The asylum. The institution. The school. Deaf identity. Does Deaf history recount the success of this progression—or is it about the margins where control has failed? Isn’t Deaf history really about the small land wars at the margins of society and self-identity, exactly where the Hearing administrations of the Deaf through these institutions don’t quite succeed in controlling or suppressing Deafness? Isn’t Deaf history more about the resistances to subjugation and oppression than about the success of the institutions into which Hearing people put Deaf people?

—Owen Wrigley, The Politics of Deafness

Among them there is always one who exercises great influence on the others . . . because of his intelligence; but above all because of his reputation for bravery and because he has shown he knows how to endure . . . deprivation and punishment.

—Juan Manuel Ballesteros, Curso elemental de instrucción de sordo-mudos

Researchers of deaf history know all too well the difficulties of unearthing information about deaf people’s lives, especially if the object of study is “ordinary” deaf people. My experience in researching the students who attended the Spanish National School for Deaf-Mutes and the Blind during the 1870s is no exception. Although residential schools were—and continue to be—the nucleus of the deaf community, the place where most deaf children first learn their language, history, and cultural traditions, it is not easy to learn much about life there. This is not to say that published sources of information do not exist. On the contrary, annual reports, or memorias, explained the class schedules, masses, and other activities; outlined improvements in the physical plant, changes in personnel, and modifications in curriculum; and described the students’ uniforms and

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even their diet. In addition, the *Reglamento* set forth the school’s objectives; stated the entrance requirements; and spelled out the respective obligations of the director, faculty, students, and staff; while the speeches given on graduation day touted the school’s accomplishments. Such documents suggest a highly structured existence in which the days marched by in orderly fashion. Yet when all is said and done, we are left wondering: What was life at the National School really like?

It is at least as difficult to learn about the individual students who attended the National School. Official records generally contain little beyond their arrival and departure dates and a smattering of personal information—date and place of birth, cause of deafness and age of onset, whether there were other deaf persons in the family, and so on. The words of Leah Cohen, a contemporary writer, sum it all up: After perusing the records of New York’s Lexington School for the Deaf in an effort to learn more about her deceased grandfather, alumnus Samuel Cohen, she concluded, “In all the letters, the telegrams, the documents, the medical records, I couldn’t locate Sam himself. . . . When I go looking for Sam, it seems I come up only with papers, sheaves of dry correspondence about him and for him but never by him.” So, too, it is with many students who passed through the Spanish National School and left little more than their names and dates of attendance, seemingly passive entities who were acted upon by their teachers and other school personnel (the great majority of them hearing) and buffeted by the changing tides of deaf education. Once again we are left wondering what these students were really like; how they interacted with each other, their instructors, and their caretakers; and which students stood out among them, and why.

To venture beyond the official version of life at the residential school, we must delve into archival documents, and even then the record is fragmentary at best. Yet such documents offer our only hope of fleshing out the limited, sanitized accounts created for public consumption. The unpublished accounts dealt not infrequently with episodes that were intentionally kept from the public eye to protect the reputation of the school, its teachers, and administrators. Instances of mistreatment of students, insubordination, and even insurrection were prime targets for a cover-up. On such occasions the
disparity between the official rhetoric and reality could not have been greater.

Documentation concerning these events, which was often the result of internal investigations, may supply us with missing pieces of a rich mosaic, regaling us with unexpected details about day-to-day life at the establishment. These archival documents also acquaint us with individual deaf students, for when the investigation included interviews, transcripts sometimes preserved the students’ accounts of events in their own words, in their own signs. Interviewees thus appear not as passive recipients of knowledge doled out by instructors and caretakers but as protagonists who shaped events at the school and helped determine the course of deaf history.

One such protagonist was Manuel Tinoco, a hitherto unknown student who, more than a century ago, played a crucial role at the Spanish National School. His story, together with that of his classmate, Patricio García, brings to mind the 1988 Deaf President Now movement at Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C. Neither story is chronicled in official works on the National School. Nevertheless, such accounts are crucial to a fuller understanding of deaf history, for they offer a rare, uncensored glimpse of residential school students—of their defiance, courage, and resourcefulness in confronting abuses perpetrated by authority figures and also of the cooperation, loyalty, and unity that reigned among them.

Manuel Tinoco’s Story

Early in the morning of Saturday, July 29, 1876, Manuel Tinoco y García was discovered missing from the National School for Deaf-Mutes and the Blind. The school’s shoemaker, Juan Francisco Suárez y Segura, first noticed that young Manuel was not in his workshop. Suárez informed the concierge, Ildefonso Gutiérrez y Sánchez, who notified the school’s director, Pedro Cabello y Madurga, and the hunt was on.

Authorities at the school assumed the boy had run away, and a motive was not hard to find. Sixteen-year-old Manuel had little reason to be content at his home-away-from-home. In the classroom he was hardly a model student, and in the workshop he showed little promise of mastering a trade. Ousted from the print shop (where he had been sent to learn typesetting) because of his poor work habits
and the bad example he set for his classmates, his behavior in the
shoemaking shop was little better. Moreover, in the almost four years
since his arrival, he had not spent a single holiday away from the
school, so his father’s recent refusal to allow him to spend summer
vacation at home must have only compounded his woes.

Deaf from the age of four (reportedly because of a “congestion”?),
Manuel had long since lost most of his speech, and what little re-
mainded was largely unintelligible.8 A few months shy of his thirteenth
birthday, he had enrolled in the National School as a pensionado, or
nonpaying student, in October 1872 and journeyed to the nation’s
capital from Veger de la Frontera, Cadiz, in southern Spain. Remain-
ing at home were Manuel’s parents and two siblings—all hearing.9

For deaf children from hearing families like Manuel Tinoco, the
residential school often provided their first contact with other deaf
people. This was especially true of those from small towns and vil-
lages, who might never have seen another deaf person in their lives.10
Newcomers to the school exchanged their former isolation for the
friendship and camaraderie of others like themselves. The first rite of
passage was the “sign language baptism,” in which the new student
received a unique name sign (Spanish Sign Language has no proper
names) based on a facial feature, a distinctive mark such as a scar, or
even some aspect of the newcomer’s clothing. The newly coined
name sign may have been the first sign novices acquired, and it was
soon followed by many others, for deaf students immersed in a sign-
ing environment quickly pick up manual language.

