

Athletic Programs at Utah School for the Deaf

**Compiled & Written by Jodi B. Kinner
Edited by Valerie G. Kinney**

2014

Like other state schools for the Deaf across the country, athletic programs have been at the Utah School for the Deaf (USD) since the early 1900s (Roberts, 1994). Sports were an important aspect of the Utah Deaf community as well as the national Deaf community.

In 1921, Arthur Wenger, a sport enthusiast, a 1913 alumnus of the Utah School for the Deaf and also a founder of the Arthur Wenger Athletic Association, observed that USD had received mixed-ability students. Some were too aggressive or clumsy. Others were too timid. After learning to interact with each other while playing a sport, their rough edges had smoothed off. Arthur Wenger noted that once or twice, USD had experienced a half grown student from the fields who could not catch a ball. They were taught how to play baseball, volleyball, soccer ball, basketball and medicine ball (Wenger, *Silent Worker*, January 1921).



Arthur W. Wenger

Arthur Wenger said that athletic programs were encouraged and kept up all year, not just callisthenic drills that repeated exercises all the time. He also noted “games that produced unexpected situations that caused the players to think and move with the rhythm of the games, much like a piano, not a music box. This taught harmony and poise” (Wenger, *Silent Worker*, January 1921, p. 3).

Our local community has had a significant history of athletic involvement. In fact, playing sports has been beneficial for the development of physical, social and leadership skills. While playing sports, players have the opportunity to learn to interact with people, communicate and collaborate as a team. In addition, sports foster strategic thinking and problem solving. Most

importantly, sports help in building confidence, winning a game and give the athletes a sense of accomplishment, further boosting their confidence.

For some years, Utah Association of the Deaf (UAD) expressed unhappiness over the



Jerry Taylor

lack of a coach at the Utah School for the Deaf. In April 1959, UAD was happy to announce that Jerry Taylor, fresh from Gallaudet College and majoring in Physical Education, had been hired as director of physical education and athletic coach in the fall of 1958 (Tegeeder, *The Utah Eagle*, October 1958; Sanderson, *UAD Bulletin*, April 1959). After he was hired, UAD hoped there would be room for improvement. UAD noticed that championships often were a result of a combination of good material and good coaching. Although Idaho and Colorado had good athletic students and great coaches, this did not stop Jerry's work and determination for improvement (Sanderson, *UAD*

Bulletin, April 1959). He eventually became the athletic director of the school and successfully directed the athletic programs at USD.

Over the years, USD offered various sports such as cross country, volleyball, basketball, baseball, football, soccer, cheerleader, track, and pep club. The vibration of drum was utilized when starting a game.



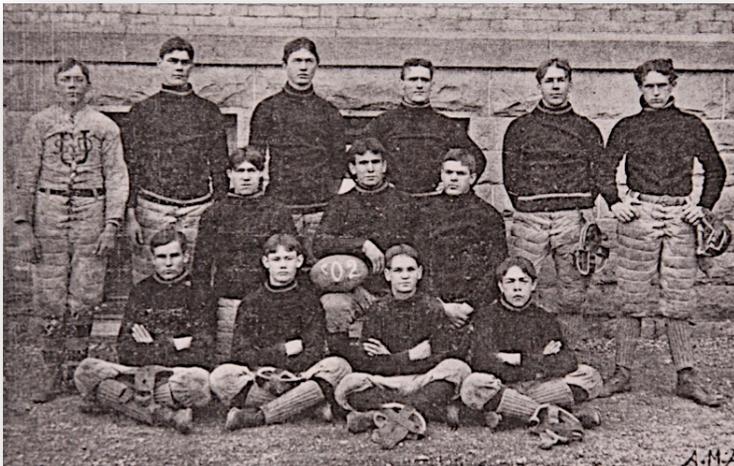
Utah School for the Deaf Basketball Team, 1907

Did You Know?

When Utah School for the Deaf was affiliated with the University of Utah (U of U) in the late 1800's, numerous football games took place between the boys of the Deaf school and other students at the University. While sharing the same campus, athletic events became the major acquaintance between the USD students and U of U students. After USD moved to Ogden, Utah, boys played football games among themselves. On at least one occasion they invited the team from the Agricultural College in Logan, Utah to play in Ogden (Roberts, 1994).

