

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

RESTORATION WORK COMMENCED AT MALTZAHN'S FARMHOUSE.

Work finally commenced in June 2001 on the long awaited restoration of Maltzahn's Farmhouse and is on track to be completed by the end of 2001.

The story of the decade-long fight to save Maltzahn's Farmhouse and the long awaited commencement of restorations was the subject of a Herald-Sun double page colour centrefold on 27 June 2001. In an excellent photographic report, stonemason James McAuley was shown working on the walls and Greg Drake (City of Whittlesea) and Megan McDougall (Heritage Victoria) were also featured at Ziebell's Farmhouse. Interestingly, the Herald-Sun's photographer was Bill McAuley, the stonemason's brother.

At the time of writing this report, the brick chimney has been rebuilt; bluestone walls repaired and original front window openings reinstated; wooden 12 pane window frames installed; the 1960s concrete floor removed prior to reinstatement of the timber floor; internal wooden wall framings installed; and the roof pitched ready for covering with corrugated galvanised sheeting.

It is understood that when completed, Maltzahn's Farmhouse will be offered for sale as a private residence, with heritage controls in place to prevent unsympathetic future modifications.

HERITAGE WEEK – APRIL 2001

The Friends of Westgarthtown and City of Whittlesea combined during Heritage Week 2001 to hold its annual Westgarthtown Cemetery Tours.

Two successful tours were held on Saturday 31 March 2001 – a general one at 3.00 pm and a torchlight one at 7.00 pm, specifically for family groups with children. About 65 people attended. As the tours took place just prior to Easter, Ellen

Mitchell and Rob Wuchatsch explained the significance of the traditional Wendish practice of colouring and decorating eggs for Easter. Chocolate eggs were then distributed to all children who attended.

Ziebell's Farmhouse was also open during the day, for inspection and refreshments. Each tour ended with coffee, tea, hot chocolate, biscuits and cake.

Prior to Heritage Week, the kitchen, pantry and east bedroom at Ziebell's Farmhouse were furnished with original or similar items. A wooden table identical to the former one has been made and installed in the kitchen, to go with the two forms built some time ago by ----- Adams.

The original nickel plated brass bedstead and marble washstand have been kindly *loaned/donated* (?) by the Schultz family, along with the old wooden coffer or trunk Christian Ziebell used on his several sea voyages to and from Australia.

Thanks to all who helped at -

**GARDENING WORKING BEES HELD
FIRST SATURDAY OF EACH MONTH
AT ZIEBELL'S FARMHOUSE.**

Monthly working bees have continued at Ziebell's Farmhouse under the guidance of Sylvia Schultz and co-ordinated by Gillian Borrack.

More volunteers are always welcome. Working bees run from 10.00 am – 4.00 pm on the first Saturday of each month including summer. Anyone wishing to

attend and help has only to bring themselves, gloves, hats and their lunch.

The cleaning arrangements are working well. As advised in our March 2001 newsletter, local residents Marita and Norbet Anders have been engaged to clean the house, with funding provided by the City of Whittlesea. Marita and Norbet are former members (not current members as I wrote in our last newsletter) of the Thomastown Lutheran Church. They in fact now attend Calvary Lutheran Church at Greensborough.

**PROPOSED WESTGARTHTOWN
CEMETERY BOOKLET –
PUBLICATION DELAYED.**

Publication of the proposed Westgarthtown Cemetery booklet, details of which were advised in our September 2000 and March 2001 newsletters, has been delayed until 2002.

This booklet, another joint project of the Friends of Westgarthtown, City of Whittlesea and Heritage Victoria, is reliant for success on receipt of new burial information from the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages.

We have been advised that the 1853-1920 burial information we seek will not now be available until mid 2002. As no burial records for the Westgarthtown cemetery survive, we are dependant on BDM records to identify all those buried there. At present the names of about 165 people buried there are known but we believe another 30 or so burials took place.

**PUBLICATION OF BOOK
'A COMMUNITY PORTRAIT' BY
CITY OF WHITTLESEA.**

On 28 April 2001, the book "A Community Portrait: Lifetimes in the City of Whittlesea", was launched by Harry Jenkins, Federal MHR Scullin.

This book, written by Robert Pascoe and published by the City of Whittlesea, was made possible by Centenary of Federation funding.

"A Community Portrait" is based on a dozen oral histories conducted by the City of Whittlesea since 1998. The first of these oral histories related to Westgarthtown descendants and German born Thomastown and Lalor residents.

Readers may recall that extracts from the German oral history interviews were included in our September 1998; March 1999; and September 1999 newsletters.

Copies of "A Community Portrait" can be obtained from the City of Whittlesea for \$20, plus postage if applicable. Enquiries to 9217 2170.

