

*April 2003*



THE SEVEN  
**Lum and Abner®**  
MOVIES

are available on video!

*Dreaming Out Loud • The Bashful Bachelor  
Two Weeks to Live • So This Is Washington  
Goin' To Town • Partners In Time  
Lum & Abner Abroad*

**\$29.95 each**

Order from  
**Lum & Abner Associates**  
135 Circle Drive  
Hot Springs, AR 71901

<http://www.lumandabner1.homestead.com/homepage.html>

**VISIT**

The Jot 'Em Down Store &  
Lum & Abner® Museum



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

**PINE RIDGE, ARKANSAS**

For further information, contact  
**LON & KATHY STUCKER**  
P.O. BOX 38  
PINE RIDGE, AR 71966  
(870) 326-4442

April 2003 - Page 2

**Listen!**

The National Lum & Abner Society is very excited to be able to make a special offer to members of our organization.



NOTICE  
This Transcription Manufactured by Alvin Bernard Manufacturing Company, Hollywood, Calif., and must be returned to Alvin Bernard Manufacturing Company, 200 West Washington Street, Chicago, Illinois.

Time 12 19  
Outside Start No. 602  
"LUM AND ABNER"

Released by  
KEYSTONE BROADCASTING SYSTEM, INC.  
445 52nd Ave., New York, N. Y.

Produced by  
WADE ADVERTISING AGENCY  
200 West Washington Street  
Chicago, Illinois

Thanks to a special arrangement between the NLAS and the **First Generation Radio Archives**, we are now able to offer our members the chance to purchase a set of ten audio compact discs containing 40 consecutive 15-minute *Lum & Abner* shows. These

have been newly transferred from original 16" Keystone transcription disks, and digitally restored for outstanding sound quality. Each comes complete with the original Miles Laboratories commercials, but for unknown reasons during this period the disks were issued with no opening or closing theme music! (The music was supplied to Keystone Network affiliates on separate disks.)

This set contains the episodes beginning on April 12, 1944, and ending on June 20, 1944 (tapes #137 through #143 in the NLAS Tape Library, although of course the tape library episodes are the unrestored versions).

This set of ten audio CDs, all attractively labeled and playable on any standard compact disc player, sells for the low price of only \$50.00, plus \$2.50 for First Class postage. This is an outstanding price (averaging \$5 per CD) for first generation programs taken directly from original disks and professionally restored for outstanding sound quality. And remember: when you purchase this collection, part of the proceeds from each sale will go to support on-going NLAS programs, as well as help defray the costs of our upcoming convention.

The folks at the First Generation Radio Archives ([www.radioarchives.org](http://www.radioarchives.org)) tell us that they have plans to release at least one more ten CD set of *Lum & Abner* shows in the near future - and hope to offer additional sets of shows in the coming months. Help support the Archives' preservation and restoration efforts, as well as the NLAS, by purchasing this set today. We promise that, when you have the chance to hear how great these delightful shows sound, you'll be glad you did!

=====

OH... And while you are at it... These 40 episodes include the ones that introduced Phinus Peabody, Abner's "papa," into the program for an 8-month stay. If you want to learn more about **Elmore Vincent**, the character actor who brought Phinus's inimitable voice to life, you can also order a VHS copy of his appearance at the 1988 NLAS Convention for only \$15.00 extra. Send CD and video orders to the NLAS Executive Secretary, 81 Sharon Blvd., Dora, AL 35062.

*The Jot 'Em Down Journal*,  
Volume 19, Number 5 (Whole  
Number 113), April 2003.  
Published bi-monthly by the  
National Lum and Abner  
Society. Membership, includ-  
ing a subscription to the  
*Journal*, is \$15.00 per year.  
Send editorial and subscrip-  
tion correspondence to the  
Executive Secretary, Tim  
Hollis, #81 Sharon  
Boulevard, Dora, AL 35062,  
e-mail CampHoll@aol.com.

\*\*\*\*\*

**THE NATIONAL  
LUM AND ABNER  
SOCIETY**

*Zekatif Ossifers*

**PRESIDENT**

Donnie Pitchford

**VICE-PRESIDENT**

Sam Brown

**EXECUTIVE SECRETARY**

Tim Hollis

\*\*\*\*\*

*Front Cover: Lum, Abner,  
Franklin Pangborn, and Rosemary  
LaPlanche encounter the patient  
("Mr. Strotz") who really does  
have only TWO WEEKS TO  
LIVE... or does he? The actors  
who play Strotz and his caretaker  
are unidentified.*

---

LUM AND ABNER is a reg-  
istered trademark. Used by  
permission of Chester Lauck,  
Jr.

