

Laurent Clerc: One of the First Educators of the Deaf in America

Laurent Clerc was born on December 26, 1786 in the city of La Balme, France. At the age of twelve he started school at the National Institution for Deaf Mutes in Paris. At the age of twenty-eight he met a hearing man, Thomas Gallaudet, who was searching for a way to educate the deaf people of the United States. Clerc and a colleague started teaching Gallaudet the French sign language used at the school. Eventually, Clerc came to the United States with Gallaudet to aide in the opening of the first school for the deaf in the United States. The school was opened on April 15, 1817 in Hartford, Connecticut. Clerc married one of the students, Eliza Boardman, several years after the opening of the school. Their marriage was the first in the United States between two deaf people. Clerc died on July 18, 1869.

Laurent Clerc was a great man who helped bring education to the deaf people of America. At the opening ceremony of the first college for the deaf in the United States, Edward Miner Gallaudet described him as “a living monument of an age long past, a witness of events and men soon to be known only in the pages of history” (Lane 278). Laurent Clerc was an example to all deaf people of America of what they could become. For all of his efforts, he should have the honor of being called a champion of resistance.

If you would like to know more about Laurent Clerc or Deaf history here is a list of a few books that give wonderful accounts:

Lane, Harlan. When the Mind Hears: A History of the Deaf. New York: Random House, 1984.

Scouten, Edward L. Turning Points in the Education of Deaf People. Illinois: The Interstate Printers and Publishers, 1984.

Van Cleve, John Vickrey and Barry A. Crouch. A Place of Their Own. Washington D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1989.