

gsa and your sign language needs

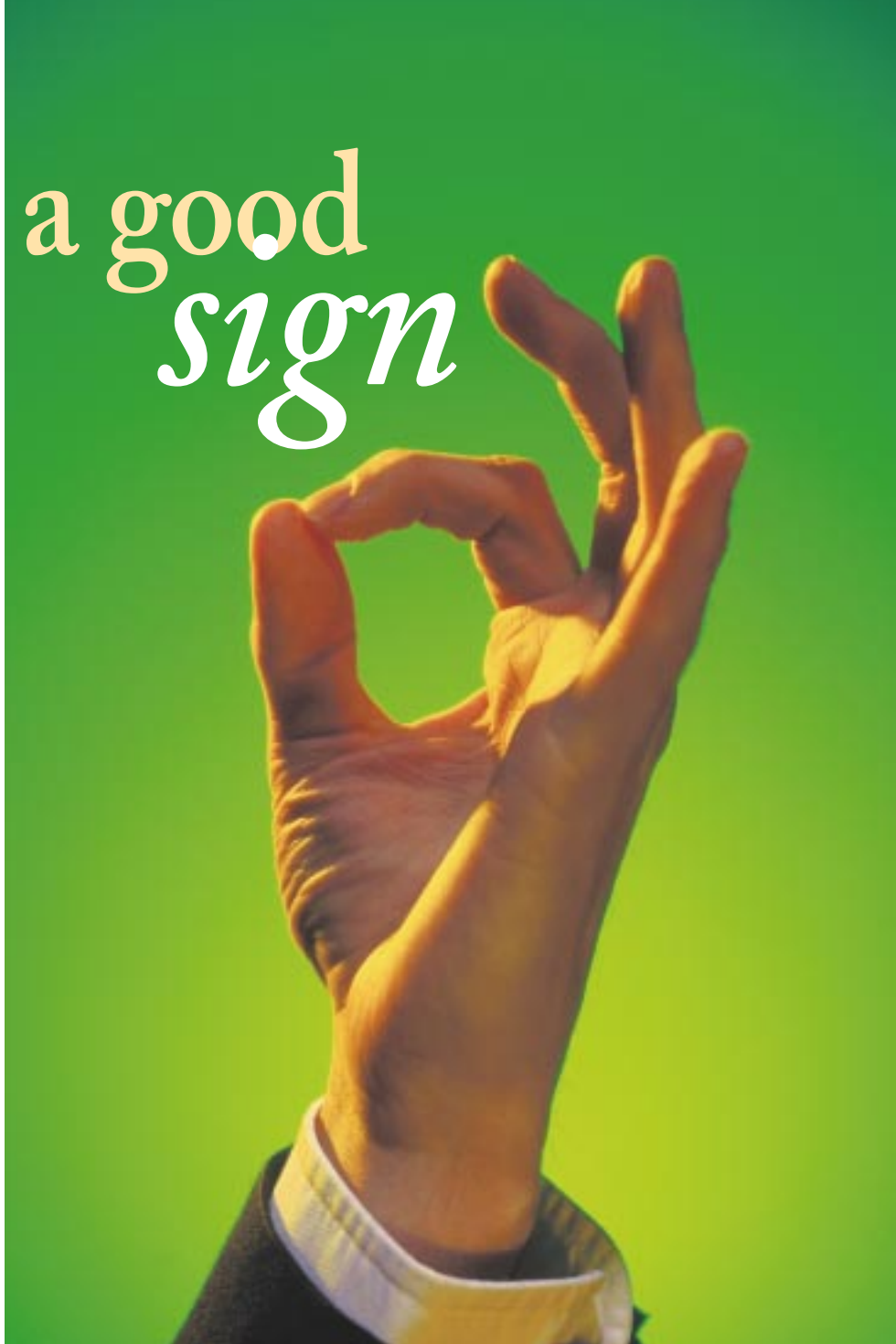
by Craig Buckstein

The Americans with Disabilities Act, established in 1990, states that deaf and hard-of-hearing citizens have the right to effective communication on the job and in all Federal, state, and local government agencies, including schools, hospitals, courts, prisons, libraries, and human services organizations. Additionally, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, requires that Federal agencies provide meaningful access for individuals with disabilities to Federally conducted programs and activities—this includes the general public. To comply with these laws, Federal agencies hire interpreters to help deaf and hard-of-hearing people communicate. Many Federal agencies often hire full-time interpreters. Other government agencies hire interpreters on a part-time or short-term basis to satisfy their needs. Whether an occasional or full-time user of interpretation services, every agency can benefit by bridging the communication gap. GSA's Language Services schedule contractors are the best available option to help staff your various Sign Language needs.

