

ESSIE CLAY

(1888-1948) Essie Clay's career on the stage encompassed both variety and serious drama between the early to mid-1890s and World War I. She first appeared on stage as a child, touring with her parents Harry and Kate Clay, and made her debut Tivoli appearance in 1898. Her career highlights were as leading lady with her father's 1909 Queensland tour (starring Scottish tragedian Walter Bentley) and a 1910 tour with the George Marlow Dramatic Co. Clay's last known stage appearances were in 1914.

Although she never reached the heights of the industry her parents had likely hoped for, and was mostly associated with her father's operations, Essie Clay nevertheless appears to have been well received by audiences and critics alike. In this respect she was well-trained, with her parents overseeing her development as a professional variety artist, and securing several high profile Australian actors to educate her more serious aspirations. This is supported by a *Brisbane Courier* theatre critic who wrote of her performance opposite Scottish tragedian, Walter Bentley in 1909:

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).

1888-1899

Likely named after the song "Essie Dear," which her father first began singing while an emerging professional variety entertainer, Essie Clay was born in Glebe in 1888. Although she almost certainly began performing before the public with one or both of her parents from an early age, Essie's first advertised appearances identified to date were for an 1895 season at the Gaiety Theatre, Brisbane, when she appeared with her parents as members of Warren's Surprise Party. Also in the company were Maud and Rose Fanning, William A. Ball, Will Wallace and Wal Rockley. During the engagements Essie also featured in several benefits - including those held for Will Wallace (27 Sept.) and Helen Gordon (5 Oct.). The following year she appeared around the Sydney suburbs with the Australian Minstrel and Variety Company, a troupe organised and/or managed by her father. After five months the Australia Eleven played a short season at the Gaiety Theatre, beginning late March.

Essie made her debut appearance with Harry Rickards on 2 April 1898. Billed as the "child balladist," her song "My Mother was a Lady" was not heard to advantage, according to the *Sydney Morning Herald* due to it being "unsuited to her register" (4 Apr. 1898, 12). Her appearance the following week was apparently much more successful with the same papers recoding that "Little Essie Clay" was warmly welcomed and was recalled following her performance (11 Apr. 1898, 3). Later that same month she was engaged to tour Queensland with her parents by J.L. Travers and his Continental Vaudeville Company. Among the songs she performed on the tour were: "The Last Farewell," "My

GAIETY THEATRE.
TO-NIGHT, TO-NIGHT,
SATURDAY, 5th OCTOBER.
A GRAND BENEFIT WILL BE
TENDERED TO
MISS HELEN GORDON.
The following Artists will appear:—
Harry | CARLTON and SUTTON, | Ted
The Brisbane Favourites.
MISS HELEN GORDON.
Maud | THE FANING SISTERS, | Rose
JAMES C. VAINE.
LITTLE ESSIE CLAY.
WILL WALLACE.
The Black Diamond.
Nellie | THE CUNARD SISTERS, | Alice
A. L. CUNARD.
MISS KATE CLAY.
GEORGE SEARLE.
MISS FANNY SHEPHERD.
DICK GLENVILL.
HARRY CLAY.
EDWARD BURRELL.
Brisbane Courier 5 Oct. (1895), 2.

Mother Was a Lady," "Our Flag," "There'll Come a Time" and "What Will You Lend on My Dolly." It would seem that Essie had either changed the key for "My Mother Was a Lady" or had developed a stronger projection as her rendition in Brisbane was reportedly sung "in excellent style, giving evidence of some talent" (BC: 26 Sept. 1898, 7). Indeed, on the company's return season in December, having spent the interim in North Queensland, Essie's performance one night was hailed by the *Brisbane Courier's* theatre critic, who wrote, "Little Essie Clay again captivated her hearers with 'There'll Come a Time'" (5 Dec. 1898, 4).

