

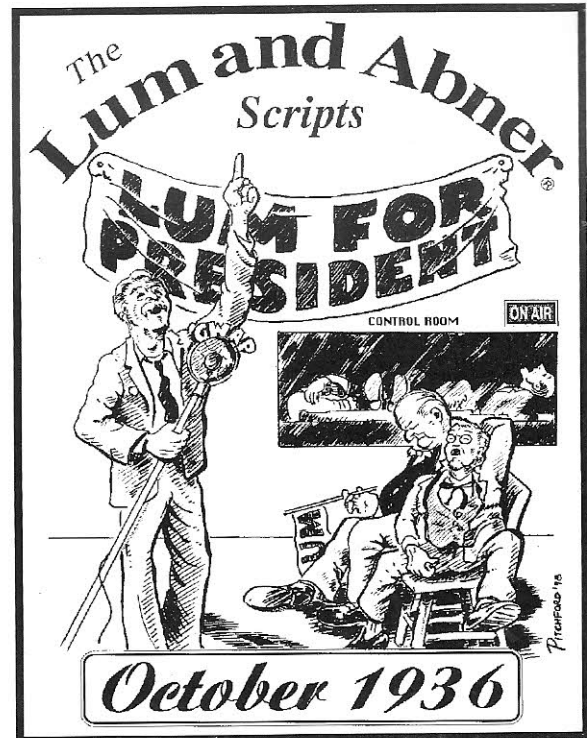
February 1998

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During Lum's presidential campaign, the old fellows study up many different ways to get the candidate's name in the paper, but nothing succeeds like their accidental entrapment in an abandoned silver mine near Pine Ridge. Yes, this is the ORIGINAL rendition of the storyline that was repeated (minus the campaign material) in February 1945. At last we can see how the story was told during its first airing!

*OCTOBER 1936: LUM FOR PRESIDENT* is \$5.00, as are the few copies left of previous volumes, *JUNE 1936: THE MYSTERY OF THE OLD TRUNK* and *JULY 1936: THE GREAT BICYCLE RACE*. Orders should be sent to the NLAS Executive Secretary at 81 Sharon Blvd., Dora, AL 35062.



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# THE JOT 'EM DOWN JOURNAL

FEBRUARY 1998

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**THE NATIONAL  
LUM AND ABNER SOCIETY**

*Zekatif Ossifers*

**PRESIDENT**  
Donnie Pitchford

**VICE-PRESIDENT**  
Sam Brown

**EXECUTIVE SECRETARY**  
Tim Hollis

\*\*\*\*\*

**Cover:** Abner appears to be somewhat bored by Lum's romantic duet with ZaSu Pitts in this publicity shot for their 1942 RKO feature film *The Bashful Bachelor* (this scene does not appear in the movie itself). See page 4 of this issue for information on L&A's much-neglected short subject appearances!

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## *In This Issue:*

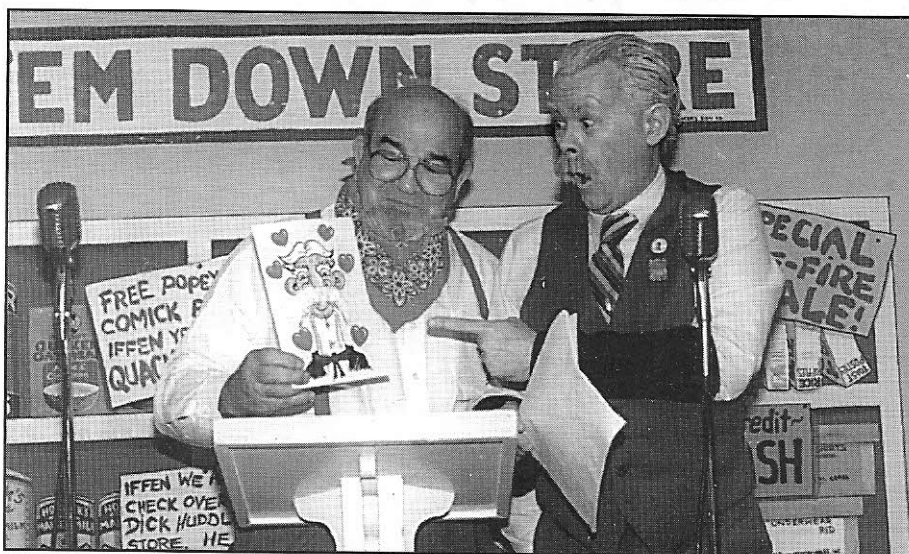
### **Lum & Abner In Hollywood ..... 4**

A new installment of this series, looking at L&A's rarely-seen short subject work.

### **Home On The Range ..... 8**

The story of Chet Lauck's beloved Bar Nothing Ranch, now a Nevada state park.

