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ETHEL HUDDLESTON BALL

1905-1997



OCTOBER 1997



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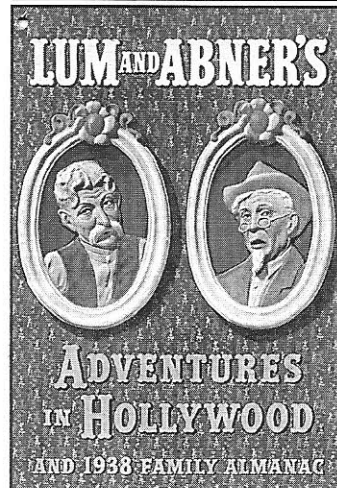
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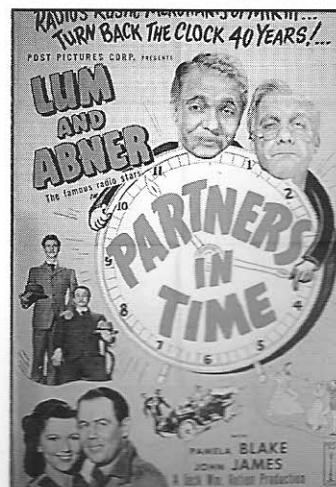
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THE JOT 'EM DOWN JOURNAL

OCTOBER 1997

**THE NATIONAL
LUM AND ABNER SOCIETY**

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Cover: Ethel Huddleston Ball during an interview conducted with the NLAS Ossifers, 1986. (Photo by Uncle Donnie Pitchford) **Inset:** Ethel as a young beauty queen, early 1920s. (Photo courtesy Lum & Abner Museum)

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LUM AND ABNER.
GO ON LINE!

“Doggies, Lum, I thought hangin’ out
the warshin’ wuz worman’s work!”

E-MAIL ADDRESSES OF NOTE:

Questions and comments can now be sent to the NLAS Executive Secretary’s office at CampHoll@aol.com.

The Lum & Abner Museum in Pine Ridge can be contacted at nstucker@hsnp.com.

The NLAS has a web page created by member **Jim Temple** of Lufkin, Texas. That address is www.inu.net/stemple. You can also correspond with Jim by e-mail at jtemple@inu.net.

Information about the L&A movies on video cassette can be obtained from clauck@mail.snider.net. Grannies, sich teknologiky!

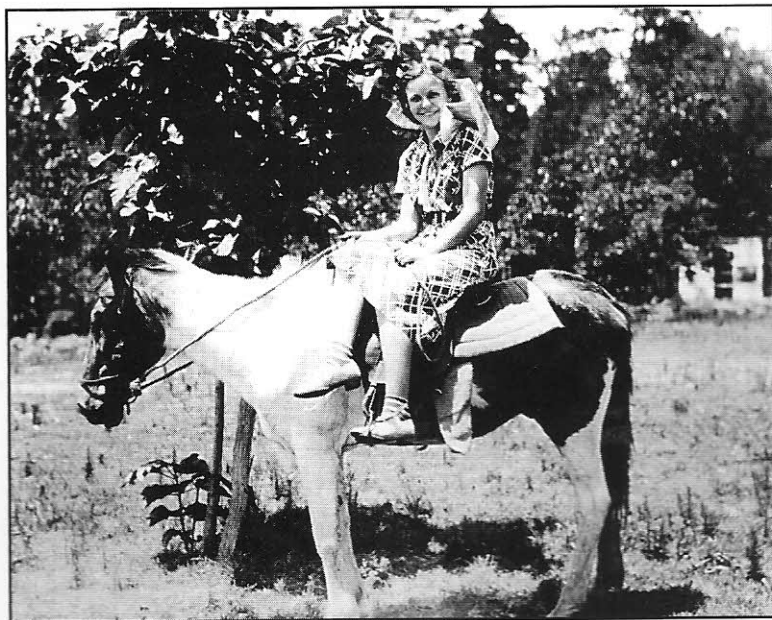
"DICK'S GURL"

Ethel

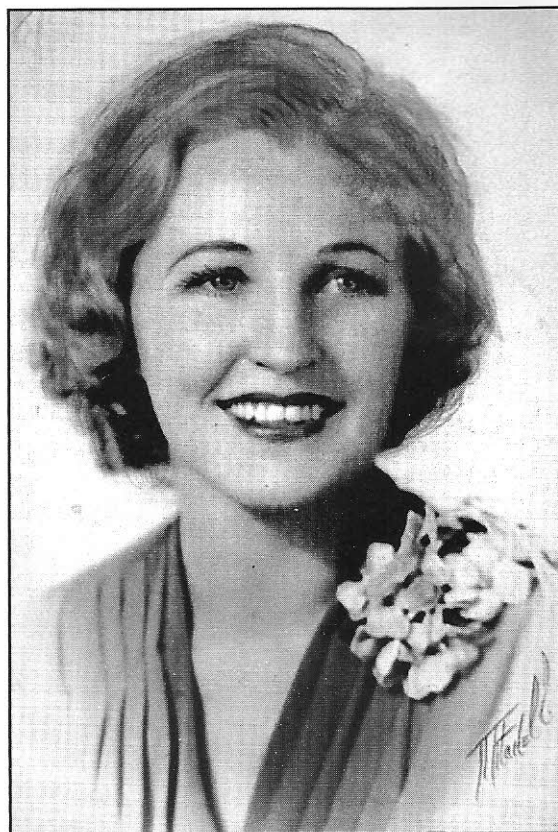
A Tribute

We are indeed sorry to report that the NLAS lost one of its closest friends and earliest supporters when Ethel Huddleston Ball passed away at the age of 92 on July 3, 1997. As most of you probably know by now, Ethel was the one and only child of the real-life Dick Huddleston, and as such was our last living direct link with that aspect of *Lum and Abner* history.