TOWN HALL, WARWICK.
MONDAY NEXT, 16th OCTOBER
The Continental Vaudeville Co.
TO THE PUBLIC—The above Company will play here **NEXT MONDAY ONLY** on account of Hall being previously engaged. This Company has toured Queensland for Two Years in succession, and has just finished a successful season of 34 nights at the Theatre Royal, Brisbane. New Programme nightly by Mr. HOB BELL, who has been the rage through Queensland.
MISS LOTTIE LORNE, the Australian Gem, in all Peggy Pryde's Latest Hits
LITTLE ESSIE CLAY, the Wonderful Child Vocalist, in her Character Sketches.
MISS IDA ROSLYN, Australia's Representative Dancer.
And Ten others, from all the leading Metropolitan Theatres, all Artists of standing
For further particulars, see Day Bills, & PRICES—3s, 2s, and One Shilling.
Box Plan. **BERT HOWARD**,
1238 Representative.

Following the Queensland tour Essie returned to Sydney with her parents and in early 1899 began appearing around the suburbs with a revived Australian Eleven - with special guests being the Bovis Bros, Charles and Will. Around the time she toured of Queensland with G. Sullivan's Continental Vaudeville Company later that year, Essie had extended her performances to include character sketches, an early indication that she was interested in becoming more than just a singer.

Warwick Argus 14 Oct. (1899), 8.

1900-1907

Much of 1900 was spent touring with her parents as members of Walter Bell's Waxworks, Boer War and London vaudeville Company. While only some Queensland dates between July and October have yet been established, the *Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton) records that the company had previously been travelling with much success in southern towns, including "a month in Newcastle" (19 July 1900, 5). The Bell tour is believed to have been the last that her father undertook under another managers direction, as in December he took his own troupe, billed as Clay's Waxworks and Vaudeville Company on the road through Northern NSW. In this respect he likely bought out Bell's operations (primarily the waxworks), and using his own knowledge of Northern NSW and Queensland undertook a tour in his own right. Among the songs that Essie is recorded as having sung on this first tour 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."

Essie is known to have toured Queensland with her father's company for the first five years of its operations. Her final tour, undertaken at age 16, saw her being positioned away from the "child balladist" of her early years and given the billing "young contralto." Among the songs she is known to have performed between 1901 and 1904 were "You Can Get a Sweetheart But Not Another Mother" and "Good-bye Dolly Gray."

While Essie's movements between 1905 and her 1908 tour with Clay's Dramatic Company are yet to be established, it is likely that she remained in Sydney with her mother and concentrated on her final years of schooling. Research into her father's movements indicates that the family resided in Wigram Street, Glebe during this period. It was also during this same period that Essie received dramatic acting lessons from Harry Leston and Roland Watts-Phillips.



Terrace houses in Wigram Road, Glebe
The Clay's resided at No 25 in 1907 and 1908
Photo courtesy of Clay Djubal.

1908-1914

Realising that his daughter showed some promise as an actress, Harry Clay used his considerable reputation to mount a short tour of Queensland and New South Wales over October and November with Essie as the lead actress opposite experienced actor Albert Lucas. After playing a short season at Sydney's Royal Standard, the company travelled directly to Rockhampton. The tour dates established to date were Mt Morgan, Bundaberg, Maryborough, Gympie, Ipswich, Toowoomba, Warwick and Singleton. Clay saw no advantage in trying to hoodwink the public by claiming that Essie was anything other than a young and aspiring actress. The *Toowoomba Chronicle* typified the type of publicity she received leading up to the arrival of the company in each town when it drew attention to the tour being her first important appearance on the stage in a dramatic role:

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).

Clay hedged his bets further by engaging a number of seasoned veterans from both the serious and variety stage to make the tour. His reasoning was likely that their experience would increase the quality of the performances while at the same time helping providing invaluable assistance in the development of stagecraft. Among these actors were John

(Jack) Cosgrove,¹ Walter Whyte,² Lancelot Vane,³ Will Wynand,⁴ Harry Norman and Ada Lawrence. The four productions staged on the tour saw Essie play the characters Madge Carlton (*The World Against Her*), Norah Desmond (*The Irishman*), Camille (*Camille*), and Mary Anne (*The Marriage of Mary Anne*). Few reviews of the tour have been located to date, apart from the seasons in Toowoomba. and Ipswich It appears, though, that in these town at least, the critical opinion of Essie's performances was largely positive:

The company comprises a number of accomplished artists, and consequently their presentation of the drama [*The World Against Her*] was of a particularly thrilling character, and the acting was of an unquestionably high order, while the inspiring nature of the music supplied by an orchestra, and the effective scenery, appealed to the audience in a marked degree. The admirable blending of tragedy and pathos with humour and gaiety produced an effort which was not lost upon the enthusiastic audience. 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 (QT: 29 Oct. 1908, 7).

