

Barre's Socialist Labor Party Hall

Background

Barre's Socialist Labor Party Hall was built in 1900 by Italian stoneworkers. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The hall was an important part of life in Barre, the "Granite Capital of the World." Workers met at the hall to discuss how to fight for better pay and working conditions. A granite workers' union had offices upstairs. Volunteers at the hall taught English to new immigrants, and even taught classes in Italian culture to young Italian Americans who want to know more about their home country. Local bands rehearsed in the labor hall. Dances and other social events were also held there.

First quarried in 1815, Barre granite drew workers from not only the surrounding region, but from across the Atlantic Ocean. The first to arrive were Scots, followed by Italians, Spaniards, Swiss, Austrians, and people from Norway and Finland. Later immigrants included large numbers of French Canadians. By 1910, Italians represented one-fifth of Barre's population. These new residents brought their culture with them, including not only language and the arts, but political ideas. The ideas included trade unionism, anarchism, socialism, and communism.



photo: Aldrich Public Library

Children from Lawrence, MA sent to Barre for safety by their parents during the 1912 "Bread and Roses" textile strike. This photo was taken in front of the Socialist Labor Hall, which had the words CO-OPERATIVA painted on its front.

A strong pro-worker community developed in Barre. Stonecutters joined unions, or workers' groups, to fight for better wages and working conditions. They also fought for educational and medical services for themselves and their families. Labor organizations ran stores where members and their families could purchase food and clothing for fair prices—instead of from stores owned by the companies, which often charged unfair prices. In 1912, when textile workers struck in Lawrence, MA, workers in Barre and the surrounding area took in some of the children of strikers to protect them from potential violence.

Work in the quarries and granite sheds of Barre was difficult and dangerous. Workplace accidents were frequent and safety precautions few. Before 1915, employers in Vermont were not required to pay if a worker was killed or injured on the job. A stoneworker's death meant his family would often be left without the money they needed to survive. Unions raised money to help support the families of those injured or killed.

Around the turn of the 20th century, a significant number of Vermont's laborers included children as young as seven or eight years of age. These children worked long hours for low pay. In the textile mills, children worked as much as 72 hours in a week to make as little as \$4. Unions and reform activists worked to end

child labor, but change came slowly. In 1913, Vermont passed a law limiting work hours for women and children to 58 hours per week.

About This Segment

Produced by Shelburne, Vermont filmmaker Louise Michaels, this segment focuses on the early years of Barre's granite industry and shows how organized labor affected life in Barre. A tour of the Socialist Labor Party Hall serves as a focal point for a look at Barre and the immigrants who lived there in the late 1800s and early 1900s. The film is dramatically illustrated with historical photos of granite cutters and their families in the early years.

Before Viewing

- What do you know about the role of granite in creating jobs and attracting immigrants to Vermont during its early years?
- What were working conditions like for people in industrial jobs 100 years ago?
- What is a union? How does a union work?
- Why might workers in the early 1900s want to organize into unions?

Vocabulary

Anarchism: a political belief system centering around the idea that government should be abolished and that people should organize cooperatively on a voluntary basis

Socialism: a political belief system centering around the idea that the tools for producing and distributing goods should be owned by everyone in the community

Communism: a political belief system centering around the idea that all property should be publicly owned and each person paid according to his or her ability and need

union: an organization of laborers that works for better pay and working conditions for its members

After Viewing

- What forces attracted immigrants to Barre?
- What role did unions and other labor organizations play in Barre's history?
- What made work in the granite quarries so difficult?
- How does immigrant culture live on in Barre today?

Grades 4-5

Public Speaking Imagine you belong to a labor group from outside Vermont in 1910. Your goal is to convince workers in Vermont to unionize for better pay and working conditions. Work in a small group to write a speech for your representative. Have your representative and representatives from other groups deliver their speeches. Then decide which speech is most effective and why.

Vermont History and Social Sciences Grade Expectations

Initiate an inquiry (3-4:1; 5-6:1); Design research (3-4:3; 5-6:3) Conduct research (3-4:4; 5-6:4) Connect past with present (3-4:8; 5-6:8) Understand how cultures change (3-4:13; 5-6:13) Interaction/interdependence between humans, environment, and economy (3-4:18; 5-6:18)

A Letter to Home Many immigrants who came to work in Barre left their families behind in Europe. Imagine you are one of these workers, or a member of their family in Barre. Write a letter to a relative in the

“Old Country” telling about your new life in Barre, how it is different from your life before, and how you are keeping your culture alive in this new land.

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Immigrants in Your Community Not everyone in your community was born in Vermont. Do some research to find out which countries your friends and relatives' families originally came from. Work with your classmates to find as many nations as you can. Then make a painting of the flag of each country you find. You can find out what the flag looks like on the Internet or in an encyclopedia. When your paintings are finished, hang them in the classroom. It will show other people that your community is made up of many cultures.

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Grades 6-8

Technology Today, workers still quarry and carve granite in Barre. But the tools they use to do the job differ greatly from those used in the early 1900s. Do research to find out how the tools of the granite industry have changed, and how this has changed the lives of workers in the industry. Share your findings, including images in the form of a blog entry, Power Point, or poster.

Vermont History and Social Sciences Grade Expectations

Initiate an inquiry (5-6:1; 7-8:1); Design research (5-6:3; 7-8:3); Conduct research (5-6:4; 7-8:4) Connect past with present (5-6:8; 7-8:8); Understand past, present and future (5-6:10; 7-8:10); Understand how cultures change (5-6:13; 7-8:13)

Primary Source Interview someone who works in the granite industry as a quarry worker, stone carver, or in another position. Ask your interview subject how he or she started work in the industry, how the industry has changed over the years, how granite workers in earlier years lived and worked, and what the challenges and rewards of the job are. Share this first-person story in the form of a podcast.

