

# Ziebell Exhibit & Book Launch



Clockwise from above left: Some of the new panels, Geoff Borrack with Mayor Kris Pavlidis, and some of the guests at the launch

The Friends of Westgarthtown and City of Whittlesea recently joined together to create two new exhibitions at Ziebell's Farmhouse.

**O**n 27 May 2007, with Cr John Fry acting as Master of Ceremonies, the Mayor, Cr. Kris Pavlidis, launched a gallery of photographs relating to former residents of Ziebell's Farmhouse and other family members. The gallery consists of two large photographic panels mounted on the west and north walls of the kitchen at Ziebell's Farmhouse. The panels, which contain photographs and a Ziebell family tree, were designed by Geoff Borrack and laid out by Léon Borrack.

The Pribislaw exhibit, based around two historic

timbers from the ship which brought the Ziebell family and many other Westgarthtown settlers to Australia, is located in the display room at Ziebell's Farmhouse. Also designed by Geoff and Léon, it includes an interpretive panel, in which is placed a small model of the Pribislaw.

On the same day, Janet Hubbard's comprehensive history of the Ziebell family, *The House that Christian Built*, was launched by Geoff Borrack. The book, of 220 pages, is profusely illustrated and covers the Ziebell family's origins in Germany; their long journey to Australia in 1849–50 aboard the Pribislaw; and settlement at Westgarthtown. As well as being essential reading for all Ziebell family descendants, relatives and friends, Janet's book will also be of interest to anyone wishing to learn more about the history of German settlement at Westgarthtown and Victoria in general. It is a wonderful addition to the history of Westgarthtown and can be obtained from Janet Hubbard, 2752 Broadford-Flowerdale Road, Flowerdale Victoria 3658 for \$25 plus \$8.10 packing and postage, or the Friends of Westgarthtown at Ziebell's Farmhouse.

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# John Borrack Drawing Exhibition at Ziebell's

The Friends of Westgarthtown, as part of the City of Whittlesea's 2007 Heritage Program, held a special exhibition of John Borrack's early black and white and colour wash drawings of Westgarthtown at the Ziebell Farmhouse on Sunday 28 October 2007. A renowned contemporary landscape artist, John is a great-great-grandson of Christian and Sophia Ziebell who established the farm in 1850.

While talking to John about the exhibition, he made the following comments.

"I draw for several reasons. For the artist it is a necessary discipline and one that throws light on his way of seeing. It can also be an invaluable means of understanding something because when I draw, I must look and analyse. Drawing can be an end in itself and an individual's complete expression of something that motivates him."

"These drawings executed originally before demolition of the Ziebell farmyard, have in some cases been later reworked and express how I saw that remarkable collection of buildings beneath the pines. They were not necessarily made to simply record in some photographic way, how things were. Although some are certainly more literal than others, certain liberties, as occur in any works of art, have been taken. Nevertheless they still can fulfil another purpose of drawing, namely to convey a record of a world that has largely vanished."

During the course of the afternoon, visitors to the Heritage event viewed the exhibition and other displays, then enjoyed refreshments on the verandah. John's paintings and drawings represent a wonderful and unique visual record of Westgarthtown which we were very fortunate to be able to experience.



*The Pines*, one of the drawings by John Borrack displayed at the exhibition

### Visiting Ziebell's Farmhouse

Ziebell's Farmhouse is open to the public on the second Sunday of each month between 1-4 pm. For enquiries, call 03 9464 1805 or [nmj1@bigpond.com](mailto:nmj1@bigpond.com)

Tours can be organised for groups of ten or more people. For information and bookings contact Tatiana Joukoff on 03 9464 5062 or [tatianajoukoff@hotmail.com](mailto:tatianajoukoff@hotmail.com)

### Thomastown Lutheran Church Services

Services are held on the second and fourth Sunday of the month at 11.15 am at the Thomastown Lutheran Church, German Lane, Lalor. For further details, contact Irma Hatty on 03 9338 9064 or see the Calvary Lutheran Church website at [www.calvarychurch.com.au](http://www.calvarychurch.com.au)

## VALE

### Albert Unmack

26 December 1911 – 14 September 2007

One of the Friends of Westgarthtown's oldest and longest-serving members died on 14 September 2007 aged 95. Albert Unmack was born at Leeds Grove, the family dairy farm in Harvest Home Lane East at Epping on 26 December 1911. Albert was the son of Otto Carl Christian Unmack and Emily Priscilla Cordell. Otto's parents were Carl Louis Johann and Caroline Christiana Sophie Unmack (née Ziebell).

