

Kenneth C. Burdett

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Kenneth C. Burdett, commonly known as KB was born hearing in Evanston, Wyoming on October 20, 1909 to Charles Lyman and Sarah Thomas Burdett. At the age of two, he became seriously ill with measles and chicken pox at the same time and lost his hearing (Ronald & Joyanne Burdett, personal communication, October 27, 2011).

On January 16, 1916, Charles and Sarah enrolled Kenneth at the Utah School for the Deaf because the State of Wyoming did not offer educational opportunities for Deaf children at that time. Thereafter, he spent his school year in Ogden as a resident student at the school (USD), and was home with his family in Evanston during the summers and during holidays (Ronald & Joyanne Burdett, personal communication, October 27, 2011).

As a young student, when he was not occupied with studies, Kenneth spent his time in sports, both in and out of school. His enthusiasm and love of life drew many friends and Kenneth loved to spend time with them, whether it was with hunting, fishing, playing sports, or other activities. He was a natural leader and inspiration for many with whom he associated (Ronald &



**Kenneth C. Burdett, 1929 Utah School for the Deaf
Senior**

Joyanne Burdett, personal communication, October 27, 2011).

After completing his undergraduate studies at Utah School for the Deaf, Kenneth entered Gallaudet College in Washington, D. C., in the fall of 1929, and spent the next five years there. His collegiate life was filled with studies, varsity sports and other campus activities.



**Kenneth, a student at Gallaudet College
(1929-1934)**

He played on the Gallaudet basketball team from 1931 to 1934 and was a member of the Kappa Gamma Fraternity starting in his freshman year. He was also actively involved as a printer for the Buff and Blue magazine of Gallaudet. He graduated with honors in the spring of 1934

(Gallaudet
University
Alumni Cards,
1866-1957).

Although Kenneth had several options for work after graduation, he chose to return to his alma mater, USD, and a career in teaching. In the beginning, he worked as a teacher during the school day and as a dormitory counselor at night. For the first two years he taught social studies and mathematics. In 1936, he was appointed as a printing instructor in addition to his other teaching assignments. During the summer of 1936 he attended linotype school in Chicago, Illinois. Further training in photography was obtained at Weber State College. Thereafter, Kenneth pursued continuing

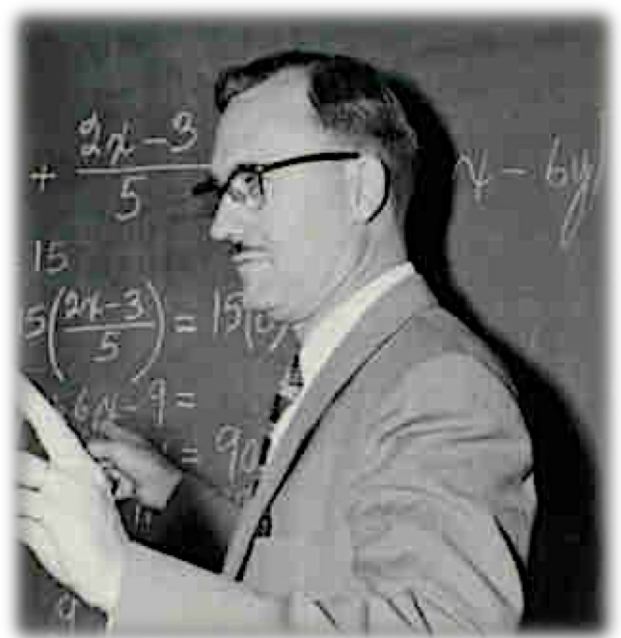


Kenneth, 1934 Gallaudet Graduate

education training in teaching, printing and photography at the University of Utah, Utah State University, and Brigham Young University. This core of teaching responsibilities and educational development continued, thus, through 1963 (Ronald & Joyanne Burdett, personal communication, October 27, 2011).

