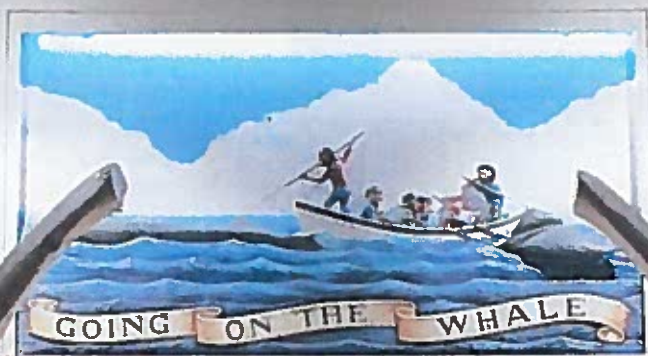


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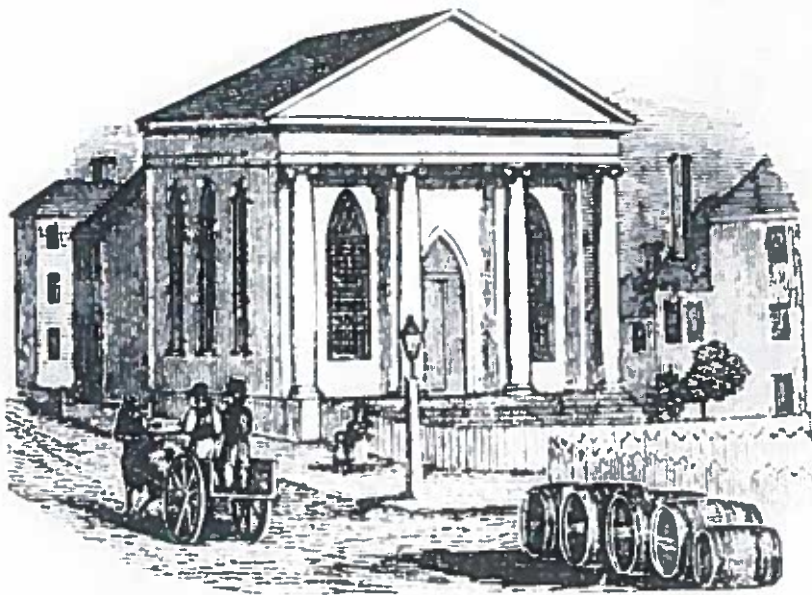
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Oceans Unheard: Nantucket's Nineteenth-Century Deaf Children

By R. A. R. Edwards and Amanda Keenan

In 1822, the *Nantucket Inquirer* newspaper reprinted an editorial from the *Charleston Courier* entitled “The Deaf and Dumb.” It asserted the widespread contemporary belief that people who were born unable to hear or speak were “shut out of life”—they stood as “a sad and silent monument amid the joys of others.” The editorial asked readers to imagine “carrying within your bosom the buried seeds of happiness which is to never grow, of intellect which is never to burst forth, of usefulness which is never to germinate . . .” The article ended optimistically, as if somehow someone could open intelligence through God’s love and the deaf could find true joy. The author did not have any suggestions for how to achieve this result, but, thankfully, a philanthropic group in Hartford, Connecticut, did. In 1815, they funded a trip to England, Scotland, and France for Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet to learn how to educate deaf and hard-of-hearing people. He returned with Laurent Clerc, a deaf Frenchman who was already a trained and talented teacher of the deaf. Together, the two men opened what is now called the American School for the Deaf (ASD) in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1817. Welcoming deaf students from across the country, the school pioneered education for deaf people in the United States. It served both as the birthplace of a new language, American Sign Language (ASL), and of a new community, a Deaf community, that was transformational for deaf people. Armed with an education and fluency in two languages, ASL and English, members of this fledgling Deaf community fought the wistfully sad description that Nantucketers read in their newspaper, that deaf people were to be pitied and should passively accept their fate.¹

1. “The Deaf and Dumb,” *Nantucket Inquirer*, July 25, 1822, 4; R. A. R. Edwards, *Words Made Flesh* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 3, 16.



It is rare, indeed, to glimpse in the historical record hearing people being brought into the social circle of the Deaf community and even learning aspects of signed communication in the process.

