IKE BECK

Often referred to as "The Fashion Plate," Ike Beck made his reputation as a boxer and businessman before turning to vaudeville in 1916 as a performer. The following year he briefly joined forces with Bert Howard to operate Beck and Howard's Vaudeville Enterprises before opening his own circuit in the Hunter Valley district. His entrepreneurial career over the remainder of the decade appears to have been up and down, and at times he returned to performing. After several years doing turns on Harry Clay's circuits he re-established a successful venture in the Hunter Valley only to sell the circuit to Clay in 1922. As a touring showman Beck appears to have continued his association with regional New South Wales well into the 1930s, and notably in the coalfields region. He is recorded as performing on stage professionally as late as 1946, and also appeared in the 1924 film Fisher's Ghost.

Ike Beck's variety entertainment career appears to have begun in 1916. He was not unknown to the New South Wales public by then, however. Described in a celebrity endorsement for G.W. Hean's Nerve Nuts that same year, Beck is described as "a well-known sporting man and proprietor of the largest horse saleyards in Sydney."

Beck's address at the time is given as Abercrombie Street, City (it is actually located in the inner city suburb of Darlington). This appears to confirm his identity as one of the contestants in a boxing event staged on 30 December 1913 at the Olympia Athletic Club. The £600 open tournament, comprising ten six-round events included a fight between Ike Beck (Darlington) and W. Farrelley (Randwick). Beck is identified with boxing as early as 1906, however.

Ike Beck's first known stage performance as a ragtime singer was with Tup Smith's Vaudeville Players at the Kitchener Hall, Adamstown (Newcastle, New South Wales) on 16 August 1916. His stylish dressing saw him billed for that engagement as the "Fashion Plate." It was to become his trademark throughout his career. Despite his limited experience as a professional vaudeville entertainer, Beck nevertheless had sufficient talent to secure an engagement on the first-part vaudeville bill during Stiffy and Mo's first season at the Princess Theatre in October of 1916. The quality of his ragtime singing and hard-shoe dancing (tap), led Australian Variety to note as early as his third week at the Princess that "[Ike Beck] works with much more assurance; as a dancer he is in the A1 class; and gets a big applause for his clever work."

In May 1917 Beck made an appearance in an unidentified motion picture directed by Jack Garvin. The film also featured Fred Bluett. Around the same time, possibly as early as April, he went into partnership with Sydney suburban entrepreneur Bert Howard. Beck and Howard's Vaudeville Enterprises presented combined vaudeville and picture programmes in Redfern, Mascot, Leichhardt, Burwood and Rozelle, with the business operating out of 9 Commercial Chambers, 80 Bathurst Street, Sydney. Beck's move into variety management one led Australian Variety to note as early as 16 May in the magazine's 16 May 1917, n. pag.

Ike Beck is a comparative newcomer to vaudeville... Amongst the sporting fraternity Beck has a big following, and is popular with all. His taste for good dress is well-known, and he has often been referred to as "The Fashion Plate." As a vaudeville manager, he already displays a wide knowledge of what is needed, and as he is not afraid to invest capital in his various ventures there is every reason to believe that he will be eminently successful (n. pag).
Despite its promise, the Howard/Beck partnership was short-lived. It seems that the two men found they could no longer work together (perhaps in response to their vastly different natures), and amicably severed their relationship around September 1917. Beck is known to have been engaged by Howard on the latter's Sydney circuit in 1919, which further suggests that there was little animosity between them.

Following his split with Howard, Beck immediately set up his own Sydney circuit, with the principal venue being the Redfern Picture Gardens. Despite being relatively new to the variety business he still managed to engage some respectable names for his newly formed circuit, including Arthur Tauchert, Alf Edwards, Louie Duggan, Ted Tutty, Joe Charles and Emily Dani, and Kitche and Kliffie. He was even accorded his own poem, "A Week Around the Suburbs with Ike Beck" by Presto. Shortly after starting his new venture (and while still continuing to run the Picture Palace), Beck made a move to extend his operations to the Newcastle area soon afterwards. Australian Variety records: "Ike Beck is a very busy man nowanights, particularly as he is extending his circuit to the Newcastle suburbs. In the meantime, the Redfern Picture Palace is the big draw for the pay-roll, and the other of Beck houses also report excellent business."