During those forty years, the printing department was significantly developed and organized under Kenneth's direction. As printing instructor, Kenneth was also editor of the "Utah Eagle," a monthly magazine of USD (Ogden Standard-Examiner, May 23, 1974). This publication was a constant teaching tool under Kenneth's direction and stood as an ongoing tribute to USD and its students. It is remarkable that throughout those years Kenneth never missed a single publishing deadline. He always worked diligently after school hours and on weekends to complete the work in hand (Ronald & Joyanne Burdett, personal communication, October 27, 2011).

On September 1, 1963, Kenneth was called to be Curriculum Coordinator of the Total Communication Department (Ogden Standard-Examiner, May 23, 1974). This appointment was carried out on a half-time basis in addition to his teaching responsibilities for the next ten years. In 1973, Kenneth was promoted to be the full time Curriculum Coordinator of the Total Communication Division of USD, a position he held until his retirement in May 1974. In a 1981 publication, a well-known book entitled, "Deaf Heritage: A Narrative History of Deaf America" written by Jack Gannon, a Deaf author, Kenneth is recognized for his influential role as Curriculum Coordinator for the Total Communication Division at the Utah School for the Deaf" (Gannon, 1981).



Kenneth teaching math, 1960

During his forty-year career, Kenneth's work ethics, his positive nature and influence were exemplary. His response was always wholehearted and immediate. No job was ever too difficult nor any day too long. His deep love for the students at USD was always manifested by

his attendance at any and all school functions involving students. Besides his teaching duties, he served as head basketball coach and athletic director from 1934 to 1946. He continuously gave of



Afton & Kenneth. Marriage Ceremony in the Ogden Branch for the Deaf, July 29, 1936

himself as an advisor of various student organizations, including the student council, as well as on many faculty committees. Kenneth was a perfectionist in his own right and always demanded the very best efforts of his students. Graduates of his printing classes were always in demand, with the vast majority of “his” printers being gainfully employed, often through his own efforts in locating employment opportunities for them (Ronald & Joyanne Burdett, personal communication, October 27, 2011).

In Kenneth’s keynote address at the 25th Biennial Convention of the Utah Association for the Deaf in 1973, Dr. Jay J. Campbell, Deputy Superintendent of Utah State Office of Education and staunch supporter of the deaf, spoke on “Humanizing Education”— making education a warm and personal thing (UAD Bulletin, June 1973; Ronald & Joyanne Burdett, personal communication,

2011). This was not something new to Kenneth or his students. He had always embodied this concept and exemplified it by his actions throughout his career.

Kenneth and Afton Curtis, a USD graduate of 1933, grew up together as friends at USD. They didn’t begin dating until his senior year at Gallaudet while Afton was in her freshman year. With Kenneth’s graduation from Gallaudet, Afton returned to Utah rather than



Afton & Kenneth, 1954

continue with her own studies at Gallaudet. These were years of the Great Depression and Afton's family could not afford to support her tuition fees any longer (She worked as a maid to President Percival Hall of Gallaudet University for several months). Her interest in Kenneth drew her back to Utah as well. On July 29, 1936, they were married at the Ogden Branch for the Deaf of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, the first couple to be married there.



**Kenneth, a Curriculum Instructor. Supervising the simultaneous academic department of the Utah School for the Deaf, 1968
The UAD Bulletin, Summer 1968**

The marriage was later sealed in the Salt Lake Temple on September 5, 1941. They had two children, JoAnn (hearing) in August 1945 and Ronald (Deaf) in September 1947 (Gallaudet University Alumni Cards, 1866-1957; The Utahan Yearbook, 1974; Obituary of Kenneth C. Burdett; Ronald & Joyanne Burdett, personal communication, October 27, 2011).

