

## Who Was Laurent Clerc?

- **Full Name:** Louis Laurent Marie Clerc
- **Born:** December 26, 1785, in La Balme, France
- **Died:** July 18, 1869, in Hartford, Connecticut, USA
- **Identity:** Deaf, French, Educator, and co-founder of the first permanent school for the Deaf in the U.S.

## Childhood and Deafness

- Laurent Clerc became deaf at about one year old, likely due to a fall into a fireplace or an illness such as meningitis.
- As a result, he never developed speech and identified as Deaf.
- His family supported his education, even though at the time, opportunities for Deaf people were extremely limited.

## Education in France

- At age 12, Clerc was enrolled in the National Institute for Deaf-Mutes in Paris (founded by Abbé de l'Épée and later led by Abbé Sicard).
- There, he learned French Sign Language (LSF) and received a strong academic education.
- He became a star pupil and eventually joined the school as a teacher.
- He worked closely with Abbé Sicard and Jean Massieu, a fellow Deaf educator.

## Meeting Thomas Gallaudet

- In 1815, Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, a hearing American minister, came to Europe to learn how to educate Deaf children in the U.S.

- Gallaudet met Sicard, Massieu, and Clerc in London during a lecture tour.
- Impressed by Clerc's intelligence, Gallaudet asked if Clerc would come to America with him to help found a Deaf school.

## **The Voyage to America**

- Clerc agreed and sailed to the U.S. with Gallaudet in 1816.
- During their 52-day journey, Gallaudet taught Clerc written and spoken English, and Clerc taught Gallaudet sign language, a key example of collaborative learning between hearing and Deaf people.

## **The American School for the Deaf**

- In 1817, Clerc and Gallaudet co-founded the American School for the Deaf (ASD) in Hartford, Connecticut.
- This was the first permanent school for the Deaf in the United States.
- Laurent Clerc became the first Deaf teacher in America and helped train generations of Deaf students and teachers.
- The school used French Sign Language, Martha's Vineyard Sign Language, and home signs, which eventually blended into what we now call ASL.

## **Legacy and Impact**

### **Contributions to ASL and Deaf Culture**

- Clerc played a direct role in the creation and spread of ASL.
- He showed that Deaf people could be highly educated, articulate, and successful.
- He was a symbol of Deaf pride and professionalism.

## **Teaching and Leadership**

- Taught at ASD for more than 50 years.
- Trained both Deaf and hearing teachers.
- Promoted the importance of Deaf role models in Deaf education.

## **Writing and Advocacy**

- Wrote many letters, essays, and memoirs describing Deaf life, culture, and education.
- Supported the idea that sign language was the natural and best method for teaching Deaf children.

## **Famous Quote by Clerc:**

“I am Deaf; I cannot hear. But I can see. I can understand. I can learn. I can teach. I can succeed.”

## **Clerc’s Lasting Influence**

Laurent Clerc is sometimes called:

- “The Apostle of the Deaf in America”
- “America’s First Deaf Teacher”
- “The Father of American Sign Language”

Today, many schools, streets, and awards are named after him, and he remains a heroic figure in Deaf history.