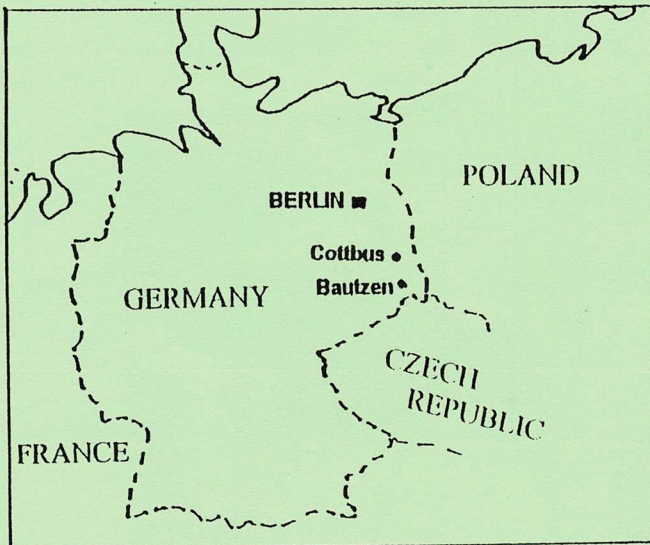


Wends (Sorbs) in Australia

The **Wends** are a Slavic race of people who lived in south-east Germany. In Europe they are known as **Sorbs**, the smallest of the Slavic races which inhabited Eastern Europe in past centuries. They have their own language, culture and customs.

In the 12th & 13th centuries they were encircled by the Germans and bitter clashes often occurred. As a result of this, some Sorbs became assimilated into the German communities and adopted their culture.

But many maintained their distinctive language, culture and way of life by living in close communities in small regions of south-east Germany. This area is called **Lusatia** (Lausitz) and is centred around two cities: **Cottbus** and **Bautzen**. The Cottbus district is in Lower Lusatia (Nieder Lausitz), and the Bautzen district is in Upper Lusatia (Ober Lausitz). Sorbs still maintain their language and culture in these districts today.



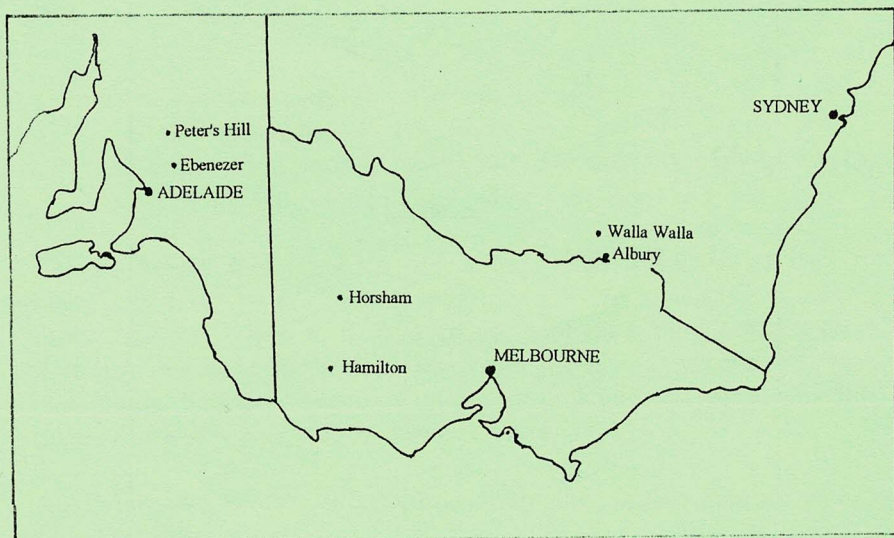
MIGRATION

When German migration to South Australia occurred from the 1840s, many Sorbs from Lusatia also migrated. The Germans called them **Wends**, and only that name was used in Australia.

On arrival in South Australia they lived in communities and retained their language and customs. The settlements at Hoffnungsthal, Ebenezer, St Kitts, and Peter's Hill had many Wendish families, and descendants can still be found there today.

Gradually they spread out to other areas - Victoria (the Western District, near Hamilton; the Wimmera, near Horsham) and New South Wales (the Riverina, north of Albury). A small number also came direct from Germany to Thomastown, north of Melbourne.

Altogether about 2000 Wends in 400 families came to Australia, mainly between 1848 and 1860. The map below shows where they settled. (About 30,000 Germans came in that same period.)



A FORGOTTEN PEOPLE

The Wends were devoutly religious people. At first they continued to worship in the Wendish language using Wendish Bibles, hymn books, sermon books and devotion books which they had brought with them.

Within two generations most of the Wendish language and culture had been abandoned in Australia. Why? They had no Wendish pastor in Australia, so the Wends joined the German Lutherans in worship and adopted their language. As Wendish settlers spread out they found themselves in a minority, and so intermarried and assimilated with the larger German population.

About 50 Australian-born Wends have become **pastors** in the **Lutheran Church**: some names are Altus, Biar, Burger, Jarick, Jenke, Kleinig, Kotzur, Lehmann, Lieschke, Mickan, Noack, Pech, Wenke, and Zwar. Many Lutheran teachers have also been direct descendants of the Wends.

Large numbers of Wends also migrated to **America** in the 1800s. One group in Texas retained its culture for a longer period because it had a Wendish pastor, and so they continued to use their Wendish language for much longer.



SOCIETIES

In recent years there has been a revival of interest by many people in their Wendish heritage. **Sorbian/Wendish societies** have been formed in Adelaide and Melbourne.

We invite you to join these societies. They each produce newsletters and hold regular functions.



In **Adelaide**, contact Lyall Kupke, Secretary,
Wend Sorb Society of South Australia Inc.,
6 Emes Court, ATHELSTONE, SA, 5076.
tel: 08-8365 2572;
e-mail: lyallkupke@picknowl.com.au

In **Melbourne**, contact John Noack, Secretary,
Wendish Heritage Society Australia Inc.,
PO Box 297, HEIDELBERG, Vic, 3084.
tel. 03-9458 2848
e-mail: johnnoack@yahoo.com.au



The Wendish Research Library is located at
27 Livingstone St, Ivanhoe, Vic. It is open on the
1st Sunday of the month (Feb-Nov), 1pm - 5.30 pm.

The best **reference books** on the Wends are:

Nielsen, *In Search of a Home*

Burger, *The Coming of the Wends* (article in the *1976 Lutheran Yearbook*, reprinted in 2003 with corrections)

The **Lutheran Archives** (27 Fourth St, Bowden SA 5007) contains many church registers, which provide help for people researching family history. They also have many published family histories of Wendish families. The Archives is open Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday (9.30am-4.30pm). The library collection of the Wend Sorb Society of South Australia is also kept there.

An **Internet** site with information about the Wends (Sorbs) can be found at:

<http://www-user.tu-cottbus.de/~muellerb/inhalt08/austral/mainpage.htm>