F. M. CLARK

(1850-1945) One of Australia’s leading variety managers in last decades of the 19th century, Frank Clark came to Australia in 1882 with Clark and Ryman’s Minstrels (later Clark and Ryman’s Red Stockings Co). From 1886 onwards he mostly toured his own companies – known variously as the Silk Stockings, All Star Novelty Co, European Celebrities, Clark’s Last Sensation Co, Boston Ideal Co, New Folly Co and the American English Co amongst others. In the 1890s he did, however, briefly joined forces with other managements briefly, including the Cogills and W. H. Speed. Clark built a solid reputation around the country not just as a high profile variety entrepreneur but also as a writer of comic songs, burlesques and farces (including Muldoon’s Picnic). In the 1880s and 1890s Clark was mostly associated with venues such as the Victoria Hall, Gaiety Theatre (Melb) and the New Opera House (Syd). He also ran joint operations at Queens Hall (Syd) and Gaiety Theatre (Melb) around 1904-05. Clark moved back to the USA sometime around 1910 to work in the film industry. He is known to have appeared in at least 197 films to 1938.

Highly regarded by his contemporaries as a writer and producer of farces, burlesques and comic song (which he sometimes sang on stage himself), Clark’s name first emerged in Australia as a variety manager in the early 1880s. His output of original productions was considerable during variety's boom decade, and he rivalled F. E. Hiscocks, Frank Smith and even Harry Rickards as Australia’s premiere variety entrepreneur during that era. Famous for his Red Stockings and Silk Stockings companies, he was certainly Hiscocks’ principle rival in so far as Melbourne and Sydney were concerned, with each establishing quite strong connections in those two cities, through their commitment to engaging the best performers available – whether they be local or from overseas. The opportunities made available by Clark, Hiscocks, Smith and Rickards in fact led to many imported stars staying in the country for years and decades, thereby helping to build a strong and dynamic local popular culture entertainment industry.

Although very few details of his life and career prior to arriving in Australia are currently available, it has been ascertained that he was born in Cincinnati, Ohio on 22 December 1857. He made his first public appearance at age 15 with a travelling circus and afterwards became a member of Barry McCauley's Company. He soon afterwards decided to specialise in variety entertainment, however, and over the next decade established his reputation as an accomplished all-round minstrel performer. Clark was also clearly an intuitive showman, however, and fully realised (long before Florenz Ziegfeld's famous Follies shows) that scantily clad women, top notch comedians and patriotic/ sentimental balladeers was what audiences wanted. He certainly never stopped trying to Australian audiences more of the same during his twenty or so years in the country. Clark's New Folly Company in the early 1890s, for example, comprised some 100 artists, including "fifty handsome ladies" (A: 28 Feb. 1891, 12). A letter writer to the Theatre magazine in 1917 recalls Clark's entrepreneurial inventiveness, too. According to the story, Clark was once in Bendigo for a season at the town's Royal Princess Theatre during the town's Easter week charity carnival, and found a novel way to gain much needed good publicity for the cost of forty or so sixpences. According to the writer, J.G., while attending the carnival earlier in the day Clark bought a supply of half-price tickets and distributed them to a crowd of children who were standing around with their parents and friends gaping open-mouthed at the fancy-attired performers spruiking the next session. After it "quickly got round the carnival that [Clark] had shouted the free show… everybody voted that he couldn't be a bad bloke , and hundreds went along to see [his] show that night just because he'd franked in the children at the fair" (May 1917, 42).

Among the host of famous engagements appearing under his banner were African-American celebrities, Charles Pope and Irving Sayles (both of whom shortly after -wards became stalwarts of the Rickards company, and who remained in the country up until their deaths); American acrobatic comedians and farce writers, Franks and Marion, and singer/comic, Priscilla Verne. It was Clark's line-up of Australian artists that is most impressive, however. At various times these included Horace Bent, Will Whitburn (later a long term Rickards performer), Slade Murray, Delohery Craydon and Holland, Johnny Matlock, Charles Fanning and Alf Lawton. Indeed, so confident was Clark in his

1 "Personal." Table Talk 27 May 1887, 4.
position by 1892 that several managerial notices published in the daily newspapers saw him declare himself “the premiere vaudeville manager in Australia” (A: 15 Feb. 1892, 8).

