

December 1995

Grady Sutton, the character actor who was cast as Cedric Weehunt in three of the Lum and Abner movies, died at the Motion Picture Country Home in Woodland Hills, California, on September 17, 1995. He was 89.

Sutton was born April 5, 1906 (often erroneously recorded as 1908) in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and had been performing in neighborhood shows since childhood. The family relocated to Florida, where Sutton attended school with Robert Seiter, brother of motion picture director William Seiter. When Grady and Robert visited William in Hollywood, William used Sutton as an extra in *The Mad Whirl* (1924). Grady liked the experience so much that he kept acting for the next 55 years.

After working as an extra for a few years, receiving no screen credit, in 1928 Sutton was hired by the Hal Roach Studios. He appeared in at least two comedies with Harold Lloyd, starred in *The Boy Friends* series, and played "Eddie the Groom" in the Laurel & Hardy vehicle *Pack Up Your Troubles* (1932).

To non-L&A fans, Sutton is probably best remembered for his long association with W.C. Fields. The two first worked together in *The Pharmacist* (1933), and Fields liked the way Sutton reacted to him. Fields used him in *The Man On The Flying Trapeze* (1935), *You Can't Cheat An Honest Man* (1939), and *The Bank Dick* (1940). In this last picture, Sutton played the part of Ogg Oggilby, Fields' son-in-law. Sutton remembered: "The studio wanted to get someone else to play the part, and Mr. Fields wanted me to play the son-in-law. Finally, Mr. Fields said, 'If we don't use Grady, then get yourself another Fields.'" In the early 1980's, Sutton spoke on behalf of W.C. Fields at the unveiling of a commemorative stamp issued in

# GRADY SUTTON

## 1906 - 1995



*Grady Sutton as Cedric, with Lum & Abner in PARTNERS IN TIME (1946).*

*Time* (1946). Judging Sutton's performance as Cedric should be left strictly up to the individual viewer; considering that he was 40 years old at the time of his final Cedric

Fields' honor.

It was in 1942 that Sutton first played the role of Cedric Weehunt in the L&A film *The Bashful Bachelor*. He would repeat the role in *Goin' To Town* (1944) and *Partners In Time* (1946). Judging Sutton's performance as Cedric should be left strictly up to the individual viewer; considering that he was 40 years old at the time of his final Cedric appearance, his rendition of the character came across as more mentally retarded than the carefree, youthful Cedric as voiced by Chet Lauck on the radio shows.

During his career, Sutton worked in approximately 200 short subjects and feature films. His other movie appearances included *My Man Godfrey* (1936), *Alexander's Ragtime Band* (1938), *Anchors Aweigh* (1945), *White Christmas* and *A Star Is Born* (both 1954), and *My Fair Lady* (1964).

Two of his most unusual (to say the least) movies were

*Myra Breckinridge* (1970) and *Rock 'N' Roll High School* (1979).

After his retirement from acting in 1980, Sutton became somewhat reclusive and generally shunned any attention from his fans. When asked why he did not wish to participate in any activities of the NLAS or the Sons of the Desert (the Laurel & Hardy equivalent of the NLAS), he replied, "I just don't want people making a fuss over me, or being a bother to anyone." He had received *The Jot 'Em Down Journal* since 1986, but refused to grant any interviews or discuss his role as Cedric in any way.

Sutton continued to live in Hollywood until 1993, when he moved to the Motion Picture Country Home as a result of failing health.

(Our thanks to NLAS member Greg Riley for supplying us with Sutton's biographical data.)



*NLAS member Greg Riley meets with Grady Sutton, June 25, 1995.*

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# THE JOT 'EM DOWN JOURNAL

## December 1995

### *In This Issue:*

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#### **THE NATIONAL LUM AND ABNER SOCIETY**

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**Cover:** L&A enjoy a festive feast with a Yugoslavian farm family in their final motion picture, *Lum and Abner Abroad* (1955).

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A close inspection of this cinema disaster.



We are proud to report that Honorary Member (and 1991 Convention guest) LES TREMAYNE was inducted into the Radio Hall of Fame at the Museum of Broadcast Communications in Chicago in October. This was done as part of the ceremonies observing the 75th anniversary of commercial broadcasting in the United States. Our congratulations to Les Tremayne on this terrific honor!



# "A Sure-Fire Trick"

## How Lum & Abner's Christmas Story Might Have Come To TV

Ten years ago, in the December 1985 issue of *The Jot 'Em Down Journal*, we presented the story of how Chet Lauck and his business partner, Harlan Hobbs, attempted to interest the Walt Disney Studios in producing a television special based on the famous *Lum and Abner* Christmas show. That was in 1969, and of course nothing ever came of it.

However, at that time we did not realize that yet another try at an L&A Yuletide special had come about a decade earlier! This amazing story was discovered during the NLAS Zekatif Ossifers' research visit to the University of Arkansas at Little Rock in March 1994, and we are presenting our findings here. This is going to be complicated, so please try to stay with us!

Our story centers around a Hollywood motion picture studio known as Jerry Fairbanks Productions. Fairbanks had achieved his greatest fame during the 1940's, when he produced a series of theatrical shorts entitled *Speaking of Animals*. These shorts were composed entirely of shots of animals with animated cartoon mouths, with appropriate funny dialogue dubbed in. (Fairbanks also created some similar animated sequences for a few of the Bob Hope/Bing Crosby "Road" movies.) By the late 1950's, the Fairbanks studios were immersed in television production as well.

