

Line of Duty Deaths of Assistant Fire Chief W. H. “Wally” Anderson and Officer Eli Klugherz

By Michael Werner

Mankato lost two of its local heroes, Assistant Fire Chief W. H. “Wally” Anderson and Officer Eli Klugherz, as a result of a single incident where both men were escorting an arson suspect to the police station when the car they were riding in was struck by a train. Wally Anderson was killed instantly in the ensuing crash and Eli Klugherz died later in the hospital from his injuries.

The incident began when fire crews responded to a house fire at 316 Mound Avenue at 1:45 am. Crews quickly found evidence of arson. “All valuable furniture had been removed and, in several places, kerosene had been placed on walls and floors. Fire had started in six different places.”¹ The house was badly gutted by the fire before crews were able to extinguish it. A resident of the property, Herbert Reed, arrived on scene about thirty minutes after the blaze started. He was immediately questioned by fire and police officials. Herbert Reed stated that he was returning home when he learned of the fire and that his wife was visiting her mother.

Eli Klugherz arrived on scene with Chief of Police Jacob Hilgers in the police car and Chief Hilgers wanted to remain on scene for further investigation. As a result, Anderson and Klugherz were to escort Herbert Reed to the police station in Reed’s personal car for further questioning. It was on the way back to the station when the car the three men were riding in was struck by an Omaha freight train on the Hubbell Avenue crossing in West Mankato at 3:30 am.² The car was dragged for a distance of approximately two blocks after the crash before the train

¹ “W. H. Anderson Killed, Seven Hurt in Weekend Accidents”, Mankato Free Press, Mankato, MN, August 18, 1930

² “W. H. Anderson Killed, Seven Hurt in Weekend Accidents”, Mankato Free Press, Mankato, MN, August 18, 1930

was able to stop. Anderson was killed instantly and his body was removed from the wreckage. Eli Klugherz and Herbert Reed were both rushed to St. Joseph's Hospital both in critical condition. Eli Klugherz "suffered several fractured ribs and an injury at the base of the chest besides numerous bruises and cuts." Herbert Reed "suffered a fractured skull and numerous bruises from the crash."³ Early reports stated that Klugherz was "recovering nicely" and that Reed was "expected to live".



Portrait of Wally Anderson (Files from Jeff Bengston, Mankato Public Safety)

W. H. "Wally" Anderson was born in Copenhagen, Denmark in 1868.⁴ He joined the Merchant Marines as a teenager. During his years as a sailor, he saw Mount Vesuvius and "was quoted years later saying that with the aid of the Mankato Fire Department he could 'put the darned thing out.'"⁵ He came to Mankato in 1884 and established a business at 627 South

³ "W. H. Anderson Killed, Seven Hurt in Weekend Accidents", Mankato Free Press, Mankato, MN, August 18, 1930

⁴ "W. H. Anderson Killed, Seven Hurt in Weekend Accidents", Mankato Free Press, Mankato, MN, August 18, 1930

⁵ Helen Sofchalk, *Fire! Stories of Fires and Firefighting in Blue Earth County's Early Years*, (Mankato, MN: Blue Earth County Historical Society, 2014), 48

Front Street where it was located up until his death.⁶ Wally initially started a carriage trimming business and later turned to automobiles. As a trimmer he would do upholstery, dealing with cushions, fringe, etc.⁷

He had joined the Mankato Fire Department in February, 1892⁸ becoming a member of Hose Company No. 1.⁹ After joining he was serving continuously since that time with “fire fighting being his greatest hobby.” He had been serving as assistant fire chief for the past 15 years leading up to his death. He was president of the Mankato Fire Department Association for one year. Wally served as treasurer of the Minnesota Fire Department Association for seven years as well as its statistician for six years. In 1915 he was elected an honorary life member of the State Fire Department Association.¹⁰

Wally Anderson’s funeral took place on August 19, 1930. In keeping with his wishes, he was given full firefighter’s honors. “Firemen in full uniform acted as pallbearers while nearly 100 firemen from all parts of the state marched as a bodyguard.” The body was taken from the Landkamer Mortuary where Revered Arthur W. Ratz conducted services at 2 pm to Glenwood Cemetery on a fire truck. At the head of the funeral procession was Mankato Fire Chief Ben Bangerter in his official car. Behind Bangerter were C. W. Ringer, Chief of the Minneapolis Fire Department in his special car, and Owen C. Dunn, St. Paul Chief, in another special car.

