

# Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet

1787-1851 | Educator

Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet wanted deaf children to be able to go to school.

Thomas was born in Philadelphia, but he moved with this family to Hartford when he was a teenager. When he got older, he traveled around New England teaching in communities that did not have their own schoolteachers.

On one visit back to Hartford, he met a 9-year-old girl named Alice Cogswell.

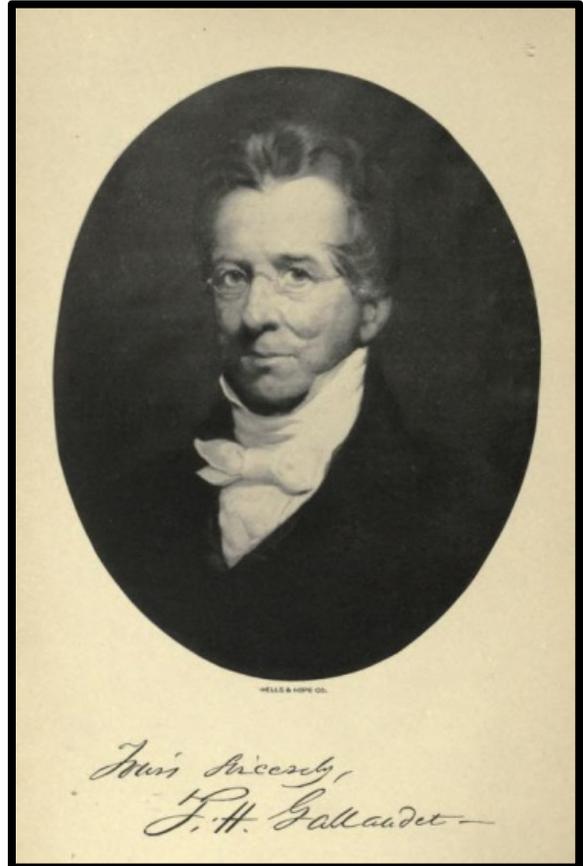
Alice was deaf and could not speak, but she had learned to write from her

sisters' teacher. Alice's father asked Thomas to teach her. Thomas did some research. He found out that people in

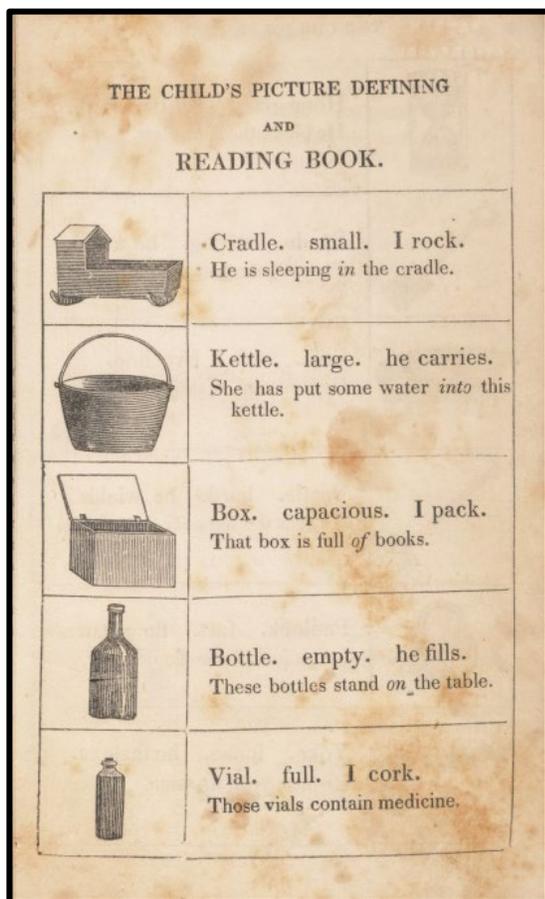
Europe had started to create a "sign language" that could be used to communicate with people who could not

hear. Thomas went to Europe and traveled around to meet teachers and visit new schools for deaf students. In France, he met a deaf teacher named Laurent Clerc. Laurent agreed to come to the United States and taught Thomas sign language on the ship home.

Together Laurent and Thomas traveled around New England teaching deaf children and raising money for a new school. In 1817, they opened the first school for deaf students in the United States. The school started with seven students in a hotel in downtown Hartford. Alice Cogswell was one of the seven.



Portrait from *Life of Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1888. Courtesy University of Toronto Library



Page from *The Child's Picture Defining and Reading Book*, courtesy Harvard University Library

After a few years, the school moved to the Asylum Hill neighborhood of Hartford. Students came from all over to attend the school. The new building had offices, classrooms, and dormitories (bedrooms for the students coming from far away.) The school taught students how to communicate (reading, writing, and sign language) and, also, school subjects such as French, geography, and math. Students also learned work skills such as woodworking and shoemaking. In 1830, Thomas wrote a book called *The Child's Picture Defining and Reading Book*. He used it to teach the youngest children at his school, but he also wanted it to help all children learning to read.

In 2017, Thomas Gallaudet's school, now called the American School for the Deaf and located in West Hartford, celebrated its 200th anniversary.

For more information, visit:

<https://connecticuthistory.org/the-childs-picture-defining-and-reading-book-by-thomas-hopkins-gallaudet/>

<https://asd-1817.org>

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