Now Chester "Lum" Lauck comes into the picture. As you probably know, after the demise of the *Lum and Abner* series, Lauck took a position as Executive Assistant to the president of the Continental Oil Company (Conoco) in Houston, Texas. Apparently, at some point in the late 1950's Lauck came into contact with Fairbanks Productions' Texas representative, Jack Mullen (whose office was at 219 Majestic Building, San Antonio, according to the letterhead). It seems that either Lauck or Mullen came up with the idea of producing a TV special based on the L&A Christmas program, to be sponsored or backed financially by Conoco. The correspondence on file at UALR picks up on February 23, 1959, when Mullen wrote to Lauck:

"On the chance you are still interested in filming the Christmas Story, I called your office last week while I was in Houston, but, as has been my luck, you were out of the city. I learned from Mrs. Brinkman that since we last discussed the film there have been some changes in the executive department,

**Because there is no illustrative material that accompanies the documents discussed in this article, we have used illustrations by NLAS Prez Uncle Donnie Pitchford, which first appeared in the December 1986 issue of *The Jot 'Em Down Journal*.**



*"How'd you happen to find out about these fokes, Grandpap?"*

which leads me to hope that perhaps there is now a chance of doing this picture."

On March 19, Chet responded to Mullen: "I am still enthused over the possibility of making a thirty-minute television film of the Lum and Abner Christmas Story. As you well know, this has been presented to some people in our company and no action has been taken. I am in an awkward position to try to press this, as they might feel that I have some mercenary motive in promoting it."

Lauck went on to suggest that Mullen present the idea to the Benton & Bowles advertising agency, which was handling the Conoco television spots at the time. Perhaps some people were right when they said that Chet would have made a great politician, for he closed his letter by stating, "This is about as far as I can go. I stand ready and willing to make the film should they decide they want it, but cannot take any part in promoting the idea. I am sure you can understand." "Conflict of interest" is not a new term, it would appear.

The next thing that happened is that Fairbanks Productions came up with a proposal for their pitch to Benton & Bowles. This proposal is so intriguing that it will now be presented here in its entirety...

"Lum & Abner have a Christmas show that has become one of the classics of radio of all time," it begins. "It is now proposed to bring this to life on television. The original radio sketch runs just under twelve minutes. To make it suitable for television, it must be expanded to 26 1/2 minutes. The two principal questions

are: (1) HOW DO WE DO THIS? (2) HOW MUCH WILL IT COST?

"It is important that we truly 'expand' the present story, not simply 'pad' it out. The 11 1/2 minutes we now have make up a simple, tightly written little masterpiece. The additional material must be of this same high caliber. And it will be. The best way to illustrate this is to cite a somewhat, though not quite, similar situation.

"When Messrs. Loewe and Lerner prepared to do a musical version of George Bernard Shaw's famous stage play *Pygmalion*, they were faced with the problem as to how to approach the story. They did not want to take the original and simply insert musical numbers into it. They wanted their version to 'smack' of the original, but to have a happy, healthy entity of its own. Then they hit upon the perfect solution: they carefully picked out of the original a number of stories and incidents mentioned, but not

"The idea of having Lum & Abner tell the children the Christmas Story is so the details will be fresh in the minds of the audience and the significance of it will gradually dawn on the viewers as Lum & Abner and Grandpappy start out on their hike through the snow to the old barn." [Editor's Note: They must have figured the audience's intelligence level was somewhere below Cedric's.]

"The progress along the road will be built up in the movie version, with a small accident or two to give us a further complication and significant twist. Further, we wish to introduce special Christmas music in the opening that gets its reprise during the tramp through the snow and at the denouement in the deserted stable. All in all, a film that will become as much a classic as the shorter radio version for which this long-time favorite team is famous.

"THE COST: Until we have a shooting script, we cannot budget the production too exactly. But to the best of our ability, from the radio script and from the above bare treatment outline, we estimate the budget will run between \$35,000 and \$40,000. This cost includes everything except the services of Lum & Abner themselves."

The proposal goes on to explain the financial arrangements between the sponsor and Fairbanks Productions, and concludes: "If we can get a preliminary go-ahead now so that we can work both the writing and production into our schedule at our most economical convenience, we can make the picture for appreciably less money and have the proper number of prints ready and waiting for the next Christmas season."

Did Benton & Bowles jump at the idea of Conoco sponsoring "Lum & Abner's Christmas Story"? Let's put it this way: have you seen "Lum & Abner's Christmas Story" running on television lately?! The gray flannel suits of Fifth Avenue made their reply on August 24, 1959: "After a very careful evaluation by everyone here, and the Advertising Division at Conoco, it has been decided that this does not fit in with plans for 1959. Thanks for bringing this matter to our attention."

The story gasped its last on September 8, when Jack Mullen sent a copy of the B&B letter to Chet: "As you will note from the enclosed copy of letter from Benton & Bowles, they turned down the Christmas Story. I wish I had the money or could get it to make this film. I believe this show could be sold year after



*"Wait a minit; I bleave that's the barn yonder, ain't it?"*

portrayed in the Shaw piece, and these they elaborated on with dialogue and music. Triumphant result: *My Fair Lady*.

"We propose to start with the Christmas dinner party at Grandpappy's house... the one he tells about as the three men tramp along the road through the snow. Grandpappy is entertaining Doc Miller and his wife.

