. It points to early schools for the deaf as the loci of community-formation. Very clearly Gannon sees the advent of deaf education in the United States as crucial in the formation of a vibrant and successful Deaf America, and the choices he makes in his work reflect this belief. Gannon's history begins with a narrative account of the voyage from France to America made by Laurent Clerc and Reverend Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet to begin their momentous undertaking of establishing a formal system of deaf education in the United States. From here *Deaf Heritage* chronicles notable dates, people, institutions, and organizations in the history of the deaf in America. Although Gannon's work is more so narrative than critically argumentative, his work inspired others to take up the task of critically analyzing the existence and origins of a distinct American Deaf community, and it is for this that his work is most significant.

Harlan Lane's (1984) *When the Mind Hears* is one such a work. Simply put, Harlan Lane describes his work as "a study in the anatomy of prejudice" (xiii). He writes

from the perspective that the deaf are a distinct minority population in America. Lane's work seeks to overturn hearing people's assumption that deafness is simply a physical condition residing within an individual, rather than being a facet of an individual's identity and culture. Simply put, according to Lane the majority of hearing people did not believe the deaf shared a collective history. He points out that "Until recently, no deaf person had written a history of the deaf community either—bitter testimony to the effectiveness of the establishment in inculcating the medical model of deafness in children" (xiv). He credits Jack Gannon's *Deaf Heritage* as breaking this cycle, but it is clear that Lane believes there is much work to be done in the history of the deaf.

Before Gannon, Lane argues, the history of the deaf existed only as an anecdote in hearing histories and generally existed as a noteworthy accomplishment in education reform. In fact, it was not really about the deaf at all, but about the capacity of hearing people to effectively educate the deaf. In the wake of Gannon, Lane's work goes further in overturning this tendency. He adopts an unusual method to place the deaf squarely at the centre of their own history. He actually assumes the voice of Laurent Clerc, one of the deaf founders of ASD, in his book. In this way, Lane borrows stylistically from earlier histories of the deaf which are biographical in nature. However Lane's book advances a well-defined argument under the guise of biography. Lane clearly states "With the recent evidence from linguistics that American Sign Language is a natural language, the signing community is revealed to be a linguistic minority, and this history interprets the record of their struggle in that light" (xv). Lane's work represents a turning point in deaf historiography as it demands scholarly, critical scrutiny of the history of the deaf in America, a history that should exist on its own terms. It solidifies the notion that the deaf

constitute a minority community in America. Most significantly, it speaks to the tension between the colonizing influences to which the deaf were subject from the earliest years of deaf education, and to their own state of mind and affairs as a linguistic and cultural community of individuals. For all its strengths, Lane's work is at times heavy-handed in its casting the deaf as an oppressed and colonized minority, and it is sometimes hard to read agency in between the lines. A synthetic history which manages to incorporate biography in a way that is neither canonizing nor unwittingly victimizing should be one of the goals of future histories of the deaf.

Though not a monograph or even an historical anthology, the *Gallaudet Encyclopaedia of Deaf People and Deafness* (1987) is included in this historiographic review. Edited and compiled by John V. Van Cleve, the *Gallaudet Encyclopaedia* appears here because of its timely emergence on the scholarly scene. No doubt inspired by Gannon and Lane's works, this comprehensive source, which details the stories of deaf people, their history, their language, their culture, and their unique issues, shows that deaf people have a history and a culture that is rich enough to stand on its own. It is a history and culture which can quite literally fill a book...or three in this case. Of particular interest are the entries which deal with individual deaf figures. No longer relegated to the fringes of hearing history as bit players who are enacted upon, the deaf emerge in this collection as historical actors with agency. Once again, biography factors heavily into deaf scholarship, perhaps as a way of asserting "We are human. We exist. We have lives and stories that matter." These assertions are made manifest through this collection. Though this collection necessarily does not advance a central argument, it does factor into the historiographic landscape and dialogue in that it

begs scholars pay attention to the magnitude and richness of material available for study where the deaf are concerned.

