

The Great Howe Ryder Scandal of 1890

Mary Wyman Howe was born in Shrewsbury, MA in 1870 and attended Shrewsbury High School prior to enrolling at Bridgewater State Normal School in February 1888. Helen Freeman Ryder was born in Provincetown, MA in 1869 and attended Provincetown High school before enrolling at Bridgewater State Normal School in February 1888.

In January 1890, a week before Howe and Ryder were to graduate from the two year program at Bridgewater State, a fellow female student of the same class told school administration these two women, "early in their course," had violated school regulations by going for a Sunday walk with two young men who were not students of the school. The unnamed student who initiated the complaint told administration the entire class agreed these two women should not be given diplomas the following week. After vetting other students, Principal Albert G. Boyden and the entire faculty agreed to expel the students for "continued violations of the regulations of the school." The class originally had 29 students, 2 men and 27 women.

After interviewing fellow students Principal Boyden interviewed community members from the town. He found "that there was much severe comment upon the freedom of their actions." Opinions of fellow students, faculty and administration, and the community all were used as evidence to expel Ryder and Howe.

On January 28, 1890 Reverend S.M. Burney of Provincetown wrote a letter to Albert Boyden asking for information and clarification of the decision. Both Ryder and Howe felt it was a few, and not all, of their classmates who didn't like them. A letter on behalf of Howe, to Boyden, went as far to ask the principal if the girls had been expelled "because the jealous gossip of a country village have carried to you their vile exaggerations?" A letter of Helen Ryder from late February 1890 to faculty member Emma Bowler indicates that Bridgewater faculty were telling the students to never associate with the two girls again even after the term was over and they had been removed from the premises. The girls wanted another investigation to clear their name, but as Ryder states to Bowler, "It looks as if now the faculty did not want an investigation made." Ryder and Howe were never reinstated.

1. Statement concerning the case of Helen F. Ryder and Mary W. Howe, Jan. 1890

Statement concerning the case of Miss Helen F. Ryder and Miss Mary W. Howe members of the graduating class for Jan. 1890

Early in their course Misses Ryder and Howe <showed a disposition to form the acquaintance of young on the street who were not memb. of the sch.> They violated the regulations of the school by going to walk on Sunday after-noon with two young men of the town They were reprovved and promised obedience <anew to observe faithfully the regulations>. <Later on> The conduct of Misses Ryder and Howe was brought to my notice by a young lady of the graduating class informing one of my lady assistants that several members of the class, after careful consideration of the matter, had come to the conclusion from what they had seen and heard of the conduct, of these two persons <that they> ought not to receive a diploma from the school, and that the faculty ought to know what was thought and said of them by the class, the school, and the community.

I took the testimony of several members of the graduating class and found the reports concerning

the feeling of the majority of the class strongly confirmed. The testimony from the young men <of the older classes> of the school was "we take no stock in these two young women" from what we have seen and heard <of them> our feeling is that we cannot afford to associate with them. I found a similar feeling existed <among the members of the older classes of young ladies in the school.> Outside the school I found it to be the fact <from the testimony of reliable men and women> that there was much severe comment upon <the freedom of> their action <with men> especially <in connection> with their visits to the cotton gin factory in which only men are employed. I called the young ladies to my office questioned them closely, told them that their conduct was much criticised [sic] and heard their explanations of the matter. I then called the faculty together laid all the facts before them and after a full and careful consideration of the whole subject we came to the unanimous conclusion <that in our judgement as confirmed by the observation of the school and also by that of the community we shall not be justified in recommending these young women as candidates> I have cited <for graduation>. I then informed them of this conclusion of the faculty. They asked what shall we do? I said I advise you quietly to withdraw from the school, <and make better record for yourselves>. You have brought <about> this condition of affairs by your own actions and it is beyond our power to remedy it. They withdrew from the school on Wednesday, Jan. 22, 1890. They asked can we not have a certificate of scholarship? I said <if we cannot grant a diploma we cannot give a> certificate <wh.> would be regarded as equivalent to a diploma.

2. Expulsion letter for Ryder and Howe signed by faculty, Jan. 21, 1890

State Normal School,
Bridgewater, Mass.

At a meeting of the faculty [sic] held on the afternoon of Jan. 21, 1890, after a full and careful consideration of the whole matter of the continued violations of the regulations at the school by Miss Helen F. Ryder and Miss Mary W. Howe we came to the unanimous conclusion that in our judgement, as confirmed by the observation of the school and also by that of the community we shall not be justified in recommending these young women as candidates for graduation.

