

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.

EDITOR: ROB WUCHATSCH

A GERMAN HERITAGE FEST WILL BE
HELD AT
WESTGARTHTOWN ON SUNDAY 29
NOVEMBER 1998.

Heritage Victoria, the Department of Education, Thomastown Lutheran Church, Plenty Valley Arts and Mill Park Secondary College to hold a one-day festival to celebrate Westgarthtown's outstanding and unique heritage. Activities will commence at 11.00 am with a service at the Thomastown Lutheran Church. There will be free pony cart rides from the car park off Thomas Street to the Lutheran Church and Cemetery Reserve, German music all day in the grand marquee and Lutheran Church, quality crafts, German food and beverages and historic displays and tours. We look forward to seeing everyone there. For further details see the enclosed flyer.

Special events planned for the inaugural Westgarthtown Heritage Festival include the launch of three important new publications.

The first, a new 40-page WESTGARTHTOWN BOOKLET, is designed to guide visitors around Westgarthtown and provide information about its historic German and Wendish origins, its long history and wonderful legacy of heritage buildings, is a joint collaboration between the Friends of Westgarthtown, City of Whittlesea and Heritage Victoria. Judy Turner, Community Arts Officer at the City of Whittlesea, is co-ordinator for the booklet and has arranged finance, photography and publication. The Friends of Westgarthtown has contributed an historic essay for the first section of the booklet, written by Rob Wuchatsch, with Heritage Victoria providing both finance and text by David Harris on Westgarthtown's architectural heritage. The Friends of Westgarthtown has agreed to distribute the booklet, with all sales proceeds to be used

The Friends of Westgarthtown has combined with the City of Whittlesea and government and community groups such as

for future promotion of the Westgarthtown precinct.

The second publication will be John Borrack's book **LAMPLIGHT AND BLUESTONES**. This very special book is a compilation of astutely observed recollections and humorous childhood memories from John's early visits to the Ziebell Farm (The Pines) at Westgarthtown. His earliest memory records the beginnings of his magnificent obsession with art. His recollections are accompanied by his wonderful detailed drawings of Westgarthtown during the 1940s.

The third will be **MARIA KARSTEN'S 1999 CULINARY CALENDER**. Ellen Mitchell, Public Relations Officer for the Friends of Westgarthtown, has lovingly translated Maria Karsten's old cookbook and selected recipes for inclusion in the calender, which will be published by the Friends of Westgarthtown and Plenty Valley Arts. The following article, written by Ellen and first published in Plenty Valley Arts 1998 Winter and Spring Newsletter, is reproduced here courtesy of Plenty Valley Arts.

*One highlight of the German Heritage Fest in November will be the launch by the Friends of Westgarthtown and Plenty Valley Arts of a culinary calender containing twelve German Recipes selected from **MARIA ELIZABETH CAROLINE KARSTEN'S** cookbook of c.1848. When arriving in Australia in 1850, with her husband **HEINRICH FRIEDRICH JACOB KARSTEN**, her two children, eight brothers and sisters and her parents, **SOPHIA** and **CHRISTIAN ZIEBELL**. Maria was 26 years old.*

*Maria's stylishly written recipe book acts as a rare legacy to the best of German regional cooking. The leatherbound, octavo volume contains 207 recipes, faultlessly and diligently recorded in Gothic German script, over 292 pages, on hand-made laid paper. The book is divided into a number of sections according to food-type, thus following the structure of famous prototypes such as *Illustriertes Kochbuch*, by L. Kurth with its many editions. Recipes relating to soups, fish, poultry, game, beef, sauces, pickles, vegetables, cakes, puddings and preserves comprise the main categories, but there are long and detailed sections dedicated to spine-tingling descriptions of dissecting and preparing oxen, geese, game and calf-heads.*

