



LILY  
BRANSCOMBE

**LILY  
BRANSCOMBE  
1878–1970**

NOTES ON A  
NEW ZEALAND  
MOVIE STAR

by

Ian St George



Lily Branscombe

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**Cover:** Lily Branscombe,  
*Motography* 14 September 1912.

## Chapter 1: Born in Carterton

Lily Branscombe was born Lillian Mabel Rodman in Carterton on 28 February 1878 to Mary Jane (Fenwick) Rodman and William Hedley Rodman. Her parents were married in 1875 and she was their third child after Hedley born in Christchurch in 1875 and Arthur Sydney in 1876. Four more children would be born in Australia: Charles Henry in 1881, Ethel in 1886, William in 1888 and Gladys in 1893.

We know little of her mother Mary Jane Fenwick. She died in 1924 and is buried in the Randwick Church of England cemetery (Section A Grave 137).

Her father William Hedley Rodman was the second son of Sarah Jane (Newton) Rodman and William Rodman, a Minister of the Wesleyan Chapel in St Ives, Cornwall.<sup>1</sup> He was born in 1857 at Swanage, Dorset. His father died in 1868 and in 1871 he was 15 and boarding at Kingswood, the College for Wesleyan Ministers' sons in Lansdowne Rd, Charlcombe, Somerset.<sup>2</sup>

The list of Kingswood old boys has his brothers Arthur Thomas Rodman 1865–9 “Became a soldier,” Edward Newton Rodman 1870–3, Sidney Rodman 1877–80, “Chemist” and William Headley Rodman 1865–71 “Went to sea;” a later entry has “now dramatic author”.<sup>3</sup>

He claimed to have come to New Zealand in 1873 as second mate of the fully rigged wooden ship *Cospatrick*, which had just been acquired as a cargo and emigrant ship by Shaw Savill & Co.; she sailed from London on 29 March, arrived at Lyttelton on 6 July and Port Chalmers on 14 July 1873, when Rodman would have been 17. The second mate on that voyage was a man named Charles Romaine, not William Rodman, who deserted at Port Chalmers on 24 August 1873.

It was a difficult voyage with many desertions and more than 20 deaths among “emigrant” passengers documented in the crew agreement and official log book (*pers. com.* David Bradley, Maritime History Archive, Memorial University of Newfoundland).

On her second voyage for New Zealand the *Cospatrick* would catch fire and founder 400 miles south of the Cape of Good Hope, with the loss of 469 lives. Three crew men survived, having eaten the livers and drunk the blood of their dead comrades. It is still, in terms of lost lives, New Zealand’s worst disaster.<sup>4</sup> The second mate on that voyage, Henry McDonald, was one of three survivors.

Rodman was still in Dunedin in 1875,

Yesterday afternoon an express driver named William H. Rodman was proceeding over Saddle Hill when his horse bolted and capsized the express, thereby causing a compound fracture to this unfortunate man’s left leg. He was removed to the Hospital last night, when he received every attention. Saddle Hill is becoming notorious for the number of accidents that have recently taken place in its locality.<sup>5</sup>

In 1877 he gave evidence at an inquest held at the Marquis of Normanby Hotel, Taratahi, into a fire at Haggerty’s store in Carterton.<sup>6</sup> Lily was born there in 1878, her birth later registered in Christchurch.

In 1879 the New Zealand *Police Gazette* carried this notice,

WILLIAM HEDLEY RODMAN is charged, on warrant issued by the Christchurch Bench, with failing to provide his wife and three children with adequate means of support, at Christchurch, since April last. Description: English, a clerk, but was formerly second mate of the ship “Cospatrick,” twenty-three years of age, 5 feet 10

inches high, dark-brown hair and moustache, cheeks shaved, active appearance; wore dark-tweed suit and hard black-felt hat. He is supposed to have gone to Dunedin.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps Mary Jane did as abused women do and withdrew her complaint, for shortly afterwards the warrant was cancelled,

THE warrant issued for the arrest of William Hedley Rodman, charged with failing to provide his wife and three children with adequate means of support, has been cancelled.<sup>8</sup>

On 27 May 1879 a Mrs Rodman and 3 children sailed on the S.S. *Hawea* from Wellington to Auckland.<sup>9</sup> I cannot find a record of their voyage to Australia, but the New South Wales Police *Gazette* of 19 January 1881 announced,

Sydney.—A warrant has been issued by the Water Police Bench, for the arrest of William Hedley Rodman, charged with unlawfully deserting his wife Mary Jane, of No. 70, Cumberland-street, leaving her without means of support. Rodman is about 25 years of age, 5 feet 8 or 9 inches high, slight build, dark hair and complexion, moustache, otherwise clean shaved, limbs slightly; dressed in blue serge suit and black Sydney hat with small rim; an Englishman; a newspaper reporter.<sup>10</sup>

The fracture in Dunedin must have left him a little lame.

The *Sydney Daily Telegraph* was disgusted,

A heartless case of wife-desertion on the part of a respectably-connected young man named Rodman was brought under the notice of the Water Police Court yesterday by Sergeant Higgins. He introduced to the bench a young wife and her three children (one an infant in arms) who had been left totally destitute by the father, who was supposed to have gone to Victoria, and against

whom a warrant had been issued. The two elder children, aged four and six respectively, and of winning and prepossessing appearance, were recommended by the bench to be sent to the Benevolent Asylum, where they will unfortunately have to herd with many juveniles of a very different type—the sweepings of the streets and the lowest purlieus.<sup>11</sup>

Indeed that year his sons Arthur and Hedley were in Randwick Asylum for Destitute Children. Hedley's entry reads, "Government. Brother of 'Arthur'. Received from Mother Mrs Mary Jane Rodman (c/o Mrs Joseph's—70 Cumberland St, Sydney.) Particulars:—Deserted by Father." Hedley was seven years old (Arthur would have been six); he was discharged on 10 November 1881,<sup>12</sup> presumably because his father had come home (indeed he and Mary Jane would have further children in 1881, 86, 88 and 93).

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1 1861 England census.

2 1871 England census.

3 The History of Kingswood School together with registers of Kingswood School and Woodhouse Grove School, and a list of masters, by three old boys. 1898.

[https://archive.org/stream/historykingswoo00schogoog/historykingswo00schogoog\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/historykingswoo00schogoog/historykingswo00schogoog_djvu.txt).

4 Clark C 2006. *Women and children last: the burning of the emigrant ship Cospatrick*. Otago University Press.

5 *Otago Daily Times* 1 May 1875.

6 *Wairarapa Standard* 17 March 1877.

7 *New Zealand Police Gazette* 1879. p191.

8 *New Zealand Police Gazette* 1879.

9 *New Zealand Times* 27 May 1879.

10 *New South Wales Police Gazette* 19 January 1881.

11 *Sydney Daily Telegraph* 19 January 1981.

12 Randwick Asylum for Destitute Children. NRS 13362 [3]; Reel 1867, Page 370, Number 3773.

## Chapter 2: The Child Prodigy

On 2 December 1880 the Launceston Examiner carried a story under the head STACEY’S PANORAMA,

This panorama opened at the Oddfellows Hall last night to a small audience. The entertainment comprises an excellent series of views of Tasmanian, Victorian, New South Wales, and New Zealand scenery, painted in Hobart Town some five years ago by Mr J. Fry, scenic artist. The paintings are really first-class views of what they represent, and reflect great credit upon the artist. In addition to the panorama itself there is a ventriloquist of average merit (Mr Corbett), a lady and a gentleman vocalist (Miss Sheridan and Mr Dean), and little Miss Lillie, daughter of the owner of the panorama, who astonishes her hearers by the clever manner in which she renders character songs. Master E. A. Stacey is the pianist. The lecturer is Mr Stacey himself....<sup>1</sup>

This was Lillie Sheridan, last heard of as a nine year old in 1882. When Lillie Rodman’s father took her into a show business career he would mount variety shows with “Little Lillie,” a ventriloquist, singers, a panorama—and, for a time in 1883 “Miss Aveline Stacey, in her Comic Songs.”

In 1883 WH Rodman had joined fellow Cornish migrants in the copper mining town of Kadina, Yorke peninsula, South Australia.

The Copper Coast towns of Kadina, Moonta and Wallaroo are collectively known as Australia’s Little Cornwall, due to the large settlement of Cornish copper miners who lived in the region after copper was discovered near Kadina in 1859.<sup>2</sup>

The *Wallaroo Times* of 24 January 1883 carried an advertisement for a Grand Entertainment to be held at the Oddfellows' Hall in Kadina in aid of the Kadina Institute Building Fund. It was organised by Mr WH Rodman and among the performers was to be a recitation of the "Charge of the Light Brigade" by "Lillie Rodman, aged 4 years."<sup>3</sup>

It was the beginning of Lily's stage career. The *Wallaroo Times* was ecstatic,

In the matter of amateur entertainments the people of Kadina have always been foremost on the Peninsula. For years past at regular intervals a number of young men have spent both time and money in the inauguration of entertainments for some worthy object, scores of pounds have been spent in the preparation of scenery, while the money raised has reached hundreds. Hitherto, however, nothing with comedy has been attempted, but for some years past it has been known that a number of Lady and gentleman amateurs, led by Mr Rodman, a gentleman who has lately settled in Kadina, were preparing to give a representation of the Third Act of Hamlet, in aid of the funds of the Kadina Institute. The entertainment came off on Wednesday evening last, and although it was expected, under the able management of the gentleman referred to, something much superior to former efforts would be the result, but few anticipated such a thorough success as the affair turned out. As we mentioned in our last, Mr Rodman had painted some new scenes, and with the able assistance of Messrs Anson and other gentlemen who are ever ready at such times had prepared the stage so tastefully that it afforded pleasure even to regular play-goers! The following were the characters represented: Claudius, King of Denmark, Mr John Anthony; Hamlet, Mr W. A. H. Rodman; Polonius, Mr Anson; Horatio, Mr Joliff; Gertrude, Queen of Denmark,

Miss Sparkman; Ophelia, Miss Anson; Player King, Mr S. W. Haselgrove; Player Queen, Miss O. Fergusson; Guildenstern, Mr A. Fergusson; Rosencrantz, Mr W. Mardon; Lucianus, Master Keeling; Ghost, Mr Morey Rendell. Proper dresses were worn, and the whole of the performers exhibited a freedom which denoted a close study of their respective parts. It is only fair to say, however, Mr Rodman's Hamlet was such as at once placed that gentleman beyond the reach of ordinary amateurs; but while this was noticeable, instead of throwing others in the shade it was directed rather in the way of helping out weaker parts, and thus contributed much to the success of the whole. The King and Queen were both well placed, while Polonius would have done credit to any company. Horatio had little to do, but as usual, he did it well, Ophelia had by no means an easy task, and Miss Anson is deserving of praise for the representation, especially as it was her first appearance. We are bound to refer to the clear enunciation of Miss Fergusson, as the Player Queen. There was no hitch of any kind, not the slightest prompting being required throughout. The Wallaroo Mines String Band, with Mr S. Thomas as leader formed the orchestra, and added very much to the enjoyment of the evening. The second part of the entertainment was in the form of a concert, being opened by an overture, Nabucodonsor, by the Misses Gurner, which was played most artistically. The Kadina Choral Society followed with the Gipsy Chorus, which was loudly applauded. Mr W. H. Letheby was very successful with the Scout, but his best effort was The Prairie on Fire, the accompaniment, a most brilliant one, being played by Miss Nellie Gurner. Mrs Coltman and Mr Bews were encored in the duet, The Pilot Brave. The greatest hit of the evening, however, was the reciting of Tennyson's Charge of the Light Brigade, by Miss

**ODDFELLOWS' HALL  
KADINA.**

**A GRAND ENTERTAINMENT** will be given in the above Hall, on **WEDNESDAY EVENING, Jan. 24**, in aid of the Kadina Institute Building Fund.

**PROGRAMME.**  
**PART FIRST.**

When for the first time in Kadina will be presented, the Third Scene from Shakespeare's Great Tragedy

**HAMLET.**

The Characters will be sustained by Lady and Gentlemen Amateurs.  
The Scenery has all been renovated for this special occasion.  
Splendid and appropriate costumes have been obtained from Adelaide.

The Prologue, written for the occasion, by Mr W. H. Rodman, will be delivered by Mr D. Bees, J. P., Mayor of Wallaroo.  
Overture (Piano and String Band) L'Italiana in Algeria, Miss Opie and the String Band.

**INTERVAL OF TEN MINUTES.**

**PART SECOND.**

Overture—Nabuccodonosor, Miss and Nellie Gurner  
Glee—Gipsy Chorus, Kadina Choral Society.  
Solo—The Scout, Mr W. H. Lethaby.  
Duet—Pilot Brava, Mrs Coltman and Mr Bees.  
Recitation—Charge of the Light Brigade, Lillie Rodman, aged 4 years  
Glee—Carnivale Kadina Choral Society.  
Comic Song Mr T. G. Price.  
Solo and Invisible chorus—Time may steal the Rose, darling, Miss Gurner and Kadina Choral Society.  
Solo—Killarney Mrs Coltman.  
Glee—We rock away on the billows gay, Kadina Choral Society.  
Solo—"The Prairie on Fire", Mr Lethaby  
Solo and Invisible Chorus—Morning's Golden shere, Miss Sparkman and Kadina Choral Society.  
Comic Song—Mr T. G. Price.  
Solo and Invisible Chorus—We meet again, Mr S. Thomas and K. Choral Society

**GOD SAVE OUR QUEEN.**  
Doors open at 7.30, entertainment to commence at 8 o'clock.

**ADMISSION**—Front seats 2s; Back seats, 1s.

A Special Bus will leave Wallaroo at seven o'clock, returning from Kadina at the close of the entertainment.

**Remember—WEDNESDAY, Jan. 24.**

Lillie Rodman, a little dot, aged four years. The piece was given in a way that would have done credit to one of mature years, and she was vociferously encored, retiring amid a shower of floral offerings. The Carnivale by the Choral Society, was followed by a solo and invisible Chorus, Time may steal the roses, the solo being sustained by Miss Gurner. Mrs Coltman sang Killarney splendidly, and was loudly applauded at the conclusion of each verse. The Choral Society next sang We Rock away on the Billows Gay, after which Miss Sparkman with her usual success sang Memory's Golden Shore, an invisible chorus being supplied by the Choral Society. Mr Price fairly brought the house down in his fast changing characters impersonating the "Soldier" and the "Sailor." Mr Thomas

sang *We meet Again*, very nicely. The singing of the National Anthem brought the proceedings to a close. The hall was densely crowded throughout, and everyone seemed to be highly satisfied with the performance. The accompaniments were played by Miss Opie and Miss Nellie Gurner.<sup>4</sup>

It was such a success a second performance was mounted,

The energetic President of the Kadina Institute, P. W. Gurner, Esq., J.P., with a few others, seeing the success that had attended their efforts lost no time in arranging for a repetition before the dresses which were borrowed for the representation of *Hamlet* were returned.... the entertainment was repeated in the Oddfellows' Hall last night to another excellent house, every available seat being occupied, which says more in favor of the piece than could be said in a column of our space.... Certainly the thanks of the public are due to Mr Rodman, who has rendered an inestimable service, in proving that it is possible to carry out high class entertainments successfully with fairly good amateurs.... Little Lillie Rodman again electrified the audience with her rendering of the *Charge of the Light Brigade*, and on being encored sang *I'm Ninety-five*.<sup>5</sup>

The Kadina Institute Committee resolved to convey a special vote of thanks to Miss Opie, Mr Rodman and the other ladies and gentlemen....<sup>6</sup>

In April "Little Lillie Rodman (aged 4 years)" again recited *The Charge of the Light Brigade* at a concert for the Wallaroo Presbyterian church.<sup>7</sup> Rodman was in Kadina trying to set up a private school, the *Wallaroo Times* carrying a notice in each issue,

**KADINA COLLEGE.**

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**I**N consequence of the delay in the completion of Premises, the **OPENING** of the above will be **POSTPONED** until next quarter. In the meantime the undersigned would respectfully notify that he is prepared to receive a few pupils (Boys or Girls) for Private Lessons in any of the following Branches,—namely, Latin, French, Greek, Algebra, Euclid, Mathematics, Painting, Drawing, or Bookkeeping.

A few vacancies for night scholars.

For terms, &c., apply  
**W. A. H. RODMAN,**  
 Kadina.

But too few pupils were received, so six months after the success of the Grand Entertainment the *Wallaroo Times* announced,

Mr W. A. H. Rodman.—This gentleman whose name was brought prominently before our readers some short time ago in connection with the very successful representation of “Hamlet,” in Kadina, has resolved, on account of continued commercial reverses, to adopt the stage as a profession, and in pursuance thereof will shortly appear, in conjunction with Mr M. Mitchell, who is favourably known in the district as a ventriloquist of more than ordinary ability. His debut will be made in Kadina, when, in addition to numerous Shakesperian and humorous representations, a portion of “Hamlet” will be produced with the same appointments and scenery as upon the former occasion. Little Lillie Rodman will assist in the performance. After visiting Wallaroo, Moonta and Snowtown, it is that gentleman’s intention to travel under the stage nom-de-plume of Wilford Branscombe, through the principal towns of the colony.