Clark first came to Australia under contract to L. M. Bayless and W. Reynolds, lessees of the Gaiety Theatre, Sydney. His company, Clark and Hyman's Minstrels was co-managed with Add Hyman and featured several performers who went on to carve out long careers in the country - notably Alf Lawton and Edward Amery. His name has first been identified as an entrepreneur in the mid-1880s with Clark and Ryman's Red Stockings Company. He then went out on his own with the Silk Stockings Company in 1886, establishing himself at the Victoria Hall in Melbourne. That year he presented arguably his most popular farce, Muldoon's Picnic. It was revived many times over the years by Clark as well as by other companies, notably the Cogills (1887, with Dan Tracey in the lead role) and Delohery, Craydon and Holland (1895).

Clark moved his operations to Sydney's Opera House in December 1887 for a season before returning to the Victoria Hall in Melbourne later in 1888. On his return to Sydney (Academy of Music) during the middle of that year Clark changed the name of his troupe to F. M. Clark's All Star Novelty Company. Around the time of his next project - F. M. Clark’s European Celebrities (Academy of Music, Sydney) - Clark was also managing the Australian Waxworks in George Street, Sydney (opposite St Andrews). He returned to Melbourne, where his audience base was particularly strong, taking up residence at the city's Gaiety Theatre in 1890. Despite being rivals, F. E. Hiscocks and Clark actually managed and leased the Crystal Palace Rink in Sydney together for a period of time - with one highlight being Hamston's Circus season in March 1890. The effects of the depression seem to have begun to put increasing pressure on Clark by 1890, however. Indeed there were quite a few changes of name being applied to his troupes, perhaps in an attempt to make his companies appear new. His operations at that time, for example, saw the American English Company (Gaiety Theatre, Syd) became the All Star Combination and later F. M. Clark's New Folly Company (1890-91). He reverted back to F. M. Clark's Silk Stockings Company in 1892, before returning to solo performing engagements - perhaps the first since he took up a management career.

Although the depression seems not to have curtailed Clark’s career quite so drastically as Smith and Hiscocks, the mid-1890s did see him downsize his operations significantly. And while his whereabouts between 1892 and 1897 are yet to be established, it is likely that he continued performing for other companies - either here in Australia or perhaps overseas. From around 1897, however, he was sufficiently ready financially to put together a number of troupes, notably his Clark's All Star Company. He did still appear on occasion tour with other leading companies, though.
During the last years of the decade Clark spent much time in Western Australia, producing melodramas such as The Octoroon (Theatre Royal, Perth 18 Apr. 1898) and musical comedies like A Trip to Chinatown (Bijou Theatre Perth, 17 Sept. 1898). During this same period he joined forces with other actor/managers like Billy Speed and Charles Cogill to stage variety shows - and again specialising in burlesques, farces and assorted musical extravaganzas. Among the more notable performers to appear in his companies around this time were Martyn Hagen and Lucy Fraser, ex-patriot English comic, Denis Carney, W. B. Warner, touring English sketch artists, Williams and Amy Gourley, the Bovis brothers, George Leopold and George A. Jones (later of Jones and Lawrence, Perth's premiere local variety company during the late 1890s).

In the early years of the new century Clark returned to the east coast and set about running dual operations in Sydney (Queen's Hall) and Melbourne (Gaiety Theatre) around 1904/05. Although by now unable to attract the a continued stream of quality performers of yesteryear, Clark nevertheless managed to engage artists of the calibre of the Stagpooles (acrobats), Harry Shine, Will Rollow, Kitty Lenton, Harry Carroll and Harry Leggett. The Theatre notes, too, that Clark's Folly Company belied its name in providing such a bright show" (15 May 1905, 7). The entrepreneur was not taking a back seat with his productions either, appearing quite regularly on tour as an illustrated singer (with such songs as "Faces We Miss From the Stage" and "As Long as She's Irish"). He is also believed to have been responsible for putting together a number of new and original farces, including "On the Tiles; Or, A Hot Night in Woolloomooloo."

