

APPENDIX M

ESSIE CLAY

NB: An updated biography of Essie Clay can be accessed at the Australian Variety Theatre Archive.
See: <http://ozvta.com/practitioners-c/> (or at Pandora <http://nla.gov.au/nla.arc-143747>)

Born: Glebe, 1888

Died: 9 January in Sydney

Interred at South Head Cemetery (CEO section), along with her parents.
Allotment No: 236.

- Named after the song "Essie Dear," which her father first began singing while an emerging professional variety entertainer.
- Essie died a spinster. Her last will and testament indicates that she may well have died with much bitterness, with this appearing to have been directed towards her mother. Her deceased estate file shows that she died with a considerable amount of money, amounting to £2,016. This included the property at 11 Wigram Rod Glebe (known as "Zetland"), which was valued at £850, and shares in her father's company worth £696. She also had £782 in the bank. Appointing Harold Eric Morgan and Alfred Thomas Morgan as her legal representatives she decreed that after her debts were paid out that the rest of the money was to be given to the Church of England Homes, Carlingford and Wahroonga. She also left an annuity of £2 per week to her mother, plus an additional £3 each quarter (making a total of £116 per year).

Most interesting was her statement regarding her house, which she wanted "demolished as soon as may be possible after [her] death." The statement went on to further request: "The materials [are] to be sold and the land upon which the said building is at present erected shall not be sold until after the expiration of two years from the date of my death and shall not during such period of two years be occupied or let" (Essie Clay Deceased Estate File, NSW State Government Archives, 20/4273 No 135194).

- Essie Clay's career as a "legitimate" actress appears to have been carried out between circa 1908 and 1914. She received tuition from Harry Leston and Roland Watts-Phillips around 1907-1909, and undertook the principal female roles in two companies which toured Queensland under the management of her father – 1908 Clay's Dramatic Company and the 1909 Walter Bentley Company.

CRONOLOGY IN BRIEF

1898

- Apr. 2: Billed as the "child balladist" Essie makes her first appearance for Harry Rickards at the Tivoli Theatre (Syd). A Sydney Morning Herald review records that she "was not heard to advantage in a song entitled "My Mother was a Lady" as it was evidently unsuited to her register" (4 Apr. 1898, 12).
- Apr. 9: Re-engaged for a second week at the Tivoli. The Sydney Morning Herald review records that "Little Essie Clay" was warmly welcomed and was recalled (11 Apr. 1898, 3).
- Sept-Dec.: Engaged with her parents to tour Queensland with J.L. Travers Continental Vaudeville Company. Among the songs she performed on the tour were: "The Last Farewell," "My Mother Was a Lady," "Our Flag," "There'll Come a Time" and "What Will You Lend on My Dolly."

1900

- Aged 12, Essie was engaged, along with her father and mother, to tour Queensland for Walter Bell's Waxworks, Boer War and London Vaudeville Company. One of the songs she is recorded to have sung was "Place Thy Loving Arms Around Me."

1901

- Toured New South Wales and Queensland, and possibly Tasmania and Victoria, with Harry Clay's Waxworks and Vaudeville Company. Among the songs she sang were: "Please Mr Conductor," "In the Pale Moonlight," "John Bull Jnr," "London Town," "My Mother was a Lady," "Take a Patsie," "She Was Happy Till She Met You," "I'll Be Your Sweetheart, If You'll Be Mine" and "Whisper My Name to Nell."

1902

- Toured New South Wales and Queensland with Clay's Waxworks and Comedy Company. Known songs were: "You Can Get a Sweetheart But Not Another Mother" and "Good-bye Dolly Gray."

1903

- Toured New South Wales and Queensland with Clay's Waxworks and Comedy Company (aged 15).

1904

- Toured New South Wales and Queensland with Clay's Waxworks and Comedy Company. Now aged 16 Essie was being billed as the "young contralto."

1905

- Essie did not tour Queensland this year.