Unlike their hearing counterparts, many deaf children acquire
their language and culture not from parents and relatives but from
peers and deaf adults at a residential school (fewer than 10 percent of
deaf children have deaf parents). Such institutions play a key role in
the transmission of deaf people’s language, culture, and history. In
Manuel Tinoco’s day, the National School was the heart and soul of
the Spanish deaf community, and its language, culture, and traditions
spread throughout the peninsula when successive generations of Na-
tional School students returned to their home provinces.11

The National School for Deaf-Mutes and the Blind first opened
in 1805 with six deaf students (all boys) and admitted its first blind
pupils in 1847; by the time of Manuel’s flight, enrollment stood at
112 deaf children (84 boys and 28 girls), 63 blind students, and 1 deaf-blind boy. The school’s purpose was threefold: provide pupils with a primary education, prepare them for a trade or profession in keeping with their social position and abilities, and serve as a training ground for future educators of deaf and blind children. Students had to be deaf (or blind) to a degree that rendered their instruction impossible by “ordinary” means; those from poor families were allowed to attend for free. Pupils were admitted between the ages of seven and fourteen unless they had some prior instruction, in which case they might be accepted up to the age of sixteen. They could reside at the school a maximum of ten years, but under no circumstances could they remain there once past their teens.

The school was a world unto itself, complete with classrooms, workshops, dining rooms, dormitories, play areas, infirmaries, a gymnasium, and a chapel. Housed at number 5 on the calle de San Mateo in a dilapidated three-story structure built (reportedly “with malice” during the seventeenth century, the overall condition of the facility, the distribution of the rooms, and the limited space left much to be desired. In the dormitories the beds were so close together there was barely room for a chair between each one—a situation authorities lamented. If a child died in the school’s infirmary, the body was not removed until late at night to spare the students the sight of a dead classmate. (The alternative was to carry the corpse through the classrooms while lessons were in progress.) Despite the “constant cleanliness of the rooms [and] perfect tidiness of the children’s clothing, beds, and personal effects,” the rooms were “wretched and poorly adapted.” One observer noted, “between ancient retaining walls and uneven roofs, [the rooms] smother rather than promote the natural development of [these] unfortunate beings.”

Instruction at the National School was divided into two levels, elementary and secondary. In theory elementary education lasted six years, but better students could advance more rapidly. Moreover, those who, because of their age or circumstances, needed to learn a trade as soon as possible spent less time on academics. In the primary grades pupils studied sign language, lipreading and articulation, grammar (the emphasis was on written composition and spelling),
arithmetic, Spanish history and geography, religion, gymnastics, and hygiene. At the secondary level they either continued their academic preparation or learned a trade in one of the workshops. Those who followed the latter route had to be at least thirteen years of age; they spent no more than ten hours a day in the shop and received a daily lesson to round out their instruction.

In the workshops the boys were trained as printers, typesetters, lithographers, bookbinders, carpenters, cabinetmakers, lathe operators, tailors, shoemakers, or locksmiths—trades that enabled them to become self-supporting. Along the way they manufactured and repaired a host of things for everyday use at the school: The print shop produced textbooks, the tailor shop fashioned the boys’ uniforms, the shoemaking shop crafted their shoes and boots, and the woodshop turned out window frames, doors, tables, benches, and bookshelves. In their class of labores, the girls learned to sew, crochet, darn, and embroider—skills they used to make their own uniforms, along with shirts, blouses, underwear, and linens, which they also washed, mended, and ironed.

At the National School strict segregation of the sexes was the rule (which was typical of hearing schools as well), and girls and boys studied in separate classrooms, slept in separate dormitories, and ate in separate dining rooms (the girls’ food was delivered from the kitchen on a dumbwaiter). Students worshipped in separate parts of the chapel—the girls sat above the boys in a gallery that was presumably out of their field of vision—and they amused themselves in separate play areas. (Nevertheless, we may question the effectiveness of these measures, for in a log of students’ offenses and punishments, among the boys’ peccadilloes was “talking with deaf-mute girls.”)

School life was highly regimented, with every minute accounted for. The day began at 6 A.M. (5 A.M. in the summer), when students recited a prayer before dressing, attended to personal grooming, and made their beds. Mass at 7:00 was followed by a light breakfast of bread and coffee or hot chocolate. The boys went to class from 8:00 until 10:30, at which time they enjoyed a half hour of playtime and then did gymnastics from 11:00 to 12:30. A thirty-minute break preceded the midday meal of soup, stew, and dessert. The hour between
1:30 and 2:30 was reserved for the *siesta*; then the boys dedicated half an hour to study and two and a half more to instruction. After a one-hour recess, they attended drawing class for an hour and a half, and then it was time for the rosary and another hour of study. The evening meal (meat, potatoes or rice, and vegetables) followed, and then it was bedtime.

The girls’ day was similarly regimented, but they spent only two and a half hours in class (compared to five for the boys), half an hour studying their lessons (thirty minutes less than the boys), and five and a half hours on sewing, embroidery, and the like: a total of three hours per day on academics and nearly twice as much on domestic pursuits.

Classes continued in the summer as well (although for fewer hours). However, students whose conduct and diligence were deemed satisfactory could return to their homes in July and August, as well as for Christmas, Carnival, Holy Week, and Easter. Family members, friends, and guardians could visit from 10:00 to 1:00 on holidays, and students could leave the school in their company on holidays and the first Sunday of the month. On Thursdays and holidays the teaching assistants and aides took their charges for a walk on the outskirts of town—the girls strolled separately from the boys, of course.

Pupils were under constant surveillance (the *Reglamento* stipulated that they were never to be left unattended). During classes they were entrusted to the teachers and their assistants, whereas outside the classroom their care and supervision fell mainly to the teachers’ aides. When family members or guardians came to visit, children could receive them only in the presence of an aide.

Because students were virtually never left alone, it would not have been easy to slip away—which made Manuel Tinoco’s disappearance all the more baffling. When a thorough search of the premises failed to locate him, personnel at the school surmised that he had left Saturday before dawn, sometime between 3 and 4 A.M. At this unusual hour, the teaching assistants and aides, together with the concierge and the doorman, followed the doctor’s orders and herded the sleepy scholars to the Manzanares River to bathe. Normally the
youths washed their feet twice a week—under the watchful eyes of their keepers, needless to say—but in July they were expected to cleanse their entire bodies.24

The night of July 28 was dark because there was no moon,25 making it easier to steal away unnoticed, and Manuel appeared to have taken advantage of this excursion beyond the school’s walls to claim his freedom—thus “mocking [his caretakers’] exquisite vigilance,” in the words of the school’s director.26

School employees looked for the fugitive in the boulevards, streets, and plazas of Madrid, as well as on the outskirts of town and in the railway station.27 The search was extended to the homes of students and alumni with families in the capital or nearby Carabanchel, but to no avail. The hunt intensified when word arrived that a policeman had spotted a boy fitting Manuel’s description asleep on a bench in the Plaza Mayor. The sound of the officer’s voice had failed to rouse him, but at a light tap on the foot, the youth sprang from the bench and disappeared into the night without a word. At this news, Manuel Cornejo, the night watchman, was dispatched to the Plaza Mayor on subsequent evenings on the chance that the boy might return, but he never did.

