

FRIENDS OF WESTGARTHTOWN

NEWSLETTER

Westgarthtown is an historic former 19th Century German/Wendish farming settlement at Thomastown, 16 kilometres north of Melbourne. Westgarthtown's unique heritage includes Australia's oldest operating Lutheran Church, a pioneer cemetery and several old bluestone farmhouses and outbuildings.

WESTGARTHTOWN - SOME HERITAGE HIGHLIGHTS

- Westgarthtown is the oldest and most intact German/Wendish settlement in Victoria. It was established in March 1850 and will celebrate its 150th Anniversary in the year 2000.
- The Thomastown Lutheran Church at Westgarthtown is the second oldest surviving Lutheran Church building in Australia and the oldest to be still used as the principle worship centre of a Lutheran congregation.
- The Victorian Government's Heritage Victoria has included the Lutheran Church, Cemetery and Reserve; and Graff's, Siebel's, Wuchatsch's and Ziebell's Farmhouses on its Heritage Register, recognising their outstanding heritage value and providing legislative protection for the future.
- Wuchatsch's Farmhouse is believed to be the oldest house in Melbourne to have been constructed and continually occupied by the same family.

ABOUT THE FRIENDS OF WESTGARTHTOWN INC.

The Friends of Westgarthtown was formed in 1995 to bring together those who care for Westgarthtown and its heritage. The aims of the Friends of Westgarthtown Inc. include the promotion of:

- Awareness of Westgarthtown's unique architectural, historical, cultural, landscape and environmental assets.
- Protection, restoration and enhancement of Westgarthtown's German/Wendish heritage sites of National and State significance at Thomastown/Lalor.

- Programs which will assist with the restoration and maintenance of the bluestone buildings, structures and landscape at Westgarthtown, particularly those in public ownership.

WHO ARE WESTGARTHTOWN'S FRIENDS?

The Friends of Westgarthtown Inc. consists of descendants of original German and Wendish settlers, local residents, German born Australians and other interested people with a wide variety of backgrounds, interests and skills.

Committee members:

President:	Rob Wuchatsch
Vice-President:	Geoff Borrack
Secretary:	Gillian Borrack
Treasurer:	Elizabeth Trenerry
Membership/Public	
Relations Officer:	Ellen Mitchell

Current Projects include:

- Restoration and development of Ziebell's Farmhouse (1851) and garden as a tourist attraction.
- Restoration and improvement of the 4 hectare Lutheran Church and Cemetery Reserve.
- Restoration and beautification of the Edgar's Creek and its parklands.
- Provision of further plaques and signs to tell Westgarthtown's story.
- Ongoing research into Westgarthtown's history.

FOR SALE - SIEBEL'S FARMHOUSE

Siebel's Farmhouse (1860), lovingly restored by Brigid Burnard, its owner for over 20 years, is up for sale. This property, nominated in February 1994 by Rob Wuchatsch, was recently included on Heritage Victoria's Historic Buildings Register, guaranteeing its future preservation. The history of this property, which stands at 77 Mt View Rd, Thomastown, is as follows.

Siebel's Farmhouse was erected in 1860 for Johann Gottlob Siebel, a German immigrant who first settled at Westgarthtown (now Thomastown) in 1850. Siebel arrived in Australia aboard the EMMY in December 1849 with his wife Christiane and two children. At least seven more children were born at Westgarthtown, although several died young. Born at Ober Zauche in the Glogau District near Liegnitz, Silesia in 1812, Siebel is known to have served as a Grenadier in Berlin from 1832 to 1835. Christiane was born at Rettkau in 1819.

Siebel established a dairy farm at Westgarthtown on 30 acres he purchased in 1851. The farm was later enlarged to 90 acres by the purchase of two adjoining properties. He was also active in the development of the Lutheran Church at both Westgarthtown and Melbourne. He served as a foundation trustee of the Westgarthtown church and school and as a foundation synod member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Victoria. Siebel died in 1877 aged 64 and his wife Christiane in 1898 aged 79.

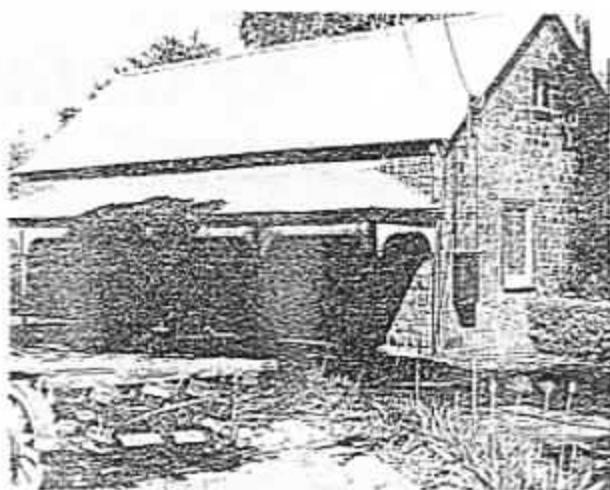
A son, John Siebel, continued his father's interest in the Westgarthtown Lutheran Church, also serving as a trustee. John was church organist at Westgarthtown for over 50 years.