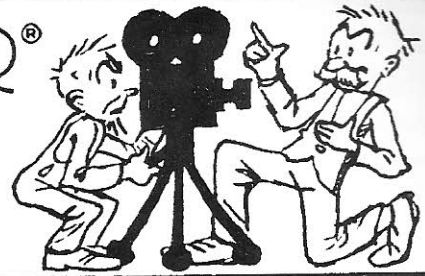
## **"MY FUNNY VALENTINE"**



**IN 1997, NLAS PRESIDENT UNCLE DONNIE PITCHFORD OF CARTHAGE, TX, (RIGHT) AND HIS PASTOR, REV. JOHN MORRISON (LEFT), ACTED AS SUBSTITUTE L&A IN A CHURCH VALENTINE'S DAY BANQUET RECREATION OF THE FAMOUS FEBRUARY 14, 1940, L&A EPSIODE ABOUT LUM'S "COMIC VALENTINE." THEY HAVE BEEN ASKED TO COME UP WITH A SEQUEL FOR THIS YEAR'S BANQUET.**

# LUM and ABNER<sup>®</sup> in HOLLYWOOD

## The Short Subjects



Over the years, *The Jot 'Em Down Journal* has published numerous articles detailing Lum & Abner's well-known seven feature films produced between 1940 and 1955. However, there was always one aspect of their movie career that continued to elude documentation. In several interviews published over the years, Chet "Lum" Lauck indicated that, in addition to their feature film work, the Lum & Abner characters had also appeared in some short subjects.

The WHOLE story of L&A's short subject career is still not certain. The earliest indication of any such goings-on comes from an undated script that was in a collection Lauck donated to the Lum & Abner Museum in Pine Ridge. Its intended use was as newsreel coverage of the opening of the new CBS Studios in Hollywood in 1938. Al Jolson is the star of the short, with comic relief by Eddie Cantor's radio sidekick Parkyakarkus. Chet and Tuffy make only a brief appearance, apparently out of makeup but initially speaking in L&A dialect. The script carries notations on some of their lines, "Second voice," which may mean either their natural speaking voices or that they were supposed to switch over to, say, Cedric and Squire voices. Even the national Al Jolson society has been unable to help us locate a print of this film, which may or may not have ever been completed.

Another script in Chet's collection features the handwritten notation "20th Century Fox" at the top of the first page. The plot involves L&A taking a prize bull to the county fair, and experiencing some difficulty in getting the animal out of the truck. The routine is full of sight gags, such as Abner mistakenly lassoing Lum and dragging him out of the truck instead. Lum finally gets the idea of having Abner remove his shirt so the bull can get a glimpse of his red flannel underwear (was this

production supposed to have been filmed in color?). The bull charges, and L&A finally get him into the desired pen just as a couple of fair officials inform them that the pen has already been reserved for someone else. The script ends with the notation, "Blackout." We have no idea as to whether this was supposed to have been a short subject all its own (it seems too brief for that), or as a comic routine in a longer feature film of some sort. We also do not know whether it was ever committed to film.

There is a similar format in a two-page script from 1940 that is titled "Lum and Abner Receive Invitation From Ted Vernon." Although typed in what was then their standard format of a radio script, it contains stage directions that indicate it was meant for film, not broadcast. We do not know who Ted Vernon was, but the script indicates that there was to be closeup of the invitation, which read: "Ted Vernon requests the honor of your presence at a Barn Dance and get acquainted party at his home, Vernon Oaks, 8 p.m. Saturday, November 9." L&A then get into a discussion of "reading between the lines." "He's jist tryin' to make friends with us, that's what he's up to... But we ain't a goin', I'll tell you that right now," says Lum. "We'll see that nobody else goes too... We'll see everybody in the community and tell em what he's tryin' to do." When Abner says he will tend to that tomorrow, they go into their standard "tomorrow never comes" routine, in which Abner thinks the world is coming to an end. "I ain't got time to be settin' around talkin' about no party then," yells Mr. Peabody. "If the world's comin' to a end tonight, I've got some repentin' to do." Again, as Lum attempts to explain his "Old Eddards Sayin'," the script ends with the "BLACKOUT" notation.

The earliest L&A short subject appearances that are known to actually exist were all released in 1942 (although some of the footage could have been shot earlier). One of these is an installment of *Hedda Hopper's Hollywood*, released by Paramount. As with most of L&A's existing short subject work, their appearance is but one segment of many "behind the scenes in show biz" sequences. Narrator Hopper (whom L&A often referred to as "Heddy Hooper" on their radio show) takes us out to Norris Goff's home, where Tuffy awaits the arrival of his partner. Chet Lauck comes onto the scene with son Chet Jr. in tow, and the youngster is soon paired up with Tuffy's daughter Gretchen. (The Lauck & Goff wives are nowhere to be seen.)

After a brief tour of Tuffy's farm, the two actors travel out to Chet's ranch in Northridge, where Lauck has the opportunity to show off some of the prize race horses he owns in partnership with Don Ameche. (Hopper mentions Lum's Pride, the horse that was to have run in that year's Kentucky Derby.) Chet is obviously quite proud of his four-legged friends, changing from street clothes into a cowboy outfit that would make Roy Rogers proud. Although L&A's close friend Phil Harris later remarked that, unlike Chet, Tuffy Goff never really got



Lauck and Goff visit with Al Jolson at the opening of the new CBS Studios, 1938. This event was supposedly filmed as a movie short subject.



**Chet & Tuffy smile for the camera in their segment of *HEDDA HOPPER'S HOLLYWOOD*, 1942.**

interested in race horses, for purposes of this film Goff feigns intense concentration.