At USD, Afton first worked as a girl's counselor, and then, as teacher of physical education, home economics, typing and shorthand. She very much wanted to teach the core subjects of English, and history, but couldn't qualify to teach them without a bachelor's degree. Thus, while teaching the auxiliary classes at USD and raising two children,

she enrolled at Weber State College (later renamed Weber State University) where she became the first Deaf student to receive an Associate of Science degree there. After completion, she furthered her education at Utah State University and was the first Deaf person at USU to complete a Bachelor degree, which she did with honors in Elementary Education on June 6, 1959. Kenneth supported her throughout this effort by taking over much of the household responsibilities with the help of his children and by taking on a printing job at night, which helped pay her tuition fees (Gallaudet University Alumni Cards, 1866-1959; Tegeder, *The Utah Eagle*, October 1959; Ronald Burdett, personal communication, May 13, 2009).

With her degree in hand, Afton looked forward to the teaching career she had been seeking. However, just a year after graduation, Afton passed away suddenly from a heart condition on August 23, 1960, when JoAnn was just 15 and Ronald was about to turn 13. Kenneth not only lost his wife that year, but both of his parents as well; his father, in March 1960 and his mother in November 1960. With this stunning turn of events, he turned more intensely to his teaching and to his family to ease his sorrow (Ronald & Joyanne Burdett, personal communication, October 27, 2011).

Kenneth eventually became remarried to longtime friend, Priscilla Steele Rogerson, originally from Oklahoma, on June 19, 1965 in Tucson, Arizona, and acquired additional family of the three Rogerson boys: Terrance Blaine, Richard Leroy and Charles Lee. Priscilla was the widow of Earl Rogerson. Years before, in 1944, Priscilla and Earl Rogerson settled in Ogden after Earl was hired at USD to teach printing and chemistry. Prior to this history, Kenneth had been Earl's printing instructor when Earl attended USD before he left for college at Gallaudet. Throughout those early years in the 1940's, the two couples, Kenneth and Afton and Priscilla and Earl, became good friends and spent many enjoyable hours together camping and boating. Priscilla made clothes for JoAnn and Ronald after their births, never dreaming she would one day be part of their family. In the late 40's, the Rogersons moved from Ogden to Tucson where Earl taught at the Arizona School for the Deaf for the next 20 years. Earl passed away in July 1962. After their marriage in 1965, Kenneth and Priscilla shared 35 years together (Priscilla Burdett, personal communication, April 7, 2009).



Priscilla & Kenneth
Photo by Robert L. Bonnell

May 24, 1974 was a memorable day in the history of the Utah School for the Deaf as present and former teachers, former students, friends and neighbors came to pay tribute to Kenneth C. Burdett. Films taken by Kenneth over past decades, showing class trips, graduations, and memorable campus activities, were highlighted. On behalf of USD, Superintendent Robert



Kenneth's algebra class, 1954

W. Tegeder

presented a plaque honoring Kenneth for his forty years of service. He was also awarded a set of golf clubs among other gifts to encourage new adventures in sports and the outdoors. In addition, Priscilla

had arranged for surprise arrivals during the ceremony of Kenneth's son, Ron, and his wife, Joyanne from Fremont, California, and JoAnn and her two very young children from St. Louis, Missouri. Throughout his lifetime and remarkable career, Kenneth gave unselfish service to USD. Not only did he serve the school as a professional for four decades from 1934 to 1974, he spent fifty-two years, all together, directly involved at USD in his many roles: as a student, Boy's Supervisor, Head Basketball Coach, Athletic Director, Teacher, Printing Instructor, and Curriculum Coordinator. In addition, he was an active member of the Utah Association for the Deaf, the National Fraternal Society



Kenneth, Basketball coach

for the Deaf and the Golden Spike Athletic Club for the Deaf (Ogden Standard-Examiner, May 23, 1974). He will always be remembered for the endless assistance given to student athletics, his deep love for his students (Ogden Standard-Examiner, May 23, 1974), and as an inspirational leader who believed in the growth potential of each individual student (Kenneth L. Kinner, personal communication, 2006). In essence, he was a consummate teacher and coach who inspired youth and all those with whom he came into contact (Dr. Robert Sanderson & Valerie Kinney, personal communication, July 8, 2011).