We feel sure that the very favorable impression created by Mr Rodnan in the part of Hamlet alone will secure good houses for himself and partner in the towns where they are known. Mr Mitchell, too, is well known in the north, so that between the two there seems little fear of their having much trouble in establishing a good reputation throughout the colony.<sup>8</sup>

Wilford Branscombe's first concert was held in the Kadina Oddfellows' Hall on 18 July 1883. Lily's repertoire had increased and she shared top billing with her father (who interpreted "Hamlet, Prince of Denmark" and gave impersonations of "People we Meet"); "Mr M Mitchell, Prince of Ventriloquists" rounded out the programme.<sup>9</sup>

The *Times*,

That little wonder, Lillie, "the child elocutionist" is most certainly justly named, for, although suffering from a severe cold, her rendering of "The Collier's Dying Child" would have done credit to any adult elocutionist.<sup>10</sup>

Little Lillie, the Child Elocutionist, astonished some of the good folks of Wallaroo by her finished elocutionary selection and was particularly effective in "The Bridge of Sighs".<sup>11</sup>

The troupe would play in Moonta and thence to the lower towns of the peninsula. Moonta's *Yorke Peninsula Advertiser* reported a "fair house. Little Lillie was much admired."<sup>12</sup>

For the 6 October event at Booyoolee Wilfred Branscombe was supported by "Little Lillie, the Child Elocutionist, the most Wonderful Infant prodigy living," along with "Mr Nichols, the great Comic Singer" and "Miss Aveline Stacey, in her Comic Songs."<sup>13</sup> The critic praised her father's work, but was not as happy with Lily,

**ODDFELLOWS' HALL**  
—KADINA—

**OPENING NIGHT.**  
THIS (WEDNESDAY) EVENING  
JULY 18.

**WILFORD BRANSCOMBE**  
IN HIS GREAT ENTERTAINMENT  
"PEOPLE WE MEET"

**For Four nights only.**  
WEDNESDAY, THURSDAY, SATURDAY  
AND MONDAY.

**LITTLE LILLIE (AGED 4 YEARS)**  
THE CHILD KLOCOTSBERRY.

In her finished recitations of the "Bridge  
of Sighs," "The Collier's Dying Child,"  
"The Charge of the Light Brigade," &c., &c.,  
**MR. M. MITCHELL,**  
PRINCE OF VENTRILOQUISTS,  
IN HIS "VOICES FROM SHADOW  
LAND."

**PROGRAMME**

PART I.

The Raven, ...	E. A. Poe
Clarence's Dream, ...	Shakespeare
The Bridge of Sighs, ...	Hood
The Rattle of Fustiness, ...	Davis
Hamlet on a future state, ...	Shakespeare
Hamlet on the emotion of the Player, Shakespeare	
Henry V. before Harfleur, ...	Shakespeare

**LITTLE LILLIE.**

The Collier's Dying Child, ... Varner  
The Charge of the Light Brigade, ... Tennyson  
To conclude with the last scene from the  
Third Act of Hamlet.

INTERVAL OF TEN MINUTES.

PART II.

**HUMOROUS SKETCHES OF "PEOPLE  
WE MEET"**

Squire Bohernawa, in his after-dinner speech,  
Mr. Tarence O'Donnell (a jovial Irishman), in  
his amusing recitals. Mr. Good Fitzwater (the  
Lady Killer), with local song "La di Da."  
Mr. James Brown (the Crooked Trade-union)  
with song. "Muriety" (a member of the  
Foster), with song.

**MR. M. MITCHELL,**  
PRINCE OF VENTRILOQUISTS,  
IN HIS "VOICES FROM SHADOW  
LAND."

In which he will introduce no less than  
Seven distinctly different voices without the  
aid of Puppets.

As a genuine Ventriloquial Exhibition this  
performance has never been excelled.

The Entertainment will close with the  
amusing dialogue between  
**TIM O'BRIEN AND THE NEW CHUM.**  
Doors Open at half-past Seven o'clock.  
Entertainment to commence at Eight.

ADMISSION—Front Seats, 2s; back  
seats, 1s.

**V. LANE,**  
Business Manager

The child elocutionist, a little girl of 4½ years of age, gave some of the most difficult recitations in a remarkably clever manner. It seemed to us a little hard to place the girl in such a position. She was quite unfitted to appear before the public, suffering severely from a cold, but no one could help admiring her efforts. She attempted, while giving the "Charge of the Light Brigade," to infuse into it force and expression; and this, with the childhood lisp, which she has not yet lost, was too much for the little girl. In the other pieces "Collier's Dying Child," and "The Bridge of Sighs" she was very good.<sup>14</sup>

The other Little Lillie (Sheridan) was playing in Queensland.<sup>15</sup> Branscombe's troupe moved on to Port Augusta, now joined by Fred Rollin, Miss Evelte Stacey and Cecil Montague.<sup>16</sup>

**Institute Hall, Port Augusta.**  
**FOR TWO NIGHTS ONLY,**  
 This (Tuesday) and Wednesday Evening.  


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**WILFORD BRANSCOMBE**  
 IN HIS  
**GREAT ENTERTAINMENT,**  
 "PEOPLE WE MEET,"  
 ARRANGED BY  
**LITTLE LILLIE,**  
 The Child Elocutionist, Mimic and Comic  
 Vocalist. The Greatest Infant Prodigy living.  
**FRED ROLLIN,**  
 Negro, Dutch, and Irish Character delineator  
**MISS EVELYN STACEY,**  
 Versatile Actress, and  
**CECIL MONTGAGUE,**  
 Pianist and Covered Keyboard Executionist.  
 Production of Shakespearian Representations.  
 See Handbills.  
**Quorn: Friday and Saturday.**  
 On Wednesday a Prize will be given for the  
 best Comedrum on the Friendly Societies'  
 New Hall.

Fred Rollin is a mysterious but important figure in this story. The first we can find of him is in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 10 November 1880 where an advertisement reads "FOR SALE. A thoroughly-established News Agency and Hairdressing BUSINESS. For particulars apply to FRED ROLLIN, News Agent, Bourke, N.S.W." Presumably there was no buyer, for from then on the *Australian Town and Country Journal* advertised each week that Fred Rollin was its Bourke agent—the last time on 14 January 1882.

At Port Augusta in October 1883,

Little Lilly, for her comic impersonations and reciting different parts, gained great favour and had to respond to several encores.<sup>17</sup>

... Little Lillie, of whose powers we have already spoken in terms of the highest praise, created quite a furore with

her reciting and singing. La-de-da, sung by a child of four-and-a-half, was irresistibly comic.... Great praise is due to Mr Fred Rollin, whose gentlemanly, and we might add finished style, in everything he undertook, won for him hearty and well-merited applause.<sup>18</sup>

The recitations and songs of "Little Lillie" seemed to please the audience greatly.<sup>19</sup>

At Melrose in November, "Mr Branscombe and Little Lillie, the juvenile elocutionist, were much appreciated. Mr Rollin, the pianist, also came in for a meed of applause."<sup>20</sup> At Jamestown later in the month,

That astonishing infant prodigy, "Little Lillie," is in herself sufficient to attract a good house, for her finished elocutionary renditions are almost beyond belief, and considering her tender years (4½) in our opinion her style and clear articulation provide a good example for many professed adult reciters.<sup>21</sup>

On 23 November Little Lillie Branscombe recited the Charge of the Light Brigade at Adelaide's Theatre Royal in a farewell benefit for actor HR Walton. The critic tut-tutted,

At the conclusion of the piece Miss Lillie Branscombe, who is stated to be only 4½ years old, recited "The Charge of the Light Brigade." The poem was given cleverly, and it was evident that the child had been well tutored, but any right-thinking person must have protested against the performance of so young a girl in such a place. The recitation was encored; and in response Hood's "Bridge of sighs" was given.<sup>22</sup>

The *Adelaide Observer* pulled no punches,

On Friday evening of last week at Mr. Walton's benefit "The Charge of the Light Brigade" and "The Bridge of Sighs" were given by "Little Lillie Branscombe," a child

of four or five years of age. The recitations were done as well as they could be by a child of that age, but it is time that these infant prodigies were banished from the stage. It was revolting, and seemed positively wicked, to permit the tiny creature to commence life under such surroundings. Instead of her little bed the theatre, and in place of a mother's lullaby the applause of gallery boys; while the baby lips lisping in childish accents words ringing of war, or breathing of sin and shame, of which the speaker could know nothing, sounded "like sweet bells jangled, out of tune, and harsh." Juvenile precocity in the drawing-room is bad enough, but when it blooms upon the stage there can be but one opinion of the taste which permits it.<sup>23</sup>

The *Mount Barker and Onkaparinga and Gumeracha Advertiser* reviewed her performance, avoiding the city paper's moralising,

BRANSCOMBE.—On Tuesday evening last we had the pleasure of listening to some of Miss Lillie Branscombe's recitations. This young lady is not yet five years old, and the proficiency which she has attained as an elocutionist is really surprising. Her repertoire includes many well known pieces, and we are informed that she is equally successful in each. We can, however, only speak of the selection which she delivered on the occasion above mentioned. The somewhat hackneyed poem descriptive of "The Charge of the Light Brigade" was the piece chosen, and the little reciter rendered it with wonderful vigor and feeling. She entered thoroughly into the spirit of the poem and showed a skill in action and expression which would do credit to a much older person. As will be seen by advertisement elsewhere, little Lillie will appear in conjunction with her father at an entertainment which is to be held in the

Institute Hall, on Saturday night, and we advise all those who are interested in youthful prodigies to go and hear her.<sup>24</sup>

Lily was becoming the chief attraction of the Branscombe troupe. The *Wallaroo Times*,

It is evident that Mr Wilford Branscombe, since his departure from Kadina, has not succeeded in taking the world by storm.... Little Lillie Branscombe—who is a truly wonderful four-year-old—redeemed the entertainment from the common-place by the tasteful and effective manner in which she recited and sang.<sup>25</sup>

In the 1884 new year they were in Portland, Victoria, where, renamed,

On Saturday afternoon there was a matinée performance in the Masonic Hall by the Branscombe-Oscar Variety Company, for the benefit of little Lilly, and a second performance in the evening. Neither entertainment was attended as it should have been. The company left on Sunday morning for Belfast by coach.<sup>26</sup>

The comedian WM Oscar had top billing, Lily third and Branscombe himself fourth: 14 January,

**LOOK OUT FOR OUR FIRST NIGHT  
IN SALE.**

**PROF. W. M. OSCAR,**

**T**HE Greatest Prestidigi-Comedian in the world, in his marvels of modern magic and supernatural Mystery.

Assisted by **MISS NELLIE OSCAR,**  
America's premier serio-comic vocalist and  
soubrette actress.

**LITTLE LILLIE,** aged 4½ years, the  
Child Elocutionist, in her marvellous in-  
terpretations of the poets, pronounced by  
the Press to be the Greatest Living Infantile  
Protigy in the World (must be seen to be  
believed).

**MR. WILFRED BRANSCOMBE** the In-  
imitable Impersonator and Elocutionist.

**MISS GRACE OSCAR** will also appear in  
her choice select ballads.

**MR. THOMAS HILLIAR,** the Greatest  
Scotch C median, just arrived from America.

Also **MR. FREDERICK OSCAR,** in his  
great and original act entitled the Diamond-  
Eyed Kaffir.

The above Artists will positively appear.  
For further particulars and programme  
see small bills. Prices as usual. Commence  
at 8 p.m. sharp.

The arrangements seem not to have lasted long: on 18 January the local paper called them Oscar's troupe—and Lily "Miss Oscar."<sup>28</sup>

**W. M. OSCAR,**  
 Assisted by  
**MISS NELLIE OSCAR,**  
**T. G. OSCAR,**  
**LITTLE LILLIE,**  
 And  
**FRED. ROLLINS,**  
 Will positively appear at  
 at STRATFORD TO-NIGHT, Friday,  
 Jan. 18th,  
 at MAFFRA, TO-MORROW, Saturday,  
 Jan. 19th.

**PAYNE'S ROYAL ASSEMBLY**  
**HALL,**  
 Grand Opening Night,  
**THURSDAY, JANUARY 31.**  
**Oscar Transatlantic**  
**NOVELTY COMPANY.**

**EVERYTHING** entirely new. Something of everything. Ventriloquism, Magic, English, Irish, Scotch, Dutch and Negro Delineations. Choice selections from Shakespear and other plays.

**Little Lillie,**  
 Aged 4½ years,  
**THE CHILD ELOCUTIONIST,**  
**MIMIC AND COMIC VOCALIST,**  
 Acknowledged to be the most wonderful Infant Prodigy in the World.

Miss **NELLIE OSCAR**    **WM. GOULLY**  
**W. M. OSCAR**        **T. G. OSCAR**  
**W. DRANSCOMBE**    **FRED. ROLLIN**  
**CECIL MONTAGUE.**

Admission, 3s and 2s.

Mr W. M. Oscar's troupe gave a performance in the Mechanics' Hall, Traralgon, on Wednesday evening. The room was fairly filled and the vocalists and ventriloquist kept the audience in a mirthful state during the evening. The performance of the child, Miss Oscar, was really good.<sup>29</sup>

They played in the Shire Hall at Maffra on 19 January,<sup>30</sup> when,

... the recitation of "Little Jim" by that wonderful little child Lillie, were in themselves,

independent of the other parts of the performance, well worth the money paid at the door.... The songs, in character, "Lardy da," and "Not Before Pa," by Little

Lillie, were something extraordinary for such a mite of a child.<sup>31</sup>

At Bairnsdale they had become the Oscar Transatlantic Novelty Company and Little Lillie had top billing. Branscombe and Fred Rollin were back,<sup>32</sup>

At Walhalla on 25 and 26 January they were “The Oscar Company” with Little Lillie, Fred Rollin and Wilford Branscombe. four Oscars and others.<sup>33</sup> The *Gippsland Times* of 30 January was there,

The Oscar troupe appeared last night at the Victoria Hall. The company is essentially a variety company, the programme being made up of singing, comic and sentimental, step dancing, ventriloquism, and comic sketches. Prof. W. Oscar displayed exceptional ability as a ventriloquial artist, and was received with rounds of applause. Miss Lillie Oscar, aged four years and a half, though she certainly does not look so old, sang “La didah,” in splendid style, eliciting strong marks of approbation from the audience. She also recited the “Charge of the Light Brigade” in good style. We must however express our regret that a child of such tender years should be subjected to such a strain on her voice and strength, by having to sing and recite when she should be in her bed. Mr T. G. Oscar, in his comic songs was but fairly successful, though his exposition of the Scotch dialect was very good. Miss Nellie Oscar, as a serio-comic vocalist was not a success, but her efforts in the sentimental portion were good. Prof. Oscar’s manipulation of the bones was clever as was also his dancing. A farce entitled “Irish Justice,” was placed on the boards, and the manner in which the impromptu judge delayed the business of the court was as wearying to the audience as it appeared to be to the attorney-at-law who conducted the cases. Mr Rollins acted as

accompanist, but seemed unable to come to terms with the vocalists. He, however, sang one or two patriotic songs, which were well received. A laughable farce concluded the entertainment, which was somewhat of an improvement on “Irish Justice.” A change of programme is announced for this evening, when there should be a good attendance, as the ventriloquism of Professor Oscar, and the singing of Little Lillie are well worth hearing. The inimitable Joe Clues is also announced to render his assistance.<sup>34</sup>

The Oscar Transatlantic Company gave its final performance in Payne’s Royal Assembly Hall in Bairnsdale on 2 February, when Lily was “loudly applauded.”<sup>35</sup>

In March Lily was on Melbourne’s Victoria Hall stage, curiously enough to provide some variety at a show of paintings illustrating Mark Twain’s *The Innocents Abroad*.<sup>36</sup>

Further variety is given to the entertainment by the introduction of Miss Lily Branscombe, a child of five years of age, who exhibits remarkable precocity in elocution and vocalism....

Miss Lillie Branscombe, who is only five years of age, recited “The Charge of the Light Brigade” with such effect that the audience loudly called upon her for a second effort, when she sang a song very tastefully. She was a second time recalled.<sup>37</sup>

It seems to have been her last performance. Little Lillie (Lilly, Lily) Branscombe (Rodman), disappears from the public record, probably—one hopes—to go to school, until 1892.

Prof WM Oscar’s last mention in the Australian papers was in 1884.

“Mr WA Branscombe” recited “Charge of the Light Brigade” at a complimentary benefit tendered to Signor Pietro Canna in

Geelong in February 1885.<sup>38</sup> After that there is no trace in the Australian papers of William Hedley Rodman by any of his known aliases, apart from a single note in the *Adelaide News* of 12 March 1924, referring to Robert Raymond, a singer who “had been in this State previously with William Branscombe’s Dandies.”

Fred Rollin similarly disappeared; the next time he was mentioned was in the *Nepean Times* (Penrith, NSW) on 5 September 1891, in a new show—and with a new child prodigy and a new professor,

Miss Myra Carden’s magnet company are advertised to appear at Penrith on Friday night next, September 11. Everywhere this company have appeared, the press have been loud in their encomiums of the first-class entertainment offered. Accompanying the troupe is a wonderful child elocutionist, little Mabel, who is described by one of our exchanges as “a really wonderful child. Her efforts of elocution are very praiseworthy, the intonations and emphasis being almost faultless, whilst her gestulation is becoming apropos and graceful. All the other members of this talented company which include. Miss Myra Cardon, Miss Clara Williams, Messrs Lionel Lambert, Fred Rollin, Pat Flaherty, George Shannon and professor Nunn (who it will be remembered was here with the Bairnsfather family), are all highly spoken of and no doubt a great treat is in store for those who visit the Temperance Hall on Friday night next.<sup>39</sup>

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1 *Launceston Examiner* 2 December 1880.

