



Deaf History:

No one knows exactly when sign language first appeared and it's impossible to know exactly when and where the first deaf person tried out sign, but we do know that the first written record of sign language came from Ancient Greece. In 422 B.C. the philosopher Socrates said: "If we had neither voice nor tongue, and yet wished to manifest things to one another, should we not, like those which are at present mute, endeavor to signify our meaning by our hands, head, and other parts of the body?" Another philosopher Plato wrote the dialogue *Cratylus* where he cited Socrates' words. It took many years before it was proven that sign language is indeed a language, not just a set of signs. In 1960 William Stokoe, a hearing professor at Gallaudet University (USA), has published a book that unequivocally proves that sign language is a separate system. He claimed that American sign language is an independent system with its own grammar and syntax and it is not a translation from English. Since then, American Sign Language has been recognized as an important national language. Sweden was the first country to officially recognize sign language as the mother tongue of the deaf (1981). Sign language is now recognized as the native communication and education method for Deaf people. No one knows exactly how many sign languages exist around the world today, but there are unique signing methods in just about every country on the globe.

In addition to those few hints of opportunities for deaf people to express their thoughts in sign language, their lives have been severely constrained for many centuries. E. g., looking back to Ancient Egypt where the deaf were respected and revered and in contrast, those who were deaf in Ancient Greece were considered a burden to society and put to death. The first people who made attempts of teaching the deaf were priests or physicians. The education of deaf children was usually arranged by the family. The purpose was to teach the deaf to communicate with other people orally or in writing.

With the advent of the Renaissance in Europe, the first schools for the deaf were opened. The first school for the deaf was opened 1760 in Paris (France) - the National Institute of Deaf-mutes - by Charles-Michel de l'Épée. Two years later, it was opened to the public. The school's focus was on the acquisition of language through sign language. In 1760, Scottish teacher, Thomas Braidwood founded Braidwood Academy for the Deaf and Dumb in Edinburgh. The educational approach utilized a "combined system" incorporating sign language, articulation, speech, and lip-reading. The third school for the deaf was opened in 1778 by Samuel Heinicke in Leipzig, Germany. Heinicke's school focused on teaching deaf children to lipread and produce speech. The first deaf school in the USA was opened in 1817 in Hartford, Connecticut.

Gallaudet University (Washington, USA), the world's only university in which all programs and services are specifically designed to accommodate deaf and hard of hearing students, was founded in 1864 by an Act of Congress (its Charter), which was signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln. Going from a school of 12 students in 1857 to over 1,500 students served in 2020, Gallaudet has always been a consistently growing and evolving university.



The University's undergraduate students can choose from more than 40 majors leading to bachelor of arts or bachelor of science degrees. Graduate programs at Gallaudet are open to deaf, hard of hearing, and hearing students and offer certificates and master of arts, master of science, doctoral, and specialist degrees in a variety of fields involving professional service to deaf and hard of hearing people.

The first games, known as the International Silent Games, were held in 1924 in Paris. They were the brainchild of Eugène Rubens-Alcais, himself deaf and President of the French Deaf Sports Federation. At a time when societies everywhere viewed deaf people as intellectually inferior and linguistically impoverished, Monsieur Rubens-Alcais envisioned the international sports event as the best answer. Antoine Dresse, a young deaf Belgian, was instrumental in helping him accomplish his dream. 148 sportsmen from 9 European countries took part in the first games. After the initial Paris Games, deaf sporting leaders established the International Committee of Silent Sports (CISS), which was later renamed The International Committee of Sports for the Deaf (ICSD). **ICSD** provides the essence of Olympism for the deaf population, with its own motto: "Equal through sports". Since 2001 the games are called *Deaflympics*. Only deaf and hard of hearing athletes can compete in the Summer or Winter Deaflympics, World Championships, Regional Championships, and other ICSD-sanctioned competitions. The Deaflympics are held every four years, apart from a break for World War II. The logo, designed in 2003 by graphic design artist Ralph Fernandez, is a positive and powerful symbol of the international deaf sports community. It ties together strong elements: Sign language, deaf and international cultures, unity and continuity. The hand shapes, "ok", "good", and "great" that overlap each other in a circle, represent the original sign for "deaflympics". Together, the hand shapes represent the sign for "united". The center of the logo represents the iris of the eye, which defines deaf people as visual people; they must use their eyes to communicate. The logo incorporates the four colors of the national flags of the world. The red, blue, yellow and green represent the four regional confederations – the Asia Pacific Deaf Sports Confederation, the European Deaf Sports Organization, the Pan American Deaf Sports Organization and the Confederation of African Deaf Sports.



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

Project No. 2020-1-RS01-KA201-065366

