

# North Dakota School for the Deaf History

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Early Pioneers  
and  
*The Banner*

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This program is  
dedicated to the pioneers  
who accepted a  
daunting challenge

Their task - to establish  
a school for deaf children  
who resided in the  
newly formed state  
of North Dakota



Four young people

three deaf

one hearing

laid the ground work  
for a school  
that celebrates  
120 years of proud history

The pioneers were:



Anson Spear (deaf, age 29)

Julia Spear (deaf, age 28)

Philip Axling (deaf, age 28)

Clara Halvorson (hearing, age 26)

Their early efforts and  
dedication established a  
foundation strong enough  
to launch the school  
confidently into a  
new millennium.



Their legacy has become  
an integral part of  
the school's history  
and we remember them  
with pride and gratitude.

# Anson Rudolph Spear





Spear was a graduate (1878) of  
Minnesota School for the Deaf

He attended the  
National Deaf-Mute College  
(Gallaudet)

He later quit school and  
returned to his home state  
where he obtained employment  
as a postal worker.

Spear had long taken keen  
interest in the deaf of  
Dakota Territory  
and felt it was his province  
to start a school in  
North Dakota...



When North Dakota was  
admitted into the Union in 1889  
Spear came to Devils Lake  
and met with local leaders  
to impress upon them the  
importance of establishing  
a school for deaf children.

Local leaders welcomed Spear  
and pledged their support

Together they drafted a bill to  
present before North Dakota's  
first-ever legislative session.



Spear's account  
of the bill's passage  
into law follows:

Our bill was introduced  
in the Senate by  
the Honorable W. E. Swanston

This gentleman was untiring  
in his efforts to secure its passage.



In the House the bill was in  
the hands of Honorable  
J. McCormick & C. Currier –  
these two gentlemen also  
worked diligently.

I remained in Bismarck during the time the bill was before the legislature and, by my presence, did much for the success of the measure.



The bill finally passed  
both houses, only to  
be vetoed by  
Governor John Miller.

It must be kept in mind that North Dakota had just been admitted to the Union and expenses of putting in operation the state government were heavy.

There was limited amount of money in the treasury.



Governor Miller felt that funding a school for deaf children was not necessary since there was already a school in Sioux Falls.

Our bill seemed lost  
for it would be almost impossible  
to muster the necessary support  
to pass it over the governor's veto.



But the originators  
of the bill  
did not give up!

After a hard fight, on the last day  
of the session, March 18, 1890,  
the bill passed and became law

"the objections of the governor to  
the contrary notwithstanding."



Anson Spear was named  
Superintendent of  
the North Dakota school.

Spear, deaf, was 29-years-old

He was thought to be  
the youngest superintendent  
of a state school in the country.

1890 - 1891  
during the first  
school year

23 pupils  
enrolled.



Spear's wife, Julia,  
was named Matron.

She cared for the pupils'  
day-to-day needs;  
cooking, laundry  
and housekeeping.

Julia, deaf, was 28-years-old.



The city fathers of Devils Lake  
provided Spear with a  
vacant building  
to establish the first school.



The old building had  
once served as a bank.

It was located inside  
the city of Devils Lake,

situated on the corner of  
3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue and 5<sup>th</sup> Street.



The building housed two classrooms, eating and sleeping quarters and a room in the rear for a print shop.



← Spear



The building was provided rent free for two years but Spear was not happy with its conditions.

Spear believed that:

The school's location exposed pupils to 'bad influences.'

The building was not large enough to accommodate the needs of its pupils.

The building was a fire hazard.



The old building was made of clapboard and the fear of fire was ever present.



Clapboard – long, thin boards

Spear requested funds to build a new school and in January, 1891, legislators agreed to appropriate \$10,000 for a new building.



In the fall of 1893 the  
Main building was ready  
and with much excitement  
teachers and pupils moved  
into their new school





Wood burning  
stoves heated  
the school.

The school  
was lighted  
by oil lamps.





1894 *Banner*: North Dakota has no nobler monument on her broad prairies than this building and what it stands for ...



A typical school day for pupils  
included instruction in:

reading, writing, arithmetic  
and articulation



It was Spear's firm belief  
that all pupils needed to be  
trained in a trade vocation.

Girls were instructed  
in the trades of:

Housekeeping  
Sewing  
Needlework



However Spear lacked a  
vocational trade program  
for boys.

In 1891 Spear requested  
permission to procure  
a teacher to instruct pupils  
in the trade of printing

Permission was granted.

