

OCTOBER 1989



# THANKS

The National Lum & Abner Society would like to express its thanks to the Archives Department of Miles Laboratories ( "the makers of Alka-Seltzer, One-A-Day Brand Vitamins, and Miles Nervine" ) for their recent help in locating priceless information and photos from their sponsorship of the L&A programs, 1941-48.

Much of this material will be turning up soon in the Journal in a new series of articles entitled "Lum & Abner And Their Sponsors." In the meantime, many thanks to Michaela Meagher and the whole staff of Miles Archives!



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# THE JOT 'EM DOWN JOURNAL

## October 1989

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COVER: The citizens of Pine  
 Ridge, Arkansas, meet their  
 counterparts from Dogpatch,  
 Arkansas (see story, page 2).

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 trademark. Used by permission  
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Dear Sirs: Who plays Uncle Fletcher  
 on "Vic and Sade"?—F., Miami, Fla.  
 Clarence Hartzell, as Uncle Fletcher,  
 is first addition to a veteran serial  
 cast. He's also Pappy in "Li'l Abner"

FROM RADIO GUIDE,  
 OCTOBER 5, 1940

From

# DOGPATCH<sup>®</sup>

To

# Pine Ridge



In some past issues of The Jot'Em Down Journal we have examined the parallels (and differences) between L&A and some other examples of rural humor. We now take a closer look at one of these examples, which (aside from "Amos 'n' Andy") is probably confused with L&A by the general public more than any other: the famous newspaper comic strip "Li'l Abner," by the late Al Capp.

"Li'l" first appeared on comic pages in August 1934, just about the time L&A were emerging from their early struggling years and beginning to attract national attention under the sponsorship of Horlick's Malted Milk. We have been unable to determine whether the similarity in titles was done deliberately, but to this day I still have people say to me, "Lum and Abner? Wasn't that a comic strip?"

For a possible reason why Lauck, Goff, and Capp all became famous for lovable hill country characters around the same time, we must consult two nationally-famous comic strip historians, Bill Blackbeard and Dave Schreiner. Schreiner presents the theory that it was the work of the Tennessee Valley Authority in the early 1930's that began to draw the public's attention to rural America at this point, with the result being a stack of novels with rural Southern settings, and a renewed interest in "hillbilly music." Blackbeard mentions that radio also profited from the public's fascination with things rural, as exemplified by the rise of Bob Burns, "The Arkansas Traveler." (For some reason, Lum and Abner are left out of his discussion, as they usually are!) It was also during this time that "The Grand Ole Opry" and its kissin' cousin, "The National Barn Dance," gained fame (L&A's 1932-34 "Friday Night Sociable" broadcasts seem to be heavily influenced by these two sources.)

"Li'l Abner" represented this trend on the comics pages, and so did the character of Snuffy Smith, who was introduced into the "Barney Google" strip in June 1934. Of course, close examination shows that L&A and the "Li'l A/Snuffy" genre really represent two different classes of people, but, so far as popular culture is concerned, all rural characters (or "hillbillies") could be lumped together with no problem.

Some of the primary similarities between L&A and

"Li'l" appear among the characters in each. In the case of the comic strip, most of these parallels occur among the supporting characters; "Lum and Abner" really has no direct equivalents to Daisy Mae, or Mammy Yokum...mainly because Lauck and Goff de-emphasized the female denizens of Pine Ridge...but it is at least possible to look at simpleminded Abner Yokum himself as a more physically-attractive version of Cedric Weehunt.

The characterization of Pappy Yokum (especially in the strips of the 1930's) shows a possible strong influence by Abner Peabody. Mammy and Pappy frequently have discussions that sound like almost direct echoes of the famous "Ole Eddards Sayin's" routines; consider the two examples below:







In later years, Pappy's character was modified to the point of resembling a combination of Grandpappy Spears and Ben Withers. Of major note is the fact that in 1939-40, "Li'l Abner" briefly became a daily 15-minute radio show, and the voice of Pappy was none other than Ben Withers himself, Clarence Hartzell!