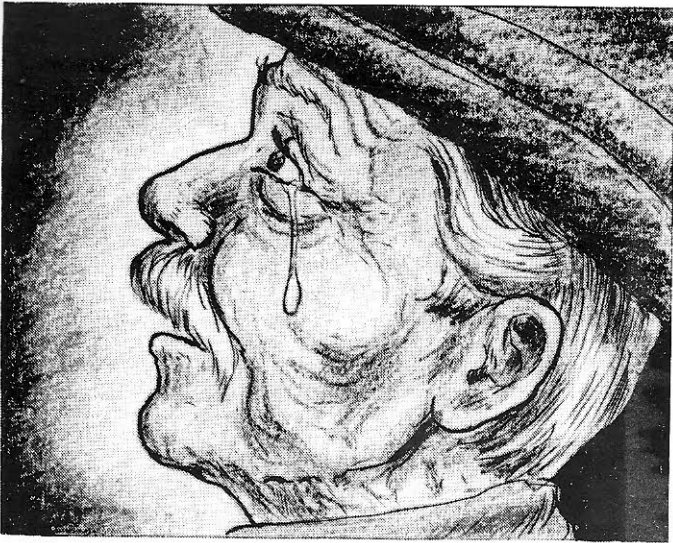
"We have a couple of children in the picture for good measure at Christmas time, and Lum & Abner essay to tell them the story of the First Christmas. (Amos 'n' Andy used to make a big repeat thing of Amos telling the Christmas Story to his little daughter. We plan to capture a little of this sure-fire trick, only with the Lum & Abner distinctive flavor.) One of the boys tells the story while the other interrupts with interpretations of his own, some correct, some not quite."

[Editor's Note: Maybe it says something about the producers' sincerity when they consider including the story of the first Christmas in a Christmas show to be "a sure-fire trick." If you think that's bad, wait till you get a load of the sledgehammer they start swinging in the next paragraph.]



*"Soon ez Doc thinks hit's safe fer 'em ta be moved, I'm gonna INSist on 'em comin' over to my place an' stayin'."*





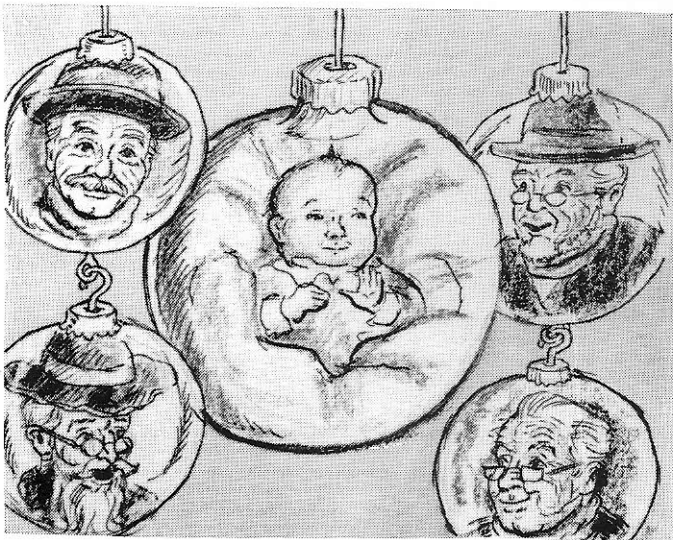
*"We're sorter like the years, us three ole fellers."*

year direct to the stations as a Christmas 'special.' Am sorry we dropped the ball on this one, and I appreciate sincerely your help."

We will now have a soft chorus of *Taps*. (Or maybe *Silent Night*?) It should be noted here that in 1959, Fairbanks Productions' concept of a 30-minute Christmas TV special was basically entering unknown waters. Christmas specials as we know them today did not really take hold until the early 1960's, and the first half-hour entertainment special of any kind was the classic *A Charlie Brown Christmas* in 1965. (Prior to that, the belief was that no one would bother to tune in to a special that was shorter than an hour in length.)

And so, "Lum & Abner's Christmas Story" returned to its former status as a 16-inch transcription disc gathering dust in a warehouse... for the time being, anyway. Now, of course, it circulates widely and is played on numerous radio stations each and every Christmas, but in 1959 it looked like its time had passed. So celebrate this Christmas by dragging out your own recording of the show, play it while drinking some hot chocolate, and accept the wishes of the NLAS Ossifiers for the merriest of all Christmases and the happiest of all New Years!

- Tim Hollis



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THE SEVEN

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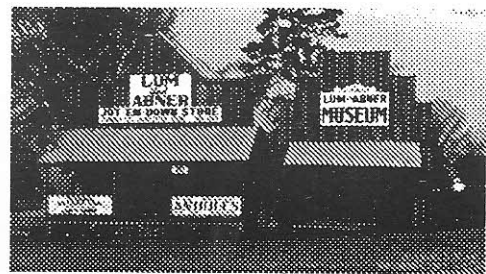
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# LUM and ABNER®

## Mind Somebody Else's Business

### PART TWO

(Originally Published in *Radio Mirror*, December 1945)

(Part One of this story was published in the previous issue of *The Jot 'Em Down Journal*.)

Harry dropped in at the store now and then... more as a matter of habit than anything else... and Lum and Abner tried to get him to talk, to bolster up his lost pride a little. It usually didn't work out too well.

"How about them German pilots?" Abner would ask. "Were they as good as everybody says they were?"

