

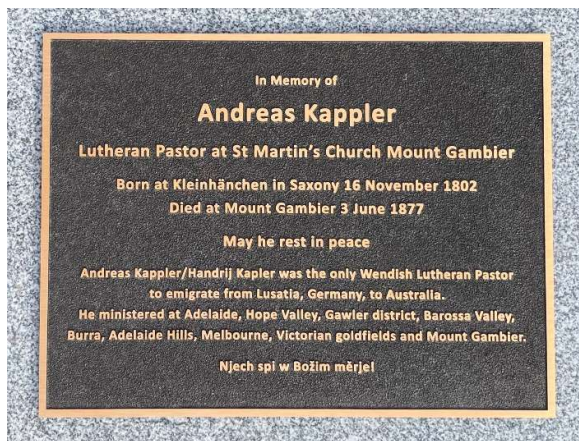
Pastor Kappler honoured at Mt Gambier

On Sunday 10 March 2024 a bronze plaque was unveiled at Mount Gambier in honour of Andreas Kappler, noting he was the only Wendish Lutheran pastor to emigrate to Australia.

Pastor Kappler (1802-1877) and his family emigrated to Australia from Weissenberg, Upper Lusatia, Saxony (now in Germany), in 1848. An independent Lutheran pastor, Kappler ministered in South Australia and Victoria before serving as the first pastor at St Martin's Lutheran Church, Mount Gambier from 1860 until his death in 1877.

Dr Edward Wehl, who conducted a medical practice and had other business interests in Mt Gambier, gave land at Claraville on which a manse and church were built. Pastor Kappler was highly respected by the sizeable German Lutheran community in the Mt Gambier district. Three years before his death he also began conducting services at Millicent.

The plaque, located on Pastor Kappler's grave at the Lake Terrace Cemetery, was jointly funded by the Wendish Heritage Society Australia, the Wend/Sorb Society of South Australia and St Martin's Lutheran Church. Representatives from each group spoke at the unveiling ceremony. Greetings were also read from Dawid Statnik, Chairman of the Domowina, the Sorbian cultural association in Germany; Trudla Malinkowa, author of *Shores of Hope: Wends Go Overseas*; and Peter Johnson of Adelaide, a great-great-grandson of Pastor Kappler.



On Pastor Kappler's plaque is a blessing written in the Wendish language, which reads *Njeh spi w Božim měrje!* and translates as *May he sleep in God's*

peace! These are probably the only Wendish words in public on the Australian continent.



Holding the flag, from left: Rob Wuchatsch, Lyall Kupke, Sandy Cameron, Betty Huf

The plaque was unveiled during the Wendish Heritage Society's annual weekend tour in March. A group from Victoria and a few from South Australia attended and enjoyed the program organised by their President Betty Huf. The St Martin's Lutheran congregation at Mt Gambier hosted the Saturday evening meal and the Sunday lunch after the morning church service. Lyall Kupke gave a talk on Pastor Kappler on Saturday evening.

The new plaque gave us the opportunity to correct some details on his tombstone as well as acknowledge his Wendish background.

Upon his arrival in South Australia in 1848 he was soon approached by both Pastor Kavel and Pastor Fritzsche to join their synods. [They had separated in 1846.] They desperately needed more pastors to assist them to minister to the growing numbers of Germans in the colony.

But Kappler was disappointed to see the bitter divisions between Kavel and Fritzsche and didn't want to get involved. So he worked as an independent Lutheran pastor. He saw the Pietistic attitudes of the Old Lutherans as producing a new legalism over the Gospel, and he opposed that.

Continued on next page

Despite his rejection of Kavel and Fritzsche's overtures to him, Kappler found many German Lutherans who felt the same way as he did and they asked him to minister to them. He conducted services in various locations in Adelaide and North Adelaide, and then a little further afield in scattered settlements at Happy Valley, Black Forest, Hope Valley, Norwood, Gilles Plains, Windsor, Glen Osmond etc. (These are now suburbs of Adelaide.)

He then ventured into the wider country areas and started congregations at Tanunda (Tabor congregation) and at Burra (a copper mining town, with a large number of German miners), and he also held services in homes at Gawler, Concordia, Sandy Creek, Lyndoch Valley and Flaxman's Valley (in Barossa Valley), in the Adelaide Hills at Crafers, Grünthal, Hahndorf, Balhannah, Callington etc.

And take note - he travelled to these widely-spread places on horseback.

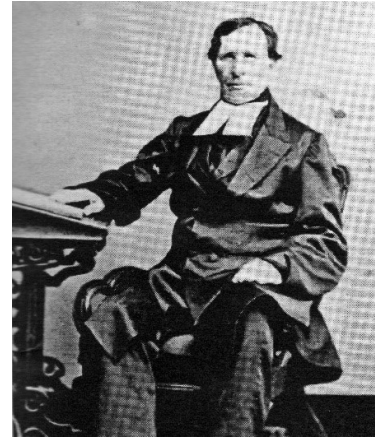
Wherever he went he conducted baptisms and marriages. How do we know all this? He brought with him from Germany two very large registers in which he recorded the baptisms and marriages he held. These are now in the Lutheran Archives. (There may have also been a burial register, but if so, its whereabouts is unknown.) These are the most detailed records I have ever seen and provide us with wonderful information about these early settlers. Some years ago Dr Henry Proeve translated most of the entries and this has proved extremely valuable because Kappler's handwriting is rather difficult to read.

In his first 12 years before going to Mt Gambier he conducted over 700 baptisms, while in the 16 years at Mt Gambier he conducted almost 300 baptisms.

The congregation at Hope Valley deserves a greater mention for us, because it included a number of Wendish families along with the Germans. Kappler was their regular pastor and took up residence there in the 1850s. Although he does not seem to have been accepted by Upper Lusatian Wends who settled elsewhere, there were 47 Wendish families at Hope Valley who did accept his ministry for 12 years. 44 of those were from Lower Lusatia.

In 1852 (March-November) he undertook a trip to Melbourne. This occurred at the height of the Victorian gold rushes. Despite the unfair comments of some that he "exchanged his ministerial garb for a gold-digger's outfit", it seems that he came to minister to the Germans on the goldfields and in Melbourne. While there he conducted 10 baptisms,

although there is a 4-month break in which he likely did try his hand at gold-digging. Unsuccessful at both mining and at establishing a congregation, he returned to Adelaide. In 1860 he moved to Mt Gambier.



Pastor Kappler

What of his legacy?

To most he has been forgotten, although not by family historians who treasure the details they find in his records.

Yet he presents as a genuine Lutheran pastor, with a strong regard for preaching of the Word and Sacraments. In a ministry in Australia spanning 28 years, he conducted 1029 baptisms and performed 236 marriages. What an achievement!

When the Lutheran retirement home was established at Hope Valley many years ago, Henry Proeve petitioned the committee to recognise in some way the efforts of this faithful preacher in that district. As a result, one of the sections is now named as Kappler Court.

And we have the St Martin's church and congregation at Mt Gambier.

As his Mt Gambier friend wrote after his death: "He deserves to be more widely known and appreciated than he was."

Lyall Kupke



Report of the unveiling in the Sorbian paper in Germany