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# Finding Hidden Treasures: Research Help in the Library and Archives

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# Finding Hidden Treasures: Research Help in the Library and Archives

*Diana Moore and Joan Naturale*

At the 2009 Deaf History International Conference, Ulf Hedberg spoke on the preservation of Deaf materials.<sup>1</sup> The objective was to promote the preservation of Deaf materials by individuals, institutions, and organizations and to encourage the donation of Deaf materials to libraries, archives, museums, or organizations. In this chapter our objective is to identify the numerous resources at the Gallaudet University Library Deaf Collections and Archives and the Rochester Institute of Technology's (RIT) Wallace Library, which are now on the Internet. The resources discussed here contain biographical materials that relate to this book's theme of telling Deaf lives. Since the year 2012, when the Eighth Deaf History International conference was hosted, was the three-hundredth anniversary of the Abbé de l'Épée's birth, several de l'Épée resources are identified. Many of the materials mentioned from the Gallaudet University Library Deaf Collections and Archives were made accessible online thanks to a generous grant from the Mellon Foundation.

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Founded in 1967, the Gallaudet University Library Deaf Collections and Archives has the world's largest collection of materials related to the institute and the global Deaf community. It strives to collaborate with other repositories as well. Founded in 2006, the Rochester Institute of Technology and National Technical Institute for the Deaf's (RIT/NTID) Deaf Studies Archives focuses on collections and topics related to NTID at RIT and the Rochester community in New York State.

### Deaf Rare Book Collection at Gallaudet

The Deaf Rare Book Collection contains publications dating from 1546; the materials cover various topics and languages from different countries. About 180 titles were selected to be scanned and digitized and are now available online in two databases. The first is the Gallaudet University Library Catalog, also known as ALADIN Catalog (<http://www.gallaudet.edu/library.html>), and the second is the Internet Archive (<http://archive.org>). An example of one title available online is *The Abbé de l'Épée, Charles-Michel de l'Épée, Founder of the Manual Instruction of the Deaf, and Other Early Teachers of the Deaf*.<sup>2</sup> Although the de l'Épée text is available at two online sources, the features of each are different. The ALADIN Catalog and the Internet Archive have a tagging feature and search box, which make searching easier. Another important resource available from Internet Archives is the *Deaf Mutes' Journal* (1874–1901). Issues from 1902 to 1938 will be added later to complete the series.

### NTID Connection

Jeanne Behm, the coordinator of RIT's ASL and Deaf Studies Community Center (RADSCC) (<http://www.rit.edu/ntid/radsc/>), who was charged with hosting a celebration of de l'Épée's birth, asked us whether a play had been written about de l'Épée. After searching the Internet Archive, a play called *Deaf and Dumb or the Abbé de l'Épée; an Historical Drama, Founded upon Very Interesting Facts: From the French of M. Bouilly* was found and adapted for the celebration ([http://ia701206.us.archive.org/10/items/gu\\_deafdumbabbed00bou/gu\\_deafdumbabbed00bou.pdf](http://ia701206.us.archive.org/10/items/gu_deafdumbabbed00bou/gu_deafdumbabbed00bou.pdf)). This play focuses



FIGURE 1. A Lesson with Abbé Charles Michel de l'Épée, *Painted by Nachor Ginouvier, after a draft by Frédéric Peysson, 1891. Collection Institut National des Jeunes Sourds, Paris.*

on de l'Épée and the abandoned Count of Solar, Theodore (Joseph), a Deaf orphan who was brought to the school. The story tells how the Count finds his childhood home and dramatizes the court case to regain his lost title. The play also shows de l'Épée's incorporation of sign language in his teaching. This play was one of the first to include a signing Deaf character.<sup>3</sup>

The story is famously depicted in an innovative painting by Marie-Pierre Nicolas Ponce-Camus that shows the Count and de l'Épée at the Count's family home (figure 2). When Joseph recognizes his home, de l'Épée uses



FIGURE 2. Marie-Pierre Nicolas Ponce-Camus, L'Abbé de l'Épée. *Taken from the Causes Célèbres, 1802 (Institut National des Jeunes Sourds, Paris).*