The following year Essie returned to Queensland twice, the first time with her father's Waxworks and Company and later in the year with another dramatic company. Her repertoire for the earlier tour, which included such songs as "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," saw Essie re-establish her reputation as a popular singer and variety actress. It was the second tour, however, during which she starred opposite internationally-acclaimed Scottish tragedian, Walter Bentley, that became the highlight of her career as a dramatic actress.

The Walter Bentley Queensland tour was to be Harry Clay's most audacious, but ultimately his last dramatic company tour, despite its popular reception. Comprising 20 actors and a reported production team of nine, the company presented four works - Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *David Garrick* (two of Bentley's most acclaimed roles), along with *The Bells* and *The Courier of Lyons*. Essie played the principal female roles of Ophelia (*Hamlet*), Annette (*The Bells*) Ada Ingot (*David Garrick*) and Julie (*The Courier of Lyons*). In lieu of Bentley's formidable reputation Clay engaged several highly experienced actors to support him - the most notable being S. A. Fitzgerald,⁵ his son (and 1908 tourist) Lance Vane, J. B. Atholwood,⁶ Johnstone Weir,⁷ Helen Fergus,⁸ and Maurice Nodin. This time Clay organised for the company to play a season in Brisbane, a destination he rarely ventured into with his vaudeville tours. After a three weeks season at Her Majesty's (1-17 Sept.) , the company travelled north, appearing in Maryborough, Townsville and Charters Towers, before turning around to play such towns as Mackay, Rockhampton, Mount Morgan, Bundaberg and Toowoomba.

ENTERTAINMENT.

HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE.
Under the direction of Mr. Harry Clay. Lessee: Harold Ashton.

TO-NIGHT.

UNDER THE PATRONAGE OF HIS WORSHIP THE MAYOR AND MAYORESS,
THE WORLD-RENOUNDED TRAGEDIAN,
WALTER BENTLEY,

Supported by
MISS ESSIE CLAY and a SELECT DRAMATIC ORGANISATION.
In Shakespeare's Sublime Tragedy in Five Acts.

HAMLET. HAMLET.

Cast of Characters:

HAMLET	MR. WALTER BENTLEY
Claudius	(Prince of Denmark)..... Mr. Johnstone Weir
Laertes	(King of Denmark)..... Mr. J. B. Atholwood
Ghost of Hamlet's Father	Son of Polonius..... Mr. J. B. Atholwood
First Grave-digger	Mr. S. A. Fitzgerald
Horatio	(Friend to Hamlet)..... Mr. Winifd Hunter
Polonius	(Lord Chamberlain)..... Mr. Maurice Nodin
Rosencrantz	(Courtiers)..... Mr. Arthur Egan
Guilendern	(Courtiers)..... Mr. L. Buderick
First Player	Mr. Lancelot Vane
Second Player	Mr. Vincent Scully
Marcullus	(Officers)..... Mr. V. S. Patrick
Bornardo	(Officers)..... Mr. W. O'Toole
Page	Miss P. Pope
Orrick	Miss Romo Laurie
Actress	Miss Mary Lang
Gertrude	(Queen of Denmark)..... Miss Helena Fergus
Ophelia	(Daughter to Polonius)..... MISS ESSIE CLAY

Lords, Ladies, Soldiers, Players, and Attendants, by a Host of Auxiliaries.
Produced on a scale of Magnificence never before attempted on a Brisbane stage.

POPULAR PRICES: 3/, 2/, and 1/. Plan at Paling's, Day Sales, Marb's Bar and Back's, Tobacconist's.

CLAUDE E. WEBB.

Brisbane Courier 4 Sept. (1909), 2.

¹ Eminent Australian stage and film actor, writer, playwright and director John Cosgrove (1867-1925) was associated with J. C. Williamson, Brough and Boucicault and Bland Holt during his three or more decades in the Australian theatre industry.

