

FRIENDS OF WESTGARTHTOWN

Newsletter

Vol. 28, No. 1, April 2024

WE ACKNOWLEDGE THE TRADITIONAL CUSTODIANS OF WESTGARTHTOWN, THE WURUNDJERI WILLUM PEOPLE, AND PAY OUR RESPECTS TO THEIR ELDERS PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE.

EDITOR'S NOTE

In this edition of *Friends of Westgarthtown Newsletter* we welcome new members Peter Constantine, Cameron Lang, Barbara Miller, Jenny Morris Smith, Jan Sievers and Millie Stewart. Thanks to all members who have renewed their membership for 2023/24 and also those who generously donated funds over the last year. As well as supporting the work of the Friends of Westgarthtown, membership entitles you to free entry to Ziebell's Farmhouse Museum and two newsletters each year. Please contact me on subscriptions@westgarthtown.org.au if you have any queries about your membership status.

We welcome Lyndel Wischer, the new Director of Ziebell's Farmhouse Museum and Heritage Garden, who commenced on 18 March 2024. Lyndel's Report appears on page 2. Lyndel's appointment by the City of Whittlesea follows Gordon Johnston's resignation in November 2023. We thank Gordon for his outstanding contribution over 4½ years and wish him well for the future.

Rebekah Vagg's report on Descendants' Day 2024 appears on pages 3–4. Thanks to the hard work of Rebekah and her Descendants' Day committee, the day was a great success. It concluded with a visit to Siebel's Farmhouse at 77 Mount View Road courtesy of Adam and Kim Smith. Adam grew up at Siebel's Farmhouse which his mother Brigid Smith/Burnard owned for over 20 years until 1997. He loved the old farmhouse so much he bought it when it came up for sale again in 2022.

Four research articles are included in this newsletter. They cover William Westgarth and the naming of Westgarthtown; two forgotten Thomastown World War Two heroes – Albert Bassett DCM and Norman Hudson MM; Herman Graff of Westgarthtown, Doreen and Mernda; and the Belmont/ Thomastown Hotel, which operated from the 1850s to 1990s.

2025 will mark the 175th Anniversary of the arrival of the *Pribislaw* in Australia in February 1850 and Westgarthtown's establishment in March 1850. A program of events to celebrate these significant milestones is now being planned.

Next time you visit Ziebell's Farmhouse, look for the antique secretaire recently donated by Ziebell descendant, Janet Hubbard. This secretaire was once owned by Christian and Sophia Ziebell. Thanks Janet for enabling the return of this very interesting furniture item to its former home.

Rob.



(Photo by Rob Wuchatsch)

Ziebell's Farmhouse Museum

Director's Report

LYNDEL WISCHER

As I commence at Ziebell's Farmhouse I have been delighted by its garden, its interpretive displays, its volunteers, garden team and its clear respect for museum culture. Equally impressive is how the farmhouse continues to inspire current community members, represented very recently by a song entitled 'Bluestone and Roses' written and composed by Ian Marks who is a musician, bookbinder, Lalor resident and dedicated museum volunteer. Hearing this song during my first Sunday at the museum has set the scene for many creative and cultural experiences to come.



There is an evident need for continued careful and collaborative planning between the Friends of Westgarthtown and the City of Whittlesea to strengthen and streamline a shift in museum management as well as public programs and collection care. Also very important is the need to support Friends' activities and new initiatives both now and into the future and I look forward to developing positive ties and a fruitful relationship with all members of the Friends and particularly its Committee.

On 24 March I met members of the Lutheran Church community and heard a lay pastor, Anthony Gabbo, lead the Palm Sunday service. Palm fronds were brought to church by his mother and traditions were enacted much like they would have been when multiple original German and Wendish families attended church services from the 1850s onward. Walking back to the farmhouse I could not help but think how many people had walked this path over nearly 175 years; looking right to the cemetery and left the farmhouse's northern wall, then shortly afterwards encountering a hidden and lush courtyard garden which continues to enthrall visitors to this day.

My own German Lutheran forebears, Wilhelm and Marie Wischer arrived in Melbourne in 1863 and I feel honoured to be working amongst descendants of German immigrant families; with a shared sense of heritage and a desire to interpret this fascinating aspect of Australian history to a wide public.

Going forward it will be essential to attract and engage a wide range of age groups to the museum; building on successful group tours, kinder visits, school visits and the ever popular 'Walking Thomastown' event. New programs will form part of a strategy to grow visitation including by young people looking for an experience that feeds an interest in culture, immigration, heritage and gardens, or a combination of all these disciplines which is manifest in every aspect of the Lutheran Reserve and Christian and Sophia Ziebell's solid bluestone home.

Descendants' Day 2024

BY REBEKAH VAGG



On 3 March 2024 the Friends of Westgarthtown held Descendants' Day at Ziebell's Farmhouse Museum and Heritage Garden. It was a cooler day than the last few years and the garden looked amazing. It was wonderful to see many familiar faces and welcome some new descendants. We again shared the grounds and museum with the public due to a Sunday opening. It is nice to see the public visiting and enjoying the space. It was great to see everyone who was able to come and the sausage sizzle was very enjoyable.

(Photo by Ian Marks)



In the cellar at Siebel's Farmhouse (Ian Marks).



We were blessed by Adam and Kim Smith as they invited us to view the Siebel house on Mount View Road. It was wonderful to hear about their renovation journey so far, and what their next projects are. Thank you Adam and Kim for kindly opening your home to us.

The Siebel house on Mount View Road (Ian Marks).

As usual we had prizes for the oldest and youngest attendees — Heinz Gerlach for the wisest and Harvie Nelson was the youngest. The next Descendants' Day is planned for 2 March 2025, being 'the Sunday before the Victorian Labour Day weekend'. Please stay safe and well – hope to see everyone next year!



Youngest attendee Harvie Nelson, being held by Susan Adams (Ian Marks).

William Westgarth and the naming of Westgarthtown

BY ROB WUCHATSCH

Westgarthtown at Thomastown/Lalor

I wasn't aware of the name Westgarthtown until about 1960 when I was ten years old. One day my father stopped our car near the old wooden bridge over the Edgars Creek at German Lane and gave me a history lesson. I recall his arm sweeping across from Siebel's house, past the old church and cemetery, to our house in the distance as he said 'All this area was once called Westgarthtown.'



William Westgarth
(State Library of Victoria).

