

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

2001 HERITAGE WEEK CEMETERY
TOURS TO BE HELD AT
WESTGARTHTOWN ON SATURDAY 31
MARCH.

The Friends of Westgarthtown and the City of Whittlesea have again combined to hold Westgarthtown Cemetery Tours

during Heritage Week, which runs from 30 March to 8 April 2001.

Two tours will be held at Westgarthtown on 31 March 2001 – a normal one at 3.00 pm and another torchlight one at 7.00 pm aimed specifically at family groups with children. If coming to the evening tour, please remember to bring a torch. Bookings for both tours are essential, on 9217 2306.

Both tours will last for about one hour, followed by refreshments at Ziebell's farmhouse, which will be open from 12 noon for inspection.

The Friends of Westgarthtown will soon start work in the cemetery to remove weeds and generally clean up around the graves. It is hoped the timber picket gates at the main entrance off German Lane and the two pedestrian box-gates at the eastern and western ends of the cemetery can also be reinstated this year.

PLAQUE UNVEILING HELD AT ZIEBELL'S FARMHOUSE ON 12 NOVEMBER 2000.

On the 12 November 2000, a commemorative plaque dedicated to the memory of the Ziebell family was unveiled at Ziebell's Farmhouse by Sylvia Schultz, a great-great-grand daughter of Christian and Sophia Ziebell.

The ceremony, which was held to commemorate both the hardwork and determination of Christian and Sophia Ziebell in establishing their farm at Westgarthtown and the family of Sylvia Adams (nee Ziebell) who made the property available for sale to the City of Whittlesea during the early 1990s, was attended by

about 100 relatives, Friends' members and invited guests.

The Mayor of the City of Whittlesea
Sam Alessi spoke first, as follows:

Ladies and gentlemen and distinguished guests, it is indeed a real historic day, and a great day, another great day for our pioneer settlement here in Thomastown. Today's events are occurring because sometime back, in co-operation between the Ziebell family descendants and Council, it was decided that this area would be a worthy area to restore and keep in memory of the pioneer spirit here in Thomastown in particular, and the City of Whittlesea as a whole. So today we are honouring the Ziebell family, with Mrs Schultz unveiling the plaque which recognises the family's contribution and their involvement in keeping this facility and restoring it and the hard work that they have put in with the committee. Now Mrs Schultz has been quite an influential person on the committee and continues to be so. We get a lot of advice from her, and it is part of her efforts that we are at the stage where this magnificent restoration is at today. There is a long way to go still, but it certainly has gone a long way from some years back. Also the plaque will not only honour Mrs Schultz, but her predecessors and her descendants. So without further to do I will pass on to Geoff Borrack, who will say a few words about the history of the place, which he knows a lot better than I do, and then we will do the unveiling, so thank you very much.

Geoff Borrack, a great-great-grandson of Christian and Sophia Ziebell, Vice-President of the Friends of Westgarthtown and supervising architect then spoke:

Ladies and gentlemen, honoured guests, I suppose today is a fun day in a way, it is what some people have jocularly referred to as "not another opening"! We have already had three or four, and it should be apparent to everybody now that the project as it stands will be an ongoing affair for some years, and I dare say there will be lots of other openings as time goes by. The nice thing about that of course is that it brings people to the house on a regular basis, and you can have an ongoing involvement in how things are developing here and I think that is of interest to everybody.

There are two aspects to the work being done here at the moment, there is the building side of things, and that has had to take precedence over the last four or five

years. That involves a few problems, the most recent one is the control of water which has continued to seep in under the floor boards and recently necessitated the replacement of what you may well remember was the originally restored floor here a few years ago. At the moment we think we have solved that problem, and we are about to enter into the finishing of the floor which will be treated in a similar way to the old floors which has a waxed and polished finish, as opposed to the conventional way of doing things now with urethane. That should add much lustre to the house, and it will open the opportunity then for us to move in and start fitting out the premises, installing furniture, historic items of that nature.