Ethel was born on April 9, 1905, in the community that was then known as Waters, Arkansas. Her father, J. R. "Dick" Huddleston, had married the daughter of one of the pioneer families of that area, and at the time of Ethel's birth he and his wife Nancy were living just south of the Ouachita River, which runs very near the little community. In 1909, Dick decided to go into the general merchandise business, opening a large store in Waters in partnership with Mena merchant S. I. Wood. That wooden frame building burned to the ground in 1912, and while a new structure was being built, 7-year-old Ethel's bedroom served as a temporary substitute store. When



Ethel saddles up for a ride in Pine Ridge!



the new building reopened, S. I. Wood was no longer a partner, and the store would remain Dick Huddleston's alone for the rest of his life.

During those early days in Waters, the Huddleston family became acquainted with a couple of young businessmen from Mena. W. J. Lauck, local bank president and lumber company owner, often sent his son Chet out to check on his business interests in the surrounding hills, and Rome Goff, who had the large wholesale grocery house in Mena, entrusted the orders and deliveries to his son Norris (also known as "Tuffy"). Ethel once reminisced about these two families: "I didn't know Chet so well," she admitted. "His father owned the Union Bank in Mena. That was my father's bank, and it's been my bank all these years. Mr. Lauck owned a lot of timber land out here, and he would ride out from Mena on horseback, and he stayed with my father and mother. We always had an extra bedroom, and he would stay with us a couple of nights. One time, I must have been four or five years old, I had never seen a white rabbit, and he brought me a white rabbit! I remember that big white rabbit with those pink eyes. To this day, I don't know what ever happened to it, but oh, I just adored that rabbit!"

Ethel attended school in Waters through the eighth grade, at which time she transferred to a boarding school to finish her education. (There were no grades 9 through 12 in the little community.) According to the information at our disposal, Ethel was elected campus beauty queen at least three times, and it is easy to see why.

During her return visits back home, she fell in with a



Although not the best quality, these are the only photos in the NLAS archives showing Ethel with her parents, Dick (left) and Nancy (right) Huddleston.

group of local young people, the ringleader of whom was Mena's favorite clown, Norris Goff. Ethel remembered: "Norris was in the University of Arkansas when I was in the Caddo Valley Academy, a Presbyterian high school over at Norman. It would take my dad all day long to bring me over there and come back. Abner was in the University, and he'd be home in the summer time. Mena was a flourishing railroad town. A whole bunch of us, about three or four pretty girls... maybe eight or ten... would go swimming. We never thought about smoking or drinking. We would go to dances at a local college, and then we'd come back to town. One time, we parked the cars in front of Aunt Jo and Uncle Silas' house in Mena. ["Uncle Silas" was Dick Huddleston's former business partner, S. I. Wood.] Tuffy got out, got the lawn mower, started rolling it around the house at 12:00 or 1:00 a.m., singing 'The Ol' Gray Mare, She Ain't What She Used to Be,' and 'A Bird in a Gilded Cage!' Uncle S. I. was real stern and didn't talk very much. He was a good man, he wasn't a foot-stompin' Baptist, but Aunt Jo said he would lay in there and laugh, and just shake the bed. 'Abner' was always funny, he was always just as witty as he could be! He was older than we were, but he had the car!"

It was obvious that Ethel thought a lot of Tuffy Goff (who, in actuality, was a year younger than she was). She had some further memories of the future Abner Peabody: "We called him 'Tuffy,' because he was little, and he was a football player like you wouldn't believe, he was so fast and so quick. We had been on a date one night - I call it a date, because he was my escort - I rode in the front seat! I had been going to Ouachita College by that time. We had been out, and my

sweetheart, Homer, whom I later married, had been to National Guard camp in Kansas. He was coming back with his platoon, and they were on a train. I was going to meet him at the station, and we were both going to Texarkana. He was going to stay in a hotel, and I was going to be the guest of my house mother. My cousin took me to the station at about 4:30 in the morning. Tuffy wanted to get up and take me to the station. No way would I do that, because I was practically engaged to Homer then! Anyway, I expected Homer to be waiting at the train station, but I got on, and the brakeman said, 'Where to, young lady?' and I said, 'Texarkana.' I sat down, the train took off, and a man behind me said, 'Honey, where'd you say you were going?' and I said 'Texarkana.' He said, 'I hate to tell you this, but you're on a train going north!' The conductor immediately called the other train, and let Homer know, and even called my house mother in Texarkana. I sat in Heavener, Oklahoma at that little old dirty station all day long, until about 5:00 that afternoon, I got a train south. When I went through Mena, I just leaned over, I was so afraid Tuffy would be out someplace and see me, I didn't know what to do! I got kidded about that!" (Faithful *Lum* and *Abner* listeners will recall an episode in which Abner mistakenly boarded the train in Mena and had to hike all the way back to Pine Ridge from Heavener, Oklahoma. That event may or may not have been inspired by Ethel's experience.)