Johann Gottlob Siebel's descendants continued dairying at Westbourne park, as the farm became known, until the property was sold in 1950. In 1934 a grandson, Albert Siebel, had established the Pura Dairy at Preston, to sell milk produced at Westbourne Park. From a one cart dairy, delivering only to a few streets, the Pura brand grew to become one of the best known in Australia.

Another grandson, Arthur Siebel, was a musician who played first violin in his own band, which performed at theatres, dance halls and parties. Arthur also taught music and worked for the Pura Dairy at different times.

Constructed of bluestone, with the initials JGS and date 1860 inscribed in stone over the front

door, Siebel's Farmhouse is of both National and State significance and an important reminder of the way of life of Westgarthtown's early German settlers. Of particular interest is its original bread oven and cellar, the only ones which remain at Thomastown.



Siebel's Farmhouse (1997).

MALTZAHN'S FARMHOUSE

Negotiations are currently under way between the City of Whittlesea and the Victorian Government's Office of Housing over the future of Maltzahn's Farmhouse at 127 Gardenia Road, Lalor. This property, sold in 1989 following the death of Henry Ziebell, a former long time Thomastown Lutheran Church trustee, was to have been renovated as a single storey unit as part of a nine unit public housing development.

Although the City of Whittlesea's 1993 permit conditions required Maltzahn's Farmhouse to be restored where possible to its original condition, the Office of Housing wishes to demolish the building, now reduced through neglect to a roofless-bluestone shell. Geoff Borrack, Friends of Westgarthtown Vice-President and an architect, recently met with City of Whittlesea Planning Services Manager Rob Baggio and recommended that both the front and rear sections of the building be retained and restored to the exterior appearance which existed during the 1950s. Such action would enable retention of the farmhouse's best known street appearance and preserve the property's perspective within the City of Whittlesea's Westgarthtown Heritage Precinct. A decision is expected shortly.

WESTGARTHTOWN OPEN DAY

On 17 November 1996, to mark the 140th Anniversary of the Thomastown Lutheran Church, The Friends of Westgarthtown Inc. held a very successful Open Day at Westgarthtown.

The Westgarthtown Open Day commenced at 11.15 am with an special anniversary church service conducted by Pastor Stephen Pietsch. The small bluestone church, dedicated on 17 November 1856 by Pastor Matthias Goethe, was filled to overflowing with congregation members and visitors, many of whom were descendants of original Westgarthtown settlers.

After lunch, about 150 visitors assembled at Ziebell's Farmhouse to hear Friends of Westgarthtown President Rob Wuchatsch formally welcome them to the Open Day. In his address, Rob stated that after many years of hard work by various people to research Westgarthtown's history and secure recognition and protection of its unique heritage assets, the time had now come to improve, present and promote Westgarthtown to the public at large. Rob also pointed out that Westgarthtown would celebrate its 150th Anniversary in the year 2000, with Ziebell's Farmhouse the logical reception point for visitors.

Don Gillies, Chairman of Commissioners, City of Whittlesea, then spoke of the Council's commitment to Ziebell's farmhouse and its intention to complete restoration as soon as possible. He noted that since purchasing the property from the Adams family (Ziebell descendants) in 1993, Council had undertaken substantial restoration of Ziebell's Farmhouse, and had allocated a further \$50000 in 1996/97 for completion. He confirmed the City of Whittlesea's desire to see the historic old 1851 farmhouse opened as a tourist heritage attraction.

Final plans are now being prepared and the restoration, including the old bluestone laundry and a new galvanised iron toilet block, is expected to be completed by June 1997. Volunteers are sought for such jobs as painting, cleaning, gardening etc.

Rob then introduced Dr Miles Lewis, Associate Dean of Research, Faculty of Architecture, University of Melbourne. Dr Lewis, who first visited Westgarthtown in 1984 on behalf of the National Trust (Victoria), spoke of the significance of German emigrant architecture. In his 1984 report for the National Trust, he wrote that Westgarthtown was "one of Victoria's most distinctive ethnic settlements, reflecting the historical circumstances of settlement, German vernacular -building traditions, and the geology and conditions of the area". He also remarked upon the "almost Cyclopiian rubble wall of

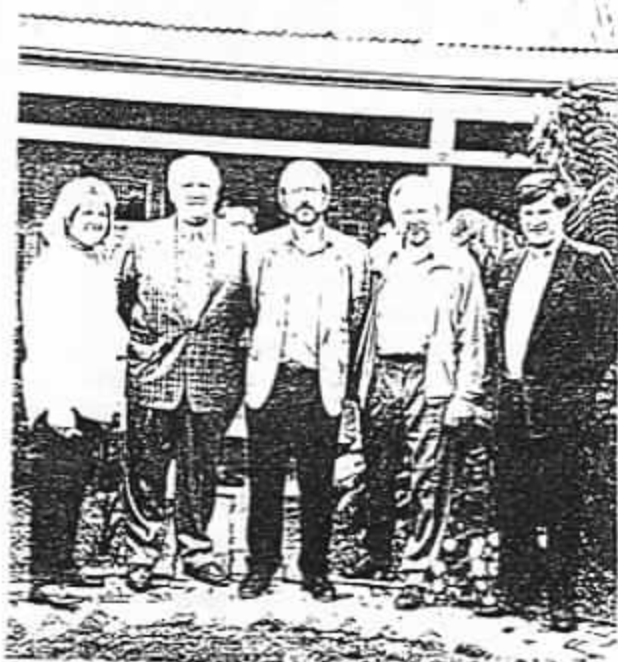
split grey and red-brown floaters on the west face of the Ziebell house".

