

DONNA GOODISON

He brings history to life

Richard Clark has found his identity by becoming other people.

His one-man plays chronicle the lives of Clarence Darrow, Mark Twain, John Barrymore, and Andrew Carnegie.

"My goal is to do exactly what I'm doing," Clark said. "As Dan Akroyd in 'The Blues Brothers' said, I'm on a mission from God. I could never find greater joy or satisfaction if I was given a major role in an A-list Hollywood picture."

The **Boylston** man performs up to 35 shows a month across New England — at retirement communities, colleges, schools, libraries, historical societies, and other community organizations.

"The stories my characters tell all lead to spiritual and fundamental truths that I hold dear," Clark said. "That gives me great pleasure in telling history because of it."

He finds his show about Darrow — the legendary 20th-century trial lawyer, civil libertarian, and champion of the labor movement — to be most inspirational. Darrow was the defense attorney in the Leopold and Loeb murder trial and the "monkey trial" of Tennessee high school teacher John Scopes, who in 1925 was charged with violating a state law that barred public schools from teaching the theory of evolution.

"He's the most thought-provoking, the most personally satisfying to play because of the subject matter," Clark



Richard Clark of Boylston says that of all the historical characters he portrays he finds Clarence Darrow "the most inspirational."

said. "Not that I believe in his philosophies, but I admire the courage of his conviction. He was a beacon in the darkness of a terrible time in the history of this country."

Clark's shows are a mixture of his own writing — based on autobiographies, books, and letters — and that of other playwrights. He ends each performance with an epilogue on the char-

acter that he has portrayed.

Clark developed his "Keeping History Alive" series in 1998, when he was doing regional theater.

"I was looking for a way that I didn't have to commute to New York," he said. "I have a home and family here, and I needed a reasonable way to make a living."

Though he never desired to act on

television or the big screen, he took TV soap opera roles in the 1990s to earn his Actors' Equity Association card. He appeared as a teacher and carnival worker on CBS's "Guiding Light" and "As the World Turns." He also took turns as a moviegoer in a "Saturday Night Live" comedy sketch with Will Ferrell and a dockworker in "The Kennedys of Massachusetts" miniseries.

"If you blinked, you might have missed me," Clark said.

His first theatrical performance was at home at age 6 — a poetic reading of Rudyard Kipling's "If."

"My mother taught me the poem," Clark said. "It wasn't the impetus [for his acting career], but it was the first time I ever received any praise for acting."

Clark moved around as a child — New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Rhode Island — while his father, Dick Partridge, pursued a career as a radio and television personality in the 1950s.

"It whetted my appetite, I guess, because I got to sit in his lap and talk to all of New York and half of New England" on New York's WNEW-AM radio, he said.

The desire to become an actor hit Clark after he performed a skit on a Caribbean cruise and won first prize.

"People loved it, so I figured it was a good way to make people happy," he said.

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Clark majored in English and theater at Clark University in Worcester, graduating in 1973. He did voiceover work for the former Worcester Science Center and performed at Foothills Theatre in Worcester and in other repertory productions.

But theater remained an avocational pursuit rather than a vocation for many years. Clark was self-employed in the financial services field and did not become a full-time actor until a decade ago.

"I act because I love it," said Clark, who also studied at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts, the TVI Actors Studio, and the Actors Connection in New York. "It's fun, and you give people pleasure — no better job in the world. You can't have any more fun with your clothes on."

Clark will perform his one-man play about Clarence Darrow at 7:30 p.m. March 17 at the Boylston Historical Society and Museum. Admission is \$3 for members, \$5 for nonmembers, and free for students younger than 18. For more information, call the museum at 508-869-2720.