

December 2001



LUM & ABNER WISHES YOUNG  
A RIGHT MERRY CHRISTMAS

# FUN with FUNDRAISING

Well, folks, guess what? Even though it's still a long way off, it appears that the 2002 NLAS Convention (June 14 & 15, for you calendar-markers) may turn out to be the biggest to date. We can't go into any more details right now, but we do know one thing already... this one is going to be expensive!

Those of you who have attended in the past know that everything provided at the convention is absolutely free, and that no one has to pay anything to enjoy the festivities. We have simply always done it that way, and just wouldn't feel right to charge a registration fee like most other conventions do. Ours is different! However, we do have considerable expenses involved with bringing our wonderful guests to Mena and taking care of them while they are there... so the bottom line is, we would like to ask for some voluntary donations for this year! If you have attended in the past and thought you got your money's worth (even though it was free!), we would gladly accept a donation designated specifically for the 2002 event.

Now, for those who prefer to get something tangible for their moolah, we are making another offer that gives us a funny feel-

ing... and we don't mean funny "hah hah," we mean funny "sheee!!" However, some awfully charitable individuals have

asked that we market a book collecting the scripts we have performed at the conventions over the years. Why anyone would want to read our concoctions when they could be enjoying the legitimate L&A in our *Lum and Abner Scripts* reprint volumes is beyond us, but as a fundraiser for the 2002 convention we are offering copies of *The NLAS Convention Scripts* for \$10.00. Yes, we know that is twice the price of the normal script volumes... but remember, we're trying to raise operating capital here! These scripts range from 1986 to 2001, and even include the one that long-time L&A writer Roz Rogers penned for us personally... which turned out to be his final L&A script ever. Okay, we know we're pushing our luck, but for the "dee-lux" edition

with a full color cover, add on an extra \$5.00 and it's yours.

Send donations or orders for *The NLAS Convention Scripts* to the apprehensive Executive Secretary's office, 81 Sharon Blvd., Dora, AL 35062. And if you do, plan on being in Mena on June 14 & 15 to enjoy the fruits of your efforts!



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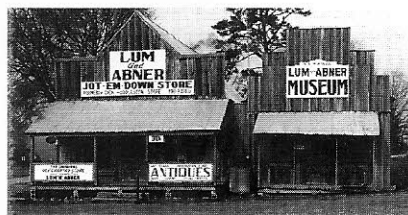
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Located on Highway 88  
(the "Lum & Abner Highway")

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The Jot 'Em Down Journal, Volume 18, Number 3 (Whole Number 105), December 2001. Published bi-monthly by the National Lum and Abner Society. Membership, including a subscription to the *Journal*, is \$15.00 per year. Send editorial and subscription correspondence to the Executive Secretary, Tim Hollis, #81 Sharon Boulevard, Dora, AL 35062, e-mail CampHoll@aol.com.

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*Front Cover: Chet Lauck created this Christmas card that was sent out probably in 1931, judging from the fact that Abner is wearing a constable's badge. At any rate, it was early in the show's history! (Courtesy of Lum & Abner Museum)*

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# THE JOT 'EM DOWN JOURNAL December 2001

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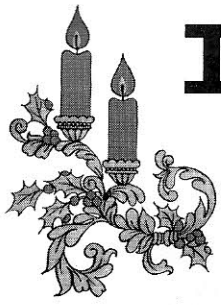
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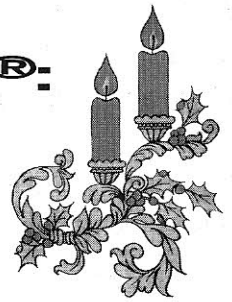
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 A special reprint from 60 Christmases ago



*There isn't really anything that special about these ceramic roosters, which were very popular dime-store items for years, but this particular pair was sold as a souvenir in Dick Huddleston's store in Pine Ridge. You will notice that someone... probably Dick's daughter Ethel... personalized the pair with the year (1941) and Cedric's favorite phrase ("Yes mom"). This in itself would date them as being 60 years old this year, but there is another notable thing about them. On the bottom of each rooster is stamped "JAPAN." Considering what occurred on December 7 of the same year these were sold in Pine Ridge, these must have been some of the last souvenirs to be imported from that country for quite some time!*



# Lum and Abner®



## Christmas 2001

Lum Edwards breathes a heavy sigh. Glancing up at the weathered boards of the old Jot 'Em Down Store, he shivers a bit from the December cold, turns up his collar, and slowly shuffles toward the front porch. "Hit jist don't seem worth it no more," he mumbles. He pauses briefly to pick up the weekly newspaper from the top step. "Abner's too dad-blame lazy ta pick up the paper these days!" he roars. Glancing at the headlines regarding terrorism and world economy, Lum shrugs his shoulders and tosses the paper blindly away, sighing "Hit's all th' same."

Every floor board seems to creak and pop as Lum trudges into the musty general store that has been a second home to him for over 60 years. The rusty, scraping hinges and the clanging of the old bell on the door once brought musical sounds to his ears, but these days it seems annoying. "I ort ta quit," the veteran storekeeper whispers, "I jist ort ta hang it up."

Lum's sigh of depression is interrupted by a high-pitched cackle coming from the feed room. "That's Abner!" he snaps, "That li'l varmint ain't got nuthin' better ta do than set back there a-lookin' at that dad-blame teevee set!" Picking up his pace, the old fellow stomps toward the feed room, slings the door open, and stands observing a childlike Abner Peabody, engrossed in an animated image flickering from a rather odd-looking television set. After a deep breath, an irritated Lum slowly and deliberately speaks the name, "Ab-ner!"

"Huh?" squeaks Lum's business partner and lifelong friend, "Oh! Hidy, Lum! Doggies, you ort ta watch this here veedeo tape we jist got in! The youngins is a-gonna LOVE it!"

"Abner..."

