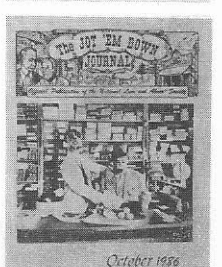
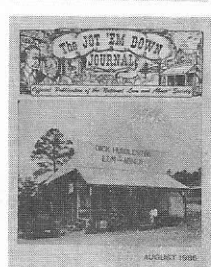
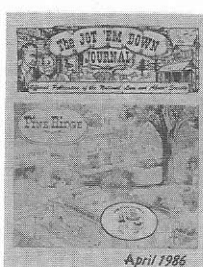
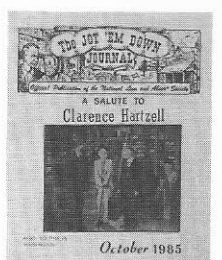
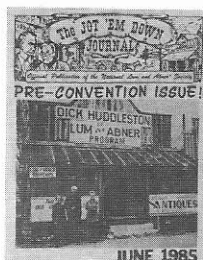
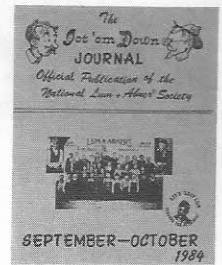
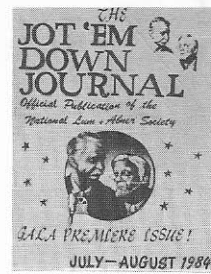
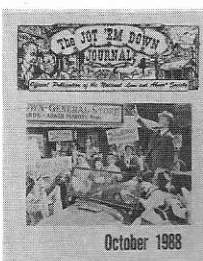
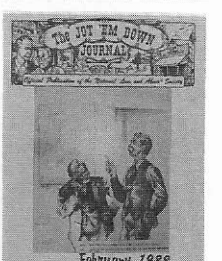
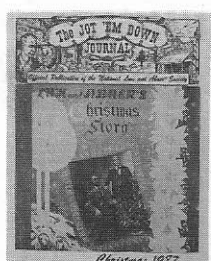
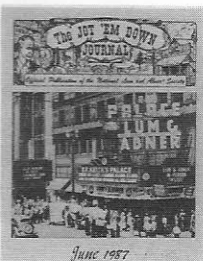
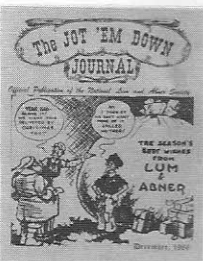


The JOT 'EM DOWN JOURNAL

Official Publication of the National Lum and Abner® Society



5th Anniversary Issue!



August 1989

JIM BACKUS

1913-1989

Like many others, we were saddened to hear of the passing of multitalented entertainer Jim Backus on July 3.

There was a connection between Backus and the Lum and Abner program, although details are quite vague. According to our Honorary Member (and Backus' closest friend) Jerry Hausner, Backus recalled that he appeared on at least a couple of L&A shows back around 1933, when he, L&A, and Hausner were all broadcasting from radio station WIAM in Cleveland, Ohio. The nature of these appearances is not known. A recording is available of one 1950 half-hour episode in which Backus again appeared with Chet & Tuffy.

Mr. Backus' work with L&A seems small when compared with his more notable ventures as Mister Magoo (with Hausner as Waldo) and on "Gilligan's Island." It is certain that all the branches of show business will miss him greatly.



BACKUS WITH PAINTING OF MAGOO
BY JERRY HAUSNER

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THE JOT 'EM DOWN JOURNAL August 1989

In This Issue:

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EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

Tim Hollis

PUBLICITY DIRECTOR

Rex Riffle

COVER: A look back at the 30
 issues of The Jot'Em Down Journal
 that have been published to date.
 (Montage created by Donnie Pitchford)

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WENDELL NILES SPEAKING.....	2
The career of a legendary radio announcer	
THE NLAS FIFTH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION	
CHAPTER 1: THE OSSIFERS' TALES.....	5
How these four fanatics found L&A	
CHAPTER 2: THE BIRTH OF THE NLAS.....	9
The four fanatics decide to DO something	
CHAPTER 3: THE JOT'EM DOWN JOURNAL AND	
HOW IT GREW.....	11
Where we came from, where we air now	
CHAPTER 4: THE NLAS CONVENTION.....	12
A review of the yearly event	
THE GOLDEN ERA.....	13
Our comical strip continues	
THE 1989 NLAS CONVENTION.....	14
Your full report, in words & pictures	



CARTONIST KURT JENSEN'S VERSIONS OF THE
 NLAS OSSIFERS: (1) SAM "CEDRIC" BROWN;
 (2) REX "SQUIRE" RIFFLE; (3) TIM "ABNER"
 HOLLIS; (4) DONNIE "LUM" PITCHFORD



WENDELL NILES SPEAKING

"In the old days, the announcers were stars...now the stars are announcers!"

- WENDELL NILES

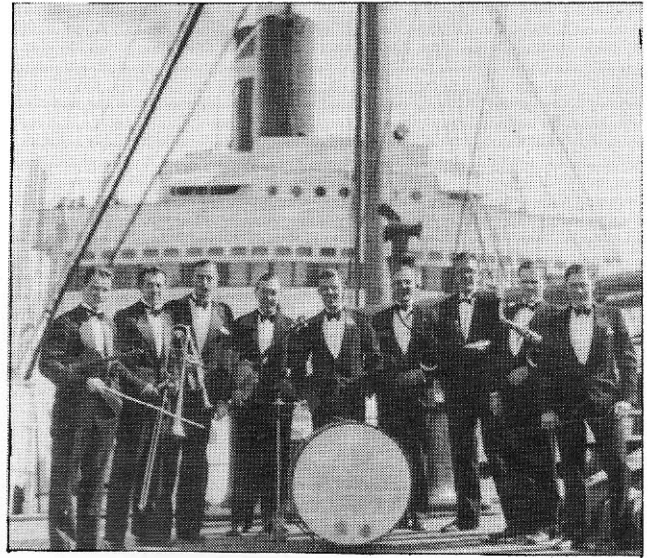
Wendell Niles was a part of that elite period when radio announcers were indeed as well-known as the programs on which they worked. Involved with virtually every aspect of show business for over 65 years, he certainly has had a career to look back upon.

Born in Montana on December 29, 1904, Wendell Niles' first professional experience came in 1923 when he organized an orchestra. This proved to be quite a successful venture, as Niles and His Montanans toured the country (and even other parts of the world) until 1927. The stock market crash in 1929 brought an end to that crazy decade known as the 1920's, and Niles was forced to bow out of the music business.

Deciding to pursue another field, Niles enrolled at New York University to study aeronautics. He returned to Seattle, which he now called home, and opened a flight school. Everything went peachy until the last minute, when some creditors clamped down on the whole project, and that was the end of that.

So, Niles and his wife Ann (whom he had married in 1928), plus their two sons, Wendell Jr. and Denny, packed up and headed for Hollywood, to try show business again. Niles began auditioning as an announcer, but encountered an unusual stumbling block: his younger brother Ken had already made quite a name for himself as an announcer, and "Wen Niles" was just a little too close to that name for the radio producers' comfort. "Are you trying to cash in on Ken Niles' reputation?" they asked.

