

Bank Heist, Sioux Center

You can know a ton about this story just by knowing the guy who robbed the bank, was driving a Graham-Page, an showroom vehicle in October, 1929, sure to draw a crowd when it was parked right there on Main in Sioux Center.

If you're going to rob a bank in 1929, in a burg like Orange City or Sioux Center, it's not a good idea to leave a shiny Graham-Page a block down. There lies the tale.

What was he thinking? He wasn't. Perp walks in, pulls a gun, empties a cash drawer, walks out, and gets back in his Graham-Page. But the dang car drew a crowd of people. Once the news of the heist got told, even a dullard could have guessed it was the stranger in the Graham-Page.

In fact, some nosy guy had climbed inside where they spotted something akin to a registration--"Rex Something or Other, LeMars, Iowa."

I'm not making this up.

Rex pulled this heist in a fever. He needed a bundle of cash yesterday. Hefty gambling debts probably, but to this day no one knows for sure. Anyway, he got into his car and took off to LeMars, to his wife's house, which was not a good idea either because he hadn't been living with her for quite some time, for reasons no one really knows, which doesn't mean people didn't speculate because he kept a place in Sioux City too, where he also ran a radio station.

Now the Sioux Centerites who'd read his registration got on their high horse, so to speak, and went to the street address they'd seen. "Vigilantes," the LeMars paper called 'em later, a bunch of hot-head Hollanders looking to

snare the sinner. Credit them this--they went to the law, where they let the local Sheriff know what happened.

There's some back story here. This Rex was, locally, a celebrity, a war vet, a college football star, a man-about-town with a radio voice, even a sometimes preacher of the Word. He was a Richard Cory type. Let me quote the old poem

Whenever Richard Cory went down town,
We people on the pavement looked at him:
He was a gentleman from sole to crown,
Clean favored, and imperially slim.

People loved Rex, loved his talk, loved his walk. The man could part a crowd like Moses at the Red Sea. Maybe that's why the sheriff lolly-gagged when the Sioux Center mob demanded him arrested. After all Sioux Center gets the bad rap in the local paper, and the outlaw gets nothing but tears. Read it for yourself.

Rex zipped that Graham-Page out west of town to a farm his wife owned, where he grabbed that stolen roll of bills, gave it to his tenant, and told him he was going into the barn to end it all, which he did, right then and there, those Sioux Center vigilantes rolling up just then, close enough to hear the shot.

Listen. That death broke LeMars' heart. Rex wasn't a bad man, just down on his luck. It was October, 1929. If he was a bad man, he wouldn't have pulled that heist in a Graham-Page and left it on the street. He was at wit's end, they said.

Ninety years ago this happened, but it's still hard to talk about, and I'm not going to tell you the man's last name.

Just let me say this. Rex and his estranged wife had adopted two kids from a broken, boozy home, a home that wasn't a home at all. Those two kids, both deceased now, turned out just fine even though their birth parents were irresponsible, and their adoptive father robbed banks and did himself in once it was clear to him what he'd gone and so thoughtlessly done.

Many years later, Rex's adopted son, after forty years teaching school in a number of Siouland towns told people, "I could not have had a more wonderful life."

Isn't that something? It's just the way you want your bad stories to end, don't you think? "I could not have had a more wonderful life." How many of us can say that?