"This is the out-cappinest thing you ever seen, Lum... These little people - puppets er sump'm - air jest a dancin' and a sangin' - these is them Christmas veedeo fillums we ordered! This one here is about that li'l drummer boy!"

"Ab-ner..."

"He jist got done a-singing about the animals, and howcum they don't never smile! Kinda put me in mind of a ol' Alky-Seltzer commercial fer some reason, but I..."

"ABNER!" Lum's face is red.

Abner Peabody has rarely seen his partner this angry. "Huh?" is his timid reply.

Lum takes a deep breath. "Abner... What do you mean settin' back here, watching them silly childern's veedeo fillums, laughin' like a little kid of a boy, when we got WORK ta do?"

"Uh... well... Lum, I was jist a-tryin' out these fillums! An' also, Ben Withers wanted me to keep his ol' homemade teevee set warm fer him while he was onna vacate ta Mount Idy! You orta set here a spell and watch these thangs, Lum, the childern er jist gonna love ta check 'em outa our Pine Ridge Liberry!"

"Abner, fer pity sakes, I ain't in no mood ta waste my time with sich huskin' shuckin's!"

"Why not?"

"You little eediot, don'cha know they's a WAR goin' on? We got no right ta set around and en-joy ourselves, an' act normal and be happy!"

"Why Lum, that's plumb silly! Hit's gittin' close ta Christmas, and Christmas is ALWAYS a time ta be happy!"

"I don't wanna argy about it, Abner! Facts is, I don't know if life's worth livin'."

"Huh?"

"Abner, this world seems ta be fallin' apart all around us! Pine Ridge is never gonna be th' same. Facts is, this whole WORLD ain't never gonna be the same. Our country is been attacked... People is a-sufferin'... Our store binness ain't doin' much good. I reckon we orta jist close 'er up permanent."

"PERMANENT? You'd jist open it right back up agin! We've closed it b'fore!"

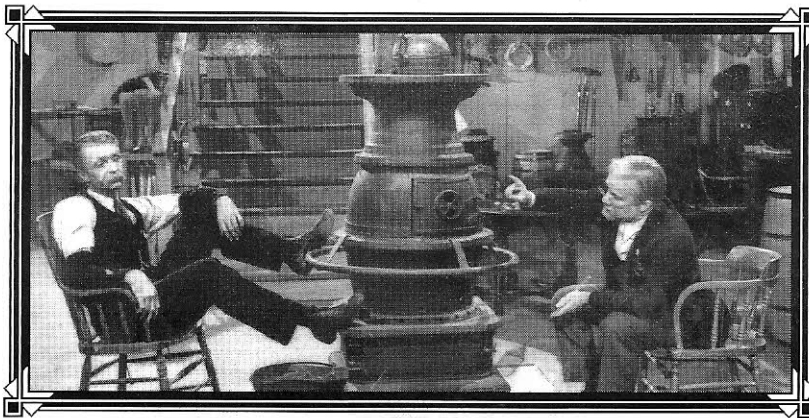
"I ain't dreamin' out loud this time, Abner, I'm as searse as I kin be. You an' me is too old fer this nonsense."

Abner's joyous holiday mood vanishes. He ejects the video cassette and places it carefully back in its sleeve, and watches Lum shuffle slowly toward a rocking chair. Unfortunately, the creaky old piece of furniture sees fit to collapse as Lum seats himself, and Abner finds himself chuckling uncontrollably. He covers his mouth just as Lum recovers his senses. There is that red face of anger once again!

"DAD-BLAME YOU!" Lum shouts, "You little VARMINT! Laugh at me, will ya!" With speed amazing for a man his age, Lum grabs a bit of the broken chair and hurls it at Abner! Missing the shocked old fellow by an inch, the shard of wood instead strikes a pane of glass in one of the counters, shattering it into countless pieces.

Now it is Abner's turn to be angry: "LUM EDDARDS! What do you think yer a-doin'?' You mighta knocked me unconscientious!"

Lum buries his face in his hands, and appears to be sobbing. "Abner, I'm sorry..."



Abner walks slowly toward his friend, and places a kind hand on his shoulder. "Lum, what's botherin' ya?"

"Abner... I jist don't see no reason ta keep runnin' this ol' store... This world jist ain't th' same as it was when we was younger! We're too old ta do this!"

"Why Lum, we still got our health! This ol' store's got a lotta years in it!"

"Yeah, maybe, Abner, but thar's no place fer us in this modern world! We're too old ta help with this new war! Pine Ridge don't even need our store. Jist look across th' street at Dick Huddleston's store! He's got them youngins a-helpin' him run it now, and he's got all th' new customers tradin' with him!"

"Well, yeah... them Stuckers is nice folks, Lum. They're young folks, and they're doin' Dick a good job. But we still got our ol' friends comin' in here! We still make a livin' outa this place!"

"I don't know, Abner. All these old codgers a-comin' in here... I git tarred o' all their ol' backwoodsy sayin's..."

"Well, dog bite my cat, Lum, I don't hear nobody say nuthin' so dad-blame backwoodsy aroun' here!"

"I grannies, you wouldn't, would ya? 'Bout as backwoodsy as any feller in these hills!"

"Huh?"

"An' another thing, Abner, ever'body's a comin' in here hollerin' 'MERRY CHRISTMAS!' ta beat the band!"

"Huh? What band?"

"Makes me wanna tell 'em ta go jump in th' mill pond an' stay thar till it's plumb friz over."

"You mean th' Pine Ridge Silver Cornet Band?"

"Ha-? Wha-?"

"That band you was a-talkin' about... said somebody was a-gonna BEAT 'em!"

"AHHH, sassyfrass, Abner, I ain't got time ner patience ta argy with ya! I was sayin' I'm tarred o' all this 'MERRY CHRISTMAS' nonsense these ol' fellers is a-yellin' aroun' this store! Plumb sick an' tarred of it."

"Why, Lum Eddards, Christmas is a happy time!"

"Not in this day an' age. Nuthin' happy about it a-tall."

