

June 1989

The Golden Era by Gary Stivers



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THE JOT 'EM DOWN JOURNAL

June 1989

In This Issue:

THE NATIONAL LUM AND ABNER SOCIETY

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PRESIDENT
Donnie Pitchford

VICE-PRESIDENT
Sam Brown

EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
Tim Hollis

PUBLICITY DIRECTOR
Rex Riffle

COVER: Check your sundial; it's
almost time for the Convention!
Lum, Abner, and Grandpappy
Spears (Danny Duncan) in a scene
from PARTNERS IN TIME (RKO Radio
Pictures, 1946).

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THE MANY FACES OF GRANDPAPPY SPEARS	2
A study of that cantankerous ole critter.	
AND NOW	4
What's going on <u>not</u> in Pine Ridge.	
THE NLAS CONVENTION	5
What you'll find and who you'll meet.	

SPECIAL NOTICE

Yes, we realize that this
issue of The Jot'Em Down Journal
is considerably smaller than
usual. The reason is that our
next issue (August 1989) is
going to be a larger-than-normal
blockbuster commemorating the
NLAS's first five years, and
financial considerations made it
necessary to economize somewhere.
Have a good summer, and we'll see
you in August with the biggest

Journal yet!!

The Many Faces Of Grandpappy Spears

The visualization of radio characters has been a subject of much fascination; as evidence, witness the profusion of publicity photos and motion pictures featuring radio performers that appeared during the 1930's and 1940's. L&A and their associate characters, while often left up to the listeners' imaginations...part of the great appeal of radio...were depicted visually literally from their first weeks on the air until the show's demise, and then afterward. In this series of articles, created by Uncle Donnie Pitchford and Squire Rex Riffle, we will be exploring these various depictions of the L&A characters.

In this issue, we concentrate on that cranky old varmint, Grandpappy Spears.

The all-time prize for description of Mr. Spears goes to the fertile brain of Publicity Director Rex

Riffle, who submitted the following: "Grandpap wears old-fashioned black high-topped shoes, usually with cloth pants and a blue work shirt; when the top button of his shirt is open, you can see the top of his long johns underneath. He is very, very thin and wiry, standing not much taller than five feet. Most of the time he walks using a thick cane that has a "pistol-grip" top. He is slightly stooped over and usually wears a sort of Indiana Jones-style hat ... an older one that has seen better days. He has solid white hair, which he wears long, reminiscent of the 1800's, a very thick and full mustache drooping far over his lips, and a Van Dyke-like pointed beard ('the ole billy goat!')"



#1 (1936)



#2 (1936)

Longtime L&A fan David Miller once said that he saw Grandpap as looking like the character of Fred Ziffel on TV's "Green Acres," while our teenaged correspondents in Harrison, Arkansas, James & Janet McMurrin, state: "We see Grandpap as thin and only a little taller than Abner. He is wiry with thinning white hair, and a small beard...almost a goatee."

As with most of the characters, commercial depictions of Grandpap began with the 1932 series of Oscar Plaster photos from Waters/Pine Ridge. Elderly resident Cling Wilhite was generally considered to be the

real-life Grandpappy Spears, so he also posed for pictures in character. He was again photographed in 1936 (#1), in the formal attire he wore to the ceremony that changed the town's name. Mr. Wilhite died in 1938 at the age of 82.

Also in 1936, Grandpap made his first appearance in ink-wash form in that year's Lum & Abner Family Almanac (#2). A cartoony, beardless version of Mr. Spears appeared in the Jot 'Em Down Store Party Book (1939) (#3).



#3 (1939)

The character of Grandpap did not appear on the silver screen until the fourth L&A movie, SO THIS IS WASHINGTON (1943). In this film he was portrayed by actor Danny Duncan (#4), who was familiar to the radio listeners as the voice of town marshal Uncle Henry Lunsford. With some changes in makeup, Duncan again hobbled through the part in PARTNERS IN TIME (1946).

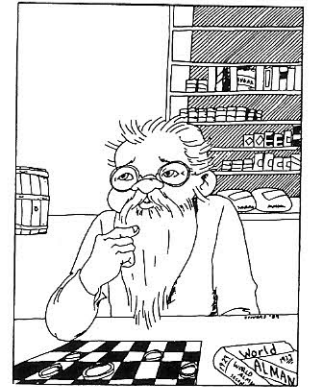


#4 (1943)

As for modern-day versions of Milford Avery, both cartoonists Kurt Jensen and Gary Stivers have incorporated the old coot into their privately-published comic strips (#5 & #6, respectively). Our artistical Prez, Uncle Donnie Pitchford, says he has never been completely happy with his mental picture of Grandpap, but he hitched up his britches anyway and gave it a try in last December's Journal (#7). It is interesting to note that virtually all of the different ver-



