

What is the American School for the Deaf?

The **American School for the Deaf (ASD)** is the **first permanent school for Deaf students** in the **United States**, and one of the most important institutions in the history of **American Sign Language (ASL)** and Deaf culture.

- **Founded:** April 15, 1817
- **Location:** Hartford, Connecticut
- **Original Name:** The Connecticut Asylum for the Education and Instruction of Deaf and Dumb Persons
- **Current Name:** American School for the Deaf (changed in 1818)

Who Founded It?

1. Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet

- A hearing educator inspired to help Deaf children after meeting **Alice Cogswell**, a Deaf girl in his neighborhood.
- He wanted to learn how to teach Deaf children using effective methods.

2. Laurent Clerc

- A **Deaf teacher** from France, trained at the **Institution Nationale des Sourds-Muets** in Paris.
- He brought **French Sign Language (LSF)** to America and taught it to Gallaudet.
- Together, they introduced **signed education** to the U.S.

3. Dr. Mason Cogswell

- A wealthy doctor and father of Alice Cogswell.
- He funded Gallaudet's trip to Europe and supported the school's founding.

Why Was It Founded?

Before ASD, **Deaf children in America had no formal schools**. Many grew up **isolated**, without access to language or education. Families often didn't know how to communicate with them.

The goal of ASD was to:

- Provide **Deaf children with language and education**
- Teach them reading, writing, and skills for life
- Use **sign language as the primary method of instruction**

What Happened When the School Opened?

- The school opened with **seven students** in **1817**.
- One of them was **Alice Cogswell**, the girl who inspired it all.
- Students came from **all over the country**, and they brought their own **signs** from home.
- These signs **mixed with French Sign Language (LSF)** and **Martha's Vineyard Sign Language (MVSL)**.
- Over time, this blend of signs became **American Sign Language (ASL)**.

Why Is the School Important?

1. Birthplace of ASL

ASD is where **ASL began to form**, as Deaf children from different areas brought regional and home signs that blended with Clerc's LSF.

2. First Deaf Education in America

It proved that **Deaf students could learn**, succeed, and communicate using sign language.

3. Model for Other Schools

Many early teachers and leaders in Deaf education trained at ASD, then opened schools in other states.

4. Deaf Identity and Culture

ASD was one of the **first places where Deaf children could meet other Deaf people**, share culture, and develop identity.

Legacy Today

- ASD still operates today and is a **respected bilingual-bicultural school**, using **ASL and English** in education.
- It offers **academic classes, life skills training, counseling, and technology** support.
- The school serves as a model for Deaf education across the U.S.
- It remains a place where **Deaf history and language** are honored and celebrated.

Summary: Why ASD Matters

- First school for Deaf students in the U.S.
- Birthplace of ASL
- Promoted Deaf rights, identity, and education
- Proved that **Deaf children thrive with access to language**
- Continues to be a symbol of **Deaf pride and progress**

Historical Highlights

Year	Event
1817	ASD opened with 7 students
1818	School renamed "American School for the Deaf"
1864	ASD helped influence the founding of Gallaudet University
1900s	ASD expands to include vocational training and new teaching methods
Today	ASD continues to educate Deaf, hard-of-hearing, and hearing students using ASL and English