

**NOTES ON GERMAN-AMERICAN STUDIES AT
SOUTHWEST TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY**

With hope of creating interest in Texas-German cultural research, the German faculty of Southwest Texas State University organized a new course called "Multicultures of America: German,"¹ an advanced elective course taught by Professor Dona Reeves. As a partial requirement for the course, a semester project was undertaken by the students, and the variety of topics researched included family notes and photographs, a study of German architecture, and the life and work of artists, poets, teachers, and politicians. Because the major research preference focused on family history, students were encouraged to examine museum and other primary collections, church and county records, federal census microfilms, and cemeteries, as well as to collect local and oral history. The instructor also provided topics from the area of verbal and non-verbal folklore to be investigated among the students' families and acquaintances or within a community. This list has subsequently been expanded to serve as a guide for classroom, genealogical, and historical projects:

- dances, music, games (Sängervereine, Turnvereine)
- handicrafts, decorative arts, toys, stencils, furniture, pottery
- buildings, fences, farm equipment
- education, German schools, German in schools
- foods and nutrition
- superstitions, folk medicine
- birth celebrations, courtship and marriage, funeral customs
- life histories, family letters, photographs

Such research can bring to light many unevaluated materials. In this manner, Southwest Texas State University acquired what is apparently the largest private research collection (5000 items) of German-Americana in the Southwest. The Brinkmann-Ransleben library is the lifework of three generations of bibliophiles. The first was Mrs. Otto Brinkmann (nee Marie Ochse) who opened her family collection in 1896 as a revolving library in Comfort, Texas. She influenced her son Alex Brinkmann (1868-1947) to continue collecting German-language newspapers, rare documents, maps, historical photographs, and books during his extensive travels. After the collection was closed to the public in 1947, it was maintained by Brinkmann's son-in-law, Texas-German historian Guido Ernst Ransleben, who added extensive holdings on life and literature of the American Southwest.

With its rich holdings in German and German-American literature of the nineteenth century, this private library reflects the reading preferences of a class of Texas-Germans aspiring to a level of education commensurate with its new living standard in this country. The collecting includes numerous *Konversationslexika*, books on art, history, and travel, and representative works of writers from Lessing to Rilke. Of special interest are the works of German-American and Texas writers like Balduin Möllhausen, Friedrich Gerstäcker, Ferdinand Lindheimer, Adolf Douai, August Siemering, Ludwig Vogel, Fritz Goldbeck, Johannes Romberg, Heinrich Ochs, Ferdinand Lohmann, Julius Dresel, Hulda Walter, and Selma Metzenthin-Raunick.

Because recent issues of journals like *Monatshefte*, *The Modern Language Journal*, and *Die Unterrichtspraxis* have focused interest on the German literature of America, Dona Reeves and Glen Lich of Southwest Texas are sponsoring a special German-Americana meeting to be hosted jointly by the South Central

Modern Language Association and the Arkansas Chapter of AATG. The session will convene at the Arlington Hotel in Hot Springs on 28 October 1977.

1 Dona Reeves and Glen E. Lich, "Germans Along the Guadalupe: An Approach to the Study of Cultural Diversity," *Die Unterrichtspraxis*, 10 (Spring 1977).

THE WENDS OF TEXAS

The Institute of Texan Cultures is preparing a new monograph in its series, *The Texians and the Texans*, which will give an account of the Wendish element in the state of Texas. Al Lowman, a research associate at the institute, is tasked with the project which will draw on several published accounts, as well as a forthcoming book, but for the most part, sources for the monograph will be provided by individuals of Wendish extraction, like Robert Robinson-Zwahr, from across the state whose interest has led them to collect primary research materials.

When the Institute of Texan Cultures opened in 1968, the Wends were one of the 26 ethnic groups recognized during the Hemisfair. This Slavic nationality settled initially in Lee County in 1853-1854. Like the Germans, Alsacians, Swiss, Austrians, Tyrolese, Bohemians, and Poles -- the Wends originated within the political and cultural confines of German-speaking Europe, but unlike all these other nationalities, the Wends did not leave Europe in response to the prevailing mood of economic depression. It was not poverty but dissatisfaction with the union of Old Saxon Lutherans with the Prussian Reformed Church in 1830, which prompted Pastor Johann Kilian of Dahlen (Saxony) to organize the migration to Texas of over 500 Wendish Lutherans.

Although the majority of the Wends and their descendants remained around the mother church at Serbin and in the nearby town of Giddings, a number of filial churches were established in other parts of the state. The diffusion by now has been extensive, yet, while assimilation is complete, the Wends have retained not only their ethnic identity, but also their unique heritage of trilingualism. Significant historical and cultural examinations of the Wends have been George Charles Marius Engerrand's *The So-Called Wends of Germany and Their Colonies in Texas and in Australia* (1934) and Anne Blasig's *The Wends of Texas* (1954).

The monograph of the Wends continues *The Texians and the Texans* series published by the Institute of Texan Cultures at the University of Texas at San Antonio. Other titles in the collection include *The Afro-American Texans* (1975), *The Anglo American Texans* (1975), *The Belgian Texans* (1975), *The Czech Texans* (1972), *The French Texans* (1973), *The German Texans* (1970), *The Greek Texans* (1974), *The Indian Texans* (1970), *The Italian Texans* (1973), *The Jewish Texans* (1974), *The Mexican Texans* (1975), *The Norwegian Texans* (1970), *The Polish Texans* (1972), *The Spanish Texans* (1972), and *The Syrian and Lebanese Texans* (1974).

Southeast Texas State University — Glen E. Lich

1 "Berricht über Leben and Wirken des sel. Joh. Kilian, weiland Pastors in Serbin, Texas," *Der Lutheraner*, 15 November 1884, pp. 171-172.