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## THOMAS HOPKINS GALLAUDET

AN ADDRESS MADE AT COMMENCEMENT EXERCISES, GALLAUDET COLLEGE,  
WASHINGTON, D. C., JUNE 7, 1932

By WM. JOHN COOPER, *United States Commissioner of Education*



IT IS well that you who receive diplomas from this institution should know that it has been in existence not quite seventy years, opening in 1864. For the first thirty years of that period it was known as National Deaf Mute College. But since 1894, at the urgent request of the alumni, it has been known as Gallaudet College. It is especially worthy that the only institution of collegiate grade for the deaf in this country should be named for Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet. He was the great-grandson of the great-granddaughter of Rev. Thomas Hooker, whose life was practically spent in the ministry at Hartford in the very first generation that it was settled.

It was his great descendant, Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, who performed in this city a miracle in the first third of the nineteenth century—the miracle of teaching the deaf. Although he was born in Philadelphia within three months after the convention which made our Constitution had adjourned, he moved to Hartford, Conn., at an early age. Here he received his education at the Hartford grammar school. He then went to Yale University where he entered the sophomore class. Graduating here in the year 1805, he began the study of the law, and after one year in the law office of the Hon. Chauncey Goodrich he concluded that this type of study represented too much indoor work and the state of his health would not stand it. Accordingly, he gave up his legal studies, in which he was unusually good, and devoted himself for the next year to the study of English literature and composition. This period of study evidently had a marked influence on him for the rest of his life, his diction being marked by great simplicity, and the sermons which he wrote having soul-stirring power.

He served two years immediately after this as a tutor in his Alma Mater, but again finding that this meant a confinement which was hard on his health he gave it up. He now spent something like three years

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in a business which caused him to travel on horseback largely through Ohio and Kentucky. This built up his health, but he did not get the satisfaction from it that he had expected from a profession. After a short period he decided to enter the ministry. He went to Andover, where he entered the divinity school and remained until he had graduated. He had embraced the Christian faith as represented by the Congregational church, and he was satisfied in its ministry for the rest of his life.

During the last year of his ministerial studies he became acquainted with the deaf daughter of a neighbor, Alice Cogswell, and during one visit at her home succeeded in teaching her the word *hat*. This was merely the beginning of a life-long interest in the instruction of the deaf. She had been stricken at 3 or 4 years of age with spotted fever which took away her power of hearing, and shortly after what power of speech she had acquired also departed. She had been deaf some five years already. Gallaudet's power as a teacher was here shown.

Shortly thereafter Dr. Cogswell called a meeting of some neighbors and friends to discuss the possibility of founding a school in America where the deaf could be taught, and after some negotiations Reverend Gallaudet was secured to go abroad to find out how European schools were serving the deaf. He landed at Liverpool on the twenty-fifth of June, 1815, and spent more than a month in fruitless efforts to get permission to learn the secrets of the school of London which were held in the possession of one family. However, he did make the acquaintance of the Abbé Sicard, who was in London to deliver some lectures at the time of Gallaudet's arrival.

After many trials and tribulations lasting over a month, in which Gallaudet attempted unsuccessfully to remove the prejudices of Mr. Braidwood against letting out any secrets, he went to Paris where the Abbé Sicard gave him complete access to his school. This accounts for the fact that it is the French or manual method that leads today in America. After several months' stay, during which he learned much, he persuaded Laurent Clerc to come to America with him. He returned in 1816 and began the preparations for the opening of his school. The fifteenth day of April, 1817, witnessed the opening of the Hartford School for the Deaf.

For some thirteen years Mr. Gallaudet was to be the principal and managing director of this school. He was beset by worries of administration during the entire period. A double-headed system of man-

agement almost wrecked the institution in 1823 when a resolution to declare the principalship vacant received a tie vote. And in the end, his health failing, he resigned the place in 1830.

In the meantime he had married. His bride, Sophia Fowler, was a charming young woman of fine character who was herself entirely deaf. It appears that Mr. Gallaudet had fallen in love with her entirely without her being aware of it. As soon, however, as he was able to convince her of the reality of his affection she entered most happily into marriage. During their entire married life she was able to impart the larger outlook and to add a cheerfulness to his otherwise sad periods.

After his resignation from the Hartford School for the Deaf he devoted some years to writing juvenile books which were published by the American Tract Society for the Sunday schools. During this time he refused offers from many sources—colleges, school districts, the special schools which existed and insane asylums. Finally he accepted, in 1838, a call to be a chaplain in the Hartford Home for the Insane, a position which he held until the close of his life in 1851. Upon his passing he received a splendid funeral and eulogy by Henry Barnard who was later to be the first Commissioner of Education; and who too, although some years younger, had been associated with Gallaudet rather intimately for the advancement of public education in the State of Connecticut.

"If to be an eminent benefactor of the most unfortunate and neglected of his race is to be great, then was Thomas H. Gallaudet a great man. But no matter. He was a *good* man, with a great overflowing heart. His philanthropy was no spring freshet, to be dried up in the summer, but a perennial fountain, always refreshing whenever the stream flowed. He was a good man—full of faith, abounding in charity and good works, and his record is on high." Such was the man who founded the first school for the deaf in the United States. Today there have sprung from it some 64 residential schools, 114 day schools, and 18 private and denominational schools ministering to a total of some eighteen thousand deaf children, all of whom would have been neglected but for the work of this one man.

To his tireless zeal and earnest enthusiasm must be attributed everything which has been accomplished. You, who today go out of this

<sup>1</sup> Gallaudet, Edward Miner. "Life of Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet. (Tribute from Dr. Humphrey)" Page 339. Henry Holt and Company, New York, N. Y., 1888.

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college, go out into a world which is less hospitable to college graduates than usual, but by the same tireless energy and the same boundless enthusiasm you also will prevail. I have no doubt but that many of you may find it difficult to find a place if you are expecting a place to be awaiting you, but if you will strike out as if you knew there was a job awaiting you I am confident that you will find it. Such is the life and lesson of Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet. May it be a slogan that will help you win.