² Actor, singer Walter Whyte appeared on the vaudeville stage as Walter Jackson, (for many years with Maisie Pollard as Pollard and Jackson). He later became a prominent member of Nat Phillips Stiffy and Mo Revue Company.

³ The son of actor/director S. A. Fitzgerald, and brother of comedian Jim Gerald, Lance Vane (born Lancelot Sherlock Fitzgerald) was for many years a prominent member of William Anderson's dramatic Company.

⁴ Will Wynand worked largely in vaudeville as a comedian, descriptive singer, character impersonator and actor. The 1908 dramatic company tour was the first of four consecutive tours he made through Queensland for Harry Clay.

⁵ Actor, director and film pioneer S. A. (Sydney Australia) Fitzgerald (ca. 1860-1940), established his reputation as an actor in the 1890s. He later went on to direct two films - *Robbery Under Arms* (1907) and *The Life and Adventures of John Vane, the Notorious Australian Bushranger* (1910), both of which featured his sons Lance Vane and Jim Gerald.

⁶ Another of Australia's more eminent actors of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, J. B. Atholwood (ca. 1861-1931) played the full gamut of theatrical genres from Shakespeare to pantomime during his long career. He started out his career in the early 1880s and came to prominence in the 1890s with Julius Knight's company, later playing with almost every major actor to tour the Antipodes, including Alfred Dampier, Roy Redgrave and Cuyler Hastings.

⁷ Dramatic actor Johnston Weir occasionally appeared on the vaudeville stage, presenting recitations which were accompanied by slides. He was also active within the industrial aspects of the industry, becoming at some stage president of the Australian Actors Association.

⁸ The mother of well-known dramatic actress Nellie Ferguson and variety actor Dick Dunbar, Helen Fergus (aka Fergus) began to establish her reputation as an actress by the early to mid-1880s and was later associated with most of Australia's leading theatrical firms and managers, including Macmahon's Dramatic Company, Alan Wilkie, William Anderson, Edwin Geach, George Willoughby and the Fullers.

Once again reviews of Essie's performances were largely favourable, with the critical responses suggesting that she was beginning to mature as an actress. Among the reviews located to date are following from the *Brisbane Courier* and *Northern Miner* (Charters Towers):

Shakespearean drama has had little attention in Brisbane since Mr Bentley appeared here some ten or twelve years ago. A production of a tragedy or a comedy at rare intervals has been all that we have had, not because a more generous measure of production would not have been gladly supported, but because actors and actresses capable of work in these high domains of literary and dramatic art have been few and far between. The warmth and spontaneity of the reception accorded to Mr Bentley... evidenced both the pleasure felt in meeting an old friend, and the appreciation of opportunity afforded of seeing once more an immortal play... 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 great 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).

Within a few months of ending the Bentley tour Essie was engaged to play the lead female roles for the George Marlow Dramatic Company. The company made its debut at Newcastle on Boxing Night 1909 and later travelled to Brisbane, opening there on 19 February. The repertoire reportedly comprised *Married to the Wrong Man*, *The Wedding Ring*, *Camille*, *That Woman From France* and *The Heart of a Hero*. Chief among her fellow thespians were H. Bentley (an English juvenile lead who came to Australia under engagement to J. C. Williamson, and later worked for Clarke, Meynell and Gunn), Tom Curran, Louise Carbasse and Lilian Booth. In writing about Essie's performance in *That Woman from France*, the *Queensland Figaro* critic said that she had "distinguished herself as the French adventuress whose passion for riches led her to perpetrate several murderous crimes" (10 Mar. 1910, 5).

In April 1911 Marlow brought his company to the Adelphi, Sydney, opening with *The Bad Girl of the Family* (5 Apr.) The line-up by then included John Cosgrove, J. P. O'Neill, Harry Diver, Arthur Shirley, Frank Reis, Robert Inman, Ethel Buckley, Cora Warner and Nellie Fergusson. For his production of *Driving a Girl to Destruction* (17 June), Marlow had specially engaged London actors Louise Hampton and Lionel Mannering. Both subsequently played their roles (Ruby Wright and Robert Ray) in the entrepreneur's cinematic version. Although Essie Clay's name has not been included as a cast member in any secondary film sources, it is likely that she reproduced her role (Madame de Meral), given that Marlow utilised most of the then current members of his company for the film.⁹