Signed by
the faculty.

Albert G. Boyden, Principal
Franz H. Kirmayer, Assistant
Arthur C. Boyden
Frank F. Murdock
W. D. Jackson
Clara C. Prince
Emma F. Bowler
Fannie A. Comstock

3. F.W. Brigham to Albert Boyden, Jan. 23, 1890

Shrewsbury Mass
January 23^d 1890
Mr Boyden Principal &c

My dear Sir,

I am informed that Miss Mary W. Howes has been expelled from your school. Her step-mother is an invalid, and I am her Guardian. Will you kindly inform me concerning her offences and can she by any apology or conduct atone for them and be reinstated? I am anxious to do for her whatever is best, and I shall be grateful for your prompt reply. I have the honor to be,

Yours very respectfully,
F. W. Brigham

4. Rev. S.M. Burney to Albert Boyden, Jan. 28, 1890

Provincetown, Mass. Jan. 28, 1890

Prof. A. G. Boyden Principal Normal School

Dear Sir:

At the solicitation of the family of Miss Helen F. Ryder of Provincetown, I beg the liberty of addressing you. Just one week ago, as I understand it, you requested or commanded Miss Ryder to desist from further attendance at the Normal School, for alleged violations of the Rules. So far as we have been able to learn the offences charged to the young lady were not of a serious nature, and did not impeach her moral character. To her family and a large circle of deeply interested friends, this summary treatment of Miss Ryder appears to be a great hardship. She had spent two years at the Normal School - making sacrifices and incurring expense and then, within a week of the time for her graduation, she is peremptorily dismissed, and thus crippled at the threshold of the active life toward which she had looked so expectantly. If, indeed, any grave offence has been committed by the young lady, of course I would not make any plea in her behalf, however much I might regret her course. But in this case, we are not advised that she is charged with any vicious conduct. Hitherto, the young lady has been without reproach. Here where she was born, her character is beyond suspicion.

Nor can I learn that during her term at the Normal School she has been deficient in her studies. I find myself greatly perplexed: for from a pastorate of three years at the First M. E. Church Taunton, and later of the church in Middleboro, I had gathered the notion from various sources that you were a wise and considerate educator. A number of scholars who have enjoyed your instructions have come under my notice. But in this specific case of Miss Ryder, I am at a loss to understand why "her course", so nearly completed - should have been so abruptly terminated, and she thrust back upon her family and the world without any certificate of scholarship.

I trust you will hear me patiently in behalf of this afflicted family. The barrier which you have put in this young lady's path, as you well know, is of no trifling character. She seems to be stopped in her life work. Will you be kind enough to say, on mature reflection, 1st whether you deem the young lady guilty of anything warranting so serious a punishment?

Has not Miss Ryder's scholarship been satisfactory? May she not, without further proceedings, be accorded a "certificate of Scholarship" at least - if not a "diploma"? This letter is written, My Dear Prof. in the kindest Christian spirit, by one who knows something of the trails to which the administrators of our schools are often subjected; and I desire to assure you again that I would not make the slightest

apology for infractions of school Discipline. Still I cannot forget that students do many things unwittingly, and that these inadvertencies of youth should hardly be made impediments to a useful and active life. My interest in this case, both on account of the family and the young lady, is so pronounced, that I will willingly call on you at Bridgewater, if you desire it, for a more extended consideration of the matter. Meanwhile, I shall await your reply. Believe me, Dear Sir,

Yours Sincerely
S. M^cBurney
Pastor Centenary M. E Church

P. S. This letter is written at the very hour when Miss Helen Ryder expected to graduate.

5. F.C. Gammons to Albert Boyden, Jan. 30, 1890

Bridgewater Mass Jan 30/90

Prof. A. G. Boyden
Bridgewater Mass

Dear Sir.

Herewith I enclose a letter from Miss Ryder stating several accusations against her which concern myself which are wholly untrue as she states and as you have stated in regards several of them. And in as much as this letter requires an answer and you have used my name in these accusations, you are the one to answer & please write your answers to each question or accusation stating whether it is true or untrue and allow me to see the letter and forward it returning her letter. I also have to ask of you in as much as you say publicly that my head workman has made a false statement to you to give me his name. He could have had no other motive than an injury to me. I beg also to call your attention to the article in The Boston Evening Record Jan 24. In justice to myself if you believe me innocent and of unquestionable character please give me a certificate to this effect.

