

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

**MALTZAHN'S FARMHOUSE SAVED.
HERITAGE VICTORIA TO RESTORE
MALTZAHN'S FARMHOUSE FOR USE
AS A PRIVATE RESIDENCE.**

In June 1999, the Friends of Westgarthtown and the City of Whittlesea won a five year battle to save Maltzahn's Farmhouse from demolition, when Rob

McLellan, Minister for Planning announced that ownership of the derelict property would be immediately transferred from the Ministry of Housing to Heritage Victoria, which would undertake its restoration.

Soon after, architect Nadia Gasparetto, engineer Tomas Nobel and historian Francis O'Neill were appointed to undertake a study of Maltzahn's Farmhouse and prepare a Conservation Plan with recommendations for restoration. Their draft report has now been completed and is currently open for comment.

Key recommendations include removing all concrete work from the original bluestone walls, reinstating the original window openings and replacing newer brick walls with bluestone. The recent concrete slab floor will also be removed and timber flooring reinstated. At this stage it is too early to say how much the work will cost or when it will be completed.

Considering the poor condition to which building had been allowed to deteriorate, caused by the Ministry of Housing's shameful policy of strategic and accelerated neglect, the decision by the Victorian Government to save Maltzahn's Farmhouse came at the eleventh hour, following the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal's approval of its demolition. Such a successful outcome, when all seemed lost, is a tribute to the efforts of two people in particular – John Fry, Mayor of the City of Whittlesea and Geoff Borrack, Friends of Westgarthtown Vice-President and architect, who consistently argued the building was capable of restoration.

The *Age* of 9 June 1999 and the *Whittlesea Post* of 23 June and 6 October 1999 carried

reports on the saving of Maltzahn's Farmhouse.

150th ANNIVERSARY OPEN DAY TO BE HELD AT WESTGARTHTOWN ON 16 APRIL 2000

The Whittlesea City Council; Friends of Westgarthtown; and Wendish Heritage Society Australia are planning an Open Day at Westgarthtown on Sunday 16 April 2000. It will celebrate the 150th Anniversary of the establishment of Westgarthtown during March 1850.

To be held as part of a city-wide City of Whittlesea-Heritage Day, 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 Westgarthtown.

The Wendish Heritage Society Australia will hold a community lunch in the nearby scout hall in Mount View Road, then conduct its 1999/2000 Annual General Meeting at 1.30 pm. At 2.00 pm Rob Wuchatsch will speak about Westgarthtown's early days. Special guests will be members of the Bendigo German Heritage Society.

COMPLETION OF WESTGARTHTOWN MASTER PLAN BY HELEN LARDNER CONSERVATION AND DESIGN

The Thomastown Pioneer Precinct Conservation Analysis & Management Plan, better known as the Westgarthtown Master Plan, was completed in June 1999 and subsequently adopted by the City of Whittlesea.

The aim of the report was to establish the cultural significance of Westgarthtown and formulate conservation policies and a management plan to retain and enhance the significance of the precinct. The City of Whittlesea has provided copies of the plan to the Friends of Westgarthtown, Lalor Library, Heritage Victoria, the National Trust and the Immigration Museum.

The commissioning and completion of a Westgarthtown Masterplan has been one of the main aims of the Friends of Westgarthtown and we are very pleased to

see its successful completion and adoption by the City of Whittlesea. The Friends of Westgarthtown provided considerable input to the preparation of the Masterplan, including several meetings with the consultants and a written submission on 26 April 1999 on the Draft Masterplan, which was released for comment on 29 March 1999.

A Thomastown Pioneer Precinct Committee will be established to, amongst other things, make recommendations to the City of Whittlesea within the Masterplan framework; co-ordinate visitor and usage related operational matters; and contribute to the management of heritage issues.

The committee is expected to consist of 10 members, comprising two Councillors; four representatives from the Friends of Westgarthtown; two representatives from the Thomastown Lutheran Church; and two community members.

The initial tasks of the TPP Committee will be to:

Encourage volunteer involvement in the interpretation, conservation and restoration of the Ziebell Farmhouse and Lutheran Church sites.

Provide input into the staging of the capital improvement projects funded in the 1999/2000 City of Whittlesea budget.

Draft a disaster plan.

Draft an updated and upgraded business plan, with strategies to promote the precinct to schools and other potential visitors; link into local visitor promotions, festivals and tourism initiatives; and create other opportunities for publicity and income promotion.

Planning is progressing with the works recommended by the Masterplan, in particular car parking, which will be mainly along German Lane between Gardenia Drive and Mount View Road (formerly Rosedale Drive). Council engineers are preparing plans for the proposed improvements to German Lane. The revised road reserve alignment will then set the location of the new fencing which will, in turn, indicate the position of the walking path.

