

Deaf Culture Question of the Week - February 25-29, 2008
Bill Newell, Principal, Washington School for the Deaf

What famous Deaf person born in 1813 was a prolific artist, writer and poet? His poetry was praised by William Cullen Bryant and he painted portraits of such luminaries as: Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederate States of America, Horace Greeley, newspaper editor, politician, "Go west young man", William Seward, United States Secretary of State under Presidents Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson and most notably Laurent Clerc?

(Scroll down for the answer)

Answer: **John Carlin** - Deaf from birth in 1813, John Carlin graduated from the Mt. Airy School for the Deaf (Philadelphia) at the age of 12. He studied every night at home mastering art history, English and five foreign languages. After saving enough money he traveled to Europe to study art. Eventually he returned to the United States and became an outstanding portrait painter. He painted the portraits of such famous people as William Seward, Horace Greeley, and Jefferson Davis. He is the first known deaf person to compose excellent poetry. His work was praised by William Cullen Bryant. Mr. Carlin was also a prolific writer whose articles on architecture, geology and ecology were published in leading newspapers. He was the first deaf person in America to be awarded an honorary degree from Gallaudet College (1865), and, quite appropriately he painted the first portrait of Laurent Clerc, one of his teachers. (Quoted from Deaf in America: Two hundred years of progress by Robert F. Panara, Professor Emeritus, National Technical Institute for the Deaf)

A picture of John Carlin is available at:

<https://ritdml.rit.edu/dspace/bitstream/1850/1342/1/RFPanaraPaper1976.pdf>