



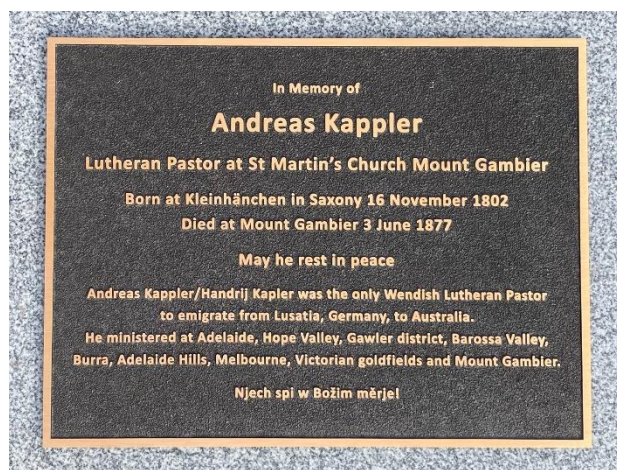
## Pastor Kappler honoured at Mt Gambier

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 *Njech 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*

*Pastor Kappler (cont.)*

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.

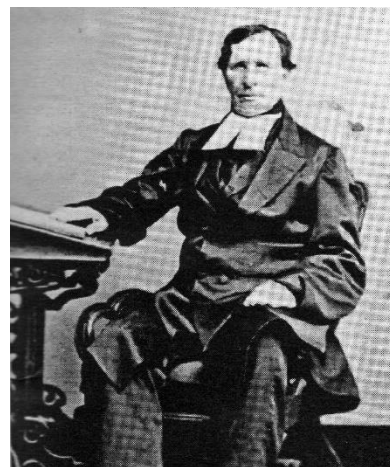
Wherever he went he conducted baptisms and marriages. How do we know all this? He brought with him from Germany two very large registers in which he recorded the baptisms and marriages he held. These are now in the Lutheran Archives. (There may have also been a burial register, but if so, its whereabouts 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*



# Coming Events

## Sat 20<sup>th</sup> July, 12 noon Lunch at the Parkside Hotel

Enjoy a relaxed lunch with other Wend Society members.

At the Parkside Hotel, **142 Glen Osmond Rd, Parkside.** (Enter the car park on the approach to the city.)

Bookings: contact John Zwar (mobile: 0408 887 565, email: jzwar@bigpond.com)

## Sun 18<sup>th</sup> August, 2 pm Annual General Meeting

Followed by a talk by Heather Watkins on the 'Chaff Mill' Kleinig family.

At the Glynde Lutheran Homes hall (**22 Avenue Rd, Glynde**). All welcome.

## Sun 20<sup>th</sup> October, Peters Hill day

The Friends of Peters Hill Church have their annual get together and AGM.

Lunch at 12 noon, church service at 1.30 pm, Annual General Meeting at 2.30 pm.

For more information, contact the Secretary, Chris Fisher (mobile 0417 837 709)

# Postage Stamps of the Wends/Sorbs

Recently I was contacted by an Englishman, Cliff Jermyn-Francis, who wished to learn more about our Society. Despite not having any Wendish ancestry, he has developed a large interest in the culture of the Wends/Sorbs. As part of this interest, he has built a collection of postage stamps that relate to the Sorbs of Lusatia.

During the period of the divided Germany (1945-1990) the East German government issued a number of stamps which illustrated Sorb places, people, history, customs, and dress. Since reunification the German government has also issued some. Here are a few examples.



Are there any stamp collectors in Australia who have made a similar collection?

## Trip to the North (Laura, Appila & Booleroo)

The weekend of 20-21 April was the occasion of our 'Trip to the North' to investigate the Wendish presence in this part of the state. There were 19 people in the group, including the Laura locals Malcolm and Lyn Pech, and those from nearby Port Pirie, David and Heather Burger.

Some on the trip had little prior knowledge of Appila, not even knowing where it was in South Australia. The richness of its history, the early settlement of Wends, and the flourishing area around Laura was a big revelation to most of us.

The courage of the early settlers is still evident. We visited the original home of the Pech family, built over the dugout they first lived in on the banks of Pine Creek, with early planted date palm trees on the other side of the creek.

The Albinus, Pech and Zwar families were Wends in these districts. Heinrich Borgas married a Wend, so all Borgas descendants have Wendish ancestry.