School Director Pedro Cabello notified the provincial governor that Manuel was missing, and he also informed the boy’s guardian in Madrid, Don Manuel Sánchez. (Students from the provinces were required to have a representative in the capital whom the school could contact in case of emergency.) On August 6, more than a week after the disappearance, Cabello wrote to Manuel’s father, Francisco Tinoco, in hopes that the runaway might have somehow managed to reach his home in Veger de la Frontera—nearly five hundred kilometers from Madrid. Manuel’s father did not reply—he was sick and unable to work—but his mother, Francisca García, replied that her son was not there and begged that if he were found, he should not be punished.28 At this point Cabello still had not notified his superior, José Cárdenas, the Director General of Public Instruction, of the pupil’s absence—a clear breach of procedures.

At the age of forty-six, Director Cabello was in his second year at the National School.29 Before assuming this post he had acquired a
string of academic degrees. While still in his twenties, he had attended the Escuela Normal Central, earning first a teaching credential and then an advanced degree in teacher training. In both fields he consistently received the highest possible marks—all sobresalientes, the equivalent of straight A’s.

Next he completed a bachillerato—a bachelor’s degree—at the Instituto de Noviciado, followed by a licenciatura—a more advanced degree—in civil and canon law from the Universidad Central. Cabello taught at the Escuela Normal Central, where he also served as regent. As his reputation grew, one honor followed the next, and the distinguished educator was soon hired by the royal family to tutor their offspring in history, geography, arithmetic, and grammar. His illustrious pupils included Isabel II’s daughter, María Isabel de Borbón, the children of the duke of Montpensier, the queen’s brother-in-law, and the infantas Pilar, Paz, and Eulalia. Yet despite his many professional achievements, when Cabello assumed the directorship of the National School, he was in essence a novice in special education. His preparation in the field was apparently limited to the one teacher-training course he had attended (it is not clear in what year) at the school he would now lead. And although he embraced his new assignment wholeheartedly—“your cause, most worthy professors, is today my own, just as your glory is my glory,” he assured his faculty—there is no denying his lack of experience.

The National School was a state-sponsored institution, and its directorship was in fact a political appointment. Thus Cabello’s predecessor, Carlos Nebreda y López, had been swept in with the triumph of the revolution of 1868, no doubt because of his close ties to the politician Manuel Ruiz Zorilla, who headed the Ministry of Development. When the Bourbon monarchy was restored in 1875, Ruiz Zorilla went into exile abroad, and Nebreda was replaced by Pedro Cabello, acclaimed educator and not coincidentally, tutor to the royals. As director of the National School, Cabello was charged with a host of responsibilities—overseeing instruction; visiting classes, workshops, and dormitories; presiding over faculty meetings; writing annual reports; and managing the finances. First and foremost, however, was his duty to “establish and conserve order and discipline.”
Manuel’s flight was prima facie evidence of Cabello’s inability to maintain complete control, which may explain his reluctance to notify his superior of the renegade’s escape.

But Cabello could not conceal Manuel’s disappearance for long. On the morning of Sunday, July 30, some twenty-four hours after he had been discovered missing, teaching assistant Aniceto Legaz, teachers’ aides Manuel Cortés and Ramón Bahón, and the school nurse, Angel Arias, were searching for the runaway along the calle de Fuencarral (Fuencarral Street). There they encountered Miguel Fernández Villabrille, the highest-ranking teacher of deaf students, and informed him that they were looking for Manuel. (Villabrille did not reside at the school, so this was the first he had heard of the boy’s flight.)

The next day Villabrille happened to meet the school’s secretary, Juan González de San Román, on the calle de Atocha. Believing the news to be in the public domain, Villabrille mentioned the youth’s disappearance.34 In no time the word was out, and on August 10—when Manuel had been gone for nearly two weeks—Cabello was obliged to write a letter to the Director General of Public Instruction, informing him of the boy’s escape.35 (He would later attribute his delay in reporting the incident to a “desire to communicate at the same time the results of the search for the runaway.”36)

Six days later the director general responded to Cabello, admonishing him to be “more exact and punctual” in the performance of his duties in the future. He also instructed Cabello to conduct a formal inquiry into the youth’s disappearance.37 When the investigation ended in September, it alleged that employees’ responsibilities were not clearly delineated and that the director himself sometimes instructed the employees to perform tasks other than those they had been hired to do. But this did not exempt staff members from their official obligations, and the teaching assistants and aides were pronounced negligent in supervising their charges. The investigation also criticized the “internal order of the establishment” and upbraided Cabello for his lengthy delay in notifying the ministry of the boy’s flight.38
At 7 p.m. on Friday, July 28, the evening of his escape, Manuel Tinoco and his classmates had been in the courtyard of the National School, opposite the gymnasium. The small garden area was presided over by a bust of Pedro Ponce de León, the sixteenth-century Benedictine who is best remembered for teaching deaf children to speak. Aside from the likeness of the long-dead monk, however, no one was watching the boys, who had been playing unsupervised since leaving the shoemaking shop an hour earlier. One of the teaching assistants, José María Baracaldo, hovered nearby at the doorman’s desk, but he was reading the newspaper and did not notice when Manuel pulled on street clothes over his blue shirt, denim vest, and pants (the boys’ summer uniform) and prepared to leave.

Workmen had secured the gymnasium door with a latch rather than locking it with a key. Thanks to their carelessness, young Tinoco did not have to wait for the hour of the predawn baths to make his getaway. The gymnasium was actually a converted carriage entrance that had been enclosed for its present purpose, so when Manuel opened the door, he stepped out directly onto the street. Then he walked away from the National School for Deaf-Mutes and the Blind. From the courtyard Carlos Becerril, Juan Cosías, Gumersindo Rico, and Joaquín Menéndez watched silently as their friend departed. That evening school authorities did not miss him. Teachers’ aide Cortés ushered the children from the workshops to the chapel to pray; teaching assistant Baracaldo watched over them in the boys’ dining room at supper; and night watchman Cornejo patrolled the dormitories when the boys bedded down for the night. Before sunrise a phalanx of staff members ushered the students to the Manzanares River and back again, but because many children were away on vacation, Manuel’s absence went undetected until the following morning.

In his four years at the National School, Manuel Tinoco had made new friends, deaf youths like himself who had come there to acquire an education and learn a trade. In the days leading up to his escape, these friends had collaborated in some rather elaborate preparations. Realizing that his uniform would betray him as a school runaway, his companions had set about providing him with less conspicuous attire. (Their actions were unwittingly facilitated by
staff members who relinquished the wardrobe keys to pupils upon request, rather than personally escorting them to the dormitories when they needed to retrieve items of clothing. This was in violation of Director Cabello’s explicit order, issued earlier that month, that employees were not to give out the keys.)

Carlos Becerril appropriated an old jacket belonging to one of the paying students and gave it to Juan Cosías. (A pensionista, or paying student, himself, Becerril would have had access to the pensionistas’ dormitories, which were off limits to pensionados like Manuel and his other friends. The Reglamento stated that the two categories of students were to “lead separate lives in the establishment,” but the relationship between Tinoco and Becerril suggests that, in practice, their separation was not that rigid.)