I learnt later that Westgarthtown had been named in honour of William Westgarth (1815–89), a Scottish-born merchant, financier, politician and historian, who had helped Germans migrate to Australia and also to establish Victoria's first German settlement. In 1857 William Westgarth visited the settlement named in his honour and wrote:

...a square mile of land ten miles to the northward of Melbourne, exhibits the pleasant spectacle of an orderly variety of social life in the colony, and of the success attending the industry and well known frugality of this people. There are above a hundred Germans on this section, who revel alike in the plenty of British Victoria and the luxury of still clinging to everything German. The women are busy in the fields, with their German caps, their broad comely faces, and their broader guttural tongues. They rejoice in nothing so much as those everlasting difficulties of the English language, that have hitherto prevented their learning it. The garments of male and female are German, and so are the houses, which are even more impregnated than in [the] Fatherland with the cherished tobacco odour; and there is a little German church perched on an eminence, where a German sermon is heard as opportunities contribute a preacher.

Westgarthtown wasn't the settlement's first name. When established in March 1850, it was known as the German settlement at Keelbundora, but by 1851 it was referred to as being at Dry Creek, an early name for the Edgars Creek. The adjoining British settlement, founded by the Thomas family, was also known as Keelbundora and Dry Creek until 1855 when their Wesleyan school was given the name Thomastown.

The name Neu Mecklenburg appears on a Lutheran church marriage certificate dated 13 October 1854, the first reference I have found to the use of that name for the German settlement. In 1855, the newly established Lutheran school was officially named Neu Mecklenburg, but as most settlers came from Saxony and Silesia rather than Mecklenburg, that name seems to have proved unacceptable for the settlement as a whole.

The earliest reference I've found to the name Westgarthtown is by Pastor Goethe, who used it in May 1856 when reporting that month's proceedings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Victoria's synod meeting. Of Westgarthtown's three synod representatives, Leberecht Fiedler and Johann Gottlob Siebel were from Silesia and Johann Wuchatsch from Saxony.

Late in 1857, Westgarthtown expanded out of the 640 acres of Section 25, Parish of Keelbundora when Ludwig Maltzahn leased Section 23 (740 acres) from Robert Campbell. Then from 1858 Christian Ziebell leased Section 24 (770 acres) from Robert Campbell. These two large sections continued to be farmed by German settlers until the early 1900s, enlarging Westgarthtown to over 2,000 acres.

During the late 1850s, Lutheran baptism and marriage records variously include the names Keelbundora, Dry Creek, the German Colony, Neu Mecklenburg and Westgarthtown. The name Germantown was also used sometimes by outsiders. However, by 1860 Westgarthtown was the most commonly used name, although the school continued to be known as Neu Mecklenburg until government financial assistance ceased in 1864. By the early 1900s, Westgarthtown had effectively merged with Thomastown, so the name Westgarthtown declined in use.

Westgarth at Northcote

Westgarth, the shopping and residential neighbourhood at Northcote, also takes its name from William Westgarth, but not for any local connection. It derives its name from the 1888 railway station located on Westgarth Street, Northcote, a street named after William Westgarth in 1853 in recognition of his work on behalf of Melbourne and Victoria.

Having two different localities named Westgarthtown and Westgarth has caused considerable confusion over the years. In 1919, Charles Maltzahn's funeral notice respectfully invited mourners 'to follow his remains to the place of interment, the Westgarthtown Cemetery (near Thomastown), not Northcote, as previously advertised.'

Westgarth fountain
(Rob Wuchatsch).

The 1888 Westgarth Memorial Drinking Fountain in Melbourne

This historic pink granite and bronze fountain, presented to the people of Victoria by William Westgarth in 1888, stands at the Nicholson Street entrance to the Carlton Gardens.

Unfortunately, the fountain does not bear Westgarth's name. With typical modesty, its inscription simply reads *To Victoria from one of her earliest colonists in pleasant remembrance 1840–88*. Given his significant contribution to the early development of Victoria, I believe a plaque identifying William Westgarth as the donor should be installed beside the fountain.

For information about William Westgarth see Friends of Westgarthtown News of September 2002 and Australian Dictionary of Biography (online). Further details about the Westgarth Drinking Fountain are also available online.



Thomastown's forgotten World War 2 heroes

BY ROB WUCHATSCH

As we approach ANZAC DAY we should remember Thomastown's servicemen. While Thomastown now has a memorial to its World War 1 soldiers, there is nothing to recall its World War 2 servicemen, or those from other conflicts. Today's residents could be forgiven for assuming no-one from Thomastown enlisted during World War 2, but many men who were born, raised or worked at Thomastown did serve. While most of their names are included on the Epping Riding Honour Board at the Epping RSL, there is nothing to connect them with Thomastown.

Two men who enlisted while living and/or working at Thomastown and won bravery awards were Albert Bassett DCM and Norman Hudson MM. However, apart from the Epping RSL's Honour Roll, there is nothing to else to recognise the district's two most decorated World War 2 servicemen. They have now been forgotten, remembered only by their families and the Darebin and Epping RSL sub-branches. Perhaps their names and deeds can be commemorated publicly somewhere in Thomastown, Lalor or Epping?

Albert Bassett lived on Pitman's farm, located between Ziebell's farm at Westgarthtown and the Merri Creek, which he had leased for several years prior to enlistment. He was a greyhound trainer, who as well as training and racing his own animals, transported greyhounds to and from race meetings for other trainers.

Norman Hudson was born at Thomastown. Although he lived at Epping, he was working on Ben Seeber's farm at Westgarthtown when he enlisted. Two of his older brothers, Harry and Ted, also served during the Second World War. Norm Hudson and Albert Bassett served with the 57/60th Battalion, the Citizen Military Forces militia unit for Melbourne's northern suburbs. Other Thomastown men to serve with the 57/60th Battalion were Norm Brazil and Ken Mann.

Albert Donald Bassett DCM

Albert, known as Alby or Basso in the AIF, was born at Northcote on 1 December 1912, the son of Robert and Alice (née McLennan) Bassett. He enlisted in the Citizen Military Forces on 19 March 1941 and after initial training was called up for full-time service on 18 December 1941 (V43873), shortly after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. He served as a Private with the 57/60th Battalion in Australia before departing for New Guinea on 8 March 1943. He transferred to the AIF (VX141784) on 17 June and was appointed Lance-Corporal on 31 December 1943.

After 16 months in New Guinea the 57/60th Battalion embarked at Madang on 26 July 1944 for Townsville. For two months Albert and his unit



Corporal Albert Bassett DCM (Australian War Memorial).