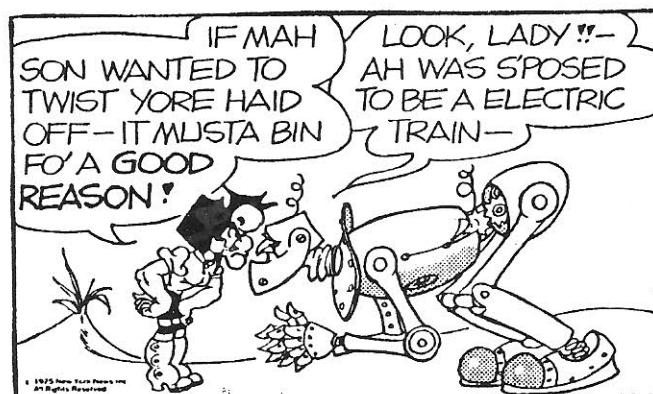
Other parallels could be drawn between the town bully of Dogpatch, Earthquake McGoon, and his Pine Ridge counterpart Snake Hogan; also between Abner's half-senile papa, Civil War veteran Phinus Peabody, and Dogpatch's founder, inept Confederate general Jubilation T. Cornpone.

The biggest and most startling character similarity is that of Squire Skimp and Marryin' Sam. Both are con men extraordinaire, with a bottomless barrel of tricks for gypping their neighbors. Sam first appeared in "Li'l" in January 1935, well after Squire's highly questionable reputation had been long established. However, when the first Lum and Abner Almanac was offered late in 1935, artist Wendell Kling's depiction of Squire very closely resembled Al Capp's drawings of Marryin' Sam! (See the article "The Many Faces Of Squire Skimp" in this issue for a comparison.) In 1940, RKO Radio Pictures produced a live-action feature film of "Li'l Abner," and the role of Sam was played by Dick Elliott, who four years later became Squire in a couple of the Lum and Abner movies for the same studio.

Some similarities in storylines popped up as well, although probably not deliberately. In a totally humorless sequence in March 1936, Abner and Daisy Mae found themselves trapped underground by a cave-in; the following October, I&A temporarily suspended their usual comedy when the same thing hap-

pened to them ( they later repeated this story in 1945 ). I&A's misadventures in the big city, on the occasions when they ventured out of Pine Ridge, were often echoed by the Yokums. And even as late as 1975, Abner Yokum was assembling his own version of Robert the Robot. Other similar stories abound, but because of space limitations, these episodes will have to suffice.

( We might point out that both "Li'l" and I&A, in each's later years, fell into the habit of re-using older storylines from 10 to 20 years earlier, a fact which probably went unnoticed at the time. )



Just as I&A were directly responsible for the creation of a United States Post Office for "Pine Ridge, Arkansas" in 1936, so did "Li'l" cause the Postal Service to establish a zip code for "Dogpatch, Arkansas" in 1967; this was done preparatory to the building of the Disneyland-type theme park Dogpatch USA the following year. ( When the comic strip first began, Capp specifically placed Dogpatch in Kentucky, but by the late 1960's he was telling newspaper reporters that he had always thought of it as being in Arkansas...sociologists could probably say something about the real-life differences between the people who lived in I&A's area of the Ouachita Mountains and those who lived in the isolated Ozarks, where Dogpatch finally became a reality. )

At one time, there was some quickly-aborted talk of converting the real Pine Ridge into a more Dogpatch-like attraction, with souvenir shops, costumed



characters, and the works. Fortunately, it was wisely decided to leave Pine Ridge in its natural state, but Kathy Stucker of the I&A Museum reports that tourists passing by the store (with "Lum and Abner" prominently painted on the sign) frequently drop in expecting to see Li'l Abner and Daisy Mae.