The original building of the Nantucket Atheneum, built as the First Universalist Church in 1825 and converted to a library in 1834. Woodcut from J. W. Barber's 1839 book *Historical Collections . . . of Every Town in Massachusetts*. P16011

Deaf Nantucketers were among the earliest students at the American School, which from 1820 to 1895 was known as the American Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb. Nantucket in the early nineteenth century did not have a large deaf population, although the neighboring island of Martha's Vineyard did. In her landmark study *Everyone Here Spoke Sign Language: Hereditary Deafness on Martha's Vineyard*, anthropologist Nora Ellen Groce explored how a recessive gene that caused deafness spread widely in the closely clustered communities of the Vineyard. Although Nantucket's English settlers came from some of the same families that populated Martha's Vineyard, the population turnover brought by the whaling economy resulted in fewer partners who carried this gene intermarrying on Nantucket. Nevertheless, Nantucketers were not immune to the genetics, physical accidents, and diseases that caused hearing loss, and a number of early deaf Nantucketers are known.

What's in a Name?

When it opened in 1817, the school now known as the American School for the Deaf was named the Connecticut Asylum for the Education and Instruction of Deaf and Dumb Persons. The school's reach soon transcended Connecticut as several states in New England and beyond began sending their deaf students to be educated there. As well, the federal government supported the fledgling school in 1819 with a land grant of 23,000 acres in Alabama, the proceeds from the sale of which funded operating expenses and the construction of a campus in Hartford. To recognize this overall expansion, the trustees petitioned to change the school's name, which became the American Asylum, at Hartford, for the Education and Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb in 1819.

Over the following decades, the term "asylum" grew increasingly inappropriate and undesirable as a name for the school, as it was widely used for residential hospitals for the mentally ill. A group of alumni began working in 1892 to have the word removed, and their activism led the Connecticut legislature to change the name to the American School, at Hartford, for the Deaf in 1895.

Lucretia Barnard

Three of the eight children of Benjamin and Anna (Folger) Barnard are among the first recorded deaf people on Nantucket as well as the first siblings sent to the school at Hartford from Nantucket. Lucretia (1814–1902), Anna (1820–1847), and Albert (1823–1875) were all born deaf. The family traced its roots to Martha's Vineyard, and it seems likely that the children's deafness was part of the heritage of genetic deafness common to the Vineyard. Lucretia, the eldest, attended the school from 1826 to 1831. Albert arrived in Hartford in 1832, and Anna quickly followed in 1833; the younger siblings attended the school until 1839.

The school published Lucretia's own account of traveling between Hartford and Nantucket in 1830. While the journey that Lucretia describes was arduous, it was facilitated by the school's location in a city on a major waterway. Lucretia boarded a boat (probably the sloop *Osterville*) outside Hartford and sailed down the Connecticut River to Middletown. "On Monday morning, we again sailed in the vessel for Saybrook, and in the afternoon, we arrived at it. I was much pleased to see the town of Saybrook. About 4 o'clock in the morning, some people and myself continued to sail in the vessel for Nantucket, the whole day and all night. On Wednesday morning, I was very much enjoyed to arrive at Nantucket in safety. I discovered my same father and uncle, who were standing on a board of the vessel, because they were happy to talk with Capt. [Lot] Phinney. Then my uncle came to the cabin, and I shook him by the hands. I was very glad to see him. A little while, my father entered the cabin. I embraced him, and he wept. I was very glad to see him. I was happy to talk with him by my small slate. Then I rode in the chaise with my father. We arrived at home. I entered the room of the house. My mother was very much delighted to embrace me, and my sisters also kissed me. I was tired. My neighbors heard that I arrived at home. They came home, and they seemed to be very happy to shake me by the

hands. I was much delighted to stay at home four weeks. I often visited my relations who were happy to converse with me by my small slate every day." Lucretia's experience here highlights the educated Deaf community's tendency to adopt useful personal communication technologies. Note that her hearing family talked with her in English, using her small slate. It also suggests her bilingualism, as she would have communicated with teachers and fellow students at school in ASL.²

Lucretia's brother, Albert, attended the American Asylum with a young deaf woman from Westport, Massachusetts, named Lydia Macomber. As Lydia's surviving letters indicate, Lucretia "often thought of writing to me though she has never seen me and she said she frequently thought to make an attempt to go over to New Bedford to visit her cousins sometimes next summer and then she should be happy to come to Westport to see me. I should like to have her to come here and make me a good visit." The two young women began corresponding and visiting with one another. But Lydia made a stunning aside to another friend in an 1837 letter: "Last seventh month L. Barnard said she left Hartford and went to Nantucket and she has been at the Athenaeum and [seen] Maria as she wanted L.B. to go and see her. She talked with her by fingers and she was surprised to see that she could spell. She told her that I have taught her how to spell the letter."³