The high point comes when Chet takes one of his horses out onto the track for a test run. Tuffy is to use his stopwatch to time the horse's jaunt, and for several minutes we see Cowboy Chet astride his beauty, galloping at full speed as Tuffy observes. But when Chet gets back to Tuffy's position, it seems that the Goff stopwatch has... er... stopped. This footage was shot silent, but even a casual lip reader can tell that Chet's angry reaction is something a bit stronger than Hopper's voiceover "Wal, bust mah britches."

Although it is difficult, if not impossible, to determine in what order the 1942 short subjects were released, most likely the next one, chronologically speaking, is an episode of Columbia's long-running *Screen Snapshots* series. During this period, these shorts were being hosted and narrated by announcer Don Wilson, and at the beginning of this entry, Wilson appears on-screen to tell us that a big party is underway to celebrate his boss Jack Benny's 10th



**Tuffy Goff discovers that his stopwatch has malfunctioned while he was supposed to be timing Chet's prize racehorse.**

anniversary on radio. After some footage of NBC president Niles Trammell presenting Jack with the master key to the NBC Studios of both New York and Hollywood, we find Chet and Tuffy (in tuxedos) seated at one of the tables. Oddly, even though they are not wearing their old-age makeup, they continue to speak in Lum & Abner's character voices throughout the film. Don Wilson informs them that they will be called upon in a few minutes to say something nice about Jack. "Grannies, you better give us a little time, Don," says Chet as Lum. "We cain't think o' sompin' nice to say 'bout Jack Benny jes' offhand." "No, that'll take time and study," drawls Tuffy in his Abner voice.

Other motion picture and radio celebrities appear on-screen to extend best wishes to Jack, including Charles Laughton and wife Elsa Lanchester, L&A's fellow Arkansas comic Bob Burns, Henry Fonda, Joan Bennett, Ted Lewis, Rudy Vallee, and Sonja Henie. As the ice skating star approaches the podium, we cut back to Chet and Tuffy, still mumbling away in L&A's voices:

**ABNER:** Wisht we was tryin' to think o' sompin' nice to say about HER. It'd be easy. She's so nice and fresh lookin'.

**LUM:** Grannies, she ort to be... she's been on ice fer 20 years.

**ABNER:** Ort to freeze that Benny, then...



**Don Wilson consults with Lauck and Goff during Jack Benny's 10th anniversary party, 1942.**

More celebrities arrive, including Fibber McGee and Molly (who look strangely awkward and ill at ease). Don Wilson then encounters Sunday night co-star Phil Harris, drinking milk. When Wilson explains that NBC has paid for this whole party, including the champagne, Harris changes his mind. "I thought Jack bought all this stuff," says Harris, "and the kind of champagne he'd pay for, I wouldn't pour over lettuce." Irene Rich, Jean (Dr. Christian) Hersholt, Pat O'Brien, Dennis Day, Stu Erwin, June Collyer, Gary Cooper, Herbert Marshall, and Eddie (Rochester) Anderson make brief appearances. Jack cuts the anniversary cake, causing Don Wilson to pout, "Imagine! Cake for dessert! Positive disloyalty, I call it... and I'm going to tell our sponsor!" (J-E-L-L-O, of course!)

Then we return to Chet and Tuffy's table, where L&A's conversation is still going on:

**ABNER:** I doggies, I give up... I don't know nothin' nice about Jack, Lum...

**LUM:** Well, stop worryin' about it... We can jes' make up a bunch of stuff like the rest of the fokes done.

**ABNER:** Well, I'll think of sompin' nice to say about him if I hafta stand ther all night.

The parade of guests continues with Bob Montgomery, Barbara Jo Allen (Vera Vague of the Bob Hope radio show), Hattie McDaniel, Gracie Allen, John Payne, and Edgar Bergen & Charlie McCarthy, whose possibly unrehearsed routine goes over like a lead balloon, causing Charlie to bellow, "WRITERS!!" As the short reaches its close, we return to Chet and Tuffy's table for a final word:

**ABNER:** Lum! I jes' thought of sompin'!

(Half the lights in the room go out)

**LUM:** Too late now, they're turnin' out all the lights. Everbody's gone home.

(The rest of the lights go out, leaving Lauck & Goff in total darkness)

**ABNER:** That's what I thought of. Maybe we better go, too.

The third 1942 short subject for L&A was yet another installment of Columbia's *Screen Snapshots*, this time a more typical entry in the series. While the Jack Benny Anniversary short was unusual in that it stuck with one subject throughout the film, this second *Snapshots* follows the established format of wandering here and there about Hollywood to give various behind-the-scenes glimpses of radio and movie personalities. The L&A segment is saved for last, immediately following a hilarious routine in which Great Gildersleeve Hal Peary has the hiccups, and Walter (Leroy) Tetley and Lillian (Birdie) Randolph try to cure him.

