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Why Schools for Deaf Children Are a Good Thing...

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The Society for American Sign Language Journal (SASLJ) is pleased to present a special issue: The Relevance of a School for Deaf Children and Preserving Its History. I thank the leading author, Dr. Clifton F. Carbin, for giving me permission to reprint his three booklets, which have been turned into articles for the purpose of this publication. All three featured articles cover one of Canada’s longest-operating schools for deaf children, in Belleville, Ontario. The Sir James Whitney School for the Deaf was founded in 1870. The United States, where I reside, has its own similar system of schools for deaf children, usually one or two in each state. In this Editor’s Note, I begin with the premise that dedicated schools for deaf children are a good thing, although society by and large may not agree with this assessment. For several decades, regular public schools have been “favored” over schools for deaf children under the banner of integration. Deaf people’s thoughts about the current push for integration and schools for deaf children seem to have been disregarded. What attracts me to the work of Carbin and his co-author, Donna J. Fano, is their positive view of schools for deaf children. I have come to believe that we need to revisit the whole idea of schools for deaf children and consider linguistic accessibility.1 The ASL/Deaf Studies literature includes little about those schools and the roles they play in the lives of deaf children, which is another reason for my excitement about this special issue. I am also honored to state that Mr. Paul Bartu, a former superintendent who worked closely with Carbin at his alma mater, contributed his time in writing an afterword. Bartu’s thoughts on the featured articles by Carbin and Fano and the viability of schools for deaf children in general are insightful.

In the 21st century, schools for deaf children have lost much of their preeminence in the education system in the United States and Canada. Declining student enrollment plagues many schools for deaf children, with some closing down. The current norm is that deaf children are placed in a regular school setting, thus encompassing close to 90 percent of the entire population in question (see Akamastu et al., 2000; Karchmer & Mitchell, 2003; Snoddon, 2008). I recall that the Nebraska School for the Deaf was erased from the map in 1998 despite the National Association of the Deaf’s lobbying efforts to keep it open. Readers are encouraged to view this deaf community–produced video titled “The History of How Nebraska School for the Deaf (NSD) Closed?” at https://youtu.be/lS44K9uKPPk. A video produced by Gallaudet University (in its Deaf Mosaic series) in the 1990s reports on the Illinois School for the Deaf’s fight for survival. The deaf community rallied at the state capitol in Springfield and protested the school’s closure plans. Fortunately, the Illinois school prevailed and continues to operate to this day, but with a very small student enrollment. Likewise, Canada’s deaf community has been anxious about the future of schools for deaf children. The closure of Saskatchewan School for the Deaf in 1991 was controversial from the start (Snoddon, 2020; Weber, 2019), and its fate was met with great sadness.

Knowing the First Author of the Three Articles

In this section, I address only the first author, Carbin, due to space limitations and the fact he is an alumnus of the school covered in this special issue.2 With this said, I had the opportunity to interview him through a Zoom meeting. As Carbin and I talked in ASL, we referred to the school as “Belleville” (see the video for the sign’s rendition). The sign for the school is synonymous with the school’s location in the province of Ontario. Please note that I am originally from Canada, and I presently

1 My Editor’s Note draws heavily on the concept of linguistic accessibility to some arguments and observations that emphasize strengths of schools for deaf children (see Supalla & Cripps, 2008; Cripps & Supalla, 2012, for further discussion on ASL as an accessible language in comparison to English or any other spoken language).
2 I encourage readers to learn about the second author, Fano, and her book on a dog who was deaf and lived its days on the campus of a school for deaf children (see the Society for ASLs newsletter cover story at http://societyforasl.org/node/20).
live in South Carolina in the United States. My background explains my knowledge of the sign for the school. Carbin’s alma mater had an older name in English, the Ontario School for the Deaf (OSD), which was the official name during the time of Carbin’s attendance in the 1950s and 1960s. The references to Carbin’s school are thus OSD/SJW from this point.

When it was established, OSD/SJW was the only school for deaf children in the province of Ontario. Thus, deaf children who needed to attend OSD/SJW often traveled great distances to attend. OSD/SJW stands as an independent school publicly funded by the provincial government of Ontario (which is similar to how American schools for deaf children are run by state governments). In later years, two more schools for deaf children were established in Ontario, one in Milton and the other in London, bringing the total number to three. However, during the 1970s, society’s push for the integration of children with disabilities into regular public schools gained traction. Fortunately, Carbin’s time of education at OSD/SJW occurred before this change in policy.

Carbin confirmed that he is a staunch supporter of his school, not just because he attended it but because he believes that schools for deaf children are a good thing. Carbin explained that OSD/SJW was 400 miles from his home, as he was born in the town of Espanola, Ontario, to hearing parents in 1946. English was spoken at his home. However, Carbin was diagnosed with spinal meningitis at the age of four, which left him deaf. For three years (1951–1954), he attended a local public school where his mother was a teacher. The fact that Carbin had acquired English (owing to his intact hearing capacity for the first four years of his life) caused his mother and the school to start him with the typical education of hearing children. However, it soon became clear that his hearing loss prevented Carbin from benefitting from what the local school offered.

Carbin’s transfer to OSD/SJW took place in 1954 (and he graduated in 1966), and he never looked back with regret. Carbin embraced deaf people’s language, the American Sign Language (ASL) that was in use at OSD/SJW. Students at OSD/SJW were busily signing to each other. OSD/SJW’s enrollment of a little fewer than 550 students (from the youngest to those who were close to graduating) at that time is impressive. What was important for Carbin was that the critical mass of signers at OSD/SJW enabled him to learn a new and accessible language through natural social interactions. The prevalence of a rich signing environment at OSD/SJW is the school’s greatest strength. OSD/SJW helped Carbin become a proficient signer in due time. A recent photo of Carbin as an adult who has lived his life as a signer is shown below.

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3 I recognize that the original sign for OSD/SJW was subject to replacement with the current sign (as depicted) at some point. The original OSD/SJW sign was used in the deaf community when OSD/SJW was the only school of its kind in Ontario. The current sign for OSD/SJW represents the modern era with multiple schools for deaf children.
I should mention that my own father enrolled at OSD/SJW in 1951, and he knew Carbin as a younger peer. My father was an accomplished signer and served as a language model for Carbin. My father did not learn ASL at home, as his parents were hearing and did not sign. OSD/SJW thus served as linguistic compensation for home. The important demographic fact is that an overwhelming majority of deaf children (i.e., 90 percent) are born to hearing parents. Only a small minority (less than 10 percent) have deaf parents and are the ones most likely to acquire the signed language at home (Mitchell & Karchmer, 2004). I should also note that today is different than Carbin’s time, with many modern hearing parents learning ASL. The provision of ASL classes through community colleges, for example, is among the opportunities that parents now have (see Brueggemann 2009/2020; Rosen 2017, 2020). However, it is important to keep in mind that not all hearing parents of deaf children are committed to learning the signed language and becoming fluent signers themselves (see Snoddon, 2009, for further discussion on hearing parents with deaf children and ASL).

After high school graduation at OSD/SJW, Carbin attended Gallaudet College (now Gallaudet University) in the United States. He enjoyed the exposure to ASL as the linguistic vehicle for learning the liberal arts subject matter taught in this higher-education setting. Carbin earned a bachelor of arts degree in 1971, majoring in sociology and minoring in psychology and philosophy. He obtained his master’s in education from Western Maryland College (now McDaniel College) in 1974. His master’s thesis was titled “The Effects of a Continuing Education Program Upon Deaf Adults at Alberta College.” He received his doctorate from Gallaudet University in 1989 (LL.D., honoris causa), which stands out as a professional accomplishment. Carbin was also the Powrie V. Doctor Chair of Deaf Studies at Gallaudet University from 1990 to 1991. He was one of several plenary presenters at the first-ever International Conference on Deaf History (June 20–23, 1991), and served as an editor of the Deaf History International newsletter from 2005 to 2012.

During my Zoom interview with Carbin, I mentioned that his earlier work had focused on encouraging hearing parents and siblings of deaf children to learn ASL (Carbin, 1976, 1979, 1986). Carbin agreed, noting that ASL intervention with families has always been a high priority because of his restrictive language and communication experiences at home while growing up (see Snoddon, 2008, for further discussion of the concept of ASL intervention). This led Carbin to write a book with two hearing University of British Columbia faculty members, Can’t Your Child Hear? A Guide for Those Who Care About Deaf Children (Freeman et al., 1981). It was written for parents without jargon or specific terminologies that are difficult to read, and it was later translated into Dutch/Flemish (1984), Danish (1987), Icelandic (1988), Czech (1992), and Portuguese (1999). Carbin and his colleagues also received positive reviews regarding this book (Dresser, 1982; A. B. Hall, 1983).

Carbin also authored Deaf Heritage in Canada: A Distinctive, Diverse, and Enduring Culture (1996) and Samuel Thomas Greene: A Legend in the Nineteenth-Century Deaf Community (2005). Carbin began writing Deaf Heritage in Canada while living in Vancouver, British Columbia, in the early 1980s, inspired by Jack Gannon, the author of Deaf Heritage: A Narrative History of Deaf America (1981). He continued to work on the book after being appointed as the Powrie V. Doctor Chair of Deaf Studies at Gallaudet University and then as the program director for Bilingual/Bicultural Education for Deaf Children, serving three schools for deaf children in Ontario from his office located in the Milton school.

I personally attended the Milton school and had known Carbin for some time before following in his path to Gallaudet. When I was at Gallaudet, his Deaf Heritage in Canada book was released, to the pleasure of the deaf community in Canada. Similar to Gannon’s work, Carbin collected different stories and narratives from deaf Canadians. A special note must be made that Carbin paid attention to different signed languages used in Canada (i.e., ASL, Langue des Signes Québécoise, and Maritime Sign Language) as well as devoting countless time to archival work, such as visiting libraries and taking copious notes (see Burch, 1996; Perreault, 1999; Stanley-Blackwell, 1996, for reviews of his book).

Carbin’s other publication, Samuel Thomas Greene, elicited similarly positive reactions among members of Canada’s deaf community, particularly in Ontario, where the narrative is set. Greene was an American who moved to Canada to become OSD/SJW’s first deaf teacher, and he helped found the Ontario Association of the Deaf. The contributions that Greene made to the school and the deaf community were profound and included solidifying the spread of ASL from the United States to the Canadian province of Ontario. Greene is described in Carbin’s book as a masterful signer; an alumnus of the American School for the Deaf in Hartford, Connecticut; and a graduate of Gallaudet University. I recall that when I attended Gallaudet, I felt sorry for other international students, who had to learn ASL as a new language in addition to the signed languages that they knew from home. We Canadians who came to Gallaudet from Ontario were fluent in ASL and could easily immerse. When reading Carbin’s book, I was fascinated with one account about a large, long-neglected painting of Greene displayed high on a wall in the auditorium at OSD/SJW; students, including Carbin himself, did not know who Greene was. For these reasons, I applaud Carbin for writing the biography on Greene, as it helps support the significance of ASL/Deaf Studies. A positive review of Carbin’s book appears in Bailes (2005).
The Value of Schools for Deaf Children

OSD/SJW is a signed language school (see Cripps & Supalla, 2012, for further discussion on the language modality distinction for schooling purposes). For anyone visiting a school for deaf children today, perhaps the most interesting feature is finding that teachers, administrators, librarians, counselors, speech and language pathologists, psychologists, house parents, custodians, and cafeteria workers know and use ASL. I believe that this feature is something to celebrate! I add that without the provision of a rich signing environment, as found in schools for deaf children, linguistic deprivation would easily be a bigger problem for the children in question (see M. L. Hall et al., 2019; W. C. Hall, 2017; Humphries et al., 2016; Murray et al., 2019, for further discussion on linguistic deprivation). I hope that readers now understand why Carbin is so passionate about schools for deaf children.

Moreover, let's talk about the common expression that “it takes a village to raise a child.” This could not be more true in the case of deaf children. Family and school environments must complement each other when it comes to ASL. The earlier discussion on Carbin's strong support for having deaf children's hearing parents and siblings learn the signed language is a well-founded way of thinking. Signing in homes helps prepare deaf children for schooling and learning all subject matter in ASL, including learning to read in English as a second language.

Sadly, the current push for deaf children's integration into regular public school does not fit with taking a village to raise a child. The current linguistic situation for deaf children is most precarious. The idea that all deaf children should learn ASL is treated with ambiguity when it comes to policy and practice (see Snoddon, 2009, for further discussion of this topic). ASL serves as “an option” for deaf children, which is a rather strange and yet prevalent view among educators. The current education system does not recognize that a deaf child has the right to a signing teacher, and this ignorance of deaf children's right to attend a signing school like OSD/SJW rather than be placed in regular public schools is widespread.

I was born to deaf parents and acquired ASL from infancy. My home environment was rich in ASL, but I experienced loneliness, as my peers living close by did not sign and only spoke English. I found myself brawling with my hearing peers due to poor communication and misunderstandings. My deaf father came to my rescue numerous times. At the time, I was attending the Milton school, a school for deaf children that was close to my home. As a day student, I attended school during the day and went home every afternoon. However, during my teenage years, I begged my parents to let me live in the dormitory at my school for better socialization. My parents understood my needs and agreed to let me live on the school's campus. I then went home for weekends, just like many other students at my school.

My wife, Stacy Duvall, who is also deaf, had to fight with her hearing mother to enroll in the Arkansas School for the Deaf in Little Rock, as she instinctively believed that she needed it. Unfortunately, she lost time there, as she was integrated in a regular public school for most of her school years, with the provision of special education services. When she was finally able to convince her mother to let her enroll at the school for the deaf, she was 17 years old and did not know any ASL. She was frightened when sitting in the classroom filled with deaf peers and a teacher who all signed. However, by the second-period class, she felt at home and was very happy to remain at the school until graduation. Of course, she was determined to attend Gallaudet, which is where we met; we have been together since 1994 (see my wife's cover story in the Society for ASL's newsletter, available at http://societyforasl.org/node/122).
In sharing the stories of Carbin, myself, and my wife, I hope that I have conveyed the importance of schools for deaf children in public education consideration. I remember my time at the Milton school, when the integration movement became a powerful force. It was fortunate that my parents did not question my school choice, and I stayed at the Milton school until graduation. In this day and age, it is ironic that although the public's awareness of ASL and deaf culture may be at an all-time high, the attention and support for schools for deaf children are at all-time low.

