

The Hungerford Clapper

I was in the Triangle show in the winter of 1953. We did 19 shows in 15 cities, going as far south as New Orleans. We had our own Pullman cars which, after each show, were hitched to a train going to our next city. Here is a paragraph from a letter I wrote to my parents in 1954.

“From St. Louis to Kansas City, the president of the Frisco railroad hooked his private dining, club and living cars onto our train for our use. Free food, cigarettes, etc. He gave each of us a nice set of 8 glasses saying “Frisco Railway, Clark Hungerford, Pres.” And two decks of Frisco playing cards. I wish you could have seen his living car! Small living room, exquisitely decorated, small dining room, bedrooms each with shower, etc. His club car where we had drinks and played cards looked like a fashionable New York club.”

Another Triangle cast member, Joe Knox, recalls that Mr. Hungerford was dressed in orange and black for the trip. He says, “I believe that the Frisco car was hooked up to an Illinois Central train behind the two Triangle Club Pullman cars. I remember that the car was lavish--paneled, with comfortable furniture, a shower, lots of drinks, and big enough for a party for the whole troupe. Every time I see an old-time fancy railroad car--like those in the Railroad Museum of York, England, or in movies about the Orient Express--I think of that car.”

Years pass. From 1972 to 1974 I taught English at Campbell College, Buies Creek, NC. In one of my writing classes, I had a student who was noticeably older than the others, named Homer Hungerford. I inquired as to whether he might be related to Clark Hungerford of the Frisco railway, and he said Clark was his uncle. Homer turned out to be Princeton '48. He lived near Buies Creek and invited me to his home one evening for drinks.

As Homer and I were swapping Princeton stories and memories, he told me that he had been a member of a party that stole the clapper (presumably in the fall of 1944). His uncle Clark was so proud of the accomplishment involving a family member that he had the clapper melted down so that miniature chrome-plated clappers could be made for all of the participants.



Homer had one of these clappers. And to my huge astonishment, *he gave it to me*. Perhaps thanks partly to the drinks, I was overwhelmed with emotion to the point of tears at having this precious piece of Princeton memorabilia. I have kept it safe for 45 years, though I will admit I have periodically misplaced it and then found it again.

Homer's dates were 1926-2014. His obituary in the Greenville SC newspaper read in part:

"During Homer's colorful life he made an impact wherever he lived. This was never more evident than while serving his country in Korea and Vietnam. Homer was honored for his gallantry and valor with 10 Battle Stars, a Silver Star, 3 Bronze Stars with Oak Leaf Clusters, 2 Purple Hearts with Oak Leaf Clusters, 6 Good Conduct Medals and a reprimand or two thrown in."

His *PAW* obituary read in part:

“Homer sailed the Atlantic in a sloop and traveled from Tonga to Tahiti in a ketch.

“Homer had several Princeton relatives, including his father, Leslie '23; an uncle, Clark '22; a brother, Phillips '51; and cousins Clark Jr. '49 and Richard '50. Homer was fiercely loyal to '48 and to Princeton and always was warmly welcomed when he would appear at major reunions. He was our soldier of fortune and our most unforgettable character.”

I am happy for the Princetoniana Committee of the Alumni Council to have The Hungerford Clapper, and I think Homer Hungerford '48 would be too.

Cherrill P. Heaton '54