

Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Alexander Melville Bell, August 10, 1882, with transcript

Letter written by Alexander Graham Bell to his Father. Newport — August 10th, 1882. My dear Father:

Your note of the 7th inst. just received.

Glad you are thinking of bringing Visible Speech forward. The more I think of it the more I feel sure that the time has come to give Visible Speech a vigorous push on its way to popularity and I think that the American Association is the Society to bring it forward before. What I would recommend is a lecture describing Visible Speech itself and illustrating it in the old way by sending some one out of the hall.

You can call upon me if you like as in the olden times or we can get some people in Montreal itself to illustrate with. I would recommend commencing with a simple description of the symbols themselves followed by practical illustrations so that the people shall clearly understand what Visible Speech is before a word is said about the uses of the system. Having heard the explanations and witnessed the experiments the audience will be ready to receive intelligently and enthusiastically as much as you like to put in about applications and I think that the time has come when Visible Speech should be prominently brought forward in connection with spelling reform.

By the Constitution of the A. A. A. S. no title of a proposed paper can be even submitted to the Standing Committee until an abstract giving a general idea of the nature of the paper has been 2 handed in, but this abstract is more a matter of form than anything else. A simple statement of the nature of the paper comprised in six lines would be sufficient to comply with the formalities.

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I would suggest that you write to the permanent Secretary, Mr. Putnam at once explaining the nature of the lecture and sending him a copy of your recent work, "Sounds and Their Relations" which will give fuller information concerning the nature of Visible Speech.

I will write also by this mail to Mr. Putnam seconding your application and to some of the men who would be most interested in the subject. Major Powell of Washington, whom I believe you know, would be specially interested and the paper would probably come into his section, viz: "Anthropology."

The address of F. W. Putnam permanent secretary of the A. A. A. S. is Salem, Mass., until August 17th after that time Windsor Hotel, Montreal.

It might be a good plan to have Burbank print off two or three hundred copies of the English alphabet with some illustrations of English having interlinear translation as in "Sounds and Their Relations" for distribution at the meeting.

Perhaps the simplest and best title would be Visible Speech.

Other titles that strike me as still more suitable from a scientific point of view but perhaps not so popular would be "Universal Alphabets" — "A Scientific Notation of Speech in Connection with Spelling Reform" (The only objection to this is 3 that spelling reform does not properly come under any section of the Society and might therefore better be omitted from the title).

I think that "Visible Speech" alone would be the best title if it is supplemented by a description or "abstract" for the information of the Standing Committee giving a general idea of what Visible Speech is.

Could you not come up here a few days before leaving for Montreal so that we might practice reading and writing the symbols.

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I leave here for Montreal on the 19th instant.

By the bye were you not elected a member of the Association at the Boston meeting? If so you better mention the fact to Mr. Putnam and ask whether you are still a member as you have not heard anything from the Association since.

The probabilities are that you can continue your membership by simply paying the back fees and if so this would not only place you in a better position for having your paper accepted but would also enable you to get a return ticket to Montreal at half price.

We now have Lena McCurdy and Miss Barnard staying with us and expect Miss Horseford and Charlie Hubbard in a day or two. Also Gertrude and Maurice Grossmann and Company.

Love to Mama and my cousins. Hope Mr. Henderson is progressing well. Give my kind regards to him. Please send Mrs. Henderson's Montreal address.

Would you like me to apply for rooms for you?

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Will Mama go to Montreal too? If you and Mama both go to Montreal please telegraph me to that effect as time is short to secure accommodations and if you go I will invite you both to join our party and stay with us at our hotel.

With much love.

Your affectionate son, Alec.