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FIGURE 3. *De l'Épée* sculpture by Eugene Hannan. Photograph by Francis C. Higgins, Gallaudet University Historical Photograph Collection, Gallaudet University Library Deaf Collections and Archives, Washington, DC. <http://dspace.wrlc.org/view/ImgViewer?img=2&url=http://dspace.wrlc.org/doc/mainfest/2041/72566>.

a methodical sign for “heaven,” pointing upward to the sky, and the Count, using a natural gesture, clasps de l'Épée's hand over his heart. This painting is an important work in the genre of historical art because of the depiction of sign language.<sup>4</sup> Because he was unable to travel himself, de l'Épée provided traveling companions for the Count when he went searching for his home.<sup>5</sup> The play was popular and was staged all over Europe and the United States to raise financial support for Deaf schools. Laurent Clerc, who wrote the preface to the play, had it performed in Hartford, Connecticut, to help raise funds for the American School for the Deaf.<sup>6</sup> After reviewing materials on this famous teacher, the de l'Épée committee decided to host a dinner-theater event.

### Gallaudet Video Catalog

Many Gallaudet University film productions are online, as are other films such as those in the George W. Veditz Collection, produced by the National Association of the Deaf (NAD). Additional films in other formats have been preserved and digitized and can be viewed in the video catalog (<http://videocatalog.gallaudet.edu>). One may search among various categories, including alumni, biographies, Davila (president),

Deaf mosaic, and Deaf sports. Films of American and international guest lecturers and visitors are also included. All films are signed or have open captions. One such title is *A Plea for a Statue in Honor of Abbé Charles Michel de l'Épée* (<http://videocatalog.gallaudet.edu/?id=2518>).

### NTID Connection

Saint Mary's School for the Deaf in Buffalo, New York, is the only site in the United States that has a statue of de l'Épée.<sup>7</sup> The film *A Plea for a Statue in Honor of Abbé Charles Michel de l'Épée* led to a request for proposals from sculptors, and Eugene Hannan (an alumnus of Saint Mary's School for the Deaf and Gallaudet University) was appointed to produce this sculpture. Since Saint Mary's is near NTID, trips to view the historic statue were planned during the International Week of the Deaf, which takes place in the last week of September. The RADSCC also planned to display a collection of papers compiled by Bernard Bragg when he was a Gallaudet student. The papers showed the development of the NAD statue project, proposals by sculptors, letters, and sketches. These documents are all from the Gallaudet University Library Deaf Collections and Archives.<sup>8</sup>

The de l'Épée committee asked whether there were any films about de l'Épée. Through international contacts, two important films were found based on the play *Abbé de l'Épée; an Historical Drama*. One is a British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) film titled *The Count of Solar* (figure 5) (<http://vimeo.com/39223648>), and the other is *L'Enfant du Secret* (<http://ph.bourdais.pagesperso-orange.fr/>), a French film (figure 4). Both adaptations present different perspectives on the story, as there were several variations of the play in existence.<sup>9</sup> The BBC film shows the sister's denial of knowing her brother in court and incorporates the use of British Sign



FIGURE 4. *Photograph of characters (students and de l'Épée) in the film L'Enfant du Secret. Acbard and Privat (2007).*



FIGURE 5. Count of Solar. Vimeo. Video file, 12:47. Posted by Tony Bloem, 2012. Accessed September 4, 2012. <http://vimeo.com/39223648>. Screen capture scene from the film clip.

Language. All of the students in this film are boys. The French film shows the Deaf boy's mother denying knowledge of her son in court and illustrates the use of *L'Langue des Signes Française* (LSF). The students are a mixed group of boys and girls.

Other video sources are YouTube videos posted by Charles Katz and Bernard Truffaut on French Deaf history: <http://infoguides.rit.edu/lepee>. These videos introduce background information about de l'Épée and other influential historic figures from this era.

## WRLC Libraries Digital and Special Collections

At the website <http://aladin.wrlc.org/dl/> scroll down to “Gallaudet University Archives and Library,” where you will find the following resources: Gallaudet University Historical Photograph Collection; *American Annals of the Deaf* (1847–1893); Gallaudet University alumni cards; and the *Silent Worker* (complete holdings, 1888–1929).

