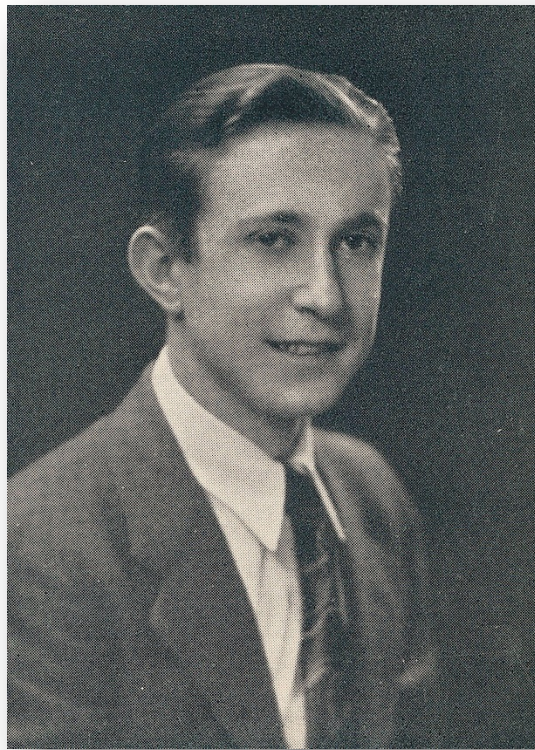


Dr. Robert G. Sanderson

Compiled & Written by Jodi B. Kinner
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Dr. Robert G. Sanderson, known as Bob (and as Sandie to his friends) was born on February 20, 1920 in Las Vegas, Nevada, to George and Fern Sanderson. As a young boy, he lived a carefree life as a country kid until the age of eleven when he was stricken by spinal meningitis (Sanderson, *UAD Bulletin*, March 1992, p. 3). He survived the illness, but was deafened by this disease. There was a national epidemic at this time. He considered himself lucky that he survived the disease. He said during the interview with Rachel J. Trotter, a reporter of the Ogden Standard Examiner, "It killed some kids, left some kids blind and left some kids deaf." According to Trotter, he and his younger sister, Barbara, who also lost her hearing to the same disease, were the only two Deaf people in the town (The Ogden Standard-Examiner, January 2, 2011). Their deafness was a shock to the family.



Robert G. Sanderson, 1936 Utah School for the Deaf Senior

Dr. Sanderson shared in the March 1992 UAD Bulletin issue that since there was no school for the deaf in Las Vegas at the time, he had to return to the same eighth grade public school grammar class that he had been attending prior to his illness. His classmates tried to help; his teacher tried to help; he was given lots of attention and still could not succeed academically. On advice of the teacher and the school principal, he was sent in 1931 to the Utah School for the Deaf (USD) in Ogden along with Barbara. The state of Nevada covered the expenses for Dr.

Sanderson and his sister to move to Ogden to attend USD (Trotter, *The Ogden Standard-Examiner*, January 2, 2011). He graduated from USD in 1936. He shared that his experience at



Robert (second left) and his Utah School
for the Deaf friends

USD had transformed him from a “wild young desert rat” into a disciplined student (Sanderson, *UAD Bulletin*, March 1992, p. 3).

He had an impressive and varied career. Upon graduation from Gallaudet College, he relocated to his home state, Nevada where he worked as an assistant assayer at

a mine and mill in Pioche for a year, and as a chemist/technologist for the U.S. Bureau of Mines, experimental plant in Boulder City, for five years from 1942 to 1946 (Trotter, *The Ogden Standard-Examiner*, January 2, 2011). Dr. Sanderson then moved to Ogden, Utah in 1946 where he obtained employment as a draftsman at the Weber County Recorder’s Office (Newman, 2006).

During Dr. Sanderson’s interview with Diane Urbani, a reporter of Deseret News, she noted that he and his future wife, Mary, knew each other while at the USD, but he paid a little attention since she was years younger. In 1946, friends arranged a blind date for Dr. Sanderson at a convention of the Utah Association of the Deaf in Ogden. It was at this date that he and Mary Margaret Antonietti met, fell in love, and very soon thereafter married in Ogden, on November 9, 1946 (Dr. Robert G. Sanderson, private interview with Valerie Kinney, June 10, 2009). Dr. Sanderson stated in his interview with Urbani, “she never let me forget that I



Mary Margaret Antonietti

ignored her back when we were in school,” he said with a smile (Urbani, *Deseret News*, October 4, 2003).

