

October 1998

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MOM??

In our August issue, we let Cedric typeset the ad for the NLAS Convention videos, and as usual young Mr. Weehunt messed up. The price for each tape is **\$9.95**, NOT \$19.95 as printed. Years 1985 through 1991 are available for **\$9.95** each. I grannies, that takes keer of THAT!

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VISIT

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35062.

THE JOT 'EM DOWN JOURNAL

October 1998

**THE NATIONAL
LUM AND ABNER SOCIETY**

Zekatif Ossifers

PRESIDENT
Donnie Pitchford

VICE-PRESIDENT
Sam Brown

EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
Tim Hollis

Cover: This wonderful portrait of Lum and Abner was issued by CBS in 1948 to promote the debut of their new weekly half-hour show. This original of that photo was donated to the NLAS Archives in 1987 by former CBS staff photographer Ted Allan.

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NEW TAPE LIBRARY RELEASES!

After MANY years, we finally have some NEW material ready to be released into the NLAS Tape Library. In observance of the 50th anniversary of L&A's weekly 30-minute show, we now have available the tapes in our "T" (for "thirty minute") series. These tapes contain many of the half-hour shows not previously available from the NLAS, and totally replace former tapes #240 to #248, which will no longer be available. If you already have a Tape Catalog, send a self-addressed stamped envelope to get the new pages; a new catalog is \$3.00. Send to NLAS, 81 Sharon Blvd, Dora, AL 35062.

Lum AND Abner IN AN ABANDONED QUANDARY

This "short story" adaptation of a 1937 L&A storyline was published in the February 1938 issue of RADIO MIRROR. (There may have been an earlier installment in the January 1938 issue, but we do not have a copy of it in our archives.) Although Lauck and Goff are credited as the authors of this tale, their role in its creation was more than likely confined to the fact that they wrote the original scripts upon which it was based. Betraying its "ghost written" status is the fact that it consistently refers to Grandpappy "Sears" (I doggies, wher's Roebuck?), and the authors' names are listed as "Charles" Lauck and Norris Goff. Those flaws aside, it is an excellent example of how the L&A radio storylines could have been adapted into novel form. (The accompanying original illustration, credited to one Charles Dye, is also worth noting for its accurate portrayal of the characters.)

A ghost can do a lot of things— rattle chains where there aren't any chains to rattle, ooze through

keyholes, moan sadly at midnight, and fly through the air with the greatest of ease— but it can't restore a man's memory to him once he has lost it. Grandpappy Sears and Abner Peabody were willing to take oath in a court of law on that point, after seeing what a ghost did— or rather didn't do— to Lum Edwards.

Despairing of restoring Lum's wandering memory to its rightful owner by any other means, they'd tried dressing Grandpappy up in a white sheet and scaring Lum into a faint. The best medical authorities to the contrary, a severe shock doesn't bring back a wandering memory. Anyway, it didn't with Lum. When he came to, he was more addled than ever. Ghosts had managed to get themselves mixed up in his brain with the gold he was convinced he'd buried somewhere, and the result, when it came out of Lum's mouth in the form of conversation, was something awful.

Abner, sitting with Grandpappy in Pine Ridge's forum, the Jot 'Em Down Store, a couple of days after the ghost experiment, was downhearted about the whole affair.

"If only Evalener hadn't married Spud," he complained, "all this'd never a' happened in the first place. Dad-blame Evalener anyway! Seems like she might a' known Lum couldn't stand seein' his

best girl marry another feller... Never thought, though," Abner added in all fairness, "it'd make him lose his memory and go traipsin' around the country huntin' fer gold and promisin' to marry that Miss Katherine Colvert."

"Does he think them ghosts are a-comin' back?" Grandpappy inquired.

"Oh, he knows they air," Abner said, with a disgusted jerk of his chin whiskers. "Had him over for supper last night and I 'clare I thought he never was goin' home.

"Wouldn't be so bad," Abner sighed, "if we'd only knocked all that foolishness 'bout Katherine Colvert and the buried gold out'n his head. Still claims he's got a couple million dollars in gold from the Old Spanish mine buried but he can't remember where. And still keeps insistin' he's goin' ahead and marry that Colvert woman next Friday."

"Abner, he don't care a thing in the world about her," Grandpappy said emphatically. "We just got to figger out some way pf gettin' his memory back 'fore that weddin', so's he'll know he never asked her to marry him!"

Having said all this with great decision, Grandpappy settled back comfortably into his chair and gradually slipped into a light doze.

He had begun to snore when the telephone rang. He opened one eye and watched Abner answer it.

"Hello— Jot 'Em Down Store! Who? The chief of police? Just a minit." He turned, holding the receiver out to Grandpappy. "Call for the chief of police."

Grandpappy put his hands on the arms of the chair and hoisted himself up, his eyes shining with anticipation.

"Well, well," he said, "first time I've had a call in a month... Hello? Chief o' p'leece Sears speakin'. Yes mom? Who?



Oh, yeah, yeah, what can I do for you?... Mom?... Well whyn't you tell him to get out?... Oh, all right, Mamie, I'll be right over."

He hung up and turned to Abner.

"That was Mamie Phillips, Abner. Says Lum's over there with a pick and shovel and's a-diggin' up her whole front yard!"

Abner was sizzling when Grandpappy returned half an hour later with Lum.

"Now see here, Lum Edwards," he yelled, "you got to quit tryin' to dig up the whole town lookin' for that gold. There ain't no gold, an' you know it!"