As she mentioned, Ethel ended up marrying the college football star, Homer Graham. His job took them far away from Ethel's beloved Ouachita Mountains for long periods of time, but she did return whenever possible to visit her parents. It was during those visits that she became involved in the next

project Chet Lauck and Tuffy Goff would cook up. She recalled:

"There was a Lions Club luncheon, and they put on this Amos 'n' Andy skit, and my dad was there. In fact, he knew the manager of the old KTHS Hot Springs radio station, and he sat next to him at this banquet. He said to him, and this is just his words, 'You oughta git them boys, they're GOOD!' Sure enough, he invited Chet and Tuffy over there the next Sunday, and when they got over there, there had been two other black-face programs, and they changed theirs to hillbilly right there in the studio! Mrs. Goff [Tuffy's mother] was just as down-to-earth as I am, and she would talk to me and tell me

how it used to be when they were growing up in grade school and high school. She said that even in grade school, Chet and Tuffy would sit around the fire and chew tobacco and spit - or play like they were! They could talk hillbilly, the Negro dialect, Italian... they could do all of it; it was just a hobby with them. So, they changed their act right there in the radio studio, and they started talking about Pine Ridge, and their Jot 'Em Down Store. You know, Abner coming out here all those years as he did, taking my dad's orders then delivering them in the truck [from the Goff Wholesale Company]; he knew a lot, he particularly knew my father, and I'm sure he met a lot of these characters right down in that old store. They had a base for the program, right here in this village. At that time [on their early broadcasts], they talked about Pine Ridge, and Dick, and they were in some kind of quarrel, they weren't speaking, and they had a rope stretched down the middle of the store, and Abner was doing one side and Lum was doing the other. They were into a quarrel about a truckload of canned good they'd bought that'd been in a flood and didn't have any labels on them. And so, they were getting Dick's opinion. You know, it pleased my dad. We had an old Crosley radio, with a horn on it, and people would come - neighbors - and sit on the floor and listen to Lum and Abner, and then on Saturday night, it'd be The Grand Old Opry."

We are not certain just how much of this story is accurate, because the Jot 'Em Down Store was not brought into the *Lum and Abner* broadcasts until sometime in 1933. However, other Mena residents who claimed to remember Chet & Tuffy's first broadcast from KTHS



Ethel and her family on the front porch of their comfortable home in Pine Ridge.

things hung on the back. As you go in the front door, at the right were the shoes: Friedmann-Shelby Shoes, Red Goose Shoes, the rubber boots... My dad knew every customer, the size they would wear and how many he'd sell. From there on, there was snuff and tobacco, and back in the far corner on the right was all of the beans and sugar and patent medicines. You could even buy paregoric - you have to have a prescription to get that now - liniment, and all that kind of stuff. Then on the other side were the piece goods, we call it 'material' now. Everybody sewed, they made their own dresses out here. After we got a car, Dad and I would go to Fort Smith to an old dry goods store and drive that thing back full of rolls of cloth. I'd always have what I'd picked out, and he'd say, 'Now old



Dick Huddleston waits on a customer in his store, probably Pine Ridge postmistress Eddie Williams.



Ethel and daughter Nancy were even immortalized on one of the postcards Dick Huddleston sold in his store!

Sister So-and-so will have her dress out of this.' Maybe it'd be yellow and red. His pattern always sold better than mine! He knew his customers. He was really a merchant, and he never lost his patience with people. My dad had all the patience in the world, he was just so kind. Many times he'd point at his stack of ledgers, and he said, 'Baby, if I could collect all that was owing to me, I could die a rich man.' He did not die a rich man, not in money. He had assets, but he died a beloved man, and one that will always be in the memory of people that knew him, and he never did sent out a dun. We call them statements today. Can you imagine? Somebody owing you, and you never sent out a statement. He had faith enough in people, that he thought they'd pay him if they ever got the money."

Even though Tuffy Goff actually played the role of Huddleston on the air, using his natural speaking voice, the real Huddleston store definitely reaped benefits from being mentioned daily over a national radio network. Here is Ethel again: "My dad and Lum and Abner never had a written contract, and he never got one dime for his name being used on the program. A lot of people think he did. He did get publicity that brought in a lot of business to that store. It was nothing to see 50 cars down here at a time. At one time, Hot

Springs was wide open, it had gambling, and saloons, and those bath houses. There would be carloads of people that would come out here that didn't even know each other. It brought lots of people to the old store. The only contract he had, and this was not written, it was just an understanding, they would never in any way say anything that would be poking fun, or making slurs, like Bob Burns. Burns was always talking about Arkansas people swinging in on a grape vine, which is a black note on Arkansas people. I don't mind saying 'hillbillies,' I don't mean that they're ignorant or anything like that, because I think people who are raised in the mountains are true natives. Today, people are moving out of the north, and they love the south.

