

Letter from Arthur McCurdy, March 31, 1891, with transcript

1336 19th St., Washington, D.C., March 31, 1891. Dear Sir:

For your information, Mr. Bell asks me to forward the enclosed copies of correspondence between President Gallaudet and Mr. Bell , .

Yours truly, Arthur W. McCurdy, Secy. P.S. Please return at your convenience.

The Co ? lumb ? i a ? l nst ? i tut ? i on for the Deaf and Dumb, Kendall Green, Washington, D.C., March 23 d , 1891. Professor A. Graham Bell, Dear Sir:

Yours of the 19th inst. is recd.

The important facts alluded to in my note of the 18th inst. are as follows:

1. That the establishment of a school for the “training of deaf teachers of the deaf” was not “the purpose” of our proposed Normal Department;
2. That the plans for this new department included the training of hearing and speaking persons to be teachers of the deaf;
3. That in this department it was proposed to give the oral method equal prominence with the manual;
4. That it was proposed as an essential feature of the new department to give instruction in articulation to the students of the College, availing ourselves, for this purpose, of the services of an accomplished instructor of speech, and of our hearing normal pupils who might by th ?eir services render a valuable return for the advantages of normal training afforded them;

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5. That all these plans would be carried out next fall, if the appropriation of \$5,000 asked of Congress should be granted.

These "important facts" were clearly laid before you at your house by me on Monday, January 26th, the day before you addressed the House Sub-Committee on Appropriations.

In this interview I assured you that your construction of a paragraph of my letter of Sept.22" to the Secretary of the Interior, into a purpose to establish a training school only for deaf teachers of the deaf was a forced and mistaken one, and called your attention to the latter part of the letter which referred to "other considerations" which were to be presented to Congress in our Annual Report. I also laid before you a copy of this report, the terms of which leave no doubt as to our purpose to include in the new Normal Department the training of hearing and speaking persons "in all the valuable and accepted methods of teaching the deaf."

And yet the very next day the whole strength of your argument before the House Committee was directed against what you repeatedly declared to be my "proposition," viz: "to train ? d eaf persons to teach the deaf," declaring at the close of your speech that the \$5,000 asked for is for this " purpose ." And you relegate our clearly declared intention of training hearing persons in both the oral and manual methods to the indefinite future.

In your letter to Senator Allison, of Feb.11", widely circulated, no hint is given of any purpose on our part other than the "training of deaf persons to teach the deaf."

The same omissions are noticeable in your letter to Mr.Cannon of Feb.28, also widely circulated, in which again you assume to give the "purposes stated by President Gallaudet."

But it is in the references you make to Mr. Fechheimer, and to my alleged misrepresentation of his views, that in this letter to Mr. Cannon you do the greatest

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injustice to me, and I may be allowed to add, to yourself : in proof of which I need only to refer to your careful reading Mr.Fechheimer's telegram to you, side by side with my references to him in my letter of Sept.22d to Secretary Noble, and in my Annual Report. For you will assuredly search the latter in vain for any statement from me that I was using Mr.Fechheimer's name as your telegram from him implies you had told him I was doing.

That you secured Mr.Fe ? c hheimer's endorsement of your opposition to our Normal Department by representing to him that our sole purpose was the establishment of a school for the "training of deaf teachers for the deaf," I have the proof in your letter to him of Feb.12", a copy of which you were kind enough to send me.

That you secured Mr.Greenberger's endorsement by similar representations I have his assurance. Whether the endorsements of the other heads of oral schools, conveyed to Mr. Cannon were secured in a similar manner you know better than I.

In your letter to Professor Fay returning my MSS. you say:

"If President Gallaudet would only be willing to admit the purity and honesty of my motives, and the fact that I am incapable of intentionally misrepresenting his views, there would be no difficulty in our coming together."

I do not think I have anywhere questioned the "purity and honesty of your motives," and if you can give me proof that you have not intentionally misrepresented my views I shall receive such proof with the greatest pleasure.

Am I mistaken in an impression I have received, that you have conducted your recent controversy with me more in the spirit and attitude of a lawyer (which you are not) bent on winning his case, than as a philanthropist (as I like to regard you) striving to advance a worthy cause?

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May not our future relations be such that I can always think of you in the latter character, and never again in the former?

Very truly yours, (Signed) E.M.Gallaudet.

March 30, 1891. President E.M.Gallaudet, Kendall Green. My dear Sir:

Your note of the 23d instant received.

It is not my custom, as you know, to reply to personal attacks.

In deference, however, to the wishes of mutual friends, and out of regard for our past friendship, I shall endeavor to disabuse your mind of the ungenerous thoughts you have allowed yourself to entertain concerning me.

In your note you say:

“If you can give me proof that you have not intentionally misrepresented my views I shall receive such proof with the greatest pleasure.”

Allow me to remind you of the fact that I myself notified you of the day and hour of my appearance before both Committees of Congress, and invited you to attend, so that you might have the same opportunity for presenting your views that I myself enjoyed. In response to this invitation you attended both meetings. Only a few words were allowed us by the Senate Committee, but the House Committee permitted me to make an argument—to which you replied. Copies of your reply, as well as of my argument were sent by me to every person with whom I held communication.