But Harry would wave a deprecatory hand. "The old Eagle Squadron boys had it tough in the early days, but by the time I got over there, we outnumbered 'em... ten to one sometimes. We had American production backing us up. And there's no glory in just plain weight of numbers."

"The Army must have thought there was some glory to what you did," Abner would suggest cautiously, "or they wouldn't have given you all those medals and a whole squadron to lead."

But Harry wouldn't accept that. "It was a different world over there. Everything was different... and abnormal. It wasn't life. It was a bad dream. And the Army was built to

fit. Sure, I was a big shot... a big shot in the nightmare. So what does that make me now? The nightmare's over. I'm awake again and it's the next morning and I'm right back where I started. I'm just plain Harry Johnson, a mill-hand in Pine Ridge, Arkansas. And nothing that's happened in that bad dream can change it. Besides, I don't want to think about it any more."

So Lum and Abner would lapse into unhappy silence and pretty soon Harry would say that it was time for him to go, and they wouldn't see him again for a long time.

Then the spring rains started, and all of Pine Ridge was a sodden, dispirited place where people stayed indoors as much as they could, and only ventured out when they had to, in raincoats and umbrellas and rubber boots. It had been a dry year so far, and it seemed as though the weather were trying to balance itself with a continuous downpour. The Mill River began to rise, and the lower road... the old dirt road that wound through the back country... was washed out in two places.

Harry came stomping into the store one evening, shaking the rain from his hat and mopping his dripping face with an already wet handkerchief. "Gosh," he said, "I sure hope this

lets up pretty soon. The river's up another foot tonight. Sixteen more inches and it'll be up to the 1927 level."

"How's the dam holding?" asked Lum. The dam was the one built by the mill people years ago, to furnish the power for their operations. In case of flood it was the one thing Pine Ridge had to fear... the lake formed by the mill dam would practically wipe out the town if the dam were to burst. The town had long stopped worrying about that, though. The dam had never burst, and in the usual human way, people figured that since it never had it never would. The rain, to the people of Pine Ridge, was just a nuisance that would stop eventually. Almost no one was giving a thought to the dam and what would happen if it burst.

Harry's next words, then, were a little startling. "The dam seems to be all right," he said, "but I don't know how much more pressure it'll stand. The thing that worries me is the machinery the mill has set up to divert the water in case of emergency. You know... the breakwater farther up the river where that other channel cuts in? They diverted the water years ago into its present channel, to get enough power for the mill. But the breakwater can be lifted and the water

rediverted if necessary, right from the engine room at the mill..."

"Well, then," cut in Lum, "there's nothing to worry about. I didn't even know about changin' the river bed."

"There wouldn't be anything to worry about," Harry told him, "except that I took a look at the engine room today, and I've never seen a junkier mess of old rusted machinery in my life. It's never been used, of course, and I guess the mill people figured it'd never have to be used. They've just let it go and neglected it until now I doubt if it could be started with a sledge-hammer."

"Did you report it?" asked Abner.

"All the bosses are up in Chicago at a convention or something," said Harry. "Al Middleton's in charge. I told him, but he doesn't like me much anyway, and he told me to mind my own business." He shrugged. "Well, at least I told him, so it's





not my responsibility any more. And maybe it'll quit raining before morning anyway."

But the next morning it was still raining, and Lum and Abner heard to their alarm that the river had risen another eleven inches. That afternoon Betty Holden telephoned to them. Her voice was tight with panic as she told Lum she had phoned the store because she didn't know where else to turn. Could they come out right away, she asked. She'd feel better if they were there. She had wired to the mill superintendent and manager in Chicago, but the weather was so bad they wouldn't be able to fly, and it would take too long for them to get back to Pine Ridge in time by train. Al Middleton didn't seem to know what to do about the dam, and Harry wouldn't say a word to her.

Lum said they'd be right out. They locked the store, putting up a sign that it would be closed until they returned, climbed into their old car, and drove through the mud and rain to the mill.

The mill was in a turmoil when they arrived. Al Middleton had every man in the place loading sandbags on top of the dam and along the sides. His face was perspiring and his voice was hoarse as he urged them on. "Can't talk to you now," he roared at Lum and Abner as they approached him, "too busy." So they backed away and looked for Harry. They found him coming in from a trip to the dam, his wet shirt sticking to his shoulders, his face grimy from sand and mud and rain.

"Harry," called Lum as he walked toward them, "isn't it about time somethin' was done about that engine room?"

Betty had joined them and listened anxiously as Harry replied, "It sure is. Those sandbags are just a drop in the bucket. They won't hold the dam two minutes when the water gets up six inches higher... and it's rising fast."

"Well," said Abner, "how about the engine room?"

"There's the boss over there," said Harry grimly, waving toward Al.

"Please, Harry," pleaded Betty, "if that dam bursts, the whole town will be flooded."

Harry just jerked his thumb in Al Middleton's direction.

"Maybe we better try talkin' to him again," suggested Lum, and they all walked over to Al. "Listen, Middleton," began Lum, "Harry says the only way to save the dam is to divert..."

But Al interrupted him. "Can't you see I'm busy?" he shouted. "The only thing we can do is get more sandbags out there. And we can do that quicker without you buttin' in."

"It won't do any good, Al," said Harry quietly. "Six more inches and that dam's a goner... sandbags or no sandbags."

