

Growing up on Wuchatsch's farm

Born in 1950, **Robert Wuchatsch's** generation was the last to experience a rural Westgarthtown. By the time his childhood was over, so was the family farm. Here he vividly recalls some of his unique experiences as a child and the inevitable changes that occurred as suburban development edged its way across the land first settled by his pioneering forebears.

In 1967 my father Norman Wuchatsch sold the farm. Well, most of it, anyway. He kept two acres around our old house and outbuildings.

The farm had been in our family since my great grandparents, Johann and Magdalene Wuchatsch, settled on it in 1850. Originally 78 acres, it was enlarged to 92 acres in 1892 when my grandfather, Charles Wuchatsch, purchased an adjoining property, which included a paddock on the east side of Edgars Creek.

Johann Wuchatsch established a dairy farm, which was continued by his youngest son Charles, who eventually passed it on to Norman. My father milked cows until

the mid 1930s, when he sold his herd and draught horses and leased his land to the dairy farmer next door, having decided to take up roof tiling. Later, he had a number of jobs, including charcoal carting during the Second World War. He spent the last 15 years with Northern Fibrous Plaster, which established a plaster factory in our old farm sheds in 1949 and operated there until 1958.

In 1965, approaching retirement age, my father put all but two acres up for sale through Ted Savage of the Reservoir real estate agents, E. J. Love & Co. A developer subsequently took out an option on the property and purchased it in 1967. The sale had been delayed while the

C. J. Ziebell's Britannia Pharmacy, Fitzroy

BY ROBERT WUCHATSCH

Recently John Schubert, a member of the Friends of Lutheran Archives Victoria, donated an old medicine bottle to AKI, Trinity German Lutheran Church's historical society. This bottle, which John found among the belongings of relatives, bears the name C. J. Ziebell, Britannia Pharmacy, Fitzroy.

Carl Christian Johann (Charles John) Ziebell was a grandson of Christian and Sophia Ziebell, of Westgarthtown, so AKI felt it would be more appropriate for the bottle to be housed at Ziebell's Farmhouse. Accordingly, the bottle has now been passed on to the Friends of Westgarthtown, to be placed on display.

Charles John (Charles) Ziebell was born on 10 February 1870. He was the son of Heinrich Ziebell, a ham and bacon curer of Somerton and Caroline (née Stoffers) Ziebell, who married in 1856. In her book *The House That Christian Built*, Janet Hubbard states that Charles was dux of Scotch College and had studied in Germany. He passed his final pharmacy exam in Victoria on 7

March 1892 and was included on the Pharmaceutical Register on 13 April 1892. Soon after, he established a chemist shop at 19 Brunswick Street, Fitzroy which came to be known as the Britannia Pharmacy. Charles lived and worked there until his death.

On 23 October 1895, Charles married Sophie Ludwine Unmack of Bendigo and they had two daughters—Margarita (1896) and Sylvia (1900). In 1900 he applied



Charles Ziebell aged twenty two (J. Hubbard)

Growing up on Wuchatsch's farm

from PAGE 1

Titles Office transferred the property from its old General Law title to the required Torrens title.

The first section of land to be subdivided and sold for housing was the Kalara Estate, located on the east side of the creek—today's Kalara Close, Lalor. Prior to its subdivision, there were some very pretty wild briar roses growing along the creek, some Kentish cherry trees and a huge old poplar tree. But there was also about five acres of artichoke thistles, grown from seed blown over from Callaghan's farm, on our northern boundary. At the time, I wasn't unhappy to see the end of that paddock, as one of my least favourite jobs was to carry a heavy knapsack around it and spray the thistles with poison—a fairly futile exercise as I recall.

Subdivision of our old farmlands began in earnest with construction of the Robert Street bridge over Edgars Creek in 1967. Despite the rock, streets were soon formed and blocks sold, at around \$3,000 each. If I recall correctly, the first blocks on the west side of the creek

near our house were released as the Greenfields Estate, but within a short time, A. V. Jennings bought the land from the original developer. They renamed it the Pinetree Estate, after a huge old pinetree which stood about 50 metres west of our house. Pinetree Crescent, then under construction, was also named after it.

