GERMANTOWN REVISITED

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ABSTRACT: Germans were among the earliest settlers in the Geelong region — their presence was visibly identifiable in the early township of Germantown, now Grovedale. This paper makes a contribution to recognising the legacy of the pioneering Germans in the region and the Humboldtian visualisation of Geelong captured by German artist Eugene von Guérard. The stimulus for the paper was the contemporary German event in Geelong when Deakin University generously hosted the 2022 conference of the Australian and New Zealand Associations of von Humboldt Fellows at its Waterfront Campus.

Keywords: Germantown, Grovedale, Geelong, Germans, von Guérard

THE FOUNDING OF GERMANTOWN

In the early 1840s, residents in the Port Phillip District of the then Colony of New South Wales observed the 'useful class' of German colonists in the development of South Australia. An article in the *Port Phillip Gazette* of 9 December 1846 promoted German emigration to Port Phillip, stating that its agriculture districts would be 'eminently fitted to receive these hard-working emigrants'.[1] The key advocate for German emigration became the prominent businessman, William Westgarth (1815–1889) (Serle 1976).[2] From 1847–1849 he spent over two years in Europe during which time he convinced the colonial emigration commissioners to support subsidised emigration from the German States to Port Phillip. Westgarth visited Saxony and Silesia promoting the scheme and appointed an emigration agent, Eduard Delius. A specific request for German migrants received by Westgarth came from Dr Alexander Thomson (1798–1866), who required skilled labourers, like vinedressers and coopers, for the Geelong area (Darragh & Wuchatsch 1999: 119; Rowe 2021: 107–108 & 776–777; Wuchatsch 2000: 49–51).

Thomson, a medical practitioner and pastoralist, had settled at Kardinia on the Barwon River in 1836. He became a leading figure in the Geelong community and its development. Sometimes called its founder, he was its first mayor in 1851, serving in this capacity again in 1855–1857. He was also active in wider colonial affairs, including the movement to separate the Port Phillip District from New South Wales. Thomson played a key role in bringing Presbyterian services to Geelong and was noted for 'his enthusiastic Presbyterianism'. The latter perhaps elucidates why he opposed Irish immigration, while advocating for German settlers to come to the Geelong region (Gardiner 1967).

The emigrants destined for Geelong arrived in Williamstown on the *Emmy* on 19 December 1849. Farmers from Züllichau in the Prussian Province of Brandenburg, they reportedly travelled by paddle steamer on the Oder River to Berlin and then by train to Hamburg for embarkation. Some were so-called modern Lutherans from the State Church of Prussia; others were from the free Lutheran Church of Prussia or Old Lutherans (Darragh & Wuchatsch 1999: 46 & 50−51; Nutting 2001).[3] Apart from the promotional material on Port Phillip that Delius had distributed to them, the Germans' reasons for emigration included economic hardship in their homeland, political unrest following the revolutionary 'wave' across Europe in 1848, and religious persecution (Darragh & Wuchatsch 1999: 25–28; Wuchatsch 2000: 49–51).[4]

Upon their arrival, it was reported that the *Emmy* migrants appeared 'to be of a much more suitable description than some of the former importations'. Ten families, encompassing 37 individuals, had been brought to Port Phillip by Thomson. Following clearance by the Immigration Board, they were taken into his charge.[5] As indentured migrants, the Germans had to work for Thomson, most for three years and in two cases for one year. Eventually, they and other Germans arriving in the district were able to purchase land and build their homes and establish vineyards, market gardens and orchards. By 1852, the area near the Waurn Chain of Ponds on the Waurn Creek, about six kilometres southwest of the City of Geelong, where some of them settled, had become known as Germantown (Darragh & Wuchatsch 1999: 119–123; Noack n.d.; Nuting 2001; Rowe 2021: 777).[6] The hilly country and volcanic soils around Germantown and the proximity to the Barwon River were ideal for the German settlers' viticulture and agriculture. Further, there was a ready market for the produce, which they carted to the City of Geelong.[7]