Thus, Niles originally made the rounds of the studios under the name of "John Dennison" (his mother's maiden name), and finally succeeded in landing his first network announcing job: on the George Burns



"NILES & HIS MONTANANS," CA. 1926

and Gracie Allen Show, at which time Burns assigned him the monicker of "Ronald Drake." But with his own reputation now established, Niles was subsequently able to revert to his real name.

Niles likes to relate how he was actually the person responsible for making Orson Welles into a national celebrity. In 1938, Niles was announcer for NBC's "Chase and Sanborn Hour," which boasted emcee Don Ameche and featured comedian Edgar Bergen (with Charlie McCarthy, of course). The competition across the dial at CBS was an obscure anthology show, Orson Welles' "Mercury Theatre." (The Chase & Sanborn Hour was such a whopping ratings success that it was considered foolhardy to put any type of worthwhile show in the time slot against it.)

As almost every student of radio now knows, on

October 30, 1938, "The Mercury Theatre" presented its modernized dramatization of H.G. Wells' science fiction novel The War of the Worlds, concerning Martians invading the Earth. But, when that program began, hardly anyone was listening; most of the radio audience was tuned to NBC to hear Bergen & McCarthy's latest witticisms. Somewhere around 10 minutes into the broadcast, Don Ameche introduced Wen Niles, "With a word about Chase & Sanborn Coffee." As Niles began to deliver his commercial, listeners across the nation participated in a tradition that continues to this day: they began dial-twisting. Reaching CBS, they were confronted by an apparently hysterical newscaster screaming that Martians had landed in New Jersey!!

That did it. The rest was history, Orson Welles was a celebrity, and Niles now says, "If it hadn't been for me reading that coffee commercial, no one would have ever tuned to CBS to see what else was on!"

Niles worked on several radio series at one time; by the 1939-40 radio season he was featured on not only the Al Pearce Show, in which the rotund comedian Pearce portrayed "Elmer Blurt," a reticent door-to-door salesman ("Nobody home, I hope I hope I hope"), but also on Gene Autry's brand-new "Melody Ranch" program (for "healthful, refreshing Doublemint Gum").

By 1942, Niles had landed his longest-running stint, with "The Pepsodent Show," starring Bob Hope. During those wartime years, Niles, Hope, and the rest of the cast (Frances Langford, "Vera Vague" [Barbara Jo Allen], and the zany Jerry Colonna) traveled to military bases worldwide to entertain the troops and help the war effort.



NILES WITH COLLEAGUES JERRY COLONNA AND BOB HOPE

Around this same period of time, Niles and his very good friend Don Prindle gained quite a bit of fame as a comedy team ("Niles and Prindle"), appearing in movies and in their own radio series for several years. After the war, Niles worked on many more programs (both with and without Prindle), along the way changing his billing from "Wen Niles" to "Wendell



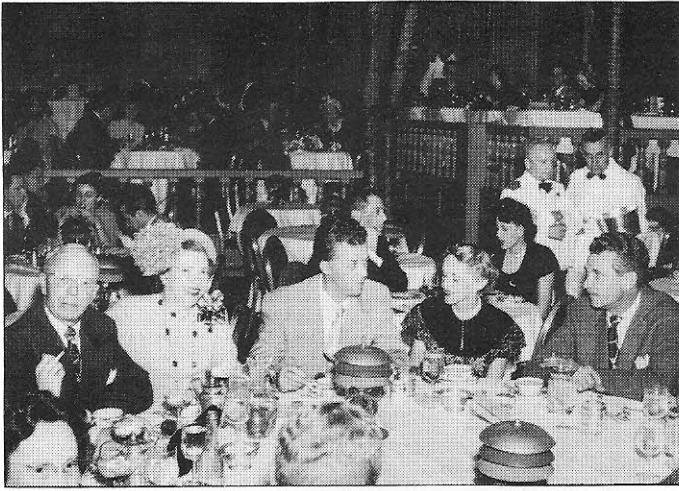
NILES & PRINDLE, PROMOTING SPONSOR HIRES ROOT BEER, 1944

Niles," in a further attempt to avoid confusion with his brother, who by now was well-entrenched on the Abbott & Costello program, among many others.

In 1946, Niles announced for "Hollywood Startime " (a clone of the "Lux Radio Theatre"), which was sponsored by Frigidaire. This led directly to his hook-up with Lum and Abner when Frigidaire began sponsoring the new half-hour "Lum and Abner Show" in September 1948. In addition to announcing, Niles also appeared as himself in the body of each program, although it was never fully explained just what famed radio announcer Wendell Niles was doing living in Pine Ridge, Arkansas! (Most often he appeared to be a local Frigidaire representative, checking on how his products were moving in the Jot'Em Down Store.) Niles remained with I&A through the end of their second and final half-hour season in April 1950.



NILES & PRINDLE EXPRESSING THEIR OPINION OF CHET LAUCK'S COWBOY ACT, 1948



**NILES (THIRD FROM LEFT) AT PARTY WITH CHET LAUCK (#5) AND TUFFY GOFF (#7):
TUFFY LOOKS LIKE HE JUST HEERED JEDGEMENT WAS A-COMIN' IN THE MORNIN'**

With radio on the way out, Niles turned his attention to movies and television. His face and voice turned up in two Martin & Lewis films, "The Caddy" and "Money From Home" (both 1953), and he essayed a dramatic role in John Wayne's "Jet Pilot" (1957). Niles eventually accumulated credits in over 25 other films whose titles he no longer recalls.

TV also proved fertile ground: since the daytime quiz/audience-participation shows were really the last stronghold for the veteran announcers, most of Niles' work in the late 1950's and early 1960's centered on them. "It Could Be You" (Ralph Edwards' spinoff of "This Is Your Life," focusing on everyday people instead of celebrities) provided his longest and most regular employment, as sidekick to host Bill Leyden. (On occasions when Leyden was absent, Niles handled the host's duties quite admirably himself).

to his son Wendell Jr. He is currently considering reviving the "All-American College Show," and has completed his memoirs, All An Angel Can Do: 60 Years Behind the Mike, which awaits only a publisher. Made an Honorary Member of the NLAS in 1986, Mr. Niles has been extremely generous in donating photographs and original I&A scripts, and in 1989 was awarded the Lum and Abner Memorial Award for his assistance.

Wendell Niles once summed up his career in a 1944 interview: "Some folks say you're through when you stop being nervous over a show. I never get nervous; if you're through when you stop being nervous, then I was through when I started!" A look at Mr. Niles' subsequent career proves that he most definitely was not through then, and we at the NLAS can assure you that he is far from being through today!!

- Tim Hollis



**AL PEARCE (CENTER), FLANKED BY
NILES (L) AND PRINDLE (R)**

In the 1960's and 1970's, Niles turned his energy more and more toward producing rather than performing. His pride and joy was "The All-American College Show," a talent-discovery program that boasted (among other distinguished alumni) the singing duo The Carpenters. Wendell Niles Productions was also involved with several other TV series and pilots during this time.

Today, Wendell Niles devotes most of his life to relaxing and playing golf, leaving most of the day-to-day business operations of Wendell Niles Productions



**"YOU'RE ALWAYS SURE WITH TWO GREAT NAMES...
FRIGIDAIRE AND WENDELL NILES!"**



5th Anniversary!