Albert's mother died in 1914, shortly before his third birthday. A few years later, his father remarried and the family made a number of moves, including to Tullamore, the old mansion at Doncaster which later became the clubhouse for the Eastern Golf Club. He attended Doncaster State School in 1918-19, but the school closed on the outbreak of the flu epidemic, so his parents sent him to Portsea for six months. After that his family moved to Hawthorn East and he attended the Camberwell State School, before finishing his schooling at Gardiner Central School.

On leaving school Albert's step-mother, Margaret Houston, found him a job at Briscoe & Co, wholesale hardware merchants, where he was to work for 42 years. During World War Two Albert joined the AIF Ordinance Depot and served in Buna and Lae for 18 months with the 42nd F.O.D. On his discharge he returned to Briscoe & Co, remaining with them until 1970 when the company was sold. He then worked for J.S.Kidd & Co and John Danks for another seven years until his retirement.

Albert met his wife May Ackroyd during a visit to Ballarat in the 1930s and they married two years later. Their daughter Christine was born in 1948. Following May's death in 1989, Albert remained at Parkdale until 2003, when he moved into Corben House at Mentone. He moved into a nursing home shortly before his death.

For many years, Albert was a driving force behind the annual Unmack Reunion, which in recent years has been held at Ziebell's Farmhouse. He was also a generous donor to the Friends of Westgarthtown.

## German Fest

On Sunday 9 September 2007, the Friends of Westgarthtown participated in a one-day festival at Melbourne's Immigration Museum to celebrate Victoria's 160,000-plus German community.

Among the earliest Europeans to arrive in Victoria, Germans have been migrating since at least 1842 – even before the colony was official declared. In 1861, 10,418 Germans were recorded in Victoria, while numbers rose to 33,000 before World War 1 and declined to under 15,000 by 1945. Post-World War 2 migration, commencing in 1952, laid the foundation for today's large German-Australian community.

In the 2006 Census, the German community ranked as one of Victoria's largest ancestry groups, with just under 167,500 people claiming German heritage, while 28,125 were German-born. The Census also shows that 104,384 people living in the Melbourne area claim German ancestry.

The Friends of Westgarthtown operated a stand at the German Fest from which we provided information about Westgarthtown to the many people who visited the Immigration Museum that day. A display of Pribislaw timbers, arranged by Geoff Borrack, was a highlight. Gillian Borrack, Paul Schultz, and Rob Wuchatsch answered questions and Robert also gave a presentation on Germans and Wends at Westgarthtown in the Immigration Museum's theatre.

### Friends of Lutheran Archives

Do you have Lutheran ancestors? Have you checked with the Lutheran Archives in Adelaide to see whether they hold information about your relatives? Would you like to join the Friends of Lutheran Archives and help support the collection and preservation of important Australian and New Zealand Lutheran archival material.

**For further details, contact Lutheran Archives**  
 27 Fourth Street, Bowden South Australia 5007.  
 Phone/Fax: 08 8340 4009.  
 Email: [lutheran.archives@lca.org.au](mailto:lutheran.archives@lca.org.au)

# Westgarthtown Lutheran School

BY ROBERT WUCHATSCH

A Lutheran school operated at Westgarthtown for over twenty years from 1855. First known as the Neu Mecklenburg Lutheran School, after an early name for Westgarthtown, it was partly funded by the Denominational Schools Board (DSB) from 1855–64. When the DSB withdrew funding in 1864, the school struggled on independently with declining enrolments until the trustees finally decided to close it around the end of 1876. The school building, which stood about thirty metres down the hill in front of the Lutheran church, was then rented out as a private dwelling until its eventual demolition during the 1940s and 1950s.



Westgarthtown Lutheran School, c. 1930

On 14 March 1855, Pastor Matthias Goethe applied to the DSB for a grant towards the construction of the school. Interestingly, in his application, he stated that the school was ‘now almost finished’. A grant of £82/10/- was approved, that amount being the difference between the estimated cost of £350 and the £267/10/- which the German settlers had raised themselves. Neu Mecklenburg Lutheran School No. 428 officially commenced on 1 October 1855. On 16 January 1856, an architect named Bagge inspected the building and wrote ‘I hereby certify that the new Evangelical Lutheran School at Neu Mecklenburg has been erected, finished and completed according to the plans and specifications in a sound, satisfactory and workmanlike manner for the sum of four hundred pounds sterling’.