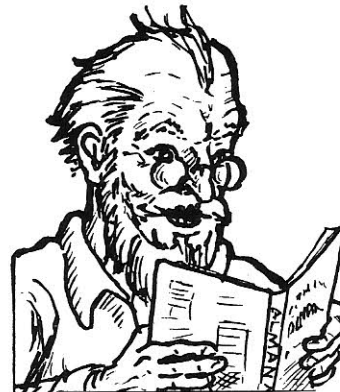
#5 (1977)



#6 (1988)

sions of Grandpappy Spears bear a strong resemblance to each other, a fact not often found with the other characters. Perhaps everyone's mental picture of a vinegary old codger is about the same; the only really noticeable difference among all of Grandpap's depictions is the size of his beard!!

In our next installment, we will be concentrating on that likeable crook Squire Skimp, so send us your ideas on his appearance! Or, if you have anything more to say about Grandpap, let us know; we still plan to have a "wrap-up" article at the end of this series to tie up any leftover comments. Address all correspondence to the Executive Secretary, Tim Hollis, Route 3, Box 110, Dora, AL 35062.



#7 (1988)

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“AND NOW...”



L TO R: SAM BROWN, KURT JENSEN, JAY PEARCE, AND CHARLES THURMAN AT WSIU STUDIOS

...let's see what's going on down in Southern Illinois. Well, as we look in on the home state of our vice - prez, Singin' Sam Brown, we find the television viewers of that area still buzzing about the recent evening of Lum and Abner programs offered by WSIU, Channel 8.

As we reported in our December, 1988 issue, Sam was hard at work promoting the 1986 AETN (Arkansas Educational Television Network) documentary, "Laughter Never Dies", a one-hour program tracing the history of Lum and Abner. WSIU, a PBS affiliate in Carbondale, Illinois (located on the campus of Southern Illinois University), expressed an interest in airing the documentary plus two Lum and Abner movies during their "Festival" fund-raising programming.

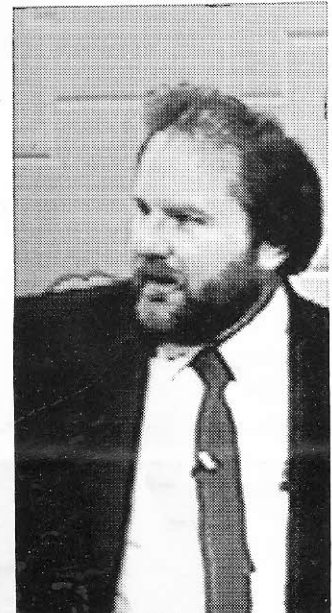


Irv Coppi of WSIU contacted Sam, and soon the wheels were in motion to secure the necessary broadcast tapes from AETN. Once this was accomplished, air time was scheduled. The final touch was the invitation extended to Singin' Sam and our esteemed members, Charles Thurman and the Abner-in-residence himself, Kurt Jensen (unfortunately, Ed "Lum" Frost was unable to attend, now living some distance from his partner Kurt). It seems these three "vamints" were asked to appear on WSIU during the "pledge breaks" aired between and during the L&A programs!

WSIU personality Jay Pearce called the evening of Friday, March 10, 1989 a "Lum and Abner Festival". Scheduled programming began with the AETN special at 7:00, followed by two Lum and Abner motion pictures, "Dreaming Out Loud" and "So This is Washington". Society fellers Brown, Jensen and Thurman took turns throughout the evening's pledge breaks appearing with Jay Pearce, lending their support to the PBS cause, introducing the volunteers who manned the telephones, and discussing both Lum and Abner and the NLAS.



"YES, MUM?"



"HUH?"

Although Kurt and Sam did not appear in their Abner and Cedric apparel, host Jay Pearce did manage to coax the two into an all-too-brief exchange, as Kurt/Abner asked Sam/Cedric, "Cedric, have we heard from Board Camp yet?" Sam/Cedric, monitoring the ringing phones, replies, "...we've heard from Cherry Hill," much to the delight of Pearce.

Charles Thurman informed the audience of the goings-on of our annual conventions, Kurt shared his career as an Abner impersonator (illustrated with photos of Kurt and Ed Frost), and Sam offered the viewers the first on-air appearances of two pieces of original NLAS art (a color drawing by Bobb Lynnes and the 1982 watercolor by Uncle Donnie).

Clearly a good time was had by all (but we're not sure if "san'riches and cocoa was served at a late hour")! If you would like to see your local PBS affiliate offer a "Lum and Abner Festival", write or call them! Send along a copy of this article! What a great way to support both Lum and Abner and PBS! WONDERFUL WORLD!!!

