

Biographical Sketches

Andreas Andrew Gruenewald (1831-1872) and Susanna Preib (1838-1923)

Andreas Andrew Gruenewald and Susanna Preib were born in neighboring villages of the Rhineland, a region defined by steep hills, vineyard labor, and deeply rooted Catholic communities. Andreas was born on 21 May 1831, in or near Oberfell along the Middle Rhine, while Susanna was born on 9 April 1838 in Mittelstrimmig, a small farming village on the Hunsrück plateau. Though no record shows that they knew one another in Germany, they independently decided to emigrate to Chicago where they met.

Marriage and Life Together

Chicago was a fast-growing city in the 1850's that already had large German communities and many opportunities for work which likely appealed to Andrea and Susanna. It was there, within the German Catholic community, that Andreas and Susanna met. They married in 1858 or 1859 and soon began building a family.

By 1860 Andreas and Susanna were living in Chicago's Tenth Ward and welcomed their first child, Peter John. Andreas worked as a laborer, and the couple reported owning \$600 worth of real estate. The census showed that several of their neighbors in Chicago's Tenth Ward also reported owning \$600 in real estate. This amount almost certainly represented a small wooden worker's cottage set on a narrow city lot, the kind of simple homes common in the immigrant communities in the north of the city. Such cottages were typically one story high, built of inexpensive pine boards, and contained only two or three rooms warmed by a single iron stove. Though plain and sometimes unfinished, owning a home like this signaled upward progress for newcomers like Andreas and Susanna.

Growth and Stability

The 1860s were eventful years for Andreas and Susanna. By 1870 they were raising four daughters—one of them our direct ancestor, Anna Marie (Emma). During this decade they moved to Chicago's Seventh Ward, where Andreas earned his living as a saloon keeper, a common occupation among German immigrants. Despite the demands of a growing family, Andreas reported owning \$400 in personal estate, evidence that the couple was steadily establishing themselves in their new city.

Sudden Loss

In 1871, Andreas and Susanna welcomed their sixth child, Anna. In later records, Susanna would report that she had given birth to nine children in total, six of whom survived. The following year brought sudden loss. On 30 September 1872, Andreas died at the age of forty-one, leaving Susanna widowed with several young children still at home. He was laid to rest in Saint Boniface Cemetery in Chicago, a burial ground closely tied to the city's German Catholic community and the world in which the family had built their life.

Widowhood and Family Survival

After Andreas's death, Susanna and her children moved to 1049 30th Street in Chicago's Sixth Ward. By 1880, Susanna was living there with four of her children. The older siblings contributed to

the household income: twenty-year-old Peter worked as a laborer in a lumber yard, while seventeen-year-old Emma was employed as a sewing girl. Both married in 1881—Peter in October, and Emma to Emil Anthony Gerber in November. Following Emma's marriage, Susanna lived with her daughter, Anna.

Because the 1890 census was destroyed, the family doesn't reappear in records again until 1900. By then, Susanna still owned the home on 30th Street, and Anna's husband, Frank—whom Anna married in 1897—had joined the household. The 1900 census shows Susanna, Anna, Frank, and their young daughter, Emma, living together. Frank worked as a laborer, while Susanna and Anna managed the home. Since Susanna still owned her home, Frank must have earned enough money for them to live as a working class family.

In 1907 tragedy struck again. Anna's husband, Frank, died, leaving the family once again without the head of the household and without outside income. For Susanna and Anna, it was another sudden reversal, repeating a familiar pattern of loss and adjustment. As a result, Susanna was forced to sell the house on 30th Street. By 1910, Susanna, Anna, and Anna's children had moved to a rented home at 21b Mosspratt (now Aberdeen) Street in Ward 4, where Anna supported the household by working as a dressmaker.

Later Years and Enduring Resilience

By 1920, the family had relocated again, this time to 2952 Bonfield Street, an 864-square-foot house built in 1900, another rented residence. Although Susanna was eighty-two years old, she still contributed to the family's support by working as a laundress for a private family, one of the few forms of paid work available to elderly widows. The economic climate of the time made such contributions essential. In the years immediately following World War I, Chicago experienced sharp inflation that drove up the cost of food, rent, and fuel while wages struggled to keep pace. As a result, every able member of the household worked. Emma was employed as a bank stenographer, Edmond worked as a stenographer for a manufacturing company, and Francis earned wages as a stock clerk in the stockyards. Their combined incomes helped sustain the household in an era with no pensions or social safety nets, illustrating a family economy built on the expectation that everyone, regardless of age, would pitch in to ensure survival and opportunity for the younger generation.

A Life Completed

Throughout her life, Susanna's world remained centered on family and the bonds that sustained her through years of hardship and responsibility, until she reached the closing chapter of a long and demanding life. Susanna Prieb Gruenewald died on 27 September 1923 at the age of 85 and was laid to rest beside her husband, Andreas, in Saint Boniface Cemetery. Together, their lives reflect the experience of many mid-nineteenth-century German immigrants—shaped by loss and hard work, sustained by family and community, and marked by a quiet persistence that laid the foundation for generations that followed.

