

BALLINA & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC

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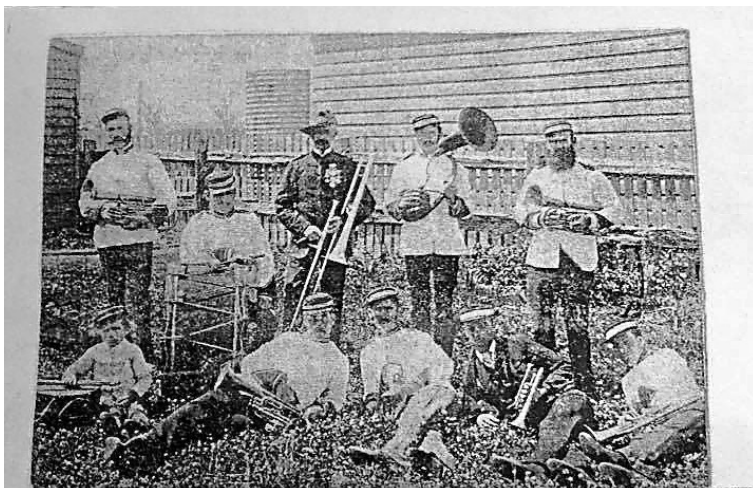
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Fresh from the Christmas and New Year celebrations, our thoughts turn back to the early days of settlement in the Richmond Valley and we wonder how they celebrated in those first years? Most of those who had arrived here came from the British Isles which was a vastly different environment. They would have related stories from other times. Did they sing and dance? They certainly did. We cannot live without music.

So, what did they bring with them? They brought the songs and dances of their homeland. There were tin whistles and mouthorgans, maybe a button accordion or violin. The earliest settlers could not have carried much, but we know it was not long before many instruments, including pianos, arrived on our shores.

We have already looked at venues for dancing - the Centennial Hall, the Masonic Hall, and country halls, of which there were many in the area. The dances would have been waltzes, mazurkas, the Palais Glide and the Maxina to name just a few. Soon after those, we had the Canadian Three-step, the Barn Dance and the Gypsy Tap. By the 1920s however, movies had arrived and we fell much more under the influence of the United States where dance styles blossomed exponentially. They continue to do so.

Let's have a look at what we know about Ballina district. The most comprehensive book about dances and bands seems to be one that Lynn has found, written by Colin Stratford in 1991. I will use some information from his book 'From the Stage' and also the newspaper articles that we found.



BRASS BAND AT BALLINA, organized by Herbert Powell (standing at left)
band: Billy McCurdy; Ab Lewis; Arthur Bevan; Harry Watson; Billy
and; & Mr Klein. Young Bert Powell with drum. File- BALLINA

An article in the Northern Star on April 4th 1883 states: 'BALLINA BRASS BAND.- This band has made great progress since its formation and will shortly appear before the public. Mr. Nelson is band-master, and has worked well towards putting it in a fair way.' The band members were drawn together by Herbert Powell and it seems to be the earliest in Ballina. No records can be found of any other band in the 1880s.

The photo, at left, was taken in 1887 and is held by The Richmond River Historical Society.

You may recall that in 2022, the Ballina Concert Band was 100 years old so there is clearly no connection between the two groups. You may also recall - Newsletter 2 - that we had an orchestra which played at the Centennial Hall, which was erected in 1915 and burnt down in 1938.

The new cinema which was erected to replace the Centennial Hall did not provide a venue for dancing so, for a time, the only places available for social dancing was the Masonic Hall and country halls, some of which were erected in the 1800s. The bands for these were mostly drawn from the local community. The Berry Band was Lismore based but they, also, travelled around the country halls in the early 1900s. Ref, 'From the Stage' p. 3

Part of an extract from the Indonesian Observer in 1977 states ' In 1919 its (Ballina's) population was 1500 who lived off the local industries of timber, sugar cane, fishing, boatbuilding and dairying. But in 1919, it also harboured a jazz band - the Ballina Jazz Band and some music historians call it (Ballina) the birthplace of Australian Jazz.'

KEWPIE HARRIS

David Samuel Harris had arrived in Australia from Britain and, having reached Ballina, decided to stay. He was better known as 'Kewpie', and his band as The Kewpie Harris Band. Kewpie Harris was 'as big as Ben-Hurr' in the music scene on the Northern Rivers for over thirty years.

In Stratford's book, 'From the Stage', he has recorded some wonderful interviews with some of those who were close to Kewpie. Tom McBurnie said that Kewpie would go to Sydney each year to seek out new ideas for the band and also decorations for the Waterfront Hall. These would stay for the year until his next Sydney trip looking for something different. His band played six nights a week in towns along the north coast from Tweed to Clarence. During WWII, English boys were stationed at the airfield at Evans Head and they attended the dances. Jazz was very popular throughout Australia.



The band folded in 1951 with an amazing event held at 'the Riv.' (Riviera) in Lismore. Kewpie invited seven other bands to join him. Hundreds turned up to 'pay tribute to Kewpie and his band, They had had the best dance to music performed by a man who had helped shape the music scene on the Far North Coast and who had provided them with entertainment for thirty two years.' Ref: 'From the Stage' p.12

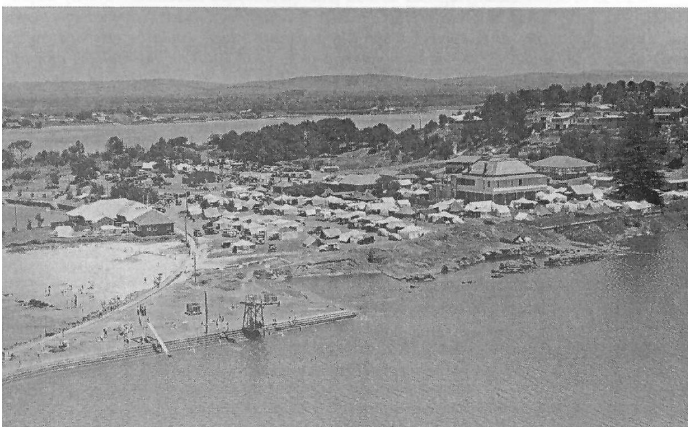
Over the years, band membership changed but it always showcased our local talent.

