

Tracking Your Vaudeville and Circus Ancestors

Program length: One hour

Optional: Combine this program with the one-hour “Vaudeville Retrospective” to create a custom two-hour presentation.

Description: This program provides attendees with both the background context and the most up-to-date tips needed to begin a successful search for Vaudeville and circus ancestors.

Today, some 80 years after the demise of Vaudeville, it is difficult to fathom just how large the industry was. At its peak in the mid-1920s, there were over 4,000 venues – including theatres, Grange halls, showboats, traveling tent shows, and Chautauqua meets. There were as many as 30,000-50,000 performers – big-time headliners, small-time theatre professionals, acknowledged geniuses, and minimally-talented hangers-on. And all of them are on *somebody’s* family tree!

Developments in the last two decades – especially the easy access to mountains of data via the Internet –



The Unknown Saxophonist – Might he be in *your* family tree?

has made tracking ancestors an easier task than ever before. However those peripatetic showbusiness ancestors present the same problems they always did: (1) they were always on the move, and likely to elude census enumerators; (2) many changed their names with casual abandon, using a “stage name” instead of their legal name; and (3) many maintained only sporadic contact with their more rooted “civilian” families.

In this program your presenter provides essential background context about the Vaudeville era (1880-1930), introduces basic genealogical ground-rules, and then dispenses tips, resources, and suggestions gleaned from his own experience as a Vaudeville historian, genealogical researcher, and museum professional.

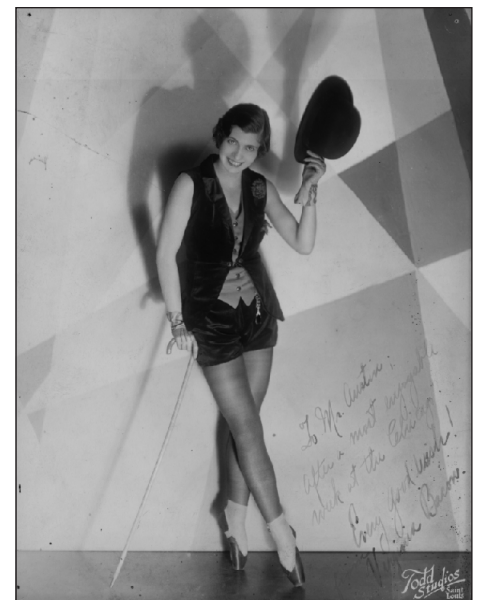
There are no guarantees, of course, that the information presented will lead everyone to a genealogical breakthrough with their family Vaudevillian, but with the growing number of newspapers being digitized and indexed, there is more hope than ever before for those hunting down those adventurous vaudeville and circus folks in the family.

About the Presenter: R.W. Bacon is an all-but-retired acrobatic juggler, jazz banjoist, and comic dancer – and a nowhere-near-retired historian and museum professional. His father was a sleight-of-hand magician, and later, and escape artist in the style of Houdini. His grandmother was a silent moviehouse pianist and music director. About 30 years ago his grandfather put him on the trail of cousin Fred Bacon, half of “Leroy & Appleton,” a highly-regarded comedy



“Leroy & Appleton” (also worked as “Bacon & Eggs”)
Frederick Leroy Bacon (1882-1958)
& Frederick Appleton Holden (1881-1927)

acrobatic team in the early 20th century. The surprising twists and turns of this personal family research comprise a captivating part of the program. ■



What about Virginia Bacon, creator of the “Toe Charleston”?