According to the November 2008 issue of the UAD Bulletin, Mary was active in several organizations serving the Deaf and hard of hearing people. While working and dealing with people, she was modest and seldom ever criticized friends or colleagues (UAD Bulletin, November 2008).

Together they raised two boys, Gary and Barry. Dr. Sanderson credited his wife and two boys who had to put up with many his absences as National Association of the Deaf president due to NAD/UAD work, his regular jobs, and his studies, for his successes (Newman, 2006). During his evenings and weekends he, with Mary helping, built their home in Roy. He had the help and advice of a carpenter. Using his time efficiently, it still took them two years to do it (Dr. Robert G. Sanderson, private interview with Valerie Kinney, June 10, 2009).

After graduating from USD, Dr. Sanderson was encouraged to attend college and went on to Gallaudet College. While a prep student at Gallaudet, he inscribed his name, “Sandie ‘41” on a dormitory window panel, which housed the preps at that time. During the renovation in 1992, the pane of glass with his name on it was removed, framed in original wood from College Hall, and presented to Dr. Sanderson, who in turn, gave it to the Office of Alumni Relations to display in “Ole Jim” (UAD Bulletin, February 1992).



**Robert G. Sanderson, 1941 Gallaudet
College Senior**

As a Gallaudet student, Dr. Sanderson served as president of his class, and was proud of the fact that the class published the first Tower Clock yearbook (Gallaudet's Daily Digest, Board of Trustees Emeritus Robert "Sandie" Sanderson passes away, 2012).

In 1941, he graduated from Gallaudet College with a bachelor's degree, majoring in general studies. When he moved back to Ogden, a friend then hooked him up with a job as a dry cleaner. He said in his 2011 interview with Ms. Trotter, "Imagine that I went to all that school



Robert at Gallaudet College

and was a dry cleaner -- but it opened up the world to me," He experienced other health setbacks and was unable to do his dry cleaning work, so he started working for the Weber County Recorder's Office (Trotter, *The Ogden-Standard Examiner*, January 2, 2011).

He then secured employment with the State Office of Education. For twenty years from 1965 to 1985, Dr. Sanderson served as a statewide coordinator for Deaf adults in the Division of Rehabilitation Services, Utah State Office of Education and Director for the Utah Community Center for the Deaf (Newman, 2006).

Ms. Trotter reported that eventually, Dr. Sanderson still wanted more education and went with his wife and sons to California State University, Northridge, where he received a master's degree in Educational Administration in 1965. There he learned how to work and study (Trotter, *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, January 2, 2011).

Dr. Ray Jones, a professor and director of the Leadership in the Area of the Deaf master's project at San Fernando Valley State College (later California State University – Northridge),

followed up some of the graduates of the project who had earned a master's degree – among them was Robert Sanderson. Dr. Jones persistently challenged the graduates to continue on and earn a doctorate degree. It was that frequent pushing that finally led Dr. Sanderson to get on the doctoral program at Brigham Young University in Provo (Dr. Robert G. Sanderson, private interview with Valerie Kinney, June 10, 2009).

Dr. Sanderson served as president of the Utah Association of the Deaf from 1960 to 1963. From 1964 to 1968, he was the 17th president of the National Association of the Deaf. Bobbie Beth Scoggins, then president of the National Association of the Deaf, noted that the title of President Emeritus was given to



Robert (front, center) and his Gallaudet classmates

Dr. Sanderson at the 1968 National Association of the Deaf conference in Las Vegas hosted by



Robert is running for president at the 1964 National Association of the Deaf conference

Utah Association for the Deaf. He went on to serve as President Emeritus for 44 years. She also reported that Dr. Sanderson as NAD president was recognized as one of the most powerful, inspiring advocates (NADmag, Spring 2012, p. 1). He was considered gutsy at the time when he successfully challenged the 18-year reign of Byron B. Burnes to become the NAD president in 1964 (In Memoriam: NAD President Emeritus Robert G. Sanderson). The March 2000 UAD Bulletin issue reported that during his term as NAD president, Dr. Sanderson moved the

NAD Home Office from Berkeley, California to Washington, D.C. in 1965. Although it was a financially risky thing to do, he had the full support of the officers. Additionally, his presidency led to the appointment of Frederick C. Schreiber, the first NAD executive director who was the creation of youth programs, such as Junior NAD, Miss Deaf America and Youth Leadership Camp. Dr. Sanderson was re-elected as NAD president in 1966. He also served a total of 14 of years on the NAD Board of Directors from 1969 to 1974 (In Memoriam: NAD President Emeritus Robert G. Sanderson).

