

Michael Ryder (1828-1877)

Janice Gallant

Michael Ryder (1828-1877)

**For the descendants of his granddaughter Dorothy “Billy”
Daggett Wild (1900-1964)**

By Janice Mattson Gallant, her granddaughter

Introduction

My great great grandfather Michael Ryder was born in Ireland in 1828, and died in St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada in 1877. For many years, most of our information about him was based on a family history written by his grandson Paul Daggett (1893-1973). In recent years, on-line research has yielded much new information about Michael Ryder, including dozens of newspaper articles from his time in St. Catharines. Paul Daggett’s account was invaluable in facilitating this on-line research, but the new information shows that Paul’s account is not entirely accurate. As with many such family histories, the truth was romanticized and human failings were omitted.

What follows is my attempt to piece together Michael Ryder’s life story. Like Paul Daggett’s account, this account may contain some errors, but it is more consistent with the available records than his account. For more context and a complete list of the St. Catharines newspaper articles about Michael Ryder, refer to [Michael Ryder’s page](#) at wild-roots.org.

A warning to his descendants: Michael Ryder was an illiterate alcoholic who got into physical fights and regularly spent time in jail. He was also articulate, witty, maybe even charismatic, and he had a very friendly relationship with the blacks of St. Catharines – in some ways, at least, he was a man ahead of his time.

Early years (1828-1845)



Ireland, County Mayo highlighted

Michael Ryder was born in 1828 in Newport, County Mayo on the west coast of Ireland. His father was Daniel Ryder (1780?-1867); the name of his mother has been lost. Michael had at least 4 brothers – Patrick, John, Martin, and James – and one sister, Bridget.



1855 map from "Griffith's Valuation". Daniel Ryder family at #15.

Little is known of Michael's early life. In 1855 – about 10 years after Michael had left County Mayo – his father Daniel appears in “Griffith's Valuation” as a tenant on a rural property, less than 2 acres about a mile northeast of Newport.

All of Michael's known siblings eventually left Ireland. Patrick moved to England; John moved to Louisville, Kentucky; Bridget moved to Kenosha, Wisconsin; and Martin moved to Chicago, Illinois. The ultimate whereabouts of James are unknown.

Service in the British army (1845-1855)

The Potato Famine began in 1845 when Michael Ryder was 17 years old; County Mayo was hit very hard. Michael enlisted in the British army in 1845, almost certainly motivated by the Famine. He served for about 10 years, discharged in August 1855. His military record shows that he served in Gibraltar, Bermuda, and possibly Canada (the hand written record is difficult to read). Years later, Michael may have been referring to his time in Bermuda when he was quoted in a St. Catharines newspaper:

I've carried me knapsack all over the worlt, since the days I 'listed in the swate town av Nayna... Me ridgment was so lon quathered in the West Indies, that every wan av us became natives av the sile... an' wouldn't I be there to-day, livin in me grate house an' ridin in me coachan-four, if the haythens had something besides their dirty laygur beer to drink. – St. Catharines Daily Times, 14 Mar 1870

“The swate town av Nayna” where Michael enlisted is likely Nenagh in County Tipperary.

Michael's discharge record from the British army in August 1855 describes his character as “Indifferent”; most of his peers were described as having “Good” characters. We don't have any photos of Michael Ryder, but his British discharge papers provide a basic physical description: 5 feet 6 inches tall with blue eyes.

Early years in North America (1856-1861)

Michael Ryder entered the United States via New York in September 1856. He would have been about 27 years old with over 10 years military experience. He

applied for naturalization as a U.S. citizen a few months later in December 1856.

Michael's whereabouts over the next few years are not known, but he ultimately ended up in St. Catharines, Ontario. At that time, St. Catharines was well known as a center for abolitionists and as a terminus for the Underground Railroad. According to Paul Daggett's account, Michael Ryder "was violently opposed to all forms of tyranny and oppression" and was a "slave runner" in the Underground Railroad. There is no way to determine the truth of that charming family story, but it is tempting to speculate that Michael Ryder ended up in St. Catharines as a result of his work with the Underground Railroad.