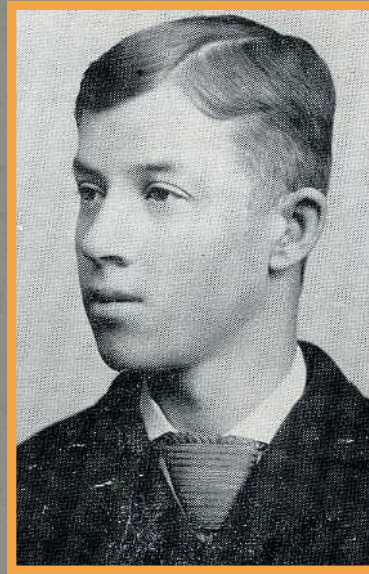


Spear knew of a young deaf man  
who worked as a foreman at the  
Mandan Daily Pioneer newspaper.

Through letter correspondence,  
Spear convinced him to come  
teach at the school.



In 1891  
Philip Axling accepted  
Spear's offer to teach printing.



Philip as a young teacher  
in North Dakota



Philip was the first graduate of  
Dakota Territory School for the Deaf  
in Sioux Falls (1888).

He was the second teacher  
to be hired at the school.

Philip, deaf, was 28-years-old.

Spear obtained a  
small foot-powered  
printing press and Axling  
taught pupils (mostly boys)  
basic principals of  
the printing trade.



What year was  
Volume I, Issue I  
of the *Banner*  
printed?

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First edition  
December, 1891

What was the original name  
of the *Banner* when it  
was first published?

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*North Dakota Banner*



Who was credited with  
naming the *Banner*?

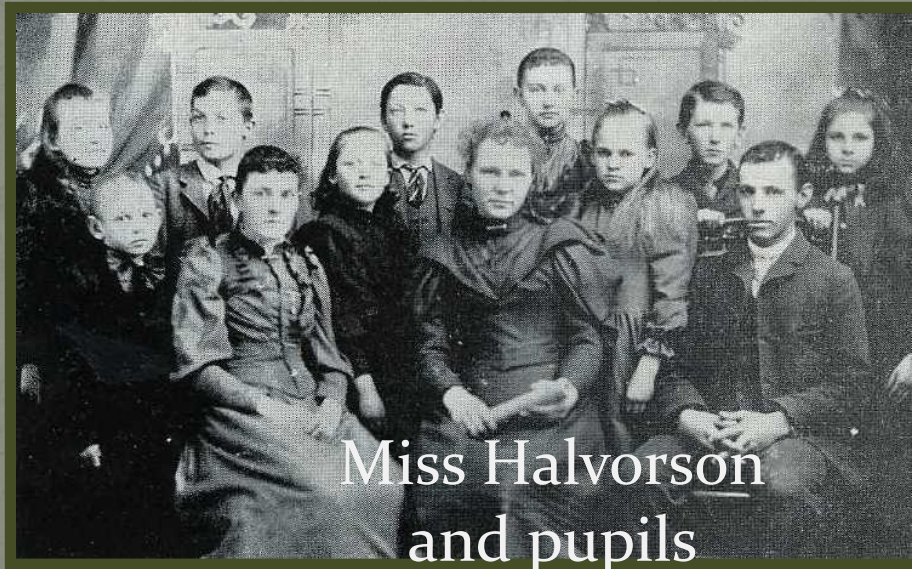
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Clara Halvorson

Who was  
Clara Halvorson?



Clara was the first teacher  
employed at the school.



Miss Halvorson  
and pupils

Clara, hearing, was 26-years-old.



1892 - Spear wrote in his report to the Governor:

Miss Halvorson gives instruction in speech and by her close application, gentleness and patience with the pupils has become a most successful and valuable teacher.



Halvorson  
sisters ...

Clara  
Julia

Superintendent Spear married  
Julia Halvorson.

Julia was a graduate of the Faribault  
Minnesota school (1880).

When Spear and Julia moved to  
North Dakota they recruited Julia's  
sister, Clara, to move to North Dakota  
to teach at the school.





Sisters  
Clara Halvorson,  
first teacher,  
and  
Julia Spear,  
Matron.





## How the *Banner* Acquired its Name as told by Philip Axling, Editor

Mr. Spear called a meeting of the four school officials (Anson, Julia, Philip and Clara). Spear outlined the plans for printing a school newspaper and asked our opinions regarding its name.

He reminded us that a paper would greatly add to the school's standing and be a benefit to its pupils. Several names were suggested and discarded.

Then Miss Halvorson spoke up and asked,  
"How would *The Banner* do? "

Mr. Spear jumped out of his seat as he clapped his hands and said, "That's it! We will use that name and add North Dakota to it."

Thus was chosen the name  
*North Dakota Banner*.



How often was the  
*Banner* printed?

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In the beginning, the *Banner*  
was printed every two weeks.