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Eli Corti (far left) in the Barre granite shed where he worked. Corti was later shot and killed outside the Socialist Party Labor Hall.

photo: Aldrich Public Library

Union vs. Management Union workers in Barre’s granite industry fought for higher pay and better working conditions. The owners of granite-related businesses fought against these efforts. Do some research to find out the reasons each side took the position it did. Why did workers think they deserved more? Why did management do its best to oppose unions? Present your findings in the form of a debate between two student actors. One actor can play a granite union representative. Another can play the owner of a Barre granite shed.

Vermont History and Social Sciences Grade Expectations

Initiate an inquiry (5-6:1; 7-8:1); Conduct research (5-6:4; 7-8:4); Develop reasonable supporting explanations (5-6:5; 7-8:5); Understand how humans interpret history (5-6:9; 7-8:9); Understand how access affects justice, reward, and power (9-10:17; 11-12:17); Interaction/interdependence between humans, environment, and economy (5-6:18; 7-8:18)

Grades 9-12

Guest Speaker Invite a labor leader or a representative from a local union to give a presentation to your class about unions in Vermont. Ask your speaker to tell a bit about the history of unions. Then ask the speaker to compare and contrast historical unions with the unions of today. What challenges stand in the way of unions? How are unions working to meet these challenges? What role does technology play in unions? How do these situations compare and contrast with those of the past? Record your guest speaker’s talk on digital video and share it with others on a class Web site.

Vermont History and Social Sciences Grade Expectations

Initiate an inquiry (9-10:1; 11-12:1); Design research (9-10:3; 11-12:3); Conduct research (9-10:4; 11-12:4) Communicate findings (9-10:7; 11-12:7); Understand how access affects justice, reward, and power (9-10:17; 11-12:17); Interaction/interdependence between humans, environment, and economy (9-10:18; 11-12:18)

A Rocky Economy At one time, the granite quarries of Barre dominated life in the community. But economic factors have resulted in closed granite sheds and job losses. Propose a hypothesis: why has this occurred? Do some research to test your hypothesis, and create a “State of the Industry” report for Barre granite, including competitive obstacles, opportunities for future growth, and a look at how industries such as clean energy are shaping the economic landscape of Barre.

Vermont History and Social Sciences Grade Expectations

Initiate an inquiry (9-10:1; 11-12:1) Develop a hypothesis (9-10:2; 11-12:2); Design research (9-10:3; 11-12:3); Conduct research (9-10:4; 11-12:4); Develop reasonable supporting explanations (9-10:5; 11-12:5); Communicate findings (9-10:7; 11-12:7); Interaction/interdependence between humans, environment, and economy (9-10:18; 11-12:18)

Voices from the Past In the 1930s, Mari Tomasi and Roaldus Richmond collected stories from granite workers and other residents of Barre for the Works Progress Administration’s Federal Writer’s Project. In 2004, University Press New England published many of these stories in the book *Men Against Granite*, edited by Alfred Rosa and Mark Wanner. And the Vermont Historical Society sells copies of Randy Croce’s documentary *If Stone Could Speak*. Use these or other sources to create a one-act play about Barre granite workers and their families. Perform the play for your class or school.

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On the Road

The Rock of Ages Visitor Center in Barre, Vermont offers tours of an active granite quarry nearly 600 feet deep and a 160,000 square foot granite production facility. Visit there, and you can see firsthand how granite is quarried, cut, shaped, and polished. You can bowl at what is believed to be the world’s only outdoor, granite bowling lane. And you can even sandblast a stone souvenir of your trip. For more information about Rock of Ages and its tours, visit rockofages.com.

Barre’s Hope Cemetery offers the opportunity to see the work of some of the world’s most skillful granite carvers. Memorials at the cemetery date back to its founding in 1895.

Career Corner: Museum Curator

If looking into the past is something you enjoy, you might consider a career as a museum curator. Curators are responsible for getting, caring for, and displaying the artifacts, or display items, held by museums. They also do research to find out more about the artifacts. How do you get a job as a curator? Many curators have studied history. They may have also specialized in a particular branch of history. Art museum curators have often studied art. Science museum curators may have studied biology, geology, or computer science.

Today’s museums often display artifacts on Web pages. They also use the Internet to communicate with the public. For these reasons, curators must know how to use Internet technology. If you’re worried that working in a museum might be boring, think again. Curators get a close-up look at artifacts that have unforgettable stories to tell—and get the chance to share these stories with people from all over the world.

RESOURCES

Links

Barre Socialist Labor Party Hall: uvm.edu/histpres/HPJ/NR/barrelabor/statement.html

nps.gov/nr/travel/centralvermont/cv26.htm

ptvermont.org/commentary/socialist_hall_maurer.php

Barre Museum and Historical Archives:

aldrich.lib.vt.us/museum.htm#Archives%20of%20Barre%20History

Rock of Ages Quarries and Visitor Center: rockofages.com

Hope Cemetery, Barre: vermonter.com/hopcemetry.asp

central-vt.com/web/hope/

Sculptures in Downtown Barre: <http://www.central-vt.com/web/sculpt/index.html>

Books

Richmond, Roaldus, and Tomasi, Mari. *Men Against Granite*. University Press of New England, 2004.