"Dick was used in the programs more in the early days. When the program first started, they did it more just for fun, from Hot Springs. Then they got on with Quaker Oats out of Dallas about a year, then they went with Horlick's for several years, and then they were on in Chicago. They wrote their own scripts, and a lot of times, I would stand behind the old stove down there in the store, and jot down things I would hear in a little old notebook - just old original sayings, witty things, and send it to them. I've heard them almost build a program around the things I sent, but not under my name. I didn't get any credit for it. Then, when they moved to Hollywood, they had a script writer [Roz Rogers], and I don't think they used Dick's name as much then as they did in the earlier programs. I do not think the programs then were as witty and original as they were when they were doing their own scripts."

That, of course, is a matter of personal preference, but it is true that the character of Dick Huddleston appeared less frequently as the years went by. One reason for this was practical. Chet and Tuffy often explained that Dick was too intelligent for most of their plots; if Lum and Abner had told him they were planning to open their own bank, or build a rocket ship to Mars, or whatever, Dick would have quickly straightened them out and there would have been no comical story-



Ethel rows her boat ashore to advertise Dick Huddleston's fishing camp and tourist cabins, 1936.



The original Pine Ridge Silver Cornet Band, 1936. Ezra Buzzington is at the far left; Dick Huddleston at right.

line! When the Huddleston character did appear on the show during the 1940s, it was more often than not in scripts that were being “recycled” from 1930s storylines.

The publicity Huddleston and his store were receiving gave the genial storekeeper an idea. The radio show was set in the fictitious town of Pine Ridge, while his store was located in a real-life town called Waters. Why not change the town’s name to fit the radio program, so tourists could visit Pine Ridge, Arkansas, for real?! Waters being unincorporated, the only thing necessary was to change the name of the post office, and this was accomplished on April 26, 1936.

Ethel had clear memories of that day: “The ceremony was at the state capitol. It’s one of the prettiest capitals you’ll ever



Dick Huddleston poses with a later version of the Pine Ridge Band drum set.

see, copied after the one in Washington, D.C. I can’t tell you how many thousand people were there, and of course, the governor and their special publicity agent, and all the dignitaries around Arkansas, and of course, my dad was there. I can’t remember what other Lum and Abner characters were there; the one I do remember was ‘Grandpappy Spears’ [Cling Wilhite]. He’d never been out of Montgomery County, I don’t guess. They had him dressed up in a tuxedo, and completely not rehearsed, they said, ‘How are you today, Grandpap?’ and he said, ‘Just peert as a cat-bird!’ Now, that was an original saying, wasn’t it?

“Even the governor had his script in his hand. I don’t remember anything that was said. Lum and Abner were introduced, and they each one made a talk. They were holding their paper, and their hands were shaking! I teased them about

it later, and they said, ‘It’s a lot harder to speak before an audience where you know a lot of people, than it is to get on the air!’ Their agent came up to my dad, and said, ‘Mr. Huddleston, we have a script written here for you, and we’d like you to look it over and use it.’ Dick said, ‘Do you want me to make a mess of this?’ ‘We certainly do not!’ ‘Well, then, you’d better just let me say it like I know it,’ and he got up there without any script. He had a real good voice, and he talked in the language that people could understand, and he knew what he was talking about. I think I have a right to be proud of him.” (What exists of the actual recording of this ceremony can be heard on Tape #H-35 in the NLAS Tape Library.)

Later in 1936, Dick Huddleston went on tour with a vaudeville act originally known as “Ezra Buzzington and the Pine Ridge Silver Cornet Band.” Ezra Buzzington was an early vaudeville performer, sort of a primitive Spike Jones, and at one time his novelty band included some musicians who would later win fame on their own as the Hoosier Hot Shots. Ethel talked about Dick’s days touring with the band:

“When he got on with this Lum and Abner Band, he was called ‘the Good Will Ambassador of Arkansas.’ He was only with this band for about four or five years. He’d go in the summer months when the fairs were showing around the country, and then in the winter up towards Christmas time, it’d be the big theaters, like in Columbus, Ohio, Cincinnati and Indianapolis. Occasionally, Lum and Abner would appear with them. My dad would go ahead and make out the advertising for the newspapers, and when the show was ready, he’d open the curtains, walk out on the stage, and address what the show was about. He’d do questions and answers, anything the

audience wanted to know. He had a mind like a computer! He knew everything about Arkansas: the biggest watermelons, the biggest peach orchard, the only diamond mine, the largest cotton plantation, rice, forests, mountains, recreation, fishing and hunting - he knew it all - he was an expert! He knew every president by name, and all the vice-presidents, and he only went through the eighth grade. He was a self-educated man.