DEVELOPMENT OF GERMANTOWN

German migration to the region continued, promoted by the settlers themselves and the Geelong Committee for German Migration (Darragh & Wuchatsch 1999: 101–102). Germantown developed, with a day school opened in 1854, the first Lutheran congregation school in Victoria, and recognised by the Victorian Government as the Germantown Common School. The original building is reported to have had mud walls and a roof thatched from grass and doubled as the Lutheran Church. Subsequently, a stone building, called Trinity Church, was erected in 1859; a second Lutheran congregation also developed with St Paul's Church built in 1871.[8] In 1861 Germantown had a population of 117 and by the mid-1860s some 70 families of German origin had settled in the region and established two flour mills, two tanneries, four wool washing works and two hotels (Noack n.d.; Rowe 2021: 777–778).[9]

Among the arrivals on the *Emmy* were the Baensch, Bieske, Kaerger and Winter families. Other early settlers, as noted on the Germantown cemetery memorial (Figure 1), were Andressen, Baum, Hartwich, Hermann, Heyer, Jasper, Klemke, Kosseck, Lorke, Momm, Pacholke, Renzow, Rossack, Schneider and Schultz.[10]
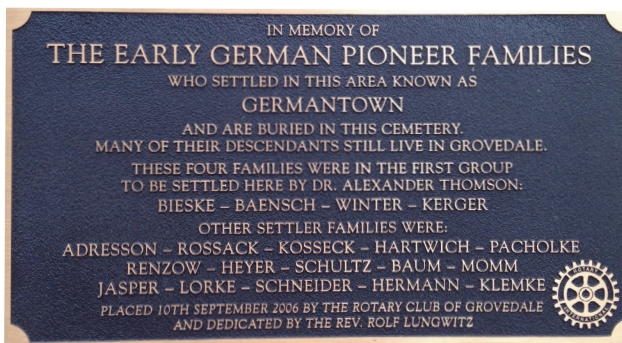

Figure 1: Monument to the German Pioneer Families, Germantown Cemetery, Church Street, Grovedale. Photo by Nancy Alford and reproduced with the permission of Monument Australia.

Besides orchards and market gardens, it was reported in 1866 that about 70 acres of Germantown were under vines. While most vineyards were small 'one or two acre patches', three were noted 'for their extent', namely those of Bieske, Kaegar and Scheffley. A Melbourne newspaper, noting that the population was almost exclusively German, reported that it was not uncommon to see women and men in traditional dress 'which is the holiday glory of the German peasantry'. The article also describes the village as 'a peaceable and order-loving community, as a thrifty and industrious people, … one of the very few well-populated places in the neighbourhood of Geelong that can safely be left to take care of its own morality without the aid of police protection'.[11]

FORMING A PICTURE OF MID-NINETEENTH-CENTURY GEELONG

The visits to Geelong and artistic legacy of a significant German artist enable the modern reader to glimpse the landscapes that would have been familiar to the Germantown community. The artist, Eugene von Guérard (1811–1901), was born in Austria, where his father, Bernhard, was a court portrait painter. Eugene also showed artistic talent, with his father his first and an influential teacher. After Bernhard's death in 1836, Eugene went to his father's hometown of Düsseldorf and in 1840 enrolled at the progressive and highly esteemed Düsseldorf Academy, where Alexander von Humboldt's concept of landscape painting was actualised (Botting 1974; Wulf 2015). Von Guérard studied there for four years completing an academic and practical program and, in particular, gaining skills in *Freilichtmalerei* (*plein air* art). He painted significant works during this period (Pullin 2011a, b; Tipping 1972).

Von Guérard arrived in Geelong from London on the *Windermere* on 24 December 1852 intent on going to the Ballarat goldfields (von Guérard & Tipping 1982: 29 & 35). On his journey to Australia and travels while here, he recorded his experiences in a journal[12] and sketchbooks. Later in his studio, these sources would inform his renowned oil paintings, which capture landscapes and life in the new Colony of Victoria.[13] Journal excerpts and later paintings reproduced below provide a 'glimpse' of the Geelong region that von Guérard experienced in the early 1850s.

After a brief visit to Melbourne, von Guérard set up camp near Geelong with the party of Frenchmen, with whom he was heading to Ballarat. On 31 December, he recorded that he experienced his first Australian dust storm and met 'a number of Aborigines, both men and women, some clad in opossum rugs and other in European attire' (von Guérard & Tipping 1982: 37).

