

# 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 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.

PLENTY VALLEY ARTS INC'S  
5<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL CONFERENCE "BARON  
VON MUELLER'S GERMAN  
MELBOURNE" WILL BE HELD AT  
STATE LIBRARY OF VICTORIA ON  
SATURDAY 17<sup>th</sup> APRIL 1999.

Plenty Valley Arts Inc, in association with the Friends of Westgarthtown, has organised the forthcoming landmark conference "BARON VON MUELLER'S GERMAN MELBOURNE", to celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of German migration to Victoria.

The conference will be held at the State Library of Victoria, Village Roadshow Theatre, on Saturday 17 April 1999, commencing at 1.15 pm. Fran Awcock, Chief Executive Officer of the State Library of Victoria and the German Consul-General, Hans-Michael Schwandt will co-open the conference, which will be held in conjunction with a display curated by Walter Struve, in Queen's Hall, of the library's rare manuscripts, books and visual material.

Topics to be covered relate to individual accomplishments in a variety of fields including farming, botany, geology, Lutheran religion, consulship and the visual arts in the nineteenth century. Heading the list of remarkable nineteenth century Melbourne Germans is Baron

EDITOR: ROB WUCHATSCH

Ferdinand Von Mueller followed by Georg Neumayer, the painter Carl Kahler and the sculptor Emile Todt. Other speakers will cover the Lutheran Church, German Clubs and the experiences of early German settlers.

Speakers include Professor Rod Home and Sara Maroske from the University of Melbourne; Dr Thomas Darragh, Museum of Victoria; Dr Raoul Middelman, a representative of the Trinity German Lutheran Church, East Melbourne; Terence Lane, National Gallery of Victoria; and Friends of Westgarthtown committee members Rob Wuchatsch and Ellen Mitchell. Ellen, also a member of Plenty Valley Arts, is the conference co-convenor, with Plenty Valley Arts President Elizabeth Trenerry.

Admission fee is \$25, concession \$15. For enquiries, bookings etc contact Ellen Mitchell (9836 2917) or Elizabeth Trenerry (9715 1582) by phone/fax or Anne Pratt (9404 1505). Entry to the conference is via Entrance 3, La Trobe Street, opp. RMIT.

German wine and food will be available (wine courtesy Henkell Bros) along with delicious sandwiches. Tom Darragh and Rob Wuchatsch will also be available to sign copies of their new book.

#### **SUCCESSFUL GERMAN HERITAGE FEST HELD AT WESTGARTH TOWN**

An inaugural German Heritage Fest was held at Westgarthtown on 29 November 1998, with several thousand people attending over the course of the day. The following is an extract from the Jan/Feb 1999 edition of the arts and culture magazine ArtStreams.

*"There were Germans from every corner of the country there. They drank German beer, ate wurst and sauerkraut, sang traditional*

*German songs and danced traditional German dances. They were celebrating their successful integration into the Australian community but they were also remembering the hard times. As one old lady told me "In 1914 they didn't want to know us". This was despite the fact that the community, mostly Australian-born by then, had contributed generously to the war effort to the point of losing sons.*

*Among the residents of Thomastown who attended the festival were many who were surprised to discover the importance and longevity of that area's contribution to Victoria's development"*

#### **LAMPLIGHT AND BLUESTONES**

JOHN BORRACK'S wonderful new book *Lamplight and Bluestones*, about the Ziebell family and his recollections of growing up at *The Pines*, the former Ziebell Farm at Thomastown, was launched at the German Heritage Fest. It can be obtained from the Friends of Westgarthtown for \$20, plus \$3.50 postage.

The following is an extract of a review of John's book by Warren and Lucy Ellem, based on Lucy's launch speech.

*"The importance of memory in shaping our sense of identity, in forming our sense of place and in creating our sense of nation is underscored by John Borrack's beautiful, intelligent and sensitive record of his childhood days at Ziebell's. In this account of his childhood visits to his grandparents at Ziebell's Farmhouse in the 1930s through to the 1950s, Borrack combines photographs, drawings, poetry and prose which together give us a feel for the texture of life at that time which would otherwise remain largely inaccessible to us.*

*Evidence of a deep culture, the often poetic prose brings to life the people*

of Westgarthtown, their traditional German/Australian culture and their relationship to the land. John Borrack's personal recollection recreates the thoughts and imaginings of the people who lived in this community. The farmhouse and surrounding buildings, including the church, lovingly recorded in the drawings which accompany the text, exemplify the hard work and persistence of the early settlers who wrested a living from their stony plain. The siting of the church and cemetery in the centre with the community built around them reflected the centrality of religion in the early settlers' lives. This linking of church and cemetery symbolised the immediacy of life and death, a commentary both on the harshness of pioneer life and the importance of religion as a spiritual and social focus of the small community.