Now known as Ike Beck's Vaudeville Enterprises (and still run out of the same Bathurst street office), by the end of the year he was reportedly doing "remarkably well around the Newcastle districts." Ike Beck is enjoying a spell in town prior to re-opening around the suburbs," wrote one industry commentator. "In the meantime his combination at Newcastle and the outlying districts is doing particularly fine, and Ike may now claim to have established a permanent circuit of houses there. Nobody is more deserving than this small-time manager, whose energy, perseverance and obliging manner is gradually bringing him to the fore." Beck maintained his presence in the Hunter area until April 1918, at which time he sold his interests and undertook a tour of Queensland with a troupe that included Arthur Tauchert, Little Sadie (Gale), and the Coleman Sisters. After the tour ended he returned once more to performing, finding engagements with several Sydney-based companies over the next year or so, including Harry Clay.

It would appear that Beck was not content to remain a performer for long. By early 1919 he was once again operating a variety circuit, with Australian Variety reporting: "The artists who have just returned from the Ike Beck Circuit speak in glowing terms of the manner in which Ike treats them. 'One of the most comfortable and pleasant two weeks engagements I have ever had,' says Chady. A little bird off Jim White's hat tells us that Ike has started a No Three banking account. Well, Bo, you tried hard, and like Sir Robert Bruce, it looks as if you have won. Perseverance, ability and honesty of 'purpose' must win in the long run. Good luck"

Sometime around mid-1919 Beck once again returned to the Newcastle and Hunter area, and by August had a second company touring Northern New South Wales, including the towns of Werris Creek, Tamworth, Murrurundi, Narrabri, Gunnedah and Boggabri. His expansion also saw him running two companies in the Hunter by the end of the year, some of the artists on his books being Gale and Sadie, Porky Kearns, Shipp and Gaffney, Joe Archer and the Coleman Sisters. He appears to have maintained a regular presence in both northern New South Wales and Queensland over the next couple of years.

In March of 1922 Harry Clay took control of Beck's Hunter operations, including the towns of Cessnock, Wallsend, West Wallsend and Maitland. Beck returned to the Hunter in April the following year, sending his companies through the district until November, at which time he once again relinquished the circuit - this time to E. Tighe (Tighe's Theatres Ltd).

Beck movements in 1924 have not yet been accounted for, apart from his appearance in the Raymond Longford film Fishers Ghost. His name has next been identified in relation to a season at the Windsor School of Arts (NSW) in late January 1925. The company, once again billed as Ike Beck's All-Star Vaudeville Company included Cass Mahomet ("The Indian Digger"), Lily Coburn (comedienne), Olive Wallace (singer/dancer), Frieda Hollis (contortionist) and Beck himself. Reports of the company's movements and reviews indicate that it was mostly staging shows around the

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6 Originally published in Australian Variety (Sydney) 15 Aug. 1917, 8. A transcript is available in the Texts: Published section of the AVTA. Click on the "Poetry, Prose and Short Stories" PDF.
7 Australian Variety (Sydney) 16 Nov. 1917, n. pag.
8 Australian Variety (Sydney) 14 Dec. 1917, n. pag.
9 Australian Variety (Sydney) 8 Mar. 1918, n. pag.
10 Australian Variety (Sydney) 28 Mar. 1919, 9.
11 Australian Variety (Sydney) 3 Sept. 1920, n. pag.
Hunter Valley again, and up until at least October 1926. At that time he staged *Dick Whittington and His Cat* the Maitland Town Hall. Early the following year Beck took one of Harry Clay's troupes on tour through north-west New South Wales (ca. Feb/Mar.). One of the towns played was Moree (Memorial Hall, 3 Mar.). By October he was managing *Keith's Original Jazz Band* tour for Clay's Bridge Theatre Company.