This photo of the band was taken about 1939.

THE WATERFRONT

In 1925 an open air dance floor was erected in Bangalow beside the new Bangalow Pool in Byron Creek. It was known as 'The Waterfront'. There was also a number of other attractions such as a diving tower and slippery dip which were built there, with carnivals being held, principally, to raise money for the pool.

A roof had been erected over the dance floor in 1929 and then the last dance was held there on 14th April 1931. On 28th September 1931, an application was made to Ballina Council by the Bangalow Carnival Committee to erect the carnival buildings at East Ballina on a site near Fenwick House between Water Street and a lane, now known as Range Street. Not only was the dance floor reconstructed but, as you can see in the photo below, the diving tower and slippery dip were placed at Shaws Bay as were the dressing sheds and other carnival attractions.



East Ballina in the late 1940s, festooning can be seen fluttering around the Waterfront Dance Hall, to the right of Fenwick House

The dance floor was 60' X 40', with 4" x 1" tongue and groove dressed teak. The roof was of corrugated iron and a 3' net wall around the hall made for safer dancing!

(Ed. How many of you remembered the symbols used for feet and inches?) The Gala Opening Carnival was held on December 13th 1931 with music played by Ballina Jazz Band.

In 1948 a successful application was made by owners, Hilda and Jim

Ramsay, to build a skating rink, which was opened by Mayor Ray O'Neill on June 16th 1958. The Waterfront became a mecca for young residents and carnivals held at East Ballina drew crowds from around the district. The last dance at the Waterfront was held on May 27th 1966 and the land sold for the erection of a block of units which are still in use today.

By 1966 our lives had changed quite dramatically with television having reached the Northern Rivers as well as Drive-in Movies in Wollongbar. The Masonic Hall was still in constant use for functions of all types and the new RSL Club had opened on River Street in 1964.

The music scene continued with many more dance bands attracting crowds to the dance floors. One of those was a band organised by Stuart Hagan whose family owned a music shop in River Street. Some of the musicians shown in this photo can still be found playing the music they love.



READY to play for the next dance at the Ballina Waterfront in 1957 or 1958 are members of Hagan's Orchestra, from left, Les Wilson, Stuart Hagan, Roger Munsie, Una Hagan and Norma Osborne (now Tulk), of Ballina, who submitted the photo.

■ Send your interesting old photos to Looking Back, PO Box 423, Lismore, 2480, with all details, including a return address.

Reference: Much of the information about the Waterfront came from a book written by Marlene Lester, 'The East Ballina Waterfront Dance Hall and Skating Rink'. It is available for borrowing from the Ballina Library.

The book 'From the Stage' has stories about many bands and Lynn has been able to find photos of several. I will include more about bands in future Newsletters.

BACK TO NORTON STREET

Lynn's thirst for knowledge has uncovered yet another piece of information about the Marine View Hotel, later known as Tattersalls Hotel, on the corner of Norton and Fox Streets.

An article that sparked her interest, appeared in the Northern Star of May 5th 1930, which was an obituary for a Henry M Stone. 'After having suffered two strokes, Mr. Henry M. Stone of Ballina, died early yesterday morning. The late Mr. Stone was born at Kiama about 77 years ago and as a boy came to the Richmond River with his parents, who entered into the cedar industry.Mr. Stone also became interested in the timber industry in the Brunswick district and was a large buyer and shipper to the Sydney markets. Most of the logs were loaded into schooners through the surf at Byron Bay and off Brunswick Heads. Among the buildings erected by Mr. Stone were Tattersall's Hotel, Ballina, and the Court House Hotel, Brunswick Heads.'

With further research, Lynn found a much earlier article: 'Northern Star (Lismore, NSW : 1876 - 1954) Wed 28 Nov 1883'

'STONES HOTEL – We have had an opportunity of inspecting new hostelry just completed and opened. It is pleasantly situated on the North Creek Ballina. It is appropriately named "the Marine View Hotel" for it really commands a splendid view from its lofty and spacious balcony. The building is of goodly proportions ...with 18 rooms, 12 of which are bedrooms. No expense was spared to furnish it and in point of comfort as well as situation, it would compare favourably with some of the best hotels in Sydney marine suburbs.'

Charles Jarrett Snr purchased the hotel for his son Charles Stephen Jarrett and it became known as Jarrett's Marine View Hotel. However, on Saturday June 19 1886, a notice was printed in the Northern Star stating, "The Marine View Hotel, lately kept by Mr C.S.Jarrett, has changed hands, the new comer, whose name I have not ascertained, is from Sydney."

It would be wonderful to have a photo of the Marine View Hotel . Despite searching, we have found none so if anyone knows where we might find one, I would be very grateful.

FROM THE MUSEUM

A new display is underway at the museum and it will be ready for viewing late in February. The generosity of the Ballina Council has provided items for the display which will be of historic interest to all residents.

Many thanks to the team for their interest and support.

Patricia Wilson

Editor