"Why, they is done it! Have you fergot everthang you done learnt in Sunday School?"

"Uh... well, no, Abner... I reelize what Christmas actual means..."

"Well, then, get up on yer feet an' sang a coupla them Christmas hymns!" Abner starts dancing an awkward little jig, and bursts into song. "DECK TH' HALLS WITH BOSTON CHARLIE..."

"ABNER, HESH UP! Fer goodness sakes... You cain't never git no words right ta no song..."

"But I jist love that name 'Charlie!'"

"You'll git a Charlie HORSE a dayncin' thataway!"

"Huh?"

"Look like a hayf-growed jackrabbit prancin' aroun' thataway... AN' DON'T START ASKIN' ME 'BOUT NO HORSE!"

"Well, Lum, all I gotta say is you BETTER git happy, 'cause

hit ain't too much longer 'fore hit'll be time fer you ta dress up in yore red Sanny Claus suit an' innertain th' childern over at th' school house!"

"That's whur yer wrong."

"What air you a-talkin about?"

"I done re-tarred myself. Let some other eediot be Sanny Claus. Thar ain't no reason in this world ta try ta be happy er make other fokes happy."

"Do you mean that, Lum?"

"I do fer a fact."

"Well... then... GIT OUTA HERE!"

"What did you say?"

"You heared me! GIT ON OUTA HERE!"

Seeing that his partner is serious, a stunned Lum wheels about and walks through the front door of the Jot 'Em Down Store. As the old door squeaks and the rusty bell jingles, a distant Abner is heard to add, "I don't need no sourpuss partner in here makin' me feel bad! I doggies, I'm gonna stay happy if it kills me!"

"Dad-blame li'l varmint," Lum mumbles. "Too much like a youngin, that's his trouble. Don't know enough ta unnerstand the mess this ol' world is in. Don't know ta..."

His thoughts are interrupted by the sight of a little girl, sitting alone on the steps of one of the abandoned storefronts along Pine Ridge's main road. At various times, the building had housed a candy store, and had briefly served as a headquarters for an ill-fated travel agency run by Mousey Gray. The child is sobbing softly. Lum's old heart melts as he softly approaches the child. "Here now, honey," he speaks in low, gentle tones, "What's troublin' sich a purdy li'l gal like you today?"

Looking up though large, beautiful eyes, the girl brushes a tear from her cheek. "I'm sorry sir," she fairly whispers, "Am I sittin' on your steps?"

"No, not at all, honey..."

Slowly, Lum sits down on the lowest step, his eyes now on the same level with the child's. Reaching for a handkerchief, the elderly gentleman gently hands it to the girl. "What's yer name, sweetheart?"

"I'm Katherine... Katherine Bates!"

Something in the adorable little face strikes "a tender chord of memory" for Lum Edwards. "I grannies, Katherine, I b'lieve I knowed yer paw! Is his name Gomer?"

Little Katherine tilts her head a bit, as her shiny golden hair falls behind one shoulder. "No sir," she replies in a voice filled with surprise, "but my grandpa's name is Gomer!"

Now it is Lum's turn to feel surprised! "Grandpa?" he laughs, "Well, fer the land's sake, I reckon it HAS been more'n a FEW years..." The broad grin upon his face makes the child smile as well, and both are chuckling. "Honey, ain't you cold settin' out here?" She nods, as Lum removes his jacket and wraps it around her. "I'd in-vite ya into my store over thar, but I reckon my partner's a mite upset at me jist now."

"I'm kinda upset too, Mr..."



"Huh? Oh, my name is Lum... Lum Eddards... You can jist call me... 'Uncle Lum'... Yeah!"

"Mr... Uncle Lum!"

"Yeah... I like that a heap, Katherine! But what's a purdy little lady like you got ta be upset about?"

"Well... Uncle Lum... My daddy is gone... He's off in th' army... Off ta fight in this war..."

"Well bless yer heart..."

"My mama cries an' prays a lot. She says there won't be much Christmas this year. She said even Sanny Claus might not come this year."

"You poor darlin'..." As the tears well in the child's eyes, Lum feels himself start to "puddle up." The haze of tears seems to bring about a "dissolve" in his vision. Suddenly, sitting before him is another little girl. It was as if 60 years had not passed! The newspaper he had so carelessly tossed away earlier now sits beside him, blown to the candy store porch by the chilly winds. Its headlines now bear news of an attack on Pearl Harbor!

"Grannies... Pearl Harbor... Katherine, that seems like jist yesterdee!"

"Katherine? Uncle Lum, my name is Dulcie!"

"Little Dulcie Bates!?" Lum, shocked, glances about quickly to discover the old candy store is open for business! "Grannies... I must be seein' things..." he whispers. As a Pine Ridge youngster of bygone days leaves the shop, the crackling sounds of an old Delco radio within projects the voice of 1941 broadcaster Edward R. Murrow through the streets until the door closes.

"Uncle Lum, I'm so scared..." the lass sobs, "My brother Gomer an' a buncha his friends has gone off ta enlist an' fight! He won't be here for Christmas this year!"

Lum's heart is breaking as he gently lifts the child onto his lap, cradling her head against his shoulder. "Don't cry, honey," he speaks in a soothing voice, "There's a lotta hope left in this ol' world!" He closes his eyes, as visions of a 48-star flag flutter magnificently before him, and frightening scenes of war seem to blend with visions of patriotic Americans standing tall to unite in an effort to restore peace to the world. The long months and years of ration stamps, war bonds, good and bad news, sorrow and happiness seem to flow by like a warm river of Technicolor memories. Lum feels his heart warmed by the tremendous morale of the era - the manner in which his fellow citizens unite as never before to make the nation strong in the name of freedom. "God bless America," he whispers into the child's ear.