The Nantucket Atheneum was still in its infancy when Lucretia visited it, and its librarian was the young Maria Mitchell. Much to Lucretia Barnard's surprise, Lydia Macomber had apparently taught Maria Mitchell fingerspelling. It is rare, indeed, to glimpse in the his-

2 [Lucretia Barnard], "About My Voyage Home," *Fourteenth Report of the Directors of the American Asylum at Hartford . . . May 8, 1830* (Hartford: Hudson and Skinner, 1830), 32–33; the authors thank ASD archivist Jean Lindemann for sharing this story with them.

3 Lydia Macomber to unnamed correspondent, Dec. 5, 1837, in the Lydia Macomber Letter Book, Westport Historical Society.

torical record hearing people being brought into the social circle of the Deaf community and even learning aspects of signed communication in the process.

The Macomber family were Quakers, and their faith brought them into contact with Quakers from other communities. Lydia sometimes accompanied family members to Nantucket to attend Friends quarterly meetings, and they stayed with the Mitchells, as Lydia relates in a number of her letters. In an 1838 letter, Lydia talked about just such a trip to Nantucket, describing how “my brother Leonard and myself went on board a sloop for Nantucket to attend Quarterly Meeting. We put up with William Mitchell’s for four days and had a very agreeable visit. We went with the Mitchell girls to Lucretia Barnard’s mother’s to call on her, but I was sorry that Lucretia was not at home. She left Hartford for Nantucket and spent several weeks with her mother some days after I left Nantucket. Then we went to the Atheneum which is opposite to Lucretia’s house to see it and I was filled with great wonder.”⁴

Though the Barnard family, which had several deaf members, lived across the street from the Atheneum, it proved to be Maria’s friendship with off-islander Lydia that prompted Maria to learn fingerspelling, which in turn allowed her to chat directly with Lucretia, much to Lucretia’s surprise. And then Lucretia, who had not actually known Lydia at school, was moved to reach out to her. Lydia’s surviving correspondence indicates she regularly wrote letters to Maria Mitchell, Anne Mitchell, and Lucretia Barnard. Lydia mentioned in an 1838 letter to Lucretia that “I have received three letters from the Mitchell girls six days after I had a letter from thee from the hand of their friends who left Nantucket for New Bedford and attended the Quarterly Meeting.” Lydia went on to remark in her letter that Maria had told her that “she talked fingers with thee a great deal.” These webs of



Lucretia Barnard Kent (right) and Anna Kent (left), Amherst, Mass. Courtesy of the Historical Society of Amherst, New Hampshire

connection bound the Quaker world of her birth family to her chosen family of the larger Deaf community.⁵

This friendship of two deaf women, Lydia Macomber and Lucretia Barnard, allows us to begin to see the complexity of deaf women’s lives. In a March 1838 letter to Lucretia, Lydia wrote, “Last seventh month my brother Leonard and myself went to Nantucket to attend Quarterly meeting. We went with the Mitchell girls to thy mother’s house to see thee. Thy mother told me that thee was not at home and lived with T. H. Galaudet. I was much pleased to talk with her about thee a little while by writing.” The following August Lucretia visited Lydia in Westport and brought news of others she knew in the Deaf community: “Lucretia Barnard told me,” Lydia wrote another friend, “that Paulina

⁴ Macomber to Rebecca Eastman, Jan. 1, 1835, Lydia Macomber Letter Book.

⁵ Macomber to Lucretia Barnard, Mar. 16, 1838, Lydia Macomber Letter Book.

