

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**

**PLAQUE UNVEILING TO BE 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 will be unveiled by members of the Adams family and the City of Whittlesea.

The commemoration, which will take place between 2.00 – 4.00 pm, will include light refreshments (tea/coffee, sandwiches and cakes), served during the afternoon in a marquee with a quartet playing German classical music. Invited guests will include members and descendants of the Ziebell family and all Friends of Westgarthtown members. Members should book using the specially enclosed flyer.

This long awaited event will honour 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 and thus ensured its restoration and preservation for present and future generations to visit and enjoy.

PLANNING PERMIT ISSUED FOR RESTORATION OF MALTZAHN'S FARMHOUSE AT LALOR.

The City of Whittlesea has advised that on 22 August 2000 it issued a planning permit for the reconstruction of Maltzahn's Farmhouse at 127 Gardenia Road, Lalor for the purpose of a dwelling. Work is expected to commence shortly and be completed during 2001.

The permit application was lodged by Terence Nott Architect Pty Ltd, 24 McKean Street, North Fitzroy who has been appointed by Heritage Victoria to design and oversee reconstruction of the now derelict house.

The works approved include rebuilding of the front wall in exposed stonework similar

to the original and that of Wuchatsch's farmhouse. Other walls will be rebuilt as required. At this stage the east and south walls will be pointed up in cement/lime mortar with a final decision regarding the north and west walls still to be made. The permit application sought for these walls to be rendered, but the Friends of Westgarthtown has requested that these also be of exposed stonework and the City of Whittlesea has written to both the architect and Heritage Victoria requesting *"that further technical investigation and funding be considered in relation to this matter to enhance the historic context of the site"*.

External timber windows and doors will be of a similar design to those of other Westgarthtown farmhouses; the roof will be rebuilt to the original pitch and clad with corrugated galvanised sheeting; the brick chimney will be rebuilt as close as possible to the original; a simple verandah added, like Wuchatsch's and Ziebell's; a carport, parking area and steel shed constructed at the rear; and a timber picket fence similar to Ziebell's erected.

The now imminent commencement of reconstruction of Maltzahn's Farmhouse is a further positive step in the eleven year battle to save this integral part of Westgarthtown's heritage. The committee and members of the Friends of Westgarthtown greatly appreciate the recent work by Heritage Victoria, architect Terence Nott and the Councillors and Darren Jackson of the City of Whittlesea towards the completion of this project. I am sure the long suffering neighbours around Maltzahn's Farmhouse must also feel the same.

**\$70400 FEDERAL FUNDING GRANTED
TOWARDS THE RESTORATION OF
THOMASTOWN LUTHERAN CHURCH
AND ZIEBELL'S FARMHOUSE.**

The City of Whittlesea advised the Friends of Westgarthtown in July 2000 that it had been successful in its application for Federal funding towards essential repairs and restoration work at the Thomastown Lutheran Church and Ziebell's Farmhouse.

The \$70400 funding, granted under the Department of the Environment & Heritage's Cultural Heritage Projects Program, will be applied to such works as restoration of the church roof and fascia boards, cleaning and re-mortaring of external stone joints, reinstatement of

windows to the original style, interior and exterior painting etc. Work to be undertaken at Ziebell's Farmhouse relates to the stairs and attic, to ensure public safety.

It is hoped that the main central cemetery gates and the pedestrian gates formerly located at the eastern and western ends of the cemetery can also be reinstated as part of the church renovation process.

News of the grant was announced in the *Whittlesea Post* of 23 August 2000, which included a photograph of a very happy and proud Irma Hatty (Secretary and Treasurer of Thomastown Lutheran Church) standing inside the church. Irma said *"a church committee and Whittlesea Council would decide which work was to be done first"*

Mayor Sam Alessi said *"the \$74000 funding was in addition to \$20000 from Heritage Victoria to compensate the council for work already done on the farmhouse floor. The money will allow us to make much faster progress in getting the Thomastown Pioneer Precinct up to a good tourism standard for the general public"*.

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

Since May 2000, the Friends of Westgarthtown has held monthly working bees in the garden at Ziebell's Farmhouse, under the guidance of Sylvia Schultz and co-ordinated by Gillian Borrack.