Notably, Dr. Sanderson allowed Deaf women to vote and Black Deaf individuals to become members as well as to vote in 1965 (UAD History).

When Dr. Sanderson was interviewed by Lawrence R. Newman for the publication of *Sands of Time: NAD Presidents 1880 – 2003* book, he said, “Today I believe the NAD is much stronger. The changes are positive. Our dream of having a permanent, stable Home Office came true. The NAD is financially viable.”

At the time, there were no Deaf individuals with doctorate level degrees in Utah. Dr. Sanderson decided to further his education and show what could be done. While a student at Brigham Young University, he commuted from Roy to Provo while working full-time. In 1974, he became the first deaf person at BYU and in Utah to receive a Doctor of Education degree. In addition, he was the first and only totally deaf graduate of USD and deaf Utahn to earn a doctorate (Deseret News, September 26, 2003).



Frederick C. Schreiber and Robert in the 1960s

Dr. Sanderson was appointed as the first state coordinator of services to deaf people in the United States on November 16, 1965 (Sanderson, 2004). He was a leader and a pioneer in



Robert G. Sanderson
UAD Bulletin, Winter 1965

opening up job training and jobs in Utah (Dr. Robert Sanderson & Valerie Kinney, personal communication, July 8, 2011). During his interview with Ms. Trotter, he said that his new job as a coordinator became his passion. When he started, only 11 people were in the program. After a few short years there were 200. He was swamped, but was discovering many things. He realized the deaf needed interpreters to succeed, so he held workshops across the United States to recruit interpreters. He found that those who could hear but had parents who could not were perfect candidates. His next goal was to help people understand that [American] sign language was an actual language, with syntax and grammar, that needed to be taught in college so deaf people would have more life opportunities. That

also became his passion (Trotter, *The Ogden Standard-Examiner*, January 2, 2011). Over the years, Dr. Sanderson became a “rehab man,” counselor, coordinator, and director. He was known as the “Father of Vocational Rehabilitation.”

According to the Deseret News, Dr. Sanderson was appointed the first director for the Utah Community Center for the Deaf in January 1983. He was also the first deaf professional hired by the Utah State Board of Education for this position and was a pioneer of services for deaf adults in Utah. He



Robert Sanderson, new National Association of the Deaf President receives congratulations at dinner with his friends in the Ramada Inn, July 30, 1964
The UAD Bulletin, Summer 1964

lobbied on behalf of deaf and hard of hearing Utahns for more than 40 years. Many of the services provided to the deaf community today were his original ideas (September 26, 2003). Trotter reported that Dr. Sanderson attributed much of his success in his life to connections with friends who opened doors for him (Trotter, *The Ogden Standard-Examiner*, January 2, 2011).

Lawrence R. Newman reported in his *Sands of Time: NAD Presidents 1880 – 2003* book that Dr. Sanderson had a secondary

career teaching American Sign Language, social, psychological and cultural aspects of deafness. He taught as an adjunct assistant professor of the Division of Communication Disorders at the University of Utah from 1978 to 1985. From 1985 to 1986, he was an adjunct instructor, teaching in the Department of Communication Disorder at the Utah State

University. Dr. Sanderson also

became an adjunct instructor for the Department of Health, Recreation and Leisure at the University of Utah. Lastly, he served as an adjunct instructor for the Division of Continuing Education at Weber State University. After retirement, Dr. Sanderson still found time to teach sign language occasionally at local high schools (Newman, 2006).



Dr. Sanderson, a member of Gallaudet University Board of Trustees

While Ms. Trotter was interviewing Dr. Sanderson in 2011 for the *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, he reported the ASL programs for recruiting interpreters and using them at the college level was getting national recognition. Colleges and universities started picking up his programs. That gave him a great satisfaction. He said, "By the year 2000, colleges and universities across the United States finally realized [ASL] sign language is a real language," (Trotter, *The Ogden Standard-Examiner*, January 2, 2011).

Dr. Sanderson served in numerous Gallaudet functions. He was a charter member of Gallaudet College Board of Fellows, which was established in 1970 as an advisory group, and served on the board until 1982. He was a member of the Gallaudet College (later University) Board of Trustees from 1982 to 1994 and held the title of trustee emeritus. Upon his death in 2012, his last role was Board of Trustees Emeritus. He was also selected as a professor of Gallaudet's prestigious Powrie Vaux Doctor Chair of Deaf Studies from 1981 to 1982.