NEW BOOK FROM HAMBURG TO HOBSONS BAY - GERMAN

**EMIGRATION TO PORT PHILLIP
(AUSTRALIA FELIX) 1848-51 BY
THOMAS A. DARRAGH & ROBERT N.
WUCHATSCH PUBLISHED APRIL 1999**

This book, about the origins of German/Wendish migration and settlement in Victoria, was launched on 15 April 1999 by the Hon. Tim Fischer, then Deputy Prime Minister, at Melbourne's Immigration Museum. The launch was jointly hosted by the Friends of Westgarthtown and the Wendish Heritage Society Australia.

The book's publication was timed to coincide with the 150th anniversary of German immigration to Victoria. Part 1 relates the history of German emigration to Port Phillip; Part 11, which includes a translation of Carl Traugott Hoehne's 1853 book, covers the early reactions and experiences of ten Port Phillip Germans and Wends, including Johann Graff. Part 111 contains brief biographies of emigrants mentioned in Hoehne's book, including Johann Graff, Johann Rosel, Johann Wuchatsch and Johann Zimmer. Also included in the Appendices are the names of over 650 passengers known to have arrived in Melbourne from Germany prior to Separation in 1851.

The book has been well received and reviewed. The *Age* of 16 April 1999 carried a report on the launch and reviews have appeared in various family and history based journals.

Royal Historical Society of Victoria.

"Handsomely produced, the book will prove a rich resource for historians of any ilk"

Genealogical Society of Victoria.

"The text is supported by many footnotes relating to well researched material in archives and libraries and it provides a solid base for further studies into Victoria's Germanic and Wendish history and heritage".

Friends of Lutheran Archives.

"It is a valuable resource not only for those directly concerned with German migration to Victoria, but also for anyone interested in the emigration debate and the image of Australia in Germany, and in the story of how and why our forbears came to this

country, and how they fared when they arrived".

Copies of *From Hamburg to Hobsons Bay* and John Borrack's book *Lamplight and Bluestones*, which was featured in the March 1999 edition of this Newsletter, can be obtained through the Friends of Westgarthtown.

**BARON VON MUELLER'S GERMAN
MELBOURNE CONFERENCE – APRIL
1999**

As advertised in our March 1999 Newsletter, Plenty Valley Arts' 5th Annual Conference *Baron Von Mueller's German Melbourne* was held on 17th April 1999 at the State Library of Victoria. This conference was arranged in association with the Friends of Westgarthtown.

Ellen Mitchell, co-convenor and Plenty Valley Arts/Friends of Westgarthtown committee member, reports that the conference was very successful, being well attended and the subject of many stimulating presentations. Ellen presented a paper herself on the German artist Carl Kahler, as did Rob Wuchatsch, who spoke about his and Tom Darragh's latest book *From Hamburg to Hobsons Bay* (see report above).

Co-convenor of the conference with Ellen was fellow Friends of Westgarthtown committee member and President of Plenty Valley Arts Elizabeth Trenerry.

An exhibition, curated by Walter Struve, Reference Librarian was also held in Queen's Hall, State Library of Victoria, from 12 April to 30 May 1999.

DONATION BY ALBERT UNMACK

Westgarthtown descendant Albert Unmack recently made a very generous donation of \$200 to the Friends of Westgarthtown. Thank you Albert for your kind gesture.

Albert is the son of Otto Unmack and grandson of Carl Louis Johann Unmack, who married Caroline Ziebell in 1863. Caroline was the daughter of Christian and Sophia Ziebell.

**WESTGARTHTOWN GERMAN
LANGUAGE HERITAGE TRAIL TO BE
ESTABLISHED BY EDUCATION
DEPARTMENT**

Roxy McGuire of the Education Department, in conjunction with the Association of German Language Teachers of Victoria, is currently preparing Westgarthtown Heritage Trail materials to assist German Language students during future visits to Westgarthtown.

Further details of the new Heritage Trail will be provided in our March 2000 Newsletter.

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF MELBOURNE

Rob Wuchatsch was invited to and has now prepared a 300 word article on Westgarthtown for the forthcoming Encyclopedia of Melbourne, a project hosted by Monash University and funded by an Australian Research Council grant.

The Encyclopedia will chronicle Melbourne's urban environment from its beginnings to the present day. It will be launched in 2001, to coincide with the centenary of Federation and sesquicentenary of Victoria's separation from New South Wales.

**RECONSTRUCTION OF
KITCHEN/PANTRY FLOORING IN
ZIEBELL'S FARMHOUSE**

The floorboards have been taken up in part of the eastern wing of Ziebell's Farmhouse to enable necessary drainage works to be undertaken. It is hoped that all flooring works can be completed by early 2000 at the latest, to enable Ziebell's Farmhouse to be reopened as soon as possible. The building is currently closed to visitors until further notice.