What do ASL/Deaf Studies scholars have to say about the current integration practices in public education? One particular article by Dr. John Vickery Van Cleve got my attention. Like Carbin, Van Cleve is a historian with a strong interest in schools for deaf children. Van Cleve was a professor in the history department of Gallaudet University when he wrote his 1993 paper titled "The Academic Integration of Deaf Children: A Historical Perspective." He points out that the current push for integration of deaf children into regular public school is actually an old idea that can be traced back to the 19th century, although those efforts were feeble and did not become a dominant trend.

Of interest to me is how Van Cleve reports that these early integration efforts with deaf children did not include ASL and were instead part of what is known as the oral education model or oralism. Educators hoped that isolating deaf children from each other in regular public schools would help them learn to speak and become successful with spoken language. The power of ASL as an accessible language was clearly recognized at the time, but it was thought to be distracting and deserving of obliteration altogether. In comparison, modern integration practices are not explicitly oppressive. The common provision of signed language interpreters in regular public schools reminds us that ASL does have some support. However, regular public schools are speaking schools and continue to represent the idea that they are better than signing schools. For these reasons, the motive for today's integration practices continues to be questionable and problematic.

Attention needs to be focused on the need for an alternative integration model. If integration is an important attribute of education, there has to be a better model than what has occurred in the past for deaf children. Van Cleve spends a sizable portion of his writing discussing what I call "an ideal school integration model for deaf children." As part of implementing this model, a school for deaf children would be subject to desegregation and allow for the admission of hearing students—with the important understanding that teachers would continue to sign, as would all students who attend (see Cripps & Supalla, 2012, about the significance of signed language schools for integration purposes).

Van Cleve refers to the pioneering work of David Bartlett, who established and operated such schools in Connecticut and New York in the United States between 1852 and 1861. Van Cleve explains that Bartlett's schools "sought to acculturate hearing children to those who were deaf" (1993, p. 335). Deaf children's hearing siblings were encouraged to attend Bartlett's schools to support an improved home signing environment as the hearing siblings themselves became proficient in ASL. Carbin is in favor of such a model, based on what he has written over the years on the concept of ASL intervention. In light of Bartlett's school integration model, Van Cleve writes that with the current integration efforts, deaf children as a weak minority "must always adopt their culture to meet the cultural preference of the stronger majority" (1993, p. 335)—namely, hearing children.

Researchers have also examined how deaf students fare when placed in a spoken language school over a signed language school. The results of one study using a measure for ASL proficiency indicate that deaf students attending regular public schools are substantially behind those who attend a school for deaf children (Singleton et al., 1998). A case for linguistic deprivation becomes relevant here. Spoken language schools have an equally troubling impact on the socioemotional development of deaf children:

Researchers have found that there is minimal to nonexistent social interaction between deaf and hearing learners in the same environment. Further, deaf and hard of hearing students in such environments report feeling isolated, lonely, and rejected by their hearing peers. (Reed, 2003, p. 334)

Bartlett's integration model is not something that should belong only to the past. A small number of modern charter schools in the United States are following or have followed such a model. The Laurent Clerc Elementary School, which operated in Tucson, Arizona, between 1996 and 2002, followed Bartlett's model closely. I saw with my own eyes how equitable the relationships were between deaf and hearing children enrolled in this charter school. Administrators had implemented a specialized reading program for deaf children, as they do not hear English or use spoken language knowledge for reading development purposes. A signed language school with a properly aligned curriculum, instruction, and assessment will help ensure that deaf students learn to read and are educated successfully alongside hearing peers who sign (see Supalla et al., 2019, for further discussion about the signed language education model).

The modern pressure to integrate into public schools is so strong that the deaf community must consider becoming proactive in promoting Bartlett's model (Cripps & Supalla, 2012). For example, existing schools for the deaf would need to be renamed as signed language schools. This idea is not prohibitive, considering that Carbin's school in Belleville, Ontario,
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has undergone name changes over time. When his school opened in 1870, it was Ontario Institution for the Education and Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb. Perhaps a potential new name for Carbin's school could be the American Sign Language School at Belleville. The school I attended could be renamed as the American Sign Language School at Milton. These new names could represent a positive shift toward becoming more supportive of deaf children's educational needs.

What to Look for in the Featured Articles

Carbin and Fano's writings demonstrate a special relevance of OSD/SJW that can help fill some voids in the ASL/Deaf Studies research and scholarship arena. I find it important to also consider the book Inside Deaf Culture by Carol Padden and Tom Humphries (2005), which includes notable differences from what Carbin and Fano have written for this issue. For starters, Padden and Humphries' book sheds a negative light on schools for deaf children by devoting two chapters to such topics as institutionalization, isolation, and abuse. Based on the book's title, I had anticipated that the authors would discuss deaf culture in depth and tell readers about the exceptional value of schools for deaf children. As discussed earlier, the social context favoring speaking schools over signing schools is a troubling trend for the deaf community. In comparison, Carbin and Fano do not discuss the concepts associated with institutionalization, isolation, and abuse for their articles on OSD/SJW. Instead, the featured articles in this special issue are truly reflective of deaf culture.

I personally do not associate institutionalization with schools for deaf children in a negative way. I acknowledge that evils within institutionalized settings have occurred with certain individuals, especially those with cognitive impairments, and I do not suggest that this population should be confined to a hospital setting for their entire lives. However, schools for deaf children have striven to function as schools in every sense of the word. The historical photographs in all three featured articles in this issue repeatedly show OSD/SJW students with their teachers, and some show deaf students participating in a play. Carbin and Fano note that by policy, OSD/SJW served deaf children up to the age of 21, which supports the intention of functioning as a school and not as a hospital-type institution.

Deaf people, especially those who attended schools for deaf children, frequently refer to their alma maters as their second homes. Had OSD/SJW been simply an institution with all the associated negative connotations, former students would most likely have become bitter about their experiences rather than be drawn to Carbin and Fano's archives and museum project. The first featured article demonstrates how endearing OSD/SJW is to the deaf community. Carbin showed a labor of love for his school through the archives and museum project. Many deaf alumni volunteers are named in the article for their worthy and dedicated participation in the project. In addition, the photographs of elderly OSD/SJW alumni answering questions on the history of their school are touching.

The archives and museum for OSD/SJW are an interesting endeavor. For context, readers need to recognize a current movement pushing for archives and museums to be established among schools for deaf children throughout the United States and Canada. I do not think that such a movement has occurred with regular public schools. Why is the archives and museum concept so strong among schools for deaf children? I believe that such a concept is an act of defiance against the thought of losing schools for deaf children. Thanks to the movement toward establishing archives and museums, the marginalized deaf community has another way to show the value of their schools.

Regarding the isolation and abuse (both physical and sexual) in reference to schools for deaf children, of course I oppose such actions occurring among deaf students or between deaf students and staff. But it should be noted that abuse is a social problem, not something that is integral or specific to deaf culture. It is true that striking a student's hands with a rod for signing in a deaf classroom has occurred in the past, but that action was part of the poorly conceived policy of oralism, not the school for deaf children itself. Instead, schools for deaf children had a good start by embracing manualism or ASL in Canada and the United States, according to the historical sources. Only over time did educators decided to take a position against ASL. At present, a strong awareness of civil rights has returned schools for deaf children to being supportive of signing and ASL.

The second featured article sheds a better light on the concept of isolation. It is not that deaf children experience isolation when enrolling in a school for deaf children; rather, they are isolated from society at large. The fact that so many hearing people do not know any ASL in the American and Canadian societies is a serious matter. In writing the story of how a deaf child attempted to throw a brick at a hearing child, Carbin and Fano address the deaf child's isolation from society in a way that really hits home with me. Fortunately, John Barrett McGann stopped the deaf child from harming the hearing child, an incident that inspired McGann to found OSD/SJW. I can relate to the deaf child who received McGann's intervention for the reason of poor communication and frustration that escalated to fighting.

I want to discuss another insight about McGann. I encourage readers to look at one of the photographs (in the second featured article, p. 36), which shows him sitting with a crowd of deaf students signing to each other. McGann is proudly looking at all his students, showing his support for a signing school. McGann was a hearing person, yet he empathized with deaf students'
need to be placed in a signing school. McGann's advocacy for the use of signing as the primary language and communication vehicle for deaf children's education suggests his sensitivity to social justice. The fact that OSD/SJW hired Greene as its first deaf teacher upon its opening is most commendable. I know of many deaf people who have taught or still teach at Ontario's three schools for deaf children.

A story from my father's time at OSD/SJW belies the social isolation misconception of schools for deaf children. When my father was in his teens, Beatlemania took the world by storm. My father's being deaf did not stop him from becoming part of the craze. The photograph shown below, provided by my mother, includes my father playing the role of Ringo Starr, duplicating Ringo's hairdo and clothes. This 1964 skit of the Beatles at OSD/SJW includes three other deaf peers, Carl Masters, Terry Stewart, and Kenneth Warren. Understand that all deaf performers did not produce any auditory sound, lip-sync the song through their mouths, or even use ASL at all. A song played on a record player, and then the band "performed," imitating the Beatles through the wild motions of drumming and guitar playing. The audience of OSD/SJW students and staff went crazy after the seemingly ironic, if not bizarre, Beatles performance. Carbin fondly remembers being part of the audience for this event.

The third featured article is important for reminding readers that deaf culture does not stand in isolation but is very much intertwined with society. With the advent of World War II, the Royal Canadian Air Force took over OSD/SJW to use as a training site. The community of Belleville came to the aid of the school. Various dwellings and buildings around the town served as temporary sites for housing and educating deaf students. Carbin and Fano succeed in conveying how deaf children made their own contributions to Canada's war effort by sacrificing the school campus. When reading the article, OSD/SJW students and alumni can look back on the history of their school with pride and patriotism. At the same time, note the discussion in the article of the government's idea to permanently remove deaf children from OSD/SJW's campus and place them in regular public schools. Echoing what Van Cleve discusses regarding 19th-century integration efforts in the United States, controversy erupted, and the idea was dropped. Given that the integration idea was not strong at the time, deaf children could and did return to the signing school.
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A Decade of Hard Work and Success, 2010–2020

Clifton F. Carbin       Donna J. Fano
OSD-SJW Archives and Museum

Introduction

This article is an account of the archives and museum at the Sir James Whitney School for the Deaf (SJW) in Belleville, Ontario, which has a long history dating back to 1870. The deaf community affectionately calls this school “Belleville” in American Sign Language after the city where it is located, and so references to the school in this article are also to “the Belleville school.” It is also important to understand that the Belleville school had different names over the years: The school was first called the Ontario Institution for the Education and Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb (OIDD) from 1870 to 1913, and then the Ontario School for the Deaf (OSD) from 1913 to 1974. The year 2020 marked the school’s sesquicentennial and the 10th anniversary of the archives.

A former classroom, room no. 13 holds a historical collection of school materials (e.g., artifacts, photographs, documents, and other valuable items) to ensure their preservation and maintenance. Many of them are culturally sensitive to Deaf History, deaf people in general, and the school alumni. Since the archives’ inception three decades ago, employees and volunteers from the deaf community have enthusiastically assisted in the task.

As it is known, the OSD-SJW Archives were started in earnest not long after the OSD-SJW Alumni Association came into existence in 1989. Keith George Charles Dorschner, ’56, an alumnus and residential counselor at the school from 1984 to 2001, conceived both schemes with the support and assistance of his wife, the former Christine Margaret Bennett, ’56. (Keith can be seen in Figure 1.) They publicly encouraged the school and alumni communities to donate any physical materials (e.g., records, uniforms, photos, building plans, letters, and graduation certificates) to build an archival collection about the school. However, financial resources for archival showcases and supplies were limited, and they frequently had to move all holdings from one room to another when the school needed the space.

Figure 1: Keith Dorschner

1 Adapted from the booklet created by the authors. Special note: An apostrophe and the two digits after a person’s name (e.g., John Doe, ’95) represent their graduation year from the Belleville school. An “E” with a dash before the last two digits of their class denotes a former student (e.g., Jane Smith, E-’33) who attended the school but dropped out or transferred to another institution before graduating.
In 2009, the Provincial Schools Branch of the Ontario Ministry of Education (as it was known at that time) assigned Dr. Clifton Francis Carbin, ’66, an employee and author of two historical books, *Deaf Heritage in Canada: A Distinctive, Diverse, and Enduring Culture* (1996) and *Samuel Thomas Greene: A Legend in the Nineteenth-Century Deaf Community* (2005), to supervise, catalogue, stabilize, and preserve the materials as a part of his other duties. Single and multipacked boxes were temporarily brought from Belleville to the Ernest C. Drury School for the Deaf in Milton and stored in a secured location near Clifton’s office. (Figure 2 shows a temporary workspace in Milton.) The Provincial Schools Branch hired three hearing summer co-op students (Melissa, Cayla, and Fiona) to assist him. (Figure 3 shows Clifton and the three students.) A year later, in 2010, all the archival materials were returned to Belleville and stored in room no. 13. (Figure 4 shows about 40 sorted and catalogued boxes returned to Belleville from Milton, waiting to be stored by Clifton in the new archives vault.)

