

Texas German Heritage Society

GERMAN

Volume II, No. 4 Serbin, Texas July-August 1981

A STUPID AND EASY WISHES TO ALL MEMBERS OF THE TEXAS
GERMAN HERITAGE SOCIETY MEMBERS AND NONMEMBER FRIENDS.

Psalm 118:24 - "Tu je ton geln, halteg z'n hafes
nawel jes; echo dle mordring a wisseling sic wi."

"This is the day which the Lord
has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it."

for Tom and Bella Hildebrand, Suzanne, a Swedish Doctor, German,
in the care of the Fischer, Son, and Terry Spield, Akron.

EDITOR: John J. Schles

VISIT

THE

GERMAN BOOTH

AT THE

TEXAS FOLKLIFE FESTIVAL

IN SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

THURSDAY - SUNDAY - - - AUGUST 6-7-8-9, 1981

OFFICIALS HOST AND HOSTESS:

WALTER AND MARIE SCHIMMANK

NEXT TIME YOU ARE IN THE CENTRAL TEXAS AREA NEAR GIDDINGS, PLAN TO VISIT THE WENDISH HERITAGE SOCIETY MUSEUM IN STERLING, HOME OF THE WENDS OF TEXAS SINCE 1965, WHEN THEY PURCHASED A PLATEAU OF LAND ON THE ABALOM DE-APLAINE SURVEY.



Wendish Society member Bernd K. Schmitz, antique trader in the Wendish Heritage Society, demonstrates his wood-clapping methods for News Letter editor John J. Szczerba as interested visitors look on. Bernd's barn is full-scale re-creation during the Society meeting at the Museum the same day.

THE TEXAS NEDVICH HERITAGE SOCIETY MUSEUM,
WHICH IS STILL BEING DEVELOPED, IS OPEN
TO THE PUBLIC EVERY SUNDAY AFTERNOON. THE
UNSELFISH DEVOTION OF THE VOLUNTEERS WHO
SERVE AS ATTENDANTS, IS DEEPLY APPRECIATED.
PLAN TO VISIT THE MUSEUM AND GET ACQUAINTED WITH THE GREAT WEALTH OF HERITAGE DATA.



A family group visiting the heritage museum enjoy an exhibit of many and varied artifacts, given or loaned to the Polish Museum. Exhibits include authentic clothing, books - Bibles, Hymnals, Catechisms, etc.

HENRY W. SCHNEIDER JR. VISITS GERMANY

Two years ago, when I began searching for my ancestors, I could not find anyone who had even a vague idea where in Germany the Leischbers (my mother's side of the family) had come from. Painstakingly I researched, and discovered not only my original ancestral home, but also counties in both East and West Germany. Now, as a result of my research, I have met and visited with five Leisbher families in the DDR and four in West Germany.

Planning the trip myself was tedious. Despite the care I had taken, my excitement was still at an extreme high when, on October 8, 1980 with visa, passport, and other required papers, I was admitted to the DDR at "Checkpoint Charlie." According to the West German border guards I had talked with the day before, I was the first tourist to enter the DDR with a car at Checkpoint Charlie, which had previously been a crossing point for diplomats and military personnel only. This was to work to my advantage a week later when, as I was leaving, the guards were apparently not familiar with the proper procedure and relegated me a honk-bee-the. With legal formalities out of the way, I began to follow the directions in the map that my Leisbher kinfolk had thoughtfully provided and soon found the Autobahn that took me to the "Sprungwald" and Beelitz. Along the autobahn I made numerous stops at places of interest to me, including the old villages of Berg and Veltheim in the Spreewald. In the Spreewald many old women lined the sides of the autobahn selling baskets of colorful "Filze" that grow wild there. In Lusatia, the October harvest was well underway, with potatoes being the largest crop. Each new sight, enhanced by the very pleasant weather, became unforgettable.

When I arrived in Beelitz, I was warmly welcomed by my cousin Martin Leisbher, his wife, and their three children. (TO BE CONTINUED.)

This is exactly one-half of the story as told by Henry W. Schneider Jr. about his 1980 trip to the Spreewald in Beelitz. We hope to complete the story in the next edi-

Wendish—Saxo-Germanic at Serbin and Old Fonda

by Prof. Joseph Wilson, Rice University

In Texas, as had been the case in Germany previously, the Wends used German as their sole official language. Therefore it is not surprising that their grave inscriptions were also in German. Until about nine months ago, I believed that there were no Wendish-language gravestones at Serbin. The only use of Wendish I had found at all was on a bilingual German and Wendish stone in the Old Wenda (Old Holy Cross) cemetery, which will be described below. However, last fall, while completing an article on the Wends and their gravestones, I made a last search at Serbin cemetery for any use of Wendish—and was happy to discover a beautiful Wendish inscription, apparently the only one, and previously unknown. The stone is unfortunately broken at the base and in the middle, but could probably be easily restored. This grave is not one of the oldest, but rather is from 1859—35 years after the arrival in Texas. It is located in the eastmost row, across the 15th stone from the south end. The grave is that of a anti-pioneer eighteen year old young man, Emil A. Mierischin (an alias of the present Carl Mierischin), and—on today's calendar—of such an untimely death. The inscription itself is in beautiful Old-Saxon letters (called "Fraktur" in "Catholic"), reading:

Tučy vospomněje se lym hruši

Emil A. Mierischin

rodž. 26th NOV. 1871

umor. 15th Oct. 1893

Rozstávka svatého sv. je po dobu hromadky,
čímž bude mohlo množství, schodit se z jednoho roka, když
Rozstávka se řečejí církevní, je, až především původem s
také vždy u převje výři, nirké mohou mít jistí.