Michael Ryder married [Rose Joyce \(1837-1885\)](#) of St. Catharines sometime in the late 1850s. According to Paul Daggett, Rose Joyce was born in Swinford, County Mayo. No record has been found of her birth or her entry into America. Her brother John Joyce lived in St. Catharines and worked as a laborer. It seems likely that Rose accompanied her brother to Canada, and that she lived with him until her marriage to Michael Ryder.

Sadly, Michael and Rose's first child Mary Ann – born in St. Catharines in April 1860 – died in infancy or early childhood. Sometime in 1860 or 1861, Michael and Rose moved to Louisville, Kentucky, where Michael's brother John Ryder had a teaming outfit. Rose gave birth to their second child - John Joyce Ryder - in Kentucky in June 1861.

American Civil War service (1861-1862)

Michael Ryder enlisted in the Union army (the Fifth Kentucky Infantry aka The Louisville Legion) in September 1861. He deserted the Union army less than a year later; the date of his desertion is unknown. Note that in April 1862, the Louisville Legion saw action at Shiloh, one of the first bloody battles of the Civil War.

Desertion was common during the Civil War, especially on the Union side. Though Michael's Civil War records show that he deserted, they also include the note "Distinguished Service". It is tempting to speculate that after experiencing the carnage at Shiloh, the 34 year old British army veteran decided to desert the army, and return to St. Catharines with his wife and infant son. Years later Michael may have been referring to his Civil War service when he sang:

Och, wanst I ne'er did think I'd be In this dejected shate, Like a poor phorlorn effigy Bowed down by fwiskey straight The burds that flutter an the tree Wid terror strike me hart, Each sthar I see alarms me Och, fwwhy did I desart? – St. Catharines Daily Times, 21 May 1870

In 1862, John Ryder's wife Mary Fallon gave birth to a son Michael Ryder. Mary Fallon apparently died or was otherwise unable to raise her baby. In any event, Michael Ryder and Rose Joyce took in their young nephew Michael and raised him in St. Catharines as if he were one of their own children.

St. Catharines - Part 1 (1862-1870)

During their early years in St. Catharines, the Ryders lived in a "shanty" on Division Street in an area known as "The Patch", a rundown part of St. Catharines. During these years, Michael appeared frequently in the local court and jail records, as well as occasionally in the newspapers. None of these appearances was positive. Meanwhile, Michael and Rose had several babies during these years. A chronicle of these years follows:

- 25 Jun 1862 – Michael convicted of assault and fined \$10.
- 30 Aug 1863 – birth of son James
- 23 Jun 1864 – death of son James
- 15 Mar 1865 – Michael convicted of being drunk and disorderly, fined \$2.
- 3 May 1865 – birth of son Michael (who died in infancy or early childhood, date unknown)
- 4 Dec 1865 – Michael convicted of beating his wife
- Jan 1866 – Michael released from jail after serving 30 days for assault and battery
- Jul 1866 – Michael released from jail after serving 3 months for assault and battery
- 12 Jan 1867 – birth of daughter Agnes Bridget
- 21 Feb 1867 – Michael Ryder charged Mrs. Judge with demolishing his gate. "Michael ... testified to Mrs. Judge's appetite for ardent spirits, but failed to prove his accusation touching the gate."
- Aug 1867 – Michael released from jail after serving 21 days for assault and battery
- 21 Aug 1867 – Michael convicted of striking Nathaniel Patterson, fined \$5 or 25 days in jail.

- 30 Jun 1868 – Michael convicted with using abusive language with Daird Powers and with calling him foul names. Michael was fined \$1 or 6 days in jail.
- 1 Aug 1868 – Rose Ryder charged William Barrett “with using obscene and abusive language towards her on the public streets.” Barrett was fined \$2.
- 7 Sep 1868 – Michael Ryder charged Julia Barrett and her son James with setting fire to his house. The charges were dismissed.
- 20 Oct 1868 – Michael charged John Courtney with assault and battery. The charge was dismissed, “which exasperated Ryder into using foul language, when he was fined \$2.”
- 4 Feb 1869 – birth of daughter Anne (my great grandmother)
- 18 Sep 1869 – Michael convicted of using abusive language and fined \$2.
- 27 Jan 1870 – Michael charged James Freeman and Anthony Garrity “wid stealing me bottle uv whiskey”. The case was dismissed.

