

JOHANN KILIAN

Johann (in German)/Jan (in Wendish) Kilian

Pioneer Pastor to the Wends

BORN: MARCH 22, 1811 *Döhlen, Kingdom of Saxony*

DIED: SEPTEMBER 12, 1884 *Serbin, Texas*

JAN KILIAN BELONGED TO THE WENDS, a Slavic people living among the Germans in Saxony and Prussia. They had their own language and culture, but, by Kilian's time, they also employed German and went to German schools and universities. So Kilian became a Lutheran pastor after a thoroughly German theological education. For his entire ministry he used both languages, but it was especially among the Wends that he carried out his work. He published translations of the Large Catechism and the Augsburg Confession in Wendish and wrote hymns in that language as well.

Like many of those who founded The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, his experience with the state churches of Germany convinced him that Lutheranism in its homeland had lost its way and that the official churches were at best indifferent (and often plainly hostile) to authentic Lutheranism. So after almost 20 years of ministry in Germany, he accepted a call from a flock of about 550 Wendish Lutherans to be their pastor as they left their homeland to practice their faith and settle in Texas.

The voyage was a difficult one. From Germany they went to England where some in their group contracted cholera. This meant quarantining in Ireland before they could begin crossing the Atlantic in October 1854. By the time they arrived in Galveston in December, 73 of them had died. By way of Houston, they made their way inland to New Ulm where some earlier Wendish immigrants had settled. Then they purchased almost 4400 acres for a settlement that they called Serbin, located about 50 miles east of Austin. The first years were very difficult. Sickness, poor harvests and drought all took their toll. But the congregation did manage quickly to build a two-room building that served as church, school and parsonage.

For almost 30 years, Kilian provided spiritual leadership. That meant thousands of sermons and homilies, countless visits, absolving penitents, dealing with recalcitrants, settling quarrels, leading worship and traveling widely to preach the Gospel. As one might expect, he taught school for several years; as one might not expect, he also served the community as a homeopathic physician!

Acquainted with C.F.W. Walther in the old country, Kilian quickly contacted him upon arriving in the United States and shortly thereafter became the first Missouri Synod pastor in Texas. For the next 14 years, he was the only synodical pastor in Texas.

Kilian was married to Marie née Groeschel. Though several of their children died in infancy, one son grew up to follow his father into the ministry and succeeded him as pastor in Serbin in 1883. Jan Kilian served as assistant pastor until his death a year later.

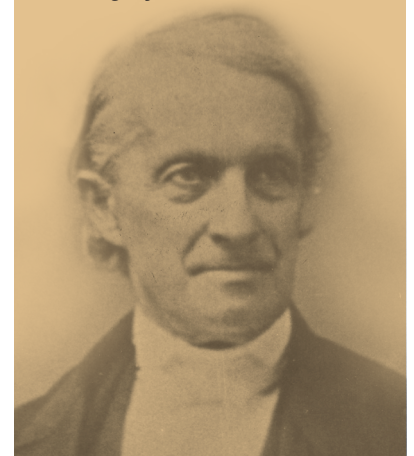
For more information about the 175th anniversary of the LCMS, visit lcms.org/175.

DISCOVER MORE

George Nielsen, *Johann Kilian, Pastor: A Wendish Lutheran in Germany and Texas* (1stBooks Library, 2003).

Gotthilf Birkmann, "1884/1929 – About the Life and Work of the Sainted Johann Kilian, Formerly Pastor in Serbin, Texas," *The Wendish Research Exchange*, accessed May 20, 2022, wendish-research.org/history-and-culture/people/rev-gotthilf-birkmann/1884-1929-about-the-life-and-work-of-the-sainted-johann-kilian-formerly-pastor-in-serbin-texas/.

David J. Zersen, "Jan Kilian's Legacy in the United States," in *The Wendish Research Exchange*, accessed May 20, 2022, wendish-research.org/2020/04/24/jan-kilians-legacy-in-the-united-states/.



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NO OTHER NAME

– 175 YEARS –



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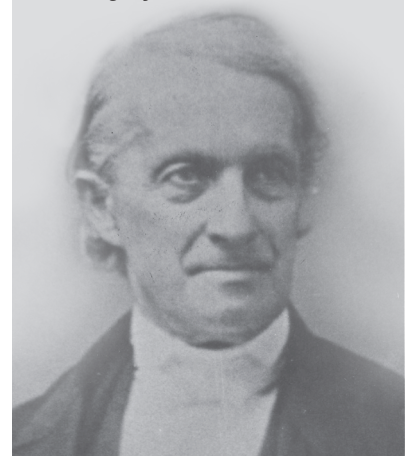
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