As this era of American deaf historiography took shape, much of the historical literature published in this era sought first to prove that there was a community of individuals whose lives and interests aligned around their experiences of being deaf. This movement was begun by Jack Gannon, himself a member of the Deaf community, and advanced by Harlan Lane, who critically examined the forces which conspired to create the American Deaf community. When consensus began to emerge in deaf historiography that the deaf were indeed a minority community, literature began to emerge which described the historical origins of that community, the evolution of that community over time, and the habits and nuances of that community, as previously known primarily to the deaf only.

A Place of their Own (1989) follows this initiative. This book emerged for very practical reasons when John Vickrey Van Cleve and Barry A. Crouch realized the difficult task before them when creating a course for Gallaudet University called “The History of the American Deaf Community”. Although they agreed that such a history existed, they realized that there was still a dearth of resources attesting to this history. They write that “With the exception of Jack Gannon, author of *Deaf Heritage*, deaf people had neither produced their own histories themselves nor attracted the attention of hearing scholars” (1989, vii). Indeed Vickrey Van Cleve and Crouch’s task was a difficult one, since they were simultaneously devising a history course, and a literary resource to support their teaching.

In an era where narrative histories were long eschewed in the scholarly realm,

historians of the deaf often were consigned to narrative, because lay readers knew nothing of the basic framework of the deaf American story. The challenge then was to try to advance thoughtful arguments about the Deaf community, while simultaneously introducing readers to the deaf American story. Vickrey Van Cleve and Crouch explain of their work "This narrative is our attempt…to provide a coherent look at some aspects of the process whereby deaf Americans became the American deaf community" (viii). Enmeshed in their narrative is the insightful argument that Deaf community formation was a process influenced by particular historical moments—in particular they point to the rise of deaf schools as the most significant historical moment--and this poises *A Place of their Own* as a subtle turning point in deaf historiography.

Once again, Harlan Lane emerges to add nuance to the history of the American Deaf community. *The Mask of Benevolence* (1992) is an essential companion piece to Lane's *When the Mind Hears*. With the benefit of years and the emergence of new literature to support his research, Lane takes the history of the deaf which he traced in *When the Mind Hears* and layers it with a powerful discussion of the colonizing aspects of that history. Lane writes "Our current views of deaf people, our ways of talking about them, are a product of history…In this book I present the case that these views ill serve deaf and hearing people" (xi). Lane's work begins with a discussion of what at the time was referred to as a "cochlear prosthesis", now known commonly as a cochlear implant, as a way of illustrating the continuing and disruptive influence of hearing communities, and medical professionals, on deaf lives. Lane argues that the long-held and misguided perception that deafness is a physical problem to be solved led to an inclination in hearing people to "colonize" the deaf through professional intervention. Lane traces this

effect from the earliest days of deaf education, where institutions were often staffed with numerous hearing individuals, through to the FDA approval of the “cochlear prosthesis”, which quite literally sought to make deaf people hearing. The deaf will recognize such professional intervention as bearing the trappings of “audism”, a term Lane uses is his book, and one which was coined by deaf educator and author Tom Humphries to describe the unique acts of prejudice and discrimination faced by the deaf.. Influenced by eminent thinkers from Michel Foucault to Edward Said, there is nary a biographical or narrative influence in this text. As such, this book represents a break-through in deaf historiography in terms of offering critical, contextualized scholarly analysis. Nonetheless, a shortcoming of this book is that it focuses on the people and forces who sought to oppress the Deaf community, rather than focusing on the stories of the deaf people who resisted those forces.

