

## "Wend Traditions and Celebrations"

By Angie Daniel Collier

<https://freepages.rootsweb.com/~danielcollier/genealogy/wendtrad.html>

### Wend Traditions and Celebrations

#### Bird Wedding

On January 25th children placed empty plates on windowsills or on fence posts to prevent raids by dogs and cats. They were told that the birds were celebrating their wedding on that day and would bring gifts to put in the plates as part of the celebration. The mother would bake a special cake and using a three-pronged fork, made marks on the cake resembling bird feet. Secretly she placed the cake on the plates along with candy and nuts. The next morning the children would wake to find the dishes filled with the special gifts.

[From the Lubbock paper January 26, 2007](#)

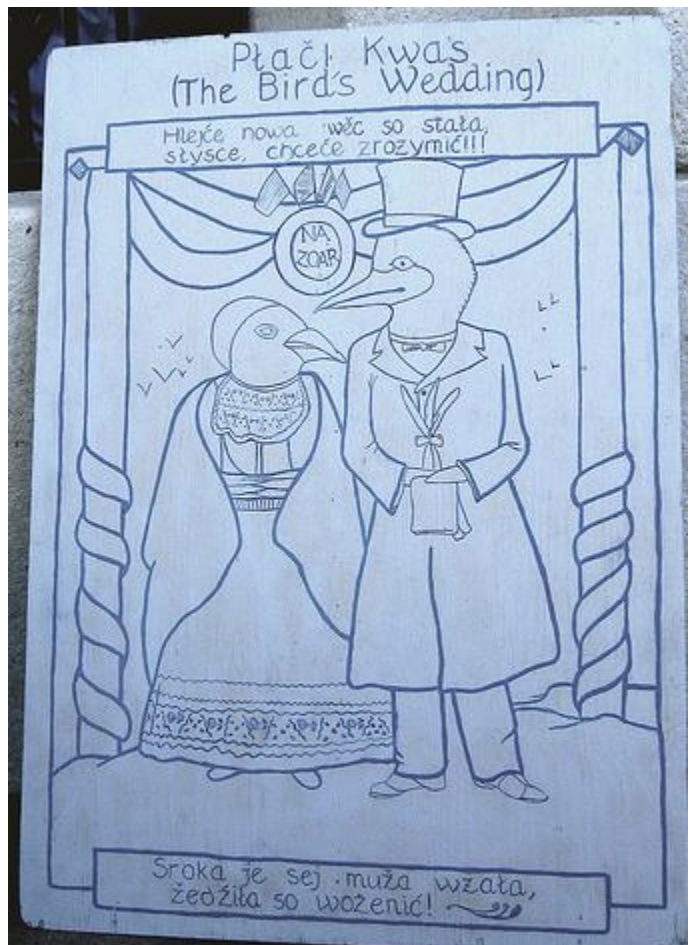
#### Births

The birth of a child was always a happy event. Babies were delivered by midwives. If the baby was weak or if there was any doubt in the parents' mind as to whether or not it would survive, the pastor was called immediately to perform the baptismal rites. When the pastor was not available, the father performed the rites.

The day of formal christening was followed by a celebration which lasted until the early-morning hours. Relatives and friends gathered around tables filled with food. In the evening both old and young sang songs, or the younger generation played games.

#### Christmas

Rumplich was the custom meaning roaming the countryside at nighttime. Youth disguised themselves in homemade masks and costumes, often white tunics covered with dark red stripes two or three inches wide. The masks were usually black or white cloth with a cow tail for a beard. The leader of the group carried a long stick or staff to make himself look more impressive, and the merrymakers disguised their voices so that the host would have to guess their identities. They wandered from house to house to ask the children if they had been good and what they wanted for Christmas. Sometimes a child was asked to recite a prayer, for which he would be rewarded with a handful of candy. The Wendish celebration of Christmas, however, really focused on the special church services which often lasted two or three hours and featured recitations and religious



pageants by the schoolchildren. Wends congregated from miles around to feast and celebrate Christmas Eve together.

#### Death

When a member of the family died, the doors and windows were opened to allow the soul free egress to heaven. The death was announced to the community by ringing the church bell, followed by tolling taps to indicated the age of the deceased. The funeral was held as soon as the homemade coffin was completed and the shallow grave was dug. Simple funeral rites were held as soon as the procession wended its way to the cemetery. Unlike current practices, the funeral sermon was preached on the following Sunday. The short rites at the grave were followed by the long drawn-out procedure of filling up the grave with the newly-dug earth. Immediate relatives observed the custom of wearing black during the six months' mourning period during which time they did not attend any social gatherings.

