



*Friends of the  
Topiary Park*

## Looking Back on the Ohio School for the Deaf

### How Ohio Made Education History

When the Ohio Institution for the Deaf and Dumb was established in 1829, it was one of only five such institutions in the U.S. Ohio's school for the deaf was also the first to be entirely supported by state government as a public institution.

The school opened in a few rooms in a building at Broad and High streets with one student. By the second year there were 22 students enrolled, and soon the state decided to purchase land for a permanent location. The new site was 10 acres, one-half mile east of the Statehouse and it was purchased for \$300.

The first building opened in 1834. The original building was added to in 1845 and 1856. The success of the school led the state to fund the creation of a new building on the same site. The new school, finished in 1868, comprised seven connected buildings designed in the Second Empire style. It is commonly believed that George Bellows Sr. was the architect of this expansive structure; however, records indicate that the architect was J.M. Blackburn. When it reopened the new school served 400 students and had transitioned to a residential facility with students ranging in age from 6-21.

The grounds were developed into a landscaped park, which included an iron fence taken from the Statehouse grounds, in 1873.

In 1899 another new building was added to the western edge of the campus. The French Chateausque building was designed by Columbus architects Richards, McCarty and Bulford and is the only remaining building from the deaf school campus. In 1908 the name of the school was officially changed to the Ohio School for the Deaf.



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## The Deaf School Moves & A Park Rises from the Ashes

As the school grew so did the neighborhood, however in 1943 a commission recommended the relocation of the campus. In 1953 the Ohio School for the Deaf moved to its present location on a 130-acre site on Columbus's north side.

After the school left, the neighborhood declined. The decline cannot be entirely attributed to the move of the deaf school, but it took several decades for the area to see a renaissance. In the 1970s community groups were formed to preserve and restore the historic Town-Franklin neighborhood. By the early 1980s the deaf school buildings were vacant and in disrepair, but plans were underway to redevelop the main building into housing for the elderly. A suspicious early morning fire put a stop to these plans and left all but one deaf school building demolished.

Today the remaining building is being restored and developed into apartments and seven acres of the campus has been transformed into a beautiful downtown public park, which includes the Topiary Park that attracts visitors from around the world.