1908

- Cast in the principal female roles, opposite Albert Lucas, for Clay's Dramatic Company tour of Queensland. The Toowoomba Chronicle records that this was Essie's first important appearance on the stage in a dramatic role. Her roles were:

Madge Carlton (*The World Against Her*)
Norah Desmond (*The Irishman*)
Camille (*Camille*)
Mary Anne (*The Marriage of Mary Anne*)

1909

- Engaged for the New South Wales and Queensland tour with Clays Waxworks and Comedy Company. Her repertoire included: "Antonio," "Boomerang," "Cherry Blossom" "Cosy Flat," "I'm Thinking of You," "Just Idle Dreams," "Take Me Back to Bendigo," "When My Golden Hair is Turned Silver-Grey" and "When the Whip-Poor Will Sings, Margaret."
- Aug-Nov.: Tours as lead actress opposite Walter Bentley with Clay's Dramatic Company. Her roles were:

Ophelia (*Hamlet*)
Annette (*The Bells*)
Ada Ingot (*David Garrick*)
Julie (*The Courier of Lyons*)

1911

- May: Appears in *The Bad Girl of the Family* at the Adelphi Theatre (Syd). Produced by George Marlow, the cast includes Robert Inman, H. W. Diver, Arthur Shirley, J. P. O'Neill, John Cosgrove, Wilton Welch, Frank Reis, Ethel Buckley, Nellie Ferguson and Cora Warner.

1912

- Returned to Queensland with her father's touring vaudeville company. Among the songs she is known to have performed were "Little Man" and "Mandy Lee."

1914

- Performs a various times during the year at the Bridge Theatre (Newtown).

1919

- Contracts the Spanish Flu.

1920

- Recorded as "still ill," and described as Harry's cherished daughter, *Australian Variety* notes that Essie's condition was serious and even though she fell ill some time ago "she has never been the same since." The piece goes on to note "it will be remembered that Miss Clay proved herself one of Australia's most artistic young actresses some years ago" (5 Aug. 1920, 1).

1925

- Residence: 50 Hall Street, Bondi. Records show that she was still living at this address in 1933.

1948

- Essie Clay died on 13 May in Sydney. She is buried in the same plot as her father and mother. Her epitaph reads:

In Ever Loving Memory of Essie
Beloved Daughter of Catherine and Harry Clay
Who Passed From This World 13th May 1948
Thy Will Be Done

- Miss Essie Clay, the child balladist was not heard to advantage in a song entitled "My Mother Was a Lady," as it was evidently unsuited to her register (SMH: 4 Apr. 1898, 12).
- Little Essie Clay, a child balladist, who is said to have just concluded a successful season with the Rickards Company, sang "My Mother Was a Lady," in excellent style, giving evidence of some talent (BC: 26 Sept. 1898, 7).
- Little Essie Clay succeeded in completely pleasing the audience by her singing of "The Last Farewell." A very promising child vocalist, little Miss Clay had no difficulty in impressing the audience favourably (BC: 3 Oct. 1898, 6).
- Little Essie Clay again captivated her hearers with "There'll Come a Time" (BC: 5 Dec. 1898, 6).
- Essie Clay was heartily encored for her sweet rendering of "I'll Be Your Sweetheart, If You'll be Mine," her clever enunciation and nicely balanced voice being a treat to hear (NM: 8 July 1901 2).
- The leading lady is Mr Clay's own daughter, Essie, who has been showing great promise in the roles allotted her, and to whom our Northern contemporaries extend great praise. It is predicted she will soon take her place among the chief of our Australian actresses (TC: 24 Oct. 1908, 3).
- The part of the heroine has been entrusted to Miss Essie Clay, who is making her first important appearance on the stage, and she will be supported by a particularly strong combination of metropolitan artists (TC: 27 Oct. 1908, 3).
- The rising of a new star in the theatrical firmament is ever a matter of interest, and the advent of Miss Essie Clay, daughter of the well-known manager, tomorrow at the Town Hall will be bound to excite more than ordinary curiosity (TC: 29 Oct. 1908, 3).
- Miss Essie Clay's acting was a treat. It was a most difficult role to fulfill, but nevertheless her portrayal was excellent and well above some who come here with a record (TC: 31 Oct. 1908, 3).
- The "star" was of course, Miss Essie Clay, whose representation of an injured wife was decidedly realistic, and it earned for her unmistakable signs of approval. She has a charming presence on the stage, has a sweet-toned voice, and puts considerable feeling into her acting (TC: 29 Oct. 1908, 7).
- Miss Essie Clay's acting was again admirable, while all the remaining members ably acquitted themselves (TC: 4 Nov. 1908, 3).

