

**AN ACCOUNT OF THE ORIGIN
AND PROGRESS OF THE
PENNSYLVANIA INSTITUTION
FOR THE DEAF AND DUMB**

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An Account of the Origin and Progress of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Deaf and Dumb
by Various

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VARIOUS

**AN ACCOUNT OF THE ORIGIN
AND PROGRESS OF THE
PENNSYLVANIA INSTITUTION
FOR THE DEAF AND DUMB**

AN ACCOUNT, &c:

AT a meeting of a number of gentlemen to consider the propriety of establishing an institution for the instruction of the deaf and dumb, at the hall of the American Philosophical Society, Wednesday evening, April 12, 1820,

The Right Reverend William White was requested to take the chair, and William Meredith appointed secretary.

Mr. Roberts Vaux stated to the meeting that the attention of himself and others* had been directed to a school recently established and supported in this city by David G. Seixas, who having acquainted himself with the modes pursued in Europe for educating the deaf and dumb, had for some months past applied his knowledge and talents in the most unostentatious manner to that benevolent object. That this humane individual had, without pecuniary aid or recompense successfully instructed eleven or twelve children labouring under the deplorable privation of the sense of hearing and of speech; that there was reason to suppose the number of these unfortunate persons in this city and its neighbourhood much exceeded what was generally believed, and that these circumstances had led to the project of establishing an institution for their relief, for which purpose this meeting had been called.

Mr. Vaux then submitted a plan for establishing and organizing such an institution in this city, which was read, and on

* The gentlemen alluded to are Horace Binney, Clement C. Biddle, Joseph Correa de Serra, late minister from Portugal near the government of the United States, Jacob Gratz, Dr. N. Chapman, and William Wilkins of Pittsburgh, who after an interview with David G. Seixas at the residence of Roberts Vaux on the 6th of April 1820, determined upon a call of the meeting at which these proceedings were had.

motion committed to Messrs. R. Vaux, Horace Binney, Dr. N. Chapman, W. J. Duane, James N. Barker, Clement C. Biddle and John Bacon, who are to consider and report thereon, with such alterations and amendments as they may think expedient to the next meeting.

And this meeting was adjourned to meet at this place on Saturday evening next, at half past seven o'clock.

Saturday Evening, April 15, 1820.

Bishop White was again called to the chair.

Mr. Roberts Vaux, on behalf of the committee appointed at the last meeting reported a preamble and constitution for establishing an institution for the deaf and dumb, which being read, was afterwards considered by paragraphs, and adopted with amendments as follows:—

“ Among the various efforts of Philanthropy and Learning, to enlarge the circle of human happiness and knowledge, none, perhaps, should rank higher than those which have been directed to the discovery and application of means for the instruction of the deaf and dumb.

“ To behold a human being destitute of the faculties which essentially distinguish our species from the brute creation, and denied those enjoyments without which temporal existence must be to the last degree oppressive, is to witness an object eminently calculated to awaken compassion, and invigorate exertions for the alleviation of the sufferer.

“ In Europe institutions have been for a long time in successful operation for the relief of this description of persons, and recently two schools have been established in the United States for the same beneficent purposes. But Pennsylvania has not numbered in the comprehensive list of her charitable institutions, an asylum where these children of affliction may be taught to know that they possess intellectual powers, and are capable of deriving enjoyment from their exercise. The only reason which can be supposed or assigned for delay until this period in the formation of a school for the instruction of the deaf and dumb in this extensive commonwealth, is that few, if any of the citizens have been aware of the great number of individuals within its limits, whose condition emphatically demanded their notice and sympathy.

"Desirous, therefore, of extending the benefits of instruction, and with it the incomparable solace of rational social intercourse to that portion of our fellow beings who are deprived of the faculties of speech and hearing—We, the Subscribers, associate for the purpose of establishing and maintaining a school for the education of the deaf and dumb, soliciting towards its support the bounty of individuals and the patronage of the legislature."

See the act of incorporation, which is the constitution as originally adopted.

Wednesday, April 26, 1820.

At a meeting of the members of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, on Wednesday evening, April 26, 1820, in the Hall of the Philosophical Society, agreeably to notice, the following gentlemen were elected officers and directors, to serve until the first Wednesday in May, 1821.