Ziebell's farmhouse is a physical embodiment of the past, revealing something of the way of life through its living spaces and domestic arrangements. Yet it is only through memory, recollections and anecdote relating to environment, that we can relive these ways of looking at the world and recreate past experiences and emotions. Borrack's account fleshes out the skeletons of surviving buildings and landscapes and brings to life this dead past. *Lamplight and Bluestones* wonderfully evokes a less technologically sophisticated but in many ways, far richer era. It brings to life the simplicity, self sufficiency and ingenuity of the German settlers, whether in orchard and garden, kitchen or forge. Ziebell's had no electricity or town water, its agriculture in part reflected modern farming methods, as trucks and tractors were gradually introduced, but it also preserved traditional, horse drawn implements. A blend of modern and primitive, it was farming on the edge of the modern, but still using centuries' old technology. Life and livelihood focussed on the annual rotation of

seasonal tasks; on foretelling the weather; on the ... timeless cycle of agriculture ... Domestic and social life centred on traditional German hospitality, on cakes, jams and preserves, on listening to valve radio (no TV), on musical evenings around the piano, and on a darker social issue, the vulnerability of Australians of German descent in the War years.

But above all, this is a personal biography. Borrack recounts the pranks of childhood, not all of them, as he notes, politically correct - smoking pine needles, climbing trees to jump onto haystacks, riding the poddy calves, teasing female cousins.

This is a very human book, in every sense of the word - intelligent, humorous, poetic, passionate; the book of a man deeply committed to life and to art, to people and places. As a fascinating account of the early formation of the artist and as a lasting tribute to the pioneering traditions of Westgarthtown. *Lamplight and Bluestones* will interest and delight a wide range of readers."

#### NEW WESTGARTH TOWN BOOKLET AND POSTCARDS LAUNCHED

A new glossy promotional Westgarthtown booklet was launched at the recent German Heritage Fest. This very attractive 36 page booklet, jointly funded by the City of Whittlesea and Heritage Victoria and distributed by the Friends of Westgarthtown, provides information about both Westgarthtown's history and its unique legacy of heritage architecture. The history was written by Rob Wuchatsch and the architectural section by David Harris of Heritage Victoria. Lavishly illustrated, including many colour photographs, the booklet also includes a tourist map of Westgarthtown. Copies can be obtained from the Friends of

Westgarthtown for \$5 plus \$2 postage.

Eight colour postcards based on photographs included in the new Westgarthtown booklet have also been produced. These cover subjects such as Ziebell's, Siebel's Graff's and Wuchatsch's Farmhouses etc. These can be obtained from The Friends of Westgarthtown for \$1 each or \$6 for the full set.

#### MARIA KARSTEN'S CULINARY CALENDER

The 1999 Maria Karsten Culinary Calender (as described in our September 1998 Newsletter) was also launched during the German Heritage Fest and proved very successful. This calender contains 14 historic German recipes selected from Maria Karsten's handwritten c. 1848 cookbook.

Remaining copies can be obtained from the Friends of Westgarthtown for \$8 plus \$2 postage.

#### BOOK LAUNCH "FROM HAMBURG TO HOBSONS BAY - GERMAN EMIGRATION TO PORT PHILLIP (AUSTRALIA FELIX) 1848-51" TO BE HELD IN APRIL 1999

Rob Wuchatsch and Tom Darragh's book regarding the origins of early German and Wendish immigration to Victoria, including a translation of Carl Hoehne's 1853 book, will be launched by the Hon. Tim Fischer MP, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, on 15 April 1999 at the Immigration Museum in Melbourne.