Because the jacket had a torn sleeve, Pascual Gasulla mended it, and Manuel hid the garment in a locker in the blind students’ dormitory. Gumersindo Rico appropriated a pair of pants belonging to another student, Fernando Martínez, and also a necktie, and these too were concealed in the blind students’ dormitory. A black hat left in the servants’ room on the third floor likewise made its way into Manuel’s possession. The day before the escape, Cosías moved the purloined items to a locker in the gymnasium, which was on the ground floor.

All the students had known in advance about Manuel’s plans to flee—“[A]ny news that might interest the community spreads instantaneously,” former director Juan Manuel Ballesteros had observed years earlier; but they kept his secret. Then, as now, students at deaf schools formed a close-knit community, and allegiance to the group was paramount. Former director Ballesteros emphasized their “great unity,” which he considered a “great advantage,” noting that “it is not possible to inform on a classmate without running the risk of paying a high price for the accusation. All of them will resign themselves to being punished rather than reveal the identity of the guilty party. If for some reason the guilty one is discovered,” he explained, his classmates “regard him as a victim and deprive themselves of a portion of their food in order to save it for the one sentenced to confinement.”
Despite their defiance of authority and willingness to conceal Manuel’s plans and facilitate his escape, the accomplices could hardly be considered troublemakers. Several of the boys—Becerril, Gasulla, and Menéndez—had received awards at the annual ceremonies at the close of the academic year, and in the years to come at least two of them, Becerril and Rico, would receive still more. Indeed, Manuel himself, although not exactly an outstanding student, had never once been subject to disciplinary action in his four years at the school.

After leaving the National School on Friday, July 28, Manuel Tinoco spent the night not in the Plaza Mayor, as had originally been thought, but in the Plaza de Oriente, in the shadow of the massive royal palace. Amid vast gardens enclosed behind a wrought iron fence, Manuel ate a meager supper consisting of some bread Cosías had given him. The next day he went hungry, loitering in the vicinity of the train station and sleeping there when night came. On Sunday he left Madrid before dawn. Intent on eluding capture, he set out for Toledo, about seventy kilometers away.

Manuel’s brief taste of freedom came to an end on Monday afternoon on the highway to Toledo, when two members of the Civil Guard, Spain’s rural police force, took him into custody. In writing, the pair asked him his name, where he was headed, and whether he had relatives in Toledo. Manuel attempted to get away but was dissuaded when one of the guards fired a warning shot. The next day he was taken to the Toledo jail and interrogated by the warden. The prisoner volunteered his name and stated that he was going to Toledo to look for his uncle, Juan Ojeda, who belonged to the Civil Guard. But he never revealed that he was a student at the National School. His stolen apparel allowed him to conceal his school affiliation, and he did not contact his guardian or anyone at the school because he did not want to go back. He spent the next three months peeling potatoes in the Toledo jail. (Because he had attempted to run away from the civil guards, he may have been locked up for resisting authority.) Although hardly the summer of his dreams, apparently he found this preferable to life at the National School.

In late September Manuel heeded the suggestion of a companion and wrote his mother to tell her where he was. Her reply arrived
three days later and with it was a draft for twenty reales, which the deaf youth turned over to the jailer to cash.

Despite Manuel’s efforts to conceal his whereabouts, word that he was in the Toledo jail eventually reached Madrid, and at 6 p.m. on October 26, the fugitive was returned to the National School. The director determined that, in light of Manuel’s past behavior, the duration of his absence, and the experiences he must have had while in jail, he should be kept in solitary confinement—all in the interest of morality and discipline.

In the meantime Manuel’s parents had written twice to the school, characterizing their son’s flight as the act of a foolish child. In their first letter they proposed to chastise him by not letting him come home for vacation, but in the second they relented and offered to send train fare if he wanted to visit them. Each time they pleaded for the school not to punish the errant youth—a proposal Cabello called “unspeakable.”

A disciplinary hearing was convened at 11 a.m. on November 4, with Director Cabello y Madurga presiding. Attending were Miguel Fernández Villabrille, first professor of the deaf students; Antonio Hernández Contreras, first professor of the blind students; and second professors Claudio López Montes, Manuel Cristóbal Huertas, and Manuel Blasco y Urgel. Marcelina Ruiz y Ricote, the sewing teacher and the school’s only woman professor, was there, too, as were Eusebio Fernández Cuesta y Palafox, art teacher; Narcisco Domínguez Alvarado, gymnastics instructor; and the blind students’ music teachers, Julián Mateos y Cerezano, Antonio Cano y Curriel, Gabriel Abreu y Castaño, and José Lambea y Sanz (the latter two blind themselves). (During this era deaf teachers were employed only in the workshops, and even then the majority of the shops were headed by hearing people. Shop teachers did not attend faculty meetings, nor were they included in the disciplinary council.)

Summoned before this august assembly, Manuel Tinoco promised to tell the truth. Director Cabello began by reviewing the facts of the case. Then as first professor Villabrille conducted the interrogation in sign language and second professor Cristóbal Huertas interpreted the testimony, Manuel recounted the details of his escape. He acknowledged that he had been dismayed at the prospect of spending yet
another summer at the school. All during July, he admitted, he had been thinking of running away. Although all the students had known about his plans, he affirmed that the staff had been unaware of his intentions. One of the students (Juan Cosías), he added, had wanted to go with him. Manuel had refused to let Cosías tag along, however, because he considered him clumsy and he reasoned that with Cosías in tow, the two would be apprehended sooner.

When asked about his motives for running away, Manuel related an incident that had occurred sometime in March. It had all begun, he testified, when the doorman caught another student, Eduardo Saco, as he was about to mail a letter from Manuel to his parents. The letter, which Manuel had composed in art class with Pascual Gasulla’s help, had said, among other things, “I am very thin now,” a remark sure to alarm his parents and reflect negatively on the school. The offending missive was promptly handed over to the director, and Manuel, escorted by teaching assistant Baracaldo, was made to appear before Cabello. The outcome was that Baracaldo, along with teaching assistant Legaz, teachers’ aide Cortés, and night watchman Cornejo all beat Manuel with a rope in the dormitory.

