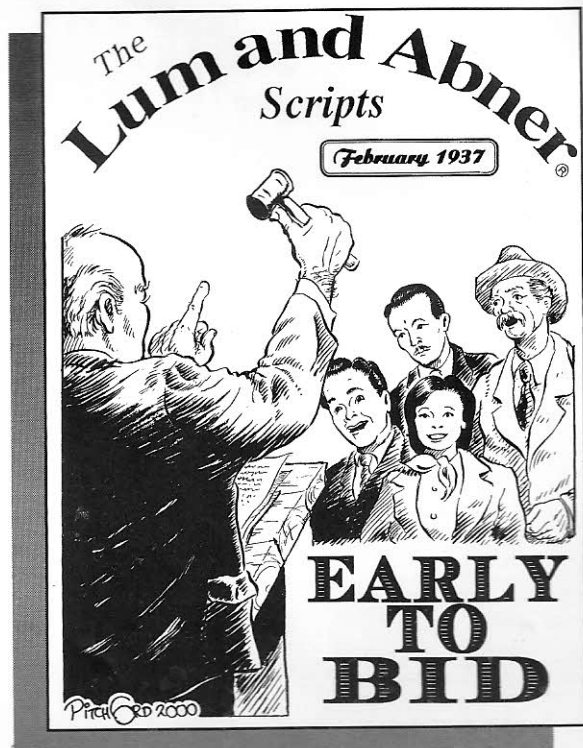


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A new volume in our series of books reprinting the *Lum and Abner* scripts of the 1930s is now available, just in time for these programs' 63rd anniversary! The newest volume is *FEBRUARY 1937: EARLY TO BID*, and continues the storyline begun in the previous volume. Abner is going to inherit a small fortune from an eccentric millionaire, but in order to comply with the terms of the will, he must dispose of all his worldly possessions and be absolutely broke by March 1. In this series of scripts, our old pal Mr. Peabody tries every possible way to get rid of his belongings, only to find that most of the Pine Ridgers will not take them. When he resorts to having Squire Skimp auction off his house and its contents, things really get messy.

As always, copies of this volume are \$5.00 each. There are still a few copies left of the previous volume, *JANUARY 1937: WHERE THERE'S A WILL*, in case you need to see how this all came about. Send orders to the Executive Secretary at 81 Sharon Blvd., Dora, AL 35062.



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# THE JOT 'EM DOWN JOURNAL

February 2000

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**THE NATIONAL  
LUM AND ABNER SOCIETY**  
*Zekatif Ossifers*

**PRESIDENT**  
Donnie Pitchford

**VICE-PRESIDENT**  
Sam Brown

**EXECUTIVE SECRETARY**  
Tim Hollis

\*\*\*\*\*

**Cover:** Chet (Lum) Lauck and Norris (Abner) Goff celebrate their 15 years on the air in 1946. With the help of the NLAS, the story of *Lum and Abner* now continues into 2000!

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## IS IT 2000 OR 1939?



In our December issue, we reprinted a 1939 article from *THE MENA STAR*, in which Dick Huddleston related some of the questions he fielded from the tourists who visited his Pine Ridge store. Today, of course, that store is under the management of Lon & Kathy Stucker, and after that issue of the *Journal* came out, Kathy sent the following: "I just remembered that I wanted to comment on something in the last *Journal*. The questions asked by tourists haven't changed since Dick Huddleston was here. We get exactly the same ones even now. We answer them as well as we can, since they are asked in complete sincerity." So, even as the calendar switches over from the 1900s to the 2000s, we find that some things stay the same!



# BOBS WATSON

## 1930 - 1999

During 2000, the NLAS will be doing a lot of talking about the 60th anniversary of L&A's first motion picture, *DREAMING OUT LOUD*. Sadly, one of the main actors in that film will not be around to celebrate this milestone with us. We recently received the shocking news that Rev. Bobs Watson passed away on June 26, 1999. We do not know why we were not notified of this sad event when it happened; had we known about it we would have acknowledged it in the *JOURNAL* long ago. However, it is not too late, and following is a summary of his career, including his work with Lum and Abner.

The youngest actor to ever work with Lum and Abner came from a true show business background. The Watson family was quite prominent in the industry; father Coy Watson worked in various capacities, including special effects (he was responsible for, among other things, the effects in the Douglas Fairbanks Sr. silent film *The Thief of Baghdad*). Coy and his wife had produced eight offspring, all of whom were working in the movies: Coy Jr., Vivian, Gloria, Louise, Harry, Billy, Delmar, and Gary. On November 19, 1930, the last addition to the family made his debut and was christened Robert B. Watson.

Young Robert began his film career at age six months. ("I played a baby," he stated.) During the mid-1930s he began appearing in films more frequently, often in tandem with some of his older brothers or sisters. Most child actors in those days had a speciality in some area or another, be it singing, dancing, comedy, or whatever. Bobby Watson, as he was known professionally, found his particular talent: he was a "crier." Whenever a scene called for a youngster who could cry convincingly, the word went out that the Watson kid was the one to get.

He also got calls for other types of roles as well; it seems there was another actor named Bobby Watson, who was old enough to have appeared in silent pictures, and the two were always being confused by the post office, casting offices, and the like. The climax came when Daddy Coy answered a request for an audition for "Bobby Watson," only to discover that the role would have his 6-year-old son playing a bartender! At that point, Dad decided that a new name was in order. "Robert" sounded too mature for a child, and "Bob" just wasn't right either, so they finally created a nickname and called him "Bobs," which stuck for the rest of his adult life.

