

The Early Years of the Jacob Regez Family in the United States

Have you ever noticed the beautiful house with the kidney-shaped porch that stands on a double lot at 2121 7th Street? It also has a carriage house on the back part of the large lot. In this column and the next two, we will learn about the man who had the house built and how the house came to be, more than 12 decades ago.

Jacob Regez (Johann Jacob Regez, Jr.) was one of the many Swiss immigrants who came to America and were successful in their endeavors here. Jacob was born on September 18, 1849, the oldest of 12 children, and educated in Canton Bern. What he might have done for the next few years after that depends on what biography is referenced.

The 1884 History of Green County said that he came to the United States in 1869 and lived in Ohio for a year. At that time his father was operating a large cheese factory in France and had other interests that needed his attention. Jacob then went to France where he took charge of the factory. He was employed in that country for more than two years when the Franco-Prussian war required them to suspend that business. He, and his brother, Rudolph, then came to the states where Jacob was making cheese by 1872.



Jacob Regez, the subject of this column, is the third man from the left, with his wife Louisa standing behind him. Shown are some of his siblings who migrated to the United States, Emma Ruegsegger being in the inset. Rosalie Regez Lehnherr is seated on the left. The other couples shown from the left are Rudy and Lisetta Regez, Ernest and Louisa Regez, Jacob and Beli Regez Roth, and Fred and Elise Regez Mayer.

A biography written in 1901 said that he came to the States in 1867, but left for France a year later. He came back here to make this his permanent home in 1871, accompanied by a brother. They spent a year in Iowa and made their first appearance in Monroe in 1873.

And yet a biography written in 1913 said that he went to French Switzerland while still a youth where he became familiar with the French language. He later spent a year in Paris and then three years in Normandy, France. After that he came to the United States where he lived at Iowa City from 1872 until 1874, when he came to Monroe where he manufactured cheese.

Passenger lists were checked, but no records of his immigration were found. Which of these scenarios, or combination of them, is correct may never be known. The 1900 census states that Jacob immigrated in 1871 and had been naturalized. An article about their 30th wedding anniversary said that he had "been identified with the cheese business in Green County since 1872."

It is known that Jacob met Louisa Wittwer, of Monroe, and they were married on January 20, 1876. The 30th wedding anniversary article said that the marriage took place in Washington township, but no record of their marriage was found at the Court House. However, there is a record of the birth of their first child, Ida, born at 11:30 a.m. on Christmas Day 1876. At this time Jacob was listed as a cheesemaker in New Glarus township. A son, Jacob "John", was born in 1878 and another daughter, Louise, in 1879.

The 1880 census shows the family still living in in New Glarus township where Jacob was still making cheese. In addition to the family of five, Frederika Blum, a 15-year-old Swiss immigrant, was living there probably to help Louisa in the home. Jacob's brother, Ernest, 19, was also living with them and working in the cheese factory. Unfortunately, only four months later, Louise passed away of diphtheria at the age of 11 months. Another son, Eddie, was born there in 1882.

Jacob and Louise made a trip to Switzerland in 1883 (without the children) while his mother was still living; his father had died about three years earlier. It is believed that there were also three siblings living there at the time.

The 1884 history stated that Jacob was "at present operating successfully ten cheese factories. He thoroughly understands the art of cheese making, and has acquired quite a fortune in the business." The couple's second son, Robert, was born in January 1885 in New Glarus township.

The Monroe Sentinel announced on May 6 of that year that Jake Steinman had begun the preliminary work on Regez's new house on the northwest corner of what is now 7th Street and 22nd Avenue in Monroe. The lots adjoined August Schuetze's property and the house was expected to cost between \$4,000 and \$5,000. The house was "about ready for the painters" by the middle of August.

It is unknown when the family of seven actually moved into the new home, but they would experience some wonderful, as well as some tragic events, there. The first wonderful event was the birth of their youngest child, Herman, in February 1887. It was unfortunate that three years later, also in February, Robert and Eddie passed away only nine days apart at the ages of 5 and 7, respectively. There are no death certificates nor newspaper articles, so no cause of death is known.

Of course, the family made some good memories in the house, too. More than 50 guests were able to witness the marriage of the oldest daughter, Ida, to John Strahm on the evening of February 11, 1896. "The bridal party stood under a handsome bower in the large sitting room as the words were spoken, and the rooms of the home looked very pretty in their decorations of amylox roses and pinks, the tasty handiwork of Mrs. Emil Tschudy and Miss Sophie Hoehn. An elaborate gown of cream Landsdowne, with pearl trimming, draped in white violets and cream satin ribbons, was worn by the bride, while the bridesmaid was attired in a silk of light tan. The wedding song was given by the Harmony club, of which the groom is a member."

The next columns will tell more about the lives of the Regez family and their homes.