"I told you once to mind your own business," yelled Al. "But if that machinery could be made to work..." insisted Harry.

A thick vein in Al's forehead stood out as he turned to Harry. "Who's the boss here, you or me?" he demanded hoarsely. "You learned to obey orders in the Army, didn't you, you stuffed shirt? Well, obey them. Get on back to that pile of sandbags." He turned away from them, and began to shout once more to the men.

Harry's jaw set and his lips tightened, but he didn't make a move, and there was a long moment of silence. Then in a small voice, Betty spoke.

"It's not the mill I'm worried about. It's the town... all those people who live down there... the little children and the old people and the mothers and fathers. That water getting ready to break down the dam is sort of like the Germans were when the war started... getting ready to break out and drown

all the little innocent people who couldn't get out of their way... Isn't there *any* way to stop it?"

"The Allies stopped the Germans," suggested Abner, almost as though he were saying it to himself, "and seems to me I've heard tell that when a Commander wasn't big enough for his job, he got replaced by somebody else. Ain't that right, Harry?"

Harry looked at each one in turn, and he looked longest at Betty. Then he shook his head violently, as if to clear it. "Okay," he said finally, "I guess you're right... all of you." Then, straightening his shoulders and taking a deep breath, he strode over to Al.

Catching him by the shoulder, he spun him around. "Pull your rip-cord, Middleton," he said softly, "this is May-Day for you." With that, he hit Al squarely on the chin, with a blow that seemed to send a quiver all through the man's body. Al's head snapped back, and he slumped soundless to the floor. Harry looked wonderingly at his fist.

"Attaboy, Harry," Lum told him quietly, "now all you got to do is get that machinery working."

Harry flashed him a quick smile. Picking out a nearby bench, he walked over and jumped up on it. Then he raised his voice and shouted to the men.

"Listen, fellows," he said when he'd gotten their attention. "There's only one way to keep the dam from bursting, and that's to divert the river into its old bed, a mile upstream. There's machinery in the engine room right here to do it with. It's in bad shape and maybe it won't work, but we've got about half an hour to try it. What do you say?"

There was a stunned silence. Then a man called out, "What's Middleton say about it?"

"Middleton isn't saying a word," Harry shouted back

grimly. "I just knocked him out."

More silence. Then came a long, low whistle from the back of the big room, and somebody laughed. That broke the tension. "Okay, Harry," came a voice, "what do we do first?"

Harry's eyes gleamed and bright color rose into his face. Briskly he issued his orders, and quickly the men dispersed under his directions.

The engine room was the whole problem, of course, but the men who followed Harry into it knew their business. Wordlessly they settled to their task of cleaning, oiling, filing, and scraping away the years' accumulation of dirt, grease, and rust. Harry himself went to work adjusting the delicate starting mechanism that was to set off the heavier machinery. He found that the principle in operated on wasn't much different from that used in automobile or airplane engines.

Twenty minutes passed before Harry straightened up. Lum and Abner, who stood with Betty by the wall, out of the way of the workmen, could see the tension in his face.

"I've done everything I can to it," he said to the others. "You all set?" The men nodded in turn, making final adjustments and last-minute polishes at the now gleaming machines.

"Let's try her, then," said Harry, and grinned palely as he held up two crossed fingers. The men stood back and held their breaths as Harry pushed a button. Nothing happened. He reached over a twisted a wire, fastening it more securely. Then he pushed the button again. A sudden whirl rang out in the hushed room. Then, almost as though a giant were waking up after years of death-like sleep, the engines shuddered and came to life. There was a sputter and then a hum. They were





working!

"The breakwater should be lifting right now," said Harry breathlessly, and watched a gauge that began to move slowly in the central engine. When the needle pointed straight up in the air, he pushed a lever and the engine stopped. Everybody just stood and waited, then. If it were a success, the river should now be pouring into its old bed... to lose itself harmlessly below the town and eventually join the larger river of which it was a tributary.

Suddenly there was a shout from the outer room. A man stationed out on the dam had reported that the water was going down. Harry drooped and sat down tiredly on a bench. It was all over. That desperate last-minute effort had worked. The dam was not going to give way, and the town was saved. He could only grin faintly at the men as they crowded around him to shake his hand and thump him on the back. And Abner was the only one who noticed that his eyes sought out Betty's, as she stood against the wall, swallowing hard.

The next day, with the irony of nature, the rain stopped pouring down, and the sun came out to shine dimly on Pine Ridge. Life took up its normal comings and goings, and Lum got out his inventory book again to check on the store's stocks. A week had gone by and they hadn't seen or heard anything of Harry. And then Betty came in for a library book. Lum stopped inventorying and went over to talk to her.

"How're things going up at the mill?" he asked guardedly, and Betty smiled delightedly at him.

"Well," she began with the fond air of a doting mother about to distribute lollipops, "Mr. Ellis and the others got back from Chicago, and of course they had to have a full report about what happened. So they called Harry in. And you should have seen him while he was talking to them. He was just like a different person... sort of brisk and sure of himself. He wasn't a bit afraid of them... or subservient... or anything. He just told them what had to be done under the circumstances and how he did it. It must have been just like when he was a fighter pilot, reporting back to the Colonel after a mission."

"So what'd they say?" asked Abner.

"Well, first they asked him all about himself, and he answered all their questions without hedging a bit or getting embarrassed like he used to when people asked him things. And then they offered him Al Middleton's job. But he wouldn't take it!"

