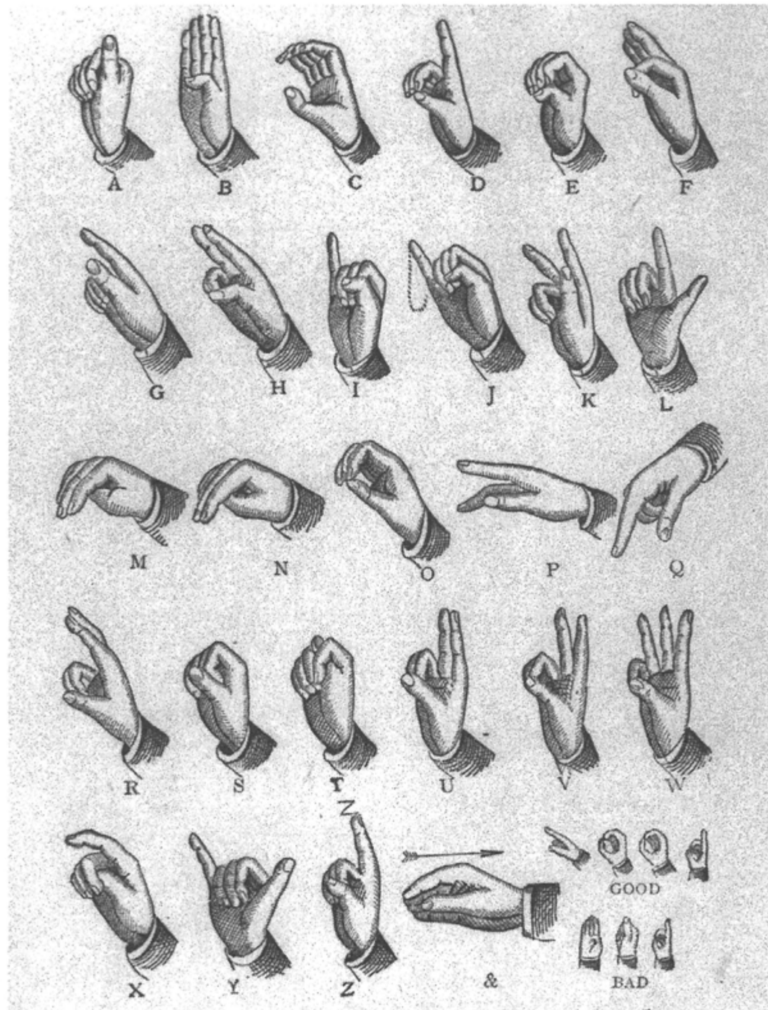
Sign Languages



The manual alphabet used in American Sign Language
The Deaf Mutes of Canada/Gallaudet University Archives

Sign language is one of the most — if not *the* most — important features of the Deaf community. A person's language is closely associated with that person's identity. If the language is devalued, suppressed, or taken away, the person's identity is threatened or diminished. In the words of Dr. Jerome D. Schein, "Deaf people see these assaults on sign as assaults on themselves, much as any minority language group regards efforts by the majority to impose its language on the minority as a personal and cultural assault."[1] An attack on sign language is seen as an attack on deaf people. Thus, it is understandable that, throughout history, deaf Canadians have exhibited intense feelings for their sign language and have made concentrated efforts to keep it in their education and daily lives. This determination to value and preserve the language of the Canadian Deaf communities can be seen in the following statements, the first of which was made in 1914:

Despite the fact that the sign language is acknowledged by the most eminent educators of the deaf to be the best means by which to quickly impart knowledge to those [deaf] *people, a large number of the Schools for the Deaf are doing away with this language altogether. No graver mistake can possibly be made.*[2]

In 1915, another statement echoed these sentiments:

There is nothing more nonsensical than the suggestion made by the advocates of pure oralism that the sign language should be done away with altogether. To deprive the deaf of their BEST

sized that, even in Biblical times, some form of manual language was used when two or more deaf individuals encountered each other. Other references to deaf people and how they communicate can be found in the writings of the ancient Greeks, including Aristotle and Plato. Some historians believe that more formalized signs were developed around 530 A.D. by hearing monks of the Benedictine order in Italy, who had taken vows of silence and needed an alternate way to communicate.[8] One of the earliest publications on the one-hand manual alphabet was *Reduction de las Letras, y arte para enseñar a ablar los mudos* (*Simplification of Letters, and the Art of Teaching the Mute to Speak*) by Juan Pablo Bonet (b. 1579; d. 1620), a Spaniard. Published in the 17th century, this document contains engravings of a manual alphabet that is similar to what is used in ASL today.

In France, the Abbé Charles Michel de l'Epée (b. Nov. 24, 1712; d. Dec. 23, 1789) of Paris modified the sign language used in the Paris Deaf community to more closely resemble spoken French. His "methodical signs" formed the basis of French deaf education. Other countries had manual alphabets for their own spoken and written languages as well.

A manual alphabet used in Italy
The Deaf Mutes of Canada

It may not be possible to pinpoint where and when sign language began, but apparently deaf people in all parts of the world have developed some form of manual communication. According to Dr. Robert E. Johnson, anthropological linguist and then chairman of Gallaudet University's Department of Linguistics and Interpreting, "'In every place we've ever found deaf people, there's sign'."[9] No in-depth research has been done on the origins of sign languages used by Canada's deaf citizens. It is possible that communication between deaf native peoples occurred in a manual form prior to the colonization of the country, although there is no documentation of this. However, it is logical to assume that French-based and English-based signs were introduced in the same way as spoken French and spoken English were introduced to Canada — brought by explorers or settlers from France, the United Kingdom, and later the United States. As deaf Canadians and their families and friends struggled with ways to communicate, the precursors to a visual-gestural language began to develop; these "home signs" and regional signs were later modified and expanded as deaf people began associating with each other more and more at residential schools. In the days before Canada established its own residential schools for deaf students, a few deaf children of well-to-do families were sent to British and American schools for their schooling. When they returned home, these children brought back the varieties and dialects of the sign languages used in their schools.

"Sign" of Another Time

In 1939, an interesting notice appeared in a window on Portage Avenue in Winnipeg, Man. It read: "The following foreign languages spoken here: Russian, German, etc. and 'The Sign Language'."[10]

Today, the predominant sign language preferred by deaf Canadians from anglophone (English-using) families is American Sign Language (ASL); francophone deaf Canadians typically prefer Langue des Signes Québécoise (LSQ).[11] Deaf Inuits living in the territories near the Arctic Circle are reported to use a sign language that differs from both ASL and LSQ, although no formal research has been conducted to determine whether it is indeed a separate language or a dialect of ASL. There are also a small number of users of what is called Maritime Sign Language (MSL), which is derived from British Sign Language. MSL is used primarily by older deaf people in certain Nova Scotian communities; it, too, has never been formally researched and is quickly becoming extinct.[12] Research conducted to date does not appear to justify the use of the term "*Canadian* Sign Language." The majority of anglophone deaf Canadian signers use ASL as their primary language. Naturally, there are regional variations (which could be called "dialects" or "accents") of ASL found in the different parts of the country — this occurs in the United States as well. However, until further research clearly demonstrates that the sign language used

by anglophone deaf Canadians differs enough from ASL to warrant its own classification as a separate language, ASL is considered the predominant sign language of the North American continent.