One of the first productions in  
February 2000 - Page 4



Bobs Watson as "Pee Wee" in *BOYS TOWN* (1938)

which the new Bobs Watson's weeping attracted a lot of attention was *In Old Chicago* (1938), with Don Ameche, in which Bobs cried his way through the role of the youngest member of the O'Leary family. He appeared again with Ameche in *Alexander Graham Bell* (1939), a film that Lum and Abner frequently joked about. In the Bell biography, Bobs played a deaf mute whom struggling inventor Ameche helps learn to talk.

Bobs said that every kid in Hollywood tested for the pivotal role of "Pee Wee" in the 1938 Spencer Tracy/Mickey Rooney drama *Boys Town*, but it was Bobs who landed the role. His scenes turned out to be among the best-remembered in the movie, as he searched for candy in Father Flanagan's (Tracy's) desk drawers, and was later run over by a car as he tried to stop tough kid Rooney from leaving.

Bobs always joked that he had one of the most traumatic of all childhoods, because being run over by a car was only one of the grisly fates he faced during the next three years of his film career. In *Kentucky* (1938), not only was his father shot by Yankee soldiers during the Civil War, but as if that were not bad enough, Bobs grew up to become Walter Brennan! In *Dodge City* (1939), he was jerked off a wagon and dragged to death by a team of frightened horses; in *On Borrowed Time* (1939), with Lionel Barrymore, he finished his scenes by falling out of a tree and breaking his back.

Amid this trail of tears came his role in Lum and Abner's first movie, *Dreaming Out Loud* (1940). Bobs played the part of Jimmy, Frances Langford's kid brother, and nephew of cranky old spinster Jessica Spence (Clara Blandick, "Auntie Em" of *Wizard of Oz* fame). In the story,



With Lionel Barrymore in *ON BORROWED TIME* (1939).



*When Bobs Watson appeared with Lum & Abner in DREAMING OUT LOUD (1940), he was more of a movie veteran than they were!*

Jimmy witnesses the hit-and-run death of a little girl in Pine Ridge. He recognizes the car as belonging to his Aunt Jessie, but her explosive temper makes him afraid to reveal the truth to anyone. When he finally does confess everything to L&A, the task becomes theirs to prove that he is telling the truth. At the high point of the plot, Jimmy/Bobs comes down with a severe case of pneumonia, and it looks like he will die before the murder case is solved. (Moviegoers who had seen his previous films would probably have been less than surprised had he done so.) However, all ended happily anyway.

During the filming of *Dreaming Out Loud*, young Bobs fell in love with a certain toy sailboat that was part of the set representing his bedroom. When the picture was completed, Chet Lauck and Tuffy Goff surprised Bobs by buying the prop from the studio, autographing it, and presenting it to him as a memento. At the time, Bobs was told that his new sailboat had even been used in *Gone With The Wind*, as a plaything belonging to Scarlett and



*Bobs and Chet Lauck confer between takes during the filming of DREAMING OUT LOUD (1940).*

Rhett's daughter.

Bobs kept his *Dreaming Out Loud* boat until 1989, when, during a move from one residence to another, a moving van full of Watson family belongings (including the toy boat) was stolen. The story of what happened next is too long to get into here, but basically an antique dealer contacted the NLAS, wanting to know the story behind a toy boat he had recently acquired that was labeled "Dreaming Out Loud," and had Lum & Abner's autographs on it. When all was said and done, Bobs had recovered his prize from the antique dealer, and in June 1990 he presented the one-of-a-kind artifact to the NLAS archives in gratitude.

Unfortunately, it was shortly after completing *Dreaming Out Loud* that Bobs' career went into a temporary decline. In 1941 he appeared with the Dead End Kids in *Hit the Road*, and was reunited with Tracy and Rooney for *Men of Boys Town*, but at age 11 it looked like he was getting too old for "crybaby parts," as he called them. When the Walt Disney Studios began work on their animated version of Kenneth Grahame's *The Reluctant Dragon*, Bobs was called in to be the voice of the young boy in the story, but everyone

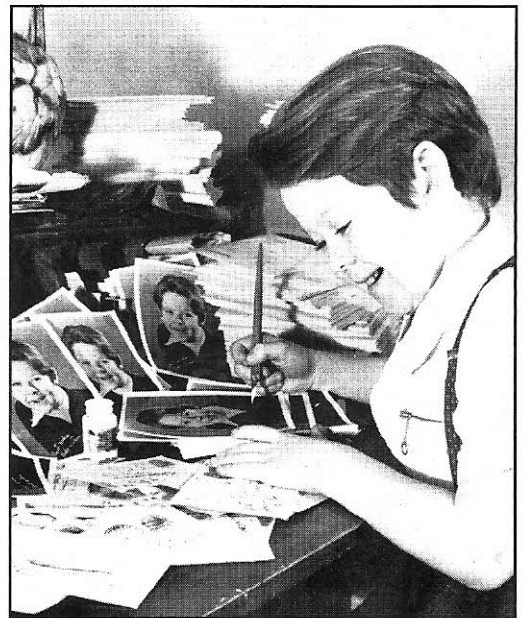
discovered that, while he could memorize lines with a photographic memory, he was less than convincing when reading from a script.

Many child actors faced similar problems when they began growing up, but this did not take a toll on Bobs as it did on some others. He credits this to his

strong family unit and the love the members showed for one another. During the rest of the 1940s he concentrated on his schooling, and let his acting slide for a while.

By the early 1950s he was quite active on stage in the Los Angeles area, demonstrating a versatility that had not been evident during the years he had been typecast as a crybaby. In a multitude of plays, which continued through his stint in the military, he performed everything from drunks to imbeciles to heroes to the dual title roles in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. He also made a brief appearance in one more film with Mickey Rooney, *The Bold and the Brave* (1956), in which he continued his screen track record of the past by getting shot in the head.