Suddenly, the United States flag seems to dissolve into view again, with two new stars in place, the red stripes seeming more brilliant, the white stars brighter, the blue field deeper. A sense of patriotism is reborn! All around him, Lum sees his Pine Ridge neighbors hoisting Old Glory anew, pledging their hard-earned income to the Red Cross, organizing church groups to collect food and clothing for the victims of the tragedies of September 11, 2001! "Don'cha worry, Dulcie, we're a-gonna make it!"

"Dulcie?" the child almost shouts. "Uncle Lum, My great auntie's name is Dulcie! My name's Katherine! Katherine Bates!"

As if waking from a dream, Lum shudders for a second, feeling a sudden cold breeze upon his back. Sitting upon his lap is the wide-eyed little girl, her head once again tilted with a look of childlike confusion. Lum chuckles as he strokes her silky locks. "Shore, Katherine's yer name, honey! I was jist re-memberin' another war, a long, long time ago!"

"Tell me about it, Uncle Lum!"

"Well... Hit was another bad time! A bad war! They was sad times, an' good times, an' lotsa neighborly love! Lotsa prayin' an' cryin' and workin' t'gether... Yore grandpa Gomer can tell ya lotsa stories about it! Ever'body was a-doin' his and her part fer good ol' Uncle Sam!"

"Uncle Sam? Is he my uncle too?"

"Well... I always figgered his name musta been Uncle Sam EDDARDS, jist like mine... But yeah, honey, he's EVER'-BODY'S uncle!"

"Do you think we're gonna be okay, Uncle Lum? Even if there won't be a Sanny Claus?"

"WHAT? Why, there will TOO be a Sanny Claus this year!"

Why, jist a little while ago, I got a long distance call on th' party line..."

"The WHAT?"

"The... the TELLY phone! Anyway, hit was from ol' Sanny Claus hisself!"

"REALLY, Uncle Lum?"

"You bet yer little boots it was! An' he said he is a-gonna be HERE, right here in Pine Ridge, right over there at th' SCHOOL HOUSE jist like he is EVER YEAR, and he's a-gonna be bringin' presents ta ever good little boy and good little girl in Pine Ridge!"

"OH, UNCLE LUM!" Little Katherine wraps her arms around old Lum's neck, as tears of happiness flood out the bitter drops of sorrow.

With both a beaming grin and a trembling lower lip, "Uncle Lum" softly whispers, "Ever'thing's gonna be jist fine, honey."

"Uncle Lum, I'm all warm now! You better take your jacket back!"

"Naw, sweetheart, I'm as warm as I can be! Facts is, I ain't never felt better! Say, what were you doin' settin' over here by this ol' closed up candy store?"

"Oh... Well, my mama told me my daddy used to come here to buy candy when he was a little boy... I was... I was jist thinkin' about my daddy... and..."

"Here now, don't you puddle up agin, now, a old feller like me cain't take too much tears from a purdy little girl like you! Tellya what... We got a whole counter fulla candy over at th' Jot 'Em Down Store, an' a big ol' wood-burnin' stove named Betsy!"

"A stove named BETSY?"

"Yessir, hit's a four-star dandy! An' I'll git ol' Abner ta bile up some water on it an' we'll have some hot cocoa! Howzat sound?"

"YESSIR!"

Hand-in-hand, a rejuvenated Lum and Katherine walk briskly toward the Jot 'Em Down Store, passing numerous U.S. flags and colorful red, white and blue banners. "Grannies, hit's a beauty-ful world!" proclaims a beaming Lum, "WONDERFUL



WORLD!"

A sulking Abner jumps at the sound of the clanging door bell, as Lum swings his new little friend through the door, placing her gently atop an old cracker barrel, much to her delight. "Uncle Abner," he booms, "allow me ta innerduce ya to Miss Katherine Bates, grand-darter of Gomer Bates!"

"Uh... howdy do you do, mum!" Abner cautiously responds. "Lum, air you feelin' all right?"

"Never better, Abner, my ol' friend... Wonderful world! Merry Christmas! God bless America!"

"Ah... yeah... YEAH! Yessir, Lum ol' boy, that's th' way I like ta hear ya talk!"

"Dad-blame, right, Ab-" Lum suddenly blushes, and lowers his voice. "Oh, 'scuse me, Miss Katherine, I gotta watch my langridge aroun' a young lady sich as yerself!"

With a giggle, Katherine covers her mouth, in an attempt to prevent further embarrassment for her new friend. "That's okay, Uncle Lum," she assures the kindly gentleman.

"Well, Abner, ol' boy, whatcha waitin' fer?"

"Huh?"

"Come on, git that hot cocoa ta brewin'!"

"Huh?"

"Git a move on, we got comp'ny!"

"Oh, shore! Shore!"

"We're gonna drink some cocoa, eat some Christmas candy, and watch some video fillums about Christmas!"

"We air?"

"Why shore we air, Abner, ain't you got no Christmas spirit? Christmas is a time ta be happy! Merry Christmas! God bless America!"

"Yessir!" Abner busily begins preparing the hot cocoa as Lum struggles to move Ben Withers' bizarre television set and a 20-year old VCR into the store proper. "What're you doin' there, Lum?"

"Why, I'm a-movin' this rig into th' Pine Ridge Liberry, so the youngins can come in here an' watch these Christmas movin' pitchers! An' let's git some o' them patriotics cartoons... Remember them, Abner? Remember how Daffy Donald an' Popeye an' Bugs the Bunny used ta win th' war at the pitcher show? Grannies, let's git this store fulla our neighbors' childern, an' just bring this ol' store ta life!"

"Lum, you mean you wont ta keep this ol' store runnin' after all?"

"Why o'course, Abner! This is a time ta keep this nation workin' an' strong! This is a time fer Christmas cheer! God bless America! Merry Christmas! HO HO HO! Say, that reminds me..."

"What?"

"I better git my San- er, my red suit cleaned..."

"You mean yer gonna dress up like San-"

"ABNER WATCH YER MOUTH!"

"Huh? I ain't got no mirror handy Lum, how can I watch my

mouth?"