Federal agencies have many tools at their disposal to satisfy Sign Language needs, which include:

- Hiring interpreters full-time to help deaf and/or hard-of-hearing people communicate
- Hiring interpreters on a part-time or short-term basis
- Outsourcing their recruitment process and utilize professional language service companies on the GSA schedule.

a good sign



Outsourcing your Sign Language services to professional language services specialists can be an effective and efficient way to satisfy your agency's needs. Language service companies have the specialized knowledge and know-how to ask the questions you may not think of and assure that the deaf clients needs are met. The agency will optimize the interpreting sessions for the hearing and the deaf and/or hard-of-hearing client. There are several agencies available on the GSA schedule that are specially suited to meet your requirements, which can be found on E-buy and are just a few clicks away.

Interpreters in the workplace help facilitate deaf and/or hard-of-hearing employees to achieve effective communication with



all employees, supervisors, management, officials, applicants, guest speakers, and other individuals who do not know or use Sign Language. Communication difficulties between deaf, hard-of-hearing, or deaf-blind individuals and hearing individuals may be eased through the use of an interpreter as well. Some hard-of-hearing people can speak and read lips or hear well enough to communicate with little problem. Others use Sign Language and depend on interpreters to help them communicate with the hearing world. Interpreters for the deaf and hard-of-hearing are the people who translate between spoken English and Sign Language, changing a speaker's words into Sign Language for a deaf audience or “voicing” a deaf person's signs for a hearing audience.

There are many factors to consider when requesting Sign Language services:

- What variant of Sign Language does the client use?
- Are there any medical impairments that would require a specialized interpreter.
- Is the session consecutive or simultaneous?
- How many interpreters will be needed for an interpreting session?


In the United States, most interpreters for the deaf and hard-of-hearing use American Sign Language (ASL), a unique language with a grammar and vocabulary very different from English. Although there are many other types of Sign Language, such as Spanish Sign Language, and Russian Sign Language, ASL is the most widely utilized form in the U.S. Between 100,000 and 500,000 people in the U.S. use it as their primary mode of communication

Some interpreters, called *transliterators*, help deaf people, who read lips, get the full meaning of a speaker's words. When a speaker is difficult to see, speaks quickly, or uses an unfamiliar accent, lip readers can't easily understand the meaning of the words. Transliterators solve this problem by mouthing the speaker's words clearly and slowly and by communicating through Cued Speech, a system that uses hand shapes and hand placements to represent sounds and syllables.