(As you know, The Jot 'Em Down Journal usually devotes itself to the history of the Lum and Abner radio program itself. However, on this occasion of the NIAS's 5th Anniversary, we have decided to be self-indulgent for once and present the story of how the NIAS was begun. First, the histories of its founders; the accompanying cartoon illustrations are by Uncle Donnie Pitchford, from ideas created by Squire Rex Riffle.)

Chapter 1: The Ossifers' Tales

"DAD, WHAT'S A LUM?"
BY DONNIE PITCHFORD, PREZ

You'll probably ask, "How in the world can a guy born four years after Lum and Abner went off the air become interested enough in 'the old fellows' to be appointed President of the NIAS?", and I, Uncle Donnie Pitchford, will probably tell you the whole story....

Born in East Texas of Arkansas/Texas parents, I was abruptly exported to a foreign land called Memphis, Tennessee in the early sixties. My dad, Don Sr., the Arkansawyer, allowed me to tag along on his job one day when I was yet a wee kid of a boy. Feeling hunger pangs, we dropped into a Lum's Restaurant, where I ordered a hot dog. Upon its delivery, I was informed by my dad that the big, puffy frankfurter I was about to gobble had been "steamed in beer," or so said the menu. No doubt he laughed inside as I ate the juicy concoction, knowing that I was fearing I'd become intoxicated at age seven by a beer-spiked coney!

Struggling for a topic of conversation to hide my paranoia, I eyed the name "Lum's" on the sign outside the building, and asked, "Where'd they git the name 'Lum'?" Daddy replied, "Oh, I don't know....but there used to be an old radio show in Arkansas called 'Lum and Abner,' about two old guys who ran a country store."

"Really? When was that?" I asked, my interest having been sparked by my enjoyment of the then-new

TV "corncons:" "The Beverly Hillbillies," etc.

"Oh, that was way back when I was just a boy."

"You mean a radio show like the one you listened to called 'Sky King'?"

"Sorta like that, only kinda funny."

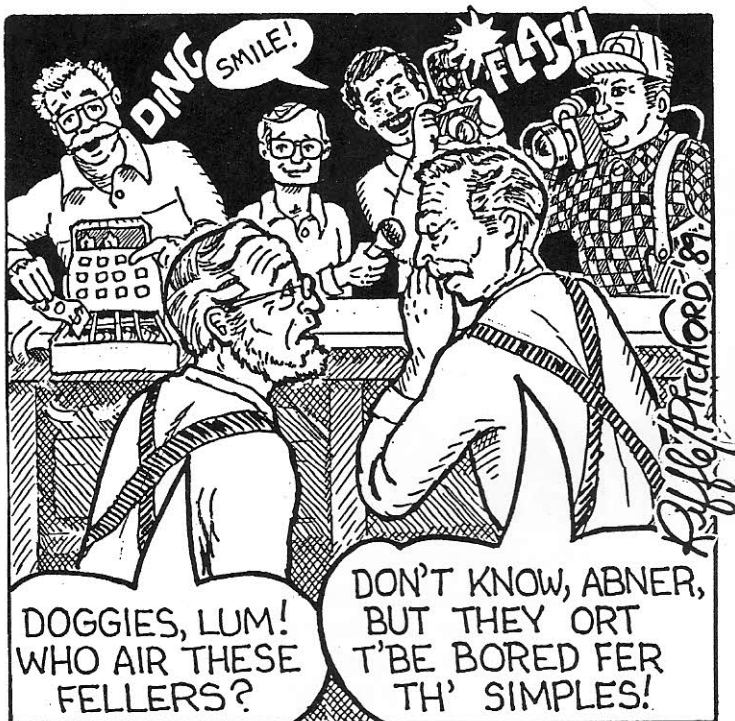
"Do you think they mighta saved tapes of those?"

"No, I doubt it; they didn't have tape recorders in those days."

Through the years, I maintained a deep interest in nostalgia, and was made aware of the radio counterparts of certain TV programs by my mother, who reminisced about how she LISTENED to "Amos 'n' Andy," "The Lone Ranger," etc. as opposed to my WATCHING. "And," she said, "your grandpa used to walk two miles every evening to his brother's house to hear 'Lum and Abner,' since he couldn't afford a radio." Whether he did so "barfooted" in the snow was not made clear to me (although my dad and Lum traveled the same kind of snowy distance to school, as I would later discover ... but doesn't every dad tell his kids the same thing?).

An avid cartoonist, I had scribbled together my own crude cartoon characters at age five, and oddly, they bore many similarities to L&A (rural dialects, a tall unmarried one, a short married one, running businesses and having adventures together, etc.). In 1972, after having returned to the Republic of Texas two years before, I even incorporated the names "Lum and Abner" into my comic strip in a listing of radio shows the lead character listened to as a child.

Finally, in the mid-1970's, I found a record album of a 1950 L&A program in a budget album store.



I enjoyed it, but wasn't overly thrilled. It wasn't until October 31, 1980, when the campus radio station at my university ran the 1944 Halloween show that I became interested in the original 15-minute classic L&A series. The following summer, my dad informed me that KHYM-Radio, Gilmer, Texas had been running L&A on a daily basis. Immediately, I began a four-year process of setting my cassette deck on a daily timer, taping the wonderful episodes diligently.

Upon receiving a few tapefulls, my friend David Miller of Allen, Texas found them a tad boring at first. Somewhere around November of '81, however, David went L&A crazy, and inspired my interest even more. Early in 1982, David contacted Mr. George Lillie, the nationally-famous L&A purist, and his actions started the process that would tie Singin' Sam Brown and Uncle Donnie Pitchford together as fellow "zekatif ossifers" of the NIAS.

So, basically, that's how this 31-year-old East Texan got so "hooked" on Lum and Abner! It all started almost a quarter-century ago at a Lum's Restaurant! Wait a minute....maybe there was more than just beer in that hot dog....GULP!

"THE DONGOLA, ILLINOIS, REPORT" BY SAM BROWN, VICE-PREZ

While growing up in rural southern Illinois, I remember from time to time hearing some mention of "Lum and Abner" by family and friends ... but at that time I did not really know who they were talking about. Later, during my high school and college years, I remember more about someone answering a phone and jokingly saying, "Hello, this is the Jot'Em Down Store;" also, people would occasionally refer to Lum and Abner and the Jot'Em Down Store together,

so I finally came to know that they were connected in some way.

Eventually, in the mid-to-late 1970's, I would hear parts of the syndicated L&A series on WGGH in Marion, Illinois, and I would think, "Hey, those guys are pretty darn good." But I still just wasn't that interested...yet.

Now came the early 1980's. I listened to Cedric's predicament of his upcoming marriage to Winifred Redfield, and then an outlandish trip to Tennessee to look for buried treasure. And now, ole Singin' Sam was HOOKED.

I guess that when my dad mentioned that my Grandpa Brown and other family members had been loyal fans, that was the clincher. Then I knew I had to find out all I could about this Pine Ridge, Arkansas, and all those lovable characters who called it home.