On 9 January 1853, von Guérard went to a local church service, where a young man approached him to stand in as his baby's godfather 'as he knew no one in Geelong'. Von Guérard 'accepted the responsibility' and the later retelling of the incident 'caused much amusement'. The party left Geelong on 11 January, travelling by bullock wagon to Ballarat. That first day in the Moorabool Valley they came across 'three or four mia-mias, the abode of some eight or ten Aborigines'. The 1854 oil painting by von Guérard titled *Aborigines met on the road to the diggings* depicts this encounter (see Figure 2).[14] A transaction is in hand between the Wadawurrung people and two of the diggers, one of whom is examining a possum-skin clock. Thus, this painting has also been titled *The Barter* as well as *The Barwon River Geelong* (von Guérard & Tipping 1982: 37–38).[15]

Figure 2: Eugene von Guérard, *Aborigines met on the road to the diggings*, 1854. Oil on canvas, Geelong Gallery, gift of W. Max Bell and Norman Belcher, 1923.

During his time in Ballarat, von Guérard was enriched by his impressions of Colonial life, the inspiration for later paintings, rather than by his gold prospecting. After 13 months he returned on foot to Geelong. On 25 February 1854 he recorded that he had rented a room there for £1 per week from an acquaintance from the *Windermere* who now had a wine shop. Despite 'rats and other annoyances', he stayed there for some weeks and undertook sketching expeditions. Nearby, another 'old mate' had a boarding house where he was able to take his meals. He observed: 'Geelong has altered a good deal in the thirteen and a half months since I last saw it. The streets are better kept and have sidewalks. Many new buildings have arisen, and the town has extended considerably' (von Guérard & Tipping 1982: 66–69).

Von Guérard recounted that he found his excursions in the environs of Geelong pleasant and particularly enjoyed visiting 'a very nice wine and tea garden' near the Barwon Bridge. He wrote: 'There is a small house with a veranda, and a vineyard beyond the garden. It is much frequented by the people of Geelong on Sundays' (von Guérard & Tipping 1982: 69). Such excursions brought him to Montpillier Hill and the home of grazier and businessman John Highett (Hone 1972).[16] From that vantage point he made sketches from which he later realised his iconic 1856 painting of Geelong and environs, including the You Yangs and in the further distance the Dandenong Ranges — it is modestly titled *View of Geelong* (Figure 3).[17]

Von Guérard's journal describes his attendance on 15 March at a performance of Bellini's *La Sonnambula* with 'the celebrated singer, Madame Sara Flower' (Skinner 2023a) at Geelong's Theatre Royal, a seat in the stalls costing six shillings. 'The stalls were filled with the most marvellous collection of human beings.' While he was critical of the performance, 'the audience was enthusiastic' (von Guérard & Tipping 1982: 72).

On 24 April von Guérard visited the Herne Hill area on the Barwon River and recorded sketches which in 1860 formed the basis for his oil painting titled *View from Fritz Wilhelmberg, Herne Hill, Geelong*. The view across the Barwon Valley captured in the painting (see Figure 4) is the outlook from Friedrich Bauer's residence, Fritz Wilhelmberg.[18] A German compatriot, Bauer's contribution to Geelong is noted below.

Later that month von Guérard left Geelong and established himself in Melbourne and, after a 'rocky' start, gained recognition as a significant Colonial artist and received many commissions. From 1870 until 1881, he was foundation curator of the National Gallery of Victoria and master and painting instructor of its School of Art (Figure 5) (Pullin 2011a, b; Tipping 1972).

A HUMBOLDTIAN VIEW OF GEELONG

Like many Germans of his time, von Guérard had been influenced by Alexander von Humboldt (Heathcote 2001; Hook 2017; Pullin 2011a, b; Tipping 1972). In Humboldt's

Figure 3: Eugene von Guérard, *View of Geelong*, 1856. Oil on canvas, Geelong Gallery, purchased through the Geelong Art Gallery Foundation with the generous support of the Victorian Government, the Australian Government, the City of Greater Geelong and numerous community and other donors, 2006.

