



Louis Braille: A Touch of Genius

By C. Michael Mellor

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"We the blind are as indebted to Louis Braille as mankind is to Gutenberg." - Helen Keller

Three great men were born in the early weeks of January 1809: Abraham Lincoln, Charles Darwin, and Louis Braille. Only one has remained virtually unknown — the man who invented a means of reading and writing still used today in almost every country in the world, adapted to almost every known language from Albanian to Zulu.

Born sighted, Louis Braille accidentally blinded himself at the age of 3. He was lucky enough to be sent to a school for blind children in Paris, one of the first in the world. There, at the age of sixteen, he worked tirelessly on a revolutionary system of finger reading that became braille. He was a talented musician, astute businessman, and genius inventor — collaborating with another Frenchman to invent the first dot-matrix printer around 1840.

Louis Braille: A Touch of Genius is the first ever, full-color biography to include thirty-one of his extant letters, some written by his own hand, and translated into English for the first time.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Thoroughly researched and charming, this coffee-table book is overstuffed with pictures, letters and every type of Louis Braille memorabilia available. Unabashedly admiring, the author acknowledges his goal is not to write a "pathography" of Braille, and indeed, readers will find none of Braille's hidden vices (nor any hints of their presence) to enliven this life story. But Braille's life in the middle of the 19th century provides a rich story: a man who, blinded during boyhood, devoted himself to teaching other blind people better ways of negotiating their world. In addition to devising the raised-dot alphabet, Braille also set up a system for musical notation and built printing machines for his alphabets. The writing here is straightforward and suits the reverential tone of the text, which incorporates photo-reproductions of Braille's correspondences (both dictated and those he printed using his printing techniques) and provides a brief history of the contentious debate over standardizing the Braille system. If the tone seems boosterish, the book accomplishes its aims-to highlight the goodness and inventiveness of a man who transformed the lives of blind people worldwide. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Review

... [Here is] an inspiring blend of talents, meticulous research, and the obvious affection and devotion of everyone associated with the project. Reading it is a never-to-be-forgotten experience. --CTEVH Journal

I cannot recall another instance in which the publication of a book simultaneously in print and braille has caused such a stir.... This book is a must read for everyone who loves braille. --Braille Monitor

At last, Louis Braille's world comes to life with a richness that is entirely new.... Braille may not have been the saint portrayed in children's literature, but he was authentically a good man and, indeed, a genius. At a distance of nearly two centuries, modern readers can hardly help being moved by knowing what Braille cannot - that he really will improve the world for millions of people. *Louis Braille: A Touch of Genius* does a wonderful job of showing readers exactly what it cost him. Parents of blind children (especially those who may have been warned by "experts" against making their children "too independent") cannot afford to miss it. --Future Reflections

About the Author

C. Michael Mellor embarked on a biography of Louis Braille when he first saw the letters of Louis Braille on display at l'Institut National de Jeunes Aveugles, the school in Paris where Louis was a student, teacher, and creator of an embossed code that carries his name. As editor of the Matilda Ziegler Magazine for the Blind for eighteen years, Mike has long held a fascination for braille. His published paper, "Making a Point: The Crusade for a Universal Embossed Code in the United States," was delivered at the International Conference on "The Blind in History and the History of the Blind," in Paris, France, where he came upon Louis's extant letters and decided to translate them for publication. Mellor holds an MA in the History of Science from the University of Leeds in England, where he was born. During National Service with the Royal Air Force, he maintained electronic equipment on jet fighters. He lives in Brooklyn, New York, where he enjoys being an urban farmer.

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William Grimm:

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Jennifer Ruiz:

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