"He wouldn't take it?" gasped Lum.

"No. He said he didn't think he'd like being a foreman. He said he had other things in mind. Besides, he told them that Al was a good foreman. Al's only trouble during the flood was that he was mad at Harry and that momentarily affected his judgment."

"Well, if that don't beat the bugs a-fightin'," breathed Lum. "Did he tell 'em what other things he had in mind?"

"Yes, he did," said Betty, and her eyes sparkled. "He told them he'd gotten interested in flood control. He said the control measures they had at the mill, if they hadn't been allowed to get into such bad shape, were about the best things he'd ever heard of. They liked that, I can tell you! And he said he'd like to study flood control and then work into some kind of a job having to do with it."

"What'd they have to say about that?" asked Abner eagerly.

"They thought it was fine," said Betty. "They told him they'd find out all there was to find out about it and help him get started. And then when it got going, they said they'd recommend him to a group of engineers or something to

advise a whole lot of different mills about their various problems... maintenance, emergency controls and that kind of thing. They said it was a great field for a young man and they were delighted that one of their own men was going into it. They will help him, too, like they said they would. Mr. Ellis has got a lot of influence."

"Well, by grannies," said Lum, "that's about the best news I've heard in a coon's age. I guess that flood was the 'something' that had to happen to Harry, eh, Betty?"

"I guess so," said Betty, and then her face dropped a little. "But he still hasn't been over to our house yet."

"Say," broke in Abner out of a deep thought, "I tell you what... we ought to have a kind of celebration."

"A celebration?" asked Lum in surprise.

"Sure," said Abner. "For Harry. We still got some cider left from last fall. We can throw a party."

"Who'll we ask?" inquired Lum a little doubtfully.

"Well... Harry, and...uh...uh... and... Betty... and... shucks, that's all we need. Just us four. We'll have a whackin' good time."

"I think maybe you got somethin' there, Abner," said Lum, looking sideways at Betty. "All right with you, Betty?"

"Why yes, Mr. Edwards. That'd be fine, I guess. When'll it be?"

"What's the matter with tomorrow night?" asked Abner triumphantly, and they decided then and there that tomorrow night would be fine.

It was a whackin' good party, too, just as Abner had said it would be. Betty was looking her very prettiest, in a pink outfit that almost matched the color in her cheeks, and Harry's shoulders were straighter and his head higher than even before he'd gone away to war. Lum had found an old Victrola, and they had music with their cider.

About half way through the evening, Harry jumped to his feet and held up his hand. "I've got an announcement to make," he said, his eyes sparkling. And then he turned to Betty. "I didn't really intend to say this in public," he grinned, "but I can't think of any better audience. The thing is, I've been a big jerk and a bigger sap, but I think I've finally got my feet on the ground again, and it looks as though things are going to go all right from now on. What I wanted to say was..." He hesitated for just a fraction of a second, and then blurted it out, "Betty, will you marry me?"

They all turned to look at Betty. Her eyes dropped in confusion, and then they opened wide and her chin came up. She faced Harry and said firmly, "What else do you think I've been waiting for all these years?"

Abner whooped, and Lum put another record on the Victrola. Harry walked over to where Betty was sitting and bowed deeply. "May I have the honor of this next dance?" he asked gravely.

Just as gravely, she rose and walked into his arms. They danced around the room twice

without a word before they stopped, with their arms around each other, and proceeded to forget about the music, about Lum and Abner, about everything else in the world except each other.

Two minutes later, by the Jot 'Em Down Store and Library clock, they sat down again and the party went on. But this time the talk was no longer about what had happened before... it was all about what was going to happen from now on. And Lum and Abner couldn't get a word in edgewise.

Then, so suddenly that it startled all of them, the front door banged open, and Al Middleton strode in. As they stared at him speechlessly, he walked over to Harry and held out his hand. Harry rose to his feet, looked at Al for a long moment, and then accepted the hand and shook it heartily.

Al's set face broke into a big smile as he said, "I was hoping you'd take it like that, Johnson. I got some apologizin' to do, and I think now's the time to do it. I just want to say that maybe the Army wasn't as wet as I been sayin' it was. I guess maybe you deserved your Major's leaves and them medals. And I guess maybe they stretched a point to even give me stripes."

Harry grinned at him, and Lum came forward with a glass of cider and a plate of cheese and crackers. Al sat down on a upturned orange crate and accepted them humbly.

"Just the same," he said, "I figure that if I keep my nose clean, and work a little harder mindin' my own business, and act like a grown man instead of a spoiled kid, maybe I'll even work up to Sergeant's stripes some day. And when that happens, I'd like to be in your squadron, Harry!"

Harry thumped him on the back, and Lum put another record on the Victrola. Abner blew his nose loudly on a big red and white bandanna handkerchief. The Jot 'Em Down Store and Library was once again at peace with the world.

## THE END



ZAGREB

**Lum** and **Abner**

PARIS

Monte Carlo

**GO ABROAD**

SEE ROCK CITY

"How would you like to make a movie in Europe?"

That was the question posed to Chet Lauck and Tuffy Goff in 1954. The *Lum and Abner* radio program had finally ended its long run earlier that year, and the two were casting about for future projects. It was the Nassour Brothers studio of Hollywood who came up with the European proposal that Lauck and Goff wound up accepting. They would live to regret that decision.