By 1959, Bobs had developed into a very fine character actor with a particular flair for comedy. In that year, production began on a new TV sitcom, *Hot Off The Wire*, starring Jim Backus. In



*Bobs answers his fan mail, circa 1941.*



this series, Backus portrayed the head of a struggling news wire service, with Nita Talbot as his cynical assistant; Bobs Watson was cast as Sidney the office boy, who could sometimes be bright but who could also be as dense as foam rubber. The syndicated series lasted for two seasons.

During production of the Backus series, Bobs said he would come home at night and hear that oft-mentioned "still small voice" whispering to him, "Is this all there is? Isn't there something more?" Consultation with his local pastor convinced Bobs that he was experiencing a genuine divine call into the ministry. He began his seminary training, but found it necessary to continue his performing whenever he could, in order to support his wife and young children. He appeared in several episodes of Lum and Abner's TV descendant *The Beverly Hillbillies*; in one set of shows he played the part of "Fred Penrod," one of Elly May's boyfriends (nice work if you can get it!), and later (1965) returned as a TV assistant director who tried to put Jed and Granny through the paces of a commercial for Foggy Mountain Soap, with disastrous results. In an episode of *The Lucy Show* he basically recreated his newspaper role from the Jim Backus series. He also appeared in one episode of *Bonanza*, and again demonstrated his versatility with his portrayal of a gung-ho Marine sergeant in the film *The First To Fight* (1967).

Finally, in 1968 he finished his schooling and became a fully-ordained minister in the United Methodist Church. "When I first went into the ministry," he said, "I thought that meant I was supposed to totally abandon everything I had ever done in the past, and become this 'whole new creature,' as it were. But after about a year I realized that God hadn't called me into the ministry for me to ignore my past, but rather so I could USE the talents I already had!"

His show biz background first raised some eyebrows in 1969, when he organized an old-time camp meeting at his La Canada, California, church and promoted the event in full costume as a circuit rider. Throughout the remainder of his ministry he continued to incorporate costumes, props, and voice characterizations into his sermons, once even coming to church in his pajamas to illustrate a certain point.

During 1977-78, Bobs took a brief leave of absence from the ministry, and to keep body and soul together he once again signed with an agent and began searching for new roles to perform.



Rev. Bobs Watson preaches a sermon in his pajamas, ca. 1986.

He appeared in four episodes of TV's *Lou Grant* series, and then essentially played himself in the 1977 Ron Howard picture *Grand Theft Auto*. He had performed Howard's real-life wed-



Bobs presents his *DREAMING OUT LOUD* prop sailboat to the NLAS archives, June 1990.

ding ceremony earlier, and when someone was needed to do the same in the movie, Howard called on Bobs to do the honors. He returned to the ministry in 1979.

In 1988, Bobs and Mickey Rooney were reunited at Boys Town, Nebraska, for a celebration of the 50th anniversary of that famous motion picture. In June 1990, "Pee Wee" returned to Boys Town to deliver the opening sermon in the new Protestant chapel there, and the very next weekend was the special guest of the NLAS at the 50th anniversary "re-premiere" of *Dreaming Out Loud* in Mena, Arkansas. It was at this time that he presented the NLAS with the prop sailboat from that film, and in turn the NLAS presented Bobs with the 1990 Lum & Abner Memorial Award.

Bobs experienced some health problems while in Mena, and after his return home continued to have difficulties. He eventually was forced to retire from pastoring completely, but did manage to have one more TV performance as a judge in the first *Perry Mason* made-for-TV movie that was done after the 1993 death of series star Raymond Burr. Unfortunately, this would be one of Bobs' final appearances. His wife Jaye explains what happened next:

"Bobs was diagnosed with prostate cancer in 1994, and in the last year of his life it metastasized to the bones. I brought him home from his last hospital stay on March 24, 1999, and for the next three months, while on a leave of absence from my own ministry in hospice, we set up our own hospice here in Laguna Beach. On June 19, at Annual Conference in Redlands, I was ordained Permanent Deacon in the United Methodist Church. Bobs had been left well guarded by a co-worker and RN, and upon my late return I found him awake a waiting for me, amazingly alert. He congratulated me and then he said with a smile, 'Now I can really rest in peace. There's another Rev. Watson on the job.'" Bobs passed away exactly one week later, on June 26.

The NLAS and all of Bobs' many film fans deeply regret the loss of our friend. Even with all the weepy, tearful parts he played in the movies, it is safe to say that Bobs never made people as sad as he did when he actually left us. Our condolences go out to Jaye and their children.

- Tim Hollis

# LUM & ABNER: JANUARY-FEBRUARY 1950

We now continue with our series of articles examining the two half-hour seasons of *LUM AND ABNER*. By the time January and February 1950 came along, the program was in some serious trouble, both ratingswise and in some of its listeners' opinions (which probably amounted to about the same thing). Since only two episodes from this time frame are available to us, we will first examine them, then take a look at some of the fan mail that was coming into L&A's CBS office at the time.

**JANUARY 4, 1950:** The first show of the new year brings a welcome change. For the first time during the half-hour version's second season, the show is not sustained by the network. Instead, the Ford Motor Company has returned to *Lum and Abner* after a 16-year absence! Unfortunately, however, this new sponsorship would not be on a weekly basis, but would consist of only a few episodes in a hit-or-miss fashion during the next four months. For some reason, even though Wendell Niles can

still be heard delivering the show's introduction, Ford chose not to use him in the commercials themselves. In fact, it sounds as though the commercials may have been prerecorded and then dropped into the show; they have the same exact announcer and cast of actors that appeared when Ford sponsored the last days of *The Fred Allen Show*, an association that had ended six months before they began halfheartedly picking up the tab for L&A.