In the jail records, prisoners were classified as to their Moral Habits (Temperate or Intemperate), and whether they could read and write (Neither, Imperfectly, or Well). Not surprisingly, Michael was identified as Intemperate, as were most of the other prisoners. Like about half of the other prisoners, he could neither read nor write.

Michael Ryder became a well known figure in The Patch, referred to in the newspaper as “Michael Ryder, the notorious” in 1868.

St. Catharines – Part 2 (1870-1877)

Michael’s appearances in the newspaper took a more positive turn in 1870. For one thing, the newspapers began referring to him as “Baron von Ryder”. The origin of this name is unknown, but there is a humorous quality to these references, for instance this item:

On Saturday evening last, the famous Baron Von Ryder went around Town practicing the fine art of paper-hanging on the dead-walls and fences, and having completed the job to his own satisfaction, rested from his labors in the enjoyment of a “noggin av speerits.” Next morning, however, the citizens were amused to find all the bills turned upside down, but firmly stuck on to the walls. The Baron who has been writing poetry on the

destruction of Sanacherib, avers that: "The dimon av fun schwept by on the blast And turn thim upside down as he passed."

He is repeating the work to-day, having first sharpened his vision by a copious inhalation of Paddy's eye-water. It is hoped that the antics of this mischief maker will not prevent a large attendance at the lecture to-morrow night which the bill announced. – St. Catharines Daily Times, 21 Feb 1870

During the spring of 1870, there is a wonderful series of articles in the St. Catharines Daily Times. Michael was a regular at Police Court proceedings, even when he wasn't directly involved. For instance, this item:

The noble Baron Von Ryder and his beloved Brudder Payne were early at the Justice Shop this morning. "Shure 'tis meself that loiks to be to the fore, fwhin the fun is goin' on," remarked the Baron. "Faix I'd rather see a naygur in the crib than go widout me bithurs av a mornin."

"Ise ob 'pinion dat de niggah is too ophten put in de fence," retorted Brudder Payne, with a dark frown of injured dignity mantling his noble brow. "'Spose dey'll soon be sayin dat niggahs ought to climb de pole, and showdar – like de" Com'n Man' does."

The Baron was thunderstruck at the "impidence" of this speech, and was just beginning a terrific volley of Tipperary wild-fire, when the Beak was heard approaching, and silence reigned supreme. (ed note: "The Beak" was police magistrate Thomas Burns) – St. Catharines Daily Times, 10 Mar 1870

Things took a sad turn later that year, when Michael assaulted Rose:

Yesterday afternoon, the aristocratic neighborhood of Upper Division street (we mean the "Patch,") was disturbed considerably by a friendly discussion, "wid shticks," between Mr. and Mrs. Michael Ryder - said discussion having taken place on the lawn in front of their princely abode. During the progress of the discussion, Mr. Ryder merely intending to give emphasis to his remarks, accidentally allowed his "shtick" to fall rather too heavily on the well shaped head dress and auburn tresses of his lovely spouse.

Soon, distressing to relate, the beautiful face, alabaster neck and costly attire, were stained by the crimson flood that poured from the wounds caused by the bit of timber already alluded to. Mr. Ryder, in an agony of remorse and dread at the unfortunate turn events had suddenly taken, exclaimed, in agonizing tones: –“O willihoo! willihoo! – wirra! wirra! Bidy, acushla, are ye kilt? Bad cess to the dirty shillela!Sorr a time will I ever touch it again.”

Then he cast the unlucky cause of the catastrophe to the ground, caught the fair partner of his joys and woes to his manly bosom, strained her in a fond and convulsive embrace, imprinted a kiss on her ruby lips, laid her tenderly on the sward, and then, in company with the Chief of Police, who in the interval had opportunely arrived on the spot, rushed frantically down towards the Lockup, there to pass the time in gloomy reflections on his domestic sorrows.

