

# Elizabeth DeLong

Compiled & Written by Jodi Becker Kinner, 2012  
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Utah is honored to have Elizabeth DeLong, known as “Libbie,” who has many *firsts*. She was the *first* Deaf student from Utah to enter Gallaudet College in 1897 and *first* Deaf female Utah college graduate with a bachelor’s degree in 1902. She was also the *first* in the family to complete her college education. She was the *first* Deaf teacher with a degree to teach at the Utah School for the Deaf and was the *first* Deaf female to be called as Superintendent of the Sunday School for the Ogden Branch for the Deaf. She was also the *first* Deaf female president of the Utah Association of the Deaf in 1909 (beating two Deaf male candidates – and this was before women were granted the right to vote in 1920 and were first allowed to vote in the National Association of the Deaf election in 1965). Lastly, Libbie was also the *first* Deaf woman state association president in the entire nation.

Libbie was born hearing on April 2, 1877, in Panguitch, Utah to Albert DeLong and Elizabeth Houston.

At the age of five in 1882, Libbie became Deaf from scarlet fever and smallpox. At home, her mother was busy rearing her large family and wasn’t able to pay much attention to Libbie, but she was very close to her older sister, Dicey. She taught Libbie to practice her speech and served as an “oral” interpreter until she left to go to the Utah School for the Deaf in 1891 (Banks & Banks).



Elizabeth DeLong. Courtesy of FamilySearch

At the age of fourteen, Libbie's life changed forever when she entered the USD which was housed at the University of Deseret in Salt Lake City, Utah. Her close cousin, John Houston



**Elizabeth DeLong as a student at the Utah School for the Deaf in Salt Lake City, about 1895**  
Courtesy of the DeLong Family Saga

Clark, commonly known as "John H." who lost his hearing from spinal meningitis, also attended the USD at the same time (Banks & Banks). There, she began to learn sign language. At school, she was an active participant in extracurricular activities. In February of 1892, Libbie participated in a division given before the State Legislature to demonstrate what was being done at the school. She gave the welcome speech and later participated in a demonstration of lip reading and a recitation of a story told by another person (Banks & Banks). In 1893, Libbie was one of the two storytellers for the Student Literacy Society. During her senior year, she became one of the editors of the student newspaper, The Eaglet (Banks & Banks).

Libbie was a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. While the Utah School for the Deaf was housed at the University of Deseret, she was likely one of the original Latter-day Saints Deaf Mute Sunday School pupils (The Daily Enquirer, February 11, 1892).

On June 8, 1897, Libbie and John H. were only two students from USD to graduate (The Ogden Standard, May 8, 1897). They became the first students from Utah to enter Gallaudet College in Washington, D.C. in the fall of 1897.

On September 15, 1897, Frank M. Driggs, superintendent of the Utah School for the Deaf and Blind, accompanied them by train to their first year at Gallaudet of a four-year course of study (The Ogden Standard, September 15, 1897).



**Elizabeth DeLong, a student at Gallaudet College, about 1902**  
Courtesy of the DeLong Family Saga

The U.S. Government paid for Libbie’s schooling (Banks & Banks). While at Gallaudet, she was active in drama and writing. During her senior year, Libbie was elected associate editor



**Elizabeth DeLong, 1<sup>st</sup> Deaf female president of the Utah Association of the Deaf**

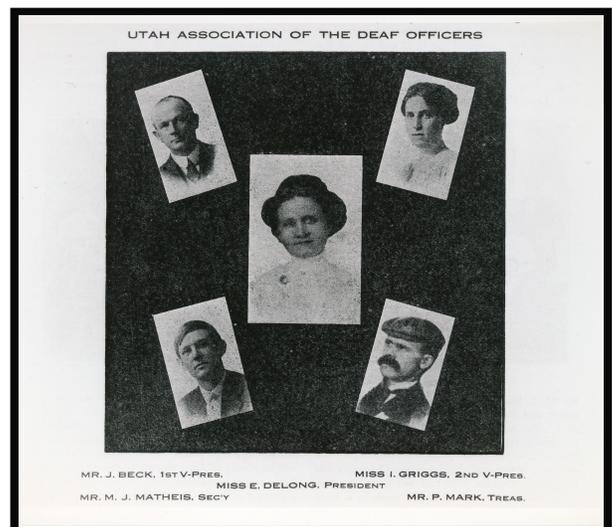
of the college publication called The Buff and Blue, and John H. (also a senior) was elected editor-in-chief (The Ogden Standard, June 19, 1901; Dr. Thomas C. Clark, personal communication, November 13, 2008).

According to the Ogden Standard article (1901), “To be elected editor-in-chief of the college paper has always been considered one of the highest honors, and it is of special note that Utah students obtained two of the positions (1).”

During her last year at Gallaudet, from November 1901 to June 1902, Libbie also wrote a monthly column called “Our Washington Letter for the Utah Eagle.” (The Utah Eagle was the new name of the paper at the USD) (Banks & Banks).