![Figure 2: A temporary workspace in Milton.](image)

![Figure 3: Clifton Carbin and his student assistants, Melissa, Cayla, and Fiona.](image)

![Figure 4: Sorted and catalogued boxes returned to Belleville.](image)
Until his retirement in 2015, Clifton successfully obtained as much as $30,000 in government funding through the support of his supervisor, Dr. Nancy Sanders, the Provincial Schools Branch superintendent and later director. Before Clifton got involved with the project, the Provincial Schools Branch had already committed funds to install high-density shelves in a climate-controlled room with supporting beams underneath (see Figure 5). Altogether, these funds transformed room no. 13 into a place to permanently preserve and display the school’s archival materials, either collected or donated. Money was also well spent on quality wooden cabinets, acid-free boxes, tables, chairs, display shelves, a reading room, display cases on the school’s central stairs, and other resources necessary to complete various projects. An around-the-clock camera monitors the room.

An Introduction to the Dedicated and Passionate Volunteers

In 2010, Donna Jeanne Fano, a hard-of-hearing teacher at the Belleville school from 1973 to 2006, joined the OSD-SJW Archives and turned her unending energy to volunteer in an archival technician’s role. (Figure 6 shows Donna.) Other volunteers came and went over the years; most notable were Steven “Steve” Percy Lee Bradshaw, ’70, and his wife, Beth; Gerard Bernard Kennedy, ’76, and his wife, Marilyn; Marie Julie Maisonneuve, ’83; Daniel “Danny” Pigeau, ’84; and Jacqueline “Jackie” Flewell (née Gougeon), ’73. The Kennedys are recent employee retirees of the school. Clifton, who retired in 2015, continues to support the archives as a virtual volunteer and remote consultant. In March 2020, Kenneth Wayne Roberts, a Deaf teacher at the Belleville school from 1991 to 2006, was set to begin volunteering when the COVID-19 pandemic broke out. A description of the volunteers’ assignments appears later in this article.
Between 2009 and 2015, Clifton sought assistance in dating old school photographs and identifying pupils and staff from “more senior” volunteers who had attended our school before the 1960s; participants included Apolonia “Pola” Hickman (née Prus), E-’33; Dorothy Ellen Beam (née Ouellette), ’35; Olive Ruth Wojcik (née Morton), ’35; Margaret Manning (née Krause), ’39; Thomas Ernest Blower, ’39; George Archibald Calder, ’41; George Margo, ’41; Enid Arlene Cowley (née Bowman), ’47; Dorothy Elizabeth Hazlitt (née O’Neill), ’48; Ada Maureen Baskerville (née MacDonald), ’51; Frances Patricia Gregory, ’51; Joseph Cassar, ’52; Lula Georgette Micetick (née Cayer), ’53; Claudette Marie Annieta Beaulne (née Gravelle), ’54; Keith George Charles Dorschner, ’56; Christine Margaret Dorschner (née Bennett), ’56; Gerald Roger Griffore, ’58; Donna Vera Wait (née Roult), ’58; and a few others, including Rudolf “Rudy” Lacis, ’62, a former vice president (2005–2010) and president (2010–2015) of the OSD-SJW Alumni Association. Some of them also donated or scanned their school pictures for the archives.

As of December 31, 2020, Beam, Wojcik, Manning, Blower, Calder, Hazlitt, Baskerville, Gregory, Cassar, Micetick, and Keith Dorschner are no longer with us. (Figures 7–8 show senior volunteers discussing and identifying old school pictures.)

In December 2016, Janice Lynne Drake, ’83, the principal at the Belleville school, wanted to clear a vault used for general purposes in her office area to properly store more documents and school records. She sent 23 boxes of antique books to the school archives for care and safekeeping. Many of them were classic novels and texts on education in excellent condition, published between 1847 and 1927. (Figure 9 shows the boxes of antique books, and Figure 10 shows the spaces for safekeeping.)

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2 Pictured in 2010 at the Bob Rumball Home for the Deaf in Barrie, 88-year-old Margaret Manning (née Krause), ’39, a resident (left), and 93-year-old Apolonia “Pola” Hickman (née Prus), E-’33, a visitor (right), discussing and identifying old school pictures.

3 Pictured in 2010 at the Bob Rumball Community Centre for the Deaf in Toronto, 88-year-old George Margo (left) and 95-year-old George Archibald Calder (right), both 1941 graduates of our school, trying to identify and recall the names of students in the photos.
Some of their inside pages were labeled “Allen Kelly Library: Institution for the Deaf & Dumb, Belleville,” a reference to a farmer of Ancaster, Ontario, who died in 1875 and had no apparent connection to the school. (Kelly’s “Rules of the Library” document is seen in Figure 11.) Through the Methodist Episcopal Church of Canada, Mr. Kelly left $850 (a large amount of money at the time) to the Belleville school.

The yearly interest on this amount was used to purchase new books for the students. Over time, this collection became quite extensive.

**An Exciting Find**

In one of the Belleville school’s basement rooms, an audiovisual technician who had worked there since 1974 had filing cabinets and boxes of archived photos of campus buildings, students, and staff spanning many years of school history. Unfortunately, no one knew what had happened to them when this employee retired in 2005. The goal was to move the school’s valuable historical materials into the new archives that Clifton set up in 2010, but Donna had searched in vain for them. Then, in November 2017, Rosanne Lily Mary Mark (née Skinkle), ’85, an educational assistant who happened to be the president of the OSD-SJW Alumni Association since 2015, chanced upon a different basement room with its door left wide open. Lo and behold, she found the 12-years-missing and almost lost collection of slides, photographs, and negatives of all sizes (Figures 12–14). This poorly ventilated and long-closed room, with heat trapped from an old stem pipe (up to 33 degrees Celsius), had caused some damage, but most, if not all, survived and were fortunately retrieved.
Rosanne immediately reported her exciting discovery to Donna. With Principal Drake’s permission, Donna and Danny spent two afternoons bringing the lost collection from the far side of the basement up to the main floor. Once the materials were gathered, there was little space to work in the archival reading room. Steve had to do his assigned tasks on top of an old school trunk donated by William Garth Gregory, ’67, a Belleville school teacher from 1991 to 2006.

In 2018, Dr. June Rogers, the director of the Provincial and Demonstration Schools Branch (that has replaced the old name of the Provincial Schools Branch), visited the OSD-SJW Archives. Noticing many slides, photographs, and 35mm negatives sitting around, she did not hesitate in ordering acid-free boxes and other materials to help store them properly, including a computer and a scanner to document every item.

**An Archival Disaster**

On December 13, 2018, Danny spotted a leak from an old cast-iron steam radiator in the archival reading room. Stacked on the floor under the long tables, many water-soaked boxes contained unsorted photographs that Rosanne had found about a year earlier, and moisture was slowly seeping in. It took Danny and Donna three hours to quickly remove all the images and spread them on the tables to dry out (Figure 15). There would have been more damage had the leak not been discovered.

The good news was that only 10 out of 1,000 pictures were stuck together beyond repair and thrown out. The bad news was that most of the rest were severely curled and required extra attention (Figure 16). Donna and Danny carefully flattened each dried photograph in pairs, faces together with plastic paper clips to hold the four corners (Figure 17). Over time, the straightened pictures were ready to be sorted by subject (e.g., residences, classrooms, sports, teachers, and such) and placed in special envelopes without the fasteners.
A New Project: OSD-SJW Museum

In the fall of 2018, the school staff and a few others organized the OIDD-OSD-SJW Sesquicentennial Committee, tasked with planning events for its 150th Anniversary (1870–2020). They brainstormed ideas, including a proposal to set up a museum in an unused part of the old Boys’ Residence (constructed in 1914), but it had been outsourced and was unavailable. Furthermore, they would have been required to pay monthly rent for the space.

This committee ended up creating a rent-free museum in a nook known as “the Alcove” in the main school dining room and two unused changing rooms in the J. G. Demeza Sports Centre. However, the project needed seed money for such start-up costs as the equipment, supplies, and materials necessary to build shelves and cabinets and paint the rooms. Donna, then the presiding chair, asked the school property management for approximately $5,000 but was encouraged to seek outside financial help. She had already raised $500 from collecting wine bottles and beer cans from her neighbors for two years in anticipation of a school museum.

As early as April 2019, Norbert Walter Robert Irion, a deaf teacher since 1993, and his students in the Belleville school’s Green Industries and Science Technologies Program helped prepare gym rooms to serve as vocation and sports museums. Donna and the volunteers cleared and painted the rooms where Norbert’s group had removed wooden benches and shelves, which were recycled as the bases for the new cabinets.

Funds were still desperately needed to continue the project. Encouraged by Richard Hughes, the president of Hastings County Historical Society, Donna applied for a $3,000 grant from the Belleville Community and Arts Culture Fund. In May 2019, she was thrilled to receive notice that her application was approved. A year later, with all the money used, Donna built the cabinets at home (Figure 18).

In the spring of 2020, Donna asked the Belleville Association of the Deaf for assistance in completing the project. A motion in favor of a $1,000 donation passed at its next regular meeting.

The school staff and volunteers wish to acknowledge the Belleville Community and Arts Culture Fund and the Belleville Association of the Deaf with great appreciation for their financial contribution and support of the OSD-SJW Museum. (Figure 19 shows the finished cabinets in the Alcove.)
More Information About the Volunteers

Donna, a retired teacher of 33 years at the Belleville school, volunteered with Clifton from 2010 until he retired in 2015. She then took over management of the OSD-SJW Archives. Her eight years of volunteerism at the Community Archives of Belleville and Hastings County, under archivist Amanda Hill’s leadership, had taught her how to process archival collections and organize volunteers to work in the school archives. Donna also gained some knowledge about archival procedures from a day workshop hosted by the City of Toronto Archives. (Figure 20 shows Donna working in at the OSD-SJW archives room, a.k.a. room no. 13.)

According to her logbook entries, Donna tracked each volunteer’s days and hours and the jobs each one performed. They began meeting on Thursdays from 12:30 to 3:30 p.m. The later addition of more helpers increased the work to two afternoons each week. They have so far contributed at least 2,000 hours. Donna found ways to keep all the volunteers motivated by allowing them to choose what they could do from a large variety of jobs that needed to be accomplished.

A BIG THANK YOU to the amazing volunteers listed below who gave countless hours of support and dedication to the OSD-SJW Archives’ success. (Figures 21–25 and 27–28 show individual volunteers who worked in the archives room.)

Julie Maisonneuve (January 2016 to December 2017)

Julie was the first volunteer to work with Donna. She started by organizing and inserting a collection of newspaper clippings about the school, students, and staff into binders, and she also sorted and bound loose copies of the school’s publications, The Canadian Mute (1892–1913) and The Canadian (1913–1991), for use in the archival reading room and school library. Additional responsibilities included transferring files (mostly yearbook photos) from many 3.5-inch disks to a hard drive and compiling a list of recipients from fading nameplates on trophies and plaques in the school. Julie also scanned some of the early photo albums.

Ready-to-assemble cabinets were delivered to the Alcove Museum on March 12, 2020, to be filled with old and treasured school artifacts.
**Stephen Bradshaw (March 2016 to March 2018)**

Stephen spent some time organizing boxes of issues of *American Annals of the Deaf* (1886–present) and its forerunner, *American Annals of the Deaf and Dumb* (1847–1886). He also did the same for the school publications, *The Canadian Mute* (1892–1913) and *The Canadian* (1913–1991), and used them to further compile a student list for genealogy purposes. With his wife, Beth, he sorted marked and unmarked years of graduation photographs from the boxes.

Figure 22: Stephen Bradshaw.

**Danny Pigeau (September 2017 to March 2020)**

Danny came two afternoons each week to offer a hand. He helped tremendously with the many photographs, negatives, and color slides discovered in the basement. Danny was able to reproduce 4,900 negatives with a photo station that Donna created. He also inserted 35mm negatives into new acid-free paper envelopes. In addition to these responsibilities, Danny helped set up the new museum by washing and painting the gym walls, moving and cleaning artifacts, and performing some carpentry work on the Alcove cabinets.

Figure 23: Danny Pigeau.

**Beth Bradshaw (December 2017 to March 2018)**

Beth spent many hours at home making 250 small containers out of cardstock to help organize and group the extensive collection of color slides. Each bin with a category label holds an average of 20 slides; approximately 7,100 slides were sorted into 63 containers of 1,425 images each and packed in five large acid-free corrugated cardboard storage boxes made by Neutracor for microfilm and artifacts. Beth also transferred 35mm negatives from old regular envelopes to acid-free envelopes and filed papers in cabinets. The volunteers will digitize all the slides after the museum is completed and ideally the negatives as well. So far, oversized negatives from 1922 up to 1960 have been digitized. When the archives had a water leak in December 2018, Beth helped with the emergency.

Figure 24: Beth Bradshaw

**Gerard Kennedy (November 2019 to March 2020)**

Gerard is a great handyman, and he helped Danny paint the display board before adding framed photos of 15 superintendents for the Belleville school since 1870. Furthermore, with his wife, Marylin, Gerard rearranged the two gym museums’ vocation and sports artifacts for the display shelves. (Figure 26 shows the Superintendent History Wall in the schools’ archival room, set up by Gerard in 2020.)

Figure 25 (left): Gerard Kennedy

Figure 26 (right): The Superintendent History Wall
Marilyn Kennedy (December 2019 to March 2020)

Marilyn’s help with typing up all the bins’ labels for the color slides was invaluable. She also finished a slide database that Donna had started in 2017 but was unable to complete. Marilyn additionally gathered and scanned a few photos for the fundraising activities of the OSD-SJW Alumni Association.

Figure 27: Marilyn Kennedy

Jackie Flewell (February 2020 to March 2020)

Jackie is a great handywoman whose proficient skills often assist her husband in his woodworking shop. She assembled and finished the cabinets in the Alcove Museum, and she also sorted through a stack of documents and other papers for filing.

Figure 28: Jackie Flewell

Special Mention: September 2010 to current

Local stores donated mannequins to Keith about 20 years ago. From 2000 to 2005, they modeled theatrical costumes in the vocational building, where much of the archival material was stored. Five of our “friendly” mannequins, as seen in Figure 29, will once again showcase these costumes, meticulously made by students from 1938 to 1991.