The faithful Chief, who took to him like a friend of his youth, poured into the ear of the disconsolate Ryder a plentiful stream of consolation for his afflictions. The surgeon who was speedily in attendance on the fair sufferer, has removed a heavy burden of anxiety from our heart by informing us that - thanks to her abstemious habits (she drinks nothing stronger than Stinson’s best), fine constitution and (this spoken sotto voce) thick skull - Mrs. Ryder will probably recover. – St. Catharines Daily Times, 7 Sep 1870

Michael was found “guilty of common assault” and “sentenced to the common jail two months at hard labor”. The following March, he was sentenced to 4 months in jail for being drunk, disorderly, and assaulting Police Chief Montgomery. But after that, he seems to have mended his ways, at least for a while. For the next three and a half years, there is no record of criminal charges against Michael Ryder.

In January 1873, he was “repeatedly applauded” for his role as “Deacon Perry” in a local production of “Uncle Tom’s Cabin”. He is occasionally cited in newspaper articles during this period, for instance:

“Fwhat with whate and mate so high,” says the Baron Von Ryder, “a boy can’t afford to drink nothing betther nor cider.” – St. Catharines Daily Times, 6 Aug 1873

About a week after that article appeared, daughter Rose was born. Unfortunately, the saddest newspaper article appeared a few months after Rose’s birth:

Rose Ryder was charged by P.C. O’Keefe, with being drunk and disorderly. He found her last night about 10 o’clock lying in the mud in rear of the Saw Works, with an infant about 3 months old in her arms. She was discharged owing to a flaw in the information. – St. Catharines Evening Journal, 4 Dec 1873

Michael still had his occasional run-ins with the law. In September 1874, he was sent to jail “for taking home a horse belonging to Mr. Thomas McCarthy without asking permission.” Three months later, he was sent to prison for two months for assaulting his neighbors.

Sometime during this period, the Ryders moved from Division Street to a house on Cherry Street, today considered a swanky area of older homes. This house was probably a nice step up for the Ryder family. Unfortunately, the Cherry Street house burned down in 1875, as recorded in the following series of items from the St. Catharines Daily Times:

- 27 Jul 1875: *Just as we were going to press an alarm of fire was given. The fire was found to be on Cherry street, corner of Trafalgar. The buildings burned up to this writing were a frame house occupied by Mike Ryder, and a number of out-buildings in the rear of J.V. Lepper’s boarding house. The damage will not be very great. Fortunately the adjoining buildings were saved.*
- 29 Jul 1875: *Mr. Michael Ryder, who was burned out at the recent fire, says his losses were very heavy. He lost all his clothing, beds, and other things too numerous to mention, and hadn’t a dollar insurance on them. Mike feels down in the mouth and says he has now to commence his life over again. He says \$50 wouldn’t cover his losses.*

- 9 Aug 1875: *Mr. Mike Ryder wishes to return his sincere thanks for the kindness he has received from the people of St. Catharines since he was burned out. He says he had no idea that so much generosity and kindness existed here.*

Another daughter - Catharine - was born a couple of months later on November 29, 1875. Michael was probably celebrating her birth when he had a very close call:

An unfortunate man named Michael Ryder had a narrow escape from being frozen to death yesterday morning. He lay in the ditch on George street for about three hours, in a helpless state of intoxication and but for the compassionate assistance rendered by three or four kind-hearted men in that neighborhood, Michael would certainly have suffered the "extreme penalty" of his incurable appetite for whiskey. – St. Catharines Daily Times, 1 Dec 1875

There is a gap in the availability of St. Catharines newspapers from 1875 until 1891, so this disturbing article is the last newspaper article about the Ryders.

Nine month old Catharine died of dysentery in August 1875. Michael died in 1877 in a drowning accident; he was 49 years old. No details of his death are available, but it seems very likely to have been alcohol-related.