Four months later, in May 1856, Pastor Goethe reported to the Lutheran Synod that ‘a pretty church of bluestone is presently being built’. The church, dedicated on 17 November 1856, was actually the same building as the schoolhouse, said by Bagge to have been completed in January that year. In fact, from 1855–64, the schoolhouse and church remained one and the same building.

By referring to the building as a school in his correspondence with the DSB, Pastor Goethe was able to have a church built partly with Government funds which had been allocated for educational rather than church construction purposes. The separate school building, previously believed to have been erected in 1855, was not

erected for another ten years. We now know the school building was built between October 1865 and April 1866, this information gained as a result of the translation in 2006 of Johann Friedrich Topp’s day book, in which Topp records his purchases of materials for and the labour involved in construction of the schoolhouse. Johann Topp was a son-in-law of congregation member Johann Gottlob Schultz of Wollert.

## TEACHERS

Teachers at the school included Gottlieb Renner (1855–62), Johann Stanger (1863–66 and 1871–76) and Eduard Meyer (1867–70). Where the teachers and their families lived until 1866 is unknown. The new schoolhouse, completed early in 1866, contained both a schoolroom and teacher’s residence.

During 1856, eighteen children were on the school roll, although average attendance was only twelve. Some pupils came from Mill Park where several German families also lived. In addition to a DSB grant of £100 per year, parents were required to contribute one shilling per week per pupil towards the teacher’s salary, or sixpence in the case of infants.

## CURRICULUM

The Synod-approved curriculum for Lutheran schools in Victoria was thirty-one hours of schooling a week, consisting of twelve hours devoted to the study of the German language (reading and writing), six hours to religious instruction, five hours to mathematics, and lesser

times to the study of art, nature study and German history. A most significant provision was the direction that ten hours per week were to be devoted to the proper learning of English. The Lutheran Church apparently understood well the need to prepare children from German-speaking households to operate comfortably in a predominantly British community. 'Proficiency in reading, writing and understanding English was to be aimed at, plus a knowledge of English coinage, weights and measures.'

### ATTENDANCE AND LANGUAGE PROBLEMS

As early as 1857, problems became evident—limited attendances and a lack of suitably qualified teachers fluent in both German and English. These shortcomings were to persist throughout the life of the school at Westgarthtown.

In November 1857 the DSB's Inspector Geary commented:

'The master [Renner] knows no language but German. The German bible is the reading book. German Grammar, History and writing are also taught. I am of [the] opinion that in as much as the children will be eventually thrown among British people it is highly desirable that they should be taught the English language—and if schools of this description are permitted and subsidised by the state we may expect to have French, Spanish or even Chinese schools each claiming aid from the Government and perpetuating its own particular language.'

A drawing of the school and church by Geoff Borrack



Geary concluded his report by recommending that 'A teacher understanding both German and English should be at once provided.' The DSB reminded the trustees that aid could not be provided to schools where English was not taught. Then in June 1858 it followed up with the advice that the school 'may be superseded' under a new policy to close, where possible, schools with less than fifty pupils. At that time the school had only twenty pupils.

Regular attendance was a matter over which Pastor Goethe, teachers and the trustees could exercise only limited control. School attendance was not compulsory and parents often kept children home to assist, especially during harvest time or the new arrival of a new baby. Somehow the school survived, even though in 1860, with thirty-nine children on the roll, average attendance was only twenty-three. In November 1860 the DSB again wrote stating 'the Board expects the English language to be taught in the school.' Goethe dutifully replied, promising that alterations would be made.

In 1863 Renner, who returned to Germany, was replaced by Johann Stanger, the former teacher at Germantown [Grovedale] and Castlemaine. By this time many Westgarthtown families had begun sending their children to the Thomastown Common School. Although that school was further away for most children, many parents clearly felt a good working knowledge of the English language was essential for their children's advancement. By 1865, children from the Gruetzner, Hempel, Karsten, Krieger, Maltzahn, Nebel, Peters and Winter families were attending the common school. DSB funding was withdrawn from the Neu Mecklenburg Lutheran School the following year.

