Harry Clay and Clay's Vaudeville Company, 1865 - 1930: An Historical and Critical Survey

Revised Edition

Clay Roden Djubal
BA (Hons)

Department of English, University of QLD
A thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Arts

Date of Submission: 17 February 1998

This revised edition published in 2011 by
The Australian Variety Theatre Archive
DECLARATION

I declare that the work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original, except as acknowledged in the text, and that the material has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.

Clay Djubal
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to take this opportunity to thank my supervisor Associate Professor Richard Fotheringham whose enthusiasm, guidance (and ability to not let my "over-exuberant style" get the better of him) over the course of this thesis has been greatly appreciated. I also wish to extend my thanks to the Department of English, University of Queensland, for its support not only 1997 but throughout the past five years. In particular Elizabeth Mitchell and Angela Tuohy (English Department office) as well as Technical-Officer Chris Rintel must be mentioned, mostly for their often-needed help in solving my technical and logistical quandaries.

Thanks, too, go to Correne Joyes, for proof-reading, and the mighty job she did, in ripping out, the, excessive amount of, commas,,, cutting down the length of my sentences, and generally making the reading of this thesis much easier!!

It would also be neglectful of me not acknowledge the ever-willing assistance of my computer-room mate Toni Johnson-Woods for technical help above and beyond the call of duty, in addition to her company over the long hot summer of '98. Special thanks too, must also go to Dr Veronica Kelly and Dr Helen Gilbert, who although not associated with this project, have nonetheless had a special influence on my academic and writing processes during the course of my association with the University of Queensland.

The assistance given me by the University of Queensland's Library staff, with special mention going to the Fryer Library, is also appreciated. Much of my work has been carried out in various libraries and archives throughout Queensland and N.S.W. and without doubt the assistance given by these staff members has rarely been matched.

During the course of my research for this thesis I have had the pleasure, and good fortune, to be assisted by several individuals whose interests and connections to my subject have allowed me access to materials and information I would otherwise have found near impossible to locate. Jo Mercer and Del Buchanan (Ted Tutty's grand-daughters), Valmai Goodlet (Maurice Chenoweth's daughter), Bill Ellis (Enmore Theatre, Sydney), Max Solling, Christine Newtown, and Valantyne Napier have all contributed in one way or another to the success of this project.

Of course my acknowledgments would not be complete without making special mention of my brief association with Charles Norman, the one-time vaudeville and revue star who became my physical link with Harry Clay, he having worked for the company during the mid 1920s. Mr Norman's unbridled enthusiasm for this period of time and his extraordinary memory were invaluable during the early stages of my research. But more than this was his desire to help me, despite the difficulties which his age must surely have placed on him. Charles died in late 1997 after suffering a stroke sometime earlier. I never got the chance to say good-bye to him personally, but in our telephone conversations he would sometimes allude, humorously, to his final bow. To his wife Patty and his family my deepest sympathy at your loss. Upon the ending of each interview Charles would always thank me for my interest, referring to me as his friend, and I can think of no finer compliment than to be known as a friend of Charles Norman – "God bless you too, my friend."
Thanks, too, go to my son, Jarred, for his patience (and at five years of age that's no ordinary feat), and all those friends (yes you two) who have had to put up with my one-track conversations during the entire year of 1997.

Others who have shared an interest in this project and hence helped contribute information or assisted in various ways are:

- Rodney Seaborn (Seaborn Foundation)
- Lianne Hall (Stanton Library, North Sydney)
- Genealogical Society of Queensland
- Singleton Historical Society
- Muswellbrook and Upper Hunter Historical Society
- NSW State Government Archives
- Ross Thorne (Associate Professor, Department of Architecture, University of Sydney)
- George William Clay (my late grandfather, who first told me stories about his uncle Harry)
- Peter Haigh (Queensland Railways Archives, Ipswich)
- The Masonic Library (Sydney Masonic Centre)
- Cheri Lutz (Marrickville Council)

