

# WESTGARTHTOWN HERITAGE WALK



Subsumed by the modern suburbs of Thomastown and Lalor, Westgarthtown's surviving buildings are of national significance for their illustration of German migration to Victoria. This heritage walking trail will take you on a unique journey through time and uncover a hidden story of early European settlement in Australia.

German and Wendish immigrants first settled at Thomastown and Lalor in March 1850. The Wends are a Slavonic race from Lusatia, a region in Eastern Germany, near the Polish/Czech border. Most had arrived in Australia the previous month aboard the ship *Pribislav* after a six-month journey from Hamburg. They were among five million emigrants who left Germany during the nineteenth century, mainly for economic reasons. Most moved to the USA, with smaller numbers settling in Canada, Australia, South America and South Africa.

William Westgarth, a prominent Melbourne merchant, had promoted German migration to Victoria, having observed the 'industry, frugality, sobriety and general good conduct' of Germans in

South Australia. He actively encouraged Germans to emigrate to Melbourne and urged the British Government to assist them to travel and settle here.

In March 1850, Westgarth purchased 640 acres (240 hectares) of Crown land at Thomastown in trust on behalf of 16 German and Wendish families. He bought the land for them as only naturalized non-British subjects could own land in Australia. He transferred this land to them as they became naturalized and raised enough money to buy it. It cost one pound per acre. The village the settlers established soon became known as Westgarthtown.

Ten acres were reserved for use by the Lutheran Church. The remaining land was

subdivided into farms running east-west on both sides of Edgars Creek giving all settlers creek frontage, along with guaranteed access to a spring, located near today's Balmain Court Reserve.

Making use of the most readily available building material — basalt — the German and Wendish settlers at Westgarthtown erected a church, school, cemetery and numerous farmhouses and accompanying barns, stables and dairies. All were located on neatly laid out properties, bordered and divided by seemingly endless dry stone walls. Even the roads and yards were paved with stone.

For over 100 years, dairying was the main activity of the settlers and their descendants. Each day wagons, then later trucks, carried milk and butter to Melbourne's inner suburbs. The Pura Dairy, now a national brand name, was started by the Siebel family in 1934. Only with the sale of Ziebell's Farm in 1972 did dairying cease at Westgarthtown.

Although once rural, Westgarthtown has now been engulfed by urban growth and now forms part of the Melbourne suburbs of Thomastown and Lalor. The Thomastown Lutheran Church, cemetery and reserve survive, along with some of the old German and Wendish farmhouses and outbuildings. The remaining buildings and structures are protected by inclusion on the Victorian Heritage Register.

Westgarthtown was not a previous name for Thomastown. Founded in the early 1850s by English Wesleyan migrants, Thomastown was originally a separate village, centred between Main and Spring Streets. At first the two villages existed side by side, but by 1900 they had merged and the name Westgarthtown fell into disuse. Many of the English settlers and their descendants were market gardeners. Lalor did not exist until the late 1940s when it was created from Thomastown's northern farmlands by returning servicemen and their families.

## At a glance

### Walk commences at Ziebell's Farmhouse

Corner of Gardenia Road and Ainwick Cres. Thomastown.

Distance: 2.9 km

Duration: 90 mins

Walking map .....2

Getting there ..... 4

# Westgarthtown Heritage Walk

## 1 Ziebell's Farmhouse

Corner Gardenia Rd and Ainwick Cres, Thomastown

Owned by the City of Whittlesea

Open to the public — visit [westgarthtown.org.au](http://westgarthtown.org.au)



Ziebell's farm was the largest at Westgarthtown. Built between 1851 and 1856, with walls 61 cm thick, the house is a typical German farmhouse design. Like other houses in the settlement it has a steep pitched roof. In Germany, this was intended to prevent the build up of snow. The house appears to have been constructed in two stages, as evidenced by the different external stonework and floor levels in the attic.

The farmhouse, barn and outbuildings have been carefully restored by the City of Whittlesea since it purchased the property from the Adams family in 1993. The

work has been supervised by architect Geoffrey Borrack, a descendant of Christian and Sophia Ziebell, who built the house.