ASL and Its Spread to Canada

Some scholars claim that the foundation of what is now known as American Sign Language appeared in North America in 1816, when Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, an American protestant minister, returned home from Europe and brought with him Laurent Clerc, a deaf Frenchman.[13] The year after Clerc and Gallaudet opened the American Asylum for the Education and Instruction of Deaf and Dumb Persons in Hartford, Conn., they introduced a version of the methodical signs (sometimes called Signed French) used in France, which they had modified for use in the U.S. Of course, prior to 1816, deaf people in America were already signing, but they had few opportunities to share the signs used in their homes and local towns with deaf people from other parts of the country. When deaf children who used these local "home signs" began to attend residential schools, however, the situation changed.

It is likely that some of the first students to attend the American Asylum came with exposure to or skill in some form of manual communication. Eighty of the first 100 students at the school became deaf before they acquired spoken language, and 28 of these came from families with other deaf members.[14] Some of the students had already attended European schools where signing was used. Others had been educated by private tutors, while still others had never attended school, but had developed "home signs" to communicate with family members. When the various students began attending school, they shared their local signs with each other, in addition to being exposed to the methodical signs used in the classrooms. Over time, the instructors at the American Asylum began to incorporate the signs used by deaf people into the methodical signs developed for use at the school. This incorporation added to the richness of what later was called American Sign Language. To sum up, in the beginning of the school, instructors used "English-ized Signed French" (introduced by Gallaudet and Clerc) in combination with regional signs, but by 1835, the schools had abandoned the methodical signs (the artificial sign system based on English) in favour of the natural sign language used by the Deaf community.[15] The standardized sign language used at the school in Connecticut gradually spread as other American schools for deaf students were founded.

These residential schools became the nucleus of what would become a rich heritage of Deaf communities. Deaf children who had Deaf parents shared their language and culture with their peers who came from hearing families. The shared experiences of these students often became one of their most treasured life experiences. Upon leaving the schools, deaf people began to set up ways in which to continue the camaraderie and shared language experiences that they had found in the residential schools. Thus, Deaf communities began to develop and thrive in towns and cities where significant numbers of deaf people lived. One or two deaf people do not make a Deaf community; there must be a certain number living in one area to form viable organizations. However, scholars do not agree on what that critical number is.

In one striking American example, however, a large concentration of deaf individuals in one geographical area did *not* result in a Deaf community as would be expected — because one was not necessary. This unique situation was found on Martha's Vineyard, an island five miles (eight kilometres) off the southeastern coast of Massachusetts. From the 17th century to the beginning of the 20th century, a local sign language was used there by most if not all of the deaf and many of the hearing residents. The earliest settlers on Martha's Vineyard had first emigrated from England to the mainland of Massachusetts. Many of them had come from the Weald, a particular section of England in the county of Kent where a regional sign language was reported to be in use during the 1630s and 1640s. Apparently, the settlers from the Weald brought knowledge of this sign language with them to their new home. After living in the crowded areas of Boston and Cape Cod for a while, a number of these British immigrants and their offspring moved to Martha's Vineyard. Jonathan Lambert (b. Apr. 28, 1657; d. 1738), a native of Barnstable on Cape Cod, Mass., was the first known deaf person to settle on the island in 1692. Two years later, on May 17, 1694, he and his hearing wife, Elizabeth (née Eddy), bought 60 acres of Vineyard land (now known as Lambert's Cove) in the township of Tisbury. There the couple raised seven children, two of whom were deaf.[16] Beginning with the arrival of the Lambert family, the small island continued to have a significant number of deaf residents for the next 12 generations. The nucleus of the Vineyard Sign Language (VSL) was formed by the signs brought to the island by the early hearing immigrants from the Weald, supplemented by signs used by the earliest deaf Islanders, Lambert included.[17]

Almost all of the hearing residents of the Vineyard towns of Tisbury and Chilmark were "bilingual" — users of both spoken English and VSL. Because so many islanders knew signs, there were few communication or social barriers for the deaf residents. "Hearing and deaf people intermingled everywhere — at home, at the general store, at church, at parties."[18] According to the hearing townspeople, the deaf inhabitants were full members of the general community; thus there was no need for a separate "Deaf community" to develop.[19] The 20th century brought changes to the island, with an influx of hearing newcomers along with modern technology and mass communication. The island's deaf population shrank as the older residents died and many of the deaf youth left, never to return. The last deaf Vineyarder was Mrs. Abigail Brewer, who died in early 1952.[20]

Martha's Vineyard was a unique situation in the history of sign language and the Deaf community, however. For the most part, deaf people continued to experience communication barriers when dealing with hearing people and hearing society. Thus, sign language continued to be the most efficient and pleasurable means of communication among most deaf people, and the developing Deaf communities provided them with a place where they could communicate with ease and feel comfortable with their lives. The residential schools provided deaf

children with a sense of community that they carried with them when they left the educational setting and entered the adult world.

The first schools in the United States provided another service to deaf people as well — some of the first teachers and students at these schools became founders and/or principals of other schools throughout North America. For example, Ronald MacDonald, a hearing, ex-law student from the province of Lower Canada (now Québec), was trained by Laurent Clerc at the American Asylum. On June 15, 1831, MacDonald opened the first Canadian school for deaf students. And the prime mover in establishing deaf education in the province of Upper Canada (now Ontario) in 1858 was John Barrett McGann, a hearing Irishman who had observed the teaching trade while working as a writing clerk at the New York Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb.