⁶ ⁶ “W. H. Anderson Killed, Seven Hurt in Weekend Accidents”, Mankato Free Press, Mankato, MN, August 18, 1930

⁷ Helen Sofchalk, *Fire! Stories of Fires and Firefighting in Blue Earth County’s Early Years*, (Mankato, MN: Blue Earth County Historical Society, 2014), 48

⁸ “W. H. Anderson Killed, Seven Hurt in Weekend Accidents”, Mankato Free Press, Mankato, MN, August 18, 1930

⁹ Helen Sofchalk, *Fire! Stories of Fires and Firefighting in Blue Earth County’s Early Years*, (Mankato, MN: Blue Earth County Historical Society, 2014), 48

¹⁰ “W. H. Anderson Killed, Seven Hurt in Weekend Accidents”, Mankato Free Press, Mankato, MN, August 18, 1930

The mortuary chapel had been too small to accommodate out of town friends who gathered to pay their last tributes to "Wally". "Hundreds lined the streets near the mortuary and stood with bared heads as the procession passed." Among those that attended were officials of the State Fire Department Association, including its president, Andrew Erdman. Many officials from Minneapolis including Chief Ringer; Alderman Mauer, chairman of Minneapolis city council fire committee; Charles A. Johnson, Chief of the Fire Prevention Bureau; battalion chiefs Tim J. Bohan, Ack Foster and E. A. Traeger; and many others. Officials from surrounding towns attended, hailing from LeSuer, Owatonna, New Prague, Kasota, Madelia, St. Paul, and Northfield. Even high-profile attendees including St Paul Chief Justice of Minnesota Supreme Court S. B. Wilson and State Senator August Saggau came to pay their respects.¹¹

It is clear by the number of attendees and their high profiles indicate that W. H. "Wally" Anderson had an enormous amount of respect and regard in the fire profession not only in Mankato but in Minnesota as a whole. He faithfully served in the fire department in Mankato for 37 years and most certainly left a gaping hole that would be difficult to fill with his untimely passing. He left behind his wife and three children, Harold G. Anderson, and Mrs. Helen Peterson, and Edith Scholton.

The day after the accident that led to Wally's death, August 18, 1930, local officials and the state's fire marshal's office continued to investigate the fire at the Reed residence at 316 Mound Avenue. Mrs. Reed was questioned by officials but she denied any knowledge of the fire.¹²

The same day Wally was laid to rest on August 19, 1930 the Free Press reported that neither Eli Klugherz or Herbert Reed was still in critical condition. "They are both progressing

¹¹ "Wally Anderson Takes Last Ride", Mankato Free Press, Mankato, MN, August 20, 1930

¹² "Officials Probe Into Reed Fire", Mankato Free Press, Mankato, MN, August 19, 1930

rapidly toward recovery, but they will not be able to leave the hospital for some time.”¹³ On August 22, 1930 both men “smilingly informed friends that they ‘are feeling fine.’”¹⁴ Things really seemed to look good for both men and their road to recovery.

While Klugherz and Herbert Reed were still recovering progress was being made with the investigation into the suspected arson. On August 26, 1930, Mrs. Agnes Reed, wife of Herbert Reed, was charged with second degree arson. The charges were approved by S. B. Wilson Jr., special judge, who presided over the municipal court. Agnes Reed was released on a bond of \$1,500 the same day from county jail where she was being held with her 13-month-old baby. She was set to appear September 8 when a special grand jury would be called by Judge Harry Johnson. The state objected to the low bond but the objection was overruled by the judge out of consideration of the 13-month-old and the fact her husband was still in the hospital recovering.¹⁵