The following month Clay was cast to play "the somewhat colourless part of Blanche Kingsley" in George de Gray's "weird drama" *The Power of the Cross*, a performance that the *Sydney Morning Herald* critic found "acceptable" (31 July 1911, 5). After some 20 weeks in Sydney, Marlow sent the company back to Brisbane, with the season premiere being a production of *Under Two Flags* (9 Sept.). Three weeks later the company opened in Rockhampton at the Theatre Royal (29 Sept.). This time the opening production was *Driving a Girl to Destruction*. The *Morning Bulletin* had already primed its female readers with details of the costumes being worn during the Brisbane season. Regarding Essie's attire, the paper records:

Miss Essie Clay, as Madame de Meral, wears some exquisite "creations," among them being a cream satin charmeuse veiled in cream toska net, the bodice and trained overdress of French valenciennes lace. Her toque is of pale pink velvet, ornamented with steel trimmings and plumes. Miss Clay also wears a pale blue crepe dechene, with a shimmering tunic of net ornamented with silver and steel and finished with a deep silver fringe (23 Sept. 1911, 5).

Another role played by Clay on the Queensland tour was Barbara Hare in *East Lynne*.

Sometime around May 1912 Clay returned to Queensland to appear on the return leg of her father's vaudeville company tour, performing songs like "Little Man" and "Mandy Lee." Among the other artists who accompanied her North were Lily Vockler, Wally Edwards, Ern Delavale and Will Gilbert and Harry Clay himself. After returning home in August or September she joined forces with Johnson Weir to work up a comedy sketch act. In December that year they appeared at Holland and St John's Empire Theatre in Brisbane, opening with "Next Door Neighbours" (14 Dec.). Another known sketch was "Euchred; Or, The Bank of Love." By the end of the month the two actors were in North Queensland Townsville under contract to Birch, Carroll and Coyle as a between films feature presentation. Interestingly, while advertising in the *Townsville Daily Bulletin* records that the pair was appearing "direct from Harry Rickards' Theatres" (31 Jan. 1913, 3), no details have yet been located which confirm this claim. The same paper also reviewed one of their performances:

⁹ While little is currently known about Marlow's film version of *Driving a Girl to Destruction*, it was likely put in to production shortly after Hampton and Mannering joined the company and prior to it leaving Sydney for Brisbane in early September 1911.

Essie Clay and Johnson Weir followed up their successful sketch, "Euchred," by presenting a new pocket comediettas, "Neighbours," last night at the Olympia, Both these clever artists were at their best in this piece, which abounds with irrepressible Irish humour. It was a very bright cameo of the lighter side of things - simply a tabloid of clever and brisk repartee and humour with a delightful miniature plot (3 Jan. 1913, 3).

THE EMPIRE,
 Direction HOLLAND & ST. JOHN, LTD.
 THE COOLEST THEATRE IN THE COMMONWEALTH!
GRAND MATINEE TO-DAY 2.30 P.M.
ED HOLLAND'S VAUDEVILLE ENTERTAINERS
 AN AMMOTH STAR ATTRACTION!
 Special Engagement and First Appearance here of the Famous

4 **MAX FRANKLIN** 4

roupe of Continental Acrobats and Novelty Gymnasts. From all the principal
 theatres of England, Europe, and America. The Very Last Word in Acrobatics.
 Also First Appearance here of the Comedy Sketch Duo,

Johnson **WEIR AND CLAY.** Essie
 in the Charming Comedy Sketch, "Next Door Neighbours."
 positively Last Night of

Specialty **BURNS AND BENTLEY,** Dancers.
 Appearing To-day, To-night, and every Evening with
 "L'oiseau," "Two Rhodesburys," "The Prices," "Scott Gibson,"
 "Mysto," "The Punchinellos,"
 AND OUR GRAND DOUBLE COMPANY OF VAUDEVILLISTS.

Brisbane Courier 14 Dec. (1912), 2.

The established dates for the Birch, Carroll and Coyle tour were Townsville (30 Dec. 1912) and Charters Towers (6 Jan. 1913). By mid-July Clay was back with the George Marlow Dramatic Company, appearing at the Princess Theatre, Melbourne alongside Frank Reis, Frank Crossley and Agnes Keogh in *The Girl Who Loved a Soldier* (12 July).