Both creations have continued in reruns since their original demise. The I&A radio programs began to be syndicated to radio stations in the late 1960's, attracting a whole new group of listeners. Likewise, even though "Li'l Abner" ended its run in November 1977 and Capp died two years later, in 1988 the NEA newspaper syndicate began to redistribute some of the original strips from the 1940's. Simultaneously, the Kitchen Sink Press of Princeton, Wisconsin, embarked on an ongoing project to reprint all 43 years of the strip in book form. So, both I&A and "Li'l A" live on for future generations (Al Capp historians have at least one great advantage over the NLAS: all of the "Li'l A" strips still exist in one form or another, whereas we are still faced with about 15

years of I&A shows that were never recorded and will probably always remain a mystery! ).

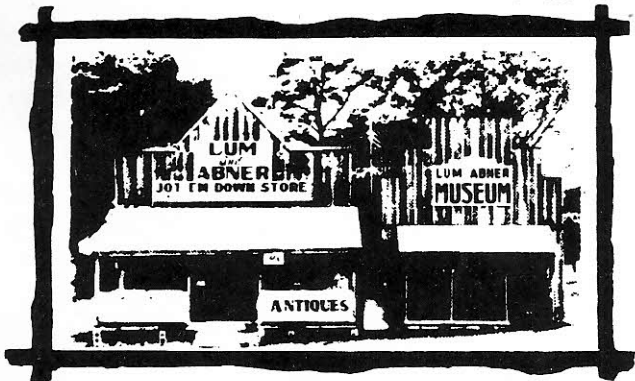
So there you have it. Were any of the similarities between I&A and the citizens of Dogpatch done deliberately, or were both simply part of that larger tradition that makes up rural humor as a whole? It's hard to say, but interesting to ponder, nevertheless!

- Tim Hollis



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# The Many Faces Of Squire Skimp

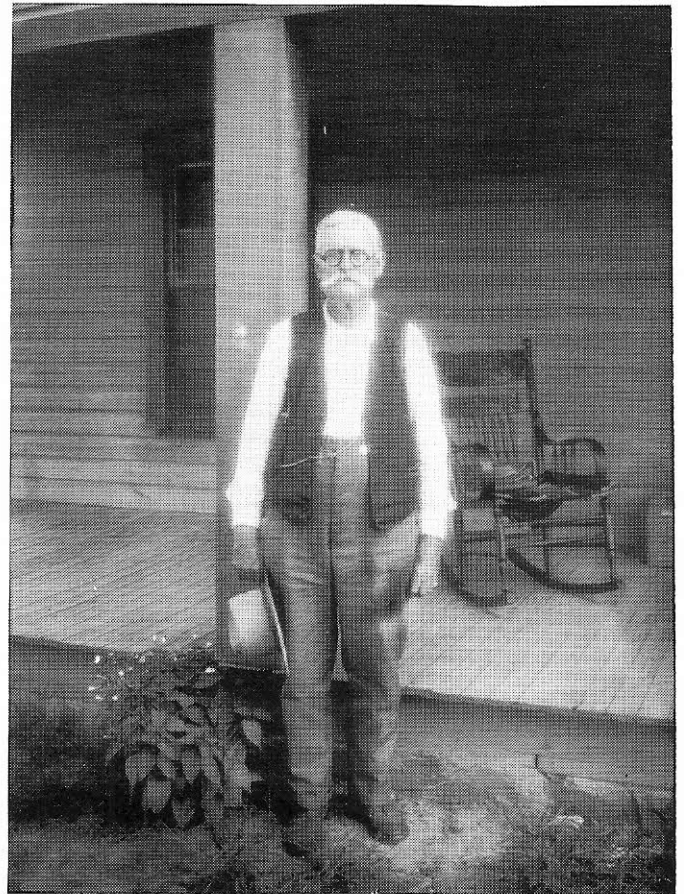
The visualization of radio characters has been a subject of much fascination; as evidence, witness the profusion of publicity photos and motion pictures featuring radio performers that appeared during the 1930's and 1940's. L&A and their associate characters, while often left up to the listeners' imaginations...part 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 look at Pine Ridge's long-running lovable villain, M.K. (Squire) Skimp.