The Impact of “Y” System in USD Athletic Programs

Under the leadership of Dr. Grant B. Bitter, an ardent advocate for oral and mainstream education for Deaf and hard of hearing students, Utah's trend toward mainstreaming grew steadily in the 1960s. With Dr. Bitter's effort in 1962, a new policy of UAD embraced the Dual



Utah School for the Deaf Football Team, 1902

Division, known as the “Y” system. Through this system all Deaf and hard of hearing children had to begin their education in the Oral Division and were not allowed to enter the Simultaneous Communication Division until age 11 or 6th grade. The Ogden campus was

divided, with each Oral and Simultaneous Communication (later renamed Total Communication) Division, having its own separate classrooms, dormitory facilities, recess, and co-curricular activities, except athletic programs (The Utah Eagle, February 1968; The Ogden Standard-Examiner, October, 19, 1970). Because each division was not large enough to provide athletic programs, only athletic programs were still offered a social opportunity due to an insufficient number of students from both Oral and Simultaneous Communication Divisions (The Utah

Eagle, February 1968; Dale R. Cook, Paul Arthur, and Linda (Snodgrass) James, personal communication, May 29, 2011). At the time, Jerry Taylor was the coach for the signing team

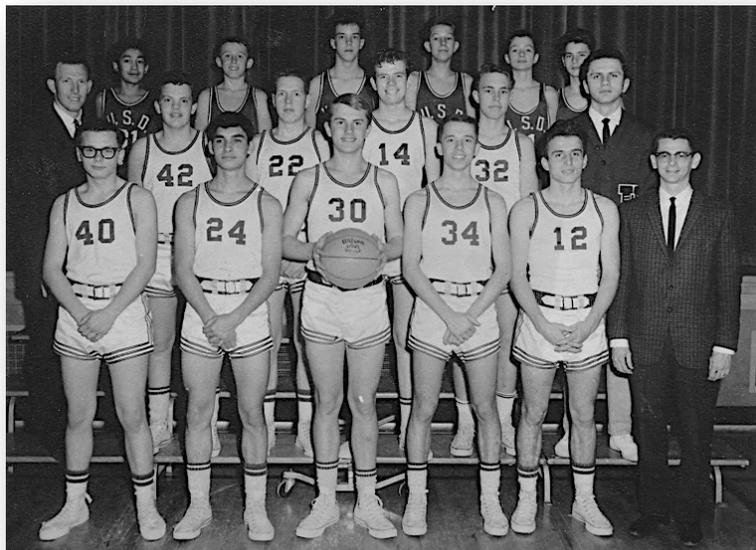
while Bert Chaston, a staff member from the oral department, was the coach for the oral team (Ruth Taylor, personal communication, February 11, 2015).



Dr. Grant B. Bitter
The Utah Eagle, 1961

While all things were going on with the division at the USD, Utah Association of the Deaf clarified in 1962 that, among other things, they supported a fair test of the “two-track” or dual program at the Utah School for the Deaf as a classroom matter. Among other things, they however expressed strong disapproval of the attempt at crippling the sports program (UAD Bulletin, Fall-Winter 1962, p. 2-3).

Kenneth L. Kinner, USD alumnus of 1954 and a father of two Deaf children, Deanne (Class of 1979) and Duane (a product of USD and Class of 1991 from Idaho School for the Deaf) recalled that in the 1970s, a mother of an oral girl insisted that her daughter be moved to Ben Lomond High School, under the USD extension program, located between 7th & 9th Streets and Harrison Blvd. In growing influence in the mother’s campaign, the oral parents asked for the same Ben Lomond High School option. Their preference for their children was to join common social activities and



Utah School for the Deaf Basketball Team, 1962

sports with hearing peers. They urged for their best prepared children for integration into mainstream society. As a result, the USD athletic programs was crippled, as UAD predicted it would eventually happen. When the USD students at Ben Lomond High School became crowded, some of them attended Ogden High School for two years from 1973 to 1975. Some



Basketball Team at the Utah School for the Deaf

oral students joined hearing sport teams and some did not. Only one oral student, Bruce Aldridge was given permission by his parents to join the USD sports (Kenneth L. Kinner, personal communication, 2010).

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, a small number of USD basketball players from the Total Communication

Division managed to participate in the Western State Basketball Classic (WSBC), a basketball tournament for teams with Deaf players. Usually the eight teams included California School for the Deaf-Riverside, California School for the Deaf-Fremont, Oregon School for the Deaf, Washington School for the Deaf, Arizona School for the Deaf and the Blind, and Phoenix Day School for the Deaf. Other schools that have participated in the past included Idaho School for the Deaf and the Blind, Marlton School (a program for Deaf students in Los Angeles), Colorado School for the Deaf and the Blind, and New Mexico School for the Deaf. Each school took turns hosting the tournament.

