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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/IS44K9uKPPk>. 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 ASL's 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.³ 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.



A signed word: *Belleville*
(<https://youtu.be/sBB3GcikaR8>)

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.



Clifton F. Carbin

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).

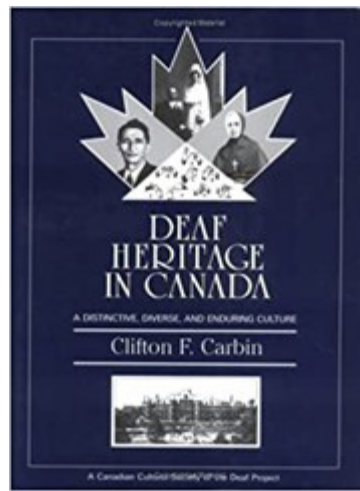
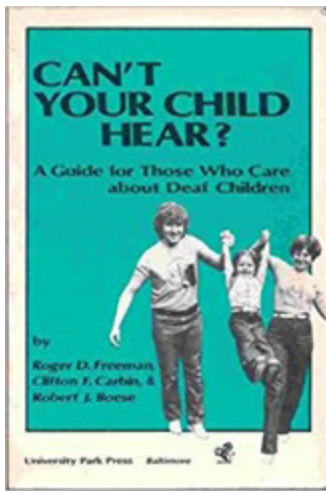
After high school graduation at OSD/SJW, Carbin attended Gallaudet College (now Gallaudet University) in the United States. He enjoyed the exposure to ASL as the linguistic vehicle for learning the liberal arts subject matter taught in this higher-education setting. Carbin earned a bachelor of arts degree 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,

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 decide 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-synch 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.



Left to right: Carl Masters, Herbert Cripps, Terry Stewart, and Kenneth Warren.

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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