"When he started going with this show, he said, 'Baby, you know I've never really been out of Arkansas, and especially a show like that.' They had black-face comedians, the straight man, one girl was like Minnie Pearl with one tooth blacked-out, and wore this hat - the show was two hours long, and was actually like an old vaudeville show. It was more publicity for Lum and Abner. The state paid half of my dad's salary, and Lum and Abner paid the other half. He got \$165 a month, with all expenses paid. That would be good back then. I helped my mother, and some local boys helped her with the store."

The Pine Ridge band tours came to an end once World War II reached the United States, and the postwar world brought some tough times for both the *Lum and Abner* show and its real-life counterpart. By now, Ethel and Homer had a daughter, Nancy (born in January 1933), and by the late 1950s they were ready to retire. In 1959, the Grahams returned to Pine Ridge for good, where Dick Huddleston was still keeping his store open, more out of force of habit than anything else, as both local business and tourist business had pretty well dried up by that time. Huddleston passed away in July 1963, and for a while Ethel kept the store going just to have something to do.

It has been related in past issues of the *Journal* how Ralph and Dorothy McClure of Fresno, California, happened across the decaying old store and decided that it deserved a more dignified fate. They bought the business and the Huddleston family home from Ethel in 1969.

Unfortunately, Ethel's husband Homer passed away the very next year, 1970. Ethel was, at the time, still operating the fishing camp and tourist cabins her father had built on the banks of the Ouachita River back in 1936, and she had the following to say about one of the camp's frequent visitors: "Charlie Ball kept coming down; he'd been floating this river for a long time, and two years later we got married. I remem-

ber one time, he said, 'What are your qualifications?' and I said, 'Fun, fishin' and just foolin' around!' I said, 'I'll tell you what I don't do: I don't patch, I don't iron, and I don't shell purple hull peas!'"

Ethel and Charlie Ball continued to make their home on the hillside across the street from the old Huddleston store. When the first NLAS Convention was held in the Pine Ridge fire hall in June 1985, no one in the organization had ever met the legendary Ethel Huddleston Ball, although we had heard her name mentioned often. Imagine our surprise, then, when just before the first meeting of the day, a tiny little lady approached us outside and introduced herself as "Dick's girl, Ethel." "I have some photos here I thought you might like to see," she said, setting a stack of scrapbooks on the hood of a nearby parked car.

Might like to see? Our eyes bugged out like a tromped-on toadfrog as she leafed through page after page of previously-undocumented L&A and Pine Ridge history. The time to begin the first Convention activity was only minutes away, so we hurriedly made an appointment to visit with her during the afternoon lull. That we did, and were all prepared to make copy shots of her collection right there in her living room. But she dropped another bombshell on our already-overloaded senses: "Oh, why don't you just carry those things back to your motel in Mena and go through them

there," she offered. "That way, you can decide what you need to copy and what you don't."

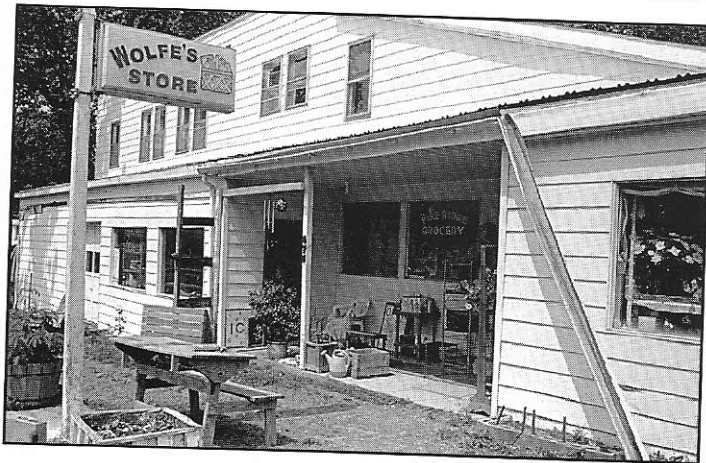
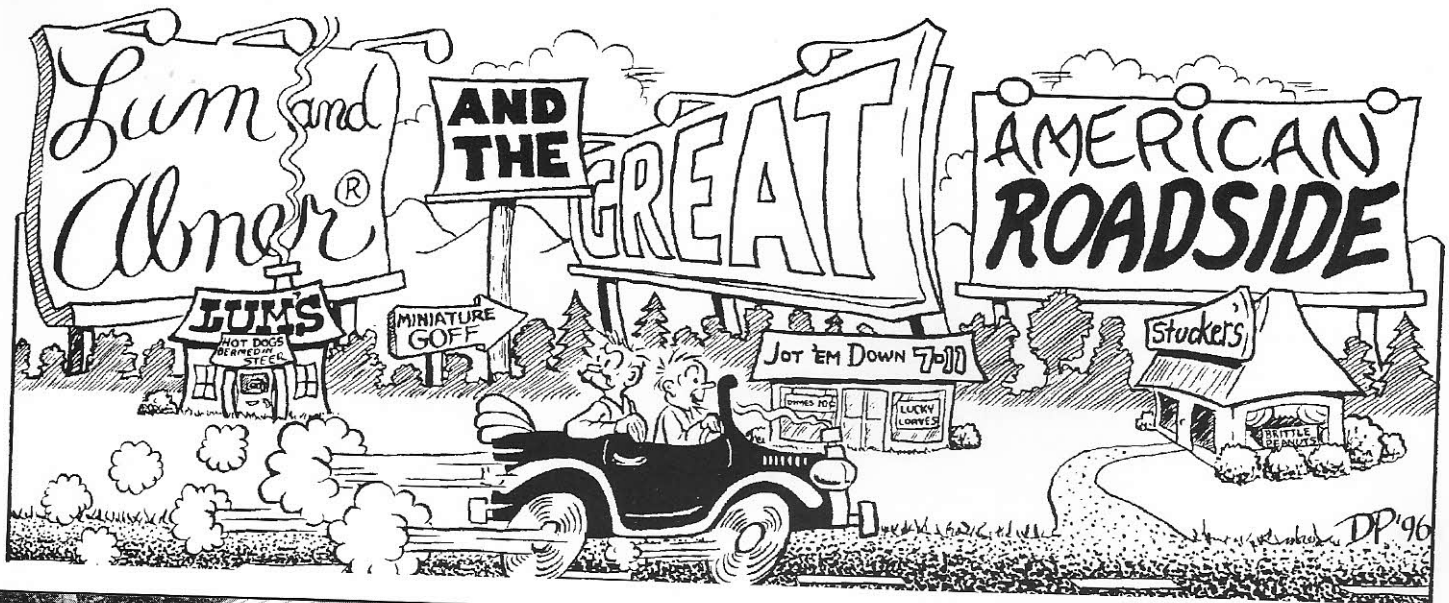
Well, the dazed NLAS Ossifers ended up copying everything in the books, and many of those illustrations have been used in *The Jot 'Em Down Journal* ever since. The next year, 1986, Ethel was one of the recipients of the NLAS's annual Lum & Abner Memorial Award, as well as one of the guest speakers for that year's event. She returned to the Convention several times after it was moved to Mena, and was always happy to talk about her father's long association with Chet and Tuffy. She also sent frequent long letters, all of which are safely archived in the NLAS holdings.

