

AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION
2020 MIDWINTER MEETING
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

FRIDAY, JANUARY 24, 2020
11:00 A.M. - 3:00 P.M.
DEAF CULTURE FORUM

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History and Awareness

History of the Deaf Community and Libraries; and Stages of Building the Deaf Culture Digital Library,

>> MOLLY RAPHAEL: I don't know about you, but I think that is a powerful film and brief, but just powerful in terms of the message that it has conveyed.

So, as I was saying before I fortunately was interrupted, I'm here to present Alice's speech now, and I hope those of you who know her will imagine her instead of me doing this. She has been a mover and shaker in this community for over 50 years. And obviously has been a vision even beyond that.

And is not only the founding president of FOLDA, but she is also an honorary member of the American Library Association, and being an honorary member is the highest honor the ALA can bestow on everyone.

>> If I slip into the I, just remember its Alice speaking not me. There are slides that will go with this. Alice's brief speech today is based on her life experience in the real world. Her hopes for the future of America and globally. First and foremost, she hopes for a new deaf image for all, and a new

library image for all.

Her colleague, Dr. Thomas Holcum, the deaf author of Introduction to American Deaf Culture, who has long been considered a leading authority on Deaf culture, said that there are approximately 150 American Deaf cultures. This demonstrates the vibrant Deaf culture alive in the United States today. To learn more about oneself, you should pay attention to the diverse deaf experiences that are present. So, learn how our lives are different from yours. Your hearing status does not matter, but your humanity does. There often is confusion about the proper definition of deaf and how to serve the population. The official definition of deaf by Noah Webster of Hartford since the early 19th Century also matters. He defined deaf as, quote, lacking or deprived of the sense of hearing wholly or in part, which encompasses a variety of people and services. Many people get confused with deaf politics that includes issues like what to call oneself. There is no consensus in the deaf community. This also includes old outdated labels like deaf and dumb, deaf mute, and hearing impaired. Annual events like deaf history month, Gallaudet week or international week of the deaf which NAD, FOLDA and the World Federation of the Deaf respectively endorse are critical to the deaf. Next slide.

Here is a little deaf history for all of you. In 1817, the first signing American public school of its kind opened for the deaf in Hartford, Connecticut. It was founded by the reverend Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet of Hartford and Laurent Clerc, a deaf teacher from Paris. This new school followed the philosophy of the first school in Paris founded for the deaf in the 1760s. This philosophy was that teachers and students should use French Sign Language and be bilingual in ASL and written French. Before this, Dr. Mason F. Cogswell was the first known hearing parent to advocate for the first public deaf school in America, because at the time deaf children whose parents could afford it went to school in Europe. He did not know about formal sign language until after Reverend Gallaudet met and brought Clerc from France to America. Dr. Cogswell's library at home had deaf education with most books ordered from Europe. In the 1850s, there were two successful students from the school founded by Gallaudet and Clerc, first was Sophia Fowler Gallaudet, a former student who lobbied the U.S. Congress to establish what we call today Gallaudet University.

Her efforts bore fruit in 1864. Another student, Thomas Brown presided at the first ever national gathering of the deaf in Hartford. It led to the National Association of the Deaf today, which was founded in 1880. Then there was the golden age for the deaf. There was a formation of a deaf community complete with clubs, churches, literary societies in New York City, San

Francisco, and other large cities.

The American Annals of the Deaf, a journal focusing on the education of the deaf was founded in 1847, and in 1874 the Deaf Mutes Journal started in which deaf writers contributed articles of special interest to deaf cultural readers. This all happened before 1880.

A week after the first NAD Convention, the second international Congress on the deaf on the education of the deaf met in Milan, Italy, from September 6 to 11 in 1880. The mostly hearing delegates voted to ban the use of sign language in classes at deaf schools in America and other countries.

As sign language began to decline in popularity, oralism became the primary teaching method. Deaf teachers in all parts of the world slowly lost their jobs. There was also an overall decline in deaf professionals such as artists, writers and literary promoters. Sadly, the quality of life and education of the deaf was negatively impacted from this decision. In the early 1900s, the primary advocacy issue of NAD were the rights of the deaf to use sign language at school and to obtain federal employment. George Fadits, the seventh National Association of the Deaf president and a renowned national archivist and writer as well as his fellow leaders had been intervening in efforts by several state legislatures to abandon state deaf schools.