"We've got a date with Lum and Abner," narrator Wilson intones as the camera focuses on a sign outside the RKO Radio Pictures Makeup Department. (How did RKO get into a Columbia short? Who knows!) We discover Chet and Tuffy, this time in full character makeup as well as voice, sitting in their chairs as a makeup artist applies the finishing touches. "I doggies, I don't know why I'm so sleepy this mornin'," yawns Goff. "I got nearly five hours of sleep last night." Lauck agrees with a chuckle, "Yeah, we're goin' to have to find some other work to do, Abner... Grannies, we ain't spendin' but about 18 hours a day over here. Leaves us six hours with nothin' to do but eat and sleep."



**Jinx Falkenburg gives L&A their day's schedule in the RKO makeup department in their Columbia SCREEN SNAPSHOTS short.**



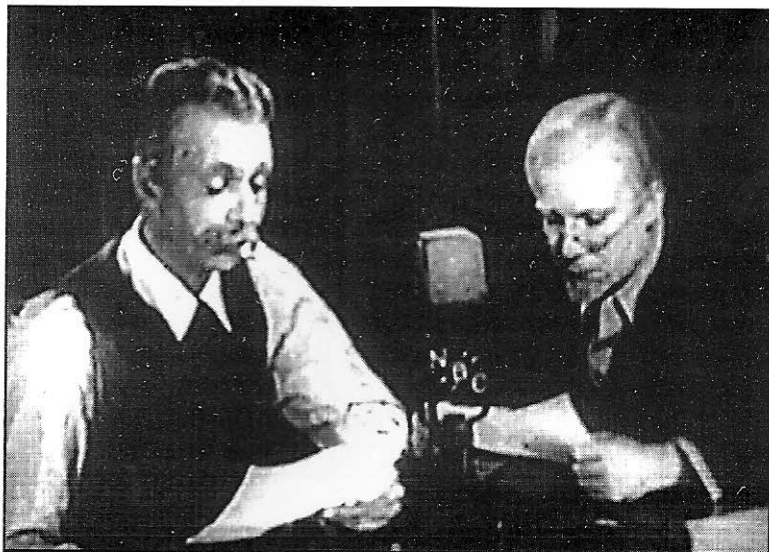
**In the SCREEN SNAPSHOTS appearance, L&A pose for a typical publicity photo.**

Tuffy/Abner is dying for a cup of coffee, but finds he cannot have it because it will spoil his makeup job. Champion athlete-turned-actress Jinx Falkenburg is portraying Lauck & Goff's secretary in this short: "Oh oh, Simon Legree," groans Abner. "Git out yer whip, Simon, whaddaya got lined up fer us today?" Jinx outlines their day's schedule: Due on the movie set in five minutes, a 10:00 appointment with a doctor for insurance purposes, 11:00 interview with Sarah Hamilton of *PHOTOPLAY* magazine, 12:00 to 1:00 appointment with producer Jack Votion ("12 to 1 we don't make that," cracks Lum).

In rapid succession, we see a series of vignettes depicting L&A at work. On a simplified Jot 'Em Down Store set, the director yells "ACTION" as L&A take their places around a checkerboard. Next, they are shown posing for a simulated publicity still, then being interviewed by the magazine reporter who asks them what their real ages are. Narrator Don Wilson takes up the subject: "In their spare time, Lum and Abner have nothing to do but write and broadcast their radio show." They are shown pounding away at a typewriter (although by this time, Roz Rogers was the one turning out their radio scripts) and then broadcasting at an NBC microphone, still in full makeup. (It is true that during production of their movies, Lauck and Goff did have to do their nightly show from a isolated portion of the motion picture studio.)

At the end of the long day, we return to the makeup room, where Chet and Tuffy finally sit unmasked, and speaking in their natural voices. "Boy, am I glad this day is over," mutters Goff. Jinx Falkenburg reenters: "Oh, Chet... Harriet called," she reports. "WHO?" asks Chet. "Harriet," persists Jinx. "Who's he with?" asks a clueless Chet. Exasperated, Jinx explains, "Harriet... YOUR WIFE!!" Embarrassed, Chet instructs Jinx to call Harriet and tell her he will be home early. As Tuffy finally makes ready to dive into his long-awaited cup of coffee, the director comes into the makeup room: "Now look, fellows, in the next scene you..... HEY, who told you to take your makeup off?!" "Well, they said a while ago that was the last scene," Tuffy argues. "That was the last scene in THIS SET," the apoplectic studio executive yells. "But we go and do exteriors tonight! Come on, come on, GET THEIR MAKE-UP BACK ON! YOU'RE HOLDING UP PRODUCTION!" Chet and Tuffy can only stare numbly as the scene fades out.

Our next view comes during the L&A half-hour days, in 1949.



**L&A have to take time out from their moviemaking to broadcast their radio show during Columbia's SCREEN SNAPSHOTS.**

(If there were any more Lum & Abner short subject appearances between 1942 and 1949, they have not yet come to light.) Once again it is part of Columbia's *Screen Snapshots* series, which was beginning to fall into disrepair by this time. In fact, the first several minutes of this installment, titled "Hollywood's Happy Homes," are comprised of *Screen Snapshots* footage stated as having been filmed some 20 years earlier.