The upslanting is the 17th century Lutherian Wendish—a dialect as was used by the Wends in Germany and Texas. It was naturally based on Old-Saxon spelling and differs considerably from modern Wendish spelling, which looks more like Czech or Polish. The letter B is the Gothic letter for *s*; it is often transcribed as ss or ss.

The line before the grave means "Here rests in the land," The verses which follow are the third verse of hymn 488 of the Wendish hymnal book. This hymn is a translation of the German hymn 483, "Lasset ab, ihr meine Lieben, lasset ab von Gott Freude habt," which is apparently unknown in English.

In the former, the third verse reads:

To des Gerns Jesu Wunden hab' ich mich geschlossen ein,
Da ich alles reiblich funden, wodurch ich sonst selig sei.
Er ist die Gerechtigkeit, die vor Gott gilt ewigzeit;
Wer dasselb' ergreift im Glauben,
dem kann nichts den Himmel rauben.

A literal (non-poetical) translation of the Wendish verse would be:

"Christ's holy wounds, they are my refuge, / fresh &
where everything will be found which will eternally re-
Christ with his suffering is our justification before God
him who believes correctly in that, nothing will drive
out of Heaven."

The bilingual old Warda inscription reads as follows:

Maria Schoppa

geb. 23. Jan. 1840

gest. 15. Jan. 1881

Wie wohl ist mir, o Freund der Seelen,
wenn(?) ich in Deiner Liebe ruh'.
Nur du bist mein, du bist mein ganzes
mein Jesu, o Täufes! Jesu!

Note the Verner, first given in German, then in English. It is from hymn 252 of the German hymnal book and 11 of the English. In this case there is an English equivalent, hymn 362, where these lines are condensed:

"My soul's best friend, that joy and blessing,
my spirit ever finds in thee."

A more literal translation of the Wendish would be:
"How blessed I am when I rest,
in Jesus, in thy love."

It is noteworthy that these two Wendish-language inscriptions, probably the only ones in Texas, are from the 1880s generation after the arrival here. The oldest entries Martin etc from the 1860s, and are all in German. We unfortunately know nothing about the grave-makers of the first few years, which have all been lost, possibly because they may have been made of wood. We can only see them, too, write in German. The sectionalism of the 1880s which was based partly on language preferences, was, in 1880s, long past, so there seems to have been no external reason for the use of Wendish in these two cases; the motivation was, no doubt, simply the individual devotion of the two families to Wendish.

ABOUT JACK RITTENHOUSE

(Editor, John J. Socha, says:) In my file is a copy of a letter to Paul Elter by an unknown writer living in Victoria, Texas. (Hope we can identify the writer.)

says: "There lived in Houston in the days I had my book operation there, a man named Jack Rittenhouse. He was a man of many parts in the book world. When I first knew him (we were both charter members of the Houston Civil War Round Table), he edited and published the company magazine and trade journal for the Saroid Co., which is an oil well mud co. He had come to Houston from California. He was a member of the Typephiles. This is a national group that have their own small printing premises and collect early day type from nothing later than 1900. He called his press the Stagecoach Press. Used to in his free time chase to ghost towns and hunt up defunct newspapers in small country west towns to buy their old type. It was in just such a town that he came to Serbia. There he found the type that had been used to print a Wendish paper. (It was Andrew Priske's The Riddings Danzschas Volkeblatt, Ed.) He bought it all. Plus the other printing tools, and so are sold - there was about three hundred of type in a "clock" being set but never finished. When transposed, he discovered the story of the Christ Child - evidently for a Christmas edition. Now Jack Rittenhouse, every Christmas, would send his friends absolutely unique Christmas greetings. Always writing, he had raffled himself off on such thought. Each presentation was a superb thing. One Christmas he sent to the middle west and got authentic epistles and in a small box, sent each of us some frankincense, and myrrh. For the gold, he laid in a small piece of gold leaf. And in his own small press, included the Christmas story just as it is told in the gospels - sing Park, So there was a Christmas when he sent this story the Wendish typesetter (No doubt, Allett Nietschkin, Ed.) had set. And with it a small brochure explaining the background of it all and where and when he had found it. He now lives and operates as a rare book dealer in Albuquerque, N. M." - WE NEED SOME OF THESE ITEMS IN THE WENDISH MUSEUM, EDITOR, JJS.

Jack B. Rittenhouse Albuquerque
600 Salado Dr. S.E.
Phone. 517-2475 N.

DUE AND PAST DUES The by-laws of our organization state that the members that have not paid their dues by the August meeting will be dropped from the membership list. That would mean that delinquent members will no longer receive our Society mailings and we will have lost a good member.

We would welcome opinions that measure the extent that our programs and activities are reaching our members. Would you like to comment on this matter? It's "your" organization.

I feel that it is always necessary to encourage members to be active in the preservation of our historical heritage. It is a commitment that should challenge every board. The historic information that we are dedicated to collect is found to a great extent with the individual and family collections.

Any private organization must of necessity have a sustained commitment throughout the year for financial support. We are at the present time working on Plate II, which is the completion of the schoolhouse for our Museum. We encourage the use of Memorial Wreaths and direct contributions for the support of our present project.

TED CLEMENT, Past, Texas

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THE MEMBERS of the Texas Dutch Heritage Society have voted unanimously in the interest of preserving our language, our history, the records of the Society and their efforts in preserving the Dutch heritage of the state of Texas. 10.7003 Rev. John J. Socha (a Slovák), Pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church, Old Town Park, Texas, and Manager of the Giddings, Lee County, Texas, Chamber of Commerce, P.O. Box 150, Giddings, Texas 78962 (313/567-2445)

OFFICERS - Elected November 9, 1990:

President: Ted Clement

First Vice-President-Secretary: Faye M. Vassier

Vice-President: Louise Bersek

Treasurer: Olivia May

Membership open to anyone, \$5.00 per year