Ziebell's house, like nearly all the original farmhouses, had split wooden shingles on the roof. The shingles were later covered with British made 'Gospel Oak' galvanized iron which gave greater protection from the elements and allowed cleaner water run-off.

Ziebell's Farmhouse, cart shed, bath house, smoke house and tank are all included on the Victorian Heritage Register, as is the historic cottage garden.

## 2 Maltzahn's Farmhouse

127 Gardenia Road, Lalor

State Government owned — not open to the public

Johann and Sophia Maltzahn purchased 30 acres in 1851 and a further 20 acres from a neighbour, Ernst Heyne, in 1853. The bluestone house stands on Heyne's block.

The rear cottage section is believed to have been built during the early 1850s, possibly by Heyne, while the larger front section was probably built in the 1860s

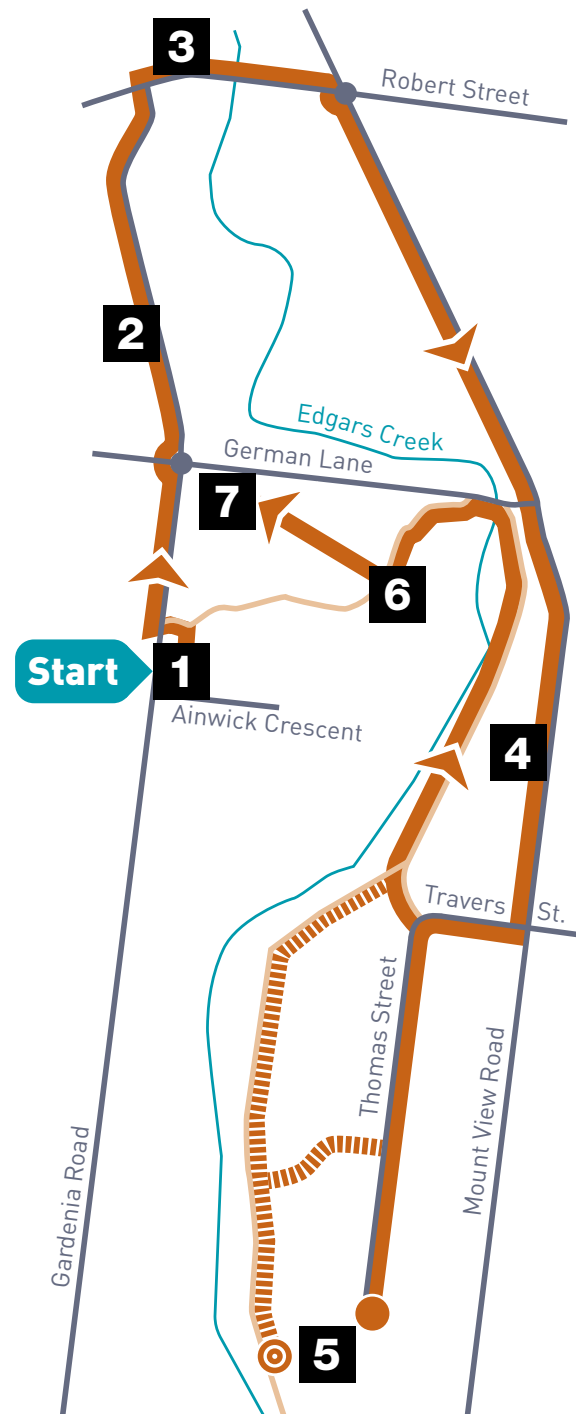
during the Kreitling family's occupation. The property was owned by the Maltzahn family until the early 1900s, but occupied by the Kreitling family for almost 60 years.

In about 1900, the external walls of the house were rendered and whitewashed, then during the 1960s weatherboard extensions were built behind the house

and bedrooms added upstairs. In the late 1980s the house was almost demolished, subsequently standing roofless and forlorn for over a decade before finally being restored by Heritage Victoria. The restoration work was funded under the Public Heritage Program.

Although the interior is of modern design, the house

serves as an important reference point, locating the old Maltzahn/Kreitling farm within Westgarthtown.