In the show itself, L&A hang up their new calendar and marvel that it is 1950. Lum is worried, though, because ZaSu Pitts has stepped up her attempted romance with him, and he wonders what to do about it. Abner demonstrates a rarely-exhibited talent for making up verses on the spot when he suggests that Lum send ZaSu a poem: "I cannot marry you, Miss Pitts / My reasons I will explain / The more I hear the 'Wedding March' / The more it sounds like 'Mule Train.'" (This cues Opie Cates' orchestra to go into an odd musical rendition of those very two songs in juxtaposition!)

Abner has troubles of his own: Lydia, a distant cousin of Lizabeth's, is coming all the way from New Jersey to look for a husband in Pine Ridge. Lum takes one look at the photo of Lydia and immediately falls in love. He hopes that by having every date with her while she is in town, he can discourage Miss Pitts' affections. Only after he has written a passionate letter to Lydia, proposing marriage, does he notice some partially rubbed-out writing on the back of the photo. Lydia is a former beauty queen... "Miss Egg Harbor of 1909"!!

After Abner and Lizabeth meet Lydia at the train, Abner cannot resist torturing Lum with her description: "When she got off the train, I thought we wuz standin' in front of the cattle car... She's got more wrinkles than a pound of prunes. Lemme see that pitcher agin, Lum, I think hit was took in 1809!!" Now Lum is in a mess, since Lydia has made it plain that his letter of proposal is with her lawyer. When Lydia arrives, she is played by the brilliant comic actress Elvia Allman, famed as half of the team of "Brenda and Cobina" on *The Bob Hope Show*. It takes only one look at her for Lum to decide to feign amnesia, in the hope Abner can convince her that he is not responsible for his actions (or letters).



Elvia Allman

The unlikely romantic couple gets a big laugh:

**LYDIA:** Oh, Lum, look at me! I'm your Lydia! The girl in the picture! Lydia!

**LUM:** (in a daze) Oh yes, how do you do, Miz Pinkham.

When ZaSu Pitts enters and Lum mistakenly calls her by name, his ruse is exposed. Now the only way Lum can get out of dating Lydia is to announce that he and Miss Pitts are engaged! ZASU: "Oh, this is so sudden... I ACCEPT!" Lum faints at the thought of

what he has done, and Abner rushes for some water. While both of them are thus preoccupied, Lydia congratulates ZaSu, and



## SO WHAT? DEPARTMENT

The L&A broadcast of January 4, 1950, eventually came to play a role in the 1984 formation of the National Lum & Abner Society. Our prez, Uncle Donnie Pitchford, explains how this came about:

During my elementary school years, I learned of *Lum and Abner* from my father, who had heard the programs with his family during their Depression and World War II years spent on a farm in northern Arkansas. For another decade or so, I believed Lum and Abner had been an "Arkansas-only" program, due to my father's impression of the rural-style storytelling and vocal performances of Goff and Lauck.

The Bicentennial year found me making my transition into college, and with it came acquisitions of classic radio recordings. I stumbled onto a brief *Lum and Abner* clip that summer (the oft-repeated "You hold the nail and I'll whack it with the hammer" bit), and finally located a complete program a year later.

I found the program on a 12-inch LP (that's a record album on vinyl for you younger fans) in the budget section of the music department at a Longview, TX, Gibson's Discount Center! (This was our area's pre-Wal-Mart style of store.) For less than two dollars, I picked up the January 4, 1950 episode, which was split across two sides of the record. It was part of the "When Radio was King" series produced in 1974 by Memorabilia Records (release #MLP-717). I was excited to finally have a complete recording of *Lum and Abner* to play for my father, who had told me a decade or more earlier, "Nah, I doubt any recordings of that old show exist. They didn't have tape back then."

I immediately spun the platter (which was on the Nostalgia label) upon arriving home, but oddly my father wasn't that interested. He listened for a few moments, and said "That's not really how I remember them." No doubt he recalled the classic quarter-hour series! At the time, I thought the program was interesting, but filed it away for safekeeping, not becoming too excited about *Lum and Abner* until a few years later when the earlier programs started appearing over the AM radio waves from a nearby town. Once again, it was my father who called my attention to L&A when he informed me of the broadcasts.

An odd coincidence surrounds the purchase of that 1950 episode. Some years later, when the NLAS had become a reality, Tim Hollis asked me if I could estimate the dates certain things took place for an article designed to chronicle the Society's formative years. I discovered I didn't have to guess when I bought that record. I printed the date on the inside sleeve (an odd habit I had). It was March 12, 1977, which happened to have been Tim's 14th birthday! I told him I must have bought it for him that year, but since I wouldn't meet him face-to-face for another eight years, I held onto it!



confides, "If that long-legged Casanova tries to back out of this, just call me and I'll help you trap him again, like I did this time!"

**JANUARY 11, JANUARY 18, and JANUARY 25, 1950:** The content of these shows is unknown at this time.

**FEBRUARY 8, 1950:** For a long time we have had this show listed as undated in our tape catalog, but thanks to the remarks from some of L&A's fans, we now know that this was its correct broadcast date. This is one of only a handful of half-hour shows that were specifically adapted from storylines originating in *Lum and Abner's* 15-minute days; in this case, the original programs were broadcast in January 1946.

