

Jillian Riley Remembers.

Story of Greensborough Picture Theatre

I am proud to be the youngest daughter of Lou Riley who was a significant influence in the area by operating the Greensborough Picture Theatre from 1949 to 1974.

Louis Andrew Riley was born on September 7 1909 in Granville New South Wales coming to Ballarat Victoria with his mother and brother (8 years older) at the age of 3 to live with relatives when his father died.

Lou Riley was a star footballer from Golden Point Club (Ballarat League) and came to the attention when he kicked 11 goals of his side's 13 goals against a visiting Collingwood side in 1931.

Melbourne Football Club won his services and he joined the 'red legs' midway through 1932. Lou Riley had a successful first season in 1933, before moving to Collingwood halfway through 1934. He played in two Magpie Premierships during 1935 and 1936, and remained with this side until he retired from football in 1938.



Lou came to work in Melbourne boarding in Thornbury when he met and married Dorrie Ashby in 1937.

Lou Riley's interest in motion pictures dated back to the age of fourteen years when he owned his first Magic Lantern, which was an early type of image projector. When land began to become available for sale in Greensborough, as an investment Lou began to purchase a number of lots around the Main Street area.

BUT, he always wanted to operate a motion picture theatre and eventually in 1949, he had the opportunity to lease the Victory Theatre in Main Street, which had the seating capacity of 200. The building was owned by the Masonic Lodge and was originally the Masonic Hall, with the theatre downstairs and the Masons holding their meetings upstairs.

On May 13 1958, Lou purchased the building from the Masonic Lodge for £ 10.000. In 1961, Lou refurbished the theatre to accommodate the introduction of the new cinema technology of Cinemascope. At the same time he changed the name to 'Ashril Theatre' (an amalgamation of his and his wife Dorrie's surnames, Ashby and Riley) and the seating capacity was increased to 223. Lou used seating and some fittings from the Regal Theatre in Hartwell which had closed its doors earlier.

Lou opened a second motion picture theatre in the Spring Street Community Hall in Thomastown in 1959 which he also named 'Ashril Theatre'. It had a seating capacity of 300. The theatres were a successful venture for Lou until, with the introduction in Melbourne of the drive-in and television, patronage began to drop over the years and he eventually closed both ventures.

Lou sold Ashril Theatre Greensborough in 1974. This was eventually demolished and the site redeveloped. The building also included two shops that were located either side of the theatre.

Jillian's special memories

Lou had two friends (Glad and Charles Cripps) who worked with him at the theatre for many years.

How her sister Pam who was 8 years older, often used to decorate the theatres in the theme of the movie that was currently showing. On one occasion in particular, she set up a dramatic black and white theme for "Blackboard Jungle".

And myself (Jillian). I remember spending Friday evenings and Saturday afternoons and evenings happily at the Greensborough Theatre. Special memories include the huge green canvas Peters Ice Cream containers filled with 'dry ice' in which the ice creams were delivered for sale.

On Saturday Lou and Jillian would go out after the movies had finished and paste up the bill posters around the local streets for the next scheduled movie. They would then go to the Greensborough Railway Station and leave the old movie with the train guard and pick up the new movie for the next week. After that they would take fish and chips home to Dorrie for their dinner.

Such memories and thank you Jillian for putting this history of the Ashril Theatre together.

Lou Riley died in 1989 and Dorrie died in 1991 after a very happy marriage.

Now, Jillian requests that anyone with theatre memorabilia or anyone with any special memories of the theatre to get in touch with her via Rosie Bray who is a distant cousin.