We are truly sorry to have lost our good friend, but are grateful that we got to know her for as many years as we did. Through her generosity to the NLAS, her family's history and legacy will be preserved for many years to come.

- Uncle Donnie Pitchford and Tim Hollis



Postcard advertising Huddleston's fishing camp, which was later operated by Ethel and her husband.



owned by their daughter Helen, who runs it with help from her son.

"The store was named Pine Ridge Grocery by her grandmother, who associated it with the *Lum and Abner* radio show. Helen says a row of pine trees along the ridge also played a role in naming the store.



"The store did a good business while the coal mines were operating in nearby Kempton, Maryland, but things are slow these days at the grocery, which sells beverages, bread, snacks, and an assortment of used merchandise. Helen recalls a time when the store had an ice cream and lunch counter. Many of the locals came to refer to the business as the 'Jot 'Em Down Store,' further associating its 'Pine Ridge' name with the radio show."

This feature has not appeared for the past several issues, but we promised that as new material came in, it would return from time to time. The following report and accompanying photos were submitted by NLAS member Carl Feather of Kingsville, Ohio. He writes:

"The sign by the road says 'Wolfe's Store,' but the words painted on the window hearken back to the 1940s, when this convenience store was the 'Pine Ridge Grocery.'

"The store, located along U.S. Highway 219 between Oakland, Maryland, and the West Virginia state line, was started in 1946 by Ralph and Bessie Wolfe. It is now



As we have said before, keep your eyes open when traveling the back roads of the good old USA. You never know when a remnant of Lum & Abner roadside history will jump out at you. Keep on sendin' 'em in, and we'll keep sharin' 'em!

- Tim Hollis

Lum and Abner® In The News

REPRINTS OF PAST LUM & ABNER ARTICLES

The following rather depressing view of Pine Ridge is one of the very few articles to be published during the "interim" period between Dick Huddleston's death in July 1963 and the restoration of his store by Dorothy and Ralph McClure in 1969. This was the era in which Ethel Huddleston Graham was barely keeping the venerable old mercantile establishment alive, in the days before interest in LUM AND ABNER was revived.

(Reprinted courtesy of the Lum & Abner Museum)

At Pine Ridge, Times Change... But Famous Store Is Still the Same

by BOB LANCASTER

Originally published in the PINE BLUFF (ARKANSAS) COMMERCIAL
Sunday, June 6, 1965

PINE RIDGE — The natives here say there are only about 15 people left, and about 50 dogs. There were also a few harlequin-streaked chickens, perhaps a cross-breed between Rhode Island Reds and Dominecker, scratching around near one of the few remaining houses.

Grandpappy and Aunt Charity Spears aren't around any more; neither are Mose Moots (the barber) or Kalup Weehunt (the blacksmith). But they say Sister Simpson (who must be more than 90 now) is still around, and will apparently live forever.

All that Pine Ridge has left is its past—and that is (and was) only illusory. Much of it is illusory, anyhow.