#### Easter [See Photos](#)

The Wends had special techniques used to decorate eggs. Eggs were decorated using a wax technique, scratch technique or acid technique. They would spend hours on each egg. The evening before Easter children put nest out and the Easter bunny would put eggs and candy in the nest to surprise the children on Easter morning.

The older girls gathered Easter water. The night before, or early Easter morning, the girls would go silently to the creek and fill a container with water. They then sprinkled the water on their friends and livestock and sometimes even woke the sleeping household with it at daybreak in order to ensure good luck for the rest of the year.

Easter Monday a game was played called egg rolling. A shallow trench is dug with a sloping surface. At the lowest point brightly colored eggs are laid and each child attempts to roll his or her egg down the slope so that it hits the other one. Whoever is successful is allowed to take out two eggs and the one with the most eggs wins the game.

#### Folktales

European Wends had a wide repertoire of folktales documented in both Wendish and German. Legends of witches and mysterious evil creatures continued with the Texas Wends. In Serbin there were tales of a witch with a household of frogs, who kept her neighbors' cream from turning to butter when they aggravated her. There was also tales of a mysterious little man with no head who wandered around accompanied by huge black dogs. Some Wends whispered of buried treasure and of horse manure miraculously turning into gold.

#### Weddings

The Wendish settlers of Texas celebrated weddings for three days. Before the wedding procession left for the church, the guests who had arrived at the bride's home sang a song led by the braska (the young married relative of the bridegroom) who also recited the Lord's Prayer.

The bride wore the traditional Wendish black gown which symbolized the sufferings of the new life ahead of her. During the 1890's gray was substituted for black, and after 1900 the traditional white wedding gown became the acceptable fashion. In Lusatia the bride was crowned with myrtle. In Texas the headdress was adorned with available flowers.

After the wedding ceremony school children halted the guests by roping off the road. They would not let down the rope until the groom gave them nickels or some other small

change. During later years not only the groom, but all the wedding guests, had to give the children small change.

The wedding feast was served at the bride's home. During the evening meal someone pulled off one of the bride's shoes. This shoe was passed around for a collection to be given to the bride as a wedding gift. The bride and groom sat at the first table during all the meal shifts until midnight. At midnight the flowers and the veil were taken away from the bride, after which the bridal couple was free to mingle among the guests.

The concluding festivity of a Wendish wedding was a shivaree after the bride and groom had retired. Young men from throughout the community, whether they had been invited to the wedding and the feast or not, gathered under the windows of the bedroom and paraded back and forth, making all the noise they could by beating on pans, tubs and plows with rocks and hammers. They kept this racket up for 30 minutes to an hour.

#### Schoppa Wedding Story

The dream of 19-year old Maria Schoppa was to embrace the customs of her new country-including a wedding dress decked in virginal white. The soon to be bride would suffer first tragedy then disappointment, however. In January 1881 her mother passed away, three months before the planned April wedding. A period of mourning followed the death, in line with Wendish tradition. And, when Maria approached a woman seamstress to sew her wedding dress, she was told the proper way to honor her mother would be in black rather than the newly fashionable white. A heartbroken Maria consented and, on April 26, 1881, walked down the aisle to meet her future husband in the trapping of mourning.

#### Witchcraft

During the early days there were no doctors and settlers relied on home-remedies and sometimes even witchcraft. They believed a black cloth cured cramps, and they burned herbs and cedar foliage to drive away illness. When someone was bitten by a dog, some of the hair of the dog was burned and given, diluted with water, to the victim to drink. Bags of garlic were hung from the neck to prevent communicable diseases. A favorite charm to prevent illness and accident from animals was a hazelnut shell filled with quicksilver and sewed in a bag. Hazelnut charms were also put in trunks for good luck. Witchcraft was used in the treatment of livestock. Witch doctors ran around a sick animal five or six times, made signs of crosses while they prayed for the animal in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and then pulled the animal by the tail. Another remedy was to take the blood from the horse, soak it in a wad of cotton wrapped around a stick which was then placed in a hole bored in a tree. The horse was then expected to get well.

Sources: The Wends of Texas by Anne Blasig

The Wendish Texans by Sylvia Ann Grider

Michael Schoppa Family Album published in 2000 by Mary Schultz Guggisberg and Kenneth W. Schoppa

[Texas Wendish Heritage Museum.](#)

E-mail comments or questions to: [gunner@totacc.com](mailto:gunner@totacc.com).

Last update: Aug. 24, 2002