

INTRODUCTION

* Harlan Lane, Richard C. Pillard, and Ulf Hedberg, *The People of the Eye: Deaf Ethnicity and Ancestry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co, 1969); Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986).

The formation of French Deaf heritage is of interest in its own right and also because it influenced the formation of other Deaf cultures, notably American Deaf culture. We do not know when this formation began in France; but perhaps well before the abbé de l'Épée opened the first enduring school for the Deaf during the Enlightenment. By 1900, many important structures were in place for ethnic formation, such as residential schools for the Deaf, publications by and for Deaf persons, and Deaf organizations. Thus, we select the end of the nineteenth century as an end-date when cultural formation ceded to cultural maintenance. More recent events and interpretations must stand the test of time.

We have aimed in this book to include virtually all of the French Deaf schools and leaders, all of the important national and international organizations and congresses, and a survey of French Deaf artists, up through about 1900. The index leads to brief readable texts on many topics, as with an encyclopedia. Although we did not conduct original research, we did consult numerous Deaf publications from 1760 to the present. We did that by scanning over some twenty thousand book and journal pages, giving us an insight into the activists, their values, and actions. We think this technological breakthrough will have a major impact on historical research.

You may well ask, what brings two American Francophiles (one of them Deaf) to write about elements of French Deaf culture? For one, American Deaf culture is partly derived from it. Furthermore, we find that the works published so far are often narrowly focused or, on the other hand, vulgarizations. This book takes the middle road but not every element contributing to French Deaf culture can be examined in a single book. Published in English, it gives access to French Deaf culture to a wider audience. We have adopted the framework of ethnicity,* which itself provides a good fit to the issues of minority life.

Ethnic communities existed before the start of written history and they are to be found virtually everywhere today. Ethnic ties are deeply meaningful and strongly felt. The strength of emotion evoked by ethnicity is reminiscent of that evoked by family ties, and may be based on them; as the aphorism goes, "Ethnicity is family writ large." Like family, ethnicity is woven into the fabric of everyday life and involves shared obligations and traditions. However, ethnicity surpasses family in its scope: it evokes a rich history of one's kind and a historic fate across generations; it entails stereotypes of "us" and "them." Ethnicity involves distinct values, customs, and myths. These cultural traits are

embedded in language and in behavior. In brief, shared culture is the cohesive force in an ethnic group and one that differentiates it from other such groups.

What are the elements of French Deaf heritage? We begin with the residential schools where acculturation takes place (chapter 1). Next, “founders”—individuals who have played an important role in the formation of French Deaf heritage (chapter 2). Associations of the Deaf, with their leaders and followers, reinforce the connectedness of ethnic members long after school years are over (chapter 3). National and international congresses of the Deaf reinforce bonds while defining and executing strategies to enhance the interests of the Deaf (chapter 3). The Deaf press plays important roles in Deaf bonding (chapter 3); it allows Deaf readers to keep informed and schoolmates to keep in touch. Finally, Deaf people have played an outsized role in the fine arts, which elicited pride in Deaf culture and was a tool to persuade hearing people of the normalcy of Deaf people (chapter 4).



ETHNIC ACCULTURATION IN THE DEAF SCHOOLS

A major force in the development of Deaf ethnicity was cultural and language acquisition in the residential schools. During socialization, children internalize ethnic repertoires, such as language and cultural beliefs and practices that are highly resistant to change. Children are often socialized by people to whom they are not related biologically; call it proxy socialization.¹ For example, foster children and orphans are not socialized by their biological parents. Moreover, when parents and children move to another country, peers will socialize the children in the language and culture of their new homeland long before the parents will have mastered these skills and practices. Deaf socialization is often proxy socialization, conducted by peers and Deaf adults to whom the Deaf child is not related. It is during the period of socialization to the Deaf-World that Deaf children learn their Deaf identity, acquire sign language and all the cultural contents, rules and values, history and myths, and with them a deep attachment to that Deaf-World. If parents are unable to model Deaf-World language and culture for their Deaf child, proxy socialization begins when the child is able to mingle in the Deaf-World—for example, upon enrolling at a school or program for the Deaf. There, many acquire language for the first time. Interacting with members of the Deaf-World, the Deaf child finds a positive identity and Deaf role models, whose ways of being and doing present possible lives for that child. There is nothing in the Deaf child's past or future that can compete with the importance of the residential school.

