



*Ann Dube receives a blessing during a visit to Schleife*

In the region of Schleife, which consists of the villages of Schleife (Slepo), Rohne (Rowno), Mulkwitz (Mulkecy), Mühlrose (Miloraz), Trebendorf (Trjebin), Halbendorf (Brězowka), and Groß Düben (Dżewin), the Advent season tradition of the gift-giving Christkind (džěćetko) is kept alive. According to the tradition, a young woman who will soon be married is chosen to be the Christkind (džěćetko). She is dressed in a bridesmaid's costume with a veil covering her face, a headdress, white gloves, and streams of elaborately embroidered ribbons attached to the white blouse. After putting on the complicated costume, the džěćetko is given a birch bundle to carry in her right hand and a small bell to announce her arrival in her left hand. Accompanied by other young women or girls carrying baskets of small gifts (candy, fruit, nuts, or other sweets), she visits nursery schools, schools, senior citizens' Christmas parties, Advent gatherings, and the local Christmas market, silently touching each person on the shoulder with the birch bundle, then touching each side of the person's face with her right hand. Tradition says this touch is the giving of a Christmas blessing, which is followed by the giving of one of the small gifts from one of the accompanying young women. During her visit to each group, the džěćetko does not speak; it is only the young ladies accompanying her who are allowed to speak as they give the small gifts to those who have received the blessing. In the photo above, Ann Dube receives a blessing during a visit to Schleife in December, 2008. Ann and her husband, Rev. Walt Dube, were members of the Luther lands and Wendish homelands tour.

On December 4, forty-eight people from Texas, Oregon and Indiana gathered at the airport in Houston to depart for a tour to the eastern area of Germany. In Germany, Geoffrey and Enis Saegenschnitter (TWHS members) from Australia joined the tour group. The tour itinerary included visits to places that hold significance in the story of Martin Luther's life, to villages and churches in our Wendish ancestors' homeland, and to enjoy the sights, sounds and tastes of the many Christmas markets along the way. The tour proved to be more than we could have anticipated. The visit to Wartburg Castle was only the beginning of visits to many historically significant places over the course of 10 days. (And for many of us, those visits to the Christmas markets offered some amazing shopping opportunities.) Toward the end of the tour, Rev. Robert Boyce (tour co-host with his wife, Georgie) invited tour members to submit written memories and photos of the tour for inclusion in this newsletter, and while space limitations don't allow for inclusion of all the submissions we received, we are sharing some of those thoughts, impressions, and photos taken during the tour (photos courtesy of Walt Dube, Enis Saegenschnitter, and Jan Slack).



*TWHS President, Chuck Dube presenting a commemorative certificate to Jan Nuk, President of the Domowina during the tour visit in Bautzen.*



*A warm welcome at the Heimatmuseum Dissen*

### Thoughts from the travelers ...

"On December 9, we attended an Advent Service at the church in Spreewitz, followed by a unique shopping opportunity when we found that ladies of the church had prepared two tables set with Christmas ornaments and various unique craft items available for purchase.

"After lunch we went to Schleife, another dorf where many of our forefathers came from. We were greeted at the Sorbian Culture Center in Schleife by costumed ladies who offered us the customary "welcome" of a piece of bread that was dipped in salt. Then we were treated to refreshments of sweets and coffee, and a great program put on by three ladies who were great singers.

"The Wendish Choir Concert, at St. Michael's Church (Pastor Mahling's church) was great and the Farewell dinner was beautiful. The dinner of Wild Boar Rouladen was delicious, the entertainment by a young man sent by the museum to play the dudelsack was great, and a good time was had by all!

"Everything was great, but it was sooooo good to be home in Warda, Texas, again." ~ Evelyn Kasper



*Rev. Jan Mahling (left) and Gertrud Mahling (right) join in singing a hymn written by Rev. Jan Kilian during the tour's farewell dinner in Bautzen*

"My wife Enis and I counted it a real privilege to have been able to join Pastor Bob and Georgie Boyce's Wendish Heritage Tour to Germany last December.

"As Charles Dube publicly stated on numerous occasions, this tour was a unique pilgrimage for our group back to our roots in Lusatia. The extra effort that so many of these people and groups made to entertain or educate us is something that could never be achieved on a personal visit to those regions.

"Besides being an awe inspiring tour for our group wanting to learn more about our heritage, I believe that it was also a huge morale boosting experience for all of the contacts we made in Germany. It gave them an opportunity to showcase to our special interest group what they are humbly and proudly doing to preserve their heritage and culture. The exchanging of gifts between the various organizations in Germany and the TWHS, Boyce family, etc., also strengthened ties across the oceans. It also gave the TWHS an opportunity to make new contacts for possible future Wendish Fests and library resources for the Serbin museum bookshop." ~ Geoff Saegenschnitter



*Leo Symmank is entertained by the singers at Schleife. Leo celebrated his 80th birthday the day we visited Schleife.*

"Once we arrived in Cottbus and the beginning of the Wendish heritage part of the tour, I was repeatedly overwhelmed by the hospitality of the people we visited. I had not appreciated that the Wends in Europe continue to think of themselves as a minority group under siege, and their appreciation for a group of people coming from the U.S. and Australia to visit them and revisit Wendish roots was powerful. Local newspapers and television news covered our visit. A news team followed us through the countryside for a day, interviewing tour members along the way. I think four town mayors spoke with us during our stops in their villages. We learned after the fact that a Sorbische folk dance group we saw in Hoyerswerda had spent several weeks planning a special presentation just for us. All of these things were done just to honor us and thank us for visiting, as if we were doing something special for them, when in reality it was quite the other way around." ~ David and Linda Domelsmith"



*Rev. Boyce, Petra Fuerchtenich, and Rev. Hornich at Sprewitz*

"The 2008 Wendish Heritage Tour led by Rev. Bob and Georgie Boyce far exceeded our expectations. The Christmas markets were not exactly what we had expected - they were a culturally enlightening experience as well as a unique buying opportunity. The variety of foods offered, the craft items and the entertainment for children (including carnival type rides) presented something for everyone. The visits to the museums and the Domowinas gave an almost in-depth overview of the culture. However, most appreciated were the visits to the churches. They were well-orchestrated, having pastors or church members greeting us and sharing with us information, food, entertainment and faith-sharing words.

"All of this gave us a close-up picture of the life of the people as they now live it. Luther Tours and the Boyces put together an unforgettable tour." ~ Chuck and Joan Symmank



*all enjoyed a boatripe (kahne) in the waterways of the Spreewald Region at Burg*