

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. It was established in March 1850 and 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 to be still used as the principal worship centre of a Lutheran congregation.
- The Victorian Government's Heritage Victoria has included the Lutheran Church, Cemetery and Reserve; and Graff's, Siebel's, Wuchatsch's and Ziebell's Farmhouses on its Heritage Register, recognising their outstanding heritage value and providing legislative protection for the future.
- Wuchatsch's Farmhouse is believed to be the oldest house in Melbourne to have been constructed and continually occupied by the same family.

ZIEBELL'S FARMHOUSE RESTORATION - PROGRESS TO DATE

As reported in our last newsletter (No. 1, February 1997), the City of Whittlesea allocated \$50000 for further restoration work at Ziebell's Farmhouse during 1996/97. In January 1997 Friends of Westgarthtown committee members Rob Wuchatsch, Geoff Borrack, Gillian Borrack, Elizabeth Trenerry and Ellen Mitchell were appointed members of a Special Section 86 Council Committee to compile and implement the Stage Two restoration plan.

We are pleased to report that restoration work at Ziebell's Farmhouse is now virtually complete. Work carried out to date includes internal carpentry repairs, such as replacement of loose floorboards in the attic and pantry shelving; painting of internal walls and varnishing of skirtings and doors; sanding and sealing of floors; external painting of windows, verandah posts, fences, stucco and timber walls; reconstruction of stone laundry and smokehouse; replacement of concrete paths with brick paving and construction of

brick pathway to the new toilet block. The new toilet block is now almost complete.

Anyone who has not visited Ziebell's Farmhouse over the last few months will notice quite a change. Great credit for the restoration works at Ziebell's Farmhouse must go to Geoff Borrack, who has worked tirelessly towards this outcome.

For 1997/98, the City of Whittlesea has allocated a further \$40000 towards restoration, fitting out and displays at Ziebell's Farmhouse. The Council has also allocated \$22000 for restoration and reinstatement of drystone walls, with identical sums for each of the following two years, and \$20000 towards the preparation of a masterplan for the Westgarthtown Lutheran Church and Cemetery Reserve and Ziebell's Farmhouse.

The Friends of Westgarthtown has supported the City of Whittlesea's September 1997 application to the Australian Heritage Commission for a further \$20000 towards creation of a masterplan for improvement, maintenance and promotion of the whole Westgarthtown precinct.

The Friends of Westgarthtown has also, in conjunction with Plenty Valley Arts, applied for a \$9500 grant under the Parks Victoria Community Environment Fund towards the restoration and enhancement of Edgar's Creek and its surrounding open space environs.

ZIEBELL'S FARMHOUSE BUSINESS PLAN

In March 1997 the Friends of Westgarthtown completed and submitted a detailed Business Plan for Ziebell's Farmhouse to the City of Whittlesea, in accordance with Council's resolution to grant us a

five year licence to develop and operate it on completion of Stage Two restorations.

Given Council's decision to commission a masterplan during 1997/98 for the restoration, maintenance and promotion of the Westgarthtown Lutheran Church and Cemetery Reserve as well as Ziebell's Farmhouse, the granting of a licence has now been deferred until completion of the masterplan.

GERMAN COLONIAL CULTURE: SURROUNDING WESTGARTH TOWN

The Plenty Valley Arts Winter 1997 Newsletter featured an article by Friends of Westgarthtown Inc. committee member Ellen Mitchell about the German Torchlight Procession in Melbourne in November 1867 in honour of Alfred, Prince of Saxe-Coburg, Duke of Edinburgh, on the occasion of his visit to Victoria.

In her detailed article, which outlined events leading up to and during the Procession, Ellen posed the question "Who represented Westgarthtown?". She conjectured that perhaps it was Pastor Matthias Goethe, head of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Victoria and Minister at Westgarthtown since 1853. Or Wilhelm Alexander Brahe, Acting Consul for Prussia and legal representative for the Germans at Westgarthtown (and most others in Victoria) since 1850.

Ellen also noted the existence of a photo of the Melbourne Club Deutscher Verein Choir's picnic at South Morang in 1923.

SALE OF GRAFF'S FARMHOUSE

On 15 March 1997, Graff's Farmhouse at 1 Thomas Street,

Thomastown was sold by Bruce Edwards for \$234000 to Sibilla Laguda and Anthony Soldini. Bruce purchased the property in 1984 in a very run down condition, but had lovingly restored both the buildings and garden.

**WESTGARTHTOWN LUTHERAN
CEMETERY - NATIONAL TRUST
STUDY**

Earlier this year the National Trust (Victoria), with financial assistance from the Australian Heritage Commission, reviewed the Westgarthtown Lutheran Cemetery as part of a project to identify significant and representative cemeteries in Victoria.