That will be an exciting phase of the work – it is one that cannot be entered into lightly because in a property of this nature, it shouldn't be just a museum for collectibles, but it has to be allied very much to the history of the place, the origins of the people who came here first, and certainly how they lived their lives here. And in that way if we do our work correctly and sensitively, I think it will become a very unique and greatly appealing precinct to future generations who are able to come and visit the place.

Today's ceremony is perhaps long overdue you might say, one hundred and fifty years almost since Christian and Sophia put the place together, and it's great to think that they as the authors of this project or house now attain enduring recognition by way of a plaque, no less worthy you might say than people who compose music, write great works of literature, poets, artists all have their name appended to their work, and it is a terrific thing to think that after a hundred and fifty years that Christian and Sophia Ziebell's names will be inscribed on these premises as a permanent reminder of people who came here, and the future generations then who have inhabited the place. I am very excited about that prospect, I think it is a fitting way to start the next phase of this development which as I say will be the fitout.

Thank you very much, and certainly "Thank You" to the Council for all the support financially and otherwise that they have given us, and it is great to have their understanding and assistance in these matters. Thank you very much and I would like to hand you over now to Mrs Sylvia Schultz, who will proceed with the unveiling. Thank you.

Sylvia Schultz, in unveiling the plaque on behalf of the family of Sylvia Adams, spoke as follows.

We are here today to remember and commemorate Christian and Sophia Ziebell and in particular the building of their home here in Westgarthtown in the 1850s after the long journey from Hamburg. Four successive generations of Ziebell families made their home here until 1980. Indeed it became "home" to myself and my brothers from the time I was 6 years old, and my brothers and I lived here like many preceding generations, until we left home to be married.

In 1973, by which time the farm had ceased to operate, and the estate of Alfred and Dorothea Ziebell was resolved, my mother, Sylvia Adams (nee Ziebell) purchased the homestead and remaining land and outbuildings.

Mother died in 1990. My brothers Joe, Carl, Francis and I inherited the property from our mother.

Although the homestead and remaining outbuildings were listed on the Federal Heritage Register, in 1992 when Council officers from the City of Whittlesea visited the house for the first time, they were astonished to see the originality of the buildings and site, and realised immediately the heritage it represented. In their wisdom they saw the potential for future preservation and restoration.

The City of Whittlesea purchased the property in 1993 with the view to restoring the buildings and keeping the site intact for perpetuity. If this came to fruition they resolved that a plaque would be placed on this house to enable future generations of descendants and the community of our City to enjoy the heritage of the German settlers who pioneered this area in 1850.

The City of Whittlesea together with the Friends of Westgarthtown are working to realise this vision. Many people have assisted in the intervening years and I thank you all for your interest and support.

In particular, I would like to thank my three surviving aunts who belong to the fourth generation of Ziebells to grow up here with their two brothers, Alfred and Henry, and their five sisters Ruth, Sylvia, Verona, Augusta and Linda, for coming to the unveiling today. Auntie Esther, the

fourth child of Alfred and Dorothea Ziebell, is now 97 years old; Auntie Bertha, the eighth child is 90 years old and my Auntie Decima is 87 years old. I am part of the fifth generation, and we are now up to the eighth generation. May many more generations enjoy and visit this precinct, the home of Christian and Sophia Ziebell, and remember the original German Lutheran pioneers.

As we stand here on this verandah today the memories flood back, I recall how we chased one another, and ran around the garden and along the verandah (stopping to pop the fuschias). I think no matter how hard and long we think, we could never fully comprehend what has happened here, the joys, the work, the plan for each day for what was a truly self sufficient family and farm.

They were God fearing Pioneers of Faith and Fortitude.

To Glory be the God.

On behalf of my family, and as a great great granddaughter of Christian and Sophia Ziebell, it gives me much pleasure to unveil this commemorative plaque in their memory.

**WORK TO START ON RESTORATION OF
MALTZAHN'S FARMHOUSE AT
LALOR.**

Heritage Victoria has advised that tender and contract negotiations have now been finalised and work will start shortly on the reconstruction of Maltzahn's Farmhouse at 127 Gardenia Road, Lalor. Restoration is expected to be completed by the end of June 2001.