After retirement, Kenneth turned his energies and focus to preserving the heritage of the Utah School for the Deaf. He and a team of volunteers spent immeasurable amounts of time and



Kenneth's bulletin board of the Utah School for the Deaf, 1976

effort putting together booklets for the “First Reunion of the Utah School for the Deaf Alumni, 1976” and also “A Century of Memories: Utah School for the Deaf 100th Year Anniversary Alumni Reunion, 1984,”

consisting of history and pictures of USD dating back to its foundation in 1884. For the first reunion of the Utah School for the Deaf in 1976, Kenneth and his team pasted the USD historical pictures on both sides of eight 4 x 8 foot bulletin boards, permanently covered with a special Mod Podge to preserve them from deterioration so that USD alumni could remember their fond memories and appreciate the history of USD for years to come. The images describe activities and scenes of campus life including academics, athletics, commencement exercises, superintendents, principals, vocational programs, buildings and grounds, support services, student activities, houseparents/supervisors, and deaf organizations in Utah. Without his efforts, much of this history would have been lost or remained disorganized. Kenneth also created the films entitled,

“A History of the Utah School for the Deaf: 1940-1965” and “Alumni Reunion 1976.” Without his efforts, much of this history would have been lost or remained disorganized.

Kenneth was a proponent of organizations for the deaf. He was one of the charter members of the Ogden Division #127 of the National Fraternal Society of the Deaf and its first president. For his dedicated service over two decades, he received its highest award, the 34th degree of Society. The Utah Association for the Deaf was another organization of which he was a member for many years, and gave unselfishly of his time. In addition, as a keen sportsman, Kenneth was a longtime member and supporter of the Golden Spike Athletic Club for the Deaf in Ogden.

In 1976 at the age of 66, Kenneth received two awards for his contributions in teaching Deaf students. He was one



Kenneth (far left, bottom) with members of the National Fraternal Society of the Deaf

of thirteen members named to the National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Hall of Fame, and he received the Gold Key Award from the Utah Governor’s Committee on Employment of the Handicapped. In receiving the Gold Key Award during a special ceremony in the Salt Palace in Salt Lake City, Dr. Roy Gibson, a professor at University of Utah, especially stressed the impact of Kenneth’s forty-year career on the education of Utah’s Deaf and cited him for a record of “outstanding service” to the society and to his community (The Ogden Standard-Examiner, May 19, 1976).

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was an important part of Kenneth’s life. He served compassionately in many capacities in church activities at the Ogden Branch for the

Deaf and served in his calling as President of the Young Men's Mutual Improvement Association for twenty-seven years. For his dedication and service, Kenneth was awarded the rare honor of an Honorary Master M Men certificate and pin (given to men who had done outstanding work in some field such as athletics, administration, drama, scouting, etc and who



Kenneth C. Burdett, 1958

had devoted a good deal of their lives to youth) for his outstanding work among the deaf. He was the first Deaf man to be so honored, and at that time, he was one of only twenty-seven men in the entire LDS Church to receive this honor.

Kenneth was a coach for the Ogden Branch for the Deaf's basketball team, which won the Ogden Stake tournament twice. In 1943, Boyd E. Nelson, Superintendent of the Utah School for the Deaf shared this thought:

“Coach and Mrs. Burdett are splendid players in this game of life. Their earnest endeavors and exemplary living reflect in the fine characters of our pupils. As Mr. Burdett's adherence to the rules of fair play, untiring effort, and clean sport is inspired by his charming wife, so do these qualities spread with contagion to the boys whom they guide. In the

recent basketball games, our boys demonstrated to the general public the results of fine coaching, and the type of leadership, which builds substantial American citizenship. Our children and school owe much to Supervisor, Teacher and Coach Kenneth Burdett and to Defense Worker, Scout Leader and Helpmate, Afton Burdett.”