---

# THE JOT 'EM DOWN

## JOURNAL

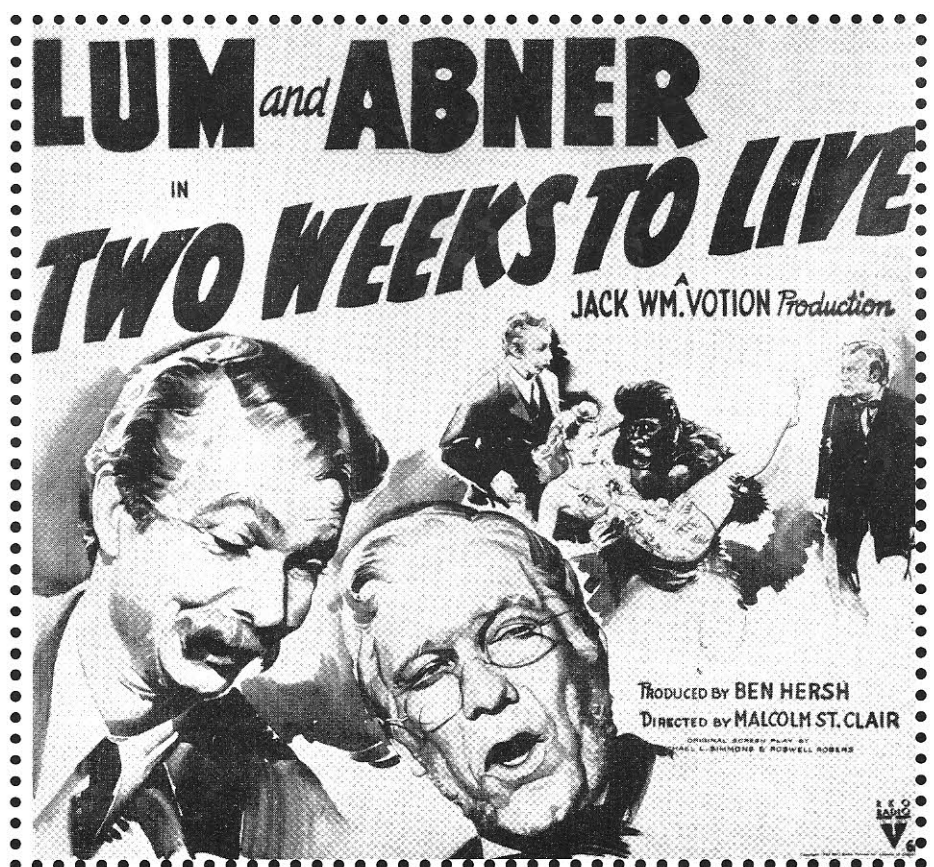
*April 2003*

### *In This Issue:*

**Lum & Abner: Attack of the Clones ..... 4**

**A Mighty Crowded Two Weeks to Live ..... 7**

**Lum & Abner for Dummies ..... 10**



*False advertising in action! This rare billboard-sized "six sheet" for TWO WEEKS TO LIVE features the preposterous image of the movie's trained gorilla making off with Rosemary LaPlanche in her swim suit, a combination of characters that never even remotely entered into the movie itself.*

**April 2003 - Page 3**

# LUM and ABNER®: ATTACK OF THE CLONES

## PART THREE OF A SERIES

When "Lum and Abner" arrived in Chicago to begin their network radio careers in 1931, they were entering a medium dominated by two other Chicago-based performers — Freeman F. Gosden and Charles J. Correll, the pioneers of the nightly radio serial, whose program *Amos 'n' Andy* had been a national obsession for nearly two years. Chet Lauck and Norris Goff would follow their own path in broadcasting over the next two decades — but at the same time, elements of their work owe a clear debt to the trailblazing precedent set by Correll and Gosden.

Little is known of the format of Lauck and Goff's earliest broadcasts — but what is known is that these early programs from Hot Springs during April/May 1931 did not use scripts. Lauck and Goff broadcast their dialogues extemporaneously, and it is unclear just how much of a connection there was between the action of one broadcast and that of the next. All that changed when the performers went to Chicago that summer to begin their series for the Quaker Oats Company over NBC.

The catalyst for this change was a man by the name of Henry Selinger, then head of the radio division of the Lord and Thomas advertising agency. Lord and Thomas handled the Quaker Oats account, and it was Selinger's job to act as liaison between the sponsor, the network, and the talent engaged for the company's radio features. And it is Henry Selinger who stands as the "missing link" between Correll and Gosden and Lauck and Goff.

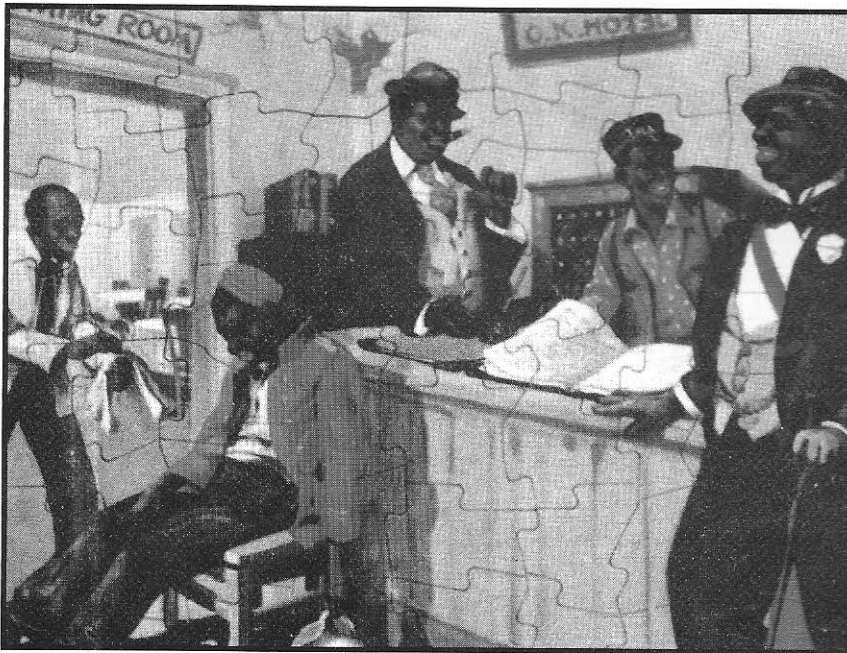
Five years before his first encounter with Lauck and Goff, Henry Selinger was program director at WGN, the powerful radio voice of the *Chicago Tribune* — and it was Selinger, along with *Tribune* promotion manager Benjamin T. McCanna, who first proposed the idea of a "radio comic strip." In November 1925, Selinger and McCanna approached Freeman Gosden and

Charles Correll — then on the WGN staff as a novelty singing team — and assigned them to develop a radio version of "The Gumps," a *Tribune* comic strip which had begun the craze for continuity comics in 1919.