Pitman's house
(drawing by John
Borrack).

rested in Victoria, then trained in North Queensland until 1 January 1945, when they left for Bougainville. On 23 March Albert was promoted to Corporal and on 18 May 1945 was involved in an action against the Japanese for which he was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal. His citation read:

For outstanding leadership, devotion to duty and conspicuous gallantry in fierce fighting during the operations of the Commando Road which forced the enemy from his defensive positions on the Hongorai River and eventually led to the capture of the important Oso Track Junction.

Cpl Bassett was a section leader in 10 platoon B company when on commencing to move from its defensive position on the west bank of the Pororei River at approximately 0700 hours 18 May, the company was attacked from the south by a strong enemy force using light machine guns, rifles, and knee mortars.

10 Platoon was caught on an open bombed out piece of ground and was pinned down by heavy enemy automatic fire. After a fierce fight which lasted for two hours, the enemy commenced an encircling movement to the left leaving portion of his force to cover the encirclement with fire.

Cpl Bassett was ordered to take his section to the left flank and oppose the enemy encirclement. Showing great leadership and determination he led his section across open ground through heavy enemy fire to a position in which he disposed his section to meet the encircling enemy.

The section engaged the enemy with accurate fire and after inflicting casualties forced the enemy to withdraw to their original positions. Bassett and his section remained in position until half an hour later when the enemy commenced an encirclement from the right. He was then ordered to take his section back over the open ground and oppose the enemy from the right flank.

Again, with untiring energy and forceful leadership, he led his men across the open ground through heavy fire. His Bren gunner was wounded before the section reached its new position but Cpl Bassett quickly reorganized his section under fire and dragged the wounded man to safety. His section continued, and under the inspiring leadership of Cpl Bassett reached its position in time to oppose the enemy attack, once again inflicting casualties on the enemy and repulsing the attack.

During this engagement two enemy light machine guns opened fire on the section wounding another man. Appreciating that further casualties would be caused unless bold action was taken, Cpl Bassett gallantly moved out to an exposed position from which he could observe these light machine guns, and by directing the fire of his own light machine gun succeeded in silencing the enemy guns.

Throughout the four hour engagement with the enemy, Cpl Bassett displayed leadership of the highest order, and by his own personal courage and devotion to duty so inspired the men in his section that they were able to repulse the enemy attacks on each flank with heavy losses and permitted the company to continue its advance to complete its task.

Albert returned to Australia on 3 February 1946 and was discharged from the AIF on 12 March 1946. Although he does not appear to have remained at Thomastown for long after his return, he continued to live in the northern suburbs. He married widow Rebecca Hollow in 1952 and died at Reservoir in 1990 aged 77.

Norman Frederick Hudson MM

Norm was born at Thomastown on 24 April 1917, the youngest child of Charles and Florence (née Harris) Hudson. During the early 1890s, the Hudsons lived in the former Lutheran schoolhouse at Westgarthtown, then moved to Cr. J. S. Morgan's Sambourne Farm located in the Kingsway Drive area of today's Lalor. Charles worked for Morgan for about 20 years and then stayed on as manager after Terence Callaghan purchased the farm in 1910. He lived and worked there for a further 10–15 years before moving to Epping by the mid-1920s.

Norm attended both Thomastown and Epping Primary Schools. He was 23 and working on Ben Seeber's farm at Westgarthtown when he completed his mobilization form at Preston on 15 August 1940. He enlisted on 23 January 1941, was assigned as Private (V43132) to the 57/60th Battalion, Citizen Military Forces and then underwent three months training at Mt Martha. On 30 October 1941 he commenced further training at Trawool near Seymour and was called up for full-time service on 20 January 1942.

In March/April 1942 the 57/60th Battalion marched from Trawool to Albury, then travelled by train to Casino, where they remained until September. The battalion then moved to Queensland, where Norm transferred to the AIF (VX120542) on 15 November 1942. He left with the 57/60th Battalion for New Guinea on 8 March 1943.

On the night of 31 March–1 April 1944, during the Australian advance towards Madang, Norm was involved in an action for which he was awarded the Military Medal 'For Conspicuous Leadership and Personal Gallantry in action in the clearing of the Mindjim Valley and capture of Bogadjim.' His citation read:

VX120542 Pte Norman Frederick Hudson was acting as Section Leader during the operations which led to the capture of Yaula on 31 Mar–1 Apr 44.

When attacked by superior numbers of Japanese and despite the withdrawal of the Section on his right flank, Pte Hudson so



Private Norman Hudson MM (Norm Hudson).

manoeuvred his Section that he was able to repel repeated enemy attacks.

For four hours during darkness, Pte Hudson's Section resisted repeated enemy attacks, thus enabling his Pl Comd to reorganize the remainder of his Pl on more favourable ground. During these attacks Pte Hudson continually moved from man to man of his Section and directing their fire and so inspired and encouraged his men that severe casualties were inflicted on the enemy and the enemy attacks were broken up.

In this action Pte Hudson displayed outstanding qualities of leadership, and such bravery and disregard for his personal safety that he was an inspiration to the whole of his Section, with the result that the determined stand made by Pte Hudson's section, was instrumental in forcing the enemy from his strong positions at Yaula.

On 12 April 1944, however, Norm succumbed to scrub typhus and was evacuated and hospitalized on 17 April. He later attributed his survival to the 'Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels', the native stretcher bearers who carried him much of the way from Madang to Lae, a distance of over 120 miles. He remained on sick leave until 10 July, then arrived back in Australia on 11 August 1944, but was soon hospitalized again with malaria.

In January 1945 Norm embarked with the 57/60th Battalion for Bougainville. He undertook flame-thrower training in February and March, but was evacuated on 24 March with dermatitis to his hands, then hospitalized from July-September with hepatitis and malaria. In late 1945 he was transferred to the 22nd Battalion prior to his return to Australia on 4 February 1946 and discharge from the AIF on 22 March 1946. Norm's relatives recall his letters from New Guinea often arrived with portions cut out by army censors.

Norm returned to Epping and worked with his brother Ted at the Preston City Council's quarry behind the hotel. He married Mary McKeown in 1947 and they had two sons, Les and Norm, who they raised at their home in Wedge Street, Epping. When the quarry at Epping closed Norm and Ted worked for the council at Preston. Norm died at the Austin Hospital at Heidelberg in 1986, aged 69.



Norman Hudson's Military Medal (Norm Hudson).



Scarf made by Norman Hudson MM while in hospital (Norm Hudson).

Herman Graff of Westgarthtown, Doreen and Mernda

BY ROB WUCHATSCH

Herman August Graff was born at Westgarthtown on 2 September 1880, the second child of John and Salome (née Metzenthin) Graff. He was baptized by Pastor Herlitz of the Trinity German Lutheran Church on 26 September 1880 and his godparents were John and Johanna Wuchatsch of Epping and Henry Grutzner of Westgarthtown. He attended Thomastown Primary School from 1886–90 then completed his education at Doreen when his family moved there.