Lum, however, far from being subdued, was angry on his own account. "Well," he retorted, "if you'd try to help me think where I buried the gold instid o' settin' around here tryin' to keep me from lookin' fer it, I'da had it found by this time!"

"How can I help you when I keep tellin' you there ain't no gold?"

"There is so! I know 'cause I dreamt I found two sacks under a chimbley last night!"

Abner's answer cannot be written down. Perhaps it will be enough to say that it partly resembled the hiss of a disgusted goose, partly the bellow of an enraged water buffalo, and partly the sound of surf on a rocky coast. He might have undertaken the difficult task of amplifying on this expression of his feelings, but at that moment the screen door slammed open and Cedric Weehunt rushed in.

"Did you find it, Cedric?" Lum asked.

"Yes mom... er, never found no gold but I found another chimbley."

"Whereabouts?"

"Over there to the Lunsford place."

Lum rose and shuffled toward his pick and shovel, the fire of ambition in his eye. Then he stopped and muttered, "Got to make a phone call first."

He turned the crank and spoke into the mouthpiece. "Hello, Addie, get me Parker Pitts, will you?... Hello, who is this? Well, this is Lum Edwards, Park. Yeah. I want you to do a little work on the chimbley over there at my place... Why, it's leanin' over to one side, sorta. Looks like it's about ready to fall any minit... I don't know, I think maybe somebody's been sorta diggin' under it, seems like. Yeah, all right, goodbye."

The week slogged peacefully on its way, as weeks have a habit of doing in

Pine Ridge. Lum continued to dig, until his hands were blistered and sore. Abner began to hope that Lum would make such a spectacle of himself that when Friday came Katherine Colvert would refuse to marry him.

On Wednesday afternoon Lum walked into the Jot 'Em Down Store, the picture of utter weariness and dejection, and slumped down in the chair in front of his desk. His jeans were gray with dust, and his whiskers lank and stringy with sweat. He looked around at Abner, Grandpap, Dick Huddleston, and Cedric.

"I grannies," Lum sighed, "looks like I have the hardest luck of anybody I ever seen in my life."

Abner looked at the beaten man with a sympathy he hadn't felt for days— sympathy, plus a sudden hope that Lum was going to regain his reason. "It ain't hard luck, Lum," he consoled him. "You jist never had no gold buried to start with."

Lum shook his head sadly. "Ain't no good for you to say that, Abner. I did. I know I did."

"Stop talkin' foolishness," Abner snapped. "If you'd had any gold, wouldn't you a found it by now?"

"That's jist it. I've found one sack of it, but I can't find t'other."

"HUH?"

"Over there under the chimbley on the old Witherspoon place. Jist like I dreamed it. But I've dug and dug that ground fer twenty feet in ever' direction but I'll be dad blamed if I can find t'other one."

The news that Lum, amnesia and all, had found one of his sacks of gold caused an even greater sensation in Pine Ridge than had his first disappearance. The party line was so busy all day long that in order to make a telephone call you had to hang on and listen until the people using it were through— not that anybody minded doing that. A reporter from the county seat came down and wrote a story that appeared on the front page of his paper and started the Pine Ridge gold rush. By Friday morning the Jot 'Em Down Store was completely cleaned out of picks and shovels and every front yard in town looked like a battle-field.

The wedding was set for Friday evening at six o'clock, in the church.

Six o'clock came, and so did most of Pine Ridge. All except Lum Edwards.

The minister was waiting, the guests were waiting, even the bride was waiting— and not looking very happy about it, either— but the groom was late.

He finally came down the street at a slow gallop, grabbing his black hat with one hand and holding his collar on with the other.

"I had an awful time getting dressed," he explained breathlessly. "Never did get the collar fastened."

Sister Simpson took her seat at the organ, and after a preliminary wheeze or two the strains of "Lohengrin" filled the church.

From the sidelines Grandpappy and Cedric watched Lum start down the aisle, leaning on Abner's arm and looking a little like a condemned man being led to the scaffold. After them came Katherine Colvert, splendid in a white veil and orange blossoms, escorted by her father.

"Hey," Grandpappy yelled suddenly, "what's happenin'?"

Lum, standing with Abner at the altar, had begun to act mighty funny. He was looking back down the aisle at Katherine Colvert bearing down on him like a transcontinental bus under full power, and he was tugging at Abner's arm. Then he began to look wildly around the church.

"What's goin' on around here?" he asked weakly.

"Why, it's your weddin', Lum," Abner assured him.

"Yeah, I know that, but *where's Evalener?*"

"Oh that all happened a month ago. You're marryin Miss Katherine Colvert, don't you remember?"

But Lum obviously did not remember. His head was jerking wildly from side to side and his eyes looked like those of a wild horse. "Sompin's happenin' around here," he mumbled. "I'm all mixed up... I... I... never wanted to marry no Miss Katherine Colvert."

"I doggies," Abner shouted suddenly, "he's gettin' his memory back! He thinks this is last month and this is Evalener's wedding!... Hey! Hey, somebody, help me grab him!"

For Lum was meeting the situation in a typical Lum fashion. He'd regained his memory, but the strain was too much for him.

Once more, Lum had fainted.

1940: A SIGN OF THINGS TO COME

This issue is primarily concerned with the 50th anniversary of the advent of the ill-fated weekly half-hour version of *Lum and Abner*; however, for the sake of accuracy, there is another part of the story that should be told as background information.