Figure 4: Eugene von Guérard, *View from Fritz Wilhelmberg, Herne Hill, Geelong (Mr Levien's hut on the Barwon)*, 1860. Oil on canvas, Geelong Gallery, gift of W. Max Bell and Norman Belcher, 1923.

Figure 5: Eugene von Guérard. Photograph from 1870–1874 by John Botterill, Melbourne, held by State Library Victoria and reproduced with its permission.

writings he laid out 'new "scientific" terms for landscape art'. Humboldt's influence saw scientific illustrators 'rendering their subjects in their habitat' and landscape painters presenting 'holistic views of the landscape-as-environment'. Von Guérard and other artist 'disciples' of Humboldt expressed their admiration for him by their adherence to his 'rule that the landscapist should be a precise natural historian' (Heathcote 2001: 29 & 31).

Von Guérard responded to Humboldt's call for *Reisekünstler* (travelling artists). Thus, in Australia he undertook thirteen major expeditions covering vast distances in the southeast of the continent, including accompanying scientific expeditions. He sought both to capture the pristine wilderness and explicitly to record the impact of European settlement, as the images of Geelong and environs above illustrate. In his sketch books von Guérard recorded the unique characteristics of the Australian landscape and impacts of nature and settlement upon it — he subsequently accomplished *Naturgemälde*

(nature paintings) on canvas in true Humboldtian style. He gained a reputation as 'decidedly the landscape painter of Australia' (Pullin 2011a: 10). Von Guérard left Australia in 1882 and died in London in 1901.

CONTRIBUTING TO GEELONG'S BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Geelong became a major centre within the Colony of Victoria and, significantly, as early as 1856 the City of Hamburg established a consulate in Geelong (Tampke & Doxford 1990). German emigrants continued to arrive and contributed beyond Germantown and agricultural production and transport of produce.

One German who left his mark on Geelong is the architect Friedrich (Frederick, Fritz) Kawerau (1818–1876). He arrived in Melbourne, with his younger brother, Theodore, on 21 April 1849 on the *Dockenhuden*, another of the vessels which brought German migrants recruited by Westgarth to Victoria (Darragh & Wuchatsch 1999: 291; Nutting 2001). Friedrich, an architect and surveyor, had graduated from the Royal Academy of Architects Berlin and is reported to have been the first German architect of the Colony of Victoria (Darragh & Wuchatsch 1999: 92–93; Lewis & Sawyer, n.d.; Mees 2004: 436–438; Phelan 1993: 37; Tibbits 2017).[19] He was also an amateur vocalist while Theodore was a professional musician. They initially resided in Melbourne and were involved in the musical and German cultural life of the city, while Friedrich sought to gain recognition locally as an architect.[20]

By 1851 Kawerau was in Geelong with professional rooms in Moorabool Street and had built, and was then selling, his residence in Herne Hill to head to the Ballarat goldfields. He was back in Geelong the following year and entered into practice with engineer and surveyor Edward Snell (Rowe 2021: 109–110; Skinner 2023b) — a number of Snell and Kawerau buildings are on the Victorian Heritage Register.[21] In March 1853, *The Argus* reported on one of their projects under construction in Buninyong as follows: 'There is a handsome stone house in the course of erection for a hotel, under the direction of Mr. Kawerau, of German quartet-singing notoriety, who is now more profitably employed in his original profession as an architect at Geelong'.[22]

In Geelong, Kawerau and Snell collaborated on the Terminus Hotel, built on the corner of Mercer Street and Brougham Place in 1853 and 'fitted up on the principle of the great New York hotels' and reportedly the first of Geelong's distinctive round-cornered hotels. Beyond Geelong, they were the architects for a Bank of Australia branch in Ballarat, the above-mentioned hotel in Buninyong, and Watson's Hotel in Meredith, the largest

wooden building in the Colony apart from the Exhibition Building.[23] Other Snell–Kawerau projects include works on St Paul's Anglican Church in Latrobe Terrace and the former St Gile's Presbyterian school house and master's residence in Gheringhap Street, both in Geelong, and the Werribee Railway Station (Franz 1999a: 61; Franz 1999b: 60–61; Rowe 2021 109–110).[24]