It must have seemed like a good idea at the time, but A. V. Jennings soon came to regret naming the estate after our tree, as about three weeks later we cut it down. A magnificent old specimen, which stood prominently against the horizon as you drove west over the bridge, it was axed in 1969 to make way for my sister Betty's intended new home at 86 Robert Street, Lalor. While we had been planning the tree's demise for some months, Jennings' had been quietly devising an advertising campaign around it, based on a silhouette image of its unusual shape (see cover page image). A. V. Jennings spent many thousands of dollars promoting the Pinetree Estate, long after the tree was cut down, thoroughly confusing newcomers who could see no reason why a pinetreeless housing estate should be so named.

A section of our land at the rear of the farm, in the

for a trade mark for a 'chemical effervescing substance for human use' he named Citropyrene. He is said to have been 'the first chemist in Australia to produce hydrogen peroxide' which he produced in a building behind the shop. He was devastated when a 'large chemical firm somehow obtained his hydrogen peroxide formula...Probably this, combined with his deafness and the anti-German feeling which was prevalent at the time, depressed him so much that he took his own life' on 21 November 1918, aged 48. Charles had cut his throat with a razor. At the inquest, Constable Mafferzoni testified:

“ I have known the deceased Charles J C Ziebell 22 years here he was a chemist and before the War broke out he was doing good business and was very popular in Fitzroy...shortly after the War broke out his business began to fail and during the last 12 months he [has] done little or no business whatever...he was deaf he could not hear a word, every conversation to him had to be written down.”

Charles' brother Julius confirmed that 'He had been boycotted in business since the War broke out and his



C. J. Ziebell medicine bottle similar to the one donated to AKI.

business fell and he was depressed on that account.' The fact that Charles 'was strongly pro-German and had a big picture of the Kaiser in his shop' would not have helped business.

An accomplished pianist, Charles 'went deaf at a very early age, probably as a result of an earlier attack of typhoid...His life, especially his passion for music, was thwarted by his deafness, which meant he could no longer hear his playing.'

Both Charles and Sophia, who died on 6 March 1925, aged 53, are buried in the Lutheran Section of the Melbourne General Cemetery.

vicinity of today's Kimberley Street, was very swampy. My mother once told me a government body drilled for oil there in the late 1940s. To empty the swamp for subdivision, a large drain was constructed to Edgars Creek, entering behind my sister Dorothy's house at 138 Gardenia Road, Lalor. This drain was bored mostly through solid basalt, so was quite an achievement, considerable blasting being required. Had I been younger, I would have no doubt played in it, despite the obvious dangers. A smaller drain which enters the creek on the east side about fifty metres further north, was one of my favourite haunts after its completion in 1962. I used to collect tennis balls, washed down from the streets, which collected around its entrance. Sadly, the creek was soon dredged, straightened and eventually concreted, reducing much of it to the dead concrete wasteland which exists today.

Before we sold the farm, my favourite place was a disused stone and earth ramp beside the creek, about 200 metres south of the Robert Street bridge. The ramp had been constructed during the 1940s by a man named Jimmy Welsh, to anchor and feed a rock crusher, my father having leased a small portion of land there to him for a quarry.

Large stones were hauled up the ramp and dropped into the crusher, the crushed rock and screenings presumably being used locally on roads, or for concrete. After several years, Jimmy moved to Mernda and established another quarry, later losing a foot in an accident there.

In the late 1950s, long after the quarry had ceased operation, my father let the site to a man who erected a shed and equipment to pulverize sheep manure for fertilizer, but that business lasted only a short time. The old ramp, with its crusher removed, was my cubby or fort and from it I could survey the surrounding countryside. As I got older, I think I smoked my first (and almost last) cigarette there.

I also loved walking around the paddocks. I could climb trees, sit on old ploughs and hayrakes, catch lizards and small snakes under rocks, fish for eels in the creek, pick mushrooms, or shoot rabbits, quail or birds. I even learnt to drive there in my father's old 1935 Ford sedan. But mostly, I just enjoyed the fact that here, in my own backyard, there was room to move or meditate, as the mood took me. All that is now gone, replaced by functional, but relentless suburbia.

LOVE & *Lace*

City of Whittlesea Cultural Heritage Program 2011

BY GILLIAN BORRACK

Some years ago, the Friends of Westgarthtown were very fortunate when Harry and Minna Thiele's sixth child, Gladys Knight (née Thiele) kindly donated Minna Thiele's wedding dress and some items from her trousseau to our textile collection. Gladys Knight is also a descendant of the Finger family. Like many Westgarthtown families, the Fingers migrated to Australia aboard the 350 tonne wooden barque *Pribislaw*, which arrived in Melbourne on 2 February 1850. Emma Finger married Johann Thiele on 15 April 1880.