The book's publication has been timed to coincide with the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of German Immigration to Victoria. Part 1 relates the history of German emigration to Port Phillip; Part 11 covers the early reactions and experiences of ten Port Phillip Germans and Wends, including Johann Graff. Part 111

contains brief biographies of emigrants mentioned in Hoehne's book, including Johann Graff, Johann Rosel, Johann Wuchatsch and Johann Zimmer. Also included in the Appendices are the names of over 650 passengers known to have arrived in Melbourne from Germany prior to Separation in 1851.

The book, of 350 pages, will be available after publication for \$45, plus \$6 postage (Vic) and \$8.50 NSW/ACT/SA; \$9.50 QLD; \$10 TAS; \$11.50 WA. Enquiries should be directed to Rob Wuchatsch at PO Box 189, World Trade Centre, Victoria 3005 or the Friends of Westgarthtown.

#### CONSTRUCTION OF STORAGE AND DRYING SHED AT ZIEBELL'S FARMHOUSE

Geoff Borrack reports that the reconstruction of the storage/drying shed at Ziebell's Farmhouse is now complete. The former shed, which originally occupied the same space, was demolished in 1970.

Geoff reports:

*"the old storage and drying shed had been a vital part of the original fabric of the farmhouse buildings, affording a sheltered space for storage of equipment such as harness and hand implements and grain to feed the domestic fowls and ducks. In general terms, the shed provided the only roofed space linked to the house where a variety of different tasks could be performed.*

*An area had been sectioned off for the storage of garden produce such as potatoes and onions, the latter being spread on racks or hung for drying. Garden bulbs and seed were also housed in the shed. Other activities such as cheese making and the stitching of haystack covers were sometimes undertaken. Small timber wall benches occupied the south and west sides where tin dishes were*

*filled with water from the well and used for hand and face washing by the residents and workers before their meals.*

*The original format of the storage/drying shed attachment to the smokeroom and washhouse has been maintained in terms of its plan, construction and use of materials, but the eastern wall has been left partially open to enable access to the public toilet facilities. The original timber door on the north side, with its admirable patina of age has been re-hung. The floor area has been re-paved in pressed red bricks as before and the storage areas overlaid with stone gravel. Stone from the original drystone walls has been repositioned along the eastern and northern walls, to form openings at the top for through ventilation".*

**RESTORATION AND  
RECONSTRUCTION OF STONE  
WALLS AT WESTGARTHTOWN  
AND REVEGETATION OF  
EDGARS CREEK**

This project, now complete, has been particularly successful. In her report to Parks Victoria, Friends of Westgarthtown Treasurer Gillian Borrack, who conceived, applied for and managed the project, wrote that:

*"This grant facilitated the ongoing involvement and commitment of a range of community groups and members of the local community in the protection and enhancement of the open space network, both local and metropolitan. We are particularly pleased by the City of Whittlesea and Melbourne Water's commitment to further extend and develop the Open Plan Network with revegetation, trails, recreation etc on the Edgars Creek frontages south to Main Street, Thomastown.*

*Labour for the project was provided by Reservoir Community Correctional Services and their*

*clients turned up for work with great dedication despite freezing conditions in winter and arduous heavy work. Their Supervisor reports that the clients do not want to shift to other work sites ... we have been fortunate that the City of Whittlesea has given Friends of Westgarthtown and Plenty Valley Arts a further grant to allow Reservoir Community Correctional Services to allocate further clients to the Ziebell Heritage Precinct as well as other sites and activities within the City of Whittlesea."*

**CITY OF WHITTLESEA GERMAN  
SETTLEMENT OF THOMASTOWN  
ADVISORY COMMITTEE .**

The German Settlement of Thomastown Advisory Committee, which consists of City of Whittlesea councillors John Fry (Mayor) and Frank Merlino; all members of the Friends of Westgarthtown committee; Irma Hatty and Gordon Menzel representing the Thomastown Lutheran Church the Lutheran Church of Australia; and City of Whittlesea staff, continues to hold regular meetings to oversee restorations and improvements at Westgarthtown.

**WESTGARTHTOWN MASTERPLAN  
COMPLETION DATE EXTENDED  
TO MAY 1999**

As advised in our September 1998 Newsletter, the City of Whittlesea has appointed Helen Lardner Conservation and Design (HLCD) to prepare a long awaited Masterplan for Westgarthtown.

