

John Harmon – July 31, 1884 - LODD May 22, 1921

Here is an excerpt of an article from the Renville County Register newspaper in 2012.

“It was an ordinary Sunday morning, May 22, 1921, when Renville fireman John Harmon, answering a fire alarm at the city gas plant, lost his life in the line of duty.

At about 9 a.m. the call went out and Harmon was the first on the scene. He tried to crawl through the wire fence surrounding the building to establish a position to handle the hose when it came.

Harmon never made it.

A downed wire carrying 23,000 volts of electricity had fallen on the fence unknown to Harmon.

The wire charged the fence and set fire to the posts and grasses, spreading to oil drippings near the gas building, causing “an alarming fire,” as Editor Reid of the *Star Farmer News* wrote.

Byron Welch saw the wire fall and notified the local company agent Albert Zaske who called the electric company to have the power shut off.

Before that could happen, however, Cornelius Westby arrived at the scene. His first inclination was to pull Harmon out of the wires, but when he saw “a tin can in motion under the bottom wire and being somewhat conversant with electricity, concluded there was something wrong.

Bill Lentz and Will Johnson were coming up to the fire when Westby yelled danger, warning them away from the electrified fence.

Somehow Lentz touched the wire with his hand and was also electrocuted. Others on the scene received mild shocks coming in contact with the clothing of Harmon and Lentz.”





**Minnesota Fallen Firefighter Memorial Dedication
September 30, 2012 - Minnesota State Capital
The family of John Harmon, along with Renville Fire Department
members Kim Mulder, Nick Wulf and Greg Dikken**



Renville County Register – 2012 Article on John Harmon and Minnesota Fallen Firefighter Memorial Dedication.



Groundbreaking at the State Capitol July 13 with a depiction of the Minnesota Fire Service Memorial in honor of the fallen firefighters. The statue once inhabited the airport.

John Harmon, fallen firefighter

Renville only one of 7 fire departments asked to bring engine

By Susan Williams
Editor

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Submitted photos

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Harmon
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Greg Dikken, Renville City firefighter, attended the groundbreaking ceremony at the State Capitol July 13 along with John Harmon's granddaughters, Juanita Rosa and Jean Stadt. Harmon, who died in the line of duty in 1921, will be recognized in a service at 2 p.m. Sun., Sept. 30.

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from the electrified fence.

Somehow Lentz touched the wire with his hand and was also electrocuted. Others on the scene received mild shocks coming in contact with the clothing of Harmon and Lentz.

Assembled crowds were kept away from the fence until the power was shut off, but not before an unnamed girl saved Fred Galow's life because she knew about the conductivity of water. Galow was about to throw a bucket of water on the fence post in front of his house when she stopped him.

L.L. Kottum warned neighbor Mike Zarske away from the wire fence running around his property. It had also been charged and set the posts on fire.

"If the nature of calamity had not been discovered by Mr. Westby," wrote Reid, "there surely would have been a number more fatalities... And thus it went with one narrow escape after another."

Two funerals:

The Wednesday following the fire, Harmon and Lentz were laid to rest. All of the businesses in town closed between 1 and 4 p.m. to honor the men.

Born in Millette, S.D.,

Harmon moved to Renville in 1908. He set himself up as contractor employing others doing excavations, tiling and ditch work. The winter before his death he branched out and built an ice house to supply the city during the summer.

Harmon – characterized as a self-made man, hard-working and energetic – left behind his wife Arvena (Thompson) of 10 years and five children, one of whom was adopted. He was 37 years old.

Greg Dikken, Renville firefighter who will be attending the dedication, said Harmon is buried in Fairview Cemetery, along with his wife and her second husband.

Lentz, 36, was also a family man. Married to Freda (Schafer) in 1917, his obituary said he was "a hard working man, strong, and able to earn good wages and seldom had to hunt for a job... He had a good heart as evidenced through him taking two little orphan children, twins to raise."

Honoring fallen firefighters:

On Sept. 30 Harmon will be honored along with 205 other fallen firefighters at the State Capitol.

The Renville City Fire Department is one of just seven services, said Dikken,

asked to have an engine at the ceremony for Minnesota Fallen Firefighters Day. They were also asked to attend the groundbreaking ceremony.

As a firefighter who died in action, Harmon's name will be placed on the memorial and his relatives will be on hand for the dedication.

Granddaughters Juanita Rosa of Sturgeon Lake and Jean Stadt of International Falls will join State Fire Marshall Jerry Rosendahl – Master of Ceremonies – on the podium when Harmon's

name is called.

The official ceremony begins at 2 p.m. with members of the state's firefighters in Class A attire forming a "Sea of Uniforms."

To facilitate parking, a shuttle bus from the Sears parking lot will be available to take firefighters and family to the site.

Complete information regarding this historic event is available on the Minnesota Fire Service Foundation website: www.mnfireservicefoundation.org



Submitted photo

Harmon's granddaughter's extended family were also in attendance during the groundbreaking.