2 <https://www.coppercoast.sa.gov.au/page.aspx?u=1777>

3 *Walloo Times* 24 January 1883.

4 *Walloo Times* 27 January 1883.

5 *Walloo Times* 31 January 1883.

6 *Walloo Times* 7 February 1883.

7 *Walloo Times* 18 April 1883.

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- 8 *Wallaroo Times* 23 June 1883.
  - 9 *Wallaroo Times* 18 July 1883.
  - 10 *Wallaroo Times* 21 July 1883.
  - 11 *Wallaroo Times* 4 August 1883.
  - 12 *Yorkes Peninsula Advertiser* 28 August 1883.
  - 13 *The Areas' Express* 3 October 1883.
  - 14 *The Areas' Express* 10 October 1883.
  - 15 *The Western Champion* 5 October 1883.
  - 16 *Port Augusta Dispatch and Flinders' Advertiser* 16 October 1883.
  - 17 *The South Australian Advertiser* 17 October 1883.
  - 18 *Port Augusta Dispatch and Flinders' Advertiser* 18 October 1883.
  - 19 *The Areas' Express* 24 October 1883.
  - 20 *Frearson's Monthly Illustrated Adelaide News* 1 November 1883.
  - 21 *Burra Record* 13 November 1883.
  - 22 *The Express and Telegraph* 24 November 1883.
  - 23 *Adelaide Observer* 1 December 1883.
  - 24 *The Mount Barker and Onkaparinga and Gumeracha Advertiser* 30 November 1883.
  - 25 *Wallaroo Times* 12 December 1883.
  - 26 *Portland Guardian* 3 January 1884.
  - 27 *Gippsland Times* 14 January 1884.
  - 28 *Gippsland Times* 18 January 1884.
  - 29 *Traralgon Record and Morwell, Mirboo, Toongabbie, Heyfield, Tyers and Callignee Advertiser* 18 January 1884.
  - 30 *The Maffra Spectator* 17 January 1884.
  - 31 *The Maffra Spectator* 21 January 1884.
  - 32 *Bairnsdale Advertiser and Tambo and Omeo Chronicle* 29 January 1884.
  - 33 *Gippsland Times* 25 January 1884.
  - 34 *Gippsland Times* 30 January 1884.
  - 35 *Bairnsdale Advertiser and Tambo and Omeo Chronicle* 5 February 1884.
  - 36 *The Lorgnette* 15 March 1884.
  - 37 *The Age* 17 March 1884.
  - 38 *Geelong Advertiser* 10 February 1885.
  - 39 *Nepean Times* 5 September 1891.

### Chapter 3: McLean's Young Australians' Shakesperian Comedy & Burlesque Company

On 15 June 1892 the Hobart *Mercury* announced,

THEATRE ROYAL. On Monday evening next a new company will open the Theatre Royal entitled McLean's Young Australians Shakesperian Comedy and Burlesque Company. Their *repertoire* will include tragedy, comedy, drama, and the burlesque with all the latest and most popular songs and dances. The amusements of the city having for the past few evenings been somewhat quiet it is anticipated that the new Company will receive a full share of public favour.<sup>1</sup>

#### MCLEAN'S YOUNG AUSTRALIANS.

Mr. E. McLean's company of Young Australians, who, after some months of private training, are seeking to introduce themselves to the theatre going public, gave their opening performance at the Theatre Royal last evening.... That this was a company of youthful performers—some of them fresh from school—seemed to be lost sight of by a number of gallery critics in the early part of the performance.... Miss Lillie Rodman gave one or two excellent character songs, for which she has a very considerable talent. Nothing could excel the unsophisticated presentation of the breezy little ditty which tells of "Selling up the 'appy 'ome," a composition in itself of much higher merit than either "The little peach" or "Ta-ra-ra." Miss Rodman also sang "Whistling," each verse being supplied with a whistling obbligato from the gods....<sup>2</sup>

The *Tasmanian News* thought "Miss Lillie Rodman was effective in her mimic selections."<sup>3</sup> Their next show was *Romeo and Juliet*, before the Governor and his wife, with the

Branscombe pianist Fred Rollin playing Capulet and Lily playing the nurse.<sup>4</sup>

Next stop Wellington, New Zealand in August,

McLean's "Young Australians" are announced to open at the Opera House on Friday, the 19th inst. The company arrived this week from Sydney, after having played a successful season in Tasmania. Mr McLean is well-known as a skilful instructor of juvenile performers, and will be remembered as having toured the Colony some twelve years ago with his "Juvenile Troubadours." The repertoire, as will be seen from the advertisement, is an extensive one. The opening piece will be a burlesque entitled "Selim and Zuleika," which has been specially arranged for the company, and introduces some of the very latest London successes in songs and dances.<sup>5</sup>

The *Wairarapa Daily Times* critic enjoyed the show,

#### MR. McLEAN'S YOUNG AUSTRALIANS.

This clever little company is now playing at the Opera House, Wellington, with marked success. The Company has made a palpable hit with the extravaganza of "Selim and Zuleika," presumably a travesty on Byron's "Bride of Abydos," although there is very little of the original skeleton left by the time the Young Australians have got through the evening. However, the Burlesque extravaganza, or what you please to name it, serves as well as anything else to introduce the company in their specialities. These specialities mainly consist of that class of entertainment known as "variety," and include some very clever skirt and step-dancing, some fooling of a most laughable description, and some really excellent singing. The local hits and topical songs are about the best of their kind that have ever been set before a Wellington audience. Nearly all the popular songs of

the day are sung by the Company during the course of the Burlesque, notably the now famous “Ta-ra-ra-Boom-de-ay,” which is sung and danced with great *vim* by the whole strength of the Company. For the original inane words of the song have been substituted a series of hits at our legislators which are productive of much amusement and nightly result in vociferous encores.

The Misses Bella Adair, Lillie Rodman, and Lydia Breakwell bear off the honours amongst the ladies, whilst Messrs Arthur Glyn and Frank Lynch are very amusing in their particular lines. Miss Adair is the possessor of a sweet and flexible soprano voice and sings with much taste and finish. Misses Rodman and Breakwell both sing and dance very pleasingly, and Messrs Glyn and Lynch (who by the way are rather old Australians, judging from appearances) keep matters alive by their comicalities. Altogether the whole performance is most creditable, and a very pleasant evening can be spent. There are, however, one or two items verging on vulgarity which might be omitted with advantage, notably that song by name, “So was mine, so was mine,”

At the conclusion of their Wellington season the company open in Masterton, which will be in September.<sup>6</sup>

A week later, a different programme,

McLean's Young Australian Company presented a change of programme at the Opera House last evening to a fair house. The first part consisted of a one-act drama, entitled “Not Guilty.” The plot turns on the fortunes of a young bank clerk, accused of a robbery, but who is eventually proved innocent. Miss Lillie Rodman was exceedingly successful in her impersonation of Samuel Lexicon, and showed herself to be a capable little actress.

Misses Adair and Breakwell also acted well. The other characters call for no special mention. The second portion of the programme consisted of the extravaganza "Patchwork." Miss Adair was in excellent voice, and received encores for her singing of "This is my Dream" and "Fiddle and I." Misses Rodman and Breakwell also contributed greatly to the success of the performance. Mr F. Lynch was very funny as Peter, and kept the audience well amused with his bye play. A number of songs and dances were given by other members of the company, the performance, taken altogether, being a very enjoyable one. The same programme will be repeated to-night.<sup>7</sup>

They were in Feilding in midseptember,<sup>8</sup> thence to Palmerston North,<sup>9</sup> Masterton,<sup>10</sup> Woodville (where they received nine encores for *Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay*), Dannevirke<sup>11</sup> and Waipawa, where there was competition from "Prof. Mason's company.... It never rains but it pours," complained the *Daily Telegraph's* Own Correspondent William Frederick Howlett.<sup>12</sup>

Then a return visit to Woodville,<sup>13</sup> Hastings on 1 October,<sup>14</sup> Napier, then a week starting 18 October 1892 in Gisborne,<sup>15</sup> where they ended their season with the drama *Struck Oil*—Lily acted the part of Dr Brown "in good style".<sup>16</sup>

They arrived in Auckland on the S.S. *Waihora* on 25 October<sup>17</sup> to begin a season at the Opera House on 17 November.<sup>18</sup> Both the *Star* and the *Herald* gave them glowing reviews, though the audiences were not large.

Late in November McLean's Young Australians left Auckland for Sydney, intending to tour in Queensland.<sup>19</sup> They played at Goulburn in December, without Lily Rodman or Fred Rollin.<sup>20</sup>

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- 1 *The Mercury* 15 June 1892.
  - 2 *The Mercury* 21 June 1892.
  - 3 *Tasmanian News* 21 June 1892.
  - 4 *The Mercury* 23 June 1892.
  - 5 *New Zealand Mail* 18 August 1892.
  - 6 *Wairarapa Daily Times* 25 August 1892.
  - 7 *New Zealand Times* 1 September 1892.
  - 8 *Feilding Star* 8 September 1892.
  - 9 *Manawatu Herald* 10 September 1892.
  - 10 *Wairarapa Daily Times* 19 September 1892.
  - 11 *Bush Advocate* 20 September 1892.
  - 12 *Daily Telegraph* 22 September 1892.
  - 13 *Woodville Examiner* 22 September 1892.
  - 14 *New Zealand Mail* 29 September 1892.
  - 15 *Poverty Bay Herald* 18 October 1892.
  - 16 *Poverty Bay Herald* 22 October 1892.
  - 17 *Auckland Star* 25 October 1892.
  - 18 *Auckland Star* 12 November 1892.
  - 19 *Observer* 26 November 1892.
  - 20 *Goulburn Evening Penny Post* 29 December 1892.

## Chapter 4: Fred and Lily in Woodville

In fact a few months later Lily and Fred reappeared on stage at charity events in Woodville—the first scheduled for 7 March 1893,<sup>1</sup> though Lily was “unavoidably absent”.<sup>2</sup> She performed at a concert in May,<sup>3</sup> then again in July (Mr EA Hagen in the chair) when she recited “Pretty Jean” and “established herself a great favourite with the audience by her clever recital;” Fred Rollin sang.<sup>4</sup>

Later in July at an event in aid of funds for the Bush Districts Rugby Union she sang “The ’appy ’ome” (“which was splendidly rendered by Miss Rodman, and she had to repeat the last verse”) and “England and Ireland’s Own” with Fred Rollin in a duet—which was encored.<sup>5</sup>

On New Year’s Eve 1893 she and Fred Rollin appeared in a Grand Gala Concert “tendered as a complimentary benefit to Mr F Rollin and Miss Rodman”; they appeared together in a comic operetta *Dutch Courtship* and she revived her part as Lexicon in the play *Not Guilty*.<sup>6</sup> Rollin was stage manager.<sup>7</sup> They sang and recited at a ball in Maharahara in April 1894<sup>8</sup> and at the opening of the new school there in May, when she delivered two pieces.<sup>9</sup>

She and Rollin received “hearty encores” for their performances at the annual concert and dance at Manga-atua in May<sup>10</sup> and she recited verses composed for the occasion by Woodville cabinetmaker RC Noedl at the opening of the Alexandra Hall in July,<sup>11</sup>

Success to the Alexandra Hall!  
 Old Woodville is advancing;  
 May many happy nights be spent  
 In music and in dancing.  
 Amusements cheer the saddest hearts,

And drive away dull feeling;  
 Then let our hearty cheers resound  
 Right from floor to ceiling.

Such enterprise deserves success;  
 Thanks to our old friend Sandel.  
 May we all live long to hear the songs  
 Of Offenbach and Handel.  
 Let's hope we'll have the chance to hear  
 The last named's great "Messiah"  
 For sacred music tends to raise  
 Our idle thoughts much higher.

Friend Thornton has surpassed himself—  
 The scenery is perfection;  
 See how the lake is shadowed  
 Beneath the sun's reflection.  
 It makes one think of paradise,  
 Or a world of sylvan wonders;  
 His artistic brush will never rest  
 Till he *produces thunder!*

May these seats be always well filled up,  
 May we never hear dissention;  
 May silence reign between th' applause—  
 For actors like attention.  
 Let's show good companies, one and all,  
 We can appreciate them:  
 But anything inferior—  
 Well, you all know how to treat them.

In September 1894 Lily Rodman read the connective narrative for the Woodville Methodist Sunday School's cantata<sup>12</sup> and recited "Papa's letter" at the Woodville Presbyterian Church soiree; Fred Rollin sang "Friends were saying goodbye."<sup>13</sup> Later in September she read "The Narrative" at the Methodist

Service of Song “with great pathos, and received the heartiest thanks for her services”.<sup>14</sup>

Lily competed in a ladies’ double skating race in September 1893<sup>15</sup> and in the Ladies’ Championship races in October (Mr F Rollin lap-keeper).<sup>16</sup> She was challenged to a skating race with “Master T. Reade” in Woodville in September 1894.

The floor is in good order and the distance (a mile) has been laid off in 24 laps. “Tommy” has to concede his fair opponent a start of  $1\frac{3}{4}$  laps, and as both are determined to win, an exhibition of fast skating is sure to reward those who patronise the Rink this evening.<sup>17</sup>

There was a splendid attendance at the skating rink last Wednesday evening to witness the mile race (on skates) between Miss Rodman and Master T. Read. Miss Rodman proved herself to be “Tommy’s” superior on skates, she winning easily.<sup>18</sup>

At the Foresters’ celebration in the Alexandra Hall on 12 December 1894 songs were given by several, including Miss Rodman and Mr Rollin. “A clever recitation of a scene at the wreck of the *Wairarapa* was also given by Miss Rodman.”<sup>19</sup> It was her last reported performance in Woodville.

A Miss Rodman sailed as a cabin passenger on the S.S. *Wakatipu* from Wellington to Sydney on 15 February 1895.<sup>20</sup>

Why was she in Woodville and why was Fred Rollin with her? Lily was fifteen. Rollin was at least thirty-five.

She was back on stage in Sydney in 1895.

But Fred Rollin stayed in New Zealand: his name appeared in the *Examiner* as a Woodville then a Hastings hairdresser between 1893 and 1898.

In August 1895 he made a “first appearance” as a comedian at the Criterion Theatre in Wellington with the Australian

Merrymakers and Living Pictures troupes.<sup>21</sup> It seems to have been his first and last.

He “supplied” the music at a dance at Stortford Lodge in Hastings in April 1898.<sup>22</sup>

A man named Fred Rollins died in Carlton Victoria in 1913.

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1 *Woodville Examiner* 1 March 1893.

2 *Woodville Examiner* 8 March 1893.

3 *Woodville Examiner* 22 May 1893.

4 *Woodville Examiner* 5 July 1893.

5 *Woodville Examiner* 24 July 1893.

6 *Woodville Examiner* 29 December 1893.

7 *Woodville Examiner* 3 January 1894.

8 *Woodville Examiner* 23 April 1894.

9 *Woodville Examiner* 4 May 1894.

10 *Woodville Examiner* 28 May 1894.

11 *Woodville Examiner* 16 July 1894.

12 *Woodville Examiner* 7 September 1894.

13 *Woodville Examiner* 14 September 1894.

14 *Woodville Examiner* 21 September 1894.

15 *Woodville Examiner* 15 September 1893.

16 *Woodville Examiner* 13 October 1893.

17 *Woodville Examiner* 26 September 1894.

18 *Woodville Examiner* 1 October 1894.

19 *Woodville Examiner* 14 December 1894.

20 *Evening Post* 15 February 1895.

21 *Evening Post* 16 August 1895.

22 *Hastings Standard* 27 April 1898.

## Chapter 5: On Tour with Maggie Moore

Lily Rodman played Kitty Kattleby with the mature actress Maggie Moore in the leading role in *Little Jack Sheppard* at Sydney's Theatre Royal in April 1895.<sup>1</sup> A young Auckland, Herbert Ashton, who had first appeared with the Maggie Moore Company in October 1893,<sup>2</sup> was still with the company.

“Bis” wrote a regular “Australian Stage Gossip” column for the Otago Witness and on 28 November 1895 included this,

Miss Lily Rodman (Polly Stanmore in “Little Jack Sheppard” with Maggie Moore’s company at Sydney Royal last April) has been engaged for McLean’s panto company. E. Leonard will also be a member. Miss Rodman was through Maoriland with McLean’s Young Australians in. ’92, when she played the following parts:—

Haroun ...	...in	“Selim	and	Zulieka”
Mr Dibbs	...	...	...	“The Three Hats”
Samuel Lexicon	...	...	...	“Not Guilty”
Betsy L.	...	...	...	“Patchwork”

“Maoriland, the variety pro’s graveyard.” — Fred Daveys.<sup>3</sup>

“Bis” gossiped in December,

Maud Fanning (Charley’s sister) and Lily Rodman have joined hands, and will do doubles with McLean’s panto company.<sup>4</sup>

There is no other record connecting Lily with Edward McLean’s Pantomime Company or McLean’s Gaiety Company, though he did list Miss Fanning and Mr Leonard among his artists.<sup>5</sup> She may have used a new name during this period, but anyway McLean’s company seems to have wound up after poor reviews in Goulburn in April 1896.<sup>6</sup>

Nor is there any record of Lily Rodman with Maggie Moore's company between 1895 and 1898, though it continued performing in different Australian cities through 1895–1898.

