

Gift-giving Traditions in Lusatia

Over the centuries the Wends (Sorbs) of Lusatia developed numerous customs and traditions, but many of them have disappeared from modern life in Lusatia. Here is an account of a custom which has continued in two villages today.

In his talk to us last year Geoff Saegenschneider related a custom he saw when he visited the village of **Schleife** in central Lusatia. During the Advent season a young woman, who is soon to be married, is chosen to be the *Christkind*. She is dressed in the costume of a bridesmaid with a veil covering her face, a headdress and white gloves, and with streams of elaborately embroidered ribbons attached to her white blouse. She carries a bundle of birch sticks in her right hand and a small bell in her left hand to announce her arrival. She then visits schools, senior citizens Christmas parties, Advent gatherings and the local Christmas market, accompanied by other young women or girls, carrying baskets of small gifts of candy, fruit, nuts or other sweets.



Christkind

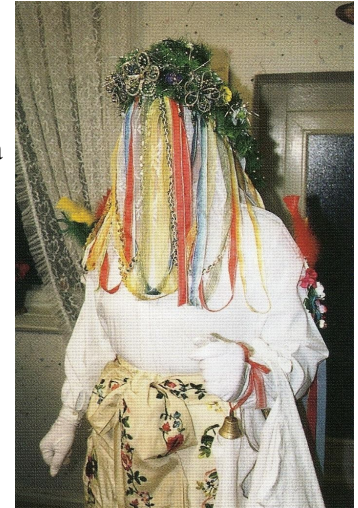
As the *Christkind* she silently touches each person on the shoulder with the birch bundle and then

touches each side of the person's face with her right hand. Tradition says that this touching is the way of giving a Christmas blessing. During the *Christkind's* visit to each group, she does not speak. The young ladies accompanying her are the only ones who are allowed to speak, when they give the gifts to those who have received a blessing.

In the Lower Lusatian village of **Jänschwalde** (*Janšojce*) a similar custom has also survived. On the Wednesday before Christmas, the oldest girl in Jänschwalde is chosen as the Jänschwalde Gott (*Janšojski Bog*) (the God from Jänschwalde) and is

dressed by the other girls in a very special costume.

The gift-giving girl (*Janšojski Bog*) is clothed in various portions of the national costume, put together in a fancy combination. It includes a quilted underskirt. A red skirt decorated with a ribbon is placed over the underskirt. The upper part of the body is covered with a long white blouse, with small bunches or wreaths of artificial flowers attached on the sleeves. A white starched lace apron is tied over the skirt with a ribbon at the front and back. Embroidered ribbons are stitched onto the waistband. A wide silk sash is then tied around the waist. White gloves, white stockings and black shoes complete the costume.



Janšojski Bog

The headdress is particularly remarkable and complex. A woollen scarf is wrapped around the head of the *Janšojski Bog* in the same way as a turban is made, with a knot tied at the front. A white scarf decorated with two flower tendrils is placed over it. A bridal crown of young spruce twigs is fixed in the middle. A tulle scarf, arranged in folds and trimmed with coloured ribbons, strings of pearls and with little glittering pieces of tin sewn on, covers the face. The whole outfit is completed with a bundle of birch sticks and coloured ribbons in the right hand and a little bell in the left.

With the accompanying women *Janšojski Bog* sets out to meet the youngest inhabitants of the village. In order to remain unidentified, she must not speak. A tap by the birch bundle on the window and the sound of the little bell announces her arrival at every house. After giving the children their presents *Janšojski Bog* touches the adults with the birch bundle so that the awakening strength of Nature may be transferred to them.

[Information from the Texas Wendish Heritage Society newsletter, January 2009, and *The Winter Season among the Sorbs*.]

President's Report to the AGM (29 Aug 2010)

I am pleased that the events this year have gone ahead smoothly and successfully. Our bus trip to the Murray Flats was an enjoyable day's outing, as many of us journeyed through areas we had never visited before, like Summerfield, Bow Hill and Nildottie. Thanks go to Ruth and Eric Fiebig for their well-prepared trip. They are already planning for next year, so make sure you don't miss out.

We were privileged to have John Noack, the President of *Wendish Heritage Society Australia* in Victoria, speak to us in May. A good crowd turned up despite the late change of meeting date. John outlined in detail the resources held in their society's library at Ivanhoe, and also demonstrated what can be found on their website. They are kept very busy assisting people doing family history in Victoria.

Today we look forward to hearing from Geoff Saegenschnitter about his travels to the Wendish areas in Texas and Lusatia.