### CONSTRUCTION OF THE NEW SCHOOLHOUSE

In 1865, the trustees took the decision to build a new purpose-built schoolhouse. Johann Topp was engaged to erect the building, to consist of both a schoolroom and teacher's residence. The architect was Friedrich Kawerau and the specifications, recorded in Topp's day book on 2 October 1865 under the heading Westgarthtown Schoolhouse, were for a building 45 feet long by 17 feet wide, with two partitions of bricks. The schoolroom was to be 20 feet long by 14 feet high; living room 11 feet 3 inches long by 14 feet high; and bedroom 9 feet 3 inches long and 14 feet high.

Fireplaces were to be included in both the schoolroom and living room and the total cost was set at £124/6/6.

Topp, a mason, was responsible for construction of the building, but he also employed some local men to assist him. Johann Rosel, Hermann Sandmann and Heinrich Daubenthaler were the main labourers, with various other local German men engaged to cart materials. These included Carl Ewert and Johann Graff and members of the Maltzahn, Nebel, Schultz, Siebel, Winter, Wuchatsch and Zimmer families. During October and November, Topp's expenses mainly related to the purchase of blasting powder, fuses, masonry drills and pick axes, as he quarried the stone needed for the schoolhouse. The quarry, the same one used to provide stone for the church, was located just north of the church. Sharpening of drills and pick axes was a continuing expense until mid-December 1865.

In November, bricks were purchased from Gottlieb Arndt's brickworks at Preston for £2/8/0 per thousand. More were obtained in January 1866. Seven sash windows with counterweights were bought in December for £1/1/0 each, along with three door frames at 9 shillings each. Late in February, Topp paid £31/15/3 for timber for the roof and flooring. The chimneys were built in April 1866 and the schoolhouse appears to have been completed later the same month.

## CLOSURE AND EVENTUAL DEMOLITION

As no records for the school's operations have been found, the exact date the school closed is unknown, but an influx of German pupils of varying ages and academic levels at the newly rebuilt Thomastown State School in 1877 suggests its demise occurred at the end of 1876. The schoolhouse, on which the last construction debts had been repaid in 1871, was subsequently rented out as a private residence, earning the congregation much-needed income. It was to serve as a dwelling at various times until its unfortunate demise more than seventy years later in circumstances which now seem almost comical.

The schoolhouse, which if still standing today would have made a wonderful meeting place for visitors to Westgarthtown, was lost as a result of an unfortunate situation where the church trustees, at their wits end, had the building condemned in order to remove some problem tenants. Over a decade before, Pastor Steiniger had noted on his first visit to Thomastown in 1935 that 'Although the outer walls of the original school are still in good order, the interior is very dilapidated ... Mr Siebel said that they used to rent it out but because they had had



School ruins, c. 1959

so much trouble with their tenants, it wasn't worth their while.' Then after the Second World War, when housing accommodation was extremely scarce, the church trustees relented to help a family living in a tent at Epping. By June 1946, however, the trustees sought and obtained an ejectment order at the Preston Court to remove the family, which among other complaints, was apparently well behind with its ten shillings per month rent.

The family was evicted later that year and the roof removed, a requirement of the shire council's condemnation order. For the next ten years or so, the walls of the old building gradually crumbled, until by 1960 they stood only about two feet above the ground. The remnant walls remained visible until the early 1970s when the old quarry hole was filled and the schoolhouse site covered and graded to allow the area to be more easily mown to avoid summer grass fires, which were a regular occurrence.

## Friends Of Edgars Creek Visit Westgarthtown

BY ROBERT WUCHATSCH



On Sunday 30 September 2007, the Friends of Westgarthtown hosted a visit to Westgarthtown by over 20 members of the newly formed association, Friends of Edgars Creek. It was a pleasure to host such an interesting group. The Friends of Edgars Creek is a community group established in 2007 to help restore and protect Edgars Creek, the largest tributary of the Merri Creek. For further details about the Friends of Edgars Creek email [edgarscreek@freshwater.net.au](mailto:edgarscreek@freshwater.net.au), telephone 03 9350 4212 or see [www.freshwater.net.au/foec.htm](http://www.freshwater.net.au/foec.htm)

I grew up by the Edgars Creek, which ran through our farm at Lalor. When I was young the creek there was a beautiful place, not the disgraceful concrete drain you see today. As children, my sisters Dorothy and Betty and I all swam in a large waterhole below our house. We also caught eels, yabbies and small carp. Frogs abounded. The creek was a child's wonderland. Our swimming hole had been deepened and walled with stones, probably by my great-grandfather, Johann Wuchatsch. At the north end was a stone wall and a ford, which was just wide enough for people to walk across. About 100 metres south of the waterhole was another stone ford, wide enough to drive drays or waggons over. There were quite a few fords across the creek.