"I DON'T UNDERSTAND" BY TIM HOLLIS, ZEC SEC

Beginning around the time I was nine or ten years old, and living (as I always had, and still do) in Dora, Alabama, my mother started telling me bits and pieces about the great old radio programs she remembered from her youth. (This came about because of a 1972 Johnson's Wax magazine ad featuring Jim Jordan as "Fibber McGee," and the oddness of that name fascinated me. Pack rat that I am, yes, I still have the ad!!) I found it quite impossible to believe that a person could actually SEE pictures in his or her head while listening to those programs, though.

Even though her own personal tastes ran more to the drama and mystery radio shows, Mother Hollis knew that I would probably be more attracted to the comedy programs. For years I heard about the Jack Benny Show, "Our Miss Brooks," "Glamour Manor," "Fibber McGee and Molly," and "Baby Snooks and Daddy." My dad could only remember one show that his family had listened to regularly: "Lum and Abner," about "two old men running a general store." (As for my mom, she only knew that she never could stand the snail-like pace of that particular series!)

In the late 1970's, while I was in high school, various mail-order companies began to offer old-time radio programs on cassette tape (Radio Reruns, later known as Metacom, was one of the leaders in this field). My parents ordered roughly a half-dozen assorted shows for me as an intended Christmas gift in 1977, but our wonderful postal service being what it is, the tapes did not arrive until the spring of 1978. That first group of shows included episodes of "Baby Snooks," the Red Skelton Show, Abbott and Costello, and some other greats. I don't believe Radio Reruns was offering any L&A titles at that time, or my dad would probably have insisted on ordering one of those as well.

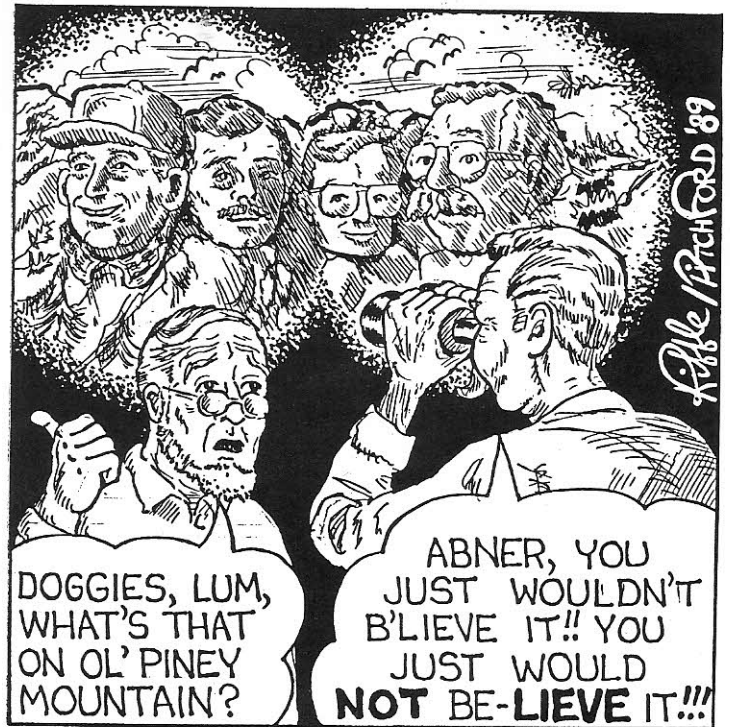
Well, needless to say, I became hopelessly addicted to the old programs, and could at last understand the mental pictures my mom had been telling me about for so many years. I soon located an electronics store in nearby Birmingham that sold old radio tapes as a sideline, and found a new source of material. Around July of 1978, I was buying a new batch of shows from this store when my dad noticed that they had one cassette of his fondly-remembered "Lum and Abner," containing four fifteen-minute episodes. So, along with my usual quota of Jack Benny, Bob Hope, and Fibber McGee shows, I threw in this one I&A tape.

I can still recall how totally baffled I was upon hearing that first tape. The four episodes all contained their original Alka-Seltzer commercials, but they were not consecutive. One was from the 1943 Movie Theatre series, two were from 1944 (about six months apart), while the fourth was dated July 1945. I could tell that these episodes were only parts of continuing storylines, but taken individually they were quite confusing. I had never heard ANY radio programs that did not have a live audience laughing at the jokes, so I was unsure whether "Lum and Abner" was even INTENDED to be funny. At any rate, there didn't seem to be any reason to pursue this program any further, since these fragmented stories held little or no entertainment value for me.

We now fast-forward to Christmas of 1982. I had continued to accumulate radio shows from a variety of sources, and had become a member of the giant old-time radio organization SPERDVAC, with access to their exhaustive tape library; however, it was of little use to me, because I had no way to duplicate their shows for my own collection. But that Christmas, one of my presents was a tape dubbing deck, to be used especially for this purpose!

Now I could see that SPERDVAC had quite a stock of continuous episodes of "Lum and Abner," so I decided to give this weird show one more try. The series I picked was the 1940 Postum series, now found in the NLAS Tape Library on Tapes #35 to #41 (catalog is \$5.00, for those of you who don't have one). Little did I know what that was going to lead into! It wasn't long before I was planning a trip to the REAL Pine Ridge, Arkansas and, well...you'll read the rest of the story in the next few pages.

(P.S. Mother Hollis now attributes her former dislike for I&A to youthful ignorance, and enjoys their programs greatly!)



"1000 MILES FOR LUM & ABNER" BY REX RIFFLE, PUBLICITY DIRECTOR

Not long after my daughter, Molly, was born in 1975, I started to become very fed up with modern-day television. I found that many of the shows just did not have the entertainment value that they once did; plus, they were becoming more and more difficult for family viewing. I, like a lot of others, began wishing for the good old days of entertainment again.

I am old enough to remember the last days of radio. As a grade-schooler, I can remember sitting in the living room of my family's farmhouse in north-central West Virginia, listening to Jack Benny, Charlie McCarthy, "Suspense," Gene Autry, "The Lone Ranger," etc. I believe that I listened to "Lum and Abner" as well, but got them confused with "Amos 'n' Andy."

I suppose I thought that those great old shows were just broadcast over the air, then forgotten. So you can imagine my surprise when I picked up a copy of Good Old Days magazine, which my mother subscribed to, and saw an advertisement for old time radio shows on tape. After sending away for some catalogues I found the prices to be fairly reasonable, so as a starting point I began to collect Jack Benny shows, because I could remember some of them very well.

I soon had quite a Jack Benny collection. One Sunday, I took some tapes up to my mother's to see if she could remember them as well. She did remember them, but said that by far and away her all-time favorite radio show was "Lum and Abner." She went on to explain how everything in my old home town of Johnstown, West Virginia, came to a halt each evening while I&A were on the air, and how my great-uncle Judd would demand total silence from his household

during the 15 minutes of "Lum and Abner." It must be entirely too "countrified" for me, I thought to myself, and decided that was one show I'd stay clear of.