What has never previously been documented in any study of L&A history is that their first attempt to switch to a 30-minute format actually occurred in 1940. (Actually, one could even argue that they first worked in a half hour show in 1932, when they broadcast their weekly Friday Night Sociable for the Ford Motor Co. However, their storylines remained 15 minutes daily on Monday through Thursday, and the Sociable was definitely considered to be a separate variety show entity.)

Here is what had been going on up to that point: On March 29, 1940, *Lum and Abner* had left the CBS airwaves in order that Lauck and Goff could devote their full energy to the filming of their first feature film for RKO, *DREAMING OUT LOUD*. Filming began in April, and continued into either late May or early June (accounts vary). At any rate, once the picture was "in the can," Chet and Tuffy apparently began considering the business of how to revive their radio broadcasts.

On July 29, 1940, the pair recorded a pilot for a new type of L&A series. While this disk does exist in the NLAS archives, it has never been made available to the public for the simple reason that the sound quality is absolutely horrible. Either the disk was made from inferior materials to begin with (since it was not intended for broadcast, but only as a sales tool, this is a distinct possibility), or it was played so many times that the grooves are literally worn out. The beginning is fairly listenable, but as it goes along the sound gets worse and worse until by the end it is nearly impossible to even understand what is being said. Regardless of its flaws in this regard, the very fact that it was attempted at all makes it an important relic of a crucial period in L&A's careers.

The recording opens with organist Sybil Chism playing the familiar rendition of *Eleanor* from the recently-discontinued series of Postum shows, after which announcer Lou Crosby returns to the microphone for this intriguing bit of information:

"Howdy, everybody, this is Lou Crosby speaking. This is the spot where you would ordinarily hear the sponsor's identification and a talk about their product. For over ten years [It had actually been just a little over nine] Lum and Abner have been heard over the networks in 15-minute episodes dealing with the interesting life in Pine Ridge. For years, the public has demanded that 15 minutes was not enough; why couldn't we hear the old fellows for 30 minutes? Well, naturally Lum and Abner were reluctant to discard a formula that had been successful for so long a time. But, as costs became higher, desirable 15-minute slots on the air became more scarce. They decided the time was right to make a change. This 30-minute recording is merely a suggestion as to how these well-established characters are adaptable to a one-time-a-week program. These programs can be complete within themselves, or can be episodic, carrying a continuity from week to week. The lives of Lum and Abner and their friends in Pine Ridge can be made more inter-

esting than ever with this new treatment: *Lum and Abner* in a half-hour show. And now, for today's story..."

Unlike the 30-minute *Lum and Abner* that eventually premiered eight years and a world war away, this first attempt is basically two 15-minute shows put together. L&A are operating a weekly newspaper in connection with their Jot 'Em Down Store, and as the program opens we find Lum confounding Abner with the bombshell that he has just hired a woman reporter for the paper. Abner gets even more apoplectic when he learns that their new reporter is none other than his own wife Elizabeth! Lum reasons that since Elizabeth hears all the town gossip as soon as it is minted, she will be the perfect one to get the news for their paper.



After Lum & Abner finished filming *DREAMING OUT LOUD* in the spring of 1940, they began considering getting back into radio.

Now for an unsolved mystery that would stump even Lauck & Goff's old skeet shooting buddy Robert Stack: For years, L&A historians have tried to learn the identity of the actress who portrayed Elizabeth in her solitary on-air appearance, one 1943 episode in which Grandpappy Spears tries to sell her a vacuum cleaner. No one seems to be able to identify the voice. Knowing that L&A usually called on versatile radio actress Lurene Tuttle when they needed a female character, she would be the logical candidate. However, the legendary Gassman brothers of SPERDVAC, John and Larry, emphatically state that the voice in question is not Lurene's. What does all of this have to do with this subject? The same actress portrays Elizabeth in this 1940 pilot show! This only deepens the mystery as to whom L&A could have known so well to have used her in the part so regularly. (Whoever she is, she also appears in one of their wartime *Melody Roundup* episodes done for Armed Forces Radio, although in that disk jockey format show, she is not billed as Elizabeth.)

The anonymously-voiced Elizabeth enters with a load of gossip items for the paper, including one hot flash that Grandpappy Spears is about to sell his farm. According to Mrs. Peabody, Grandpap has gone into partnership with two other men who claim to have discovered oil on the property. The two

strangers are to get the farm and \$300.00 for organizing an oil company. L&A seem to be well familiar with this kind of doings... and well they should be, as many times as Squire Skimp has pulled it on them! And speaking of Squire, it should come as no surprise that Grandpap and his would-be partners are having a meeting at Squire's office to finalize the deal.

L&A hustle over to the office, where Squire reveals that the two strangers, Mr. Wilkins and Mr. Freeman, have cut him in on the deal. The sound quality of the recording is so bad that it is difficult to identify the actors who portray Wilkins and Freeman, but at least one of them sounds like he could possibly be Lou Crosby, affecting a more forceful delivery than he uses in his commercials. Squire all but gives L&A the bum's rush, but after their departure Grandpap begins thinking that perhaps giving up his farm and \$300.00 isn't something he should leap into either. Squire, Wilkins, and Freeman turn up the pressure, and before you can say "fer the land sakes," Grandpap has handed everything over

to this unholy trio.

Newspaper editor Lum decides to use the power of the press to combat the evil forces at work in Pine Ridge. He sends cub reporter Elizabeth over to "interview" Wilkins and Freeman at Sister Simpson's boarding house, knowing that she can worm information out of anyone.