Although it was originally expected that the Masterplan would be completed by Christmas 1998, the contract has been extended to May 1999 to enable adequate consideration of all issues, in particular questions such as parking for the growing numbers of visitors to Westgarthtown.

**RESTITUTION OF THE FORMER  
NAME OF GERMAN LANE TO PART  
OF ROSEDALE DRIVE**

As reported in previous newsletters, the Friends of Westgarthtown suggested to the City of Whittlesea in early 1998 that it re-name that part of Rosedale Drive which extends through the Lutheran Church and Cemetery Reserve (between Mt View and Gardenia Roads). This recommendation was duly considered by the German Settlement of Thomastown Advisory Committee, the name German Lane agreed upon and new signs erected during November 1998.

**GERMAN ORAL HISTORY  
PROJECT**

As reported in our September 1998 Newsletter, the Friends of Westgarthtown joined with the City of Whittlesea; Mill Park Secondary College; and Berndt Klewitz of Education Victoria to successfully conduct the German Oral History Project during early 1998.

The aim of this project was to equip a core group of students with the necessary skills to successfully interview ten former and current residents of German heritage, thus learning more about the history of the Westgarthtown area and its people. The interviewees were aged from about 45 to 85.

A selection of extracts from the transcripts of the first four of the ten interviews were included in our September 1998 Newsletter. Three more extracts are included below and the final three will be included in the September 1999 edition.

*Ilse Fiedler (German born Lalor resident)*

*Where born? " ... 1920 ... in Kobitz in Saxony ... I went to school in Kobitz, in Neuendorf I went to school and then in Langhennersdorf ... A very*

*happy childhood ... Kobitz, as I said, on the river Elbe and yes, it was pretty hilly there. It was elevated ... that region is called "Saxonian Switzerland" ... Husband? " ... Where did we meet? ... somewhere on the train station ... in Lubeck ... "Migration? " ... we wanted to build over there, but when we heard about Australia we emigrated ... left the ship, onto the train, to Bonegilla, that's a refugee camp and from there on, they then asked us if we wanted to earn some money, that was picking hops. And that's where we went and we earned pretty well. But the fingers! And they were former Germans, the ones who were there. I mean, it was wonderful ... "Lalor? " ... first we lived with some people ... in a bungalow, and those people lived in the bungalow, too, and then we were asked "Listen, would you like to buy our land?" And that's what we did. We had a bungalow in the back and from there we built the rest of the house, but not till we had enough money ... I have three children ... The daily life in Westgarthtown? ... We go to the church. I mean not everybody goes to church, do they? But we belong to the Lutheran Church, and we lived with Mrs Lydia, she originally came from Russia, but she is German. And she took us with her. Although to be frank, we didn't used to be churchgoers, but the woman introduced us and it's actually a good thing ... Have you seen the little church there?"*

*Stephen Wailes (Graff descendant)*

*" ... All my family have been in Whittlesea for, and this area, since 1850, so I grew up in Whittlesea, which was very country in those days and spent all my early life there. A very rural place, country ... I got to secondary school and I met Robert Wuchatsch, who I found came from this Germantown place I had never heard of and it turned out many, many years later we were actually related, but we never knew ... I think my grandmother had mentioned her father had been German, but it*

really didn't mean anything to me at all ... I know my German background covers two families, the Graff's and the Lehmann's ... They were very hard working people. Most of them ended up running farms ... They intermarried with German families ... The Graff family's eldest son went gold prospecting and was asleep in his tent and a branch of a tree fell on him from his camp fire and killed him ... The Graffs had, they came with five kids, four survived and Magdalena Graff, who was my grandmother's grandmother had about twelve children I think, most of them survived. She married another German immigrant, a Lehmann ... I had a mixed background. Mainly English, but I have a German component ... When I did all my genealogical work on the family, I found Jewish, Spanish and French and Irish ... Quite a mixture ... I think it's great to be an Australian of mixed origin ..."

Robert Wuchatsch (Westgarthtown resident, descendant and President Friends of Westgarthtown)

What does it mean to be an Australian of German heritage?