Actually, the footage that eventually became *Lum and Abner Abroad* was conceived, scripted, and filmed as three half-hour television programs. Instead of the travels all over Europe originally envisioned by all, the entire production was filmed in Communist Yugoslavia, where the Nassour Studios (among other Hollywood concerns) had money tied up that could only be used in that country. Hence, while the first of the three segments was actually supposed to be set in Yugoslavia, for the other two segments the countryside had to double as Paris and Monte Carlo.

Surviving correspondence indicates that the filming of *Lum and Abner Abroad* took place over a period from approximately October through December 1954. The scripts for the episodes were written by Carl Herzinger, a former protege of longtime L&A radio writer Roswell Rogers, with additional contributions from Rogers' other writing partner, Betty Boyle.

Because Yugoslavia's filmmaking industry was a few decades behind that of the USA, an attempt was made to simplify the process. In Lauck and Goff's cases, the most immediate result of this was an alteration in the old age makeup they had

always had to undergo to become Lum and Abner. Granted, by this time Chet Lauck was 52 years old and Tuffy was 48, so the heavy applications of latex wrinkles that had been required for their 1940-46 films for RKO were no longer absolutely necessary. In earlier movies, Chet had worn a wig with a receding hairline to properly age his characterization of Lum, but for *Abroad* it was decided to use his own thick, wavy hair, only dyed blonde so it would photograph gray in the black & white film. Betty Boyle

has recalled that when the blonde dye mixed with the natural jet black of Chet's hair, the color that resulted was more of a shocking orange hue! It was so unnatural-looking that the staff (including Tuffy) refused to be seen in public with the carrot-topped Chet unless he wore a hat to cover up his hideous hairdo. In addition, Chet Lauck Jr. has said that when Chet Sr.'s hair grew back out again after the dye debacle, it really was gray!

As for Goff, one of the banes of making

their previous films had been the painstaking application of Abner's famous "chin whiskers." With all of the other inconveniences associated with filming in a third world country behind the Iron Curtain, for *Abroad* he absolutely refused to put on the beard again, and elected to simply use a thickened and dyed version of his own mustache. In later years, Chet recalled wryly that "we almost had a fight over that," but Tuffy was adamant. In the film, Abner with a mustache bears a strong resemblance to Cliff Arquette's famous TV portrayal of Charley Weaver.

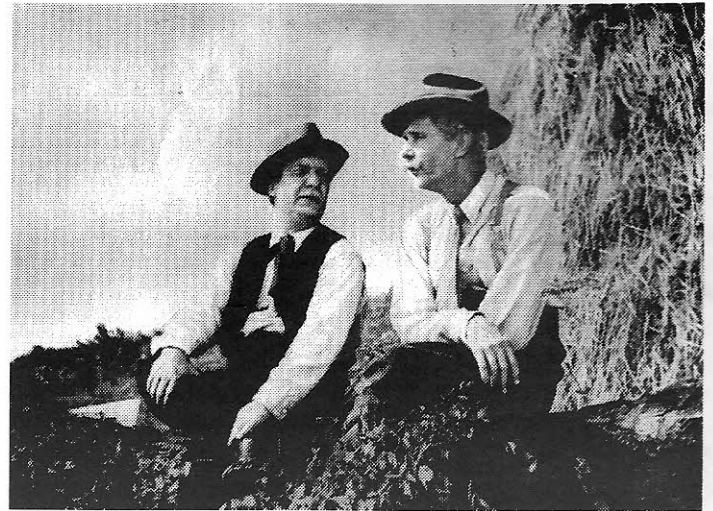
Since the scripts were intended to be viewed as three separate







*Lum & Abner give ballerina Marianne the benefit of their wise counsel.*



*L&A relax on a farm in the Yugoslavian community of "Pinevec Ridgeka."*

installments, the combination of them into one feature film resulted in some awkward moments. The film opens with L&A getting out of a taxi in Zagreb, Yugoslavia, with no explanation as to what they are doing there. (Presumably this would have been explained in either the TV show's opening title sequence, a la *The Beverly Hillbillies* and *Gilligan's Island*, or in a domestically-filmed premiere episode.) As the story goes on, it turns out that the boys have won some sort of contest in which they were named "America's Ambassadors of Good Will."

In the first 30-minute segment, L&A befriend Marianne Popavich, a young Yugoslavian ballerina who has been trying to locate her boyfriend, an American named Tommy Ellis. It turns out that Nicky, the leader of the ballet troupe, has been hiding Marianne's mail from Ellis, to prevent her from getting married and leaving the group. He is appropriately contrite when L&A manage to reunite the lovers.

The transition between this segment and the next makes painfully clear another drawback to editing the TV episodes together into a feature. Gene Gary, the Desi Arnaz lookalike who portrayed Nicky in Episode #1, is cast as a TV announcer in Episode #2. Viewed in two separate weeks on television, few people would have noticed this. But with one episode now following hot on the heels of the first, actor Gary bridges the gap with voiceover narration, in what surely must be one of the most lame segues in film history: "That was only the beginning of Lum and Abner's strange adventures abroad. Soon afterward I, Nicky Blasovich, found myself in Paris, working as a sports announcer. And guess who I found in Paris too? I know you know!" (It must be a rare ballet troupe leader who can successfully serve as a sports announcer in his spare time.)