Nearly a decade after the *Gallaudet Encyclopaedia of Deaf People and Deafness,* Harry G. Lang and Bonnie Meath-Lang’s (1995) *Deaf Persons in the Arts and Sciences: A Biographical Dictionary* appeared. Similar to the treatment they are given in the *Gallaudet Encyclopaedia,* the deaf appear in this collection as actors with agency. Once again, we see the persistence of biography in deaf scholarship. Simultaneously a merit and a shortcoming of this source is that it focuses on accomplished deaf individuals who have made significant contributions to the arts and sciences. This is beneficial in that it helps develop the other side of histories like Lane’s. Where Lane’s work describes the negative effects of a unique breed of colonization against the deaf, Lang and Meath-Lang’s work demonstrates how historically the deaf have resisted such colonizing efforts to achieve positive ends. Like the *Gallaudet Encyclopaedia,* this

collection necessarily does not advance a central argument, but the subtext is that deaf people are impressive individuals whose accomplishments must be recognized. Thus, this collection in itself is an effort in resistance. On the other hand, this emphasis on highly accomplished individuals can be interpreted as a whiggish, “great man history” of sorts, to the exclusion of lesser-known deaf people, whose experiences are nonetheless historically valuable. Indeed, the challenge of balancing the dialectics of hagiography and victimization is one of the biggest obstacles in deaf historiography. This is why the deaf experience needs to be understood as a spectrum, one that evolves and is fluid. And this is why deaf history needs an infusion of stories detailing that range of experiences.

The Second Wave of Deaf Historiography

It is difficult to proclaim when the first wave of deaf historiography began. By definition, a historiography should begin with the genesis of a particular body of historical literature. However, in the case of deaf historiography, it is equally apt to say that it began in the late eighteenth century as to say it began in the early 1980s. Determining the start of the second wave of deaf historiography is easier. Douglas Baynton’s (1996) *Forbidden Signs: American Culture and the Campaign Against American Sign Language* is a refreshing addition to American deaf historiography, since it professes to be an exploration of American cultural history as opposed to deaf history in the abstract. Baynton uses the subject of sign language and deafness as a means to explore American cultural history throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century. This work represents a departure from the narrative and biographical structure of so many

previous histories of the deaf in America. Specifically Baynton examines why manualism, especially in schools for the deaf, was championed by the deaf and hearing alike for the first half of the nineteenth century. He then explores why it fell into disfavour with hearing communities in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and as a result was superseded by oralism in schools for the deaf.

Prior to Baynton's book, few histories adequately approached these questions, and if they did, Baynton argues these issues were regarded through the lens that manualism was sensible and oralism was an unfortunate aberration in the history of the deaf.[5] Baynton argues "seeing both as reform movements embedded in particular historical moments and expressing historically situated constructions of deafness can illuminate both them and the reform eras of which they were a part" (1996, p. 7). The conclusions Baynton draws from his examination of the history of deafness and language in America is revealing both as a history of the deaf and a history of American society. From his examination of these histories Baynton concludes that "Manualism—and oralism as well—was the result of a fortuitous confluence of various related and unrelated cultural and social factors which created a context, a *climate*, conducive to it" (p. 8). In other words, Baynton argues the case for either system of communication had very little to do with the needs and preferences of the deaf, and everything to do with the anxieties du jour of American society, in particular an increasing sense of nativism among many Americans. On the surface Baynton's work could be misconstrued as a history which overemphasizes the malevolent power of the hearing in the lives of the

[5] See R.A.R. Edwards' (2012) *Words Made Flesh: Nineteenth Century Deaf Education and the Growth of Deaf Culture* for a more updated treatment of this subject.

deaf, but Baynton includes ample discussion about resistance and agency within the Deaf community, and the about persistence of American Sign Language.

This approach of examining the history of the deaf as enmeshed with American social and cultural history continues in Robert Buchanan's (1999) *Illusions of Equality: Deaf Americans in Schools and in Factory, 1850-1950.* One is hard-pressed to find a history of deaf communities, American or otherwise, that does not link them to schools for the deaf. Indeed each of the histories discussed in this historiographic review thus far has either begun with a discussion of, or focussed heavily on, schools for the deaf. Buchanan's work is no exception as he relates the vocational success or struggle of deaf citizens to, among other things, pedagogical choices in deaf education. Like Baynton, Buchanan attributes these pedagogical debates to the values of the dominant hearing culture. Buchanan uses the experiences of the deaf in education and employment as a micro-study of the standing of all minority communities in America in the period 1850-1950. He argues that "[t]he pervasive racist, ethnocentric, and assimilationist practices and values of the dominant culture restricted the rights and standing of all minority communities" (1999, xiv). Specific to the case of the deaf, Buchanan argues that the sign-language based education system for the deaf which was championed in the first half of the nineteenth century was crucial in "shaping the identity, intellectual growth, and vocational success of this nation's deaf citizens" (xiii). By contrast, Buchanan argues that when oralism superseded manualism as the preferred method of instruction by a constituency of hearing professionals and stakeholders, this pedagogical choice "restrained the academic, intellectual, and vocational progress" of many deaf students (xiv). In other words, the success of deaf

