Photo: David Johns Photography

Westgarthtown Cemetery

BY ROBERT WUCHATSCH

Westgarthtown, 16 kilometres north of Melbourne, was first settled by German and Wendish immigrants in March 1850. Soon after, the site for a Lutheran church, school and cemetery was chosen on a centrally located basalt knoll. Over 160 years later, this small private cemetery remains open, although burials are restricted to members of the Thomastown Lutheran congregation and descendants of the original settlers.

The first interment at Westgarthtown, which was also known at times as Keelbundora, Dry Creek, Neu Mecklenburg, Germantown and Thomastown, was of an unknown stillborn child and had taken place by October 1850. Although no burial register for the cemetery survives, headstone or memorial inscriptions, death certificates, undertakers' records, funeral notices, obituaries and memorial cards confirm over 210 burials, with a probable total of 230-250. Interestingly, some birth dates on the memorials appear to be incorrect, different from those recorded in old baptism registers in Germany.

As the original settlers had donated the land for the church, school and cemetery, each founding family — Franke, Graff, Groening, Gruenberg, Heyne, Kawerau, Knobloch, Maltzahn, Siebel, Timm, Waehner, Wanke, Winter, Wuchatsch, Ziebell and Zimmer — was allocated a burial plot. A pencil sketch plan, drawn on the inside of the small door in the back of the original altar, shows the location of 14 of the original 16 family plots. These numbered plots, in the northern half of the cemetery, run eastward from the Maltzahn graves in the north-west corner at Gardenia Road and German Lane to the Graff plot in the north-east corner. Separated by the pathway

Cemetery Tours

Presented by the Friends of Westgarthtown in support of the National Trust Heritage Festival and City of Whittlesea Cultural Heritage Program.

Date: Sunday 27 April 2014
Time: Guided tours depart 1.15 pm and 2.45 pm.
Cost: Free event
Location: Ziebell's Farmhouse
Westgarthtown Lutheran Reserve
German Lane Thomastown (Melway 8 H5)

Did you know?

The Westgarthtown Lutheran Church bell, which sat atop a wooden pole, was not only rung for church services, but also to announce other important community events. In the time before telephones and electronic media, births, deaths, fires etc. were announced by a pre-arranged number of rings e.g. three for the birth of a girl, four for a boy. The bell was also used to ring in the New Year.

which connects the east and west pedestrian gates, the remaining plots stretch back to the Wuchatsch graves, near the western wall. If a settler sold his farm, the burial plot passed to the new owner.

The graves within the family plots are randomly placed with all headstones facing east. Several are enclosed by iron fences which were common in the nineteenth century. Most graves have marble headstones, although some are of black granite and surprisingly, there is one small bluestone memorial and another of redgum. Many inscriptions are in German with some in both German and English. There are a number of unmarked graves. Some would once have been identified by long-lost wooden memorials, while others were probably never marked.

Burials have also taken place outside the original plots. As well as the first landholding families, other Germans or their descendants from Westgarthtown or nearby Epping and Wollert are also interred here. Some members of the Trinity German Lutheran Church at East Melbourne are buried at Westgarthtown, including Pastor Ewald Steiniger, his wife Annemarie and other family members. Trinity's German-born Pastor Steiniger, who served the Thomastown Lutheran Church from 1935-64, described the cemetery as 'An idyllic setting in the Australian landscape.' Although no longer surrounded by farmlands,

it remains idyllic, surviving peacefully within modern Australian suburbia.

The cemetery's memorials record the passing of those of all ages. Many people, such as Johann and Johanna Graff, Johann and Sophia Maltzahn, George and Dorothea Nebel, Johann Gottlob and Maria Schultz, Johann and Magdalena Wuchatsch, Christian and Sophia Ziebell and Johann and Johanna Zimmer lived long and productive lives before being laid to rest far from their birthplaces in Germany. Johann Gottlob Schultz had been born in 1788. While medical reasons are given for most of these deaths, some are just attributed to 'old age'.

A considerable number of burials were those of adults whose lives were tragically cut short by illness or accident. Pulmonary consumption or tuberculosis claimed sisters Martha Wuchatsch and Augusta Grützner within six months of each other in 1905/06. John Schuster was killed in 1871 when thrown from a horse on Ziebell's farm; Henry Grützner drowned on his family's farm in 1882; and Marie Ewert died in 1894 following a waggon accident at Northcote.