"I mean... wait a minit..." Lum approaches Abner and whispers into his better ear. Both old fellows break into happy smiles, and begin to chuckle. "Now Abner, you see that our little friend is as comfort as she can be, an' I'll take my.. er, my Sunday suit to th' cleaners, an' I'll let Katherine's maw know where she is... I'll bet the Stuckers know where she lives at..."

Katherine, unwrapping a colorful candy, perkily states, "We live right next door to Mr. Mousey Gray, Uncle Lum," and pops the treat into her mouth.

"Well," Lum responds in a musical voice, "That's just won'erful! We gotta all git together over at Mousey's one night an' have a sing-along and pop some corn! I'll be right back!"

Katherine giggles chirpily as Lum's lean form seems to dance through the old door, which, like Lum, somehow doesn't seem so rusty any more. "He's so funny," she sings, clapping her hands, her mouth almost full of Christmas candy.

"Yeah," laughs Abner. "He gits thataway. Acts like a kid of a boy sometimes! I have a awful time with him around here. Sometimes he won't hardly do no work a-tall here in this store.

He'll set around watchin' teevee instid o' waitin' on customers! I hafta do most o' th' work!"

"Oh, but he's so nice. I feel like I've known him all my life!"

"Well, Lum loves childern. Never had none hisself. Facts is, I only have one darter myself. Little Pearl. She's about yore age! Well, I mean, she re-minds me of you. Facts is, she's a grandma herself!"

Katherine giggles as Abner mixes her cocoa, carrying it carefully over to her perch on the cracker barrel, and reaching to activate the whirring, squeaking old VCR. "Now, honey, let's watch one o' these movin' pitchers about Christmas! These is th' out-cappinest

things... Looks like little puppets! I don't know how they do it... Looks like they're ALIVE! I don't even see no strings! See here? That purdy school teacher thar is a-gonna grow up and marry Sanny Claus! She's might nigh as purdy as you air! Facts is, yer as purdy as Cindereller! You must be one o' her sisters!"

"They weren't too pretty, Uncle Abner!"

"Oh, they was too... Cindereller had a sister name Rhoda that was purtiern a speckled pup!"

"You must have read a different story than I did, Uncle Abner!"

"Well anyway, let's watch this fillum... Miss Jessica is a-gonna sing a song about her world is beginnin' today... but how can that be? She don't look like no little baby... I don't know iffen I onderstan' that... I wonder if-"

"Uncle Abner?"

"Yes honey?"

"Merry Christmas!"

"Well, bless yer heart... bah-LESS yer LIT-tul HEART!"

- "Uncle Donnie" Pitchford



# FOUR STARS and TWO STOREKEEPERS

## The Story of Lum & Abner's 1961 TV Pilot

*The Jot 'Em Down Journal* has, over the years, reported on several aborted attempts to bring *Lum and Abner* to the television screen. As you may recall, these efforts began even while the radio show was still on the air, with pilot presentations being produced in 1948 and 1949, and an apparently "live" pilot broadcast in 1951. That cinema fiasco *Lum and Abner Abroad* was filmed in 1954 as three television episodes, which were clumsily stitched together for a theatrical release in 1955. However, the biggest and most likely attempt at an L&A TV series came about in the early 1960s, and the period from late 2001 into early 2002 marks its official 40th anniversary.

It seems that from the earliest radio days onward, *Lum and Abner* was fated to always be following in *Amos 'n' Andy's* footprints. The basic radio format, of course, was modeled after the Gosden/Correll series, and when A&A converted to a weekly half-hour situation comedy format, it was only a matter of time before L&A did the same. Therefore, when *Amos 'n' Andy* became a successful (if controversial) TV series by casting other actors in the roles Gosden & Correll made famous, it seems to have occurred to everyone that *Lum and Abner* could do the same... especially since Lauck & Goff were too busy with other interests to actually perform in an entire series.

It is often assumed that what inspired the 1960s L&A TV effort was the success of the similarly-themed *Andy Griffith Show*, which premiered in October 1960. While the eventual L&A pilot would indeed show traces of that show's influence, the surviving correspondence (preserved at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock) indicates that negotiations actually began in the early spring of that year, before the Griffith series ever made it to the air.

The earliest letter to refer to the project was written from

Tuffy Goff to Chet Lauck, who of course was with the Conoco oil company in Houston at the time. On April 6, 1960, Tuffy wrote:

*Enclosed is a proposal of a deal as set up by Charlie Wallace of Four Star Productions. I do not know if this is a good deal or not, but I do think it is the best we can do with them. I have had several talks with Charlie and I know he has a great regard for Lum and Abner, and I think he could probably come as close to doing L&A as anyone I have ever talked with. The financing of pictures such as this is really rough, and the man with the money comes out with a big hunk of the profits. In talking with several others, this seems to be the general format that is being used today - that is, the first sponsor pays for the production cost of the films and any profits are derived from the residuals thereafter. It doesn't make one bit of difference to me if we do them or not, and I would like to leave the decision up to you. Whatever you decide is just fine with me. So think it over and drop me a line, and I in turn will get in touch with*



Wallace.

As seems to have been a custom with the two retired comics, Tuffy ended his letter with a gag: "Did you hear about the fellow who lost his girlfriend? He wanted to paint her in the nude... but she insisted he wear a bathrobe."

Unfortunately, a copy of the proposal is not preserved with the above letter. However, Four Star Television was indeed a powerhouse in the industry at the time; among its better-known series were *The Rifleman* and *The Big Valley*, so Tuffy was probably correct in assuming that L&A would be given a lavish treatment there.