Corporal punishment was banned in Spanish schools—a royal order of August 25, 1835, had abolished the use of the lash or any other punishment capable of producing lesions—but public opinion was divided on the subject and legislation notwithstanding, corporal punishment was not infrequent in Tinoco’s day. Accounts of physical abuse at the National School were nothing new, and low-ranking personnel, in particular the teachers’ aides, were frequently among the offenders. The aides were invariably hearing persons, and their lack of fluency in the children’s primary language, Spanish Sign Language, could have hardly made their task any easier. And to make matters worse, some aides were not much older than the most senior of their charges: Cortés, for instance, was twenty-two and Bahón was twenty-four, while students could stay at the school until their twentieth birthday. At the end of his testimony, Manuel Tinoco left the room. Then Director Cabello read aloud articles 85 and 87 of the Reglamento. Article 85 stated that the director alone, or together with the teachers, acting as a disciplinary council, might impose a variety of punishments, including a dressing-down in private or in the
presence of the other students, deprivation of play time, loss of the privilege of leaving the school for excursions, vacations, or confinement. Article 87 stated that if these punishments did not suffice to correct an errant student’s ways, the director, in agreement with the disciplinary council, should propose to the government the offender’s expulsion. Cabello instructed the teachers to decide which penalty should apply, adding that in view of Tinoco’s transgression, his history at the school, and the circumstances surrounding his absence, the penalty—in Cabello’s opinion—should be severe. (Cabello, it will be recalled, had been reprimanded for his handling of this affair. In addition, the school’s “internal order” had been questioned, so it would hardly do for him to appear to be lenient now.)

A lengthy discussion ensued. Huertas favored article 87—expulsion. Contreras, Fernández Cuesta, Blasco, Lambea, Cano, Domínguez, and Mateos also supported Tinoco’s ouster, as did Cabello. They argued that the youth’s flight had been premeditated, and they voiced concern about the bad habits he had most likely acquired during his three months in jail. But Montes opposed their argument. Although the runaway deserved to be punished, he conceded, expulsion was undesirable because it would harm both the boy and his parents. (Montes no doubt knew that the senior Tinoco was sick and unemployed. Sending Manuel home before he had completed his studies would create an undue hardship for the family.) Ruiz y Ricote sided with Montes, and Abreu, too, opposed expulsion.

Villabrille reminded his colleagues that Manuel had never been a discipline problem or insubordinate, emphasizing the boy’s testimony that he had run away because he had been beaten. Manuel, Villabrille maintained, should not be held responsible for the consequences of his three-month absence because he had been imprisoned during that time. Furthermore, the first professor observed, expulsion for Manuel would not constitute genuine punishment because dismissal was, in a manner of speaking, exactly what he desired.

What was called for instead, Villabrille concluded, was temporary confinement—the first disciplinary measure leveled against the youth since his arrival at the school four years earlier—together with isolation and close supervision, if needed, to correct any bad habits he might have picked up while away. The first professor’s arguments
failed to sway the majority of his colleagues, however, and the disciplinary council voted for expulsion by a margin of two to one, with eight teachers in favor and four—Abreu, Montes, Ruiz y Ricote, and Villabrille—against.

Cabello wrote to his superior urging that Manuel be expelled. His continued presence at the school would undermine both discipline and order, Cabello contended, whereas his expulsion would afford his schoolmates an excellent example. The director dismissed Manuel’s allegations that he had been flogged with a rope, asserting that he had no knowledge of such an occurrence. As for the boy’s claim that he had been brought before the director for attempting to smuggle a letter to his parents, Cabello said he did not recall the incident. And even if a letter had been intercepted, he added, this was in keeping with the long-established custom of forbidding correspondence to be sent without the director’s approval, a practice he defended on the grounds that it allowed him to correct errors in students’ compositions and improve their writing.60

Manuel Tinoco was expelled from the National School for Deaf-Mutes and the Blind on November 21, 1876, apparently without ever being reunited with his schoolmates. According to Cabello, he had been kept apart from his companions so that he could not influence them with bad habits picked up while in jail.

Nevertheless, we may suspect there were other motives for his isolation. The words of former director Ballesteros may clarify the matter: “Among them there is always one who exercises great influence on the others . . . because of his intelligence; but above all because of his reputation for bravery and because he has shown he knows how to endure . . . deprivation and punishment.”61 We can imagine that Manuel’s daring escape, together with his ability to elude the school’s authorities for three months and to bear the hardships of the Toledo jail, had made him such a one. For this reason, then, it was necessary to prohibit his contact with his classmates—because Manuel Tinoco had become a hero in their eyes.

In the aftermath of the affair, teachers’ aides Bahón and Cortés and night watchman Cornejo were held responsible for Manuel’s escape and were fired for their negligence. Teaching assistant Baracaldo, who had been so engrossed in the newspaper that he had failed
to notice when Manuel slipped away, left the school to take another job; otherwise, he too would have been dismissed. (Three of these men, Baracaldo, Cortés, and Cornejo, were among those Manuel had accused of beating him; the fourth alleged assailant, teaching assistant Legaz, stayed on at the school.)

It was decided that Manuel’s accomplices, Carlos Becerril, Juan Cosías, and Gumersindo Rico, should also be punished for their role in their friend’s escape in order to “maintain discipline and order in the establishment.” New security measures were adopted, including installation of a special lock on the entry hall windows, so that no one could enter or leave the premises without the doorman’s knowledge. Director Cabello was admonished to supervise his employees “with the most exquisite zeal” and to see that their assignments did not go beyond those included in their job description. No doubt shaken by the reprimand, Cabello personally took charge of the keys to the school and redoubled his efforts to lead Spain’s flagship school for deaf students and blind students: “I am such a slave to this establishment, I dare not even take the walks prescribed and recommended by my doctor for my health, so as not to abandon my post,” he lamented in a burst of self-pity.

When the Director General of Public Instruction received the recommendation for Manuel’s expulsion, he instructed Cabello to find out what truth, if any, there was to Manuel’s claim that he had been beaten. (Apparently it had not occurred to Cabello to do so on his own.) In interviews following the boy’s expulsion, employees categorically denied having struck him with a rope or inflicting upon him any corporal punishment whatsoever. They averred that they had never seen co-workers do so either.

Angel Arias, the school nurse, alleged that after Manuel was returned to the school, he had disclosed his intention to say he had run away because of corporal punishment, reasoning that under those circumstances his father would not hit him if he were expelled. Cabello conceded that some months earlier he had fined night watchman Cornejo five pesetas for striking another student, Francisco Conesa. This, Cabello claimed, was actually evidence that Manuel had not been hit, arguing that if the boy’s accusations were
true, he would have penalized the offenders, just as he had done with Cornejo.69 It seems no one believed the boy’s story that staff members had beaten him with a rope. The inquiry into physical abuse went no further—significantly, it did not extend to the students—and the file on this matter was effectively closed.

Nevertheless, this episode revealed much about the internal state of affairs at the National School. Discipline was lax. A runaway had not been missed for more than twelve hours, the director himself had orchestrated the cover-up, and three months had passed before the fugitive was located and returned to the school. The director’s orders had been disobeyed when employees handed out dormitory keys to students upon request. Moreover, a complaint of physical abuse had been rejected out-of-hand. These events would prove a harbinger of things to come, and the twin themes of physical abuse and inadequate discipline and order would reappear, and with them, student resistance.

