

1866

B060/F20: Letter from Jerusha M. Skinner, 1866

Edward Miner Gallaudet

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Gallaudet, Edward Miner

letter from Jerusha M. Skinner

Folder 20
1866

Box 60

Prattsburg Steuben Co. New York,
March 22nd 1866.

Dear friend -

I send you my printed
letter, hoping you will induce a few friends
to help in relieving my present troubles the
debts and wants. I know my friends will
^{not} allow me to want after having befriending
~~the~~ God's poorest children so long - if they
only know - I believe Mrs Hall of Navy Observatory
will be glad to do something. May I hear from you soon.
Yours aff - J. M. Skinner.



Maria R. Mann -

173. 15. St Pet - 187194

Washington
D. C.

Prattsburg N. Y. April 9th 1866

DEAR FRIEND:

I am receiving letters daily, asking for a statement of the particular circumstances attending the death of my husband, DR. P. H. SKINNER, and of the fate of our School for Colored Deaf, Dumb and Blind; and the little paper we published, viz, "*The Mute and the Blind.*" These letters and inquiries are so urgent and numerous, that it is utterly impossible for me to answer them by written letters to each, and I have therefore resolved to attempt to answer by a printed letter addressed to all, in which I will try to give you a brief but correct statement of all the essential facts in the case.

DR. SKINNER was taken seriously ill on the 25th day of December last, and after much suffering died on the 1st of January, 1866. His disease was not named to me by his physicians. On the morning of the day he died, his physician pronounced him better, and I was encouraged to believe he would recover. But soon after, he became worse, and died about an hour after his physician left him. He was conscious to his last moments, and died happy, leaving the brightest evidence that he had a full assurance of entering that immortal life, where the blind can all see clearly, and the deaf and dumb can both hear and speak distinctly. Among his last words he expressed an earnest wish and prayer that some one might be raised up to take his place and continue the School and Paper, and thus care for the unfortunate ones for whom he had given his life.

Previous to his death, we had issued an earnest appeal to our friends for contributions to help pay the heavy debts incurred by purchasing the land, and building a House and Barn thereon. In answer to that appeal, we received sufficient money to pay off all claims that were due, or pressing for immediate payment. Encouraged by this response of our friends, our House and Barn being sufficiently completed to permit us to occupy them in all their parts; our pressing debts being thus paid, and, better than all, the persecutions and slanders of our opposers having seemingly ceased for a time, we therefore felt that our opportunity for greater usefulness had come, and we had resolved on taking an additional number of pupils in our School during the year 1866, and were making our arrangements accordingly. Just at this time the sickness and death of my husband occurred, and frustrated all our plans and designs.

What to do then I did not know. I tried to think of some one who had the ability and would make the sacrifice, to undertake the work with me, and most earnestly did I pray that God would raise up some one for the place. But no one could be found; and then my friends and advisers at Trenton, said, "*you had better send your pupils to their homes, and go yourself to your friends, and rest a year.*" This seemed to be my only alternative, and I commenced to plan accordingly about the 10th of January.

About one week after DR. SKINNER'S death, I sent a small printed notice to most of our friends and subscribers, in which I asked for help to pay up our debts, thinking and hoping that within one year I might be able to pay off all claims against the institution, rest myself and find some one competent and willing, to undertake with me to open the School again. In answer to this request, several friends have sent me small sums of money which have helped me very much in my present afflictions and necessities. And to all such as have thus kindly remembered me, I wish here to tender my most sincere thanks, and wish them to accept this as my acknowledgment of their donations, in place of a personal letter to each, or a published list as we formerly gave in the *Mute and the Blind.*

About the last of January I had sent all our pupils to their homes but three, viz, one blind girl, one deaf and dumb girl, and a deaf and dumb young man. I then left the young man in the care of our buildings and started with the two girls for Corning, N. Y., where I hoped to find a friend to take the girls to their homes. Before I had sent the girls on from Corning, a letter overtook me informing me that on the night of the 3rd day after I left, our House was burned, and soon after the arrival of the letter, the young man I left in care of the buildings came in, and confirmed the sad intelligence of the letter. I then learned from him that at about 12 o'clock in the night of February 3rd, he was aroused

from sleep by a shock and the smell of powder, and found the House so fully on fire, that he could save nothing therefrom, but barely escaped with his life, by jumping from a window.

I immediately sent this young man and the girls to their homes, and then took a friend with me to Trenton. From the best information I could gather there, I must believe that the statements of the young man are true, and conclude the fire was the work of some vile wretch of an incendiary, as is the opinion of the neighbors in the vicinity. My friends can easily understand that my afflictions and bereavement were much increased when I was compelled to look upon the ruins of a home, which I hoped to see remain during my life-time at least, and one that was indeed a beautiful monument of the contributions of many valued friends, and the industry and economy of my dear husband and the deaf and dumb and blind colored ones who assisted in erecting it. And my sorrow and poverty were still further increased when I found that all the valuable furniture, books, tools and apparatus for the use of the School were destroyed with the building. Now all there is left of the whole is the ten acres of land and the Barn on it. On this there are claims as follows: a bond and mortgage to the amount of four hundred and fifty dollars, due on the 1st of October next; and claims for materials furnished for the buildings to the amount of about four hundred dollars more, which must be paid on or by the 1st of January next. Unless these claims are paid the place must be sold to pay them.

What money I have received is nearly all spent, in the funeral expenses of my husband, sending the children to their homes, and in settling the small bills and accounts that were out against us, and must be paid. Now I have no way of earning money, and the only hope I can have of saving the place from a sacrifice to pay these claims, is in the kindness and generosity of those kind friends who have so long adhered to and supported our school heretofore, and I hope they will assist me in saving this property.

To those who have recently subscribed and paid for the *Mute and the Blind*, I must say, I am sorry that we cannot furnish you with the Paper as you expected and we designed to do, but you will see by the explanations in this letter that it is by misfortunes that we could not control or avoid, that we are rendered unable to do it, and by the same misfortunes we are unable to return your money to you, and may I not ask you to consent that the money you sent for the paper may be appropriated to pay the debts against the place.

I am asked by many, "*How will you and your child be supported?*" My answer is this, my husband undertook the cause of the poorest and most unfortunate class in the world, and trusted in God for help. God undoubtedly put it into the hearts of many good people, to send him the necessary temporal aid to carry on the good work, until he succeeded in it beyond the expectations of his most sanguine friends.

Now I believe that the same kind Father still rules in Heaven and on earth, and I can still trust in Him, and believe that the kind friends who rendered my husband so much aid in the cause in which he sacrificed his life, will not allow one who has tried to be his faithful helpmate, to go suffering, or in want, nor his child to go entirely portionless. My faith is strong in God, and though He suffers me to be afflicted for a season, He will still care for me.

As to what I shall do, I can only say, I shall be ready and willing to teach the poor colored deaf and dumb, and blind, or any others so far as I am capable, as soon as I shall be rested from the severe labors and afflictions of the last two months, if the opportunity and means are offered, or do anything that under God, my friends shall advise.

I shall be glad to hear from all. Please direct all communications designed for me, or as for the *Mute and the Blind*, to me at

Prattsburg Steubenville N. Y.
Yours Sincerely
Jerusha M. Skinner