During the Deaf President Now Protest at Gallaudet University in 1988, Dr. Sanderson, as a member of the Board of Trustees, supported a deaf president for the university and opposed the choice of a hearing president. Dr. I. King Jordan was eventually hired as the first deaf president (UAD Bulletin, April 1988).



Dr. Sanderson shakes hand with US President Bill Clinton at the 1994 Gallaudet University graduation

Dr. Sanderson was as well known nationally as he was locally. With his advanced education, successful careers during and after retirement in 1985, he contributed his varied knowledge, skills, and abilities and gave generously of his time and energy to serve as officer or board member in the following organizations:

- National Association of the Deaf, President Emeritus
- National Fraternal Society of the Deaf, President Emeritus
- Utah Association for the Deaf, President Emeritus
- Utah Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf
- National Rehabilitation Association, Utah Chapter
- American Deafness and Rehabilitation Association
- National Technical Institute for the Deaf, National Advisory Group
- Gallaudet College Board of Fellows

- Gallaudet University Board of Trustees
- University of California San Francisco, National Advisory Committee, Center on Deafness,
- Utah Schools for the Deaf and the Blind, Institutional Council
- 2007 Winter Deaflympics, Utah, board member

Dr. Sanderson also served on various committees dealing with deafness:

- Utah Relay System for the Deaf Advisory Committee
- Utah State Interpreter Certification Board
- Utah State Board of Education Task Force to study Utah Schools for the Deaf and the Blind
- UAD Bulletin, editorial subcommittee of the monthly UAD Bulletin
- Utah Association for the Deaf Task Force
- Davis Applied Technology College, Advisory Committee for the development of an interpreter training program

In 1979, Dr. Sanderson received the first Golden Hand Award given by the Utah Association for the Deaf (UAD Bulletin, July 1979). In 1999, Dr. Sanderson also received the Presidential Award in recognition of his long time service, commitment and loyalty to the same organization (UAD Bulletin, June 1999).

After his retirement in 1985, Dr. Sanderson did not sit around and twiddle his thumbs. He was actively involved in the Utah Relay System; Utah Mentor Project, Utah Schools for the Deaf and the Blind Institutional Council, the Utah State Interpreter Certification Board, and more (UAD Bulletin, July 2006).



Robert as a young man

As explained in the “History of the Robert G. Sanderson Community Center,” on October 4, 2003, a state building in Taylorsville, originally named Utah Community Center of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and housing comprehensive services for the deaf and hard of hearing citizens of Utah was renamed the Robert G. Sanderson Community Center of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in recognition of his efforts in behalf of the deaf community (Deseret News, September 26, 2003). Dr. Sanderson published a book entitled A Brief History of the Origins of the Robert G. Sanderson Community Center of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, on March 9, 2004.



Dr. Sanderson receives congratulations from members of the Deaf Community, October 4, 2003

Lawrence R. Newman recognized Dr. Sanderson as “concerned and diplomatic, a good listener, willing to be helpful and to share crucial parts of his wide gamut of rich and varied experience. Dr. Sanderson has always been an advocate of the deaf, nationally and locally” (Newman, 2006).

During the 2003 interview, Diane Urbani noted that Dr. Sanderson had a long list of public achievements, but he was the proudest of the personal ones. He said, “I have two great

boys, two great grandchildren, a good wife. What more can a man want?” (Deseret News, October 4, 2003).



In 2007, Dr. Robert G. Sanderson was invited and served on the 16th Winter Deaflympics Board of Directors.

In 2010, the Gallaudet University Board of Trustees voted to award an honorary doctorate degree to Dr. Sanderson for his outstanding leadership in the Deaf community, in his



Dr. Sanderson (standing far right) and the Utah Association for the Deaf Officers, 1971

home state of Utah and across the nation, for more than 60 years. He received the honor on May 14 during the Gallaudet University 141st Commencement exercises (UAD Bulletin, June 2010). He was devoted to the Deaf community on the national and local level for most of his life.

Dr. Sanderson himself was a testimonial to his own words: “Deafness per se does not prevent a person from accomplishing what he sets out to do if he really wants to do it” (UAD Bulletin, March 2000, p.1).

During his spare time, he enjoyed working with his hands and built the family home in Roy from drawing the plans to making the beautiful knotty pine cabinets. He also enjoyed fishing with his grandson and long, lively political discussions with his Deaf friends (Dr. Robert G. Sanderson, private interview with Valerie Kinney, June 10, 2009).

