

TEACHING AMERICAN HISTORY PROJECT

Lesson Title—The 1863 Draft Riot in West Rutland, Vermont

Created by Sean Gilligan

Grade: 9-12

Length of Class Period: 48 minutes (this will be a two period activity)

Inquiry (what essential questions are students answering, what problems are they solving, or what decision are they making?)

- Why did Irish immigrants in places like West Rutland and New York City riot in 1863?
- Is a riot a legitimate form of political or social protest?
- What other information is needed to learn more about the 1863 West Rutland, Vermont Draft Riot?
- What was it like to be an Irish immigrant in 1860s Vermont?

Objectives (What content and skills do you expect students to learn from this lesson?)

- Students will interpret an article and primary source excerpts about the 1863 West Rutland, Vermont Draft Riot.
- Students will write a diary entry where they portray an Irish immigrant teen living in 1863 West Rutland, Vermont. By doing this writing activity, students are trying to demonstrate historical empathy.

Materials (What primary sources or local resources are the basis for this lesson?)-(please attach)

West Rutland, Vermont Draft Riot Article (includes primary source excerpts obtained from *Ballykilcline Rising: From Famine Ireland to Immigrant America* by Mary Lee Dunn.

Saint Bridget's Roman Catholic Church of West Rutland, Vermont Website

Activities (What will you and your students do during the lesson to promote learning?)

This lesson can be used as part of a Civil War unit or an immigration unit in a U.S. History class. It is expected that students will have studied the Civil War up to 1863 before this lesson. Or if this lesson is used in an immigration unit, it is expected that students will have studied the topic

of Irish immigration. The lesson will be two periods in length (if your period ranges from 45 to 60 minutes).

First, ask students if they have ever heard of the 1992 L.A. (Los Angeles) Riots. Ask students if they knew what the riots were about. Then ask if they ever heard of the 1863 New York City Draft Riots. After discussing the New York City Draft Riots, ask students if they think draft riots occurred in other places in the United States during the Civil War. At this point, you can tell students they will study a draft riot that occurred in New England....in West Rutland, Vermont.

Hand out the West Rutland Draft Riot article (which includes primary source excerpts). Have students split into pairs. They should use the essential questions while reading and discussing the article. Also, they should write their responses. After students interpret the article/primary sources, a whole class discussion will occur. Student responses to the essential questions are shared. A good closure discussion question could be: "If you were an Irish immigrant worker in West Rutland's marble quarries, would you have participated in the riot? Explain."

Students can then tackle the West Rutland, Vermont Immigrant Teen's Diary Entry Creative Writing Assignment at the second class session. Please encourage some students to share what they wrote. Helping students develop historical empathy is an important skill.

How will you assess what students learned during this lesson?

- Verbal responses
- Active pair interpretations
- Written interpretations
- West Rutland Irish Immigrant Teen's Diary Entry Creative Writing Assignment

Connecticut Framework Performance Standards—

Standard 1-Content Knowledge

1.1 Significant events and themes in United States History

High School 10. Assess the significance of the evolving heterogeneity of American society (e.g. role of immigrants).

Standard 2-History/Social Studies Literacy

2.2 Interpret information from a variety of primary and secondary sources.

High School 6. Determine the central ideas of, and be able to, summarize information from primary and secondary sources.

2.3 Create various forms of written work (e.g. journal) to demonstrate an understanding of history and social studies issues.

High School 16. Write informative/explanatory texts about events and topics.

**West Rutland Irish Immigrant Teen's Diary Entry
Creative Writing Assignment**

Name: _____

Pretend that you are an Irish immigrant teen (either Patrick Gilligan or Bridge Gilligan) born in County Sligo, and now living in West Rutland, Vermont, in July 1863. The Civil War has been going on since 1861, but also there has been a lot of controversy in your marble quarry town this month (the Draft Riot!).

In a diary entry (10 to 15 sentences in length), please talk about your life as an Irish immigrant teen in West Rutland, Vermont. Also, talk about how the Civil War has impacted your community and share your feelings about the West Rutland Draft Riot.

Use the article/primary sources about West Rutland and the draft riot. Also, use your knowledge about Irish immigrants in 19th century America and what you have studied about the Civil War (up to July 1863) to aid in writing this as well.

1863 West Rutland, Vermont Draft Riot

Information and primary source excerpts from the book *Ballykilcline Rising: From Famine Ireland to Immigrant America* by Mary Lee Dunn were very helpful in writing this article. Also, the St. Bridget's Roman Catholic Church (West Rutland, VT) website was consulted as well.

