Ezra C. Dalby was principal of Ricks Academy from 1901-1914. Under his guidance the school developed into a highly respected institution, gaining respect from not only community members and church leaders, but from the state of Idaho. He was a devoted father, teacher, principal, church servant and role model. Why, then, was he asked to quietly resign on 27 March, 1914? Unorthodox teachings and unconventional schools of thought were looked down upon by the older, conservative generation, especially in rural America. In Provo, Utah this unapproval from conservatives resulted in the termination of respected teachers. They very conservative educational board of Rexburg, Idaho took this problem to heart and determined to clean the area of all corruption. Was Ezra C. Dalby another victim? Or are the hearts of men weak in leading their decisions? Could Dalby have been let go because of personal feelings and dislike?

Ezra C. Dalby, born Ezra Christiansen, grew up in a most humble home. His mother was converted to the Mormon religion and traveled to Utah alone. She was the most influential person in his life. Ezra was seemingly born with the desire for knowledge. Not much is known about his early education. In an interview with his son, it was learned that on his first day of school, young Ezra slowly and shyly approached the classroom. At the age of six, the small boy hesitated as he reached the door, and then entered the room. The teacher instructed that he should close the door. Speaking only Danish, he did not understand and continued to stand where he was staring at her in confusion. Taking this for disobedience, the teacher spanked him.¹ As he grew, Ezra learned the trade of carpentry. During his youth, he worked on the Manti Temple, and later in his life he volunteered his services for the once standing Ricks Academy building. Very little is known about his early education, but it is known that Ezra received most of
his beginning education at the Snow Academy before continuing on to the University of Utah. He received his diploma on 9 June 1892. He then immediately began teaching in Manti, Utah in September 1892. Ezra happily married Zella Anderson in the Manti Temple on 14 February 1894. The love between Ezra and Zella is spoken of by his son as beautiful and forever lasting. At the end of his second year of teaching, Ezra was called by President Wilford Woodruff to serve a mission in the northern states. He tearfully left behind a wife and a child of 1-½ years with no income. It was equally difficult for him to part with his students. He pleaded them to continue with their schooling and to live pure and clean lives. There was not a dry eye on the stand, or in the audience, while he spoke. Two long years later, the homecoming party joyfully met Ezra at the Ephraim, Utah station; it included his wife, his son and a baby girl, Lisle, who was born during his absence. As life went on for Ezra he continued teaching, the second love of his life, and spent vast amounts of time gratefully serving the church. Not one to be idle, he occupied his summers with summer schools that he instituted for the training of teachers. On 19 June 1901, Elder Thomas E. Bassett offered him the principalship of the Academy in Rexburg.

On 7 October 1901, Ezra’s term began with five faculty and 35 students. Ezra was dedicated not only as a teacher and principal, but to his church callings as well. His hard work and devotion were honored by a commendation he received from President Joseph F. Smith and David O. McKay for his works. Later, in 1907, Ezra Christiansen changed his name to Ezra C. Dalby to avoid confusion with the numerous Christiansens of all spellings in the area. In that same year, the Academy was dedicated as Ricks Academy in loving memory of Thomas E. Ricks, its founder. Ezra envisioned the
potential of this institution and its students. Throughout his term, Ezra inspired the students and instilled within them higher ideals, such as the love of learning, a deep love of the gospel, and a strong desire to live worthily and to serve their fellowmen. Through his efforts, the academy became a great influence for good throughout the Upper Snake River Valley. Dalby had a desire to help develop true Latter-day Saints. To accomplish this, courses of theology were taught at every level and devotional exercises were held daily.iv

The years Ezra led the Academy seemed to be years of triumphant growth and substantial success. He envisioned a 4-year high school program, along with business and missionary programs. Under his direction, the Academy grew not only in students and faculty, but also into a tri-department institution. Being a man of foresight, he introduced classes in mechanical arts, domestic science, music, and physical education. He was very careful to select competent teachers who would strengthen each department. By 1913, the academy became the finest higher education institution in the Upper Snake River Valley and one of the prides of Idaho. Unknown to Ezra, trouble was upon the horizon.

