

# Rodney W. Walker

Compiled & Written by Jodi B. Kinner  
2012

Rodney W. Walker was born Deaf at home on February 23, 1914 in Driggs, Idaho. His older brother, Emerson was also Deaf. In 1917, Emerson died from a ruptured appendix at the age of 5, which left Rodney (not necessary as) the only Deaf member in the family. He and his family invented and communicated in home signs. Life was isolated for him as a child (Walker, 2006). During the interview for the LDS Church News, Rodney noted, "My family used some minimal home signs, but I often felt a lack of full communication" (First sealer serving in Salt Lake Temple, LDS Church News, August 8, 1998).

While attending a public school near his home, he could not comprehend his teacher and hearing pupils. It was decided that he would attend a special school. At the age of 5 in 1919, his parents and a friend took Rodney in their family's 1916 Cadillac touring car from Driggs, Idaho to the Utah School for the Deaf in Ogden, Utah. There, he learned from his peers the manual alphabet and signs (Walker, 2006).

He did not learn the gospel until the about age 11 where he began to attend the Ogden Branch for the Deaf. At this time, students above 10 years old, and residents



Rodney W. Walker, 1933 Utah School for  
the Deaf Senior

of the Main Building, and who were members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, attended the Branch for the Deaf. Rodney served in many church callings such as Deacon and Priest. In addition, he attended the Young Men's Mutual Improvement Association classes as well as activities (Walker, 2006).

Upon graduation at USD in 1933, Rodney's close friend, Joseph B. Burnett who just completed his first year at Gallaudet College, inspired him to attend there. He applied for post-graduate work at the USD, in which he would study those subjects required for the entrance examination for Gallaudet College. During the year of 1933-34, he worked as a supervisor of boys at the school while studying for the exam. Although he passed the examination, he was concerned about his ability to be successful there because of his English challenge. He decided not let this prevent him from enrolling at Gallaudet, so he went (Walker, 2006).

In the fall of 1936, he reunited his USD alumni, Ned Wheeler, John Glassett, Dolores Atkinson, Earl Jones, Earl Rogerson, Robert Sanderson, Robert Lewis, Verl Thorup, and Kyle Workman. In his "My Life Story" book, he proudly reported, "It was the highest number of Utahns who were at Gallaudet College, the number never surpassed since then" (Walker, 2006).

At Gallaudet College, Rodney participated in many activities and sports such as Kappa Gamma Fraternity, football team, basketball team, track team, Kappa Gamma Fraternity Dance and Football Homecoming Dance. He remained at Gallaudet for five years. In 1939, he graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in math and chemistry (Walker, 2006). During his five years at Gallaudet, he wasn't able to attend the LDS



Rodney, age 9 and his horse, Pat

church because of limited services for the Deaf (First sealer serving in Salt Lake Temple, LDS Church News, August 8, 1998).



Georgia & Rodney Walker

After graduating from Gallaudet College and returning to Utah, Rodney obtained employment at the American Smelting and Refining Company, working as a data integrator for 38 year. He retired in 1978 (Walker, 2006).

Rodney married Georgia Hendricks on October 22, 1940 in the Salt Lake Temple. They were parents of two sons, Rodney Dale and Richard Gary. Georgia passed away on July 2, 1988. On September 16, 1989, Rodney married Joan Patricia (Pat) Seegmiller in the Jordan River Temple. Pat was well acquainted with the Deaf community

through her son, Nathan Van De Graaf, and her late Deaf father, Carlos Seegmiller (Walker, 2006).

During the interview with the LDS Church News in 1998, Rodney responded explaining how he got involved in the church capacities, as follows:

In early 1940s, George Hill, who was general superintendent of the Sunday School, once asked Rodney: “As a Deaf man, where do you go to