3

**Wuchatsch's Farmhouse**

74 Robert Street, Lalor

Privately owned — not open to the public



Johann and Magdalene Wuchatsch's house is believed to have been built during the mid-1850s. The farm, originally 78 acres, was enlarged to 92 acres in 1893. The Wuchatsch family was Wendish, from Saxony.

This farm is the most complete of Westgarthtown's survivors. It comprises a two-storey bluestone house, three bluestone outbuildings for milking and stabling, a timber tank house over an

underground stone-lined tank, stone pathways and drains, some dry stone walling and mature trees.

Wuchatsch's farmhouse is believed to be the oldest house in Melbourne to have been constructed, owned and continually occupied by the same family. The farmhouse, stables, milking shed, dairy, tank house and circular stone horse path are included on the Victorian Heritage Register.

4

**Siebel's Farmhouse**

77 Mount View Road, Thomastown

Privately owned — not open to the public

Johann Gottlob and Christiane Siebel's farmhouse was built in 1860, to replace a smaller one. The farm, initially 30 acres, was later enlarged to 90 acres by acquisition of adjoining land. Siebel descendants continued farming at Westbourne Park, as it became known, until 1950. In 1934 a grandson, Albert Siebel, established

the Pura Dairy at Preston to retail Westgarthtown's milk. From a one-cart dairy delivering to only a few streets, Pura grew to become a leading national brand.

Siebel's farmhouse has the only cellar at Westgarthtown. The house also retains its bluestone bakeoven, which can be seen attached to the

outside of the kitchen on the north side of the house.

As with Ziebell's Farmhouse, Siebel's house retains its visible link with Westgarthtown's church building, reinforcing the former strong relationship between the settlers and their religion. It is included on the Victorian Heritage Register.



5

**Graff's Farmhouse**

1 Thomas Street, Thomastown

Privately owned — not open to the public



Graff's farmhouse was erected in 1873 for Johann and Johanna Graff, Wends who had established a dairy farm on their 50 acres. It replaced two earlier and smaller houses.

The surviving features of Graff's farm comprise the house, a two-level barn, small milking shed, well, tank, several large trees, and some remnant dry stone walls, set on an acre of gently sloping land beside the

creek. The barn is the largest outbuilding at Westgarthtown and probably intended to provide shelter to animals in the European manner. Hay was stored in the loft.

The well is the only true well at Westgarthtown, as distinct from the underground storage tanks, which were constructed on all the farms to hold roof run-off water. The farmhouse, barn and outbuildings are included on the Victorian Heritage Register.

## 6 Thomastown Lutheran Church

German Lane, Lalor

Owned by the Lutheran Church of Australia

**Open to the public on special occasions**

Services held on the fourth Sunday each month at 2.30 pm



Westgarthtown's church, dedicated in 1856, is the oldest operating Lutheran church building in Australia. Services are held monthly on the fourth Sunday at 2.30 pm. It was constructed from bluestone quarried nearby.

Services were conducted in German until the 1900s, German and English until the

1920s, then English only until the 1950s, when German as well as English services were re-introduced. Since the 1970s, however, services have been conducted in English. A Lutheran schoolhouse, built in 1865-66, stood just to the east of the church and operated until 1876. It was demolished in the 1950s.

## 7 Thomastown Lutheran Cemetery

Corner German Lane and Gardenia Road, Lalor

**Open to the public**

Many fine headstones remain in the cemetery, some with inscriptions in both English and German, reflecting new and old cultures. The name Westgarthtown appears on the Ziebell and Winter graves. An interesting plain redgum memorial, painted white, can also be seen. No burial register survives for the cemetery, but over 185 known burials took place, with a total figure of around 200.

Some of the dry stone walls typical of the area survive around the church and cemetery. These walls define the open land and combined with the adjoining tree-lined cemetery, Ziebell's Farmhouse and Edgars Creek help retain Westgarthtown's original rural character. The Thomastown Lutheran church, cemetery and reserve are all protected by inclusion on the Victorian Heritage Register.



## Getting there

### Ziebell's Farmhouse

100 Gardenia Road, Thomastown

(cnr of Ainwick Crescent, Melway Ref: Map 8 H5)