On August 29, 1930, both Herbert and Agnes Reed were bound to the district court to await the action of a special grand jury. They were both charged with second degree arson and their bonds were set at \$1,500 each. Herbert Reed was served an arrest warrant while he was still confined at the hospital. The Free Press reported “Conflicting reports of witnesses who appeared this morning and evidence brought before the court were found sufficient to bind the prisoners over to the district court.”¹⁶

¹³ “Release Another Accident Victim”, Mankato Free Press, Mankato, MN, August 20, 1930

¹⁴ “Three Accident Victims Remain for Treatment”, Mankato Free Press, Mankato, MN, August 22, 1930

¹⁵ “Bond Approved for Releasing Arson Suspect”, Mankato Free Press, Mankato, MN, August 26, 1930

¹⁶ “Reed, Wife Bound Over Grand Jury on Arson Charge”, Mankato Free Press, Mankato, MN, August 29, 1930

Chief Ben Bangerter appeared before the court as the first witness. He testified that “he had noticed a distinct odor of kerosene in the house upon his investigation after the fire had been extinguished.” He also declared six different fires had been burning in the house. He went on; “Dresser drawers, clothes closets, pantry, and bed rooms were found to be practically empty.” Finally, he mentioned “An insurance policy on the house was carried by Mrs. Reed in her pocketbook during the night of the fire.”¹⁷

Both Bangerter and Chief of Police Jacob Hilgers testified “the curtains in the house had been pulled down and that kerosene was found on the floor in two rooms of the house.” Hilgers said he “tested the kerosene to make sure that it was not water.” Both Herbert and Agnes Reed made conflicting statements in regards to their whereabouts and other witness statements that “were not untangled in the evidence presented.” Both Herbert and Agnes told the police and fire chiefs that they were visiting their respective mothers when the fire occurred. A deputy state fire marshal stated Herbert Reed told him under oath at the hospital “that Mrs. Reed set the fire and that the two of them had been together during the entire evening proceeding the event.” If that wasn’t damning enough a final nail in the coffin came Chief Bangerter said “one window in the house was covered with an issue of the Mankato Free Press” the issue was dated “August 16”. When questioned by the chief “Mrs. Reed had previously told him that she used the paper to keep the sun out of the pantry and that it had been put up nearly two weeks before the fire.”¹⁸ The fire was started in the early morning hours of August 17, that Free Press issue was barley, if even, 24 hours old when that fire started. Not even close to the two weeks claimed by Agnes Reed who likely placed it in the hopes the fire would spread faster.

¹⁷ “Reed, Wife Bound Over Grand Jury on Arson Charge”, Mankato Free Press, Mankato, MN, August 29, 1930

¹⁸ “Reed, Wife Bound Over Grand Jury on Arson Charge”, Mankato Free Press, Mankato, MN, August 29, 1930

While things began to really turn south for the Reeds, Eli Klugherz took a dive for the worst. On August 31, 1930 Eli Klugherz passed away at 9:45 am at St. Joseph's Hospital as a result of "injuries sustained in an automobile accident on August 17" that also killed Wally Anderson. Eli Klugherz appeared for weeks to have a very promising recovery but "suddenly became worse Saturday evening", August 30, 1930. He was sixty years old at the time of his passing.¹⁹



Mankato Police in 1902. Left to Right: Frank Bienapfl, Andrew Lundberg, Chief Dan Bowen, Charles Vogel, and Eli Klugherz. (Mankato Free Press, June 30, 1952)

Eli Klugherz's full name was Eberhardt Klugherz and he was born on October 23, 1869 in Mankato to pioneer residents Mr. and Mrs. Adam Klugherz. He was a Mankato resident his entire life and took part in many of the community's activities. Klugherz dedicated most of his life to community service dedicating 30 years of his life to police work "serving both as county sheriff and chief of Mankato police, as well as serving in numerous other capacities in the law enforcement force of Blue Earth County." He was deputy sheriff under John Donahue and was

