

# 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 millenium



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 Hon. 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 establilsh 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

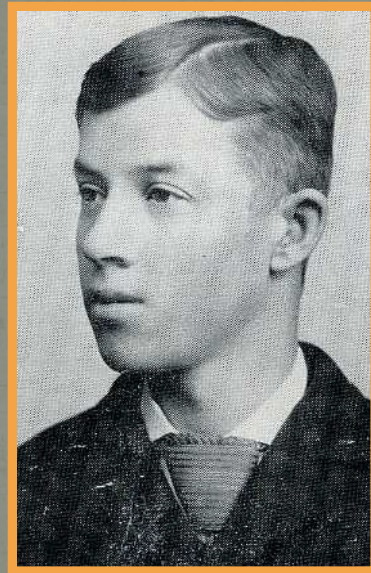


Spear knew of a young deaf man  
who worked as a foreman at the  
*Mandan Daily Pioneer* newspaper

Through letter correspondence  
Spear convinced him to come  
to 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*?

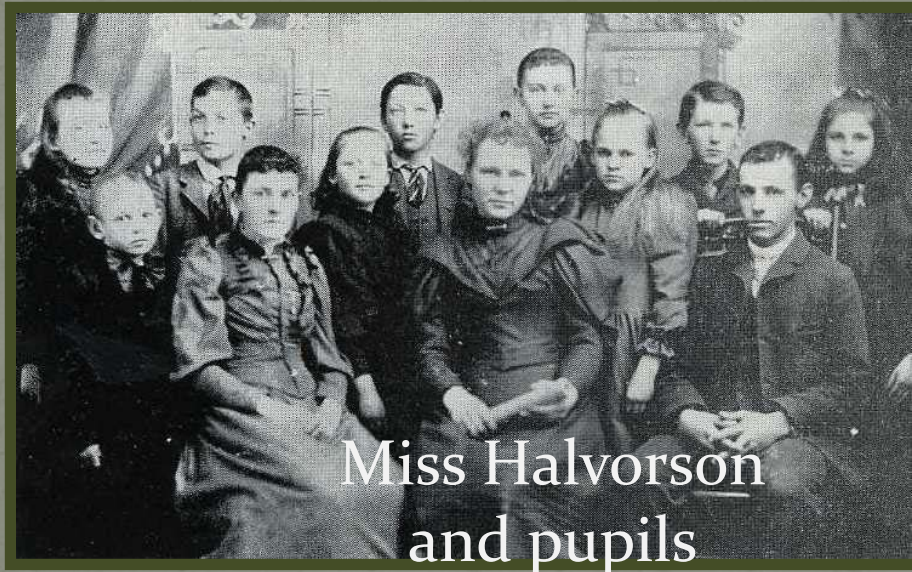
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Clara Halvorson

Who was  
Clara Halvorson?



Clara was the first teacher  
employed at the school



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 Clara  
to teach at the school





Clara Halvorson  
first teacher  
and  
Julia Spear  
Matron  
were sisters





## 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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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:

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

Publish pupils' school work  
for parents to see



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

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



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*  
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  
staff 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

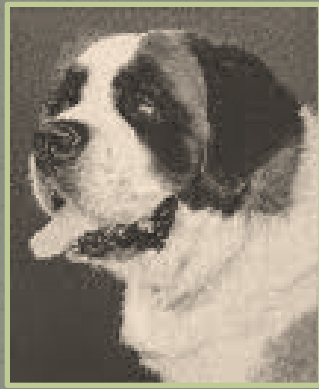


1892 *Banner* - The school is infested with mice. One night the mice held a meeting in Superintendent Spear's office. They raided his desk and nibbled on papers, bills and postage-stamps. The sticky stuff on the stamps was so good that the mice stored them away. After a search, the stamps were found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



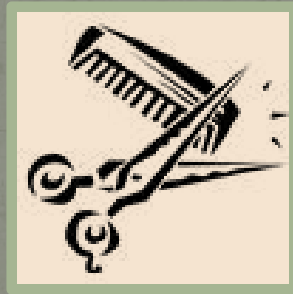
Rex, the school dog, chased away  
gophers, tramp cats and stray dogs



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. Unfortunatley 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 Halovorson 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 Haloverson 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

# Thank you

*NDSD Society* alumni organization  
for maintaining a webpage that  
provides historical facts and  
photos for future generations to see  
The photos can be viewed at:  
<http://ndsdsociety.org>



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  
has been 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/](http://www.nd.gov/ndsd/History%20of%20NDSD%201890%20-%202009)  
History of NDSD 1890 – 2009  
(Printed copies available by contacting  
Communications Coordinator at NDSD)