In 1902, Libbie was the first Deaf female Utah college graduate with a bachelor’s degree and the first in her family to have a full college education. She left Washington, D.C. and returned to Ogden, Utah where she began to teach at the USD on September 3, 1902. She continued that position for fifteen years (Banks & Banks). She is believed to be the first Deaf teacher with a degree to teach at that school.

From the time when the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) was founded in 1880, the affiliated state chapter associations were establishing across the country. In 1909, Libbie proposed the formation of the Utah Association of the Deaf for social purposes and welfare needs among USD



**The 1909 Utah Association of the Deaf Officers. Courtesy of J. Willard Marriott Library**

alumni and it was approved by Utah School for the Deaf and Blind Superintendent Frank M. Driggs (Evans, 1999).

On June 10, 1909, the UAD was established at the Utah School for the Deaf under guidance of Superintendent Driggs and the association was emerged from the first alumni reunion (Evans, 1999). During the voting process on the next day, Libbie won the presidential election by 39 votes by beating two Deaf male candidates, Paul Mark (2 votes) and Melville J. Matheis (2 votes). She made the history of becoming the first Deaf female NAD state chapter association president in the entire nation – this is notable, as women were not granted the right to vote for decade until the ratification of the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment in 1919 and Deaf women members were not allowed to vote in the NAD election in 1964. In fact, Libbie was also the first Deaf woman state association president in the nation (The UAD Bulletin, Summer 1963; NAD History). She served as president of the Utah Association of the Deaf from 1909 to 1915. After serving a second term as UAD president, Libbie gave a talk about women’s suffrage at the UAD Convention in 1915 (The UAD Bulletin, Summer 1963).



**Elizabeth and her husband, Loran Savage, about 1930**

**Courtesy of the DeLong Family Saga**

Shortly after the establishment of the Ogden Branch for the Deaf in Ogden, Utah on February 4, 1917, Libbie served as Superintendent of the Sunday School working with three Deaf males, Nephi Larsen, 1<sup>st</sup> Assistant, Grant Morgan, 2<sup>nd</sup> Assistant, and Loran Savage, Secretary (Historical Record Book 4, 1941-1945; Historical Events & Persons Involved Branch for the Deaf, 1992). Libbie is probably the *first* Deaf female Superintendent of the Sunday School for the Deaf.

While teaching at the USD, Libbie met a young man by the name of Thomas Loran Savage, better known as Loran Savage, from Antimony, Utah (Banks & Banks; Roberts, 1994).

They became very well acquainted. At the time, the nature of the residential school allowed the students and staff members to become acquainted as well as become a major place for Deaf individuals to associate with other Deaf people. The result of was that many marriages among Deaf people occurred (Roberts, 1994). Loran was 14 years younger than Libbie, as Loran was born on June 18, 1891. While Loran was a student at USD, he was a very athletic and participated in the school sports division. He especially excelled in basketball. In school, Loran was in training to become a shoemaker (Banks & Banks).

Libbie and Loran Savage married on July 25, 1917 in Panguitch, Utah. They eventually moved to Flagstaff, Arizona, where Loran established his shoe repair business. Libbie gave up her teaching position. Libbie was a very positive influence on her nieces and nephews and she adored them (Banks & Banks).

Libbie and Loran worked well together running a shoe repair business. According to (Banks & Banks), Libbie and her husband shared the esteem of the entire community. She did most of the clerical duties connected with Loran's business, and they were happy "in their constant companionship until her last illness, which however, did not abate her sweet cheerfulness nor his loving devotion" (Banks & Banks).

After fourteen years of marriage, Libbie died of cancer on September 25, 1931, at the age of 57. Her associates remembered her as a bright and attractive personality (Banks & Banks). Her nieces and nephews described "Aunt Lib" as the bright, talented woman she was. They also shared, "With a quick wit and a sense of humor, she never let her deafness keep her from enjoying life and making a success of her life. Her devotion to her nieces and nephews was legendary" (Banks & Banks).

Three years after Libbie's death, Loran and his mother were killed in a car accident, just north of Cedar City (Banks & Banks). Loran was only 42.



**Elizabeth DeLong**  
Courtesy of the DeLong Family Saga

Shortly after the Utah Schools for the Deaf and the Blind (USDB) Administrators saw the story of Elizabeth DeLong, a prominent Deaf Utahn, posted on the Better Days 2020 website (written by Jodi Becker Kinner), they proposed that the new Deaf School in Springville, Utah be named after her.

Upon approval from the Utah State Board of Education and USDB Advisory Council in October 2019, USDB announced a new Deaf School in Springville, Utah. It is known as the “Elizabeth DeLong School of the Deaf,” named in honor of Elizabeth DeLong. The school opened on January 6, 2020 (USDB Website). It is a great way to honor her legacy. It may have been possible that the early Utah’s suffrage movement influenced Libbie to achieve her educational, political, and spiritual aspirations.

Looking back, Libbie was the first in many of her accomplishments and she has inspired people both in her time and today. Utah is fortunate to have her as an inspirational leader on behalf of the Utah Deaf community.



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## Note

Thomas C. Clark, e-mail message to Jodi B. Kinner, November 13, 2008.

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