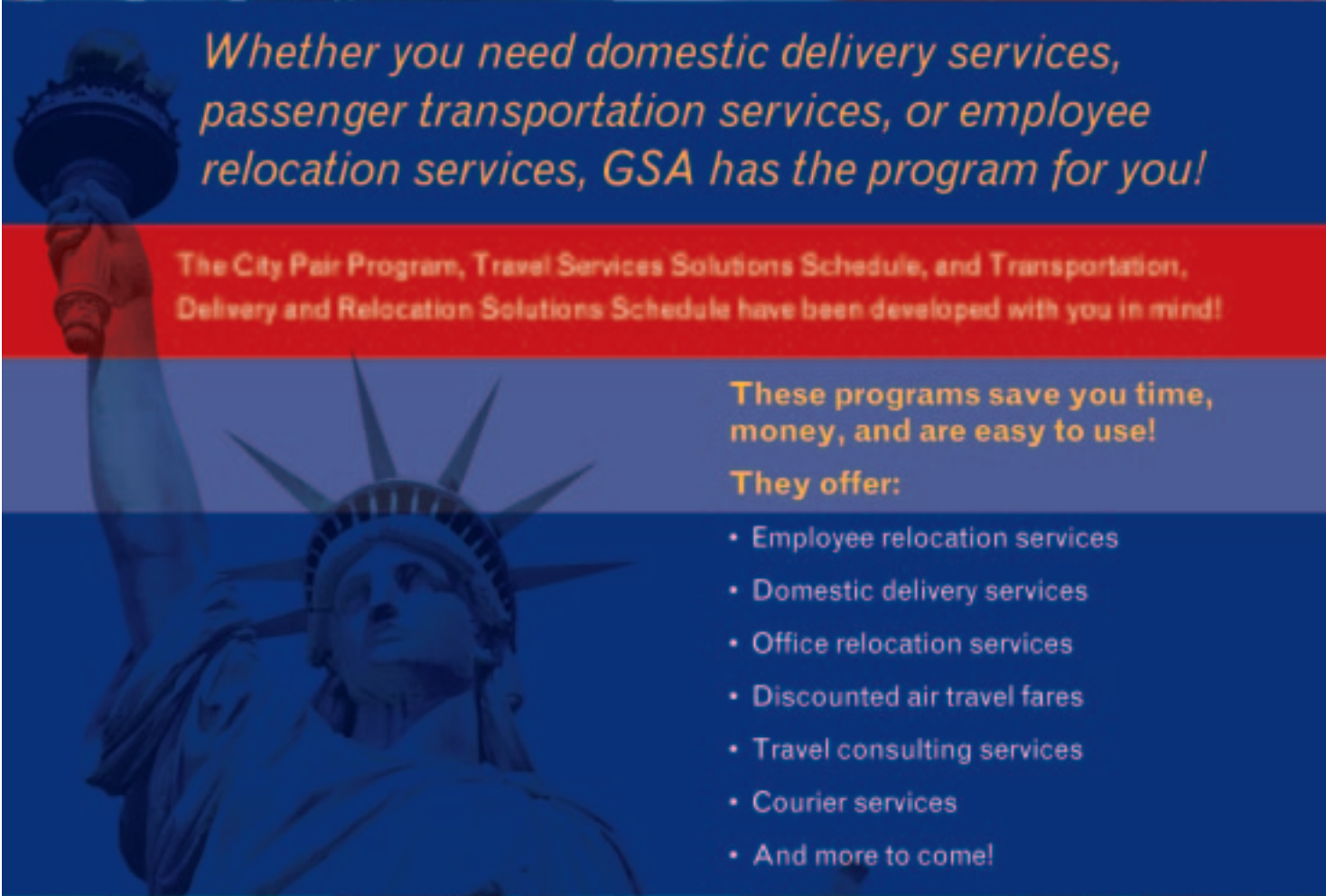
As a purchaser of interpretation services, it is important to know that there are two types of interpreting sessions: consecutive and simultaneous. In consecutive interpretation, the interpreter has time to process information before translating. A consecutive interpreter listens to one person speak, or watches the person sign and, after the speaker or “signer” finishes, the interpreter translates the information. In simultaneous interpretation, an interpreter listens to someone speak—or watches someone sign—and translates at the same time. For instance, if an interpreter is simultaneously translating a new hire orientation for deaf staff members, the interpreter must listen to the presenter and sign as the presenter continues to speak.

For either type of interpretation it is important to realize that many interpreting sessions that require two or more hours of interpreting will require two or more interpreters. Studies have shown that an interpreter's accuracy usually diminishes after working continuously for twenty minutes or more. Interpreting sessions vary greatly and it may be advisable to contract more than two interpreters depending on the number of deaf and/or hard-of-hearing clients, the logistics of the assignment and other variables.

Whether the assignment is short term or long term, a language service agency is your best option to facilitate interpreting requests. Agencies are aware of the various nuances and details required to fit the best interpreter to a particular assignment. GSA Schedule language service companies are currently working with every type of Federal agency and are in the business of bridging the communication gap for deaf and/or hard-of-hearing clients.



Whether you need domestic delivery services, passenger transportation services, or employee relocation services, GSA has the program for you!