Correll and Gosden were approached for this assignment after demonstrating an unusual skill for dialogue — most notably in their distinctive routine of interpolating short dialogue sequences in their versions of popular songs. Their most successful selection along this line was "The Kinky Kids Parade," a Walter

Donaldson-Gus Kahn novelty song describing the antics of a group of African-American children staging their own backyard military parade. In performing this selection, Correll and Gosden interpolated a short interlude in black dialect — Gosden had grown up on the border of the African-American district of Richmond, Virginia, and had a native speaker's familiarity with this form of speech.

"The Kinky Kids Parade" quickly became Correll and Gosden's signature selection — and its success was still very fresh in the performers' minds when they received the assignment from McCanna and Selinger. They quickly rejected the idea of adapting "The Gumps"



*This jigsaw puzzle was offered as an AMOS 'N' ANDY premium by Pepsodent. Notice that all one needs to do is change the heads on the characters to convert them into (L to R) Grandpappy Spears, Cedric, Lum, Abner, and Squire Skimp in the Mountain View Hotel!*

in favor of using characters of their own creation — characters who would be performed in black dialect. Correll and Gosden also rejected the proposal that the feature be performed by a large cast. "There would be too little time for rehearsal," Correll recalled, "and we did not think things would move smoothly enough." Instead, Correll and Gosden suggested that they play all the parts themselves — eliminating any potential for problems with a large cast. The focus would be on two central characters, with additional characters to be added by voice doubling — a technique for which Gosden had already demonstrated



**Charles "Andy" Correll and Freeman "Amos" Gosden broadcasting their show in the early 1930s.**

remarkable skill. Here was the kernel of the idea which would evolve first into *Sam and Henry*, and later into *Amos 'n' Andy* — and here is the origin of the format which would be adopted by dozens of dialogue programs over the next decade, among them *Lum and Abner*.

Henry Selinger left WGN in 1929 to take over the Lord and Thomas radio department, and there resumed his relationship with Freeman Gosden and Charles Correll, sponsored since August 1929 by the Pepsodent Company — a Lord and Thomas client. Selinger served as agency supervisor for *Amos 'n' Andy* from 1929 until he left Lord and Thomas toward the end of 1931

— and was quite familiar with Correll and Gosden's working methods and broadcasting technique. So it was that Selinger himself taught Chet Lauck and Norris Goff the basic procedure for writing and performing from a script.

Lauck and Goff met Selinger the day before their first Quaker Oats broadcast, in late July 1931 — and the executive was shocked to learn that the performers had no idea what he was talking about when he asked to see their script. "Not only didn't we have any," Goff recalled, "we didn't know what he was talking about. Believe me, I'd never heard the word in my life."

Desperately, Selinger worked into the night with Lauck and Goff, explaining the process of writing a script — and the performers finally picked up enough of the technique to assemble their first written episode. However, much to Selinger's frustration, Lauck and Goff abruptly diverged from this script when on air, and ad-libbed their way thru the broadcast. Eventually, though, the performers came to understand the value of a thought-out scenario — and while they remained facile adlibbers for as long as they were on the air, for the most part *Lum and Abner* became a scripted, carefully-structured program with a clearly defined continuing storyline.

What, precisely, did Henry Selinger say to Lauck and Goff over the course of that long July night? The recollections of the performers themselves were somewhat hazy on the details, but it is evident that Selinger detailed the basic format and structure required for a proper script. And it is also evident

that his pattern for this explanation was the format originally devised by Correll and Gosden — a brief scene-setting explanation by an announcer, followed by approximately ten minutes of dialogue between two central characters. Other characters would be brought to life by voice doubling — or by means of another key Correll and Gosden technique, the use of one-sided telephone conversations or third-person description. Structurally, then, the format developed for *Lum and Abner* was identical in all essential elements to that of *Amos 'n' Andy*.

Certain characterizations in *Lum and Abner* echo *Amos 'n' Andy* as well. The relationship between Lum and Abner has a vague resemblance to that of Amos and Andy as outlined in Correll and Gosden's earliest scripts. Lum and Andy share the basic traits of being pompous, vain, and self-important — while in reality not being as clever as they think they are. The earliest depiction of Amos displayed a certain naivete in his relationship with Andy, which resembles the bewilderment often displayed by Abner over Lum's latest doings.

In both programs, however, these characterizations evolved. Even by the time *Lum and Abner* began its network run in 1931, Amos had grown and developed into *Amos 'n' Andy*'s voice of reason and common sense — essentially the same role that Dick Huddleston would fill in *Lum and Abner*. Andy, in turn, began to display more of the naivete originally ascribed to Amos, particularly in his frequent encounters with high-pressure promoters and confidence men. In this respect, Lum and Abner are less direct parallels of Amos and Andy then they are parallels of the two sides of Andy Brown. Both Lum and Andy used their swell-headed overconfidence as a way of concealing a profound inferiority complex — and both Abner and Andy had a certain wide-eyed innocence in their dealings with the world at large.