These old plaster mannequins became curiosities when Clifton and Donna set them up in room no. 13. Three of the five dummies will depict the biblical figures of Mary and Joseph (part of an immensely popular Nativity play that was produced by the Belleville school over the years) in the new museum.

Figure 29: Mannequins in the school’s archival room.

Historical Memorials

In 2010, the deterioration of a grave marker in the Belleville Cemetery prompted Donna, Keith, and Christina, with Clifton as chair, to form a restoration committee. The stone, a circular column of white marble standing on a square pedestal, was installed in 1882 to honor the Belleville school’s founder, John Barrett McGann (1810–1880; see Figures 30–31). They wanted its faded stone inscription reengraved, the fingerspelled surname chiseled deeper, and lichens removed. Around the same time, they created another committee to sponsor a headstone for five students who died at the school between 1903 and 1910 and were buried in an unmarked “Institution Lot” that Donna discovered. (Figure 32 shows the committee who successfully arranged for the restoration of McGann’s monument and the installation of a new marker in memory of five students who passed away from illness at the school between 1903 and 1910.)
Figure 30: McGann’s monument.

Figure 31: Restored engraving of McGann’s fingerspelled surname.\(^5\)

Figure 32: Clifton, Donna, Christina, and Keith at the new marker in memory of the five students.\(^6\)

\(^5\) Section M25, Row 13.
\(^6\) Section D16, Row 16.
Celebrating Hard Work and the Success of the Project

On October 20, 2020, staff and students marked the school’s 150th anniversary without alumni, visitors, and outside volunteers due to the widespread coronavirus. Five volunteers had a backyard campfire at Donna’s house to celebrate everyone’s hard work and success in setting up the museum. They also watched the videos that had been created for the school’s sesquicentennial event.

Each and every one of the volunteers had fun, and each is worth their weight in gold! They made the work easier for Donna, the driving force behind several projects’ success. She shows her appreciation each year by giving them tickets to enjoy a sumptuous turkey dinner before heading to their seats for the school’s Unique Christmas Celebration or bottles of maple syrup sapped from the school campus trees.

The Dufferin Medallions, 1874

William “Willie” Kay (1859–1932) of Perth County, a student at the Belleville school from 1870 to 1880, was the recipient of the silver medal (Figure 33, left) for general proficiency in the literary department and good conduct. It was presented to him by Lord Dufferin, the governor-general of Canada from 1872 to 1878, who visited the school on September 6, 1874. The outer rim reads “Ontario Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, William Kay, 1874.” Fifty-four years later, in 1928, Kay generously donated his treasured medal to his alma mater. Lord Dufferin also presented a bronze medal (Figure 33, right) for excellence in carpentry and cabinetwork to William Wright Smith (1854–1912) of Lanark County, who attended the school from 1871 to 1877. The outer rim reads “Ontario Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, W. W. Smith, 1874.”

In the spring of 2018, Clifton discovered Smith’s medal on a Toronto Coin Exposition website, Canada’s premier coin and banknote show and auction event. He quickly contacted and persuaded the seller to donate the item to the Belleville school, who refused but offered a price below its value. Clifton then sought help from Donna, who happened to have some money from different fundraising projects for the school museum. Together, they met the seller’s agent in Toronto and successfully bought the medal before it went up for auction.

Afterward, they donated Smith’s medal to display beside Kay’s medal in the OSD–SJW Archives, in anticipation of the school’s sesquicentennial celebration. Again with private funds, they had them encased to preserve their condition.
Conclusion

The school archives would not be where it is today if it were not for the untiring efforts of Clifton, Donna, and the volunteers.

The unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic has caused many global events to be canceled or postponed. Due to related safety concerns, visits to and volunteer opportunities at the Belleville school abruptly paused, and plans for the 150th anniversary, with archival displays, the opening of the OSD-SJW Museum, and alumni reunion activities, had to be postponed from 2020 to a later date. Serving as a fitting and honorable closure to this article, additional photos of a diploma, a crest, and students and staff of the Belleville school from 1870 to 1938 are shown below.

A group of girls dressed in white after performing a rendition of the hymn “Nearer, My God, to Thee” in American Sign Language during a visit to the Belleville school on June 1, 1894, by Lord Aberdeen, the governor-general of Canada from 1893 to 1898. Behind is Superintendent Robert Mathison, who interpreted for them. Seated is Miss Ada Mary James, a teacher and former student.
The original main school building opened on October 20, 1870; it was demolished in 1922.

The new main school building was partially opened in May 1922; it was fully constructed by March 1923.
The Belleville School's teachers and staff, 1923.

This old-school athletic navy blue and gold crest showing the initials of the Ontario School for the Deaf (the school’s name at the time) was designed in the late 1920s or early 1930s by Wallace Edward Sloan, a former student at the Belleville school from 1920 to 1935. One of our “senior volunteers,” Pola, who attended the same school from 1927 to 1933, had this timeworn crest in her possession for many years. In 2011, she donated it to the OSD-SJW Archives.
Belleville school boys and girls skating on the Bay of Quinte, a short walk down in front of the school, March 2, 1917.

1889 graduation diploma awarded to Mary Jane Miller under the school’s former name, the Ontario Institution for the Deaf and Dumb.
Intermediate and senior girls wear lovely blue Grecian costumes to perform “The Blue Danube Dance” for the Belleville school concert, April 29, 1938.
John Barrett McGann, Pioneer in Canadian Deaf Education

Clifton F. Carbin  Donna J. Fano
OSD-SJW Archives and Museum

Introduction

This article is one of several sesquicentennial projects undertaken by staff of the OSD-SJW Archives to commemorate the 150th anniversary (1870–2020) of the Sir James Whitney School for the Deaf (SJW) in Belleville, Ontario. Initially known as the Ontario Institution for the Education and Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb (OIDD), it opened on Thursday, October 20, 1870. This article includes a condensed history of the life of John Barrett McGann, an Irish-born immigrant to Canada in 1855, and his founding of schools for deaf children in Toronto (1858), Hamilton (1864), and Belleville (1870), taken from a forthcoming book by the first author of this article.

Figure 1: An oil-on-canvas portrait of John Barrett McGann.

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1 Adapted from the booklet created by the authors.
2 This portrait of John Barrett McGann was painted in the early 1880s by Ambrose Wilcock Mason (1851–1935), an eminent deaf artist in Toronto, Ontario. He was a student (1871–1874), a dormitory supervisor of boys (1874–1878), and a teacher of drawing (1876–1878) at the school. Between 1887 and 1991, this painting was passed down through the family of McGann’s second daughter, Cecilia Watson (née McGann), living in the United States. Her great-grandchildren had no wish to keep it, so in 1991, their father, Dr. Boyce R. Williams, consulted with Dr. Clifton F. Carbin and then donated the painting to the school. Today, this elegant and colorful portrait, still in its original wooden frame, can be found hanging on a high-ceilinged wall in the hallway beside the main school building’s entrance to the main lobby.
John Barrett McGann was born at home on Christmas Day, 1810, in rural Kilkenny County in Kilkenny, Ireland, which lies about 100 km southwest of Dublin. He was the son of Edward McGann, a farmer, and a mother whose name is unknown. It is also not known whether he had siblings, but it is known that he had no hearing impairment of any kind.

McGann grew up mainly on the family farm in Clonmellon, a small village in Westmeath County, northwest of Dublin, where he received most of his education. His first occupation was as a land surveyor in the vicinity of Castletowndelvin (now known as Delvin) in the same county.

In his early twenties, McGann was a recruit in the 55th Regiment of Foot of the British Army and received his infantry training at the regimental depot (headquarters) in Edinburgh, Scotland. The militia then assigned him to duty with the Ordnance Survey of Ireland (OSI) to map the countryside and the boundaries of the townlands for valuation purposes.

On Monday, August 11, 1834, McGann, then single and 23 years old, deserted the army and went underground. His name appeared on a notice in The Police Gazette (also known as Or, Hue and Cry), a newspaper circulated exclusively among police in Great Britain and Ireland. The big question remains unanswered: Was he ever caught, charged, and jailed for the crime of desertion?

Next, McGann married Miss Cecilia Webb (ca. 1815–1851) in Rathfarnham, a village south of Dublin. Their correct marriage year is 1839 and not 1829, a copied error in some publications. They had five daughters and one son: Euphemia in 1840, Cecilia in 1843, Edward in 1845, Harriet in 1846, Hannah in 1849, and Martha in 1851.

It is generally thought (although unverified) that McGann left the Catholic faith to attend the Church of Ireland Training College in Dublin, with the goal of becoming a teacher in Anglican schools. Upon completion of his studies and around the time of his marriage, he taught at a parish school from 1840 to 1844. McGann then moved to Booterstown, where he, from 1844 to 1854, was a “Master and Professor of Penmanship” for male students at a parochial school on Cross Avenue (known today as St. Philip and St. James’ Anglican Church). He also served as a parish and vestry clerk.

In early May 1851, McGann became a widower at the age of 41. He remarried a year later, on April 11, 1852, to Miss Maria Gale (ca. 1811–1854). Their union, unfortunately, was short-lived, for she died during childbirth in early September 1854. (Figure 2 shows a portrait of McGann as a young man.)

Emigration

McGann wanted a better life for his motherless children and himself, so he decided to emigrate to Canada, known then as “British North America.” By December 1854, the family had traveled to Liverpool, England, to embark on the American packet ship Isaac Wright, bound for the United States. For whatever reason, McGann used his middle name, spelled with one t, as the surname for his family on the ship’s manifest of passengers. The list also shows their appropriate ages. England instead of Ireland is either erroneously or purposely written down in the column noting “The country to which they severally belong.” McGann’s occupation is listed as “engineer” (sometimes referred to as a surveyor), and his second child, Cecilia, is listed as “Ellen,” presumably her first name at birth. (She might have changed it to her mother’s first name not long after coming to North America.) Absent from the record is McGann’s fifth child, Hannah, whose fate is not known.

After a 4-day delay, the slow-moving, three-masted vessel, operated by the Black Ball Line company, departed Liverpool on Wednesday, December 20, 1854. The Isaac Wright voyaged across the Atlantic Ocean for 35 days and safely reached New York City’s port on Wednesday, January 24, 1855, just in time for the arrival of the first snowstorm of the season.

McGann immediately sought out the acquaintance of Rev. Dr. Samuel Irenaeus Prime (1812–1885), an American-born and long-time editor of the weekly religious paper New York Observer to help find lodging and such for him and his family. They had come to know each other two years earlier, in 1853, when Prime had visited Ireland.

Figure 2: A portrait painting of John Barrett McGann as a young man.3

Their Stay in New York City

Prime introduced McGann to the venerated Dr. Harvey Prindle Peet (1794–1873), the president and principal of the New York Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb. After he toured the school, McGann accepted a temporary assignment without hesitation. From January to October 1855, he worked “chiefly in the capacity of a writing clerk” in the bursar’s office and the school library, but he never taught there. His oldest daughter, 14-year-old Euphemia, was also employed as a domestic servant in two private homes to supplement her father’s income.

With enough money saved and before winter came, the McGann family traveled again. After a long and arduous journey by rail or other means of transport, they finally reached their originally planned destination, Toronto, Upper Canada (the precursor of modern-day Ontario).

New Life in Canada

In all probability, McGann and his children first settled in East Gwillimbury or Newmarket, in the Toronto region of York County.

On Thursday, July 17, 1856, McGann got married, for the third time, to Elizabeth Ann Brook (ca. 1829–1892), from the neighboring town of St. Albans (now Holland Landing). She was born, educated, and raised there in the Quaker faith. Together, they birthed three children: John Brooks in 1858, Elizabeth Anne in 1860, and a baby girl of no known name who died of dysentery at 4 months of age in 1860. The two girls may have been twins.

With valuable letters of introduction from Ireland, McGann sought work either as a private tutor, schoolteacher, or both. On Thursday, August 28, 1856, the County of York Board of Public Instruction granted McGann a “First Class License” to teach. He taught in the vicinity of East Gwillimbury for a time.

By the summer of 1857, the McGann family had moved into the heart of Toronto. He became an English master at a grammar school near the present-day Jarvis and Lombard Streets. His supervisor, the headmaster Michael Callanan Howe (ca. 1819–1884), a Dublin-trained scholar and immigrant, had a then-2-year-old deaf son, Charles James Howe (1855–1895). In 1888, Charles Howe compiled and published a 127-page book titled *The Deaf Mutes of Canada*, including a chapter by McGann called “The Rise and Progress of Deaf-Mute Education in Canada.”

However, during the earliest times in Canada, McGann did not engage in deaf education specifically. He was teaching students who could hear and supplemented his public-school salary in the evenings and on weekends to support his large family, assisting in teaching penmanship and arithmetic at the Mademoiselle Fraas’ School for Young Ladies and providing private tutelage to children of prominent families.

While living and working in Toronto, McGann made a name for himself in educational, religious, and community affairs. He was an active member and officer of such organizations as the Grand Lodge of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons of Canada, the Teachers’ Association of Upper Canada, the Church Association of the (Anglican) Diocese of Toronto, and the Upper Canada Bible Society.

One evening, while walking on a Toronto street in late April or early May 1858, McGann stopped a young lad who was throwing a brick at a 15-year-old girl. It caught his attention that the unschooled boy was deaf, and their encounter triggered McGann’s interest in deaf education. McGann’s exposure to deaf education in the United States gave him some confidence in promoting it in Canada. He advertised his plan for an “Evening School for Deaf-Mutes” in a local newspaper, which led to his opening of a private school for deaf children on Tuesday, June 22, 1858, in an unoccupied room at the Phoebe Street School. Advocacy for deaf education would dominate McGann’s life for the next 20 years.