*Our friends look rather dubious as they are escorted into an eerie castle outside Paris.*

Throughout this film, L&A are portrayed as international celebrities. It is never made clear if this is due to their recent ambassadorship appointment, or because of their fame as comedians. In Episode #1, at dinner with Marianne's family, Papa Popavich tells L&A, "Ve know you from radio," but just how he means this is unclear. Likewise, Episode #2 begins with ballet leader-turned-sportscaster Nicky introducing L&A as if their reputation is well-known to the assembled crowd.

In Paris, L&A become involved with a gang of notorious jewel smugglers, who enlist their unwitting help in transporting a priceless national treasure out of the country. Our friends end up in a spooky old castle, where the film almost takes on an Abbott & Costello flavor. L&A are menaced by a lumbering creature called "Frankenshplnin;" in this segment, for the first time Chet is obviously doubled by a stunt man, as Lum keeps his face covered while he runs around the room and falls over the furniture. At the close of the segment, L&A hail a taxi for their departure from Paris, and the cabdriver turns out to be Frankenshplnin, in an ending that smacks heavily of the Three Stooges.

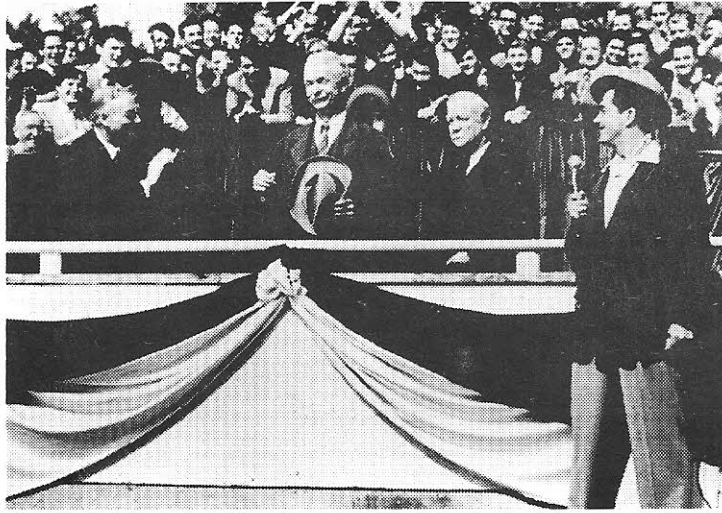
In Episode #3, L&A crash a party in Monte Carlo, and impress everyone with their pretense of being American millionaires. Playing some of Monte Carlo's famous games of chance, they end up "breaking the bank." They learn that they have won \$14,080,000.00. This comes as a surprise to them, since every time the casino owners thought they were betting \$5,000.00, L&A thought they were betting a nickel. When the boys learn that paying them off would cause extra taxes to be levied on the people of Monte Carlo, they generously insist on taking only the \$14.80 they thought they were winning all along. They become national heroes, but the ending of this

segment (and also the whole film) is ruined by one unfortunate miscalculation:

Leaving Monte Carlo, L&A are interrogated by an American stranger, who seems greatly interested in the fourteen million dollars they won. L&A invite the friendly chap to stop in Pine Ridge and seem them sometime. He assures them that he most certainly will, and hands them his business card. The script calls for a closeup of the card, with the inscription, "Fred M. Barry, U.S. Department of Internal Revenue, Income Tax Department." This would have made a great (and typical for L&A) closing gag; however, since the IRS man is played by Jim Kiley, the actor who appeared as Tommy Ellis in Episode #1, for the feature version the producer chose to alter the name on the card to "Thomas Ellis." This only serves to kill the joke, as one is left to wonder why L&A did not recognize Ellis from their previous encounter! *Lum and Abner Abroad* fades out with L&A leaving Monte Carlo, with no attempt to bring an end to this "trip to Europe" storyline.

It has been widely reported that *Lum and Abner Abroad* was never released theatrically, but NLAS research has proven that information to be incorrect. In Chet Lauck's scrapbooks, housed at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, there are several newspaper clippings reporting on the feature's engagements. By the time the movie reached the nation's theaters, Lauck and Goff had officially dissolved their partnership and gone on to other things. This, combined with the undeniably poor production standards and weak story, probably contributed to the film's utter box office failure.

Correspondence between Chet and the film's distributor,



**Former ballet director-turned-TV announcer Nicky introduces L&A to the crowd at a Parisian soccer match.**

\$3,384.12 in rentals, Memphis \$2,255.63, and New Orleans \$1,948.79.) Then, as late as February 20, 1962, Chet wrote to Eddy Nassour, "I am sorry our venture in Yugoslavia was not a profitable one, but I am sure you will agree that this was no fault of ours." He was absolutely right!

After such a distinguished career in show business, it is too bad that the history of Lum and Abner as a team had to end on such a dismal note. That is probably why *Lum and Abner Abroad* remains today as a curiosity piece, searched out strictly for its historical significance rather than its entertainment value. Chet and Tuffy much preferred to not even discuss it, believing, and rightly so, that *Lum and Abner* was much better represented by those 23 years of priceless radio episodes.

- Tim Hollis

(*Lum and Abner Abroad* can be ordered on video from Lum and Abner Associates, 135 Circle Drive, Hot Springs, AR 71901, for \$29.95. Other discussions of it can be found in the June 1986 and February 1992 issues of *The Jot 'Em Down Journal*.)



**After being attacked by Frankenshplnin, L&A decide to get out while the getting is good.**



**The jewel smugglers and their beautiful accomplice are apprehended as L&A look on.**