Considerable progress has now been made. Each month, between 6-8 eager volunteers (including Sylvia and Paul Schultz, Gillian and Leon Borrack, Ellen Mitchell, Gaye Caldwell, Rene Schultz, Rob Wuchatsch and Ian Ziebell have progressively removed all weeds and unwanted plants; turned over all the flower beds and dug in a large load of good soil; planted bulbs, annuals and other flowering plants and herbs; removed rubbish; relocated bricks and stones; repaired the sprinkler system; and undertaken any other odd jobs requiring attention.

More volunteers are always welcome. Working bees run from 10.00 am – 4.00 pm on the first Saturday of each month. Now that most of the heavy work has been completed at Ziebell's garden, work will soon commence around the church and in

the cemetery. It is hoped the City of Whittlesea will purchase a set of gardening tools and equipment for Ziebell's Farmhouse, to reduce the need for volunteers to bring more than their own lunch, labour and expertise.

Geoff Borrack has completed a plan of the garden, drawn up in consultation with Sylvia Schultz. This plan will list all plants to be included, based on Ziebell family knowledge of past and present species, layout etc. Gillian Borrack is preparing a self-guided tour of the garden, in a similar format to the one she prepared in 1998 for Ziebell's Farmhouse.

**NEW BOOKLET TO BE PUBLISHED ON
WESTGARTHTOWN LUTHERAN
CEMETERY DURING 2001**

The Friends of Westgarthtown, City of Whittlesea and Heritage Victoria are about to join forces again to publish another high quality booklet about Westgarthtown, this time on the Lutheran Cemetery.

The proposed new booklet, to be 24 pages, will include information about Westgarthtown, the Lutheran church and cemetery; names of those buried there and their details; translations of headstones; practical advice on restoration and maintenance of the memorials; photographs; and a map.

This booklet has been made possible through the planned completion in 2001 by the Victorian Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages of its Burial Index Project. This computerised project, to list by cemetery all burials included on Victorian death certificates, will provide the names of all people buried at Westgarthtown from 1853-1920. This long awaited list will fill a major gap in our knowledge of Westgarthtown's history, given the loss many years ago of the Lutheran church cemetery register.

The City of Whittlesea and Heritage Victoria will provide most of the funding for the booklet, with \$1000 to be provided by the Friends of Westgarthtown. Contributors to the text are expected to include Rob Wuchatsch and Ellen Mitchell from the Friends of Westgarthtown; Irma Hatty from the Thomastown Lutheran Church; Celestine Sagazio - National Trust (Vic); and Helen Lardner, the Heritage Architect who prepared the Westgarthtown Master Plan in 1998/99.

Several months ago Rob Wuchatsch updated his reconstructed 1979 list of Westgarthtown burials, compiled from headstones, death certificates, obituaries and memorial cards. He has now identified 157 known burials and 23 probable ones. When the BDM Registry's Burials Index is released in 2001 and the names of previously unknown people buried at Westgarthtown are available, the list of confirmed burials will probably reach 200.

**150th ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS
HELD AT WESTGARTHTOWN
ON 16 APRIL 2000.**

The Friends of Westgarthtown combined with the City of Whittlesea, Thomastown Lutheran Church and Wendish Heritage Society Australia to successfully celebrate the 150th Anniversary of German and Wendish settlement at Westgarthtown on Sunday 16 April 2000.

The day commenced with a packed Palm Sunday Lutheran Church service at 11.15 am. There were 48 worshippers inside the church and as many outside. As well as members of the Thomastown congregation, guests included Friends of Westgarthtown and Wendish Heritage Society Australia members, along with visitors from the Friends of Lutheran Archives and South Australian Wendish Heritage Society in Adelaide and the Bendigo German Heritage Society.

The Wendish Heritage Society Australia provided lunch at 12.30 pm in the Scout Hall for country and interstate visitors. Other visitors brought their own food or bought lunch at Ziebell's Farmhouse.