L&A's appearance is somewhat similar to their "running gag" status in the Jack Benny Anniversary short of seven years before. After the initial sequence of archival footage, the announcer states: "And now folks, we've asked Chet Lauck and Norris Goff, better known to radio and screen fans as Lum and Abner, to bring their families to the studio today and pose for us. They're posing... but I regret to say that our cameraman has been delayed. I'm sure the Laucks and Goffs won't mind holding their pose just a little longer." Over all of this is a static shot of Chet and Tuffy and their families (minus oldest Lauck daughter Shirley, who was already married and out of the house by that time) standing comically (if a bit stiffly) in an old-fashioned daguerreotype-style position.

The tour goes on to visit other "happy" Hollywood homes, including those of Pat O'Brien, Penny "Blondie" Singleton, and Arthur "Dagwood" Lake (clowning with his children on a miniature merry-go-round). Then we return to the same shot of Chet, Tuffy, and their families: "Oh yes, the Lauck and Goff families," the narrator remembers. "Well, if they've waited this long, surely they won't mind waiting a bit longer. That's it! Hold it, please..."

More celebrity families put in an appearance: Rosemary DeCamp, cowboy hero Charles Sterrett, and Art Linkletter and his large brood. Then it's back to the same shot of the Laucks and Goffs: "This is becoming embarrassing," admits the narrator, "I simply don't know what to say, except to thank Mr. & Mrs. Lauck and Mr. & Mrs. Goff from the bottom of my heart for their good sportsmanship."

While waiting for the cameraman, the narrator introduces us to Dorothy Lamour and her family, Elise Knox, Gordon McRae and company, singer Buddy Clark, and future "Margie" Gale Storm. Then, it's the same shot of the Laucks & Goffs again: "Lum!

Abner! Don't look at me like that, fellows!" pleads the narrator. "Suppose you DO have to wait a little while... so what? You're philosophers, remember? It says so in all your publicity!"

Comedian Walter O'Keefe of the *Double or Nothing* radio show is next, vainly trying to get a laugh out of his two sons. Then we meet Ed "Archie" Gardner of *Duffy's Tavern*, and George Burns, who with son Ronnie is picking frozen oranges from his private orchard. "Gosh, the mention of frozen things reminds me of Lum and Abner," the narrator mutters apologetically as we return to the same shot once again. "Oh say, fellows, the cameraman just arrived! But what do you think... he forgot his camera! So long, folks!" The scene fades out with the two families still holding their pose.

It is highly likely that this represented L&A's final appearance in a Hollywood short subject. The radio show's popularity was on the decline, and even its eventual return to a daily 15-minute format in 1953 failed to erase the damage done by television and Norris Goff's health setbacks. Even their final feature film, the ill-fated *Lum and Abner Abroad*, was not a Hollywood production, but produced in Yugoslavia.

For the most part, the short subjects discussed here are not publicly available. The *Hedda Hopper's Hollywood* film turns up occasionally on the American Movie Classics channel, but the Columbia productions remain tightly under control by that company. In fact, the NLAS would not even have archival copies of them had it not been for the courtesy of Chet Lauck Jr., who allowed us to show his father's personal prints of them at our 1997 convention. Because we were probably tempting fate by even doing that, we do not plan to repeat the showing! But at any rate, these brief film appearances give us yet another tantalizing look at a side of the Lum & Abner phenomenon that is really not documented anywhere else, and for that alone we can be grateful.

- Tim Hollis



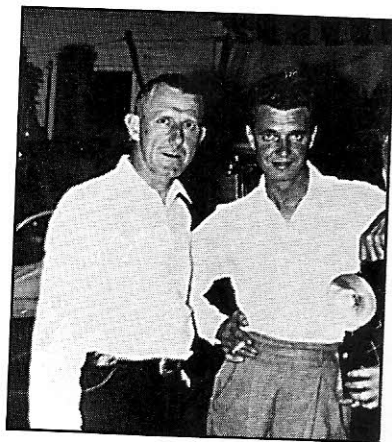
**Chet & Tuffy (rear), along with Elizabeth, Gretchen, & Gary Goff and Nancy, Chet Jr., and Harriet Lauck, await the photographer in their 1949 SCREEN SNAPSHOTS appearance.**