1914 saw Clay appear at various times throughout the early and latter parts of the year at the Bridge Theatre (Newtown). She also once again to Queensland with her father's vaudeville company, this time accepting an engagement for the entire tour. Among the other artists on the tour were George Pagden and Kitty Stanley, Wal and Lily Rockley, Billy Maloney, Joe Rox and Harry Little. Reviews published during the tour indicate that Essie's performances were once again a hit with audiences:

Miss Essie Clay, in her contralto songs, made a great success and was doubly encored (TDB: 5 May 1914, 4).

Miss Essie Clay scored with her remarkably sweet contralto voice. She possess a fine range and a splendid volume of tone, her enunciation being particularly clear and distinct (NM: 14 May 1914, 5).

1915-1948

Very little is known about Essie Clay after 1914, with no further details having been located in terms of her career as an actress and variety entertainer. It was reported that she contracted the Spanish Flu sometime around late 1919 or early 1920. *Australian Variety* noted in August 1920 that the "cherished daughter of Harry Clay" had been seriously ill and even though she fell ill some time ago had "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). It is possible that the illness effectively ended her career. *Everyone's* also records in a 1922 article titled "Two Decades Ago - And Now" that she had by then retired:

Essie Clay, only child of Harry Clay, was a very pleasing juvenile balladist. Although she appeared for some years on the stage, Miss Clay decided to stay home with her mother and has lived in retirement for some years (22 Feb. 1922, 20).

Archival records indicate that Clay was living at 50 Hall Street, Bondi between 1925 and 1933, and that she eventually moved back to Glebe at some point before her death on 13 May. Buried at South Head cemetery, in the same plot as her father and mother (No: 236), 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

Essie Clay's last will and testament indicates that she was a spinster and that she had become very bitter. Much of her ill-will appears to have been directed towards her mother. 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).

Clay's deceased estate file also shows that she died with a considerable amount of money, amounting to £2,016. This included the property at 11 Wigram Road 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).

SEE ALSO

- [Harry Clay](#)
- [Catherine \(Kate\) Clay](#)

HISTORICAL NOTES AND CORRECTIONS

- It is unclear if Clay was a member of the George Marlow company which played a season in Melbourne at the Princess Theatre in early 1911. Most of the previous Sydney cast members were involved but her name has not yet been identified.

ADDITIONAL QUOTATIONS

- 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 (24 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 fulfil, but nevertheless her portrayal was excellent and well above some who come here with a record (TC: 312 Oct. 1908, 3).
- Miss Essie Clay's acting was again admirable, while all the remaining members ably acquitted themselves (TC: 4 Nov. 1908, 3).
- 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).
- Miss Essie Clay would like it known that she is not a member of any suburban touring company, and never authorised her name to be advertised as appearing with any such company. Such things as these are very misleading to the public, and annoying to an artists, and the sooner the persons offending desist the better for all concerned (AV: 4 Aug. 1915, 13).

ENGAGEMENTS CHRONOLOGY

Essie Clay toured with her parents for much of her childhood and early youth ca. 1888- ca. 1905, and very likely appeared on stage as a special unadvertised guest performer. This chronology therefore includes only the engagements for which she received advertised billing or was mentioned in reviews. For further details, and possible appearances undertaken while touring with her parents, see **Harry Clay: Career and Personal Chronology, 1865-1925**.