Rodney & Patricia Walker, Wedding Day, 1989

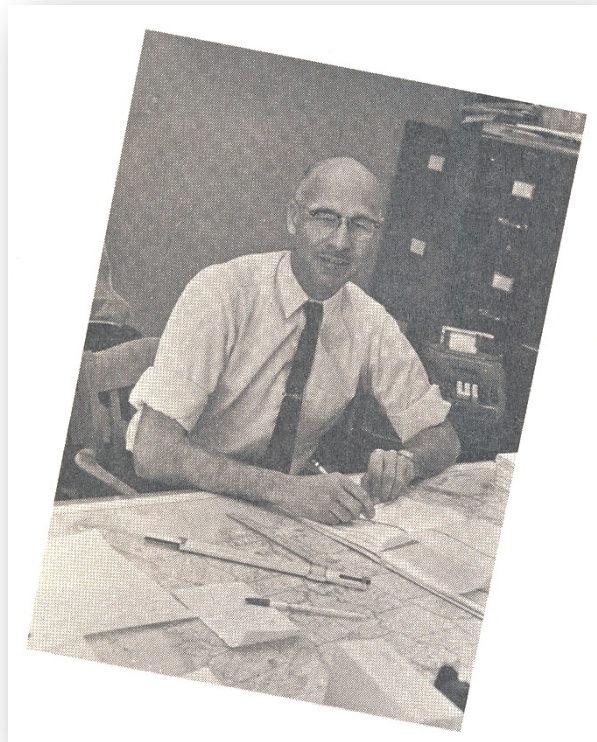


church? How many Deaf, regardless of religion, live in Salt Lake City?” Rodney decided to do an informal statistical survey of the Deaf in Salt Lake City and their status in the Church. The results of the survey found its way to the General Authorities of the Church. In 1948, the Sunday School of the Deaf was organized into the Salt Lake Valley Branch for the Deaf. Interestingly, the branch was first considered a foreign language branch. There, Rodney was called as branch Sunday School teacher. Several months later, the branch was transferred to the Salt Lake Park Stake and a priesthood quorum was organized. He served as a quorum instructor and counselor in the Young Men’s Mutual Improvement Association. The first ward of the Deaf, the Salt Lake Valley Ward for the Deaf, was created in 1971. He later served as bishop of this ward and the Salt Lake Park Stake High Council for thirteen years (LDS Church News).

Additionally, Rodney worked in the Jordan River and Salt Lake Temples. He credited his first wife, Georgia for his deep involvement in the LDS Church (Walker, 2006).

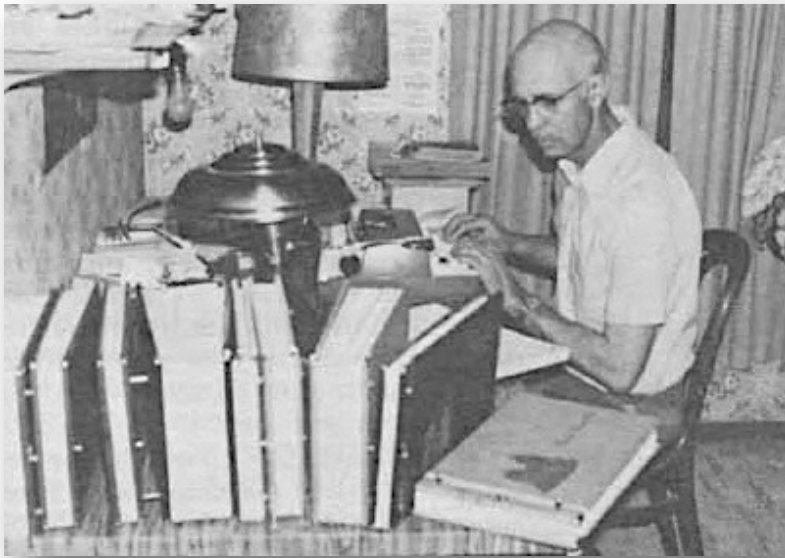
The LDS Church News reported in 1998 that Rodney, then 84, a descendant of Utah pioneers, was called as the first Deaf temple sealer. When it was announced at the Salt Lake Park Stake conference, including the Salt Lake Valley Ward for the Deaf that Rodney, as a Deaf sealer had been called, members rejoiced (LDS Church News).

Rodney shared that in 1997, President Carlos E. Asay of the Salt Lake Temple envisioned a full program for the Deaf at that temple and that vision included a Deaf sealer. Through sign language, a patron can receive the full beauty of the temple ordinances (LDS Church News). He served as a temple sealer until his death in 2007.



**Rodney Walker as data integrator at the American Smelting and Refining Company in Salt Lake City, Utah, 1968  
The UAD Bulletin Summer 1968**

During the LDS Church News interview, Rodney indicated that his first interest in genealogy began when he returned home from Gallaudet College in 1935. While staying at his uncle's place, he was shown his uncle's pedigree charts that went back to the late 1200's. Rodney gradually invested his energy in the John Walker Family Organization when he was



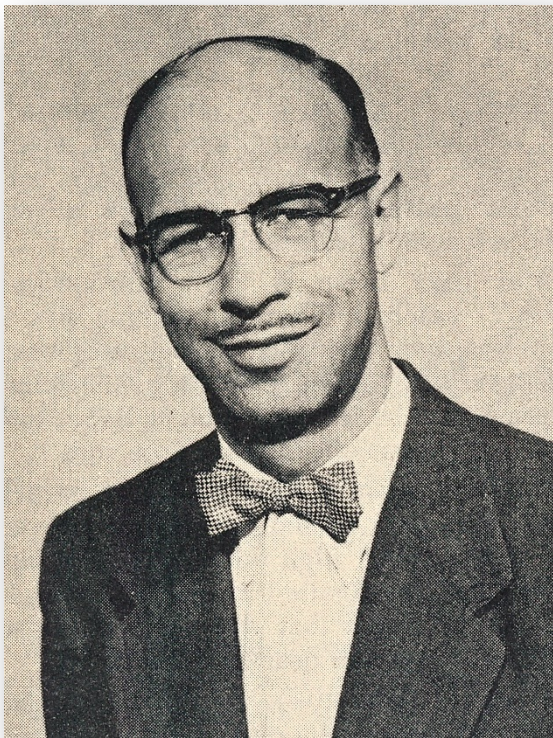
**Rodney working on the descendants of John Walker  
UAD Bulletin, June 1973**

