

# 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 celebrated 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.

EDITOR: ROB WUCHATSCH

150<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS AT  
WESTGARTHTOWN TO BE HELD ON  
16 APRIL 2000.

The Whittlesea City Council; Friends of Westgarthtown; Wendish Heritage Society Australia and the Thomastown Lutheran Church are planning an Open Day at

Westgarthtown on Sunday 16 April 2000. It will celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the German/Wendish settlement at Westgarthtown, which was founded during March 1850.

To be held as part of the City of Whittlesea's Heritage Week activities, the Open Day will not be on the same scale as the Westgarthtown German Fest in November 1998, but there will be displays, stalls, a Sunday morning church service and tours of Ziebell's Farmhouse and other Westgarthtown sites.

A Lutheran Church service will be held at 11.15 am. The church will be open for inspection before and after the service. This church is now the oldest operating Lutheran church building in Australia and the second oldest, after Lobethal in South Australia.

The Wendish Heritage Society Australia will hold a community lunch at 12.30 pm in the nearby Scout Hall in Mount View Road, Lalor (Melway 8H5) 200 metres east of the church. Lunch will be provided for country and interstate visitors by the Greensborough Calvary Lutheran Women's Fellowship at \$5 per person. As the numbers able to be catered for are strictly limited, those people wishing to purchase lunch must pre-book with Barbara Healy on telephone (03) 9723 4154 as soon as possible.

Those Wendish Heritage Society Australia or Friends of Westgarthtown members unable or not wishing to purchase lunch are welcome to bring their own lunches into the Scout Hall. Food will also be available for the general public at Ziebell's Farmhouse.

Special guests for the Wendish Heritage Society's lunch will include members of the Bendigo German Heritage Society; Friends of Lutheran Archives, Adelaide and the Wend-Sorb Society of South Australia.

A display will be mounted in the Scout Hall and from 1.30-2.00 pm Rob Wuchatsch will speak on the history of Westgarthtown and its German/Wendish settlers.

An anniversary ceremony, tours and displays will follow at the Lutheran church and ceremony reserve and at Ziebell's Farmhouse, 100 Gardenia Road, Thomastown which adjoins the south-west corner of the reserve.

Afternoon tea will be provided in the Scout Hall from 3.30 pm by the Friends of Westgarthtown.

We encourage as many members as possible to come along and help celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of what is arguably Victoria's first multicultural settlement. As there is much to be done on the day, we would be glad to hear from any members or friends able to help that day.

**THOMASTOWN PIONEER PRECINCT  
COMMITTEE**

The Thomastown Pioneer Precinct Committee, formed to advise and assist with the management and operations at Westgarthtown, held its first meeting on 13 December 1999.

Friends of Westgarthtown representatives on the TPPC are Rob Wuchatsch, Geoff Borrack, Ellen Mitchell and Paul Schultz. Meetings are held monthly. Major issues considered to date have been the replacement of flooring at Ziebell's; signage; establishment of car parking facilities in German Lane; and the installation of kitchenette facilities in a heritage style cupboard in the bathhouse at Ziebell's Farmhouse.

A new tenant, Camilla Farchione, moved into the newer caretaker's house at Ziebell's Farmhouse during February 2000. A qualified horticulturalist, part of her tenancy agreement is to restore, develop and maintain the garden. She will play no role however in booking or providing access to Ziebell's Farmhouse and once the new fencing is erected, the two properties will be separated.

The flooring at Ziebell's Farmhouse has almost been replaced and the house will be reopened in time for the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations. Core holes have been drilled and sumps and pumps installed to improve sub-floor ventilation.

**HERITAGE INTERPRETATION  
SIGNAGE AT WESTGARTH TOWN  
RESERVE**

The City of Whittlesea has appointed Clare Gervasoni as its History Project Officer. One of Clare's tasks will be to produce six heritage text panels to be erected at Ziebell's Farmhouse and the Lutheran Church and Cemetery in time for the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations on 16 April 2000.

Clare, whose experience includes work at Sovereign Hill and the Castlemaine Art Gallery, is also the author of several historical works. She has had several meetings with representatives of the Friends of Westgarthtown and circulated a draft text for comment. Photographs from Rob Wuchatsch's 1985 *Westgarthtown, the German Settlement at Thomastown* will also be included on the panels.