There were also many burials of infants or young children, victims of dysentery, diphtheria and typhoid, or misadventure such as drowning. Six Siebel infants died before they were six months old and three Graff and three Wuchatsch children before their sixth birthdays.

Maintenance in the cemetery is today undertaken by the City of Whittlesea, but prior to 1993 it was the responsibility of the church trustees, most notably Henry Ziebell, who died in 1988. Another trustee, Norman Young, dug many of the more recent graves, most of which required blasting and back-breaking work to remove solid rock. Many years before his death in 1990, Norman dug his own grave, then refilled it with dirt. Today's graves are now dug much more quickly and easily with backhoes.

In 2002 replacement timber gates were installed by the City of Whittlesea. Broken or vandalised memorials were also restored with funds provided by descendant families and a grant from the Federal Government. Further repairs were made after an old Monterey pine fell and damaged several memorials during a storm in 2005.

Some pines, planted during the 1870s, have recently been replaced by trees grown with seeds from the old ones. The Italian cypresses, which line the main entrance from German Lane, are also believed to date from the 1870s. As well as native lightwoods and sheoaks, a variety of indigenous and introduced species of flowering plants grow within the cemetery.

The Westgarthtown Cemetery, Lutheran Church and reserve, are all included on the Victorian Heritage Register.

Ziebell's Farmhouse Open Garden a great success

BY GILLIAN BORRACK

The 2013 open garden weekend proved even more popular with the gardening public than the inaugural event held in 2012.

The Open Gardens Australia (OGA) and City of Whittlesea Cultural Heritage weekend was held for the second time at Ziebell's Farmhouse on 16 and 17 November 2013. A segment which aired on ABC TV's Gardening Australia on 1 June 2013 (www.westgarthtown.org.au/news/#GardeningAustralia) publicised the garden to a much wider audience and Gardening Australia presenter Jane Edmanson also promoted our 2013 Ziebell's Farmhouse Open Garden on her Big Backyard radio program that weekend.

As well as our hand and mail delivered flyers The Age, local papers and Weekend Notes also promoted the event. Visitors travelled long distances to see the garden and the atmosphere across both days was one of sincere enjoyment, reflected in comments in the OGA Visitors Book. There were over 300 visitors, which OGA organisers say is at the high end of visitor numbers, apart from blockbusters like Cruden Farm (the late Dame Elizabeth Murdoch's garden). The OGA selectors who attended on both days were very happy with our presentation. Heavy rain during the preceding week caused some flooding in an area of the garden where we have an ongoing drainage problem and the roses were damaged. However, the weekend weather proved to be an improvement on the forecast and an overall impression of a beautiful healthy garden remained.

The plant stall was again a great success and visitors greatly appreciated the tea/coffee and German biscuits provided. We had many volunteers working over two long days setting up, welcoming visitors and collecting entry fees, handing out brochures, serving refreshments, selling seeds and plants and answering questions. We extend our heartfelt thanks to them all.

Parking for the event was much easier to manage in 2013, thanks to the City of Whittlesea installing permanent signage within the Westgarthtown Reserve indicating the direction of Ziebell's Farmhouse, Cemetery and Lutheran Church from the designated parking area. In addition, the City of Whittlesea provided street parking signs for German Lane, which can now be used for subsequent events where parking on the reserve is required. Temporary star picket fencing with ropes and flags were installed to mark out the parking zone and removed afterwards. The Friends of Westgarthtown thank the City of Whittlesea for all their support and encouragement in the management of the garden and presentation of the event.

Due to major site works planned for the garden this year, the decision was made not to put the Ziebell's Farmhouse garden forward for OGA selection for 2014/15, but aim for inclusion in 2015/16. We are planning a September 2015 opening as a variation on our November openings in 2012 and 2013. With this in mind we plan to plant many more traditional bulbs in April 2014. Meanwhile we continue to monitor plant growth and seeding annuals together with the usual weed growth removal and constant appraisal of the health of all the plants and trees.

Westgarthtown Descendants' Day

BY SYLVIA VAGG

The weather was extremely kind with a wonderfully warm day for our inaugural Westgarthtown Descendants' Day held on Sunday 2 March 2014.

It was 164 years ago, in March 1850, that our forebears began their historic adventure in a new country. The event commenced with a bring your own picnic lunch in the garden of Ziebell's Farmhouse and it was wonderful to see the various family groups gathered on the lawn to share lunch together in a very relaxed style. Typical of Sunday afternoon at the farmhouse, 87 year olds connected with two year olds — it brought back some very happy memories for many of us.