students in education was inextricably linked to pedagogical choices, and the success of deaf workers in vocations was bound up in the foundation laid by their education. Buchanan's history is both a labour and a cultural history. With deaf workers as the primary actors in Buchanan's history, Buchanan weaves biographical sketches into his text in an organic way that lends agency to the actors, yet his work is neither canonizing nor reductive.

Although the 'pathological' histories of the deaf against which Harlan Lane railed in the 1980s were not entirely replaced by a social model of analysis in the new millennium, the second-wave of deaf historiography, precipitated in the late 1990s by works such as Baynton's and Buchanan's, was promising. In general, *Deaf* as a way of life and/or identity, rather than *deafness* as a biological affliction, tends to be the focus of historical literature of the early twenty-first century.[6] Susan Burch's (2002) *Signs of Resistance* is a fine example of this trend, and in fact holds a unique position in the historiography of the deaf since it is one of the first works that specifically professes to be a disability history text. As this historiographic review demonstrates, where histories of the deaf were once dissociated narratives and biographies, the later twentieth century saw added layers of American history, social and cultural history, and labour history. *Signs of Resistance* is layered in such a way, but is further textured by including the

[6] Burch and Kafer affirm this tendency towards a employing a social model for both Deaf and Disability studies, explaining in their book that, "Academics and activists from the West have historically shared common theoretical frameworks for understanding deaf/disability identity and community. Specifically, they have rejected what is commonly called the 'medical model,' which interprets deaf and disabled people as pathologically 'abnormal' and presents the proper response as intervention (usually of a medical sort) at the level of the individual and the family rather than at the level of the state and society. Instead, both deaf and disability researchers and community members have relied heavily on a social model of analysis. This approach assumes that disability and deaf are shaped primarily by context, including cultural values and conventions, environmental barriers, *historical periods* [emphasis added], and resources." (Burch and Kafer, 2010, xvi).

rhetoric of disability history.[7] As Burch explains of her work "[t]he relationship between Deaf citizens and mainstream society highlights important conflicts over the concepts of normality, citizenship, culture, and disability" (p. 1).

Burch makes explicit her intent to emphasize deaf people's, and by extension disabled persons', self-advocacy and agency through her work. She does this through chronicling their various forms of resistance in the face of an intense "Americanization" campaign, which she argues pervaded American society in the first half of the twentieth-century. Burch's argument is complex, but logical and familiar when considered in the context of other minority groups in the United States, such as racial and ethnic minorities. Burch argues first that "By the late nineteenth century, focused attacks on deafness and Deaf culture intensified, nurtured by broader trends in America, including industrialization, scientific developments, eugenics, and the Progressive movement" (p. 3). At the heart of her book is her second argument, which puts forward the idea that "[m]ost deaf people both actively and passively resisted the attempts to deny them this cultural identity, preferring to attend residential deaf schools, join Deaf clubs and churches or synagogues, marry other Deaf people, and communicate primarily in sign language" (p. 4).

However, Burch also points out that as much as Deaf people cherished their unique cultural identity, they also valued the *perception* of "normality" and the benefits that were linked to it. Burch explains that "Many deaf leaders equated citizenship with normality and equality with full citizenship" and thus Burch argues that the Deaf in this era "crafted a careful public image of a Deaf community that emphasized their fulfillment

[7] See also Jan Branson and John Miller (2002) *Damned for their Difference: The Cultural Construction of Deaf People as Disabled*; and Brenda Jo Brueggemann "The Tango: Or, What Deaf Studies and Disability Studies DO DO" (2010).

of societal “norms”: white, middle class, educated, moral, hardworking, and highly patriotic citizens” (p. 4). Perhaps Burch is remiss for not commenting more extensively on how such a masquerade served to reinforce discriminatory practices against other minority groups in America. However, Burch wrestles with a highly-nuanced series of arguments, and such an oversight is understandable.