The City of Whittlesea Cultural & Heritage Event *Love & Lace*, held at Ziebell's Farmhouse on 20 November 2011, exhibited these beautiful antique garments for the first time. Former caretaker Ellen Mitchell prepared the garments for the exhibition and designed and organized their display. The wedding dress, positioned near the entrance to the living room on a raised stand made by Jordan Mitchell for the occasion, set the mood for the rest of the exhibition.

Copies of photographs, post cards and their marriage certificate were provided for reproduction by Harry and Minna's grandchild, Lindy McKew, together with text gleaned from Eric Collyer and David Thiele's book *The Thiele Family of Doncaster 1849–1989*. Using Lindy's material, Léon Borrack designed three small panels to

complement the story of the Finger and Thiele families.

The simple and sensitive display was enhanced by our good fortune to have three members of the Australian Lace Guild volunteer to demonstrate the traditional art of lace making. Visitors were transported into a totally different era.

Our sincere thanks go to Gladys Knight, Lindy McKew, Ellen Mitchell and the three Lace Makers—Jan McVey, Elizabeth Mayon and Helene Gannac—for their generosity and support.



Clockwise from above: Finger and Thiele family descendants pose for a photograph on the lawn at Ziebell's Farmhouse; Lindy McKew and Ellen Mitchell admire Minna Thiele's wedding dress; Demonstrating their craft, lacemakers Helene Gannae, Jan McVey and Elizabeth Mayon.

Ziebell's Farmhouse Open Garden



With the support of the City of Whittlesea, the Friends of Westgarthtown are delighted to announce that the historic Ziebell Farmhouse Garden has been included in the Australian Open Garden 2012–2013 program for the first time. The Friends of Westgarthtown are including this event as part of the 2012 program to celebrate the History and Cultural Heritage of the City of Whittlesea. We hope you can join us.

Calling for Volunteers

We will need many volunteers that weekend. To help make sure this event is well organised we are requesting you to register your interest in assisting—see the separate flyer included with this newsletter or go to www.westgarthtown.org.au. This will be a significant and busy weekend for the Friends of Westgarthtown and we will be most grateful for any support you may be able to provide.

Ziebell's Farmhouse Open Garden

Date: 17 & 18 November 2012
Time: 10.00am – 4.30pm
Cost: \$7 per person. Children under 18 free.
Location: Ziebell's Farmhouse

Note: For this event parking and entrance to Ziebell's Farmhouse will be via Westgarthtown Lutheran Reserve, German Lane, Thomastown (Melway Map 8, H5)

The City of Whittlesea's Cultural Heritage Program 2012 booklet will be posted when available. For further information contact Gillian Borrack on 03 9717 3559 or enquiries@westgarthtown.org.au

1916 Schmutsch plea for British fair play

In our April 2009 issue of *Friends of Westgarthtown News* (Vol 13, No 1) entitled Remembering Westgarthtown's Servicemen, we included an article about Adolph (Dolph) Schmutsch (1881–1951), a grandson of Christian and Sophia Ziebell. Dolph's mother was Ernestine Karsten, who was born at Westgarthtown in 1859 and married ship's captain Adolph Schmutsch in 1879. Below is a self-explanatory letter

Writes F. W. Schmutsch (Albany): I should like to draw your attention to a matter of British fair play as dealt out by the members of the Albany Lumpers' Union of Workers. About a fortnight ago I received an anonymous note to the effect that they had decided individually not to work with me any more. No reason was given, but on making inquiry the next day I was informed that it was on account of my nationality. Now, sir, I was born in Germany, but am naturalised in Australia. I came to this country when I was about three months of age. Of my father I have no remembrance, as he died whilst I

was still an infant. My mother was born in Australia. I have never been near Germany since I left as a baby in arms, and am unable to speak one word of the language. My brother fought through the South African War with the first Victorian contingent, and later with Tullabardine's Scottish Horse. He was one of the first to volunteer for the present war, and is at present fighting at the front with the 2nd Brigade Ammunition Column, A.F.A. Has been wounded once and now returned to active service. During the South African War the German Government sent to my mother informing her that we would have to go home and serve our time, but she

replied that one son was in Africa fighting the Boers and that the other refused to go. As a result, she received a reply to the effect that the Fatherland (?) had no further use for our family. Now, sir, I ask you, is it justice that one son should be fighting to gain all the privileges of British freedom whilst the other is debarred from earning a living for his Australian wife and children thereunder? The union knows the particulars of my case, and whilst sympathetic say they cannot discriminate. Surely by taking up arms against Germany the family has established its claim to British protection."

by Dolph's younger brother Frederick William Schmutsch (1885-1968), who was naturalised as an Australian citizen in 1914, shortly after World War One began. This letter, published in Perth's *Sunday Times* on 5 March 1916 helps explain why he changed his surname by deed poll in 1920 from Schmutsch to Shaw, a surname he had already used for some time.

