

Hearing a need — and fulfilling it

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The way it was

By George A.
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minute and she returned to Westford Academy the following year.

Although Miss Rogers wanted to be a hospital nurse or a teacher of former negro slaves who had escaped to the Union lines, she had to give up these goals when she was urged to take Fanny Cushing, a little deaf girl, into her home and teach her to speak. She achieved considerable success in her work with Fanny.

About this time she was approached by Gardiner Greene Hubbard, a lawyer, businessman, and a member of the Massachusetts State Board of Education. He had been shocked by his inability to find anyone able or willing to teach his recently deafened young daughter, Mabel, to speak. Mr. Hubbard encouraged Miss Rogers to open a school in Chelmsford. Through his efforts, about \$1,000 was raised to finance the undertaking. Seven students, including Mabel Hubbard, attended the first year.

The teaching of Miss Rogers and Miss Byam was very successful in that first year, so much so that Mr. John Clarke of Northampton, Mass. offered \$50,000 to establish a school for the deaf in the city. On June 1, 1867, the first anniversary of the opening of the Chelmsford school, the state legislature

granted a charter to the Clarke Institution for Deaf Mutes (later changed to the Clarke School for the Deaf) at Northampton.

Miss Rogers hesitated to close the Chelmsford school but she was finally persuaded to accept the position of Director of the Clarke School. In October, 1867, she and Mary Byam, who had been named Assistant Director, moved their pupils to Northampton. Harriet Rogers continued to direct the Clarke School until she was forced by bronchial trouble to resign in 1886. She died in 1919.

The Clarke School Alumni Association erected a bronze and granite marker on the Center Common in 1952 to commemorate the Chelmsford school. Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Pouillot of Chelmsford, graduates of the Clarke School, were co-chairmen of the committee for this memorial.

In the one year that the deaf school was located in Chelmsford, it proved conclusively that teaching the deaf by the purely oral method could be accomplished.

Incidentally, Mabel Hubbard of that first class became Mrs. Alexander Graham Bell when she married the inventor of the telephone.

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The ability to communicate effectively is one of the most important accomplishments of human beings. Most of us find that it takes a lot of effort to achieve even a moderate level of success in this field. But consider for a moment the obstacles you would face if you were born completely deaf.

Until the middle of the 19th century, teaching speech to the deaf was seldom accomplished, although the manual method, i.e. the use of hand signs and the finger alphabet, has made communication possible among those who had learned the system.

It was on June 1, 1866 that Miss Harriet B. Rogers of North Billerica opened the first regularly organized school in the country for teaching "articulation and reading from the lips;" in other words the pure oral method.

She had selected an accomplished teacher, Miss Mary S. Byam, as her assistant. The classroom was on the second floor of the residence of Deacon Otis Adams (sometimes referred to as the Winn/Emerson House) at 1 Academy St., across North Road from the Central Fire Station in Chelmsford Center. The school was later moved next door to the Academy building, which was on the site of the present Central Baptist Church parsonage.

Harriet Burbank Rogers was born in North Billerica April 12, 1834. She graduated from the State Normal School in West Newton in 1851 and entered the teaching profession, including four years as a preceptress of Westford Academy (1855-59). An offer of a teaching position in a private school in Texas (1860) caused her to leave Westford but, because of the impending war, her plans to go west were abandoned at the last