The City Pair Program, Travel Services Solutions Schedule, and Transportation, Delivery and Relocation Solutions Schedule have been developed with you in mind!

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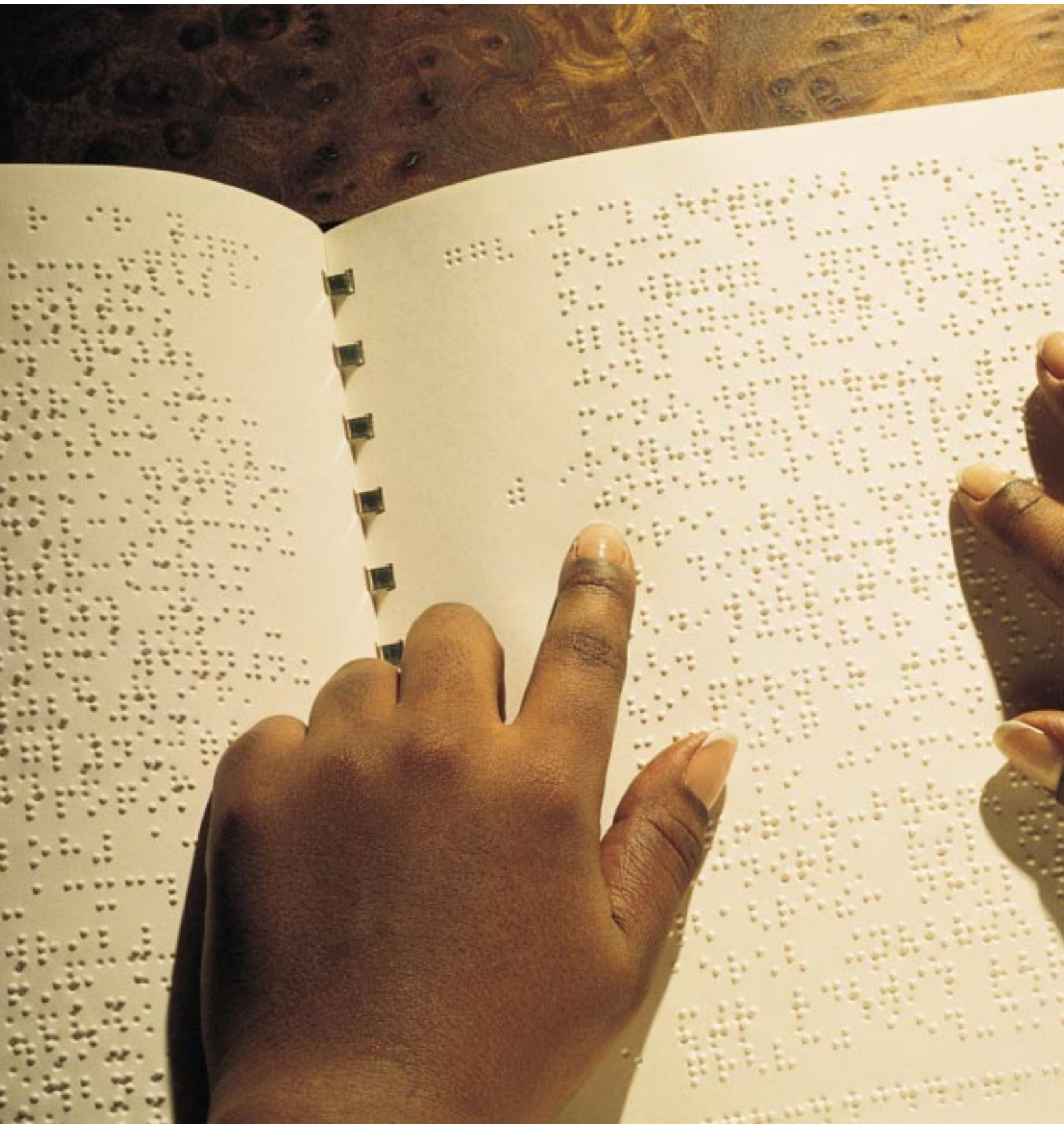
And remember, when you are looking for a solution for your transportation or travel needs, look no further! Look to GSA!