Both *Amos 'n' Andy* and *Lum and Abner* dealt with similar plot ideas — revolving much of their action around the basic themes of money and romance. Lum's clumsy pursuit of a long line of eligible women — dating back to schoolteacher Evalena Schultz — echoes the many romantic fumbblings of Andy Brown, notably his long-running pursuit of beauty-shop owner Madam Queen. In both programs, such activities were in contrast to the stable, long-term relationships of Lum and Andy's partners: Abner, with his marriage to Lizabeth, and Amos with his longterm relationship, leading to marriage, with Ruby Taylor. Likewise, both pro-



**Chet Lauck & Norris Goff during a LUM & ABNER broadcast, 1936. In the background is their secretary, Velma McCall.**

grams placed their lead characters in an ever-changing progression of business ventures as a strategy for getting ahead financially. And this, in turn, led to an enduring sub-theme for both programs — the lead characters' constant problems with shaky investment schemes.

In *Amos 'n' Andy*, these schemes were generally promoted by George Stevens, the Kingfish of Amos and Andy's lodge, the Mystic Knights of the Sea. Played by Gosden in a resonant, theatrical bass, the Kingfish was filled with ideas for making a fast dollar — and was always willing to risk other people's money to make it happen. He was also ever ready to impose himself on Amos and Andy whenever any of their own ventures showed signs of profit.

The Kingfish's direct parallel in *Lum and Abner* is, of course, Squire Skimp — and indeed, Goff's 1930s portrayal of the Squire even sounds very much like the voice used by Gosden for the Kingfish. (*EDITOR'S NOTE: In the 1940s, Squire developed a more "jowly" sound that did not sound much like his 1930s voice!*) The methods of the two characters are quite similar — rolling over the objections of their potential marks with a line of big, bombastic patter, and usually arranging matters so that their own risk in any given venture is minimalized. But the Kingfish is not the only *Amos 'n' Andy* character echoed by Squire Skimp — he also has strong parallels to Henry Van Porter, the slippery real-estate and insurance salesman portrayed by Charles Correll. Van Porter and the Squire both purveyed questionable insurance policies with real enthusiasm — and never mind the fine print. And when the time came to pay off on a policy, both characters could be counted on to unearth some obscure clause which would void the coverage.

Other supporting characters in both programs have parallels as well. Grandpappy Spears' love-hate relationship with Abner echoes the distaste with which Brother Crawford often viewed the activities of Andy, while the travails of Mousey Gray and his formidable wife Gussie resemble Brother Crawford's constant laments of his own marital state. The role of Cedric Weehunt as a well-meaning all-purpose lackey for Lum echoes the manner in which Andy often took advantage of the equally well-meaning Lightning. Amos and Andy occasionally encountered a phony mystic by the name of "Prince Ali Bendo," whose name would be echoed years later by Squire Skimp's old cohort "Prince Ali Kush" (Both characters, in turn, may have been inspired by a real-life Chicago charlatan who called himself "Prince Ali Hindu.")

The similarities between *Lum and Abner* and *Amos 'n' Andy* also extended to specific storylines. At various times, Amos and Andy and Lum and Abner ran lunch rooms, ran hotels, found abandoned babies, dealt with breach-of-promise suits, became involved with counterfeiters. But while the subject matter in these storylines was similar, the handling of these storylines displayed the essential difference between the two programs — and, indeed, emphasizes the reason why Lauck and Goff endured where so many *Amos 'n' Andy* imitators failed.

The essential difference was one of tone. *Amos 'n' Andy*, during its years as a nightly 15-minute serial, tended to take its storylines seriously. While there were certainly comic elements in the program, it had a melancholy undertone which often led to moments of straight, serious drama. *Lum and Abner* took a much lighter approach — emphasizing the absurdity of its situations over any dramatic elements. Compare how the two programs handled the "abandoned baby" sequences — when Amos and Andy found themselves with custody of a foundling girl in the spring of 1932, the story revolved around the challenge of locating the baby's mother — and culminated with Amos discovering



*This, purportedly the only time Lauck, Goff, Gosden, and Correll were photographed together, was taken during a party honoring radio announcer Harry Von Zell, late 1940s.*

the desperate poverty in which she lived, and the sense of hopelessness which had led her to give up her only child. When, ten years later, Lum and Abner found themselves the guardians of a baby boy, the storyline developed as a subtle comedy-mystery and was ultimately revealed as just another confidence scheme. The same basic idea — but taken in entirely different directions, based on the differing tones of the two programs.

(*EDITOR'S NOTE: The above would indeed seem to be the correct assumption based upon the Lum and Abner recordings that circulate. However, a close examination of the L&A scripts of the 1930s, as reprinted in the NLAS's series of volumes, shows that during that decade, L&A too would take time out for some serious storylines as well... unfortunately, we do not have access to any L&A scripts from the early 1930s, so we do not know just how closely their approach would have paralleled that of Amos 'n' Andy at that time.*)

There are many connections between *Amos 'n' Andy* and *Lum and Abner* — the Henry Selinger link, the fact that Lauck and Goff were for several years managed by *Amos 'n' Andy* announcer Bill Hay, the similarities between characters and plotlines in the two series. But Chet Lauck and Norris Goff stood out from the legion of *Amos 'n' Andy* imitators of the early 1930s thru the distinctiveness of their own vision. They took the basic format they inherited from Correll and Gosden and gave it their own unique stamp — and in doing so, carved out for themselves their own place in broadcasting history.

- Elizabeth McLeod

(*Another link not mentioned above was related to us many years ago by the late Gaylord Carter, who was the organist for AMOS 'N' ANDY. Apparently at some point in time, A&A and L&A were broadcast consecutively, and Carter said that he and L&A organist Sybil Chism used to participate in what he called "fanny practice." He said that he would finish playing A&A's theme, "The Perfect Song," and during the station ID, he would have just enough time to slide off one end of the organ bench while Sybil Chism slid on from the other end, to be ready to begin playing "Eleanor" to signal the beginning of L&A's program. Goodness knows why the network did not retain one organist for both broadcasts, but that's show biz!*)

# A Mighty Crowded TWO WEEKS TO LIVE

It just may be that *Two Weeks to Live* had the largest credited cast of any of the L&A movies. This is largely due to the fact that the storyline is comprised of a series of individual sequences, and with only one or two exceptions, each of them features a completely different set of characters. As we have done for the 60th anniversaries of the two previous movies, *Dreaming Out Loud* (1940) and *The Bashful Bachelor* (1942), we will now take a brief look at the careers behind the *TWTL* actors.