At the tournament, USD basketball teams had the opportunity to participate where they got to mingle with their peers from different state schools for the Deaf before, during and after games. WSBC not only made possible a series of basketball games between the eight boys' and eight girls' teams and competition among the cheerleading teams from the participating schools, but there were also social events for the participants. In addition, there were meetings among the

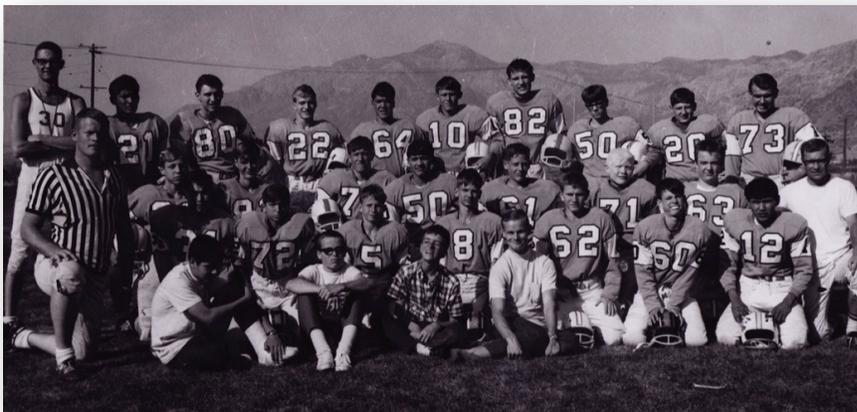
superintendents of the eight schools (who tended to attend as well as the athletic directors of the schools). The games were well attended by fans from the Deaf community. Every year students from the schools looked forward to this opportunity to compete against their peers and communicate in their own language, American Sign Language.

However, the number of USD students eventually declined due to mainstreaming. After the retirement of Jerry Taylor as the Athletic Director in 1987, Mike Hillstrom continued as coach. All sports were eventually dropped, except for basketball and volleyball.



Mike Hillstrom

Under Mike Hillstrom's two-year leadership as coach, he said that the sports program between the 1986-87 functioned with only a basketball team that followed a junior varsity schedule under Tintic High School as the varsity team. Both teams were small and played other small schools throughout the state such as Tintic High School, Rowland Hall High School, Dugway High School, and Rich County High School. While playing a basketball game, not too many teams could boast of a perfect record, but USD did that year. It was 0-10. Not one win even though many games were close. Because of the small numbers and the struggling status, the following year (1987-88) USD was taken out of the Utah



Football Team at the Utah School for the Deaf, 1967

High School Athletic Association and the team played with the Christian Athletic Association (CAA). The competition was comparable and all games were played at the USDB campus on 20th and Monroe in

Ogden. They also participated in a volleyball league with the CAA. With numbers continuing to decline, "The athletic programs were closed during the year of 1988 – 1989 (Mike Hillstrom, personal communication, May 30, 2014).

This was a sore spot for the members of the local Deaf community as sports had always been central to them. In addition, the Deaf community as a whole, enjoyed sports longer and more "widespread" throughout the community than in many other communities. There were nationwide sport organizations with regional affiliations for a wide variety of sports, from basketball to softball to ice hockey to handball. Each state had a statewide organization for sports. Some states even had local chapters of the state sport organizations.



Volleyball Team at the Utah School for the Deaf, 1955

While mainstreaming continued to grow steadily since the 1960s, the situation is an



Utah School for the Deaf Basketball Team, 1920

example of how the concept of integration in a mainstreamed setting was so popular in Utah. The implementation of dual tracking and mainstreaming constituted the darkest chapter in the education of the Deaf in Utah. With a large number of Deaf children being mainstreamed, the State of Utah closed the residential campus and consolidated the Utah School for

the Deaf and the Utah School for the Blind on a new campus on 742 Harrison Boulevard in Ogden, Utah in 1993 (Leers, November 1, 1988, p. B1; Deseret News, November 4, 1988; Bannister, UAD Bulletin, February 1989). After the move in 1993, school sport trophies went missing. In spite of asking around, Jerry Taylor had no clue where they were (Jerry Taylor, personal communication, February 2012).