L&A take out "partnership insurance," which will pay the surviving partner \$5000 in the event of the demise of the other one. Typically for the half-hour shows, Abner seems much more interested in the money than in Lum's life:

*LUM: Grannies, wouldn't you be turrible sad if sompin hap-pened to me?*

*ABNER: Well, yeah... but that \$5000 will be a awful lot o' comfort to me in my hour o' sorrow. Don't worry, Lum, I'm gonna be just as sad as I can be... with \$5000 in my pocket... I'd jist love ta dry my eyes on them little green hankies.*

This exchange is just another example of how L&A's human qualities often took a back seat to easy gags during these 30-minute programs. Anyway, the duo head off for the physical exam they must pass in order to take out the policy; the role of Dr. Finchley is played by frequent L&A supporting player Willard Waterman. (Eight months after this program, Waterman would replace Hal Peary as *The Great Gildersleeve*, and never again would he be relegated to bit parts!)

The scene in the doctor's office is lifted largely from the 15-minute version of this storyline (in which Frank Graham played the part of the doctor), but with some additional jokes thrown in. The routine about Abner's "middle ear" and "forearm" remains, however. An almost throwaway line comes when Finchley listens to Abner's pulse, prompting Lum to ask, "Errrr... What's up, Doc?" in his best Mel Blanc imitation. There is also a wonderful sequence in which Waterman and Norris Goff harmonize beautifully on a chorus of "The Old Oaken Bucket."

In this show, Andy Devine basically plays the role assigned to Grandpappy Spears in 1946. As Abner's confidant, he warns Mr. Peabody about the need to be wary around a partner who has a \$5000 policy on his life. Andy tells the story of Barney Baltenstopper, who tried to push his partner off a high stepladder to collect the money. "Folks always said Barney had a mean streak in him," says Andy, echoing Grandpap's line, but for some reason it doesn't get as big a laugh from the audience as it should. Naturally, this sets up a scene in which Lum tries to get a suspicious Abner to climb a stepladder.

As for Lum, he consults with Luke Spears (Dink Trout) and develops similar suspicions. A joke apparently originates here that became a regular part of Chet Lauck's post-radio career as an after-dinner speaker. Discussing his and Abner's

years in school together, he recalls their fourth grade teacher: "Nag, nag, nag! 'Why don'tcha git ta school on time?' 'Why don'tcha git yer lessons?' 'Why don'tcha git a shave?'" For the rest of the show, L&A each think the other has an ulterior motive for everything that happens.

As in the 15-minute version, things come to a head when L&A decide to fight it out in a showdown, with the unwilling help of Andy Devine and Opie Cates. Whereas in the original Squire Skimp stopped this whole business before it got serious, in this rendition L&A do actually begin firing at each other, only to be interrupted by Dr. Finchley telling them that they both flunked the physical and the policy was rejected.

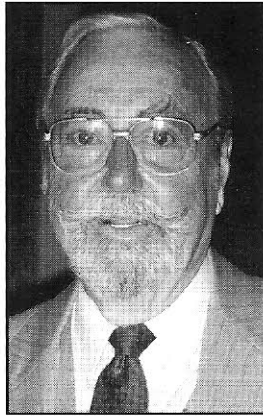
**FEBRUARY 11, FEBRUARY 18, and FEBRUARY 25, 1950:** The content of these shows is unknown at this time.

As stated earlier, a portion of L&A's fan mail from the early part of 1950 has survived. It gives a very good view of what the listening audience was thinking about their program during this period. Naturally, there were those who continued to enjoy the show:

*Glen Burnie, Maryland*

*Your show affords me a great deal of entertainment each week, and I look forward to it with a great deal of pleasure. Since your show is not presently sponsored, I wonder if you have given any thought to having recordings made for the regular record market. I should think that it would be a natural for the new 45's, and although I am not at all sure of the market or acceptance, I do know that it interests me.*

*I especially enjoyed your program tonight, February 8, about "Partnership Insurance," as I am an underwriter. I think that it was treated in a really different fashion by making it a really humorous situation, and at the same time emphasizing the serious nature of the business. You certainly have my best wishes for a long and prosperous operation of your partnership as Lum and Abner.*



**Willard Waterman**

*New England Mutual Life Insurance Co.*

*Louisville, Kentucky*

*As you will note from my stationery, I am in the life insurance business. Last Wednesday night I had the pleasure of tuning in on the LUM AND ABNER radio show, and this episode dealt with Lum and Abner buying partnership insurance.*

*As an insurance man, I think that I enjoyed this half hour skit more than any other show they have shown on the air, and since I do a great deal of work in the partnership field, you can readily understand how this appealed to me.*

*If it is possible to get a complete copy of the script of Wednesday, February 8, I would appreciate it more than I can tell. I truly want to use it in connection with a case that is actually pending right now. I certainly hope that it will be possible to obtain a copy of this script.*

*Branchport, New York*

*I have been listening to you old ras-cals for a long, long time, ever since we had our first little battery set... back when radio and you and I were young.*

*I want to tell you boys that your programs are improving with age (something I cannot say for myself) and I do enjoy them very, very much. You guys don't need any extra padding or props, like Andy Devine, ZaSu Pitts, Luke, nor Obe Case [Opie Cates] with his clarinet... BUT they are all fine, and I am sure I speak for thousands of your listeners when I say you have the best and*

**FORD** DIVISION OF *Ford Motor Company*,  
5800 SCHAEFER ROAD  
DEARBORN, MICHIGAN  
March 1, 1950

Mr. L. J. Severin  
2201 Richard Street  
Dayton, Ohio

Dear Mr. Severin:

This will reply to your very interesting letter of February 15th relative to the Lum & Abner radio show.

We always appreciate letters of this type because they do give us reactions from our various sales and promotional campaigns. The Ford dealers of America did buy the Lum & Abner show for a short period of time. It is my understanding that they will possibly do so again at a later date. We know that Lum & Abner has a tremendous audience, and it is a very effective medium for getting messages across.

