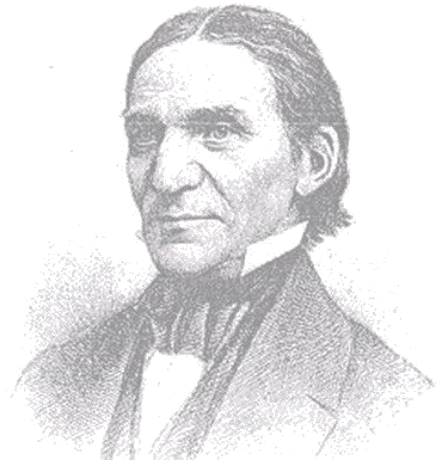


## PEIRCE SCHOOL & CYRUS PEIRCE

The Peirce School is named for Cyrus Peirce (1790 – 1860) who devoted his life to furthering the social causes of education, abolition of slavery, and world peace. His last name was pronounced “Purse.” He was best known for his efforts to eliminate corporal punishment from nineteenth century schools.

Peirce began his teaching career in West Newton as a young man in 1807. He later attended Harvard University, was ordained a minister, and taught in many different communities, including Nantucket where he is buried. His skill as a teacher guaranteed his success in schools despite the controversy aroused by his insistence on eliminating corporal punishment. Peirce had a great understanding of human nature and seemed to be “able to see through students, “knowing just what methods would work best for individual teaching and discipline problems. His glance and his personality were so kind that students began calling him “Father” Peirce. Samuel J. May once said that Peirce looked “like a saint pretending to be one.”



Cyrus Peirce



Cyrus Peirce was appointed the first Principal of the first Normal School in America, seen here in Lexington, MA.

Horace Mann, the great educational reformer and first Secretary of the Massachusetts State Board of Education, heard of Peirce’s reputation as a teacher and selected him in 1839 to run the first public normal school for teacher training in this country, at Lexington. At this school, Peirce developed methods of training teachers, ran a Model School, the first yearly public school in Newton, for practice teaching, acted as a substitute parent and advisor for many of the young women students, and even did his own janitorial chores such as building fires and sweeping floors. He was an exacting worker and rarely slept more than four or five hours a night. When the Normal School moved to West Newton in 1844, Peirce’s assistants included Nathaniel Allen, Principal of the Model School, an innovative and successful young teacher. In 1854, Allen and Peirce founded the West Newton English and Classical School, an academy and training school for college, which

became one of the most well known schools in New England, attracting students from all over the world. It was in 1852 that Newton got its first free high school.

Twice Peirce was chosen by his peers to travel for larger political causes. In 1843 he traveled five weeks to deliver an unusual anti-slavery petition to Congress. The “Great Latimer Petition” was nearly ½ mile long and signed by thousands of Massachusetts citizens who urged freedom instead of prosecution for George Latimer, an accused fugitive slave. Rolled up and in a wooden frame, it was nearly the size of a barrel when Peirce deposited it on John Quincy Adams’s desk amid jeers and threats from Southerners. In 1850, the Massachusetts Peace Society chose Peirce to attend an International Peace Congress in Paris. His friends from Newton and Boston, including Horace Mann, Charles Sumner, Francis Jackson, and Nathaniel Allen, demonstrated their respect by taking up a collection to pay for his travel expenses.

Peirce’s favorite motto was “Live to the Truth.” He used it every day to signal the end of school.