Chet responded to the proposal on May 3, 1960. True to the Lum Edwards character, he seemed to be first and foremost concerned about the financial arrangements (as who wouldn't



★                      ★                      ★

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FOUR STAR TELEVISION

4030 RADFORD AVENUE, NORTH HOLLYWOOD, CALIFORNIA

POPLAR 6-4151

MAY 10 1961

CHESTER LAUCK

be?). He said:

*Four Star is certainly a good outfit and I hope we can work out a deal with them. My only suggestion in the matter is that in assuming a Lum and Abner series can be made and sold, there would be no money in the venture unless there are two and three runs. If the series does not play well, then there would likely be no second and third runs, and yet the Lum and Abner program would have been exposed and the possibility of any future Lum and Abner programs eliminated. If we are going to expose and exhaust Lum and Abner for television, then we should be guaranteed something on the first run. Even if we have to take a lesser percentage on the residuals. I understand, of course, that income from residuals can be treated as capital gain, and has that advantage, and I would like to feel certain that we would at least make a little money out of the use of the Lum and Abner characters.*

*One other thing... I would like to have understood, and proper protective measures taken, that the principals portraying the parts of Lum and Abner could not appear as Lum and Abner or in any way represent Lum and Abner in commercials, personal appearances, endorsements, etc. My thought being that if through the television series, Lum and Abner would become so popularized that we might be able to personally capitalize on any fringe benefits thereby created.*

And Chet reciprocated Tuffy's closing gag with another: "Just remember... you can always tell a happy motorcycle cop by the bugs on his teeth."

Finally, on May 10, producer Charles Wallace of Four Star Television jumped into the project with a letter to Chet addressing the above concerns. Excerpts:

*It is nice to be writing you and I hope that this will be the first of many letters through many years of pleasant, successful association.*

*Your suggestion regarding limitation of the actor or actors and their right to portray Lum and Abner after the series has completed production is certainly well founded. Rest assured this will be an absolute clause in the individual actor's contract when first signed for the series, not only the people cast as Lum and Abner, but any other running part such as Grandpappy Spears, Aunt Charity, Dick Huddleston, Squire Skimp, Mose Moots, Caleb Weehunt or any other character created by the series as it continues.*

*Having been brought up in Texas, New Mexico and Arizona, I feel quite strongly about the humor that has been associated in the past with Lum and Abner. I realize its distinctive American flavor, the cleanliness with which it has been portrayed over the years, and will assure you that at no time will the con-*

*cepts you and Norris have of the original Lum and Abner ever be violated.*

Attached to this letter was a detailed agreement of the financing and legalities involved, but the most interesting part is the second item. Chester Lauck and Norris Goff, it says, will provide the following:

*Exclusive right to use any or all of 1800 radio scripts previously used on the Lum and Abner radio show. In the event any script is used, the Minimum Writers Guild story fee would be paid to Mr. Goff and Mr. Lauck. In the event Mr. Goff and Mr. Lauck did the teleplay of said radio script, they or he would receive the top teleplay fee on the show, which would include the story fee mentioned above.*

Might as well go ahead and plan big, huh? Well, shortly after the new year of 1961 got underway, the official contracts were drawn up and signed. At that point, Chet had a thought about one possible conflict of interest having to do with recasting the roles of L&A, and he mentioned it to Tuffy in a letter on January 9, 1961:

*There is one matter which should be straightened out, but am in hopes it will not be necessary to rewrite the contract to do it. It should be understood that I have made some television commercials for Conoco in the character of Lum. I may be called upon to do more of these from time to time. I act as host on the "Blue Angels" series sponsored by Conoco and in some instances, I am referred to as Chet Lauck, Lum of Lum and Abner. Paragraph seven of the enclosed contract specifies certain activities in which I might be permitted to engage on behalf of Conoco. I have prepared and am enclosing a supplement to this paragraph which gives me a little more latitude.*

Keeping up the tradition, Chet ends with: "I am pleased to report that they have finally found a spot for Eleanor in the new administration. I understand she is to be Den Mother of the Cabinet." (No doubt referring to the often-joked-about youthfulness of the Kennedy administration...)

Strangely, between January 1961 and the end of the year there is no more correspondence relating to the project. By December 7, however, things were in full swing and the audition process was well underway. Four Star Television sent Lauck a set of screen tests done on 35mm film, and another set done on video tape. Accompanying all of this was another letter from Goff (on Four Star letterhead this time), in which he was in rare form and proved that his "Abner" sense of humor was well intact:

*This letter is being written by a very ugly, stubborn, uncooperative, and narrow-minded secretary. Throughout this letter you may find the words "dog" and "cat" scattered here and*



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there. Pay no attention to them, as they are the only two words she can spell without lolling her tongue out and she delights in using them.

(Knowing how to keep up a running gag, there are indeed childishy-printed DOG and CAT notations scattered throughout the rest of the letter!)

Inasmuch as John Drew and John Barrymore have passed on to their rewards and Francis X. Bushman has reached that age in life where he would probably become incapacitated before this series has been on TV for any length of time, it is impossible to cast anyone with the acting ability of our former LUM. As to casting someone with the I.Q. of our former LUM, I think there are three in the 35mm film tests who, after repeatedly hitting them over the head with a sledge hammer, might come up to specifications mentally.

I would appreciate your running the video tests first, which are also on 35mm film. I am enclosing two separate envelopes. Number One is comments on the video group. First run the video tests and then read the comments and then run the videotape again. DOG Number Two is the comments on the 35mm film group. I would appreciate your running the film first, then reading the comments, and then rerunning the film. CAT

Please, Chester, be honest in your opinions and comments. Charles Wallace and I have interviewed everybody in Hollywood that we could find for these characters - a total of over 400 people, and an equal number which we've disqualified after looking over their screen credits. There are a number of people who we think would be excellent, but unfortunately they are committed to contracts that make it impossible. To give you an indication as to what I would consider fine casting, I would first choose Leon Ames (you remember him as the lead in LIFE WITH FATHER) but, as you know, he is now committed to the

series FATHER OF THE BRIDE. I would like Mil Stone ("Doc" on GUNSMOKE) as Abner, but he is now committed to this series and even though he is trying to obtain a release to do this character, I am sure it is impossible to obtain either of the above two in the very near future as they both have five year contracts.