Apparently some time goes by... something that typically did not happen in the daily 15-minute shows, which seem to generally follow a 24-hours-between-episodes pattern (with occasional exceptions in special circumstances). Abner is upset because Elizabeth has packed her hand satchel and left town, ostensibly on the trail of clues regarding the two prospective oil barons. (Lum says he heard yesterday that the crooks have now made a similar shady deal with Uncle Henry Lunsford.) Sybil Chism strikes up the *Eleanor* theme on the organ again, while Lou Crosby suggests that this would be where the next commercial announcement would be heard.

Then, back to this gripping drama. Unfortunately, the second half of the show is on Side 2 of the disk, which is in even worse condition than Side 1. Through the unrelenting scratchiness and sound dropout, we make out that Elizabeth has returned from her mysterious trip. She has learned that these same two villains (under other names) have pulled their same stunt over in Belleville. They couldn't be arrested there, because what they are doing is just within the law. The contract the unfortunate landowner signs simply says they will drill a well on the property, and according to Elizabeth they always drill a tiny 10-foot

deep hole, thereby fulfilling the legal aspects of the contract but retaining possession of the land.

This info seems to have come too late to help poor Grandpap, who enters the store wailing over the eviction notice he has just received. Wilkins and Freeman have shown their true colors and intend to begin farming the Spears land as soon as they kick the old coot out. Lum pores over his law books, trying to find some grounds on which he can arrest the two varmints until some solution can be studied up. He finally finds it: The often-used 1906 Pine Ridge ordinance that says it is unlawful to drive an automobile in Pine Ridge without having someone with a red lantern preceding the vehicle. (Faithful listeners will recall that this ordinance plays a part in several L&A episodes.)

At this point, the recording ends. Why? We don't know. There is no closing of any kind, which makes it seem that the recording may have been discontinued on purpose. Regardless, it is obvious that in 1940 the idea of a weekly half-hour L&A show was not welcomed. After a flurry of personal appearances to promote the release of *DREAMING OUT LOUD* during the fall and winter months, Lum and Abner finally returned to the air (initially on the West Coast only) in May 1941, back with their traditional 15-minute daily show.

When the program did eventually switch to 30 minutes weekly, it would be in a form completely different from this first 1940 attempt, but it is interesting to ponder just how different the history of *Lum and Abner* would have been had they made the switch at this particular time!

- Tim Hollis

1948: A BRAND-NEW KIND OF VISIT

The weekly half-hour version of *Lum and Abner* that debuted 50 years ago this fall is usually looked upon as a poor stepchild of the far greater run of daily 15-minute episodes. In all honesty, this reputation is frequently well deserved, particularly in the later weekly installments when all prior characterizations of L&A and their friends seem to have been utterly discarded. However, the stated purpose of the National Lum & Abner Society is to document and preserve all aspects of L&A history, from what time of day their first broadcast aired to how many trips the real-life Dick Huddleston made to Mena during an average month. With that thought in mind, we are in this issue launching a new series of articles examining the often-overlooked 30-minute L&A programs.

There seems to be no single satisfactory answer to the question, "Why did Lum & Abner decide to discard a proven successful formula and turn their show into a half-hour sitcom?" This was instead the result of a complex series of events that began in October 1947. At that time, *Lum and Abner* returned to the CBS radio network after six years on NBC Blue (which had become ABC in 1944-45). Following them was their sponsor, Miles Laboratories, who used the L&A show to plug Alka-Seltzer and One-A-Day Vitamins. Whereas the NBC Blue/ABC shows had been heard only four days a week (usually Monday through Thursday), the new CBS run would be heard five days a week. There was another important change. Whereas Lauck and Goff had always done two broadcasts daily, one for the East Coast and one for the West Coast, with their return to CBS a new policy was instituted whereby the first broadcast, the one for the East Coast, would be recorded on disk, and then that recording would be played a couple of hours later as the West Coast broadcast. This only helps frustrate L&A program collectors, because that means the entire 1947-48 series of 15-minute shows did exist in recorded form at one time, but today only a few isolated episodes from that run seem to have survived.

At any rate, listeners to the show in the summer of 1948 would have caught no inkling that they were hearing the end of an era.

But behind the scenes, the winds of change were whispering in the pines of old Pine Ridge. On July 7, 1948, Chet & Tuffy and their crew recorded a "pilot" for a new weekly half-hour version of *Lum and Abner*. (Everyone seems to have conveniently forgotten that they had entertained the same idea back in 1940, as has been documented elsewhere in this issue.) This pilot recording, which actually runs closer to 35 or 40 minutes, can be heard on Tape #234 in the NLAS Tape Library.

This concept for the show is really not that unpleasant. It does at least attempt to retain some elements carried over from the 15-minute show, which at the time opened with the familiar three rings on the telephone and Gene Baker's announcement, "That's our ring! Time for *Lum and Abner*, brought to you by the makers of Alka-Seltzer." The July 7 pilot also opens with the telephone rings, but the sound effect is now followed by Lum him-



self, in a line that has remained with us ever since: "I grannies, Abner, I bleave that's our ring." Abner responds with "HUH?", cueing new announcer Charles Lyon (who was, in fact, frequently substituting for Baker on the daily show) to shout, "THE NEW LUM AND ABNER SHOW!" Felix Mills' orchestra strikes up a beautiful and well-orchestrated rendition of Ralph & Elsie Mae Emerson's organ theme *Down on the Old Party Line* as the studio audience cheers wildly.