The federal government also banned the hiring of the deaf by stating, quote, people with disorders such as total deafness and loss of speech could not take the civil service exam. Thank goodness today deaf state schools in America do not ban sign language, and there is a non-profit organization called Deaf in Government in which membership is open to federal employees with various hearing levels.

Turning to librarians in the latter half of the 1900s, hearing librarians in general assumed too much about the ability of the deaf to read books, read lips, and having no problem accessing the library if they use hearing aids or have cochlear implants. It was not the fault of librarians that they did not know the true issue. It was that deaf had no access to using phones or other media like the radio or TV or public hearings or others until fairly recently. This impacted the deaf community in many ways.

One step to fix the divide between deaf and other disabled Americans and able bodied Americans was the Americans With Disabilities Act which was signed into law on July 26th, 1990 by U.S. President George H.W. Bush. However, the ADA still needs work. It does not currently work for the deaf as a whole especially with changing attitudes, access in the digital age, interpreters, and captions.

Librarians began to make progress in bridging the divide

between them and the deaf populations they serve in several instances that Alice was personally involved with. In fact, two conferences stand out in her mind. The first conference was in 1979, the White House Conference on Library and Information Services. Alice was one of three delegates, deaf delegates out of 800 from all over the United States.

There were representatives of different types of cultures and peoples ranging from Native Americans to representatives of the LGBT community. It was here that was passed a resolution to support what we now call the Deaf Culture Digital Library on a national and state level. Maryland is the only state to have a DCDL library. Also, in 1991, White House Conference on Library and Information Services was a refresher, although we left the conference of the 1970s with high hopes, progress stagnated after librarians and the deaf community realized it was a challenge to learn about one another. The 1991 Convention brought recognition to the lack of progress in services for the deaf in libraries.

As one of four delegates, Alice and her colleagues suggested new resolutions that built on the resolutions of the 1979 conference. Since then there have been little improvements, but not much. For example, NAD and ALA both endorsed a resolution for a Deaf History Month.

My hopes, Alice's hopes for the future are divided into two groups, library users, and the future of the DCDL. For library users, her hope for the future include that all babies, deaf or hearing, should be encouraged to learn sign language from their Public Library in which family members will be exposed to their library's cultural activities. For many, seeing is believing in the power of change.

Also, when applying for a free library card, members of the deaf community and other members of the library community should be offered to take a training course of sorts on how to be independent users of resources at any library. For accessibility and services and to be library advocates.

Part of this hope stems from the ALA campaign, "libraries transform communities" as well as the United Nations and the NAD campaign slogan of "Nothing About Us Without Us." I do hope to -- she does hope to see more Deaf culture books written for children and youth. Programs that include the deaf among other groups will help people recognize resources available for them and their families.

This includes exposure and knowledge of the NAD, its sections, affiliates, state deaf organizations and national organizations serving the deaf. This knowledge could lead to partnerships with the Public Library, museums, archives or galleries. For the future of the deaf cultural digital library,

she hopes DCDL expands to other states and they start by consulting a State Librarian to form a task force on the DCDL and appointing consultants as recommended by the ALA and NAD. The DCDL should employ people to specifically fill these positions. Teen services and family engagement coordinator, a senior citizens services coordinator as well as social workers, ASL teachers, various tutors and other possible service providers for libraries to work with the deaf.

She also has hope for action from this speech. She wishes to see a resolution from the ALA encouraging the U.S. Congress to follow up and sign into law to bring to life two things, national Deaf History Month, which would be March 13 to April 15, and the National Deaf Cultural Digital Library.

She also wishes to see a resolution from the NAD during its upcoming biennial Convention in Chicago to resume the librarian position. For the future, Alice wants to encourage shared resources and partnerships with various organizations. This is only possible by creating shared services, providing advice, workshops, and helping one another. One such hope I have is a mobile signing library that travels to different libraries in the United States to provide workshops and partnerships with others. Alice wanted to conclude her speech with a special thanks to Paige Watson who we thought would be here with us today but is not for editing and providing feedback on my work, on her work. Paige is a graduate student at the University of Maryland with an interest in archives and Alice says I hope she goes far in life. Thank you.

(Applause).