Prez Uncle Donnie Pitchford has this mental picture of the Squire: "I have always seen him as heavy-set, always wearing a vest, gold watch and chain, a wide-brimmed hat of some sort, and often smoking a pipe ... for some reason, I have never seen him as having a cigar, as he has been shown at other times. I see him as having heavy, almost jowly, cheeks; almost a cross between the two actors who played him in the L&A movies. I see him as being in his mid-to-late 50's ... old enough to have been everywhere and done everything, and is now content to live in this small town and take advantage of his neighbors. I think of him as balding, or with rather thin hair, and quite a bit gray, especially around the temples. He has a swagger and holds his head high when he walks, and carries a cane of some type, I would think."

Zec Sec Tim Hollis is left out of this discussion, because he had never heard any recordings of Squire at the time he saw his first visual depiction of him, and so had no chance to imagine him on his own.

Strangely enough, while Rex Riffle's mental picture had some similarities to Donnie's, there were also major differences. He says, "I see him as a huge, heavy man, always wearing white suits. He wears spats, carries a thin bamboo cane, and usually has with him one of the old-fashioned strap-type briefcases. His face is very broad; he does not wear glasses; he is constantly leering at people, with his eyebrows raised in an amused manner. He occasionally

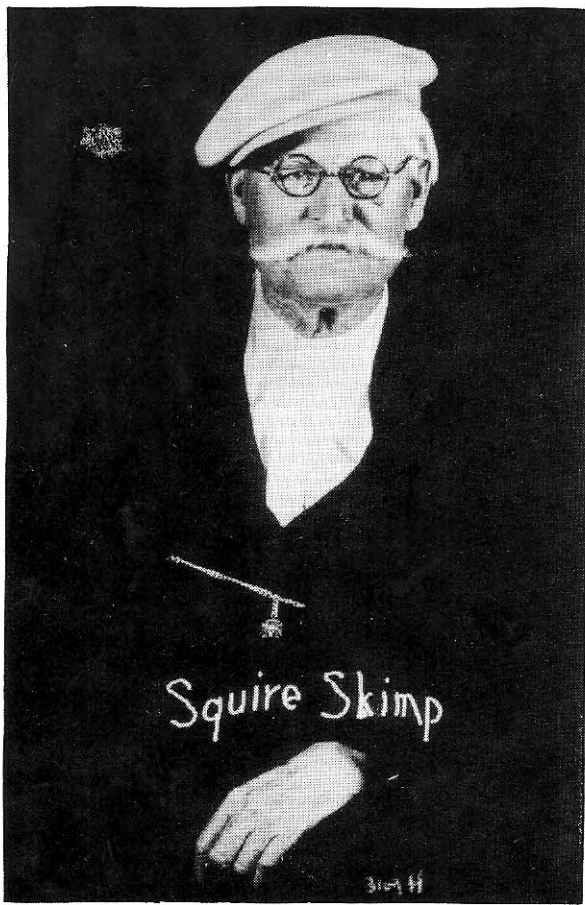


#1 (1932)

smokes a crooked pipe. His hair is dark, not gray; Squire's age would be in his late 40's to around 50. He parts his hair in the middle, keeping it relatively short and heavily oiled. Most of the time, unless he is in his office, he wears a broad-brimmed, Panama style hat."

Like the Ossifers' conceptions, commercially-released depictions of Squire are likewise highly varied. He was first shown in Mena photographer Oscar Plaster's series of character portraits in 1932; since, unlike the other L&A characters, Squire was not supposedly based on any real person (at least no one would admit to it), Mr. Plaster (with Chet and Tuffy's assistance) had to go by physical type only.





#2 (CA. 1935)

The man chosen to pose for the photos of Squire was a Mena lawyer, "Doc" Hammond (#1). In many ways he was quite different from any future rendering of the character; quite elderly, his most noticeable facial feature was a large mustache that joined onto his sideburns, in an 1800's-type style. His attire was also slightly more rural than it would later be shown. When, a few years later, Mr. Hammond was again photographed in character for one of Dick Huddleston's postcards, his dress more accurately reflected Squire's not inconsiderable (ill-gotten?) affluence (#2).