*Apart from the historically informative recipes Maria left us some splendid typically German ones. In the section **VON SUPPEN (ON SOUPS)**, we find two types: *Gruene Erbsensuppe (Green peasoup)* and *Kartoffelsuppe (Potato soup)* qualify as examples for the one, rye bread soup in wine and sour cherry soup for the other. Among meat dishes, *Roast Mutton with asparagus, cabbage or suedes* emerge as choice. *Carp in wine, eel in jelly, a fish pudding and a crayfish pate* vie for attention elsewhere. From the many cakes, puddings, fruit desserts, ices and pancakes, it is difficult to select the **SCHOKOLADENKUCHEN (Chocolate Cake)**, **ZITRONEN SPEISE (Lemon Dessert)**, or fluffy pancakes with apples or raspberries for inclusion in the calender. Last, the 12 page index is a reminder that sauces, pickles and preserves require a meagre representation too, displacing **SAUERKRAUT**, for once!*

*The ampleness, richness, and type of food substance used as well as references to cellar facilities suggest that Maria wrote her recipe book before her family's migration from Mecklenburg to Melbourne. This assumption is further reinforced by documents attesting to her employment as cook in the household of **KARL VON OERTZEN**, Royal Prussian Chamberlain in Alt Poorsdorf. Her collection of recipes would have impressed any potential employer.*

*Another document reflects on Maria's kindness and generosity. In a letter dated June 1855, **VON OERTZEN** thanks her in highly emotive terms, for a gold piece received after the death of his wife, stating, that her sentiments touched him more deeply than those expressed by her relatives.*

*The Friends of Westgarthtown are deeply grateful to **DORA BUCKLEY** who facilitated access to Maria's manuscript now professionally repaired to last another 150 years. For photograph's showing Maria in the prime of her life, and later as second link in a five-generation picture, we thank her also. For letters, certificates and other documents shedding light on Maria's life, we are indebted to the generosity of **CARL ROBERTSON**. (Maria was Dora and Carl's great-grandmother).*

Whereas Maria Karsten's Culinary Calender will only reflect a "taste" of her talent, the Ziebell Farmhouse envisaged as a German Museum, affiliated with the new Museum of Immigration, would constitute the appropriate place to house the full range

of heritage items thus rescuing the spirit and the deeds of a vital part of Victoria's pioneer settlers.

The Friends of Westgarthtown also wishes to place on record its thanks for a very generous \$250 donation from the estate of Olive Robertson, a Westgarthtown descendant who died in 1997. A Karsten descendant and sister of Dora Buckley and Carl Robertson, Olive was always very interested in Westgarthtown's history and provided several important photographs for Rob Wuchatsch's 1985 Westgarthtown book. She is buried in the Westgarthtown Cemetery.

HOEHNE BOOK

Robert 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 now be launched at a German Conference to be held at the State Library in Melbourne in April 1999 to celebrate the 150th Anniversary of German Immigration to Victoria.

WESTGARTHTOWN CONTINUES TO RECEIVE GOOD PUBLICITY

Rob Wuchatsch did a 10 minute interview with *Optus Local Vision* on 22 May 1998 and a 40 minute interview with *Plenty Valley FM Radio* on 9 August 1998.

The Age carried a report on 16 May 1998 in its Education Section, referring to the activities of teacher David Harris, currently on secondment to Heritage Victoria and who is preparing an architectural heritage article for the forthcoming Westgarthtown promotional booklet.

The *Whittlesea Post* also continues to provide regular coverage, including articles on 6 May and 24 June 1998 re the German Oral History Project and on 2 September 1998 re the forthcoming German Fest.

Ziebell's Farmhouse was included in the recently released Plenty Valley Tourist Map and Locality Guide, a high quality production of the Whittlesea Courthouse Association, in co-operation with the Plenty Valley Tourism Development Panel, of which Friends of Westgarthtown Treasurer Elizabeth Trenerry is a member.

RESTORATION AND RECONSTRUCTION OF STONE WALLS AT WESTGARTHTOWN

Work continues under Parks Victoria grant funding towards restoration and enhancement activities along the Edgar's Creek. Local residents and visitors to Westgarthtown have all commented very favourably on the reconstructed drystone wall along the western side of the creek below the Church.

The revegetation works along the creek will commence shortly.

