

# MAGIC LANTERN AT COMEBUNGALONG

## (by Robt. Kaleski)

John Hyett

This is an article I came across in an old newspaper, the *Guyra Argus* (New South Wales, Australia) of 3 October 1907 – a lesson on how to run a magic lantern show at short notice. Comebungalong does not exist, of course, and hopefully never will, Joadja is an old kerosene shale mining town in the Southern Highlands of NSW, now a heritage listed ghost town. The writer was visiting his friend, the editor of the local newspaper, and after discussion on other matters the editor asked ...

"By the way, were you at my magic lantern entertainment last night? I call it mine, though it was advertised as Mr Puffer's, of Sydney. We adverted the show in the usual way— 'Travels in the East, admission by silver coin,' all that sort of thing. You understand?

"At eight o'clock the hall was packed and expectant – but no Mr Puffer. So my proprietor, who, as Mayor of the town, was introducing him, got up on the platform and announced that, Mr Puffer being indisposed (by the way I found out afterwards that he was drunk) Mr Henwood would have much pleasure in supplying his place. And I knew absolutely nothing whatever about it.

"However, we got along much better than I expected. The first photograph was Rome. Fortunately I had been there in my youthful days. So I told them all about Rome. Then we had Naples. I have never been to Naples; still, I remembered the saying 'See Naples and die' so I enlarged on the beauty of the place. I also told them a little anecdote about my father being there, which amused them heartily. He often used to tell us that, mindful of the old proverb, he went specially to see Naples, out of curiosity. So he saw it, and very nearly died – the smells were so bad.

"Then we had Cairo. I have not seen the place, so drew on my imagination again. I interested my audience by describing the horrors of the ancient slave trade, which I had read of when a boy in *Martin Rattler*, or some such book.

"From that we went on to Damascus. I explained all about the swords of Damascus, and the feats which had been performed with them. Such as cutting an anvil in two at one stroke, and so on. This also proved very interesting. By the way,



5. Notre Dame, Paris

Thompson, the blacksmith, had to be ejected at this point for calling me a liar. I hope he won't bear ill will and stop his paper.

"Then we came to Jerusalem. Having taken a Bible class in my early days, I was able to point out all the most interesting spots. Feeling at home with my subject, I enlarged on it for a full hour, and held the audience spellbound. In fact, my proprietor has been jealous ever since.

"From Jerusalem we naturally came to Jericho. Here again I was at home and had no trouble in keeping the audience interested. I created a little amusement by telling them that though my first name was Joshua I was afraid that if I blew my own trumpet ever so, I would never make the walls of Comebungalong tumble down.

"From Jericho we, by some mischance, got in a place called Joadja. The name seemed familiar, but for the life of me I could not recall any place in the East by that name. I was about to make some remarks on it in general principles when fortunately a woman in the audience cried out 'There's th' shale mine where my boy Joe wuz killed.' So I hurried on to the next subject. Evidently Puffer was inclined to be careless about his slides. I could see there was need for watchfulness.

"The next one (Paris) proved this. However I have been in Paris, so had no difficulty in giving a vivid and, I trust, truthful description of the place. Any spots I was doubtful about I called the Morgue, the King's Palace at Versailles, etc., and gave a long description of it.

"After that we had the usual interesting Biblical spots of the East, the Sea of Galilee, the Red Sea, Sidon, Tyre, Joppa, etc. All of these, thanks to my early training, I was able to describe fluently and at length. By this time the evening was far advanced. My proprietor, becoming uneasy at the way I was holding the audience, climbed up on to the platform and hurriedly moved a vote of thanks, which was carried by acclamation. In returning thanks, I told the people frankly that I was glad I had pleased them, and that it was the more extraordinary as I knew nothing whatever about the subject.

"So I passed one of the most pleasant evenings I have ever spent, though the collection, I believe, was very small, only totalling five and ninepence.

"Now, if you must go, I will resume my labours. I have a 'Nature Study' article to do on the brush turkey; never saw one in my life. All I know about them is that they're edible. Well, good-bye."

*The slides, except Fig. 4, are from the Riley Brothers set Round the World in 100 minutes (first produced in or before 1887).*



1. Rome – general view; 2. Naples – bay and city; 3. Jerusalem  
4. Joadja, photographed by August Tronier (c. 1885) (bottom right)