After Michael Ryder's death

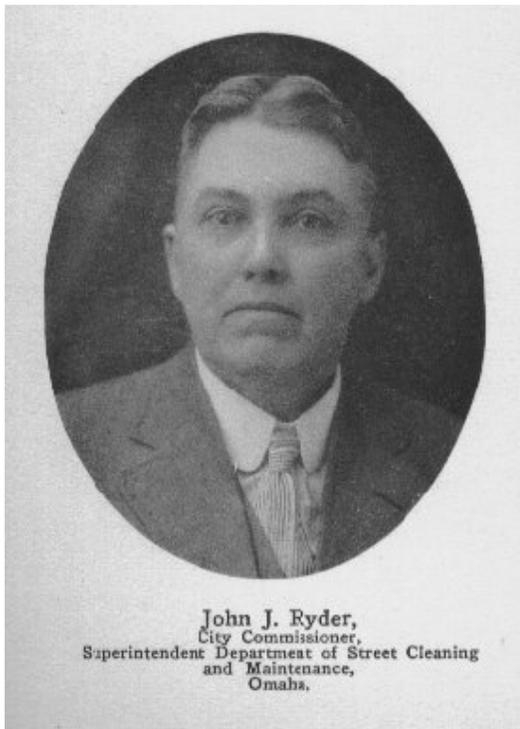
When Michael died, he left Rose with five children: son John Joyce (16 years old); nephew Michael (15 years old); daughter Agnes Bridget (10 years old); daughter Anne (8 years old); and daughter Rose (4 years old). Sometime during the next few years, the two older boys moved to St. Paul, Minnesota and found jobs. It is not known why they selected St. Paul.

Rose died in St. Catharines in 1885 at the age of 48. The death record shows her occupation as Widow and cause of death as "found dead in bed". Michael Ryder and Rose Joyce are buried in Victoria Lawn Cemetery in St. Catharines.

After Rose's death, John and Michael helped arrange for their sisters to move to St. Paul. Rose was only 12 years old, and lived with Michael's sister Bridget

Philbin and her family in Kenosha, Wisconsin for a few years before joining her older siblings in St. Paul.

So what became of the children of Michael Ryder and Rose Joyce?



John J. Ryder, about 1914

[John J. “Jack” Ryder](#) (1861-1942) married Wilhelmina “Minnie” Gies (1868-1941). They had one child who lived to adulthood: Mary Theresa Ryder (1891-1981). Jack Ryder worked at newspapers for many years, including stints as a printer, proofreader, reporter and editor. He was a gifted orator and became known as a political and labor leader. He served in the Minnesota state legislature in the 1890s. Later he served as labor commissioner in Nebraska, and as a city commissioner in Omaha.

[Michael “Mike” Ryder](#) (1862-1914) married Jennie Wischek (1867-?) and worked as a hack driver in St. Paul. He had a troubled life, first appearing in the St. Catharines newspapers in 1873, accused of stealing bottles. By the mid 1890s, he was appearing in St. Paul newspapers, accused of burglary and forging checks. He was sent to jail in 1896, and was in the Minneapolis newspapers again in early 1897 when he and a couple of other prisoners briefly

escaped from jail. By about 1900, he was back home with his wife in St. Paul. He stayed out of trouble during the next several years, but died in 1914 at the age of 52. The cause of death was given as “Illuminating gas poisoning. Accidental turning on of gas jets in gas store.”

[Agnes Bridget Ryder](#) (1867-1946) married train brakeman John DeWitt (1862-1920), and raised five children in Nebraska.



Annie Ryder

[Anne “Annie” Ryder](#) (1869-1945) married deputy U.S. marshal William Smith Daggett (1864-1912) and raised five children in Minneapolis, including Dorothy Ann “Billie” Daggett (1900-1964), future wife of Edward “Ted” Wild (1892-1980).

[Rose Ryder](#) (1873-1935) never married, and worked as a domestic for many years in St. Paul and Minneapolis.

Paul Daggett's accounts of Michael Ryder

Paul Daggett (1893-1973) was Michael Ryder's grandson, born 16 years after Michael's death. Paul wrote a couple of accounts of Michael Ryder's life. Those accounts follow.

Michael Ryder was born in Newport, County Mayo, in 1828, the exact date unknown. In 1845, the first year of the famine, he was a youth of 17. Connaught, the province which included Mayo, Connemara and Sligo, has been termed the most distressed province in Ireland. During the bitter years of 1845, 1846, and 1847, Michael Ryder must have endured all the hardship occasioned by famine with its accompanying disease. What was his fate, then? How did he live, and where?