Herman's father John Graff had arrived in Australia as a child from Germany on the *Pribislaw* in 1850 with his parents, brother and three sisters and the Graff family were original settlers at Westgarthtown. Salome's parents arrived in South Australia from Germany in 1845 and later moved to Victoria. John and Salome were married at Harkaway in 1877 following the death of John's first wife Auguste (née Reu) in 1876. In 1891, John moved his family from Westgarthtown to Mount View, a 100-acre farm at Cookes Road, Doreen which he had owned since the 1860s and their last child Martha was born there in 1891. John's eldest son Charles carried on the farm at Westgarthtown.

John Graff died at Mount View in 1901 aged 57 and was buried at Westgarthtown. His estate was valued at £4,717, but under a complicated will, most of his assets were placed in trust for his widow, children and grandchildren. When he died he owned property at Doreen, Westgarthtown, Epping, Mernda and other places. Son Charles and his family remained at Westgarthtown although eventually left. Charles died in 1942 and Ernest, the other surviving son from John's first marriage, who had moved to Western Australia by 1903, died there unmarried in 1924.

Salome, along with her son Herman and daughters Mary, Sarah and Martha, remained at Mount View after John's death. When Salome



Herman Graff, c.1920 (Robert Cockerell).

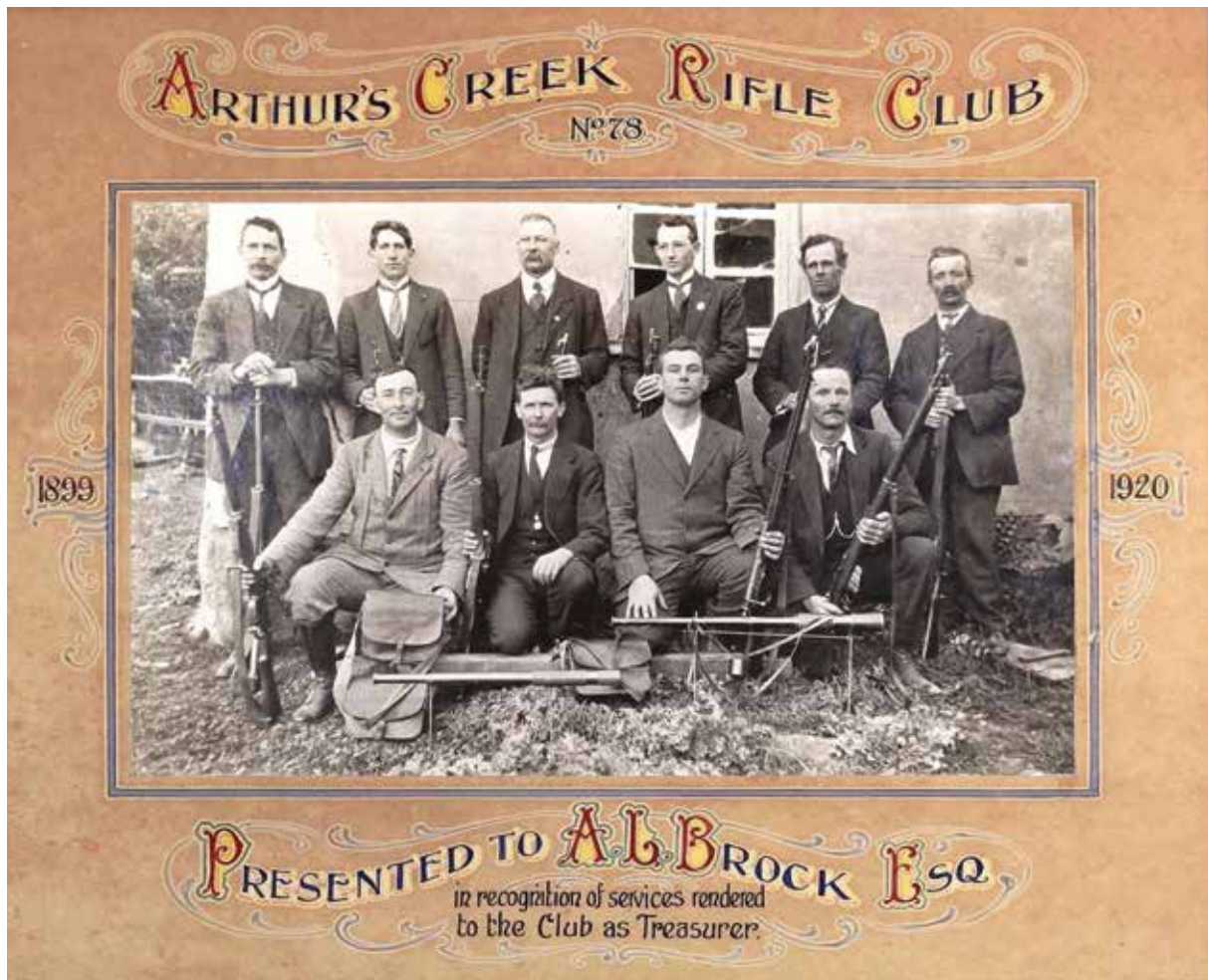


Mabel and Herman Graff, 1929 (Robert Cockerell).

died in 1904, aged 46, she was buried with John at Westgarthtown. The children, presumably led by Herman, the only surviving son from the second marriage, continued farming at Mount View.

In 1913, after Martha had turned 21, John Graff's executors John Siebel and Albert Wuchatsch put Mount View up for sale. Sisters Martha and Sarah Graff purchased it and held it as joint owners until Sarah's death in 1960. Martha, who married Charles Johnson in 1918 and had three children before separating in about 1938, farmed Mount View until her death in 1977. Mary, the eldest sister, married William Rankin in 1929 and moved to San Remo, but died in 1931.

