



In Search of a Home: Nineteenth-Century Wendish Immigration

George R. Nielsen

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In the previous century a large portion of the smallest of the Slavonic nations left their German homeland and migrated to three distant continents. The Wends, or Sorbs, were seeking--what? Fortune? Religious freedom? Land for their children to farm?

George R. Nielsen, in this revised edition of his classic study of Wendish migration first published in 1977, carefully describes the details of immigration to Australia, Texas, and elsewhere and judiciously weighs the possible explanations for both the exodus and the settlement and acculturation patterns that resulted.

The earliest emigrants traveled to Australia. Although they tried to take along a Wendish-speaking pastor to provide unity, they were unsuccessful, and no single, large Wendish settlement was formed. Instead, there were several different concentrations--some large, some small--and Wendish ways soon blended into German and finally local culture.

The largest number migrated to Texas, where at Serbin, under the leadership of pastor Jan Kilian, they formed a Wendish community, retaining their own language in church, school, and home. The local agricultural conditions, however, proved too poor to sustain many people, so the Wends of Texas also scattered to different parts of the state and eventually lost most of their ethnic distinctiveness.

Smaller numbers of Wends migrated to Canada, Nebraska, and South Africa. These Wends generally settled among Germans and were absorbed by the local German communities.

This work, already recognized as the best source available, promises in its updated and expanded form to continue as the standard reference on the overseas resettlement of these unique people. The appendix lists all known Wendish emigrants to Texas and Australia, with biographical data.

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