5-4-00330



Smarter Solutions

the words they touched:



louis braille's new way of writing



by Peter Daniel Davis

*Staying up late with
stylus and paper,
he devised a new
alphabet system
using combinations of
dots and dashes that
was easy to read or
write and could be
learned by someone
who was sighted or
blind. Louis Braille was
fifteen years old.*

He was born on January 4, 1809, the fourth child of Monique Baron and Simon René Braille. They named the boy Louis. He was baptized only three days after his birth, a custom owing to the high rate of infant mortality. Simon Braille, the child's grandfather and the father of Simon René, had come to work as a harness-maker in the French village of Coupvray, located between the Champagne province and the Brie region of France. Upon Simon's death in 1782, Simon René took over his father's business. Skilled and honest, he was given the title of Master Harness-Maker, entitling him to membership in a guild. Over the years, Simon was able to increase his land holdings to seven and a half acres, raising hay and growing wine grapes. The family had a cow and poultry, and raised vegetables in a kitchen garden. He served his community, giving to charity and agreeing to serve as a tax assessor in 1804.

Perhaps the young Louis Braille would have followed in his father's and grandfather's footsteps as a harness-maker. But one day, away from his parents, the three-year-old Louis attempted to cut a piece of leather in his father's workshop. Perhaps the small child had his hands above him to reach up to the top of the workbench, but the knife slipped and cut into his eye. The bleeding was stanching, but infection set in, spreading to his other eye. The child had lost his eyesight. Louis needed to begin adapting to a changed world.

The next year, in June of 1813, his older sister, Monique Catherine Josephine, married Jean François Carron. Louis had always walked with her at noon to fetch water, and now that she had moved with her new husband to Moulin Street, he missed her company.

In the beginning of January 1814, Napoleon's army retreated through the countryside, obliging villages en route to supply the troops. In that month alone, Coupvray provided 407 bushels of oats and 1,200 bundles of hay. It was no small sacrifice for a village of about six hundred people, which was also obliged to give the army eight cows and hundreds of loaves of bread. By mid-April, the Russian general Pernosky's grenadiers would follow, making similar demands of horses, cows, oats, and hay. They would be followed by the Bavarian infantry, and then later the Prussians. All made their demands. Simon René Braille gave up his cow and quartered a total of

sixty-three soldiers from 1814 to 1816. And then, in 1816, the depleted town was hit by smallpox. But life in the village continued.

A new curé had come to Coupvray. Recognizing the intelligence of the youngest Braille child, the Abbé Jacques Palluy gave him instruction and encouragement. When the town council hired a young teacher, Abbé Palluy asked him to instruct Louis. The new instructor, Antoine Becheret, was astonished at the abilities of Louis, who could recite the lessons from the day before, and whose answers were both germane and humorous.

But a new educational doctrine was being imposed on the schools. "Mutual Instruction" was a method of students instructing each other. Theoretically, they would spur each other on to greater study. But in practice it did not work well, and was opposed by Abbé Palluy, Antoine Becheret, and many

of the parents, including Monique Baron and Simon René Braille. A kindly local manor lord, Marquis d'Orvilliers, knew of a school for blind children founded by a man named Valentin Haüy, whom he had known at court. With the help of Marquis d'Orvilliers, Abbé Palluy helped arrange for a scholarship for Louis Braille to attend the Royal Institution for Blind Youth in Paris. Simon René was cautious of new ideas. He had chosen not to let his family or himself be vaccinated against smallpox. Certainly he did not wish for his son to be away from home. But he and Monique Baron could read and write, their older children had attended



school, and he certainly valued education. Abbé Palluy convinced him that this was a way that Louis could have greater opportunities to learn, and he relented. The morning of February 15, 1819 saw father and son depart by coach for Paris.

When his father embraced him and returned home, Louis must have missed his home and village immensely. But the young student began to adapt to living away from his family and not surprisingly, showed himself to be gifted in school, excelling in grammar, geography, history, and arithmetic. Louis befriended another boy named Gauthier, a friendship that was to last his entire life.



Two children's books on the life and work of Louis Braille are available from booksellers on GSA Schedule 76, Publications Media.

