

THE GROWTH OF THE ORAL METHOD IN AMERICA

By Alexander Graham Bell

The substance of this paper was delivered as an address, October 10, 1917, at Northampton, Mass., at a meeting commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Clarke School. The importance of the occasion has seemed to justify a more careful presentation of the subject than could be made in a spoken address without notes: Hence this paper.

This is a memorable occasion. We are not only celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Clarke School, but the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the oral method in America: The first permanent oral schools appeared in 1867.

It is true that the Braidwood oral method was introduced at a very much earlier date, 1812, but it failed to take root here, and died out within a few years.¹

FIRST ATTEMPT TO INTRODUCE ORAL TEACHING INTO AMERICA

John Braidwood, a grandson of the celebrated Thomas Braidwood of Edinburgh, came to America in 1812 with the object of founding in this country a school for the Deaf similar to that which had been so successfully established in Great Britain by his grandfather in 1760.

Unfortunately John Braidwood seems to have been the black sheep of his family and left his country for his country's good! He had been placed in charge of the Edinburgh Institution for the Deaf² at its opening in 1810; but after remaining three terms he fell into financial and other difficulties and suddenly abandoned the Institution and fled to avoid arrest for debt. In May 1812 he turned up in America at Washington, D. C.

I do not know a more pathetic chapter in history than the story of this young man's life. How old he was when