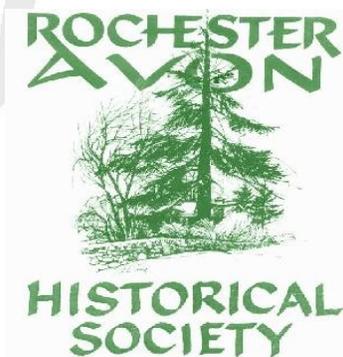


# Rochester Avon Historical Society Research Reports

Research Report #7  
Joseph Reimer Residence  
209-211 Walnut Street  
September 12, 2011



Rochester Avon Historical Society  
Rochester, Michigan  
[www.rochesteravonhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.rochesteravonhistoricalsociety.org)

**Joseph Reimer Residence**  
**209-211 Walnut Street**  
researched and written by  
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for the Rochester Avon Historical Society  
September 12, 2011

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**Introduction**

The house at 209-211 Walnut Street, located on Lot 82, Original Plat of the Village of the Rochester, on the west side of Walnut between Second and Third streets, was built in the summer of 1878 by Joseph Reimer (1826-1896). Originally constructed as a single family residence, it was converted to apartments some time between 1919 and 1926 after it was acquired by Elizabeth M. Butts Casey (1888-1973) and her mother, Julia E. Bromley Butts (1858-1955), and has served exclusively as a residential building for its entire 133-year history.

**Description**

The Joseph Reimer house is a two-story, square building of Italianate Victorian architecture, with a two-story gable-roof addition extending from the rear (west)

elevation of the main house. The front portion of the house includes many features that make it a classic example of the Italianate Victorian style, including a deep roof overhang supported by heavy paired brackets, pedimented window hoods, a bay window and a heavily-molded double door entryway.

Several current features of the house are later additions and some are not typical of the Italianate Victorian. Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps for the village of Rochester tell us that in 1900, the house had a small porch over the front entrance only, at the south end of the east elevation (see Appendix for map images). This porch is absent in the 1908 and 1916 Sanborn drawings of the building, but on the 1919 and subsequent maps, a full-width porch is shown across the front of the house.<sup>1</sup> The current porch stands on a molded concrete block foundation, as does a small first-floor rectangular addition on the south elevation below the bay window. Typically, the bay window would have been a two-story feature in a dwelling of this style; it appears that the first-floor bay window was removed and replaced with the small rectangular bump-out addition at the same time that the full-width front porch was built.

Currently, the house is clad in asbestos shingle siding installed on top of the original siding, the condition of which is unknown. Ornamental shutters, not typical of the Italianate, have been added to the windows. On the front (east) elevation, an additional entrance, not original to the house, has been added at the north end as an entryway to one of the apartments.

Sanborn maps indicate that the house was a single family dwelling (evidenced by the notation "D.") until the 1926 and subsequent maps, in which the notation "F." - for flat or apartment - is seen.<sup>2</sup>

### **Original construction**

Rochester hardware merchant Joseph Reimer purchased Lot 82, then vacant, from John B. and Mary Ann Martz on December 20, 1877.<sup>3</sup> Six weeks later, on February 7, 1878, the *Rochester Era* reported:

**Joseph Reimer has purchased a village lot of J.B. Martz on Walnut street and has already commenced hauling stone preparatory to building the foundation for a fine family residence, which will probably be erected as soon as the building season opens.<sup>4</sup>**

Subsequent numbers of the newspaper offer a fair account of the progress on the house. On May 30, 1878, the *Era* reported that "Mr. Reimer's new house is raised and work on it is progressing."<sup>5</sup> Then, on October 17 of the same year, the newspaper's readers were informed that "Mr. Joseph Reimer's new residence on Walnut street is about ready for occupancy, and the family will move therein some time next week."<sup>6</sup>

