



THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND
AUSTRALIA

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

Revised Edition

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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

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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.

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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.

"Just sit yourself right here, sir, you haven't long to wait;
Here's a roll and butter, a knife, a fork, a plate.
How would you like your chop, sir, lean, with a little fat?
You never "came at" Chasers, well I'll put you wise to that.
Never throw at Wangy, or he'll "go crook" all the day,"
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.