OLD ALBION PARK, 1900-1925—NIGHT LIFE:

The advent of T.V., radio and social clubs has completely changed the habits and needs of the district in the way of entertainment.

Sixty years ago the town brass band was still active and played in the main street every Saturday night, the late shopping night; band practice was held in Condon Bros.’ barber’s shop—they and their brother Dan, who was later murdered in Sydney, were all good musicians.

Full houses were always assured for the frequent visits of travelling concert and comedy shows; these included the Lynch Family of Bellringers, the all-negro Fisk Jubilee Singers, sundry vaudeville companies, intermittent visits by silent movie showmen, and magic-lantern shows, the latter consisting of slides shown from an oil-lit projector and generally run by one of the church missionary bodies.

Euchre parties in the Town Hall, followed by a dance and supper, were run by the School of Arts and other minor organisations and were always popular.

About 1912 the roller-skating craze hit N.S.W., and rinks came into being in public halls in most country towns. Not to be outdone, Condon Bros. bought a couple of hundred pairs of skates and went into action in the Agricultural Hall every Saturday night. No one knew how to skate but customers flocked in from the most unlikely sources each week to crash and thump their way around the floor—the accent being on “floor.”

When the boom ended, those local entrepreneurs, the Coodons, started silent movies in the Town Hall. The hand-turned projector was lit by an electric arc light powered from a dynamo coupled to a big old petrol engine near the front door; it had two bad habits of either refusing to start or catching fire, so it was always an even chance that money would be refunded and pictures postponed for a week. Luckily talking pictures were still in the future; they would have been inaudible, as the engine, when it did run, sounded like an aeroplane.

When the Condons left Albion Park after buying a suburban cinema in the early twenties, the “flicks” were continued by Old Teddy Rowe of Shellharbour. Using a machine illuminated by a mixture of acetylene gas and ether, he toured a weekly circuit by car and train, taking in Shellharbour, Albion Park and Huskisson.

Gas leaks and flame-outs generally had the hall smelling like an operating theatre by the end of the show, but the audiences turned up religiously each week to follow 20-episode serials such as the “Sign of the Double Cross” and “Lure of the Circus”—every chapter ending on a note of suspense with the heroine tied to the rails in front of an approaching train, or locked in a room with a keg of gunpowder fitted with a burning fuse. Programmes were tagged as a two-reel comedy, two-reel serial and a five-reel drama, with a couple of minutes delay at the end of each reel for the changeover.

Also sure of capacity attendances were the fairly frequent circuses and buckjuming shows such as Perry’s and Skuthorpe’s—the town kids would work like demons carrying water and hay for the animals in order to get a free pass into the tent at night.

—B. E. WESTON.