They built their sandstone churches on corner blocks that were within easy access to walk or ride on the dusty summer tracks or slippery clay roads in the winter. Now these little churches are mostly closed and abandoned, although two have been converted into dwellings (the Appila Gloria Dei Lutheran church - sometimes called the "Borgas church" - and the Fullerville Lutheran church).

The largest country church, the Appila Holy Trinity Lutheran church was obviously the centre of the Lutheran community, standing in the countryside 10 km to the west of the almost-deserted township of Appila. It is sometimes known as the Pine Creek church, since it is situated alongside Pine Creek, where many German Lutherans settled.



*Appila Holy Trinity church, hall and old school building*

This large sandstone building stands majestically in the landscape and features beautiful stained glass windows in the chancel and on both sides. A carved marble baptismal font brought out from Germany and donated by Mr JC Pech is another feature.



*Appila Holy Trinity church and Lorraine Kempf, standing at the font in which she was baptised*

There are six congregations in the parish served on a rotating basis, but in the way of many Christian churches, attendances are at a low level. Changes to the farming industry, bringing the formation of larger farms, has also drastically reduced the country populations in all districts.

However the well-kept Appila Lutheran cemetery records the early pioneers, and the elegant recent graves attest to the continuing prosperity of the area. One local (still living) has even erected his own inscribed, substantial tombstone, but without his final date filled in!



*Appila members: Neil & Judy Lange, Yvonne & Paul Wurst*

Another revelation was the thriving town of Laura, and surrounds, with a population of approximately 650. The popular annual Laura Fair had been held the weekend before with many thousands attending.

We visited the Laura History Centre where an annual Art Exhibition is held, attracting entries Australia-wide. Each year the Centre purchases an art work, which becomes part of their impressive permanent collection. Local historian Greg Slattery also showed us the local archives collection.

And indulging in the local ice cream, "Golden North", was obligatory!

*Continued on next page*



### *Trip to the North (cont.)*

Some of us stayed at the very comfortable modern apartments at the North Laura Hotel, only a short distance from the Lutheran church. Dinner at the same hotel was a bonding experience, sharing the space with exuberant locals.

The Sunday morning service was a special experience, held in the former Uniting church, an attractive sandstone building which the Lutheran congregation purchased in the year 2000. Pastor Stephen Noblett welcomed us, and the address based on the Good Shepherd was most appropriate in the rural setting. And we were treated to country hospitality at morning tea.



*Redeemer Lutheran Church, Laura*

Taking in local attractions before lunch, we travelled in convoy through the Wirrabara Forest (covering 7000 hectares) to the Bluff, a high vantage point on the Southern Flinders Ranges with a wide vista over the plains to Port Pirie and beyond to Spencer Gulf and Eyre Peninsula. Lunch was at Wirrabara at the local "Pie Shop".

We then travelled further north to the Booleroo district to view the remains of three Lutheran churches around the town of Booleroo Centre: Fullerville (5 km west), Pekina (8 km east) and Willowie (10 km north). They were built where Lutherans lived, in the days when travel was by horse and buggy. These closed after St Paul's church was opened in the town in 1957.

*Ruth Walter*



*Pekina Lutheran church (1891-1957)*

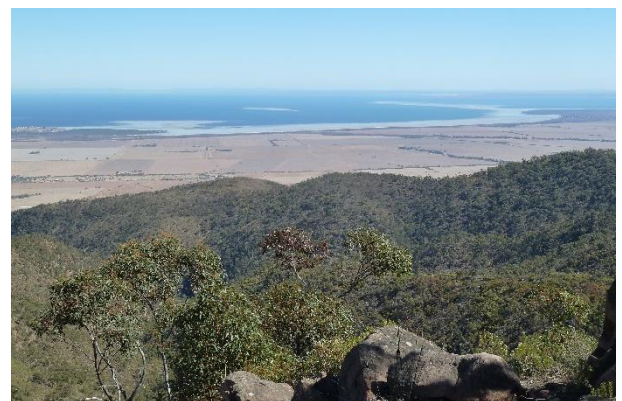
*Photo: Sisters Lynette & Heather (nee Koch) at their childhood church of Willowie*



This was the first time we have held a weekend tour. Here are some comments from other participants.

*Roz and Malcolm Twartz:*

Highlights included the fellowship together, catching up with old friends, the worship at Laura and meeting the pastor beforehand, and noticing the foundation stone at Booleroo Centre was laid by one of our former pastors (Peter Mattiske). The accommodation at the hotel and the dining were good.



*View from the Bluff lookout – Port Germein on right*

*Leona Coleman:*

The weather was excellent for touring the area and viewing the various churches and cemeteries. I welcomed the opportunity to worship with the local congregation at Laura on Sunday morning and we enjoyed a special morning tea they provided afterwards.

