

Andreas Risser - 1809-1871

Andreas Risser, father of Emma Risser (Cotton), was born in Baden, Germany, on December 4, 1809. He was the only child in the family. His mother's name was Salome (although that may have been her family name). Andreas' father was by nature aristocratic. He fell in love with a pretty little village girl and married her against his parents' wishes. To this union Andreas was born, but the marriage soon broke up, and Andreas' mother was left with her people.

Physically, Andreas was short, stocky and strong. His mother had been a small woman. His hair was brown, his nose and mouth rather large and pronounced. His "wanderbuch" (travel book) issued to him in 1829 gave his height as four feet nine inches - he was too short to get into military service. He loved to travel; his wanderbuch for many years in the possession of his daughter, Salome, and later given to Frederic E. Risser (1945) shows that between 1829 and 1836 he traveled over much of Germany. This book was his authority to travel. By trade Andreas was a weaver.

He inherited some aristocratic traits from his father. It is said that he was too proud to wear anything but white shirts. When he moved into Piper's Valley farm, he usually kept about twelve. He tried to be a gentleman farmer. He was a fine impersonator, and in company he entertained in that way. Andreas was a good singer and a religious man.

Andreas married Salome Spittler. She was born on October 20, 1821 and was from a family of eight children born to Jacob and Catherine (Renkert) Spittler. Jacob Spittler was born in Haszlach, Germany in 1793. On April 26, 1846 Andreas, his mother, wife and three children (Andrew, Frederick J. and Salome) left home. The voyage across the ocean in a two-masted sailing vessel took 26 days. Their daughter, Salome, a girl of three, died and was buried at sea. They landed in New York, went up the Erie Canal to Erie County, NY where they lived until 1850. A son Charles was born there. Then they moved to St. Clair County, IL, where they remained until June 1856. Here more children, Mary and Henry, were born. At the August term of the Circuit Court of St. Clair County, in 1854, Andreas was granted U. S. citizenship under the name of "Andrew Risser".

In June 1856, Andreas, Salome and their five children came up the Mississippi in a side-wheeler "Ben Bolt" to Winona, MN. After staying here for about three weeks they took a steamer to "Holmes Landing", now Fountain City, WI. From here they drove by ox team to a site on section 21 Piper's Valley (WI), where Andreas got 120 acres of land, of which only three or four were broken. There was a one room log house on the place and into this the family moved. There were no roads and all the supplies had to be carried on the back through the wilderness. Four more children, Elizabeth, Emma, Salome, and John were born to Andreas and Salome in Piper's Valley. Before he passed away at the age of 62 years, Andreas had succeeded in acquiring 240 acres of land and was considered well-to-do. He served as a justice of the peace for a number of years. In the early years services of the German Lutheran Church were held in his log house.

All the children had great admiration for their mother. They felt she was a wonderful woman. She was a good mother, exceptionally strong, very energetic, a tireless worker and the driving force of the family. She saw to it that the work was done and the family provided for. While Andreas was very short Salome on the other hand was very tall, almost six feet. She brought into the Risser family some of the Spittler strength which she inherited. On the way across the ocean shortly after the boat left Germany, she threw a man who was a trouble maker overboard, because he had been picking on one of her sons. The man was rescued, but put off the boat at the next stop. After her husband passed away, she sold the farm and went to Fountain City, WI to live, serving the community as a practical nurse. She survived her husband 23 years.

Both Andreas and his wife were buried in the Fountain City Cemetery. The tombstones still standing (1947) bear the following inscriptions translated from the German:

Andreas Risser - Died Dec. 12, 1871 - Age 62 years 8 days
Salome Risser - Died Nov. 15, 1894 - Age 73 years 26 days

A report handed down to the older generations states that the name Risser is associated with the German word "Zeiresser", meaning "to rend". It is said that during feudal times the Risseres were robber barons. They had their retainers, and went out and took what pleased them, whether it be cattle, vassals or girls. Their coat of arms was the "raven". They lived in Baden, Germany for a long time, but may have come from Switzerland or near the border.

Submitted by TOM & KERI COTTON