## NTID Connection

To prepare background information for the de l'Épée committee, research was conducted using archived material from the *American Annals of the Deaf* and the *Silent Worker*. Articles about de l'Épée and French Deaf people were found and linked on the research guide. In 1834 the Deaf-Mute banquet began celebrating de l'Épée's birth

anniversary.<sup>10</sup> The Parisian Deaf community organized these annual formal dinners to celebrate Deaf culture, sign language, and the achievements of Deaf leaders. This led to discussions about hosting a Deaf-Mute banquet at NTID. An interesting *American Annals of the Deaf* article about the Anniversary Festival of Deaf-Mutes in Paris can be accessed at <http://dspace.wrlc.org/doc/bitstream/2041/56331/AADDvol09no3display.pdf#page=3>. Readers can also learn about the first Deaf museum in a *Silent Worker* article titled “The World Museum of the Deaf in the National Institution at Paris” by Kelly H. Stevens: <http://dspace.wrlc.org/view/ImgViewer?url=http://dspace.wrlc.org/doc/manifest/2041/40204>.

### Additional Resources

The Deaf Research Guide at Gallaudet (<http://libguides.gallaudet.edu/deaf-research>), the Gallaudet University Guide to Deaf Biographies (<http://liblists.wrlc.org/deafbiog/>), and the Gallaudet University Index to Deaf Periodicals (<http://liblists.wrlc.org/gadpi/>) assist researchers in finding biographical and other Deaf resources and information.

### NTID Connection

Information about Deaf and influential hearing persons from France was found in the Gallaudet University Guide to Deaf Biographies database and assisted the de l'Épée committee in selecting live characters for their Deaf-Mute banquet. While dinner was served, these characters visited each table and explained their significance in Deaf history. Some examples of the characters involved were Ferdinand Berthier, founder of the Deaf-Mute banquets; Laurent Clerc, the first known Deaf teacher in the United States; Jean Massieu, the first Deaf teacher at the Institut National de Jeunes Sourds de Paris; Pierre Desloges, a Deaf writer who published the first book in defense of sign language; Émile Mercier, a Deaf winemaker from Champagne; Theodore, Count of Solar, the Deaf orphan; Frédéric Peysson, a Deaf artist who painted *Last Moments of the Abbé de l'Épée*; and Marie Pierre Pelissier, who was a Deaf teacher and writer at the



Institut National de Jeunes Sourds de Paris. At the end of the banquet, the English-translated French *Art Pi* (<http://www.art-pi.fr/public/page/>) special issue magazine on Abbe de l'Épée (<https://www.dropbox.com/s/69rk0v2nwwjtj6/artpi.pdf>) was handed out to the participants.

## LibGuides

Some examples of LibGuides are as follows:

- Gallaudet University Library: <http://libguides.gallaudet.edu/searchtags.php?iid=642&gid=0&tag=research%20guide>
- Rochester Institute of Technology's Wallace Library: <http://infoguides.rit.edu/>

LibGuides are resources that lead the researcher to information on various topics, such as de l'Épée and Deaf culture. These guides also sometimes identify specific materials in various formats. LibGuides are updated, and new topics are added regularly. One of RIT's LibGuides is about de l'Épée: <http://infoguides.rit.edu/lepee>. This LibGuide includes links to many of Gallaudet's online journals, books, and video resources and is freely accessible for curriculum planning. Several recommended books present biographical sketches. Others discuss French Deaf history, such as the prevalence of Deaf artists and sculptors in France. De l'Épée believed in training Deaf teachers who would establish Deaf schools around the world. These Deaf teachers brought LSF with them, which influenced the development of sign language in the countries they visited. In this LibGuide, the section on "Sign Languages in Different Countries" will assist those who are researching the historical roots of LSF. In addition, the LibGuide includes French Deaf poets, writers, educators, scientists, artists, and sculptors.