L&A were extensively listed in many of the catalogues I had received, and I must admit that some of the show titles intrigued me. But still I kept on collecting Jack Benny. Finally, right after my son Paul was born in 1981, I received a flyer from a dealer in Pennsylvania, offering three 90-minute tapes of L&A shows for \$5.00. Well, I thought to myself, that is too good a deal to pass up, so I gave in and ordered them. They turned out to be from the 1946 series in which L&A operate the Meadowlark Restaurant; the first character I heard was Cedric. I didn't hear Abner on the first few shows because, as it turned out, Tuffy Goff was taking a well-deserved vacation, but Ben Withers was very much in evidence. The more I listened, the more I liked it...and I was suddenly addicted to "Lum and Abner"!!

Very soon, Jack Benny was forgotten (for the time being, anyway). It was L&A who had my full and complete attention. Soon I had bought out every L&A show that dealer had, and it didn't take me long to locate a dealer who had a more extensive holding. '82 and '83 were really L&A years for me. Finally, in the spring of 1984 I got a really wild idea. I had found out that there was a real Pine Ridge, Arkansas ... I had learned this from the book Tune In Yesterday, which related how the town had changed its name, how Dick Huddleston was a real person, etc. Checking with a post office directory, I found that Pine Ridge was now listed as a CPO, or community post office, so I figured it must be a small town. As with most of our smaller communities, the postmaster knows everyone and everything in the town. I was wondering if there was anything left of the L&A days, and I knew the postmaster would be the one who could tell me. Of course, the postmaster turned out to be Kathy Stucker, who ran the post office in the old Huddleston Store itself! She told me about Lum & Abner Days in Mena, and Lum & Abner Sunday in Pine Ridge each Father's Day. Since I am a public school teacher and have my summers free, I immediately made up my mind to try to go.

I talked to a fellow teacher, Walt Mick, and asked him if he would be interested in going to Arkansas. Of course he wondered why. After I had explained the whole story, he asked if a former student of his, Dave Queen, could come along. (That meant we could cut all costs into thirds, instead of halves.) So we began to make our preparations. We planned out a route with a Rand McNally Atlas, and in June 1984 we all three set off. It was quite an adventure for me, as I had never been any further west than Columbus, Ohio.

We traveled through West Virginia, Kentucky, Indiana, Illinois, and stopped in the "bootheel" of Missouri for the night. The next day it was ONWARD TO ARKANSAS! Finally, in the afternoon of the second day we started down Highway 88, designated the "Lum

and Abner Highway." It seemed we would never get to Pine Ridge. Then we topped a small rise in the road, and there it was. I couldn't believe it...there was the actual store! I had made it, and it was a fantasy come true!

I pulled my old orange-and-white VW bus up in front of the store, and jumped out. In a kind of daze, I stepped up onto the porch. There were two fellows sitting on the benches out front. I can remember very clearly that one of them was talking about a L&A episode in which Mousey Gray had started a detective agency, calling himself the "Masked Muskrat." The fellow who was telling this went on to say that Cedric was Mousey's assistant and that he had a name for himself, but he forgot what it was. I immediately jumped in and said, "Cedric called himself the 'Blindfolded Wildcat.'" Both guys looked up at me with an expression of, "Who's this guy?"

I went on into the store. Two women were talking in the back. I had already written to tell Mrs. Stucker I would be coming, and I figured one would be her. As I approached, Mrs. Stucker asked, "Can I help you?" "Not really," I replied, "I've just driven 1000 miles to get here." "Are you Rex?" she asked, and when I assured her that I was she immediately sent me into the Museum. Seeing all that L&A memorabilia put me into an even worse state of stunned amazement.

About that time, running feet came toward the Museum. The two fellows who had been on the front porch came bursting in: "You're Rex?? You're Rex!!" Oh my gosh, I thought, is that a crime down here?! Well, it turned out that this pair had been waiting for me. They turned out to be Sam Brown and Tim Hollis, great L&A fans in their own right who had been told of my impending arrival.



That night we were invited out to the Stuckers' home and watched two of the L&A movies on tape. All this time, Sam and Tim had been filling me in on the plodding plans (over a year old by then) to form a National Lum & Abner Society. Would there be enough interest? Are there enough L&A nuts around to make it feasible? We discussed all the aspects and what we could do.

Well, you can read the rest of the story in the complete history that follows. But I have never regretted sending off that \$5.00. It brought me into contact with some wonderful people, and I have made some fantastic friends. In 1985, for the first time,

Chapter 2: The Birth of the NLAS

Now that you have read the backgrounds that led the founders of the NLAS to Lum & Abner in the first place, the question probably going through your mind is, "How on this green earth did these four characters ever get together?" A good point!

Sometime in the spring of 1982, Sam Brown saw a newspaper article about Cedar Rapids, Iowa, resident George Lillie's well-publicized ongoing project to produce a Lum & Abner TV series using mechanical puppets. Intrigued with the idea that there was actually another human being with more than a passing interest in L&A, Sam obtained Lillie's phone number and gave him a call. Details of their conversation are now hazy with time, but Sam does recall that Lillie offered him the names, addresses, and phone numbers of two more L&A fanatics: David Miller (Allen, Texas) and Donnie Pitchford (Longview, Texas).

Immediately after hanging up the phone, Sam tried calling the first number Lillie had given him, the one for David Miller. The resulting conversation convinced Sam that he had at last found a kindred soul. Miller also brought up the subject of Donnie Pitchford, so Sam wasted no time in calling this fellow as well.

As it turned out, through separate channels Sam and Donnie had both found out from Kathy Stucker (of the L&A Museum) of the annual Lum & Abner Sunday in Pine Ridge on Father's Day, and what was more, they were both making plans to attend and get their first glimpses of the real Pine Ridge. They agreed to look each other up while there, but lack of planning or something got in the way, and they wound up only seeing each other for the briefest of a few minutes. Throughout that autumn and winter, Donnie & Sam began to send messages to each other via cassette tape, and

all of us officers were together in Pine Ridge, and L&A insanity prevailed.

I went through a terrible divorce the next year, and was not able to return to Pine Ridge until this year, but if it hadn't been for the NLAS members giving me moral support during those dark days, I don't know what I would have done.

Since then, I have remarried and started a new life. Peggy and I have another daughter, Emily, who will be one year old this September. The NLAS has been a big, happy, and wonderful part of our lives, and I'm sure that it will just keep getting bigger and better!!

soon discovered that there was a lot more to the story of L&A than met the eye. Also during this period of correspondence, they gave each other the nicknames that eventually stuck with them: "Uncle Donnie," after the old-time children's radio show host Uncle Don, and "Singin' Sam," from the radio singer of the same name.

The next piece of the puzzle fell into place in January 1983. Tim Hollis, by then a college student, wrote to Pine Ridge to see if any artifacts from the L&A program were still to be found there. Receiving the information about the store and museum from the Stuckers, he immediately planned a pilgrimage to Arkansas during the upcoming spring break in March. This proved to be an excellent time to go, since not being the height of the tourist season gave ample opportunity to get acquainted with Mr. & Mrs. Stucker. Before he left, Mrs. Stucker took down Tim's address, informing him that she would pass it along to some of the other L&A fans that she ran into from time to time.

Of course, this address fell into Sam's hands when he contacted Mrs. Stucker to find out plans for that year's Lum & Abner Sunday, and as is his wont, Sam didn't drag his feet in following up on this information; not having a phone number available, Sam chose to write to Tim. (This letter, dated May 2, 1983, is now framed and hanging in the NLAS's world headquarters.)