Louis Braille: *The Boy Who Invented Books for the Blind*

Margaret Davidson, Janet Compere
(Illustrator)

Out of Darkness: *The Story of Louis Braille*

Russell Freedman, Kate A. Kiesler (Illustrator)

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It was a friendship that endured difficult years. In addition to their classes, students were also obliged to labor in workshops, where they made shoes, baskets, rope, and other goods that were sold in the city. Work included spinning and knitting, as well as weaving sheets both for the public hospitals in Paris and for their own uniforms. At the age of fourteen, Louis was foreman of one shop in the school that made slippers.

A system of reading for the blind had already been created by Valentin Haüy using large, raised type, but it was cumbersome, taking several volumes to reproduce a small schoolbook. It was also difficult for younger students to use, and what's more, the blind could use it only for reading, not writing.

Under tutelage of local conservatory instructors, the students also learned to play music, though they learned under the less-than-perfect conditions of the school. Often, more advanced students would be given the role of instructing schoolmates in music. Louis Braille proved himself adept at music, and would later play the organ at the Cathedral of Notre Dame des Champs.

The school was in severe financial straits, something the director, Dr. Guillié, had hidden from Louis' father. A number of the staff was released. Without enough supervision, Guillié—who was an ophthalmologist and was the founder of Paris' first eye clinic—resorted to brutal means of punishment, including beating students and giving them only stale bread and water. Guillié had dismissed Valentin Haüy from the school in 1817. Poetic justice was served when, in 1821, Guillié was dismissed for a scandal over an indiscretion with a schoolmistress. A Dr. Pignier replaced him. He was a man who would befriend Louis and champion his work.

Summer vacation brought him back to his family. His sister, Marie Céline, had married. His brother, Louis Simon, had moved to the nearby village of Chessy, but would take the younger Louis to church on Sundays. Here, he would again see the Abbé Palluy, his old teacher, Antoine Becheret, and Marquis d'Orvilliers, who inquired about his classes.

On August 21, 1821, the school celebrated the work of Valentin Haüy. The new director Pignier, along with the assistant director, a man named Dufau, had worked to make the celebration a success. They decorated the school and planned a musical party at the end of the day. Guests included Louis' father and brother, and Valentin Haüy himself, now in his seventies. Louis Braille was overwhelmed when the elderly man shook his hand. Back home, toiling in his father's workshop, Louis Braille began cutting shapes in leather, working at the problem of devising a more practical system of reading for the blind. The following year in March, the school learned of the death Valentin Haüy at the age of seventy-seven. At the gravesite, with only a small group of relatives and students from the school, Braille wept for the man who had given him a priceless gift he would soon render obsolete.



for a single word, the complicated sets of letters made Sonography hard to learn. Louis began to revise and simplify the system. He politely explained his ideas to Barbier, who noted Braille's improvements but became no less defensive that this boy should revamp his work. Louis set himself to devise a new system, staying up late with stylus and paper. Instead of the twelve dots that Barbier had used, Louis used six dots with dashes in sixty-three combinations. At the age of only fifteen, he had made easily readable and writable symbols not only for the letters of the alphabet but for punctuation marks and accents as well as for mathematical signs. Later, a blind English student asked him to add the letter "w," not often used in French, which he did.

But there was another system of writing, not nearly as well known as Haüy's, that Braille would adapt into the system of reading and writing for which he is remembered. Almost three years before, the French Academy had reviewed a letter from an artillery captain in the army of Louis XVIII named Charles Barbier, which described a system making communication possible between persons who were deaf and persons who were blind. While participating in night maneuvers, he was faced with the difficulties of transmitting orders in the dark, and so he invented "night writing." It consisted of dots and dashes pressed into thin cardboard that could be read with the touch of fingertips. Although it was never used by the military, Barbier had other ideas for its applications. Improving on his system by using a system of phonetic writing instead of spelling words out, he called the new method Sonography.

When Barbier approached the Royal Institution with the idea of the blind using Sonography, Dr. Guillié insisted that the students first try out the new system. But only eight days later, the scandal surrounding Guillié led to the loss of his position. Pignier, his successor, told Barbier that the students would be told of the new method of writing. Barbier was not happy that Sonography had not immediately been accepted. Still, the faculty and students were intrigued by the new way of writing, and Pignier informed Barbier in a letter that Sonography would be adopted as an "auxiliary" means of instruction.