Thank you for your courtesy in writing.

Sincerely yours,  
*Albert J. Pennington*  
Albert J. Pennington  
Advertising & Sales Promotion

AFR:dm

**The Ford Motor Co. explains its current relationship with L&A to one of their fans.**



*cleanest program of anything of its kind on the air today.*

One particular person still seemed to be under the impression that Lum and Abner and their associate characters were real people:

*Clyde, Kansas*

*A study club that I am a member of is having a hobby display this spring. One lady has a hobby of pipes, and as a courtesy to her our club would like to give her a pipe. I wonder if it would be possible for us to get a pipe from the "Jot Em Down Store?" As we are all listeners of the LUM AND ABNER radio program, we are all interested in a pipe from Pine Ridge.*

*This lady always wants a used pipe, and doesn't care about it being an expensive pipe. We would like a pipe like the men of the Ozarks smoke, and we would like to have it smoked by one of your radio characters or a man of your community.*

People in radio had to be extra careful about the jokes they made, especially when it came to making up names. Unfortunately, we do not have the particular episode to which this lady was referring, but it was broadcast sometime in January 1950:

*Lynch, Kentucky*

*While listening to LUM AND ABNER I was quite disgruntled to hear the description of their new character, Nellie Schulz (or Schultz). Since this was my mother's name, I didn't enjoy having it used publicly and in such a manner.*

*Since you think it so humorous, it will be hard for you to believe that she has lived in the same community for about 65 years without comment on her name, although if she listened to your program she must be embarrassed now. At any rate, I would appreciate it if you would find the boys another character.*

Unfortunately, among the complimentary letters and obviously flakey ones such as the above example, there were others who seemed to deeply resent the program's switch to its half-hour format and the necessary alternations in its style of humor. All of these people, it should be noted, were devout fans of L&A as characters... but they certainly did not care for the weekly format:

*Tulsa, Oklahoma*

*It is because of my knowledge of your characterizations that I am prompted to write this question that has come to me of late. On your present program, just as long as Lum & Abner themselves are talking and the sole point of concentration, everything is as always... perfect. However, notwithstanding my high regard for such outstanding support as old Andy Devine, Miss Pitts, and others, they just don't "ring the bell." I find a great longing in my heart for Cedric Weehunt, Squire Skimp, Grandpappy Spears, and even wonder if Quincy ever got that barn painted. Of course, Opie Cates is good because he is like you and me... "he knows whereof he speaks." Also, there is Luke, who is good... mighty good, and a dead ringer for the cantankerous little restaurant owner we had in my home town. I feel I know Luke well.*

*Hancock, Michigan*

*Heard your program again last week, and was rather disappointed. Your material was good, and the theme of your story was fine, as were both of you "old timers." But don't you think that Andy Devine rather spoils the air of the Jot 'Em Down Store? He has been portrayed in the movies in so many parts that I just cannot picture him as a part of your world.*

*And where is "fine" and the others whose names I cannot remember; there was the so-called dumb one who talked so slow and stupid like, always good for a laugh. They were a true part of your show, your town, your store. Can't you get them back again?*

*Do you need an orchestra? If your setting is as you have conjured up in our imagination, then an orchestra of this style is out of place. They do not fit. Play barn dance music or guitar playing... maybe barber shop singing.*

*The only reason I would take the time off to write this is because I enjoyed you so much and would like to have you continue as you were. I heard you almost daily on your 15-minute program while I was at college in Chicago. In fact, three of us would run out after our 5:00 clinic shift to hear you fellows. So, you can understand that this is written in all sincerity, and hope that it might prove to be helpful to you and that your sustaining days end soon.*

*Russell, Kansas:*

*You will never find a more devoted couple to any radio program than my husband and I have been all thru your years of wonderful comedy and entertainment. Now what's happened? You seem to be the kind who believe in giving a boost to all the radio and movie has-beens. Do you think that can be done and still be fair to yourselves?*



*For the past year or more I have been making it a point to speak of your show whenever radio conversation took place, to try to learn whether it was just us who cared nothing about your show any more. Apparently we are not the only ones who have dropped from your listening audience. I won't bore you with things people have said... always with regret...*

*about your show, but I will tell you of this one conversation that I hope will interest you.*

*We were driving with a lady friend when radio conversation took place. She said her husband, who is a very hard-working man, always used to enjoy LUM AND ABNER so much. I said, "Are you Lum and Abner fans too?" She replied, "We used to be, especially my husband, but no more." I said we felt the same. She said her husband would break his neck to get through with his work... he owns and runs a large greenhouse... in order to get to the radio for LUM AND ABNER. She said he worked so hard, and that was a bright spot in his day.*

*I said, "Doesn't he like the new characters they use either?" She said, "He can't stand them any more... can you?" As I said, we enjoyed you so much all through the years, perhaps because we knew the Fred Smiths so well, who used to live in Mena, and they told us about a boy who used to be called "Tuffy" who lived there too. Occasionally yet my husband tunes you in, hoping for something better, but leaves the program with a let down feeling.*

*We miss and need more Grandpappy Spears, Cedric, etc. in your radio shows. Please bring them back.*

*Unidentified city*

*No! No! No! You're taking the last bit of Americana from us. Why? Who told you to go sophisticate? Give us back the old writers... in smaller doses if need be, but... please!*

*You're funny, yes, but you're dying and some part of us is dying with you. This is my first written protest.*

If these people felt that the humor of the half-hour Lum and Abner was far removed from what had been done during the 15-minute days, they were in for a shock during this format's last two months on the air, when some of the strangest L&A comedy yet was to come. Join us in our next issue to learn how the 30-minute rendition of L&A finally hung up and quit during March and April 1950.

