

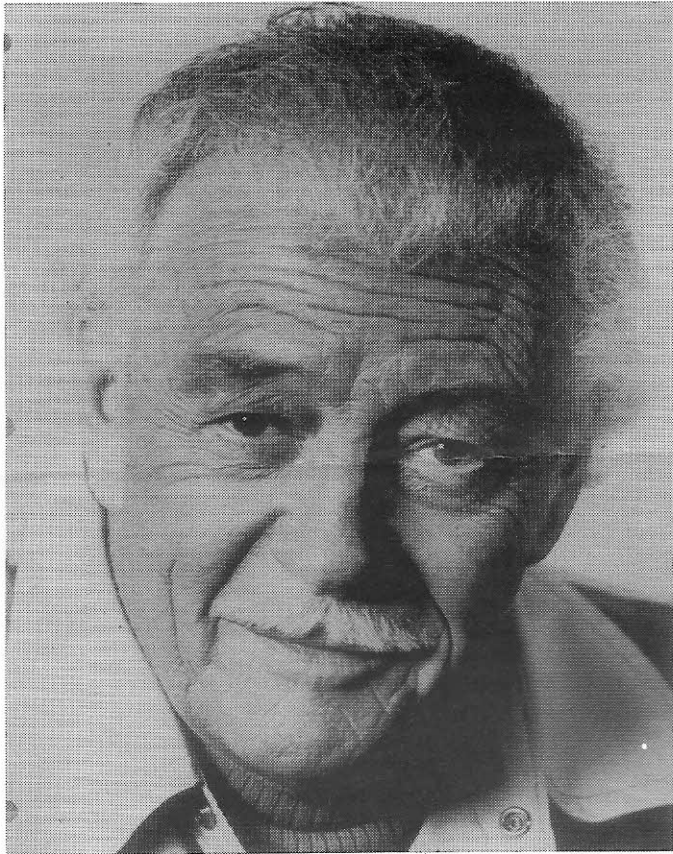
JUNE 1991



Convention

Mena, Arkansas

June 22, 1991



Special Guest:

**LES
TREMAYNE**

The 7th Annual NLAS Convention will be held as usual at the Best Western Lime Tree Inn in Mena, Arkansas, on June 22, 1991. This year being the 60th anniversary of the L&A program itself, the convention will revolve around that theme.

Our special guest this year will be one of the most honored and distinguished radio actors in history, LES TREMAYNE. Mr. Tremayne's radio career predates even L&A's, as he made his first appearance before a microphone in 1930. Since that time, he has appeared on over 30,000 radio and TV broadcasts.

Mr. Tremayne first won fame for his continuing starring role on the *First Nighter* series, as well as for his performance as Nick Charles in the *Thin Man* radio show. His other radio credits include roles on nearly every other major series originating in Chicago or Hollywood. He has been equally as busy on television, his most recent stint being as crotchety millionaire "Edward Quartermaine" on the soap opera *General Hospital* (substituting for actor David Lewis, who originated the role.) In the 1970's, children could see his performance as the "Mentor" on the Saturday-morning series *Shazam*, based on famed comic-book character Captain Marvel. Demonstrating an amazing versatility, Mr. Tremayne has also been heard as the voice of many different animated cartoon characters.

The convention will begin with a luncheon at noon on Saturday, June 22, at which time Mr. Tremayne will give an entertaining talk about his many years in show business. At 7:00 p.m., a dinner will feature as the evening's entertainment *The Wonderful World of Lum and Abner*, a multimedia look at the show's history, narrated by Mr. Tremayne himself.

There will be no scheduled activities on Friday or Sunday, but members are encouraged to use the free time to visit and explore Pine Ridge and the rest of this L&A-rich countryside.

Make your plans NOW to attend the 1991 NLAS Convention! See you there!