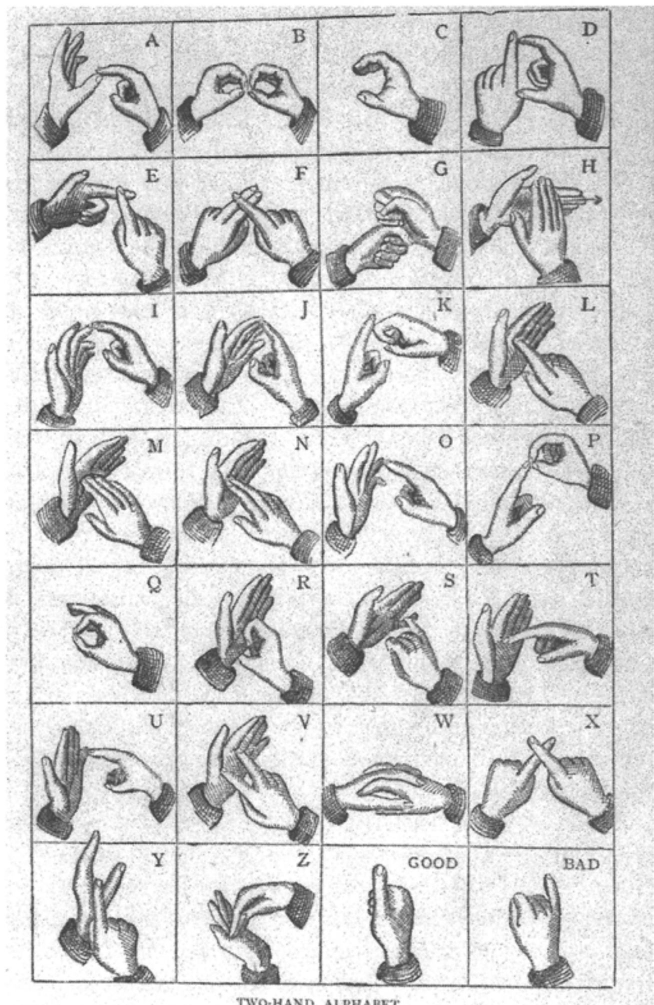
Between 1828 and 1850, 13 Canadians attended the American Asylum for the Education and Instruction of Deaf and Dumb Persons in Hartford. Another 17 were registered at the New York Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb between 1821 and 1853. The Ohio Asylum for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb admitted its first deaf Canadian student in 1848. Other American schools also enrolled Canadian students.[21] It is logical to assume that the sign language used in American schools spread into Canada as Canadian students attending those schools returned home. When schools for deaf students began to be established in Canada, many of the first teachers (both Canadians and Americans) were trained in American schools. They, too, brought with them the sign language being used in the United States. For example, the provincial school for deaf students that opened in Belleville, Ont. in 1870, used

> *the American methods of communication, finger spelling and signs ... thanks to the influence of Messrs. Greene* [deaf] *and Coleman* [hearing], *who came from Gallaudet College and North Carolina respectively. The graduates of this school* [the Ontario Institution for the Education and Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb] *insisted on making use of the American sign language, and manual alphabet, which soon put the double hand* [British] *alphabet out of use.*[22]

In this way, what is now called American Sign Language gained a foothold in the Canadian educational system and in the developing Canadian Deaf community.

British Sign Language

As indicated from the above quote, American Sign Language was not the only sign language introduced into Canada during the 19th century. There were also many deaf emigrants from the United Kingdom, who "imported" what is now called British Sign Language (BSL) with its two-handed alphabet. The Institution for the Deaf and Dumb in Halifax, N.S. and the Institution for Protestant Deaf-Mutes in Montréal, Québec were founded by deaf persons from Scotland and England respectively. Two-handed fingerspelling was used at these schools for the first few decades, until the single-handed method replaced it. The two-handed British method was also seen for a time in Toronto, Ont.[23] In the 1880s, a group of deaf English immigrants to Canada brought BSL and the two-handed alphabet to areas around Wolseley, Man. (now a part of Saskatchewan), where they settled and became an integral part of the prairie provinces.[24]



The British two-handed manual alphabet
The Deaf Mutes of Canada/Gallaudet University Archives

French Sign Language and Langue des Signes Québécoise

One of the most distinct features of Canadian deaf history is the "minority within a minority" status of francophone deaf people. Canada was settled by both the French and English, and those two languages are now considered the official languages of the country. As of 1991, there were 27,297,000 people living in Canada; of these, 6,503,000 were reported to be francophones.[25] More than 80 percent of them live in the province of Québec.[26] Members of the Québec francophone Deaf community, as well as French-using deaf people in parts of Ontario, New Brunswick, and Manitoba, prefer their own sign language

— now known as "Langue des Signes Québécoise" (LSQ). Until the early 1990s, very little research had been conducted on the linguistic aspects of LSQ.[27] Like ASL, LSQ's historical development within the Deaf community is tied to the residential schools. Between the early 1800s and the mid-1970s, the education of francophone deaf students in Québec was controlled by members of the Catholic religious community. Boys and girls were educated in separate residential schools. Officially, signing was forbidden in the classrooms, but some of the teachers obtained texts on the Langue des Signes Française (LSF) that was used in France to educate deaf children. The deaf children also taught the clergymen and nuns the sign language of the Québec French Deaf community, and outside the classroom some signing was tolerated. In contrast to the religious brothers who taught the deaf boys, many of the first nuns who taught at the girls' school had been educated in the United States and had picked up some of the signs used there as well; they tended to modify the French language with some ASL. Thus, the boys were enrolled in what could be called an "unofficial" LSF-LSQ environment, while the girls lived in a setting that more frequently (at least in its early days) used a combination of LSQ and ASL.[28] The result of this situation was described this way in 1892: "Here [in Montréal] the girls have the same style of sign language and are as charming as those of Ontario. On the other hand, the boys have that of old France."[29] This situation changed as the oral methods became stronger during the late 1800s and early- to mid-1900s. Oralism prevailed in the province (as it did in the rest of Canada); as recently as 1972, French-based schools in Québec prohibited sign language as a language of instruction. However, LSQ continued to flourish outside the classroom at both the Institution Catholique des Sourds-Muets (the boys' school) and the Institution Catholique des Sourdes-Muettes (the girls' school).

In the 1970s, artificial, English-based signing systems were promoted at schools for Canadian deaf children from anglophone families. These manual codes for English were imported from the United States. Likewise, Signed French systems were promoted for Québec's francophone students. Today, the controversy over the use of natural sign language or an artificial system in the classroom still exists among educators of French-using deaf children, as seen below.

... the province of Québec is split into two camps over the use of Signed French. The cities of Montréal and Québec do not share the same school of thought. Montréal is moving closer to LSQ, while the city of Québec is emphasizing a single meaning per word without variation, regardless of the sentence spoken.[30]

One of the most active francophone deaf people in Ontario is Roger Solomon Joseph St. Louis (b. Jan. 22, 1937) of St. Charles, a former student at the Institution Catholique des Sourds-Muets in Montréal, Québec (1951-1954). Dismayed by the number of deaf people who were being absorbed into the anglophone Deaf community and losing their identity as francophones, St. Louis decided to return to school so he could set up programs for the French sector of the Canadian deaf population. His deaf wife was the former Murielle Odile Marie Richer (b. Nov. 22, 1934), a native of McLennan in the county of Peace River, Alta. A graduate of the Institution Catholique des Sourdes-Muettes (1941-1954), she was one of several francophone deaf children from Alberta sent by train to Québec each September for their education (with a return trip each June).[31] The couple enrolled in Cambrian College and also took correspondence courses through Laurentian University (both in Sudbury, Ont.), working on bachelor's degrees. One of the biggest obstacles in their efforts was the lack of sign language interpreters who knew LSQ.