When ethnic minorities are educated nowadays, it is commonly in a language they have not mastered, a curriculum that is alien to their experience, and with majority teachers who do not speak the minority language. In the nineteenth century, on the contrary, most French Deaf children studied all their subjects in their most fluent language—French Sign Language (*langue des signes française*, or LSF).² In a school with a signing community, students were able to respond to the instruction; to get help from older students; to discuss local, national, and international events; to participate in student activities; to develop friendships; to choose a Deaf partner when marrying; to emulate older students; to have Deaf teachers; to acquire self-respect as a Deaf person.

The children who do best in school are the fortunate few who have the standard ethnic profile—ethnicization by their minority parents. These “native signers” outperform

their Deaf classmates from hearing homes—even in learning to read and write English. They are also better adjusted, better socialized, and have more positive attitudes. The superior performance of Deaf children of Deaf parents highlights the change that needs to be made in the education of Deaf children, namely, a return to sign language, Deaf teachers, and Deaf administrators—in short, Deaf schools.

TABLE 1. AN INVENTORY OF FRENCH SCHOOLS FOR THE DEAF IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER

FOUNDER	LOCATION	YEAR FOUNDED
Abbé de l'Épée	Paris (Paris)	1760s
Abbé Deschamps	Orléans (Loiret)	1775
Abbé Jean-Marie du Bourg	Toulouse (Haute-Garonne)	1775
Abbé Fremond	Angers (Maine-et-Loire)	1777
Abbé Jacques-Louis Huby	Rouen (Seine-Maritime)	1780
Archbishop Jérôme Champion de Cicé	Bordeaux (Gironde)	1786
Sœurs Saint-Joseph du Bon Pasteur	Clermont-Ferrand (Puy-de-Dôme)	1788
Abbé Salvan	Rioms (Drôme)	1788
National Assembly	Paris (Paris)	1791
Dr. Saux	Toulouse (Haute-Garonne)	1800
Laurine Duler	Rouen (Seine-Maritime)	1803
Gabriel Deshayes	Auray (Morbihan)	1810
Abbé André-François Beulé	Nogent-le-Rotrou (Eure-et-Loir)	1811
Abbé Pierre-Jean-Louis Périer	Rodez (Aveyron)	1814
David Comberly	Saint-Étienne (Loire)	1815
Paul-Denis Dudesert	Condé-sur-Noireau (Calvados)	1816
Laurine Duler	Arras (Pas-de-Calais)	1817
Abbé Pierre-François Jamet	Caen (Calvados)	1817
Mlle. Elisabeth Genestet	Le Puy-en-Velay (Haute-Loire)	1818
Madeleine Barthélémy	Le Puy-en-Velay (Haute-Loire)	1818
Soeur Rouzot	Besançon (Doubs)	1819
Joseph Bernhard	Marseille (Bouches-du-Rhône)	1819
Sœurs de Saint-Thomas de Villeneuve	Nîmes (Gard)	1822
David Comberly	Lyon (Rhône)	1824
René Dunan	Nantes (Loire-Atlantique)	1824
Abbé Breuillot	Besançon (Doubs)	1824
Hospice Saint-Louis	Laval (Mayenne)	1825
Sœurs du Sacré-Coeur	Périers (Manche)	1825
Abbé Treilhou	Albi (Tarn)	1826
Auguste Jacoutôt	Colmar (Haut-Rhin)	1826
Abbé Louis-Guillaume Chazottes	Toulouse (Haute-Garonne)	1826
Pierre Guès	Marseille (Bouches-du-Rhône)	1826
Joseph Piroux	Nancy (Meurthe-et-Moselle)	1828
G.-V. Pothier	Langres (Haute-Marne)	1828
Soeur Saint Anne	Saint-Étienne (Loire)	1829
Marguerite Mirandon	Saint-Étienne (Loire)	1830
Roch-Ambroise Auguste Bébian	Rouen (Seine-Maritime)	1832
Abbé Benoît Dessaigne	Chaumont (Puy-de-Dôme)	1833
Antoine Bertrand	Limoges (Haute-Vienne)	1833
Gabriel Deshayes	Poitiers-Pont Achard (Vienne)	1833
Abbé Chaillet	Goux (Jura)	1835
Jean Massieu	Lille (Nord)	1835
Gabriel Deshayes	Orléans (Loiret)	1835
Abbé François Lefebvre	Rouen (Seine-Maritime)	1835
Benjamin Louis Dubois	Paris (Paris)	1837