

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. Established in March 1850, it 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 still used as the principle 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 be constructed and continually occupied by the same family.

STOP PRESS - MALTZAHN'S FARMHOUSE IS CURRENTLY WRAPPED IN ORANGE PLASTIC WHILST COUNCIL NEGOTIATIONS WITH HOUSING MINISTRY REGARDING ITS FUTURE CONTINUE.

ZIEBELL'S FARMHOUSE RESTORATION

Two events were held at Ziebell's Farmhouse in December 1997 to mark the completion of Stage 2 Restorations there.

On the evening of 11 December, the City of Whittlesea and the Friends of

Westgarthtown combined to host the first function, commencing at 6 pm.

After refreshments, and music provided by a string quartet from Croydon's Luther College, Friends' member and Master of Ceremonies Warren Ellem introduced the Mayor Sam Alessi, who officially welcomed about 100 invited guests. Guests included the German Consul, local MP's, Whittlesea Councillors and staff, Ziebell descendants, heritage planners and historians.

The Mayor spoke of the City of Whittlesea's strong commitment to the preservation and promotion of Westgarthtown's unique heritage assets. He noted that since 1992 the Whittlesea Council had spent \$800,000 in buying and restoring Ziebell's Farmhouse and the southern half of the adjoining Lutheran Church Reserve. For 1997/98, \$40,000 had been allocated towards further restoration, fitting out and displays at Ziebell's Farmhouse; \$22,000 for restoration of drystone walls, with identical sums for the following two years; and \$20,000 towards the preparation of a masterplan for the conservation, landscaping, management of the Central Westgarthtown Heritage Precinct.

The Mayor then introduced Friends' President, Rob Wuchatsch, who spoke of the very successful partnership which had developed between the Friends of Westgarthtown and the City of Whittlesea. He noted the strong support by the Mayor and the many years of active interest by Crs Frank Merlino and John Fry. He also expressed the Friends' appreciation for the wonderful co-operation and enthusiasm shown by Council officers Bernie Cahir (Recreation) and Judy Turner (Arts).

In speaking of the completion of the Stage 2 restorations, Rob referred to the morale boost he and other Friends' members received from such events, when all the hard work finally came to fruition. He thanked the Friends' members who had contributed so much to the project, referring in particular to both Sylvia Schultz, whose foresight and tenacity were instrumental in stimulating and facilitating the City of Whittlesea's purchase of Ziebell's Farmhouse; and Geoff Borrack, whose architectural skills and personal dedication contributed so much to the success of the restorations.

On that note Rob introduced Geoff, who spoke of the significance the farmhouse held both for him and all the Ziebell family, particularly his surviving aunts who grew up in the old home. He referred to the restorations as *"the culmination of something I thought impossible - a dream I'd always had"*. Geoff, who spent many of his school holidays at the farmhouse, reflected *"It's not very often you get to work on the restoration of your great great grandfather's house and it certainly did bring back wonderful memories"*. Geoff first became interested in Westgarthtown's unique heritage architecture during his university studies in the late 1950s.

After the speeches, tours of Ziebell's farmhouse, including historical displays, were conducted. Guests were then conveyed across to the Lutheran Church by two horsedrawn vehicles, as in the old days, where Pastor Stephen Pietsch welcomed them and outlined the church's history. Eric Collyer, himself a resident of an 1850s German homestead (Friedensruhe at Doncaster), acted as organist. The Secretary of the Thomastown Lutheran Church, Mrs Irma Hatty kindly arranged the church's opening. Tours of the Cemetery followed, plus further refreshments.

On 14 December, the Friends held its 1997 Westgarthtown Heritage Precinct Open Day.

On a beautiful summer Sunday, over 150 visitors inspected Ziebell's Farmhouse, which looked magnificent. As well as the house, the excellent condition of the garden reflected all the work done over the previous six months by the Bergman's, the Whittlesea Council, Friends' members Ian Ziebell, the entire Schultz family, Gillian and Leon Borrack, who installed a

sprinkler system and Geoff, Luke and Marcel Borrack, who cleaned up the barn.