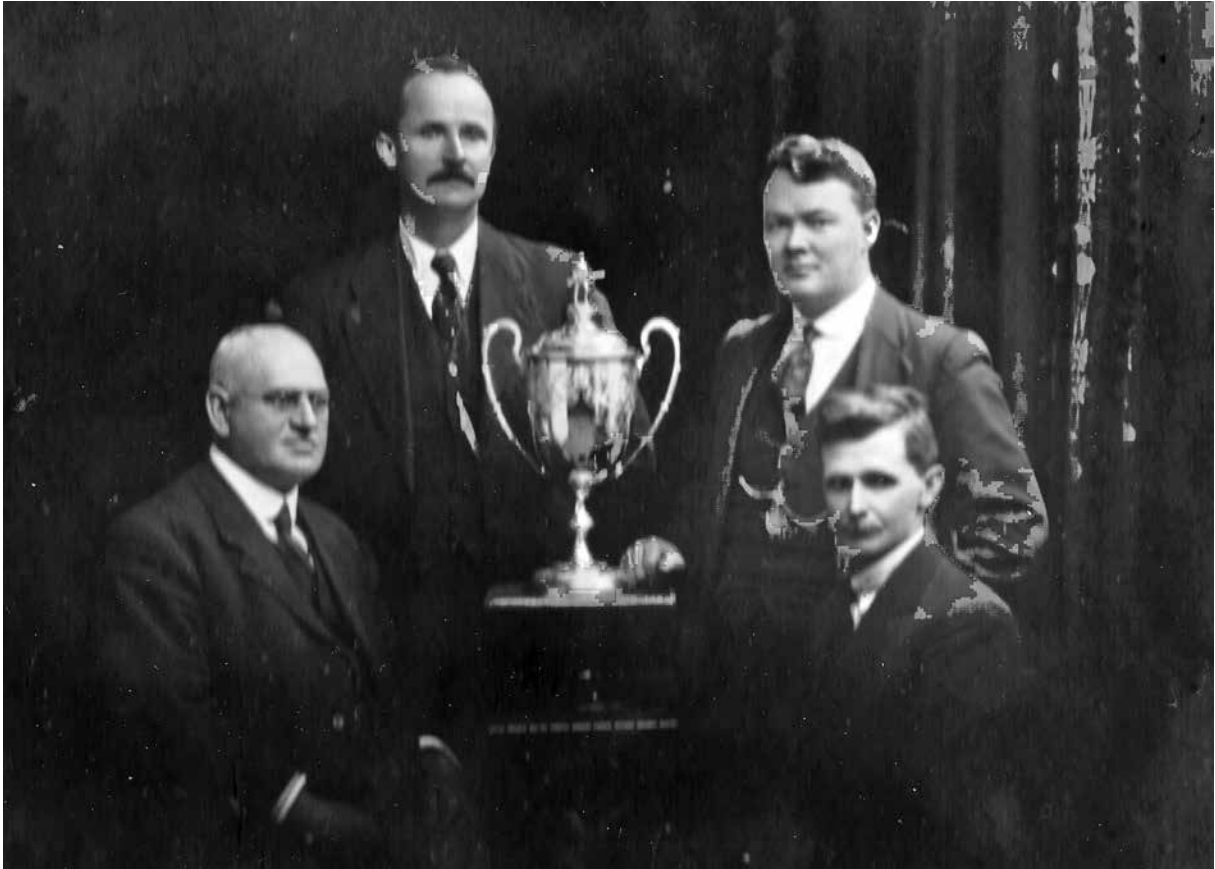
Herman appears to have lived and farmed at Mount View until Martha's marriage and possibly longer. He played cricket for Hazel Glen and in one match in 1905 against South Morang, was twice dismissed by his cousin, Bill Wuchatsch. He was also Treasurer of the Hazel Glen Cricket Club. But his main interest outside farming was shooting. He began with the Arthurs Creek Rifle Club in 1916; transferred to the Post and Telegraph Rifle Club in 1920; before finally joining the Diamond Valley Rifle Club in 1932. He also appears to have shot with the Caulfield Rifle Club at times.



Arthur's Creek Rifle Club, 1920.
Herman Graff at bottom right.
(upthecreekvictoria.com.au)

Herman Graff shooting at North
Williamstown (*Herald*, 9 November
1920).





A popular marksman, Herman was a consistent prizewinner. Newspapers regularly documented his successes and also noted that when he was a member of the Post and Telegraph Club he walked 12 miles from Mernda to the Preston Railway Station each Saturday to compete at Port Melbourne. Later, when he joined the Diamond Valley Club, he walked nine miles each way. It was estimated that from 1932-39 he walked 5,680 miles to and from the Diamond Valley range at Hurstbridge.

Post and Telegraph Rifle Club, 1924. Herman Graff standing at left (Robert Cockerell).

Herman was well-known as an expert builder and thatcher of haystacks. In January 1928 he and his brother-in-law Charles Johnson built the stacks at a working bee to cart and stack the hay off 35 acres at Magill's farm at Mernda. He also built miniature haystacks for the annual Whittlesea Agricultural Society District Exhibit at the Royal Melbourne Show. In 1930 he was also reported to have been elected as Treasurer of the re-formed Mernda and District Progress Association.

Haystack built by Herman Graff, c.1930s (Robert Cockerell).





On 29 May 1929 Herman married Mabel Grierson Hicks of Mernda. She was the daughter of Thomas and Mary (née Cockerell) Hicks. Mabel was raised at Highlands and Braeburn Farms at Doreen/Mernda, but had lived at Sunnyside at 1480 Plenty Road, Mernda with her mother since her father's death in 1920. Mabel's only brother Colin Hicks had died in 1915 of wounds received at Gallipoli. She also had two sisters, Hilda and Elsie, who married Clarence Mills and Charles Draper respectively.

Graff family leaving Sunnyside for Mayfield Presbyterian Church, 1930s (Robert Cockerell).

Herman and Mabel lived at Sunnyside with Mary Hicks after their marriage and operated a small dairy and poultry farm there. They had two children – Milton, born 8 December 1929 and Alison, born 14 February 1931 – who attended Mernda Primary School. Both children were lucky to survive childhood as Milton had a narrow escape from serious injury in May 1936 when a detonator he found exploded when he struck it with an axe. Later the same year Alison was admitted to the Fairfield Infectious Diseases Hospital for ten days with suspected diphtheria and pneumonia. In 1945 Milton was also admitted to hospital with diphtheria but recovered.

Mernda Primary School, c.1940, Milton standing in front of teacher and Alison standing fourth from right (Lost Mernda).



Mabel's mother Mary Hicks died at Sunnyside in 1934 and Herman Graff collapsed and died there on 28 July 1939 aged 58. He was described as a poultry farmer at the time of his death. After a service at Mernda's Mayfield Presbyterian Church, he was buried in the Whittlesea Cemetery at Yan Yean. His obituary stated he had recently suffered from measles which affected his heart. It noted he had been an enthusiastic rifleman whose trophies and prizes were a tribute to his skill. There were many representatives from rifle clubs and returned soldiers at the graveside and it was noted he had tried several times unsuccessfully to enlist with the AIF during the First World War. He was a skilled mechanic and instrument maker and invented an ingenious machine for converting the long rifle to the short present regulation mark. The obituary concluded by noting Herman was held in high esteem in the district.

