

OUR RELATIONS

By Janet Davis

Using HeritageQuest and online genealogy forums, we've traced the family tree of Oliver Hardy all the way back to his great-great-great grandfather, George Norvell. Taking one last step backwards, we'll now look at the father of George Norvell, Captain Hugh Norvell and the earliest records of the family in America.

His birthdate is uncertain, but was probably around 1665 in Virginia. He was a founding member and active vestryman at Bruton Church in Williamsburg in 1710, and in fact, the church remains active today (www.brutonparish.org). A plaque and pew commemorating the founders, including members of the Norvell family, can still be found in its sanctuary. Captain Norvell owned a large plantation near Williamsburg, married Sara in the 1690s, and served in the Colonial War. He died in Virginia in 1719.

The Norvell family had immigrated from Scotland in the early 1600s. Their plantation was destroyed by British soldiers during the Revolutionary War and the family subsequently moved to Georgia, where they remained through Oliver Hardy's birth and beyond.

We'll look in-depth at individual family members, and also outline Stan Laurel's history, in future columns.



BUSY BODIES

On an episode of an early 90's radio version of the improv game "Whose Line Is It Anyway", the host describes Grif Rhys Jones and his partner Mel Smith as "frequently compared to L&H and not always unfavorably."



BBC7 Radio ran a "what if..." competition that read as follows: "Loads of the great comedy acts used to perform summer seasons in Britain's seaside towns, usually at the end of some crumbling Victorian pier. That in turn started an argument - "alright then, if you had the whole of comedy history to choose from - individual performers, TV shows, radio highlights, anything... - who or what would you like to see on Ultimate End Of The Pier Show?" Only three items on the bill... One of the announced winners included the following on his three choices: "Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy - cos in the 50s they actually *did* come to Britain and find unexpected popularity and affection in the theatres who engaged 'em round the country. But for an accident of birth (I wasn't born til '59) I **could** have seen the Great Men **live**..."

- The week of July 15 the PBS "American Masters" series featured the life and work of director George Stevens. It referenced his early days as a cameraman at Hal Roach Studios filming, among others, Laurel and Hardy two-reelers. Included in the show was the story of how Stanley's pale blue eyes did not translate well to the stock film commonly at that time. It was Steven's suggestion to use panchromatic film that was said to have "saved" Stanley's motion picture career. Stevens also commented that until he knew Laurel and Hardy, he never knew comedy possessed such graceful humanity.

- A member of the L&H News group published several Film Daily movie reviews from the Boys' heyday. Here is a review of Chickens Come Home from FILM DAILY in 1930: "This is a Laurel and Hardy screamario that will rock 'em in their seats. This ace comedy team may have touched this one for all-round hilarity, but they've never topped it and they probably never will. The comedy situation is a natural, and these boys play it for all the laughs that are in it. Hardy is running for mayor, when an old flame turns up and starts to blackmail. He sends Laurel to the girl's apartment to keep her from visiting his home where he is giving a dinner to prominent people to boom his campaign. And when both their wives start to smell the dirt and mix in, with Hardy frantically trying to cover up, this comedy keeps hitting the Laugh-o-meter so steadily and heavy that you couldn't clock the laughter."

I think it's fun to see what contemporary critics thought of some of the material, so I'll print more reviews in the next newsletter.

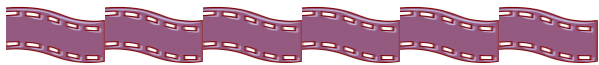
SURFING THE INTERNET WITH L&H



-From an article posted in the L&H News group: "Mobile phone content provider Funkimobiles has signed an exclusive distribution deal which gives it unlimited access to the fast-growing Chinese and Taiwanese markets 'We are bringing a different type of mobile content to the market - based on different art forms - from black and white silent screen classics such as Laurel and Hardy and Buster Keaton to contemporary artworks by both new and established artists.'"

- Shout Factory's 3-DVD set, "Groucho Marx: You Bet Your Life - TheBest Episodes," includes an episode with the SOD's Jim MacGeorge as a contestant. (This 1/30/58 episode is the one that features Phyllis Diller as another contestant.) A couple years prior to Jim making a name for himself as an animation voice actor, and Chuck McCann's partner in their Laurel & Hardy act, Jim introduces himself as a storyman for Western Publishing comic books (Dell). He tells Groucho that he writes the comic books stories of Bugs Bunny, Tweety & Sylvester and Andy Panda. Those of you who sailed on the L&H Cruise several years ago will remember meeting and being entertained by McGeorge and McCann.

- Always happy to pass along sites that feature L&H merchandise. Check out a rather nifty online catalog of stuff: ties, mugs, postcards, shirts, pins at <http://members.aol.com/LnHMag/tshirts.htm>



CHICAGO TENT IN THE NEWS

Seeing your name in print is always a rush, but when the Sons capture a feature in a major metropolitan newspaper, that's great news. I realized that we have so many new members,

they may not be aware of what a rich history the Sons has. This article captures it pretty well. Here are some excerpts from a July feature about the Sons in the Chicago area:

ANOTHER FINE MESS

Before Jackie Gleason and Art Carney, before Ben Stiller and Owen Wilson, there were Laurel and Hardy

By Donald Liebenson

IN THE COZY BANQUET ROOM of an Italian restaurant in Elk Grove Village, an annual dinner is about to commence. Present are nearly 30 minds with but a single thought: Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy.