Apart from seeing the sites connected with Wendish settlers, I enjoyed the drive through Wirrabara Forest up to the Bluff lookout where we had exceptional views down the range to the coastline extending north and south.

The accommodation in the apartments at North Laura Hotel was first class. Lyall provided us with an excellent set of notes giving an overview of the history of the area including the names of Wendish families who settled in the various districts.

## A Family divided – Emigrants to Two Continents

As part of South Australia's History Festival, Barossa historian Geoff Saegenschnitter presented the fascinating story of his **Biar** ancestors. Geoff has been researching his Saegenschnitter and Biar ancestry over many years.

Two Biar brothers migrated from Germany, but one went to Texas while the other came to South Australia. To learn their story at this event, members of the Wend/Sorb Society were joined by a number of Geoff's cousins, and several interested folk who learned of the talk through History Festival publicity.

Geoff began his talk with a display of the various spellings of the Biar surname. The original Wendish was Bjar. However, the ancestor on the shipping list of the *Steinwarder* which arrived in South Australia in 1854 was recorded as Biach. Other spellings included Baer, Bär, Bähr, Bihar and Biehar, all of which can make genealogical research challenging.

The Biar family originated in the village of Gröditz, in Saxony, Germany. While visiting this village in recent times, Geoff shared that he had been able to play the organ in the church where his ancestors worshipped. His Biar great-great-grandfather tragically had only one of his 12 children survive to adulthood and his first wife died in childbirth. With his second wife, the great-great-grandfather had two further sons named Andreas and Johann.

These 2 sons eventually left Germany for distant lands – Andreas to Australia, Geoff's great-great-grandfather, and Johann to America. Why did they go in different directions? Although the reason is not known, Geoff has a theory that it may have been from a dispute about their inheritance, listed as amounts of taler, but split unevenly between them.

In November 1854 Andreas Biar arrived in South Australia on the *Steinwarder*. His future wife Magdalena Lehmann arrived in 1855 and they were married in 1856. They finally settled at St Kitts. Geoff was able to show a photo of them in front of their thatch-roofed whitewashed wattle and daub home, taken in 1894. Unfortunately, it is now a ruin as the roof and walls have deteriorated and collapsed. Geoff mentioned that a visiting USA relative was delighted to locate some hand-made nails from the site of this ruin.



*The Biar home at St Kitts*

Geoff also showed an interesting group photo of his great-grandparents on their golden wedding anniversary in 1930 with their children, including his grandmother. However, since she had died 8 years earlier in 1922, an earlier photo of her had been added – similar to editing photos these days! Geoff's father had been born only 6 weeks before her death, yet another sad story.

When the American Dr George Nielsen came to Australia in the late 1960s to research the history of Wends in Australia, he interviewed August Biar, Geoff's great uncle. Nielsen mentioned that he had gone to school in Texas with a Biar. This led to Geoff writing simply to the Harold Biar family in Thorndale, Texas, and amazingly making contact with these distant relatives.

He learned that in September 1854, the other brother, Johann Biar, had sailed on the *Ben Nevis* via England to America. It had been a very different voyage from that of Andreas, with 81 deaths from illness, including a cholera outbreak on board the ship. Johann had reached the Wendish settlement of Serbin in Texas by December 1854.

Geoff then visited the Biar family in Texas in 1977, meeting 90 relatives in the 3 weeks he was there, and taking photos of the area where they lived near Serbin. We saw images of the heritage Wendish Lutheran church with gallery on 4 sides including behind the pulpit. The colour blue, typical in these churches, featured on the internal pillars with feather painting.

Yet another interesting story related to Geoff's photo of a 2-storey weatherboard house on the property where the Biar family had lived for a number of generations. Upstairs in a writing desk (which was dismantled to carry downstairs) an amazing number of letters was discovered, sent from the family settled over in Australia. They were written from 1881 to 1926. *Cont. next page*



### *A Family divided (cont.)*

The Wendish Heritage Society in Victoria has published a 300-page translation from the German of these and many other letters from Australia to Germany and USA.

One of the Biar cousins in Texas, Bill Biar, with 12 brothers and sisters, has gathered Wendish and family history resources. Geoff encouraged him to donate these records to the Texas Wendish Heritage Museum, which is in a lovely house with verandah. Geoff has also taken donated Australian Wendish family histories to Serbin on yet another visit. The Harold Biar family farm in Thorndale has

also been identified by the Texas government as a "Texas Century Farm" with a large sign indicating it has been in the same family for over 100 years.