In the letter, Sam asked Tim to call him if he was interested in discussing Lum & Abner. In that phone call, the idea of the NLAS actually began to germinate. Sam told about Donnie, David Miller, and some other fans he had located in the meantime; Tim, already being a member of several other similar research groups, suggested that perhaps what was needed was some sort of official organization or fan club to delve deeper into L&A history. Sam agreed with this, and said he would present the idea to the others.

Lum & Abner Sunday 1983 rolled around, and Tim was unable to make the trip, having just been there three months earlier. But this time Uncle Donnie and



Singin' Sam DID manage to get together at length, and Sam told about the new idea for a "Lum & Abner Society." Donnie today recalls that his initial reaction to the proposal was, "Aw, c'mon, Sam, what do you wanna get mixed up in all that for? If we organize everything, it'll take all the fun out of it!" Previous experience with an aborted fanzine devoted to the history of Popeye the Sailor convinced Donnie that this Lum & Abner Society idea would undoubtedly get no farther than a few fans trading tapes with each other. But Sam and Tim still thought the idea was worth pursuing, and work began in earnest.

During that summer, a set of unnecessarily-complicated bylaws was drawn up by Tim Hollis; in this proposal, which stated the purposes of the organization, the names "National Lum and Abner Society" and The Jot 'Em Down Journal were first used. Now it was time to appoint officers for the yet-to-be-formed group. A radio personality from Tulsa, Oklahoma, Joe Riddle, had been researching and collecting L&A memorabilia for several years prior to this, and with his knowledge he was the natural choice for President. Sam Brown became the Vice-President, with Tim Hollis as the Executive Secretary. The fourth office, that of Treasurer, was filled by Tim's dad, L.S. Hollis.

And now another question reared its ugly head: a number of people, including the Stuckers and George Lillie, strongly advised against making any further progress without making absolutely certain of any necessary legal clearance. But who actually owned Lum and Abner? In their later years, Chet and Tuffy assigned various rights to their characters to several different people, sometimes with no more than a handshake as the legal contract. The recorded radio shows were circulating among a multitude of dealers, so no one person seemed to actually control them. It was a vicious circle, seemingly without an end.

While the NLAS's future was being hogtied by legal entanglements, there were some changes in personell. Joe Riddle's frantic schedule made it impossible for him to continue as President, so a reluctant Donnie Pitchford, who still had misgivings about the whole project, was somehow talked into taking the job. Lum & Abner Sunday 1984 arrived, with Tim and Sam finally meeting face-to-face in Pine Ridge...but due to an unfortunate accident at the last minute, Donnie was unable to make it this time! But someone else was there: Rex Riffle, who had motored all the way from West Virginia. (See his story, "1000 Miles For Lum & Abner," in this issue for the story of his meeting with Tim and Sam.)

The Vice-Prez and the Executive Secretary were



L TO R: REX RIFFLE, SAM BROWN, AND
TIM HOLLIS MEET FOR THE FIRST TIME, 1984

overwhelmed by the new arrival's enthusiasm, and soon a new fourth office was created: Publicity Director, Rex Riffle. (The Treasurer's position was combined with the Secretary's, especially since it looked doubtful that the NLAS's finances would ever be large enough to fret over.)

The annual meeting of a portion of the officers having come and gone, the consensus was that the legal aspects should be straightened out as quickly as possible, so things could get rolling. Some hard, firm research revealed that the only thing that stood in the way of the NLAS's successful future was the name LUM AND ABNER, a registered trademark owned by Chester Lauck, Jr.

As President, Donnie was appointed to be the one to contact Mr. Lauck and secure the needed permission. While he made several unsuccessful attempts to get a call through during the month of July, 1984, Tim Hollis began grinding out a sample issue of The Jot 'Em Down Journal to show prospective members.

Prez Pitchford and Chet Lauck Jr. finally made contact during the last week of July, and Mr. Lauck was delighted with the idea. His only stipulation was that the NLAS be kept strictly non-profit (he needn't have worried about that!), and that, wherever possible, the name LUM AND ABNER should carry the registered trademark symbol.

Annual dues were set at the ridiculous amount of \$1.50, which proved so financially disastrous that they jumped to \$6.00 the following June, and have remained there ever since. The first issue of the Journal, August 1984, was mailed out to 20 charter members on July 31, 1984, and the NLAS had become a reality!!

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Chapter 3: THE JOT 'EM DOWN JOURNAL And How It Grew

As the NLAS's main form of communication with its members, The Jot 'Em Down Journal fairly accurately reflects the growth and development of the organization itself. Those of you who have joined the NLAS in the past three to four years probably cannot fathom just how different the Journal was in appearance in its earliest issues!

When the first issue of the Journal was assembled (cover-dated as "July/August 1984;" it was a few months later before the double-month dating was discontinued), NLAS membership was still far short of even 50 people. This being the case, the Officers never intended for the publication to be professionally printed ... the idea was that it would be inexpensively duplicated on a standard desk-top copier as demand required. That historic first issue did not have a very wide variety of features: the feature article was Part One of a two-part series, "Lum and Abner: Their Ancestors and Descendants," which traced the history of rural humor as an entertainment form. Also included was "A Quick Look Back," a capsule history of the L&A program (this infamous article has since turned out to be slopping over with errors), the first installment of the reprint feature "L&A In The News," and, on the back cover, a call to the members for articles to go into future issues. Another early column appearing here was "Howdy, Everybody," done in script form, depicting the misadventures of the NLAS Zekatif Ossifers as they bumbled their way through running the Society. This feature made its final appearance in the October 1986 issue, after which it was dropped to make room for more historically-significant material.



COVER OF THE FIRST ISSUE OF THE JOURNAL

By the second issue, September/October 1984, membership had grown so rapidly that it was no longer possible to duplicate the Journal on a copier; even though income from the dues collected was hardly sufficient to support such a move, the decision was made to have the Journal printed professionally. This began a period of intense financial crisis for the NLAS, which was not totally alleviated until the dues were raised from \$1.50 to \$6.00 the following June. For the October 1984 and next five issues, the cost of printing the Journal was split among the Officers, who each paid out of his own pocket. Seemingly every issue contained an urgent plea for members to send in donations of any amount to ease the monetary strain.

That first professionally-printed Journal had a press run of 150 copies. For those collectors who pay attention to such things, those original copies of the October 1984 issue are printed on YELLOW paper stock. The membership kept growing long after those 150 copies had been depleted, and at that point the Zec Sec reverted to running off copies on the old faithful copier (on WHITE paper) until the next issue could be produced. Photographs in the Journal still presented a problem, because the NLAS could not afford to have halftones made in order to get better reproduction.

Things took a turn for the better with the December 1984 issue (the first to carry a single month's cover date). Whereas the October issue had been printed by a small outfit, Davis Printing in Sumiton, Alabama, now our Prez, Uncle Donnie (who was temporarily making his living as a printer at the time) took over production of the Journal through his employer, Duplicating Services Co. of Longview, Texas. With his employee discount, the NLAS was able to pay for occasional halftones now, with even a few typeset headlines (although these were used sparingly).

The February 1985 issue marked the first use of the column format in the Journal, although this space-conserving format did not become permanent until August 1985. The cover of that issue sported, for the first time, Uncle Donnie's marvelous masthead logo that has continued to grace each cover (with occasional exceptions for special events).