St. Louis has represented deaf francophones on the executive board of the Ontario Association of the Deaf and was involved with the committee looking into the concerns of the French sector for Ontario's Deaf Education Review (released in 1989). He has taught French Sign Language at Cambrian College in Sudbury, Ecole St. Vincent in North Bay, Ecole St. Joseph in Sturgeon Falls, and St. Charles Barromée in St. Charles. (He considered calling what he teaches "Les Signes Franco-Ontarien," because it is based on LSQ with some local Ontario deaf francophone slang added.) In 1989, St. Louis received Ontario's "community action award" (given annually to recognize "the outstanding achievements of disabled persons and individuals who have made a significant contribution to the disabled community").[32]

Suppression of Sign Language in Canada

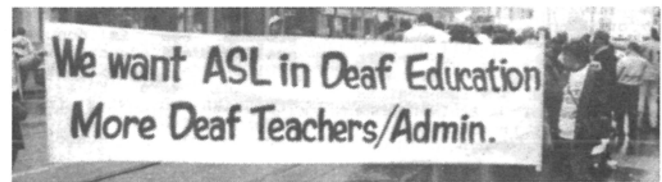
Beginning around 1860, as oralism came more into vogue, Canadian schools for deaf children began to feel the pressure of changing trends that were occurring in American and European schools. Some 20 years later, proponents of oralism justified these changes by citing the edicts of the Congress of Milan (1880). Oralism became the mandated policy in Canadian deaf education, and teachers and children were prohibited from signing in most classrooms. Deaf teachers lost their jobs as more and more hearing instructors, who could teach "articulation," were hired. In many Canadian schools, sign language was relegated to vocational classes for older students, many of whom were labelled "oral failures." In other schools, signing had to go "underground" — yet it continued to flourish in residence halls, on the playground, and any other place where hearing administrators and instructors were not constantly on guard. The only hearing people who continued to openly embrace and encourage sign language at schools were the clergy, who usually rejected oral methods as cumbersome and inefficient means of conveying religious messages to large audiences. Some religious orders offered sign language classes at their seminaries, and clergymen conducting religious services at schools for deaf students — even at some oral-only schools — were permitted to use sign language in the performance of their duties.[33]

In the United States, organizations such as the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) took up the fight to preserve ASL. One of their projects preserved on film priceless exam-

ples of sign language by such renowned signers as George W. Veditz and Edward M. Gallaudet. The first film in their collection was of Gallaudet signing a lecture on *Lorna Doone* and the Devonshire countryside where the story takes place. The cinematographer was S.G. Boernstein "of the Capitol Film Company, Washington, D.C. Knowing something of the signs of the mutes himself, the photographer was able to calculate the speed at which to turn his machine. In order not to miss any of the small fingerings, and at the same time not blur the arm movements, Manager Boernstein called into play all the niceties of his skill."[34] The sign language preservation project was begun by George William Veditz (b. Aug. 13, 1861; d. Mar. 12, 1937), whose impassioned words are familiar to many deaf people throughout the world: "As long as we have deaf people on earth, we will have signs, and as long as we have our films, we can preserve our beautiful sign language in its original purity. It is my hope that we all will love and guard our beautiful sign language as the noblest gift God has given to deaf people."[35]

Unfortunately, no similar national organization existed in Canada at that time to champion the language of the Canadian Deaf community, although provincial organizations such as the Ontario Association of the Deaf did speak out on behalf of "the sign language." And at their first official convention in 1905, members of the New Brunswick Deaf-Mute Association unanimously resolved "that to be qualified for the position of a teacher of the deaf, the applicant or candidate should be thoroughly educated, experienced in the use of the Manual Alphabet, and well acquainted with the beneficial sign-language of the deaf."[36] It was not until the late 1960s and early 1970s, when linguistic research and a new attitude toward ASL began to emerge in the United States, that deaf Canadians again saw hands raised in communication in the classrooms (but these hands were not necessarily using ASL or LSQ). Efforts to bring ASL back into the school setting sometimes took the form of open demonstrations during the 1970s, when deaf children, their parents, and members of the Deaf community began to protest the exclusion of ASL from the classroom. However, when signing did return, what commonly occurred was the simultaneous use of speech and sign vocabulary rather than the "combined method" of the 1800s (in which the two languages — spoken English and ASL — were kept separate).[37] In addition, artificially contrived, English-based sign systems that developed in the 1960s and 1970s found their way into the Canadian classrooms in place of ASL. These manually coded English (MCE) systems were intended to help deaf students learn to read and write English. SEE-1, SEE-2, Linguistics of Visual English (LOVE), and Signed English — to name a few — are variations of MCE. So, despite the fact that a form of manual communication was being used in the educational setting, the primary *language* of instruction continued to be English. ASL — the language of the Deaf community — was still excluded from the classroom.[38]

In the late 1980s, deaf Canadians again took to the streets to protest the lack of ASL and deaf professionals in the educational system. On May 12, 1989 — "National Deaf Education Day" — they marched in rallies all across Canada. One of the key points stressed at these rallies was the Deaf community's desire for ASL to be accepted as a language of instruction in the schools. This theme was expressed in sign language, voice, and posters.



One of many banners carried at the "National Deaf Education Day" rallies
The Deaf Canadian Advocate/Courtesy of the Canadian Association of the Deaf (Ottawa, Ont.)/Photo credit: B. MacMillan

In the early 1990s, a movement spread from the U.S. to Canada that espoused the use of ASL as the primary language of instruction, with English taught through its written form. This movement led to the establishment of several programs for Canada's deaf students in a bilingual/bicultural educational environment. Classes following the bilingual/bicultural philosophy were started (to one degree or another) in the Alberta School for the Deaf (Edmonton), the Manitoba School for the Deaf (Winnipeg), and in several classrooms at the three provincial schools for deaf students in Ontario: the Ernest C. Drury School in Milton, which began a pilot project in kindergarten through grade four in 1990; the Sir James Whitney School in Belleville; and the Robarts School in London.

Concern for the language being used with deaf children in the classroom has not been the exclusive domain of ASL-users in Canada. Proponents of LSQ are beginning to make their wishes known as well. In 1991, advocates of LSQ assembled to passionately plead for their language. More than 500 people met at Concordia University in Montréal, Québec, for a rally organized by the Association des Adultes avec Problemes Auditifs (later renamed Centre de la Communauté Sourde du Montréal Metropolitain [Metropolitan Montréal Deaf Community Centre]) to show support for a school for deaf students that would use LSQ as the first language of instruction.[39] The goal of those attending the gathering was the creation of a school run by deaf people that would respect the language and culture of the French-using Deaf community. According to the rally organizers, the plight of deaf children in Québec who are mainstreamed at an early age prompted the call for LSQ as a language of instruction. Gilles Claude-Joseph Read (b. Mar. 6, 1955), the deaf executive director of the association, stated that "a school for the deaf in this city [Montréal] could draw 200 students immediately, and up to 500 from throughout the province in coming years."[40] Such a school would be an option for the deaf students of the province who are currently mainstreamed into the public school system, where most of the instruction is oral and the few interpreters use Signed French or Signed English, not LSQ.