**MALTZAHN'S FARMHOUSE  
RESTORATION BY HERITAGE  
VICTORIA**

As advised in our September 1999 Newsletter, Maltzahn's Farmhouse has been saved. It has been transferred from the Ministry of Housing to Heritage Victoria, which will restore it with a \$216000 grant announced in December by the Minister for Planning, John Thwaites.

The *Whittlesea Post* of 15 December 1999 reported the good news under the headline "Pioneer site saved". It quoted Rob Wuchatsch, Friends of Westgarthtown President as stating "*People around this area felt very strongly about keeping this piece of history intact and fought passionately against losing it ... Various actions in the past caused accelerated neglect to take over, but it's great to see the significance of Westgarthtown held in the highest regard ... If Maltzahn's had not been restored it would have been like the missing piece of a jigsaw*".

Heritage Victoria advise that they are about to appoint an architect to supervise the

restorations and that they expect work to commence shortly. Maltzahn's Farmhouse was featured recently in Heritage Victoria's quarterly magazine *Inherit* (Number 7 November 1999). Ziebell's Farmhouse is also included on Heritage Victoria's Website at ([www.heritage.vic.gov.au](http://www.heritage.vic.gov.au)) and ([www.doi.vic.gov.au](http://www.doi.vic.gov.au)) All Westgarthtown's registered historic sites are included on Heritage Victoria's On-Line Victorian Heritage Register.

#### DONATION BY IAN ZIEBELL

Ziebell descendant Ian Ziebell, who has taken a keen interest in restorations at Westgarthtown, recently made a very generous donation of \$250 to the Friends of Westgarthtown. His gesture is very much appreciated. Readers of this newsletter may recall Ian has previously helped with gardening at Ziebell's Farmhouse.

Ian is the son of Alfred and Jessie (nee McLeod) Ziebell, grandson of Alfred Ziebell and Dorothea Unmack, great grandson of August Ziebell and Auguste Schleicher and great great grandson of Christian and Sophia Ziebell.

#### TWO NEW GERMAN LANGUAGE HERITAGE TRAILS – WESTGARTHTOWN AND TATURA

Ellen Mitchell, Public Relations Officer for the Friends of Westgarthtown, recently presented us with a copy of the impressive German Language Heritage Trails Folder.

The Westgarthtown and Tatura Heritage Trails were an initiative of the Association of German Teachers Victoria (AGTV) and the Goethe Institute. In 1998 the AGTV received a grant from the LOTE, ESL & Multicultural Education Branch to produce the "Westgarthtown Heritage Trail" and Billanook Primary School received a grant for the development of the "Tatura Heritage Trail".

Ellen reports that

*"On 20 November 1999 two new language trails, assembled in a handsome illustrated folder, were launched at the AGTV's annual conference at historic Erskine House in Lorne. To introduce the Westgarthtown language trail I presented an illustrated historical paper, whereas Sara Gribben from Mill Park Secondary College concentrated*

*on pedagogical aspects. As the joint Westgarthtown presentation neared its conclusion in the spacious and quaint surrounds of a former ballroom, the Tatura trail was introduced as a workshop session with the assistance of a video.*

*Before describing the trails it might prove helpful to readers to briefly remark on the background of Tatura. Between 1940 and 1947 close to 8,500 civilians and prisoners of war predominantly of German and Italian nationality were interned at seven camps at Tatura, Murchison and Rushworth. Camp 1, for instance, held 1,000 German and Italian men, most enjoying Australian resident status prior to their internment whereas one of the POW camps held 4,000 German and Italian servicemen. The Tatura language trail, however, focuses on Camp 3, a family camp of 1,000 people 'accommodated' in four compounds. The barracks were divided into tiny rooms measuring 2.75m x 3m and were equipped with two primitive beds and an electric lightbulb. As the internees settled in, they added ceilings and lined their walls with masonite then set out to convert their trunks to cupboards, tables and chairs. To supplement the army rations a vegetable garden was soon established, and ornamental plants brightened up spaces between the monotonous rows of barracks.*