By December 1858, after many public demonstrations of McGann’s work and his students’ progress, influential people of Toronto formed a society to take over the management of his school, although they retained him as teacher and headmaster. Hence, the Upper Canada Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind officially came into being. (See the appendix for early newspaper articles on McGann’s deaf education efforts from the Toronto newspaper *The Globe,*

The Upper Canada Institution frequently moved around in Toronto to stay within budget and make room for additional students, including a few admitted from outside the city. Some of the schoolrooms were rent-free for a while. Their locations between 1858 and 1864 (Figures 3–7) were as follows:
A class with four deaf students opened in a spare room at the Phoebe Street School on Tuesday, June 22, 1858.

A large classroom with plenty of space became available at the Toronto Grammar School, where McGann had previously taught English to hearing students from 1857 to 1858.

Commodious buildings were the first sites to include classrooms and dormitories on Tuesday, May 1, 1860. Dr. Beverley Robinson Morris (1816–1883), an Irish-trained physician, became superintendent, while McGann retained his position as head teacher.
Two houses were converted into a school.

Classes temporarily moved back to their original location at the Phoebe Street School.

Moving to Hamilton, Ontario

After 6 years of operation in Toronto, McGann closed the Upper Canada Institution in July 1864 and moved to Hamilton, Ontario, to seek better philanthropic support. On Thursday, August 25, 1864, he opened the Hamilton Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind (Figure 8) in some of the 54 hotel rooms and a row of vacant stores in the Florence Block building on King Street West, between Bay and Caroline Streets. The school had a new board of distinguished local citizens and enrollment of 47 deaf and six blind students. McGann hired two new teachers, Joseph John Gurney Terrill and James T. Watson, who eventually became his sons-in-law, with Euphemia marrying Joseph and Cecilia marrying James.

In mid-October 1866, the Hamilton Institution moved to a stately mansion, known as Dundurn Castle (Figure 9), that had sat unsold and unoccupied for 4 years. Rent was $600 annually. With 40 rooms on three floors, it was a potential site where McGann could permanently establish a school for deaf children in the province. At the time of its opening, 81 deaf and 10 blind students were enrolled. (Figure 10 shows students and staff looking straight at the camera, and Figure 11 shows pupils signing to each other.4 Figure 12 shows the annual letter that McGann wrote in 1866.)

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4 Hamilton Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb (Fall Session, 1965). Taken twice by photographer John Milne in an enclosed yard outside Florence Block.
Figure 8: Site of the Hamilton Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind, 1864–1866.

Figure 9: An engraving of Dundurn Castle, as seen in Illustrated London News, November 14, 1868.
Figure 10: Students and staff of the Hamilton Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind.
On the far right is McGann, wearing a light-colored hat.

Figure 11: Students signing to each other.
Figure 12: A circular written by McGann in 1866.
Forced to Move Again

A group of American businessmen bought Dundurn Castle around mid-1869 to convert it into a hotel (which never came to fruition). As a result, McGann and his board commissioners received an advance notice to evict the premises after the October visit of 19-year-old Prince Arthur, the seventh child and third son of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, to the city, including the Hamilton Institution. They temporarily relocated the school to two adjacent dwellings at nos. 29 and 30 Main Street (Figure 13). Still lacking space, McGann boarded a group of nine deaf and three blind younger students at an Emerald Street residence owned by his daughter, Euphemia, and her husband, Joseph (Figure 14). In the wee hours of the morning of Wednesday, May 18, 1870, it was burned to the ground by a student who carelessly left hot ashes to reignite in a bucket (Figure 15 shows a newspaper clipping5).

Figure 13: Two adjacent dwellings at nos. 29 and 30 Main Street.

Figure 14: Terrill’s Earlham Cottage on Emerald Street, Hamilton.

5 Terrill’s name is misspelled as Tyrrell.
Figure 15: A newspaper article about the fire.

Clipping from a Hamilton newspaper

The Evening Times.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 18, 1870.

FIRE.—About two o’clock this morning a fire broke out in a frame dwelling house on Emerald street, between King William and Wilson streets, owned and occupied by Mrs. Tyrrell, widow of the late J. G. Tyrrell. When first discovered, the kitchen where the fire originated was almost consumed, and the flames spread so rapidly that the occupants of the house narrowly escaped. Three blind girls and nine deaf mutes (being the junior class of the school now being held at Nos. 29 and 30 Main street), were in the house at the time, and Mr. McGann and others had the utmost difficulty in saving their lives. When the alarm was given the little ones were in bed in the upper rooms, and with great difficulty were brought down, but they appeared to be completely deprived of their senses, and rushed up stairs several times, getting into bed and covering themselves up with the clothes. Were it not for Miss Martha McGann, who behaved in a most heroic manner, and at the risk of her life, none of the pupils would have preserved. The fire spread to the stable, which, together with the house, was entirely consumed. The contents of the stable, including a pony carriage, harness, &c., were also consumed, and only a small portion of the household furnitures was saved. The fire companies attended, but were unable to render service owing to the scarcity of water; the hydrant nearest the fire being on the corner of King street and Victoria Avenue. The hose at the disposal of the firemen was insufficient to reach this distance. Had a high wind prevailed at the time the adjoining property would most assuredly have been destroyed. As it was it had a very narrow escape. Mr. McGann’s library, and also the circulating library for the blind, was among the property destroyed, and Mr. McGann’s wardrobe, a portion of Mrs. Tyrrell’s, and the clothing of the children, were consumed. An extensive and rare collection of geological and ornithological specimens was also destroyed. The property is owned by Mrs. Tyrrell, and was insured for $800. The loss is one thousand seven hundred dollars. We deeply sympathize with Mrs. Tyrrell and Mr. McGann in their loss.
A Vision Comes True

Since 1858, McGann had written numerous letters to notable people and government representatives, seeking help in establishing a permanent, provincially-funded institution for deaf children. He frequently took part in meetings and gave public exhibitions in different counties.

By April 1868, McGann had brought to Toronto five deaf students (Elizabeth Brooks, Mark Ezard, Charles James Howe, William Kay, and Sarah Story) from the Hamilton Institution to appear before the Ontario Legislative chamber. His daughter Harriet and son Edward, in his military uniform, were also with them. They all sat close to the speaker's dais, where the students gave an exhibition demonstrating written English through ASL communication for the legislators who were about to vote on financing their education.

McGann’s untiring and devoted efforts paid off on Thursday, November 19, 1868, when the representatives in the legislature voted to authorize an initial grant of $85,000 for the construction and furnishings of such an institution. Belleville, Ontario, was eventually chosen for its new site in April 1869. Masonic ceremonies marked the laying of a cornerstone on Thursday, August 12, 1869.

The Hamilton Institution closed its doors permanently in the summer of 1870. Because of his age, McGann declined the government’s offer to head the new school in Belleville, preferring to continue as a classroom teacher. Instead, he recommended Joseph Terrill, his son-in-law, for the position, but Terrill tragically died before the official announcement, not knowing the news of his appointment.

A Permanent Establishment in Belleville

Under the original name of the Ontario Institution for the Education and Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb or OIDD, the new school opened in Belleville on Thursday, October 20, 1870. (See Figure 16 for the newspaper article on the opening of the school.) Its name would later change to the Ontario School for the Deaf (OSD) in 1913 and the present-day Sir James Whitney School for the Deaf (SJW) in 1974. (Please note that the new school aimed at educating deaf students exclusively, not groups of students who were deaf and blind.)

On that day, a large crowd witnessed the formal opening. The first four teachers introduced were John Barrett McGann and his daughter Euphemia Terrill (née McGann); Samuel Thomas Greene (1843–1890) of Maine, USA, a graduate of the National Deaf-Mute College (now Gallaudet University) in Washington, DC; and Daniel Raymond Coleman (1840–1931). Dr. Wesley “Willie” Jones Palmer (1834–1888) served as the new principal. Coleman and Palmer were experienced teachers from the North Carolina Institution for the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind in Raleigh, North Carolina, USA. The first three pupils to move in that day were 14-year-old Duncan Angus Morrison of Grey County, 13-year-old Arthur Bowen of Simcoe County, and 10-year-old Mary Ettie Grace of Norfolk County. By the end of the 1870–1871 school term, OIDD had 107 students (70 males and 37 females) in attendance.

The inclusion of Greene as a teacher is noteworthy, as he was deaf. OIDD was clearly supportive of the idea of employing teachers who shared a common background with students. Historically, Greene was a role model for students, and his hiring proved to be an important milestone for the development of a strong and vibrant deaf community in Canada. (Please note that a biographical book, Samuel Thomas Greene: A Legend in the Nineteenth Century Deaf Community has been written on Greene that includes more information on his contributions.)

As for McGann, he continued to teach at OIDD until his retirement in 1878. Two years later, on Thursday, January 22, 1880, he died from an illness, at home in one of the two staff cottages on the institution grounds. He was 69 years and 27 days old. Family members, staff, students, and out-of-town guests mourned his passing in the school’s chapel (Assembly Hall). At the close of the funeral service, a two-horse black sleigh hearse transported his coffin for burial in the Belleville Cemetery, no more than 1.6 km from the school. (Figures 17 and 18 show the school in 1870 and 1890; Figures 19 and 20 show a photo of McGann and some students in 1872 and 1874.)
Figure 17: A nineteenth-century photograph of OIDD, opened on October 20, 1870.\textsuperscript{6}

Figure 18: An early photographic postcard of OIDD, ca. 1890–ca. 1910.

\textsuperscript{6} From left to right: Superintendent’s house (built in 1877; still standing), main building (built in 1869–1870; demolished in 1922), wood hall (built in 1877; demolished in 1964), and carpentry shop (built in 1873; demolished in 1964).
Figure 19: McGann with some students at OIDD, Belleville, 1872.

Figure 20: McGann's daughter Euphemia, surrounded by her students at OIDD, Belleville, March 1874.
An Everlasting Monument

On Wednesday, November 1, 1882, two years after McGann’s death, teachers, school officials, students, and the deaf community assembled in Section M of the Belleville Cemetery to witness the unveiling of a monument, a chaste circular column of bluish-white marble, several feet high and resting on a square pedestal, to honor this pioneer of deaf education in the province (Figures 21 and 22). One of the inscriptions reads, “Erected by the Deaf and Dumb of Ontario, Canada.” Additionally, it includes his surname etched in fingerspelling.

Euphemia Terrill, his eldest daughter, was buried beside him in 1927. She was 87 years and 21 days old. Her husband, Joseph Terrill (1839–1869), was interred with his parents and other family members in a Quaker cemetery in Wooler, Ontario, not far from Belleville. Their two children, Edith and Alfred, added a small stone in front of McGann’s monument with an inscription reading, “Mother” (Figure 23).

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7 Photo reproduction given to Clifton in 1996 by Boyce Robert Williams, whose late wife was Hilda Cecilia Williams (née Tilling-hast), great-granddaughter of McGann.
8 Sketch from *The Deaf Mutes of Canada* (1888).
In 2010, 128 years later, OSD-SJW alumni and the deaf community became alarmed at the natural degeneration of McGann’s monument due to long years of weathering and erosion. A restoration committee of three school alumni—Clifton F. Carbin, ’66 (as chair), Keith G. C. Dorschner, ’56, and Christina M. Dorschner (née Bennett), ’56—and retired teacher (1973–2006) Donna J. Fano was formed. They successfully obtained government funds through the Provincial Schools Branch, Ontario Ministry of Education, for the project (Figures 24–31 show the restoration process).

9 Section M20, Row 13, Stone 13.
The restored McGann’s monument was recognized in a ceremony that took place on Friday, May 31, 2013, in the school’s auditorium with a PowerPoint presentation and a rededication service at the Belleville Cemetery. Representatives from the Belleville Association of the Deaf, Ontario Association of the Deaf, OSD-SJW Alumni Association, SJW Student Parliament, and the Provincial Schools Branch were in attendance (Figure 31 shows people at the cemetery).

Figure 31: Rededication of the restored McGann’s monument, May 31, 2013.

Figure 23–30: The monument before (left) and after (right) the restoration.

Photo credit: David Bentley. Standing (left to right): Michael Gaetano, SJW Vice Principal Jim Harrington, Ken Roberts, Erika Stebbings, Donna Fano, Debbie Sicoli, Wayne Nicholson, Keith Dorschner, Christina Dorschner, Rudy Lacis, Robert Ryall, Rusty Clarke, SJW Principal Linda Ritchey, PSB Superintendent Kevin Cutler, PSB-SJW Superintendent Cheryl Zinszer, Danny Elliot, Clifton Carbin. Kneeling (left to right): Emily LaFleur (student), Paula MacDonald (student), Dean Walker. Sitting (left to right): Marguerite Constable, Julie Maisonneuve.
A Family Tradition

All of McGann’s Irish-born children by his first wife, except Hannah, and one Canadian-born son, by his third wife, had teaching experience at some Canadian and American schools for deaf children. Some of their spouses and children also became teachers and school administrators.

(McGann’s family can be seen in Figure 32.)

Listed below are some brief details about McGann’s children, most of whom followed in their father’s footsteps as teachers of the deaf:

Euphemia McGann

Euphemia McGann (b. October 23, 1840, in Askeaton, Limerick County, Ireland; d. November 14, 1927, in Oakville, Ontario) dedicated 48 years of her life to teaching. She worked at these schools:

- Upper Canada Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb, in Toronto, from 1858 to 1864.
- Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb, in Hamilton, from 1864 to 1865 and 1870.
- Ontario Institution for the Education and Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb, in Belleville, from 1870 to 1910.

Her husband, Joseph John Gurney Terrill (b. November 18, 1839, in Cold Creek [near Wooler], Ontario; d. December 7, 1869, in Hamilton, Ontario), whom she married on Thursday, June 22, 1865, was also a teacher, having taught only at the Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb, in Hamilton, from 1864 to 1869.

