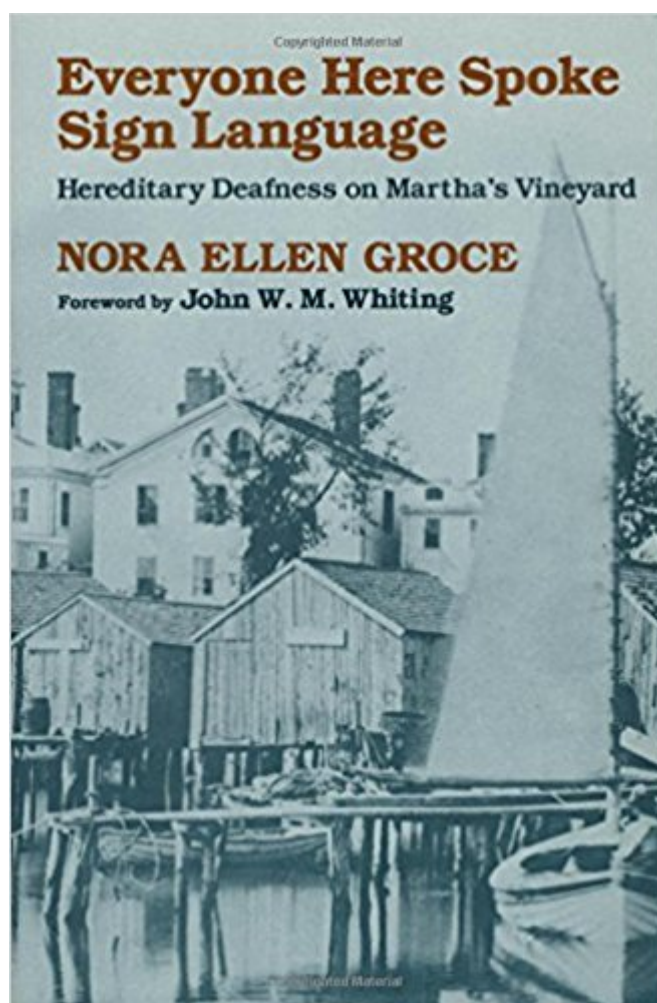


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# Everyone Here Spoke Sign Language: Hereditary Deafness On Martha's Vineyard



## Synopsis

From the seventeenth century to the early years of the twentieth, the population of Martha's Vineyard manifested an extremely high rate of profound hereditary deafness. In stark contrast to the experience of most deaf people in our own society, the Vineyarders who were born deaf were so thoroughly integrated into the daily life of the community that they were not seen--and did not see themselves--as handicapped or as a group apart. Deaf people were included in all aspects of life, such as town politics, jobs, church affairs, and social life. How was this possible? On the Vineyard, hearing and deaf islanders alike grew up speaking sign language. This unique sociolinguistic adaptation meant that the usual barriers to communication between the hearing and the deaf, which so isolate many deaf people today, did not exist.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

When is deafness neither handicap nor stigma? When, as this remarkable book recounts, the entire hearing community learns from childhood to be bilingual in conventional speech and sign language, and when the deaf are wholly integrated into the community's social, economic, religious, and recreational life...A vivid ethnography of a hearing community's full acceptance of, and adaptation to, deafness. Groce also constructs a fascinating ethnohistory of this genetic disorder.

(Choice)Beautiful and fascinating...I was so moved by Groce's book that the moment I finished it I jumped in the car, with only a toothbrush, a tape recorder, and a camera--I had to see this

enchanted island for myself. (Oliver Sacks New York Review of Books) Brilliantly argued and lively... [Groce's] information consists of the oral history she herself garnered from some 50 witnesses, almost all more than 75 years old, and the documents in print and in manuscript that cross-check and extend their first-hand accounts. Human genetic theory, ethnographic counterparts and a clear-eyed account of social attitudes are the analytic tools that form her brief and telling work... [A] persuasive and compassionate investigation. (Scientific American) Fascinating... Groce accomplishes much just by pointing out that "handicaps" are something a culture creates, and thus the joint responsibility of us all. That's what places this book squarely within the best tradition of anthropological writing, and makes it both moving and encouraging. (Village Voice)

Nora Ellen Groce, a cultural and medical anthropologist, received her doctorate from Brown University. She is currently a Fellow at the Family Development Study, Children's Hospital, Boston, and in the Department of Pediatrics, Harvard Medical School.

I initially read this book 20 odd years ago for a class and found it very interesting. It really isn't just a book about sign language, but a combination of early history of Martha's Vineyard, seafaring, societal norms, social perceptions, deafness, sign language, with a sampling of population genetics theory presented in such a manner that no genetics background is necessary to understand. One of the lessons I came away with from the book is that the concept of being handicapped is really a cultural perception. At one point, Groce is interviewing one of the old timers from the island who was recounting individuals who had lived in various houses. Groce noted that it might have taken two or three interviews before the person remember that a given individual had been deaf. Deafness was not perceived as a handicap as it was fairly common place in the early Martha Vineyard's society. Instead, it was simply seen as a trait, like being tall or short or speaking a different language. As a result, everyone learned sign language and Martha's Vineyard society was notably different from other societies on the other islands or on the mainland as a result, with different communication dynamics. This is a very interesting read. Over the years I have shared this book with several individuals.

Very interesting how well accepted the deaf were embraced

I read this book a couple of years ago after reading Oliver Sack's book "Seeing Voices". I read many books each year and I must agree with the other readers here in stating that this is one of the

books that has stuck with me. The sense of community and integration encountered by the deaf people on Martha's Vineyard are truly lessons to us all on acceptance and normal treatment of disabilities. I only wish it had a follow up edition.

Arrived in excellent condition in short order. What a great little book. I wish I could have visited when this was still a thriving Deaf community. Well, deaf and hearing together. Interesting history.

Good condition.

Interesting reading

I am a direct descendant of Jonathan Lambert and that is why I ordered a copy of this book. It is so exciting to read excerpts about my paternal grandmother's ancestors. My grandmother's maiden name was indeed "Lambert". She married a Burnett, which was my maiden name. She had given me genealogy of her family before she died that dates back to approximately 1581 around the time when Thomas Lambert was born. He, his wife and 3 children sailed on the Mary and John ship to Mass. in 1630. They boarded the ship in Dorchester, England I believe. They were from the Weald of Kent area. Thomas had a son named Joshua who married Abigail Linnell and had an inn on Cape Cod, Barnstable, Mass. Joshua and Abigail's son was Jonathan who moved to Martha's Vineyard and married Elizabeth Eddy. I loved reading about life on the Vineyard and hope to go there one day. I think this book would be fascinating for anyone.

This book is required reading for my sign language I class. Because I'm also a scientist, I find the genetics piece about this fascinating. This book is well written with bits of humor and I've enjoyed what I've read so far

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