Respectfully Yours
F. C. Gammons

6. Franklin W. Brigham to Albert Boyden, Jan. 30, 1890

Shrewsbury Mass January 30 1890

Mr Albert G. Boyden
Principal &c

My Dear Sir,
Accept my thanks for your very courteous reply to my late letter concerning the case of my ward, Miss Mary W. Howes. And kindly permit me to try your patience further. Miss Howe has returned

home, and I have today talked with and questioned her closely. Let me remark here that I have known Miss Howe since the day of her birth. Her family have been my immediate neighbors. Her conduct and reputation have always been good, and I have never had reason to think her untruthful.

I do not for a moment doubt that you have acted in the matter, according to your best knowledge and belief, conscientiously. But I beg you to reopen the case, and to try to ascertain how reliable have been your sources of information. I have myself lived too long in a gossiping country town not to know well how much reliance to place upon easily wagging tongues, especially when they happen to belong to women who chance to have taken a dislike to some other woman! My ward claims, and I believe with some show of reasons, that she has been misrepresented to you.

She admits fully your statement of her misconduct on Sunday a year ago. And says that the offence has never been repeated. she denies that she has been many times to any offices or shops. And declares that she has never once been to such places alone, or that, when in them, she has ever been into any room without a companion or companions. And she further says that she desires inquiry made of the other parties concerned, and the fullest possible investigations made, that the truth may be established. As to the statement in your letter that "The members of the school felt the matter so much that they were not willing to associate with them," the answer of my ward to this was to take from her pocket two letters received from school-mates since she was sent away, and to ask me to read them. They were filled with the kindest sentiments of esteem, and of regret at Miss Howe's misfortune. One of them contained the statement that at an evening reunion all were saddened by the absence of these former associates. And Miss Howe further said that if the other pupils were unwilling or even reluctant to "associate" with her, "she had never observed it"! Undoubtedly there may have been some members of the large class who felt themselves of purer and holier material, and who held their garments to one side! You and I, my dear Sir, have been students in our time, and we can recall what student-caste is! Could the ill-will of a few class-mates have driven us out, probably we should never have graduated from anywhere. That these girls have been thoughtless and imprudent I do not doubt. That they have been bad I don't believe. There is no complaint of their scholarship. Is it just that, after these years of faithful study, they should be refused the honorable reward of their work, because the jealous gossip of a country village have carried to you their vile exaggerations? I appeal to you to treat these young girls with the charity with which you might wish your own to be treated if they were left, like Miss Howe, motherless and fatherless, to work their own way through a not too kind world. Pardon me for this too long letter. I have written it because, weighing the matter as impartially as in me lies, I feel that you have acted on unreliable evidence, and that you are incapable of intentional injustice. I have the honor to be,

Yours very respectfully, Franklin W. Brigham

7. F.W. Brigham to Albert Boyden, Feb. 5, 1890

Shrewsbury Mass
February 5th 1890

Mr. A. G. Boyden, Principal &c

My dear Sir,

A few days ago I wrote to you in reply to your letter concerning the case of Miss Mary W. Howe. Please inform me whether or not you received my letter. And also whether, or not, it is possible to do anything in this matter in Miss Howe's behalf. I dislike to annoy you with my importunity, but the relation in which I stated to Miss Howe must be my sufficient apology.

I remain
Your obedient servant,

F. W. Brigham

8. Helen Freeman Ryder to Emma F. Bowler [faculty], Feb. 24, 1890

Provincetown Mass
Feb. 24. 1890.

Mrs. Bowler: -

Upon certain reports with good foundation, which have come to me I take the liberty to address you. I thank you very much for your kindness to me in this affair. If you know things about me which affect my character so much so that it is even necessary to warn my friends from further intimacy, you know more than I myself which it seems to me and would to most others is hardly probable. I have seen it stated lately coming from Bridgewater that my friends would not "date" investigate I should like to know why! Certainly so far it is not thro' any lack of push on our side that there is no investigation. It looks now as if the faculty did not want an investigation made. I saw at one time since that it was our desire to rush into print. There you are entirely wrong for not until it came out in the third paper did we know it. However it has pleased me much to see that the articles were not wholly for you. Through them alone I have already received two good offers.

Hoping you are well satisfied with the settlement, as made by the Board of Education.
I remain

Helen Freeman Ryder

I tell you now, and you may tell the rest as you like, if Mr. Boyden had sent me home for breaking the rules my friends would not have taken it up, but when it comes to sending me home without a character it is quite another thing.