The bilingual/bicultural approach (whether ASL and written English or LSQ and written French) has generated a great deal of discussion among educators, parents, and the Deaf community. Time will tell whether or not Canadian deaf students will benefit from having their sign language be the pri-

mary language of instruction in the classroom. It is a concept that has the support of the majority of the Deaf community, who know first-hand the benefits of signs and the difficulties faced when education does not occur in the most accessible language for deaf students.

Sign Language Research in Canada

It took the groundbreaking work of American educator and linguist Dr. William Clarence Stokoe (b. July 21, 1919) in the early 1960s to make linguistic study of American Sign Language a legitimate discipline. His pioneering work, conducted while he was chairman of the English department at Gallaudet College in Washington, D.C., brought about a surge of world-wide attention to the study of sign languages. Following the 1965 publication of *A Dictionary of American Sign Language* by Stokoe and his deaf colleagues, Carl Croneberg and Dorothy Casterline, other researchers began studying indigenous sign languages in such parts of the world as the United Kingdom and the Scandinavian countries. Sign language dictionaries and textbooks, as well as research papers published in scholarly journals, began appearing in increasing numbers in the early 1970s. However, efforts to formally document the history, development, and structure of the sign languages used in Canada did not get underway until the late 1970s, and Canada has not yet produced its own ASL textbook or dictionary of sign language. This situation will be remedied with the long-awaited publication of *The Canadian Dictionary of ASL* by the Canadian Cultural Society of the Deaf and Copp Clark Pitman Limited of Toronto.[41]

A Canadian Dictionary of ASL

The foundations for a Canadian version of an ASL dictionary began through the efforts of four national organizations: the now-defunct Canadian Coordinating Council on Deafness (CCCD), the Canadian Cultural Society of the Deaf (CCSD), the Canadian Association of the Deaf (CAD), and the Association of Visual Language Interpreters of Canada (AVLIC). Projects to create a bilingual dictionary of ASL and Langue des Signes Québécoise (LSQ), the two major sign languages used in Canada, had been conceived by both CCSD and CCCD in the late 1970s. CCCD applied for financial support for a sign language project in 1979. The funding request was successful, and the three other organizations (CCSD, CAD, and AVLIC) joined with CCCD to establish a national editorial board for the project. At its first meeting in Ottawa (Dec. 2-4, 1983), the board developed guidelines for Canada's first sign language reference book. The fundamental purpose of the project as it was originally conceived was to:

codify a basic vocabulary of sign language in use in Canada, providing the first comparative material to place against American texts in linguistic and cultural studies; provide valuable teaching material to help ensure that people learning sign language learn the language which is generally used and best understood by the deaf community in Canada; be an important reference tool for professionals working with the deaf, such as counsellors, social workers, and interpreters; be the first attempt at an in-depth study and codification of the sign language used in French Canada, and would shed light on the distinctive cultural traits of the relatively isolated French-Canadian deaf community. It would also highlight the similarities and differences of the English and French Sign Languages used in Canada; because the method proposed ensures the extensive involvement of the deaf community in the compilation of the dictionary, the process itself will prove invaluable in terms of uniting the community in a study of a vital aspect of its own culture.[42]

After further reflection, it was decided that combining the two languages (ASL and LSQ) in one book would be an overwhelming task, primarily because of the differences in vocabulary. Plans are for the present project to include both French and English indexes.

In the summer of 1986, CCCD, CAD, and AVLIC handed over full responsibility for the project to the Canadian Cultural Society of the Deaf. A new national editorial board for the project was then formed, consisting of deaf representatives from the four Canadian regions (Maureen Donald of Vancouver, B.C. [Pacific Region]; Carole Sue Bailey of Edmonton, Alta. [Prairie Region]; Robyn Sandford of Burlington, Ont. [Central Region]; and Myles Murphy of St. John's, Nfld. [Atlantic Region]). Each individual was responsible for a regional board, composed of deaf and hearing individuals. The original regional board member were: *Pacific Region* (all from British Columbia): Larry Grant and Vincent Kennedy of Coquitlam; Ellen Hughes and Dennis Milton of Vancouver; and Dotti Rundles (hearing) of Burnaby; *Prairie Region*: Kathy Dolby (hearing) and Christine Spink-Mitchell of Edmonton, Alta.; Jane Hooey (hearing) and Dennis Zimmer of Winnipeg, Man.; and Roger Schmid of Saskatoon, Sask.; *Central Region*: Maureen Baskerville of Richmond Hill, Ont.; Louise Ford (hearing) of Ottawa, Ont.; Alana Johnston of Croton, Ont.; Jim McDermott of Kingston, Ont.; and Jo Anne Stump of Montréal, Québec; *Atlantic Region*: John Barter of Saint John, N.B.; Elizabeth Doull and Keir McLean of Halifax, N.S.; and David Still (hearing) of St. John's, Nfld.

Under the direction of the national editorial board, regional members were responsible for collecting signs from their regions by videotaping local deaf signers. Originally, Carol Sue Bailey was the sole editor. In 1989, Hilda Marian Campbell and Angela Jean (née Petrone) Stratiy (both deaf) joined the editorial team, followed by Kathy Dolby in 1991. These four editors were responsible for analyzing the videotapes and writing the definitions, descriptions, and usage of each sign included in the dictionary. In addition, they provided instructions regarding the artwork to ensure that the drawings corresponded accurately to the text.

Bailey has been the primary mover behind the dictionary project since the fall of 1982. Her persistence and dedication have kept the project alive for more than 10 years. A native of Birmingham, Ala., Bailey (b. Oct. 19, 1949) comes from an all-Deaf family.[43] She was educated at the Alabama School for the

Co-ordinator of Canada's ASL dictionary, Carole Sue Bailey (1988)
Courtesy of Carole Sue Bailey (Edmonton, Alta.)

Deaf in Talladega (1956-1961), the Maryland School for the Deaf in Frederick (1961-1969), the National Technical Institute for the Deaf in Rochester, N.Y. (1969-1971), Gallaudet College in Washington, D.C. (B.A., 1971-1975), and Western Maryland College in Westminster (M.Ed., 1975-1976). After immigrating to Canada in the fall of 1976, Bailey taught in the adult deaf program at Alberta College in Edmonton for five years (1976-1981). In 1981, she began teaching full-time at the Alberta School for the Deaf (also in Edmonton). She became a dual Canadian/American citizen the next year.