Curiously, after a decade of promising gains in the historiography of the deaf, a strictly biographical approach to deaf history appeared in the form of Harry G. Lang’s *Edmund Booth: Deaf Pioneer* (2004). Recall that a decade earlier Lang and his wife were responsible for *Deaf Persons in the Arts and Sciences: A Biographical Dictionary*, so Lang comes by this approach honestly. The book is described as a “narrative of pioneer days as seen through Deaf eyes.” Indeed when one reads the book, which traces Booth’s life from his schooling days in Hartford, Connecticut, to his pioneering days in Iowa, through to his adventures in California during the gold rush, and back to Iowa where he eventually settled, one does get a healthy dose of American history. As an entertaining saga of an accomplished deaf man and pioneer, Lang’s work is second to none.

As an illuminating and critical analysis of Deaf and American history, this work is less useful. Lang himself explains “I was indeed excited about being invited by Wilma Spice, the Booths’ great-great-granddaughter, to write a biography of Edmund and to highlight the bravery and spirit of (Booth’s wife) Mary Ann on the Iowa frontier” (2004, vii). And so, to be fair, Lang delivers exactly what he promises. The thesis of the book it is that Edmund Booth was a renaissance man who lived an extraordinary life with a capable companion by his side. Booth’s is an American story of adventure and self-

reliance, as well as a story of deaf autonomy. Lang has a gift for story-telling and his work is well-researched. It is a shame that Lang opted not to parlay this biography into a larger discussion about American expansion/nation-building, and the role of individuals in minority communities in that pursuit. As such, Lang did not capitalize on the gains made in this second wave of deaf historiography.

Anyone familiar with deaf scholarship will be familiar with Carol Padden and Tom Humphries (1988) ground-breaking work *Deaf in America: Voices from a Culture*, which brought greater attention to the notion that deaf people and their way of life constitute a minority culture. Its focus is more an analysis of culture than of history, and so it receives only cursory treatment here, despite it being a seminal addition to deaf studies. *Inside Deaf Culture* (2005) is arguably a companion piece to *Deaf in America,* as Padden and Humphries explain that this second effort is the result of the enriching and eye-opening discourse produced in the thirty year wake of their first effort. Padden and Humphries' second effort seems more appropriate for purposes of this review firstly because of its enlightening treatment of early deaf education which, among other things, invokes Foucauldian rhetoric. Padden and Humphries explain their central argument as thus: "Deaf people's bodies have been labeled, segregated, and controlled for most of their history, and as we will argue, this legacy is still very much present in the specter of future 'advances' in cochlear implants and genetic engineering" (2005, pp. 6-7).

Secondly, this source is fascinating both for its uneasy relationship with the discipline of history, and for its interpretation of what a history should be. Padden and Humphries explain that this book is "a selection of cultural moments in our [deaf] history", thus justifying its presence in this review. However, it is striking that although

the book is historical in nature, the authors proclaim that it is “not a history of the Deaf community in the United States” (p. 5). They explain that it is not a history because “it does not provide a deep description of events from the time of the founding of the first schools for deaf children in the United States to the present. Nor does it cover all the significant events of the community’s history, or even most of them” (p. 5). It is intriguing that Padden and Humphries conceive of history in such a way. Their conception of works of history as chronological narratives of events begs important questions for historians of deaf history. Are Padden and Humphries’ views of deaf history influenced by a historiography that has tended towards the narrative? Or, and this is the more important question to ask, within deaf epistemology is there a conception of history which differs from the majority hearing historians? Does the visual tradition of history-telling within the Deaf community through American Sign Language (ASL) naturally lend itself to histories which are narrative in structure? How can historians take care to maintain the cultural and epistemological integrity of a community when recording its history? Works like *Inside Deaf Culture* can help historians to explore these questions.

