

MARTHA'S VINEYARD: THE ISLAND OF THE FLYING HANDS



Martha's Vineyard

One in twenty-five islanders was Deaf

Blissfully ignorant of the idea of disability or handicap

Signed language was the island's primary mode of communication



Origins of Deafness

Profound deafness due to the genetic mutation of a recessive gene

Recessive deaf trait traced back to Kent, United Kingdom

Marriages between first cousins in insolated towns accelerated the mutation



Documentation of Deaf existence

Genealogical dictionaries affirm the arrival of the Lambert family to the Vineyard

Records of donations to the Asylum of the Deaf and Dumb in Connecticut

Statistic reports of Deaf persons per capita



Martha's Vineyard: The Deaf Utopia

Islanders viewed deafness as a variation of the human condition

Islanders learned and used Vineyard Sign Language regardless of their hearing abilities

Deafness was not a barrier to participate and thrive in the public life



American Sign Language

American Sign LANGUAGE

“American Sign Language is a natural language, the signing community is revealed to be a linguistic minority, and this history interprets the record of their struggle from that light.”¹

Founding Fathers of ASL - Laurent Clerc and Thomas Gallaudet



¹ Harlan Lane, *When the Mind Hears*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), xvi-xvii.

The American School For the Deaf

Birthplace of American Sign Language

First permanent school for deaf children in the United States and the first school to accommodate disabilities in the western hemisphere

Attending students came from communities with a high concentration of deafness



Alexander Graham Bell: The Antithesis

ORAL Deaf Educator

Discouraged Deaf intermarriage to reduce Deaf population

Nearly eradicated American Sign Language in classrooms

Studied the genetic disaster of hereditary deafness on
Martha's Vineyard



Conclusion

Martha's Vineyard was a utopia for the Deaf

Laid the foundation for American Sign Language

Epicenter for American Deaf culture

Martha's Vineyard seamlessly integrated the Deaf into society



Christian Worldview Integration

The effects of brokenness exists as a spectrum in the human experience

The Deaf community is proud of their identity and culture

The normalization of disability in an ableist world celebrates *Imago Dei*



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