One of their two offspring and the granddaughter of John Barrett McGann, Edith Josephine LeRoy Terrill (b. June 21, 1866, in Hamilton, Ontario; d. November 28, 1943, in Oakville, Ontario), worked as a teacher at the following schools:

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11 From left to right: Harriet “Hattie” Elizabeth McGann, Cecilia Watson (née McGann), Euphemia Terrill (née McGann), Martha “Mossie” McGann, and an unidentified grandson. Absent: His son, Edward Webb McGann.
In 1893, Edith married a medical doctor, James Moffitt Forster, and became a full-time homemaker.

Cecilia McGann

Cecilia McGann (b. December 1, 1843, in Booterstown, Dublin County, Ireland; d. August 11, 1930, in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, USA) had roles as a teacher, a matron, or both at the following schools:

- Upper Canada Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb, in Toronto, from 1862 to 1864.
- Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb, in Hamilton, from 1864 to 1865.
- Washington School for Defective Youth, in Vancouver, Washington, USA, from 1887 to 1906. This school is known today as the Washington School for the Deaf.
- Idaho State School for the Deaf, in Boise, Idaho, USA, from 1906 to 1909. This school was moved to Gooding in 1910.

On Tuesday, December 27, 1864, Cecilia married James T. Watson (b. May 5, 1840, in Almonte, Ontario; d. November 15, 1920, in Vancouver, Washington, USA), who taught at the following schools:

- Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb, in Hamilton, Ontario, from 1864 to 1870.
- Ontario Institution for the Education and Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb, in Belleville, from 1870 to 1887.
- Washington School for Defective Youth, in Vancouver, Washington, USA, from 1887 to 1906. He also held the position of founding director (a.k.a. superintendent). This school is known today as the Washington School for the Deaf.
- Idaho State School for the Deaf, in Boise, Idaho, USA, from 1906 to 1909. He also had the role of the first superintendent. This school was moved to Gooding in 1910.

The Watsons had three children, all of whom subsequently became involved in a similar profession as their parents.

John Barrett McGann

In the summer of 1893, he became a lawyer and started a private practice in California.

Their second child and grandson of John Barrett McGann, Cecil Rupert Watson (b. June 7, 1869, in Hamilton, Ontario; d. January 19, 1912, in Portland, Oregon, USA), was a teacher at the following schools:

- Texas Deaf and Dumb Asylum, in Austin, Texas, USA, from May 1883 to August 1884.
- Minnesota Institute for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb, in Faribault, Minnesota, USA, from 1884 to 1888.
- Washington School for Defective Youth, in Vancouver, Washington, USA, from 1888 to 1889 and 1890 to 1892. This school is known today as the Washington School for the Deaf.
- Manitoba Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb, in Winnipeg, from 1888 to 1890. He was also the first principal.

Cecil quit teaching for health reasons and moved to Portland, Oregon, USA, where he became a traveling salesman for a wholesale grocer.
Their third child and granddaughter of John Barrett McGann, **Hilda Beatrice Watson** (b. May 9, 1876, in Belleville, Ontario; d. January 3, 1946, in Takoma Park, Maryland, USA), worked as a teacher at Washington School for Defective Youth, in Vancouver, USA, from 1895 to 1899. This school is known today as the Washington School for the Deaf.

Her husband was **Edward Stansbury Tillinghast** (b. October 27, 1873, in Raleigh, North Carolina, USA; d. June 8, 1946, in Takoma Park, Maryland, USA), the son of deaf parents. They were married on Monday, August 7, 1899, in San Francisco, California, USA, during his 1894–1900 tenure as superintendent at the Montana School for the Deaf, in Boulder, Montana, USA. He represented the second generation of probably the most prominent Tillinghast family of teachers and administrators in private and residential schools for deaf children across the United States. Throughout her married life, Hilda was a school matron.

The Tillinghasts had two children, the great-grandchildren of John Barrett McGann, **Hilda Cecilia Tillinghast** (b. August 23, 1902, in Morgantown, North Carolina, USA; d. January 12, 1989, in Washington, DC, USA) and **Edward Watson Tillinghast** (b. January 21, 1909, in Salem, Oregon, USA; d. February 1, 1985, in Tucson, Arizona, USA). They were successful educators and administrators at different schools for the deaf.

In October 1970, their daughter, Hilda (then Mrs. Boyce Williams), was the only relative of McGann among a crowd of distinguished visitors, government officials, current and former staff, students, and alumni in Belleville to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Ontario School for the Deaf (now the Sir James Whitney School for the Deaf).

**Edward Webb McGann**

Edward McGann (b. October 28, 1845, in Booterstown, Dublin County, Ireland; d. May 16, 1923, in Norfolk, Virginia, USA) was a military man but taught at the Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb, in Hamilton, between 1864 and 1870. Edward was a private (1865–1870) and corporal (1870–1871) with No. 1 Company of the 13th Battalion of the Volunteer Militia Infantry of Hamilton. In 1866, he fought in the Fenian Raids at Ridgeway. Edward left Canada in 1871 to enlist with the weather service of the U.S. Army Signal Corps, a career he retired from in 1919. He was twice married, in 1874 and 1896; none of his children and their descendants became educators of the deaf.

**Harriet “Hattie” Elizabeth McGann**

Harriet McGann (b. December 1, 1846, in Booterstown, Dublin County, Ireland; d. November 15, 1919, in Toronto, Ontario) learned the teaching profession through observation and experiences at her father’s schools. She eventually taught articulation at the following schools:

- Michigan School for the Deaf, in Flint, Michigan, USA, from 1876 to 1881.
- Mackay Institution for Protestant Deaf-Mutes and the Blind, in Montreal, Quebec, from 1881 to 1882. She then was acting principal from 1882 to 1883 and superintendent from 1883 to 1917.

She and **John Imrie Ashcroft** (b. June 23, 1861, in Montreal, Quebec; d. November 30, 1891, in Montreal, Quebec) were married on Saturday, June 22, 1889. He was also a teacher of deaf children at the following schools:

- Mackay Institution for Protestant Deaf-Mutes and the Blind, in Montreal, Quebec, 1884 to 1887 and 1889 to 1891. He was also a superintendent, a position he held jointly with his wife, from 1889 to 1891.
- Washington School for Defective Youth, in Vancouver, Washington, USA, from February 1888 to June 1888. This school is known today as the Washington School for the Deaf.
- British Columbia School for Deaf-Mutes and the Blind, in Victoria. He founded it in 1888, was the sole teacher, and closed it in 1889.

The Ashcrofts had no children.

**Martha “Mossie” McGann**

Martha McGann (b. March 16, 1851, in Booterstown, Dublin County, Ireland; d. October 29, 1888, in Jackson, Mississippi, USA) received her teacher training from her sister Harriet at the Mackay Institution for Protestant Deaf-Mutes and the Blind in Montreal, Quebec. She then went south of the border to become an articulation teacher at the Mississippi Institution for the
John Barrett McGann

Education of the Deaf and Dumb, in Jackson, Mississippi, USA, from November 1882 until her unexpected death from typhoid fever in 1888. At the time of her passing, Mossie was not married.

John Brooks McGann

John McGann (b. October 13, 1858, in Toronto, Ontario; d. September 7, 1901, in Reading, Pennsylvania, USA) was the oldest of three children from his father’s third marriage and the only one who had an interest in deaf education. He taught at the following schools:

- Mrs. Adams's Boarding and Day School of Articulation and Lip Reading for Deaf and Deaf Semi-Mutes, in Hamilton, Ontario, from 1877 to 1879.
- West Virginia Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind, in Romney, West Virginia, USA, from 1880 to 1883.

The junior McGann got married in 1888, became a newspaper editor and reporter working in different towns and cities in Maryland and Pennsylvania, and did some interpreting for deaf people. Neither of his two children married or had much interest in a teaching or reporting career like their father’s.

Installation of Street Name Signage

For the school’s 130th anniversary, on Friday, October 20, 2000, there was a small ceremony to install a road sign reading, "McGann St.” The Belleville Association of the Deaf donated the sum for the brass nameplate and post (Figure 33).

The new signage, which is not an official part of the city’s public streets, identifies the lane on the west side of the school’s oval road, starting from the south entrance off Dundas Street West and continuing northward past the left side of the main school building toward where the old school farm was located from 1870 to 1961.

![Figure 33: A street sign labeling McGann St. in Belleville.](Image)

Photo credited: Donna Fano.
Appendix: Early newspaper articles about McGann's initial efforts regarding deaf education.


*The Globe* (Toronto, C.W.), May 6, 1858.

*The Globe* (Toronto, C.W.), July 12, 1858.

*The Globe* (Toronto, C.W.), December 9, 1858.
John Barrett McGann


The Globe (Toronto, C.W.), August 15, 1859.

The Globe (Toronto, C.W.), February 2, 1860.
Wartime Emergency and the Education of Deaf Children, 1941–1944

Clifton F. Carbin       Donna J. Fano

OSD-SJW Archives and Museum

Introduction

According to historical accounts, three Canadian schools for deaf children temporarily vacated their premises during World War II (1939–1945). Under the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan, the Manitoba School for the Deaf in Winnipeg was the third wireless school site for the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF), from February 17, 1941, to December 31, 1944. In Vancouver, British Columbia, the RCAF took over the grounds of Jericho Hill School for the Deaf, which was in proximity to the RCAF Station Jericho Beach, from early 1942 to December 1945. And the Ontario School for the Deaf (OSD) in Belleville was home to the RCAF No. 5 Initial Training School (RCAF #5 ITS) for potential aircrew from August 1, 1941, to July 15, 1944 (Figure 1). (Please note that the Ontario School for the Deaf [OSD] is currently named Sir James Whitney School for the Deaf.)

Figure 1: A photo of the Ontario School for the Deaf’s main building during wartime.¹

¹ Courtesy of Robert K. Loney. The OSD Main School, as pictured during the wartime occupancy of the campus buildings by the RCAF No. 5 Initial Training School, 1941–1944.
This article\(^2\) recounts information about the RCAF taking over OSD, the school for the deaf in Belleville, Ontario, to serve as one of Canada’s seven introductory aviation training establishments. Close to the end of World War II, OSD experienced a threat to its existence. The idea emerged that deaf children should be placed in regular public schools for their education, which would close OSD altogether. The outraged response from the deaf community was swift and effective, as discussed in this article.

**The Unexpected Turnover**

OSD students in Belleville had just put their books away for summer vacation on Wednesday, June 18, 1941, and returned home with their trunks. Everything had proceeded as normal, with no indication that the school would be taken over for the war effort.

Sometime during that month, Lieutenant-Colonial Goodwin Gibson, the real estate advisor for the Federal Department of National Defence in Ottawa, surveyed potential initial training sites across the country for its air corps. On Friday, July 4, 1941, he quietly conferred with senior officials in the Ontario provincial government, and by the following Monday, he had submitted a formal request to release the grounds and buildings at OSD “on loan” and “rent free” for use as a primary air training school at the earliest possible date. On Wednesday, July 9, 1941, the Honorable Harry C. Nixon, the provincial secretary and acting minister of education, announced the disposition of the turnover to the federal authorities. News went out the next day and spread like wildfire in local papers across Ontario, shocking and upsetting the school’s staff, pupils, parents, and the Belleville and deaf communities. Everyone feared that OSD would close for the coming school year and may never open again following the war. (See Appendix A for contemporaneous newspaper articles on this topic.)

When the hysteria settled, it became clear that OSD would remain open, with the understanding that it was subject to an emergency relocation. However, the RCAF’s takeover of the school’s campus was distracting and disruptive. William John Morrison (1883–1967), the school’s seventh superintendent from 1935 to 1953 (Figure 2), was completely caught off guard when a provincial government official notified him mere hours ahead of the turnover announcement. He had just 22 days to move the school out of its premises and prepare the buildings for the RCAF’s occupancy by Friday, August 1, 1941. He recalled every one of his employees from their summer break to assist with the packing as much as possible. Men from the city came with moving trucks.

Hastily moved from OSD to temporarily leased buildings on the city’s east end were office furniture, filing cabinets, desks of all sizes, blackboards, dormitory beds and bedding, equipment, supplies, items from the school infirmary, library books, and even a grand piano. Much of the play equipment, such as slides and swings, was also removed and transported to the sites. Everything else, including school records dating from 1870 and other vital documents, were packed, stored, and locked in Wood Hall, where the print shop and the shoe shop were located. As the RCAF did not occupy the school’s farm, it continued to maintain a supply of milk and eggs for the pupils.

\[\text{Figure 2: William John Morrison, the school’s seventh superintendent.}\]

\(^2\) Adapted from the booklet created by the authors.
In the early stages of OSD's move, Superintendent Morrison sent letters to parents, explaining the takeover situation. He also asked them not to send their children back to school until further notice. A letter about the status of OSD as a training ground for the RCAF was sent to all superintendents of Canadian and American schools for deaf children. It also appeared in the November 1941 issue of the *American Annals of the Deaf* (Figure 3).

![Figure 3: A letter to the community from the school's superintendent.](image)

**Temporary Relocation of OSD**

Ontario's provincial government rented some buildings in Belleville to accommodate makeshift classrooms and residences for some 200 OSD pupils no older than 16 years of age. It also made arrangements with the school boards in Toronto, Hamilton, London, and Windsor to establish day classes for 67 returning and some new pupils, ages 5 to 21. In return, seven trained teachers on loan and payroll from OSD were sent to these locations. Many employable 17- and 18-year-olds who would have returned to their vocational training at the Belleville school found jobs through the National Society of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (officially renamed the Canadian Hearing Society in 1956 and the Canadian Hearing Services in 2020).

**Temporary City Buildings for OSD**

Carpenters, painters, and plumbers hurriedly and busily made alterations to convert several leased buildings into temporary accommodations for the school's offices, dormitories, dining rooms, and classrooms. Additional facilities were refitted as they became available. The school delayed its opening to Wednesday, October 15, 1941, to allow the workers and staff extra preparation time. (Figure 4 shows the original map of the Department of Public Works used for OSD's temporary school quarters.)
A number of city buildings were needed for the school to carry out its operations for the duration of the RCAF’s occupancy of OSD. (Figures 5–19 show these buildings and the pupils and staff who were involved.) All housing placement for the pupils was based on, but not limited to, their appropriate ages in groups of juniors (ages 5–11 years), intermediates (ages 12–13 years), and seniors (ages 14–16 years).