## FRANKLIN PANGBORN (Mr. Pinkney)



The word "typecasting" could have been invented for Franklin Pangborn, whose fussy and prissy characters walked the floor of countless department stores and ruled apoplectically over numerous offices in the world of the movies. He developed this character in the mid-1930s and used it to good effect for the rest of his life, including as *TWTL*'s building superintendent who is positive that accident

victim Abner is ready to sue the whole outfit. Pangborn once commented on his knack for playing such roles: "No knockabout clown in patched pantaloons had to take the punishment regularly meted out to the comedian unlucky enough to have become identified with dress clothes." After the day of the character actor was on its way out, TV host Jack Paar intended to use Pangborn and his well-known mannerisms as the announcer on *The Tonight Show*, but that was not to be. As Paar later said, "It didn't last more than two weeks because dear Franklin could not ad-lib in character. He was an actor who could only read lines." Hugh Downs replaced Pangborn as the announcer, and the fussy-budget actor passed away in July 1958 at age 65.

## KAY LINAKER (Mrs. Carmen)

We do not have to say much about our dear friend Ms. Linaker (now known as Kate Phillips), because she is to return to Mena as the 2003 NLAS Convention guest in just a couple of months. In our June issue we will be presenting a recap of her film career, of which *TWTL* was only a small part. Stay tuned to your local *Jot 'Em Down Journal* channel for that story!

## IRVING BACON (Gimpel)

Bacon was making his third consecutive appearance in an L&A movie, but in a completely different type of role. In *Dreaming Out Loud* he played the dramatic part of the town drunk, who reforms and becomes a deputy sheriff after his young daughter is killed by a nit-and-run driver... pretty sobering stuff for Pine Ridge! In *The Bashful Bachelor*, he



was cast as the sheriff in Mena (not the same character), and had little to do but be outwitted by L&A. In *TWTL* he went for an all-out zany role as Mr. Gimpel, a more-than-unusual window washer who spouts poetry and talks to his invisible ghost dog. This became one of his reported 391 movie roles, but would be the last time he would work with L&A. Bacon passed away in February 1965.

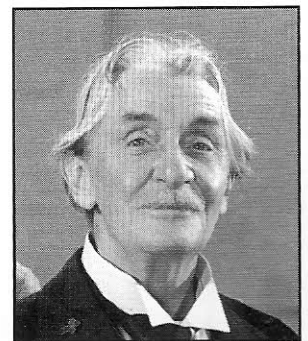
## HERBERT RAWLINSON (Stark, Sr.)

Herbert Rawlinson occupies an unusual place in L&A history, because not only was he featured with them in *TWTL* and again in *Goin' To Town* (1944), but he also became a semi-regular during the first season of their half-hour radio show. The veteran actor's British accent was genuine, as he was born in England in 1885. The Internet Movie Database lists 292 movies to his credit, beginning with a 1911 production entitled *The Artist's Sons* and ending with the infamous *Jail Bait* (1954), where it is reported that he actually died immediately after completing his final scene in July 1953. He was obviously one of Chet & Tuffy's personal favorites, inasmuch as they used him in their work so often, and Chet rarely failed to mention his name when discussing their supporting players.



## IVAN SIMPSON (Professor Frisby)

Unlike Lauck and Goff, who were young men playing old men, the eccentric Professor Frisby (a rough parallel to the radio show's Professor Sloane) was a genuine old-timer. Ivan Simpson was born in Scotland in 1875, and entered the movies around 1915. A quick perusal of his screen credits shows that he played more butlers than anything else, and probably welcomed the chance to have a comedically absent-minded role in *TWTL*. Simpson passed away at the age of 76 in October 1951.



## ROSEMARY LA PLANCHE (Nurse)

Like Kay Linaker above, we have already profiled Miss LaPlanche. Consult the last issue of *The Jot 'Em Down Journal* for a warm tribute written by her daughter, Carol Koplán. Miss



LaPlanche was the 1941 Miss America, and used her talents and beauty to land a contract with RKO. Her single scene in *TWTL* was pivotal to the plot, but the RKO publicity department made it appear that she was a full-fledged co-star, even putting out a number of ads depicting her in her swimsuit. Male moviegoers were no doubt disappointed to see that in the film itself she appeared in a prim nurse's uni-

form. (She was, however, referred to by name as "Miss LaPlanche" in the film!)

**DANNY DUNCAN (Ulysses the Postman)**

Danny Duncan's career has always been something of a mystery, and apparently even was so during his time with L&A. It is known that he was born in Paducah, Kentucky, circa 1897 and that as a child he performed "specialty acts" on the showboats that traveled the Ohio and Tennessee Rivers. Apparently he went into vaudeville from there, and at the time L&A discovered him he was a featured comedian with the famous *Ken Murray's Blackouts* stage show at Hollywood's El Capitan Theater. He first appeared on screen with them as Uncle Henry Lunsford in *The Bashful Bachelor*, around the same time he began playing a different version of the character on their radio show. In *TWTL* he was the postman, Ulysses (whether his last name was Quincy is not stated), and in the following movie he became the screen version of Grandpappy Spears. His short bio as part of the promotion for *Partners in Time* (1946) states that "he has never appeared on the screen in any picture but a Lum & Abner," yet the Internet Movie Database lists a few others, such as *Inside the Law* and *Lucky Jordan* (both 1942). Whether RKO was mistaken, or whether there is another Danny Duncan whose credits have been confused with "our" Duncan's is not clear. It is also unknown what year he passed away.