Her father had used the stage name Lily Branscombe for her in 1884 and she used it again after 15 March 1898—Lily Branscombe and Herbert Ashton were then among the artists in the Maggie Moore Company for its planned Australian tour.<sup>7</sup>

She was “well cast” as Aileen Kelly in *Mrs Quinn's twins* at Adelaide's Bijou Theatre in March 1898<sup>8</sup> and “played prettily” as Tacy Dodge in *The Prodigal Father* in April.<sup>9</sup>

Maggie Moore was Australia's most popular actress and an excited crowd greeted them on the Fremantle wharf when they disembarked from the S.S. *Rockton* in May. The Governor as patron and the Mayor of Perth would attend opening night.<sup>10</sup> They opened with *Struck Oil*, then *Meg the Castaway*, *Mrs Quinn's Twins*, *The Prodigal Father*, *Arrah-na-Pogue*, *Trilby Burlesque*. The reviews mention Lily, but she had little opportunity to shine in the minor roles she was given.

They played *The Prodigal Father* and *Hans the Boatman* at the Theatre Royal, Charters Towers in October.<sup>11</sup>

In November they opened with *The Prodigal Father* at Sydney's Theatre Royal, Lily (“Her first appearance here with this company”<sup>12</sup>) playing Tacey Dodge with “charm”. Their Sydney season continued with *Arrah-na-Pogue*. There was not even standing room for *Forty-Nine* at the Victoria Theatre in Newcastle on 26 December, so popular were Maggie Moore and her leading man, Dunedin born Harry Roberts;<sup>13</sup> a racehorse and a goldmine were named after her. Over a thousand assembled on the wharf to say goodbye.

The “Maggie Moore-Harry Roberts Company” returned from Newcastle to the Royal Theatre in Sydney and thence via

Hobart to New Zealand, planning to leave Auckland for San Francisco *en route* for England, where a long provincial tour was intended.<sup>14</sup>



Lily Branscombe in the *Coolgardie Pioneer* 10 September 1898

They disembarked the S.S. *Talune* at Bluff on 18 January 1899 and opened to a full house at Dunedin's Princess Theatre with *Tribby Burlesque* on the 21<sup>st</sup>. The *ODT* critic was very happy, adding,

The part of the Rev. Mr Bagot was allotted to Mr H. Ashton, who judiciously tempered the burlesque of that reverend gentleman with due moderation.... Miss L. Branscombe's Madame Vinard was an excellent performance, and may certainly be classed amongst the more successful features of the evening.<sup>15</sup>

The *Evening Star* was equally fulsome, remarking, "Miss L. Branscombe scored freely in the opportunity-yielding part of Madame Vinard...."<sup>16</sup>

They played *The Prodigal Father* next, *Mrs Quinn's Twins*, *Arrah-na-Pogue*, *The Golden Giant* ("Miss Lily Branscombe was a capital landlady"<sup>17</sup>), *Struck Oil*, *The Silence of Dean Maitland*. The Dunedin season was pronounced a marked success by all.

The company sailed on S.S. *Monowai* on 9 February and opened an eleven day season in Christchurch's Theatre Royal on the 11<sup>th</sup> with *Mrs Quinn's Twins*—reviewed with lukewarm comments in the *Star* of 13 February. They fared better in the following plays and embarked for Wellington on the S.S. *Rotomahana* on 27 February; they opened at the Opera House that evening before the Governor. Lily Branscombe played her usual minor roles, barely noticed by the critics. On 20 March the company sailed for Auckland, playing two nights at Gisborne *en route*.

They opened a twelve night Auckland season at the Opera House on 27 March, played three nights at New Plymouth from 20 April, Hawera, Wanganui, Palmerston North, Dannevirke, Waipawa, Napier, Hastings, back to Wanganui, three nights in Feilding, Masterton, back to Wellington, Hastings and Napier

again, then from Gisborne on the S.S. *Elingamite* back to Auckland. They played *A Prodigal Father* at the Miners' Union Hall in Thames on 14 July and at the Criterion Theatre in Paeroa on the 18<sup>th</sup>, then on to Waihi and Te Aroha.

On 7 August 1899 the Maggie Moore-HR Roberts company left Auckland on R.M.S. *Alameda* bound for San Francisco via Honolulu. Dunedin's *Evening Star* announced,

Miss Maggie Moore intends to play a three weeks' season in Honolulu, thence to the home of her girlhood—San Francisco—after which an extended tour of the States, and a visit to England. While abroad it is the intention of Miss Moore and Mr Roberts to secure novelties for the Australasian stage.<sup>18</sup>

Their advance bookings manager Joseph Fynney arranged a two week season in Honolulu.<sup>19</sup> They played *The Golden Giant* and “Mrs Boggs, the landlady of Gold Run hotel, was excellently presented by Miss Lily Branscombe,” said the *Hawaiian Star* of 6 September.

Maggie Moore had written *Struck Oil* and the role of Lizzie Stofel was universally judged to be perfectly made for her: reviews of her performance in that part were always enthusiastic. Lily Branscombe had played Lizzie Stofel when McLean's Young Australians toured New Zealand and in Honolulu she had her chance to play the role again in the Maggie Moore troupe. “Bis” wrote in the *Otago Witness*,

My word, it seems only yesterday since Lillian (then Lily Rodman) was a kiddy, playing Lizzie Stofel in “Struck Oil” with McLean's Young Australians (1892)... By the way, when the Moore-Roberts Company were at Honolulu, for three nights Lillian Branscombe played Lizzie Stofel, and played it so well that Maggie Moore fell on her neck and sobbed with delight.<sup>20</sup>

Maggie Moore and Harry Roberts did very well at Honolulu, where they played a four weeks season, in lieu of two, as originally intended. They then went on to San Francisco and were to open a new theatre at Portland, Oregon, on October 16<sup>th</sup>. The Portland season is to last 13 weeks, after which the company is to play provincial centres up to Vancouver. After a season in British Columbia, Miss Moore intends to try her fortune at a 'Frisco theatre.<sup>21</sup>

They had reached San Francisco on 22 September 1899 on the S.S. *Alameda* and were to open at Portland's new Metropolitan Opera House. Maggie Moore wrote to Sydney's *Referee* from Astoria, Oregon,

We commenced our American tour in Portland (Oregon), on October 22, opening at the Metropolitan Theatre, where we played a six weeks' season, closing on Dec. 2; opened again on the 3<sup>rd</sup> (the next night) at Cordray's Theatre for a season of two weeks, making eight weeks in Portland, where the company established themselves as warm favorites.

From Portland we went to Victoria, B.C., for one week, then to Seattle (Washington), for Christmas week, following on with New Westminster, one week; then Vancouver, B.C., one week.

In Vancouver we met several Australians, who gave us a warm and hearty welcome. It seemed like home again to see the "Union Jack" and hear "God Save the Queen" played after the close of the performance.... We were all sorry to leave Vancouver.

We returned to Seattle on the 10<sup>th</sup>, playing another week there. We have just finished five nights in Astoria, a funny little place built on the water.... We leave here this evening for Salem, Ore., where we play one week,

then return to Portland, where we play a return week at Cordray's Theatre....

After we finish Portland we play overland to Sacramento; then, later on, open in San Francisco or Los Angeles. It is not yet settled.

It will be some little time before we go East, as we want to play all California first. We have had rain for weeks, until at last we have become used to it.

We had dates arranged for Montana, Butte, but smallpox is prevalent there, so we had to cancel our dates.

We are all looking forward to Australia some day with new plays, and if we succeed, and make our tour of the world, why, I think they will be glad to see us, so don't forget to let them know about us once in a while. We never forget dear Australia. All the boys and girls in the company send best wishes....<sup>22</sup>

But when they opened in San Francisco with *The Silence of Dean Maitland* and it was a flop. Maggie Moore wrote to Sydney's *Sunday Times*,

Since writing you last, we have played San Francisco, and they didn't like us a little bit. We got what they call in this country a "roasting." Not only did one particular critic roast us, but we were burnt to a cinder—there wasn't enough fat left to sizzle us....

Have disbanded for the Summer, as nothing can be done outside of California during the warm months. Some of the company have taken engagements, and will continue playing.<sup>23</sup>

Moore blamed anti-British and anti-Australian sentiment fanned by pro-Boer sympathy, but the *New Zealand Mail* was more prosaic,

But surely there is a lot of bunkum about this argument.... No doubt- the real reason of the poor receipts was that... the company made their first appearance in that gloomy play “The Silence of Dean Maitland,” and played it with a scratch company.”<sup>24</sup>

Wellington’s *Evening Post* critic wrote,

The bitter sweets of adversity were apparently tasted to the full by the Maggie Moore-Harry Roberts Company during its ’Frisco tour. The company was an exceedingly weak one when it toured this colony, and it fell flat in the States, ultimately disbanding. Miss Moore has been “resting,” and Mr. Roberts joined one of Mr. Frawley’s companies. Concerning other members Mr. Joe Fynney, who acted as pilot, writes that they are now part of an Australian comedy company which he is running over the Canadian-Pacific, with “Sapho” as the mainstay of the repertoire. “I put on the paint myself nowadays, just to save a salary,” writes jovial Joe, who desires to be remembered to all old pals.<sup>25</sup>

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1 Sydney *Sunday Times* 7 April 1895.

2 Sydney *Daily Telegraph* 28 October 1893.

3 *Otago Witness* 28 November 1895.

4 *Otago Witness* 26 December 1895.

5 eg, Bathurst *National Advocate* 26 December 1895.

6 *Goulburn Evening Penny Post* 9 April 1896.

7 *West Australian* 15 March 1898.

8 *South Australian Register* 28 March 1898.

9 *Adelaide Advertiser* 4 April 1898.

10 *West Australian Sunday Times* 8 May 1898.

11 *The Northern Miner* 12 October 1898.

12 Sydney *Daily Telegraph* 7 November 1898.

13 Newcastle *Morning Herald and Miners’ Advocate* 27 December 1898.

14 *New Zealand Mail* 8 December 1898.

15 *Otago Daily Times* 23 January 1899.

16 *Evening Star* 23 January 1899.

- 
- 17 *Otago Daily Times* 1 February 1899.
  - 18 *Evening Star* 12 August 1899.
  - 19 *Otago Witness* 12 October 1899.
  - 20 *Otago Witness* 24 October 1900.
  - 21 *New Zealand Mail* 23 November 1899.
  - 22 *Referee* 7 Mar 1900.
  - 23 *Sunday Times* 20 May 1900.
  - 24 *New Zealand Mail* 7 June 1900.
  - 25 *Evening Post* 18 August 1900.

## Chapter 6: On the American Stage

In 22 September 1900 Wellington's *Evening Post*,

A recent San Francisco paper announces the marriage of Mr. Herbert Ashton to Miss Lillian Branscombe. They are now members of the Frawley Company, playing at San Francisco. "Cupid has," the paper referred to says, "certainly been kind to the young and happy couple, as they have been in the same dramatic companies together both in Australia and here for the past three years." They left Australia with the Maggie Moore Company.<sup>1</sup>

Lilian Branscombe, who toured this colony with Maggie Moore, whom she accompanied to the States, is playing a Japanese girl in "Sappho" at the Grand Opera House, 'Frisco, under Frawley's management.<sup>2</sup>

*Sapho* was a 1900 American play by Clyde Fitch, based on an 1884 French novel of the same name by Alphonse Daudet and an 1885 play by Daudet and Adolphe Belot. It was at the centre of a sensational New York City indecency trial. The play was not an exceptional success but the incident is considered a notable step in the transformation of American society's attitudes regarding gender roles and public depictions of sex in the 20th century.<sup>3</sup>

Lily Branscombe's name appears in American newspaper reports over the next few years. She and Herbert Ashton were in the Frawley Stock Company that played *Secret Service* at Emporia<sup>4</sup> and Ottawa,<sup>5</sup> Kansas in December 1901, Topeka ("Lily Branscombe left little to be desired")<sup>6</sup> and Minneapolis in January 1902,

Lily Branscombe gives an original interpretation to Caroline Mitford, differing entirely from her predecessors in the part, but she made it buoyant and

fresh and, aside from a certain uncouthness in her voice, caused by a decidedly “Western” accent, the impersonation was more than enjoyable.<sup>7</sup>

In St Paul Minnesota,

Lily Branscombe, as Caroline Mitford, was delightful, beyond the power of words to describe, and her vivacity and capriciousness fell across the sombre tragedy of the hour like sunshine to warm the heart.<sup>8</sup>

The company played *The Only Way* in Los Angeles in February, when Lily provided,

One bit of natural and effective portrayal.... She struck a natural pitch which the rest of the company... did not attain. That it was appreciated, probably standing out to better advantage because of the contrast, was shown by the applause.<sup>9</sup>

On in March and April 1902 to Salt Lake City, Deseret and Ogden in Utah, Los Angeles in June, back to Salt Lake City.

Lily and Herbert had a son, Herbert Arthur Ashton, born in San Francisco on 25 September 1902. They would have been surprised to read, in the *Los Angeles Times* of 22 February 1903,

Herbert Ashton, who came to this country with Maggie Moore Williamson’s company three years ago, and later on joined T. Daniel Frawley’s company, died in New York January 24, of appendicitis. The deceased was buried by the Actors’ Fund in the Cemetery of the Evergreens.

In August 1903 they both played in San Francisco with *The Dairy Farm* (“... Lily Branscombe... Herbert Ashton... were excellent in their parts”).<sup>10</sup>

In September 1907 the New Lyric Stock Company, “with Herbert Ashton, Ralph Belmont, Lily Branscombe and other favorites” opened in Portland Oregon with *Forty-Nine*, Lily playing “Carrots,” a role she had watched Maggie Moore play many times.<sup>11</sup> *All for Gold* was next, then *To Die at Dawn*,<sup>12</sup> *The Governor* and *Woman Against Woman*.

Lily was photographed and billed as “Leading lady of the Ashton Stock Co.” in the *Morning Astorian* 21 June 1908, when the new company opened with a new play, *The Sheriff*,

This company is composed of artists excellent in their special line of business. Notable is the charming young leading lady Miss Lily Branscombe who has won the hearts of theatre lovers by her winsome acting. Miss Branscombe is an actress of rare talent. Her versatility is remarkable. She is as much at home in a rough soubrette as she is in the great emotional part of “Sapho”, in which she will be seen the last half of the opening week. “Sapho” is one of Miss Branscombe’s favorite parts as it gives her unlimited opportunities to show her ability also to wear some beautiful gowns. During the season at Hagers Theatre Miss Branscombe will wear some exquisite dresses that will surely gladden the hearts of the lady patrons. This clever leading lady is sure to become the most popular that has ever appeared at Astoria.

The leading man and stage director Herbert Ashton is also an actor of great ability. Having played with some of the greatest stars in America, Mr. Ashton was also with Daniel Frawley during his oriental tour. His ability as a stage director is well known.<sup>13</sup>

The Ashton Stock Company gave a very good presentation of the four-act melo-drama, “The Sheriff.” Miss Lily Branscombe as Kate Dawson was very good

and won her way into the hearts of the Astoria theatre-goers.<sup>14</sup>

In March 1909 the Ashton company played *Wormwood* and *The Charity Ball* in Portland,<sup>15</sup> in May Lily was in *Love Ranch* at Portland's Lyric Theatre<sup>16</sup> and on 6 December the *Petaluma Daily Morning Courier* carried Lily's photograph with the announcement that their play *The Spoilers* was about to open.



In February 1910 the Chas King Stock Company played *St Elmo* at the Pickwick theatre in San Diego when she was “entitled to her share of praise.”<sup>17</sup> In March Lily and Herbert were in the Quinn Brothers’ Stock Company’s *In the Bishop’s Carriage* in Globe, Arizona<sup>18</sup> and Lily played “Carrots” in *Forty-Nine*. They played *The Sheriff* there too. In September Lily was “pretty and vivacious” in *Hunting for Hawkins* at the Marlowe Theatre in Chicago.<sup>19</sup>

In May 1911 the Indiana Stock company opened the summer season at the Airdome in Moline, Illinois with *The Middleman*, when “Miss Lily Branscombe made a most favourable impression with her pleasing personality and the sympathetic manner in which she played Mary, the favorite daughter of Cyrus Blenkarn. Undoubtedly Miss Branscombe will become a big favorite during the season as she has all the requirements of a stock leading lady.”<sup>20</sup>

They were in Chicago, Illinois and Lily was looking to the movies.



Lily Branscombe in the *Morning Astorian* 24 June 1908.



Herbert Ashton in the *Morning Astorian* 21 June 1908.

