

“Abilene in the First Two Decades of the Twentieth Century”

by Deane W. Malott

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“There were one or two motion picture theatres, as well as the converted Seeyle Theatre where traveling plays and musicals used to play one-night stands, and there was a Lyceum program of miscellaneous attractions each winter. The movie theatres were converted stores. The pictures were of course silent films, and they were usually accompanied by someone banging out tunes on an upright piano below the screen.

The Redpath-Horner Lyceum program came in early fall each year with a variety of programs, playing in a tent. I heard Conwell's famous lecture "Acres of Diamonds," various troops of bell-ringers, musicians, and magicians.

Abilene was the home of Parker's Carnival, a miscellaneous collection of tent shows, each entered thru an elaborate wooden, highly decorated, and lighted front. My Father was a friend of Mr. Parker and always had a season pass, good for "bearer and party". I was allowed to use it on occasion. I remember one show, "The Girl from Abilene," a dazzling dancer; a musical show called "Sunflower Bells"; animal shows a miniature scenic play laid in the Swiss Alps. In the center of the horseshoe of shows, was the Merry-go-round and Ferris Wheel. All Abilene turned out when Parker's Carnival opened in Abilene, before taking off on its several-months-long tour. It was at Parker's Carnival that I saw my first movies, a crudely presented “Trip to the Moon” and "The Great Train Robbery", in about 1903 or 1904.

Occasional circuses came to town for one night stands, arriving by long one or two circus trains in the early morning—a great sight for excited small boys. I remember Wallace and Hagenbeck; Sells-Floto; Ringling Brothers; Barnum & Bailey (before the last two merged).”

Courtesy of Robert H. Malott