Mabel, or May as she was known, carried on the farm at Sunnyside after Herman's death. In 1942 she had a herd of 24 cows and locals recall her grazing them along Plenty Road when feed was scarce. She was also well-known for her Presbyterian church and social work. She died at Preston on 22 April 1981 aged 89 and was buried with Herman at Yan Yean.



Milton and Alison Graff outside Graff's Farmhouse at Westgarthtown. c.1997 (Whittlesea Historical Society).

Neither Milton nor Alison married. They lived at Sunnyside for the rest of their lives, although Milton, a carpenter, often spent time away from Mernda working in Western Australia. Alison, described as a sewing mistress in the 1967 electoral roll, died on 2 September 1998 aged 67 and Milton died on 23 February 2009 aged 79. They had attended the Mayfield Presbyterian Church since childhood where Alison was a Sunday School teacher and elder. She was also involved with the Mernda Girl Guides. Milton, a church trustee, left \$10,000 to the Mayfield Presbyterian Church in his will. Sunnyside, by then over 150 years old but abandoned and in a dilapidated condition, was destroyed by fire in 2015.

For further details see Friends of Westgarthtown News of March 1998 (re Johann Graff and his family; May 2020 (re Ernest William Graff); and April 2023 (re Martha Louise Graff).

The Belmont/Thomastown Hotel

BY ROB WUCHATSCH



The Belmont Hotel, renamed the Thomastown Hotel in 1959, operated for 140 years. Opened by Peter McCoy in 1855, it provided refreshments, meals and accommodation for travellers on the Epping Road. Meetings of the Epping District Roads Board were also held there during the 1850s and 1860s, along with election rallies, ratepayers' meetings, community gatherings, inquests and land sales. Race meetings, football and cricket matches took place behind the hotel. The hotel, rebuilt in 1890 after a fire, then renovated and enlarged several times, was demolished during the early 1990s to make way for the M80 Metropolitan Ring Road.

Peter McCoy, his wife Margaret (née Suffern) and four young children William, Catherine, Fanny and Hugh, arrived in Melbourne as assisted immigrants aboard the *Manlius* on 16 February 1842. They came from County Antrim in the north of Ireland. Several more children were born in Melbourne, including Peter Jr., in 1845.

Belmont Hotel, c.1885. The original of this photograph was held by Mrs Alice (née Clinnick) Pollard when I copied it in 1983 but its location is now unknown (Rob Wuchatsch).



Shire of Epping councillors, c.1915. Peter McCoy Jr. at left (Jean Bruhn).

McCoy purchased 144 acres in Section 22, Parish of Keelbundora, on 12 April 1850 for £468 and named it Belmont Farm. Belmont was a well-known name in Antrim. On 17 April 1855, McCoy was granted a licence for the 'Belmont Hotel, Dry Creek.' As this appears to be the first newspaper reference to the Belmont Hotel, it presumably opened then, as licensing matters were regularly reported. During the 1850s and 1860s, it was sometimes incorrectly referred to in old records and newspapers as the Belmount Hotel, but from then on was known almost exclusively as the Belmont Hotel.

By April 1856 John Devine had taken over as licensee from McCoy and he operated the hotel for ten years with his wife Catherine (née Suffern). Devine had arrived in Australia with the McCoy's aboard the *Manlius* and was related by marriage. For several years Devine, like Peter McCoy, was a member of the Epping District Roads Board, which had its office at the Belmont Hotel and held its meetings there from 1855–67.

In October 1866 another McCoy relative, Michael Larmer, took over as licensee and continued until his death in 1881. Larmer also leased and operated Belmont Farm and served as a councillor for the Shire of Darebin during the 1870s.

In 1873 a Dutchman named Conrad Van Wingerdan, employed by Christian Ziebell at Westgarthtown, drowned in a waterhole while staggering home from the Belmont Hotel one night. At the inquest, Michael Larmer stated the deceased had several nobblers of gin and was the worse for drink, but capable of taking care of himself and walking. The Dutchman was buried at Westgarthtown in a now unknown grave.

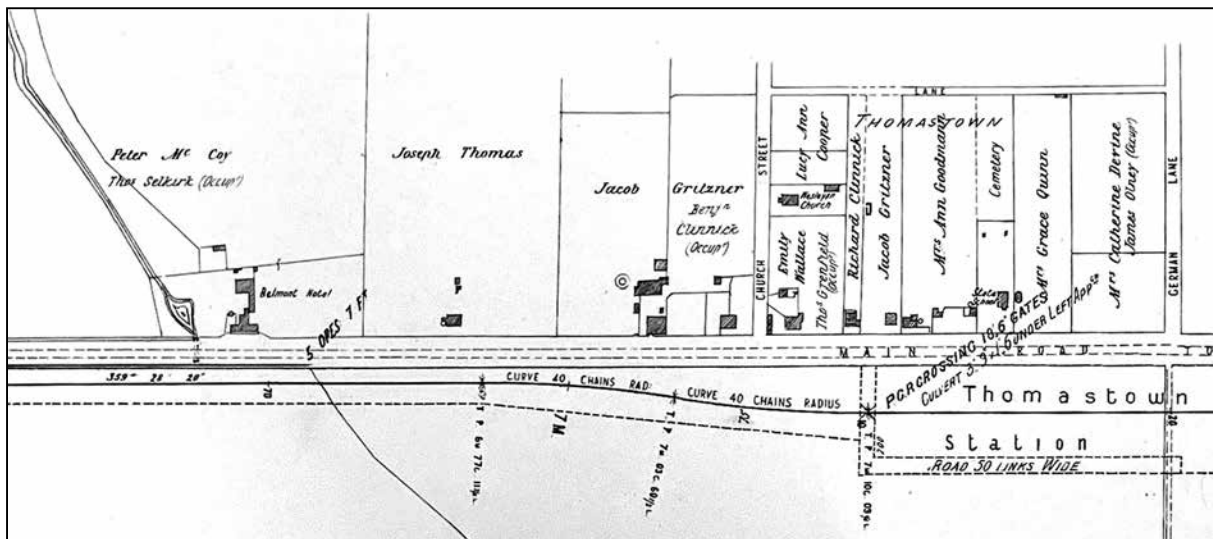
Following Michael's death his wife Frances became publican, but in her grief had drunk herself to death by 1882, leaving six young children as orphans. The next licensee, George Hill, lasted less than a year before being replaced in April 1883 by Thomas and Sarah Selkirk from Lower Plenty, who also leased Belmont Farm. The Selkirks were welcomed to Thomastown by several farmers who provided over a dozen ploughmen to help get them started. In 1884 daughter Georgina Selkirk married Benjamin Clinnick, son of Thomastown's postmaster Richard Clinnick, who operated the post office from his bootmaker's shop.