In the Minutes of the Board of Education in Bannock Stake on 27 March 1914, it was recorded that Brother Mark Austin, President of the Executive Board, expressed his appreciation for Dalby’s work but regretted to ask him to quietly resign at the end of the academic year, for the good of all those involved. One can only imagine the feelings and mannerisms of those in the room during this time. When Ezra, dumbfounded at the request, inquired as to the reason, the conservative Austin replied, perhaps shifting in his place and clearing his throat, quickly replied he did not want to address it. Ezra, perhaps
with an expression of confusion mixed with hurt, insisted and continued to ask if he had
done anything to offend. Determined to avoid the issue, the reply was to the affirmative,
and perhaps with another clearing of throat it was added that the list was too long to
discuss. Ezra was to let the matter drop and go about his duties quietly for the rest of the
semester. In short, quick and hardly understandable explanations, the reason given for
dismissal was Dalby’s sympathy for the Peterson brothers.\footnote{5}

\begin{quote}
Henry and Joseph Peterson, along with their colleague, Ralph Chamberlain,
taught at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. Highly qualified, respected, and
loved by their colleagues and students, the Petkersons and Chamberlain taught in a new
age manner. Reports of ideas contradictory to the doctrine of the Church being taught at
Brigham Young University sparked an investigation by Horace H. Cummings of the
Church Educational System. During his investigation, when reason for his presence was
known, students and some faculty members treated Cummings with disregard and
disgust. He endured slight harassment, ridicule, and outright rudeness throughout his
visit. When he reported his conclusions, Cummings explained his uneasiness of what he
encountered. He named certain teachers employing progressive thought and high
criticism. Being conservative and very strict in religious subjects himself; he was
especially disturbed in what way and spirit the Atonement and the Fall of Adam were
being taught. Professor Brimhall of the University on several occasions defended these
teachers. He, in turn, tried to counsel with the Petersons and Chamberlain to change their
way of teaching and to keep certain viewpoints out of the classroom. Without
understanding the judgment they were under, they refused. In view of Cumming’s
findings the educational board deliberated that in order to protect the impressionable and
fragile faith of the student body, the Peterson brothers and Chamberlain should be removed from their influential position."vi

Chamberlain and the Petersons were summoned to Salt Lake City without knowing why. Flabbergasted to find out the reason for meeting with their dismissal, they requested a copy of the charges against them but were refused. Again, Brimhall pleaded with them to keep their personal beliefs in the background and conform to the accepted school of thought, and "remain loyal to the heroes of Mormonism."vii Not understanding their teaching or beliefs as contrary to the gospel or the doctrine of the church, the brothers saw changing their teachings as hypocritical and refused. The three were released from employment at the university to the dismay and protests of faculty members and students alike.viii Was this a type of things to come for Ezra? Ezra refuted his harmony with the Petersons’ beliefs, but explained that he felt their case was handled unjustly.ix Was this reason for dismissal?