About 70 descendants of the Kreitling, Maltzahn, Nebel, Schultz, Siebel, Unmack and Ziebell families took the opportunity to reconnect with their heritage. Photographs and contact details were taken to commemorate the day by Angela Belot and Rebekah Vagg, assisted by Paul Schultz and Megan Belot.

A short welcome by Friends of Westgarthtown Vice-President John Fry was followed by a discussion about the merits of such a gathering of descendants. It was agreed a sub-committee be formed to arrange an annual Descendants' Day event to be held on the first Sunday in March (or the Sunday prior to the Victorian Labour Day weekend). Thank you to the following people who have agreed to organise the 2015 event — Carl Ziebell, Heather Purdy, David Adams, Margaret Dade, Megan Belot, Doretta Belot, Rebekah Vagg and Sylvia Vagg.

Communication with descendants for future events will be via the Friends of Westgarthtown newsletter and we thank them for their generous support and for auspicing this descendants' committee. We were also advised of many of their communication connection opportunities that descendants can utilise — information from the website and its membership base. Volunteers are always welcome to assist with gardening. Currently the Friends of Westgarthtown have regular garden working bees every second Tuesday. Tours of Ziebell's Farmhouse and the Westgarthtown cemetery are organised on weekdays for 10 or more people. The Friends are seeking volunteers for roles such as tour guides, help with serving morning tea, and book and merchandise sales.

Two new initiatives have been proposed specifically for Westgarthtown descendants. The first is an 'Adopt a grave' program to help with the upkeep of the cemetery and the second is a 'Research Your Family History' day to be offered at the Mill Park Library. The family history day would include a talk for beginners followed by a speaker with expertise with family history research in Germany.

The day concluded with typical Westgarthtown hospitality of streusel kuchen, sweet biscuits and tea or coffee provided, thanks to Doretta Belot and Gillian Borrack.

We look forward to a great 2015 event, so spread the word for 1 March 2015.

Above (from left): The Nebel family; John Fry and Sylvia Vagg address the crowd; the Unmack family (Photos: Angela Belot)

Melbourne Cemetery Stories Project

A Cemetery Stories Project is at present underway in relation to the Melbourne General Cemetery. Research will involve locating and recording personal information about the more than 1,600 people buried there with German and/or Wendish ancestry, in order to recreate their life stories and shed further light on the early history of Victoria.

Herbert Mees, General Editor of the 2004 book *A German Church in the Garden of God: Melbourne's Trinity Lutheran Church 1853-2003*, is project manager. Several families from Westgarthtown and surrounding areas, such as Krieger, Nebel and Ziebell, have relatives buried in the Melbourne General Cemetery. If you can assist with this historically valuable task, please contact Herbert Mees at herbertmees@gmail.com

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 Wendish/Sorbian and Germanic heritage and family history in Australia. From 1 May 2014 its meeting room and research centre will be relocated from Ivanhoe to the Doncaster/Box Hill area. It is open on the first Sunday each month from February-November between 1.30 - 5.30 pm. The Wendish Heritage Society Australia's postal address is PO Box 307, Heidelberg, Victoria 3084. For further details contact John Noack at johnnoack@yahoo.com.au or 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 joukofftatiana@gmail.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

Daniel Peters (1821-76)
Westgarthtown's One-Legged Horseman

BY ROBERT WUCHATSCH

In *Friends of Westgarthtown News* Vol. 13, No. 1 of April 2009, we included an article about John Julius Peters, who served in the Boer War. He was the grandson of Daniel and Louise Peters of Westgarthtown. Recent research reveals grandfather Daniel lost a leg in 1861 as a result of a dray accident. Sylvia Schultz recalls stories of a one-legged horse rider, now presumed to have been Daniel Peters, who lived at Westgarthtown until his death in 1876.

D aniel Peters, an original settler at Westgarthtown, was from Wustrow, Mecklenburg and arrived in Australia aboard the *Pribislaw* in February 1850. The following year he married shipmate Louise Ziebell at Scots Church, Melbourne and they had three children – Julius (c. 1852-1917), Louis (c. 1854-1918) and Henry (1856-57) – before Louise's early death on 14 March 1856, shortly after giving birth to Henry.

Daniel had been naturalized as a Victorian citizen on 31 January 1853. The Peters family lived in a small two-roomed stone cottage on two acres on Christian Ziebell's farm. Daniel and Louise almost certainly built the cottage and had lived there for several years before her death, but Daniel did not receive title to the property until October 1856. Daniel's occupation was then given as farmer, but by 1859, he had obtained a carrier's licence and drove a bullock team.