The drystone walls along Gardenia Road were also restored by the City of Whittlesea during May 1998, including part of the cemetery wall.

It is intended that the main central gates will soon be reinstated, along with the pedestrian gates at each end.

CITY OF WHITTLESEA FORMS GERMAN SETTLEMENT OF THOMASTOWN ADVISORY COMMITTEE .

On 11 May 1998, the first meeting of what is now known as the German Settlement of Thomastown Advisory Committee was held, at the City of Whittlesea Civic Centre. This committee, which consists of the Mayor Cr. Frank Merlino, Cr. John Fry, all members of the Friends of Westgarthtown committee, Dean Frank of the City of Whittlesea, Irma Hatty and Gordon Menzel of the Lutheran Church and Gabrielle and Martine Kilner. The Mayor Cr. Merlino is Chairman.

Four meetings have now been held, with considerable progress made towards the restoration and improvement of Westgarthtown's central precinct. These include the appointment of consultants to prepare a Masterplan for Ziebell's Farmhouse and the Lutheran Church Reserve and environs. Moves to change the name of Rosedale Drive between Mt View and Gardenia Roads have also commenced.

CONSULTANT'S APPOINTED TO PREPARE THE WESTGARTHTOWN MASTERPLAN - TO BE COMPLETED BY CHRISTMAS 1998

The City of Whittlesea has appointed Helen Lardner Conservation and Design (HLCD) to prepare the long awaited Westgarthtown Masterplan. An

GERMAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Architect/Heritage Advisor, Helen Lardner will be assisted by Context Pty Ltd (Consultation and Management); EDGe Environmental Design (Landscape Planning and Design); and Essential Economics (Marketing and Business Planning).

The objectives of the Masterplan are to determine an end use for the Westgarthtown Precinct and to develop an integrated and comprehensive strategy for achieving that end use which includes conservation, maintenance, capital improvement, management and landscape plans.

The Friends of Westgarthtown are co-operating with HLCD in their research. A Community Workshop was held at Westgarthtown on 13 September 1998. About 35 people first toured Westgarthtown and then moved to the Mt View Road Scout Hall to discuss all aspects of the future management of Westgarthtown.

RE-NAMING OF PART OF ROSEDALE DRIVE

As reported in our March 1998 newsletter, the Friends of Westgarthtown has suggested to the City of Whittlesea it re-name that part of Rosedale Drive which extends through the Lutheran Church and Cemetery Reserve (between Mt View and Gardenia Roads). This matter has now been considered by the German Settlement at Thomastown Advisory Committee and the name German Lane agreed upon.

Prior to the 1920s German Lane started at High Street and ran west (now known as Main Street) then north (now known as Mt. View Road) to the Winter Farm, where it crossed over the Edgar's Creek on an old wooden bridge and ran west (now known as Rosedale Drive) to what is now Gardenia Road. German Lane West formerly ran the whole length of Gardenia Road.

The Friends of Westgarthtown believe it is very fitting that part of the old German Lane should again carry the original name. It is hoped that final approval from all relevant authorities will be granted in time to enable a formal re-naming ceremony to be held during the German Heritage Fest on 29 November 1998.

From March - June 1998 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.

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.

Interviews were conducted from 7 April - 3 June 1998 by groups of two to three students per session, at Mill Park Secondary College or in interviewees private homes. The interviews, which lasted between 17 and 57 minutes, were recorded onto Digital Audio Tape and later transcribed and edited by Christian Froelicher, the historian who supervised the interviews and Christel Weller. Six interviews were conducted in English and four in German. Some of the interviews have been included on Education Victoria's web page, at

www.bssc.edu.au/learningareas.

The German Oral History Project was launched at Mill Park Secondary College on 18 June 1998. A selection of extracts from the transcripts of the first four of the ten interviews are included below. Others will be included in future newsletters.