After welcoming everyone, Rob Wuchatsch introduced Geoff Borrack, who outlined the architectural works completed to date and further works planned, which include restoration of stone walls, fences and gates; reconstruction of the drying and storage shed; stonework around the well; underground and internal power cabling; installation of security system and lighting; internal furnishings etc.

Ellen Mitchell, the Friends' Public Relations Officer, then welcomed visitors in German and spoke of the progress so far with the establishment of tours to Westgarthtown. During 1997, Ellen conducted several groups over Westgarthtown, and is currently negotiating with Bernd Klewitz, German Adviser to the Victorian Education Department, to have Westgarthtown included as part of the VCE German Language Studies Program. Up to 50000 Victorian students are currently studying German and inclusion of Westgarthtown on the syllabus would result in significant numbers of student visitors, including publicity via its Internet site. *More information about Ellen's exciting project is included later in this newsletter.*

Credit for the success of the 1997 Open Day must go to Gillian Borrack, Ellen Mitchell, Sylvia Schultz and Elizabeth Trenerry, who worked tirelessly to arrange, cater for and clean up after it.

ZIEBELL FAMILY HISTORY

Janet Hubbard, a Ziebell family descendant, is currently researching the Ziebell family history, both in Germany prior to emigration, and after arrival in Australia. Those who attended the recent Westgarthtown Open Day will recall seeing her display in the old kitchen, where she discussed her research with other Ziebell descendants in attendance. Janet hopes to complete her research in time to hold a family reunion/book launch during the year 2000, the 150th Anniversary of the Ziebell family's arrival in Australia. If there are any Ziebell descendants who have not yet met Janet, she can be contacted on 059 64 4573 during working hours or at 2752 Broadford - Flowerdale Rd, Flowerdale, Vic. 3658.

Robert Wuchatsch also intends to publish a book on his family that year and

encourages all other Westgarthtown families to do the same.

PUBLICITY

Westgarthtown has recently received good publicity. *Channel 9 News* carried a report on the restorations on 11 December 1997, including interviews with the Mayor and Rob Wuchatsch; *Plenty Valley FM Radio* did a 10 minute interview with Rob Wuchatsch on the same day; the *Whittlesea Post* gave us coverage on pages 1 and page 9 on 17 December 1997; the *Sun-Herald* published an interview with Geoff Borrack and photo on page 3 on 2 January 1998; the *Whittlesea Post* of 21 January 1998 reported Gillian Borrack's Edgar's Creek Parks Victoria project and *Your Gazette* gave us extensive feature coverage in its 1998 Australia Day edition.

The City of Whittlesea also featured John Borrack's painting "*Morning Shadows - Ziebell's Farm*" on its 1997 Christmas card.

\$10,230 PARKS VICTORIA GRANT

In September 1997 Friends' Secretary Gillian Borrack prepared and lodged a joint application on behalf of the Friends of Westgarthtown and Plenty Valley Arts for Parks Victoria funding towards restoration and enhancement works along the Edgar's Creek and its open space environs south of the Rosedale Drive bridge. Gillian's well researched and prepared submission was successful and work will commence shortly on reinstating the drystone wall along the creek's western boundary with the Lutheran Church Reserve.

This project, which will utilise Reservoir Community Correctional Services labour, working under paid supervision, will also involve planting 1000 indigenous trees along both banks immediately south of the Rosedale Drive bridge. Melbourne Water will supply the trees and help prepare the site. The City of Whittlesea will provide toilet facilities etc.

Gillian, who is still recovering from a serious road accident at Mernda just after Christmas, received the good news in January. The well deserved success of her submission cheered her up considerably. She said "*the aim of the project was to develop and support the creation of parks, trails and recreation areas along Edgar's Creek*". It is hoped the successful

completion of this project will pave the way for the realisation of Gillian's vision for the whole of the Edgar's Creek, showing what can be done to this currently badly degraded stream.