Despite the athletic programs at USD being cancelled in 1989 due to mainstreaming, this did not stop the local Deaf community, especially former USD mainstreamed students, from participating in Deaf sports

beyond school. Many Utah Deaf people joined local sport organizations such as the Utah Athletic Club of the Deaf and Golden Spike Athletic Club of the Deaf. Additionally, members of the Utah Deaf community joined regional and national sport organizations to compete with other teams. They were Far West Athletic Association of the Deaf, Northwest Athletic Association of the Deaf, American Athletic Association of the Deaf, and the USA Deaf Sports Federation.



Utah School for the Deaf Basketball Team, 1907

Did You Know?

About 1895 the Utah School for the Deaf added a physical education program in Salt Lake City, Utah. After moving to Ogden, Utah in 1896, the school built a gymnasium and hired a physical education instructor (Roberts, 1994).

Rebirth of the Athletic Programs at the Utah School for the Deaf

Soon after Jean Massieu School of the Deaf (JMS) merged with Utah School for the Deaf in 2005, the athletics programs returned. Julio Diaz, a sport enthusiast and husband of JMS co-founder, Minnie Mae Wilding-Diaz and father of three Deaf children, pursued an athletics program under the administration of Linda Rutledge, Utah Schools for the Deaf and the Blind superintendent.



Julio Diaz

Seventeen years after the closure of the athletic programs in 1989, the Utah High School Activities Association's board of trustees revived activities and athletics in 2006 for Deaf and blind students regardless of where they attended school. The board allowed the USDB teams to use students who attended any high school as long as they were identified as students using their services (Donaldson, Deseret News, March 6, 2007). Starting athletic programs at USD from scratch was not easy and it required a lot of time to develop. It had growing pains along the way.



Basketball Team at the Utah School for the Deaf,
1926

Mike Hillstrom, a long-time teacher of the Utah School for the Deaf and USDB activities director said, “In the past, when we had 200 students living in a residential setting, we used to field fairly big teams.” He recalled that “In the late 1980’s, more and more students attended public schools and the USDB began providing its services and teachers in those high schools,

rather than requiring the students to live away from their families on campuses in Ogden or Salt Lake City. The residential aspect of our school has gotten smaller and smaller. So as the students had moved away from campuses, the activities and athletics programs died.” (Donaldson, Deseret News, March 6, 2007). He hoped the athletic opportunities would grow in the future.



Basketball Team at the Utah School for the Deaf, 1944

In 2008, USD

boys and girls basketball team traveled to Oregon for a national tournament. Jen Byrnes, the Deaf head coach of the girls’ basketball team, observed that the tournament was an eye-opener for USD players. She said “The girls were in a national environment. They’re so isolated here, that for some of them, it was the first time they’d seen conversations everywhere among the Deaf population. They said, ‘Hey, they’re teenagers just like us, they’re talking about boys and school.’ They got to be a part of a bigger community. Craig Radford, the Deaf USD head boys

coach said, “Some of the kids have identity issues, and being part of the larger community helps them develop more confidence as Deaf individuals.” Radford and Byrnes agreed that not only have the teams improved in their skills, but the students now enjoy more community support as those affiliated with the school get used to the idea that sports are back for USD students (Sights & Sounds, May 2008).



Craig Radford

It was a dream come true for the Utah Deaf community! In spite of funding challenges and small number of students, USD and JMS students have participated in athletic programs since then. More coaches volunteered. More mainstreamed students practice and play games at the Sanderson Community Center of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. How lucky they are being able to use the gym!

Did You Know?

Sports have always been important aspect in the Deaf community. While attending the schools for the Deaf nationally, including Utah School for the Deaf, Deaf students enjoyed participating in competitive sports with other Deaf students, similar to the hearing peers at a public school. Hence, the local Deaf community, who were USD alumni, wished to see mainstreamed students share the same opportunity at the Utah Community Center for the Deaf (later renamed Sanderson Community Center). In order to prepare for the architect's sketch of proposed building plans, Norman Williams, alumnus of Utah School for the Deaf of 1962, visited various buildings that had a gym. Much to his dismay, he couldn't locate a satisfactory one. So he visited the Idaho School for the Deaf that had a new full size basketball court with bleachers. He took satisfaction in the size of that gym and requested that the center copy the school's size of the gym. As a result, the gymnasium was designed to house a basketball court with moveable bleachers! (Kenneth L. Kinner, personal communication, 2008; Norman Williams, personal communication, May 8, 2012). It was a goal that sports be available for sports enthusiasts when they might not have equal access to an athletics program at a public school.