The storyline cobbles together elements from several previous broadcasts. L&A are behind in their taxes, and the county tax collector (played by Herbert Rawlinson, who had previously worked with L&A in their 1943 movie *Two Weeks To Live*) informs them that they either pay \$72.00 by tomorrow morning or the Jot 'Em Down Store will be sold at auction. One of the most obvious changes that occurs right off the bat concerns Lum's voice. Chet Lauck seems to be trying to get away from the deep tones and dialect he has always used as Lum; this version of the voice is much, much closer to his own natural way of speaking. For now, Abner sounds about the same voice-wise, but changes in his personality are beginning to surface. Consider this exchange, just after the tax man has walked out:

LUM: Grannies, now wher can we git our hands on \$72.00?

ABNER: Well, now, uh...

LUM: Some good honest way.

ABNER: (crestfallen) Oh... That lets my idee out.

Abner's personality will continue to degenerate as the series goes on, as we shall see in upcoming installments. For now, Lum faces their financial problem in his usual way: He goes to Squire Skimp to borrow the money. The audience titters as Goff switches to his Squire voice... we are told that actors voicing multiple characters was not a common practice on shows done before a live audience, and this may explain why even Lauck and Goff began phasing out this traditional aspect of the show within a few months. Lum's scene with Squire sounds very much like a typical routine from another show that had switched to a weekly format four years earlier, *Amos 'n' Andy*. In fact, the scene could be read with Andy doing Lum's part and the Kingfish reading Squire's lines with hardly any changes at all... and it would probably fit those two characters even better!

Of course, by the time Squire finishes, L&A now owe \$350.48 instead of their original \$72.00 debt. At this point, Ben Withers happens to drop in, portrayed as hilariously as ever by Clarence Hartzell. There is only one problem with the way Ben comes across in these half-hour shows. In the 15-minute storylines, the character has a defined role, that of town constable (after a brief introduction as a veterinarian in 1946). Ben comes in and out of the continuity as dictated by the storyline, and sometimes is even surprisingly shrewd. But beginning with this first 30-minute pilot, Ben Withers is given no real purpose in the plot, appearing to be brought in for one scene per show, in which his (apparently arbitrary) absent-mindedness usually makes him seem more of a hindrance to L&A than a friend. Those who have heard Ben/Clarence only from the 30-minute *Lum and Abner Show* have no inkling as to what a complex and thoroughly intriguing character he was in the 15-minute days.



Chet Lauck, Clarence Hartzell, & Tuffy Goff performing a Ben Withers routine.

yer mind, I cain't do both," the new grumpy Abner snarls), a call comes in that there has been an accident at the Peabody home. Abner rushes out of the store, leaving Lum to surmise that something terrible has happened to Elizabeth right when she is needed most. We soon learn (but Lum doesn't) that the victim is Abner's cow Rosebud, which has been grazed by a passing truck driven by veteran radio character actor Herb Vigran.

At the halfway point in the show, announcer Lyon returns to deliver the usual message to potential sponsors. In its own way, it gives a better picture of L&A's image than the script it interrupts: "Your message will be welcomed by millions of Lum and Abner fans from every city, town, hamlet, and crossroads throughout America. For over 17 years these loyal friends have followed the daily lives of these two old codgers from the hill country, and Pine Ridge is perhaps as well known today as any city in the land. Lum and Abner have become a household name as truly American as baseball and ham & eggs. Their entertainment throughout the years has typified good, clean, wholesome down-to-earth American life. To the folks in small towns, it's a visit with old friends. To those in the city, it's a pleasant departure... like going back home. It's an era of American life that people who knew it don't want to forget... and people who didn't, like to know. Isn't this the type of entertainment you want your product associated with?"

Volmar K. Sutter arrives, excellently played by former silent screen idol Francis X. Bushman, who had been portraying similar stuffy figures on the 15-minute *Lum and Abner* programs since March 1945. Of course, Lum's idea that Elizabeth is the injured one causes some typically mixed-up dialogue with Abner, who is of course talking about his cow. (There is a cameo appearance by Cedric Weehunt, another character who would see less and less use as the shows went on.) Mr. Sutter becomes so enraged by Abner's seemingly cavalier attitude toward his supposedly ailing wife that he leaves the store in high dudgeon, apparently ending L&A's chances at getting the money. But, all's well that ends well, and it turns out that Abner is getting enough money from the truck driver's insurance company to pay off their loan!

After the end of the story proper, Charles Lyon takes some time to remind sponsors of some of L&A's past storylines: "This sort of thing goes on all the time! For instance, there was the time Lum took up piano tuning and restrung the church piano with baling wire. Or the time he and Abner promoted an oil well

Ben's scene in this show is to resurrect a routine originally done on the show in 1946. He calls his old friend Volmar K. Sutter of Mt. Idy, "a millionaire banker worth several thousand dollars." Of course, by the time Ben finishes his phone conversation he has talked to most of the sentient populace of Mt. Idy, including Orin J. Watford ("wears his vest inside out to break himself of the cigar habit"), Ralph Conway, Charlie, Ed, and a few unimportant people. Sutter will be in Pine Ridge that afternoon to discuss the loan, but Ben warns L&A that his friend will not do business with bachelor Lum, only with "happy family man" Abner.

While Lum instructs Abner in the proper way to look like a happy family man ("Make up

in Pine Ridge and drilled right into an intercontinental pipeline. Or the time Lum appointed himself postmaster and a postal inspector was sent out to investigate him..." This leads into some brief dialogue that will be expanded upon in an eventual episode of the half-hour series. The orchestra launches into the closing *Down on the Old Party Line* theme under the closing credits. We learn that this pilot was produced by Glenhall Taylor, and written by L&A's longtime scribes Roz Rogers and Betty Boyle.