Letter courtesy National Library of Australia website

Wendish Heritage Society Australia

Do you have Wendish ancestry? The Wends (also known as Sorbs) are a Slavic people who spoke a Slavic language—Wendish or Sorbian. The Wends live in Lusatia, an area in eastern Germany which during the mid-nineteenth century was divided between Saxony and Prussia. Five families who settled at Westgarthtown were Wendish—Graff, Grutzner, Rosel, Wuchatsch and Zimmer.

The Wendish Heritage Society Australia researches and promotes the Wendish/Sorbian and Germanic heritage and family history in Australia. Its meeting room and research centre is located at the Ivanhoe Lutheran Church's meeting room, 27 Livingstone Street, Ivanhoe, Victoria and is open on the first Sunday each month February–November, from 1.30 – 5.30 pm. The Wendish Heritage Society Australia's postal address is PO Box 307, Heidelberg, Victoria 3084. For further details see www.wendishheritage.org.au

Thomastown Lutheran Church Services

Services are held on the second and fourth Sunday of the month at 2.30 pm at the Thomastown Lutheran Church, German Lane, Lalor. For further details, contact Irma Hatty on 03 9338 9064 or see the Calvary Lutheran Church website at www.calvarychurch.org.au

Visiting Ziebell's Farmhouse

Ziebell's Farmhouse is open to the public on the second Sunday of each month, 1–4 pm. For enquiries, call 03 9464 1805 or enquiries@westgarthtown.org.au

Tours can be organised for groups of ten or more people. For information and bookings contact Tatiana Joukoff on 03 9464 5062 or tatianajoukoff@hotmail.com

Trinity German Lutheran Church Archives, East Melbourne

If you had German Lutheran ancestors in Victoria, the Trinity Church Archives at East Melbourne may be able to help you.

The most commonly used records held by Trinity Church Archives are the marriage, baptism and confirmation registers, church minutes and correspondence. Information on many early members of the Trinity congregation is also kept.

The Trinity Church Archives are located at 22 Parliament Place, East Melbourne Victoria 3002. Opening hours are Tuesdays from 10.00 am to 3.00 pm. For inquiries, please contact Renate Jurgens on 03 9761 1430 or at auntnati@optusnet.com.au

Benjamin (Ben) Seeber (1883-1959)

BY ROBERT WUCHATSCH

In our September 2004 issue of *Friends of Westgarthtown News* (Vol 8, No 2) we included an article about Johann Christian Ludwig Seeber, a shoemaker who lived in a house which stood in High Street, Lalor facing the railway station. Johann and his wife Johanna (née Wuchatsch) raised a family of eight children, the second youngest of whom was Benjamin, who with his sisters Lizzie and Magdelene Seeber carried on their father's small farm after his death in 1904. Ben, as he was known, served as a trustee of the Thomastown Lutheran Church from 1931 until his death in 1959.

Ben was born at Westgarthtown on 4 May 1883 and baptised by Pastor Herlitz on 24 June 1883. He attended both Thomastown and Epping State Schools at different times, his home being half-way between the two schools. He was confirmed in 1898. After leaving school, he helped his ageing father on the family's three-acre farm, aided by two unmarried sisters. Ben also remained unmarried.



Ben Seeber aged 4; and a photo of him (on the left) standing with George Simpson. (R. Wuchatsch)

In September 1912, the *Evelyn Observer* noted that Ben had provided choumoellier, a type of coarse kale fodder, for the Whittlesea Agricultural Society's prize winning District Exhibit at that year's Royal Melbourne Show. It is said Ben preferred to keep his small dairy herd of 10-15 cows indoors during cold weather rather than leave them outside as other farmers did.