Joseph Reimer was born in Pennsylvania in 1826 and was a schoolteacher, and later a merchant, in Upper Mount Bethel township, Northampton County, Pennsylvania. He married Matilda Eyer/Eyre (1822-1891) there and the couple had four children, all born in Pennsylvania: Benjamin Franklin Reimer (1849-1904), Eliza Alice Reimer (1852-1917), Cyrus C. Reimer (1854-1923) and Lily Reimer (1861-?). In September 1862, Reimer enlisted in the 153<sup>rd</sup> Pennsylvania Infantry in response to a call for volunteers and served as captain in command of Company G until he was discharged for medical reasons in late January of 1863. During the time that Reimer was with the regiment, it was one of the units charged with the security of Washington D.C. and environs.<sup>7</sup> He later received pension benefits for his military service during the Civil War.

Some time after the end of the war, Reimer moved his family from Northampton County to Rochester. He is shown as a resident of the village of Rochester in the 1870 census. According to a newspaper item about his business which was published in the *Rochester Era* in February 1874, Joseph Reimer established a hardware business in the village of Rochester some time in the summer of 1873,<sup>8</sup> although the 1870 census also gives his occupation as "merchant." At the time of the 1874 *Era* article, Reimer had a partner and his business was known as Reimer & Thompson, but the partnership was dissolved in the fall of 1874 and Reimer continued as sole proprietor. In 1885, Joseph Reimer built a new brick building at 418 S. Main Street to house his hardware store. (This building still stands - currently the home of Sumo Sushi in 2011 - and is the oldest building in the 400 block on the east side of Main Street.)

Reimer's son, Cyrus, was associated with him in the hardware store and bought him out in 1886. Cyrus Reimer was also a traveling implement salesman for Buhl & Sons of Detroit, so he brought in a partner, Alvin S. Bliss, to run the store in Rochester while he was on the road. In 1888, Bliss sold his half of the business to Harvey J. Taylor, who subsequently bought out Reimer and then moved the store from 418 S. Main to 335 S. Main, on the opposite side of the street. Taylor then took Charles W. Case as a partner and eventually sold out to him, at which time the firm originally started in the 1870s by Joseph Reimer became known by the name of Case's Hardware. (Case's closed in 1968 when a devastating fire destroyed the hardware store).

Besides being a merchant and founding what would later become one of Rochester's best known businesses, Joseph Reimer was a justice of the peace for Avon Township and a member of the school board for Avon District #5, located at the corner of Fourth & Wilcox, perhaps hearkening back to his early days as a schoolteacher in his native Pennsylvania. He died in Rochester in 1896 and was buried in Mount Avon Cemetery. His wife had preceded him in 1891.

### **Subsequent ownership**

After the death of Joseph Reimer in 1896, the house at 209-211 Walnut remained in the family until June 19, 1917, when Cyrus Reimer and other heirs sold it to Julia E. Butts and her daughter, Elizabeth Mary Butts Casey.<sup>9</sup> The mother and daughter owned the property as joint tenants, partitioned the house into apartments and used it as both a residence and an income producing property.

Elizabeth Mary Butts (also sometimes spelled Butz) was born on July 27, 1888 in Avon Township, the daughter of David Wagner Butts (1844-1924) and Julia E. Bromley Butts. Her paternal grandfather, Elias Butts (1806-1879), was an early settler of Avon Township and owned a large farm on South Hill. Elias Butts was one of a number of people who migrated from Upper and Lower Mount Bethel townships in Northampton County, Pennsylvania, to Rochester in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Among those who were neighbors in Northampton County and came to Rochester were the Azariah L. Ross family, Dr. William Deats, Reuben Immick, Francis Stofflet, the McCracken family, and the Joseph Reimer family.

The Butts and Reimer families appear to have been closely connected; Joseph and Cyrus Reimer witnessed the will of Elias Butts, so it is no surprise that the Reimer heirs sold the Walnut Street property to the Butts family.

Elizabeth Mary Butts first married George E. Casey in Rochester on February 1, 1909. She subsequently married widowed hardware merchant Charles Wallace Case (1870-1944) on November 29, 1939. C.W. Case died in 1944, and Elizabeth Butts Casey Case made a living thereafter by owning and managing a number of rental properties in Rochester. She died on March 11, 1973.