Bowdish is at Albany to teach a deaf and dumb man who is about thirty years old and another. Jonathan Marsh frequently went from city of N. York to Albany to see her. I expect he is going to marry her.” This is a fascinating detail. Paulina Bowdish of Douglass, Massachusetts, attended the American Asylum from 1831 to 1836; Jonathan Marsh of Winchester, Connecticut, attended 1827–33, briefly overlapping with Paulina. That Lucretia had news of these people to pass to Lydia reveals that each woman had her own network within the Deaf community, which combined allowed each of them to be aware of the comings and goings of a greater number of deaf people. Additionally, Paulina Bowdish had created a job for herself as a private tutor and moved to Albany. Too frequently, the only news we have of deaf women in the nineteenth-century is that they married. Their lives between leaving school and marriage are a blank space in the historical record.⁶

In 1844, Lucretia Barnard married New Hampshire native George Kent (ASD 1825–30). The couple settled in Amherst, New Hampshire, where they lived for the rest of their lives. George Kent died in 1883. In 1901, their hearing daughter Anna hired a nurse to help care for her now single and ailing mother. Anna worried about the complexities of a hearing nurse caring for an elderly deaf woman. Like many CODAs (Children of Deaf Adults), Anna could sign. But as she explained to her cousin, “I felt that no nurse could really help me very much because it would be so difficult for Mother to make herself understood . . . but as soon as the nurse came I set her to learning the language and it was wonderful to see how quickly she could make herself useful. Mother likes her very much and continually [*sic*] tells me what good care she has.”⁷ Lucretia Barnard Kent died in 1902.

Albert Barnard

Anna Barnard, the middle of the deaf Barnard children, died of consumption in 1847 at age 25. Albert F. Barnard, the youngest deaf child, refused to be “a sad and silent monument” as described in the Nantucket newspaper. Shortly after his father’s death, nine-year-old Albert traveled with his older sister to attend the American Asylum from 1832 to 1839.⁸ In 1849, at age 26, Albert joined hundreds of other Nantucket men in the rush to California in search of gold. Like thousands of eager thrill-seeking Americans, Albert did not strike it rich, but he did make business connections.⁹

Albert returned to the East Coast by the summer of 1850 where the census recorded him living in New Hampshire and working as a sash and blind manufacturer. On May 1, 1851, he married fellow Hartford student Rhoda A. M. Edson at his sister and brother-in-law’s house in Amherst, New Hampshire. The small ceremony attracted national attention, and their nuptials were reported in papers in Nantucket; Columbus, Ohio; Milwaukee; New Orleans; and other places. All these reports highlighted the fact that both the bride and groom were deaf and that Rhoda was the daughter of the famous sideshow performer Calvin Edson. Known more broadly as the “Living Skeleton,” Rhoda’s father traveled North America and Europe after

⁶ Macomber to Barnard, Mar. 16, 1838, Macomber to Eastman, Sept. 16, 1838, both in Lydia Macomber Letter Book.

⁷ Anna [Kent] Carruth to Mary Mason [Kent] Ellis, Dec. 6, 1901, Amos Kent Family Papers, Mss. 199.724.1101.2296, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, La. Thank you to Bill Veillette of the Amherst Historical Society.

⁸ *The Twenty-Eighth Report of the Directors of the American Asylum at Hartford . . .* (Hartford: Tiffany and Burnham, 1844), 22.

⁹ Albert’s name appears among the gold seekers in “The California Emigrants,” *Inquirer*, Dec. 24, 1849, 2.

Deaf Nantucketers . . . pushed the boundaries of interracial public education.

contracting a tape worm during the War of 1812 that left him able to eat food without retaining weight. By the time of his death in 1833, his 5-foot, 2-inch frame weighed only forty-five pounds. His body was purchased from the family to be preserved and studied at the Albany Medical College.¹⁰

By 1860, Albert Barnard worked sawing clapboards in Charlestown, Massachusetts. By 1864, he had returned to San Francisco, where a local directory lists him as a box maker. There was a familiar face in the city, his hearing sister Phoebe. She and her husband, cooper Henry Coffin, had moved their family from Nantucket to San Francisco during the 1850s.¹¹ By 1868, Albert Barnard was back in the blind-making trade with his family in Lawrence, Massachusetts, and at the time of the 1870 census he was employed as a house carpenter. Albert's career brought him across

the United States and back again. Whether he was successful or struggling to support his family is not clear from surviving records. What we can see is that Albert Barnard's education enabled him to travel the country and find employment wherever he went. The school at Hartford taught deaf boys carpentry, and Albert was clearly able to put those skills to use. As historian Mary Eyring points out, "The carpentry classes taught skills of basic woodworking, which were of obvious value to employers in the nation's centers of shipbuilding in New York and Massachusetts . . ." He created a life for himself, supporting a wife and four children. He died in October 1875 of heart disease at age 52. Of note, Albert and Rhoda's daughter Lucretia was deaf. She lived briefly on Nantucket, perhaps in a desperate attempt for the ocean air to improve her health, before passing away from tuberculosis in 1880.¹²