Pine Ridge was the setting of the *Lum and Abner* radio show—and now its history is intertwined with its myth.

The show was based on fact, all right—and there was doubtless more truth, more contemporary realism, in Abner Peabody's droll, slurping observations on Pine Ridge and the people who inhabited it than anyone imagines.

Lum and Abner got their material from real characters: Grandpappy Spears was really Uncle Cling Wilhite; Sister Simpson was really Mrs. Wilhite. The Jot 'Em Down Store, the place where all the Lum and Abner dialogue was supposedly taking place, was really Dick Huddleston's general store, and was really much the same as they por-

trayed it on the radio: Dick Huddleston was really like the image of him that the two pseudo-hillbillies transcribed to 40 million listeners.

Now they are all gone. Dick Huddleston

died a couple of years ago; Lum (Chester Lauck) is a sales executive for the Continental Oil Company in Houston; Abner (Norris "Tuffy" Goff) is in Hollywood, comfortably relegated to obscurity.

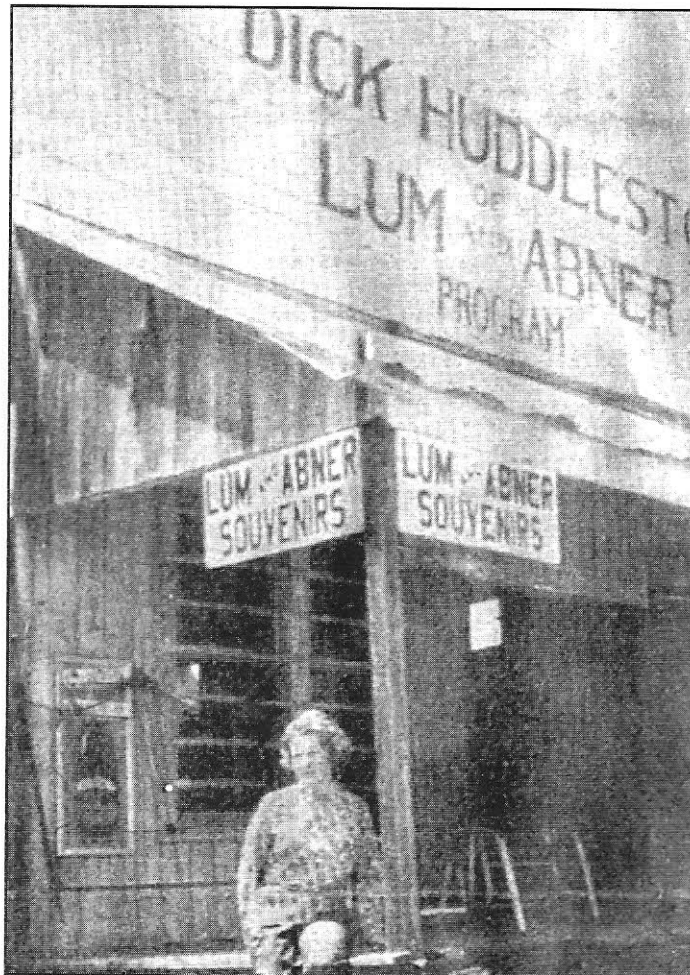
About all that is left here is Dick Huddleston's store, which his daughter has wisely kept in the condition that it was in when the radio show was at its popularity peak in the Thirties.

The blacksmith shop is gone; the barber shop is gone; and the store would be gone too, if it was concerned with selling foodstuffs and cattle feed, hitches and plowshares, print material and overalls, chunks of tobacco and Red Goose shoes, as it was in the Thirties and Forties when Dick Huddleston was running it and it was the only general store between Mount Ida and Mena—a distance of more than 30 miles.

The Pine Ridge exodus began in the Thirties, ironically, just as Pine Ridge's name was beginning to be broadcast from the Sierra Nevadas to the Catskills by the National Broadcasting Company.

Poverty drove the people out of the mountains—away from the haunts they had hewn out of the Ouachita hills; drove them to the fruit fields of California. The Depression was even tough for Dick Huddleston, who was getting all that free national publicity.

Then in World War II, most of the others left; left for the shipyards of the West Coast. (The migratory pat-



tern here, as elsewhere, was westward. The people had come from the East, from England, Scotland, Holland, and knew that what they wanted was not back that way.)

After the war, there just wasn't much left.

The *Lum and Abner* show paralleled, to a great extent, the drift of the times.

Lauck and Goff were two bright young men from Mena who grabbed the attention of the manager of a Hot Springs radio station with an *Amos 'n' Andy* pantomime at a Lions Club luncheon at Mena. That was in the Twenties, the prosperous years.

The radio man took them over to the spa, ran them as amateur talent for a few months for no pay (both, coming from well-to-do families, could afford it), and gradually the act transmuted into an imitation of a typical day's activity at Dick Huddleston's store.

Both boys knew Huddleston. Goff—Abner—hailed his daddy's wholesale groceries to Huddleston's back door; Lauck's father had vast timber holdings and several sawmills in the hills around here, and was a frequent visitor in the Huddleston house. Goff even dated Huddleston's daughter some.