Our newsletter continues to be our contact with our members, many of whom cannot come to our meetings. Thanks to those who have provided articles this year. We welcome any interesting item that you find or write. Thanks to Chris Longmire for again laying out the articles in the newsletters.

It is a pleasure once again to record the efforts of the hard-working committee. Our Secretary, Pauline Burger, continues to provide careful and diligent support to our society. Our Treasurer, John Longmire, maintains the finances with great care. Ruth Walter handles the book sales reliably.

Our committee has continued to work on preparing a Wendish Heritage Trail in SA. As I said last year I am more concerned that we prepare it carefully and get it right, rather than rush in and later regret it. We have changed our ideas on some things this year, but the project is getting closer to finality now.

I wish to thank the committee once again for their support for me.

Lyll Kupke

ELECTIONS:

The following office-bearers were elected at the AGM (29 Aug 2010):

President: Lyll Kupke

Vice-President: Eric Fiebig

Secretary: Pauline Burger

Assistant Secretary: Ruth Walter

Treasurer: John Longmire

Extra committee members: Marie Brazier, Ruth Fiebig, Brian Hennig, Dennis Jenke, June Jenke, Michael McDonnell, Rona McDonnell.

Bev Hall remains an Honorary member of the committee.

The Huppatz family at Saddleworth

Over the past few years, as the result of dedicated research by our Society members into the pioneering days of the early Wendish settlers who arrived in South Australia from Germany in the mid 1800s, we have gained considerable knowledge about their first settlements in the State. We hope to continue this and expand it into a permanent record for future generations. A lot of this information was gathered from the excellent Lutheran Archives and from the many historical bus trips organised by June and Dennis Jenke, and Ruth and Eric Fiebig.

Some of the original settlements are now well known, such as Hope Valley, St. Kitts, Ebenezer, Peters Hill, Neukirch and Rosedale. Over the years as the original Wendish pioneers continued to farm in these first settlements and as their families grew, their many sons and daughters had to leave the original family homes to find their own lives and fortunes elsewhere. I think it is interesting to look at where just a few of them went and what influence the next generations of Wends had on the development of the State of South Australia in the towns in which they lived.

For this first look at a small South Australian town I have chosen Saddleworth, which was a place we stopped at on the 2007 Jenke bus trip to visit the local museum. Although the nearby Carlsruhe Lutheran Church was a strong centre, the small nearby town of Saddleworth started



St Stephen's Roman Catholic Church, Saddleworth

to develop as a town and some Wendish people had a strong influence there.

Saddleworth is 105 km north of Adelaide and was originally known to the early settlers as 'Stone Hut', and is indebted to the early pastoralist John Masters for its name of Saddleworth. Masters, who settled in the area in the 1840s, named his property after his home town in Yorkshire. Being born in Yorkshire myself I can understand his foresight and good taste in settling such a very

worthwhile place. Saddleworth straddles the North Road and is the commercial centre for a region which is still dependent on the pastoral industry, although land owners to the north are turning increasingly to wine production.

Quite a few families originally from Germany eventually moved away from their original settlements and settled in Saddleworth.

These included a number of well-known families: Becker, Behn, Huppatz, Klem, Milde, Plueckhahn, Schirmer, Schnaitmann,

Schwartz, Vater and Wurst amongst others. Of these Huppatz was Wendish.



Cemetery overlooking Saddleworth

The nearby Lutheran church at Carlsruhe, founded early on in South Australia's history in 1857, had a strong community, as did other churches in the district, and this is reflected in the strong representation in church statistics. Even in Saddleworth today there is still a strong presence of faith attendance with the top four churches reflecting a strong faith in the small town: Lutheran 25%, Uniting 20%, Catholic 16%, Anglican 15% and no religion 16%. Most of the churches are situated in the town itself, but the Catholic Church of St. Stephen's occupies a very prominent position at the top of a hill overlooking Saddleworth on the outskirts and has a cemetery dating from the 1860s.

During the early years of the town's development many references appeared in the South Australian newspaper *The Register*. We can read of the openings of the school in 1851, a Methodist church in 1851, a horse race meeting in November 1853, Carlsruhe Lutheran church in 1857, a proposed district council in 1866, a Baptist church in 1869 and St. Stephen's Catholic Church in 1870. During its formative years Saddleworth was not without its problems: in 1860 incendiarism occurred in the town and flooding in 1867.

In the Saddleworth General Cemetery and also in

the one at St Stephen's, many headstones can be seen commemorating the strong presence of German families, as well as the Wendish Huppatz family. A listing of headstones shows that there are fifteen members of the Huppatz family buried in the General cemetery and eleven in St. Stephen's cemetery.