Charles Hiller

Deaf Nantucketers traveling to Hartford not only helped shape deaf education and expectations about deaf people in the United States, they also pushed the boundaries of interracial public education. Charles Hiller (1810–1887), whose name was sometimes spelled Hillar, was the first student of African-American descent to attend public school in Connecticut and the third in the country. Born deaf on Nantucket on January 3, 1810, to George Hiller and Betsey (Gardner) Hiller, he attended the American Asylum at Hartford from 1825 to 1829. His school registration record says, "He had a mixture of African blood." The American School for the Deaf is today on the Con-

necticut Freedom Trail because of his enrollment. At the time, however, there was widespread resistance in America to Black education. In 1833, white townspeople in Canterbury, Connecticut, attacked Prudence Crandall's school when she dared to include Black students. The mob showed their hatred by trying to burn down the school with the faculty and students inside and poisoning the school well with manure. Meanwhile, Nantucketers heatedly debated race and education, as Barbara White discusses in her book, *A Line in the Sand: The Battle to Integrate the Nantucket Public Schools 1825–1847*. Perhaps because the school at Hartford was designed for students with disabilities,

10 U.S. Federal Census for 1850, Ancestry.com, accessed Apr. 17, 2021; "Married," *Farmers' Cabinet* (Amherst, N.H.), May 8, 1851, 3; Carl Johnson, "The Living Skeleton," *Hoxsie* Jan. 23, 2014, https://hoxsie.org/2014/01/23/the_living_skeleton/.

11 U.S. Federal Census for 1860, Ancestry.com, accessed Apr. 17, 2021.

12 "Albert F. Barnard," Deaths Registered in the Town of Quincy 1875, Ancestry.com, accessed Aug. 27, 2021; "Lucretia Barnard," Deaths Registered in the Town of Nantucket 1850, Ancestry.com, accessed Aug. 27, 2021; Mary Eyring, "The Benevolent Education of Maritime Laborers at America's First Schools for the Deaf," *Legacy* 30, no. 1 (2013), 26.

or because it admitted its first Black student without fanfare, it did not provoke the same ire.¹³

As much as Charles Hiller's enrollment was an achievement, life was not easy for him, and the details of his troubled existence are still being uncovered. Charles did not leave any personal writings to give us insight on his life. What we understand about him comes through government documents, prison records, recollections of his teachers, and comments in newspapers. He is listed in Eliza Starbuck Barney's Nantucket genealogical record books, compiled in the late nineteenth century and held by the NHA. This is at first a surprise, because Eliza Barney generally omitted island people of color from her record, but, if we look closer, Charles's brief and incomplete record in Barney suggests the possibility that, although his mother was white, his father may have been mixed race or African-American. Barney recorded that Charles's mother already had one daughter out of wedlock before he was born, and, after his father died in 1813, his mother remarried three more times. As his mother built new families, she abandoned ten-year-old Charles at the island poor house in Quaise in 1820.¹⁴ Charles lived at this remote area of the island with no family nor any contact with other deaf people until he was fifteen years old and the Board of Selectmen sent him to school in Hartford. In Hartford, Charles found like-minded peers and learned to read, write, and communicate using ASL. After he graduated in 1829, he never returned to the island. Instead, he moved to Hooksett, New Hampshire, and lived with the Head family, whose son Thomas had also enrolled at the American Asylum in 1825. The Heads provided Charles room and board and employ-

ment through their several businesses, which included a tavern. For the next five years, Charles lived with them and worked as a laborer until the horrifying events of March 23, 1834.¹⁵

At four o'clock in the afternoon, the sun dipped low on the horizon as milliner Elizabeth Vaughan walked the mile of heavily wooded road from Head's Tavern to the center of Hooksett. Along this road, she encountered Charles, who, according to newspaper reports, lay in wait for her. She was "seized by the throat and dragged into the woods, and most inhumanly insulted and abused; her clothes were rent to pieces, her comb broken to flitters, and her life but hardly spared." What, if anything, triggered Charles to commit this monstrous act or how he planned to escape justice is not known. Vaughan swiftly ran to the authorities, and they apprehended and incarcerated Charles without difficulty.¹⁶

Charles Hiller was quickly caught, but the legal system stalled as lawyers worked to understand how to give a deaf man a fair trial. Lawyer John Harris of Concord questioned the depths of deaf people's moral instruction and sought ways to acquire a translator in a letter to Principal Lewis Weld at the American Asylum. American Sign Language had barely existed for eighteen years, and here it was being requested in court. In his reply, Weld insisted that all students at the school were taught "the nature and consequences of crimes" in addition to moral law and obedience to parents, magistrates, and the law. Weld did not know Charles, so he consulted Gallaudet and other teachers. From what they told him, Weld formed a less than favorable impression and described Hiller as "not unexceptionable, that he was a lad of low propensities and that in his general deportment he gave the officers of the Asylum more than usual trouble.