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- 1 *Evening Post* 22 September 1900.
  - 2 *Otago Witness* 24 October 1900.
  - 3 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sapho\\_\(play\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sapho_(play))
  - 4 *Emporia Gazette* 30 December 1901.
  - 5 *Ottawa Evening Herald* 30 December 1901.
  - 6 *Topeka Daily Capital* 3 January 1902.
  - 7 *Minneapolis Star Tribune* 6 January 1902.
  - 8 *Saint Paul Globe* 10 January 1902.
  - 9 *Los Angeles Times* 18 February 1902.
  - 10 *San Francisco Call* 25 August 1903.
  - 11 *Oregon Daily Journal* 8 September 1907.
  - 12 *Oregon Daily Journal* 29 September 1907.
  - 13 *Morning Astorian* 21 June 1908.
  - 14 *Morning Astorian* 23 June 1908.
  - 15 *Oregon Daily Journal* 9 March 1909.
  - 16 *San Francisco Dramatic Review* 5 June 1909.
  - <sup>17</sup> *San Francisco Dramatic Review* 19 February 1910.
  - 18 *Daily Arizona Silver Belt* 29 March 1910.
  - 19 *Suburbanite Economist* 30 September 1910.
  - 20 *Dispatch* 16 May 1911.

## Chapter 7: Lily's Motion Pictures

The Essanay Film Manufacturing Company was founded in 1907 and was based in Chicago. Its founders were George Spoor and Gilbert Anderson (S&A). It is best known today for its series of Charlie Chaplin comedies of 1915. It closed in 1918.<sup>1</sup> Lily Branscombe's first movie was *Pals* in October 1911.

By 1912 she was well known, an interview with her published in the *Motion Picture Story Magazine* and her photograph published alongside that of Essanay's male lead, the handsome Francis X Bushman in *Motography* magazine.

### LILY BRANSCOMBE, OF THE ESSANAY COMPANY

MISS LILY BRANSCOMBE, who was born in New Zealand and educated in New South Wales, is pretty, petite and brimming over with life and animation. Apparently she is young, but I cannot state this authoritatively, for when I ventured a hint in this direction she drew herself up to her full five feet three and looked reproachful.

"It's rude to ask a lady her age," she informed me.

Miss Branscombe began her stage career in '94 by playing Little Eva. Her Photoplay work has all been with the Essanay Company and her favorite rôles are comedy and emotional.

"I like the work, and the rehearsals are fun," she said, "but my best work?—don't ask me; wait till I have been longer in the business."

"Are you married?" I queried—simply because the question is in my list.

"I'm living in hopes," she sighed, but her dancing eyes belied the pensive tone.

“I spend my evenings enjoying myself,” she declared in answer to another question. “I read, sing, play, go to the opera or to the theater. I love to read, first all the newspapers I can get my hands on, then the standard authors, especially Lytton.”

“And do you like parties, dancing, etc.?”

“You bet your life!” was the ready response. “Everything interests me. I do plenty of walking and swimming, and I adore the briny deep—after the *mal de mer* is gone. Last summer I spent on the Mississippi River.”

“How about politics?”

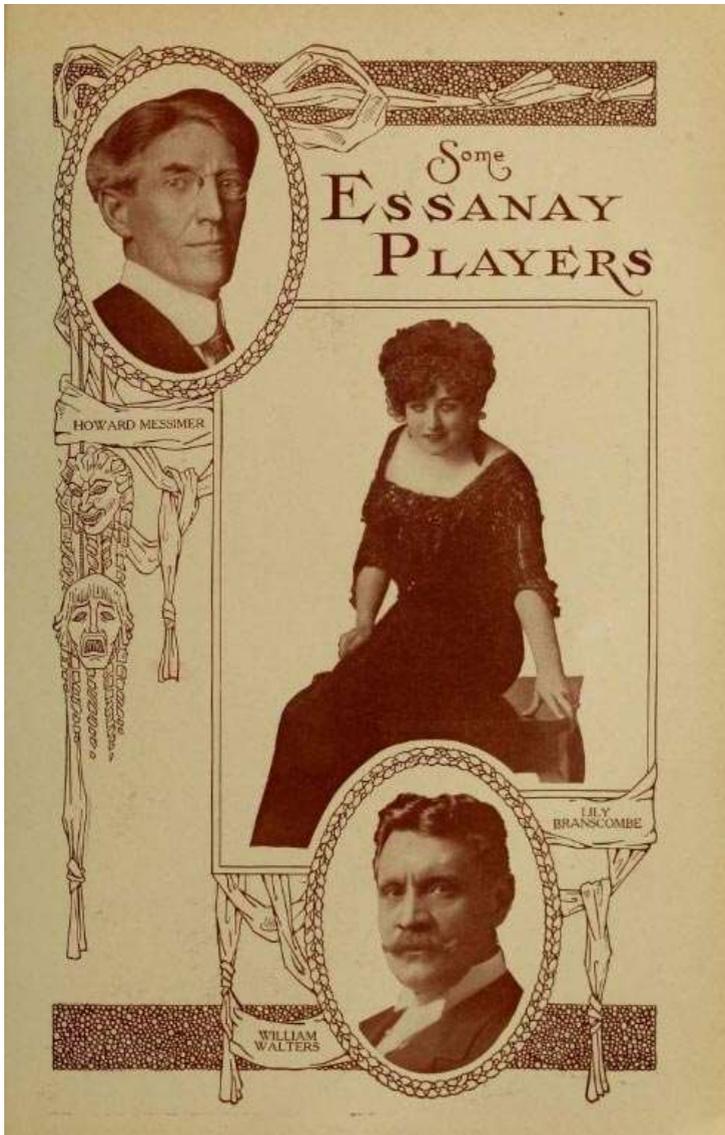
“Nothing doing; don’t know a Democrat from a buzz-saw,” she laughed.

It was like some sparkling tonic, my interview with this vivacious little lady, so full of the joy of life. It is good to find sincerity and high ideals combined with youth and the bubbling spirit of fun.<sup>2</sup>

Naturally she was reticent about her age (she was 34 in 1912): but little Eva from *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*? Lord Lytton? the *briny deep*? living in hopes? sincerity and high ideals? *really*?

Lily Branscombe acted in 50 Essanay films, 44 of them released in 1912.

She began starring in Essanay movies in 1911. The following is a list of films she appeared in, with synopses and cast lists based on Essanay advertisements, those from *Moving Picture World* and *IMDb* (<https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0105201/>).



*The Motion Picture Story Magazine* 12 January 1912.



Lily Branscombe in *Motography* magazine 1912; 7: 12.



Francis X Bushman in *Motography* magazine 1912; 7: 13.

**1911 Pals** (short) 27 October

*Boyhood friends Fred and Jack play football for their college. Fred falls in love with Marion but Marion and Jack are friends and Fred is jealous and in an argument strikes Jack knocking him unconscious. Fred falls asleep in another room and dreams he has killed Jack. He plans to leave, but Jack wakes and explains that his relationship with Mildred is innocent. The friends shake hands and Fred promises never to be jealous again.*

Francis X. Bushman as Fred, Bryant Washburn as Jack, Mildred Weston as Marion and Lily Branscombe in an unnamed part.

**1911 He Fought for the U.S.A.** (short) 7 November

Washburn, Bushman, Lily Branscombe and Virginia Randolph in *He fought for the USA*

*The American Civil War: one brother Bob fights for the Confederates, the other Frank for the Northern army. Frank saves Bob's life in the battle but follows him to their old Southern home where Frank's sweetheart Virginia is hiding Bob. Frank thinks Bob and Virginia are an item but after the war he learns she still loves him.*

Francis X. Bushman as Frank, Bryant Washburn as Bob, Harry Cashman as Major Langdon, Frank Dayton as Colonel Randolph, Lily Branscombe as Virginia Randolph.

**1911 The Empty Saddle** (short) 10 November

*The American Civil War: in battle a locket given by his sweetheart Mary saves John's life but next day John is fatally wounded. John slips the locket onto the bridle of his faithful old horse Billy and tells him to go to Mary. Mary is on her knees praying when the horse arrives; the empty saddle and the locket tell the story.*

Francis X Bushman as John, Lily Branscombe as Mary.

**1911 The Quinceville Raffle** (short) 1 December

*Ezra Higgins, editor of the Quinceville Bugle, needs wife and money. He advertises a grand raffle with himself as prize, in the Bugle. But the boy clerk errs and Ezra finds he has been won by a number of women. He tries to flee, but is chased by the women and captured.*

Francis X. Bushman as Ezra Higgins, Whitney Raymond as Jim, Lily Branscombe.

**1911 The Long Strike** 7 December<sup>3</sup>

*Alex Readly hears the men employed at his steel mills are about to strike. His son Bert goes to the mills to negotiate. On his way he meets Jane Williams, the daughter of an employee. Bert refuses the men everything and the strike is called. In danger of his life Bert flees to Jane's house, she hides him from the mob and while hidden he hears a plot to burn the mills. He escapes and has Jane's father, the ring-leader, arrested. Jane goes to Readly Sr and begs him to grant the men their demands. He sees the justice of their pleas and calls the strike off with the promise of better pay and hours.*



Francis X. Bushman as Jim Blakely, Bryant Washburn as Bert Readly, Harry Cashman as Noah Dixon, Tom Shirley as Bob Dixon, Lily Branscombe as Jane.

**1911 The Goodfellow's Christmas Eve** (short) 15 December

*A wealthy, lonely, bitter old bachelor, James Sawyer, finds an abandoned baby on his doorstep on Christmas Eve and thereby discovers true happiness results from good deeds.*

Francis X. Bushman as James Sawyer, Harry Cashman, Eva Prout, Lily Branscombe, Frank Dayton, William Walters, Whitney Raymond.



Christmas Eve

**1911 For Memory's Sake** (short) 28 December

*Helen refuses to marry Jim after her family loses its fortune. She takes to the stage and fifteen years later Leone, Jim's little sister, now a young woman, is employed by the same company. Helen protects the girl from the stage manager and when both are fired, learns that Leone is Jim's sister. They go back home where Helen and Jim are wed at last.*

Francis X. Bushman as Jim, Walter Hitchcock, Lily Branscombe as Helen, Lenore Ulric as Leone.

**1912 The Valley of Regrets** 4 January

*Feeling neglected by her very young husband, Lily Easton leaves him. Later, haunted by the memory of her little girl, she returns to her husband and begs forgiveness, but he refuses to take her back. Later still Mrs. Easton, now a worn old woman, obtains work as a seamstress and is sent to deliver the trousseau to her daughter, who is to be married. Neither husband nor daughter recognises her and when, during the ceremony, she tries once more to glimpse her little girl, the sight is too much for her and she dies.*

Miss Lillian Branscombe, Harry Cashman, Bryant Washburn.

**1912 Alias, Billy Sargent** (short) 25 January

*Mr. William Sargent pretends he is a diamond broker when he proposes a profitable deal with jeweller John Steele. He phones Mrs. Steele with a message for John to meet him at an hotel. Steele comes home with opera tickets and his wife forgets to give him the message until after the opera. Steele is angry with his wife for making him miss his deal but when Mrs. Steele learns Sargent is a crook and has been arrested, Steele realises his wife has saved him from financial ruin.*

Francis X. Bushman, Lily Branscombe.

**1912 A Brother's Error** (short) 30 January

*Farm boy Jim loves country girl Rose. A barn dance is planned when Jim's kid brother Joe comes home from college. Jim becomes jealous of Joe who pays attention to Rose. The boys quarrel and Jim threatens Joe with a shotgun, but throws it down and runs out of the house. After Joe goes to bed the house catches fire. Jim runs to the house, drags the half-suffocated*

*Joe outside. Jim is scorched, collapses and is carried to the barn where Rose and Joe reassure him they are not an item.*

Francis X. Bushman as Jim Morris, Bryant Washburn as Joe, Lily Branscombe as Rose Stanley.

**1912 The Hospital Baby** (short) 2 February

*In the hospital lies Marie, a foundling who must die without a transfusion. James Brown, an intern, volunteers and the little girl's life is saved. She is adopted by a wealthy family but sixteen years later Marie's foster mother, now a widow, is poor and Marie volunteers to find work to support them. She finds work with Dr. Brown, now a famous doctor, but neither knows the identity of the other. Marie saves his life after he is decoyed into a thieves' den. The doctor recognises her mother as the woman who adopted the hospital baby. He declares his love for Marie and they marry.*

Francis X. Bushman as James Brown, Lily Branscombe as Marie Chester, Frances Osman as Marie Chester as a child, Helen Dunbar as Mrs. Chester, Frank Dayton.

**1912 The Melody of Love** (short) 8 February

*Maurice Eaton, a composer, is engaged to Isobel McIntyre, a society belle. Eaton has composed a wedding march but on the eve of the marriage he goes blind, realises he cannot marry and tells her so. Years later he is forgotten and Isobel is engaged to a rich man. On their wedding day the organist is taken ill and is replaced by the blind musician who lives in the neighbourhood. Eaton plays his wedding march and the bride, unable to place the familiar music, wishes to see the organist. They eventually recognise each other and Isobel begs her*

*husband to take her away. Eaton, alone in his sorrow in the empty church, bursts into tears.*

**LYRIC THEATRE**  
**SPECIAL TONIGHT**  
**Miss Lillian Branscombe**  
 IN A NEW PICTURE  
***The Melody of Love***  
 —ESSANAY  
 This is the best picture Miss Branscombe has  
 ever been in.  
**Two Other Pictures:**  
*Her Heart's Refuge*—LUBIN  
*An Aeroplane Elopement*  
 —VITAGRAPH  
**DONT MISS THIS SHOW. 5c.**

From the advertisement: *A dramatic picture, with an original plot. The story is interpreted with rare excellence and finish.*

Mr Francis Bushman and Lillie Branscombe (as Isobel McIntyre), Frank Dayton.



Francis Bushman as the blind composer, Lily as the bride.

### **1912 The Turning Point** (short) 5 March

Either the summaries or the cast lists online are incorrect as they don't match. Wikipedia lists 11 films of this name.

Francis X. Bushman as Franz Seigel, violinist, Lily Branscombe as Seigel's wife, Harry Cashman as the manager, Eleanor Blanchard as the old lady, William Walters, Bryant Washburn, Helen Dunbar, Frank Dayton, Charles Hitchcock as cafe patrons, Frances Osman as the little girl.

**1912 Out of the Depths** (short) 19 March

*James Grey's mother is bedridden with lung disease so he goes to his boss for money for her treatment: he is refused so steals the money from the office safe. Office manager Dan Matthews suspects, Grey confesses and goes to jail. His mother sees the newspaper report and dies of grief. Years later Grey is so successful he becomes Mayor and proposes to Marjory Lawton. Dan Matthews is by now a drunken reprobate and threatens to tell Marjory of Grey's earlier imprisonment. Grey tries to strangle him so Matthews goes to tell Marjory but is killed by a lightning strike. Marjory finds his body and tells Grey. Grey sinks happily into his chair.*

Francis X. Bushman as James Grey, Lily Branscombe as Marjory Lawton, Bryant Washburn as Dan Matthews, Helen Dunbar as Grey's mother, Frank Dayton.

**1912 The Clue** (short) 16 April

*Kathleen's sick mother needs to go away for treatment but they have no money. Kathleen helps an old man who has fallen in the street and he makes her the beneficiary of his will. When he dies, though, all she gets is a few trinkets and an old clothes chest. She is desperate and one day finds in the chest a document with strange markings; when she folds the paper letters are formed, reading FALSE BOTTOM IN CHEST. She breaks open the false bottom to discover lots of money and bonds.*

Lily Branscombe as Kathleen Nesbit, Joseph Allen Sr as Karl Linden, Eleanor Blanchard as Mrs. Nesbit, Kathleen's mother.

**1912 In Quarantine** (short) 9 May

*Dr Ann Quill asks her sister Bernice to carry her doctor's bag home. Jack likes the look of Bernice, thinks she is a doctor, so*

*plays sick and gets Dave and Harry to call her. Bernice is wise to the ploy but extends the pretence, puts Jack in quarantine for a “dangerous fever” and sends Dave and Harry home to disinfect their home. They try to rescue Jack, but Bernice has given him some powders from the bag. Ann is horrified Bernice may have poisoned Jack. Jack plays dead, the ladies burst in and eventually everything is fully explained.*

John Stepling as Jack, Lily Branscombe as Dr Ann Quill, Bryant Washburn as Dave, Mildred Weston as Bernice, Dwight Mead as Harry

### **1912 Detective Dorothy 24 May**

*The Bioscope 11 July 1912: Poor widow Martin lets her little girl, Dorothy, be adopted by a wealthy family. The child pines for her real mother, who vainly tries to find employment. Returning to her hovel, she sees a sign saying that \$5,000 reward is offered for the capture of Jim Bradley, a murderer. Dorothy is taken out by the maid and runs away while the maid is talking to a friend. Bradley, the murderer, runs up a fire-escape leading to the widow’s rooms, where he finds the widow’s clothes, dons them as a disguise, and is on the way to safety when little Dorothy meets him in the street. Believing he is her mother, Dorothy stops Bradley, and clamours for attention. Bradley tries to drive her away, excites the suspicion of a passing patrolman, and is arrested. Dorothy is praised and is returned to the widow, to be rewarded with \$5,000 from the Chief of Police.*

*From the advertisement: one of those splendid photo-dramas ringing deep and true, with the sincerity of life as it is. A subject that borders on the sensational, yet moistens the eye in its moments of pathos.*

Little Francis Osman “*One of the cleverest child actresses, featured in the title role, with a strong company, including Lilian Branscombe and Bryant Washburn.*”

### **1912 Margaret’s Awakening** (short) 28 May

*Margaret’s mother won’t take her out with them in the car and she protests about going to bed. The maid and the cook are babysitting and are expecting "callers" so Margaret is tucked into bed. Soon her parents come home, the "callers" hastily leave, the maid assures her mistress she has kept good watch on Margaret and everyone retires. Next morning Margaret decides to tell her father of her treatment of the night before, so, still in her pajamas and slippers, climbs into the back seat of the car and falls asleep. Father drives to work, finds he has to appear in court that morning to bail out a friend and leaves the car in front of the court. Margaret wakes and starts protesting loudly....*

From the advertisement: *a bright, brisk and thoroughly satisfactory comedy-drama.*

Lilian Branscombe as Margaret’s mother, Joseph Allen Sr and “*A Romping Little tot, who is gloriously refreshing in her childish enthusiasm. An exquisite photoplay.*”

### **1912 The Legacy of Happiness** 6 June

*Allen Gordon, a young clerk, is discontented and longs for wealth. His sweetheart breaks off their engagement, as his lust for money would only make her miserable. That evening Gordon dreams he gets a telegram saying that his uncle in Italy has left him a million dollars. Gordon adopts a life of ease and meets Will Graft, a foppish dude who schemes to marry his sister to Gordon. Will's sister enchants him and Gordon,*

*enraptured with her charms, puts an engagement ring on her finger. But then he hears her boasting of her conquest and hears Will congratulate her for landing him. Gordon then arranges to send a fake telegram announcing his fortune has been swept away in disastrous speculation and the engagement is immediately broken off. Gordon now sternly rebukes the sneering brother, strikes him in the face with his glove and departs, and the dream ends. Gordon arouses and, cured of his discontent, he hastens to his sweetheart's home, restores the ring on her finger and joy once more fills their lives.*

Dwight Mead as Allen Gordon, Beverly Bayne as Miss Graft, Will's sister, Howard Missimer as Will Graft, Lily Branscombe as Mrs. Graft, Will's mother.

