

WENDISH CULTURE CLUB

Fifty years... that's nothing to sneeze at! When Lillie Moerge Caldwell, Gertrude Mitschke, Freda Wendland, Emma Wuensche, and Laura Zoch met together in Caldwell's home on August 19, 1972 and organized what they called the "Wendish Culture Club" their primary objective was fairly modest... they wanted to be able to meet the requirements necessary to have a booth at the Texas Folklife Festival in San Antonio in order to celebrate the history and culture of the Wends.

If they'd had access to a crystal ball and could have peered into the future, I suspect they would have been equal parts shocked and pleased with what their organization (which became the Texas Wendish Heritage Society in 1977) would become. At the end of 2022, we can now say that

- We have participated in every Texas Folklife Festival since the second one (unfortunately, the Wendish Culture Club wasn't organized early enough to participate in the first one).
- We have over 1,000 members today.
- We have a museum complex that spans multiple buildings (most of which have a historical connection to the Wends of Texas), houses many artifacts associated with the Wends in Texas, and tells the historical story of the Wends beginning prior to their immigration here.
- We are, thanks to the efforts of Weldon Mersiovsky and the Wendish Research Exchange, actively working to translate works about the Wends into the English language to make them accessible to those of us who aren't fluent in German or Upper Sorbian.
- We offer regular workshops to help people trace their Wendish roots.

- We offer introductory Upper Sorbian language courses.
- We help cover the cost of higher education for a number of students with Wendish heritage each year through our scholarship program.
- We have, for thirty-four years running, celebrated the culture and heritage of the Wends at Wendish Fest, which attracts people from throughout the United States and across the globe.
- We have twice-yearly membership meetings featuring a delicious meal and informative and interesting presentations.
- We have published a newsletter for forty-two years now.
- We have an active web site and social media presence on Facebook and Instagram (what do you think those ladies would have thought of the internet?).
- We have been featured in numerous magazines, newspapers, and television programs.
- And last (for this list anyway) but definitely not least, we sell produce and sell countless bags of Wendish noodles each year.

And that's only a sampling of what our organization does! Though they didn't take the first steps toward preserving and celebrating the history and culture of the Wends, they did take a very important step in creating this organization that continues what they started in ways they couldn't even have dreamed of in 1972. For that, we say "wutrobny džak" ("heartly thanks" in Upper Sorbian)!

But... if they were here with us today, I believe they would thank all of you as well. Because after all, all that we do is done with your help. Your membership dollars and donations help fund this organization and its programs, and your volunteer efforts help us pull off our events and keep the museum doors open.

So here's to next fifty years of the Texas Wendish Heritage Society. What do you think those years will bring?



TWHS charter members (left to right) Gertrude Mitschke, Laura Zoch, Lillie Caldwell, Freda Wendland, and Emma Wuensche ride in a parade float. Photo: TWHS Archives