13 "Charles Hiller," *List of Admissions 1817-1927*, 1:16. American School for the Deaf Archives; "Elizabeth (Betsey) Gardner," Barney Genealogical Record, <https://genealogy.nha.org/>; Edwards, *Words Made Flesh*, 65-67; Matthew Warshauer, *Connecticut in the American Civil War: Slavery, Sacrifice, & Survival* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2011), 20-22.

14 1800 and 1830 Census with Vital Statistics on the Asylum at Quaise, Nantucket County, Mass., 163 [online database], Ancestry.com, accessed Oct. 8, 2021.

15 "Charles Hiller," *List of Admissions 1817-1927*.

16 "Horrid Transaction," *New-Hampshire Sentinel* (Keene, N.H.), Apr. 3, 1834, 3.

His talents and capacity as a pupil of the school were moderate. He was not a hard student, was not anxious to excel, and that he fast left the Institution, falling far below mediocrity in his attainments." Gallaudet had too many engagements to attend the trial, but Weld promised that someone from the school would travel to Concord and translate the proceedings.¹⁷

Newspaper editors published the crime's disturbing details throughout March and April 1834 and called for Charles's execution. Charles was spared mob justice and pled guilty to rape after Vaughan and other witnesses testified at the New Hampshire Court of Common Pleas. The court records do not describe his race, but they also do not mention that he was deaf. Only in a close reading can we see that Charles was deaf. Twice the records say that he "read the said complaint[;] wrote that he was guilty," from which we can extrapolate that using written communication with a defendant was the only way to convey information to him.¹⁸ The court sentenced him to life in prison, where he was documented as 5-foot, 11-inches tall, black eyes, black hair, and a dark complexion.¹⁹

Principal Lewis Weld visited Charles in June 1849 and again in June 1852. Both times Weld wrote that Charles was "in the state prison in Concord, N.H." and that he "behaves well."²⁰ Based on this behavior or perhaps the overabundance of prisoners serving life sentences, Governor Noah Martin pardoned Hiller in 1853. Perhaps surprisingly, Charles elected to

stay in the Concord area, where he found work as a general laborer.²¹

Charles Hiller remained connected to his deaf classmates throughout his life. He appears in an 1857 list of members of the New England Gallaudet Association of the Deaf (NEGA), the first organization in the United States founded by and for the Deaf community. His membership demonstrates that NEGA was open to both Black and white deaf people, suggesting that the nineteenth-century Deaf community was interracial.²²

George Kent and Thomas Head were also members of NEGA. They were close friends, as they started at the American Asylum in the same year and were both born on April 12, 1813. Newspapers in the 1870s reported annually on their joint birthday celebrations as the festivities were heavily attended by deaf friends from across New England. In 1875, Charles Hiller attended their party and gave a heartfelt speech honoring his classmates.²³ After serving almost twenty years in jail and then living respectably for another twenty years, Charles was welcomed by the Deaf world as a fully reformed member of their community. Charles lived with Samuel Head, Thomas Head's son, until a sudden fall on March 15, 1887, resulted in his death by "supposed injuries to the head." Charles left his estate to Marietta Head, Thomas's widow, directing that a plain white stone be erected at his grave and that his clothes and personal effects be given to the poor.²⁴

17 Lewis Weld to John Harris, "Book of Letters 1835-1837," ASD Archives, West Hartford, Conn.

18 Records for the court case are in the New Hampshire State Archives, Concord, N.H.; see "Charles G. Hull alias Hiller," [Feb. 1835], Court of Common Pleas, Merrimack, N.H., including "No. 2, Copy of Judgements"; "No. 3, Copy of Recognizance of Witnesses"; "No. 4, Copies of Bill of Costs"; and John S. Hadley to Rufus Daw, "Mittimus 437 Pardon Charles G. Hiller," January 6, 1853.

