

ANDREW JOHN KECK & SARAH JANE SWEENEY



Andrew John KECK was born on 8 Dec 1832 in Zellhausen, Hessen, Germany.¹ He came to the U.S. with his parents Benedict Keck and Anna Marie Rachor in 1844 at the age of 12. They lived in Latrobe from 1844-46. He moved with his parents and siblings to Minerton in Vinton Co, OH in 1846 and helped his father raise sheep. On 16 Aug 1858 he bought 75 acres from his parents for \$380.² His father, Benedict, died three months later in Nov 1858. In Feb 1862 he married **Sarah Jane SWEENEY**, daughter of John Sweeney and Mary Ann Gibson from Pine Grove, Lawrence Co. OH. He was 30 yrs. old; she was just 17. They had twin girls, Mary and Martha, in



Dec. 1862 and John in 1865.

On the 15th Feb. 1865, with brothers Philip and Franklin, Andrew, 33 y/o, enlisted into Company D, 194th Regiment, Ohio Volunteer Infantry³ to fight for the Union in the Civil War. His records show that he was 5 ft. 6 in. tall, of light complexion, with brown hair and gray eyes. He had basic training at Camp Chase, MD. He served as a private but probably never saw battle. On Jun 1865 was sent to the hospital at Summit Point, then on to Cumberland, MD US General Hospital. From there he was discharged by order 77 on June 28, 1865.⁴ He suffered from chronic diarrhea and an abscess on the left breast, due to exposure and hardships.⁵

After the war he returned to OH and engaged in farming, but was never again a stout, able-bodied man. He built a one and a half storey, 4 bedroom log cabin around 1866, cutting and fashioning the timber himself. The children Frank, Joe, Edward, and Florence were born in this cabin. In the spring of 1878 he moved his family to central Illinois joining his sister Margaret's family (settled there in 1865) and his brother George's family (settled there between 1866 and 1871). Eleanor (1879), Elocius (1881), and William (1883) were born in Trowbridge, IL. The children were happy to attend the "mud" Copper Creek School.



The children grew but the family didn't seem to prosper as other families did. "Sarah was a woman of stout heart, strong faith, and firm resolution. She brought up her children to be dependable, honest and to have the strong desire and willingness to work to accomplish their goals. This contrasts with her husband, a dreamer who was always waiting for his ship to come in (but it never did)."⁶ Then tragedy struck. They lost four children [Eleanor (3) 1881, Martha (20) and Elocius (1) 1882, Mary (20) 1883]. Then in 1884 Sarah (38) died of milk fever.⁷



Andrew was devastated. Around 1885 he took his 6 surviving children, John (20), Frank (18), Joe (15), Edward (13), Florence (9), and William (2), and set out for the West to escape his grief. They crossed the Mississippi at Chester, IL and reached Coffeerville, KS on the Oklahoma border where John and Frank rebelled and refused to go any further. (Sarah's Sweeney kin lived in nearby Pittsburg, KS; moved there in ????) The older boys worked in a coal mine there for about a year but found the work too dusty and dirty. About 1886 Andrew realized that he could not run from his grief and they returned

to IL, but not to Trowbridge.

They settled in Decatur where John and Frank found work in Decatur Coffin Factory. Andrew was 54 at that time (1886, the year his mother, Anna Maria, died) and was regarded as totally disabled from war

¹ Baptism record

² source?

³ (194th Regiment was organized at Camp Chase March 1865, left Ohio for Charleston, WV on March 14, under Colonel Anson G. McCook who was assigned to General Egan's Provisional Division, Army of the Shenandoah; operated in the Shenandoah Valley till April [Lee surrendered to Grant at Appomattox on 9 Apr 1865] then ordered to Washington, DC for garrison duty till it mustered out October 24, 1865. Regiment lost 38 enlisted men by disease.)⁹

⁴ source?

⁵ source?

⁶ Autobiography of Charles Keck (1896-1982)

⁷ Lucille Wilson - caused by cows eating a poisonous weed

injuries. He was said to be of good character and had no bad habits. He had applied for a pension in 1884, but did not receive it until after 1889. He stated to the Pension Department, "I have been unable to employ doctors, and have been compelled to doctor myself during said period, as best I could, for chronic diarrhea and abscess of left breast from both of which I still suffer and grow worse daily."⁸ He received \$14 a month pension. He lived in his home at 200 Broadway (MLK) with Joe, Florence, and Bill and in his last years with Frank and Lou.

He died at age 65 of heart disease in Frank and Lou's house at 935 E. William St.⁹ in Decatur shortly after midnight on Dec. 26, 1897. Charles was 1 yr. Frank and Lou found Christmas to be a sad time in the years after his death. His death was mistakenly recorded in Macon Co. courthouse under the name Alexander Keck.⁹ His obituary also calls him Alexander but lists his survivors correctly.¹⁰ He was buried in Calvary Cemetery in Decatur. His grave marker, obviously erected decades after his death, has the date of birth as 1834 instead of 1832 and his death as 1889 instead of 1897.

Andrew's only daughter, who survived beyond 21 yrs., was Florence (22 yrs. at Andrew's death) who became a nun. Joe married Julia Moser in 1903.



We have no data on John Sweeney's life or family in Ireland. He came to USA 1792 at age of 35. He supposedly had another marriage and four additional children but nothing is known of these. Could it be that he left his first family in Ireland and started a second family in the US after turning 35? Or did he start a second family in his 50's in the US? He died at the age of 81.

SOURCE: T. F. Sweeney in 1927 at age of 75. Recorded by JWP Keck.

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(to be continued)

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⁸ Letter to Pension Office

⁹ Death Certificate

¹⁰ Obituary