By the early1900s Clarks' minstrel show first parts were also tending to be set in various topical or exotic scenes. One of his more popular first parts in 1905, for example, was the military-themed "In Camp," which saw Alec Stagpoole undertake the emcee role of Mr Interlocutor in the guise of the "Commanding Officer." Another first part was titled "Folly" (Adelaide, 8 July). Clarke was also still presenting Muldoon's Picnic as one of the feature presentations.

Despite attracting large crowds at both his Sydney and Melbourne venues (TT: June 1905, n. pag. and Nov. 1905, 24), Clark ran into trouble with the NSW Health Authority over conditions at his Sydney operations and was forced to close down in July 1905 (Frank Smith subsequently took over the lease and upgraded the theatre). His whereabouts between 1905 and 1911 are unclear. A 1905 par in the Theatre magazine's "They Say" column hints that Clark had inherited a "goodly fortune from some obliging deceased relative" (15 July 1905, 8). Reports began to surface around 1914 that he had taken up an offer with the Sellig people to work in their film operations in the USA (Nov. 1914, 35). It appears, however, that he may have left Australia as early as 1910 (if not before), as his first known Hollywood movie appearances were in 1911. The scarcity of information about Clark in the industry magazines from 1905 onwards may have possibly been due to a backlash within the Australian theatre industry. In this respect it appears that he abandoned his family to return to the USA. A benefit for his children was sponsored by Harry Rickards around 1910/1911 at his Melbourne theatre after their mother died. Clark's Hollywood film career was relatively successful, with 197 productions being credited to him. Among his earliest films (he was occasionally billed as Frank Clark or Frank Clarke) were The Code of Honour, A Sacrifice to Civilisation, The Regeneration of Apache Kid and The Blacksmith's Love. His last known film appearance was Men with Wings (1938). Clark died at Woodland Hills, Los Angeles on 10 April 1945.

Although an all-round entertainer (an aspect required of most Australian minstrel performers), Frank Clark nevertheless specialised in rendering comic songs and writing outlandish farces. He didn't write all his own material, however, as some of his more popular songs are known to have been written by Lance Lenton – including "The Push" (a parody on "The Soldier"), "Maggie Murphy's House," his great Melbourne success, "At the Football Match," and "I Say Mike." Clark's original farcical comedies include: Fracas (1885), Hot Night in Balmain (1889), Wearing the

---

2 Unfortunately the bibliographic details for this report have been mislaid. The reference comes from handwritten notes made by this author in 1997 while researching at the Mitchell Library (NSW). The most likely source is the Theatre magazine.
Trousers (1898), and Marconi Outdone, Our State School and On the Tiles (all 1905), with the last one sub-titled, "Or, A Hot Night in Waterloo." One of the most popular and of Clark's original farces, first known to have staged in Australia in 1886, was Muldoon's Picnic. It was revived many times over the years by Clark as well as by other companies, notably the Cogills (1887, with Dan Tracey in the lead role) and Delohery, Craydon and Holland (1895). One particularly popular burlesque produced by Clark, which was revived by others in later years, was Horace Bent's A Trip to Manly; Or, The Soapboilers' Picnic (1884), a spoof on the John F. Sheridan classic, Fun on the Bristol.

Queensland Figaro and Punch 11 Feb. (1888), 257.

**MANAGEMENT/PERFORMANCE CHRONOLOGY**

* = Details regarding length of engagement are yet to be established

1882: L.M. BAYLESS & W. REYNOLDS (Gaiety Th, Syd; 2 Sept. -* > Clark & Hyman's Minstrels)

1885: CLARK & RYMAN (Gaiety Th, Syd; 12 Sept.* > Clark & Ryman's Red Stockings Co) • (St Geo's Hall, Melb; 28 Nov.* > Clark & Ryman's Red Stockings Co)

1886: F. M. CLARK (Lse. F.E. Hiscocks - Vic Hall, Melb; 15 May. – 31 Dec.* > Silk Stockings Co)

NB: The Silk Stocking season also included the brief engagement of Harry Rickards Co (beginning 26 June)

1887: F. M. CLARK (Vic Hall, Melb; 1 Jan. - 31 Dec. > Silk Stockings Co) • (Op House, Syd; 17-31 Dec. > All-Star Novelty Combination)

NB: Clark and some other members of the troupe left for Sydney on 14 December for the All-Star Novelty Co season. The Silk Stocking Co continued to play the Victoria Hall.