At the beginning of the steep drive up to St. Stephen's Church there is also a sad and poignant memorial to Claire Huppatz, who was tragically killed in a car accident in 1972 at the age of 17.

The impact of the pioneering Wendish Huppatz family was strong in Saddleworth over the years. Many generations of Huppatz families were farmers, blacksmiths, and wheelwrights, while others owned a butcher shop, a bakery, and other businesses, plus the Huppatz Motor Garage and motor dealership in the main street. Huppatz family members were also involved in the various local community organisations such as church and sporting committees.

The War Memorial to the town's soldiers is facing down the main street and is replicated in many country towns, commemorating the large number of soldiers killed in the First World War, as well as a smaller number in the Second World War. Included are names of German origin, as well as members of the Wendish Huppatz family, with F.E. Huppatz killed in action and four other Huppatz soldiers – TA Huppatz, AA Huppatz, O Huppatz, and T Huppatz - surviving the First World War. Six local Saddleworth Huppatz men also served in the Second World War – five in the army and one in the RAAF.

Whilst this is just one short story about one particular Wendish family, I am sure that there are many more such histories which could be written about Wendish descendants in the many small South Australian communities.

Perhaps other members of the Society could also write about other Wendish families and their impact on other South Australia towns for future newsletters.

Michael McDonnell

(Photographs by Rona McDonnell)



Huppatz Motor Garage, Saddleworth c.1915. (SLSA: B17638)

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Coming Events

Saturday 7th May Bus Trip to the Murray Flats

See separate sheet for details and booking form. ****Book EARLY!!

Sunday 3rd July, 2pm Talk: Keith Lokan

Keith will talk about the results of his trip to Lusatia in 2004 in search of his roots (see last newsletter). He will tell where his family came from, and the general circumstances that encouraged them to migrate, the decline in Lusatia of traditional Sorbian (Wendish) life in the early 19th century and their subsequent migration and diffusion into rural Australia.

At St Andrew's Lutheran Church Hall (22 Avenue Rd, Glynde).

News from the Wendish Heritage Society:

Our sister society in Melbourne.

Website: www.wendishheritage.org.au

Sat 12 - Mon 14 March, Tour to Warracknabeal and Minyip

A fascinating and packed weekend is planned. The itinerary includes the local historical societies, cemeteries, an historical walking tour, Wheatlands Agricultural Museum, Areegra, Bangerang, Sheep Hills, Kirchheim and a slideshow presentation on the history of Minyip. The tour begins at 1pm on Saturday.

For more details contact Clay Kruger or see the website.

Please book by Sat 5th March with Clay Kruger (tel 03 8215 9212; email claykruc@optusnet.com.au).

Sun 3 April, Talk by Volkhard Wehner

Volkhard Wehner will speak about his newly-published book, *Heimat Melbourne: A History of the German-speaking Community of Melbourne, 1855-1865*.

At 2pm, at Ivanhoe Lutheran Church, 27 Livingstone St, Ivanhoe.

This will be preceded by a community lunch at 12.30 pm, and the AGM at 1.30 pm.

Sympathy

We express our sympathy to

James Huppertz at the death of his mother, aged 89 years.

Relatives of Regina Schultz, a Wend/Sorb Society member for many years, who died in December, aged 98 years.

For Sale

Booklets from Germany - in English:

Customs and Traditions of the Sorbs in Lower Lusatia - \$1, plus postage

The Winter Season among the Sorbs - \$1, plus postage

Easter with the Sorbs - \$1, plus postage

Sorbian Customs and Traditions in the course of the year - \$1, plus postage

(Postage: \$1 for one book, \$3 for 2-6 books)

Also the best books about the Wends in Australia:

Burger, *The Coming of the Wends* - \$12, plus \$3 postage

Nielsen, *In Search of a Home* (second edition, hard cover) - \$40, plus \$10 postage

CDs:

From Wendish to German to English (A Journey into Wendish Culture, History & Language)

This marvellous CD has been produced by the Texas Wendish Heritage Society. It contains English narration, German and Wendish singing by a German choir performing at Texas in 2002, talks by noted Wendish (Sorbian) historians Dr George Nielsen and Gertrud Mahling (Trudla Malinkowa). George Nielsen talks about Wendish migration to Australia. *A real treat!*

Cost = \$30, plus \$3 postage

Contact Ruth Walter, 43 Clifton St, Prospect SA 5082, (tel. 08 8269 7168),
email: ruthwalter@optusnet.com.au

Please make cheques or money orders to Wend Sorb Society of South Australia.

We welcome any contributions to this newsletter. Please send them to the Editor at the address below.

This newsletter was published by the **Wend/Sorb Society of South Australia Inc.**

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