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THE JOT 'EM DOWN JOURNAL

JUNE 1991

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

Lum & Abner and Their Sponsors...2
Part Seven: the Frigidaire story

Meet The Members.....5
More of our people in the spotlight

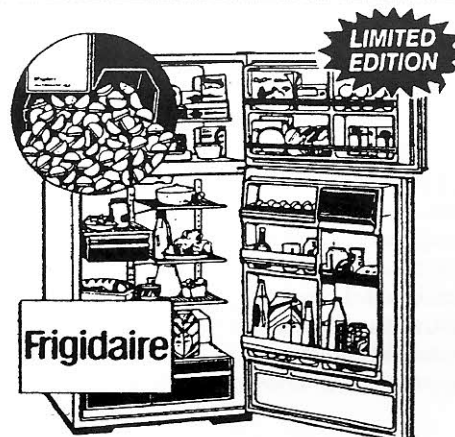
Back In The Feed Room.....6
Jokes an' all sech huskin shuckins

COVER: (Left to right) Chet (Lum) Lauck, Clarence (Ben Withers) Hartzell, and Norris (Abner) Goff during a broadcast of the 30-minute *Lum and Abner Show*, 1948. (Courtesy of Mrs. Helen Hartzell)

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SPECIAL NOTICES

You may notice that this is our annual "dwarf" issue; that is, eight pages instead of the usual 12. The Journal will return to its normal size with the August issue. Also... please note that our annual dues have now been increased to \$8.00. Keep this in mind when telling others about the NLAS.



LUM AND ABNER

and their Sponsors

PART 7 OF A SERIES



By 1948, the world of radio had made drastic changes. Once the war had ended, television had begun to creep around the corner where it had been lurking for almost ten years, but this represented only one aspect of the audio medium's changing face. In the late 1940's, the radio networks developed tremendous power, and were able to exert more control over the shows they broadcast... a power that had previously rested largely with the sponsors. Shows were now bought, sold, and manufactured like merchandise, and it was inevitable that *Lum and Abner* would fall victim to the new order. In 1972, Norris Goff recalled:

"At this time the networks wanted 30-minute shows. Well, here was an act, *Lum and Abner*, that's in prime time and using 15 minutes of a 30-minute segment, and they don't have anything else to put in that other 15 minutes. Now, about this same time, we sold to CBS. At the time, CBS bought *Amos 'n' Andy*, and Jack Benny, Edgar Bergen, Burns & Allen, Bing Crosby... they bought all these shows. And they bought *Lum and Abner*. Now they're paying you, they bought you, they do what they want with you. And they wanted us to do a 30-minute show. In other words, they wanted one 30-minute show a week, rather than to lose five 15 minutes of prime time."

Chet and Tuffy's writer, Roz Rogers, remembers the change in format a bit differently; although the trend toward 30-minute shows may definitely have been a factor, Mr. Rogers recalls that it was Chet Lauck himself who wanted to switch to a weekly 30-minute show, primarily because that was what *Amos 'n' Andy* had done back in 1943. Somehow, a big half-hour show seemed to have more prestige. But be that as it may, in July 1948 Chet and Tuffy stepped before a live audience to record an audition disc for this new format... something they hadn't been required to do since they developed their "Friday Night Sociable" format for Ford in 1932.

Their pilot disc at least attempted to retain some aspects of the 15-minute show. Clarence Hartzell continued his inspired performance as Ben Withers, who had been a regular on the show since November 1946. Francis X. Bushman, who had played many different roles in the daily series, had a prominent role in the audition as well. Squire Skimp and Cedric Weehunt were brought into the storyline, while the announcer, Charles Lyon, held the distinction of having been L&A's first announcer for Quaker Oats back in 1931! In the middle of the audition, Lyon interrupted the story with the following announcement:

"This is the spot we suggest for the sponsor's commercial. Your message will be welcomed by millions of *Lum and Abner* fans from every city, town, hamlet, and crossroads throughout America. For over 17 years, these loyal friends have followed the daily lives of these two old codgers from the hill country. And Pine Ridge is perhaps as well-known today as any city

throughout the land. Lum and Abner have become a household name as truly American as baseball and ham & eggs. Their entertainment throughout the years has typified good, clean, wholesome, down-to-earth American life. To the folks in small towns, it's a visit with old friends. To those in the city, it's a pleasant departure, like going back home again. It's an era of American life that people who knew it don't want to forget... and people who didn't, like to know. Isn't this the type of entertainment you would like your product associated with? Well, the listeners for nearly a decade have proven to be as loyal to their product as they are to Lum and Abner themselves."