Artist Wendell Kling, illustrator of the 1936 and 1937 Lum & Abner Almanacs, took a totally different approach to the figure of Squire. If anything, his version (#3) seems to be based heavily on the comic strip character Marryin' Sam (of "Li'l Abner" fame); see the related article elsewhere in this issue. Squire was now shown as enormously fat and pompous, with a flowered vest covering his ample middle. From one small illustration in the 1937 Almanac, we can also see that this Squire is almost totally bald.

The 1938 Almanac was illustrated by Dewey Proles-tino, and Squire Skimp only appears as a background character in one or two illustrations. From what we can see of him (#4, an enlargement of one of the small illustrations), he is now much younger and slimmer, resembling a stereotypical Mississippi river-boat gambler!



#3 (1936)

Squire made his first appearance on the silver screen in the second Lum & Abner feature film, "The Bashful Bachelor" (1942). In this film (and, briefly, in "Two Weeks To Live," 1943), he was played by Irish character actor Oscar O'Shea (#5), whose thick brogue bore very little resemblance to Tuffy Goff's radio voice for Squire. But physically, O'Shea was quite satisfactory for the part, combining the more elderly appearance of Squire from the 1932 photos with the portly, expansive version from Kling's illustrations. Squire, in "Bashful Bachelor," walks with a pronounced limp (with the aid of a cane), but this may have been a natural characteristic of the actor himself.

When Squire next appeared on-screen in the 1944 feature "Goin' To Town," for some reason O'Shea had been replaced by another character actor, Dick Elli-



#4 (1938)



#5 (1942)



#6 (1944)



#7 (1946)

ott (#6). Elliott was slightly younger than O'Shea, but still rather chubby. When Elliott again essayed the role in "Partners In Time" (1946), one noticeable change was that Squire now wore a modern 1940's business suit (#7), instead of the rather archaic or "cartoony" attire he had possessed up until then. Both versions of Elliott's Squire also carry an omnipresent cigar.

There were no further renditions of Squire until 1970, when an anonymous animator prepared model sheets for an unproduced series of L&A TV cartoons. The artist had admittedly never seen any photos of the L&A characters, so it is remarkable that his solitary drawing of Skimp (#8) very strongly looks like the ones that had been seen before!

Jot'Em Down Journal illustrators Gary Stivers and Donnie Pitchford (#10 and #9, respectively) primarily adhered to the movie versions of Squire, leaning more toward the Dick Elliott portrayal. Who knows what future artists will come up with?

In our next installment we will be looking at that henpecked hubby, Mousey Gray. Sneak away from Gussie and be with us, okay?

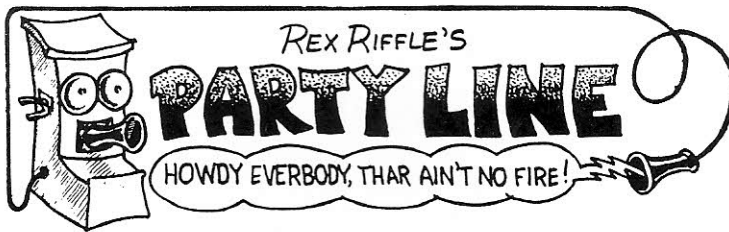


#8 (1970)



#9 (1988)

#10 (1989)



In our April 1989 issue, we presented some of member Loren Cox's recollections about Lum & Abner's stage appearance in Lexington, Kentucky, around 1936. The appearance of that column enabled Mr. Cox to dredge up a few more memories about that period of L&A's career, which we present here:

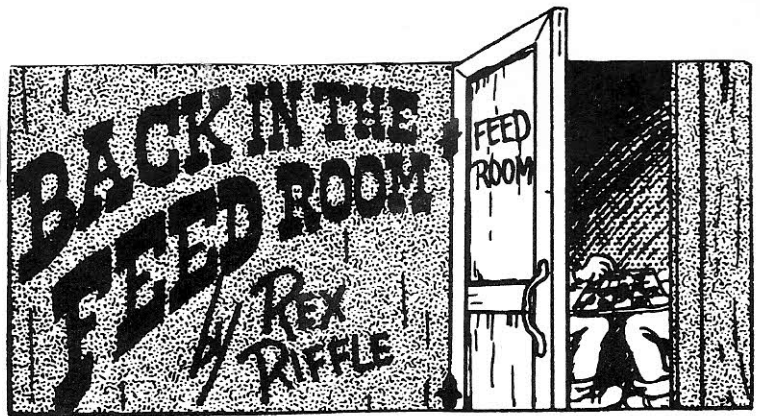
"One's memories do become clouded...I must have been about eight years old at the time...but further reflection leads me to believe that it was Norris who related the story about Cedric and the ice cream cone [which was attributed to Chet in the April 1989 Journal], because, as I now remember, Chet, assuming a Cedric-like pose, was self-consciously kicking at the mike cord as the story was being related.

"L&A did several performances that day on the stage of the long-gone Ben Ali Theatre on Lexington's Main Street. There were large crowds. I remember, while my mother and I were waiting in the lobby for the next show, we could hear the familiar voices of Squire, etc., on the theatre's sound system. At the conclusion of the sketch, which took place in a Jot 'Em Down Store setting...evidently the appropriate stage props had been brought along...Chet and Norris came before the closed curtain and spoke to the audience in their "natural" voices, as well as giving brief monologues in their various characters' voices. I remember Squire saying something about the "Pine Ridge Amusement Company" ... I believe this was the motion picture enterprise he was putting up at the time in competition with L&A's (this story was recycled several times). I guess it was in introducing Cedric that the ice cream story was told.

"As for the sketch: it was a dialogue between L&A, who were seated at a table in the Jot 'Em Down Store setting, playing checkers. It seems that a call or two came in over the party line. The makeup for the two old fellows included the familiar moustache for Lum, and goatee and spectacles for Abner. I had probably been prepared for their appearance by the L&A Almanacs. I remember nothing of the content of the skit, although at the time I recognized some lines that I'd heard on the radio.

"In those days we listened to L&A on WLW, Cincinnati; later on WHAS, Louisville, after they moved to CBS. In their last years, they were carried by a local station; I can still remember the last broadcast...L&A locked the doors of the Jot 'Em Down Store for the last time, with the announced intention of going to Hollywood to enter television."

- Loren Cox, Jr.



I was cleaning out the feed room the other day, and found this poem that Mousey Gray left back there. See how you like it:

"ODE TO PINE RIDGE II"

(A Sequel to Roswell Rogers' "Ode To Pine Ridge," 1986)

Oh, Pine Ridge, Pine Ridge, Arkansas,  
Every time I see you I drop my jaw.  
It's the biggest little town in the world, they say,  
And I hope you will always be that way.  
There's Dick Huddleston's Store in the middle of town,  
Dick's just like a king, but without a crown.  
Not far away is Mose Moots' Barber Shop,  
He'll cut off your hair with a fast chop, chop, chop!  
There's Ira Hodgekins' Livery Stable,  
You can rent a horse or team at the old checker table.  
Then there's the lunch room run by Luke Spears,  
You can always eat there...if you can conquer your fears...  
It's the home of Grandpappy Spears, who'll tell you with joy  
That he is the world's oldest telegram delivery boy!  
Also there dwells M.K. Skimp, the Squire,  
Who'll always want to sell you some insurance for fire.  
It's the residence of a bright boy named Cedric,  
Out of whom all of us get a big kick!  
Last but not least there's the Jot 'Em Down Store;  
It's been in business 40 years or more.  
It's run by Lum and Abner for all of those days  
And it's a very unique business in many, many ways!  
To make them both heroes Lum will plot and plan,  
But poor Abner just says, "I don't unnerstan'."  
But no matter whether they lose or they win,  
We'll always enjoy being with them again & again.  
So here's hoping that they both will be forever the same,  
And we'll go on telling everyone of their fame.  
Arkansas, Pine Ridge, Abner, and Lum,  
They always keep us from getting too glum!