- 1895:** GEORGE WARREN (Gaiety Th, Syd; 27 Mar. - * > Warren's Surprise Party, Gaiety Surprise Party, under W.A. Ball's management from 11 Sept.)
- 1896:** HARRY CLAY (Sydney suburban circuit; ca. Oct-Dec.* > Australian Minstrel & Variety Co)
- 1897:** HARRY CLAY (Sydney suburban circuit; ca. Jan. - Mar. * > Australian Minstrel & Variety Co) • (Gaiety Th, Syd; 13 Mar. - ca. Apr. * > Australian Minstrel & Variety Co)
- 1898:** HARRY RICKARDS (Tivoli Th, Syd; 2-15 Apr.) ▶ J. L. TRAVERS (Queensland tour; ca. Sept.-Dec. * > Continental Vaudeville Co)
- NB:** Continental Vaudeville Co Queensland tour incl. Brisbane (Op House; 24 Sept. - 8 Oct.) • Rockhampton (Th Royal; 24-30 Oct.) • Charters Towers (Th Royal; 10-18 Nov.) • Brisbane (Th Royal; 28 Nov. - 13 Dec.)
- 1899:** HARRY CLAY (Sydney suburban circuit; 2 Jan. - * > Australian Eleven) ▶ G. SULLIVAN (Queensland tour; ca. Aug - Oct. * > Continental Vaudeville Co) ▶ n/e (Coogee Palace Aquarium, Syd; 26 Dec. > Continental Vaudeville Co)
- NB 1:** Australian Eleven engagements incl. Parramatta TH; 2, 26 Jan.)
- NB 2:** Continental Vaudeville Co tour incl. Brisbane (Th Royal; 5 Aug. - 1 Sept.) • Rockhampton (Th Royal; 11-14 Sept.) • Barcardine (31 Sept.) • Longreach (1-2 Oct.) • Warwick (Town Hall; 16 Oct.)
- 1900:** HARRY CLAY (Sydney suburban circuit; 2 Jan. - * > Australian Eleven) ▶ WALTER BELL (Qld regional tour; ca. July - Oct. * > Waxworks, Boer War and London Vaudeville Company) ▶ HARRY CLAY (Skating Rink, Grafton, NSW; 26-31 Dec. > Clay's Waxworks and Vaudeville Co)
- NB 1:** Australian Eleven engagements incl. Coogee Bay Aquarium (matinee concert) and Parramatta TH; 26 Jan.)
- NB 2:** Bell's Waxworks tour also reportedly played Newcastle (NSW) for a month, along with other southern engagements prior travelling to Queensland. The itinerary established to date is: Rockhampton (Th Royal; 20 July - *) • Mount Morgan (11 Aug. - *) • Charters Towers (Th Royal, 12 Sept. - ca. Oct. *).
- 1901-1904:** For details relating to these years see Harry Clay's Annual New South Wales/Queensland tours: 1901-1918, 1927 and 1929 ("Research Lists" page)
- 1909:** GEORGE MARLOW (Newc; 26-31 Dec. > George Marlow Dramatic Co)

O P E R A H O U S E

Lessee.....Mr. J. C. Travers.
 Business Manager.....Mr. W. N. Surgam.
 Stage ManagerMr. Harry Clay.

Commencing SATURDAY NEXT
24th SEPTEMBER.

The Continental
Vaudeville Company.

Special Engagement for a Short Season of
the Marvellous, Matchless
LUCIFER,
The Physiological Marvel of the Nineteenth
Century, who will introduce several
New Items, assisted by
Mr. PAT GREEN,
The American Champion Axe Swinger and
Long Distance Diver.

FRANK YORK.	DAISY CHARD.
STELLA TRACEY.	HARRY CARROLL.
MISS GILHONI.	ROCKLEY BROS.
SPENCER BROS.	KATE HENRY.
THORNE & DELL.	ESSIE CLAY.
WALLY EDWARDS.	ADA THORNTON.
TOM EDWARDS.	PROF. SURGAM.

And the Rest of this Talented Combination,
will all introduce
NEW SPECIALITIES AND NOVELTIES.
Watch To-morrow's Advertisement.
Popular Prices: 2s., 1s., 6d.
Box Plan at Palling's. Booking, 6d. extra.
ERNIE S. DUNCAN,
Advance Representative.

Brisbane Courier 22 Sept. (1898), 2.

MECHANICS' INSTITUTE.

Direction of **HARRY CLAY**
 Manager **JAMES BOYLE**

The Dramatic Event of the Year,
For Positively One Night Only,
WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 3.

The World Renowned Tragedian,
WALTER BENTLEY.

One of the World's Greatest Actors,
Supported by **MISS ESSIE CLAY**
and a Powerful Dramatic Company, in
Tom Robertson's Famous Comedy,
DAVID GARRICK,
Or Love or Honor.