Both Snell and Kawerau were Directors of, and engaged by, the Melbourne and Geelong Railway Company, Snell as engineer and Kawerau as 'principal architect'. However, in mid-July 1854, Kawerau resigned from both the company and the partnership with Snell due to impaired health and his intention to return to Europe.[25] Kawerau, however, remained in Victoria for many years, joining the Public Works Department and advancing to District Clerk of Works and Draftsman (Franz 1999a: 61; Franz 1999b: 60–61; Rowe 2021: 110). He returned to Europe in the 1860s and was, in turn, City Architect in Danzig and Chief Inspector of Underground Sewerage for the Municipality of Berlin.[26]

Another graduate of the Royal Academy of Architects Berlin, perhaps known to and encouraged by Kawerau, sought unsuccessfully to contribute to Geelong's urban design. In 1854 the Geelong Council bought land for a town hall and held a competition for its design. Melbourne-based Jacob Braché submitted five designs; his contribution was one of twelve entries received, with Melbourne architect Joseph Reid judged the winner (McMullen 2021: 42).[27]

At the time of the goldrushes, there was a dearth of labour in Victoria, including for building works, and consequently a shortage of housing. One response to this predicament was to import prefabricated buildings and, in this regard, Frederick (Fred) Bauer (1824–1890) (Phelan 1993: 5–6),[28] an importer and ironmonger with a business in Ryrie Street, Geelong, played a leading role. His business opened in 1851 was described as:

a magnificent ironmongery establishment ... which will be a great ornament to that part of Geelong. The building, which has been erected by Mr. Bauer, is in a different style to any other down here, the internal arrangements of the shop and show-rooms, exhibit a degree of taste, economy, and comfort, that are seldom to be found in colonial shops of this kind.[29]

It was from Bauer's private residence, *Fritz Wilhelmberg*, that von Guérard sketched for his later Herne Hill landscape described above.

In 1854 Bauer advertised the sale of twelve four-room prefabricated cottages imported from Hamburg (Rowe 2021: 668). One surviving example of a dwelling imported by Bauer is *The Heights* in Aphrasia Street, Newtown, which was made to order in Europe and erected for local businessman Charles Ibbotson (1813–1883).[30] Originally,

it had fourteen rooms, with the verandas added later. It is the largest prefabricated house in Victoria and possibly the largest German house exported to Australia (Franz 1999b: 64; Rowe 2021: 667–668).[31]

Another of Bauer's prefabricated dwellings still extant in Geelong is *Keyham* in Packington Street, Newton. The house was constructed for John Buckland (1793–1873)[32] in 1854 and is now one of the few surviving examples of the wooden houses imported by Bauer (Franz 1999b: 65; Rowe 2021: 667–668).[33]

CONCLUSION

Germans were among the earliest settlers in the Geelong region – their presence was visibly identifiable in the early township of Germantown, now Grovedale. This paper makes a contribution to recognising the legacy of the pioneering Germans in the region. They brought *Deutschtum*, the German character or spirit, to aspects of life locally as illustrated in this paper.

Conflict of interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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4   German Pioneer Families, Monument Australia. Accessed at https://monumentaustralia.org.au/themes/landscape/settlement/display/31481-german-pioneer-families.

5   See endnote 3.

6   During the First World War, Germantown was retitled Grovedale, today a suburb of Geelong.

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10   For a number of these names, the spelling varies in different sources; see, for example, Appendix 2, Partially Reconstructed List of *Emmy* Passengers in Darragh & Wuchatsch 1999: 299-305; Phelan 1993.

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12 Von Guérard's journal survives under the title *Leaves from the Journal of an Australian Digger by E.v.G., a Pioneer of the 'Fifties*.

13 The Colony of Victoria was founded on 1 July 1851, with separation of the Port Phillip District from the Colony of New South Wales.

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19 The *Königliche Bauakademie zu Berlin*, a predecessor of the Technical University of Berlin, is variously translated as the Royal Academy of Architects Berlin and the Royal Building Academy Berlin, as there was no distinction in the German states between the professions of architect and civil engineer in the mid-19th century. The same word, namely *Bauingenieur*, embraced both – literally, the term translates as building or construction engineer (McMullen 2021: 43).

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