Finally, Geoff confirmed that he is the only private member from Australia of the Texas Wendish Heritage Society. It is also likely that he is the only person with Biar ancestry from South Australia who has also visited Biar family properties in Germany and Texas. Sharing his knowledge of his Wendish ancestry and current connections across three continents provided us with a fascinating, informative and entertaining afternoon.

*Pauline Burger*

## **NEW Books** **on Wendish Folklore and Customs**

These two books were originally written in German. They have recently been translated into English by two Americans, Peter Barker and Margot Hendricks. We are thankful for their dedicated work. They have been published by the Texas Wendish Heritage Society.

These books give us some idea of the beliefs of our ancestors before they came to Australia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. We have some copies for sale. To purchase these books, see page 8.



von Schulenburg, *Wendish Folklore. Its Legends, Traditions and Customs*

Wilibald von Schulenburg lived in the Spreewald for three years in the 1870s and collected the stories and customs of the Wends of Lower Lusatia. It contains many legends, fables, tales, sayings and even children's games.

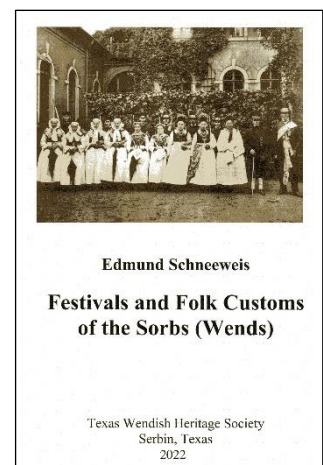
Here is an example: Before going to the church, the bride must receive two and a half groschen (coins) at the house of the bridegroom. Then she should put the money in her shoes and stand on it during the wedding ceremony; then she will always have money.

Schneeweis, *Festivals and Folk Customs of the Sorbs (Wends)*

In 1929-1930 Edmund Schneeweis travelled through Upper and Lower Lusatia and collected the customs of the Wends (Sorbs). The customs relate to birth, marriage and death, the seasons of the year, and everyday life.

For example: If extra large shoes are worn when planting the seeds of the cucumber, the cucumbers will be as long as the shoes.

Whoever wins the card game during the night of New Year's Eve, will be a winner all year.



# For Sale

## Books from Germany - in English:

- *The Sorbs of Germany* - \$10, plus \$3 postage
- *Upper Lusatia* - \$15, plus \$3 postage
- *Bautzen* - \$12, plus \$3 postage
- Korall & Schwikart, *Journey through the Spree Forest* (with lovely pictures) - \$35, plus \$10 postage
- *Five Centuries: The Wends and the Reformation* - \$40, plus \$10 postage

## 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) - **Sold out!!**

**Also:** Trudla Malinkowa, *Wendish Keepers* - \$30, plus \$10 postage  
 [The story of the four Wendish societies in Australia and America]  
 Trudla Malinkowa, *Ufer der Hoffnung* - \$20, plus \$10 postage  
 [This is the German version of *Shores of Hope*]

## NEW books:

Schulenburg, *Wendish Folklore. Its Legends, Traditions and Customs* - \$50, plus \$10 postage  
 Schneeweis, *Festivals and Folk Customs of the Sorbs (Wends)* - \$50, plus \$10 postage

## CDs:

- *From Wendish to German to English (A Journey into Wendish Culture, History & Language)*  
 Cost = \$30, plus \$3 postage

## Music CDs:

Cost \$10 each, plus \$3 postage

- Kocor, *Naleco* (Spring). [Majestic oratorio, with memorable, joyful and folk-like themes]
- Zahraj nam rejiku (*Sorbische Folklore mit Sprjewjan*) [Lively folk music, instrumental and vocal work]

**Wendish/Sorbian Flags** (small, on a stick) \$5, plus \$3 postage

## Calendars for 2025:

With scenes from Lusatia, these are really beautiful, and they make great Christmas presents. Please order *straight away*, so that we can get them from Germany before the end of the year.

Cost = \$20, plus \$10 postage

**Contact** Ruth Walter, 43 Clifton St, Prospect SA 5082, (tel. 08 8269 7168, mobile 0435 211 606),  
 email: [ruth.walter43@gmail.com](mailto:ruth.walter43@gmail.com)

Please make cheques or money orders to Wend Sorb Society of South Australia,  
 or email Ruth for Direct Debit (EFT) details.

*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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