After two years at the Alberta School, her teaching assignment was reduced to half time to enable her to become Canada's first manual communication specialist (1984-present). In that capacity, Bailey provides ASL training for the Alberta School staff and students. Her involvement in the activities of CCSD began in 1978 as a representative of the Alberta Cultural Society of the Deaf. Since 1980, she has been on the CCSD board, serving in such positions as vice-president (1981-1984) and communication development director (1985-present). She also edited the organization's newsletter for two years (1981-1982 and again 1985-1986). In 1984, she co-ordinated CCSD's 7th biennial National Festival of Arts (NFA) in Edmonton.

Bailey was one of the founders of the Sign Language Instructors of Canada (SLIC), which came into existence at CCSD's 6th biennial NFA in Toronto in 1982. She was also one of four co-founders of the interpreter training program at Grant MacEwan Community College in Edmonton (1984). At CCSD's 9th biennial NFA in Saskatoon, Sask. in 1988, Bailey received the highest honour bestowed by the CCSD — the Founder's

Meetings were held frequently during the ASL videodisc dictionary project
Courtesy of Carole Sue Bailey (Edmonton, Alta.)

Order of Honour. This award is given every seven to 10 years to a deaf person who "has given up untold amounts of time to create a positive image of deafness in the minds of both deaf and hearing citizens of Canada."[44]

In addition to the sign language dictionary, Bailey and Stratiy were responsible for the recently completed videodisc project, "ASL in Canada: A Videodisc Dictionary." Included on the disc are approximately 4,400 ASL signs. The videodiscs come with an English and French print index showing the frame numbers of the corresponding ASL sign. The videodisc dictionary and its accompanying computer program are produced by Calgary's ACCESS NETWORK, and are scheduled for release sometime in the mid-to-late 1990s.

Sign Language Instructors of Canada (SLIC)

During the 1981 International Year of the Disabled, the Canadian Cultural Society of the Deaf received a federal grant of $30,000 from the Secretary of State to develop a curriculum for sign language instructors. This resulted in the formation of the Sign Language Instructor Certificate Organization (SLICO), forerunner of today's Sign Language Instructors of Canada (SLIC). The first meeting was held on July 27, 1982 during CCSD's 6th biennial National Festival of the Arts in Toronto, Ont.

The main goals of the organization were to conduct a survey of sign language instructors in Canada; to investigate various sign language dialects and provide standard terminology; to develop criteria for evaluation of sign language instructors; to provide sign language instructor certificates; and to provide in-service training for sign language teachers. For its first two years (1982-1984), the group was almost inactive due to financial difficulties. It was re-formed in 1984, and Gary Malkowski of Toronto was elected chairperson. A national, three-day convention held at Grant MacEwan Community College in Edmonton drew more than 100 participants from across Canada. During this meeting, the organization was renamed the Sign Language Instructors Certification; in 1988 it became

known as Sign Language Instructors of Canada (SLIC).

The first SLIC convention was held in July 1990 prior to the CCSD's 10th biennial NFA convention in Niagara Falls, Ont. Workshop participants were able to view a sample of the proposed evaluation, which was designed to cover seven general areas: language, Deaf culture, adult education, class management, lesson plans, curriculum, and curriculum evaluation. Candidates for certification are now required to pass a written exam (which includes developing lesson plans and test papers for ASL classes) and a videotaped exam (in which the candidate is asked questions on the linguistics of ASL, Deaf culture and history, curriculum development, class management and lesson plans, and adult education). Responses to these questions are videotaped for evaluation. Upon successful completion of these two tasks, the candidate then proceeds to the interview portion of the evaluation. The entire process can take as much as a year to complete.

Sign Language Instruction

One of the requirements for certification under SLIC is the completion of an ASL instruction program. Formal sign language instruction is a fairly new phenomenon in Canada. The 1981 report of the special Parliamentary Committee on the Disabled and the Handicapped urged Canadian politicians to encourage certain actions that would affect the Deaf community and their language in positive ways. The Report requested, among other things, that the federal government work through the Canadian Coordinating Council on Deafness and its affiliates to establish sign language departments within colleges and universities. Following the publication of the report, several universities established research programs on ASL/LSQ, including McGill University in Montréal, the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Univérsité de Moncton (N.B.), and the University of Alberta in Edmonton. York University in Toronto began a teacher training program at the university level in 1991, which includes information on ASL linguistics and instruction in ASL. Some community colleges also offer instruction in sign language.

Several research studies on sign language have begun in Canada. As mentioned earlier, the Canadian Cultural Society of the Deaf is working on *The Canadian Dictionary of ASL*. The University of Alberta has examined regional sign language dialects of the prairie provinces (Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba). In 1981, Paul Bourcier, Raymond Dewar, and Julie Élaine Roy (all of Montréal) compiled a dictionary of LSQ entitled *Langue des signes québécois*. The next year they produced two program books of lesson plans for teaching LSQ (*Cours de signes [LSQ-I]* and *Cours de signes [LSQ-II]*). In 1985, Roy and Bourcier published *La langue des signes (LSQ)*, which contained 1,700 signs illustrated by photographs. Scholars at the Institute Raymond-Dewar have begun conducting research on LSQ's structure and grammar. And researchers in McGill University's psychology department have begun looking at the acquisition, structure, and psycholinguistic processing of sign languages used in Canada.

Sign Language Requirements in Teacher Training Programs

With few exceptions, Canadian universities that train future teachers of deaf children do not formally require advanced (or even intermediate) skills in American Sign Language or Langue des Signes Québécoise as a condition for graduation. ASL/LSQ skills are also not requirements for Canadian certification to teach deaf children. The teacher training programs have traditionally focused on oral communication or manually coded systems for English. However, with the implementation of new legislation in Ontario, teachers in that province who work with deaf and hard-of-hearing students (either in provincial or local/separate schools) may soon be required to demonstrate a certain level of ASL/LSQ proficiency before they can work with students whose families have requested ASL or LSQ as primary languages of instruction. Currently, the York University teacher training program for prospective teachers of deaf students (located in Toronto) requires that the hearing students take and pass two three-credit courses in ASL (called "Sign Language Studies"). Deaf students in York's teacher training program typically are required to take one Sign Language Studies course.

Interpreting and Interpreter/Intervenor Training

Sign language interpreters were part of the Deaf community's activities as early as the late 1800s and early 1900s. For example, the Ontario Association of the Deaf always had some hearing people who volunteered to interpret at its biennial conventions. The efforts of these interpreters was greatly appreciated, as evidenced by the following 1902 quote.