I am also indebted to the Australian taxpayers whose financial support, through both my four years of undergraduate study and the Australian Postgraduate Award system, allowed me the opportunity to undertake this project.
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my
great-great-great uncle, Harry Clay.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**DISSERTATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>i.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Declaration</td>
<td>ii.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>iii.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>v.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>vi.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Plates</td>
<td>vii.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>xiii.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revised Edition: Notes</td>
<td>ix.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preface: &quot;When the Baritone was Waiting on the Hungry Harry Clay&quot;</td>
<td>x.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two: The Silvery Tenor: 1885 - 1900</td>
<td>18.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three: Clay's Vaudeville Company: The Early Years 1901-1915</td>
<td>51.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion: Harry Clay: A Contemporary Perspective</td>
<td>125.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography:</td>
<td>129.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**APPENDICES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Harry Clay's Vaudeville Enterprises: Agency Survey</td>
<td>41.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Sydney Suburban and NSW Country Circuits</td>
<td>100.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Clay's Managers, Staff and Partners</td>
<td>110.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Artists of Significant Who Were Associated with Harry Clay's Company</td>
<td>123.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Associated Artists and Managers (Miscellaneous)</td>
<td>148.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>162.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Harry Clay: Quotations</td>
<td>170.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>Harry Clay: Anecdotes</td>
<td>176.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>Harry Clay: Miscellaneous Information</td>
<td>180.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>Kate Clay</td>
<td>193.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Essie Clay</td>
<td>195.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>Photocopied Articles</td>
<td>199.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF PLATES

2. Patricks Plains map .................................................. 10.
3. 218 Glebe Point Road, Glebe .................................. 14.
4. Wigram Road Terrace Houses (including Nos. 23, 25 and 29) .... 15.
5. Harry Clay ................................................................. 17.
8. Dan Tracey Advertisement: Gaiety Theatre (Syd) ca. 1892 .... 25.
27. Clay's Theatrical Enterprises and Booking Offices Advertisements ........ 76.
31. Clay's Princess Theatre ............................................... 82.
32. Maurice Chenoweth: .................................................. 84.
33. Harold T. Morgan: .................................................... 84.
34. Andy Kerr: ............................................................... 86.
35. Harry Sadler: ............................................................ 86.
37. George Sorlie: ca.1915 ............................................... 89.
38. George Wallace: ca.1925 ........................................... 89.
41. Rowleys Waxworks and Bells' Waxworks Advertisements .... 103.
42. Clay's Waxworks and Vaudeville Co Advertisement: Gympie 1901 . 105.
43. Queensland Advertisements: Clay's (1901, 1902, 1906, 1908) .... 111.
44. Queensland Advertisements: Clay's (1910, 1912, 1916, 1918) .... 112.
46. Maud Fanning and Family: ........................................ 115.
47. Walter Bentley: ......................................................... 118.
48. Stanley McKay: 1909 ................................................ 120.
49. Phillips Sisters: ........................................................ 120.
51. Roy Rene: ca.1917 .................................................... 124.
52. Clay's Bridge Theatre and Company ............................ 128.
ABSTRACT

This thesis will address the problem of a particular construction of our Australian cultural past through its examination of the life and times of Harry Clay and his vaudeville enterprises. Through its extensive survey of primary source materials the thesis will fill in a number of historical black holes that have occurred in our knowledge of this period of popular Australian theatrical and cultural history. While one particular argument - that Harry Clay was one of the three most important figures in vaudeville management in Australia - is not entirely new, the thesis is nonetheless the first historical survey which has undertaken the task of proving this claim.

In line with this argument I will consider the influence that Clay's Vaudeville Company exerted through the many years it maintained regular employment for performers. Also of importance would be his role in establishing or developing the early careers of a great many performers who later went on to perform on the major vaudeville circuits, and even overseas. Such considerations could add significantly more knowledge to the sad fact that, as Victoria Chance acknowledges in *The Companion to Theatre in Australia*, only Dinks and Onkus are so well remembered purely from Clay's Theatres” (191). Hence the thesis will also endeavour to bring to light several performers whose once well-known careers in vaudeville (and other areas of the entertainment industry) were linked in some way to Harry Clay's organisation.

The thesis will also investigate aspects of Clay’s institutional and commercial practices which were utilised as part of his day to day operations, identifying several options which actually worked against him in terms of later historical and cultural acknowledgment. As part of its historical focus, too, the earlier career of Harry Clay will be examined, as a means by which the thesis will be able to record and analyse the influences which informed Clay's business methods and style.

