

Deaf Culture Question of the Week – Nov 26-29, 2012
Bill Newell, Principal Washington School for the Deaf

Which of these states no longer has a state school for the deaf?

- a) Illinois
- b) North Dakota
- c) Iowa
- d) Nebraska

Answer “d” – Nebraska. The Nebraska School for the Deaf was founded in 1869 by a deaf man, William DeCoursey French. It was closed by the state in 1998 due to low enrollment and the high cost of educating students at the school. There were fewer than 40 students enrolled at the school in the last year it was operated (1997-98 school year). The state legislature established regional school programs and pays tuition to neighboring states to send students needing residential placement to their state schools. The school was closed despite protest from local, state and national associations of the deaf.

The Nebraska School for the Deaf has quite a notable history with many important leaders in the Deaf community graduating from the school. One of these notable graduates is Jack R. Gannon the author of *Deaf Heritage—A Narrative History of Deaf America* (1981). NSD was also the target of an early attack by Alexander Graham Bell to ban the use of American Sign Language at the school. In 1911 with the urging of Bell’s American Association to Promote the Teaching of Speech to the Deaf (a precursor of the Alexander Graham Bell Association of the Deaf), the Nebraska state legislature passed a bill banning the use of sign language at the school. The superintendent at the school, Frank Booth, was quoted as saying “That language is not now used in the school-room and I hope to do away with its use outside the school-room” (Baynton, 1996). Pure American Sign Language was replaced at the school by the use of what was called “the Combined Method,” which involved the use of signing and speech together. The law banning the use of sign language was actually never repealed.

Read more about the history of the Nebraska School for the Deaf here:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nebraska_School_for_the_Deaf

Baynton, D.C. (1996) *Forbidden Signs: American Culture and the Campaign against Sign Language*. University of Chicago Press. p 25.

Note that

Deaf Culture Questions of the Week are archived at: <http://www.wsd.wa.gov>