New features, regular and semi-regular, began to appear: "L&A In Hollywood" (February 1985), "Memories of L&A," "Mousey's Corner," and "Back In The Feed Room" (April 1985), "It Could Have Happened" (December 1985), "Kiver To Kiver" (February 1986), "L&A On Television?" (October 1986), "The Party Line" (August 1987), "And Now..." (October 1987), and the "Golden Era" comic strip (April 1988).

The August 1985 Journal, at 16 pages, remained

the largest issue ever until this present one. It was also Uncle Donnie and Duplicating Services' farewell, as our worthy Prez found himself leaving the "ole print shop" for his present-day teaching position. Beginning with the issue of October 1985, the Journal has been printed by Action Printing Company of Adamsville, Alabama.

Chapter 4: The NLAS Convention

The annual NLAS Convention, of course, was a natural outgrowth from the Lum and Abner Sunday activities that had been going on in Pine Ridge every Father's Day since the late 1970's. For about the same length of time, the city of Mena had been observing "Lum & Abner Days" during the two weeks preceding that Father's Day weekend, so a combination of all of this made it natural to hold the Convention at the same time.

The first official Convention was held in the Pine Ridge Fire Hall on Saturday, June 15, 1985. (Various ones of the Officers had been getting together in Pine Ridge on Lum & Abner Sunday previously, but never all at the same time!) The guests were L&A's longtime writer Roswell "Roz" Rogers and "Ben Withers" himself, Clarence Hartzell. The format set the pattern for future Conventions: the two guests related anecdotes about their years with the L&A program, and Mr. Hartzell participated in a recreation of one of his original Ben Withers scripts. There was a Trivia Quiz, which was won by a 14-year-old member, Sam Dunning of Calvert City, Kentucky.

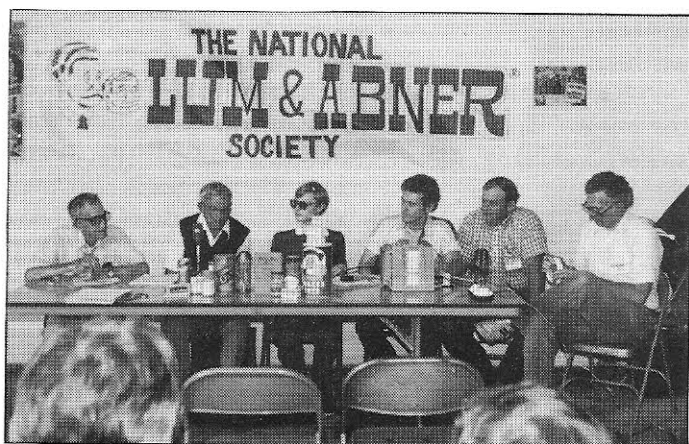
The 1986 Convention had as its theme the 50th anniversary of the changing of the town's name from Waters to Pine Ridge in 1936. On this occasion, it was decided not to bring in any "outside" guests, but to build the weekend around the townspeople them-

The Journal finally reached one of its goals in October 1987, when it began to be printed on high-quality, glossy enamel paper, which finally solved the longstanding problem with photo reproduction. Typeset headlines became the norm in February 1988, and now only one major goal still eludes us: WHEN oh WHEN will the Journal's articles ever be typeset? Only time and finances will tell...stay tuned!

selves. Again in the Fire Hall, Kathy Stucker described the history and geography of the community, and Ethel Huddleston Ball told of her father Dick Huddleston's role in getting the name changed.

Even though the 1985 guests were not present, they still took part in the proceedings by long distance, as it were. Mr. Rogers wrote a special 50th Anniversary L&A script (actually the first new L&A material to be produced in over 30 years!), in which Uncle Donnie Pitchford doubled as the voices of both Lum & Abner, with Tim Hollis "Yes mum"ing his way through the part of Cedric. The main feature, though, was that Clarence Hartzell recorded his lines as Ben Withers ahead of time and sent them in, so he was able to appear in the script as well! (Although no one knew it at the time, this was to be the actor's final performance as L&A's eccentric friend.)

The Convention for 1987 saw some major changes. The discomfort, acoustics, and other problems associated with the Fire Hall in Pine Ridge forced the NLAS Officers to consider a change of location. Mena proved the logical choice, with an abundance of restaurants with comfortable, air-conditioned meeting rooms from which to choose. Therefore, as of that year, the Convention was switched from Saturday morning to Saturday night, and was held at the Holland House Restaurant in Mena.



1985: CLARENCE HARTZELL, ROSWELL ROGERS, HOLLIS, PITCHFORD, BROWN & RIFFLE



1986: KATHY STUCKER, SAM BROWN, DOROTHY MCCLURE, ETHEL BALL, & DONNIE PITCHFORD



1987: SAM BROWN, TIM HOLLIS, AND JERRY HAUSNER PERFORMING 1937 L&A SCRIPT

The guest for 1987 was character actor Jerry Hausner, who had appeared in more different roles on the L&A program than any other performer other than Chet & Tuffy themselves. As was now a tradition, he performed in a recreation of an original L&A script from June 1937, in which he played the part of small-time crook Spud Gandel. The meeting also featured recorded greetings from several Honorary Members who were unable to be present: Grandpa Jones, Rev. Bobs Watson, Roz Rogers, Clarence Hartzell, producer Bob Dwyer, Elmore "Phinus Peabody" Vincent, organist Elsie Mae Emerson, Harriet Lauck, and Elizabeth Goff.

In 1988, the Convention moved to what should be its permanent home from now on: the Lime Tree Inn in Mena. Jerry Hausner paid a return visit and accompanied the guest of honor, Elmore Vincent (Abner's "papa," Phinus). Roz Rogers having undergone heart surgery and being in rather fragile health, this year's script was written by Uncle Donnie, based on



1988: SPUD GANDEL (JERRY HAUSNER) PULLING A FAST ONE ON PHINUS PEABODY (ELMORE VINCENT)

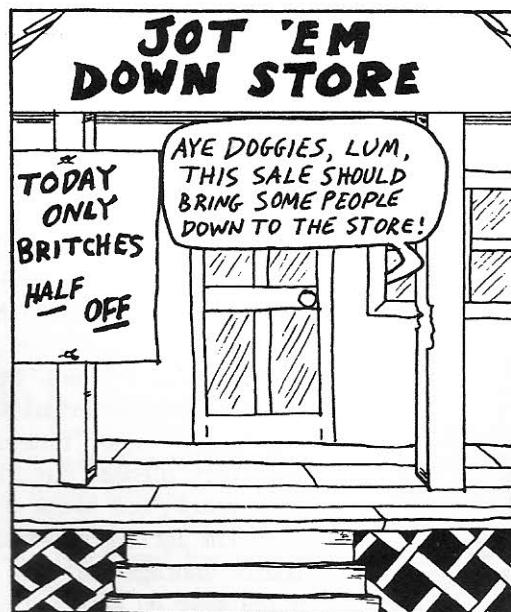
an idea suggested by Clarence Hartzell shortly before the actor's untimely death that March. In the skit, Spud Gandel returned to Pine Ridge but found his efforts to pull a fast one frustrated by old Phinus Peabody, who was running the store in L&A's absence. For a report on 1989's meeting, see the article elsewhere in this issue.