After the death of Elizabeth Case, the property at 209-211 Walnut Street passed to her only child, Della L. Casey Wilson (1910-1978), the wife of local veterinarian Dr. Francis

Hugh Wilson (1914-1982). Della Wilson died in 1978 and her husband died in 1982, and the family trust sold the Walnut Street property in 1995, after 78 years of family ownership.

RAYHS

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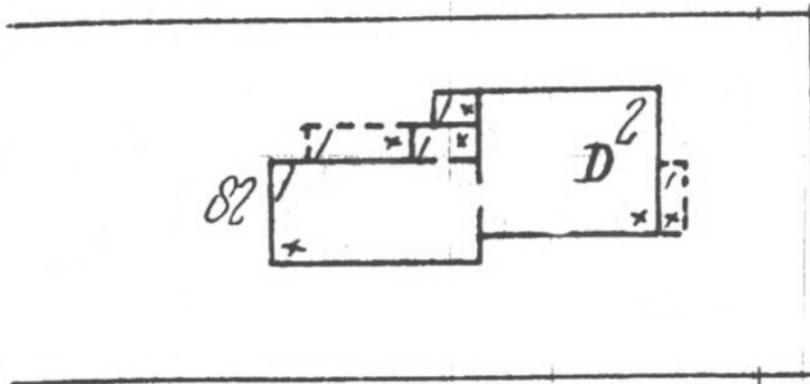
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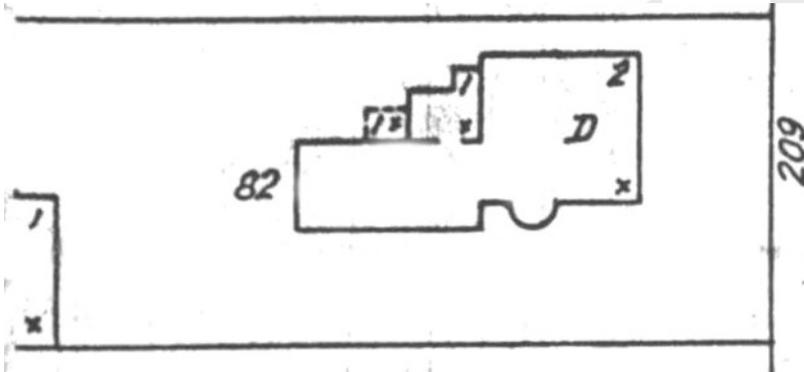
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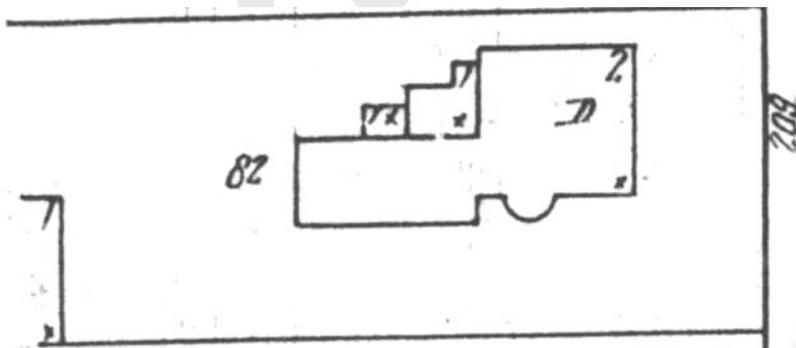
Appendix