### **1912 Billy Changes His Mind** (short) 7 June

*Billy McGrath rescues Ethel Woodby from a bulldog. Ethel is charming and Billy promises to call next evening. He dresses in a hurry and starts for the Woodby home. Ethel's parents learn Billy is wealthy. Billy arrives, knocks in vain, so walks in, sits down to wait and suddenly discovers he has come without his waistcoat! He rushes back to his rooms to complete his garb—but someone is coming and he has to hide in a small adjoining room, whence he sees Ethel and her parents enter, and has to listen while they warn her to be sure and capture him, as she ought to realise she is very near the age-limit and Billy is very wealthy. Then he sees Ethel coach her younger sister in the role of maid and watches while she rehearses how she will receive him. He realises he must escape from such a party of plotters. The hours go by and Ethel falls asleep waiting. Billy now disguises himself as a burglar and after some rough and tumble manages to escape without revealing his identity. Next day Ethel receives a letter from Billy*

*regretting he was unable to call as he has been suddenly summoned to darkest Africa and does not expect to return.*

John Stepling as Billy McGrath, Beverly Bayne as Ethel Woodby, Lily Branscombe as Mrs. Woodby, Ethel's mother, Eva Prout.



John Stepling in *Billy changes his mind*.

### **1912 The Mis-Sent Letter** (short) 11 June

*Isaac Silverman, a jeweller, takes a new and lovely wife who is extremely jealous, particularly of stage ladies. Silverman's sister and her daughter, both on the stage, now arrive in the city. Niece Sarah writes Silverman a letter enclosing her photo and asking for \$100. Silverman receives it at the breakfast table and instantly his wife's suspicions are roused. He tears up the letter, secretly pockets the photo and goes to work. His wife pieces the torn letter together and has hysterics. At work Silverman receives a letter from a jewellery firm for*

*nonpayment of a bill. He writes an answer, also pens a note to Sarah enclosing the photo and \$100. The letters are put in the wrong envelopes and the jewellery firm receives the money and photo while Sarah receives information that her uncle cannot pay his bill. The clerk discovers the error, tells Silverman and he rushes to the jewellery firm, only to be told that if he doesn't settle at once they will send the \$100 and photo to his wife. Silverman departs in a rage and they laugh over their joke. But then the stenographer errs again and sends the money and photo to Mrs. Silverman. Eventually poor Silverman takes his sister and niece home and introduces them to his new wife. She begs forgiveness for her unreasonable jealousy.*

John Stepling as Isaac Silverman, Lily Branscombe as Mrs. Silverman, Beverly Bayne as Sarah, Silverman's niece.

### **1912 The Honeybugs' First Quarrel 13 June**

*Mr. and Mrs. Honeybug are very contented but then he discovers she wears false curls and he angrily leaves the house. Mrs. Honeybug decides to go home to her parents, writes hubby a letter saying she is going home to someone handsomer than he (meaning her father), and leaves. Hubby becomes insanely jealous, rushes home, finds wife gone, hastens to a telegraph office and sends a wire to the station agent to detain a young woman with false curls. The agent manages to corral several young ladies answering the description, including an Italian girl and a couple of elopers. Mr. Honeybug arrives and despairingly declares wife is not one of the now angry group. The women turn their anger on him but then wife enters with her suitcase and her parents, and matters are straightened out satisfactorily.*

From the advertisement: *one of those magnificent gems of pure comedy that scintillate mirth and good humour at every turn of*

*the crank. One of the most valuable assets of picture production and for which we are famous.*

Miss Lilian Branscombe, John Stepling “*and strong company*”.

**1912 Down Jayville Way** (short) 12 July

*Tom and Jerry, two country boys, are in love with pretty Tilly King, a farmer's daughter. Tom and Jerry are bitter rivals and Tilly cannot decide whom she loves best, and asks her father to judge. King finds the boys are equally good at shooting bottles from the fence and leap the same distance from a standing jump. King suggests a race for the marriage: the one who first brings back a parson gets Tilly. But both reach the parson at the same moment and bring him to the farmhouse together. The minister meets Tilly, is instantly smitten with her charms and asks for her hand in marriage. The old people readily give their consent and the young couple leave by the back way to procure the license. Tom and Jerry realise they have been stung and bury their animosity. Later they meet their old girlfriends and a double wedding looms brightly.*

Harry Cashman as Farmer King, Lily Branscombe as Tilly King, the farmer's daughter, Helen Dunbar as Farmer King's wife, Howard Missimer as Tom, daughter's 1st swain, John Stepling as Jerry, daughter's 2nd swain, Eleanor Blanchard as Tom's sweetheart, Mildred Weston as Jerry's sweetheart, Dwight Mead as the minister.



Helen Dunbar, Howard Missimer, Lily Branscombe, John Stepling and Harry Cashman in *Down Jayville Way*.

**1912 Mr. Tibbs' Cinderella** (short) 25 July

From the advertisement: *the laughable quest of a shoe salesman who is always searching for affinities with dainty feet. He finally discovers "Cinderella," pursues her madly aboard the train, and dreams of wedding chimes throughout the night, only to awaken and find she is a toothless and sour-visaged spinster! Poor Tibbs! This is a comedy gem, replete with funniest fun, and featuring...*

**1912 Twins** (short) 26 July

From the advertisement: *The week's joy release! Hubby is cold and indifferent towards wifie. Wifie impersonates her twin sister who is coming from the coast, captures hubby's heart and those of his gay friends and leads him on until he begins to hint elopement, etc. Then she reveals her identity, and things begin to hum—especially for hubby. Great comedy this.*

John Stepling and Lillian Branscombe.

**1912 Her Hour of Triumph** (short) 1 August

*Frederick Barton gives his beautiful but vain wife money to buy a ball gown. She borrows a pearl necklace from a friend and is voted the most beautiful woman at the ball. At home she realises she has lost the necklace. Barton rushes back but the jewels are not found. They borrow money and sell everything they have to buy a duplicate necklace. Ten years later Mrs. Barton, now a widow, finally pays off her creditors. With white hair, and lined face she meets the friend who lent her the necklace and confesses the tragedy of the lost pearls. That night she gets a letter from her friend who admits the necklace was only a cheap imitation and not worth much. "Mrs. Barton bows her head in agony as the bitter grief wells from her bursting heart in great sobs."*

Francis X. Bushman as Frederick Barton, Lily Branscombe as the friend, Martha Russell as Mrs. Frederick Barton, Frank Dayton as the money lender, Betty Schade as the maid.



Her hour of triumph

### **1912 The Old Wedding Dress (short) 8 August**

*The town is decorated, the general store is a beehive of activity, the tailor is busy, the church is decorated, all for beloved Aunt Betsy's niece Jennie's wedding. Aunt Betsy climbs the stairs to her room and takes from the old trunk her wedding dress, to be worn by Jennie the next day. She cries as she remembers herself on that evening when, as she stood before the mirror in her bridal attire, the message came that her fiancé had been killed. She had laid the old wedding dress tenderly away in the trunk, and now Jennie would wear it. Next morning the happy couple*

*are married and leave on their honeymoon. Aunt Betsy watches them go, then sinking into a chair buries her face in her hands.*

*From the advertisement: The tragic life story of a sweet old lady whose life has been blighted by a bitter prank of fate. Redolent with beautiful pathos and fragrant with the tender memories of "the old wedding dress."*

Lily Branscombe as Aunt Betsy, Beverly Bayne as Jennie and Francis X Bushman as the bridegroom.

### **1912 An Adamless Eden** (short) 15 August

*There are no men at the Marston Inn so pretty Eva Dixon and her charming girlfriends become wildly excited on seeing a newspaper announcement that Prince Augustus Busch of Tromania is tramping the country for recreation, and is in the vicinity. They spot a bedraggled young man coming up the road and believe him to be the prince. He becomes the idol of the pretty charmers who flirt outrageously. A love match develops between the "prince" and Eva, and they are motoring along the road one day when an elderly lady recognises the "prince" as Adam Boob, an inmate of a nearby asylum and informs his father. Meanwhile Eva's jealous friends fake a letter, supposedly from the "prince's" wife, saying she is in need of money and the twins have the measles. This they show to poor Eva, when old Mr. Boob comes in with two asylum attendants, explains that Adam is demented, and leads him away. The horrified girls pack their things and start to leave, just in time to meet the real prince and his party entering. But with upturned noses, they snub the royal guests and hasten away, while a roar of laughter tortures their ears.*

Billy Mason as Adam Boob / Prince Augustus Busch, Beverly Bayne as Eva Dixon, a waitress, Joseph Allen Sr as Mr. Boob Adam's father, William Walters as the doctor, Helen Dunbar

as Mrs. Marston, Eleanor Blanchard as a spinster, Dolores Cassinelli as an auto tourist, Eleanor Kahn as a bellhop, Mildred Weston, Ruth Stonehouse, Martha Russell and Lily Branscombe as Miss Friend.

**1912 Her Adopted Father** (short) 23 August

*Little Mary Wilson feels her heart will break when many of her companions at the orphanage are adopted into wealthy families and she is always left in bitter tears. But the kind mother superior takes her to a great office building where Mary meets Richard Claiborne, a wealthy business man and her heart beats joyfully when he takes her in his arms and kisses her. So she writes him a note and slips it under the door. Claiborne finds it and writes to Mary saying his wife would not like a little girl, but that he is lonely and her visit has made him happier than he has been for months. Mary is weeping softly when the mother superior enters and sees the letter. She takes Mary to Mrs. Claiborne who kisses Mary tenderly, then says her husband does not care for children. The mother superior now shows her Claiborne's letter to Mary and Mrs. Claiborne takes the little one into her heart and home. That evening Claiborne enters the great library, to find Mary asleep at his wife's feet. Both now realise they have misunderstood each other. The little orphan is a sunbeam in their lives, the future bright.*

From the advertisement: *an unusual dramatic subject, tender in gripping pathos and replete with beautiful sentiment.*

Eleanor Kahn as little Mary Wilson, Lily Branscombe as Mrs. Albert Grayson, Eleanor Blanchard as Mother Superior, Frank Dayton as Richard Claiborne, Dolores Cassinelli as Mrs Claiborne “*in powerful portrayals*”.

**1912 Three to One** (short) 29 August

*Hinks and Dinks are business partners and a pair of old flirts. Billy, the clerk, tells them he knows a charming young lady for the position of stenographer and brings her down the next morning. Bertha Armstrong is a petite, pretty girl, and is hired. Hinks and Dinks now set out to make their conquest, and bitter rivalry ensues—the two old fellows almost come to blows. Bertha now leaves on her vacation and Hinks and Dinks discharge Billy having seen him make eyes at Bertha. Next morning both receive a letter from Bertha, declaring she cannot marry both. Each hastens out to the summer resort, armed with boxes of roses. As they are fuming at each other the door opens and Bertha steps out with Billy. She laughingly introduces Billy as her husband, waves ta-ta and starts down to the beach. Hinks and Dinks stare after them, then make up, lock arms and hasten in to drown their sorrows at the bar.*

From the advertisement: *a big comedy hit, with a rollicking plot entirely original. Two staid old business men—a pretty stenographer—bitter rivalry—and—a finish too funny to divulge.*

Lilian Branscombe as Bertha Armstrong the stenographer, Howard Missimer as Hinks “*at their best*”. Billy Mason as Billy the clerk.

**1912 Back to the Old Farm** (short) 3 September

*Frank Clayton plans a vacation on Uncle Barnes' farm. He shows his friend, George Randall, Barnes' letter asking that George be brought along, as he has always been like a son to him and “someone will be glad to see him”. That night George has a dream of the old days on the Barnes farm, where he worked as a young fellow and loved Barnes' pretty daughter, Mollie. Toiling on the old-fashioned place became irksome to*

*him and he determined to seek his fortune in the city. He left a note for Barnes, kissed Mollie tenderly, received her blessing and left. George wakes to find Clayton urging him to hurry. What a change greets them at the old place. The Barnes' farm is now equipped with the latest and most modern machinery and conveniences. With pretty Mollie by his side George rides over the vast acres and the two plan a moonlight elopement. Proudly old Barnes shows them a car he has just bought. Next morning the young couple are missed and Barnes finds a note from George, declaring the car has been just the right medium for their elopement and that the farm and Mollie are good enough for him, for they are coming back soon. So with a smile the old man prepares to kill the fatted calf.*

William Bailey as George Randall, E.H. Calvert as Frank Clayton, Frank Dayton as Farmer Barnes, Beverly Bayne as Mollie, Lily Branscombe as Mrs. Barnes.



*Back to the old farm.*

**1912 The Listener's Lesson** (short) 12 September

*The Simpkin sisters are two old spinsters, in love with Jonathan and David, country lads who own adjoining farms. The spinsters advertise for summer boarders and two dashing girls, Isabel and Clarice, come out from the city. Jonathan and David fall in love with the girls and at the barn dance the girls get the whole crowd doing the "Grizzly Bear" and "Texas Tommy" swings: the Simpkin sisters head home in disgust. Next morning the spinsters tell Isabel and Clarice to leave. The girls write to Jonathan and David, explain matters and declare that if they will sell their farms the wedding bells will chime. Jonathan calls David and they plan to sell their farms and have a double wedding. The Simpkin sisters are eavesdropping on the phone, and think the boys are speaking of them. So the sisters hasten to town, and, to speed things up, buy the boys' farms through the dealer and sit down to await the proposals. Of course, the boys receive their money and start for town to meet the girls. The old spinsters joyfully think the boys are going to get their marriage licences and follow them. But the boys meet Isabel and Clarice in the justice's office, the double wedding is performed, and the happy couples come out just in time to meet the Simpkin sisters face to face. The poor old souls sob out their grief.*

From the advertisement: *a unique and laughable bucolic comedy of two old spinsters, who "rubber" over the 'phone, and the dire results it brings, are portrayed with that snap and vim that characterises all Essanay productions.*

Howard Missimer, Lily Branscombe as the first spinster, Eleanor Blanchard "*in screamingly funny rôles*".

**1912 The Love Test** (short) 20 September

*Robert Brandt and Lily Leslie are informed by an uncle they must marry each other in order to inherit \$500,000. Neither having seen the other they each plan to avoid the issue and when Brandt calls, Lily assumes the dress of her maid while the real maid plays "Lily." The maid's assumed airs soon sicken Brandt, and he makes his escape—but has fallen in love with the real Lily disguised as the "maid." Lily has also fallen in love with Brandt, and reads with alarm Brandt's note saying he has suddenly been taken ill. Back home Brandt tells his friends of his experience. Suddenly they see Lily and the dressed up maid drive up and, wishing to escape further attention, Brandt lies on the bed while his friends whiten his face and strew the sheet with flowers. When Lily enters, they inform her Brandt is dead. Lily kneels at the bedside and sobs, "Oh, Robert, if you had only known. I am Lily Leslie, not the maid!" at which Robert comes to life and Lily faints in the nearest chair. Quickly she is revived and, on making sure Brandt is really alive, confesses the scheme. He gathers her in his arms.*

From the *Daily Arkansas Gazette* 30 September 1912: tells how two people destined to marry by the will of a rich uncle seek to dodge each other and how they fall in love with each other without knowing the identity of each other.

Howard Missimer, Lily Branscombe as Lily Leslie.