Louis Braille became adept at the new system, practicing with his friend Gauthier. Louis used a sliding ruler with small holes that he could move down the page, pushing a stylus through the holes to make indentations on heavy paper on a flat board. But it did not take him long to see that there were deficiencies in the new system. It had no way to write accents (crucial in French), punctuation, mathematical symbols, and numbers. And most of all, because the number of dots were so numerous

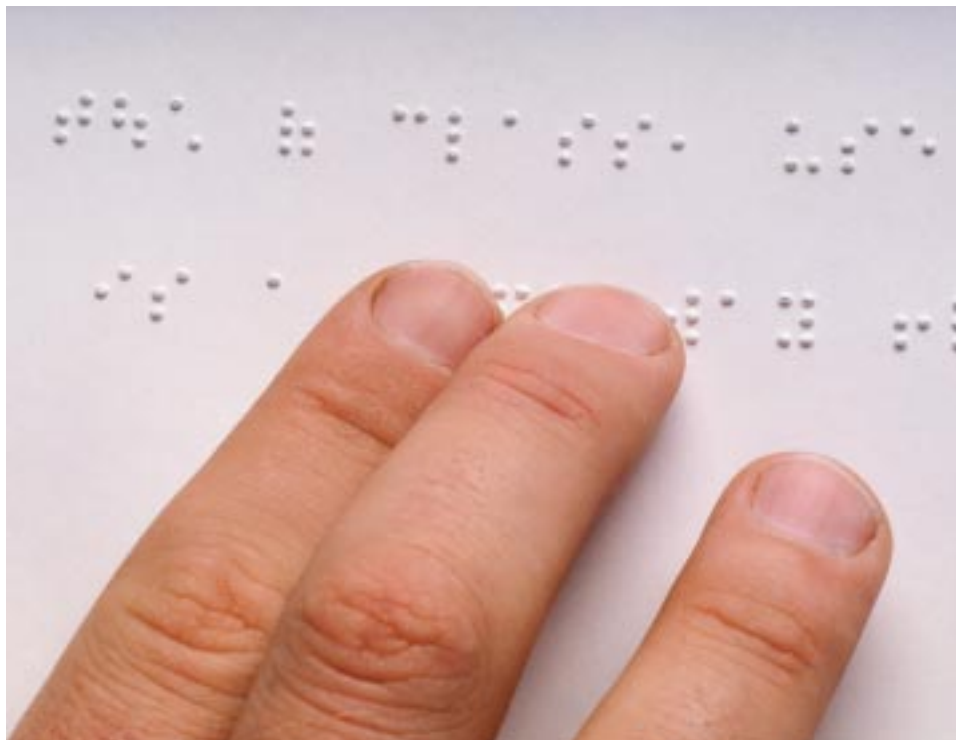
In the fall of 1824, Louis showed his new system to the school. His schoolmates were thrilled with the new way of reading and writing, and Dr. Pignier had sliding rulers made for them like the one Barbier had designed. But life at school was still difficult. The school bookkeeper absconded with substantial funds. Hard times in the country brought fuel rationing to the school, and the already meager diet of the students was further reduced to bread and soup. And the teachers, who at the time



were sighted, resented having to learn the new writing system and complained that the constant sound of punching paper was thwarting their ability to teach. Mostly, however, they were afraid of their jobs being given to blind teachers.

Dr. Pignier lobbied the government to officially recognize Braille's system, as well as for funds to recondition or replace the old, dilapidated building. He was not successful. He did succeed, however, in finding a position for Louis to study organ at St. Anne's Church. The first blind person to begin studying there, his playing was later complimented by the great composer Felix Mendelssohn.