**EVALYN KNAPP (Secretary)**

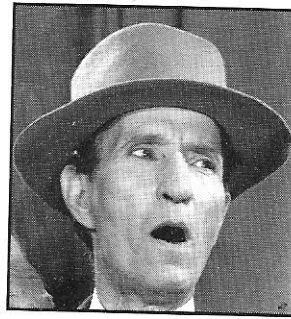
Another cast member whose talents were not put to best use because of her limited role, Evalyn Knapp (yes, that's how she spelled her first name) was born in 1908 and got into the movies in the early 1930s. Her Internet biography says that she became a leading lady in B pictures and serials during the 1930s and early 1940s, but her small secretary role in *TWTL* was hardly leading lady stuff. Perhaps tellingly, the Internet Movie



Database lists her L&A appearance as her final screen role, but gives no indication as to what she did to occupy her time between its release and her death in June 1981.

**CHARLES MIDDLETON (Elmer Kelton)**

Even though sourpuss Middleton appeared in some 200



movies during his career, it is safe to say that most film buffs remember him best as the villainous "Ming the Merciless" in the various adaptations of the *Flash Gordon* comic strip. Even his more earth-bound parts cast him as either a bad guy or some lesser form of grouch, probably because his natural appearance precluded him from grinning widely and doing joyful

jigs. In *TWTL* he appeared as a grumpy Pine Ridge citizen ready to tar and feather Lum & Abner for their perceived swindling of the citizenry. At least it can be said that he came from a genuine rural background, having been born in Elizabethtown, Kentucky, in 1874. He died of a heart attack in April 1949.

**LUIS ALBERNI (Van Dyke)**

The fine reference book *Comic Support: Second Bananas in the Movies* (1993) sums up Luis Alberni's career by stating that he was "known for playing a variety of excitable ethnic characters." His *TWTL* role no doubt fit that mold, as he was cast as eccentric Dr. Van Dyke, whose aspiration was to be "the next Dr. Jekyll." Alberni was 76 years old when he passed away at the Motion Picture Country Home in December 1962.



**JACK RICE (Hotel Clerk)**

Who would imagine that an actor could make practically a whole career out of playing hotel clerks? That might not have been the way Jack Rice wanted it, but his 189 movie roles listed on the IMDB contain an alarming number of just such parts. (Occasionally he would break up the monotony by playing a department store clerk, or with such exciting-sounding roles as "man dancing with Countess," "man walking with cane," and "surprised man in train station.") His final movie role was in the 1963 Disney

movie *Son of Flubber*, in which he played a juror. (Also on the jury was 2002 and 2003 NLAS Convention guest Dal McKennon.) Rice checked out of the big hotel called Earth in December 1968, at the age of 75.

**TIM RYAN (Higgins)**

Although Tim Ryan had a long career as a character actor and writer, he is best remembered today for his longstanding marriage to Irene Noblette Ryan, a not-so-shabby comedian in her own right. Ryan's role in *TWTL* was that of a typical small-time crook, and it is likely that it did not help or hurt the rest of his career. He passed away in October 1956, six years before





his wife became world-famous as Granny on TV's *The Beverly Hillbillies*.

#### OSCAR O'SHEA (Squire Skimp)



It is a puzzle why Oscar O'Shea was even included in this movie, much less in the credited cast, as there are uncredited actors in it who have more to do than he does. He had done a fine job as the Irish-accented Squire Skimp in *The Bashful Bachelor*, and presumably was put into *TWTL* simply to give some continuity between the two stories. His entire performance is contained within one scene, in which he has a grand total of one

spoken line. When Squire was next seen on the screen, in 1944's *Goin' To Town*, he would be played by a different actor, Dick Elliott.

#### EDWARD EARLE (Doctor)

The actor who plays the medic whose mixed-up diagnosis sets the plot in motion was born in Canada in 1882. His 309 movie credits stretch back to 1914 and run all the way through an uncredited role in *The Ten Commandments* (1956). His role as Abner's doctor was probably about the last thing on his mind by the time he passed away at the age of 90 in December 1972.



As we said earlier, this huge cast was supplemented by an even greater number of characters whose players were not credited. Two of them are Pine Ridge citizens Grandma Masters and Mamie (the telephone operator?), from whom L&A collect investment dollars for their railroad; a portly Pine Ridger is identified as "Silas Flint," but the actor is not credited. There are also assorted other Pine Ridge citizens who appear fleetingly. L&A learn the true value (or lack thereof) of their railway from an old codger who is also unidentified, but fits firmly into the Gabby Hayes/Emmett Lynn style of Western sidekicking. While lawyer Stark is played by future L&A radio regular Herbert Rawlinson, no credit is given for the actor who plays his son and locates Pine Ridge on a map of the United States. Also unidentified are the professor husband of Kay Linaker's evil Mrs. Carmen (even she does not recall who he was); the second nurse who tries to keep Rosemary LaPlanche's mind off her romantic pursuits; the "real" terminally ill patient, Mr. Strotz, and his butler; the janitor who witnesses Abner's tumble down the stairs; Franklin Pangborn's lawyer; the tailor whom Abner mistakes for an undertaker; the various employees of the Higgins Air Show; the doorman at the Hotel Ritzmore; the dowager who mistakes Abner for another doorman and gives him the immortal leading line, "Call me a taxi"; the little boy whose bicycle Abner turns into scrap metal; a bratty little girl and her overindulgent mother; assorted FBI men and Nazi spies (who get blown up by Mrs. Carmen's scheme); the doctor who pronounces Abner's health perfect in the end; and Professor Frisby's colleague, Professor Plunkett. The short and squat deep-voiced man from the newspaper who shows up to collect L&A's hard-earned cash may possibly be

Billy Bletcher, a busy cartoon voice actor who was best known as Disney's Big Bad Wolf and Mickey Mouse's nemesis Peg Leg Pete.