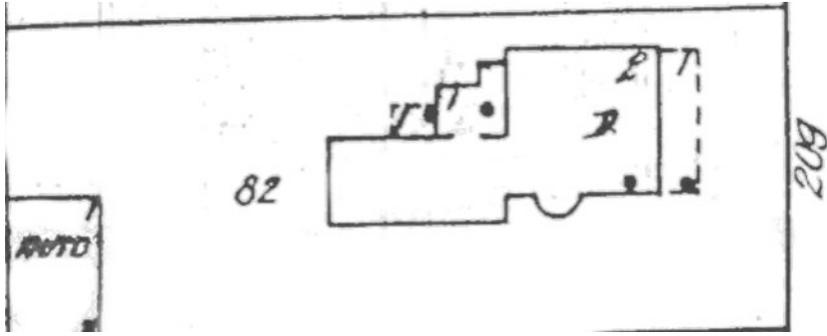
Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of Rochester, 1900  
Original Plat Lot 82 (209-211 Walnut)



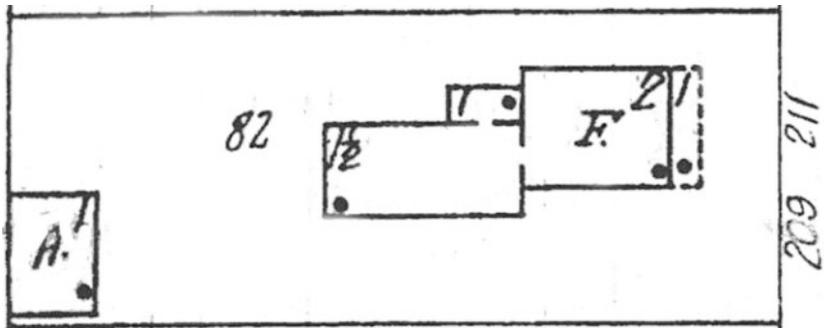
Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of Rochester, 1908  
Original Plat Lot 82 (209-211 Walnut)



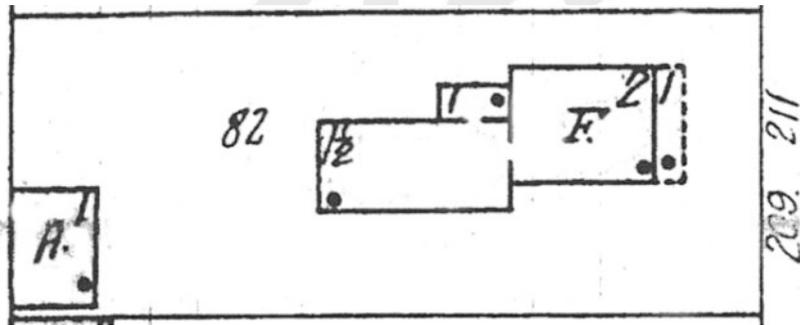
Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of Rochester, 1916  
Original Plat Lot 82 (209-211 Walnut)



Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of Rochester, 1919  
Original Plat Lot 82 (209-211 Walnut)



Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of Rochester, 1926  
Original Plat Lot 82 (209-211 Walnut)



Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of Rochester, 1939  
Original Plat Lot 82 (209-211 Walnut)

## Endnotes

- 1 Sanborn Map Company. *Rochester, Michigan* [map]. New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1900, 1908, 1916, 1919.
- 2 *Ibid.*, 1919, 1926.
- 3 Mary Ann Martz and John B. Martz to Joseph Reimer, December 20, 1877, Oakland County, Michigan Record of Deeds, liber 127, p.256.
- 4 *Rochester Era*, February 7, 1878, p.3.
- 5 *Ibid.*, May 30, 1878, p.3.
- 6 *Ibid.*, October 17, 1878, p.3.
- 7 William R. Kieffer and Newton Heston Mack. *History of the One Hundred and Fifty-Third Regiment Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry Which Was Recruited in Northampton County, Pa., 1862-1863*. (Easton, Pa. : Chemical Publishing Company, 1909) 324.
- 8 *Rochester Era*, February 26, 1874, p.3.
- 9 Cyrus Reimer and Laura C. Reimer, et al., survivors of Joseph Reimer, to Julia E. Butts and Elizabeth M. Casey, tenants in common, June 19,1917, Oakland County, Michigan Record of Deeds, liber 292, p.620.