Rebirth of the Western States Basketball Classic at the Utah School for the Deaf

The Western States Basketball Classic (WSBC) tournament has been in existence since the late 1970s and early 1980s, but it was not until 2007 that USD finally returned to the WSBC when another state school or the Deaf had to drop out due to not having enough students for a team. USD has attended four Classics since, and it was imperative that USD hold on to their spot in WSBC. Only eight teams are invited each year, and once a school drops out, the slot is

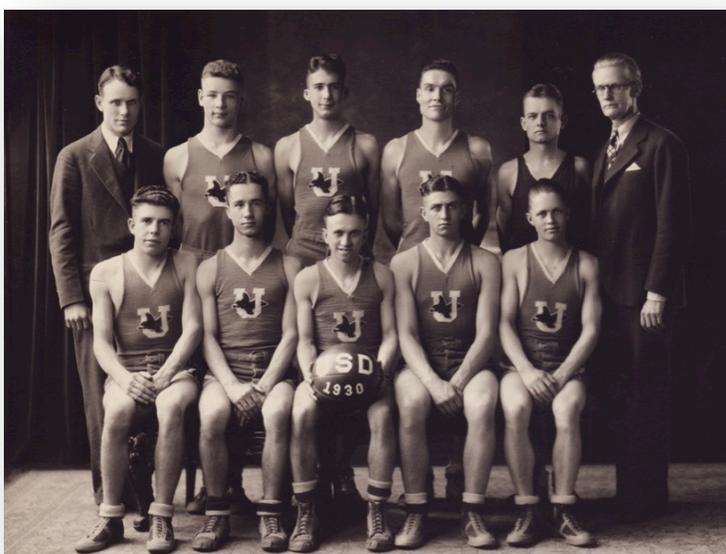
immediately taken over by another school; it is very difficult for the original school to return to the tournament.

Teams were open to JMS students, and teams practiced and played home games at the Sanderson Community Center gym. In 2009, the USD was even fortunate enough to be invited back to Western States Basketball Classic (WSBC) where students not only had the chance to play seven other state schools for the Deaf but also to socialize and learn from travel. Mike Hillstrom said that 25 students attended WSBC and stated in the March 2009 of UAD Bulletin issue, “It had become an event that is so worthwhile that I see it as life-changing (Hillstrom, *UAD Bulletin*, March 2009).



Jill Radford

During the Great Recession of 2008-2012, Julio Diaz explained that there were dire financial straits of 2012 with Utah School for the Deaf and the Blind and there were serious obstacles to resolve. Dr. Jennifer Howell, then Associate Superintendent of the Utah School for the Deaf, informed Jill Radford, then principal of Jean



Basketball Team at the Utah School for the Deaf, 1930

Massieu School, that she could no longer work towards the tournament event. Rather than having USDB end up canceling the tournament, Jill Radford volunteered to take over the responsibility for WSBC 2011 (on top of all her other responsibilities, including being the only full time person responsible for 97

students from preschool through high school). She was doing this willingly because she believed in the event, believed that it was a great opportunity for Deaf students in Utah. Jill Radford believed, like the Utah Deaf community, that WSBC was an excellent opportunity for Deaf students to not only challenge each other through sports and socialize, but also to develop life-long relationships that would support students through college. Not only did WSBC benefit the students, but it also benefited the superintendents when they met during the tournament. Additionally, it provided a forum for Deaf students from small states like ours, to see other Deaf students from other states, to realize that there was a wide world out there for them (Julio Diaz, personal communication, October 2010).

In spite of the obstacles that USDB faced with finances, Julio Diaz noted that Jill Radford managed to host the 2011 Western States Basketball Classic (35th Annual) Tournament along with two

chairpersons: Brian Thornsberry, USD Athletic Director and Craig Radford, a long-time volunteer high school basketball head coach. They worked hard to ensure that the event went smoothly for everyone involved. It was successful (Julio Diaz, personal communication, October 2010).



Track Team at the Utah School for the Deaf, 1970. Jerry Taylor (L), Total Communication Coach and Bert Chaston (R), Oral Coach

The same could be said about USD's membership in the Utah High School Athletic Association (UHSAA), said Julio Diaz. He emphasized that UHSAA offered USD students the opportunity to compete against each other high school teams. USD is required to be a member of UHSAA to join the WSBC. She was reminded USD that if school left UHSAA, it would be difficult to rejoin due to the inconvenience caused by leaving at this time. Scheduling

the USD players into teams' already established schedules would be very difficult. Even if funds are reestablished and/or a new superintendent reestablishes athletics, the process to join is not easy. The UHSAA, as well as the WSBC require going through a laborious selective application process and may be hesitant to allow us to do so due to its uncommitted history (Julio Diaz, personal communication, October 2010).