In 1993, Robert Wuchatsch wrote the following poem which lamented the Edgar's Creek's disgraceful condition.

THE EDGAR'S CREEK

A string of water,
Just 15 kilometres in length.
But ancient in time.

Washed through volcanic plains,
Over 800,000 years.
This hairline crack of life.

Headwatered mid Wollert's stony rises,
South flowing, from a source
Flanked by the Darebin Range.

Flagged by muscled river reds,
Drooping sheoak, swamp and manna gums.
This pathway for eels.

Brushed by native grasses,
Home to kangaroo, quail and snake.
Owners of the stream.

Visited too, for 40,000 years,
By man, woman and child.
Kulin, windswept Woiworung.

Was it by this stream,
At Thomastown, on a yabby hole.
That Batman met the chiefs?

A treaty, soon dismissed,
Like its signatories.
The beginning and the end.

Soon, along its modest length,
Stone houses, barns and walls appeared.
Homes for Europeans.

English, Irish, Scottish, German.
Immigrants of hope, or gold's greed.
Farmed their dreams.

Drought, dairyfarms, stock and marketgardens,
Sometimes dried the creek.
But springs, and Autumn rains, always revived it.

Then floods, poured off open plains,
Surged down to Coburg.
To join the Merri Creek.

At Reservoir, the Edwardes Lake,
Rare, local man-made jewel.
Modern tribal meeting place.

But one bred upon its banks, at Lalor,
Who as a child, swam once clear pools.
Now grieves for a sick friend.

Why did we turn our backs,
On this life giving source?
Now reduced to concrete urban drain.

Rob Wuchatsch 1993

**WESTGARTHTOWN AS A LEARNING
ENVIRONMENT FOR GERMAN
LANGUAGE STUDENTS**

Towards the end of 1997, Ellen Mitchell invited Felicity Renownden and 25 of her senior students studying German at Camberwell High School, along with Dr. Bernd Klewitz, German Adviser to the Victorian Department of Education, to visit Westgarthtown. For all visitors, it was their first introduction to this unique historical landmark, and their exclamations of astonishment at discovering such well preserved remainders of a German settlement so close to the city continued throughout the tour.

For Dr Klewitz in particular, inspection of the Siebel Farmhouse, Lutheran Church and Cemetery, and Ziebell's Farmhouse prompted him to immediately consider the incorporation of Westgarthtown and its distinctly German character into an exciting new program for German language students.

Over the last two years, programs for language teaching have been developed which place the student into a culturally "loaded" environment. Such interaction results in an enriched and engaging learning experience outside the classroom and makes language acquisition more relevant and enjoyable. For instance, a German language program entitled "Deutsche Kunst entdecken" (The discovery of German art), takes students on a discovery tour of German paintings, porcelain (Meissen), wood sculpture and photography at the National Gallery of Victoria. In a splendidly designed folder, each artist's work is reproduced in colour and English/German texts provide biographical, historical and stylistic details. A series of worksheets geared towards different levels of advancement accompany the illustrations.

The establishment of a program entitled **WESTGARTHTOWN: THE GERMAN PIONEER SETTLEMENT AT THOMASTOWN**, is envisaged, to provide a stimulating learning environment for the 50000 Victorian students currently learning German. Themes to be included in the program are many - Farmhouse and Church architecture; German and Wendish families; Lutheran Religion and Education; old documents and photographs etc. Given the enthusiastic participation of Bernd Klewitz, combined with his effective network of teachers

(Association of German Teachers of Victoria), the Goethe Institute, German Consulate, City of Whittlesea and the Friends of Westgarthtown, the prospects for this very worthwhile project seem extremely favourable.

Ellen Mitchell is also currently translating the Westgarthtown Heritage Walk brochure into German.

