**German bilingual schools in the Barossa Valley: Heritage lost**

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Part 1

Speaking more that one language is normal, and in the 19th Century German settlers in the Barossa Valley had the advantage of schooling in both German and English. As part of the celebration of Lutheran Schooling in Australia, Lutheran Education Australia commissioned a complete list of the Lutheran Schools set up in Australia. I have attached the list of the bilingual schools in the Barossa Valley – thirty-three schools out of over a hundred and twenty Lutheran schools established in Australia. As part of the German Language Documentation, Maintenance and Revival Project in the Barossa, we have been conversing with speakers whose first language was German for speaking with grandparents and parents (see separate article on Seniorentreffen in the Barossa Village and Tanunda Lutheran Homes). When they went to school they had to learn English as an additional language. They were deprived of using their mother tongue as the bilingual programs had been closed in 1917. Teachers who could not teach in English were dismissed, and English only schools were mandated. That is another story. What is significant for us is to consider the rich heritage which was lost in the closure of the bilingual programs.

Australia has a record for welcoming people from many countries, and in the nineteenth century German and Wendish speakers from central Europe were no exception. They were encouraged to come to South Australia and build settlements with schools and churches. The settlers valued the political, linguistic and religious freedom here and the opportunities for business and work. After taking up land holdings one of the first community commitments was to children’s education, with school classes held in homes and in church buildings.

German-speaking community leaders showed professional insight into children’s and people’s capacity for multilingualism. Bilingual programs are most effective for language learning. Children learn two languages for the price of one, with studies showing advantages in mental and language development and capacity. In a future article I will write about the studies into bringing children up bilingually and successful primary school programs I have directed in South Australia.

Looking down the attached list of schools we note that they were scattered across the Barossa. What is of interest are the dates when the schools opened and when they closed. The first school was opened in Bethany near Tanunda in 1842 at the time of settlement in the Barossa. South Australia was formally established in 1836. With increasing immigration from the late 1840’s schools were opened across the region. These parish schools were connected with Lutheran congregations. The date 1917 marks the closure of so many of the schools, a parliamentary action which was taken here in South Australia, but not interstate. By an act of parliament a rich record of community initiative and educational value ended. What is of interest to us today is a renewed interest in bilingual programs for teaching languages. The bilingual programs in the Barossa record an enlightened community, which recognised the value of language maintenance and at the same time the importance of English for living in the South Australian community. As part of History Month in May a seminar organised by the German Heritage Research Group includes talks based on documents in the Lutheran Archives on the bilingual schools with details of programs, personalities and policies [see separate article].

A typical school building is at Ebenezer comprising a large room for classes and attached rooms for the teacher’s residence. [image to be sent separately]

Appendix: List of German English schools established in the Barossa Valley. Source Lutheran Education Australia.



