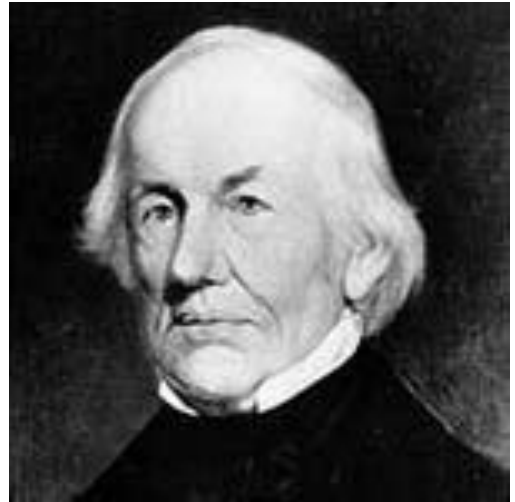


Laurent Clerc

(1785-1869)



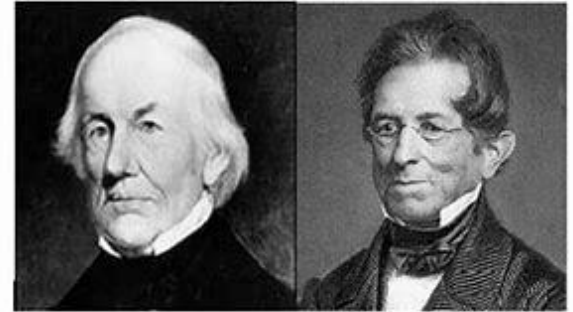
Early Life

- A fire permanently changed the course of Laurent's life when he was only one year old.
- He was born to a comfortable situation in France, he fell off of his high chair into the kitchen fire and was badly burned.
- It is believed that this accident and the subsequent fever were the source of his lifelong deafness and lost sense of smell.
- Despite the efforts by his parents to reverse his condition, Laurent was suddenly left with fewer prospects.
- Laurent received no official schooling until another Laurent Clerc, his uncle and godfather, stepped in when he was 12.
- Once Laurent was enrolled in the *Institut National des Jeune Sourds-Muets*, a school for the Deaf in France.
- His life then took a turn for the better.



Early life (continued)

- Laurent caught up quickly on his education, eventually becoming a beloved teacher at the institute.
- It was during this time that he crossed paths with Thomas Gallaudet in London and Laurent's life was forever changed once again.
- Gallaudet, future co-founder of the first school for the Deaf in America, visited Laurent in France and was impressed with his teaching methods.
- Gallaudet asked Laurent to be a part of his plans to educate the Deaf in the United States, and he agreed to join the venture.



Laurent Clerc Thomas H. Gallaudet

Laurent's Work in America

- Laurent left his homeland and immediately begin applying his skills by teaching Gallaudet sign language on the journey from France to America.
- Once on American soil, Laurent worked with Gallaudet and others to raise funds for the new school; speaking, fundraising and rounding up future students.
- By 1817 their goal was accomplished and the school opened in Hartford, Conn.
- Only a year later, Laurent was the first Deaf individual to address the U.S. Congress.
- Laurent went on to become a key figure in training teachers of the Deaf who came from all across America to benefit from his expertise.
- It was his work with students ranging from ages 6 to 40 that has had the most lasting impact; American Sign Language (ASL) was and still is heavily influenced by the French signs Laurent first brought to the country.



The Laurent Clerc monument is located on the campus of the American School for the Deaf in West Hartford

Personal Life

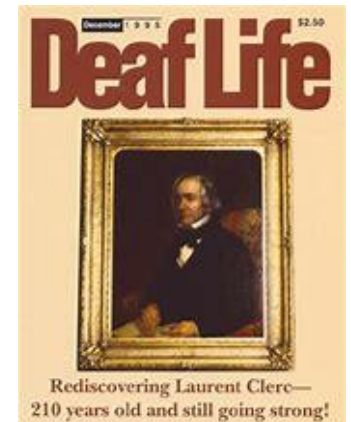
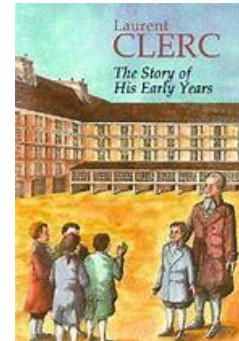
- Laurent made history in his personal life as well.
- He married Eliza Crocker Boardman in 1818, the first recorded Deaf marriage in the United States.
- Deeply devoted to his work, not much is shared about Laurent's hours outside of education, although he did have 6 children, 4 of which survived past infancy.
- Although his childhood accident left him with a significant scar on one side of his face that defined the sign for his name.
- Laurent's legacy is not linked to his physical differences, but rather, his distinguished character and career



Laurent and Eliza's tombstones

Personal Life (continued)

- It is difficult to measure the expansive influence Laurent Clerc has on Deaf culture, from language to learning to teaching methods, the establishment of new schools for the Deaf and more.
- Memorials have been made, honorary degrees awarded, plays performed, buildings dedicated and books written in honor of Laurent Clerc.
- As his New York Times obituary states, *“His ability, zeal and graces of character made him always respected and beloved.”* This has held true across the almost 150 years since his death.



Information for this biography comes from...

Great Deaf Americans (2nd Ed.) by Matthew Scott Moor and Robert F. Panara

Laurent Clerc: Apostle to the Deaf People of the New World, article written by Loida R. Canlas

The *New York Times* obituaries, published July 19, 1869