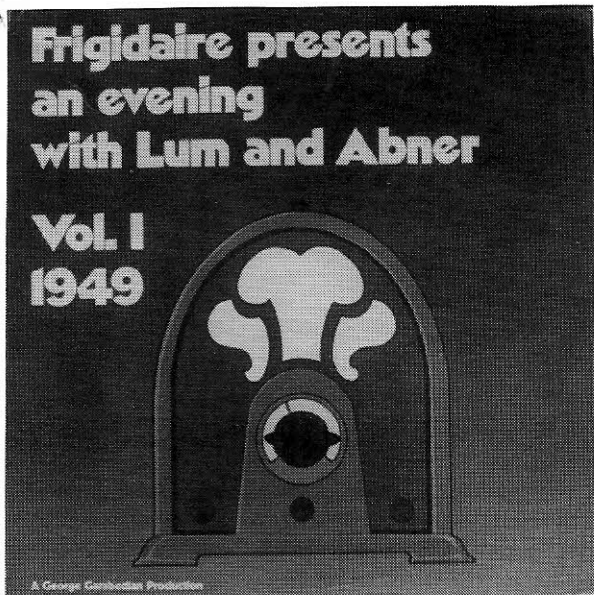
At the end of the show, Lyon reminded the potential sponsor of some of the more notable events in the L&A series' history, including the time Lum restrung the church piano with baling wire, the time he and Abner promoted an oil well in Pine Ridge and drilled into a transcontinental pipeline (this is one storyline that does not exist on tape to our knowledge, though it sounds a lot like the plot for the 1944 L&A movie *Goin' To Town*), and the time L&A began running their own post office.

Well, apparently this pitch struck a responsive chord with Frigidaire, the famous refrigerator company owned by General Motors. On September 26, 1948, the new *Lum and Abner Show* made its debut as a Sunday night feature on CBS. And just as quickly, it began to destroy most of the values for which Charles Lyon had praised it so highly in his sales pitch.

The 30-minute shows were referred to as "a brand-new kind of visit with your old friends down in Pine Ridge." And brand-new it was! Roz Rogers reports that soon after its debut,



Billboard on Highway 88, leading to Pine Ridge; somehow the juxtaposition of the 30-minute show and Dick Huddleston seems a bit odd.



The front and back covers of a record album of 30-minute L&A shows, produced by Mark 56 Records for Frigidaire in 1974.

listeners who had built up a very definite image of L&A and Pine Ridge over the past 17 years began to write in demanding to know what that crowd of laughing people was doing in the Jot 'Em Down Store! Rogers' co-writer Betty Boyle did not care much for the new format either. Only Chet Lauck seemed pleased; he later said, "I would have to say that, although it was a different conception of Lum and Abner, that the 30-minute series was a successful series. According to the laugh meter, we were #1 on many, many occasions. Usually on Monday the ratings of the laugh meter would come out; they would time how many minutes of laughs were in the show, and we had to cut our show many, many times while we were on the air because of laughs." At the same time, Tuffy Goff put in: "Lum and Abner, in my opinion, were Lum and Abner in voice only on the 30-minute show, not mentally Lum and Abner. It was a stand-up gag show, and I hated every minute of it, because it was not the characters of Lum and Abner."

