

The Beautiful Home of Jacob and Louisa Regez Burned in 1901

The 1900 census shows that Herman was the only child living in the large “new” home with his parents, Jacob and Louisa Regez, on the northwest corner of 22nd Avenue and 7th Street. The 1901 biography of Mr. Regez stated that “at one time he was running twenty factories and had on his regular payrolls the names of more than fifty employes [sic]. It added that he owned factories in many parts of Wisconsin, and that his patronage and business reached into Iowa.

This family suffered another tragedy on the evening of July 24, 1901. In the words of Ida Strahm, who wrote the following letter to a friend on December 30 of that year. [I have added some paragraph breaks since she wrote all that I am sharing here as one paragraph.]

It had been “a very dry and hot spell for about three weeks, but this day was especially hot and sultry. The evening was intensely hot and lowering [sic] overshadowed by dark clouds and distant rumbling of thunder. The folks at home had been sitting on the veranda watching the gloomy grandeur of the approaching storm.

“They had discarded all unnecessary apparel and were lightly clad; some even had taken off their shoes. Hulda Regez, my cousin, was staying there just then. It was about nine o’clock when she said she would take a bath and go to bed. Good for her that she delayed from doing so. The roar of distant thunder had been heard for some time, but still, it was thought the fury of the storm was a long ways off. All of a sudden there was an awful crash, at the same time distinguishing [sic] all of the electric lights. It was felt that the shock was very close.

“They retired into the house and father went upstairs to get a lamp. He lit the lamp and carried it to the kitchen where instinctively all the others had gone. As they looked at the windows they saw great illumination and all thought a neighbor’s house had been struck. Father goes out to see where it was, and behold; he saw his own house all ablaze. You might imagine the fright and consternation, as not one of them had imagined this the place where it struck. And now the tempest broke forth.

“The heavens were on fire with incessant and terrible flashes of lightning. The loud and constant roaring of thunder with now and then an awful crash. The rain pouring in ceaseless torrents. The fire bells a ringing. The shouting and yelling of the people. The rattling of the fire engines. And this great fire illuminating the whole town and a half dozen smaller fires broke out at the same time.

“Lightning, thunder, rain, and fire made this the fiercest and most fantastic storm and night ever witnessed by the people around here. Looking at it from an artistic point of view, one might express it as the sight was a gloomy grandun [sic]. And thus the storm kept up until 3 o’clock in the morning without an interval of rest.

“When father came in and exclaimed, ‘My God! It is our house.’ Mother from sheer fright ran into the parlor, and grabbing her best sofa pillows and the best chair ran to the neighbor’s house. When she came back the smoke was so dense that she could not go in again. Herman had set his shoes on the stairway and tried to get them, but he said the smoke came down so thick that he had to give it up.

“They all rushed out and in a few minutes were drenched to the skin; mother was around all the time in her stocking feet and wet through. The most remarkable thing is that of everything carried out, not a single article was broken. Thus the entire china closet was vacated and things carried over to the barn.



This sketch of the home of Jacob Regez was printed in the Monroe Evening Times on July 25, 1901, the morning after the house was destroyed by a fire started by lightning. This was only one of the many sad events that the Swiss immigrant and his family endured in their lives.

“They said that, if it had not been for the awful rain which followed, the entire town would have been wiped out. And our house [probably meaning hers and John’s home nearby] would have been next to follow. Everything was well insured so the actual loss was not great.”

Much was written in the newspaper the next day. “The costly residence of Jacob Regez, in the First ward, was totally destroyed last night as a result of a destructive lightning bolt that struck the chimney in the center of the house. There was a blinding flash and in an instant the roof was ablaze in four places.”

The firemen responded promptly with the hose cart being pulled by a team belonging to the Carroll Brothers. Chief Streiff directed them to connect the hose to the hydrant on the corner of the lot occupied by the residence. A stream of water was thrown to the roof, but unfortunately hardly reached the flames since there was no force. The chief ordered direct pressure by calling John Weirich, but there was no improvement. Superintendent F. B. Luchsinger arrived and said he would get more pressure; the engineer was doing all that he could.

The fire spread across the roof progressing slowly, probably because of the amount of rain falling. The roof finally caved in; the firemen mounted ladders and turned two streams onto the burning building. Chief Streiff was heartsick seeing the fireman working so hard, but to no avail.

Mr. Regez had his cheese office in his home, so the first effort they made was to carry the books in which there were thousands of dollars worth of accounts. Most of the contents of the office were removed as was the piano and some parlor furniture. Some valuable Swiss paintings were damaged slightly.

Some firemen were injured when the chimneys fell. F. W. Buehler was struck on his forehead and received a gash two inches long. Dr. F. L. Hodges sewed it up with several stitches. Henry Lutz was struck on the back at the same time resulting in some torn ligaments. Dr. Hodges also attended to his injuries.

More will be shared next week about what happened to the family and how soon the current house was constructed.