

Family Heirlooms

– Traditional Wendish Costumes

Are there any Wendish costumes, brought out by families in the 1840s and 1850s, still to be found in Australia? The answer is Yes.

In 1852 seven Wendish families and one German family trekked from the Barossa Valley to Portland in search of more extensive farming land. In May 2012 a re-enactment Wagon Trek followed the same route with descendants of all the eight families being represented. On the final day of the re-enactment (Sunday 7th May 2012) a procession down the streets of Hamilton, Victoria, was a lively sight. A horse-drawn wagon led the parade and descendants of the original pioneers rode in the back dressed in traditional costumes.



In the photo above Juliet Kennett (nee Petschel) on the left is wearing a lace bonnet, lace collar and lace apron over a black dress. The lace items were brought out from Germany in 1851 by her great great grandmother, Maria Rentsch. Maria's daughter Anna married Wilhelm Petschel and these original items have been passed down through the Petschel family, with Juliet now being the proud custodian of these traditional Wendish garments.

On the right of the photo Helen Nielson (nee Huf) is wearing a Wendish bonnet brought out by her

great great grandmother, Agnes Burger, in 1851. The elaborate bonnet of cotton is finely pintucked with fine ropes inside to hold the fanned out shape in place. The apron is of eyelet lace and both would have been worn on festive occasions. These items have stayed within the families who took part in the original trek. Agnes's daughter Magdalene married Johann Rentsch, and their daughter Pauline married Ernst Huf, the Huf family being the German family on the trek. The costumes have been passed down through the Huf family and many Victorians will remember May Huf proudly wearing the bonnet at special events.

The Wendish costumes have been, and still are, a feature of the Wendish culture. When our ancestors came to Australia it appears that few costumes were included in their luggage. Folk lore passed down through the generations is that the women were discouraged from bringing their traditional clothes, as it was stated that in Australia people did not wear national costumes.

If anyone else has stories of garments and Wendish possessions being passed down the generations from the original settlers, this newsletter would be delighted to hear from you.

Ruth Walter (nee Rentsch)



Colin and Betty Huf at Hamilton, V