appointed to the committee September 14, 1947. In 1953, this organization published the book entitled, "Ancestry and Descendants of John Walker," with Rodney as the major contributor. He eventually became the executive secretary and worked tirelessly for the organization, doing the

newsletter, keeping current addresses of over 4,300 family members, and compiling five books of family history (LDS Church News). He was the only Deaf officer of the John Walker Family Organization, and spoke at the World Conference on Records in 1981 (UAD Bulletin, July 1981).

Rodney reported collecting over 16,000 names of his ancestors and interestingly, he was a distant cousin of Priscilla Burdett's first husband, Earl Rogerson (Walker, 2006). Through the LDS Church News, Rodney's wife, Pat mentioned that he typed the John Walker Family Organization letter, had them printed, folded and stapled, and sorted the letters by ZIP code. His work was strictly "a labor of love" (LDS Church News). At a family reunion, he was showered with appreciation for his untiring efforts. Pat said, "This is his way of bonding with his family." She also said, "He does it alone. If others try to help, they just interrupt his smoothly oiled system" (LDS Church News).

Rodney was a dependable leader in spiritual, social and sports areas (Dr. Robert Sanderson & Valerie Kinney, personal communication, July 8, 2011). He had long been actively making contributions in the Utah Deaf community. He served as president of the Utah Association for the Deaf, delegate to the National Association of the Deaf, the National Fraternal Society of the Deaf, president of the Utah Athletic Club of the Deaf, president of the Northwest Athletic Association of the Deaf and national chairman of the American Athletic Association of the Deaf basketball tournament in Salt Lake City. In addition, he joined the Salt Lake City Division No. 56 of the National Fraternal Society of the Deaf, United Utah Organizations of the



Rodney Walker. Source: The Utah Eagle, April 1955.

Deaf, and Beehive Chapter of Gallaudet University Alumni Association (Walker, 2006). On May 22, 1981, he was presented with the Golden Key Award for his outstanding achievement by Norma Matheson, wife of Utah Governor, Scott Matheson. The award was given on behalf of the Governor's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped (UAD Bulletin, July 1981).

After teaching an American Sign Language class at Salt Lake Community College since 1990, he was awarded its Teaching Excellence Award in 1992. His award was inducted into the Hall of Fame at the college campus (UAD Bulletin, March 1993; Walker, 2006). Rodney was one of the five instructors selected out of 500 adjunct instructors for the award (UAD Bulletin, July 1992). At the 1993 UAD conference, he was presented the Golden Hand Award in recognition of his community services (UAD Bulletin, July 1993, p. 3).

Rodney passed away on August 2, 2007. He made himself into the kind of man to be admired and loved. He had accomplished many things in his life; he never stopped working, giving, serving and helping, and never complained (Walker, 2006; Patricia Walker, personal communication, November 25, 2008).



Rodney Walker, 2000s



### **Did You Know?**

Joan Patricia (Pat) Seegmiller's father, Carlos Watson Seegmiller was the first Deaf graduate at Utah State University where he received a degree in structural engineering and architecture. He worked for the U.S. Bureau of Public Road for 30 years as a highway draftsman. He also worked for the Forest Services for seven years as a cartographic and landscape draftsman (UAD Bulletin, July 1992).



**Carlos Watson Seegmiller**  
**The UAD Bulletin, Summer 1962**



## Note

Patricia Walker, e-mail message to Jodi B. Kinner, November 25, 2008.

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

## Bibliography

“CONGRATULATIONS.” *UAD Bulletin*, v. 16, no. 2, (July 1992): 1.

“First Sealer Serving in Salt Lake Temple.” *Deseret News*, August 8, 1988.  
<http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/31252/Deaf-sealer-serving-in-Salt-Lake-Temple.html>

“Golden Hand Award.” *UAD Bulletin*, vol. 18, no. 2 (July 1993): 3.

“Golden Key Award Goes to Rodney Walker.” *UAD Bulletin*, vol. 5, no. 2 (July 1981): 4.

“This Month’s Profile: Rodney Walker.” *UAD Bulletin*, vol. 17, no. 10 (March 1993): 8.

“To A Greater Glory.” *UAD Bulletin*, v. 16, no. 2 (July 1992): 5.

Walker, Rodney, W. *My Life Story*, 2006.