**FRIENDS OF WESTGARTH TOWN HOLDS
GARDENING WORKING BEES ON
FIRST SATURDAY OF EACH MONTH
AT ZIEBELL'S FARMHOUSE.**

Monthly working bees have continued at Ziebell's Farmhouse under the guidance of Sylvia Schultz and co-ordinated by Gillian Borrack.

More volunteers are always welcome. Working bees run from 10.00 am – 4.00 pm on the first Saturday of each month. The garden looked wonderful for the plaque unveiling in November 2000 and with regular watering and weeding over summer has held up well, although the

volunteers at the January and February working bees wilted noticeably in the heat.

The City of Whittlesea recently provided a \$600 grant for gardening equipment such as wheelbarrows, rakes, spades, forks, hoes, secateurs, hoses, buckets etc which Gill Borrack and her sons Leon and Marcel have now very kindly purchased. Anyone considering coming along now only has to bring themselves, gloves, hats and their lunch.

New cleaning arrangements are now being trialled, whereby the City of Whittlesea has appointed the Friends of Westgarthtown to manage all cleaning at Ziebell's Farmhouse. Local residents and Thomastown Lutheran Church members Marita and Norbet Anders were recently engaged to clean the house, with funding provided by the City of Whittlesea.

**WESTGARTHTOWN CEMETERY
BOOKLET TO BE PUBLISHED LATE
2001.**

As advised in our September 2000 newsletter, the Friends of Westgarthtown, City of Whittlesea and Heritage Victoria will join forces again to publish another high quality booklet, this time about the Westgarthtown Lutheran Cemetery.

Memorandums of Understanding have now been signed by all parties and it is expected the booklet will be launched at the Westgarthtown cemetery in November 2001.

**RECENT ZIEBELL FAMILY RESEARCH
DISCOVERIES.**

A number of recent discoveries have further increased our knowledge of the Ziebell family's early life in Australia.

Christian Ziebell's naturalisation application (1850) has now finally been located in Sydney, untraceable for many years as it was not kept with all other Port Phillip ones. Researcher Rod Kearney found it during a recent visit, along with Julius Groening's, the only other missing one.

In early February 2001, Rob Wuchatsch also discovered a lengthy article in the *Australasian* of 12 February 1887, entitled "Messrs Ziebell's Bacon and Sausage Factory" by reporter Bruni.

It was well known that the Ziebell family were pork butchers in Germany and that Christian Ziebell continued to make sausages, hams, bacon and other smallgoods in Australia after arrival in 1850, in addition to farming. It was also known that Christian's son Charles later operated his own bacon and sausage factory at Somerton, but details had been sketchy prior to discovery of the *Australasian* report. Whilst operations at Somerton were on a much larger scale than at Westgarthtown, most of the techniques used would have been traditional, including the recipes. Some interesting extracts from the article are as follows.

I drove out on the Sydney-road to visit the establishment of Messrs. C. Ziebell and Son at Somerton. Pork-butchering is hereditary in this family for many generations past. Mr. C. Ziebell's father arrived in the colony ... and at once commenced the business at Germantown. Mr. C. Ziebell moved to his present location about 13 years ago. He has a farm of about 300 acres ... On learning my errand he kindly undertook to show me over the establishment and explain the mode of sausage-making, save in one or two small matters which would still remain shrouded in mystery ... The pigs are brought by an agent in the Kilmore district ... The killing is done on Monday ... On Tuesday the carcasses are cut up and prepared for different kinds of sausage, for bacon, and, when a large number are killed, many hams are made ... The bodies are split while warm, and the backbone taken out. The sides are brought into the cutting up room, where a couple of experts rapidly divide each side into three parts. The forequarter and the leg are handed over to be cut up for sausage meat, while the middle is set aside to be made into bacon ... the meat is cut into small chunks about the size of road metal, and a proportion of fat and lean is weighed into parcels of 40lb. each. The whole of the operations carried out in this room are conducted with due regard to cleanliness.