**REVEGETATION OF EDGARS CREEK
PARKLANDS**

The revegetation works initiated by Gillian Borrack along the western banks of the Edgar's Creek, just below the Lutheran Church, have been very successful. The

native plantings made during 1998 have grown prolifically and further recent plantings by Melbourne Water are expected to do the same.

Following these very successful trials, it is hoped all banks of the Edgar's Creek, both in Westgarthtown and elsewhere, will ultimately be revegetated.

It is to be hoped that at some time in the foreseeable future action will also be taken by Melbourne Water and other responsible authorities to remedy the appalling visual picture the concrete lined sections of Edgars Creek offer to residents and visitors to Westgarthtown. Whereas many other creeks in Melbourne have now been improved and restored to something of their original condition, some sections of the Edgar's Creek, most notably between the Kingsway Drive and German Lane bridges, can only be described as an eyesore.

**CITY OF WHITTLESEA GERMAN
SETTLEMENT OF THOMASTOWN
ADVISORY COMMITTEE .**

Several meetings of this committee have been held since our last Newsletter in March 1999. This committee will shortly be replaced by the Thomastown Pioneer Precinct Committee.

GERMAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

As reported in previous Newsletters, the Friends of Westgarthtown joined with the City of Whittlesea; Mill Park Secondary College; and the Education Department to successfully conduct the German Oral History Project during 1998.

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 ten interviewees were aged from about 45 to 85.

A selection of extracts from the transcripts of the first seven interviews were included in our September 1998 and March 1999 Newsletters. Extracts from the final two English language interviews are included below.

Beatrice Vearing (Epping resident and Zimmer descendant)

When and where were you born? ... 1915 ... in Epping ... my father was born at Epping and he went to the State School and he helped on the farm. Then, when he was a little older, he went and studied Engineering and he used to work machines, thrashing machines and chaff cutters and they used to travel around central Victoria, harvesting the crops for people and he would repair machines, binders and that type of farm machinery ... My mother, her ancestors came from England, from Cumberland ... What was your earliest childhood memory? One of them was visiting the aunt this chair belonged to and I used to call, I don't know why, her name was Johanna, but we called her 'Aunty Wuchatsch' ... Tell us about your education? ... I went to the Epping school, State School and then I went to Lowther Hall, Church of England Girls Grammar School in Essendon. I was a boarder there for four years ... When I was 18 I left school and my mother and father took me overseas for a trip for six months. We went to England, to mother's relations and my father wanted to go and see where his ancestors came from. So we did a trip in Europe through France and Switzerland and we had a wonderful trip on the Rhine River to Cologne. Then we went by train across to Dresden, but my father never knew exactly where they came from. But he knew it was in that area, in Saxony and it was instilled in his mind that he was a Saxon. There seemed to be a division, whether you were a German or a Polish or Saxon and he always said he was Saxon. And then in 1938 we went overseas again ... before I was married. Can you describe a typical day on the farm? Well we only milked a cow or two for our own use, for milk and butter. I always had chickens that I fed and (other) animals. See, farming varies so much, it depends on the season, whether sheep are having lambs, you go around and look after the lambs and shepherd them. Then, when it comes to shearing, you have to work in the shearing shed and help with the wool ... And the harvesting. We'd cut our crops with the binder and the binder would make it into sheaves and then we'd have to make the sheaves into stooks, that's standing them up and that was one of my jobs. Going around helping stook the sheaves and then they'd be carted into the stack and another job was standing on the stack with the pitch fork, turning them over to the stack builder. Could you please tell us about the war

years? ... I got married in 1941 during the war and we didn't have much. We were rationed, we had food rationing and so we milked four or five cows, obviously being here then, on this property and we'd milk the cows and separate (the milk) into the cream, and (we) made butter and we would do some trading. We would take it down to a grocer in Preston and he would give us extra sugar and tea and we'd give him butter. And people, two friends, would come and we'd give them butter. (They) had children and needed extra cream and milk. Yes, after the war we sponsored a family from England and we kept them for six months as a war effort. It was a husband and wife and boy, he was eight years old and he was the same age as our boys, and he went to school with them. And he lives in Townsville now and he still keeps in contact with us ... Why did you choose to stay in Epping? Well, our living was here, our farm was here. I never decided to move away. Your friends. You have very deep roots, once you live in a place. That's what I feel about life.