## Genealogical Resources at Gallaudet University Deaf Library Collections and Archives

Alumni cards from 1866 to 1961, faculty/staff cards from 1910 to 1944, the Fay Marriage Index, Pennsylvania School for the Deaf applications from 1824 to 1938, and vital records are available in the collection at

[https://www.gallaudet.edu/library\\_deaf\\_collections\\_and\\_archives/genealogy\\_resources.html](https://www.gallaudet.edu/library_deaf_collections_and_archives/genealogy_resources.html). Vital records, an index found in many Deaf periodicals from 1847 to 2001, assists in locating dates of Deaf people's births, marriages, and deaths.

### **Art Print Resources at Rochester Institute of Technology/ NTID History and Deaf Studies Archives**

The Deaf Studies Archives at RIT/NTID (<http://library.rit.edu/depts/archives/ritntid-deaf-studies-archive>) collects original artwork and prints by Deaf artists. The de l'Épée committee looked for prints, which were shown during the dinner theater production of the Deaf-Mute banquets. Prints by Deaf artist Nachor Ginouvier, Frédéric Peysson's *A Lesson with Abbé Charles Michel de l'Épée* (figure 1), and *Abbé Roch-Ambroise Cucurron Sicard* (figure 6) by Deaf artist Jerome-Martin Langlois were ordered for the celebration. Biographical sketches of these artists can be found in the online de l'Épée library guide at <http://infoguides.rit.edu/content.php?pid=300927&sid=2513431>.

The significance of de l'Épée's work lies in his recognition of the value of sign language in Deaf children's education, which is exemplified in toasts signed at the Deaf-Mute banquets with this common theme: "Before him, we were nothing; we were pariahs, plunged into chaos and ignorance, marginal and ignored; now we exist; we have been restored to society."<sup>11</sup>



FIGURE 6. *Abbé Roch-Ambroise Cucurron Sicard* by Deaf artist Jerome-Martin Langlois (*Deaf teacher Massieu is in the back with his hand on the board*).



FIGURE 7. From the Deaf Studies Archives, a de l'Épée platter that was designed by a De'VIA artist, Ellen Mansfield, was on display for the celebration of de l'Épée's birth.

### Sidebars

The following quotes are by Pierre Desloges, the first Deaf author to write in defense of sign language—in 1779. These quotes were translated by Lisanne Houkes from the Dutch DVD script for *The Man, the City, and the Book*:<sup>12</sup>

Sign language is visual. Your hands paint feelings in the sky, like fine brush strokes of a pencil, soft colors or big movements, with clear speaking colors.

The things that reach our mind through the ear have to reach the Deaf through the eye. What cannot go through a door has to go through a window.

### Notes

1. Hedberg and Gates, “No History, No Future,” 92.
2. Holycross (1913).
3. “Literature, Dramatic Characters in,” 161.
4. Mirzoeff, “Signs and Citizens: Sign Language and Visual Sign in the French Revolution,” 281–82.
5. “Scene from the Drama of ‘The Abbé de l'Épée,’” 74–75.
6. “Literature, Dramatic Characters in,” 162.

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7. *St. Mary's School for the Deaf: de l'Épée Memorial Statue.*
8. Bragg, *NAD on the History of the Abbé de l'Épée Statue.*
9. "Literature, Dramatic Characters in," 161.
10. Mottez, "Deaf-Mute Banquet and the Birth of the Deaf Movement," 31.
11. *Ibid.*, 36.
12. *De Man, de Stad, en het Boek: Een Monoloog Voor Drie Mannen.*

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“Scene from the Drama of ‘The Abbé de l’Épée.’” *American Annals of the Deaf* 2, no. 2 (1849): 74–77. Accessed September 2, 2012, <http://dspace.wrlc.org/doc/bitstream/2041/59632/AADDvol02no2display.pdf#page=10>.

*St. Mary’s School for the Deaf: de l’Épée Memorial Statue*. Photograph. Gallaudet University Historical Photograph Collection. September 18, 2009. Accessed September 2, 2012, <http://dspace.wrlc.org/view/ImgViewer?img=2&url=http://dspace.wrlc.org/doc/manifest/2041/72566>.