



New York City Draft Riot Letter

1863

1 item

Call no.: MS278

Collection overview

This letter, dated July 14, 1863 from New York, is addressed simply to "Brother." The correspondent is unknown, as the letter is incomplete and consists only of a single sheet of paper. The subject of the letter is the ongoing draft riots in New York City, which began on July 13th and ended on July 16th. The rioters set fire to many businesses and homes, tore up railroad tracks and brought down telegraph lines during the three day ordeal.

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Background

The letter dated July 14th of 1863 was written in the midst of the New York City draft riots. On July 13, 1863, during a number drawing for the draft, approximately 500 people advanced upon the Ninth District Provost Marshal's Office on Third Ave and 47th Street, first throwing rocks at the building and then setting it on fire. A response to the conscription act passed by Congress authorizing the first draft in U.S. history, the riots and subsequent fires left many people homeless and over 100 dead. Lasting three days, the riots ended only after several regiments of militia and volunteer troops were sent to regain control over the city.

Scope of collection

The collection consists of a fragment of a letter from an unidentified correspondent addressed to "Dear Brother," dated July 14, 1863 from New York. In the letter the correspondent describes the drafts, which got off to a smooth start, but by Monday morning saw "...along several of the avenues little groups of laboring men here and there...in earnest conversation." Before long, the letter continues, these small groups converged to make a mob of laboring men, who went around the city recruiting other working men to join their ranks. As the mob was formed the rioters began setting fire first to homes and then to businesses, ultimately setting fire to The Colored Orphan Asylum, tearing down telegraph poles and destroying railroad tracks. In the final section of what remains of the letter the correspondent describes an instance in which the rioters robbed and set fire to a house merely because they overheard a critical remark made by the woman who lived there.

Administrative information

Access

The collection is open for research.

Provenance

Acquired from Marcia C. Bates in September of 1989.

Processing Information

Collection processed by Mary E. Fahey, 2007.

Related Material

For other personal accounts of the Civil War in the Special Collections and University Archives, see:

- Marcus A. Emmons Diary (MS 36)
- Samuel Chapin and William R. Session Civil War Diaries Transcripts (MS 157)
- Ellen and Mary E. Ware Papers (MS 511)
- Frank Metcalf Letters (MS 529)

Language:

English

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Search terms

Subjects

- Draft Riot, New York, N.Y., 1863
- United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865

Genres and formats

- Letters (Correspondence)

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