HOEHNE BOOK

Rob Wuchatsch's book about Carl Traugott Hoehne, which he is preparing in conjunction with Dr Thomas Darragh, is expected to be launched in November 1998. The book will include an English translation by Dr Thomas Darragh of Hoehne's 1853 German book about his emigration experiences. Hoehne, a Wend, emigrated from the Bautzen area of Saxony with several other Westgarthtown Wends (Graff, Rosel, Wuchatsch, Zimmer) and travelled aboard the Pribislaw with them from Hamburg to Australia. Many of Westgarthtown's other original settlers (Franke, Graff, Karsten, Maltzahn, Peters, Winter, Ziebell) also arrived aboard the same ship.

Hoehne's book provides a great deal of information about the journey to Australia, which Rob and Dr Darragh have combined with other material to tell the full story of the Pribislaw's journey to Australia. Hoehne soon regretted his decision to emigrate and disliked Australia so much he only stayed two years and returned to Germany in 1852.

**RE-NAMING OF PART OF ROSEDALE
DRIVE**

The Friends of Westgarthtown has suggested to the City of Whittlesea it should consider renaming that part of Rosedale Drive which extends through the Lutheran Church and Cemetery Reserve (between Mt View and Gardenia Roads). We believe this section should be renamed Westgarthtown Lane, which would more accurately reflect its historic origins and ensure Westgarthtown has an entry in street directories eg. Melway, which would make it easier to find.

It is hoped that such a change, should the City of Whittlesea agree, could be made in November 1998. Consideration has also been given to whether the annual Westgarthtown Open Day should be extended to a larger German/Wendish festival day or even weekend, possibly

including a Westgarthtown Lane re-naming ceremony, Hoehne book launch etc.

GRAFF FAMILY - A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

Johann Graff (1802 - 1888), a Wend from Preske, six kilometres west of Bautzen, Saxony arrived in Australia in 1850 aboard the Pribislaw with his wife Hanna (nee Hobrack) and five children.

In March 1850, Johann settled on 50 acres at Westgarthtown, which he subsequently purchased for 50 pounds on 2 May 1851. His land and improvements were financed with a loan, from Charles Payne of the Saltwater River, repaid in full on 2 June 1853. Johann had been naturalised on 20 March 1851.

As early as 27 October 1850, Johann had written a long letter back to Germany. In it he wrote

“I am very satisfied with my present situation and hope that with time it will become still better in many kinds of ways. I have now purchased five cows and two bullocks and also have already planted some acres with wheat, peas, lentils and potatoes. Although I have borrowed somewhat for the purchase of several things, which I needed urgently, I do know that I will be able to meet the debts in half the time I would be able in Germany. I also no longer wish to be there, but now feel sorry for all those who felt sorry for me before my departure ...”.

Johann was to become a foundation member of the Westgarthtown Lutheran Church and School Committees and also the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Victoria, established in 1856 by Pastor Goethe. He remained at Westgarthtown until his death there on 9 June 1888, aged 86. Hanna had predeceased him on 19 August 1887, aged 83. Both are buried in the Westgarthtown Lutheran Cemetery.

Unfortunately, Johann and Hanna's eldest son Carl was killed whilst mining on the Loddon River goldfields on 11 December 1852. He was unmarried. John, the remaining son, married and stayed on the family farm until 1889, when he moved to nearby Doreen, leaving his eldest son Charles in charge at Westgarthtown.

Johann and Hanna's three daughters - Magdalene, Maria and Johanna - all married fellow Wend immigrants - Johann Lehmann, Michael Zimmer and Johann Wuchatsch Jun. respectively - and lived in

Cemetery Lane (now Ahern's Road) at Epping. Zimmer and Wuchatsch were also fellow Pribislaw passengers.

Graff's farmhouse and barn at Westgarthtown, constructed of bluestone (basalt) during the 1870s, still survive and are protected by inclusion on the Victorian Government's Heritage Register.

In June 1890, when checked by the Shire of Darebin's Health Officer, Dr Wilkinson, following the death of 15 month old Anna Louise Graff from diphtheria, Graff's Farmhouse was described (Evelyn Observer) as

“made of bluestone built on black soil on the bank of the “Blind Creek” (Now known as Edgar's Creek - Editor); the floor is low, level with the soil in front; a broken spout leads roof water down to the north-east corner of the house, which is the highest ground; that ... the soil under the house must be damp therefrom. At the time of the case the underground tank had been cleaned out, and seemed well cemented. The stable is on high ground, the house close to it”.