Chester, you are a good boy. CAT Silly, but good. Give my love to Harriet and any other of the beautiful women that you might run onto or into. Charles Wallace sends his regards and incidentally has done an excellent and sincere job in trying to get this show on the road.

DOG CAT

Then comes the list of hopefuls being auditioned as the "new Lum & Abner." One notable not listed was Buddy Ebsen, whom former L&A writer Betty Boyle once recalled as testing for the role of Lum. Obviously by this time he was quite busy with discovering oil and moving to Beverly Hills, so no doubt he was another of the lost opportunities Tuffy was referring to above. The notes on the 35mm film tests reveal some awfully strange combinations, but as Tuffy said, they were testing anyone who even had a remote possibility.

Test 1 - LUM, *Doodles Weaver* (ruled out); ABNER, *Edgar Buchanan* (while a fine actor, ruled out as both LUM and ABNER because of the lack of kindness in his facial features)

(Can anyone out there honestly envision Spike Jones' erstwhile maniac Doodles Weaver as Lum? Maybe only because he was tall and thin...)

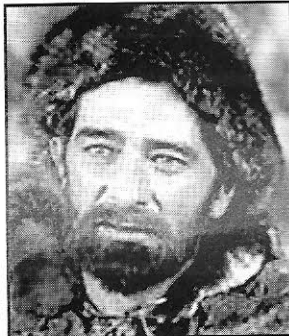
Test 2 - LUM, *Royal Dano* (has great possibilities. While he may not be the best LUM in this test, I feel because of his acting ability, at the end of 13 weeks he would develop into a fine character); ABNER - *Strother Martin* (ruled out)

(Royal Dano may not be a familiar name to the general public, but he made many appearances on other Four Star series of

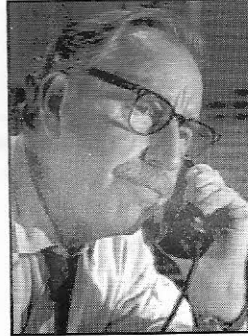
## A FEW OF FOUR STAR'S "WOULD-BE LUMS"



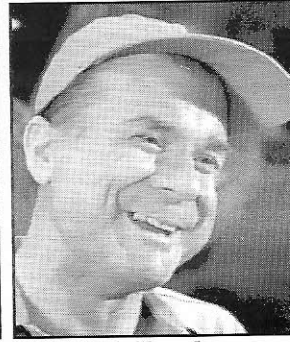
Doodles Weaver



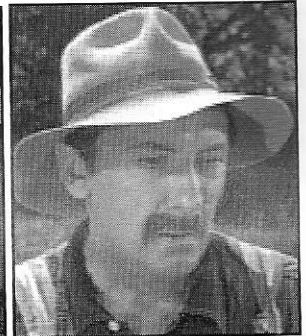
Royal Dano



Frank Ferguson



Phil Chambers

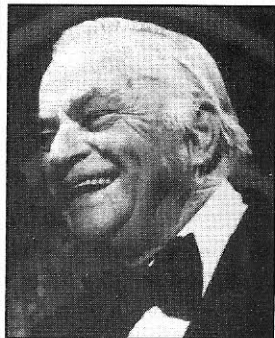


Orville Sherman

## A FEW OF FOUR STAR'S "WOULD-BE ABNERS"



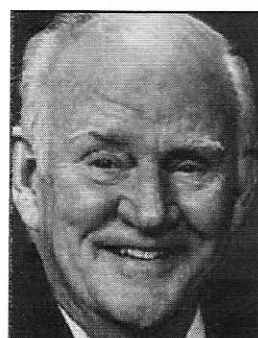
**Strother Martin**



**Edgar Bergen**



**Walter Burke**



**Dabbs Greer**



**George Dunn**

the era, and he indeed would have been a very viable contender for Lum. Continuing those bizarre L&A/Disney connections we have been seeing lately, Dano's most famous performance.. still heard today.. was as the voice of Disney's Audio-Animatronic Abraham Lincoln figure. As for Strother Martin, the only connection between him and Abner is that both were short.)

*Test 3 - LUM, Frank Ferguson (good possibilities, quality, excellent actor); ABNER, Edgar Bergen (very sweet and cute character, if we can get him)*

(Yes, that is the same Edgar Bergen of Charlie McCarthy fame. According to another interview with Goff, Bergen really wanted the role and diligently practiced his impersonation of the Abner voice. However, other commitments prevented him from continuing. Frank Ferguson, for his part, was another busy character actor who is probably best remembered today as the cranky wax museum owner in that classic of classics, *Abbott & Costello Meet Frankenstein* [1948].)

*Test 4 - LUM, Arthur Hunnicutt (a fine actor; was born and raised in Gravelly, Arkansas, which is, as you know, in the vicinity of Pine Ridge); ABNER, Walter Burke (a fine actor, possibilities)*

Then the tests turn to two other characters who had to be cast, Cedric Weehunt and Pine Ridge telephone operator Emily Burke. It seems that mostly young unknowns were chosen for these tests, because almost none of them have any other known television credits:

*Test 5 - CEDRIC, John Abbey; EMILY, Mary Lu Stevens (does not take direction well, has tendency to play everything too dramatically)*

*Test 6 - CEDRIC, John Abbey; EMILY, Susan Henryson (has a freshness and naivety that is hard to find in Hollywood)*

*Test 7 - CEDRIC, Jim Sweeney (still a good actor); EMILY, Beverly Ballard*

*Test 8 - CEDRIC, Jim Sweeney; EMILY, Lorrie Richards*

*Test 9 - CEDRIC, Jim Sweeney; EMILY, Grace Gaynor*

Then the subject turns to the videotape tests, in which it seems that all four characters appeared together. Some of the hopefuls were the same as in the 35mm tests, only paired differently, while others were totally new:

### First Group

*LUM, Frank Ferguson (good possibility; called back for second test); ABNER, Dabbs Greer (an excellent actor but I feel he can never have the softness that the character of Abner*

*demands); CEDRIC, Jim Sweeney (called back for a second test, however, as I explained on the phone, the name "Cedric" will probably not be used for this character); EMILY, Sally Fraser (ruled out)*

(Dabbs Greer, who did not appear in the filmed tests, was a prolific character actor who is best remembered today as the minister in the *Little House on the Prairie* series. Tuffy was right in that the character being tested as Cedric would be rechristened "David" by the time the pilot was filmed.)