1888: F. M. CLARK (Vic Hall, Melb; 1 Jan. – 30 Mar. > Silk Stockings Co) • (Op House, Syd; 1-27 Jan. -* > All-Star Novelty Combination) • (Th Royal, Bris; 30 Jan. - * > All-Star Novelty Combination) • (Th Royal, Adel; 17 Mar. - * > All Star Novelty Combination) • (Vic Hall, Melb; 31Mar. - * > All Star Novelty Combination) • (Vic Hall, Melb; 22 June - * > New All-Star Combination) • (A of M, Melb; 23 June - * > All Star Novelty Combination) • (A of M, Launceston; 4 Aug. - * > F.M. Clark's New All-Star Combination) • (Vic Hall, Melb; 31Mar. - * > All Star Novelty Combination) • (Th Royal, Hobart; 11-17 Aug. * > F.M. Clark's New All-Star Combination)

1889: F. M. CLARK (A of M, Syd; 13 July - * > European Celebrities) • (Gaiety Th, Bris; 12 Aug. - * > European Celebrities) • AUSTRALIAN WAXWORKS Co (Syd; 17 Aug. *)

1890: F. M. CLARK (Gaiety Th, Melb; 9 Jan. - * > Last Sensation Co) F. M. CLARK (Lse. J. Billin - Vic Hall, Melb; 15 Feb. - * > Boston Ideal Co) • CLARK & HISCOCKS (Lse/Mngr. for Harroson's Circus - Crystal Palace Rink, Sydney; 15 Mar. *) • F. M. CLARK'S BOSTON IDEAL CO (New Op House, Syd; 5 Apr. > Lse. MacMahon Bros) • (Th Royal, Bris; 28 Apr.*) • F. E. HISCOCKS' AMERICAN ENGLISH Co (Gaiety Th, Syd; 12 July*) • F. M. CLARK'S ALL STAR COMBINATION (Vic Hall, Melb; 6 Oct.) • BONDI AQUARIUM (Syd; 25 Oct.) • F. M. CLARK'S NEW FOLLY Co (Gaiety Th, Melb; 22 Nov.)
1891: F.M. CLARK'S NEW FOLLY Co (Gaiety Th, Melb; 1 Jan. - 31 Dec.) • (A o f M, Launceston; 5 Dec. - * • Folly Co) • (Th Royal, Hobart; 14-18 Dec. • Folly Co)

1892: F. M. CLARK (St Geo's Hall, Melb; 13 Feb. • Silk Stockings Co) • (Garner's Rooms, Adel; 2-22 Apr. • Silk Stockings Co) • US MINSTRELS (Lse/Prod. J. Billin > Vic Hall, Melb; 22 Oct.)

1893: F. M. CLARK (Alhambra Palace of Varieties, Melb; 4 Mar. • *)

1897: F. M. CLARK'S ALL STAR Co (Th Royal, Bris; 5 June*) • n/e (Gaiety Th, Bris; 2 July* • F.M. Clark benefit)

1898: F. M. CLARK Co (Th Royal, Perth; 18 Apr.*) • CLARK & C. W. COGILL'S SILK STOCKINGS Co (YOEF, Fremantle; 30 Apr. - ca. 24 M*) • (New Pavilion Th, Fremantle; 18 June*) • CLARK & SPEED'S SHILLING POPS CONCERTS (New Pavilion Th, Fremantle; ca. 20 Aug.*) • CLARK & SPEED Co (Bijou Th, Fremantle; 17 Sept.) • F. M. CLARK CONTINENTAL Co (New Pavilion Th, Fremantle; 29 Oct.*) • F. M. CLARK BENEFIT (Fremantle TH; 2 Dec.)