Pupils received the *Banner* at no cost  
however parents were asked  
to pay for their subscription –  
what was the cost for one year?

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50 cents



The *North Dakota Banner*  
served several purposes:

1. Inform parents of events  
that took place at school  
while their children  
lived there.

2. Publish pupils' school work  
for parents to see.



3. Enable pupils opportunity  
to see their school work in print and  
"infuse in them  
the love of reading."

4. Provide trade training  
so when pupils finished  
school they could  
obtain work and  
support themselves.



5. Disseminate news  
to its readership  
including all  
state schools for the deaf  
in the United States.



All schools for the deaf in the United States shared news with each other by exchanging school newspapers. This created a social network that the deaf community referred to as their *Little Paper Family* or *L.P.F.*

Participating in this educational news network kept everyone informed and facilitated the exchange of ideas. Over the years the *Little Paper Family* played an important role in the vocational training and education of deaf people in America.



Superintendent Spear  
submitted the school's  
first fiscal report  
to Governor Burke in 1892  
and wrote the following statement:

"The typesetting and mechanical work of the printing press are all done by the pupils. I take great pride in this department."



1892-1893

By the third school year  
the number of pupils  
had nearly doubled-

42 pupils enrolled.

There was still much  
work to be done but  
Spear's plans to progress  
the school were  
well underway.



Old issues of the *Banner*  
(dating back to the very first issue in 1891)  
are retained in  
the archives of the  
*North Dakota School for the Deaf.*

*Banner*  
stories and photos  
from past years  
document the  
school's heritage.



Following are short  
news clips taken from  
early issues, 1890-1894.

These clips will furnish  
a glimpse into the past.



And elicit a sense  
of compassion for  
the hardships  
endured while Spear  
and his 3 young co-workers  
endeavored to make  
their dream become reality.

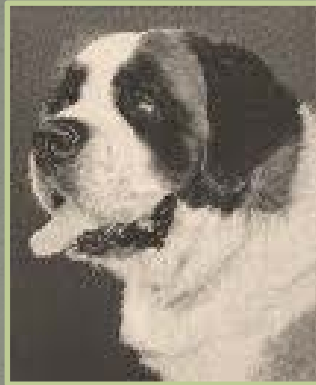
1893 *Banner* - Superintendent Spear protests against the school being called *North Dakota School for the Deaf and Dumb Asylum* and firmly states that "*School for the Deaf*" is in every way preferable.



1892 *Banner* - The school is infested with mice. One night the mice held a meeting in Superintendent Spear's office. They raided his desk and nibbled on papers, bills and postage-stamps. The sticky stuff on the stamps was so good that the mice stored them away. After a search, the stamps were found hidden inside a crevice.



Spear owned  
a pure-bred St. Bernard  
named Kent.



The large dog loved to play  
in the snow with the children



Rex, the school dog, chased away gophers, tramp cats and stray dogs.



Rex

The children loved Rex very much  
Rex accidentally ate poison and died  
The children were heart-broken.

1892 *Banner* - Superintendent Spear turned the schoolroom into a barbershop last week and made monkey heads of the little boys.





1893 *Banner* - Superintendent Spear returned from Bismarck very much disappointed in his efforts to get the school bill passed through the legislature. Unfortunately one-third of the funds we requested were stricken out. That means there can be no admittance of new pupils for two years – there are twenty waiting applications on file.



1894 *Banner* - The boys can no longer enjoy that exhilarating sport of ice skating.



During the thaw they disobeyed Superintendent Spear's order not to skate in the water on the ice. As a consequence their skates were all taken away. A good lesson for the boys.



1892 *Banner* - Mrs. Spear gave birth  
to a baby girl, weighing  
9 ½ pounds.

The baby arrived kicking and  
screaming. She is of the blond type  
like her mother.

The baby is named *Maude*.



1894 *Banner* – Maude is a cute little tot. At the dining table she provides teachers with endless amusement by her way of imitating signs. She is not yet two-years-old but has sufficient vocabulary of *silent language* to make herself plainly understood.

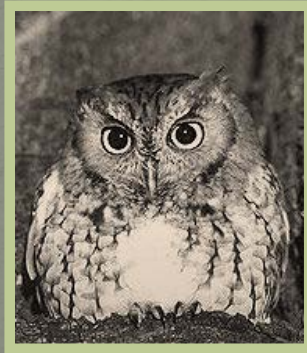
Julia & Anson Spear  
with baby Maude.





Mrs. Spear had a kiln  
and studied the art  
of painting china.

1892 *Banner* - Mrs. Spear tried so hard to tame a screech owl she found during vacation. She kept it in the wood shed for a few days but to our great sorrow it died.