Melbourne Hospital case books record that on 15 December 1861, Daniel 'was coming down from the Jamieson River with a load of wool, when he slipped while coming downhill. The wheel of the dray passed over his knee.' The location of the accident is not given, but it must have been closer to Melbourne than the Jamieson River as he was admitted to hospital the following day, by which time there was 'No pulsation whatever either in the Anterior or Posterior…the leg being of an Icy Temperature.'

Despite the application of heat, the leg did not respond to treatment and gangrene soon set in, necessitating amputation. At 5.30 pm on 20 December, Daniel was given 'a good stiff glass of Brandy & water then administered Chloroform' and his left leg was amputated 'at the Upper Third of Thigh.' Daniel was then aged 40.

Peters' cottage (1972)

By 30 January 1862, Daniel was 'sufficiently well to be allowed to go into the garden', however, the previous five weeks had clearly been very difficult, with much pain, delirium and constipation. His right leg, presumably injured in the same accident, was also very painful. On 25 February, he was said to be 'improving fast though still very weak.' A few days later he began to experience 'great spasms in the stump', but continued to improve and by 7 April the stump was reported as 'nearly healed' and 'spasms not so bad.'

On 12 April, the doctor ordered that Daniel was to be 'taken into the garden whenever the weather permits' and by 20 April, his stump was said to be 'perfectly closed.' Although he continued to experience pain in his right knee, he eventually discharged himself on 24 June 1862. Just how he managed to look after his two children and survive on one leg at Westgarthtown for a further 14 years is unknown. Doubtless his Ziebell relatives and friends had cared for the children during his long absences bullock driving and also recovering in hospital, then again when he returned home after his discharge.

Daniel died of apoplexy at the Melbourne Hospital on 21 August 1876 aged 55 and was buried at Westgarthtown. His estate, which consisted of the cottage and two acres, was valued for probate at £30. The property, known as St Petersburg, passed to the eldest son Julius, who purchased his brother Louis' half-share for £15. St Petersburg later returned to Ziebell ownership, but the cottage was demolished in the mid 1970s, following the sale of the farm for subdivision.

Julius Groening (1828-71)
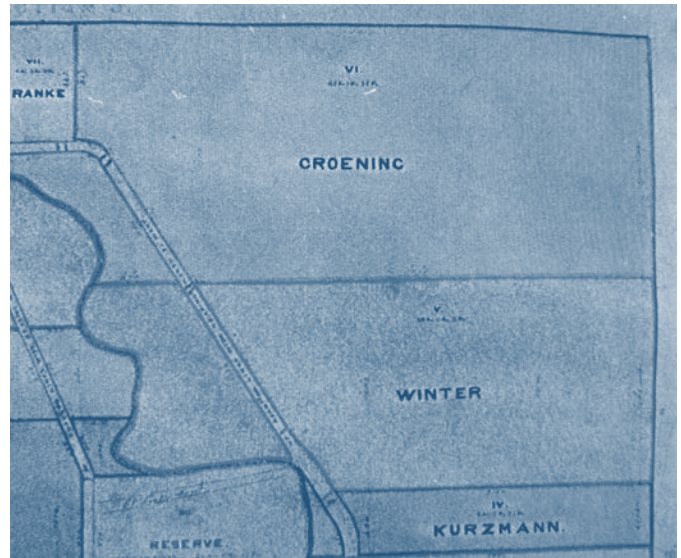## Another Forgotten Westgarthtown Pioneer

BY ROBERT WUCHATSCH

Julius Groening was an original Westgarthtown settler. In early 1850 the newly arrived Germans nominated Groening and Christian Ziebell to purchase 640 acres of land on their behalf for the new settlement. However, because this would cause delays, William Westgarth and John Stanley Carr purchased the land in trust for the Germans. In 1853, Groening sold his farm at Westgarthtown and soon settled at Bendigo, where he later opened a chemist shop. I am grateful to Joy Varty (née Groening) for information included below.

Christian Heinrich Julius Groening (sometimes spelt Gröning) was born at Bernburg in the Duchy of Anhalt-Bernburg on 2 August 1828, the son of Friedrich Wilhelm Gröning, Ducal Court and Government printer, publisher and bookseller and Friedericke Luise Gröning. Sponsors at Julius' baptism at St Marien Church, Bernburg Talstadt on 2 September 1828 included merchant Heinrich Kessler, the Ducal and City secretary Mossbach and a Lieutenant Heinemann, so he was clearly born and raised in comfortable circumstances and almost certainly received a good education. He arrived in Australia aboard the *Alfred* in February 1850, accompanied by Carl Groening and his wife, presumably relatives, but nothing more is known about them.