*Rejected Cedric wannabe Cal Bolder as an alien in a STAR TREK episode*

### Second Group

*LUM, Phil Chambers (ruled out); ABNER, George Dunn (ruled out); CEDRIC, Jim Sweeney (same boy); EMILY, Laura Shelton (ruled out)*

### Third Group

*LUM, Royal Dano (good possibilities, called back for second test); ABNER, Dabbs Greer (ruled out for reasons stated before); CEDRIC, John Abbey (called back for second test); EMILY, Carolyn Craig (ruled out)*

### Fourth Group

*LUM, Orville Sherman (ruled out); ABNER, Strother Martin (called back for second test); CEDRIC, Cal Bolder (ruled out); EMILY, Carol Leigh (ruled out)*

And so, as 1961 faded into 1962, the production was poised to get underway. Join us in our next installment for a look at which actors actually made the final cut, and also what sort of script was provided to them. I grannies, it didn't stink.. in fact, it shore did smell a heap like Mayberry, North Carolina!



*For some reason, lovely Carolyn Craig was rejected for the part of Emily.*

- Tim Hollis

# The Babe in the Manger

EVERY Christmas since 1933, those homespun philosophers Lum and Abner—in real life Chester Lauck and Norris Goff, respectively—have broadcast the same script about the birth of a baby in a barn to a destitute carpenter and his wife. Again this Yuletide the veteran team (pictured below) will repeat the celebrated sketch on NBC.

Because Lum and Abner have given to radio a classic, it is here printed in condensed form for the benefit of those who may wish to preserve its beautiful thoughts:

The night is cold but clear, and fresh snow covers the ground. The light of the stars shows dimly on three men walking along a country road, each carrying a large bundle. It is Lum, Abner and Grandpappy Spears.

GRANDPAP: There it is right ahead of us. We're going right, men.

LUM: Yeah, we can jist foller the east star . . . How did you find out about these folks, Grandpap?

GRANDPAP: Well, Doc Miller and his woman et supper over at our place and we was settin' there visitin' after we got done eatin' and the telephone rung and told Doc to get right on over here.

ABNER: Well, who done the callin'?

GRANDPAP: Oh, some feller named Joe sompin-another . . . Said they'd been into the county seat to pay their taxes and they weren't no room at the hotel, so they come out here to this old barn to spend the night.

LUM: And he said they was sorter 'spectin' the baby to be born tonight, huh?

GRANDPAP: Yeah, that's the reason they

called Doc Miller.

ABNER: I doggies, my arm's gittin' tired.

LUM: Well, here, let me carry this oil blankets a while and you can carry this oil heater. Is that box of groceries gettin' heavy, Grandpap?

GRANDPAP: No, I'm all right. We ought to be there dreckly anyhow . . . Hit was mighty thoughty of you fellers to come over here at night this-away.

ABNER: Well, I'm jist glad you called me, Grandpap. I'm jist proud of a chance to help.

LUM: Yeah, this makes it seem more like Christmas to me—doin' for somebody else. Trouble with a lot of us, we sorter lose the Christmas idee altogether. Think too much about ourselves. The real Christmas spirit is the happiness we git outa makin' others happy.

ABNER: Yeah, there we was settin' there at home; thought we was enjoyin' ourselves and these folks out here about to spend Christmas in an old barn thisaway. No, they wouldn'ta been no Christmas to it if you hadn'ta called us up, Grandpap.

LUM: Wait a minute—I b'lieve that's the barn yonder, ain't it?

GRANDPAP: Yeah, that's where they're at.

ABNER: That's due east from where we was all right, fer there's the east star right over the top of the barn.

LUM: Yeah, there's Doc's horse tied to the fence there.

GRANDPAP: We better not be talkin' too loud, fellers. Don't want to disturb 'em none.

LUM: Here comes somebody to the door! Hidy, Doc!

DOC: Oh, hello, there! Well, what are you

three old codgers doin' out here?

GRANDPAP: Why, we jist got to thinkin' after you left, Doc, these folks might be needin' somethin'.

ABNER: Yeah, Doc, we brung a oil stove and some bed-kivers.

LUM: And here's a box of groceries.

DOC: Well, they sure are needin' 'em. Haven't any heat of any kind in there. Usin' what little hay was left in there for a bed. Took and piled it up in the manger; made a purty good bed, but these covers'll come in handy.

LUM: How's the lady, Doc?

DOC: Gettin' along as well as could be expected. You men better stay out for a while.

LUM: Yeah, shore. We'll wait out here.

GRANDPAP: If there's anything we can do, Doc, let us know.

DOC: All right, thank you . . .

LUM: Well, sir, I was jist thinkin' here. Here we are three old codgers, gittin' along in years, standin' around out here waitin'—waitin' for a little baby to be born. Hit's sorter like as if we was waitin' for somebody to take our place.

ABNER: Well, course we don't like to talk about sich things, but we've 'bout sarved our time, I reckon.

LUM: Hit's sorter like the years. Here 1941 is almost gone. They's been a lot of things happen, but hit'll soon be forgot. Here'll come 1942 bringin' new hope and new courage. And we're sorter like the years, us three old fellers. We're sorter like 1941 and we're waitin' on 1942—the little baby in yonder. [Door opens.]

LUM: Any news yef, Doc?

DOC: Well, men—it's a fine baby boy!

Originally published  
in the  
December 20, 1941  
issue of **MOVIE-RADIO GUIDE**

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**Merry Christmas to All**  
from the  
**National Lum & Abner®**  
**Society!**