Well, it's important. I mean, I'm probably no different .. my mother is half English and half Irish, so that's also important to me. I think it should be important to anybody, whatever your ancestry is, where you come from ... cause that explains, sort of, what you are and who you are now. So I see it in those terms, so I don't think it's ... more important to me ... I'm ... half-Wendish ... and half-Irish, half-English, and if you want to split it up, I'm ... half Upper Lusatian Wendish, then half Lower Lusatian Wendish, which is an unusual combination, but yes ... it's a German ancestry, which is different to a British ancestry, but it's always interesting that people often ask "Why did your ancestors come to Australia to someone who's German, because they wouldn't think to ask that of someone who is a Scottish descendant or an Irish

descendant ... as though you needed some special reason or something special ... then it may have been something special, because you were coming to a country that had a totally different culture and different language and different food, and a whole lot of different things, religion. So maybe it did require a little bit more thought about it. But on the other hand, people still do it now, I mean, ... from Macedonia or ... Serbia or Turkey or Lebanon ... which is very different to anything you've ever known before. So ... because people kept being curious about it, nothing much had been written about it, that I decided that I, because I wanted to find out more about my ancestry, I did more than just find out for myself, I ... tried to find out more to explain it for other people ...".

#### VISITS TO WESTGARTH TOWN

Ellen Mitchell reports that "Towards the end of 1998, the Ziebell Farmhouse and historic environs were the welcome destination of a veritable flood of students from neighbourhood schools such as Mill Park, Thomastown, Whittlesea and Lalor. More recently we introduced senior students on a geography assignment from Luther College in Croydon to the heritage site, followed by a Christian fellowship study group from the Greensborough Church of Christ. On 24 March 1999, close on 40 ladies from Greensborough Probus joined Elizabeth Trenerry and Ellen Mitchell for a morning tour of the house, cemetery and church. Their enthusiasm for the stone buildings was both contagious and gratifying. A descendant of the Ziebell's, Joyce Anderson, enlightened the audience with family customs relating to ablutions procedures, such as seniority in the washhouse and the gender segregated bunks in the attic.

Altogether about 200 students from Mill Park Secondary College came on different days with the specific

intention (and instructions) to improve their German at historic Westgarthtown. Equipped with a well designed questionnaire divided into sections relating to the house, garden and cemetery, small groups of up to 15 boys and girls rotated with relative rapidity around these venues assisted by teachers, teacher's aids and our tour guide. Inside the Ziebell Farmhouse for instance, students were required to identify the function and furnishings of each room from a list of German vocabulary (Das Wohnzimmer, das Schlafzimmer - aber nicht das Rauchzimmer). As papers were to be marked, a minimum of tomfoolery erupted and all groupleaders behaved in an exemplary manner when making their thank-you speeches. The questionnaire developed by Mill Park Secondary College German teachers represents the first stage of a comprehensive German kit through the Ziebell Farmhouse precinct supported by the Dept. of Education.

One of the most inquisitive and intensely interested groups were the children of Class 3-4 H at St Catherine's School in Lalor West, accompanied by Sister Hillary. Their thank-you letter reads as follows:

Our class would like to tell you how much we appreciated your showing us around Westgarthtown. Lydia liked the views out of all the windows and Mathew especially liked the one from the attic. Angela, Michael, Antionette and Julian enjoyed hearing about the daily life of the settlers. Daniel liked all the little details and Matthew M. thought you were a great "storyteller". Diana, Rebecca, Sarah and Andrea enjoyed going up into the attic but David didn't like it because it was wobbly. Stefan and Robert liked learning the German words and Diane wanted to know if you could speak German as well as you spoke English! Marie and Jaimee Lee found Marie's name on two of the tombstones. Steven was fascinated by the thickness of the

walls and Nicole's favourite spot was the house with the people still living in it. John, Jesse and Chantal think that the treatment that the German people received was unfair. Gabriel hopes that your dreams of a German Museum come true.

Well, we all hope that the Ziebell Farmhouse will attain museum status in the near future. If multiple uses are contemplated, then at least some of the rooms should be authentically refurbished, facilitating an illuminating and persuasive link to the past. With the addition of large photographs and extensive visual teaching aids in other areas conveying the Ziebell family history and the story of early German settlement in Victoria, the experience of all our future visitors would be infinitely augmented"

#### MEMBERSHIP OF FRIENDS OF WESTGARTH TOWN 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.

#### 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: 03 432 9222).