1899: JOHN COLEMAN VAUDEVILLE Co (Th Royal, Perth; 9 Dec. *)

1900: CLARK & SPEED'S ROYAL BIOGRAPH Co (Th Royal, Perth; 26 May*) • (Western Australian regional tour; ca. June* • See WA: 9 June 1900, l)

1904: F. M. CLARK'S NEW FOLLY Co (Gaiety Th, Melb; 6 Aug. - *)

1905: F. M. CLARK'S NEW FOLLY Co (Gaiety Th, Melb; 7 Jan. • *) • (Queen's Hall, Syd; ca. Jan. • *) • (Tivoli Th, Adel; 8 July*) • (Crystal Th, Broken Hill; 9-18 Sept.) • (Tivoli Th, Adel; 23-29 Sept.)

NB: Clark ran the Gaiety (Melb) and Queen's Hall (Syd) simultaneously until ca. July at which time he closed down his Queen's Hall operations.

1906: F. M. CLARK'S NEW FOLLY Co (Gaiety Th, Melb; ca. Jan.*)

1910-1938: Clark returned to the USA ca. 1910 to work as an film actor. He appeared in at least 197 films to 1938. His early years in Hollywood were spent with the Selig company (see TT: Nov. 1914, 35.).

The Alhambra
GRAND RATIONAL CONCERT
SUNDAY, AUGUST 5TH

OVERTURE... Mr. CONDUIT & ORCHESTRA
SONG: "My Southern Home..."... Mr. HARRY TOWNLEY
SONG: "Sister Mary Wants to Know..."... Miss MURIEL HARROW
SONG: "Miss Allen"... WALL BUCKLEY
SONG: "A Letter to His Dad..."... Miss MINNIE NIMMO
JUBILEE: "Unfriends World..."... W. H. SPEED

COLLECTION
QUINTETTE: "Who, Will Over the Downs..."
"Misses OCTAVIA, NIMMO, and Mears..."... WADLEY, WYATT, and TOWNLEY
SONG: "I Saw Her Steal Her Apron to Her Eyes..."... HARRY BAXTER
SONG: "Daddy wouldn't buy me a Bow Wow..."... Little ALMA GRAY
SONG: "Peggy O'Moore..."... Mr. JNO. WADLEY
SONG: "There's No Place Like Home..."... SYD DAY
SONG: "If the Waters could Cool..."... Mr. FRANK WYATT
SONG: "Like a Lady..."... Miss DAISY CHARD
SONG: "The Holy City..."... WILL SEMMON
SONG: "Leone..."... Miss LILLIE OCTAVIA
SONG: "Rast and West and Us Too..."... CLAUDE HERMEN

CONCLUDING WITH
HERZ BROS.' Wonder Display

THE ALHAMBRA COMPANY
EVERY EVENING
The Finest Combination in Australia.
PRICES OF ADMISSION: 1s. and 6d.

Australian Stage Annual 6 (1905). 16.

Alhambra Opera House, Melbourne 1894
Source: Public Record Office Victoria
FARCES

All details/dates indicate first known staging in Australia.
For additional productions and credit details see each entries inclusion in the Research Lists page ["Minstrel Farces"]

1885: Fracas • Man of Education
1886: Muldoon's Picnic
1887: The Two Macks
1889: Hot Night in Balmain • Quiet Family
1891: Our Boarding House • The Unknown
1898: The Rehearsal • Wearing the Trousers
1904: Rumpus
1905: A Lady's Companion • On the Tiles; Or, A Hot Night in Waterloo • Our State School • Slocum's Dog • Skule

FURTHER REFERENCE

"Frank Clark," *Internet Movie Database*. [sighted 17/02/2007]
"Queen's Hall (Sydney) and Gaiety Theatre (Melbourne)." *TT*: June (1905), 10.
"Where Generosity Paid." *TT*: May (1917), 42.