- Miss Essie Clay's Ophelia was very tender, graceful, pathetic, and picturesque. In the heart-touching mad scene she showed histrionic gifts of a high order, albeit in some of the earlier scenes she was inclined to charge them with too much heaviness. Her musical speaking and singing voice and her pleasing presence all helped to invest her performance with additional interest (BC: 6 Sept. 1909, 6).
- Miss Essie Clay, as Ophelia, deserves considerable praise. She is natural, easy and realistic. Her voice is attractive, young, and as her singing in the mad scene pathetically true. The role is a difficult one and Miss Clay is to be congratulated on her admirable interpretation of the part (NM: 1 Oct. 1909, 5).
- Miss Essie Clay is seen too much advantage. In the heart touching mad scene she gave a fine exhibition of her histrionic gifts, which even the 'pit' m- a thing that rarely comes from such a quarter in such scenes – applauded the actress as heartily as the other parts of the theatre... Her interpretation of Ophelia was worthy of a more experienced actress than Miss Clay (TC: 29 Oct. 1909, 3).
- Essie Clay's rendering of "The Rosary" was excellent, every word being understood, and her voice getting sweeter every week (AV: 22 July 1914, 6).
- Essie Clay gets some good songs this week. She has a winner, "Little Man," which she sings well (AV: 29 July 1914, 6).
- Louise Carbasse says that Essie Clay has the prettiest feet she has ever seen (TT: Sept. 1914, 28).

SONGS KNOWN TO HAVE BEEN PERFORMED BY ESSIE CLAY

Dates in brackets indicate the first known performance. All other dates indicate other years the song was known to have been performed.

[IS] = Performed as an illustrated song

"Antonio" (1909) [IS]
"Boomerang" (1909) [IS]
"Butterfly and the Daisy, The" (1904)
"Cherry Blossom" (1904)
"Christmas Without Daddy" (1904)
"Cosy Flat" (1909) [IS]
"Daddy" (1904)
"Good-bye Dolly Gray" (1902) [IS]
"Good Mr Mailman" (1904)
"I'll Be Your Sweetheart, If You'll Be Mine" (1901)
"I'm Thinking of You" (1909)
"In the Pale Moonlight" (1901)
"John Bull Jnr" (1901)
"Just Idle Dreams" (1909)
"Kentucky Babe" (1904)
"Last Farewell, The" (1898)
"Little Bubbles" (1904)
"London Town" (1901)
"My Mother was a Lady" (1898) 1901
"Our Flag" (1898)
"Place Thy Loving Arms Around Me" (1900)
"Please Mr Conductor" (1901)
"Rosary, The" (1914)
"She's the Sweetheart From Savannah" (1904)
"She Was Happy Till She Met You" (1901)
"Take a Patsie" (1901)
"Take Me Back to Bendigo" (1909) [IS]
"There'll Come a Time" (1898)
"What Will You Lend on My Dolly" (1898)
"When My Golden Hair is Turned Silver-Grey" (1909)
"When the Whip-Poor Will Sings, Margaret" (1909)
"Whisper My Name to Nell" (1902)
"You Can Get a Sweetheart, But Not Another Mother" (1902)
"You Say Your Mother Was a Lady" (1904)