In 1882 a standpipe was erected near the hotel to provide the public with water from the Yan Yean pipeline. The hotel licensee managed the standpipe on behalf of the Shire of Darebin. In December 1898, during the worst drought since the mid-1860s, the *Northcote Leader* reported:

The standpipe at Thomastown has proved a great boon, and of late a procession of water carts has been coming and going. When water was tolerably plentiful farmers did not mind paying a shilling a load, but when cattle had to be watered at this price it became too severe a tax, so the shire council on Monday wisely reduced the charge to 6d a load.

Andreas Kreitling of Westgarthtown, who carted and distributed much of Thomastown's milk during the 1880s, once received a serious head injury from a fall while carting milk to Melbourne. The licensee of the Belmont Hotel is said to have stitched up the wound with a needle and thread and no sedative other than a large whisky and Kreitling continued on his way. Other carriers carted vegetables, fruit, flowers, hay and wood to Melbourne in their horse-drawn drays and waggons and returned with supplies and manure.

The Selkirk family operated the Belmont Hotel until March 1888 when Peter McCoy Jr. took over as owner/licensee. McCoy had inherited the Belmont Farm and Hotel in 1881 from the estate of his father, Peter McCoy Sr., who died in 1864. Peter McCoy Jr. was a member of the Epping District Roads Board during the 1860s and the Shire of Darebin from the 1870s, including President from 1878–81. He remained a councillor for many years and was also Shire President in 1893/94 and 1901/02.



Following the deaths of Michael and Frances Larmer, McCoy had assumed responsibility for the upbringing of their six young children. A bachelor who had lost a leg, McCoy was assisted to run the Belmont Hotel by his niece Bridget McCormack, who was said to have been 'his housekeeper, manager, secretary and hostess'.

1887 Victorian Railways plan showing the Belmont Hotel at left (VPRS 5751/P/17 Public Record Office, Victoria).

McCoy held a race meeting behind the Belmont Hotel on Queen's Birthday 24 May 1888. He established his racecourse at a time when the Victorian economy and horse racing were booming. The railway from Fitzroy to Whittlesea was then under construction and several Thomastown farms were purchased by developers for subdivision into building blocks and sale to speculators. However, these subdivisions failed with the onset of the 1890s Depression.

On the evening of Tuesday 5 August 1890 the Belmont Hotel, constructed of timber and iron, was destroyed by fire. By the time the Preston Volunteer Fire Brigade arrived it was only able to save the outbuildings. The fire was said to have been caused by a boy dropping a lighted match near gasoline. It is not known whether the building destroyed by fire was the original 1855 hotel or a later one.

Peter McCoy immediately set about erecting a new hotel. On 19 December 1890, he mortgaged Belmont Farm for £1,200 to finance a 12-roomed two-storey brick

Belmont Hotel, c.1928 (State Library of Victoria).



building, which was completed by April 1891. This building, with later modifications and extensions, stood for over a century until demolished in the 1990s.

Ten more race meetings were held from 1892–98, including three in 1896 – on St. Patrick's Day, Queen's Birthday and Boxing Day. At the 1892 St Patrick's Day meeting:

there was a good attendance, the patrons including quite a number of the fair sex. There were the usual side shows incidental to a country race meeting, including a singer of Irish ballads. Flags fluttered gaily over the refreshment booth, and in honour of the day most of those present wore a bit of green ribbon on their coats.

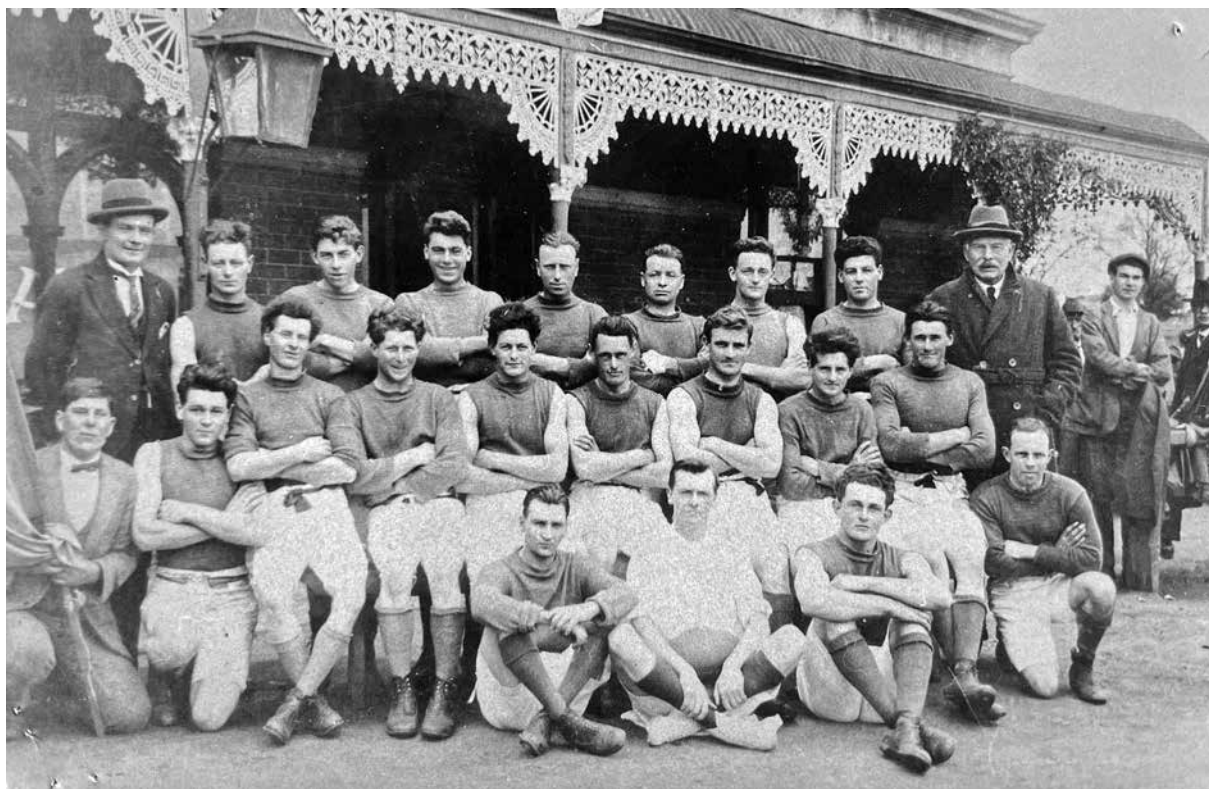
In 1894 a special excursion train was arranged, leaving Spencer Street at 10.40 am and returning at 6.30 pm.