Surely, in these facts, you have the proof that I have not intentionally misrepresented your views. I wished to present both sides, equally, to every one, and desired to treat you with perfect fairness and courtesy.

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I sent copies of my argument, and of your reply, to the Principals of the Oral Schools, and then telegraphed them for an expression of their views.

This was all the communication I had with most of them; but to Mr. Fechheimer, Mr. Greenberger and a few others I also sent the full text of your letter to the Secretary of the Interior, and a copy of your Annual Report.

I trust that these facts may convince you that my conduct throughout has been perfectly honourable to myself, and courteous to you.

And now permit me to examine the question whether I have, as a matter of fact, misrepresented your views.

The charges you brought against me, before the students of your College, you state in your note of the 18th instant was as follows:

“What I did say was that after certain facts had been brought to your notice by me as to the plans and purposes I had in view, for our new Normal Department, you published statements in regard to these purposes and plans of mine from which many important facts known to you were omitted. And I expressed the feeling, which I certainly still entertain, that your oft repeated declaration that our Normal School was to be nothing more than a place for the ‘training of deaf teachers of the deaf,’ did great injustice to me and to the plans I had unfolded to you on more than one occasion.”

If you turn to my argument (pp.7 to 10) you will find that I have told every one of your intention to receive hearing persons and teach both the sign and oral methods. Indeed all the points specified by you in your letter of the 23d instant, which you charged me with omitting, are, as a matter of fact, mentioned, either in that argument or in your reply.

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You have probably obtained your mistaken idea of my position from the opinion I have expressed that your application to Congress limited the grant to the specific purpose of training the graduates of your College as teachers of the deaf.

I did not mean to convey the idea that your intentions were limited to that end. I did not doubt that you intended to do more than that; but I believed, and still believe, that you could not do it under the wording of your application.

You claim that my construction is “a forced and mistaken one.” On the other hand, I claim that it is the obvious construction, and that other possible interpretations are forced and require explanation. In proof of this I beg to quote the exact language of the passage:

“The amount submitted for current expenses is larger by \$5,000 than the appropriation made for the current year. The object of this increase is to enable the directors to enlarge the facilities in the institution for normal instruction. For many years the graduates of our Collegiate Department have been in demand as teachers of the deaf in the primary schools of the several States. The demand for such teachers has far outgrown our limited supply. And as no normal school for the training of teachers of the deaf exists in this country, while several are sustained in Europe, it has been thought extremely desirable that the advantages for normal instruction existing in this institution to a limited degree should be increased.”

Surely this means, upon its face, the training of the graduates of your College as teachers of the deaf.

The above quotation, though only a part of your letter to the Secretary of the Interior, constitutes the whole of the passage defining the object of the proposed increase of appropriation; and this increase, therefore—if granted—would necessarily be limited to the purposes specified in that paragraph.

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Now I need hardly state to an experienced man like yourself, that what you say to me in my private parlor does not bind the expenditure of congressional funds. And while I have not ignored or omitted any of the important facts you stated to me, I felt bound to confine my argument, as much as possible, to the actual proposition before Congress.

After careful examination of all your sayings and writings that by any possible construction might be considered to be before Congress—by which I mean (1) your letter to the Secretary of the Interior, (2) your Annual Report, and (3) your reply to my argument before the House Committee— I fail to find any definite proposition to do more than train the graduates of your college to teach the deaf .

I have, therefore, given you credit, in my argument, for more than was actually before Congress, simply because of the private interview you had with me. In my argument (p.7) I said that “both the oral and sign methods will be taught,” but you simply say they “could.” (Report, p.11).

“It is true,” you say, “that we could give thorough normal training in all the valuable and accepted methods of teaching the deaf.”

That is all the promise you make in the matter, so far as I can find out.

The actual expressions in your Report are vague and indefinite and bind you to nothing. The same is true of your reply to my argument. The only definite proposition that I can find is the one contained in your letter to the Secretary of the Interior which I have quoted above.

Now, Sir, I submit that, whether my construction be right or wrong, I have a perfect right to express my opinion without being charged with wilful misrepresentation or falsehood. I have a perfect right to lay the matter before others and ask them whether they agree with me or not.

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That is all I have done, and I am sure that no fair-minded man will say that, because your judgment differs from mine, you are, therefore, justified in treating me with personal discourtesy.

You have impugned my motives to Mr. Fechheimer and others; and you have publicly discredited me before the young men and women of your college, whose interests I have at heart.

Now I do not wish to write to you in any unkind spirit. I do not even write to demand the withdrawal of your remarks, for I care very little what people may say against my good name so long as the charges are unmerited and unjust.

But I do care, that one who was my friend should entertain ungenerous thoughts concerning me, and, therefore, I have written you this letter in order to disabuse your mind.

Yours truly, (Signed) Alexander Graham Bell.

No.