*The people in the family camp came from a variety of backgrounds. There were German Lutheran missionaries from New Guinea, over 500 previously interned Templar Germans from Palestine, German, Austrian and Italian refugees shipped out from England and Singapore, many of them Jewish. Last there were 'Austral-Deutsche' (Australian/German residents) and those apprehended while on business in Australia. Today, it strikes us as decidedly odd, that even Dr. Gruber, conductor of the Vienna Mozart Boys' Choir was 'imprisoned', as his choir "happened to be touring Australia at the outbreak of war ... (but) the boys were billeted with Australian families in Melbourne".*

*Although there are stark differences between Westgarthtown's free immigrant settlers of the 1850's and Tatura's enforced population much later, both recount unique periods of hardship and endeavour, transmitting through palpable reminders and memories the sheer triumph of daily existence. Both language trails hone in on this theme.*

*Catherine Gosling, President of the AGTV explains the meaning of a 'Heritage Trail' as follows:*

*"The concept of a 'Heritage Trail' has been developed to provide support material for teachers and students to focus on historical and cultural influences of German-speakers in Australia. With authentic contexts as the basis of all tasks in the kits, students will reinforce and extend their language skills in German."*

*That Westgarthtown as a former German/Wendish farming community and Tatura's internment camp now part of the Tatura Irrigation and Wartime Camps Museum qualify well in providing historically authentic contexts as heritage sites and as invaluable reservoir of letters, diaries, reports and personal reminiscences is convincingly reflected in the themes explored in both trails.*

*Geared to excite and enrich different stages of language competence, exercises on Westgarthtown, for instance, range from an orientation tour of the remaining bluestone houses and building materials used, over "refurbishing" all rooms in the Ziebell Farmhouse, to identifying the relationship between various family members from inscriptions on headstones in the cemetery. A recipe from Maria Karsten's' manuscript collection for 'Carp in Beer' might incite a taste for popular German meals. Topics for advanced students embrace daily work practices on a farm, aspects of immigration, and designing a new brochure of Westgarthtown buildings. The composition of a credible love story, commencing with the words: Heute Nacht habe ich mich mit Johann getroffen. Es war scht schwierig, das Haus zu verlassen ... might induce some chuckles deep down in the graves.*

*Themes for the Tatura language trail, focus on life enhancing daily activities practiced by ingenious German internees within their strictly circumscribd mode of existence. A play entitled Ein Tag im Familienlager Tatura (A day in the family camp at Tatura) introduces the student in a witty but reflective manner to the idea of 3 daily roll calls, living in the proximity of 3 barbed wire enforced fences, the routine of children attending school, learning their first English words like 'barbed wire' from friendly guards and observing their parents engaged in teaching, cleaning, cooking and gardening. Songs brighten up painful memories of home, incomprehensible reasons for their internment and all*

*manners of restriction. - From the resources provided the student of German learns that classical theatre, music and the practice of art and crafts with a variety of scrap material like 'Tatura Silver' (use of tins) all fulfilled ways of counteracting depression and boredom – Tasks for the advanced student include the writing of essays, interviews or plays, all dealing with information gathered on life experiences in Tatura's Camp 3. This trail is accompanied by a superb colour-coded illustration of Internierungslager 3 Tatura – 1945. Both trails emerge as stimulating teaching tools in re-experiencing unique facets of German life on Australian soil – the home of so many Deutsch-Australier or Austral-Deutschen today"*

*It should be remembered that Pastor Ewald Steiniger of Trinity Lutheran Church, East Melbourne was interned at Tatura for almost three years during the Second World War. Pastor Steiniger, who is buried at Westgarthtown, was minister to the Thomastown Lutheran Church from 1935-1964. On 6 November 1999, his widow Annemarie who died on 29 October 1999 aged 97, was buried beside him.*

#### PURA MILK CUP

*Late in 1999, just prior to the commencement of the 1999/2000 first class cricket season, it was announced that the Sheffield Shield had been replaced by the Pura Milk Cup. The name of the dairy formed by Albert Siebel in 1934 to retail Westgarthtown's milk is now even more prominent than ever before.*

*National Foods, which owns Pura Milk, has taken an ongoing interest in the origins of its best selling milk brand and in 1998 sponsored the production of a set of eight Westgarthtown Postcards and the Maria Karsten Culinary Calender.*