In addition to the main body of the thesis, I will present a detailed appendix section which will include information that while important to the historical examination of Harry Clay has not been able to be included as part of the dissertation's argument.
MA Revised and Re-formatted Edition: Notes

The following changes have been made to the 2011 Revised Edition thesis.

1. Re-formatted from double line spacing to 1.5 and decreased margin from wide to normal. This has led to a marked decrease in the number of pages.

2. Re-scanned most images

3. Added new images:
   - Patricks Plains map
   - St George's Hall 2007 (p. 55)
   - Harry Clay (p. 21)
   - Clay's princess Theatre (p. 83)
   - Replaced original Roy Rene photo (p. 124)

4. Changed Faning to Fanning (for both Charles Fanning and his sister Maud)

5. Replaced smart quotation marks to straight quotation marks and removed indents from the start of paragraphs.

6. Minor grammatical errors fixed.
   - Replaced "c" (for "circa") with ca.
   - Deleted errant full stops before citations
   - Underlined the names of revusicals instead of placing them inside quotations marks
   - Fixed errant quotation marks
   - Replaced QLD and with Queensland or Qld.

7. Added PDFs of selected articles (Appendix N)
   - "Sometimes His Shows Were Riot"
   - "Audiences Were Tough When Harry Clay Ran Vaudeville"

8. Made footnotes continuous (instead of re-starting the numbers in each new chapter)

9. Deleted "Magazine" from most Theatre references.

10. Fixed Nellie Kolle's Christian name (it was sometimes spelled Nelle)

11. Reformatted the position of some images.

12. Added a reference to Helen Furgus in footnote 78 (re: being the mother of Nellie Ferguson) and added her to the list of 'esteemed actors' in related paragraph

13. Additional information has been added to Appendix C (NSW/Queensland tours) - primarily dates, venues and towns.
WHEN THE BARITONE WAS WAITING ON THE HUNGRY HARRY CLAY

(By Charles Vaude)

There was bustling, there was hustling, as you've never seen before. 
There was carrying and tarrying, from big boat to the shore. 
There was helping hands and willing, on everything to lay, 
When the Baritone he waited on the Hungry Harry Clay.

It was, "will you have a drink, sir? Would you like a cigarette? 
Is there anything at all, sir, that I could go and get? 
Does your "hook" at all want baiting? Now, you only have to say," 
Said the Baritone who waited on the Hungry Harry Clay.

It was, "mind the sea is rough, sir, it is much too cold to swim, 
If I'm lucky with my line, sir, can I put you by a bream, 
To make you feel at home, sir, I will try to do my best, 
I'll sit upon your lap to keep the cold from out your chest. 
If La La cracks a joke, sir, I will tell you what to say," 
Said the Baritone who waited on the Hungry Harry Clay.

"I'll tell you what to eat, sir, inform you what to drink, 
And when it comes to Chasers, I will just give you the wink. 
And if Kelso starts a throwing, I will tell you what I'll do 
To save your Regal Presence, I will stand in front of you. 
I've a watch here to inform you the right time of the day," 
Said the Baritone who waited on the Hungry Harry Clay.

"And when they go for wood, sir, don't mind Charlie Vaude, 
You're not quite fit for climbing, just stay right here, aboard. 
And if they call you "loafer," which they are bound to do, 
Just tell them I'm collecting enough wood for the two. 
And I hope you won't be lonely, the short time I'm away," 
Said the Baritone who waited on the Hungry Harry Clay.

"Would you like a little fruit, sir, banana or a pear? 
Now, mind where you are going, for they’re throwing over there. 
Keep telling funny stories, the boys are out for fun, 
And you can bet your life, sir, I will laugh at everyone. 
In Variety on Wednesday, I've told Brennan what to say," 
Said the Baritone who waited on the Hungry Harry Clay.

(Australian Variety 10 June 1914, 12)

(Written by Vaude to commemorate Harry Clay's initiation into the Chasers (a weekly social gathering of theatrical personalities on Sydney Harbour). The Baritone is Mel Brewer.)