

“Irasburg Affair”
Newspaper Clippings, 1968-1969
MSA 418: 01-11

Introduction

This collection contains newspaper clippings and other documents about the “Irasburg Affair,” a racial incident that occurred in Irasburg, Vermont, in 1968, collected by Montpelier High School teacher William H. Haines. It was given to the Vermont Historical Society in 2006 by Mr. Haines (ms. acc. no. 2006.18). The collection consumes .5 linear feet of shelf space and is housed in one flip-top archival box along with another related collection.

Historical Note

What came to be known as the “Irasburg Affair” began on the night of July 19, 1968, when shots were fired at a house owned by an African-American Baptist minister named Reverend David Lee Johnson. The case attracted state-wide and even national attention when the police focused their attention on Rev. Johnson rather than the perpetrators. Eventually Larry Conley, a resident of Glover, Vermont, was arrested by the state police. He was charged with “breach of peace” and pled no contest. Shortly after the incident occurred Johnson and a white woman, who had been staying in the house, were arrested on charges of adultery. The woman pled no contest, was fined, and left the state. Charges against Johnson were eventually dropped when the woman refused to return to Vermont.

A board of inquiry was appointed by Governor Philip H. Hoff and chaired by former governor and U.S. District Judge Ernest Gibson Jr. The board eventually concluded that the state police acted inappropriately by delaying the shooting investigation and moving quickly with the adultery charges. Public Safety Commissioner E. A. Alexander refused to discipline any of his troopers that were involved in the case. He was censured by Hoff for his actions.

Scope and Content Note

This collection contains newspaper clippings and other documents about the “Irasburg Affair,” a racial incident that occurred in Irasburg, Vermont, in 1968, and heightened state’s awareness of the racial conflicts of the era. The clippings were assembled by William H. Haines in a large notebook. The notebook pages have been removed and placed in folders. All clippings have also been photocopied for long-term preservation. The collection includes clippings from *The Times Argus*, *The Burlington Free Press*, *The Rutland Herald*, *The Vermont Sunday News*, *Vermont Freeman*, and *The Addison Independent*, during the period of November 1968 through April 1969.

The collection also includes a collection of materials used for a course at the Vermont Judicial College in 1988, most of which were copied from the notebooks assembled by the donor.

Related Collections

A typescript and other documents related to the “Irasburg Affair” assembled by M. Jerome Diamond, law clerk for U.S. District Judge Ernest W. Gibson, Jr., is housed in MSA 418:12.

In the April 4, 1969 issue of *Life Magazine* there was an article published about the incident entitled, “The Ruckus in Irasburg” (folio 051 L626).

In 1989 Vermont author Howard Frank Mosher wrote a novel about the incident entitled *Stranger in the Kingdom* (813 M853s). The novel was made into a movie of the same title in 1991 (Video C-10).

Inventory

- MSA 418:01 Clippings, November 1968
- 02 _____, _____, Photocopies
- 03 Clippings, December 1968
- 04 _____, _____, Photocopies
- 05 Clippings, January-April 1969
- 06 _____, _____, Photocopies
- 07 Bibliography of Jim Manchester
- 08A Epilogue
- 08B *Findings and Recommendations of Board of Inquiry Investigating the so-called Irasburg Affair*, photocopy.
- 09 Vermont Judicial College, Irasburg Affair, 1998, Folder 1
- 10 _____, _____, _____, _____, Folder 2
- 11 _____, _____, _____, _____, Folder 3

T. J. Coffrin
 June 2006
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