- The Friends of Westgarthtown were invited to review the National Trust's draft classification report. The detailed report, which is expected to result in the cemetery's nomination for addition to the Australian Heritage Commission's register concluded that the Westgarthtown Lutheran Cemetery was "*of at least State significance*" for several reasons, including its potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Australia's cultural history, by virtue of its use as a research and reference site.

The first burial at Westgarthtown is known to have taken place prior to 27 October 1850, when Johann Graff wrote in a letter to Germany that

"those who live in the German Colony have kept some acres for a church, a school and a cemetery, which up until now a stillborn child has consecrated".

On 26 April 1997, Rob Wuchatsch and Gillian Borrack attended a National Trust Cemeteries Conservation seminar at Hawthorn. Topics covered included Cemetery

and Burial Records; restoration of stonework, lettering, iron and steelwork; and plantings and layouts. The Friends of Westgarthtown consider that restoration of the Westgarthtown Lutheran Cemetery should be a key priority and aims to see substantial work completed in time for Westgarthtown's 150th Anniversary in March 2000.

Whilst the City of Whittlesea and other interested groups can be expected to contribute towards restoration and maintenance of the cemetery grounds, walls and gates, responsibility for memorials remains with individual families.

**THOMASTOWN PRIMARY SCHOOL
STUDENTS VISIT
WESTGARTHTOWN**

On 26 August 1997, 50 Grade 3 & 4 students from Thomastown Primary School visited Westgarthtown to learn more of the history of Thomastown. The visit was arranged by teacher Caroline Sismanes and Rob Wuchatsch, with approval by the City of Whittlesea to view Ziebell's Farmhouse.

From *Thank You* notes since received by Rob, the students were most interested in the church, cemetery and Ziebell's Farmhouse. Comments included

"I really enjoyed listening to you talk about the church where the people go and how the farms were just right so that they could see the church".

"Thanks for the tour around Thomastown. I really liked the part when we went to the graveyard. To tell you the truth I liked it all".

"When we went into the big house we went into the kitchen and there was a cupboard. I thought it was for the birds but you said it was for people's food to keep it from the flies". (Meat safe!!)

"I loved the farmhouse, I didn't know the children had to sleep in the attic".

"I liked the pantry and how you could walk through it, and upstairs in the sick room"

"Up in the attic was the best room because of the wonderful view, if it was up to me I would be sick every day".

We look forward to hosting further students from Thomastown Primary and other schools in the future.

GARDENING AT ZIEBELL'S FARMHOUSE

In recent months Ian Ziebell, a Great Great Grandson of Christian and Sophia Ziebell, has very generously supplied his time and expertise to the garden at Ziebell's Farmhouse with the result it now looks a picture. Thanks also to Sylvia Schultz and family and caretakers David and Virginia Bergman for their work.

GOODBYE TO THE BERGMANS

Unfortunately we are to lose Ziebell's Farmhouse caretakers David and Virginia Bergman in October when they move to Warwick in Queensland, where David has taken a new job. Good luck David and Virginia.

THOMASTOWN LUTHERAN CHURCH SERVICES

Services are held on alternate Sundays at 11.15am at the Thomastown Lutheran Church, Rosedale Drive, Lalor. For further details contact Pastor Stephen Pietsch on 03 9435 6846 (Fax: 03 9432 9222).

THE FRIENDS OF WESTGARTHTOWN INC.

The Friends of Westgarthtown inc. consists of descendants of original German and Wendish settlers, local residents, German born Australians and other interested people with a wide variety of backgrounds, interests and skills.

CURRENT PROJECTS INCLUDE

- Restoration and improvement of the 4 hectare Lutheran Church and Cemetery Reserve.
- Restoration and beautification of the Edgar's Creek and its parklands. Provision of further plaques and
- Restoration and development of Ziebell's Farmhouse (1851) and garden as a tourist attraction.
- signs to tell Westgarthtown's story. Ongoing research into Westgarthtown's history.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

President: Rob Wuchatsch
Vice-President: Geoff Borrack
Secretary: Gillian Borrack
Treasurer: Elizabeth Trenerry
Membership/
Public Relations: Ellen Mitchell

FRIENDS OF WESTGARTHTOWN ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Our 1997 AGM will be held on 19 October at 2.00 pm at Ziebell's Farmhouse. Hope to see you there! Subscriptions for 1997/98 are now due.

MEMBERSHIP OF FRIENDS OF WESTGARTHTOWN INC.

Should you wish to join The Friends of Westgarthtown, please write to PO Box 95, THOMASTOWN - VIC 3074. New members always welcome. Membership is \$10 per year for single members and \$15 for families. Concession rates \$5 single and \$10 family. Meetings held 2 pm third Sunday each month at Ziebell's Farmhouse, 100 Gardenia Road, Thomastown.