No mention of Beck's movements in 1928 has yet been identified. His name next appears in print in relation to another tour by his own Vaudeville Company in late 1929. In the lead-up to the company's appearance at the Moree Memorial Hall, the local newspaper makes mention of the fact that he had been absent from that area for "many years." The company's line-up at that time included stalwarts Ted Tutty, Doris Tindall, Ward Lear and headliners the Cracknells (with their racing dogs and monkey jockeys).

Newspaper records relating to Ike Beck's career during the 1930s suggest that it continued along similar lines to his activities in the 1920s, with brief periods of entrepreneurial publicity alternating with little or no sign of activity. This does necessarily mean that his ventures ended when the advertising stopped, as Beck may not have needed to publicise his shows once a circuit had been established. Nevertheless, the frequent lapses in his career are intriguing. Following the 1929 north-west New South Wales tour, for example, Beck's name is absent from newspaper reportage until he organises a tour of the Hunter region for Robert Roberts' Smilestones Revusical Musical Revue Co. Advertising for the tour begins in mid-June and continues for around a month.

In January 1931 Beck presented George Lloyd's *Puss in Boots* pantomime at the Wollongong Town Hall (10 Jan.-), but then disappears from the public record until 22 November that year, at which time he appears at a benefit in Brisbane organised by the Judean Social Club. Among the other performers on the programme were Ike Delavale, the Lewola Bros, and members of George Sorlie's company (including Sam Stern and Addie Lake).

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12 Also known as Keith's Syncopating Jesters
13 *Moree Gwydir Examiner and General Advertiser* (NSW) 12 Sept. 1929, 2.
15 While a *Brisbane Courier* review of the 22 November benefit (23 Nov. 1931, 16) indicates that Beck was then a member of Ike Delavale's Theatre Royal company, his name has not yet been linked to it in any reviews or advertising.
Beck returned to the Hunter Valley in late 1932, opening a weekly circuit in October that comprised Cessnock, Kurri, Maitland, Wallsend, and Newcastle. Once again it is unclear how long Beck operated the circuit as advertising, and subsequently reviews and reports were no longer being published in local newspapers from late November onwards. His name has been connected next with the Frolics of 1933's engagement at the Camden Agricultural Hall on 22 July - this time as a performer only. Headed by juggler Clive Clivalli, the company also included George “Hermie” Ward, Elvie Stagpoole, and Harry Little. By September he was back in Sydney appearing in vaudeville at various suburbs, including Ryde and Guildford.

There is currently no record of Beck's career movements between October 1933 and November 1935, when he starts up another circuit around the Hunter valley region. In its 5 November edition, the *Cessnock Eagle and South Maitland Recorder* notes that the new circuit was to be opened with a company headed by one of the biggest names in Australian variety theatre:

> There is no one better known in the show business locally than Ike Beck. He has been visiting the coalfields with flesh and blood shows for many years and after giving the district a rest from vaudeville is making a return…
> The programme will include Roy Rene, the original Mo, and Sadie Gale. Others in the troupe include: Morrie Darling [sic], Lulla Fanning, Richie Brothers, Clive Cavilli [sic] and the Six Rosebuds (5).

The signing of Roy Rene, along with the other performers mentioned, indicates that Beck still maintained a considerable reputation as an entrepreneur within the broader industry, and certainly boosted his already considerable reputation with coalfields centres. The Rene tour was not unsurprisingly a hit with audiences, a matter reflected in several newspaper reviews. Advertising for Beck's Hunter valley shows continues through until mid-December, after which there is another gap of several years before his name reappears.