Braille was made an apprentice teacher by Pignier in August 1828, with the very modest salary of fifteen francs per month. He was only seventeen and the first blind apprentice teacher in the school. The older teachers were infuriated by the appointment, but he was a gifted instructor, teaching geography, music, grammar, and algebra. His students were devoted to him. He continued revising his system of writing, modifying it for writing music. He also improved the system so that it no longer used dashes, which were easy to read but hard to imprint with a stylus. The following year, he published *Method of Writing Words, Music, and Plain Songs by Means of Dots, for Use by the Blind and Arranged for Them*. In the preface, Louis Braille was gracious in recognizing the significance of the earlier system of Charles Barbier. Later, Barbier was equally gracious in recognizing the improved efficiency in Braille's system.



The same year of his teaching appointment, Louis received an exemption from serving in the French army for his blindness. His father, representing him at the recruiting board, had written down that he could neither read nor write. Within a few years, the school would give full professorships to Louis, his friend Gauthier, and another former student and friend, Hippolyte Coltat. No blind person had ever held the position at the school before. They all used Braille's writing system with their students.

Other innovations were still to come. Because his students needed a way to write home, Louis also invented *Raphigraphy*, which consists of print letters formed with punched dots. It was a labor-intensive system, but it worked. The school was visited by a former student from the school, Francois-Pierre Foucault, who devised a machine known as a "piston board." Simply by pressing a key, the user could produce letters formed with dots punched into a sheet of paper. It was similar to another invention—the typewriter—that had first been made in 1808 for Carolina Fantoni da Fivizzon, a blind countess. In 1837, the school published a history of France in three volumes, set in Braille.

After visiting the decrepit school building in 1838, the poet Alphonse de Lamartine prevailed on France's Chamber of Deputies to build a new structure. But while it was being built, the assistant director, P. Armand Dufau, succeeded in having Dr. Pignier dismissed, falsely accusing him of corrupting minds by the way he taught history.

By now, Louis Braille's health was already in decline. He had contracted tuberculosis, likely resulting in part from a poor diet and the cold, damp, crowded environs of the school. Hoping to recover his strength, he traveled home to Coupvray. Returning to Paris in October 1843, he discovered that Dufau had removed academic courses such as Latin and geometry from the curriculum in favor of "training" that was more work oriented. The school, after all, was also in the manufacturing business.

Dufau also introduced a new system of reading from England invented by John Alston. Like the system of Valentin Haüy, it used raised letters, but Alston's were simpler, doing away with serifs and swirls. Dufau proceeded to burn the whole of the

school's collection of books in both Valentin Haüy's system and Louis Braille's. He also removed the slates and styluses the students used for writing. He had wanted to make a point, and he did.

But the students were interested in other points—the ones at the ends of nails, forks, and knitting needles. Against the new rules, they used these to write with Louis Braille's method. Physical punishment or receiving no dinner did nothing to discourage them. Older students would secretly teach the system to younger ones. The educational doctrine of "Mutual Instruction" had taken off on its own accord.

Joseph Guadet, Dufau's assistant, succeeded in convincing him that Dufau's position might be in danger if persons in government discovered the students were—literally—taking educational policy into their own hands. Likely we will never be certain of Guadet's true motivations, but they had the desired effect. Dufau reconsidered. When the new school building opened in November 1843, each student was given a slate for writing Braille. They petitioned the government, nominating Louis for the French Legion of Honor. Though unsuccessful, before Braille's system they could not have even written the petition.

Braille did not catch on immediately. Though simple to learn, it was—and still is—an abstract idea to the sighted, looking too different from written letters. There were also competing systems, including John Alston's and another method devised by Dr. William Moon, which also used embossed writing that was in a plainer style than Valentin Haüy's. There are still some people who use this system. Eventually though, Braille's ease of use enabled it to catch on throughout the world in hundreds of languages.



He died on January 6, 1852 at the age of only forty-three. In his will, he was generous to many, among them family, students, and workers at the school. But his friends were puzzled over a box he left, asking that it be burned without anyone opening it. Of course they looked inside, as he likely knew would happen. It contained IOUs from students to whom he had lent money. As was his wish, the contents of the box were burned.

Sources:

Jean Roblin's biography *The Reading Fingers*, translated from the French by Ruth G. Mandalian, gives a wonderfully readable account of the life of Louis Braille.

An excellent essay containing numerous links, *How Braille Began*, is on-line at <http://www.braille.com/braillehx.htm>