When a live gorilla shows up in the hotel lobby (don't ask us how), his Brooklynese trainer is also unidentified. However, we do know that the amiable ape himself is played by Charlie Gomorrah (sometimes spelled Gemora or Gamore), the premier gorilla impersonator of the day. If any movie had a humanized beast in it, usually Gomorrah was under the skin. In fact, around the same time he was monkeying around with L&A,

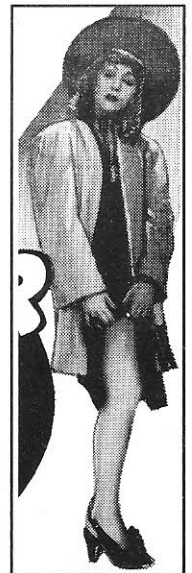
Gomorrah also donned the same costume to menace another radio celebrity in the RKO picture *Gildersleeve's Ghost*. Gomorrah died in 1961, and there is no word as to whether he was buried in his monkey suit.

Another uncredited actor whose identity is known is the newspaper reporter who sarcastically asks Professor Frisby, "If dis guy does go ta Mars, hows he gonna get back?" That one line is delivered by L&A's old friend and frequent radio guest Jerry Hausner. In fact, that scene was Hausner's first in motion pictures, and he said that Lauck & Goff put him into it mainly so he could obtain his Screen Actors' Guild union card.



It may be difficult to keep up with all of these performers without a score card in front of you, but the next time you watch *Two Weeks to Live* (hopefully at its 60th anniversary screening in Mena on June 20-21, hint hint), keep in mind that it took a lot of talent to put it together!

- Tim Hollis



*This lady is the biggest mystery of all: She appears in at least one 8x10 glossy still from TWTL (left), and is featured in many of the newspaper ads, displaying her legs (right), but she appears absolutely nowhere within the film as it exists!*

# LUM and ABNER<sup>®</sup> FOR DUMMIES

Who was the fellow who once said "A little knowledge is a dangerous thing?" Whoever he was, he must have had some experience with people who set themselves up as experts on various topics without first taking the time to do their research on the subject. The book stores are full of volumes written by these types of people, and more than occasionally they turn up on television as well.

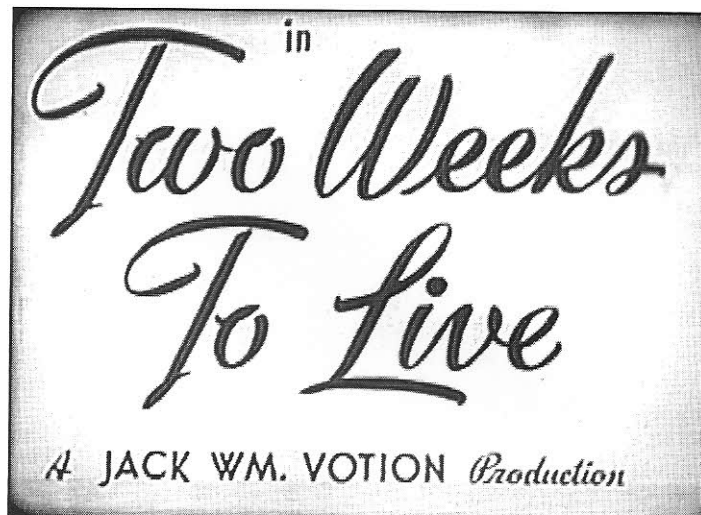
When a syndicated movie packager somehow ended up with a print of Lum and Abner's *Two Weeks to Live*, one might expect that the movie would be presented with no attempt at historical context. It is probably not the best example of their movie work, and obviously is a different animal from their radio series, but taken on its own terms it is not a stinkeroo by any means. However...

Somehow or other, *Two Weeks to Live* ended up being featured on "The Golden Age of Comedy," a production of the World Harvest Television cable network. As stated above, it might have been okay had the movie just been presented as is, but the two hosts of this "classic movies" series took it upon themselves to editorialize about the movie's merits and deficits, and ended up making themselves look pretty foolish to those who actually know something about L&A.

The primary host for this series is Ted Baehr, known for such books as *The Christian Family Guide to Movies and Video* and *What Can We Watch Tonight? A Family Guide to Movies*. Baehr's motives may be pure, and few of us would dispute that some sense of decency might be required to work our way through today's entertainment industry... but when it comes to Lum & Abner, Mr. Baehr needs to attend remedial kindergarten. At the beginning of the show, he introduces his co-host Dave Hubble, the "packager of the series" (who presumably came up with this copy of *TWTL*). Right up front, Baehr announces that he had never heard of Lum & Abner until they obtained the movie for their series. This is good cause for any NLAS member to say "Uh oh," and it doesn't get any better from there.