The 34th Field Battery Building (188 Church Street)

This red brick structure on Church Street, owned by the federal government and commonly known as the 34th Field Battery Building of the Royal Canadian Artillery, housed most manual training shops in sewing, cooking, woodworking, and carpentry on the first floor for senior students. The upstairs housed four academic classes, including one with typewriters and duplicating equipment. It also had a piano room to allow all the pupils in rhythm programs to feel the music and facilitate speech.

Around 1958, a wrecking crew demolished the building, and the site became a parking lot for the Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment Belleville Armories.

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3 OSD Lease Unit No. 1, Aug. 1, 1941. Just for a dollar ($1.00), no monthly rental.
Figure 6: A junior-class birthday party in the 34th Field Battery Building, 1941–1942.4

St. Thomas Anglican Rectory House, Parish Hall, and Garage (79 and 81 Bridge Street East)

Figure 7: Rectory House.5

Figure 8: Parish House.

4 Left to right: Jean Silver, Robert Hill, Nancy Bogaert, Joan Balyx, William Kurylo, Bill Brigham, Maxine
5 OSD Lease Unit Nos. 2 & 3, Aug. 1, 1941. Monthly rental: $175.00.
To the left of Rectory House, the steepled Parish House (a.k.a. Parish Hall) had classrooms on the main floor for intermediate pupils and in the basement for junior classes, and it had two “make-do” classrooms in the upstairs gallery. It is now a dining room annexed to the retirement residence, using 85 Bridge Street East as its current address.

![Image of a classroom scene](image1.png)

**Figure 9:** Miss Helen Marie Keeler’s junior class from the Rectory Parish Hall, 1942–1943.

![Image of a two-car garage](image2.png)

**Figure 10:** A two-car garage.

An old wooden drafty two-car garage behind Rectory House was set up for the senior boys to learn agricultural skills, such as harness making. The workers installed a furnace and stovepipe in the wall to heat the shop during the winter.

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6 Back row (left to right): _____, Howard House, Marion Smith, Jacqueline Desjardins, William Munroe, James McAlpine. Front row (left to right): _____, _____, Joyce McMahon, Peter DeRose, Bobby [unknown]. Note: According to the class list, the blanks are presumed to be, not in order, George Dodd, Peter Klym, and Emerson Leslie.
Rankin House (197 Charles Street)

This dwelling with a mansard roof on the corner of Bridge Street East was a residence accommodating about 29 senior girls. The only drawback was the very limited closet space for their wardrobes. They walked to Clare House for their daily meals.

Fourteen-year-old Olga Bodnor wrote a description of the building for a May 1942 edition of the school’s paper, The Canadian: “There are two chesterfields, many wicker chairs, five tables, and a sewing machine in the living room. Sometimes we go there to write, to play games or to sew. There is a large fireplace and two radiators. We like the Rankin House very much.”

The white structure in the picture is an addition installed after the war.

Clare House (178 Bridge Street East)

This three-story house on the corner of Albert Street was a residence for 21 junior girls. It also had large kitchens and two dining rooms to feed additional pupils coming over each day from Rectory House, Connor House, and Rankin House. Although the structure’s two long flights of stairs were not ideal, the third floor contained two improvised infirmary wards for the entire school, each holding ten beds.

The building still exists as a private home.

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7 OSD Lease Unit No. 4, Aug. 1, 1941. Monthly rental: $75.00.
8 OSD Lease Unit No. 5, Sept. 1, 1941. Monthly rental: $110.00.
**Lazier House** *(75 Victoria Avenue)*

This magnificent house on Kirklawn property at the corner of Victoria Avenue and John Street served as a residence and dining facility for the youngest children. Approximately 20 girls and 20 boys lived in it, and it previously had four apartments to rent.

In 1966, Lazier House was torn down to make way for the construction of the Regency Apartments, a seven-story and 52-suite structure.

**Mouck House** *(257 Bleecker Avenue)*

Located on a large property at the corner of Bleecker and Victoria Avenues, Mouck House was a residence and dining facility for about 53 senior boys. The contractors added extra electricity wire and two new water tanks.

The boys watered the west lawn in the winter months to create an outdoor ice rink where all the residential students from other houses could skate and play hockey. Once in a while, the good-hearted firemen hooked up the hydrant to flood it for them.

Mouck House was demolished in the 1950s. In its place, the Sons of Jacob Synagogue and a two-story apartment building were built in 1955, with their addresses known as 211 and 215 Victoria Avenue, respectively.

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9  OSD Lease Unit No. 6, Sept. 15, 1941. Monthly rental: $250.00.
10  Photo courtesy of the late Majorie Carter (née Tucker) Hodgson; OSD Lease Unit No. 7, Oct. 1, 1941. Monthly rental: $80.00.
Bridge Street United Church (60 Bridge Street)

At the corner of Bridge Street East and Church Street, this church had two classrooms and a gymnasium set up in the basement auditorium. It was also the site for infrequent staff meetings.

On a few occasions, the men’s club of the parish invited deaf boys and girls to entertain the airmen from RCAF #5 ITS and some sailors. Some of the activities included performances from a rhythm band formed by the children, the men clapping their hands, several girls tap-dancing, and the men singing “God Save the King,” “Under the Spreading Chestnut Tree,” and “The Old Mill Stream.” Attendees enjoyed a bunch of cakes, pickles, sandwiches, and water as well.

Connor House (203 Charles Street)

Twenty-eight intermediate girls lived in this large house, located between Bridge Street East and Queen Street. The contractors had to install two extra water tanks, showers, and toilets to accommodate them. They walked to nearby Clare House for their daily meals.

This dwelling remains today as it was then.

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11  OSD Lease Unit No. 8, undated. Monthly rental: $80.00.
12  OSD Lease Unit No. 9, Dec. 1, 1941. Monthly rental: $75.00.
Bull House (265 Charles Street)

This house, which still exists, was a residential home for 13- and 14-year-old intermediate boys. Since the war, it has had many uses. For example, in 1978 it became a group home for developmentally challenged deaf individuals, known as Sign Inn. By 1990, they had moved into the community with support from the Quinte Hearing Handicapped Community Services Association.

Today, this organization is currently the Community Visions and Networking (Quinte) and holds only offices to serve Prince Edward County, Quinte West, and Belleville.

Wilson House (227 William Street)

This dwelling was the temporary home for Superintendent William J. Morrison and his wife, Belle. The movers brought in most of the furniture from the superintendent's house at OSD.

Its location was a short leisurely walk to and from the city's famous Corby Rose Garden.

Today, it still exists as a private residence.
Benford House (235 Bleecker Avenue)

This framed house at the corner of Bleecker Avenue and Queen Street served as a laundry plant, outfitted with many washing machines, a dry-spinning extractor, ironing boards, and folding tables for the six residences of pupils. Large wicker baskets of clothes were carried or bussed over on scheduled days.

John “Jack” Wesley Hodgson (1915–2002), a teacher at the school from 1938 to 1977, remembered and wrote in 1980 the following: “In the spring, the house became an island surrounded by water which accumulated in the low area.” By water, he meant “melting snow.”

It is still standing as a private residence today.

Historical photos of OSD students in temporary city buildings from 1941 to 1944 can be seen in Appendix B. Additional historical photos of the RCAF using the school campus can be seen in Appendix C.

Impact on the School for Deaf Children’s Campus, 1941 to 1944

The OSD campus underwent some physical alternations to accommodate the needs of the RCAF. By all accounts, the RCAF found the school campus to be appropriate and useful for military training purposes. The following legend provides information regarding the impact of OSD’s turnover to the RCAF.

15  OSD Lease Unit No. N/A. Monthly rental: N/A.
Wartime Emergency and Education

#1 – JUNIOR RESIDENCE used as quarters for RCAF commanding officers; left basement with a built-in dining room and kitchen for junior boys and girls as a gift to OSD.

#2 – PARADE GROUND built by the RCAF; left as a gift to OSD; became a parking lot for school staff and visitors.

#3 – DRILL HALL built by the RCAF; left as a gift to OSD; became a gymnasium for boys and girls (Figure 21).

#4 – GIRLS RESIDENCE used as the West Barracks for other ranking RCAF personnel and trainees (Figure 22).

#5 – MAIN SCHOOL used as RCAF administrative headquarters and classrooms (Figure 23).

#6 – INDOOR PISTOL RANGE built by the RCAF [hidden]; left as a gift to OSD; became a metal shop for older boys (Figure 24).

#7 – BOYS RESIDENCE used as the East Barracks for noncommissioned RCAF officers.

#8 – SENTRY GUARD POST set up by the RCAF at main entrance gate in 1941; removed in 1944.

XX – BARBED-WIRE FENCING installed by the RCAF around a section of OSD in 1941; removed in 1944.

Figure 21: Drill hall built by the RCAF, 1941–1942. It was demolished in 1972.

Figure 22: Girls residence, double-decker bunk beds in one of eight barracks dormitories.

Figure 23: The RCAF installed iron security bars on all Main School basement windows, 1941–1942. They were removed in 2016.

Figure 24: Indoor pistol range built by the RCAF, 1941–1942. It was demolished in 1970.
A Wave of Protest

Why were protests needed to save OSD toward the end of the World War II? The fact that deaf children had been successfully educated away from OSD’s campus during the takeover gave some policymakers the wrong idea that a special school was not necessary. The rumored threat to OSD’s existence was confirmed when the Ontario Department of Education made plans to close the school permanently and offer only day classes for deaf children in local public schools. A wave of protests erupted, particularly from the Ontario Association of the Deaf, whose membership largely comprised Belleville school graduates. This organization and some individuals wrote powerful letters listing reasons why OSD should not be closed. The Honorable George Drew, the province’s premier from 1942 to 1948, took a day trip to Belleville on Monday, May 15, 1944, to inspect OSD classrooms and residences in temporary city buildings, and he toured the school’s premises occupied by the RCAF. On his return to Toronto, he notified Superintendent Morrison the next day by telegram and made a public announcement that OSD would return to its former buildings and grounds soon after the withdrawal of RCAF #5 ITS in July. With the move partially completed, OSD reopened on Tuesday, September 20, 1944. Everyone was overjoyed to see the school back at its old stomping grounds since 1870. Newspaper articles on the return of the school campus to OSD can be seen in Appendix D.

Unveiling of RCAF No. 5 ITS Plaque

Fifty years later, on Saturday, September 17, 1994, OSD was privileged to host a special Canadian military remembrance event. The 418 Wing RCAF Association in Belleville organized a reunion weekend for the RCAF #5 ITS graduates, with some 55 men in their seventies and eighties traveling to the event. Many dignitaries, such as the city mayor and government officials, were also present. With cadets and a band from the RCAF Air Base in Trenton, the air veterans paraded with them in front of the main school building. They then stood at attention for addresses and unveiled a commemorative plaque affixed to an exterior southeast corner of the building, dedicated to all airmen who had received their training at RCAF #5 ITS, especially those who had lost their lives in the war. Paul Stacey Bartu, the school’s 11th superintendent from 1993 to 1998, said, “This plaque on the wall will serve as a real cherished symbol of the partnership between the Ontario School for the Deaf and ITS.” (Figure 25 shows the presentation from Superintendent Bartu, and Figure 26 shows the plaque.) Newspaper clippings on the 50th anniversary of the RCAF reunion can be seen in Appendix E.

Fifty homing pigeons were released near the end of the ceremony, and there was an impressive flyby of C-130 Hercules aircraft from the Trenton RCAF Air Base. (The aircraft can be seen in Figure 27.)

Figure 25: Courtesy of 418 Wing RCAF Association, Belleville. Pictured is SJW Superintendent Paul S. Bartu on the platform, speaking to the airmen, guests, students, staff, and alumni. Beside him is Dale Abel, the school’s American Sign Language interpreter.
Figure 26: A photo of the RCAF No. 5 ITS plaque.

Figure 27: A C-130 Hercules aircraft.
Appendix A: Newspaper articles about the RCAF taking over two schools
The following is an excerpt from a lengthy article entitled “New No. 5 Training School Runs at Streamline Speed” in The Daily Star (Toronto), August 16, 1941, p. 32.

On Monday, Wing Commander Dave Harding was told to establish a new air school. On Friday, the school was open with 223 trainees and a staff.

This, in two sentences, is the story of No. 5 Initial Air Training School ... formerly the Ontario School for the Deaf ... at Belleville.

No air training unit in this, or any other land, was ever whipped together so quickly.
Appendix B: Photos of OSD students in temporary buildings, 1941–1944

Miss Reta Rose Mary Hanley's Junior Class, 1943–1944
Back row (left to right): Sheilagh Kerr, Alan Dale.
Front row (left to right): Elsie Cushing, Joan Cullen,
Ellen Summers, Robert Reid, Delbert Green, William
Gardner, Wilfred Saumure, Charles Beaumont.

Appendix C: Photos of the RCAF

New airmen trainees marching in front of the main school building at OSD during a cold gray dawn, 1942–1943.
Photo reproduction courtesy of Robert K. Loney, son of former RCAF No. 5 ITS airman Duncan R. Loney.
Wartime Emergency and Education

Recruits in their one-piece flight suits, 1943

Marching on the north side of the drill hall.

Sporting gas masks/anti-gas respirators.

One of the RCAF #5 ITS trainees in the above picture was John Harold Doran (circled). After the war, he had a son, John Joseph Doran (inset, 1947–2018), who became a teacher at OSD in 1970 and retired in 2002.
Left to right: Mr. Knight teaching precision surface grinding to students Stewart DePencier [hidden], Jimmy Howitt, Wayne Wilson, and Ted Manktelow.