Geoffrey Borrack (Ziebell Descendant and Vice-President Friends of Westgarthtown)

"... One of the things about my early youth is that when you live on a farm in your early days, (Ziebell's) the thing that stays most with you is the smell of things. And that sounds funny, I know, but when you live on a farm, there are so many wonderful smells. There is the smell of the cow yard, there is the smell of the hay being cut, the smell of the chicken yard and some people say "Oh, that's dreadful", but they're not, they are lovely smells and it's funny how you can remember smells and it brings back very, very intimate feelings about how you were and how you were as a young person. I was driving out here today and I just

thought about that, gosh, you know, all those lovely things that one sensed in those days, probably you don't anymore. You smell fumes from cars and in the spring time there is always the smell of hawthorn hedges, you know, things of that nature. Very simple things, but things that stay with you all your life ..."

Dean Putting (Siebel Descendant)

" ... I grew up not really knowing much about what my background was. We always knew that my grandfather had a German background, that there was a house somewhere over near Thomastown that was an old bluestone place and I guess it didn't really have a high importance, but certainly over the past 8 or 9 years I've been following up bits and pieces. I guess, some of the interests have been from the style of building and stuff. Then to find a little bit more about my background, as far as where my ancestors came from and then about their lifestyles, and who else they were interacting with and how they interacted with each other, how they interacted with the rest of society at the time, how the rest of society treated them, especially during things like the war years. There's a whole range of different things and I think it's really good that those background themes are becoming more and more known and I'm sure there's a lot of other communities throughout Australia that have got different ethnic backgrounds, and we, I think, we should embrace that as Australians and say that we are proud to have a multicultural background and use it as a strength to go, you know, to go on to the future and accept other people".

Dieter Steiniger (son of Lutheran Minister)

" ... I was born in England, near Newcastle, near the Scottish border ... My father was a clergyman, unfortunately he died 30 years ago. He was a Lutheran clergyman, and he was in England for six years as a clergyman for sailors, and in the year of '34, that was in December, he was called to Melbourne. He accepted that and came to the German Evangelical Trinity Church here in Melbourne for a six year contact ... I was only three months old when I arrived here ... My mother, before she got married, was a nurse in Germany ... Despite my father being interned for almost three years (during the war) there was still a simple service in German on Sundays ... I came to Thomastown as a little boy ... I was eight or ten years old then. I even went to the children's mass in Thomastown, and till

today I know a few families who belonged to that parish and partly still belong to it. They were nice times. I mean the area, for example when I was a child, there were no houses there, it was all farmers and the land was open ... their day started with the rise of the sun and it finished with sunset ..."

Rudi Richter (German born Lalor resident)

I was born ... in Germany, in Zittau ... It is directly on the Polish-Czech border ... I have another two brothers. We all came to Australia in the year of 1956. My brothers are half-brothers and my father died in the War, on the Russian front, and my mother remarried after the War and that's how another two brothers arrived ... I went to school in East Germany until I was 13 years old. Then we fled to West Germany via Berlin ... I also learnt Russian in school for four years ... it was mandatory ... East Germany was under communist rule in those days ... You had to do and sing and speak as they wanted to. You didn't have any choice, and you had to learn all sorts of Russian songs, although I have to say, I actually liked the Russian language ... We stayed for three years in West Germany and then we decided, my father decided that we would emigrate, because they couldn't really develop roots there, and then the question arose, shall we go to, in those days it was a bit different. You could go to America, you could go to Brazil, you could go to Canada, and my father decided to go to Australia. Thank God! ... it took five weeks by boat ... for the first 21 years we lived in Sydney ... then, when we came to Melbourne ... in Lalor ... it is precisely in the vicinity of ... Westgarthtown, which was also called Germantown at one stage, and it's actually quite a coincidence that I came to live there ... When I wake up in the morning, I can see the little church ... and for me that is something, how shall I say, peculiar. Because I never could have imagined to come to Australia ... and live just opposite of a church which was once built by Germans, not only that, but in 1856. It's a bit of history, Australian, and at the same time a bit of German history ... To be frank, there are, through my work at the radio here, Radio ZZZ, I discovered that there are nevertheless very many Germans who don't even know that there is indeed a certain German heritage here in Melbourne ... "

TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH'S
SENIOR CIRCLE MAY 1998 VISIT
TO WESTGARTHTOWN

On 12 May 1998, the Friends of Westgarthtown hosted about 45 members of the Trinity Lutheran Church, East Melbourne's Senior Circle to a tour of Westgarthtown.