On the topic of visual communication, one of the hallmarks of the Deaf community is its language, and yet it was not until 2006 that a comprehensive and coherent history of ASL emerged. Although John Tabak’s (2006) *Significant Gestures* is a history of ASL, rather than a history of Deaf education like most of the works in this review, any scholar of deaf history can tell you that the antecedents of a formal sign language system in the United States began in the Paris Institute for the Deaf, and later crystallized in schools for the deaf in the United States. It was from traditions within the Paris Institute that a signed system of communication and education was modeled in

the United States. As Tabak explains in his book, ASL itself was born of a combination of factors. It had roots in the “methodological” tradition of signs from France, that is, in signs that were devised by French educators specifically for instructional purposes. However, ASL’s eloquence and distinctive features were born within the milieu of nineteenth-century residential schools for the deaf in the United States. Within these schools the language was modified to suit the English influences of the majority American society. Most significantly, American deaf students themselves had a profound influence on sign language through the incorporation of their “natural signs” into the language, that is, those signs which were not formally taught by their educators, but which students instinctively devised and used amongst themselves. Ipso facto, the history of ASL is inextricably linked to the history of American deaf education. In fact, as previous sources within this review contend, the inverse is also true where the history of American deaf education is inextricably linked to language. The pedagogical debates over manualism and oralism in schools for the deaf, and their influence on the history of deaf education in the United States, bear this out. As such, Tabak’s work is useful for understanding this relationship.

Given the relationship between language, deaf education, and its history, this history of American Sign Language emerges on to the historiographic landscape surprisingly late. Earlier efforts such as Carol Padden and Charlotte Baker’s (1978) *American Sign Language: A Look at its History, Structure, and Community* exist, but such efforts are more interdisciplinary in nature, and less coherent as works of history than Tabak’s book, which is one of the first substantial and critical histories of the language. In his book, Tabak advocates for sign language, especially in classrooms

where deaf children learn. By tracing the emergence of ASL in schools for the deaf, its disappearance from schools in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century, and its re-emergence in the latter half of the twentieth-century, Tabak's is a history which depicts the resilience and triumph of a hard-won language. Reflecting on his experience visiting the campus of a school for the deaf, Tabak contends that "American Sign Language—a language developed largely by the Deaf for their own use—enables these Deaf students to effortlessly express those casual, stream-of-consciousness observations, witticisms, and insights that most hearing people take for granted" (2006, pp. 5-6). He goes on to explain that "For the students, the decision to use American Sign Language is empowering…The decision to use American Sign Language as a sort of *lingua franca* contributes to the sense of freedom so apparent around campus" (p. 6). Given Tabak's contentions about ASL, and these contentions are shared by many deaf people, it is a wonder that this kind of history was so late in coming. The relatively late publication of Tabak's work inspires questions for the historian about the latent influences of oralism on histories of the deaf.

The New Frontier of Deaf History

A recent publication in deaf historiography is *The People of the Eye: Deaf Ethnicity and Ancestry* (2011), by Harlan Lane, Richard C. Pillard, and Ulf Hedberg. In what Lane, Pillard, and Hedberg describe as "the first extended examination of ethnicity and the Deaf-World" (xix) they explore the question of whether or not Deaf ASL signers constitute an ethnic group. On the premise that they do constitute such a group as argued in Part I of their book, Lane et. al then consider the relationship between

ethnicity and ancestry. In Parts II, III, and IV of their book they trace the ancestry of several prolific deaf lineages in early America/the United States to answer questions about who were the ancestors of the Deaf-World and what did their life and times look like? Lane et. al argue that "Deaf ASL signers are most often the fruit of ancestral transmission from the beginnings of our society and even before; thus they are indeed 'born into' the Deaf-World" (xvii). Since they argue that "Deaf people have come together in this nation from its earliest times" they contend that by tracing the ancestry and history of those whom they call the founders of the Deaf-World, valuable insights about the foundations of language, culture and society emerge (xix).[8]