Heinz Gerlach (German born former Lalor resident)

When were you born? ... On 21st January 1933. In Berlin ... My mother came from an area that was, used to be Poland and is now, of course, Poland again. ... she met my father through correspondence and moved to Berlin. ... My father is the youngest child of a family of seven. His oldest two brothers were killed in the First World War ... Take us through your childhood home. My childhood home is hard to explain because I grew up before the war on a little outskirts block of land and we had just a little shack there. But when the war started and the bombing in Berlin, during the bombing era we had to vacate Berlin and go back to Poland where my mother was born and I grew up on a farm situation. I had to look after cows and went to school there and started my high school at what is now Poland, and after the war we came back, we were fleeing from the Poles and the Russians and came back to Berlin and our little hut was still there miraculously, even though other houses around there (were) destroyed, that little wooden hut was still standing there and we ... had this place where we could start off again. My mother, father came home from the war and joined us there and that's where I grew up for the rest (of my youth) until I left for Australia ... I left Germany in 1952 in February and it was, I guess, there wasn't much on in Germany in those

days ... Anything is better than staying at home, and a little bit of adventurism, I guess. Describe the circumstances of your departure from Germany. The Victorian Railways hired us in Berlin and we flew out as a group from Berlin to Bremerhaven, which is a port town in the north of Germany. We entered a ship there and we came out to Australia. We had to pay our fare, but it was advanced by the Victorian Railways and we had to repay it over the next two years ... after my railway career, I went back into bricklaying ... A friend of mine, an elderly friend, who used to be my boss in Berlin, moved out to Thomastown in 1951 and his wife and family were there and we visited them and my (future) wife (Marie - a Ziebell descendant) happened to be the girlfriend of their daughter ... I built my first home in Bundoora with my own labour and when we got married it was almost finished. That was in 1958. What do you like most about Australia? ... I guess it's the freedom. And one can only appreciate it after one has lived through war situations and bureaucratism. I like Australia for its freedom, I would suggest, and its wide open spaces, everything ... I've been everywhere in Australia. I've also flown with my family to Papua New Guinea to visit the mission station up there, because our children went to school with children from Papua New Guinea ... I've also flown in America and I've flown a light aircraft from Los Angeles all the way up to Alaska, right up to the Russian border ... and back through the Canadian and American Rockies via the Grand Canyon ... Professional and family life? I worked in the railways and I worked my way up to the station master in two years time, that's how I learned my English. After that I went back to the building industry and I had a building company for many years. We built many houses in Melbourne and all around Melbourne for many years and since none of my children were interested in the building industry I eventually gave it away and my oldest son went into the chicken broiler industry and that's where I spent my last twenty years virtually ... Have you been back to Germany? Several times ... The first time I went back I thought I'll show my wife Germany and we were together and that was in 1966 and since then we've been back again later on with our children and we've enjoyed it every time and of course you are surprised about the progress they have made since the war and how they worked themselves out of the aftermath of the war and I was there just before the unification and every time I was in East Germany as well (as) in West Germany, so I knew how

the East Germans in a way suffered the lack of freedom that the West had. I was there after the unification and it was a fantastic experience to be able to cross the old borders that we used to cross before ...

VISIT TO WESTGARTHTOWN BY
YMCA RAMBLERS

Pauline Atkins, a Maltzahn descendant, conducted a walk through Westgarthtown on 25 June 1999 for members of the YMCA Ramblers. Pauline reports that the day, which included a tour by Sylvia Schultz through Ziebell's Farmhouse, was a great success.

REPORT FROM THE ADVERTISER 24
AUGUST 1934 RE THOMASTOWN
LUTHERAN CHURCH CONCERT

Thomastown Lutheran Church

"A concert organised by Mr. Albert Siebel was held on August 18 in the Thomastown Hall in aid of the above church. The programme was opened with the National Anthem, followed by an overture and solo beautifully rendered by Mrs. Alice McDonald the accompaniste. A special feature of the programme was some clever dancing by pupils of the Fairthorne Calisthenic College under the direction of Miss Miller. Some of the dances were a ballet by the senior girls, Russian folk dance, solo and tap dancing, and action songs by the juniors. Two of the smaller children prettily danced the gavotte. The clever talent and beautiful costumes of these artists greatly impressed the audience, who showed their appreciation in no uncertain way. Miss Irene Gordon, Miss Isabel Scott and Mr. Albert Siebel gave a creditable performance in a humorous sketch entitled "Dramatic Situations". Miss Gordon's talent was also highly appreciated in other elocutionary items. The ever-popular artists, Albert Schobel and Ida Lauer, delighted the audience with Spanish and gipsy numbers in costume. Miss Lillius Hirt, a local artist, was applauded for her vocal item. The humorous side of the programme was supplied by the popular Scotch comedian, Arthur Douglas (in national costume), and also by Miss Bain of Reservoir, who caused much merriment with her comic songs.

At the conclusion of the programme the artists were presented with flowers and

boxes of sweets. The Rev. Frank, on behalf of the congregation, thanked the artists for their fine programme, and also Mr. Albert Siebel for his successful effort. The Doxology was then sung, after which supper was provided by the ladies.”

1999 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Friends of Westgarthtown's 3rd AGM will be held on Sunday 21 November 1999 in the grounds of Ziebell's Farmhouse.

Membership subscriptions for the 1999/2000 year are now due.

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.

**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).