

YMCA Spiritual Legacy Series

William Borden – Young Millionaire and Leader of Y Rescue Mission



William Borden, 1887-1913.

In 1904 William Borden graduated from a Chicago high school. As heir to the Borden Dairy estate, he was already a millionaire. For his high school graduation present, his parents gave 16-year-old Borden a trip around the world. As the young man traveled through Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, he

felt a growing burden for the world's hurting people. Finally, Bill Borden wrote home to say, "I'm going to give my life to prepare for the mission field."

One friend expressed surprise that he was "throwing himself away as a missionary."

In response, Bill wrote two words in the back of his Bible: **"No reserves."**

He was already known around campus for his commitment to Christian service as well as for his wealth. Presumably that is why he was approached by John Magee of the YMCA about some needs close to home. New Haven, the home of Yale, was also a seaport with a dock that provided irregular, occasional work for vagrants. As a result there was a large population of tramps, as well as recently released prisoners of the county jail. Magee saw the need for a rescue mission in the area and he saw the need for the undergrads of Yale to learn about the suffering of many in their own society. Magee and Borden began regularly praying about the needs of the dock area and with help from the Water Street Mission of New York, they started the Yale Hope Mission

Borden recruited many of his classmates to come to the mission to befriend and witness to those who came in. He started a continuing tradition of involvement of the undergrads in the life of mission, because from the beginning the mission was aimed as much as at the elite students as the down and out hobos. Here are the comments of a student about the mission a few years after Borden's time,

"I might say that sophomore year I was a pure atheist. Because there was so much selfishness and conceit in me, I was unhappy most of the time. The meeting at the mission opened my eyes. After attending several meetings, I saw that Jesus Christ could work miracles in men's lives. I began to get interested in the men – trying to help them get a new start and a firm hold on Christ. This work at the Mission made me a Christian."

Borden himself was the main benefactor of the mission in the beginning, not only recruiting students but providing the funds for the purchase of the building that served as chapel, hotel, and kitchen to the down and out of New Haven. His involvement was not just of the checkbook, but also of the heart.

Upon graduation from Yale, Borden turned down some high paying job offers. In his Bible, he wrote two more words: **"No retreats."**

William Borden went on to graduate work at Princeton Seminary in New Jersey. When he finished his studies at Princeton, he sailed for China. Because he was hoping to work with Muslims, he stopped first in Egypt to study Arabic. While there, he contracted spinal meningitis. Within a month, 25-year-old William Borden was dead.

When news William Whiting Borden's death was cabled back to the U.S., the story was carried by nearly every American newspaper. "A wave of sorrow went round the world . . . Borden not only gave (away) his wealth, but himself, in a way so joyous and natural that it (seemed) a privilege rather than a sacrifice"

Was Borden's untimely death a waste? Not in God's plan. Prior to his death, Borden had written two more words in his Bible. Underneath the words "No reserves" and "No retreats," he had written: **"No regrets."**



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