His wife, Rose Joyce, his junior by 9 years, was born in Swinford, County Mayo, in 1837. As a child, she too suffered the pangs of hunger during the famine. However, nothing is known of the parents of either Michael Ryder or Rose Joyce, nor do we know where or when they were married.

Michael Ryder joined the English army as a very young man, served 12 years in various parts of the world, and drew a pension until his death. We do not know the manner in which he and Rose Joyce were married. They were unacquainted in Ireland but met on the ship coming to America. They could have been married on the ship, or after arrival.

Michael Ryder's army service included the Crimean War. Since that war lasted from 1854 until the Treaty of Paris in 1856, he would have been 26 to 28 years of age at the time.

After arrival in America their son John J. Ryder was born in Louisville in 1863. A daughter Mary was also born in Louisville and died there.

The great ferment about slavery must have had a real effect on Michael Ryder. He joined the Union army, but while stationed as a drill sergeant in New York it came out that he was really a British subject and that ended his service.

He had been active in the underground railway. As a slave runner he was only evidencing his hatred of oppression and tyranny, which had been nurtured by his

own experience in the dread days in Ireland. At this time he moved his family to St. Catharines, Ontario.

My mother, Anne Ryder, was born in St. Catharines, Ontario, in 1869, the daughter of Michael Ryder and his wife, Rose Joyce. The baptismal record shows her name as Hanna, though I believe it truly was Honor Teresa. She told me that she had been christened Honor, or possibly Hanorah. For some reason she did not care for either of these and was always known as Anne. The baptismal record is in error in at least one respect; it mistakenly records her father's name as Michael Ryan, rather than Ryder, so possibly her name was listed incorrectly.

Her father, Michael Ryder, was born in Newport, on Clew Bay, County Mayo, Ireland, in 1828. Unfortunately it has not been possible to procure a copy of his baptismal record. The Parish Priest of Newport reports that there is a gap in the Parish register from 1826 to 1846.

As a very young man he enlisted in the British Army, where he served in various parts of the world for twelve years. His service included the Crimean War, which was in the years 1854 to 1856. It well might be that this army service could have been motivated, at least in part, by the Famine which occurred in the period 1845 to 1849, that appalling state of misery and hunger which is beyond description in this short recital. Following his army service he drew a pension until his accidental death in St. Catharines, Ontario, at the age of 49, on November 9, 1877.

My grandmother, Rose Joyce, was born in Swinford, County Mayo, Ireland, in 1837. Her birthplace was only some 30 miles from Newport; nevertheless, she and her future husband did not know each other in Ireland. They met on shipboard while emigrating to America. It is not known whether they were married during the voyage, or after reaching this country, but the latter seems the most likely course for two Irish Catholics.

A letter from the Parish Priest at Swinford informed me that in this case, just as happened at Newport, there is no record of baptisms during the period when Rose Joyce was born.

Where they landed is not known. It could have been New York, or Boston. Some vessels landed in Canada, although most came to the United States.

Michael Ryder's brother John had preceded them to America and was located in Louisville, Kentucky, where he owned a teaming outfit. This probably accounts for my grandparents going to Louisville. The year is not known, but their son, my uncle John J. Ryder, was born there in 1863. A daughter, Mary, was also born there, but she died in infancy.

During the Civil War, Michael Ryder joined the Union Army. Because of his military experience he became a drill sergeant and was stationed in New York. While there it became known that he was really a British subject, and that ended his service.

A letter from my cousin, Mary Erhard, daughter of John J. Ryder, informed me that Michael Ryder had been active as a "slave runner", in the so-called underground railway. He was violently opposed to all forms of tyranny and oppression; this explains his motivation in helping slaves reach Canada and freedom of a sort. Possibly this experience may have prompted moving the family to St. Catharines, Ontario.

In St. Catharines the following children were born: Catherine, died in infancy James, died in infancy Agnes Bridget, born January 12, 1867 Anne (my mother) born February 4, 1869 Michael, born in 1871 Rose, born in 1874

When grandfather, Michael Ryder, died in 1877, my mother was only 8 years old. In 1885, when grandmother Rose Ryder died, mother was only 16 years old.
