

Local heritage

Wendish ancestry is rated matter of pride in spite discriminaton



LOCAL WEND — Mr. Robert (Blandine) Rummell of the Five-In-One Community holds a plaque which pictures the first ship the Wends originally sailed to Texas on. The Wends, a unique culture originally from Prussia and Germany, came to Texas for freedom. Some, including Rummels father, settled near what is now the Zion Lutheran Church. Other persons of Wendish descent also live in the Vernon area. (Vernon Daily Record Photo)

By **RENE WILLIAMS**
Record Staff Writer

The Wends of Texas are as much a part of the state as the Texas winds.

Several Wends live in the Vernon area, and one of those is Mrs. Robert (Blandine) Rummel of the Five-In-One-Community.

Because she has a German-like accent, Rummel has always been asked where she was born. And she answers Vernon, Texas, with a proud smile, adding that her ancestors came to Texas in 1869.

The first few Wends blew into the state from Germany in 1800 seeking fertile farmland, according to the Associated Press. And in 1854, a group of about 600 sailed to Texas seeking religious freedom and non-discrimination. Their

customs, religion, language and sense of ethnic integrity had always set them apart from their German neighbors.

"The Wends were outsiders," Rummel said, "discrimination, that's what it was."

SOME OF THE WENDS, including Rummel's father, lived in Prussia as a young boy and came to Texas at the age of six. He settled in Wilbarger County in the early 1900s, near what is now the Zion Lutheran Church.

Pride in the Wendish identity has been passed through the generations, according to Rummel, who still lives on the farm land her father first purchased near the Lockett community.

"They were humble people and they were poor people

when they came over here," said Rummel. "But I am very proud of the record that they set...There are a lot here that people don't know about."

Rummel said her mother, who died when she was 10-years-old, taught her to be thankful for Texas. "I love to study this (Wend history) and read about it and talk about it," she said. "But we're Americans first and always."

IT WAS HAPPENSTANCE that caused her father, Christian Schoppa, to want to live in Wilbarger County.

He was coming through Vernon on a northward cattle drive and found that his cows would have to be dipped in a chemical to kill parasites before crossing the Red River. He got to know

several people in this area at that time, and later decided to get out of the cattle business and begin farming here.

She held a copy of her father's deed to the land, which was handwritten. He had bought 320 acres, in what is now the Five-In-One Community, for \$2 an acre.

After settling, her parents spoke German, Wendish and English, and she recalled trying to learn English as a child.

Once while her father was farming his fields, she saw a man riding on horseback to her house. Rummel, who took care of her younger brother and sister, hid the children and herself for fear of not being able to communicate in English with the man. She laughed when

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recalling the incident, but said at the time it was frightening.

LEARNING ENGLISH while living on a farm was especially difficult in comparison to the children of other Wendish families who lived in Vernon, she said.

Four other Wendish families came with the Rummel family to settle in the Vernon area at the same time. And because most of the Wendish people were devout Lutherans, they immediately began the Zion Lutheran Church now located in the Five-In-One community.

A majority of the Wends still live in Texas today and have remained in the Lutheran faith, she said. Some local Wendish names, according to Rummel, are

Schoppa, Mitschke, Schur, Schulz, Zoch and Lowke.

Rummel said many people today have never heard of the Wends.

She laughed and said that her late husband, Robert Rummel, a German, had teased her saying that when they married he thought he was marrying a "little German girl."

RUMMEL SAID although the Wends have no identifying physical features, they were known for their foods including noodles, homemade breads and coffee cakes. "They were always good cooks," she added.

The original Wends who came to Texas landed in Galveston, but had lost about 100 people because of cholera and other diseases, Rummel

said. They walked to land they had bought in what is now near Giddings, located in Lee County — a long distance by foot. The east Texas settlement was called Serbin.

Although Serbin thrived, according to the Associated Press, the language and culture did not.

Rummel said that even she felt it was more important for her own four children to learn English instead of German or Wend when they were young, but now wishes she had taught them her native tongue also.

SHE RECALLED a Wendish tradition of brides wearing black dresses, (to symbolize the hardships that were ahead of them according to an article about the Wends) and said that she had never seen a bride in black

but suspected the Wends were formerly a somewhat superstitious people.

Folk medicine, holiday celebrations, superstitions, crafts, heroes and history of the Wends are all included in an illustrated book, "The Wendish Texans," recently published by the University of Texas Institute of Texas Cultures at San Antonio. Other articles and books about the Wends' history have also been published.

As a part of local history, Rummel's father's name, along with other names, will be included on a historical marker placed in Lockett naming the founders in that area.

And as for her four children, seven grandchildren and two great-grandchildren, she says, "They are all proud of the Wendish culture."