As for Manuel Tinoco, following his expulsion from the National School, he disappeared from the pages of deaf history. But the story of his audacious escape was no doubt told and retold for many years at the school.70 In time his accusations of abuse would be vindicated, thanks in large part to a schoolmate, Patricio García, whose resistance to physical punishment would shake the administration of the National School to the core—but this is another story. [Editor’s Note: Patricio García’s story appears in the next issue of Sign Language Studies.]

Acknowledgments

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Notes

1. This study does not make the distinction between “deaf” and “Deaf,” which did not exist during the period under consideration here. Spelled with a lower case d, the word refers to the audiological condition of hearing loss; spelled with a capital D, it commonly refers to social groupings and cultural identifications resulting from interactions among people with hearing loss, who may share a common signed language.


3. For example, in an unpublished supplement to the official _Memoria_ for academic years 1874–1876, Pedro Cabello y Madurga, director of the National School for Deaf-Mutes, confided to the Director General of Public Instruction that in the official document, “I omit explanation of some facts that if, because their nature and consequences cannot and should not be left unmentioned, neither is it appropriate to include them in a document destined for publication.” This deliberate omission, Cabello went on to say, was made in the interest of the reputation and good name of the school and ultimately of the state. (Archivo General de la Administración Central del Estado [hereafter cited as AGACE], Educación y Ciencia, leg. 6244, Pedro Cabello y Madurga, Suplemento a la memoria general relativa a los dos años económicos-académicos de 1874–1876, ms., May 24, 1877.)

4. Details of this and the following paragraph, unless otherwise specified, are from AGACE, Educación y Ciencia, leg. 6244, Expediente formado con motivo de la desaparicion de aquel establecimiento de don Manuel Tinoco García, Pedro Cabello y Madurga to the Director General of Public Instruction, August 10, 1876.

5. AGACE, Educación y Ciencia, leg. 6244, testimony of Ildefonso Gutiérrez concerning Manuel Tinoco’s escape, August 1876.

6. Manuel Tinoco y García was born on December 5, 1859. (AGACE, Educación y Ciencia, leg. 6254, Manuel Tinoco.)

7. Carlos Nebreda y López, _Memoria correspondiente al curso académico de 1872 á 1873_ (Madrid, 1873), 50–51. According to this same source, Manuel Tinoco’s mother had suffered from “abscesses” prior to her son’s birth.

8. AGACE, Educación y Ciencia, leg. 6254, Manuel Tinoco.

9. Nebreda, _Memoria_ (1873), 50–51; AGACE, Educación y Ciencia, leg. 6254, Manuel Tinoco.

10. Around the time of Tinoco’s birth, his home province of Cadiz had 158 deaf people out of a total population of 401,700, that is, one deaf person for every 2,542 residents (Estadística general de España, 1860, cited in Nebreda, _Memoria_ [1873], 256); according to this same source, in a nation of 15,673,536 inhabitants, 10,905 were deaf (i.e., there was one deaf Spaniard per 1,437). In 1877 the population of Tinoco’s hometown was 11,137.
Teachers trained at the National School also helped spread the school’s language and customs to other regions. In Barcelona a municipal deaf school was established early in the 1800s, for which reason Catalonia had less contact with the National School—and its language—than did other areas of the peninsula. Today Catalan Sign Language differs considerably from the sign language used in Spain’s other autonomous communities, no doubt because historically the Barcelona school had less contact with the Madrid school than did other regional schools.

12. Pedro Cabello y Madurga, Colegio Nacional de Sordomudos y de Ciegos de Madrid. Su historia, su organización, su estado actual y catálogo de los objetos que remite a la Exposición Internacional de Filadelfia en 1876 (Madrid, 1875), 194. According to this same source, in 1875 the school had 121 residential students and 55 day students.

13. The teacher-training class, which had been established by royal order in 1857, was discontinued upon the death of the instructor, Francisco Fernández Villabrille, in 1864 and reestablished by Carlos Nebreda five years later. During the 1872–1873 academic year, a total of twenty-six students enrolled (seventeen males and nine females) (Nebreda, Memoria [1873], 32–33); the following year there were thirty-nine students (twelve males and twenty-seven females) (Carlos Nebreda y López, Memoria correspondiente al curso académico de 1873 á 1874 [Madrid, 1875], 28–29).

14. Cabello, Colegio, 136. Students were classified as pensionados, whose education was financed by the state, provinces, towns, corporations, or private donors; medio pensionados, who paid half price; or pensionistas, who paid full price. Pensionados and pensionistas alike could be either internos (residential students) or externos (day students). (Reglamento para el Colegio de Sordomudos de Madrid, 1863, Título I, Cap. V, reproduced in Miguel Granell y Forcadell, Historia de la enseñanza del Colegio Nacional de Sordomudos desde el año 1794 al 1932 [Madrid: Colegio Nacional de Sordomudos, 1932], 330.)

15. Reglamento, Cap. IV, pár. 78, reproduced in Granell, Historia, 335.

16. AGACE, Educación y Ciencia, leg. 6245, Informe acerca del estado del Colegio de sordomudos y ciegos de Madrid, August 22, 1884. The school had moved to its present location in 1866, after the cholera epidemic that swept Madrid in 1865 invaded the previous site (number 11 on the calle del Turco), forcing its closure.

17. AGACE, Educación y Ciencia, leg. 6246, Anastasio Menéndez, Proyecto de ampliación y reforma para el Colegio Nacional de Sordomudos y de Ciegos, June 19, 1873.

18. AGACE, Educación y Ciencia, caja 8106, letter from Francisco de Paula Márquez y Roco, February 21, 1881.
The print shop had previously turned out works for the government and for private parties. During the 1871–1872 academic year, for instance, the shop produced materials for the Ministry of Development, the Department of Archives, Libraries, and Museums, and the state schools of music and veterinary medicine, as well as various editions of the newspaper La Idea, a work entitled El libro de los niños, handbills, and much more (Carlos Nebreda y López, Memoria correspondiente al curso académico de 1871 á 1872 [Madrid, 1872], 66–81). Such commissioned works had generated considerable revenue for the school. But by 1875 the print shop, like the other shops, concentrated on items for the school’s internal consumption (Cabello, Colegio, 166).

AGACE, Educación y Ciencia, leg. 6244, expediente no. 3, Pedro Cabello y Madurga, June 23, 1878, Cuadro que expresa el número y clase de castigos impuestos a los alumnos del Colegio Nacional de Sordomudos y de Ciegos desde . . . Septiembre de 1876 hasta . . . Enero de 1878. Other offenses included fighting; smoking; not doing homework assignments; playing in the dormitories, the chapel, or the fountain; wetting the bed; urinating in the hallway; ruining a book; knocking over an inkwell; breaking a glass; going off alone during recess—and much more.


In the pecking order at the National School, the teaching assistants ranked below the teachers, whom they assisted during classes and replaced in case of absence or illness. The teachers’ aides were subordinate to the teaching assistants, and outside of class it fell to the assistants to see that the aides fulfilled their duties. (Carlos Nebreda y López, El Colegio Nacional de Sordo-Mudos y de Ciegos de Madrid, en la Exposición Universal de Viena [Madrid, 1873a], 184.)