¹⁹ "Eli Klugherz Dies; Result of Injury", Mankato Free Press, Mankato, MN, September 1, 1930

acting sheriff after his death. The three years leading up to his death he was a plainclothes policeman for the Mankato police. The Free Press reported “Continuously during the past 30 years he had been employed either by Blue Earth county or the city of Mankato as a law enforcement officer. He had held the positions of county sheriff, deputy sheriff, chief of police, patrolman, and plainclothesman.” Before becoming an officer, he had been in the insurance business.²⁰

Klugherz was also “one of the early members of the Mankato fire department.” He joined the fire department on May 3, 1904 and was on the pensioned retired list, retiring July 2, 1925. Klugherz was an active member for many years of the Catholic Order of Foresters. He was also a member of the old Concordia band “which held state-wide prominence.”²¹

The funeral for Eli Klugherz took place on September 3, 1930. Services began at 8:30 am at his residence at 601 N. Fifth Street then proceeded to St. Peter and Paul’s Church at 9:00 am. Members of the Mankato police escorted the remains to the church from the home. The services were conducted by Reverend Father Wells. The service was reported to be “largely attended”. At the conclusion of the services Eli Klugherz was interred in Calvary Cemetery in Mankato.²² Eli Klugherz was survived by his wife and five children, Hubert, Louis, Mrs. Willis C. Kelley and Mrs. Robert Heinzman, and Ben. He had two brothers Adam and Henry Klugherz, and two sisters, Mrs. Alec Lenertz and Mrs. Mike Lenertz. He was survived by five grandchildren as well.²³

²⁰ “Eli Klugherz, On Last Beat, Buried”, Mankato Free Press, Mankato, MN, September 3, 1930

²¹ “Eli Klugherz Dies; Result of Injury”, Mankato Free Press, Mankato, MN, September 1, 1930

²² “Eli Klugherz, On Last Beat, Buried”, Mankato Free Press, Mankato, MN, September 3, 1930

²³ “Klugherz Rites to be Wednesday”, Mankato Free Press, Mankato, MN, September 2, 1930

Few can say they held as many roles as that of Eli Klugherz in the law enforcement profession or say they had dedicated so many years of service during their lifetime. Klugherz most certainly was dedicated to public service in his community of Mankato. He was invested in his community and tragically paid the ultimate price in the line of duty.

A little over a week after the funeral for Eli Klugherz, the Reeds were formally indicted with second degree arson by a grand jury on September 10, 1930. Both Hubert and Agnes were arrested on September 12, 1930 by Sheriff Frank W. Cords and lodged in the Blue Earth County Jail overnight. They were both arraigned on September 13, 1930 before Judge Harry A. Johnson and they both pleaded “not guilty” to the charges. Their bond was set at \$2,500 each and were released that same day and were set to appear September 22, 1930.²⁴

When the Reeds' trial rolled around on September 23, 1930, they decided to change their “not guilty” plea to “guilty” regarding the charges of second-degree arson. They were both sentenced to seven years each in state prisons. Herbert Reed would be sent to the state penitentiary at Stillwater and Agnes Reed was sent to the state penitentiary for women in Shakopee by orders of Judge Harry A. Johnson who issued the sentences. Herbert and Agnes Reed set the fire in the house in a ploy to collect “insurance money on furniture they owned and had insured for \$1,000.”²⁵

Throughout the events of the Reeds' attempt to collect insurance money via arson two local Mankato heroes, Wally Anderson and Eli Klugherz, lost their lives. It was a very unfortunate tragedy that likely could have been avoided. Though it is some consolation that the

²⁴ “Reeds Plead Not Guilty to Arson”, Mankato Free Press, Mankato, MN, September 13, 1930

²⁵ “Reeds Enter Plea of Guilty, Draw Seven-Year Terms”, Mankato Free Press, Mankato, MN, September 23, 1930

two that caused the incident that led to both Anderson's and Klugherz's deaths met justice at the hands of the law. Both Wally Anderson and Eli Klugherz dedicated their lives to serving their community with both serving faithfully for over thirty years and they both paid the ultimate price in the line of duty.