> *We cannot too highly esteem and praise the services of Mr. Stewart, of the* [Ontario] *Institution staff, and Miss A. Fraser, of Toronto. Their help was invaluable to the Convention, and to them more than anyone else is due the prominence to which the status of the deaf has been raised in the estimation of the hearing public. All who have had experience know full well the extreme difficulty of interpreting signs into colloquial language; this difficult work Mr. Stewart and Miss Fraser did admirably to everyone's satisfaction. Without them the beautiful hymns signed, beyond the grace and poetry of motion, would have been meaningless, but with their interpretation our hearing friends were able to see that every sign used conveyed an expression ... to sum up all, they were the connecting link that joined the deaf to the hearing public in every meeting.*[45]

These early interpreters were usually employees of the provincial schools for deaf students and/or individuals who had deaf relatives. In almost all cases, they were volunteers who lacked any professional training in sign language interpreting. Today, formal training of sign language interpreters for deaf people and intervenors for deaf-blind individuals is the responsibility of the provinces. Each province has taken its own approach to the need for increased interpreter and intervenor

services for its deaf and deaf-blind citizens. In 1981, a federal grant of almost $95,000 was given to the Newfoundland Coordinating Council on Deafness to establish an interpreter training program in that province. The funding was to cover a survey of the Deaf community to determine the needs of deaf Newfoundlanders, to develop an interpreter referral service, and to set up interpreter training procedures.[46] Deaf people in Ontario fought to receive provincial funding for interpreter services, and in 1981, the Ontario Association of the Deaf and the Canadian Hearing Society finally received the much-needed funds to start the program. The first full-time interpreters to begin working under the Ontario government grant (administered by the CHS) were placed in the Thunder Bay, Hamilton, London, and Windsor areas, all of which had previously been served only by freelance, part-time interpreters. Around the same time, the federal government began providing interpreters for deaf federal employees and for deaf citizens who needed to meet with government officials. Ten years later, Gary Malkowski, Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP) for East York, Ont., introduced a resolution (No. 13) on May 16, 1991 that addressed the shortage of interpreters and intervenors within that province. This resolution resulted in the creation of three task forces: one on interpreter services (with a special committee on services to the francophone Deaf community); one on intervenor services; and the third on such text-based services as real-time captioning.

All three task forces submitted reports in April 1992, noting seven "urgent matters" that they felt had emerged from their investigations. Among these urgent matters was the lack of interpreter and intervention services to deaf, deaf-blind, hard-of-hearing, and deafened citizens in the province. The reports called for the establishment of an Ontario Council on Visual Language Interpreter Services (OCVLIS) to address the acute shortage of interpreters/intervenors.[47] This organization is now up and running.

Interpreter training programs began to appear in community colleges and universities in the early 1980s. The first university-level interpreter training program in Ontario began as a pilot project at the University of Ottawa in 1982. Funded by a $30,000 federal grant from the Department of the Secretary of State, the project was a joint venture between the university and the now-defunct Canadian Coordinating Council on Deafness.[48] Some of the other interpreter training and intervenor programs in Canada were established at such schools as Grant MacEwan Community College (Edmonton, Alta.), where a deaf woman (Angela Stratiy) now serves as program chair; St. Mary's University (Halifax, N.S.); George Brown College (Toronto, Ont.) — which started the first intervenor program in Canada in 1991; Sheridan College (Brampton, Ont.); St. Lawrence College (Kingston, Ont.); Red River Community College (Winnipeg, Man.), St. Clair College (Windsor, Ont.), and Douglas College (New Westminster, B.C.). Interpreter training in LSQ is available through Cambrian College in Sudbury, Ont., and the University of Québec at Montréal.

Members of the Deaf community celebrate the introduction of Resolution No. 13 in the Ontario Legislature
Photo credit: M. Sharon Fineberg (Toronto, Ont.)

Sign Language Interpreters on Television

Sign language interpreters began to appear on Canadian television in the late 1970s. For example, on October 15, 1979, Mary Butterfield, the hearing daughter of Deaf parents from British Columbia, began interpreting the Canadian House of Commons question-and-answer period, which was broadcast on cable television channels. One of the first Canadian interpreters to receive certification through the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID — a United States' professional organization that provides certification for sign language interpreters), Butterfield had just moved from British Columbia to Hamilton, Ont. to work for the Canadian Hearing Society when she was tapped for the House of Commons job in Ottawa, Ont.

Local television programs began employing sign language interpreters as well. For example, in the fall of 1978, the *CBC Evening News* was interpreted on Mondays and Fridays for deaf cable viewers in the B.C. areas of Vancouver, Richmond, and Burnaby. The interpreter appeared in the corner of the screen. On March 21, 1981, Avalon Cablevision Limited, CBC, and members of the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf in Newfoundland joined forces to present an interpreted weekly news program (*The News Digest*), the first of its kind for Atlantic provinces viewers. The interpreters, who appeared in one corner of the television screen, worked on a volunteer basis. Over the years, more and more sign language interpreters began appearing on news programs across Canada as public awareness of the rights of deaf viewers and the number of qualified interpreters increased.

The Association of Visual Language Interpreters of Canada, Inc. (AVLIC)

This association was formed as a co-ordinating organization to represent sign language interpreters throughout Canada. The idea of having such an organization had been discussed informally for several years. As deaf people began to expect and demand quality interpreting services, it became clear that a professional organization would be needed to ensure such quality. The group was officially founded in 1979 during its first national conference (held at the Hotel Marlborough in Winnipeg, Man., November 16-18).

Even before the establishment of the national organization, some Canadian interpreters were beginning to network on local and regional levels and to set up associations in their own provinces affiliated with the U.S. Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf. The Manitoba Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf was founded in 1976; the Alberta Chapter of the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf was set up the next year. In Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and British Columbia, interpreters were gathering together to establish professional groups on a local level. However, many Canadian interpreters wanted to establish a national organization that was uniquely Canadian and could accommodate both ASL and LSQ interpreters, and AVLIC met that need.

The first officers of AVLIC were Mary Butterfield of British Columbia, president; Janice Hawkins of Manitoba, vice-president; Dottie Inkenbrandt of British Columbia, secretary; R. Wayne Letourneau of Alberta, treasurer; and D. Bruce Jack (deaf) of Manitoba, member-at-large. After the establishment of AVLIC, more regional and provincial associations sprang up. Interpreters in Ontario met at the Ernest C. Drury School for the Deaf in Milton in January 1980 to organize a provincial group. In the western part of the country, sign language interpreters formed an organization called the Westcoast Association of Visual Language Interpreters (WAVLI) in 1988. Based in Vancouver, B.C., this group is a registered organization of both professional and beginning interpreters, "dedicated to encouraging excellence in interpreters and interpreting services; creating greater public awareness and understanding of interpreting and the role of interpreters; and encouraging high ethical standards in interpreting services to hearing and deaf or hard of hearing persons."[49] A francophone organization

Rally for improved and expanded interpreting and other services to deaf people living in the Sydney, Cape Breton, N.S. area (June 1991)
Photo credit: Elizabeth Doull (Halifax, N.S.)

called the Association Québecoise des Interpreters Francophones en Language Visuel (AQIFLV) was formed on September 25, 1982 in Montréal, Québec. The first president was Joane Calvaresi of Montréal.