19 "Charles Hiller," *Register of Convicts, 1812-1912*, New Hampshire Department of State, Concord, N.H., in *New Hampshire, Prison Records, 1812-1968* [online database], Ancestry.com, accessed Aug. 27, 2021.

20 Lewis Weld, "191. Hiller, Charles," in "American School for the Deaf Alumni," 1, ASD Archives.

21 1870 U.S. Federal Census, Merrimack County, N.H., population schedule, Ward 7 Concord, n.p., dwelling 210, family 225, Charles Prentiss and Charles G. Hiller, Ancestry.com, accessed Apr. 17, 2021.

22 R.A.R. Edwards, *Words Made Flesh* (New York: New York University Press, 2012) 136.

23 "The Suncook Journal," *The Farmers' Cabinet*, Apr. 28, 1875, 2.

24 "Hooksett," *Concord Evening Monitor*, Mar. 15, 1887; "Charles Hiller," *New Hampshire Death and Disinterment Records, 1754-1947*, Ancestry.com, accessed Apr. 17, 2021.

Phebe Allen

Phebe Allen of Nantucket enrolled at the American Asylum in 1830 at the age of twenty-one. Her mother was Betsey Allen, but her father's identity is unknown. Similar to Charles Hiller, she was not being cared for by her mother at the time of her enrollment in Hartford; instead, she lived with her aunt and uncle, Rachel and Nicholas Meader, and had grown up among cousins who were between three and nineteen years older than she. All of this comes from the exceptional details in her ASD record. The record also documents a series of names and signs: "Nicholas Meader - shave, Rachel - pipe, George - shake hands, Thomas - bald, Nathan - whiskers, Samuel - cooper, Reuben - gathered sleeves, John - smooth hands, Mrs. Ana Hussey - earring, Mrs. Mary Colesworthy - foretooth out." This is one of the few surviving records of early nineteenth-century name signs to be found in the ASD archives. Phebe's extensive list of name signs suggests the ways in which schooling acculturated Phebe and her peers into the distinctive cultural practices of the Deaf community.

Name signs are a cultural practice with deep historic roots in the American Deaf community. "Although most Deaf people have a name printed on their birth certificate," Samuel J. Supalla notes, "they need another [non-vocal] form to express their name sign in daily life. A name sign is most effective in serving as a symbol for the identity of a Deaf person, and it has helped to make socialization within the Deaf community possible."²⁵ There are two different systems of name signs in the United States, descriptive name signs (DNS) and arbitrary name signs (ANS). A descriptive name sign is based on a personal characteristic, while an arbitrary name sign does not indicate any personal characteristic or physical aspect. Arbitrary name signs form the most popular naming system in the American Deaf community today, and

some scholars posit that they have historically constituted the dominant system. We can see that Phebe's name signs, however, are all of the descriptive sort.

Surviving historical records indicate that both naming systems were in use among deaf people in the United States during the antebellum period. Laurent Clerc himself had both an arbitrary name sign (a /C/ handshape in neutral space) and a descriptive name sign (depicting the scar on his cheek), and he seems to have brought the naming system practice to the United States. It developed at the American Asylum for the Deaf and spread to other schools. Clerc's brief time as principal of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Deaf and Dumb in 1821 coincided with the introduction of arbitrary name signs there.²⁶ The country's first schools for the deaf exposed all students to similar curricula, a common signed language, and a uniquely Deaf naming system.

The Barnard children, Phebe Allen, and Charles Hiller journeyed away from their island home to gain a better education and marketable skills. What they found in addition was their own language and community, together with a new sense of purpose and possibilities for what living a Deaf life could mean. Historian Mary Eyring argues forcefully that it was deaf education itself, during this period, that forged a sense of unity among deaf people. Equipped with vocational training and a shared culture, graduates of America's first residential schools for the deaf were not constricted by the contemporary views of hearing people that deaf people were to be pitied and left to their lonely existences. It is thanks to these graduates that hearing people, like Maria and Anne Mitchell, were introduced to the Deaf world. Intrepid Deaf Nantucketers helped create a community that is just as vibrant today as it was in the nineteenth century.

²⁵ Samuel J. Supalla, *The Book of Name Signs: Naming in American Sign Language* (San Diego: DawnSignPress, 1992), xiii-iv.

²⁶ Supalla, *Book of Name Signs*, 33.