David Garrick .. **WALTER BENTLEY**
 Ada Qugot **MISS ESSIE CLAY**

POPULAR PRICES: 3s, 2s, 1s.
Box Plan at Short's.
CLAUDE E. WEBB.

- 1910:** GEORGE MARLOW (Newc; 1 Jan. - * > George Marlow Dramatic Co) • (His Majesty's Th, Bris; 19 Feb. - ca. Mar.* > George Marlow Dramatic Co)
- 1911:** GEORGE MARLOW (Criterion Th, Syd; 5 Apr. - ca. Aug. * > George Marlow Dramatic Co) • (His Majesty's Th, Bris; 9 Sept. - * > George Marlow Dramatic Co) • (Th Royal, Rockhampton; 29 Sept. - * > George Marlow Dramatic Co)
- 1912:** HARRY CLAY (Sydney Suburban circuit; ca. Jan. - Apr.) • (NSW/Qld regional tour; ca. May - Aug/Sept. *) • (Sydney suburban circuit; ca. Sept-Nov.) ▶ HOLLAND & ST JOHN (Empire Th, Bris; 14 Dec. - *) ▶ BIRCH, CARROLL & COYLE (Olympia Pictures, Townsville; 30-31 Dec.)
- 1913:** BIRCH, CARROLL & COYLE (Olympia Pictures, Townsville 1 Jan. - *) • (Th Royal, Charters Towers; 6-10 Jan.) ▶ GEORGE MARLOW (Princess Th, Melb; 12 July - * > George Marlow Dramatic Co)
- 1914:** HARRY CLAY (NSW/Qld regional tour; ca. Mar. - Aug/Sept. *)

Singleton Argus 2 Nov. (1909), 3.

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)
"It Will Take a Bit of Wearing Out" (1900)
"John Bull Jnr" (1901)
"Just Idle Dreams" (1909)
"Kentucky Babe" (1904)

SCHOOL OF ARTS.
—
TO-NIGHT! TO-NIGHT!
FOR THREE NIGHTS ONLY.
HARRY (CLAY'S) HARRY
NEW (COMPANY) NEW
MR. WALLY EDWARDS.
MISS ESSIE CLAY.
THE —MARTENS— THE
Victor and Maud.
* TOOHEY AND HIS DOG.
MISS MAUD FLORENCE.
MISS PEARLIE SMAILE.
MR. GEORGE SCOTT.
MISS JOLLY COLEMAN.
Mr. ERN. DELAVALLE.
MISS LILY VOCKLER.
MR. WILL GILBERT.
ADMISSION : Body of Hall, 1s. ; Dress Circle, 1s. 6d.
—
MOUNT MORGAN.
WEDNESDAY AND THURSDAY NEXT

Morning Bulletin 6 July (1912), 1.

"Last Farewell, The" (1898)
"Little Bubbles" (1904)
"Little Man" (1912) 1914
"London Town" (1900) 1901 [aka "Good Old London Town"]
"Mandy Lee" (1912)
"My Mother was a Lady" (1898) 1901
"Only a Penny" (1900)
"Our Flag" (1898) 1900
"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) 1899
"When My Golden Hair is Turned Silver-Grey" (1909)
"When the Day Begins at Dawn" (1900)
"When the Whip-Poor Will Sings, Margaret" (1909)
"While London Sleeps" (1899)
"Whisper My Name to Nell" (1902)
"You Can Get a Sweetheart, But Not Another Mother" (1902)
"You Say Your Mother Was a Lady" (1904)

FURTHER REFERENCE

"[Driving a Girl to Destruction](#)." SMH: 19 June (1911), 5.

"[Facts, Fad Feats and Fancies](#)." QF: 10 Mar. (1896), 5.

"[Olympia Pictures](#)." TDB: 3 Jan. (1913), 3.

"Papers in the Estate of Essie Clay, Late of Glebe Point near Sydney." New South Wales State Archives, No A135194.

Last updated: 25/11/2012

First published in: Clay Djubal, "Harry Clay and Clay's Vaudeville Company." MA Thesis, U of Qld (1998), Appendix E.

NB: The URL for this PDF will change each time it is updated. If you wish to cite or link to this record please use the following:

Australian Variety Theatre Archive • <http://ozvta.com/practitioners-c/>