THE NATIONAL
LUM & ABNER
SOCIETY

Convention



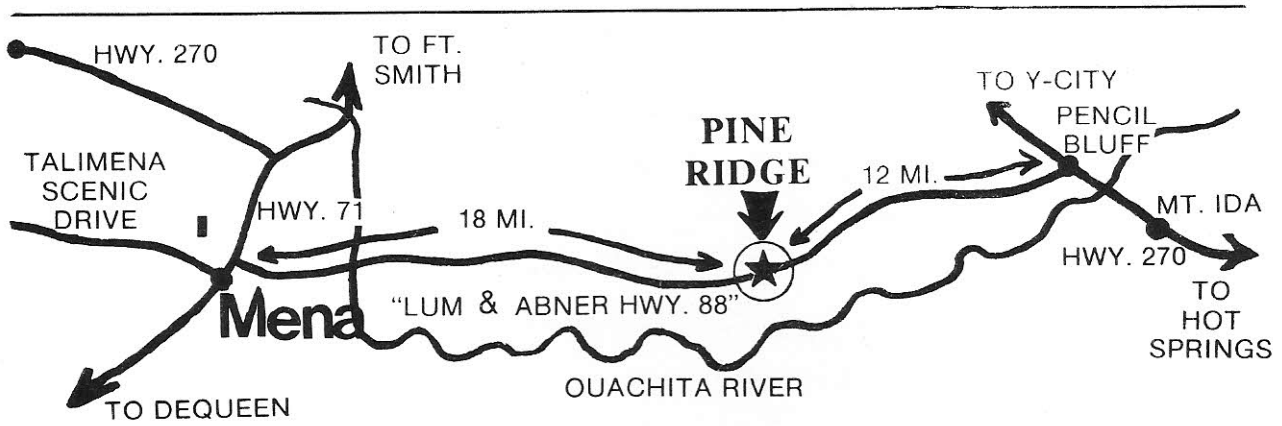
Special Guest
**WENDELL
NILES**

Attention, all members! Drop any prior commitments in order to attend the 5TH ANNUAL NLAS CONVENTION at the Best Western Lime Tree Inn in Mena, Arkansas, on June 17!

Our special guest for this year's event is MR. WENDELL NILES, one of the all-time great radio announcers. He appeared on the 30-minute L&A radio programs in 1948-50, usually delivering the commercials for Frigidaire refrigerators ("The first name you think of is the right one to buy!"), but his radio credits go far beyond Pine Ridge. For eight years, he announced for none other than the Bob Hope Show ("Use Pepsodent twice a day, see your dentist twice a year"), later moving with the show to television. He was also the original announcer for Gene Autry's "Melody Ranch" radio program, for "healthful, refreshing Doublemint Gum." And th-th-that's not all, folks! Just a partial list of the other radio programs using his talents would include the Burns & Allen Show, the Charlie McCarthy Show, "My Friend Irma," the Al Pearce Show, the Joe Penner Show, "Meet Corliss Archer," "Our Miss Brooks," and countless others.

Mr. Niles has almost as lengthy a list of TV shows to his credit, and has either narrated or appeared on-screen in approximately 30 motion pictures. In case you haven't already guessed, this is a man who is definitely worth coming to meet! (He also





has his own star on the Hollywood Walk Of Fame, an honor that even Lum & Abner themselves have never had!)

Convention activities will "begin to commence" at the meeting room in the Lime Tree Restaurant around 2:00 p.m. on Saturday, with an exhibit of Lum & Abner memorabilia and artifacts, plus material tracing the five-year history of the NLAS. Related videotapes will also be showing during this time. The exhibit will be open throughout the afternoon.

The actual buffet-style dinner itself will begin at 6:00 p.m., at which time we will hear from Mr. Niles, and some surprise features will take place (as they always seem to). The Lum & Abner Memorial Award and other prizes will be handed out, and material

from Mr. Niles' illustrious career will be presented.

On Sunday, June 18 (Father's Day), the traditional Lum & Abner Day festivities will again burst forth in Pine Ridge, 18 miles east of Mena. As always, there will be music, L&A movies, country cookin', and just a general old-fashioned foot-stompin', knee-slappin' good time, I grannies! (As always, proceeds go to benefit the Pine Ridge Volunteer Fire Department, so let's all support them and ensure that the Jot'Em Down Store doesn't burn down!)

Do NOT miss this year's Convention; it promises to be a classic! If possible, drop a postcard to the Executive Secretary (whose address appears elsewhere in this issue) and let him know of your plans to attend. WE'LL SEE YOU IN MENA!!

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