[AN URGENT CALL FOR HELP: At one time, someone provided the NLAS with a recording in which this same script was used as the last episode of the first season of 30-minute shows. By that time Clarence Hartzell had departed, so Ben Withers' dialogue was assumed by Opie Cates, while Andy Devine delivered lines originally assigned to Cedric. We cannot locate this recording, so if any of you out there remember having it, we would appreciate another copy. Thanks!!]

Once this pilot episode began making its rounds of the advertising agencies, it must have impressed someone, because General Motors picked up the show for its first season, during which Frigidaire refrigerators would be plugged into the format. Nothing was said about this impending change until the very end of the final *Lum and Abner* 15-minute episode on September 24, 1948.

In later years, when questioned about their switch from a daily to a weekly show, Lauck and Goff had their own explanation of how this came about. In one 1972 interview, Tuffy told the story this way:

"At that time everything was going to 30-minute shows. Well, here's an act, Lum and Abner, that's using 15 minutes of a 30-minute segment, and they don't have anything else to put in that other 15 minutes. Now, at the same time, we sold to CBS. CBS bought *Amos 'n' Andy*, and Jack Benny, Edgar Bergen, Burns and Allen, Bing Crosby... they bought all these shows, and they bought *Lum and Abner*. We did not sell our rights... at most, we sold them a leasing agreement. They could do what they wanted with us, and they wanted a 30-minute show. They preferred one 30-minute a week rather than to lose five 15 minutes of prime time."

While the sale to CBS probably did have something to do with it, Goff's position that the network was phasing out 15-minute shows seems to have been in error, because once the L&A series was finished, CBS and Miles Laboratories immediately filled their timeslot with another daily 15-minute show starring comedian Herb Shriner. It was a spectacular failure.

CBS certainly wasted no time in promoting L&A's new program being added to their nighttime lineup. A week before the new show's premiere, the network broadcast a special "surprise welcome party" for *Lum and Abner*, hosted by Wendell Niles,



At the CBS welcome party for L&A: Bob Crosby, Red Skelton, Tuffy Goff, Margaret Whiting, Chet Lauck, Hedda Hopper.

who would be serving as announcer for the Frigidaire broadcasts. Oddly, Lauck and Goff themselves do not appear until the closing seconds of the show!

Niles opens the show with this spiel: "Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the Jot 'Em Down Store and our coast-to-coast surprise party for Lum and Abner! Next Sunday there's a new sign over the Jot 'Em Down Store: FRIGIDAIRE. And tonight over CBS, show business turns out to turn in a half hour of music and laughs in honor of the Jot 'Em Down Store's grand opening, and to pay tribute to one of radio's favorite comedy teams, LUM AND ABNER!"

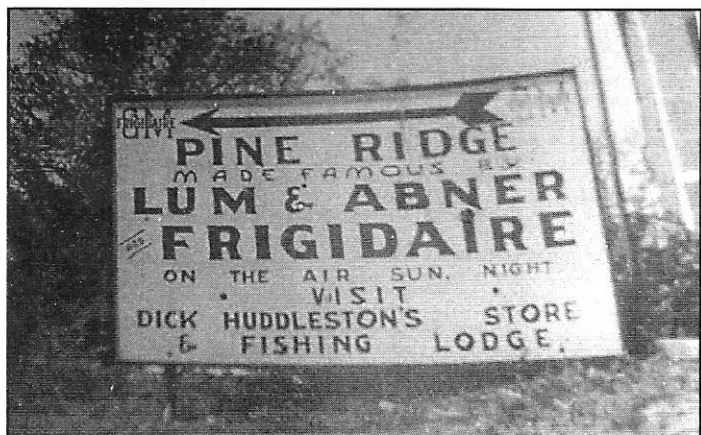
Despite that introduction, most of the program has little to do with L&A in any form. Bob Crosby, the Modernaires, and Margaret Whiting drop in to sing a song or three, and Hedda Hopper does an excellent job of playing Hedda Hopper. In a running gag, Wendell Niles keeps waiting on a long distance phone call from his old boss Bob Hope, who finally appears via a pre-recorded transcription. (Hope was one of NBC's cornerstones, so it is somewhat odd that he would even consider being heard on a CBS show.) Hope does make a reference to Quaker Oats being L&A's first sponsor in 1931, a rare wisp of reality in an otherwise-contrived show.

Red Skelton shows up in his characterization of Clem Kadiddlehopper, and quickly demonstrates his unique ability to turn any broadcast into a shambles within a matter of seconds. When Hedda Hopper fluffs his introduction, calling him "Clem Kiddle Doodle Hopper," that provides enough impetus for the ad-libs to come thick and fast. One can only imagine what it would have been like if he and L&A themselves had shared a scene together! Wendell Niles decides to play a trick on Clem by turning out all the lights in the store; peering through the darkened windows, Skelton wonders whether "Lum and Abner are in there in the dark, secretly listenin' to Amos 'n' Andy."

When the show has only seconds to go, Wendell finally gets around to introducing Lum & Abner themselves. (It is possible that they were supposed to have a bit longer appearance, but the program was undoubtedly running long because of all the unscripted laughs in Red Skelton's segment). They don't have much time to say anything, but once again Chet seems to be dropping the Lum dialect as much as he dares:

ABNER: Doggies, Lum don't jist stand ther, say sompin!

