

Deaf Culture Question of the Week - November 24 - 28, 2008

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In honor of the Thanksgiving holiday this week's Deaf Culture question is related to the early European settlers to this country who braved dangerous Atlantic Ocean crossings to venture to "The New World". This week's question is not directly a "Thanksgiving Question" but reminds us that Deaf people were also among the early settlers that came to America for adventure and opportunity.

Question:

Who is credited with being the first deaf person to settle in Martha's Vineyard island in 1694 leading to Martha's Vineyard Island becoming a place "Where Everyone Spoke Sign Language" by 1854?

- a. Laurent Clerc
- b. Alice Cogswell
- c. Jonathan Lambert
- d. "Deaf" Smith

Scroll down for the answer.

Answer: "c" Jonathan Lambert - "The first deaf person known to have settled on Martha's Vineyard Island was a carpenter and farmer Jonathan Lambert, who moved there with his hearing wife in 1694."

"The ancestry of most of the deaf population of Martha's Vineyard can be traced back to a forested area in the south of England known as the Weald— specifically the part of the Weald in the county of Kent Martha's Vineyard Sign Language may be a descendant of from a hypothesized sign language of that area in the 16th century, now referred to as Old Kent Sign Language. A number of families from a puritan community in the Kentish Weald emigrated to the Massachusetts Bay Colony of the United States in the early 17th century, many of their descendants later settling on Martha's Vineyard. The first deaf person known to have settled there was a carpenter and farmer Jonathan Lambert, who moved there with his hearing wife in 1694. By 1710, the migration had virtually ceased, and the endogamous (marrying within one's group) community that was created contained a high incidence of hereditary deafness that would persist for over 200 years."

"In 1854, when the island's deaf population peaked, the United States national average was one deaf person in 5728, while on Martha's Vineyard it was one in 155. In the town of Chilmark, where most of the deaf people lived, it was 1 in 25; in a section of Chilmark called Squibnocket, as much as a quarter of the population of 60 was deaf." (Read more about this history at and quoted from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martha's_Vineyard_Sign_Language with citations from:

References

[Groce, Nora Ellen](#) (1985). *Everyone here spoke sign language: Hereditary deafness on Martha's Vineyard*. Harvard University Press. [ISBN 0-674-27040-1](#).

[Sacks, Oliver](#) (1991). *Seeing Voices: A Journey Into the World of the Deaf*. Vintage. [ISBN 0-330-32090-4](#).