President.

The Right Reverend William White.

Vice Presidents.

Robert Patterson, Horace Binney, Roberts Vaux, Dr. N. Chapman.

Directors.

William Meredith, John Vaughan, Clement C. Biddle, Jacob Gratz, J. N. Barker, General T. Cadwalader, William J. Duane, Samuel Archer, Paul Beck, R. Walsh, jun., Alexander Henry, Rev. P. F. Mayer, Dr. William Price, Calender Irwin, Reuben Haines, Dr. F. Bache, Samuel B. Morris, W. W. Fisher, B. Tilghman, Caleb Cresson, William McIlvaine, Joseph Gratz, Samuel Canby, jun., Samuel R. Wood.

Treasurer—John Bacon. *Secretary*—Henry J. Williams.

The first meeting of the board of directors was held on the 29th of April, 1820, present the Right Reverend Dr. White, Robert Patterson, Horace Binney, Roberts Vaux, Dr. Chapman, Henry J. Williams, John Bacon, William Meredith, John Vaughan, Clement C. Biddle, Jacob C. Gratz, James N. Barker, Thomas Cadwalader, William J. Duane, Alexander Henry, Philip F. Mayer, Reuben Haines, William W. Fisher, William McIlvaine, Joseph Gratz, Samuel Canby, jun., Samuel R. Wood.

Bishop White was chosen chairman of the board, and Henry J. Williams secretary.

Robert Walsh, jun. was elected corresponding secretary to the institution.

Horace Binney, Roberts Vaux, and Thomas Cadwalader were appointed to confer with David G. Seixas, in relation to an engagement of his services as an instructor in the establishment.

William Meredith, Robert Walsh, jun., John Bacon, Horace Binney, and Dr. Chapman were requested to prepare an address to the inhabitants of Pennsylvania, explanatory of the objects of the institution, and soliciting pecuniary aid for the accomplishment of its beneficent purposes.

Robert Patterson, John Vaughan, William Meredith, Clement C. Biddle, and Philip F. Mayer were nominated to prepare by-laws for the government of the institution.

At the next meeting of the board, which was held on the 6th of May, a report was made by the committee appointed to confer with Mr. Seixas, and he was engaged as teacher at a salary of one thousand dollars per annum.

William Meredith reported an address, which was adopted, and ordered to be published.

To the Inhabitants of Pennsylvania.

Of the woes inflicted on our species, there is surely none calling for deeper commiseration than that which it is the purpose of this Institution to alleviate. The privation of any other of the senses still leaves avenues of the mind free, through which knowledge may be communicated, her resources enlarged, and her powers invigorated. The want of some of them is often more than compensated by the increased acuteness of those which remain; and the faculty of speech,—the great characteristic of man,—the chief outlet of his affections,—the chain of sweet communion with his fellows,—may remain unbroken and unimpaired.

The diseases and infirmities of the body, however severe and grievous, are mitigated by the exercise and cultivation of the mind, and her powers are often sharpened as they are accumu-

lated. She is able to bestow patience and fortitude in proportion to the pressure of these external calamities.

Insanity, among the greatest of the evils to which man is exposed, still leaves the hope of cure and recovery; and, during its continuance, some consolation is derived from perceiving, amidst its frenzy and ravings, intervals of calmness,—and glimmerings, however fallacious, of returning reason. The wreck of that exalted power which distinguishes man from the beasts that perish, and assimilates him to his Creator, is less afflicting than the spectacle of a human being destitute of intelligence, and denied the means of acquiring it.

But, to the *Deaf and Dumb*—alas! what comfort can be offered?—To friends—what consolation?—To parents—what hope? Idiocy, sometimes attendant, often consequent;—the natural powers of the mind exercised to their own perversion or destruction, the passions headstrong and impetuous, by the absence of the control of judgement,—fretful impatience at the dark preception of unknown and unattainable excellence in the rest of their species,—the wily cunning of *instinct* in the place of generous *wisdom*,—total unfitness for all occupations but those to which the brutes are as well adapted,—an entire and invincible separation from the vast stores of knowledge which human talent has accumulated—ignorance of the truths of *Revelation*, her glorious assurances and unspeakable consolations,—all these are among the bitter ingredients that fill up the vast measure of affliction to the *Deaf and Dumb*.