THOMASTOWN PIONEER PRECINCT COMMITTEE

Meetings continue to be held bi-monthly, the committee consisting of representatives of the Friends of Westgarthtown (Ellen Mitchell, Rob Wuchatsch, Geoff Borrack and Paul Schultz); City of Whittlesea Councillors (Cr John Fry, Cr Frank Merlino and Cr Stevan Kozmevski); City of Whittlesea staff Rob Ewart and Greg Drake); and Thomastown Lutheran Church (Irma Hatty and Gordon Menzel).

Co-operation between all groups remains excellent and much has been achieved during 2001 towards Westgarthtown's restoration and presentation to the public.

TOURS OF WESTGARTHTOWN – MARCH TO SEPTEMBER 2001

Ellen Mitchell, our Public Relations Officer and Tour Organiser, has submitted the following report:

Schools

The last six months saw a pleasing increase of schools visit Westgarthtown, including Luther College (Croydon); Methodist Ladies College (Kew); Oxley College (Chirnside Park); Marist Sion College (Warragul); and Macleod College. All except the geology class from Luther College comprised senior students learning German.

Conducting the tours in German and linking them to specific curriculum topics or to the Westgarthton Language Trail ... sharpens students' attention while 'authenticating' their language experience at the Ziebell precinct. Description is backed up by the real, as words qualify the palpable: architectural features of the house, life-style aspects like the function of the smoke house or the design of the cottage garden.

During the cold winter mornings, not all was sheer pleasure, as faces turned blue in the cemetery and the icy farmhouse dictated significantly abbreviated explanations on the use of interior spaces and the subject of family history. The 22 Year 11 students from Macleod College visiting on Friday 31 August, could not wait to return to the 'bathhouse café' for a cup of hot chocolate and copious amounts of biscuits. Even the German assistant teacher Ingrid, here for a year, felt the cold for a while.

The 25 Year 12 students from MLC led by Jocelyn Allen, visiting very early one June morning, enjoyed an all German language/culture day, by proceeding from Ziebell's Farmhouse to the Austrian cultural club at Heidelberg for lunch, then off for a traditional session of Kaffee and Kuchen at the Cuckoo Restaurant at Olinda.

This month twenty Year 9 students from Stawell College will also visit Westgarthtown.

Church Groups and Social Clubs

On Sunday 27 May, the Friends of Westgarthtown played host to 25 members of Calvary Lutheran Church, Greensborough, including lunch. The group was headed by Pastor Stephen Pietsch and Vicar Adam Eime from Calvary and Irma Hatty from the Thomastown Lutheran Church.

Among the visitors were quite a number of German/Australians, all enjoying a stimulating exchange of memories and experiences in the farmhouse living room, where a fire lit by Gaye warmed the guests.

The Camberwell Historical Society, led by Wendy Baden-Powell, on 17 March; Hume Social Club for 40 and Over Inc on 21 April; and Don Reid's Over 50's Walking Club on 26 June were among those enjoying the discovery of Westgarthtown and the Friends' hospitality. Don Reid's energetic group had walked to Wuchatsch's Farmhouse from Lalor Station, then proceeded to Ziebell's, from where they looked forward to their picnic lunch at Edwards Lake at Reservoir. The oldest walker is believed to have been 87 years old!

In October 2001 a large group from St John's Ambulance will also visit Westgarthtown for lunch and a tour.

**MUSICAL RECITAL AT ZIEBELL'S
FARMHOUSE SUNDAY 19 AUGUST
2001**

Ellen Mitchell also reports that an audience of 50 music lovers gathered at Ziebell's Farmhouse on a very cold August afternoon recently to listen to a program of German classical music and popular folksongs. The afternoon also introduced Gaye Caldwell, the new caretaker, and celebrated the opening of Ziebell's Farmhouse to the general public on a regular monthly basis.

George Mitchell (violin) and daughter Lisa (piano) expertly performed pieces by Bach, Corelli, Kreisler and Gossec, whereas Igor Pelka (guitar) and Carol Appelt (flute) delighted listeners with compositions by Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Chopin. While these amateur musicians extended German borders to include some neighbours, Rosewitha Horgan, currently a member of the 'Lieder-Kranz' adhered to an all German recital of folksongs including Brahm's 'Wiegenlied' and 'Schubert's 'Heidenroeslein'. Carol accompanied Rosewitha's striking vocals with great proficiency on the piano.

The audience not only enjoyed the new green chairs funded by the City of Whittlesea but also a sumptuous afternoon spread of cakes and sandwiches prepared by Marita Anders and her mother Clara.

The Friends of Westgarthtown wish to express our sincere thanks to all participants, performers, organisers and the caterers for contributing to the resounding success of the concert. Hopefully this will prove to be an annual event.