#### RESEARCH INTO NEBEL, FALK, PAULKE, SEEBER AND BORMANN FAMILIES BY MELINDA TAM

*Westgarthtown descendent Melinda Tam has been busy researching her family history over the last few years and has uncovered a wealth of interesting material. If you are related to any of the families mentioned above and have not yet been in touch with Melinda, you can write to her at*

7 Long Beach Crescent, Mt. Waverley, Vic.  
3149.

**PROPOSED GERMAN/WENDISH  
HERITAGE MAP**

The Friends of Westgarthtown has proposed that an attractive glossy folding map be produced showing significant Victorian German and Wendish heritage sites.

The map, to be produced jointly by such groups as Friends of Westgarthtown, Bendigo German Heritage Society, Heritage Victoria (which has undertaken a special project to identify German sites); the Cities of Whittlesea; Manningham, Whitehorse; Darebin, Casey; Greater Geelong; Hamilton; etc could perhaps include Melbourne and district sites on one side and regional Victorian ones on the other. The map would be used by anyone interested in Victoria's outstanding German and Wendish heritage but particularly by students and tourists, both Australian and international.

If there are any Friends of Westgarthtown members who have not yet seen either Schramm's Cottage at Victoria Street, Doncaster or Schwerkolt's Cottage in Deep Creek Road, Mitcham these are both well worth a visit. They are open to the public on Sunday afternoons.

**FRIENDS OF WESTGARTHTOWN 3<sup>rd</sup>  
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING.**

Our 3<sup>rd</sup> AGM was held on the verandah at Ziebell's Farmhouse on 21 November 1999.

After welcomes, reports were presented and elections held. The new committee consists of Rob Wuchatsch (President); Geoff Borrack (Vice-President); Paul Schultz (Treasurer) and Ellen Mitchell (Public Relations Officer). The Secretary's position was left vacant but is currently being handled by Gillian Borrack.

The committee's sincere thanks were expressed to retiring committee members Gillian Borrack (Treasurer) and Elizabeth Trenerry (Secretary), hard working foundation members who decided after four years to withdraw from committee work to attend to those many frequently shelved but important personal matters often overlooked by dedicated community

workers. Both will remain members and Gillian has agreed to act as Secretary until a new secretary is appointed.

The preservation of our unique heritage at Westgarthtown, including Maltzahn's Farmhouse, now seems assured and the future bright, but considerable work still remains to ensure our plans are fulfilled. The main task for the Friends of Westgarthtown over the 1999/2000 year and beyond will be to oversee the completion, furnishing and opening of Ziebell's Farmhouse as a heritage centre/museum. Promotion of Westgarthtown's heritage attractions also needs to be increased and coordinated with that of other Melbourne eg. Schramm's and Schwerkolt's Cottages and regional Victorian German heritage sites.

**STONEWALLS EXHIBITION AND  
RESEARCH PROJECT**

In January 2000, the Friends of Westgarthtown provided a letter of support to Raelene Marshall who has applied for federal funding under the "Visions of Australia Cultural Touring Grants Program" for her proposed exhibition "A Stone Upon a Stone"

If her Exhibition Development grant application is successful, Raelene's exhibition is expected to take place during the year 2001. It will consist of a series of free standing panels, both pictorial and narrative, each approximately 1200 mm x 920 mm in size. It is estimated there will be 30 panels, of which two will relate to Westgarthtown.

Significantly, it is hoped that further research into Victoria's stone walls can be undertaken. Although some key examples of Westgarthtown's stone walls have survived, many did not and many more, notably at nearby Epping and Wollert, now face the same fate as new development takes place.

**WENDISH HERITAGE SOCIETY  
DINNER TO CELEBRATE 150<sup>th</sup>  
ANNIVERSARY OF ARRIVAL OF  
PRIBISLAW, ALFRED, SOPHIE AND  
ANTONIE**

The Wendish Heritage Society Australia will hold its annual dinner on 28 June 2000, the theme being the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the arrival of four German ships which

arrived at Port Phillip in 1850 – the *Pribislaw*, *Alfred*, *Sophie* and *Antonie*.