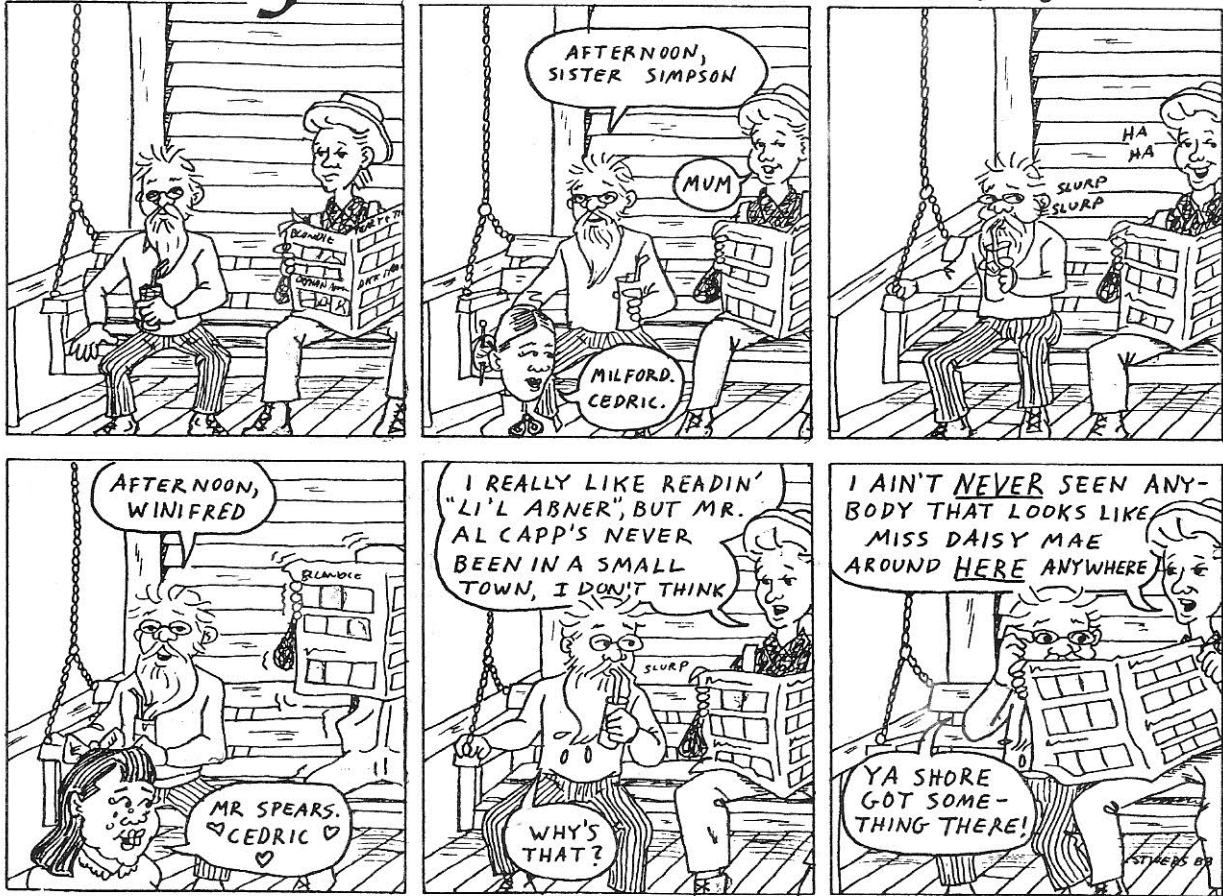
I wonder what Mousey was smoking while he was back there...I'll have to check that new shipment of feed we just got in from Colombia...





# The Golden Era

by Gary Stivers



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