A Wendish display was mounted in the Scout Hall. At 1.30 pm the Mayor Cr. Sam Alessi then welcomed visitors to Westgarthtown and spoke of the City of Whittlesea's ongoing commitment to protection and promotion of Westgarthtown and the City of Whittlesea's heritage. Rob Wuchatsch then spoke on the history of Westgarthtown and its German and Wendish settlers.

At 2.30 pm, Rob Wuchatsch and Ellen Mitchell conducted a tour of the cemetery for over 150 people. Tours of Ziebell's farmhouse were also conducted by Elizabeth Trenerry, with afternoon tea provided at the Scout Hall and Ziebell's Farmhouse by Gill Borrack and Sylvia and Paul Schultz.

On 15 April 2000, the day prior to our 150th Anniversary celebrations, *The Age* carried an excellent article about Westgarthtown written by Mary Ryllis Clark under the title “*A bit of Brueghel in a sea of brick veneer*”. Many people who attended on 16 April mentioned that they had read of the 150th celebrations in *The Age* and quite a few subsequent visitors have commented that they first heard of Westgarthtown the same way.

In her article, Mary observed that “*Westgarthtown ... is an astonishing sight, as if part of a mediaeval village had been scooped up from central Europe and deposited amid a sea of 1950s brick veneers ... Push open the gate (to Ziebell’s Farmhouse), walk across the circular paving past oleander, tecoma and wisteria into the cool, dark house. The stone walls are as thick and plain as those in the church, rooms interconnect. An attic runs the length of the house. The building feels homely, solid and industrious. The Pines was a practical house built by practical people*”.

**WESTGARTHTOWN TORCHLIGHT
CEMETERY TOUR IN APRIL 2000.**

On 8 April 2000, as part of the City of Whittlesea’s Heritage Week celebrations, Rob Wuchatsch and Ellen Mitchell conducted a very successful torchlight cemetery tour.

In cool but fine weather, 75 men, women and children assembled at 9.00 pm at the Thomastown Lutheran Church for a welcome and brief introduction and outline on Westgarthtown. The group then moved across to the cemetery where Rob talked about the history of the cemetery and the lives and deaths of many of the people buried there. Ellen translated the German headstones and also spoke on the history of Westgarthtown’s early settlers.

After the tour, which ran until 10.15 pm, visitors moved to Ziebell’s farmhouse for cocoa, coffee, tea and biscuits. Due to the overwhelming success, more tours are planned.

**THOMASTOWN PIONEER PRECINCT
COMMITTEE**

Several more meetings of this committee, which oversees preservation and promotion at Westgarthtown, have been held since the last newsletter in March.

Issues covered recently include restoration and maintenance of Ziebell’s Farmhouse and outbuildings; furnishing and fitout of the house and cartshed; establishment of car parking facilities in German Lane etc.

Street fencing around Ziebell’s Farmhouse was completed in April and it is anticipated that the kitchen and pantry will be furnished prior to the Ziebell plaque unveiling ceremony on 12 November, with the whole house and cartshed finished by end 2001. Work continues on planning to re-align German Lane to include car and bus parking.

During June 2000, the City of Whittlesea arranged the removal of several dead pine trees from the cemetery and for pruning of all dead wood from the remaining trees. The general condition of the cemetery is now better than it has been for many years. Unfortunately one of the large pines facing German Lane near the corner of Gardenia Road was struck by lightning at about 11.48 pm on 26 July 2000 (I know the exact time because it woke me up) and the tree now bears a long scar from top to bottom where a large sliver of wood was split off. Hopefully the long term health of the tree has not been jeopardised.

**HERITAGE INTERPRETATION
SIGNAGE AT WESTGARTHTOWN**

All who visited Westgarthtown in April 2000 for the 150th celebrations will have seen the wonderful new heritage signs erected at Ziebell’s Farmhouse and the Church and Cemetery.

The six coloured panels were the work of City of Whittlesea History Project Officer Clare Gervasoni.

**CITY OF WHITTLESEA WINTER
MUSIC IN WARM PLACES – MUSIC AT
ZIEBELL’S FARMHOUSE.**

On 20 August 2000, the Friends of Westgarthtown and the City of Whittlesea combined to host *Music at Ziebell’s Farmhouse* as part of the City of Whittlesea’s *Winter Music in Warm Places Program*.