# HOME ON THE RANGE

## THE STORY OF CHET LAUCK'S BAR NOTHING RANCH

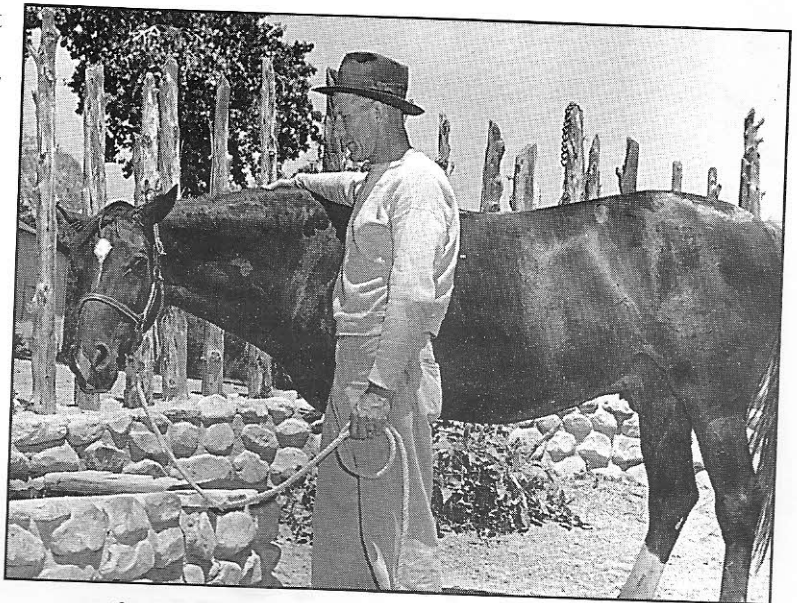
In many ways, the business side of radio was no different than any other line of work. No matter how much fun it was to write and/or perform in a show as entertaining as *Lum and Abner*, the people involved still needed a life outside their broadcast studios. Chet Lauck and Norris Goff each had numerous outside interests that had nothing to do with Lum and Abner and all their friends down in Pine Ridge. In Chet's case, one of his main passions was raising race horses; running a close second was his sprawling ranch located near Las Vegas at Blue Diamond, Nevada. The story of Chet Lauck's ranch is an interesting one, and shows just how different a human being can be from the acting role with which they are so closely identified.

The history of the ranch stretches back into the days of the Old West, before such a thing as radio had ever been thought of. Records show that the property that eventually became Chet Lauck's was inhabited as far back as 1847, when the area was a campsite on the Old Mormon Trail. To this day, some structures dating back to the 1850s still stand on the ranch. Its entrance into modern history came in 1876, when it was first developed as a true ranch by one James B. Wilson. After Wilson's death in 1906, the ranch was operated by his adopted sons, but they eventually encountered financial reverses and were unable to pay the mortgage.



Paul Warner & Chet Lauck,  
circa 1940.

To the rescue in 1929 came Willard George, a prominent Los Angeles furrier. He paid off the mortgage, and as part of the deal allowed the Wilson descendants to continue living and working on the ranch. They would remain there under the next several owners, in fact. Willard George used the ranch as a place to raise chinchillas for his fur trade, and also continued its already-existing cattle oper-



Paul Warner after he became foreman of Chet's  
Bar Nothing Ranch.

ation. It is said that he was the first "absentee" landowner of the property.

Our old friend Chet Lauck was the next person to come into the picture, but just how all of that came about is still vaguely uncertain. His association with what was then known as Sandstone Ranch was somehow connected with a man by the name of Paul Warner, who ran a nightclub in nearby Las Vegas. Apparently Chet and Warner met sometime not long after the *Lum and Abner* program made its big move from Chicago to Hollywood in January 1938. By the early 1940s, L&A were dropping references to Warner into their scripts: When Lum complained to Abner that all they were doing was robbing Peter to pay Paul, Abner demanded to know "What do we owe Paul Warner so much money fer?" In another episode, Lum went into a (probably ad-libbed) soliloquy regarding his frequent fishing trips with Warner. "I think Paul jes' gets so mad 'cause he don't catch no fish," reported Lum, "that he jes' thinks he can jump into the water and ketch 'em."

It seems that Paul Warner introduced Chet to the wonders of





**Chet makes like Caleb Weehunt in the Bar Nothing Ranch blacksmith shop; son Chet Jr. and daughter Shirley look a bit dubious.**

Willard George's Sandstone Ranch, because by the time the United States entered World War II Chet was spending quite a bit of time at the site. In a lengthy NLAS interview before her death, Chet's wife Harriet recalled the fright she received one night in January 1942. Chet had flown to the ranch in a private plane, leaving Harriet at home in Los Angeles, when she received a phone call asking her if she had heard about the plane crash on the property. As more and more calls came in, she was positive that her husband had been involved in some fatal accident, but when he reached Nevada he was able to call her and straighten things out. It was not his plane that had crashed into a mountainside on the ranch, but the plane carrying actress Carole Lombard, who was on a war bonds tour. Lombard and her equally famous husband Clark Gable were close friends of the Lauck and Goff families, and according to Harriet Lauck it was Chet who had the grim task of driving Gable to the crash site. Of course, we all know that the bodies on the plane were burned beyond recognition, but Harriet reported that for many years after that, when the sun reached a certain point during the day, inhabitants of the ranch could still see the sunlight reflecting off the plane's wreckage, which was left as it was found.

At this time, Chet still had no ownership or financial interest in the property, but that would change in 1944. In that year, Lauck officially leased the property from Willard George, with the option of purchasing the ranch in four years. One of Chet's first acts was to change the name of the operation to the Bar Nothing Ranch, a name it would hold for the next 11 years.