![Town Hall, West Maitland Saturday Next, December 14th Ike Beck Presents All-Star Vaudeville](image)


1938 saw Beck manage a tour by the Danish-American magician Dante (ca. May) and reacquaint himself with Newcastle vaudeville patrons (Sept.-Dec.). The latter venture, billed as Ike Beck's 1938 Show-Boat, was a Saturday evenings event staged aboard a boat that travelled through Newcastle via the Hunter River. Led by Pat Mahoney and comprising “Sydney’s Leading Artists” along with Ray Smith's Symphony Orchestra, the Show-Boat nights began in late September and continued through until late October. On 4 November Beck opened a nightly show at the Marquee Theatre in Union Street, Newcastle (next door to the Trades Hall). This time billed as Ike Beck's All Star Vaudeville and Revue, the company's debut line-up featured Ike Delavale, Lyla Thompson, Maggie Buckley and Buster Fiddes.

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16 *Camden News (NSW)* 20 July 1932, 3. Advert.
18 See for example advertisements published in *The Biz* (Fairfield NSW) 29 Sept. 1933, 8; and 13 Oct. 1933, 7.
19 Morrie Darling should be Morrie (or Maurice) Barling. Clive Cavelli (juggler) should be Clive Clevalli.
21 *Singleton Argus (NSW)* 27 May (1938), 7. Advert. Dante the Magician, aka Harry August Jansen (1883-1955), should not be confused with Oscar Eliason (1869-1899), aka Dante the Great, who toured Australia in 1898 and 1899.
It is not until 1940 that Beck’s name is again located, and this time in Queensland. An advertisement published in the *Queensland Times* records that his All-Star Vaudeville show was to open at the National Theatre in Booval on 31 May. On 9 August he opened in Brisbane at the Bohemia Theatre, the company then being billed as Ike Beck’s Follies of 1940. In December the following year Beck was in Melbourne playing the part of Skinnem in *Dick Whittington* (Princess Theatre). He appeared in pantomime again in 1944, having been engaged by Hal Lennon for *Aladdin* at Adelaide’s Tivoli Theatre (26 Dec. -). The cast was headed by Wong Toy Sun and Co. The following year he toured parts of Tasmania in *Mother Goose*. A critic writing for Burnie’s *Advocate* newspaper records that as the pantomime’s Baron he was “pleasing.” A few weeks later Beck appeared in *The Crazy Show* revue at Hobart’s Theatre Royal.

Ike Beck’s last known stage appearances were in Queensland in 1946, with his engagements occurring between April and July. Beginning 28 April he appeared as a special guest performer at the Ipswich Town Hall for a talent quest called *Stairway to Stardom*. The quest was carried out over several weeks and on 4 June he was one of several professional entertainers and selected performers from the talent series who took part in the first 4BH Stage and Radio Show. The event was broadcast live from the Ipswich Town Hall. In early July Beck, along with Wizardo, Jimmy Clarke, Rene Kelly, Jim O’Connor and the Singing Sunbeams, appeared at the Broadway in Brisbane’s Woolloongabba billed as Celebrity Vaudeville. The shows appear to have run between 3 and 6 July. No further records relating to Beck have yet been located.

**SEE ALSO**

• All-Star Vaudeville  
• Bert Howard  
• Clay’s Bridge Theatre Co

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**FURTHER REFERENCE**


**Australian Variety:**  
16 May 1917, n. pag. • 23 May 1917, n. pag. • 6 June 1917, n. pag. • 13 June 1917, n. pag. • 4 July 1917), n. pag. • 27 June 1917, n. pag. • 1 Aug. 1917, n. pag.

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23 In the interim Beck also helped entertain the Balmoral sub-branch of the Returned Services League as a member of Monty Bloom’s Concert Party (15 July). See "Concert Party." *Courier Mail* (Brisbane) 29 July 1940, 11. He helped Bloom out again in October at a concert on Stradbroke Island. See "Dunwich Concert." *Courier Mail* (Brisbane) 8 Oct. 1940, 12.

24 *News* (Adelaide) 22 Dec. 1944, 6. Advert

25 "Mother Goose Co. Well Received at Burnie." *Advocate* (Burnie, Tas) 10 Apr. 1945, 4.

Lithgow Mercury (NSW) 18 Sept. 1946, 3.

Queensland Times (Ipswich, Qld) 25 May 1946, 9.