Pastor Stephen Pietsch then spoke of the significance of the Lutheran Church to Westgarthtown's early German/Wendish settlers and their descendents. Services had been conducted in private houses until completion of the Lutheran school building in 1855. The church has been used continuously since 1856, with the exception of the First World War, when services temporarily ceased.

From 1853 to 1986, services at the Thomastown Lutheran Church were conducted by pastors from the Trinity Lutheran Church, East Melbourne. In 1986, responsibility was transferred to the Calvary Lutheran Church, Greensborough. Mrs Irma Hatty, Secretary of the Thomastown Lutheran Church, is the daughter of a former trustee Norman Young.

Rob Wuchatsch then concluded formalities by thanking all speakers and visitors, some of whom had travelled long distances to attend. He remarked upon the close co-operation between the Friends of Westgarthtown, the City of Whittlesea and the Thomastown Lutheran Church, which had made the Open Day such a success. He also noted the invaluable assistance provided by Ziebell's Farmhouse caretakers David and Virginia Bergman and Virginia's sister Kerry.

Tours of the Lutheran Church and cemetery then followed and the day concluded with afternoon tea at Ziebell's Farmhouse.



(L to R: City of Whittlesea Commissioners Anne Murphy and Don Gillies, Rob Wuchatsch, President Friends of Westgarthtown Inc, Dr Miles Lewis and Pastor Stephen Pietsch).

WESTGARTHTOWN HERITAGE WALK

In 1995 the City of Whittlesea established the Westgarthtown Heritage Walk. Plaques were installed outside all significant buildings and a 3 fold brochure produced which outlines Westgarthtown's history and describes its unique heritage features. For further information about the history of Westgarthtown, see Rob Wuchatsch's 1985 book *Westgarthtown, the German Settlement at Thomastown*, which can be found in local libraries.

FRIENDS OF WESTGARTHTOWN BROCHURE

A 3 fold brochure providing information about The Friends of Westgarthtown's aims and activities was produced during 1996 and distributed to interested parties. Copies of this brochure, along with the Westgarthtown Heritage Walk brochure, have been placed in such places as the Thomastown and Lalor Libraries, Whittlesea Court House Tourist Information Centre, Wendish Heritage Society Library etc. The brochure will be updated during mid 1997, on completion of the restoration of Ziebell's Farmhouse.

THOMASTOWN LUTHERAN CHURCH SERVICES

Services are held on alternate Sundays at 11.15 am at the Thomastown Lutheran Church, Rosedale Drive, Lalor. For further details contact Pastor Stephen Pietsch on 03 9435 6846 (Fax: 03 9432 9222).

GERMAN VISITORS AT WESTGARTHTOWN

On 12 January 1997, Rob Wuchatsch escorted two German visitors around Westgarthtown. Sigrid Lehmann and Egbert Fischer from Saxony contacted the Wendish Heritage Society Australia seeking information about Sigrid's relative Johann August Richter, who arrived in Australia in 1844. As Sigrid Lehmann lives only five kilometres from Pielitz, the village from which the Graff family emigrated, she was very interested to see Graff's Farmhouse. Our thanks to Bruce Edwards who kindly allowed us to inspect Graff's 1873 house that day. Graff's Farmhouse is also for sale and further details about the history of this property will be featured in our April newsletter.

MISCELLANEOUS NOTES

Plenty Valley Papers, Volume 1 - *The Cultural Landscape of the Plenty Valley (1995)* edited by Lucy Grace Ellem and published by Plenty Valley Arts Inc. Now available from Friends of Westgarthtown for \$20 plus \$4 postage. Includes papers by Friends of Westgarthtown members Rob Wuchatsch, Geoff and John Borrack and Lucy Ellem.

John Borrack Catalogue - *A Retrospective Exhibition (1956 - 1996)* edited by Elizabeth Trenerry and published by the City of Whittlesea.

Available from Friends of Westgarthtown for \$20 plus \$5 postage.

MEMBERSHIP OF FRIENDS OF WESTGARTHTOWN INC.

Should you wish to join or learn more about The Friends of Westgarthtown, please write to us at PO Box 95, THOMASTOWN VIC 3074. New members are always welcome. Membership is \$10 per year for single members and \$15 for families. Concession rates are \$5 single and \$10 family. Meetings are held at 2 pm on the third Sunday each month at Ziebell's Farmhouse, 100 Gardenia Road, Thomastown.