**1912 A Little Louder, Please!** (short) 26 September

*Old Bosworth, who is deaf, falls in love with a charming widow, but she declares she cannot marry a deaf man and Bosworth leaves. At home he finds the widow's nephew making love to his daughter Cary and orders him out, declaring that the man who marries her will have to be deaf. Later Cary meets John, another suitor, on the street and tells him of her father's*

*declaration. John agrees to pretend deafness in order to win her. Their conversation is overheard by Cal, another suitor, who also pretends to be deaf and calls at the house. Cary introduces her father to both and the old man is delighted at their affliction, but has trouble making them hear anything he says. Discovering the ad of Dr. Kureni who cures deafness, Bosworth calls on the specialist and quickly has his hearing restored with an invisible apparatus that fits in the ear. Greatly delighted, the old man hustles the doctor back to the house to cure the two suitors. They are alarmed when the doctor gets out his instruments and are undergoing awful tortures when suddenly the widow and her nephew enter and the fake deafness of the two suitors is exposed. Old Bosworth kicks them out, marries the widow whose nephew marries Cary.*

*From the advertisement: a snappy comedy subject, unusual in bright plot and showing how father bests two tricky lovers, who try to win his charming daughter unfairly.*

Missimer, Stepling, Calvert, Lily Branscombe (as the daughter Cary) and Eleanor Blanchard “*in splendid laugh portrayals*”.



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A fine Western drama with scenes laid among the Indians of the Northwest. Staged by the man the world acknowledges to be the master of modern film craft, W. M. ANDERSON.

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## The Adventure of the Button.

A slightly comical drama that abounds in witty situations and laughable incidents. EDWARD BISSHEP, JOHN STEPPING, CHAS. HITCHCOCK, ELEANOR BLANCHARD and all of Essanay's famous film makers in great roles.

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Released  
Sunday,  
December 30th.

## Across The Broad Pacific.

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A FEATURE SCENIC OF THE FAR EAST.

Approx.  
Length,  
385 ft.



## The Voice of Conscience.

An extraordinary and enthralling drama, powerful in plot and magnificent in portrayal. An accidental death, the uncovering of the guilt on an innocent man, and the terrible ordeal undergone by the guilty man until he brings a confession from him. HARRY REINHALL and FRANCIS A. BERGMAN in feature roles.

Released Thursday, December 12th. Approx. length 902 ft.



## A Little Louder, Please.

A snappy comedy subject, unusual in bright places showing how father loses two sticky fingers, who try to win his charming daughter's affections. BISSHEP, STEPPING, CALVERT, LILY BRANSCOMB, and ELEANOR BLANCHARD in splendid laugh portrayals.

Released Thursday, December 12th. Approx. length 911 ft.



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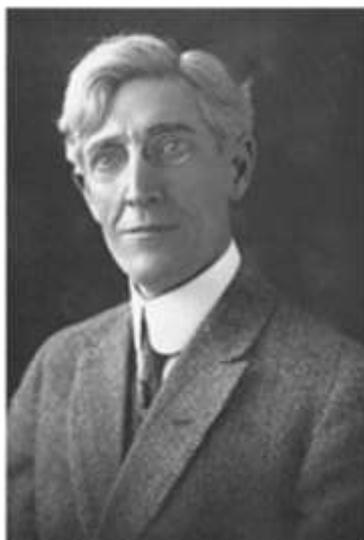
Eleanor Blanchard



Beverly Bayne



Helen Dunbar

Frances  
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Stepping

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Billy Mason



Dolores Cassinelli



Eva Prout



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Augustus Carney



EH Calvert



Whitney Raymond



Ruth Stonehouse



Essanay staff in 1912: Lily Branscombe at left in second row from the front.



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How our plant in the west section, has outgrew every other plant in America. That's why Essanay films are best!

**Essanay Film Mfg. Co., 435 N. Clark St., Chicago, Ill.**

**1912 Well Matched** (short) 2 October

*Old sweethearts Tom West and "Cutty" Gray, who have not seen each other for five years and have grown stout, arrange to come to the city and meet. Both want to lose weight and both see Dr Thin's advertisement about his wonderful methods of reducing. So unknown to each other, they start on the obesity "cure." Unaware of each other's identity they slip notes under the partition between the two departments. They tell each other their real weights and laugh. Finally each discovers they are heavier than when they started and they agree to quit and go and have lunch together. It is not until they are taking leave of Dr Thin that they come face to face and recognise each other. They explain and decide they like fat people best of all, so hasten to the nearest restaurant and enjoy a good square meal.*

John Stepling as Tom West, Mary Height as Cutey Gray, Howard Missimer as Dr Thin, Lily Branscombe as female attendant, Charles Hitchcock as male attendant, Beverly Bayne, Mildred Weston, Eva Prout as female orchestra members, Dolores Cassinelli as cabaret singer.

**1912 Terrible Teddy** (short) 4 October

*Lillian Boggs receives a telegram from her childhood sweetheart Teddy Moore in the west saying that he is coming east to see her. Lillian loves her western hero and tells her other two suitors, played by Stepling and Calvert, they will have to prove their courage before Teddy arrives in order to be considered. Stepling hires a thug to attack Lillian in the park so he may play the hero, but at the moment he is about to rush to Lillian's aid, he is captured by a fair flirt and is brought to his senses only when Lillian appears with the thug she has tied up; Stepling receives a black eye from the enraged thug and is stung when both the flirt and Lillian leave him in disgust. Meanwhile, Calvert persuades his friend to impersonate Teddy*

*Moore, to frighten Lillian's father allowing him to come in and throw him out at the proper moment and win the girl. His friend, in the guise of a "badman," is causing mayhem at Boggs' residence and has just been thrown out by Calvert when the real Teddy appears on the scene, exposes the fake to Lillian and her father, then kicks both plotters down the steps.*

Charles Hitchcock as Terrible Teddy Moore, Lily Branscombe as Lillian Boggs, John Stepling as Lillian's second suitor, E.H. Calvert as Lillian's third suitor, William Bailey as Lillian's third suitor's pal the impersonator, Howard Missimer as Old Boggs, Lillian's father.

**1912 Not on the Circus Program** (short) 11 October

*The circus comes to town and Frank Mason takes his five-year-old, Billy, to see the parade. A little bareback rider attracts Mason's attention and that evening he asks the owner to introduce him. Charmed with her gay spirit, Mason lavishes presents on her and showers her with attention. Marcel, a clown, loves the little rider and begs her to give Mason up but she refuses. Next afternoon the maid takes little Billy shopping and he wanders away. The maid rushes home and a frantic search begins. After the performance that night Marcel and the girl are talking when little Billy wanders in. Realising he is lost they set out to find his home, where they come face to face with Mason, who has kept the fact that he is married a secret. Without exposing the unprincipled scoundrel they return little Billy to Mrs. Mason and when she turns away, the heart-broken little bareback rider throws Mason's gifts at his feet as Marcel leads her from the room. Outside she realises the depth of the clown's love and goes to his arms.*

From the advertisement: *an enthralling dramatic story of life "under the great white top." The romance of a little bareback*

*rider, and her salvation from a terrible fate through the intervention of Providence.*

E.H. Calvert as Frank Mason, Eva Prout as the bareback rider, Howard Missimer as Marcel the clown, Frank Dayton as the circus owner, Master Calvert as Billy Mason the child, and Lily Branscome as Mrs Mason.

**1912 A Mistaken Calling** (short) 15 October

*Maggie, a cook, thinks she is born to write poetry and consults a phrenologist. He discovers a lump on her head that reveals she will become a literary success. Maggie resigns her job, starts writing poetry and casts off her policeman lover, Officer 444. She invades a publishing house and holding the editor on the floor by the hair she reads her doggerel into his tortured ear. Officer 444 is summoned and they recognise each other. He gets her out but Maggie soon puts him to sleep by reading her poetry and flees, leaving a verse attached to his uniform. Reduced to poverty and starvation, Maggie is re-engaged by her former mistress on taking a pledge never to scribble again. She encounters Professor Phreno and takes her revenge with fists and umbrella—but is stopped by the inevitable Officer 444. At the end "Phreno" is hunched over his chart, feeling the lump on his forehead and wondering why its location on the chart is labelled "casualty."*

John Stepling as Professor Phreno the phrenologist, Eleanor Blanchard as Maggie the cook, Howard Missimer as Officer 444, William Walters as the editor of the publishing house, Lily Branscombe and Frank Dayton as Maggie's employers.

**1912 The Grassville Girls** (short) 16 October

*Tom Carver returns to the little town of Grassville with a group of friends. He tells them about Rose, his old sweetheart, and having met her and her friends, the boys write fake letters from Tom to each girl, proposing marriage. The girls meet and “discover” Tom's perfidy; they plan revenge. Masquerading as simple country maids, they catch Tom in an awkward position at the river bank and give him a thorough ducking. He is rescued by his pals, who take him home, where a note is delivered to Tom from the girls, saying they decline his proposal. Tom and his friends go fishing, but their lines are entangled by the girls, who pass in a rowboat. But their boat upsets and the boys plunge in and bear the girls safely to shore. The girls gratefully arrange a tea party at Rose's house, they pair off and a few days later the village pastor does five weddings and the happy couples are spooning contentedly when the town people come for them with old shoes and rice. A dash up the railway line lands them on the observation platform of the train pulling out and, seeing they are cheated out of their fun, the Grassville folk give them a rousing send-off.*

Billy Mason as Tom Carver, Beverly Bayne as Rose, William Bailey, Lily Branscombe, E.H. Calvert, Dolores Cassinelli, Charles Hitchcock, Eva Prout, Whitney Raymond.

**1912 The Snare** (short) 17 October

*Tom Ransom, a fugitive from justice, is arrested at his aged mother's cottage but pleads with her to believe in his innocence. He escapes and the matter is laid before Dayton, captain of police. Among the articles taken from Ransom are a photograph and a letter from his sweetheart saying she has never seen his mother. Dayton sends for Mary Clement, girl detective, gives her the details and orders her to pose as Tom's sweetheart and trap Ransom. Mary is however charmed with*

*the sweet simplicity of the old lady. Learning that Tom is expected that evening, Mary is disgusted with her trickery and resolves to give him a fair chance to escape. But Tom enters and discovers Mary's deception. He is shouting at her when his mother enters, and he has to keep the truth from her. A few moments later a station agent enters with a telegram for Mary. It is from Dayton, saying the real culprit has been captured and she should drop the Ransom case. Mary kisses Tom's mother goodbye and gives her hand to him; he presses it with a look of deep understanding, then she fades from their lives forever.*

William Bailey as Tom Ransom, Lily Branscombe as Mrs. Ransom, Tom's mother, Beverly Bayne as Mary Clement, the detective, Frank Dayton as police chief, E.H. Calvert, Charles Hitchcock, Billy Mason as detectives, Howard Missimer as telegraph operator, Whitney Raymond as boy in detective office.

### **1912 The Warning Hand** (short) 18 October

*Young Jack Wayne staggers home drunk one evening, to find his father on his death-bed. The old man warns Jack to beware the hand of evil, and points to a shrouded painting depicting a jewelled hand holding a sword by a chain. After his father dies Jack loses heavily at cards and is about to steal money from his mother's safe when he is startled to see the shroud fade from the painting and the hand of evil pointing directly at him. Frightened, he staggers from the room. Months later he calls on his sweetheart, Grace, only to discover his rival, Morrell, sitting close to her. In jealous rage Jack whips out a gun and is about to murder Morrell when suddenly a ghostly hand appears before him, holding a hangman's noose. Recoiling from the apparition, Jack realises his folly, recovers his composure, enters the room and finds Morell apologising to Grace for not having noticed her engagement ring. Five years*

*later Jack has married and is beset with business difficulties. He attempts to secure a loan from a banker, but his securities are worthless. Seizing on an opportunity he takes a blank check from the banker's desk and is about to forge it when the warning hand again appears to him and drops ghostly handcuffs onto his wrists. They vanish as quickly as they appeared. A moment later he receives a letter offering him a fortune for some mine holdings. The warning hand has proved his salvation.*

From the advertisement: *a wonderful and startling dramatic subject and unquestionably one of the month's most extraordinary features," says the Moving Picture World.... A very distinct feature.*

Francis X Bushman ("does splendid emotional work") as Jack Wayne, Lily Branscombe as Grace, Frank Dayton as Jack's father, Helen Dunbar as Jack's mother, Harry Cashman as banker, Harry Mainhall as Frank Morrell, William Walters as the doctor.

### **1912 Bringing Father Around** (short) 23 October

*Harry Brisk loves pretty Minerva Grumpley but her father declares he cannot marry her until he has \$10,000 in the bank. Harry has little more than \$2,000 and plans how he can increase it. He sees a merry-go-round on a vacant lot—and sees the two lots next to Grumpley's home are vacant. He purchases the lots for his \$2,000, then gets the merry-go-round owner to move there for free rent. Old Grumpley is seen raging in his palatial library with gout and the sounds of pandemonium from the crowds on the merry-go-round. He rushes down and confronts the merry-go-round owner who however shows his permit. Grumpley goes to the real estate agent and tries to buy the lots, but finds the price is \$10,000. He refuses to pay and spends another night of torture with the*

*awful racket. Next morning he changes his mind, buys the lots for the exorbitant price and restores peace and quiet. An hour later Harry shows old Grumpley his bank account of \$10,000 and asks for Minerva's hand. Old Grumpley is amazed, but is upset when he finds Harry owned the lots. However, at that moment a representative of a syndicate calls and buys the lots for a high price, so the delighted old man gives his consent willingly and happiness reigns.*

*From the advertisement: an original comedy, replete with novelties. A young man increases his bank account by keeping both eyes open, and wins the girl of his heart in the bargain.*

John Steppling as Harry Brisk, Minerva's sweetheart, Lily Branscombe as Minerva Grumpley, EH Calvert as the syndicate representative, Joseph Allen Sr as Mr. Grumpley, Howard Missimer as the next-door neighbour, Harry Cashman as the new neighbour “*in big laughing rôles*”.

### **1912 Miss Simkins' Summer Boarder** (short) 29 October

*Joe Mason, a bashful country boy, tries in vain to propose to Marian Foster, but his bashfulness always gets the best of him. Jack Richards, a brisk city chap, comes to board with Miss Simkins, a spinster for the summer. Richards falls in love with Marian, much to Joe's discomfiture. Marian does not return Jack's love, but is fascinated by his dashing manner and flirts just to tantalize Joe. A Sunday school picnic is planned and a novel scheme is decided on wherein the names of each girl and boy are placed inside the lunch boxes, the boxes are drawn and the couples are paired off. Richards discovers the lunch box with Marian's name and announces he will marry the girl he lunches with. Marian's sister Florence overhears him, substitutes Miss Simkins' name for Marian's and, arriving at the picnic grounds, auctions off the lunch boxes. Richards outbids Joe, opens the lunch box triumphantly and is badly*

*stung to find the name of Miss Simkins inside. Florence lets the spinster know and Miss Simkins starts off in pursuit of the discomfited city chap while Joe, with Marian clasped in his arms, roars with laughter.*

Eleanor Blanchard as Miss Simkins, Mildred Weston as Marian Foster, Eva Prout as Florence Foster, John Stepling as Jack Richards, Whitney Raymond as Joe Mason, Lily Branscombe, Dolores Cassinelli, Beverly Bayne, Mary McNackin, Howard Missimer, Billy Mason, Bryant Washburn.

### **1912 The Letter** (short) 30 October

*Carleton Kirby, a thieving politician, offers Senator Denton \$10,000 dollars to vote for his bill in the Senate. Denton refuses and angrily dismisses Kirby from the house. Later Denton changes his mind and writes Kirby a letter agreeing to vote for the bill if the offer still holds good. He leaves the letter in his desk. Later in a reverie he envisages himself on the floor of the Senate, congratulated first by his colleagues for putting the bill through and then, as the bribe is discovered, surrounded by an angry mob, who threaten his very life. Denton wires his daughter, Renee, to destroy the letter. Winslow, a friend of Kirby's, discovers the contents of the wire, hastens to Denton's home, secures the incriminating letter, substitutes a blank in its place and takes it at once to Kirby who conceals it in the top of his hollow walking-stick. The theft is discovered and Denton realises he is trapped. A detective fails to find the letter in Kirby's house. To save her father, Renee disguises herself as a lady agent, hires a tough to shoot and scream under Kirby's window and in the excitement secures the letter from the hollow cane. Returning home she restores it to her father, and with a prayer of thanksgiving in his heart he takes her in his arms.*

From the advertisement: *a gripping, powerful political drama of the present day, showing the sordidness of the great modern*

*“machine”. Points out a moral that cannot fail to impress deeply.*

Lily Branscombe as Renee Denton, Harry Cashman, Frank Dayton, Bryant Washburn, Eva Prout as the maid, Charles Hitchcock *“in feature rôles”*.

**1912 The Moving Finger** (short) 1 November

*Stumbling into the squalor of her miserable tenement room the woman, a wretched victim of drink and dissipation, sinks down at the table and lights the half-burned candle. Slowly the memories of other days return and we see her happy with her husband in their humble cottage. Then a man arrives, finds her alone, points out her humble surroundings, paints a glowing picture of the gay city life and begs her to come with him. She does and when her husband returns he finds a note saying she could stand the poverty no longer and has gone with one who can give her the luxuries she craves. In the city she is happy, but one night she discovers the gloves of the other woman in the man's pocket. She writes to her husband, begging forgiveness but he writes, "You made your bed; lie in it." Back in the misery of the tenement room, with every hope crushed, she smiles bitterly, puts out the sputtering candle and sinks down on her cot as the light fades into blackness.*

From the advertisement: *a dramatic masterpiece. One of the most powerful subjects booked for the new month. The first wrong step of a good woman, and the bitterness of repentance as she gazes dumbly into blackest despair.*

Lily Branscombe as the wandering wife, Frank Dayton as the city slicker, Harry Cashman as the unforgiving husband.