Special trains also brought members of the Findon and other hunt clubs to the district. In June 1892 the Melbourne hounds ended their hunt at the Belmont Hotel, where 'The good old landlord of the Thomastown Inn evidently knew what a hungry hunter meant, as he had a dainty repast all ready, with plenty of good beer etc. which we did justice to, and finished an enjoyable day.'

McCoy also encouraged and supported cricket, coursing and pigeon shooting, all of which, like horseracing and hunting, were presumably good for business. In 1890, he leased part of his farm along the Edgars Creek for the establishment of a slaughterhouse, boiling down works and piggery. Despite regular complaints by Thomastown residents about offensive smells, this business operated until 1900.

McCoy operated the Belmont Hotel, along with Belmont Farm which he used for grazing purposes, with the assistance of his nieces Bridget and Ellen McCormack and the Larmer children. For the last few years before his death in 1916 Bridget and Ellen practically ran the hotel themselves. Bridget was appointed licensee following McCoy's death and from 1919 allowed the newly formed Thomastown Football Club to play on a makeshift oval on the old racecourse. The hotel served as club rooms with an old barn as change rooms. From 1934–38 the hotel and its oval was also home to the Thomastown Cricket Club. Cycling races along the Epping Road started and finished at the hotel during the 1920s and 1930s and motorcycle scrambles also took place on the old racecourse from the late 1930s.

Thomastown Football team, c.1923
(G. Constantine).





In July 1928 Bridget McCormack was fined £1 for allowing my father Norman Wuchatsch and Leslie Harper on the premises after hours. Although the two men stated they were there to write a letter to the Bourke-Evelyn Football Association seeking the clearance of a player to Thomastown, they were each fined £2.

Belmont Hotel,
c.1930 (vhhda.
wordpress.com)

Later that year McCoy's executors sold the farm and hotel to property developer Robert Lowe for £20,000. Lowe immediately sold the hotel to David Scott of Epping for £8,000, but both properties reverted back to McCoy's estate during the Great Depression, after Lowe and Scott defaulted on their loan repayments. Following Bridget McCormack's death in 1944, Belmont Farm was sold to tenant George Peterson, but the hotel's freehold remained in the hands of Larmer descendants until 1949.

Following Bridget McCormack's departure in 1928, a succession of short-term licensees managed the Belmont Hotel until 1955, in contrast to the stability of the previous 30 years. The high turnover reflected the difficulty of making a living before Thomastown's population grew rapidly after the Second World War and the establishment of manufacturing industries brought thirsty workers. Licensees included Charles Brady (December 1928–February 1933); Robert Scott (February–May 1933); John Richardson (June–October 1933); Robert Larmer (October 1933–March 1934); Mary Taylor and Ethel Gould (March 1934–May 1937); Ethel Gould (May 1937–March 1940), who had extensive alterations and improvements made in 1939, including modernization of the façade. Her daughter Pearl Gould married Ted Siebel of Westgarthtown; Jack Rose (March–December 1940); Olive Brown (December 1940–December 1942); Henry Welch (December 1942–April 1945); Catherine Goodwin (April 1945–December 1945); and following Catherine's death her son Thomas Goodwin (December 1945–July 1949).

In October 1946, a fire started in the parlour and while the Preston and Northcote fire brigades confined it to the bar areas, a quantity of bottled stock was lost and considerable damage caused by smoke and water. In 1948, the local police

reported that Goodwin's conduct of the hotel had been generally satisfactory with meals and accommodation supplied and the premises kept in a clean condition.

Roma Hughes replaced Thomas Goodwin in July 1949, her mother Mary Harris and brother Frank Harris having purchased the hotel's freehold from the Goodwin family. Catherine (née Larmer) Goodwin, born at the old timber hotel in 1874, had married Thomas Goodwin in 1911 and they had managed hotels in Melbourne before she returned to the Belmont Hotel in 1945.

In October 1949 Roma Hughes wrote to the Shire of Whittlesea requesting the removal of the 'antiquated' horse trough at the front of the hotel. By November 1950, however, Hughes was also gone, replaced by John Hills, who was followed in January 1953 by Alfred, Grace and Caroline Dwyer. Alfred Dwyer was a grandson of George and Augusta (née Paulke) Falk of Epping and Augusta is believed to have lived at Westgarthtown and attended the Lutheran School there during the 1850s before the Paulke family moved to Epping.

In December 1954 management of the hotel was transferred to Thomastown Hotels Pty Ltd, owned by the Harris family, with Robert Ward as nominee. Subsequent nominees include Sydney Moon (February-December 1955); John Donnelly (1955-70) who renamed, renovated and extended the hotel in 1959 and added a drive-in bottle shop in 1968; Eugene O'Connell; Tony Maloni; Mario Gobbo and Greg Marriott. There were probably others whose names I do not know.

The Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works purchased the hotel's freehold during the 1970s for the proposed Metropolitan Ring Road so Frank Harris established the Excelsior Hotel nearby in Mahoney's Road in 1974. The doomed Thomastown Hotel traded until the 1990s when it was finally closed and demolished to make way for the M80 Ring Road.



Thomastown Hotel
(Whittlesea Post, 12 October 1977).

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VISITING ZIEBELL'S FARMHOUSE MUSEUM AND HERITAGE GARDEN

Ziebell's Farmhouse is located at 100 Gardenia Road, Thomastown (entry via Ainwick Crescent). From May 2024 the opening hours will be Sunday 11 am–3 pm and Tuesday 11 am–3 pm.

For enquiries, call Lyndel Wischer on (03) 9217 2170 or (03) 8401 6236 or email ziebells@whittlesea.vic.gov.au or lyndel.wischer@whittlesea.vic.gov.au.

Tours can be organised for groups of ten or more people. For information and bookings contact 0417 391 514 or johnsdfry@gmail.com.

THOMASTOWN LUTHERAN CHURCH SERVICES

Services are held on the fourth Sunday of the month at 2.30 pm at the Thomastown Lutheran Church, German Lane, Lalor. For further details, see the Calvary Lutheran Church website at www.calvarychurch.com.au.