

Mrs Lillie Caldwell – an early Wendish researcher

Lillie Moerbe Caldwell – did you know that she was one of the first researchers of the Wends in Australia? She was an American from Texas and she visited Australia in 1964 to study the immigration of Wends to Australia in the 19th century.

In 1961 she had published a book titled *Texas Wends* which recorded information about Wendish families that settled at Serbin, Texas. A copy of this book can be read at Lutheran Archives, Bowden, SA.

She was the main organiser and instigator of the Texas Wendish Culture Club in 1972, which in 1977 became the Texas Wendish Heritage Society.

She came to Australia in 1964 with the intention of writing a book about the Wends in Australia. She visited Brisbane, Canberra, Sydney, Walla Walla in NSW, and the Wimmera in Victoria.

Then she went to Adelaide and managed to get an article about her quest published in the daily newspaper, *The Advertiser*. Perhaps she did the same in the other states too. A number of people contacted her and assisted her with information. Among them was Dr Fred Blaess, the Archivist of the Lutheran Church.

Here is the article:

She's Tracing The History Of Wends

(article in *The Advertiser*, 12 June 1964, page 18)

Who are the Wends? It would be the \$64 question for most people. But ask genial, scholarly Mrs Joe Caldwell from Bridge City, Texas, and you'll get more answers than you bargained for.

Mrs Caldwell, who is in Adelaide with her husband, a former Texas oil man, is an authority on this obscure race of people whose origins have their roots in Saxony and Spreewald, Prussia, known as Upper and Lower Lusatia.

But this sprightly grandmother, who proudly identifies herself as "pure Wend", is making it her business to perpetuate the history of her former race which has become scattered in pocket settlements in America and Australia.

Her enthusiasm for her dedicated task brought her to Australia in April to trace members of the Wend race who

migrated here in the early 19th century when religious persecution forced them to flee their country.

And Mrs Caldwell, who has already written a definitive volume of the Wend settlement in Texas under the title "Texas Wends. The First Half Century", has followed the trail of her people in Australia with the unerring scent of a bloodhound.

She's Tracing The History Of Wends

Who are the Wends? It would be the \$64 question for most people. But ask genial, scholarly Mrs. Joe Caldwell from Bridge City, Texas, and you'll get more answers than you bargained for.



In Brisbane she tracked down the first Wend church established there at Nundah, and took advantage of early records to collect names of the first Wend settlers.

In Canberra she was quick off the leash to sniff out even the smallest detail from the Australian National Library that would add one more link to the spread of Wends in this country.

Sydney found her at the Mitchell Library where after days of fruitless searching, she finally pounced on photostats of 19th century ships' registers which carried well-known Wendish names.

These took her even further afield in NSW and Victoria to Walla Walla, the Wimmera, Albury and Horsham.

Continued on next page

But SA provided Mrs Caldwell with her richest rewards for her history of the Wends in this country.

The Archives not only revealed to her the names of some of the early Wend immigrants who had made their homes in the Barossa Valley, but sketches, etchings and daguerreotypes of some of the bewhiskered refugees who had come here to find a more secure life.

Perhaps Mrs Caldwell's greatest joy was the discovery that Ebenezer Church nestling in the valley was the Mother Church of her people, and it was from there that the Wends began their first trickle into the SA community.

Much of her research in Australia has depended on her knowledge of German – a language she studied at Lamar State College of Technology, Texas, to help her interpret early Wendish documents.

However, she took pains to explain that although today much of the history of the Wends can only be found in German translations, the Wendish language is a unique,

separate and compact one. It is now spoken only in Lusatia.

But her study of the Wends in Australia, which will probably be published in the US in the next two years, will be written in English.

And Mrs Wend (sic), feeling that it would be an invaluable asset in Australian archives, will send copies to leading libraries here.

However, before she settles down in her Bridge City study to unravel the intricate notes she has crammed into dozens of exercise books, Mrs Caldwell will finish two other books which are due for publication – a biography of the late American sportswoman Babe Didrickson, and a collection of fairy stories.

Lillie Caldwell returned to America to prepare her book, but it did not eventuate as she died suddenly in 1974.

But other researchers followed her to Australia.