

William Hanley (c. 1870–Unknown)

First Student and One of the First Five Pupils of the Dakota Territorial School for the Deaf and Mute

William Hanley (born about 1870 in Illinois; death date unknown) is recognized as the first student and one of the First Five Pupils of the Dakota Territorial School for the Deaf and Mute, now known as the South Dakota School for the Deaf (SDSD).

The 1880 United States Census records William as a ten-year-old boy living in Sioux Falls, Minnehaha County, Dakota Territory, with his parents, Thomas Hanley and Jane C. Hanley, and several siblings. The census identifies him as deaf. His parents were born in Ireland, and the family was of Irish descent.

On November 9, 1880, William received his first lesson at the home of Rev. Thomas B. Berry in Sioux Falls, marking the beginning of organized deaf education in Dakota Territory. Early accounts referred to him as William H. Harley; later research strongly suggests this was a recording error and that his correct name was William Hanley.

No confirmed records have yet been located documenting William Hanley's later life or death. Further research may provide additional insight into his life after his enrollment at the school.

First Class of Students



First Class of Students at the Dakota Territorial School for the Deaf and Mute, Sioux Falls, c.1881. William Hanley, the school's first pupil, is believed to be among the students shown.