

Andreas Mattijetz – Inventor

By Frank Wissel

Did you know that Andreas Mattijetz, a Wend, was an inventor? Neither did I, and he was my great grandfather (my mother's paternal grandfather). Thanks to Weldon Mersiovsky and Kathe Richards of the Wendish Research Exchange, I found out that Andreas was awarded six patents. For most of my life, I did not even know I was Wendish. My mother did not even know she was Wendish. She thought she was German, Polish or Czech. She never once spoke about her grandfather so there were no family stories to be told. The way I found out about Andreas is from books, the internet and people like Kathe and Weldon (Thank you!). Here is what I have found.

My great grandfather, Andreas Mattijetz (also spelled Mattiez, Matthiez or Matthijetz), was born in Kaschel Germany in 1847 and emigrated to Texas, at the age of 6, in 1853 with his parents; Matthaus Mattiez and Dorothea Rohle, and his siblings; Hanna Mattijetz (age 4), Maria Mattijetz (age 2), and Agnes Mattijetz who was born October 9, 1853 on their way to Galveston on the ship Reform. The Reform sank off of Cuba on October 25, 1853 and all the passengers and crew survived, but they lost all of their possessions. The passengers headed to Galveston eventually got there, but that is another story. Other siblings born in Texas were: Johann Mattijetz born 1856, Carl August Mattijetz born 1858, Theresa Mattijetz born 1860 and Ernst Adolph Mattijetz born 1863.

Andreas Mattijetz married Magdalena Zwahr, another Wend who as a little girl age 5, was a passenger on the Ben Nevis with her family. They married on February 27, 1867 at St. Paul's Church in Serbin, Texas. They had 6 children: Johann August who was born on March 5, 1868 and died on April 10, 1868; Johann Hermann, my grandfather, who was born on September 25, 1869 and died on August 3, 1933 in Los Angeles, California; Maria Otilia Mattijetz who was born on April 10, 1873 and died March 8, 1875; Maria Christiana Mattijetz who was born on August 21, 1875 and died in Los Angeles, California on November 25, 1965; Anna Theresia Mattijetz who was born on February 21, 1878 and died on December 2, 1964 in Los Angeles, California; and Auguste Theresia Mattijetz who was born on October 10, 1880 and died on June 26, 1881. Magdalena Zwahr Mattijetz died earlier that year (1881) on January 7. Shortly after his wife's death, Andreas married Magdalena Lehman, also Wendish, who was born about 1837 and died on March 28, 1910 in Los Angeles, California. I do not believe that Andreas and Magdalena Lehman Mattijetz had any children. I also do not know when Andreas died.

According to St. Paul Serbin's Baptismal records, Andreas Mattijetz was a tinsmith in 1869 and then a farmer by 1873. Andreas was awarded his first patent on April 10, 1888 for a baling-press (used to bale hay) that could be operated by hand or by some other power source. The *San Antonia Daily Press* newspaper made note of Andreas' patent in the Friday May 11, 1888 issue. Because Andreas had been both a tinsmith and a farmer, he seemed to put the skills he had learned from his experiences as both, into his inventions. On February 25, 1890, Andreas was awarded a second patent. This patent was for a redesigned baling-press that was not only a baling-press, but could also carry the source of power to be used, and could produce adjustable sized bales. The third patent awarded to Andreas happened on March 15, 1892 and was an improvement to the baling-press he invented in 1890. This patent received recognition in the *Scientific American* on April 2, 1892. This got me to think, what were times like then?

The era was sometimes called the "Second Industrial Revolution". Many changes were happening in the United States in the 1890s. The railroad was expanding all across the country, the first gasoline engine tractors were being developed, and electric lights were just starting to appear in some cities, among many other advances. The nation's economy was booming, and while the bulk of the country was poor, many tried to be a part of this "revolution" to maybe make a name for themselves or to become wealthy. The cost of filing a patent request was about \$30.00, and while this seemed like a large sum of money for most of the population of the time, it did not dissuade Andreas from continuing to invent new things. In December of 1892, Andreas was awarded his fourth patent for a metallic railroad tie. This patent was given notice in the Wednesday December 14, 1892 issue of *The Galveston Daily News*.

This was a departure from Andreas' other patents. Why was Andreas interested in railroad ties? Did he go to work for the railroad? It is possible, but not something I have been able to verify.

Researching metallic railroad ties, I found that some 750 patents were issued between 1839 and 1894 for metallic railroad ties, 250 between 1890 and 1894 alone, and only about 30 were ever mass produced of which Andreas' was not one. But Andreas never gave up, and in December of 1893 was issued a fifth patent for a Cultivator for plowing a field using one or more horses.

By 1896 Andreas had moved to Los Angeles, California and was employed as a woodworker. Why he moved to Los Angeles is unclear, but he continued to invent things and filed a patent in August of 1897 for a feed cutter, for "cutting hay or other coarse feed". He was issued a sixth patent for this invention in April of 1898. It seems he was still a farmer at heart, but it appears he spent the rest of his life in Los Angeles. In 1904 he was working for the Western Iron Works and in 1906 for the Western Gas Engine Company. By 1920 he was 72 years old, no longer working, and was living in Los Angeles with his daughter Anna and her husband Christopher Ploss. After that, I have been unable to find him anywhere.

Over a period of ten years while in the prime of his life, Andreas Mattijetz was issued a total of 6 patents. Some would call him a dreamer, a man looking for the next big invention in his lifetime. That may be true. But he may have also been a creative person who was always trying to find a better, more efficient way of doing things. It is highly unlikely that any of Andreas' inventions were ever mass produced, but I would not be surprised to find out that Andreas' baling-presses and cultivators were used within the Wendish community.

Additional Information

After this article was published in the *Texas Wendish Heritage Society Newsletter* in January 2014, I received two letters through the Texas Wendish Heritage Society Museum. Both letter writers knew of Andreas Mattijetz, as both were great granddaughters of Andreas' second wife, Magdalena Lehman. They both also knew Andreas' daughter Anna and her husband Christopher Ploss. Mrs. Pat (Dube) Haubrich was one of the letter writers, and she told me that Andreas was buried in Inglewood Park Cemetery. She also sent me some pictures of Andreas and his and Magdalena's family that I had never seen. With her help, I found Andreas' cemetery plot and was able to visit it. On the cemetery monument, Mattijetz is spelled 'Mattiyetz'. Underneath Mattiyetz are 'Magdalena L.' and her dates of birth and death. Under that is 'Andrea' and Andreas' birth date with a date of death of August 3, 1923.

The second letter came from Mrs. Carol Watson, who is a cousin of Mrs. Pat Haubrich. Mrs. Watson gave me information and stories about my grandmother's family that I did not know. While I have not yet met either Mrs. Haubrich or Mrs. Watson, I have spoken to each of them on several occasions and we have shared some family pictures with each other. I would probably not have found any of the above without the help of the Texas Wendish Heritage Society and the Texas Wendish Research Exchange; especially Jan Slack, Weldon Mersiovsky, Kathe Richards, Mrs. Pat Haubrich and Mrs. Carol Watson. Thank you all very much!