One of the traditions of the Convention is the presentation of the Lum and Abner Memorial Award to the person judged to have been the most helpful to the NLAS and its work during the past year. The honorees to date are as follows:

- 1985 - ROZ ROGERS; CLARENCE HARTZELL
- 1986 - ETHEL BALL; THE LUM & ABNER MUSEUM
- 1987 - JERRY HAUSNER; ELMORE VINCENT; THE CHESTER LAUCK FAMILY; THE NORRIS GOFF FAMILY
- 1988 - BOBB LYNES
- 1989 - WENDELL NILES

The Golden Era

by Gary Stivers



The 1989



ETHEL HUDDLESTON BALL AND WENDELL NILES

The 1989 NLAS Convention was preceded by a visit to the historic Huddleston/Jot 'Em Down Store/Lum and Abner Museum by Sam, Tim, Rex (and families) and our special guest Wendell Niles, on Friday, June 16. Uncle Donnie joined everyone later at the Lime Tree Inn in Mena, marking the first time in four years that all four ossifers were together simultaneously!

After breakfast on Saturday, the ossifers set about to transfer the Lime Tree meeting room into a combination NLAS banquet/meeting area and museum exhibit, with sound system and video viewing area.

The exhibit officially opened after lunch, being attended by NLAS members and curious area citizens. On display were the original art to Gary Stivers' comic strips ("The Golden Era"), Uncle Donnie's original L&A paintings, illustrations and cartoons from 1982-88, many original L&A collectibles and premiums from the 1930's and on, L&A movie posters, the complete 30-issue run of The Jot 'Em Down Journal, and a variety of non-L&A radio memorabilia from the collection of member Ron Schultz. Simultaneously, showings were held of Mr. Niles' TV appearances and the 1986 AETN documentary, "Laughter Never Dies".

The mood of the exhibit was marred, however, by the discovery of a theft. One of the original "Let's Lect Lum" presidential campaign buttons from 1936 was discovered missing. What made this an even greater loss was the fact that this unusual button (the more rare red and yellow version) was on loan from Jerry Hausner, having come from the collection of his wife, the late Velma McCall, L&A's longtime personal secretary. Hopefully, the thief's conscience will encourage a return of this item.

The evening's activities were initiated with a fine meal, whereafter Uncle Donnie called the meeting to order by introducing the ossifers and their families. In addition to Lynn and Kathleen Hollis (parents of Tim, and important helpers at our meetings), Sam's wife Carole and Donnie's wife Laura; Rex's wife Peggy and their new daughter Emily were attending for the first time, as were Laura's parents, Carl and Frances Pearson.

"Squire" Riffle introduced our special guests from the area, Bette Redman (Tuffy Goff's niece), who brought along her daughter and granddaughter; Ethel Huddleston Ball and her husband Charlie; and Lon and Kathy Stucker. Mrs. Stucker spoke briefly, inviting everyone to the annual L&A Sunday, and Ethel, "Dick's Gurl", did some "fine out-loud talkin'" as well. We were very pleased our Pine Ridge friends were present this year! God bless them all!

Tim introduced Wendell Niles with a ten minute audio montage of his radio work, after which Mr. Niles gave an entertaining discussion of his life and



SAM BROWN (CENTER) PRESENTS AWARDS TO MEMBERS CHARLES THURMAN (R) & JOHN KNUPPEL (L)



TIM HOLLIS, AS CEDRIC, AND MR. NILES RECREATE A 1948 FRIGIDAIRE COMMERCIAL

Convention

career, sprinkled generously with witty barbs. He reminisced about the pioneering days of radio, in which a few men with names like Marconi, Sarnoff and the Niles Brothers paved the way for the "Theatre of the Mind". He concluded by saying, "If any of you would like to see me in the upcoming Bob Hope special - please write Bob and tell him!"

After sampling a video clip from his TV work, the distinguished Mr. Niles joined the "extinguished" Cedric Weehunt, in the guise of Tim Hollis, for a hilarious recreation of a 1948 Lum and Abner Frigidaire commercial.

Awards time came, and Uncle Donnie presented Mr. Niles with the annual Lum and Abner Memorial Award. Singin' Sam, in his warm, humorous style, called forward John "Grandpappy" Knuppel of Yukon, Oklahoma and Charles "Ulysses" Thurman of Paducah, Kentucky, to present them with special awards of appreciation for their perfect attendance at all five NLAS Conventions, plus their additional support.

Following a showing of a special 30-minute video documentary tracing the history of the NLAS, Tim presented a gift to a very special person in attendance. "Auntie" Helen Hartzell, wife of the late Clarence "Ben Withers" Hartzell, joined us this year, and Tim gave her some recordings of a number of Clarence's radio performances. We love you, "Auntie" Helen!!

Uncle Donnie shared the following telegram: "I'd like to add my greetings to all the folks who are attending the convention in honor of my two old friends Lum and Abner, who brought so much joy and laughter to the world. I send my very best to you all," and it was signed, "BOB HOPE"!!

The audience responded well to a prerecorded phone conversation with Spud Gandel, who was joined by Prince Ali Kush, and a small, crying infant, all voiced, of course, by the multi-talented actor, Jerry Hausner, who could not be with us this year. After his classic adlib performance as these characters, Jerry addressed the members, passing along some very good wishes from his dear friend, Jim Backus. These wishes from "Mr. Magoo" take on new meaning, since his recent, unfortunate passing.

To close the evening, Mr. Troy Boyd, playing his own hand-made fiddle, joined in with the ossifiers and members in singing our theme song, "They Cut Down the Old Pine Tree". We hope he'll bring his fiddle next year!

Other members in attendance were Roger Chambers, John & Cynthia Hale, Thomas & Doris Reynolds, Carol Knuppel, Johnny & Elenora Nichols, Laird & Ruth King, and Hank Jones of Ohio, who won the award for having traveled the longest distance to attend.

The NLAS has weathered five years... can it last longer? Probably so! A new member joined that night who is only 13 - Jeana Trice of Mena! Lum and Abner appeal to people of all ages, and will surely last!

- Uncle Donnie Pitchford



UNCLE DONNIE PITCHFORD PRESENTS LUM AND ABNER MEMORIAL AWARD TO WENDELL NILES



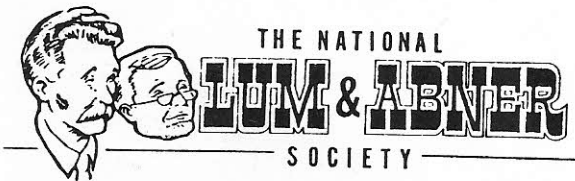
"AUNTIE HELEN" (MRS. CLARENCE) HARTZELL ACCEPTS SPECIAL GIFT FROM TIM HOLLIS



FINALE: TROY BOYD ON FIDDLE, DONNIE PITCHFORD ON GUITAR: "THEY CUT DOWN THE OLD PINE TREE"



FUTURE OSSIFERS DONNIE PITCHFORD & SAM BROWN MEET IN PINE RIDGE TO DISCUSS FORMATION OF NLAS, 1983



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