This unique “Folk and Baroque” concert featured Austrian yodelling with Dieter and Julia Bajzek of the Austrian Choir and Flute and Lute compositions by the Elysium Ensemble with Greg Dikmans and

Simon Martyn-Ellis. The sell-out concert saw 50 people fit into the living room at Ziebell's Farmhouse, warmed by crackling flames from the open fire place.

Afternoon tea was provided and books and other publications sold during the afternoon.

REPORT IN LUTHERAN HERALD ON 1931 VISIT TO THOMASTOWN.

The following long and very interesting report appeared in the *Lutheran Herald* of 23 March 1931.

"Thomastown, Vic. On Sunday, February 8th the local congregation belonging to the Melbourne parish had a very pleasant surprise. Friends from Grovedale, Melbourne and Doncaster journeyed to Thomastown to join with the congregation in celebrating a mission festival. To those who have never heard of Thomastown it might be interesting to learn that Thomastown is one of the oldest Lutheran settlements in Victoria. It is on the Whittlesea line near Epping, north of Melbourne. Long before the politicians thought of building a railway line to Epping and then later on to Whittlesea, Lutheran pioneers established their homes on the rich black-soil plains at Thomastown. From the blue-stone metal grubbed out of the soil (trees were not so plentiful as blue-stone boulders) the homes, also the church and the congregational school were built. The school has been without a teacher for many years, ever since the State School System assumed the authority it now possesses, and so this one-time congregational school, built very substantially of blue-stone metal remains a silent witness of bygone days when the now aged people received their educational training in the congregational school.

A survey of the large cemetery nearby reveals the sad fact that very many of these pioneers and their descendants have found a last resting place under the shade of the old Aleppo Pines. Some of the names engraved on those tombstones remind the present generation of men who have done yeomen service for their church in the early days, and their names live in their children who even now are loyal members of their church. Other names recall the sad fact that the church of the fathers was no longer treasured by the children, for they have found their way into the churches of other denominations, whilst quite a lot of names remind us of those who are known to the

present generation in name only – without issue.

This congregation is somewhat isolated. Very seldom have members from the neighbouring congregations visited it in its isolation. But Sunday, February 8th saw several car loads of visitors from Grovedale, a large number of friends from Melbourne and about two-thirds of the Doncaster congregation visit the Thomastown friends on the occasion of a mission festival.

Pastor Frank was the first speaker. Basing his address on Luke 19, 10: "The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost," he showed the condition of the heathen in the three-fold manner: They are lost; they are sought; they are saved. Pastor Simpfendorfer then gave a missionary address, with Acts 4, 20 as the Scripture text. Both the hardships and also the joys of mission work were fully described, the former especially with instances of modern mission work in China, the latter with reports from the great forward movement in our mission in New Guinea. Pastor Proeve then gave a short address based on Eccles. 11, 1-3 in which he showed the blessings coming to us from a lively interest in this great cause. The collection received at the close of the service in aid of Foreign Missions amounted to ten pounds ten shillings and eightpence.

During the luncheon hour after the service all present had a golden opportunity of renewing old friendships and of making new friends. Tea and coffee was provided by the congregation, and in the shade of the church and of the old pine trees a very happy crowd of about 180 people joined in harmony. Old times were recalled and brought to the notice of the younger generation by the interesting addresses of Messrs. H. Thiele, F. Paech and F. Finger, who in their addresses recalled, with the addition of amusing narratives, the occasion of their first visit to Thomastown.

Victorian readers of this little report will remember that at the Doncaster Convention it was suggested that such mission festivals might be helpful not only in furthering the bond of unity in the spirit, but also in helping those somewhat isolated congregations to know and to feel that they are not alone, but that their interests and welfare are watched by their fellow Lutherans. Well, this report desires to show that those four congregations had met for this purpose, and the reporter ventures to say that as far as he could ascertain,

everyone went home with the knowledge of having done his little bit in helping an isolated congregation, and with the satisfaction: It was worth while”.

2000 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING.

The Friends of Westgarthtown's 4th AGM will be held on Sunday 22 October 2000 at Ziebell's Farmhouse at 2.00 pm.