When the Germans and Wends settled along the creek in 1850, the area was known as Keelbundora, after the land parish in which the settlement was situated. 1850,

however, was a drought year and the German settlement soon became known as Dry Creek, as the addition of a further 100 German immigrants to those people already drawing water further upstream, meant the creek soon ran dry. Fortunately, there were life-giving springs, which sustained the residents along the creek until the rains came again.

When the 640 acres purchased by William Westgarth and John Stanley Carr was allocated among the Germans and Wends, each settler received a section of creek frontage, to ensure all residents had access to water. Communal access to a spring, located on the creek's east bank near today's Balmain Court reserve, was also ensured by making it community property. But Carl Hoehne wrote in 1853 'the water from it was so salty, as from salted butter, and had a bitter taste as well. Coffee could not be made from it, at best tea, and even this only became palatable with very much sugar.'

By communal agreement, the Germans and Wends fenced their creek frontages in a way which ensured each landowner had sole access to a section of the creek. A dry stone wall was constructed beside the creek, running first along one side for a few hundred metres, then crossing over and running down the other side for the same distance. This process was repeated all along the creek at Westgarthtown, the name by which the German settlement became known from the 1850s.

For the creek, the name Dry Creek fell into disuse, replaced by the name Edgars Creek in the early 1900s.

Before this, the creek was sometimes also referred to as the Blind Creek. The first bridge at Westgarthtown was located near today's German Lane bridge. Later another smaller one was erected on the site of today's Main Street bridge. There have been at least four bridges at German Lane, some of the early ones being destroyed or damaged by floods.

When I was growing up at Westgarthtown during the 1950s and 1960s, the area was fast developing into the suburbs of Thomastown and Lalor. I often walked through the paddocks on my way to and from Thomastown Primary School, crossing the Edgars Creek at the various stone fords. One wet day, on my way home, I found the creek in flood. I tried to cross the submerged ford which was located where the Robert Street bridge stands now, having thrown my shoes across, but eventually chickened out and headed barefoot back around to the old wooden bridge at German Lane and up past the cemetery. I thought I had lost one of my shoes, it having not reached the other side of the creek when I threw it over, but fortunately I found it under the water, wedged between some rocks. Recently Betty told me she once lost her shoes when she dropped them into the creek while trying to cross at a fence further downstream.

Later, when I was a student at Merrilands High School, I sometimes rode my bike home for lunch. One lunchtime, while checking a drum net for eels, I fell in up to my waist and had to change my clothes before riding back to school. Previously, when only about three years old, I had fallen into the creek and nearly drowned, but Betty pulled me out.

The best spot for catching yabbies was a hundred metre stretch of small water holes below Gruetzner's old house. Yabbies could always be caught there, using meat on a string, and nobody except James Ziebell and I seemed to know about it. It always annoyed me that there were far more yabbies there than at our farm, but that was because the creek near us was too stony, yabbies preferring mud.

No doubt the yabbies that lived in those holes near Gruetzner's were caught and eaten by the Aborigines before European settlement. It is possible that the Aborigines John Batman met, for his treaty signing in June 1835, were catching yabbies in that spot, beside today's Thomas Street Reserve.

There were many beautiful gum, peppercorn, hawthorn and plum trees along the creek, but they all fell victim to subdivision, which under the values of the times, required the creek to be dredged, straightened and eventually concreted. In disgust in 1993 I wrote a poem about the Edgars Creek which I later included in this newsletter in March 1998. I remain disgusted, but am encouraged by the recent formation of the Friends of Edgars Creek and hopeful the relevant authorities might finally be provoked into long overdue action to redress the previous official vandalism. Removing the concrete lining from the creek where it runs through Westgarthtown would be a good start.

## FRIENDS OF WESTGARTHTOWN INC.

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**W**estgarthtown is the oldest and most intact German/ Wendish settlement in Victoria. Established in March 1850, it celebrated its 150th Anniversary in the year 2000.

**T**he 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.

**H**eritage 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.

**Z**iebell's Farmhouse is Victoria's oldest German immigrant building.

**S**iebel'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.

**W**uchatsch's Farmhouse is believed to be the oldest house in Melbourne to have been constructed, owned and continually occupied by the same family.