Only one out of 6,664 trainees at RCAF #5 ITS between 1941 and 1944 became a teacher at OSD. Irwin White Knight (1915–2009) completed his 10-week aviation course in 1942 and received his wings at another ITS site in 1944. He taught machines and welding to older deaf boys from 1962 until his retirement in 1980. On September 17, 1994, Knight returned to the school to join his comrades for the RCAF #5 ITS commemorative event.

Appendix D: Newspaper articles about the return of OSD
Ontario School for Deaf To Get Quarters Back

Belleville, May 16 (Special) — The Ontario School for the Deaf, now utilised by the R.C.A.F. as an initial training school, will be returned to the Ontario Department of Education by the Dominion Government the latter part of June. It was announced by Premier Drew today to W. J. Morrison, principal of the O.S.D.

Mr. Drew inspected the O.S.D. classrooms and residences under present arrangement and in his communication to Mr. Morrison expressed his thanks to the staff for his stimulating experience in seeing the work of the school. “Commenting on the announcement from Ottawa,” he wrote, “I was impressed that classes for the deaf would be reopened in September at the former site.

If the department is given possession of the buildings by the latter part of June I think it would leave ample time to make necessary changes in time for reopening of classes in September,” he said. “I stress, however, that this is merely an assumption on my part.”

Although it had been known that No. 5 I.T.S. was scheduled to close at some date during the summer, no definite date had been set by R.C.A.F. Headquarters for the discontinuing of the school, as, according to information from Ottawa, it was expected a flight engineering school would take over until December.

The Globe and Mail (Toronto),
May 17, 1944, p. 13

O.S.D. Pupils Use Former Drill Hall As Gymnasia

The former spacious drill hall erected and used by the Royal Canadian Air Force during its regime as No. 5 Initial Training School at the Ontario School for the Deaf, is now doing double duty for the students and staff of that institution as gymnasium.

Recently the large floor space hitherto used as a gymnasium for the combined student body, was partitioned off and now the boys and girls of the school can indulge in practice and training in their own gymnasium. Segregation of the boys and girls for athletic purposes will achieve better results it was felt, and these results are already being shown.

The other day the gymnasium was officially opened by the faculty and student body with a girls’ team of the school playing a basketball game against a girls’ team from the Belleville Collegiate Institute. Previously to the game, Superintendent W. J. Morrison gave a brief address and Miss Feen of the school faculty “tossed” the first basketball to start the game and open the new facilities.

The school boasts well-trained athletic squads in hockey and basketball, and now badminton, and volleyball will be played with the new facilities available.

The Ontario Intelligencer
(Belleville), February 5, 1947, p. 2
Appendix E: Newspaper articles about the 50th anniversary of the RCAF

[Airmen reunite 50 years later]

Prime Time

Carrol & Fano

Fifty pigeons released during ceremony

The Intelligencer (Belleville), September 18, 1994, p. A1

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Afterword: Some Thoughts From the Former School Superintendent

Paul S. Bartu

It is a privilege to write an afterword to this journal issue as the former superintendent (1993–1998) of the Sir James Whitney School for the Deaf (SJW) in Belleville, Ontario, Canada. Please understand that the three featured articles in this issue were all originally booklets, each of which underwent modifications for reprinting in the Society for American Sign Language Journal. I recently received, with delight, the first three copies of the Ontario School for the Deaf (OSD)-SJW Archives and Museum booklets, privately sponsored and published in 2021:

1. A Decade of Hard Work and Success, 2010–2020
2. John Barrett McGann, School Founder
3. RCAF Takes Over OSD, 1941–1944

The co-authors are Dr. Clifton F. Carbin and Donna J. Fano. They have long been associated with the school and volunteered their time to care for, write, and preserve historical materials in its archives and museum.

These three publications brought back many fond memories of my time at the school. I was in the teacher-in-training program for a year, graduating in 1973. Twenty years later, I became superintendent, almost 100 years to the day in 1893 when my maternal grandfather, 7-year-old John Stacey Bartu, was enrolled at the school, then known as the Ontario Institution for the Education and Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb. He eventually married my grandmother, Lillian Curtis, a schoolmate from 1901 to 1911. My mother, Kathleen, and father, Nicholas John Bartu, also attended the same campus, then known as the Ontario School for the Deaf, from 1931 to 1940.

My five siblings and I grew up in Toronto as Children of Deaf Adults (CODAs) and have learned American Sign Language (ASL) since we were babies. We also were a part of the deaf community, comprising mostly former Belleville school students, and attended many of their functions and events with family friends. My grandparents offered room and board for some of them in our home. Throughout my childhood, I was mindful of many deaf people and their school's history. I recall my grandmother dragging me on Sundays to the Evangelical Church of the Deaf on Wellesley Street, a fate my brothers and sisters avoided! On several occasions, our parents took us to Belleville to visit the school, never realizing that I would spend so much time there in later years.

From personal experience as a CODA and a superintendent at SJW School, I know how difficult it is to champion recognition of the deaf community in the broader society and the hearing-dominated educational establishment. The concept of deaf culture has even evolved in recent years to become a common tenet of Canadian provincial and American state schools for deaf children. Today, it is an integral feature of policy and programs.

A striking and essential component of all three booklets is the extensive use of historical images of the Belleville school, campus events, and significant milestones. I encourage readers to read through the booklets, as they have a greater number of historical images than the featured articles in this special issue. In any case, the historical images in the booklets (and some in the featured articles) provide great visual appeal and enjoyment. Each booklet brings to life the many celebrations, graduations, student pageants, sports teams, and education programs throughout the Belleville school's long history. They are a valuable guide to anyone looking to establish a similar project at their provincial, state, or local school for deaf children or deaf organizations.

The importance of deaf history and deaf culture in our three provincial schools—Sir James Whitney School for the Deaf in Belleville, Ernest C. Drury School for the Deaf in Milton, and The Robarts School for the Deaf in London—only began to
emerge and develop in the mid-1970s and has grown exponentially until today. The degree to which deaf people now influence the schools still remains a heated controversy. Many critical positions within these schools held by deaf educators and hearing allies, including vice principals, principals, and even superintendents, are still constrained by the administrative structure of the Ontario Ministry of Education. The demonstration schools, Sagonaska, Trillium, and Amethyst, serve learning-disabled hearing students on each deaf school campus. And, of course, we have the W. Ross Macdonald School for blind/low vision, visually impaired, and deaf-blind students in Brantford. Combining this range of student populations with various special-education needs often compromises or dilutes the focus that needs to be paid to the unique cultural and linguistic needs of deaf students.

Additionally, the Ontario government's bureaucracy and operational/financial demands often impair the efficient management of all our provincial and demonstration schools. As a principal and later as a superintendent, I can recall not being able to hire essential new staff due to government-wide budget freezes, and administrative constraints sometimes hampered the smooth operation of our school programs. I also remember accepting a significant reduction in hard-won funding for new programs to meet the needs of multi-handicapped deaf children and students needing special mental-health services. Senior government officials believed that other programs should share financing administered by the Provincial Schools Branch. Even though those students could obtain health and psychiatric services in the broader community, deaf people could not access such services due to their need for ASL. I mention these issues because being operated by the government is a two-edged sword. The schools can readily access legislative funds through the Ministry of Education but are at the same time subject to overall government constraints. The government in the mid- to late 1800s established and funded educational institutions in the first place and now continues to support and operate these schools. Still, its policies and bureaucracies often hamper effective management, unlike those of more independently operated school boards.

The continued support of the archives and museum at the Sir James Whitney School is very gratifying to me, as these are unique amenities within the deaf community. I view with alarm the severe decline in school enrollment and the current influence of diminution of resource programs offered by the provincial schools to deaf and hard-of-hearing students in local school districts.

History allows us to understand our past and present institutions and values. I believe that our school and government officials can learn much about how deaf education has evolved for centuries. Also, deaf communities have grown and prospered despite widespread discrimination and ignorance by hearing authorities. It is of critical importance to preserve archival documents that illustrate the outstanding contributions of pioneers, hearing and deaf, and their influences that shaped education practices for deaf children in Ontario. These three booklets, and future entries, are another way to showcase this history and inform decision-makers in the government.

These three OSD-SJW Archives and Museum booklets collectively demonstrate the vitality and vibrancy of the deaf community, especially in the home of the first provincial school for deaf children in Belleville, Ontario. Still, they remind me of the complicated birthing process of deaf education, which has always been fraught with controversy and debate about the "right way" to educate deaf children. Deaf people are often relegated to the sidelines when it comes to decision-making. It is unmistakable that their communities worldwide evolved from children who finished their educational training at residential schools and shared a common signed language. Even oral deaf students from school board programs in later life learn signed language and continually become members of vibrant deaf organizations.

For 100-plus years—and, indeed, during my own career—deaf people have found an authentic voice in the debate. There has always been an issue about whether they can be teachers. The argument over methodologies, such as instruction using spoken language or signed language in the classroom, was personified in a feud between Alexander Graham Bell, an oralist, and Edward Miner Gallaudet, a manualist. Bell strongly espoused the oral approach and the necessity of teaching speech and articulation, while Gallaudet favored the combined approach of using signed language and employing deaf teachers.

When our provincial school for deaf children in Belleville opened in 1870, it followed Gallaudet's views. Wesley "Willie" Jones Palmer, the superintendent from 1870 to 1879, and Robert Mathison, the superintendent from 1879 to 1906, were staunch supporters of the combined method, including some articulation classes and the employment of deaf people as teachers, assistant teachers, house parents in each dormitory, and other positions. Then came a policy change in 1906, without input from the deaf community: The hearing educators and government officials decided to follow Bell's views. As a result, Charles Bernard Coughlin, a medical doctor and the school's superintendent from 1906 to 1928, gradually phased out manual classes and deaf employees. By 1931, signed language had officially disappeared from the classrooms. This practice prevailed until the early 1970s, when the school's communication policy changed to reintroduce signed language, fingerspelling, and the employment of deaf staff.

Let us go back to an incident between Bell and Gallaudet in 1895. Superintendent Mathison of the Belleville school valiantly tried to bring these two adversaries together at the 14th Convention of American Instructors of the Deaf (CAID), held
in Flint, Michigan, USA, on July 2–8. They both gave impassioned speeches concerning the unification of the two rival groups, CAID and the American Association to Promote the Teaching of Speech to the Deaf (AAPTSD). In his book *Never the Twain Shall Meet: Bell, Gallaudet and the Communications Debate* (1987), Richard Winefield describes a key moment:

> In a dramatic moment during the last session of the convention, Dr. Mathieson [sic], of the Ontario school, rose, and walking up to the front of the platform lifted his hands, [saying] “Let us have peace.” Then turning to the crowded hall he asked those present to join him in a request to Dr. Bell and Dr. Gallaudet to shake hands and forget their differences. For a long tense moment neither man moved, but at last each stepped forward simultaneously, and the tips of their fingers met in a frigid handshake. (p. 64)

In the past two decades, we have seen an alarming decline in the number of teachers with fluent or adequate ASL skills, as the bias in training programs and school officials favors auditory-verbal and oral approaches. Dr. James C. MacDougall, of McGill University and the Canadian Deaf Research and Training Institute in Montreal, wrote an interesting article titled “Irreconcilable Differences: The Education of Deaf Children in Canada” for the 2010 issue of *Education Canada Magazine*. In it, he briefly outlines the great debate about communication, the impact of mainstreaming, the implications of cochlear implants, the literacy challenges, and the short supply of qualified teachers needed to work with deaf children. His most significant recommendation is the call for a royal commission to investigate the affairs of the deaf in Canada, which has never come to fruition. I realize that education in our country is the responsibility of provincial governments, not the federal government. However, I would argue that interprovincial collaboration with federal government support ought to examine and better address the needs of deaf and hard-of-hearing students.

I had seen dramatic changes in the education of deaf students between the 1970s and 1998 when I retired for the first time, including our province’s acceptance of deaf people into teacher-training programs, the change in the communication policies from pure oralism to visible English (essentially, the Rochester Method), to total communication, to the acceptance of ASL, and the establishment of a bilingual-bicultural approach.

In the mid-1980s, our three provincial schools—Sir James Whitney School for the Deaf in Belleville, Ernest C. Drury School for the Deaf in Milton, and The Robarts School for the Deaf in London—were designated as regional resource centers to collaborate with school boards. The Ontario government has since provided funds to support our resource staff as consultants to local school board teachers and administrators of schools for deaf and hard-of-hearing children. They also offer educational assessments, workshops, and assistance in transferring students from school boards to provincial schools when applicable. Sadly, the breadth and scope of these activities have greatly diminished in recent years. It is difficult to predict what the future holds for the three provincial schools for the deaf.

They face severely declining enrollments due to the widespread adoption of cochlear implants and the move to fully mainstream most deaf and hard-of-hearing children. I firmly believe that provincial schools should play a critical role in ensuring that all deaf and hard-of-hearing children achieve success. Nevertheless, some questions remain unanswered: (a) Will the provincial schools be closed? (b) Will they merge into one facility? (c) Will the Ontario government establish a governance model to allow the provincial schools to operate at arms’ length from the government? (d) Will faculties of education or provincial schools take a more active role in providing teachers of the deaf who possess skills in ASL?

Additional information worth reading about the history of deaf Canadians, their education, signed languages, struggles, accomplishments, and other anecdotes, especially in Ontario, can be found in the *Deaf Heritage in Canada: A Distinctive, Diverse, and Enduring Culture* (Carbin, 1996). To this end, continued efforts to preserve, elucidate, and celebrate the history of schools for the deaf worldwide should be encouraged. I look forward to reading more historical booklets currently in the works by Dr. Clifton F. Carbin and Donna J. Fano that the deaf community can cherish. In a recent conversation, they said they aim to continue their research and write more booklets before the Belleville school’s next alumni reunion in 2025.

References