**1912 The House of Pride** (short) 13 November

*James Williams, a city purchasing agent, receives a letter from Flannery, the city political boss, advising that the Acme Paving Material Company must get the city's winter contract. Williams is offered a bribe but orders the bearer of the letter, Mullin, from the office. Mullin goes, but unknowingly leaves the letter. Later Williams quarrels with his wife about her extravagance and she demands that he get money and support her properly. Williams then agrees to accept Flannery's proposition. A week later Williams gives a reception at his home. During the course of the evening Frank Holt, president of the Acme Paving Material Company, attempts to embrace Mrs. Williams. Williams comes on the scene, confronts Holt and his henchmen, produces the incriminating bribe letter and threatens to send them all to prison. Next morning Mrs. Williams receives a letter from Mrs. Holt telling of her great suffering and asking her to plead with Williams not to prosecute her husband. Thoroughly repentant, Mrs. Williams does so, Williams tears up the letter, and happiness reigns once more.*

Francis X. Bushman as James Williams, Beverly Bayne as Mrs. James Williams, EH Calvert as Frank Holt, Bryant Washburn, John Stepping Frank Dayton, Lily Branscombe, Dolores Cassinelli.

**1912 Mr. Up's Trip Tripped Up** (short) 15 November

*Mr. Up's neighbour, Calvert, invites him to a summer resort. Up 'phones a baggage man to call for his trunk at seven next morning. Up sleeps through his alarm clock, but waking at last he finds he has only fifteen minutes to catch the train. He piles all his clothes into the trunk and sends it off with the baggage man. Then he finds all his clothes have gone in the trunk. In his pajamas he dashes after the wagon, is arrested, hauled back to his apartment, and is released when he pays a*

*bribe. Determined to secure clothes he enters Calvert's apartment, holds up the new butler at gunpoint, relieves him of his duds and forces him to don the pajamas. Trying to get to the train he has to forsake a slow cab, is knocked from a crowded streetcar, bowls over a colored washwoman and is again arrested. Meanwhile, the new butler is discovered by the maid and, unable to explain his pajamas, is also arrested. Mr. Up is led in and explanations are complicated by Calvert's arrival.*

From the advertisement: *a fine farce comedy, involving complications of the furiously funny brand—distinctly a la Essanay.*

Howard Missimer as Mr Up, William Bailey as the butler, Lily Branscombe as the maid “*in the thickest of the mêlée!*,” EH Calvert as Mr Up's friend, Dolores Cassinelli as Mr Up's friend's wife, William Calvert as Mr Up's friend's son.

### **1912 The Scheme** (short) 20 November

*Old Bickley wont let his daughter, Bertha, go to the ball with Bert Brisk, her sweetheart. Bickley intends to take Bert's aunt and Bertha has an idea. Telling Bert and his aunt of her plot, Bertha proposes to dress as a man, flirt with the widow, arouse her father's jealousy and trap him into fighting a duel. Then, having scared him, she will reveal her identity and have the laugh on him. Old Bickley is successfully forced into the duel with his disguised daughter and in the moonlight they meet, and Bickley is scared more when a group of friends, made up as undertakers and grave-diggers, measure him for his grave and stalk around him with solemn visages and uplifted spades. Bickley pleads with his seconds to call the duel off. The duellists are placed back to back, each with a revolver and after several whiskeys, Bickley gains enough courage to die, if need be. But as they are about to fire, the widow throws herself between them and begs Bertha to spare her father's life. Bertha throws*

*off her disguise, and old Bickley is so happy he readily consents to the marriage.*

From the *East Oregonian* 25 December 1912: *Essanay. One of the month's comedies.*

Howard Missiner as old Bickley, Lily Branscombe as Bertha, old Bickley's daughter, Billy Mason as Bert Brisk, Bertha's sweetheart, Eleanor Blanchard as Bert's aunt.

**1912 Mr. Hubby's Wife** (short) 26 November

*Mr. Hubby is making love to his stenographer Cassie when his wife catches them. She gets rid of Cassie, upbraids her unfaithful spouse and makes him carry her bags to the station, as she is planning a trip to the country. But instead of taking the train, she returns to the office during Hubby's absence disguised as a stenographer. Hubby starts to dictate a letter to Cassie, saying wifie has gone to the country. Then Mrs. Hubby throws off her disguise, and Hubby is dealt with by the enraged woman. He promises to be good, and she forgives him.*

Augustus Carney as Hubby, Eleanor Blanchard as Mrs Hubby, Lily Branscombe as Mrs Briggs, Ruth Stonehouse and Dolores Cassinelli as stenographers.

**1912 The Stain** (short) 27 November

*Fred Winters loves Miriam Shelby. He is about to propose when his chum, Arthur, enters and Miriam appears to slight Fred with her attentions to Arthur. Fred leaves and contemplates ending his life. Falling asleep, he dreams of his ancestor, Rosny, who loves the fair Lady Madeline. Louis, young gallant, is also a suitor for Madeline's hand. Finding them together one morning, Rosny insults Louis, a duel is fought and Louis is slain. Seeking out the Duke, Madeline's*

*father, Rosny demands her hand in marriage. Forced into the union with Rosny, whom she loathes, Lady Madeline dies of a broken heart, and the repentant Rosny is left to mourn her bier. Fred wakes and has only time to hide the revolver when Arthur hands him a letter. Fred finds it is from Miriam, asking why he left so hurriedly and to be sure to come and see her next evening. Realising his folly, Fred warmly shakes his chum's hand and rejoices at his salvation.*

Miss Lily Branscombe, one of the most widely known, popular and versatile leading ladies of Essanay's eastern stock company, has had years of experience and thorough training on the legitimate stage that have taken her almost around the globe. At the age of thirteen, Miss Branscombe joined George Rignold, the English actor, and played a wide range of Shakespearean roles throughout Australia and the English provinces. Coming to America with Maggie Moore she signed under the management of J. C. Williamson, then joined T. B. Frawley and played in "Secret Service," "The Only Way," and many other productions. An oriental tour followed with one of Frawley's companies, ending in South Africa. Returning to America Miss Branscombe played for two seasons in Belasco productions, following which she was leading lady of many noted stock organizations.



*Motography* 14 September 1912.

E.H. Calvert as Rosny (dream sequence), Lily Branscombe as Lady Madeline (dream sequence), Bryant Washburn as Louis, a young gallant (dream sequence), John Stepling as the Duke, Lady Madeline's father (dream sequence), Walter Hitchcock as Fred Winters, Ruth Stonehouse as Miriam Shelby, Fred's sweetheart, Billy Mason as Arthur.

**1913 Alkali Ike in Jayville** (short) 9 January

*Ike appears in town in woolly chaps, like goat-footed Pan, to spoil a love affair between Howard Missimer and Eleanor Blanchard. Lily Branscombe as Eleanor's sister, is being courted by John Stepling who is the happy possessor of a First Aid to Love Makers, a book, price twenty-five cents. John has learned his lesson and is getting on famously. The book has been thrown away and Howard has found it. Unfortunately for him, Ike appears, needs no schooling and is a close rival. There's a funny game of checkers got up to decide the match by the village doctor who in the meantime runs off with the girl. All these players are past masters in such work as this picture demanded of them; but they have had better vehicles than this afforded them, yet it is by no means a failure; part of it is fine.*

Augustus Carney as Alkali Ike, Howard Missimer as Mr. Dicks, Rube's father, Eleanor Blanchard as Phoebe Towle, Lily Branscombe as the widow Towle, Phoebe's mother, John Stepling as Rube Dicks.

**1913 The Road of Transgression** (short) 16 January

*Richard Wayman leaves his home and, dressed in evening clothes, visits an opium den. He smokes the fatal pipe and dreams. He imagines himself destitute, inhabiting the lowest of opium dens. He is about to be thrown out of one when a woman comes to his assistance. She gives him some money, which he*

*gives to a Chinese who has him put out. The woman waits for him and tells him of her love. Returning home Wayman discovers his wife is giving a card party. Her father finds Wayman staggering under the effects of the drug and gives him whiskey to brace him up. The woman he had met in the opium den climbs through the open window and robs the desk of several hundred dollars. Hearing footsteps she hides, Wayman enters and discovers the theft. The woman pulls a revolver on Wayman but seeing his face she recognises her lover and tries to persuade him to leave his home, but Wayman is killed. At this point Wayman comes out of his dream. Rushing from the opium den to his home he greets his wife and child and promises never to smoke again.*

From the advertisement: *a wonderfully appealing dramatic story in which a great object lesson is taught. See the great opium dens of San Francisco.*

EH Calvert as Richard Wayman, Lily Branscombe as Mrs. Richard Wayman, Joseph Allen Sr as Mrs Wayman's father, Charles Hitchcock as the proprietor of the joss house.

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1 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essanay\\_Studios](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essanay_Studios).

2 Chats with the players. *Motion Picture Story Magazine* 1912. 3: 140.

3 *Moline Dispatch* 6 January 1912.

## Chapter 9: Endpoints

Her mother died at her brother Hedley's home in Randwick, Sydney in 1924.

New Zealand birth records show Lily's husband Herbert Joseph Newton Ashton was born to Jessie Selina (Newton) and William Ashton on 28 January 1865 and baptised at St Paul's church on 2 August 1865.

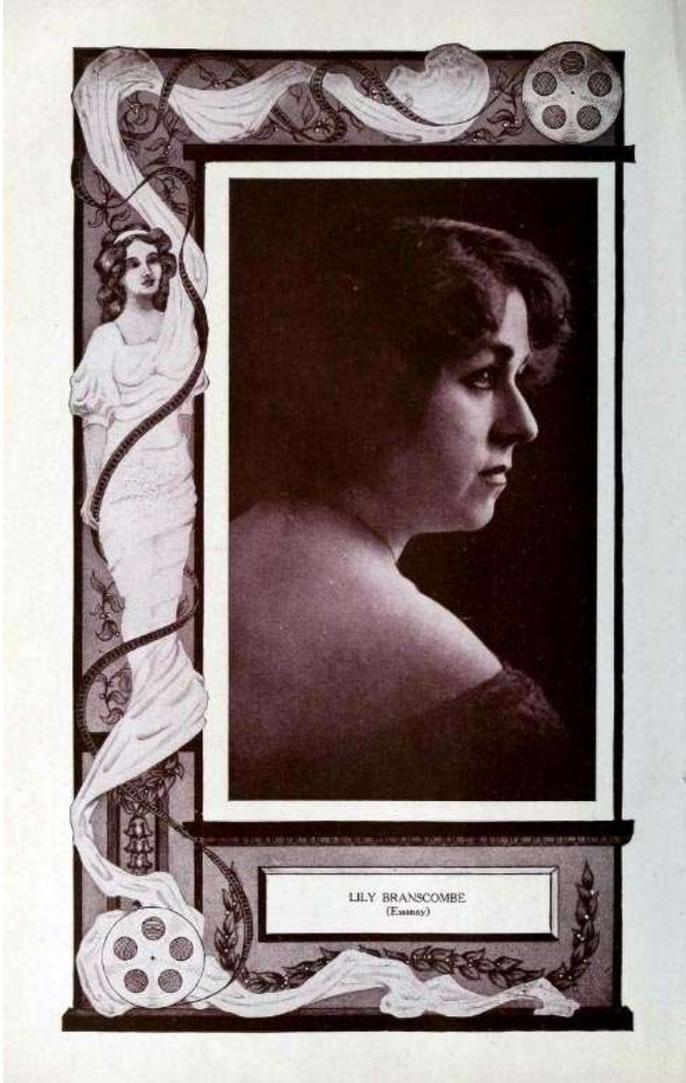
*Motion Picture Story Magazine* told its readers in October 1912,

Lily Branscombe, alas, has left the Essanay Company. This will be a disappointment to her many friends. She has not yet made arrangements for the future.

*Motography* expanded,

Miss Lily Branscombe, who for the last year has become popular wherever motion pictures are shown, by her splendid taking of leads for one of the troupes at the Essanay's eastern plant, has left the company to take a rest which is the first indulged in for three years. She claims to have no definite plans for the future beyond complete enjoyment of her vacation, which is to be of indefinite length. The well wishes of the Essanay company and of the many friends Miss Branscombe has made during her year in Essanay pictures will accompany her in whatever work she undertakes.<sup>1</sup>

In the New York City Directory for 1915 Lily Branscombe, actress, was in 10 Sherman Ave New York. At the 1920 United States Federal Census "Herman J Ashton," (51) Lily B Ashton (40) and Herbert A Ashton (17) were all living at 10 Sherman Ave New York.



*Motion Picture Story Magazine* October 1912

Herbert Sr applied for naturalisation in the United States in February 1922 when his address was 10 Sherman Ave New York City: his wife “Lillian Doris” was living with him.<sup>2</sup>

Lily Branscombe, aged 59, was honoured in Boston in 1927; she appeared with her son in a revival of the 1922 play *Kempy*.

### **“Kempy” at Somerville Theatre**

Lily Branscombe is “guest” star this week at the Somerville Theatre, playing the role of Ma Bence in the merry comedy entitled “Kempy.” Herbert Ashton Jr and Miss Marion White in congenial roles shared the favour of the audience with Miss Branscombe, the whole performance being highly satisfactory.<sup>3</sup>

Lily B Ashton was a widow living alone at 107 Wadsworth Terrace, 461 Fort Washington Avenue Manhattan at the 1930 US Federal Census (occupation: “none”).

Herbert Sr died on 31 January 1930 at age 65.

Lily departed San Francisco on the S.S. *Sonoma* on 21 August 1930 for Honolulu, Suva and Sydney, arriving 11 September.<sup>4</sup> Her brothers Arthur and Hedley were living in Sydney. Her visit went unnoticed by the Australian and New Zealand papers. She returned on the same vessel on 26 August a year later.



S.S. *Sonoma* in 1916.

The 1940 US Federal Census had her still at Fort Washington Ave Manhattan, with two lodgers, 24 year old Alice Loftus a registered nurse and Yernant Iskember, a 62 year old Turkish lecturer.

In the 1944 US City Directory for Manhattan, Lily B Ashton was still at 461 Fort Washington Avenue but in 1945 she was living at 800 River Drive.

In 1952 when she applied for naturalisation she was living with her son Herbert Jr at 468 Willets St Daly City California. He died in August 1960.

Lily B Ashton died on 28 February 1970, aged 92 or 93. She is buried at Olivet Memorial Park, Colma, San Mateo County, California: Memorial ID 172191027.





468 Willets St Daly City California where Lily and her son Herbert were living in 1952 (Google image).



Herbert Ashton junior (Herbert Arthur Ashton) was born on 25 September 1902 in San Francisco. He was a successful actor, best known for playing “Slicker” in the Fox film *Me, Gangster* (1928).

He was on Broadway from 1915 to 1934 as actor, playwright and director. He acted in *The Brothers Karamazov* in 1927, *Mountain Fury* in 1929, *Enemy Within* 1931 and *Hired Husband* 1932. He wrote and played in the crook melodrama *The Come-On Man* at the 49<sup>th</sup> St theatre in 1929—his father was in that play too.<sup>5</sup> His successful 1928 play *Brothers* (255 performances on Broadway, then on to London) was adapted by Columbia Pictures and released in December 1930 to “unanimous acclaim”.<sup>6</sup> It was an exploration of nature and nurture in twin brothers raised apart.

Herbert Ashton Jr married Lila Mae McLaren, (an 18 year old teacher according to the certificate), in Hamilton Ontario on 13 January 1924.<sup>7</sup>

### **Hamilton Showgirl And Actor Elope**

Herbert Ashton, Jr, juvenile lead in the Temple Stock Company which has been playing here for some time, and Miss Lila MacLaren, a local girl who had played in the chorus for several productions, eloped to New York late yesterday. They were married before they left by Rev. Henry Roche and wired Miss MacLaren’s mother from New York informing her of the event.<sup>8</sup>

The 1930 US Federal Census has Herbert A Ashton (27, “writer, plays”) and his (presumably second) wife “Billie” (24, born in Texas, no occupation) living at 184 Hollywood Blvd Los Angeles.

At age 50 in 1952, at the time of her petition for naturalisation, he was living with his mother at 468 Willets St Daly City San Francisco. He died in San Francisco on 13 August 1960.





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- <sup>1</sup> *Motography* January–December 1912.
- <sup>2</sup> "New York, County Naturalization Records, 1791-1980," database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:QPTQ-YQHS> : 14 February 2019), Herbert Joseph Newton Ashton, 1922; citing Naturalization, New York, United States, Citing various county clerk offices of New York; FHL microfilm 005411782.
- <sup>3</sup> *Boston Globe* 11 January 1927.
- <sup>4</sup> *Oakland Tribune* 11 August 1930.
- <sup>5</sup> Amnon Kabatchnik 2017. *Blood on the stage, 1925–1950: milestone plays of crime, mystery and mayhem*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- <sup>6</sup> *Evening Post* 24 December 1930.
- <sup>7</sup> "Ontario Marriages, 1869-1927," database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:QKM5-5LL3> : 15 March 2018), entry for Herbert Ashton and Lila Mae McLaren, 13 Jan 1924; citing registration , Hamilton, Wentworth, Ontario, Canada, Archives of Ontario, Toronto; FHL microfilm 2,393,917.
- <sup>8</sup> *Windsor Star* 14 January 1924.