With Paul Warner as his ranch foreman, Chet immediately set about making improvements on the site. One of his first projects was to have a reservoir constructed to use for irrigation and recreation. Covering approximately three acres, the reservoir was named Lake Harriet in honor of Mrs. Lauck. She recalled, "When we first got the ranch, some of Willard

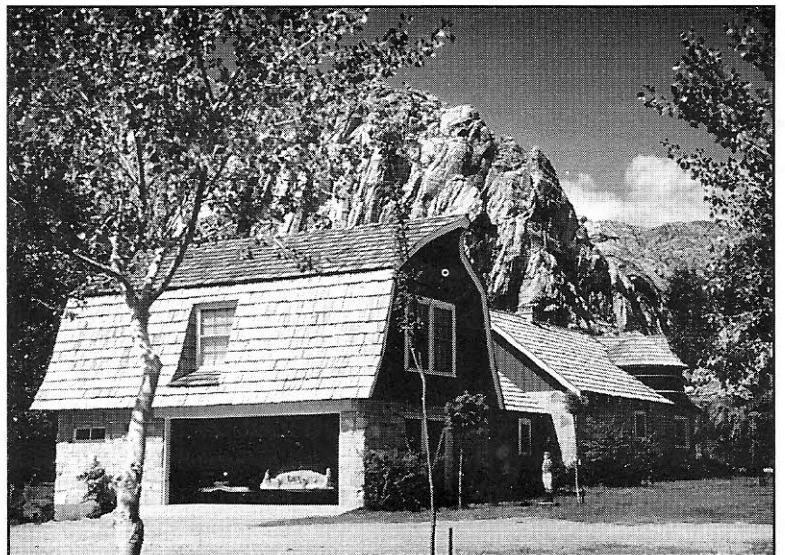
George's chinchillas were still there, but they just looked like horrible old rats to me!"

Harriet had fonder memories of other aspects of the ranch: "I remember there was a lake behind the foreman's house. It was full of carp, but they looked like goldfish, and there was a certain time of day when all the carp would come to the surface, and the whole lake looked as if it were made of gold!"

"One day, we were sitting around in the big room, talking, when all of a sudden it got dark. It kept getting darker and darker, even though it was the middle of the afternoon. We couldn't figure out what was happening, but then it lifted and got light again, and everything outside was covered with snow! A snow cloud had set down right on top of us."

When the four-year option came around in 1948, Lauck took advantage of the opportunity and purchased the Bar Nothing Ranch for his own. The Lauck family undertook their biggest project yet, the construction of a new ranch house. This was an endeavor of gigantic proportions, but most of the work was done by Paul Warner, who handled the wiring, plumbing, and much carpentry work, and Buster Wilson, one of the James B. Wilson descendants who still lived on the property. The whole house was based on a drawing by Chet, who (as you may recall from past issues of the *Journal*) had aspirations of being a commercial artist before he entered the world of radio. Harriet's expertise was interior decorating, and she brought her own talents to the house's physical appearance. Harriet later reported, "The only outside help we had were a man and his son who came out to build the cabinets. The interesting thing was that they were ship builders, and they built our kitchen cabinets as if they were on a ship, with a ledge along the front so the dishes wouldn't slide off in rough seas. Right there in the middle of the desert!"

Another change the Laucks made was to have the wooden fences painted white, with red tops on the posts. Why red and



**The House That Chet Built: The Laucks remained proud of this beautiful residence for the rest of their lives.**



**Chet Lauck Jr. would be tall in the saddle, if the horse were wearing one.**

white? Because those were the colors of the racing stables Chet owned in partnership with his pal Don Ameche! The Lauck & Ameche race horses stayed in Los Angeles, closer to the famous racetracks there, but the livestock at the ranch primarily consisted of large herds of Hereford cattle. In a 1975 letter, Chet elaborated on the success of his cattle operation:

“The grazing lease that went with the ranch would carry about 2500 cattle. You wouldn’t think to look at it that that many could survive with what grass you see in driving over the ranch. But I have sold 1000-pound steers off the range that had never been given any supplementary food whatsoever. Apparently there is a lot of nutrition in that desert grass.”

But as with any rancher, there were problems as well. “It would have been a highly successful ranching operation,” Chet continued in 1975, “but the cattle rustlers kept pretty busy thinning them out for me. They didn’t drive them off in herds like in the Western movies, but since it was not fenced they would drive out in a pickup truck, shoot a steer, and take off. Sometimes they would dress them out on the spot. In one year, by actual count, they had stolen over 400 head.”

The Laucks entertained many of their friends at the ranch, and it seemed that everyone who came to visit wanted to go into nearby Las Vegas to see the sights. (Chet’s brother, Dudley Lauck, owned a drug store and gift shop at the Desert Inn.) Mrs. Lauck said that the only road into town was a gravel one, but that wasn’t as much of a problem as the lack of a telephone at the ranch! “If you decided to stay late for dinner or to spend the night in town, you couldn’t call out to the ranch and tell them. You had to drive all the way out and then all the way back into town!” The Laucks’ oldest daughter, Shirley, added that “It was so dusty that if you were going in for a show or dinner, you had to shower after you got to Las

Vegas!”

For about three years, Chet operated a boys’ camp at the ranch. Using some old Army barracks he had purchased and moved in as housing, Chet would allow the boys to work on the roundup, the branding of the cattle, and all other such daily activities of operating a ranch. Even when the boys’ camp was no longer in operation, the Army barracks remained, used for storage. They eventually burned as the result of a fire started by a hobo who had taken up residence in one of them.