Ezra was a teacher of a new generation of thinking. The theory of evolution was introduced and Progressive thought was beginning to gain a foothold in society. Although Ezra was loved and widely respected, he was unorthodox in teaching. Instead of following a set of information and lecturing, he like to introduce a subject and let the students talk it out. He interacted with his students and guided their thoughts instead of telling them what to think. Conversations outside of the classroom however seemed to cause much uneasiness for his colleagues. Mark Austin claimed Ezra’s conversations with him and others sparked concern for Ezra’s accordance with the gospel. Austin cited a revealing conversation Ezra had with Elder Heber J. Grant on the Bible. Ezra had mentioned that Elder Grant may not have been fair in his interpretation and he didn’t
completely agree with it. Austin then mentioned another instance. Elder James E. Talmage spoke on the Fall of Adam in the Salt Lake Tabernacle. Those in Ezra’s company stated gratitude for the clarity in which Talmage stated the doctrine. Ezra shocked his party by saying that Talmage may not be completely correct. To add more bearing to his case, Austin continued with recounting many conversations on the Bible in which he recalled Ezra being contrary to the ‘Word of God’. In his opinion, Ezra seemed to be leaning more toward the dangerous Peterson brothers in his ways of thinking. Building his case further, Austin made mention of a conversation in which Ezra stubbornly declared that a school is not made up of buildings, but of teachers, and the church did not employ the caliber of teachers needed for a proposed central school in Salt Lake. The good teachers the church did employ were the Peterson brothers. Austin stated that Ezra continued with ranting, declaring the First Presidency unqualified to investigate or judge the Petersons, due to their lack of scientific training. Although Austin and another member of the board recalled this conversation with clarity, Ezra did not. These poignant conversations would indeed point to Ezra’s disregard to doctrine and progressive views as the reason for his release. After all, the minds and faith of the students must be protected. If this was the case there is still one point of confusion. If Ezra was dismissed due to his contrary beliefs of gospel doctrine and high criticism, then why was he later re-employed by the Church Educational System as a seminary teacher? If the First Presidency of the church had lost confidence in this servant, they would have never re-employed him in another position in which he could influence students, especially as a seminary teacher.
Contrary to the notion of the Church officials losing all trust and faith in Ezra, Elder David O. McKay spoke at his funeral. He recalled the memory of his friend with love and with honor. He described Ezra as containing an invincible soul when it came to seeking and accepting what was right. He stated that Ezra was a resister of temptations of the sorest kind, from within and out. McKay continued with Ezra’s cheerfulness, describing Ezra as “he who [bore] the heaviest burdens cheerfully”.xi He ends with his higher respect for the spirituality of Ezra, described Ezra’s reliance on God, on truth, and on virtue as unwavering and unshakeable.xii This praise and description of Ezra’s faith conflicts with the notion that Church leaders were concerned for Dalby’s influence upon the students. It points to quite the opposite.

Another possibility to Ezra’s dismissal may be those who put the action in motion. In the Minutes of the Ricks Academy District Board for 4 February 1910, a donation was made by letter for 250 dollars by James W. Webster and Peter G. Johnston to the school. They intended to substantially contribute to the library and kindly suggested it be named the Webster-Johnston library. In a later meeting on 4 March, it came to the board’s attention that Webster was losing faith in the institution. He felt that is was losing strength and starting to diminish. Recordings reveal the ensuing meetings to be a battle of sorts over whether or not Ezra was capable in his positions. Rumors circulated about the principal and caused uneasiness in the board. One rumor inferred that Ezra lacked spirituality and warmth. Those who know Ezra best could not believe what they were hearing. In a meeting on 1 April 1910, Thomas E. Ricks stated that he had been a strong supporter of the institution, but within the last two years his children refused to attend, and therefore something must be done. Among Ezra’s supporters were
the then-church superintendent Cummings, and a superficial support from Mark Austin. In a letter sent to President Thomas E. Bassett, Austin reported Brimhall’s and Cumming’s approval and respect for Ezra as principal. He did not state his own thoughts or opinion of Ezra. In a meeting on 5 April, Austin referred to the aforementioned rumor circulating about Ezra, coolly stating that he may lack warmth, but he is competent. On 20 May, Cummings arrived at the campus to almost overwhelming adversity against Ezra. Dismissal was strongly advised. Cummings suggested a visit from an Apostle to settle the matter. An Apostle did visit and reported favorably in reference to Ezra and the academy. The proverbial gallows faded into the background for a time.