As about half of the families who established Westgarthtown arrived aboard the *Pribislaw* (Franke, Graff, Karsten, Maltzahn, Peters, Rosel, Winter, Wuchatsch, Ziebell and Zimmer) or the *Alfred* (Groening and Timm), we would like to see as many descendants as possible at the dinner. The venue is the Doncaster Lutheran Hall, 51 Victoria Street, Doncaster. The Graff, Rosel, Wuchatsch and Zimmer family were Wendish.

The Wendish Heritage Society's library will be open for inspection with a display and pre-dinner drinks from 5.00 – 6.45 pm, then dinner from 7.00 – 10, 00 pm. Rob Wuchatsch will speak about the *Pribislaw* and its passengers and other descendants will talk about the *Alfred*, *Sophie* and *Antonie*.

The cost of the dinner is \$15 per person. For further information and bookings, contact Barbara Healy on (03) 9723 4154. Cheques should be made out to the Wendish Heritage Society Australia and mailed to Barbara Healy, 1 Joffre Street, Croydon, Vic. 3136 asap but no later than 19 June 2000.

POEM - THE PIONEERS –  
BY ALBERT WUCHATSCH

The following poem was written in 1917 by Kookaburra (Albert Wuchatsch), during the First World War. In it he reflects on the 19<sup>th</sup> Century emigration from Germany and settlement in Australia by the German and Wendish pioneers who founded Westgarthtown. Despite its lack of political correctness in parts, it is interesting as it includes the memories of Albert's then still alive mother Johanna Wuchatsch (nee Graff), who arrived in 1850 as a nine year old girl.

Albert concludes his poem by wondering at the twist of fate that saw the descendants of these original settlers now fighting for liberty against their former homeland in Europe.

The Pioneers

They're passing on, they're passing on,  
That patient, sturdy band;  
The pioneers will soon be gone  
Who opened up this land.

The pioneers were those who came  
Before the gold was found;  
Their quest was not to sink the claim  
Where riches did abound.

They sailed across the ocean wide,  
In leaky wooden ships,  
Where some were born and many died,  
For six months were the trips.

Some came from Ireland's brakes and fells,  
And some from Scotland's hills,  
And some from England's charming dells,  
Beside the purling rills.

Some came from European lands,  
By revolution stained,  
But all to work with willing hands,  
For homes that could be gained.

And one who was then but a child,  
Led by her mother's hand,  
Can yet recall how all had smiled,  
When first they saw this land.

And when at last they reached the shore,  
And in Australia trod,  
And perils of the sea were o'er,  
They knelt and thanked their God.

They built their huts of bark and stone,  
To shield them from the rain;  
Though riches then did not atone,  
There's none that did complain.

They fenced the land, they tilled the soil,  
They helped to make the road;  
They watched the patient bullocks toil  
Beneath the driver's goad.

They saw the blacks' camp near the stream,  
The gins and dogs and all;  
They saw Black Thursday's fearful gleam,  
Its awful smoky pall.

We know those early settlers were  
By hardships oft assailed;  
But hope was then their driving spur,  
Their stout hearts never quailed.

For was not this land their home,  
Their own to ever be?  
It was but this that made them roam  
Across the stormy sea.

They thanked the Lord for ripened corn,  
And reaped it with the hook;  
Those folk did not religion scorn,  
The Bible was their book.

They had no pensions for the poor,  
Each for himself must fend;  
No bonus could they then secure  
For babes that God did send.

And so they lived and paid their way,  
And one by one they died;  
And though in hallowed ground they lay,

**Their memory will abide.**

**I've told you why, in early days,  
Men left their place of birth;  
But most mysterious are the ways  
Of Providence on earth.**

**The children's children of those men,  
Who sailed across the sea,  
Have crossed the ocean wide again,  
To fight for liberty.**

<p><b>THOMASTOWN LUTHERAN CHURCH SERVICES</b></p>
---

**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).**

<p><b>MEMBERSHIP OF FRIENDS OF WESTGARTHTOWN</b></p>
--

**Should you wish to join the Friends of Westgarthtown, please write to PO Box 95, THOMASTOWN VIC 3074. New members are always welcome. Fees \$10 per annum for single members; \$15 for families. Concession rates \$5 single; \$10 family.**