OLD ALBION PARK 1900-1925 — BIG BUSINESS:

In the early years of this century, owing to lack of communication and transport, there was perhaps a greater diversity of businesses operating in the Albion Park district than now exists.

Harry Ziemans ran the largest general store for years, his competitor being an Indian, Ameera Box, who at various times went bankrupt or was burnt out, but resumed business under names such as Charlie Box, Omrah Khan, etc.; later Ned Hazelton, who had operated the small milk depot at the foot of Macquarie Pass for many years, opened a general store in the town when the depot closed down.

Both the large Dapto stores of Moorhead and Fairley had customers among Albion Park farmers, their ordermen would traverse the district on Tuesdays by horseback and the goods, mostly groceries, would be delivered by open cart on Fridays, farm eggs being collected at the same time and their value credited to the farm account.

Three butchers' shops operated — O'Gorman, Condon and Fryer; there was no refrigeration and little ice, and in summer time the sides of beef in the shop would be draped with leafy boughs to promote coolness and discourage flies. To avoid spoiling, much of the meat was converted to sausages and corned beef. The farmers collected their meat orders each day on their way home from the milk depot; meat was delivered to the townspeople and within a radius of about a mile by basket carried on the arm of a lad on horseback who would at the same time collect the order for next day.

On several occasions a "cutting cart" butchery service was started — two men come to mind in this respect, Fred Webster and Bert Faulks. This would not now be allowed under health regulations. It comprised a small box cart loaded with bulk sections of beef and mutton and fitted with a let-down tailboard to which was fixed a chunk of timber for use as a cutting up block. Driven from door to door, it permitted housewives to select the cut they wanted and have it sliced or chopped off on the spot.

Town milk supplies were got by sending children with billy cans to nearby farms every morning, or else, by arrangement with someone passing through to the depot, a jug would be taken out to the cart in the street and dipped into one of the cans.

Even at the dawn of the motor age, road transport and farm power was almost totally dependent on the horse. The four local blacksmiths and farrier businesses of Tim Crowley, Louis Mood, Ollie Wilson and Mat Carroll were kept busy. Horse-shoeing was not their only activity, as there was constant demand for doing up ploughshares, construction of farm rollers and slides, sharpening implements and making pegs for rabbit traps, etc.

L. Mood & Son also operated a thriving coachbuilding and agricultural implement factory. Their gigs, sulkies, buggies, spring carts, drays, ploughs and harrows were as well known as the model "T" Ford was later to become and were on exhibit at many country shows, even as far away as Lismore. In addition to woodwork, wheelwrighting, ironwork, seat and hood covering and paintwork they ran a busy repair business by way of shrinking iron tyres to wheels, reshafting carts and gigs and general renovation of horse drawn vehicles.
From Billy Halkett’s saddlery shop emerged an endless array of sets of sulky and cart harness, saddles and briddles, leggings and straps plus leather leg ropes for cow-bail use. Naturally harness repairs were a large feature of his work, together with sale of axle grease, harness oil, halters, cow and horse rugs and plough reins.

Dan Hockey ran a bootmaking and repair shop from the front room of the cottage still standing opposite the Post Office. His repairs were strong if not handsome, and dozens of Parkites used a pair of Dan’s made-to-measure black lace-up boots for best wear for half a lifetime.

The brothers Sylvester and Ambrose Condon combined barbering and tailoring in a tiny shop in the main street next door to O’Gorman’s Hotel. A haircut cost 10 cents, a shave 5 cents, and the three-piece blue serge suit which was practically standard for best wear and lasted twenty years cost $12.00; casual clothing was yet to evolve, and the nearest approach to a pair of slacks for minor occasions was a pair of Colonial tweed working trousers costing $1.25 at the local store.

Johnny Hobbs ran the only pharmacy between Wollongong and Kiama. It was said that he had started out as a medical student before switching to Pharmacy. His boyhood had been spent in the precincts of the Wollongong Jail in Harbour Street where his father was head warder.

For many years he was the unofficial medical man for the town and district, with a special reputation as a setter of broken bones; a call for help would see little old Johnny heading perhaps for some remote farm, black bag in hand and perched on top of his tall old ginger horse, or at times driving it in his buggy. He knew his limitations and would always advise calling a doctor if the case looked even mildly serious, but his presence in the area was a comfort in emergency when a doctor’s attendance involved a drive in a horse-drawn vehicle from Wollongong or Kiama to perhaps the Macquarie Pass locality. In his surgery behind the shop he was always ready to pull an aching tooth, lance a boil or stitch up a gash, and always had a supply of ready-mixed remedies on tap for most ailments.

For dentistry in general the community had to rely on the infrequent visits of an itinerant and unregistered fang artist who would arrive at one of the hotels, engage a small parlour as a surgery, and with no more equipment than a kitchen chair, a treadle operated drill and a few forceps would attend to the suffering populace without benefit of anaesthetics.

This painful state of affairs improved somewhat when dentists Payne and later King, both of Kiama, made regular weekly visits and gave Albion Park the benefit of the best methods and equipment then in use.

For years Missingham’s Tannery, located opposite the Police Station and several hundred yards towards the railway, handled the skin and hide output from butchers and farmers over a wide area; however, when the sprawling assembly of corrugated-iron sheds in which production of leather was carried out was destroyed by fire about 1910, the enterprise came to an end and the owners shifted to sawmilling activities around Robertson.

Sawmills were also set up and operated at various times by Bush, about where the nursery is now located at Albion Park Rail; Bresnahan at the foot of Macquarie Pass; and Charlie Thomas on the western edge of Albion Park township.

— B. E. WESTON.