Interestingly enough, Ezra, himself, seemed oblivious to the whole matter. When confronted with the board’s request for his resignation, Ezra was shocked. Ezra tried to record something in his diary everyday. He recorded the date, his geographical location, and the weather in every entry. The most used phrase, and sometimes the only thing written for an entry, was, “Taught my classes at the Academy. All went well.” He recorded events that would happen throughout the day. Through his diary, Ezra expressed what he finds most important in this life. He spoke mostly of family, what they were doing, their health and activities. He spoke of his work as a principal and teacher and especially as a member of the stake presidency. He commented on what sacrament meeting he attended every Sunday and his resultant feelings. He loved fast and testimony meetings most of all. He expressed his love for his students and his deep love of the gospel. In his diary, there are no signs of turmoil in any aspect of Ezra’s life until Friday, 27 March 1914, the day on which Austin requested Ezra’s resignation. In his diary, Ezra states his surprise and the injustice he felt he was dealt. He recalls that
there have been no warning and no adverse action from board members or his superiors before this time. In the days following the request of his resignation, Dalby continued to be confused and frustrated. He was saddened and felt betrayed by those with whom he felt friendship and respect. Despite this, there were no harsh words spoken against any person involved, namely the board members. He continued to say they were competent, good men and he was confused by the manner in which they treated him.xvi

In his last address to the students during the 1914 graduation ceremonies, Ezra’s speech contained no venom of ill will. He sadly expressed his gratitude to God for the blessings in his life, and especially his connection with Ricks Academy. He warmly expressed his love and gratitude for the students and his great privilege to serve them for so many years. He held them in high respect and commended them for their sweet spirits and stated his fullness of gratitude to have known them. He continued to say that the memories he would take away would be happy ones, and their youth and enthusiasm would, in turn, keep him young.xvii

Although the renewed lack of confidence exposed no culprits, reasons, or origins, it was terminal for Ezra’s principalship. When gallows are built, proverbial or otherwise, those who aided in its construction have a duty to see to its use. One can only grab at conclusions: Ezra’s ways of teaching, his lack of accordance with the gospel, or those who disliked him, as one would grab at straws. No solid evidence or bases of guilt have been identified, and therefore, the reason for Ezra C. Dalby’s dismissal remains another unanswered question in the history of Brigham Young University Idaho.
HAPPY TIES

Happy ties can ne’er be broken,
   Formed by you and me.
Far surpassing wealth unspoken
   They’ll forever be.

Lift the chorus, speed it onward,
   Loud for thee we’ll cheer.
Alma Mater, we all love thee.
   Hail Ricks Academy dear.

When these fleeting days are over,
   And our ways shall part,
Still by thee we’ll be united,
   Still be one in heart.
The Academy song, “Happy Ties,” written by Ezra C. Dalby \(^{xviii}\)

\(^i\) Ruth S. Ricks, Provo, Utah, to Hyrum Manwaring, Rexburg, Idaho, 1956, Ricks Academy: Biographical Notes of Ezra C. Dalby. File MS 293, Special Collections, David O. McKay Library, Brigham Young University Idaho, Rexburg.

\(^{ii}\) Ibid.

\(^{iii}\) Ibid.

\(^{iv}\) Ricks Academy: Ezra C. Dalby Years (1901-1914) from Manwaring History. File MS 292, Special Collections, David O. McKay Library, Brigham Young University Idaho, Rexburg.

\(^{v}\) Minutes of the Board of Education in Bannock Stake Commenced in 1888. pages 341-351. Special Collections, David O. McKay Library, Brigham Young University Idaho, Rexburg.


\(^{vii}\) Ibid.

\(^{viii}\) Ibid.

\(^{ix}\) Minutes of the Board of Education in Bannock Stake Commenced in 1888. pages 341-351. Special Collections, David O. McKay Library, Brigham Young University Idaho, Rexburg.

\(^{x}\) Ibid.


\(^{xii}\) Ibid.

\(^{xiii}\) Minutes of the Ricks College Academy District Board. P.283-297, Special Collections, David O. McKay Library, Brigham Young University Idaho, Rexburg.

\(^{xiv}\) Ibid.


\(^{xvi}\) Ibid.

\(^{xvii}\) Ruth S. Ricks, Provo, Utah, to Hyrum Manwaring, Rexburg, Idaho, 1956, Ricks Academy: Biographical Notes of Ezra C. Dalby. File MS 293, Special Collections, David O. McKay Library, Brigham Young University Idaho, Rexburg.

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