

Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell, April 1, 1897, with transcript

ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL TO MABEL (Hubbard) BELL Leland Hotel, Springfield, Ill.
April 1, 1897. My darling Mabel:

We expect to leave here tomorrow morning for Indianapolis. Will visit Mr. Johnson there — and encourage them with their speech work. Will be with you Sunday or at latest Monday. I do hope that you and Daisy are all right now. Tried to talk by telephone yesterday but with poor success. Learned however, that you had gone out for the evening — so I take comfort in that fact — that you must be better.

Elsie is having a perfectly splendid time here — lobbying for the Chicago Bill! I addressed the Assembly yesterday afternoon. There can be no doubt that the Bill will become a law. Mr. Walker, the Supt. of the Illinois Institution has seriously offended the Governor by his conduct in relation to this bill. The Governor takes the ground that the Supt. belongs to the Administrative Department of the state — that he is in fact — an Executive officer — and as such has no business to interfere with the Legislative Department. He explained to Walker his attitude upon this principle before Mrs. Crane's bill came up. In spite of this — Mr. Walker addressed a circular letter to the parents of his pupils on the subject of this bill asking them to write to their representatives and senators to vote against it — and he applied to the Legislative Committee to be heard against the Bill.

2

These acts alone — even if justifiable for Mr. Walker to do in his own personal capacity — were opposed to the principles of Governor Tanner's Administration — and would have led to his dismissal. In fact Governor Tanner told Mr. Walker — that if he, Mr. Walker, desired to interfere with legislation upon the subject of the Deaf, he was at perfect liberty to resign his position — and then do what he liked. But the Governor could not permit

Library of Congress

the Superintendent of the Jacksonville Institution to do such acts. Unfortunately for Mr. Walker he not only did these acts, but in his circular letter to the parents of his pupils he misrepresented the bill — so that many of the parents obtained the idea that the Bill was to do away with the Institution and substitute day schools. Some parents had the idea that the Institution was to be closed in June.

So letters from the parents came piling into the Legislature — begging them not to close the Jacksonville school. The letters nearly all contained one sentence exactly alike in all. “Vote for the Jacksonville Institution, and against the Day-Schools.”

The Chairmen of the Educational Committee in reply — sent these parents copies of the Bill itself — with the result that many of the parents wrote again to their Representatives that they had been misinformed as to the nature of the Bill — and wished them to vote for it! Mr. Walker also made the mistake of appearing before the Educational Committees — and treating Mrs Washburn and Mrs. Crane with great personal discourtesy — He spoke of one of them — to her face — as “A Super-enthused Dilletante.”

Well — the Committee couldn't stand that sort of thing — They dismissed him in short order — and reported the Bill favorably to the Assembly!

Since my appearance in the State the Jacksonville paper has referred sneeringly to me in connection with the Bill — stating that Dr. Bell had an axe to grind — and that he had employed Mrs. Washburn and Mrs. Crane to turn the crank!

This has been repeated in other papers in the State. This determined me to come to Springfield and speak for the Bill — and at the same time take the opportunity of denouncing Mr. Walker — for his unfair treatment of the Bill and of these ladies. Little Josephine Crane come with us here and captured all hearts. Her presence made every one understand the true cause of the interest shown by Mrs. Crane and Mrs. Washburn — and when I publicly denounced the conduct of Mr. Walker — and the Jacksonville paper — I was startled by the sudden response of the Assembly. Member after member

Library of Congress

arose and told of the receipt of letters from the parents of the Jacksonville children — and of the receipt of other letters subsequently from the same parties — stating they had been deceived as to the character of the Bill. A most animated scene ensued — full of enthusiasm and indignation — which was terminated by a resolution of thanks to Mrs. Crane and Mrs. Washburn for coming here. The volume of “Ayes” spoke volumes. A shout 4 went up so much out of proportion to the size of the Audience — as to show that the cause has been won.

The Governor has rounded out matters by telling the Trustees of the Jacksonville Institution to look round for another Superintendent.

(part of letter missing)

Copies of telegrams sent to Prof. Gordon.

Springfield, Illinois. March 31, 1807.

Governor Tanner wants to know whether you will accept the Superintendency of the Illinois Institution if it is offered to you. Answer Leland Hotel.

(signed) Graham Bell.

Springfield, Illinois. April 1, 1897.

To Prof. Joseph G. Gordon, Kendall Green, Washington, D. C.

Anxious to hear your decision. Walker's removal not caused by politics. There is a tide in the affairs of men. Seize this opportunity for freedom and a great field of usefulness. Let me assure the Governor that you will accept if appointed. Answer Leland Hotel — Springfield.

Library of Congress

(signed) Graham Bell.