This work merits inclusion in this review because of its unique departure from an emphasis on schools for the deaf as the loci of community formation. One would be remiss not to include *People of The Eye* in this review since it is one of few works which challenges the near unanimity among deaf scholars that the Deaf-World emerged primarily within schools for the deaf.[9] *People of the Eye* handily fulfils what should be the goal for future deaf historiography, which is a departure from uncontextualized narratives and/or hagiography, and a move towards a synthesis of critical historical analysis, as supported by the experiences of a spectrum of deaf figures.

Another notable work in this vein is Susan Burch and Hannah Joyner''s (2007)

[8] It is important to note that while ancestral transmission of deafness and culture is a significant factor in the history of the deaf, deafness is actually more often genetically discontinuous. That is to say, while there are indeed a large number of deaf families with deaf ancestors, the majority of deaf children are actually born to hearing parents. This discontinuity between deaf people and their ancestors and descendants is a significant part of deaf history too. Lennard Davis' (2000) *My Sense of Silence: Memoirs of a Childhood with Deafness* is an illuminating contribution to this discussion.

[9] See also Nora Ellen Groce's (1985) *Everybody Here Spoke Sign Language: Hereditary Deafness on Martha's Vineyard;* Harlan Lane, Richard C. Pillard, and Mary French "Origins of the American Deaf World: Assimilating and Differentiating Societies and Their Relation to Genetic Patterning" (2007); and Harry G. Lang "Genesis of a Community: The American Deaf Experience in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries" (2007).

Unspeakable: The Story of Junius Wilson. Burch and Joyner''s work recounts the life and seventy-six year incarceration of Junius Wilson, a black deaf man raised in the Jim Crow south, whose life was irrevocably altered based on a series of assumptions and decisions made relating to disability, race, gender, and class. It is another notable example of biography and critical analysis, since it focuses on the history of a rank-and-file deaf man on the fringes of both the Deaf community and the local African American community, rather than on an extraordinary deaf leader. Further, Burch and Joyner''s work considers deafness as but one facet of an individual''s identity, and they explore the ways in which deafness co-mingles with other attributes to form one''s identity and life experiences. Theirs is an account which broadens the definition of what it means to be deaf, and of which deaf stories are worthy of inclusion in deaf history. Theirs is also an account which skilfully knits deaf history together with American history, as Burch and Joyner explore the many categories which stratify and define American citizens, not the least of which are ability, race, gender, class, and geography.

Rather than depicting the deaf community as a homogeneous group of stock characters, biography, when coupled with critical historical analysis, can enrich and diversify deaf American historiography. Carolyn McCaskill et al''s (2011) *The Hidden Treasure of Black ASL: Its History and Structure* explores how different factors such as region, gender, age, socioeconomic status, and in particular race, can affect a community and its language. It is another recent publication which dismantles the notion of a monolithic Deaf community, and it is call to historians to pursue histories of deaf people and Deaf communities, rather than of *the* Deaf community.

Indeed, the inclusion of specific and diverse deaf figures is an essential

component to the future of deaf history. The most obvious advantage of incorporating biographical elements in deaf historiography is that it lends agency to the deaf historical actor, whose distinct identity and experiences should be acknowledged. In addition to agency, biography also affords diversity and nuance to deaf history since it demonstrates heterogeneity within the historical deaf community. However, historians should not lapse in to straight-forward biography in the vein of their eighteenth and nineteenth-century predecessors. They must use these stories purposefully to advance larger arguments about the history of the deaf and their relationship to the history of the United States. Though gains in deaf historiography have been uneven, and though historians are still wrestling with how to contextualize the deaf American story within the larger American narrative, recent scholarship is encouraging, and emerging scholarship is promising. In the summer of 2012, the focus of the 8th Deaf History International Conference was deaf history through the use of biographies and autobiographies. As such, this historiographic review is timely, and its propositions are relevant, given the recent direction of deaf history in an international forum.

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