

# Devastating fire didn't destroy Goosen

By Sabine Goerke-Shrode

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The first two articles followed Henry Goosen in his endeavor of purchasing the Fairfield Water Works in 1902, relocating his hardware store from Cordelia to Fairfield in 1907, and the devastating fire that hit the 700 block of Texas Street on July 13, 1909.

While Henry Goosen's hardware store and family residence on the second floor escaped much of the worst damage, his neighbors did not fare so well. Mr. Ambrose's drug store faced destruction valued at \$3,000; A. H. Munroe had a loss between \$5,000 and \$6,000.

The Munroes also lost "valuable gold watches, other jewelry and family heirlooms of considerable intrinsic value. They also lost nearly all their clothing." D. Silverstine's damage included his store building, warehouse and stable and his entire stock of general merchandise, valued from \$15,000 to \$18,000. Others had similarly high figures to report. Even worse, all these business owners were severely underinsured, often carrying just a fraction of the value in insurance.

At least injuries were light, according to the two mentioned by the Solano Republican on July 23, 1909: "R. F. Weidenmann, the druggist employed by E. R. Whitby, while at work at the nozzle, stepped on a nail and in consequence has a badly crippled foot. George C. Gordon Jr., who was on the nozzle during the fire, has hardly recovered from the severe strain he underwent in facing the flames in close quarters." Rebuilding began immediately, creating a new look for the 700 block of Texas Street over the next few years.

With fire destruction fresh on his mind, Goosen elected to use the newly developed reinforced concrete that had become so popular after the 1906 San Francisco earthquake for the construction of his new hardware store building.

By 1909, Goosen was an influential and wealthy member of the Fairfield community. His marriage with Katherine Marie Stark of Napa had produced three children: Victor Henry, born Oct. 26, 1898; Howard Norman, born Sept. 27, 1900, and Earle Phelps, born Sept. 29, 1902. Moving back into their residence on the second floor above the hardware store seemed no longer desirable.

Instead, Goosen commissioned three Scottish builders - McCullum, McDougal and Cameron - to build a new residence at the corner of Empire and Madison streets.

The house was finished in December 1910 and was "a very elegant residence in Fairfield, the architecture being of the old colonial style, with all modern conveniences, finished in hardwood, with paneled battens and beam ceiling and massive fireplaces. The structure is an ornament to the town as well as one of the fines in the entire county."

The Goosen Mansion still stands today, a two-story, wood-frame Colonial Revival house, containing 12 rooms. Onyx for the three fireplaces was quarried at Tolenas Springs. The house's entrance portico, flanked by ionic columns, is an impressive sight.

While prosperous ranchers in the valley constructed elaborate homes at the beginning of the 20th century, Fairfield houses had always been on a modest scale. Then, as now, the Goosen Mansion has no equivalent in downtown Fairfield.

By 1912, Henry Goosen's Water Works prospered and, according to the 1912 History Of Solano and Napa Counties, had "become a plant of large proportions and modern in every way. ... Mr. Goosen now has twenty-eight wells and is continually adding others. The deepest well is over eight hundred feet, the water coming from a gravel bed. The springs are equipped with good pumping plant, and the reservoir, which is seventy feet high, gives ample pressure for domestic use. Mr. Goosen is now installing an air pressure system to lift the water, which lessens the expense of pumping and when finished will be a complete air lift system.

This plant furnishes water for Fairfield, a place of nearly one thousand population, and also at times the adjoining city of Suisun, of about seven hundred inhabitants, whenever the source of their supply becomes exhausted. It is greatly to the credit of Mr. Goosen that on each occasion he has come cheerfully forward and furnished the citizens on his neighboring town with an abundance of pure water in their need, and does this with magnanimity and without prejudice or insistence of a permanent contract, and the citizens of Fairfield are to be congratulated on having such an abundance of pure water, for there are so many towns in California that have an inadequate water supply."

Goosen continued to operate the Water Works until 1926, when the city of Fairfield purchased them from him.

Hardware store and well drilling were not the only ventures Goosen was engaged in. He was an active member of the Merchants Association of Suisun and Fairfield, serving at one time as its president. He held stock in the Roachdale Store, the Green Valley and Suisun Telephone Co., and the Winters Canning Co. Not surprisingly, considering his interest in all new machineries and technologies, he acted as the agent for the

Aeromotor Co. in Solano County for more than 20 years.

Another venture was the establishment of the First National Bank in 1917, together with W. D. Robbins and other prominent citizens. Goosen was the president for many years, as well as serving as one of its directors until his death in 1930. His fellow bank directors would act as pallbearers at the last rites.

With his many civic involvements in the community, it is not surprising that his funeral was a well-attended event. The Solano Republican wrote on June 26, 1930, "When Henry Goosen passed away at his home on Empire street here last Saturday morning, Fairfield and the community suffered a loss which only time will heal. Vigorous and healthy until a few days ago, Mr. Goosen suffered a paralytic stroke while at work with his well drilling crew, passing peacefully to his reward after a heroic and courageous battle a few days later. He went away, quietly and peacefully as he had lived for the past 70 years, without complaint and without bitterness, graciously accepting the doctrine of the dominion of death and peace.

"The funeral services under the direction of W. C. Hansen, local undertaker, were held at the family home at 2:00 o'clock on Monday, June 23, 1930, under the auspices of Suisun Lodge No. 55, of Masons, of which deceased had long been a member. Vacaville Commandry sent an honor escort, attired in the regalia of the Templars, the Christian Order of which Mr. Goosen had always been proud.

"At the home, Rev. J. E. Wright of Oakland, former pastor of the local Methodist church, delivered the fine eulogy, being assisted at the service by Rev. Doran of San Leandro, also a former minister here, and Rev. Morgan, the present pastor of this church, whereof Mr. Goosen has long been a faithful member.

"The Masons took charge of the service at the Masonic cemetery north of Fairfield. J. H. Murray, past master, delivering the impressive Masonic service at the graveside, while a great number of local Masons stood in silence and reverence. It was one of the most largely attended rites the community ever witnessed, more than seventy automobiles being numbered in the procession which carried friends and relatives to the place of internment.

"A truck load of flowers banked the bier and covered the mound, tender tokens of the love and esteem in which deceased was held by the community."

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Today's article marks a milestone of sorts. It is the 250th column in the "Solano: The Way It Was Series." Jerry and I are now in our sixth year of exploring Solano County's

rich history together, and many topics remain to be researched. We both want to thank our readers for their many good suggestions and kind words of encouragement, and The Reporter for the strong support of this local history forum.

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