

Golden Oldies

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Excursion to 'Germantown' now Grovedale

Not many residents of Geelong and also of Grovedale are aware of the fact that Grovedale was, not too many years ago, known as Germantown. The name was changed in 1915. This name tells us already where the first settlers came from. Their first language was German until about 1922.

The boundary on the south was Boundary Road; on the west T.M. Burke Estate, Cr. Roberts property; on the east Barwarra Road and on the north Settlement Road. The Shire of South Barwon was formed in 1857. Little is known about the early years of the first settlers as the minutes of the Lutheran Church were not recorded for ten years.

The first settlers in Germantown were ten German families, Lutherans, who came out on the ship "Emmy", on December 19th, 1849. They were brought out by Geelong's first settler Dr. A. Thomson. Most of these settlers came from the area of Breslau and Frankfurt an der Oder, both now in the eastern part of Germany. They came because of religious and political persecution. Only four of the first ten families could be traced: F. Bieske, F. Baench, F. Kerger and J. Winter.

I would like to concentrate on two families of the early settlers whose properties I included in the excursion: John Winter and Michael Rossack, who came to Germantown a little later.

John Winter, as already said, came out on the "Emmy". He first settled at Cowies Creek, North Geelong. He worked as a market Gardener for which he was paid twenty pounds a year, but his wife and children had to help him without any extra payment. Then he went to the goldfields for a time. His first vines he planted in North Geelong. In 1954 he bought the property in Germantown, still known as "Winter's Wine Cellar", which is the first stop on your excursion. Heinrich William Winter, John Winter's son, ran the wine cellar for many years. It was the meeting place of the settlers, where they could relax after a hard days work over a glass of wine in the beautiful garden. One of the vines, which was not affected by Phylloxera, a vine disease, and not being destroyed still grows in this beautiful garden. It is now being looked after by Mr. Doerr, an in-law of the Winter's. The cellar is the oldest in the district. In the yard is also a more than 100 years old wine press. Photos of Mr Winter and his daughter are hanging on the wall of the cellar. Heinrich William Winter died at the age of 95. The house and the wine cellar are more than 120* years old. (*in 1980)

The second son of old Mr. John Winter, also called John, went to Doncaster, then called "Waldau", where he was one of the pioneer orchardists. Harry Winter, one of his sons, became a councillor in the Shire of South Barwon for 30 years, and he never missed a meeting in all that time.

After having looked at a photo of old Mr. Winter on the wall of his wine cellar, which he built himself, you can visit him at the cemetery where he rests under a large tree on the right hand side of the entrance. You will find a number of Winters at the cemetery.

Michael Rossack came to Germantown in 1863. He bought his property for £200,-. He first worked as a carrier then as a wood cutter and later as a market gardener. Three of his sons remained in Germantown. Frank Rossack, a direct descendant of the Rossack family is the owner of the beautiful Coral Gardens and Shell Museum, the only one in Victoria, which is the third stop on your excursion.

Life in Germantown was not easy. The early settlers planted vineyards, were cutting wood and grew vegetables which they wheelbarrowed to the Market Square in Geelong. Men, women and children worked often into the early hours of the next day. I think that is one reason why many died very young, as you can see on the gravestones. The Church Register shows non professional names of illnesses as cause of death. I gather from this, that they had no money to consult a physician. Women died during childbirth, children from hooping-cough, diphtheria etc. According to statistics only four out of ten children reached adulthood. You will find a great number of little

graves at the cemetery. I hope that these first pioneers of this country will never be forgotten as it was them who laid the foundation to our comfort today.

In 1854 the land for the cemetery was bought and the first school and church built – one building which had mud walls and a grass roof. Services and school were held in their homes before. In 1871 St. Paul's Lutheran Church was completed for the cost of £700,-. Rev. Heyer was the first and very well-liked minister. He retired in 1920. The Methodist Church is further down the hill and he used to say: You know I'm higher than you Methodist fellows both by name and by the Church.

St. Paul's Church, No. four on your excursion, is a beautiful little church and I like to draw your attention to the remembrance plates on the wall.

In 1868 the number of families living in Germantown had increased to 71.

No. 5 on your excursion-map is the Lutheran Church of "Waldkirch", built in 1859. Only the church with its cemetery remains of the neighbouring Lutheran Congregation "Waldkirch".

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There was a map in the original SZENE.