In April 1888, during the “Marvellous Melbourne” landboom, John Graff sold 32 acres of his land to John Mackenzie and Gerald Ballard, property developers, for 7309 pounds. By March 1890, with the boom ended, the two developers forfeited their substantial deposit and Graff's land reverted back to him.

During the 1890s Charles Graff upset many of his neighbours by the continued use of nightsoil on his land. Although attempting to improve the productivity of his depleted soils, as well as earn money from the nightsoil contractors, the adverse environmental effects were substantial. In February 1891, the Health Inspector, Constable Elliott visited Graff's farm and made the following report (Evelyn Observer)

“Running through the land was a creek, and in which was a hole with water of a greenish color. The Inspector inquired the cause and was informed that the nightmen washed their carts in it. Lower down the creek was a stone wall, and close to the wall were discovered 11 pits of nightsoil, and which Graff states were there for 15 months. Two pits measuring 18 feet by 12 feet, the other nine measured 20 yards long by 6 yards. The ground slopes towards the creek, and when rain falls the drainage will soak into the creek, to the injury of many whose cattle

use the water. When the crust on top of the pits was touched a most sickening smell broke from it.

This situation continued for several years, until the Shire of Epping banned the use of nightsoil. In March 1896, Cr J. S. Morgan commented (Evelyn Observer)

“the smell coming from Graff’s establishment on the Thursday evening was unbearable ... Graff should be compelled to use disinfectants on the manure so that no nuisance would be caused to his neighbours ...

Ironically, although the severe pollution caused along the Edgars Creek by the use of nightsoil during the 1890s was ultimately solved by prohibition of its use, a similar problem arose during the 1960s and 1970s with seepage from septic tanks. This problem was not solved until sewerage was connected to all Thomastown and Lalor’s new housing estates, but just as the creek should have enjoyed a another renaissance and permanent lease of life, it was destroyed by the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works’ decision to turn it into a concrete drain.

Notwithstanding the present appalling condition of the creek, anyone visiting Graff’s Farmhouse today - owned since March 1997 by Sibilla Laguda and Anthony Soldini - would see a very well restored and maintained property. Sibilla and Anthony are very interested in the history of the property and were welcome guests at our 1997 Open Day last December.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Friends’ 1st AGM was held on 19 October 1997. All previous office bearers were re-elected, as follows.

President: Rob Wuchatsch
Vice-President: Geoff Borrack
Secretary: Gillian Borrack
Treasurer: Eliz. Trenerry
Public Relations
Officer: Ellen Mitchell

IMMIGRATION MUSEUM TRIBUTE GARDEN

Would you like to have your family name(s) included on the Tribute Wall at the new Immigration Museum. To be located in Melbourne’s Old Customs House, the

Immigration Museum will open in October 1998. If your immigrant ancestors first arrived in Australia via Victoria, you qualify to have them included on the Tribute Wall. Entries will cost \$100 for one surname or \$200 for two. It would be great to have as many eligible Westgarthtown families included on the wall as possible.

THOMASTOWN LUTHERAN CHURCH SERVICES

Services are held 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).

At 6. 00 am on Sunday 12 April 1998, the Thomastown Lutheran Church will hold a Dawn Easter Worship Service, at the Lutheran Cemetery, Cnr Rosedale and Gardenia Roads, Lalor. All welcome.

WESTGARTHSTOWN MEMBERSHIP OF FRIENDS OF INC.

Should you wish to join The Friends of Westgarthtown, please write to PO Box 95, THOMASTOWN VIC 3074. NEW members always welcome. Fees \$10 per annum for single members; \$15 for families. Concession rates \$5 single; \$10 family. Meetings held 2 pm on third Sunday February - November at Ziebell’s Farmhouse, 100 Gardenia Road, Thomastown.