

**Findaid 2/88**

**A.0786**

**Vedder**

**Quellen zur Geschichte von Südwestafrika**

**List edited by Werner Hillebrecht, December 2004  
and revised January 2013**

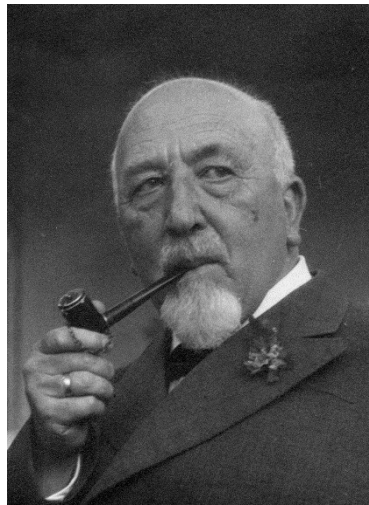
**National Archives of Namibia**  
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*Heinrich Vedder*

## Private Accession A.0786 Vedder Quellen

### Introduction

#### Biographical notes

**Heinrich Vedder** (\* 03.07.1876 at Westerenger, Westfalen, Germany; + 26.04.1972 at Okahandja, Namibia) was originally trained as a silk weaver but became a missionary of the Rhenish Mission (Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft). Missionary training in Barmen 1894-1903, came to Namibia in December 1903, and worked first in Scheppmannsdorf, Karibib and Otjimbingwe. From 1905, missionary for the black workers and prisoners of war in Swakopmund and also serving the German Lutheran congregation. Later he served the Damara congregation in Omaruru. From 1911-1919 he was educating teachers and evangelists in Gaub. Deported to Germany 1919, he returned 1922 and since then worked and lived continuously at Okahandja. From 1923-1943 he served as Head of the Augustineum in Okahandja. Interested in linguistics, ethnography and history, he made a substantial contribution to linguistic research in Otjiherero and Khoekhoegowab (Nama), and to Namibian ethnography and historiography by collecting oral traditions.

His monumental work "Das alte Südwestafrika", published Berlin 1934 and reprinted many times, (in English translation: South West Africa in early times, London 1938; in Afrikaans: Die voorgeskiedenis van Suidwes-Afrika, Windhoek 1937) was compiled from oral sources and research into archival, mostly missionary, records and became the most influential single work on precolonial Namibian history. Unfortunately, not being intended as an academic history, the information Vedder used is not referenced, and many of his sources remain obscure. The other major flaw in his work is that Vedder was writing with a preconceived idea of the civilising mission of the white man, coming to Namibia as a peacemaker to genocidal warring tribes. This overall concept is colouring his view of events, and has made it so immensely popular and influential among the white settler community, colonial apologists and apartheid ideologues.

Vedder's activity as an educationalist, training black teachers and writing school textbooks in Otjiherero and Khoekhoegowab, has also left his mark on subsequent attempts at oral history: supposed oral history accounts are occasionally found to be almost verbatim renderings of Vedder's textbooks. The ideological bias of his works should however not distract from their enormous value as source material.

Apart from his missionary activities, Vedder was also strongly involved in the German Lutheran Church in Namibia. From its inception in 1930, he edited its annual "Afrikanischer Heimatkalender" and contributed substantially to its content. He was also an influential founder member of the SWA Scientific Society, and involved in social activities of the German community in Namibia.

Sister **Emmi Meier** (\* 9.2.1906 in Windhoek, + 30.10.2002 in Brühl, Germany) was a daughter of missionary Friedrich Meier, who came to Namibia in 1901 and was stationed at Windhoek, and his wife Emma. In 1927 she moved to Germany for health reasons, and between 1928-1931 she transcribed archival sources at the Rhenish Mission headquarters in Wuppertal for Vedder's work on the history of Namibia.

After theological training in Leipzig, she became the travel secretary of the Rhenish Mission (1934-), and from 1960 until her retirement in 1968 she headed the department for mission sisters in the Rhenish Mission.

## The “Quellen”

The compilation widely known as “Vedder’s Quellen zur Geschichte von Südwestafrika” was put together by him as source material on Namibian history, mainly as a basis for writing his book "Das alte Südwestafrika" which was commissioned by the Administration for South West Africa. The material was compiled from various sources, including oral sources (volume 2), manuscripts of colonial officials (vol.29), and diverse collections (vol.30); the bulk of the material, however, has been transcribed from archival files at the Rhenish Mission Archives (today: Archiv der Vereinigten Evangelischen Mission, Archiv- und Museumsstiftung, Wuppertal) in Germany by Sister **Emmi Meier**, who has rarely been credited for her enormous work.

The compilation consists of originally 30 volumes (re-bound in 50 subdivided volumes), of which several typescript copies, photocopies and microfilms in various archives are in existence. The main set at the National Archives of Namibia was transferred to the Archives at an unknown date, possibly already when the Archives was established, but never formally accessioned until 2004. For better preservation, the leaves were glued on strong paper and bound at the Pretoria State Archives, presumably in the 1960s.

A second set of vols. 1-29 of the typescript exists at the National Archives of Namibia. It consists of loose leaves and is accessioned as Rara/0023-0051; while copies of vols.29-30 are found in the Lemmer Collection. The National Library of Namibia holds an incomplete set of photocopies.

## Related references

Other Vedder material at the National Archives of Namibia includes Accession A.579 (manuscript notes). Substantial archival holdings from Vedder can be found at the ELCRN Archives, Windhoek (including most of his correspondence) and the VEM Archives, Wuppertal. Vedder’s library was scattered after his death, and volumes from his library and his voluminous published output as well as manuscripts can be found at the National Archives Library, the ELCRN Archives Windhoek, the National Library of Namibia, the library of the Namibia Scientific Society Windhoek, and the VEM Archives Wuppertal.

*Werner Hillebrecht, December 2004  
Amended Jan.2013*

## Literature about Vedder:

Festschrift Dr.h.c. Heinrich Vedder (Windhoek 1961). *NAN Library: AA/0081*

Baumann: Mission und Ökumene in Südwestafrika, dargestellt am Lebenswerk von Hermann Heinrich Vedder (Leiden 1965). *National Library: XX/0853 A, XX/0854 B [NAN Library hold the original typescript thesis by Baumann: BB/0339]*

Moritz: Dr. Heinrich Vedder, vom Ravensberger Seidenweber zum berühmten Afrikamissionar (Schwäbisch-Gmünd 1973). *NAN Library: PA/2023*

Lau: Thank God the Germans came. Vedder and Namibian historiography. In: B. Lau: History and historiography (Windhoek 1995). *NAN Library: REF/H/31 and PA/2022*

Barth: Von draussen: Hermann Heinrich Vedder (1876-1972), in: Afrikanischer Heimatkalender 1995, pp.35-51. *NAN Library: in JZ/0077, vol.1995*

## Note about the content listing

In previous editions of this findaid, the contents had been listed very briefly. In this edition, the volumes 2 (with oral history) and 30a and 30b (with somewhat random excerpts and additional oral history) have been listed more comprehensively to provide better access to these original sources.

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