LUM: I'm havin' a little trouble with a lump in my throat right now, Abner... You know, this really ain't no surprise party,



Even though the 30-minute L&A show was almost totally divorced from the real Pine Ridge, this sign still beckoned to tourists on Highway 88.

folks, 'cause we knowed about it all the time. But the way I feel right now, it might just as well of been a surprise. I don't know, it just sorta does sompin to you inside when you see these folks in radio, who are busy with their own shows, come down here tonight to welcome me and Abner to our new show. We're sorta branchin' out here now, you know, and we're a little narvous about it. You don't know what it means to get a sendoff like this from our old friends.

ABNER: I'll amen that!

LUM: Me and Abner feels... well grannies, I don't think there's any words that says what we do feel right now, but I grannies with all the courage-ment you folks has give us, we shore ain't goin' to let you down! Thanks, folks!

There is probably a good reason that Chet got to do most of the talking on this inaugural broadcast. According to most who were working with them at the time, the idea of switching to a weekly half hour was not CBS's idea, but Chet's. Tuffy frankly admitted that when it came to the 30-minute show, he hated every minute of it, and in his later years even Chet was forced to agree that the show was not as good as it had been during the 15-minute days. But, tellingly, he always found a way to defend it as well, as he did in this bit of trivia:

"Although it was a different conception of Lum and Abner, the 30-minute series was still a successful series. According to the laugh meter, we were #1 on many, many occasions, never less than third. And that's against Bob Hope and Jack Benny and all the top shows at that time. They had a rating every week, which we would eagerly look at. It usually came out on Monday. They would time how many minutes of laughs there were in the show, and many times we would have to cut the show while we were on the air because of laughs."

50 years after the fact, it would be beside the point to argue whether that much boffo laughter was as appropriate to *Lum and Abner* as it was to shows like Hope's and Benny's. In fact, once the new programs began, writer Roz Rogers reported that they began getting mail from listeners asking, "Who ARE all those people laughing in the Jot 'Em Down Store?" So well established was the setting of the 15-minute days that people had difficulty in transferring that image to this new weekly sitcom. And to be frank, the 30-minute show did take many liberties with the "picture" of Pine Ridge that had been so carefully crafted for 17 years.

And now, we will begin the synopses of each of the existing regular episodes of this ill-fated series, trying to be fair as to what is good and what is not-so-good about each. Readers are encouraged to hear these shows for themselves and form their own opinions, which we will share in future issues.

OCTOBER 3, 1948: The first "regular" episode of the new series does not stray far from tried and true territory. L&A discover that their store partially sits on the adjoining property, and a frantic search ensues to find their neighbor's identity so they can correct the matter.

As he will on each show for the next few months, Wendell Niles opens this one with the blurb, "Frigidaire, a division of General Motors, brings you a brand-new kind of visit with those



Clarence Hartzell dances a jig for the entertainment of Lauck, Goff, and producer Bill Gay.

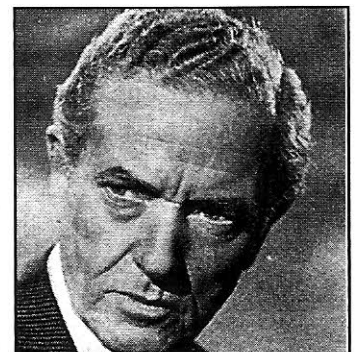
old characters down in Pine Ridge." To move the store, Ben Withers recommends Mt. Idy resident Clarence Zincafoose (whose first name is probably an inside joke on Clarence Hartzell), father of identical twins Herbert and Kenneth ("You wouldn't be able to tell them apart if it weren't for their difference in appearance"). The Burgess family is temporarily living with the Zincafoose clan; it seems Clarence moved the Burgess's house for them, but can't remember where he put it.

Squire Skimp again appears, claiming to own the property next to the store... as soon as he buys it from Ezra Seestrunk, that is. He leases them the strip on which the store sits for \$20 per year... except, of course, the first and last 40 years' rent must be paid in advance. When Squire finds out it is not the south side of the store that is in question, but the north side, he nearly has a coronary.

A new voice introduced in this episode is that of Sister Simpson, who had never previously been portrayed on the 15-minute series. The NLAS archives contain recordings of an unbelievable number of auditions that were conducted for this role; seemingly any radio actress who thought she could do a rural dialect tested for the part during August and September. The coveted role finally went to one Vivian Lasswell, who does not seem to have any other radio series to her credit. That she was a fairly inexperienced actress is borne out by her first scene in this episode. Ms. Lasswell proceeds to completely blow her lines, fumbling through her scene in a manner that is positively embarrassing to hear. Lauck and Goff do their best to keep her on track, but one can imagine their blood pressure rising as they recall how many actresses they tested for this part, only to wind up with a victim of mike fright! Through the messy playing of this scene, L&A learn that the lot is owned by Elsie Lovelace of the county seat.

While hitchhiking to Mena, L&A meet a friendly passing motorist who identifies himself as Wendell Niles, local Frigidaire representative for their district. This is, of course, the program's way of bringing in the "integrated commercial," in the form made so famous by Harlow Wilcox on *Fibber McGee and Molly*. In each succeeding show, Niles will show up during whatever story is going on, and take a few minutes to promote the glories of Frigidaire's products.

