

Rough on Rats

October 12, 1895
Wm. Proctor is the father of a son.
Two Chinamen arrived in town and will run a laundry.
Roanoke beat the Toluca Reds ball team in a game at Minonk.
Fire in the bottom of No. 1 shaft did about \$25,000 damage.
Mike Johanas is making frequent trips to Rutland—there's a reason.
E. M. Root was called to Kansas on account of his wife being seriously ill.
Lucey Martelina employed at the home of John Aimone committed suicide by taking rough on rats.
Jas. Grable has resigned from the Mercantile store and gone to Minonk to work in a dry goods store.



It all started, quite innocently while researching a friend's family history. I came across the tragic death, by suicide, of Lucey Martelina (Toluca, Illinois). I learned that the means, ingesting rat poison, was a popular and common way to end one's life. The product, Rough on Rats, was a poison composed of arsenic and barium, with a little coal or sand added for coloring, designed to kill a variety of vermin.

According to the [Annual Report of Illinois State Board of Health](#), in 1887, there were 259 suicides by poisoning and the "poisons most used were morphine and rough on rats."



Upon further research, it became clear that the use of Rough on Rats was not limited to suicide. In 1898, Frank Belew admitted that he had poisoned his sister Susie and brother Louis. "I poured the drug into the teakettle...I do not know what promoted me to do the deed" ([Belew on Trail for His Life – SF Call 6 April 1898](#))



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