- Tim Hollis

# Chet Lauck, the Eternal Optimist

*The following article is a companion of sorts to our coverage of the 20th anniversary of the dedication of the Lum & Abner Monument in Mena's Janssen Park this past summer. Later that year, Chet Lauck was the guest of honor at a banquet sponsored by the Mena Optimist Club. Since Lauck would not live for many more months after that event, this undated article from THE MENA STAR gives us the best report possible on Chet's activities during the final months of his life.*

Chet Lauck was with us again last night, and will ride in our memories for an eternity. At 7 p.m. chow began promptly, to be served and devoured at the appreciation banquet sponsored by the Optimist Club of Mena, held in the Son-Light Center.

Last night was the moment for Mena to extend its appreciation to Chet Lauck for his participation in and contribution to Mena's Lum & Abner Days.

The banquet, attended by some 200 Optimists and non-Optimists (not necessarily pessimists), was deliciously prepared and adroitly dispatched by the hungry crowd — hungry for the words of Chet Lauck. They did not have long to wait. Doy Grubbs introduced him at the conclusion of the meal.

Lauck opened his after-dinner speech with jokes garnered from his vast experience as an entertainer, oil company executive, and rancher. His humor was dry, wry and funny. In fact, he kept everyone in stitches.

People had to try to stop laughing at the last joke in order to catch the next one, which came in quick succession. He brought the house down.

Switching with elegance to a more serious note, he commented that the national debt has reached the spine-chilling figure of over \$850 billion. "What kind of legacy is that to leave to our kids?" asked Lauck. "Our children are entitled to inherit this republic just as we found it...unmortgaged.

"I believe the frontier spirit is still alive in America," he continued. "We're industrious people, we will take a calculated risk. We want government to put us down and let us walk by ourselves again.

"Our ancestors came to this part of the country seeking freedom and opportunity. They were not seeking social security checks or other props. They were their own responsibility, not the government's.

"We've come to a fork in the road. We can continue on the road to the left or we can get back on the freeway to the right, which

will lead to a greater America."

By this time the crowd had applauded Lauck several times over and was on the verge of nominating him for president — such was the enthusiasm of the people. However, Lauck drove home his point with a further comment: "Borrowing to pull this country out of a recession is a synthetic sort of prosperity. It is not real. We are borrowing from our children, which is depriving them of their inheritance. I am gravely concerned."

A standing ovation greeted his closing remarks. Mena was deeply touched. Chester Lauck had reached out to the grass roots from which he came. Everyone present felt a communion of spirit. After the applause had died down, Doy Grubbs expressed the

deep appreciation of the group and the club for Lauck's comments. Leon Fancher then presented Lauck with a video tape of the Lum & Abner Celebration and parade.

Phil Boudreaux, president of the Chamber of Commerce, presented Lauck with a plaque declaring him a lifetime member of the Chamber. The plaque was made of sassafras wood by the Gold Designers.

Ken Sloan, fiddle contest judge, and Sam Varner rounded out the occasion on a lighter note, with a guitar-fiddle duet. A snappy rendition of the "Orange Blossom Special" was their first choice, then "The Arkansas Traveler" was dedicated to Chet Lauck.

Someone from the audience shouted "Play it again, Sam"

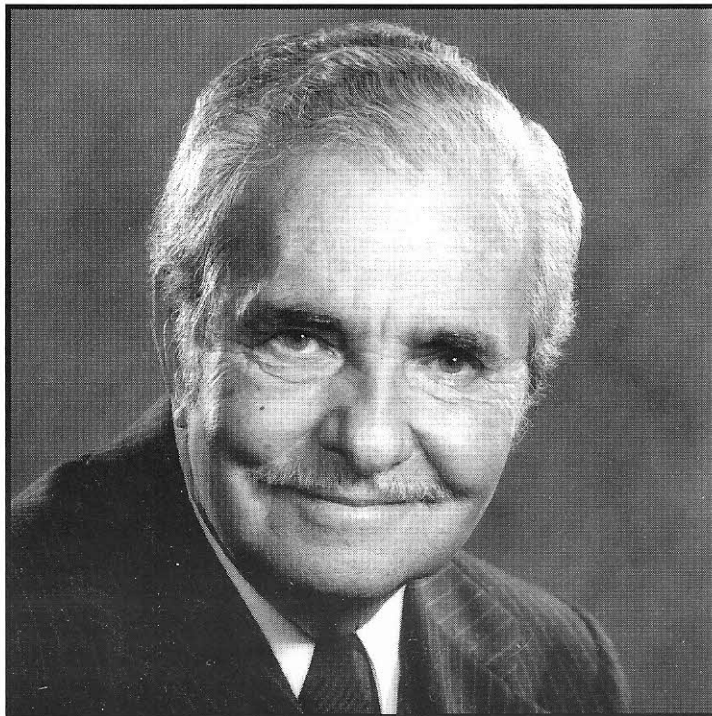
and in the true Bogart tradition, Sam Varner sang and played "Queen of the Mountain", a folk tune commemorating the importance of the railroad to this area, linking it with the skyscrapers of Kansas City and the Gulf of Mexico.

Lauck could not resist one last joke, which of course had to do with optimists and pessimists: "It seems there were two kids waiting for their Christmas packages from Santa. One kid was an optimist, and the other was a pessimist.

"When the pessimist opened his sack of presents, he pulled one out and said 'Oh, this will only get broken.' He pulled another present out and said 'Somebody will probably steal this one from me'.

"The optimist, when he opened his sack, found it full of horse manure. He promptly began to dig down through the manure, exclaiming, 'There's gotta be a pony down in here!'"