When *Lum and Abner* ended its period as a weekly half-hour show in April 1950, the show was off the air for the next three years. This may not have been so good for the program, but this hiatus did give Chet and family more time to spend at the Bar Nothing. One incident that took place around that time very nearly spelled the end of *Lum and Abner* itself. The *NEVADAN* newspaper told the story in a 1984 article:

“On a spring morning in 1951, Lauck arose early to cook pancakes for some overnight guests. However, the butane stove somehow had been left on overnight and quite a bit of the gas had seeped out and collected underneath. Unaware, Lauck lit a fire under the coffee pot and turned to reach for a utensil. Just as he did, a powerful explosion sent the heavy iron door of the oven flying some 60 feet, shattering windows at the other end of the house. The blast also blew out the wall behind the stove, bent water pipes at 90-degree angles, and shattered Harriet Lauck’s \$5000 collection of Meisenware china on display in an open-face cupboard in the adjacent living room. Later, the insurance adjustor wrote: ‘Had not Mr. Lauck stepped from in front of the stove, he most probably would have been severely injured or killed.’ But except for a scraped shin, Chet suffered no injuries.”

Of course, in February 1953 *Lum and Abner* returned to the air for a final series of 15-minute shows. The first run ended in May 1953, then a second batch began airing that fall. When the show



**The Laucks go out for a spin in the ranch’s jeep; Harriet & Chet in the front seat, Shirley, Nancy, and Chet Jr. holding down the back.**



**Chet & Harriet rustle up some grub in the Bar Nothing ranch house kitchen.**

finally ended for good in 1954, Lauck and Goff could both see that it was time to move on to other things. Tuffy retired to his California farm, and Chet took a position with the Continental Oil Co. in Houston, Texas. This career move prompted the Laucks to sell their beloved Bar Nothing Ranch.

The purchaser of the ranch was Vera Krupp, wife of German munitions industrialist Alfred Krupp. She changed the name of the property to Spring Mountain Ranch, and set about making other alterations as well. Even though no one denied that Krupp had every right to do as she pleased with her property, in later years Chet and Harriet Lauck could barely conceal their resentment and contempt for the carelessness with which Krupp treated their well-planned project.

“Vera didn’t appreciate what we left for her,” grumbled Chet in an interview late in life. “She just insisted we leave it furnished, and reluctantly I did. We had it completely furnished in pine furniture by Rennick in Beverly Hills. And then she replaced it all with some French furniture, which must have looked completely out of place in a ranch house!!”



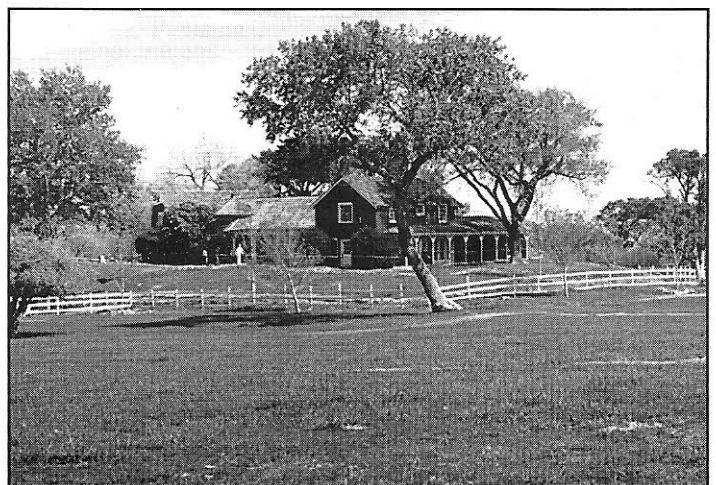
**Chet’s ranch as it appears today, preserved as Nevada’s Spring Mountain Ranch State Park.**

After 12 years Krupp tired of the ranch, and in 1967 sold the property to none other than Howard Hughes. The reclusive Hughes never lived there, though, primarily keeping it as a residence for Hughes Tool Company president Robert Maheu. When Maheu was relieved of his position in 1969, the ranch was left basically uninhabited, and many of the artifacts on the property mysteriously grew legs and walked away. Things looked pretty bleak when, in 1972, a couple of real estate developers purchased the ranch with the intent of turning it into a residential subdivision. Public protest fortunately caused this proposal to be withdrawn, and instead the ranch was sold to the Nevada State Park department for \$3.25 million in 1974.

Since that time, the ranch has operated as Spring Mountain Ranch State Park. Much work and research has been done to restore the Laucks’ ranch house to as close an approximation as possible of its original appearance. The Laucks themselves revisited the property in June 1978, while returning home from the funeral of Norris Goff in California. Chet and Harriet closely examined the current status of their former home, making valuable observations and suggestions that helped the staff with their ongoing restoration work.

When the NLAS interviewed Harriet Lauck in 1987, she still spoke lovingly of their days at the Bar Nothing, and produced a photo collection that photographer, occasional *Lum and Abner* actor, and family friend Jerry Hausner had put together. The rest of the Lauck family has also continued to stay in contact with the park, and it looks like the property is at last in safe hands. If any NLAS members happen to be vacationing in the Las Vegas area, we encourage all of you to stop in at Spring Mountain Ranch State Park and observe what the Laucks hath wrought. You will definitely agree that there was more to Chet Lauck than the bumbling old storekeeper, Lum Edwards of Pine Ridge!

- Tim Hollis



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