- Boyd E. Nelson (Nelson, *The Utah Eagle*, March 1943)

As mentioned previously, throughout Kenneth's life, he loved the outdoors. With his family, whether the Burdetts, Curtis's, or the Rogersons, and with friends from USD and Gallaudet years, he especially enjoyed fishing, hunting, and camping. A significant amount of time was spent each summer camping as a family with tents and their boat in the Jackson Hole/Yellowstone area, enthusiastically fishing, boating, and water skiing on Jackson Lake. Extended family members and friends loved to join the Burdett's at their encampment for a few days whenever possible (Ronald & Joyanne Burdett, personal communication, October 27, 2011).

At the age of 90, Kenneth passed away peacefully in his home on June 29, 2000. He will always be loved and remembered by USD students, the Utah Deaf community and those who knew him. He was admired for his significant talents and his abilities, loved for his sense of humor; appreciated for his friendship and respected for his gentlemanliness (The Salt Lake Tribune, A13).



Kenneth C. Burdett
Photo by Robert L. Bonnell

HISTORY OF THE NAMING OF THE SCHOOL:

On August 23, 2011, the ASL/English Bilingual program at the Ogden Campus was officially named in honor of Kenneth C. Burdett because of his long history connected to the Utah School for the Deaf (USD). Trena Roueche', an USD Associate Superintendent, had previously determined that the North Division program of USD should have a special name. She and others in the program felt that using the name of a Deaf individual especially would help students establish a connection to Deaf culture and community. This would, in turn, help them gain a stronger identity as a Deaf person. One of the Jean Massieu School teachers, Michelle Tanner referred Jodi B. Kinner, an amateur historian to Trena for collecting the history of the Utah School for the Deaf and biographies of prominent Deaf Utahns. Excited with the prospect of naming the USD North Division after a Deaf person, Jodi shared the news with her father-in-law, Kenneth L. Kinner, a former student of Kenneth's. He asked, "Why not Kenneth C. Burdett?" Thrilled with this suggestion, Jodi immediately recommended that Trena put his name on the ballot.



Ron, Joyanne and JoAnn, 2011

Continuing the naming process, three names were chosen from all that were suggested to submit to the USD community for a vote: Kenneth C. Burdett, Henry C. White and Elizabeth Wood. These individuals were chosen with input from past and present administrators, parents, and students of USD. Each was chosen because of the impact he/she has had on the education of Deaf students in Utah. As a result of all votes entered, Kenneth C. Burdett won with the most votes. Kenneth Kinner is credited with his thoughtful recommendation because over the years, Kenneth C. contributed unselfish service to the USD. He served the school for four decades from 1934 to 1974. He spent his fifty-two years at the USD as a student, Boy's Supervisor, Head Basketball Coach, Athletic Director, Teacher, Printing Instructor, and Curriculum Coordinator.

On September 29, 2011, the Utah School for the Deaf held a Plaque Hanging Ceremony in honor of Kenneth C. Burdett. Ronald, his wife, Joyanne and his sister, JoAnn, shared heartfelt memories of their father. The plaque along with a portrait of Kenneth are now hanging in the hall at the Kenneth C. Burdett School of the Deaf. His name will long be remembered (Kinner, UAD Bulletin, December 2011).

Notes

Kenneth L. Kinner, e-mail message to Jodi B. Kinner, April 17, 2011.

Priscilla Burdett, e-mail message to Jodi B. Kinner, April 7, 2009.

Robert Sanderson & Valerie Kinney, e-mail message to Jodi B. Kinner, July 8, 2011.

Ronald Burdett, e-mail message to Jodi B. Kinner, May 13, 2009.

Ronald Burdett, e-mail message to Jodi B. Kinner, September 29, 2011.

Ronald & Joyanne Burdett, e-mail message to Jodi B. Kinner, October 27, 2011.

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