Membership subscriptions for the 2000/2001 year are now due. If you are not paid up, you can complete the renewal form with this newsletter and pay by mail or in person at the AGM.

If you are not a member, but wish to join the Friends of Westgarthtown, please write to PO Box 95, Thomastown, Vic. 3074. Fees \$10 per annum for individual members; \$15 for families. Concession rates \$5 individual; \$10 family.

TRINITY GERMAN LUTHERAN CHURCH, EAST MELBOURNE 150th ANNIVERSARY HISTORY TO BE PUBLISHED IN SEPTEMBER 2003.

Trinity German Lutheran Church intends to publish a 400 page history in September 2003 to celebrate the 150th Anniversary of its history.

Trinity's Historical Society (AKI) would like to hear from any descendants of early German or Wendish families who were involved in the formation of Trinity Church in 1853. The church holds a list of 326 original members (which includes Westgarthtown residents), many of whom had pledged financial support for the salary of the minister Pastor Matthias Goethe and construction of the first church.

For further information, contact Trinity on 9654 5743 or fax 9650 6937.

LAUNCH OF PLENTY VALLEY ARTS PAPERS RE BARON VON MUELLER'S GERMAN MELBOURNE CONFERENCE.

On 15 July 2000, Plenty Valley Arts recently launched its third volume of PVA Papers, which related to the 1999 Baron Von Mueller Conference. The launch, at the Whittlesea Civic Centre, was co-hosted by the Friends of Westgarthtown and held in conjunction with the Royal Historical Society of Victoria's presentation of an

Award of Merit to Whittlesea Historical Society member John Waghorn. The City of Whittlesea provided refreshments.

The illustrated papers, which were edited by Ellen Mitchell and published by LaTrobe University with assistance from the Friends of Westgarthtown, were launched by the German Consul-General, Mr Hans-Michael Schwandt. Three of the essays were written by Westgarthtown "friends" – Tom Darragh, Rob Wuchatsch and Ellen Mitchell.

Tom's meticulously researched essay "The Deutsche Vereine of Victoria in the Nineteenth Century" covers the aims and functions of the many German clubs existing in Victoria at the time. Rob's paper outlines the scope of his collaboration with Tom on their book "From Hamburg to Hobsons Bay" and focuses on the starkly diverging responses recorded by emigrating Germans and Wends. Ellen's essay, on the other hand, concentrates on the highly ambitious and internationally known Austrian society painter, Carl Kahler, whose enormous Flemington race paintings perpetuate his fame in Melbourne today.

Other papers deal with 19th Century German achievement in the sciences, literature and visual arts and make an informative and captivating read. Copies are available from Ellen Mitchell, 2 Salford Avenue, Balwyn Vic. 3103 for \$15 plus \$3.25 packing/postage (9836 2917).

GUIDED TOURS OF WESTGARTHTOWN

Ellen Mitchell has been very busy arranging and conducting tours to Westgarthtown and it is expected that during the April-November 2000 period over 1000 visitors will have been shown over Ziebell's Farmhouse and the Lutheran Church and Cemetery Reserve.

Among the local schools visiting Westgarthtown were St. Catherine's Primary (Lalor West) and St. Luke's Primary (Lalor). Visitors from further afield were German language students from St. Paul's Church of England Grammar at Warragul and Benalla College. Other groups included 20 members of the Mill Park Garden Club and a "vivacious congregation of mature ESL (English as a Second Language) students from the Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE at Epping".

September, October and November 2000 bookings include the National Trust; University of the Third Age (U3A); and one of the oldest Victorian male walking clubs.

TALKS ON WESTGARTHTOWN.

In April and August 2000, Rob Wuchatsch was guest speaker at the Doncaster Historical Society and the Geelong Family History Society's monthly meetings. Both society's expressed great interest in Westgarthtown, a sister village to their 1850s German settlements.

In August, Ellen Mitchell also gave an illustrated lecture, to students of the U3A at Box Hill. In all over 100 people attended Rob and Ellen's lectures.

**THOMASTOWN LUTHERAN CHURCH
SERVICES**

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).