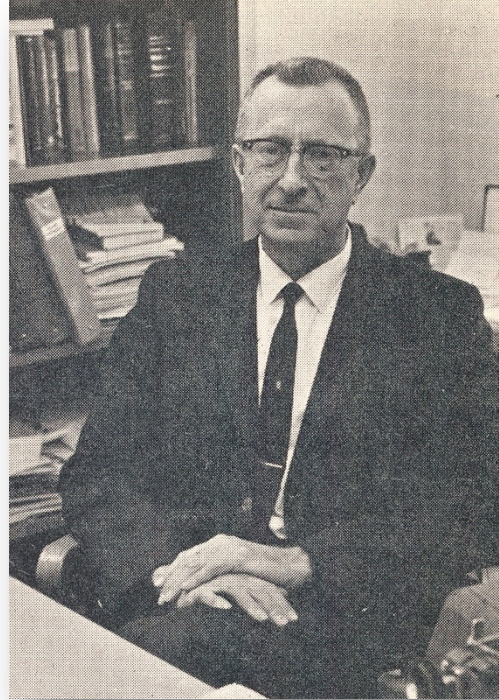
On February 25, 2012, Dr. Sanderson passed away at the age of 92, just 5 days after his 92nd birthday. He had a hematoma (bleeding) in his brain from two separate falls. While he remained in the hospital, Marilyn Call, Director of the Sanderson Community Center, visited him and wrote a message on his whiteboard to the nurses who took care for him. She told them “Bob is a giant of a man whose advocacy has helped change the world for thousands of Deaf people. This man is so special he has a great big community center named for him in SLC” (Marilyn Call, personal communication, February 23, 2012).

As Marilyn sat in his room for a few quiet moments, she thought about his mom who was probably so upset when he and his sister [Barbara] became Deaf from illness as children. Then, she realized things usually happen for a reason and we needed to trust God's plan for each of us. What if Bob Sanderson had not become deaf? Would he have just lived an ordinary life instead of a life of greatness? What if his parents didn't let him learn sign language and embrace the deaf Community? Would he have become a lonely introvert? (Marilyn Call, personal communication, February 23, 2012).

The March 2012 UAD Bulletin issue emphasized that for more than 60 years, Dr. Sanderson had been a strong advocate for the state's Deaf and Hard of Hearing citizens. His last role was as president emeritus with the Utah Association for the Deaf, capping his advocacy for the Utah Deaf community. He served the association in many capacities, one of which was as president. Through his work with the association, and with other local Deaf leaders, he began decades long work towards seeing to that Utah Deaf people received services on par with hearing people.

Upon his death, his last role was also as president emeritus with the National Association of the Deaf. Except from the “In Memoriam: NAD President Emeritus Robert G. Sanderson” webpage reads:

“He dedicated his entire life to the advancement of the American Deaf community nationally as well as in his home state of Utah.”



**Dr. Sanderson, Rehabilitation Coordinator
The UAD Bulletin, Summer 1968**

NAD President Bobbie Beth Scoggins stated, “NAD President Emeritus Robert G. ‘Sandie’ Sanderson was a true giant who humbly walked alongside anyone who shared his passion for hard work, volunteerism, and dedication to the betterment of our lives. Those who review his career and civic endeavors would be amazed at how much he truly accomplished, and we thank the state of Utah for allowing us to share in his legacy of tireless advocacy on behalf of the American deaf and hard of hearing community” (In Memoriam: NAD President Emeritus Robert G. Sanderson - <http://www.nad.org/news/2012/3/memoriam-nad-president-emeritus-robert-g-sanderson>).



Dr. Robert G. Sanderson

Dr. Sanderson is survived by his son, Barry and his wife Teresa, granddaughter McKalle and fiancée Ty Dahl, and grandson Rob and his wife Nicole. He was predeceased by Mary, his wife of 62 years, on October 6, 2008, and his elder son, Gary, on May 12, 2011. A memorial service was held on March 31 at the Robert G. Sanderson Community Center of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (UAD Bulletin, March 2012). In conclusion, Dr. Sanderson was a true giant of man for his efforts in behalf of the Deaf community. The state of Utah is very fortunate to gain recognition through his tireless dedication, exceptional leadership, and outstanding contributions to both local and national Deaf community. In addition, the state of Utah is proud to name the Robert G. Sanderson Community Center of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in honor of Dr. Sanderson. His name will be long remembered.



Dr. Robert G. Sanderson

Notes

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