

Leeleva Online Map

Andrew Ratslaff - or Andrew (Andreas) Ratzlaff

(11/11/1869 or 12/23/1869-11/05/1934)

Andrew was born to Jacob Ratzlaff (1842-1926) and Anna (Foth) Ratzlaff (1842-1912). Ratzlaff family records indicate that Andrew was born on November 11, 1869, while the records of the Alexanderwohl Mennonite Church (Goessel, KS) indicate he was born on December 23, 1869. Andrew was born in the village of Leeleva.

Little is known about Andrew's childhood. He had 6 surviving brothers and sisters and his parents had moved to Leeleva from nearby Zabara (Dosildorf) by the early 1860s. He was baptized by Johann Schartner of the Landskrone, Molotschna Mennonite Colony on February 17, 1889 (Schartner occasionally visited Leeleva during this time period as the village had no regular minister).

Andrew's grandmother, Anna (Koehn, Foth) Ratzlaff (1824-1906), had travelled with her second husband, Peter Ratzlaff, and several of Andrew's half-aunts and half-uncles, to the U.S.A. in 1874. Andrew's parents and 5 of his siblings had left Russia in 1893; Andrew was forced to remain behind due to his obligation to complete forestry service for the Russian government. Upon completion of his forestry stint at the Ratsynskaya Forestry Camp, Kherson Gubernia, which lasted from 189 until 1894, Andrew returned to Leeleva.

On February 17, 1895, Andrew was united in marriage to Susanna Wedel, daughter of Peter Jacob Wedel (1848-1917) and Katharina Nickel (1846-1929). The Peter and Katharina Wedel family were also residents of Leeleva and their house can be found elsewhere on the map. Susanna was the family's eldest child, born May 14, 1873.

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Andrew and Susanna made their home in Leeleva and had 8 children by the time they emigrated to the U.S.A. in 1907:

1. Jacob, 1895-1896
2. Maria, born 1897
3. Karolina, born 1899
4. Adam, 1900-1901
5. Katharina, born 1902
6. John, born 1903
7. Florentine, born 1904
8. Susanna, born 1906



Andrew Ratzlaff's wife and children listed on his 1906 Russian passport (wife Susanna listed first, then son Johann, then the daughters; Maria, Karolina, Ekaterina, Florentina, and Susanna)

In Leeleva, Andrew was the village schoolteacher. During the school year, the children arrived at the Ratzlaff house at 10:00 in the morning. The main room in the house was cleared for 3 long benches, and Andrew taught the children using the Bible as a textbook.

The youths of the village also gathered at the Ratzlaff house on Saturday evenings for singing and dancing (yes, Maria, the eldest Ratzlaff child, remembered the villagers dancing while her father Andrew played his fiddle).

Andrew was an intelligent man, proficient in several languages, certainly including German (*Hochdeutsch*), low-German (*Plattdeutsch*), and perhaps Yiddish, Polish and Russian or Ukrainian as well.

Others of the villagers indicate the Andrew was the man the others came to for arbitration when an argument arose. This may mean Andrew was the headman or mayor (German: *Schultze*; Russian: *starosta*, *сmapocma*) of the village. During the summers, Andrew sometimes served as the village herdsman while on his passport, Andrew listed “weaver” as his occupation. The younger Ratzlaff children remembered sitting at the table by the light of the kerosene lamp after evening chores were completed. Andrew would read his Bible and strictly monitor the children as they worked at their studies. All would finish their studies before any would be dismissed.

In the spring of 1907, the Andrew Ratzlaff Family, together with the Peter Wedel Family and the Benjamin Unruh Family, left Leeleva for the U.S.A. The travelling party loaded their belongings and travelled by wagon to Krevin Station where they boarded a train that would take them near the Russian border. They crossed the Russian border into the Austro-Hungarian Empire by foot under the cover of night and then continued by train into the German Empire to Bremen. The Ratzlaff’s trip was brokered by F. Missler, a travel agent in Bremen.

The party boarded the SS Weimar, a ship of the *Norddeutscher Lloyd* line at Bremerhaven on May 11, 1907, and arrived at Baltimore, Maryland, U.S.A. on May 25th. The family travelled into the U.S.A. by train and arrived at Hillsboro, KS, on May 29th. The Andrew Ratzlaff Family made their home in rural Hillsboro and attended the Alexanderwohl Mennonite Church near Goessel and 4 more sons were born:

1. Albert, born 1908
2. Abraham, born 1909
3. Jacob, born 1912
4. Isaac, born 1914



Andrew and Susanna (Wedel) Ratzlaff in 1922 near Lehigh, KS

Andrew passed away on November 5, 1934, in Goessel and Susanna on October 20, 1960, also in Goessel. They are both buried in the Alexanderwohl Church cemetery (*Friedhof*).