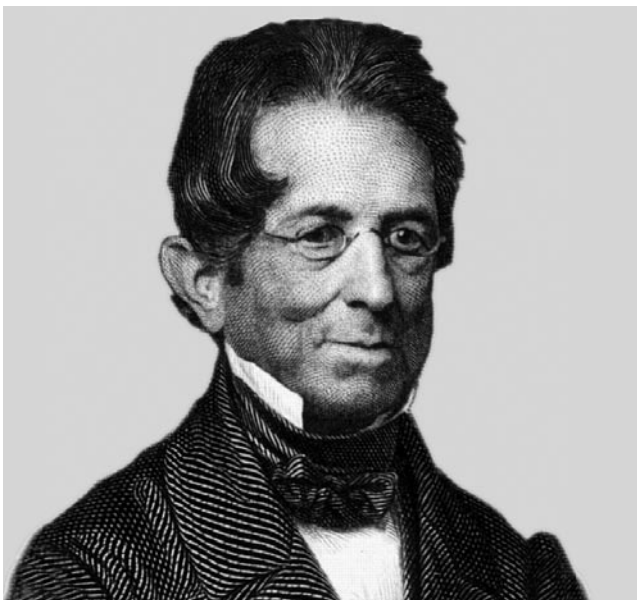


What is American Sign Language?

American Sign Language (ASL) is a visual language. With signing, the brain processes linguistic information through the eyes. The shape, placement, and movement of the hands, as well as facial expressions and body movements, all play important parts in conveying information.

Sign language is not a universal language — each country has its own sign language, and regions have dialects, much like the many languages spoken all over the world. Like any spoken language, ASL is a language with its own unique rules of grammar and syntax.

The History of ASL



In the early 1800's, Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, a hearing minister and a graduate of Yale University met and became friends with a young Deaf girl named Alice. Gallaudet took an interest in educating the girl and succeeded at teaching her a few words. The girl's father Dr. Mason Cogswell, encouraged Gallaudet to become involved with the establishment of a

school for the Deaf. In 1815 Gallaudet headed for Europe in search of methods for teaching the Deaf.

Fortunately while in England Gallaudet met up with the director of a Paris school for the Deaf, a man by the name of Sicard who was there with two of his deaf pupils, Jean Massieu and Laurent Clerc who were also teachers at the school in Paris.

Gallaudet persuaded Clerc to return with him to the States and in 1817 the first American school for the deaf was established in the city of Hartford, Connecticut.

Over time, the signs used at that school, plus the signs that were already being used by Deaf people in America evolved into what we now know as American Sign Language.