



Rev. Thomas B. Berry (1846–1918)

Rev. Thomas B. Berry was born on November 18, 1846, in Dublin, Ireland. At the age of 19, he immigrated to New York, where he began teaching at a school for the deaf, led by his older brother. Later, he continued teaching at the Maryland School for the Deaf. In 1873, he entered the ministry of the Episcopal Church. Rev. Berry was widely recognized for his dedication to the happiness and welfare of deaf children.

He married Josephine E. Anderson, a deaf educator who also worked at a school for the deaf. Together, they had three children: Frank T., Amelia E., and later Mary Richards, who was born in Sioux Falls, Dakota Territory.

In the spring of 1880, Rev. Berry became the rector of Calvary Church in Sioux Falls. Observing the development of the Dakota Territory and the growing movement for educational institutions, he recognized the opportunity to establish a school for the deaf. On August 17, 1880, he met with Governor Ordway to discuss this initiative. Governor Ordway supported the idea and encouraged Rev. Berry to pursue the project.

The following month, on October 19, 1880, Rev. Berry met Mr. E.G. Wright, a supporter of the endeavor whose sister, Miss Jennie Wright, was a teacher at the Nebraska School for the Deaf. That same day, Rev. Berry announced in the local newspaper that he would open a school for the deaf in his home on November 2, 1880. However, no students arrived on the planned date.



Rev. Thomas Berry, standing at the left, along with teachers at the school for the deaf

On November 8, 1880, Rev. Berry learned of a deaf boy named William H. Harley. He sought out the boy, and on November 9, William became the first student, receiving his first lesson at Rev. Berry's home. Shortly after, Rev. Berry rented the Thomas Lodging House for the school, where Jennie Wright also resided. Additional students joined, including Hester Black, Harry and Lewis Garrison, and Andrew Sieverson.

With no initial funding from the territorial government, Rev. Berry and Jennie Wright personally covered the school's expenses with the help of donors. They later worked with the territorial legislature to secure funding, obtaining \$5 per week per pupil for operational costs and \$2,000 for the construction of the first school building.

Tragically, on June 18, 1881, Rev. Berry's wife, Josephine, passed away after an illness. Heartbroken, he decided to return to Buffalo, New York, in the fall of 1881 with his children, relinquishing his role at the

school to Jennie Wright. He continued his work as a clergyman and missionary among the deaf in western New York. For nearly 21 years, he served as rector of a church in Buffalo. Later, he became Warden of the DeLancey Divinity School in Geneva, New York, where he received honorary degrees of M.A. and S.T.D. from Hobart College.

Rev. Berry remained active in his ministry until his death on May 12, 1918, in Geneva, New York. His funeral service was held at the Church of the Good Shepherd in Buffalo, and he was laid to rest in Manlius, New York.

His daughter, Amelia, followed in his footsteps, becoming a teacher at the New York Institution for the Deaf.



Tombstone of Rev. Thomas Berry at Manlius, New York