The peals of laughter still echo through the hall. Chet Lauck had underscored the vitality still vibrant in his being. One needs but to hear him to know what an optimist is.





# February 1980: "Goodbye, Lum"

20 years ago this month, the story of LUM AND ABNER appeared to have come to an end when Chester (Lum) Lauck passed away. As a memorial to that sad event, we present here two different newspaper coverages of it. First is the official UPI wire story, which actually managed to get most of its information correct.

**HOT SPRINGS, Ark.** Chester H. Lauck, who made millions of radio listeners laugh for more than two decades as half of the comedy team of Lum and Abner, died Thursday after a brief illness. He was 79.

With Lauck as Lum Edwards and his boyhood friend, Norris Goff, as Abner Peabody, the two were heard on radio from 1931 to 1955, most of that time five nights a week for 15 minutes.

Their down-home routines from the Jot Em Down Store in the mythical town of Pine Ridge made them second in popularity only to Amos 'n' Andy. Goff died in California in 1978.

About six years of the radio programs, most of which the two wrote themselves, were rerecorded and revived in 1968 and still are broadcast on more than 80 radio stations. "I think it was because we kept it pretty authentic," Lauck said in 1970 about the success of the show.

The pair also made 10 [actually, it was seven] feature-length movies and numerous shorts, but Lauck always preferred radio. "It took so long to make us up," he said of the movies, when he and Goff as young men were playing characters in their 70s. "But I reckon it wouldn't take more than a minute or two now."

When the program ended in 1955, Lauck joined Continental Oil Co. in Houston as a vice president for public relations and remained there for 12 years before retiring to his native Arkansas in 1967. "I thought all I wanted to do was hunt, fish, and play golf," Lauck said



*In February 1980, the ARKANSAS GAZETTE published this moving cartoon by George Fisher, commenting on both the passing of Chet Lauck and the passing of Norris Goff less than two years earlier.*

shortly after his retirement, "but I got sick of that right soon."

Funeral service will be at 11 a.m. Saturday at the First United Methodist Church in Hot Springs. Lauck is survived by his wife Harriet, a son and a daughter, and eight grandchildren.

*Now, most newspapers in the country chose to simply run the above wire story, but there were a few who decided to supplement it with a more personal approach. One of these exceptions was the LOS ANGELES TIMES, which assigned reporter Richard O'Reilly to dig a little deeper into the local history of LUM AND ABNER:*

The death Thursday of Chester H. Lauck at his home in Hot Springs, Ark., finally put the padlock on that fictional

place that had delighted radio listeners for so many years — Lum and Abner's Jot 'Em Down Store in Pine Ridge, Ark.

Lauck, 79, portrayed Lum beginning in 1931 until 1955. His partner, Norris Goff, who portrayed Abner, died two years ago.

Both young college graduates, they created the two old codgers full of hillbilly perspicacity while riding in a car on the way to do their first radio show. Until then, the pair, both natives of Mena, Ark., had been making a name for themselves as amateur entertainers doing a black-face routine. But as they drove to Hot Springs to answer an invitation to be on a Sunday afternoon local radio show, they decided blackface was too commonplace and they invented Lum and Abner instead. The show was such a success that they were invited back for the next eight Sundays.

It was 1931, and that summer they went to Chicago to audition for NBC. Charles Lyon, who was then an NBC announcer and now is retired in Los Angeles, recalls that he was assigned to handle that first audition.

"I remember that I asked them for a lead in to their script and they didn't know what that was. They didn't know radio shows had written scripts because they just ad-libbed theirs.

"They were very, very funny," Lyon recalled, "but the program manager wanted scripts. So they went back to their hotel room and wrote five scripts. They had an awful time of it. They knew nothing about timing, and one script (for a 15-minute show) would come out to 22 minutes and the next would be 8 minutes."

But Lauck and Goff persisted and were given a chance to become a summer replacement for a show sponsored by Quaker Oats.

"They were asked to go up to the Quaker Oats board of directors meeting

and do the show," Lyon said. The problem was that both men were very young and not believable in person as the old codgers they played.

"So they suggested that the board members turn around and face the wall so they couldn't see them, and then they did the show," Lyon said. Quaker Oats bought the show, and they were on national radio for the next 13 weeks. But after that, the regular show returned, and they ended up going to Texas for Quaker Oats, where they were on a statewide radio network for the next two years.

That was followed by a nationwide show that remained a fixture on radio for more than two decades. In 1937, the two men and their families moved to California, Lauck taking up residence in

Beverly Hills, with a ranch in Northridge. But Lum and Abner's Jot Em Down remained in Pine Ridge, Ark., where it never closed. If no one was there, you just walked in, took what you wanted, and jotted it down for them to find when they returned. Of course, Lauck and Goff played all of the other characters on the show, too. And they quickly became expert at writing radio scripts, Lyon noted, though later they did hire a scriptwriter to work with them, Roswell Rogers.

Pine Ridge was a fictional place at the start, just like the store and all of the characters. But the town of Waters, Ark., decided it wanted to adopt the store and changed its name to Pine Ridge, Lyon said. There was quite a celebration, with dignitaries from the governor on down to

mark the occasion, along with Lum and Abner.

"They had great senses of humor," Lyon said, "yet they didn't make fun of people. It was just a series of funny things happening down there in Arkansas in this little bitty town."

When the show finally ended about 1955, Lauck moved to Houston, to become an executive assistant to the chairman of the board of Continental Oil Co. He and Goff also made seven movies, including *Dreaming Out Loud* and *The Bashful Bachelor*.

In 1967, Lauck and his wife Harriet, who survives him along with two children, moved into retirement in Hot Springs, where he was a popular emcee and after-dinner speaker.

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