Aides were hired by the school’s director, but teaching assistants were appointed by the Director General of Public Instruction—an arrangement that, according to Cabello, led to “passive resistance” on the part of the assistants and an unwillingness to carry out the director’s orders. The assistants, Cabello complained, considered themselves “little less than invulnerable,” making it “virtually impossible” to maintain discipline and order at the school. (AGACE, Educación y Ciencia, leg. 6244, letter from Pedro Cabello y Madurga to the Director General of Public Instruction, November 5, 1875.)

AGACE, Educación y Ciencia, leg. 6244, Expediente formado con motivo de la desaparición . . . de don Manuel Tinoco García, letter from Pedro Madurga y Cabello to the Director General of Public Instruction, August 10, 1876. The distance from the school to the river was slightly more than a mile.

Nebreda, Colegio, 192.
25. AGACE, Educación y Ciencia, leg. 6244, testimony of Manuel Cortés concerning the disappearance of Manuel Tinoco.

26. AGACE, Expediente formado con motivo de la desaparicion.

27. Details of this and the following paragraph, unless otherwise indicated, are from AGACE, Expediente formado con motivo de la desaparicion, and Cabello’s testimony of August 17, 1876, concerning Manuel’s disappearance.

28. AGACE, Educación y Ciencia, leg. 6254, Manuel Tinoco.

29. Pedro Cabello y Madurga (1830–1888) was born in Buimanco, Soria (AGACE, Hacienda, caja 17.916).

30. In 1860 Cabello was charged with teaching geography and history to the duke of Montpensier’s children when they were at the Spanish court or the royal estates of Aranjuez or San Ildefonso; in 1863 he added María Isabel de Borbón to the roster (AGACE, Hacienda, caja 17.916). In 1877 Alfonso XII appointed Cabello to teach grammar, arithmetic, geography, and history to the infantas—Pilar, Paz, and Eulalia (Archivo de Palacio, Administración, caja 153, expediente 15).

31. Pedro Cabello y Madurga, Discurso leido . . . en la solemne distribucion de premios celebrada en dia 24 de junio de 1877 (Madrid, 1877), 11.

32. A native of Madrid, Carlos Nebreda y López joined the National School for Deaf-Mutes and the Blind as an acting teaching assistant in 1853; by 1864 he had risen to the rank of fourth professor. In 1867 he accepted a position as first professor at the newly opened deaf and blind school in Burgos. The following year he assumed the directorship of the National School, where he carried out numerous reforms, reorganizing the teaching, acquiring pedagogical materials, and overseeing many improvements in the physical plant. He revived the teacher-training class and admitted female students for the first time. In February 1875 he was fired from his post. Although irregularities in administration of the school’s finances were cited as the reason for his dismissal, he was no doubt made vulnerable by the change of regime and the fall of his powerful protector, Ruiz Zorilla. Nebreda wrote various works on the teaching of deaf and blind children and established Spain’s first school for mentally retarded children. A knight of the orders of Isabel la Católica and Carlos III, he died of chronic pneumonia in May 1876.


34. AGACE, Educación y Ciencia, leg. 6244, testimony concerning the disappearance of Manuel Tinoco, August 1876.

35. AGACE, Expediente formado con motivo de la desaparicion.

36. AGACE, Educación y Ciencia, leg. 6244, testimony of Pedro Cabello y Madurga concerning the disappearance of Manuel Tinoco, August 17, 1876.
37. AGACE, Educación y Ciencia, leg. 6244, letter from the Director General of Public Instruction to Pedro Cabello y Madurga, August 16, 1876.

38. AGACE, Educación y Ciencia, leg. 6244, report to the Director General of Public Instruction, September 19, 1876.

39. Details of this paragraph and the next, unless otherwise specified, are from AGACE, Educación y Ciencia, leg. 6244, testimony of Manuel Tinoco before the disciplinary council, November 4, 1876.

40. Carlos Becerril y Serrano was born on November 4, 1858, in Villa-castín, Segovia. Deaf from birth, Becerril was the eldest of five siblings (the others were all hearing). In 1869 he was admitted to the National School as a medio pensionista. (AGACE, Educación y Ciencia, leg. 6247.)

Juan Cosías y Valverde, a native of Valhermoso, Cuenca, was also deaf from birth (Nebreda, Colegio, 236–37). He entered the National School in October 1872, when he was eleven years old (AGACE, Educación y Ciencia, leg. 6248).

Gumersindo Rico y Moreno was born in 1860 in Haro, Logroño; he had four siblings, all hearing (AGACE, Educación y Ciencia, leg. 6253). His deafness, which was first noticed when he was two years old, was attributed to a fright his mother suffered while nursing. He enrolled in the National School in September 1874 (Nebreda, Memoria [1875], 46–47).

Joaquín Menéndez y Fernández was born in October 1858; he was deaf from birth (AGACE, Educación y Ciencia, leg. 6252). A native of Ablés, Oviedo, he entered the National School in June 1869. Menéndez’s great-aunt on his mother’s side was also deaf, as was one of his brothers (Nebreda, Colegio, 236–37).

41. AGACE, Educación y Ciencia, leg. 6244, testimony of Manuel Cornejo concerning Manuel Tinoco’s disappearance, August 1876; report to the Director General of Public Instruction, September 19, 1876.

42. Details contained in this paragraph, unless otherwise specified, are from AGACE, Educación y Ciencia, leg. 6244, testimony concerning the flight of Manuel Tinoco, August 1876 and November 4, 1876.

43. Reglamento, Título V, Cáp. primero, 121, reproduced in Granell, Historia, 339.

44. Pascual Gasulla y Ortiz was born in 1861 in Morella, Castellón. The son of a peddler, he was deaf from birth. His parents, Severino Gasulla and Josefa Ortiz, had three other children, all of them hearing. Pascual arrived at the National School in June 1869 (AGACE, Educación y Ciencia, leg. 6250).

45. Fernando Martínez y Fernández, a pensionado, was a native of Villafranco de Vierzo, León (Nebreda, Memoria [1875], 30–31).

46. Juan Manuel Ballesteros and Francisco Fernández Villabrille, Curso elemental de instrucción de sordo-mudos (Madrid, 1845), Primera parte: 73.
According to one student, Pascual Gasulla, the students did not reveal Manuel’s plans because he had threatened to hit anyone who did, but no one else mentioned having been threatened (AGACE, Educación y Ciencia, leg. 6244, testimony concerning the flight of Manuel Tinoco, August 1876 and November 4, 1876).