Fast forward to 2015, the Utah School for the Deaf hosted the Western State Basketball and Cheerleading Classic again at the Sanderson Community Center and Taylorsville High School from January 28th to 31st. Under the direction of Wade Hester, the Deaf coach, the Utah School for the Deaf boys'

team won the WSBC championship. In the championship game, the USD boys' team scored of 59 – 40 over Phoenix School for the Deaf (Tanner, *UAD Bulletin*, February 2015; Montalette, *UAD Bulletin*, February 2015). Craig Radford, a Director of Business Development at



Wade Hester (far right), Athletic Director/Coach with his Utah School for the Deaf boys' team
UAD Bulletin, February 2015

ZVRS, flew all the way to Utah from Florida to support the USD boys' team. While coach volunteering this team for 10 years, he knew the boys when they were young. He had been there for them as a mentor, teacher and friend. Craig must be thrilled to witness such championship match and to see the display of talent players as well.

To sum up, the social aspect of athletics gives the students the opportunity to exercise leadership, to develop the ability to work with others as a team, to accept and appreciate the discipline of sustained practice and training, and to realize the value of good sportsmanship. They are as important as the physical aspects. Even though athletics are not part of a school's

"true" curricula, our students deserve the same experiences their hearing peers do. Students have learned so much through sports, including discipline, sportsmanship, and physical control.

Notes

Dale R. Cook, Paul Arthur, and Linda (Snodgrass) James, e-mail message to Jodi B. Kinner, May 29, 2011.

Jerry Taylor, personal communication, February 2012.

Julio Diaz, personal communication, October 2010.

Kenneth L. Kinner, personal communication, 2008.

Kenneth L. Kinner, personal communication, 2010.

Norman Williams, e-mail message to Jodi B. Kinner, May 8, 2012.

Mike Hillstrom, e-mail message to Jodi B. Kinner, May 30, 2014.

Ruth Taylor, personal communication, February 11, 2015.

Bibliography

“A Chance to Compete.” *Sights & Sounds* (May 2008). 12.

Bannister, Thomas. “USDB Update.” *UAD Bulletin*, vol. 12, no. 10 (February 1989): 2.

“Combined Ogden campus for Deaf, blind is sensible.” *Deseret News*. (November 4, 1988): A10.

Donaldson, Amy. “USDB reviving athletics.” *Deseret News* (March 6, 2007): D02.

Hillstrom, Mike. “Western States Basketball Classic.” *UAD Bulletin*, vol. 32.10. (March 2009). 1.

Leers, Twila V. “Consolidation of Schools for the Deaf, Blind ok’d.” *Deseret News* (November 4, 1988): B1.

Montalette, Philippe. "President's Corner." *UAD Bulletin*, February 2015, vol. 38-09: 2.

"New Developments in Utah's Educational Programs for the Deaf." *The Utah Eagle*, Vol. 79, No. 5 (February 1978): 13 – 15.

Roberts, Elaine, M. *The Early History of the Utah School for the Deaf and its Influence in the Development of a Cohesive Deaf Society in Utah, circa. 1884 – 1905*, August 1994. A thesis presented to the Department of History: Brigham Young University.

Tanner, Michelle. "Utah School for the Deaf Make History." *UAD Bulletin*, February 2015, vol. 38-09: 1 & 3.

Tegeder, Robert W. "Presenting New Faculty Members." *The Utah Eagle*, vol. 70, no. 8 (October 1958): 2.

Sanderson, Robert, G. "Sports Notes." *UAD Bulletin* (April 1959). 2.

"Who's for the Deaf?" *The UAD Bulletin*, vol. 2, no. 8 (Fall-Winter 1962): 2-3.

Wenger, Arthur. "Distinctive features of schools for the Deaf; No. 11 --- The inspirational side of the Utah School." *The Silent Worker* vol. 33 no. 4 (January 1921): 111 – 113.
<http://dspace.wrlc.org/view/ImgViewer?img=3&url=http://dspace.wrlc.org/doc/manifest/2041/38266>

Wight, Ray. "Deaf Teaching Methods Debated." *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, October 19, 1970.