Every now and then a lad carries off one of these 40lb. parcels of meat into a neighbouring apartment, where it is cut up fine in a mincing-machine, which is worked by a pair of horses. Before it is minced, however, it receives a quantity of pepper, salt, and possibly other condiments. It takes about eight minutes to reduce the meat to the proper fineness to make Frankfort sausages, for which the meat is chopped finer than any other description of sausage made at Somerton. The products of the

establishment in the way of sausages are the kinds known as German, Frankfort, white, and black sausages. The ordinary English sausage is not made by Messrs. Ziebell. The foundation for these various products is the same; it is the seasoning, and a slight difference in the after treatment, that makes the difference. Close to the mincing-room is the cellar, in which the bacon is made. The smoking houses are close by ... The main portion of the buildings is filled with bacon and hams, while from nails stuck all over the interior depend strings of sausages so thickly that the walls can be hardly seen.

The skins used are mostly American, which are considered the best; but some Victorian prepared skins are also used. The Frankfort sausages, for which the firm are celebrated all over the colony, are made up in skins of one pound and a quarter when fresh, and are separated into six sausages. The extra quarter of a pound is allowed for drying. The true German sausage, besides having a different seasoning, is dried in a separate smokehouse. The produce of Messrs. Ziebell's manufactory is celebrated all over the colonies, the firm having customers in New Zealand, South Australia, Queensland, Sydney and Riverina. They can sell as much bacon as they can make at the highest price. Just before Christmas they sold 900 hams, being all they had in stock.

During the summer months their weekly killing is 25 head, but during the cooler portion of the year the number rises to 40 head. After a close inspection of Messrs. Ziebell's establishment I feel so satisfied with what I saw that I shall continue to be a consumer of their Frankfort sausages, as I have been for many years past.

THOMASTOWN PIONEER PRECINCT COMMITTEE

Meetings continue to be held bi-monthly, the committee consisting of representatives of the Friends of Westgarthtown, City of Whittlesea Councillors and staff and the Thomastown Lutheran Church.

Co-operation between all groups remains excellent, with strong support from Rob Ewart and other City of Whittlesea officers.

2001 TOURS OF WESTGARTH TOWN

Ellen Mitchell has been very busy arranging tours of both Ziebell's

Farmhouse and the Westgarthtown area in general.

On 18 February the Friends of Westgarthtown hosted a visit by 23 Northcote Rotary Club members and friends, who were keen to see another town named after William Westgarth. Northcote, for those who may not be aware, contains the Westgarth Shopping Centre, Railway Station and street of the same name. Westgarth Street was named in the early 1850s, also after our William Westgarth, and subsequently gave its name to the Railway Station which was constructed at Westgarth Street in about 1890. Since establishment of the station, that part of Northcote has come to be known as Westgarth.

On 25 February the Friends of Westgarthtown hosted a group of 38 members of the National Trust. After opening talks by Ellen and Rob, the visitors were escorted around Ziebell's Farmhouse in three small groups led by Ellen, Rob, Gill and Gaye. After lunch provided by Sylvia, Ellen, Gill and Gaye, the whole group moved to the Lutheran Church, where Irma Hatty kindly showed them around and spoke about its history. We then walked to Siebel's Farmhouse, which owner Neville Lynch generously allowed us to inspect, both inside and out. The day finished with a visit to the cemetery and afternoon tea at Ziebell's Farmhouse.

Successful days such as the National Trust tour do not happen without much hard work. Apart from work on the day, Ellen and Rene Schultz spent all Saturday setting up the west wing at Ziebell's Farmhouse for the tour and sit-down lunch. Gill and Rene looked after the house during the day and Rene provided superb customer service by even driving an elderly visitor home to Armadale when she became ill shortly after arrival. All in all it was a wonderful team effort

Forthcoming visitors include North Melbourne Probus Club, Camberwell Historical Society and Hume Social Club, as well as regular school groups. It is hoped that Ziebell's Farmhouse can shortly be opened on a regular basis at weekends, enabling individual visitors to be much better provided for.

REPORT IN ADVERTISER ON 1931 THOMASTOWN LUTHERAN CHRISTMAS SERVICE.

The following long and very interesting report appeared in the *Eltham and Whittlesea Shires Advertiser* of 3 January 1936.