Ben also owned about 50 acres on the eastern side of the railway line between today's Vasey Avenue and Derrick Street. A weatherboard house on this land was rented out to John and Caroline Dunn for many years. During the late 1940s this land was sold to the Peter Lalor Home Building Co-Operative Society Ltd.

Ben attended the Thomastown Lutheran Church all his life. Ownership of the Lutheran Church and Cemetery Reserve was transferred to him and three other trustees on 27 February 1931. He remained a trustee until his death early in 1959, when he was tragically struck by a car outside his home one evening. He died from his injuries at St Vincent's Hospital on 11 February 1959.

Ironically, Ben received his fatal injuries while lighting red safety lamps, to alert motorists about roadworks then in progress. A young driver, possibly speeding, had missed the curve and killed the good samaritan. At Ben's inquest, Senior Constable Bertram of Preston Police reported:

“ On Wednesday 21st January 1959 at about 9.30 pm, I attended the scene of a collision in Epping Road, just north of Lalor. Upon my arrival at the scene, motor car MO 645 was facing north on the west side of the road, with two wheels in a two foot excavation on the west side of the road. The deceased Benjamin Seeber was being placed in an ambulance. The extremities of the excavation in the road were marked by red lights. The bitumen portion of the road is 16 feet wide, six feet being taken up by the excavation. There were skid marks on the road for 20 feet before going into the hole. There was a post and a red lantern lying in the hole near the front of the car. I have made enquiries in the vicinity of this collision but have been unable to locate the two cyclists (alleged to have caused the driver to swerve off the road and hit deceased). I have been informed that the deceased Seeber was at the scene to light the lanterns.”

Ben was buried in the Westgarthtown Cemetery. A special memorial service was held for him at the Thomastown Lutheran Church on Sunday 1 March 1959. Ben's three-acre property was sold to the Hecker family and his estate, valued at £11,203, was divided among his 18 surviving nephews and nieces.

New caretakers

BY GILLIAN BORRACK

When our then caretakers, Ellen and Jordan Mitchell, made the decision in May 2011 to opt for a country life for themselves and their three young boys we were sad to say goodbye. We had all enjoyed their presence and help over the year they spent as caretakers at the Ziebell Farmhouse.

However, the City of Whittlesea once again advertised the position internally and there was considerable interest. Darren & Sheryl Kennedy were the successful applicants and we welcomed them as our new caretakers in July 2011.

Darren works for the City of Whittlesea as a Road Maintenance Inspection Officer. After six months in the position they were offered and have accepted a three-year contract. The Friends of Westgarthtown have been delighted with their commitment to the monthly Open days, security, care of the precinct and the garden. We look forward to a long association with Darren and Sheryl.



Darren and Sheryl Kennedy in the garden at Ziebell's Farmhouse.

FRIENDS OF WESTGARTHTOWN INC.

ABN 74 674 258 165 Inc. Reg No. A0032721Y

Enquiries (03) 9464 5062
PO Box 95 Thomastown VIC 3074
enquiries@westgarthtown.org.au
www.westgarthtown.org.au

President **Rob Wuchatsch**
Vice-President **Geoff Borrack**
Secretary **Gillian Borrack**
Treasurer **Léon Borrack**
Committee **Paul Schultz**
Doretta Belot

Historian **Rob Wuchatsch**
Heritage Architect **Geoff Borrack**
Tours Coordinator **Tatiana Joukoff**
Caretakers **Darren Kennedy**
Sheryl Kennedy

Editor **Rob Wuchatsch**
Design **Léon Borrack**

Westgarthtown is the oldest and most intact German/Wendish settlement in Victoria. Established in March 1850, it celebrated its 160th Anniversary in 2010.

The Thomastown Lutheran Church at Westgarthtown is the second oldest surviving Lutheran Church building in Australia and the oldest still used as the principal worship centre of a Lutheran congregation.

Heritage Victoria has included the Lutheran Church, Cemetery and Reserve; and Graff's, Siebel's, Wuchatsch's and Ziebell's houses on its Heritage Register, recognising their outstanding heritage value and providing legislative protection for the future.

Ziebell's Farmhouse is Victoria's oldest German immigrant building.

Siebel's Farmhouse, erected in 1860, is the birthplace of Albert Siebel, who in 1934 established the Pura Dairy at Preston, to retail Westgarthtown's milk. Pura has now developed into a leading national Australian brandname.

Wuchatsch's Farmhouse is believed to be the oldest house in Melbourne to have been constructed, owned and continually occupied by the same family.