Obstacles to Obtaining Interpreter Services

One would think that after the establishment of a national, professional organization to address concerns about the training, certification, and availability of sign language interpreters, interpreting would become an accepted, supported service in Canadian society. However, this has not been the case. Deaf people have had to fight for the right to use interpreter services in certain settings and to have these services provided by government organizations.

At a 1984 bilingual conference where oral French translation was provided for the hearing delegates, deaf delegates felt that LSQ interpreting should be furnished as well. The Canadian Hearing Society in Toronto made a request for bilingual interpreting on their behalf, but it was turned down by the federal government's bilingualism program. By the next year, a change had been made in the program's policy that would include sign language interpretation in ASL and LSQ at bilingual conferences. That same year, Ontario changed its rules so that deaf people making presentations to provincial governmental committees would not have to pay for and bring their own interpreters (in arguing this issue, one person brought up the point that asking deaf people to bring their own interpreters to the legislature was like asking people in wheelchairs to bring their own ramps).[50]

Other struggles involving access to interpreters were fought on a more individual basis. In 1990, for example, two men (Gordon Rattray and Ken Phil) wanted to take an evening course through the Vancouver, B.C. Board of Education. They requested that the school board provide the interpreters, but their request was turned down. The two men obtained interpreters on their own, completed the course, and sent the bills for the interpreters to the school board. When these were not paid, Rattray and Phil hired Henry Vlug, a deaf lawyer, who filed a complaint with the Human Rights Commission. As a result of this action, the Vancouver School Board is now required to provide interpreters for deaf people registering for its courses. In a similar case in 1993, the University of British Columbia was ordered to pay for sign language interpreters if deaf graduate students could not qualify for outside funding to pay for the service.

Having interpreters provided in medical situations has also been a problem over the years. In 1986, Vlug wrote an article on the issue of interpreters for deaf patients, pointing out that only "medically required services rendered by medical practitioners can be funded through the [British Columbia] medical services plan."[51] The dangers of such a situation were brought home with the newspaper accounts of a deaf couple whose twin daughters were born prematurely.[52]

Federal Recognition of Sign Language Not Yet Forthcoming

Because Canada was colonized by both the French and the English, both groups are considered the "founding peoples" of the country. It was not until 1969, however, that the Official Languages Act recognized Canada as a bilingual country, with English and French the two national languages. Deaf people — like other linguistic minority groups living in Canada — have fought to protect and maintain their "mother language," but have not been as successful as hearing anglophones and francophones in this regard. Sign language was not mentioned at all in the Official Languages Act of Canada. In 1971, the federal government adopted a policy of "multiculturalism in a bilingual [English/French] framework."[53] Eleven years later, the Canadian Constitution Act of 1982 affirmed some of the principles of cultural dualism. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms stresses the right to equality and forbids discrimination. French and English are now described as "'the official languages of Canada' with equality in status in all parliamentary institutions and in the Government of Canada. The Charter also protects the rights of French and English minorities to be educated in their own languages, and allows for minority schools to be funded by public funds."[54] However, not one of these documents includes deaf people as a cultural or linguistic group whose rights and languages (ASL or LSQ) fall under the protection of the laws.

Provincial Recognition of Sign Language

By the end of 1993, only three provinces had officially recognized American Sign Language. The Manitoba and Alberta provincial governments passed resolutions to recognize ASL as the language of the Deaf community (the Alberta resolution also recognizes it as an optional language of classroom instruction in schools, colleges, and universities). It should be noted that resolutions are not binding upon the provincial governments, however. Ontario went a step further and changed its Education Act with an amendment recognizing both ASL and LSQ as languages of instruction.

Manitoba was the first province to officially recognize ASL. On December 6, 1988, a private member's resolution (No. 35) was presented by Reg Alcock (Liberal Member of the Legislative Assembly for Osborne). Seconded by the Hon. Bonnie Mitchelson (Minister of Culture, Heritage, and Recreation), the resolution was read, debated, and passed unanimously in the legislature. It reads:

WHEREAS Canada takes pride in its cultural mosaic and officially endorses the policy of multiculturalism; and

WHEREAS deaf Manitobans view themselves as a distinct community with their own language, customs and values; and

WHEREAS American Sign Language (ASL) is distinctive, with its own grammar and rules of usage, thereby making it the true and complete first language of deaf Manitobans; and

WHEREAS deaf Manitobans are entitled to the full advantages and privileges of citizenship.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba recognize the cultural uniqueness of deaf Manitobans by recognizing American Sign Language as the language of the deaf in Manitoba.[55]

Witnessing this historic event from the speaker's gallery of the legislative assembly were several members of the Winnipeg Community Centre of the Deaf (WCCD), including their president, Lawrence Zimmer. The WCCD had been advocating for such a resolution for some time and on this day finally saw their efforts come to fruition.

On June 19, 1990, in Edmonton, Alta., Deaf community leaders gathered in the public gallery of the provincial legislature. They were joined by a group of 75 students from the Alberta School for the Deaf, their deaf principal (Joseph McLaughlin), and some of their teachers and parents. This group witnessed an important debate on Motion 216, a proposal regarding the language of the Deaf community presented by William Edward Payne (Progressive Conservative Member of the Legislative Assembly for Calgary-Fish Creek).[56] The motion read:

BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly urge the government, given the cultural uniqueness of Alberta's deaf community and the linguistic uniqueness of American Sign Language,

(1) to recognize American Sign Language as a language of the deaf in Alberta, and

(2) to incorporate it into Alberta's grade school and postsecondary curriculum as an available language of instruction.[57]

When the debate ended, the members of the legislative assembly voted unanimously in favour of the resolution, making Alberta the second province to publicly recognize ASL.

Ontario was the first (and so far, only) province to pass a law recognizing ASL and LSQ as languages of instruction for deaf students. When Bill 4 passed its third and final reading in the Ontario Legislature (July 21, 1993) and received Royal Assent on July 29, 1993, it became an amendment to the Ontario Education Act. Before the passage of this bill, the only languages officially recognized in Ontario classrooms were spoken English and spoken French. An earlier bill (Bill 112), which would have made ASL and LSQ heritage languages of the Deaf community and languages of instruction, was moving successfully through the legislative process until the September 1990 general elections. After the elections, a new political party was in control, and Bill 112 died. Bill 4 was introduced on April 21, 1993, and the legislative process began all over again — this time resulting in success. Perhaps Ontario's new law — the first of its kind in North America — will usher in a new era in which bilingual education becomes a reality for Canada's deaf and hard-of-hearing students.