Julius was naturalized as a New South Wales citizen on 21 May 1850. John Stanley Carr, who also travelled to Australia aboard the *Alfred*, was one of several people to provide character references for Julius' naturalization application. Julius and Christian Ziebell were the first of Westgarthtown's Germans to seek naturalization, selected by their fellow settlers to take title to the land they had chosen along the Dry Creek, in the Parish of Keelbundora. However, to speed up the process, Westgarth and Carr purchased the land in trust for the Germans and then transferred lots to them when they had all been naturalized and raised sufficient funds to pay for their land.
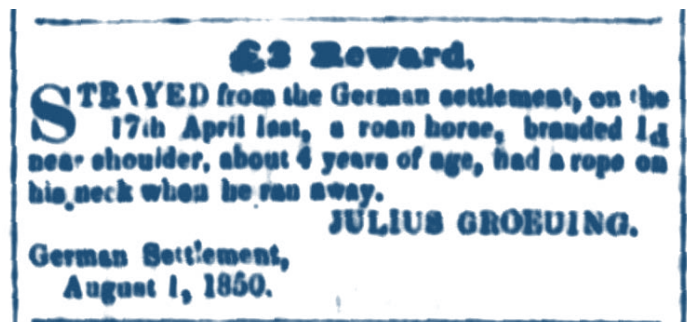
Julius bought 70 acres (Lots 11 & 12) on 30 April 1851 for £70. This land, located between today's Dickens Street and Kingsway Drive, extended westward from Epping Road to Edgars Creek. The Peter Lalor Secondary College now occupies part of Groening's former farm.

Extract of the Subdivision Plan Section 25, Keelbundora (c.1850)

Julius did not stay long at Westgarthtown, or Dry Creek as it was then known, selling his farm on 1 June 1853 to Christian Kurtzmann for £255. In 1854, he was living at Ballarat, but he appears to have spent most of the next ten years at Bendigo. On 31 May 1863, he married Marie Wilhelmine Junge at St James Church, Castlemaine. She was the daughter of Peter and Dorothea (née Meyer) Junge from Ottersdorf, Hanover. Julius' best man was Friedrich Adolph Schilling, a friend from Bernburg who emigrated with him on the *Alfred* and may also have lived with him at Westgarthtown.

By the time of his marriage, Julius was operating as a chemist and druggist in High Street, Bendigo, having

£2 Reward,

STRAYED from the German settlement, on the 17th April last, a roan horse, branded Id near shoulder, about 4 years of age, had a rope on his neck when he ran away.

JULIUS GROEUING.

German Settlement,
August 1, 1850.

Julius placed this advertisement in *The Argus* 3 August 1850

Julius Groening (1828-71)

from page 7

presumably undertaken or completed his training there. Julius and Wilhelmine had three children – Frederick Adolph (1864-1946 m. 1887 Laura Alma (née Rathnow) Schmidt), Julius August (1865-67) and Bertha Louise (1864-1925 m. Alfred Ernest Wallis) — before his death on 8 September 1871 aged 43. Unfortunately, Julius developed a drinking problem and during a bout of *delirium tremens* took a large dose of potassium cyanide and died. His estate was valued for probate at £419/12/4.

Wilhelmine, widowed with two young children, successfully continued the family business at Bendigo for many years. One of Victoria's first female chemists (No. 153 on the Pharmaceutical Register), she died aged 69 at Newport in Melbourne on 29 December 1900 and was buried with Julius in the Bendigo Cemetery. Her estate was valued at £797. Her son Frederick qualified as a chemist in 1885 (No. 800) and after working briefly at Ballarat opened a shop at Wilkins Street, Newport where he traded for over fifty years. Frederick's daughter Hilda Groening also became a chemist (No. 1790) and a son, Norman Albert Groening, served with the AIF's 14th Battalion during the First World War and was a Prisoner of War in Germany in 1917-18.

In December 1871, a labourer named Adolph Groning was employed on Christian Ziebell's farm at Westgarthtown, but it is not known if he was related to Julius Groening.

Julius Groening's store, High Street, Bendigo in the 1860s.

Westgarthtown is the oldest and most intact German/Wendish settlement in Victoria. Established in March 1850, it will celebrate its 165th Anniversary in 2015.

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.