It is painfully obvious that these two "movie experts" are concerned primarily with making fun of this movie... not without justification, but its weaknesses are different ones than they so gleefully point out. If the red flag has not been waving up to now, it certainly should be by the time Baehr identifies L&A's residence as Pine Bluff, and fellow expert Hubble corrects him: L&A are actually from Piney Ridge, Tennessee, according to him. Uh, yeah. Baehr tries to summarize the plot:

**April 2003 - Page 10**



*They go up to Chicago, they find out their inheritance is just debt, they get involved with a Nazi spy ring, then they find out he has only two weeks to live, then the spy ring plot is forgotten, then they decide they are going to take a trip to Mars..... somewhere in here is a story.*

By this point the two hosts are holding on to each other while laughing over the apparent absurdity of it all. But nothing could be as absurd as the discussion that ensues concerning L&A's show biz roots:

*HUBBLE: I think it's because Lum & Abner were doing radio, and they didn't have enough material for an hour and a half movie. So they took their 10-minute radio scripts and cobbled them together. (By now Baehr is falling on the floor again. But if you think things are bad now, just wait until Hubble's next comment:)*

*Someone asked me whether Lum & Abner ever ad-libbed. And of course some of the greatest movie dialogue was... Spencer Tracy and Katherine Hepburn became famous for being able to ad-lib, and they added more sparks... but I don't think Lum & Abner became famous for ad-libbing. I think they became infamous for cobbling together some stupid plots. Remember that they started in radio, and in radio you stood there with a script and all you did was read it and drop the pieces of paper on the floor when you got through. Well, what happened was that somebody must have picked up some of those papers but they didn't get all of them!*

It would have done no good at all if someone had told these two brains that *TWTL* was written by L&A's radio author Roz Rogers, but because of his profession, Baehr at least tries to find some high moral ground in the movie:

with  
**FRANKLIN PANGBORN**  
**KAY LINAKER**  
**IRVING BACON**  
**HERBERT RAWLINSON**  
**IVAN SIMPSON**  
**ROSEMARY LA PLANCHE**

*Original Screen Play by*  
**MICHAEL L. SIMMONS**  
 and **ROSWELL ROGERS**

Each one of the little stories, of course, all have a moral point that Lum & Abner were making about the world at large. One, traveling to Chicago and giving up everything to get the inheritance and then finding out they owed the debt... clearly you understand the point that you can't look beyond your own horizon for quick and easy fame and fortune.

Hubble can't resist getting in one more dig: This is a bonus movie package... Think of it as getting four plots for the price of one! Now, you don't get ALL the plots, they don't wrap up, but you do get four plots.

Just before this introduction mercifully ends and the movie unreels, Hubble tries to redeem himself by saying that if people want to get the true flavor of what L&A were like, they should visit some of the OTR sources and hear their radio programs. But just as one is about to give him credit for finally getting something right for a change, he says that they were always a Sunday night show. (What about all those "10-minute scripts" he was talking about earlier?)

Yes, it is true that a little information in the wrong hands can do much damage. Anyone who caught the showing of TWTL on World Harvest Television would not be likely to be converted into an L&A fan, or a member of the NLAS. We can only hope that this network has very limited coverage, and perhaps L&A will not suffer too badly at the hands of their detractors.



**RKO's publicity department concocted this summary of the TWO WEEKS TO LIVE plot, which makes more sense than the synopsis "cobbled together" by brain trust Baehr & Hubble.**

If Baehr can find a moral lesson in TWTL, we can find an even better one from his comments on the movie: "Don't go on television and make a moron out of yourself by discussing something you do not know anything about." How about that, Aesop?

VILLAINESSES, BEAUTY QUEENS, AND TOONS! OH, MY!

# THE 19TH ANNUAL NLAS CONVENTION

JUNE 20 & 21, 2003

Lime Tree Inn,  
MENA, ARKANSAS

with special guest **KAY LINAKER**



Kay Linaker flirting with Lum in 1943 (top), and still up to her old tricks in 1998 (bottom).



April 2003 - Page 12

It's about time for all of us to start making that annual trip through the beautiful Ouachita Mts. to Mena for the annual NLAS Convention! It is hard to believe that next year will be the 20th of these blowouts that we have blown up... but first we have our #19 event this year, where we are celebrating the 60th anniversary of the two L&A movies released during 1943, *Two Weeks to Live* and *So This is Washington*.

Unfortunately, there are no living cast members from the *Washington* film. However, we are very thankful that one of the main performers from *Two Weeks* is not only very much alive and well, but loves visiting Mena. Those of you who were around for our 1998 convention will remember that **KAY LINAKER** (a.k.a. KATE PHILLIPS) visited with us, even though her L&A movie was not celebrating its anniversary. At that time she promised that she would return in 2003, and sure enough, she already has her bags packed and is ready to go!

Heavens to cameo guest stars, that isn't all! In our February 2003 issue you saw the tribute to *Two Weeks to Live's* **ROSEMARY LaPLANCHE**, written by her daughter, CAROL KOPLAN, which told all about Rosemary's varied career as Miss America 1941, and later as an actress and artist. Carol plans to be with us for a portion of the weekend to speak about her late mother, and display rare photos and memorabilia from Rosemary's collection. And, keep your whiskers crossed... One of last year's guests, cartoon voice legend **DAL McKENNON**, had such a good time in Mena that wild Gumbys couldn't keep him away this year, and he too plans to be on hand. Those of you who met him last year will agree that there are few people who make one feel so good just to be around them. We should all be that jolly!

By now you should be picking up the phone and calling the Lime Tree Inn in Mena to make your room reservation. Don't depend on your speed dial or your little black address book, because since last year the area code for Mena has been changed. The correct number is (479) 394-6350. Don't delay, do it today, and all that other rhyming stuff. In our June issue we plan to have a more complete schedule of events, but we usually begin around 5 p.m. on Friday and then have events at various times on Saturday. We'll be lookin' fer ya there!