47. Ballesteros and Fernández Villabrille, Curso, Primera parte: 73.

48. Carlos Becerril received honorary mentions in both drawing and calligraphy for the 1871–1872 academic year. In 1877–1878 he earned a first-class award in calligraphy and tailor shop, a second-class award in lithography, painting, and “special education” (which included academic studies and religion), and a third-class award in gymnastics, as well as the school’s highest award, an “extraordinary prize,” for which he received a box of paints. (Nebreda, Memoria [1872], 54; Eusebio Fernández Cuesta [y Palafox], Solemne distribución de premios a los alumnos del Colegio Nacional de Sordomudos y de Ciegos, celebrada en el día 24 de junio de 1878 [Madrid, 1878], 20.)

Pascual Gasulla won an honorary mention in gymnastics, 1871–1872, and a second-class medal in special education, 1872–1873, 1873–1874 (Nebreda, Memoria [1872], 54; Nebreda, Memoria [1873], 60; Nebreda, Memoria [1875], 56); Joaquín Menéndez, honorary mention in special education and physical education, 1870–1871 and 1871–1872, plus a second-class medal in special education and an “extraordinary prize,” a tool kit, 1873–1874 (Carlos Nebreda y López, Memoria correspondiente al curso académico de 1870 a 1871 [Madrid, 1871], 41; Nebreda, Memoria [1872], 54; Nebreda, Memoria [1873], 54, 58); Gumersindo Rico y Moreno, an “ordinary” award in lithography, plus a second-class prize in tailor shop and third class in gymnastics, 1877–1878 (Fernández Cuesta, Solemne distribución de premios, 16). Another of Manuel’s friends, Eduardo Saco, mentioned in the text below and in note 57, also received a second-class prize in special education for the 1871–1872 academic year and again in the 1872–1873 academic year (Nebreda, Memoria [1872], 53; Nebreda, Memoria [1873], 60). Prizes in the category of special education were based on students’ academic record—three marks of sobresaliente (outstanding) and the rest notables or buenos for a first prize, three notables and the remainder buenos for a second prize, and so on—and a single bad grade made one ineligible for an award. Recognition for achievement in the workshops was based on teachers’ recommendations (Nebreda, Colegio, 194–95).

49. AGACE, Educación y Ciencia, leg. 6244, meeting of the disciplinary council, testimony of Miguel Fernández Villabrille, November 4, 1876.

50. The account of the next three paragraphs is based on AGACE, Educación y Ciencia, leg. 6244, testimony of Manuel Tinoco, November 4, 1876.

At this point in Spanish history Manuel would presumably not have been jailed for vagrancy. Formerly classified as a misdemeanor, vagrancy had long been viewed with suspicion—the assumption was that unemployed people with no legitimate means of support must resort to illicit measures—but the penal code of 1870 considered vagrancy merely an aggravating circumstance (Código penal, 1870, art. 10).

AGACE, Educación y Ciencia, leg. 6244, letter from Pedro Cabello y Madurga to the Director General of the Ministry of Development, October 26, 1876.

Details of the disciplinary council meeting are from AGACE, Educación y Ciencia, leg. 6244, November 4, 1876.

During the 1871–1872 academic year, for instance, out of nine shop teachers, three were deaf: Miguel Alaminos y Arias, the tailor; Pablo García y Palacios, the shoemaker; and Jaime Gumiel, the bookbinder. In this same year a deaf student, Joaquín Barquín, taught painting (Nebreda, Memoria [1872], 38).

Small wonder, for Cosías’s parents, like Tinoco’s, had abandoned their son at the school (AGACE, Educación y Ciencia, leg. 6244, letter from Pedro Cabello y Madurga to the Director General of Public Instruction, November 25, 1876).

Eduardo Saco y Núñez, a native of Madrid, reportedly lost his hearing at the age of seven months because of “an accident.” He entered the National School in 1869 (Nebreda, Colegio, 238–39).

“The mission of such modest employees is very sensitive and of extreme importance,” Cabello’s predecessor, Carlos Nebreda, had commented a few years earlier, adding that the job required “special attributes of character, kind treatment that inspires students’ confidence and affection and renders advice and warnings more persuasive; a dignified integrity that neither permits relaxation of academic discipline, nor impedes with excessive severity the emotional effusions of childhood in those acts in which their manifestation is neither inappropriate nor harmful; an extraordinary zeal to supervise them constantly and correct their defects, and an exquisite morality that may serve as their example at each and every moment and contribute most conscientiously to their education” (Nebreda, Colegio 184).

The working conditions, however, were hardly conducive to hiring and retaining such employees: Aides were expected to supervise the youngsters at all hours of the day and night except when they were in class, “during study periods and play time, at meals, in the dormitories, and in all the other acts of school life” (Nebreda, Memoria [1871], 5). If the students had nary a moment to themselves, neither did their keepers—yet their compensation was nowhere near commensurate with their duties and responsibilities, and they were paid less than servants’ wages (AGACE, Educación y Ciencia,
leg. 6243, report of Francisco Escudero y Azara to the Minister of Development, July 21, 1863). For reasons that are easy to understand, it was often not possible to attract suitable candidates for the job, and the turn-over rate was high (AGACE, Educación y Ciencia, leg. 6244, testimony concerning corporal punishment, November 1876). According to this same source, teaching assistant Legaz was twenty-seven and Cornejo, the night watchman, was thirty-two.

59. Reglamento, 1863, Título III, Cáp. V, pár. 85, 87, reproduced in Granell, Historia, 337. Professors and shop teachers were authorized to impose punishments for lesser offenses, but in instances of serious misconduct, they were to notify the director (Reglamento, 1863, Título III, Cáp. V, pár. 84, reproduced in Granell, Historia, 336).

60. AGACE, Educación y Ciencia, leg. 6244, letter from Pedro Cabello y Madurga to the Director General of Public Instruction, November 6, 1876.


62. AGACE, Educación y Ciencia, leg. 6244, letter from Pedro Cabello y Madurga to the Director General of Public Instruction, November 25, 1876.

63. AGACE, Educación y Ciencia, leg. 6244, letter from the Director General of Public Instruction to Pedro Cabello y Madurga, November 13, 1876.

64. AGACE, Educación y Ciencia, leg. 6244, letter from Pedro Cabello y Madurga to the Director General of Public Instruction, November 25, 1876.

65. AGACE, Educación y Ciencia, leg. 6244, letter from the Director General of Public Instruction to Pedro Cabello y Madurga, November 13, 1876.

66. AGACE, Educación y Ciencia, leg. 6244, letter from Pedro Cabello y Madurga to the Director General of Public Instruction, November 25, 1876.

67. AGACE, Educación y Ciencia, leg. 6244, letter from the Director General of Public Instruction to Pedro Cabello y Madurga, November 13, 1876.

68. AGACE, Educación y Ciencia, leg. 6244, testimony concerning corporal punishment, November 1876.

69. AGACE, Educación y Ciencia, leg. 6244, letter from Cabello y Madurga to the Director General of Public Instruction, November 6, 1876.

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