



April 9, 2009

President Davila:

Hello, I'm Robert Davila, president of Gallaudet University. Welcome to *Bob's Vlog*.

Throughout Washington, D.C., and all across the nation, many people are celebrating the 200th anniversary of the birth of Abraham Lincoln. Gallaudet is doing the same. As you know, back in 1857 the campus began as a school for young deaf and hard of hearing children. Seven years later, in 1864, President Abraham Lincoln signed the charter to add a collegiate program to the school. That was the beginning of Gallaudet's relationship with President Lincoln. I have two visitors here today: Diana Gates is a Deaf Collections librarian, and Jeff Peterson, a Deaf Collections technician. Both are here to share with us information about those events and other activities happening this year as we also celebrate the 200th birthday of our 16th president. I would like to ask our visitors to introduce themselves and tell us a little more about themselves before we move on to some questions which I have for them. Diana, let's start with you.

Diana Gates:

I grew up in Illinois and I guess it was a good time, and there isn't a better place to come from than Illinois. I came to Gallaudet and graduated in 1975, and I am now a Deaf Collections librarian.

President Davila:

And you, Jeff?

Jeff Peterson:

I currently live here, and I graduated from Gallaudet in 2007. I have a history degree, a B.A., so I was a student here. I grew up in California. I became deaf late in life and I was trying to figure out more about myself, so I came to Gallaudet and identified with being deaf. I have been working as an Archives technician for over a year now.

President Davila:

It was nice of you to introduce yourselves to our audience, and thank you for coming. I have some questions for you. You know that here in Washington, D.C. we have had many exhibitions of Lincoln memorabilia –at the National Archives, the Library of Congress, the National Portrait Gallery –a number of different places. Also, we see that many new books have been written, published, and distributed recently related to the bicentennial. What other events across the nation are being held to honor and recognize Lincoln’s legacy for his 200th birthday? Diana?

Diana Gates:

There are many different things happening all over the country. Many things are happening in Kentucky, Indiana, and Illinois, because that’s where Lincoln came from. There are things like workshops, conferences, lectures, music concerts, teaching in the different schools, and essay writing contests. There are a good number of things and all listed on the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission website. Also, things are happening around the world. It’s really exciting!

President Davila:

That's good to know. How did Gallaudet University become involved with the Lincoln Bicentennial?

Diana Gates:

Dr. Edna Sayers and I had contact with a former student of ours here at Gallaudet, Vienna Bacchus. She had learned that the Library of Congress was planning different things and that a commission had been set up. So, the commission itself contacted us and the relationship just continued on from there.

President Davila:

We know that Lincoln signed the Enabling Act which allows us to confer college degrees, but did Lincoln have any greater role in deaf history or have any ongoing contact with deaf people in the past?

Diana Gates:

Some people may not be aware that Lincoln was part of the legislation – well, not the legislation, but part of the governmental group in Illinois where they voted and passed support for the Illinois School for the Deaf. Then, he also signed Gallaudet's Enabling Act, known of as the charter. His contact with deaf people is mostly unrecorded. Some of it is myth or minimal recordings of things. There is nothing that is really official.

President Davila:

A follow-up question related to that is: What other events are planned for our campus?

Diana Gates:

We had Dr. Douglas Baynton come in February, the week of Lincoln's birth, and give a presentation. We have had library exhibits of different books and

videotapes. The Archives has an exhibit. Multicultural Programs has had book discussions; last fall they proposed one book about Lincoln and this spring, another book. We wanted to close the program with Dr. Harry Lang, who came last week and gave a talk. Then, Gallaudet's alumni association, GUAA, for the Charter Day Program, included recognition of Lincoln's contributions.

President Davila:

Well, I'm happy to know and see that Harry Lang, a good friend of Gallaudet University and a personal friend of mine, came to the campus to speak. That's wonderful. But, I'm just curious. What is his interest in Lincoln?

Diana Gates:

He has been working and doing research about one deaf woman, Laura Redden, who was a newspaper reporter from Missouri, and she had several interviews with Lincoln. So, his work on that probably will be made into a book. Also, he did research on the Civil War and deaf people's roles during that time period.

President Davila:

That's very good to know what the experts in the field are writing and so forth. I have another question to ask you. In addition to the Archives exhibit and the display of artifacts related to Lincoln, we have a short video to share with our audience. Let's take a look at that first and then we will proceed with questions, all right?