Rob Wuchatsch and Ellen Mitchell acted as tour guides. As well as a tour of Ziebell's Farmhouse and the Lutheran Church and Cemetery, a highlight was the German church service conducted at the Lutheran Church by Trinity's Pastor Rolf Ortwein. For Rob, Ellen and Irma Hatty, who kindly opened the church for the visit, it was a very special and moving experience to hear the service and hymns in German. The sound of the small but full church resounding to the wonderful and enthusiastic singing of the Trinity Senior Circle members almost brought your normally un sentimental editor to shed a tear at what was really a re-enactment of a fundamental part of Westgarthtown's history. We are hopeful the Senior Circle will again display their marvellous singing talents at the Westgarthtown German Fest on 29 November.

During our visit to the Church, Genie Fiebig told how she had first visited the Thomastown Lutheran Church in the 1940s, as a 16 year old, when Pastor Steiniger was in charge.

"for some reason the regular organist was not available, and he asked me to play for him (it was my first service as an accompanist). At that time we lived in South Yarra, and as public transport was meagre and uncertain, and money was short, I rode my bike to Thomastown - a day's outing. I was warmly received. Several of the congregation arrived by horse and jinker and one of my vivid memories is of the horses waiting patiently for the service to be over ... Years later, I played for Pastor Kostizen (about 1980) for a Christmas service, which I enjoyed very much (but) the element of adventure was no longer there, and I could now drive out with my husband".

Since the Trinity Senior Circle's visit, there have been two very interesting developments. The first relates to the location of the former Thomastown Lutheran Church bell, thought lost since the 1960s. Some readers will recall it once sat atop a wooden pole (which still stands) about 10 metres in front of the church door. Christina Huwald has kindly advised that the bell is now housed at the

Martin Luther Homes at Boronia, an aged care facility of the Lutheran Church.

The second was a collection of eight black and white photographs taken in 1964 at the Westgarthtown Lutheran Cemetery and made available by Renate Haensen. Of particular interest were two photos - one of the old box picket pedestrian gates at each end of the cemetery and another of Wennagel's (formerly Maltzahn's) farm.

<p>ROYAL HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF VICTORIA SEPTEMBER 1998 VISIT TO WESTGARTHTOWN</p>

On 20 September 1998 the Friends of Westgarthtown welcomed about 35 members and friends of the Royal Historical Society of Victoria to Westgarthtown.

We were very pleased to host the RHSV's tour of Ziebell's Farmhouse, Siebel's Farmhouse (courtesy Brigid Burnard who always cheerfully helps out); and the Lutheran Church and Cemetery. Committee members Elizabeth Trenerry (Treasurer), Ellen Mitchell (Public Relations Officer) and Gillian Borrack (Secretary) arranged the tour and provided afternoon tea and pastries to the great satisfaction of all. Rob Wuchatsch acted as tour guide. Thanks also to the Thomastown Lutheran Church and the City of Whittlesea for making the day such a success.

All visitors expressed great interest in Westgarthtown and some very interesting historical points and questions were raised by this extremely knowledgeable group. Among our guests were Susan Priestley, RHSV President and author of many Victorian local histories and Dr Stuart Duncan, the former Monash University geographer who in 1986 made public his work on John Batman, in which he claims Batman signed his famous treaty with the Aborigines on the banks of the Edgar's Creek at Thomastown.

Rob Wuchatsch also used this occasion to "lobby" Susan Priestley re the urgent need for a comprehensive biography on William Westgarth to be researched, written and published as soon as possible.

<p>1998 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING</p>

The Friends of Westgarthtown's 2nd AGM will be held on Sunday 18 October 1998 at Ziebell's Farmhouse at 2. 00pm.

A reminder that membership subscriptions for 1998/99 are now due – see attached renewal form.

**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).