

Who Was Louis Braille?



By Margaret Frith

Illustrated by
Robert Squier



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For Luther—MF

For my grandfather, painter Donald G. Squier, whose passion to
create never faltered—even when his eyesight failed—RS

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Who Was Louis Braille?

When Louis Braille was three years old, he had a terrible accident that left him blind. But being blind did not stop Louis from having a happy childhood. Living in the dark made him even more curious about the world around him. He was a bright, good-natured boy. He also had a remarkable memory. He couldn't read or write. But at the school in the small French village where he lived, he could listen and remember. He was one of the best students.

At the age of ten, Louis went off to Paris to study at the only school for blind children in France. The library had fourteen books for the blind that were printed with embossed, or raised, letters. The blind read them with their fingers.



Louis couldn't wait to have books he could read by himself. But reading the library books wasn't easy. Each letter was so large that the reader had to trace it with many fingers. The reader also had to remember all the letters that had gone before to figure out a single word. Large letters meant large pages. The books were very long and weighed as much as nine pounds! Only a few of the boys could get through them. Louis was one of them.

Then he found out about something called “night writing.” Louis was excited. It used a code of raised dots instead of embossed letters. But he found that night writing had problems, too.

The answer was to invent his own system.

Louis worked for three years on his reading and writing code. By the time he was fifteen, he had figured it out.



Today, almost two hundred years later, the whole world still uses this same system called *braille*. The blind have been forever grateful to Louis Braille, an unselfish, determined young man.

There is a marble plaque in honor of Louis Braille at the family home in Coupvray, France. It says

IN THIS HOUSE
ON JANUARY 4 1809 WAS BORN
LOUIS BRAILLE
INVENTOR OF THE SYSTEM OF
WRITING IN RAISED DOTS FOR USE
BY THE BLIND.
HE OPENED THE DOORS OF
KNOWLEDGE TO ALL THOSE
WHO CANNOT SEE.