West Rutland, Vermont, would break away from the rest of Rutland and be incorporated as its own town in 1885. West Rutland was the section of Rutland that was very heavily Irish Catholic. Irish immigrants began to settle in West Rutland in the 1840s to work in its marble quarries. Many of the immigrants especially came from County Sligo in the northwestern part of the Emerald Isle. By 1860, the immigrants in this section of Rutland had established St. Bridget's Roman Catholic Church. The church is made of local marble and is one of the oldest Roman Catholic churches still standing in Vermont. Later in the 19th century and early 20th century, immigrants from Poland, Italy, and Canada (Quebec Province) would join the Irish in West Rutland's marble quarries.

During the 1860s, the Civil War was happening. This war would touch the lives of West Rutland's Irish immigrants even though they were they were very far from the fighting.

The Conscription Act of March 1863 was the first draft law in the United States. It required all physically fit men aged twenty to forty-five either to submit to a military draft, to furnish a substitute volunteer, or to pay \$300 to avoid being drafted into the Union Army. The poor and immigrants, largely Irish in Rutland, Vermont, and other cities in the East, who could not afford to pay their way out of service saw it as a class issue, "an attempt to force poor men to fight a rich man's war" and to free slaves who "then would compete with them for scarce jobs in a gruelingly competitive economy". The most violent eruptions took place in New York City over four days in July causing widespread injuries and damage and a thousand deaths by riot action. Irish made up fifteen percent of the Union Army and were suffering horrific casualty rates. The New York City Draft Riots are the most famous, but smaller riots occurred in other parts of the North as well.

Many Irish immigrants worked in the marble quarries of Vermont's Rutland region ("the Marble Valley"). In West Rutland in July 1863, enrollment officers visited the quarries to take down the names of those men eligible for the draft. The enrollment officers faced several hundred angry men:

"Jerry Connell, a blacksmith, employed at Adams and Allen's marble quarry at West Rutland, having been reported by the enrolling officer for obstructing the enrollment, in refusing to give his name or any other information when legally required to do so: it became the duty of the Provost Marshal...to summarily arrest him...[Provost Marshal Crane] then returned his pistol and did not again display it until surrounded by about two hundred men, and his life endangered by the shower of marble chips hurled upon him by the mob, some of which took effect, when he did again draw the weapon, and,

from the wagon in which he had taken refuge, fire two shots at men whom he saw hurl stones at him”

(Rutland Herald, July 2, 1863)

William Y. Ripley, wrote that Crane “tried hard to shoot the ring-leader, but was over-powered and carried off by his own Posse, after having emptied his revolver.” In his own account of the incident, Crane said, “There are in and about the quarries about one thousand laborers, all Irishmen,...organized and determined to resist the enrollment and draft.”

On July 31, 1863, a man named Hugh Corey was arrested. He later was excused from the draft because of a jaw problem, but in October he was convicted of assaulting the provost marshal, sentenced to jail, and fined.

William Ripley described the incidents in letters to his brother that month: “We have had an exciting time here for the past few weeks. I wrote to you about Crane being stoned off the Quarries when he went there to enroll the Irishmen. That made a great breeze at the time. Everybody was indignant and everybody said it was a shame and that the rioters ought to be punished, and everybody damned Crane because he did not do something.”

Citizens were asked to step into the fray to help Crane uphold the law, but, Ripley said nobody immediately came forward: “One lived there or near there and did not wish to embroil himself with them. Another had a barnful of hay on his meadow liable to be burned by them if he made them his enemies, and so on. Well, Crane got two hundred men, the presence of which force developed such a wonderful amount of courage in our townspeople that they immediately set to work and formed a Home Guard. They drill every night.” (Eischenschiml 1960, p. 143).

On July 23, 1863, one day after the draft calls were issued at Town Hall, the *Rutland Herald* published the names of 263 conscripts. About 29 percent of them appear to be Irish names: Michael Costello, Edward Duffy, Dennis and John Foley, etc.

Despite the West Rutland Draft Riot, many Irish immigrant members of West Rutland’s St. Bridget’s Church proudly served in the Union Army or Navy during the Civil War. Irish resistance to the draft could be seen as Irish immigrants’ anger over their living conditions in the United States. Although life was better than back in British controlled Ireland, 1860s America was still not an easy place for an Irish immigrant.

It is interesting to note that West Rutland’s Irish gained the nickname “stone chippers” because of this incident and the name continued into the 20th century.