



Mary Lyon

Champion of Resistance for Women's Education

In a time of gender inequality, Mary Lyon rose to the challenge of making education more equal for women. Mary Lyon was born in 1797 in Bukland Massachusetts. She did not attend public school but pursued home study until she was old enough to move in with relatives that lived closer to a school.

At the age of seventeen, Mary Lyon began teaching. Three years later, she attended the Sanderson Academy. She then attended Amherst Academy for a term. In 1821, Reverend Joseph Emerson at the Byfield Female Seminary in Massachusetts taught her. Emerson's religious ideals impressed Lyon. She also liked Emerson's teaching methods that focused more on comprehension over memorization. Throughout all of her schooling, Mary Lyon had a remarkable memory and she could think and understand very well. Joseph Emerson once commented that he had instructed many well-disciplined minds, but Mary Lyon's was above any other pupil he had taught.

While Emerson was teaching Mary, her love for religion grew deeper. She looked to the Bible as a wealth of knowledge and inspiration. Lyon also adopted Emerson's views on the role for women. She believed women's roles were different from men's but she believed that education was necessary to better fulfill the women's roles. She did not fight for larger rights for women but thought that women's education needed to be more equal to increase individual's social usefulness.

After her time at Byfield Seminary, Mary Lyon had different jobs teaching. Most of her time was at Ipswich with one of her peers from Byfield until 1833. At this time, Mary wanted to found her own seminary where religion would be emphasized more. At her school, she would train teachers, missionaries, and wives of missionaries with a curriculum of science, literature and refinement. Religion was also an important part of her seminary. After three years, Lyon raised \$27,000 from people in ninety-one towns. With this money, she founded Mount Holyoke Female Seminary.

Mary Lyon wanted students to learn self-discipline and self-discovery while training them for service to Christ. At her seminary, she believed that the study of science would help her students better understand religion and God's works. The scientific focus that Mary Lyon instilled at her college remains today.

In 1849, Mary Lyon died of erysipelas, a streptococcal infection she caught from a student. Mary Lyon believed education was important for women to become good citizens. Through her efforts, the range of women's education was greatly increased and her works cleared the way for the creation of women's colleges.