In their act, they changed the name of the store to the Jot 'Em Down Store—a name they arrived at because Huddleston's daughter jotted down the conversation of the old men at the store's potbellied stove and sent it to them.

From her notes, they wrote their scripts.

They even changed the town's name—from Waters to Pine Ridge. Pine Ridge sounded more hillbillyish. Five years later, the name was changed officially.

The Quaker Oats people heard the show at Hot Springs, and contracted the two young men for NBC. A year later, *Lum and Abner* was one of the network's leading radio shows.

Like Pine Ridge, the show degenerated after World War II. Goff had a serious cancer operation, almost died, became an invalid. Television came, and there wasn't any place for such a show as *Lum and Abner*.

In the Fifties, outsiders tried to cash in on the rich, rough glamour of Pine Ridge. A new store was built and named the Jot-M-Down Store. Since it was built, it has changed hands nine times, and the last owners—a couple from Ohio—moved out last year.

Nearly all the land around the town—deserted in the exodus—was taken by the federal government (because nobody could afford to pay \$1 an acre for it). The government now has it preserved as part of the huge Ouachita National Forest.

The farmlands have been amalgamated into ranches—nearly all of them owned in absentia by rich Texans.

The post office has been remodeled.

Only Dick Huddleston's store remains any-

thing like it was in the heyday of Pine Ridge.

His daughter, Mrs. Ethel Graham ("no relation to Billy," she says) has altered the interior of the store only by updating the merchandise. She now sells trivia to tourists. The outside of the store is about like it was back then.

Dick Huddleston's old kerosene pump is still in the back of the store, and his tobacco-plug cutter is on display. The dingy dankness, dark, rank, and somewhat oily, that exists in all very old stores still hangs heavy in the air. His notary public sign is still riveted to the heavy old door. A sign that he had right under the high shelf of top-quality Red Goose shoes still hangs there: "Let us dwell together and love one another."

And on the facade out front is another of his signs: "Not responsible for axidents."

But now souvenir dolls, and colored glass and fancy colored gourds, and trinkets and cheap religious pictures line the old walls. New kerosene lamps are on sale for prices that would have made Dick Huddleston's customers horselaugh. A clean quilt is in a basket and a sign is attached: "25 cents will buy a chance on this beautiful quilt made by the Pine Ridge Home Demonstration Club... Please Help."

Even back in the mountains, folks change.

A Final Word From Ethel

Howdy Everybody:

This is Dick's Gurl Ethel, coming in to set a spell and tell you how things are down here in Pine Ridge, Arkansas.

From the time the *Lum and Abner* program started until it went off the air, I was "Dick's gurl" and my mother was referred to as Dick's "little woman." Lum and Abner and all their lovable characters are gone now, so I guess I'm just about the tail end, although I never really had any part in the program.

We have many new people who have settled in our beautiful hills, but very few of the old settlers are left. I was away for many years, but I always knew I would be coming back, as this is where my roots are.

Some things here in the little village have not changed. A couple of the older houses are left. The tiny post office still stands, although it is no longer used. Dick's old store looks the same on the outside, as does the little church next to the old cemetery. My house on the hilltop, with a view of Grape Vine Mountain, looks down on an old barn that has been here for as long as I can remember. We still don't feel that we have to lock our doors every time we step outside.

(Of course, when I was growing up around here, we didn't have locks, and never thought of locking a door when we went away for the day or night.)

My father Dick Huddleston, as most of you know, was the country merchant here from 1909 until his death in 1963. It was the only store in a radius of ten miles. This area was thickly populated during that era. Everyone had large families. Being an only child, I longed for brothers and sisters. Some of these people were sharecroppers; others, like my father, owned land along the Ouachita River or in the valleys of the hills.

The one little church, the two-room schoolhouse, and Dick's store were the

hub of the community. This was the setting for the *Lum and Abner* program. The memories I have would fill a book. That is why the *Lum and Abner* program is loved even to this day. Most of us had pioneer ancestors who settled in these hills. It was these people Lum and Abner portrayed. Their characters had that wonderful sense of humor, their bickerings, everyday problems, their wit and their funny original way of expressing themselves. I have been in the old store and jotted down some of their one-line expressions and sent them to Lum and Abner. To this day, I use some of them myself. They come natural.

I have tried to give you the time, the place, the way it was before anyone had a radio, so you can picture why Lum and Abner would choose this small village, the Dick Huddleston store, the pioneer people of these hills, for their program and the fictitious "Jot 'Em Down Store." I would like to write more about my father, also my mother, as I remember them and the memories they left with me. They were "Aunt Nan" and "Uncle Dick" to all the younguns, even though they were not related.

Well, I've shore set a spell and I've rambled on, and it's exactly how I talk. What pleases me more than I can express in words is the way the National Lum and Abner Society is working to preserve this bygone day. If I have contributed anything worthwhile to *The Jot 'Em Down Journal*, it fills my heart with happiness.

I think I had better hang up now... and don't forget we are lookin' to see you all down here in Pine Ridge come next June!

- Dick's Gurl, Ethel
(1986)