Frigidaire certainly had no cause to complain. They brought the announcer from one of their other radio series,

Wendell Niles, over to *The Lum and Abner Show* to deliver the commercials, and he did so in a flawless style. In the format that had been pioneered by *Fibber McGee and Molly*, the character of "Mr. Niles" would suddenly pop into L&A's story and do his level best to turn the subject of conversation to Frigidaire refrigerators. L&A usually tried to change the subject back again, with no luck. Since, for all practical purposes the era of radio premiums was dead, Frigidaire offered no tie-in merchandise with the show, although like the other sponsors they provided a billboard on Highway 88, leading toward the real Pine Ridge. (Later, in the 1970's, Frigidaire sponsored record albums of some of the 1948-49 *Lum and Abner Shows*.)

Some of the early 30-minute episodes were condensed versions of adventures from their earlier days. The 1941 tale of Lum's fake broken leg and equally fake Hindu bone healer Prince Ali Kush was given this treatment, as was Abner's 1944-45 operation of the Ole Doc Peabody Advice Bureau. Squire and Cedric turned up frequently in the early shows, and other familiar voices were heard as well: Clarence Hartzell and Francis X. Bushman continued to appear, as did Elmore Vincent ("Phinus Peabody"), playing the tongue-tangled lawyer Zincafoose. Lum had an on-again-off-again romance with pseudo-aristocrat Rowena Seestrunk, played by Isabel Randolph (famed as *Fibber McGee's* Mrs. Uppington). She was eventually replaced by socialite Lady Brilton, voiced by dignified British actress Edna Best. The inimitable Dink Trout, almost a semi-regular on the show since 1945, became cranky Luke Spears. Horace Murphy, who had been Ira Hodgekins in the 15-minute days, was now heard as Ezra Seestrunk. Various actresses supplied the voices for Sister Simpson and Widder Abernathy.

After a few months, the format was altered again. More "name" stars were brought in, such as ZaSu Pitts, who arrived in town and chased Lum with romantic intentions. Andy Devine, a friend of Chet and Tuffy's since their earliest days in Hollywood, was cast as Mose Moots. The original orchestra leader for the show, Felix Mills, was replaced by talented clarinetist and band leader Opie Cates, whose characterization on the show vacillated somewhere between Cedric Weehunt and Mousey Gray. The old supporting characters voiced by Lauck and Goff were seldom heard now... one reason offered being that it was too confusing to the studio audience to see



Bill Gay, producer of the Frigidaire series, tinkles the ivories while (l to r) Chet Lauck, Tuffy Goff, and Clarence Hartzell engage in some sort of harmony, 1948.

two actors doing a multitude of different voices.

It was that studio audience, combined with everything else, that drove Clarence Hartzell off the show in the spring of 1949. Clarence never liked performing in front of a live audience in the first place, so before the first season ended he informed Lauck and Goff that he could no longer continue his role of Ben Withers. On the last show of that first half-hour season the cast re-performed the script that had been used for the audition, but some changes had to be made. Opie Cates now read Ben Withers' lines, while Cedric Weehunt was

replaced by Andy Devine/Mose Moots. It must be admitted that the original version sounded better.

After June 26, 1949 (coincidentally the same day that Fred Allen broadcast his final radio show), *The Lum and Abner Show* followed the example of the other weekly shows and went on summer hiatus. When it returned in the fall, it would have changed even further... and Frigidaire would have joined the ranks of sponsors of the past. Join us in our next installment for a full report!

-Tim Hollis



H. HARTZELL

Another scene backstage at the Frigidaire show: Clarence Hartzell (center) dances up a jig as Chet, Tuffy, and Bill Gay enjoy the whole thing. It's too bad Clarence wasn't that happy with the format of the show!

Meet the Members

Send Your Article & Photo
To: MEET THE MEMBERS,
P.O. Box 869, Carthage,
TX 75633

BOB MORGAN

of College Park, Georgia

Bob Morgan, age 59, and his wife Joyce have three married children and four grandchildren. Bob delivered mail in Atlanta, Georgia, for 36 years. He has been retired for about five years now.