In former times, no human means,—no power less than that which worked miracles, could be found sufficient to remove or lighten this heavy load of misery. Natural affection, the last to yield, surrendered to despair; and the parent courted the death of his child, as the only termination of intolerable sorrow,—the only limit of suffering unutterable.

But the same kind Providence, which once effected a cure by immediate interposition, and made the dumb to speak,—has at length permitted that it may be partially effected by human power. Modern discoveries have opened a source by which relief may be had for the afflicted, and modern benevolence has improved it. You have heard of the Abbés de L'Épée and Sicard, immortalized by their successful efforts in behalf of the Deaf and Dumb. Others in France, England, and other parts of Eu-

cope, have laid just claims to the title of *Benefactors of Mankind*, by treading in their steps,—making still further advances in usefulness, and affording increased relief to the victims of despair.

You have heard, too, that men of our own country, have not been backward in following these glorious examples of benevolence. Many of you have contributed with exemplary liberality, to the establishment of an Institution like our own in Connecticut. You learn with delight of its success;—and that it has been followed by another, in our nearer neighbour, the city of New York. Surely it was well and generously done, to assist even a distant effort in so good a cause. But it does not become *Pennsylvania* to look *abroad* for benevolent institutions, nor is it convenient. She will encourage and applaud them every where; but it has not been her custom to direct elsewhere her own objects of succour and compassion.

We now call on you, therefore, in behalf of those of your own household. It is for *our brethren* we implore the same munificence which you did not withhold from *strangers*.

But a few months since, a young man, seemingly endowed by Providence with a peculiar and extraordinary talent for this work of goodness,—having acquired the knowledge which books afford, to qualify himself as a teacher, and availed himself of other sources of information,—it is but a few months since this young man opened an Institution for the Deaf and Dumb in this city. Little known, unassuming and unobtrusive,—he continued it for a while without attracting much observation. He has instructed eleven pupils,—clothed and fed several of them—and has devoted his time, his talents, and his purse, without pecuniary recompense, to their service. His success has equalled, perhaps in one respect, surpassed that of any of his contemporaries. His example has kindled a flame of charity in others.

Is not his example worthy of praise,—of co-operation?

The question is already answered, by the liberal contributions of many, and the hearty zeal which has manifested itself generally. In truth, it is to the want, and the difficulty of obtaining a fit instrument of doing this good work, that we must attribute the postponement until this time, of the establishment of an Institution for the Deaf and Dumb in Pennsylvania. Public feel-

ing has long, we trust, been ripe for the enterprise, but circumstances rendered its execution impracticable.

Yet it must be obvious that it is too much to be performed by a few. The number of the Deaf and Dumb in this city and neighbourhood, already ascertained, and doubtless there are many still unknown to us, besides those in the remote parts of the State, of whom we have yet no precise information,—is such as to require *ample means* for their relief. These means, if they are raised by general contributions from the benevolent, will occasion no individual inconvenience,—no diminution of comfort,—no sacrifice even of superfluities. This is the plan on which it is contemplated to proceed,—to ask moderate contributions from the many,—to importune large ones from none,—leaving it to those who “*have much, to give plentifully,*” but voluntarily. And we trust in the influence of a kind Providence to warm your charity in this behalf,—believing that we may count with confidence on the benevolence of an enlightened legislature to ensure success to our common exertions, by the grant of an endowment proportioned to the greatness and the goodness of our purpose.

In behalf of the *Deaf and Dumb*, then, we intreat your charity! For the children of misfortune,—*irretrievable* if you deny us,—we implore your pity!

To supply the deficiencies of our inadequate address to your compassion, and our call for your succour,—to make the appeal to your hearts commensurate to the occasion,—come to the school of Mr. Seixas,—contemplate the interesting objects by whom he is surrounded.

“Their humble gestures shall make the residue plain,
“Dumb Eloquence persuading more than Speech.”

By order of the Board of Directors,

WILLIAM WHITE, *President.*

HENRY J. WILLIAMS, *Secretary.*

At a meeting of the directors on the 13th of May, Roberts Vaux, Clement C. Biddle, Horace Binney, William M'Ilvaine, and William Meredith, were appointed a committee of instruction.