(One-minute video plays)

President Davila:

That's a very impressive collection. It would be hard to find something better than that outside of the National Archives. I'd like to ask Jeff a question. Tell us about the variety of things in the exhibit we just saw.

Jeff Peterson:

First, I want to convey special thanks to Mike Olson, another archivist, who helped a lot; the two of us worked on that exhibit. There are a variety of books – or things, I mean – sorry. There is a book of Lincoln’s famous stories. He always said, “Laugh, and the world will laugh with you.” Many of Lincoln’s stories were often funny, but also had a point. He made a strong point that way to show people about something very specific. I myself look forward to reading that book later on. We also have a very large copy of the charter on display, and you can see Lincoln’s signature. It was very powerful to think about what that signature did in establishing Gallaudet as an equal university for the deaf. We have many pictures, letters, and other newspapers, as you saw on the video. Those are from *The New York Times*. There are various things. There are some objects which are hard to find.

President Davila:

That’s good. I want to ask you something I wondered about myself: What was the hardest part of putting that exhibit together?

Jeff Peterson:

Really, the hardest part is to make sure everything is interesting, first of all, and then, secondly, finding everything. Of course you want everything to be during Lincoln’s time, or about when Gallaudet was established in 1864. Objects usually deteriorate over time, so it’s hard to find things that are in good condition. We have many papers and pictures, but just those would not be interesting, so it’s good to have a variety of things to keep it interesting. We want to make sure when people come to the Library and see that exhibit, that they are really proud of Gallaudet’s history, of Lincoln, and of American history, and that they are also impressed by what is in the Archives and what is here at Gallaudet University.

President Davila:

Is there some favorite thing in that exhibit that you found to be especially interesting?

Jeff Peterson:

Really, the most special thing, I think, is the actual original newspaper article from *The New York Times*. It's the real newspaper published on April 15, 1865, one day after Lincoln was shot. I think it was really special that Gallaudet has an original copy of that newspaper.

President Davila:

How did our Archives happen to have those things from way back in the beginning of Gallaudet history – during Lincoln's time?

Jeff Peterson:

That's a good question. Actually we have many things about Gallaudet, of course – many papers and letters and so forth – but connecting those to Lincoln is a bit more difficult. Because Gallaudet is special, it was our goal to preserve information about deaf history. That's the number one rule. We really tried to blend American history with what we have about Lincoln and Gallaudet's history. It's hard, but I think I answered your question. I apologize if I got off track.

President Davila:

That's all right. Your answer was fine, and it's amazing that so many good things are available to us to show our students. Later, hopefully, visitors who come to Gallaudet University will see that Gallaudet has been a careful collector of things – important things – over time. That's wonderful. And, another question for Diana, what are some questions that the public at large is asking the deaf community related to its relationship to Abraham Lincoln?

Diana Gates:

The general public believes strongly that the statue of Abraham Lincoln on the Washington Mall represents the fingerspelled handshapes of the letters “A” and “L” - as Lincoln is seated with his hands shaped “A” and “L.” It is not true; it is a myth. The second question is whether the sculptor of that statue, Daniel Chester French, had a deaf son. Again, it is not true. Those are the two main things that come up often.

President Davila:

Yes, because I personally also believed those things, but now you have put the record straight. Thank you for that. There is something else that I would like to share with our audience about Lincoln. Representative Lynn Woosley, a democrat from California and a member of our Board of Trustees here at Gallaudet University, introduced a resolution in the House of Representatives on March 24. The resolution was: “Recognizing and honoring the signing by President Abraham Lincoln of the legislation authorizing the establishment of collegiate programs at Gallaudet University.” Senator Sherrod Brown, a democrat from Ohio and also a Gallaudet trustee, introduced the same resolution in the Senate. That resolution was co-sponsored by Senator Tom Harkin, a democrat from Iowa and an author of the Americans with Disabilities Act. So, it is really great news that Gallaudet was recognized and that Lincoln’s connection to Gallaudet is becoming known all over the world.

I want to thank you both for joining us here today and letting our community out there know more about the person who had a very important role in the establishment and ensuing history of Gallaudet University. I want to thank the audience for joining us today and I hope to see you again for the next *Bob’s Vlog*. So long!