1892 *Banner* – Superintendent Spear  
came down with a horrible fever  
and was ill for several days.  
Mrs. Spear assumed the role of  
*Acting-Superintendent*  
and managed the school affairs  
admirably.



Miss Halvorson enjoyed  
wheeling (biking) -  
during winter months and  
rode her bike daily in the attic  
of Main school  
for exercise.





Miss Halvorson kept  
two peacocks at the school.



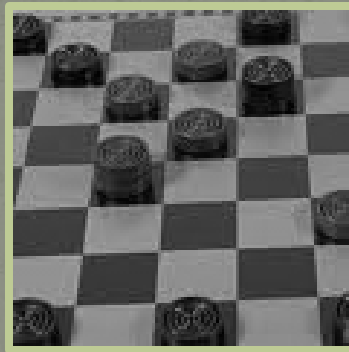


1892 *Banner* - Miss Halvorson had a beautiful canary bird but it flew out through an open window. Of course it did not return and now Miss Halvorson is feeling a little lonesome without her singing bird.





Miss Halvorson's pupils  
enjoyed playing checkers  
with her and felt proud  
when they could beat her.

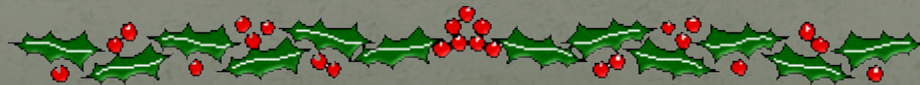




1892 *Banner* – On Halloween night a tub full of water was placed on a low box and a dozen nice apples were set to sail. Tempting as the fruit is to little ones, they were not allowed an apple unless they fished it out with their teeth. There was lively diving going on. Miss Halvorson, childish as ever, had to try the game as well. She got more than an apple; she got her whole head wet.



1894 *Banner* - The Christmas party was a very enjoyable affair. Much of its success was due to the efforts of Miss Halvorson. The pupils' dialogues were done in sign language. The Christmas tree was prettily decorated with colored candles. Hanging from its branches were dolls with chubby hands stretched out. Under the tree was a pile of packages and books. Nearby was a bushel-basket filled with apples, candies and nuts. Promptly at 7:30 P.M. Santa Claus rapped on the window. What followed can only be imagined. After Santa's departure, distribution of presents commenced. Everyone was happy with the gifts received.





1893 *Banner* - Miss Halvorson took a long buggy drive to Fort Totten – the twenty miles was covered in four hours with half an hour for rest.





1892 *Banner* - A fever broke out and nearly all of the pupils were sick. The Superintendent and teachers were also down.

The sickness resulted in the death of three pupils. The three were buried in Devils Lake cemetery as that was the wish of their parents.

I cannot refrain from expressing my deep gratitude to Miss Halvorson for her untiring care of the sick. Frequently she sat up all night tending sick pupils and then took her place in the schoolroom the next day.



Miss Halvorson always  
displayed this motto  
in her classroom:

*In God We Trust*



1892 *Banner* -The pupils in Mr. Axling's class were using their new books to recite "*The wren is a tiny bird, but it is a bold one.*" The door to the school room stood open and at that very moment, and much to everyone's amusement, a little wren flew into the school room. It was caught and shown to each one then given its freedom again.





1892 *Banner* - It is said that editors love the paste-pot and shears but such is not the case with Mr. Axling. A few evenings ago he had just finished applying the brush-to-the-paper and was putting items back on the shelf, when, lo, the paste-pot fell from its high perch and emptied its contents upon the editor's Sunday suit-coat, vest and pants.





The look back  
in time has been brief  
but the heritage  
and the legacy  
continue to this day.

Thank you

Anson Spear

Julia Spear

Philip Axling

Clara Halvorson



You helped write the history  
of education for deaf children  
in North Dakota and your stories  
have become our link to the past.

Future project: scan anniversary issues of the *Banner* including: (50<sup>th</sup> and 75<sup>th</sup>)

NDSD's (pink) 100<sup>th</sup> Centennial issue has already been scanned and can be seen on the website of the ND School for the Deaf.



In commemoration of  
NDSD's 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary,  
a chronological history  
was compiled entitled :

History of North Dakota  
School for the Deaf  
The Early Years  
(1890-1895)

The history book provides,  
in greater detail, the  
day-to-day events that took place  
at the school from 1890 to 1895,  
during the years that Anson Spear  
was Superintendent.



# The History of the North Dakota School for the Deaf, 1890-2009

Power point presentation  
Available at the following website:

[http://www.nd.gov/ndsd/  
History of NDSD 1890 – 2009](http://www.nd.gov/ndsd/History%20of%20NDSD%201890%20-%202009)