"My hobbies are antiquing and collecting. I especially enjoy OTR, such as *Lum and Abner* and *Amos 'n' Andy*. I have a complete set of Georgia car tags from the year I was born to the present. I also collect Burma Shave items and gasoline-related service station items.

"I enjoy *Lum and Abner* to this day because I grew up in the days when Radio was King! I remember listening to the radio programs then and still do today. I have eleven of the original *Lum and Abner* radio premiums and about the same number of *Amos 'n' Andy* items. I like the 30-minute complete shows of *Lum and Abner* the best (1948 to 1950 period). I have 23 of these shows and would like to secure some more that I do not have. I guess my two favorite characters on the shows were Opie Cates and Mousey Gray.

"I found two new friends through the NLAS, Tim Hollis and George Lillie [Editor's Note: See the December 1990 issue for a profile of Mr. Lillie]. I have never met them face to face, but they sure have been friends to me."



JIM TEMPLE

of Lufkin, Texas

Jim Temple is 42 years old and divorced. He has two children, Elaine (16) and Lewis (15).

"I am the computer lab supervisor for the Data Processing Department at Angelina College in Lufkin. I found out about the NLAS when we stopped at the Jot 'Em Down Store for the first time in 1986, and have been a member ever since. We enjoy collecting old radio programs, but *Lum and Abner* are our favorites.

"I enjoy country and western music, especially the old traditional kind such as Hank Williams, Johnny Horton, and George Jones. In my spare time, I am a coach for a Dixie Belles softball team in Lufkin. Our favorite vacation spots are the Ozark and Smoky Mountains."

Jim, Elaine, and Lewis attended the 1990 NLAS Convention, where he met fellow East Texans Uncle Donnie and Aunt Laura, as well as the other ossifers and members in attendance. He told us, "I love the *Journal*; I wish it came out monthly!" Hold on, Jim, we only have a limited amount of sanity left!!



SPECIAL NOTICE: The response to this column has been overwhelming. We try to print articles in the order in which we receive them, so be patient if your submission does not appear immediately. It WILL come! In the meantime, if you need to add any updates to the material you have sent, please feel free to do so!



One evening Grandpappy Spears found Cedric Weehunt standing in the road, staring at a large load of hay that had fallen from a wagon.

"That your hay, Cedric?" asked Grandpap.

"Yes mom," Cedric replied. "I wuz haulin' it ta Papa's blacksmith shop an' it all fell off, right thar in front o' yore house."

"Oh well, Cedric," said Grandpap, "I'll help ye git it loaded back on, but right now hit's my supper time. Come in an' take supper with Charity an' me."

"Oh no!" replied Cedric. "Papa won't like that a'tall!"

"Now Cedric," Grandpap persisted, "a feller needs some good vittles afore he tackles a job like reloadin' a hay rack." And the old gentleman finally talked Cedric into having supper with him. After they finished their repast, Grandpap asked, "Now, ain't ye glad ye had some o' Charity's good cookin' afore ye had ta work?"

"Yes mom," Cedric had to admit, "but I'm shore Papa ain't gonna like it that I took supper with you."

"Now why in th' spavin'-legged world wouldn't Caleb like it?!" yelled Grandpap. "Whar iz that papa o' yores, anyway?"
 "Under all that hay," Cedric replied.

SCENE IN THE JOT 'EM DOWN STORE:

LUM: Ole Grandpaw Masters left hiz umbrell here in th' store agin. He'd lose his head if it weren't tied on!
ABNER: Yep... ye know, Doc Miller told him he had ta go ta Arizony fer hiz lungs.

It seems the mail hack driver accidentally ran over one of Ulysses S. Quincy's prize hogs.

"Don't worry," said the driver to the bereaved Ulysses. "I'll replace your hog."

"Okay," answered Ulysses, "but right now you ain't fat enough fer th' job."



EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

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