Some of those in attendance are wearing conventioner fezzes. Others peer from beneath old-fashioned black bowlers that were the trademark of "the Boys," as the Hollywood icons are known to the fans of their timeless comedy. Some of the sportier wear Hawaiian shirts. All were given leis at the door....

They are the Sons of the Desert, and they're having the time of their lives. THE SONS OF THE DESERT is the official, worldwide Laurel and Hardy appreciation society, named for one of the duo's most memorable films. The Chicago chapter is called the Bacon Grabbers, also the title of a Laurel and Hardy film, a silent they made in 1929. Individual chapters of the Sons of the Desert are called "tents," and there are an estimated 200 or more tents with 2,500 members throughout the world. Each is named after a Laurel and Hardy film (some tents share the same name) and each, according to the organization's irreverent constitution, is "devoted to the loving study of the persons and films of Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy. ..."

They made more than 100 films together, including "Sons of the Desert" in 1933. ... This year marks the Sons of the Desert's 40th anniversary. The group's founder, John McCabe, struck up a friendship with Laurel in 1953 after seeing the comedy team perform live in England, where McCabe was a student. McCabe went on to write the groundbreaking 1961 biography, "Mr. Laurel and Mr. Hardy." He even married Rosina Lawrence, Laurel and Hardy's co-star in the film "Way Out West." McCabe met her at the Sons' first international convention in 1978.

McCabe, now in his 80s, holds the honorary title of "Exhausted Ruler," a classic Laurel malapropism from "Sons of the Desert." Scanning Laurel's fan mail gave McCabe the idea to create

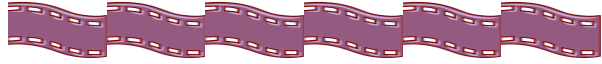
a real-life Sons of the Desert. The letters all "seemed to have an underlying theme," McCabe said in a phone interview from his home on Michigan's Mackinac Island. "His fans wished there was some way to honor Laurel and Hardy. There was nothing really to perpetuate their fame. I was determined I would have something much more than a fan club. It would be socially active and yet concerned with scholarship." His model was the Baker Street Irregulars, the Sherlock Holmes society, of which he had long been a member. "I suggested it to Stan. He thought it was marvelous, and even added to the organization's constitution."...

The city of Chicago and the Bacon Grabbers, founded in 1969, loom large in Sons of the Desert lore. In the film, Chicago is the location of the Sons of the Desert convention. As part of his ill-fated scheme to go, Hardy fakes a "severe nervous breakdown" and is supposedly sent off with Laurel to Hawaii-hence the fezzes and leis on certain Bacon Grabbers this evening....

Lee and Dee McBeath from suburban Bartlett... have been married for 32 years. Oddly enough, they are not members of the Bacon Grabbers. In fact, Lee, 58, says, "We stubbornly refuse to join." When asked why, he replies, tongue-in-cheek, "Have you seen them?" Instead, the McBeaths operate their very own two-person tent, Tree in a Test Tube, which hosted a Laurel and Hardy cruise in 1996.... What do the Sons of the Desert mean to Lee? "Fun, laughter, friendship," he replies, "which are all right there in Laurel and Hardy films. Notice Ollie always introduces Stan as 'My friend, Mr. Laurel.'"...

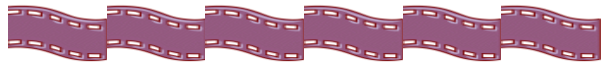
In a bygone era, when comedy was king, Laurel and Hardy were more than just a beloved comedy team. According to "Comedy Classics Reborn," an essay that author and critic Leonard Maltin recently posted on his Web site, "They were pop culture icons; they were imitated and caricatured, beloved by people who saw them for the first time in the 1920s and those like me who came along in the television era." But other than their iconic poster gracing Joey and Chandler's apartment wall on "Friends," Laurel and Hardy have fallen off the popular culture radar since their 1970s revival on college campuses and in art theaters ... So the Sons of the Desert must be vigilant.... As the evening comes to an end, the majority of the Bacon Grabbers go on their merry ways, back to a world without movie comedy teams, and where bodily-function gags have

replaced the pie fight. Lee McBeath, though, is a strict adherent to the Sons of the Desert's constitution. He lingers behind so he can make one final toast as decreed by Stan Laurel himself in Article VIII: "All members are requested to park their camels and hire a taxi; then return for 'One more for the desert!' "



FOUNDING TENT BANQUET

The New York Founding Tent will be holding it's 40th Anniversary Banquet on Friday, October 7, 2005, at THE PLAYERS on Gramercy Park. The entertainment for the evening will be VINCE GIORDANO and his NIGHTHAWKS. For further information go to the FOUNDING TENT Web Site: www.nyfounding.com



DUES RENEWAL

We will be collecting dues at the September meeting. For those who wish to renew by mail, the amount is \$20 and that covers your entire family.

2005-2006 Renewal

Name(s)

Address:

Phone:

E-mail:

Make check payable to Steve Rugh

Mail to:

63 Stable Ridge Road, Monroe, CT 06468

SEE YOU SEPTEMBER 3