Sunday, December 22, will be a memorable one for most of the members and friends of the Lutheran Church of Thomastown. It had been announced that a Christmas service followed by a Mission address and basket picnic would be held on that date.

It is a long time since a large gathering made a pilgrimage to the grounds of the Lutheran Church. Fully 100 adults and about 30 children came from far and near to the festival. Their coming was well rewarded – the little church seemed transformed. A beautifully shaped pine tree, suitably decorated with tinsel, silver bells, snow-covered pine cones, as well as lighted candles, had transformed this little church into fairyland. The lighted tree put all who entered the church, at once under the spell of Christmas. The Rev. E. Steiniger, the pastor of the church, in his address explained the Christmas-tree customs and showed how the lighted tree taught Christians to be the Light of the World.

After the ladies' choir of the Lutheran Church, Melbourne, had rendered several beautiful Christmas carols, the children gave various recitations. The children were rewarded, each child receiving a toy as well as a bag of sweets, and to judge by their happy faces, it is certain that they will be looking forward with much joy to the Christmas service next year.

At the conclusion of the service the congregation moved to the outer ground of the church, under the shade of tall pines. Rev. F. Paton told the keenly interested gathering his experience as a missionary amongst the natives in the Islands, and vividly described the trials and dangers of the work there.

Pastor Steiniger thanked Rev. F. Paton for his kindness in coming to Thomastown and speaking to them, and in view of the mission work that has still to be done among the natives, the church elders then took up an offering as a Christmas gift from the Lutheran Church at Thomastown for the Rev. Paton's Mission.

Rev. T. V. Charlton, of Epping, as well as Mr. P. G. Blakemore, superintendent of the Thomastown Methodist Sunday School thanked the committee and members of the

Lutheran Church for their kind invitation to be present at their Christmas celebrations. The committee of the church provided all with tea, coffee, milk, and for those who had forgotten their baskets, with sandwiches and cakes. So ended a Christmas gathering in the proper Christmas spirit.

Special mention should be made of the work of the Misses Ziebell, in decorating the Christmas-tree and arranging the sweets for the children, as well as the host of ladies who helped and served the tea. Special thanks are due to Mr. Maltzahn for the boiling of the billy, as well as to Messrs A. Wuchatsch, the senior trustee and treasurer of the church, and B. Seeber and Young for supervising the whole arrangements.

2000 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING.

The Friends of Westgarthtown's 4th AGM was held on 22 October 2000 at Ziebell's Farmhouse. Office bearers elected for 2000/01 are as follows.

President:	Rob Wuchatsch
Vice-President:	Geoff Borrack
Treasurer:	Paul Schultz/Gillian Borrack
Secretary:	Gillian Borrack
Public Relations Officer:	Ellen Mitchell

Remaining committee members are Sylvia Schultz and Gaye Caldwell.

Some membership subscriptions for the 2000/01 financial year remain outstanding. If you are not paid up, you will receive a blue renewal form with this newsletter and payments should be mailed to the Secretary, Friends of Westgarthtown, PO Box 95, Thomastown, Vic. 3074.

If you are not a member, but wish to join the Friends of Westgarthtown, please write to us at the above address. Fees are \$10 per annum for individual members and \$15 for families. Concession rates \$5 individual; \$10 family.

BLACK WEDDING DRESSES

Devout Lutheran women who married in Australia during the nineteenth century wore black wedding dresses. Leigh Summers, in a recent article in the *World*

of Antiques & Art, December 2000-June 2001, notes that they were not in mourning, but

chose to wear black gowns for reasons related to the perpetuation of German traditions and loyalties to the homeland and because black was considered both practical and stylish. Years after her wedding day, the smart black street gown worn by the Lutheran bride served as the young matron's 'best dress'.

<p>THOMASTOWN LUTHERAN CHURCH SERVICES</p>

Services are held on alternate Sundays at 11.15 am at the Thomastown Lutheran Church, German Lane, Lalor. For further details contact Pastor Stephen Pietsch on 03 9435 6846 (Fax: 03 432 9222).