**REPORT IN PRESTON LEADER ON
1936 THOMASTOWN LUTHERAN
CHURCH CHRISTMAS SERVICE.**

The following interesting report appeared in the *Preston Leader* of 14 January 1937.

Following the precedent of last year, the Lutheran Church of Thomastown celebrated their Christmas Festival on Sunday afternoon December 27, and a very large number of members and friends of the church came from far and near. Among those present were the children of the Methodist Sunday school, Thomastown, with their superintendent, Mr. P. Blakemore. The little church was

transformed, a beautifully shaped pine tree, suitably decorated and brilliantly lit with Christmas candles, cast its spell upon all who entered.

The service was conducted by Pastor E. Steiniger, and carols were sung by the Methodist Sunday school children, led by Mr. Blakemore, and recitations were given by several children. At the conclusion of the service each child was given a bag of sweets and a toy, and the congregation then held a basket picnic under the pines - so appropriate for a Xmas gathering.

Mr. Blakemore thanked the pastor and committee of the Lutheran Church for their kind invitation, stressing the point that this coming-together at Xmas of the two churches should be encouraged. Pastor Steiniger suitably responded. Mr F. Finger and Mr O. Sengstock, members of the Melbourne Lutheran Church committee, also thanked those who had worked so well to bring about such a successful Xmas Season's greetings.

Messrs A. Wuchatsch, Maltzahn, Young, Seeber and Misses Ziebell and Zimmer are to be heartily congratulated upon the success with which their efforts were crowned.

2001 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING.

The Friends of Westgarthtown's 5th AGM will be held on -----day ----- October 2001 at Ziebell's Farmhouse at -----.

Membership subscriptions for the 2001/02 year are now due. If you are not paid up, you can complete the renewal form included 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, write to us at PO Box 95, Thomastown, Vic. 3074. Fees \$10 per annum for individual members; \$15 for families. Concession rates \$5 individual; \$10 family.

**TWILIGHT JAZZ AT HAWKSTOWE
PARK - SUNDAY 18 NOVEMBER 2001 -
4-8 PM**

One of our sister groups - Plenty Valley Arts - in conjunction with the City of Whittlesea and Jazz Australia, will present their third annual Twilight Jazz afternoon at Hawkstowe Park on Sunday 18 November 2001.

Hawkstowe Park at South Morang, along with Ziebell's Farmhouse and the Whittlesea Court House, are excellent examples of the City of Whittlesea's outstanding heritage.

This year's TWILIGHT JAZZ promises to be a particularly exciting evening featuring two outstanding bands – THE DANCEHALL RACKETEERS and THE CREOLE BELLS – in the beautiful surroundings of Hawkstowe's parkland setting. As Dianna Allen, president of Jazz Australia puts it:

Jazz and western swing enthusiasts are in for a treat at this year's "Twilight Jazz at Hawkstowe park", when two of Melbourne's most popular bands fill the bill between 4 pm and 8 pm on Sunday November 18. Both six piece bands have their own "in built" vocalists and the Creole Bells will also feature special guest vocalist, Beverley Sheehan in their line-up.

The Dancehall Racketeers have been dubbed the KINGS OF WESTERN SWING in Australia and typify much that is great about Melbourne and its music ... the Music performed by the Racketeers, as they are affectionately known, is a hybrid of Jazz, blues, country, Cajun and so much more. The band line-up reads like a "who's who" of the Western Swing scene in Australia.

Friends of Westgarthtown members, their family and friends are advised to arrive early for this year's TWILIGHT JAZZ FEST to find a shady area under one of the elm trees, purchase a glass of wine from the Hills of Plenty or Northern Metropolitan Institute of Tafe wine stands (engraved glasses will be on sale as well), enjoy a sausage sizzle compliments of Mill Park Garden Club and visit the historic Le Page Homestead on the grounds for an exhibition of works by Plenty Valley painters. A walk around the lakes will refresh the mind and body for Jazz – and nature lovers.

The entrance fee is very affordable and exceptionally reasonable for the stature and international standing of these bands. Tickets can be purchased at the gate for \$10 per person or \$5 concession. Children are free.

Please spread the word on this forthcoming event as the Friends of Westgarthtown and Plenty Valley Arts are mutually supportive community groups in the City of

Whittlesea. The main sponsor of TWILIGHT JAZZ is the City of Whittlesea.

Contact Ellen Mitchell for more information on 9836 2917.

THOMASTOWN LUTHERAN CHURCH SERVICES
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Services are held on alternate Sundays (second and last Sunday of the month) at 11.15 am at the Thomastown Lutheran Church, German Lane, Lalor. For further details contact Pastor Stephen Pietsch at Calvary Lutheran Church, Greensborough on 03 9435 6846 (Fax: 03 432 9222).