OLD ALBION PARK 1900-1925—MORE NIGHT LIFE:

Among the events of the years were the various Balls such as those for the Show Society, School of Arts, Cavalry and the Catholic Church (the other local denominations banned such wicked frivolity). For these the floor of the Agricultural Hall had to be worked up to a mirror polish which entailed sweeping with kerosene and sawdust, sprinkling with shaved up wax candles and then finished off by dragging around chaffbags weighted down by small boys—a popular chore after school.

On the big night each male dancer would change into light shoes or proper dancing pumps on arrival and these, combined with a fast floor, at times like greased lightning, brought many a prancing couple down with a thud.

Up to the end of World War I the dances performed included the Schottische, Mazurka, Varsouviana, Valeta, Polka, Circular Waltz and the square dances—the Alberts and the Lancers. In the case of formal Balls the music was supplied by the local brass band. Many of the popular tunes of the time are still in use including Lily of Laguna, After the Ball, Let Me Call You Sweetheart, Two Little Girls In Blue, Sons of the Sea, etc., etc.

The end of the war saw the sudden change in dance styles when the Foxtrot, Jazz Waltz and One Step became the vogue, with the occasional older style dance thrown in to suit the elders. Brass band orchestras were replaced with smaller ones made up of piano, saxophone, cornet, violin and drums which belted out the music of the popular song tunes of that era, set to either waltz, foxtrot or quicktime beat. Most of the music and songs were from the U.S.A. or else relics of the war. Who of those days does not remember Moonlight and Roses, Memories, Sleepy Seas, Mexico City Rose, In a Little Spanish Town, I’m Forever Blowing Bubbles, Indiana, Mary Lou, Down by the Ohio, Roses of Picardy, Rose of No Man’s Land, etc.?

Later came the revival of dances such as the Palais Glide, Pride of Erin, Canadian Three Step, Gipsy Tap, Barndance, Tango and the strict dance time music of Victor Sylvester.

Not to be forgotten—and I attended dozens of them—are the farm house kitchen “hops” to the music of a concertina and fiddle playing “She’s My Lassie from Lancashire” or “The Miner’s Dream of Home” performed to the accompaniment of much twirling, shouting and hooting, the finale being a prodigious country style supper, lamingtons and rainbow cake, tarts and carraway-seed cake piled high.

Whereas today popular hits proliferate like rabbits and last a few weeks, they seemed in those days to emerge one by one, would be sung around the piano, played at dances and whistled by every errand boy, tradesman, workman and man in the street for weeks until a replacement emerged. Incidentally, these days nobody seems to whistle.

Practically every home owned a piano and there would be some member of a family taking music lessons from the local piano teachers—Miss Timbs, Miss Johnston or the nuns at the convent school. On passing through the township any morning before breakfast, one could hear from most houses either the scales being practised or a more advanced pupil picking out “Three Blind Mice” or “Won’t You Buy My Pretty Flowers?”.

Then came the pianola craze, and many an ancient but serviceable piano which had survived a sailing-ship voyage from the Old Country
was traded in under the blandishments of player piano salesmen. Some remain to this day, standing silent in farm sitting-rooms with ailing and perished innards.

—B. E. WESTON.