Lum goes to work his romantic charms on Elsie while Abner goes to see her ill-tempered lawyer Mr. Bushnell (played by Herbert Rawlinson, who would be a semi-regular in these early shows). This escalates into a comedy of errors, but unfortunately we cannot identify the actress who plays the giggly Elsie. In the show's closing, L&A end up hiring Clarence Zincafoose, whose voice should be very familiar to listeners of the 15-minute



Herbert Rawlinson

episodes. The role of Zincafoose is being essayed by Western movie sidekick Horace Murphy, whose whining tones had been heard on the show as Ira Hodgekins since 1944, and as Caleb Weehunt in one isolated 1946 show. Murphy would be returning to *Lum and Abner* often during the coming months.

OCTOBER 10, 1948: This is one of the few 30-minute shows that is based upon a storyline from the 15-minute days, in this case a March 1944 saga. L&A become convinced that Cedric is a mind reader when he is able to tell them the contents of a grocery list lying on the floor (it is one of his own lists he dropped the day before). The radio quiz show *Take It and Beat It* is to broadcast from Little Rock next week, and L&A plan to get Cedric on the show, have him mind-read the answers, and win the \$21,000 prize. Oddly enough, before too many minutes have passed, Squire Skimp has signed on as Cedric's personal manager.

Ben Withers suggests the services of Mt. Idy lawyer Russell Aultmeyer, a relative of George Birnbault ("his cousin-in-law by marriage"). Russell's greatest triumph was defending a man who had been accused of stealing a 1922 Buick. When he won the case, the man didn't have the money to pay Russell, so he gave him his car... a 1922 Buick.

A crucial plot development concerns the fact that Cedric is only six years old. Inasmuch as he was born on February 29, that means he only has a birthday every four years. This intriguing concept goes all the way back to some of the *Pine Ridge News* issues that were offered through Horlick's Malted Milk in the 1930s!

Squire plans to book Cedric on a vaudeville tour, but has to line up some other acts as well. His questionable acquaintances are drawn from a couple of similar routines from earlier years, including the 1943 search for Neosho the Mind Reader and the 1948 reenactment of the story of L&A's circus. ("Lady Minerva the Mermaid... Only mermaid in the world to be shot from a cannon... Lands in only two feet of water and comes up with American flag on her dorsal fin.")

Soon enough, he learns that Cedric's mind reading is nonexistent (as is Cedric's mind), and he generously sells the manager's contract back to Lum.

After Wendell Niles sells a Frigidaire to one Mrs. Dilbeck over the party line, L&A and Cedric depart for Little Rock. Just before going on the air, they too discover the secret of Cedric's amazing powers. The broadcast begins: The quizmaster, Eddie Cobb, is played by longtime L&A associate Charles Lyon, and his ingratiating sidekick is veteran radio actor Joseph Kearns. The contestant immediately preceding Cedric is a whiny-voiced housewife played by Gloria Blondell. (Lauck & Goff and their staff had originally noticed her in the role of a telephone operator on an obscure comedy show starring Bob Sweeney and Hal March.) The housewife, Mrs. Bibberson, wins such terrific prizes as "A case of Dr. Sampson's New Improved False Teeth Cement,



Gloria Blondell

a one-year subscription to *Modern Priscilla*, an all-expense trip for three to romantic Minot, North Dakota, a complete set of Morocco-bound pictures of the vice-presidents of the United States, an all-expense trip for three back from Minot, North

Dakota, and a glass bottom canoe."

In a finish that has to be heard to be understood, Cedric actually manages to win the \$21,000 jackpot, much to Mrs. Bibberson's disappointment.

OCTOBER 17, 1948: Like the previous show, this one is also based on an earlier storyline that ran for most of the month of October 1941. Lum fakes a broken leg to get out of having dinner with Widder Abernathy (in the 1941 story it was Sister Simpson), but things become more complicated once Squire Skimp files an accident claim with Lum's insurance company.

We have not been able to identify the actress who plays Widder Abernathy in this program; judging from some of her vocal inflections, she may be the same one who played Elsie Lovelace in the October 3 show. Ben Withers suggests that Lum be treated by his old friend, noted Mt. Idy bone specialist Osbert Van Shreve ("popular club man and retired air raid warden"). "It would be good experience for Osbert," Ben claims. "And GOODNESS KNOWS, he NEEDS it!" Ben goes on to tell of the unfortunate accident Mrs. Zincafoose sustained during the annual Easter egg roll in Mt. Idy in 1932, a story he first related in a December 1947 episode. For a change, Wendell Niles delivers the Frigidaire commercial to Cedric, who is minding the Jot 'Em Down Store while Abner "nurses" the convalescent Lum.

As he did some seven years earlier, Squire suggests that the only way Lum can get out of a jail sentence for defrauding the insurance company is to have his fictitious fractured limb "healed" by a Hindu miracle man before the insurance company's doctor arrives. In 1941, the phony Prince Ali Kush (aka Louie) was excellently voiced by character actor Jerry Hausner, whose bogus Middle Eastern dialogue was a string of double talk, liberally peppered with slang terms and the names of Lauck & Goff family members. John & Larry Gassman have identified Harry Lang as playing Ali Kush (aka Muggsy) in this 30-minute recreation of the story (we learn that his native habitat is the Bombay Chili Bowl in Kansas City, Missouri), but instead of double talk he recites the lyrics of bizarre current hit songs, such as "Chickory Chick, Cha la Cha la/Mollica Wollica, can't you see/Chickory Chick is me."

By-now-regular Francis X. Bushman is Dr. Hendon, sent out by the insurance company to check on Lum's leg. The similarity of "Hindu" and "Hendon" causes some mistaken identity problems for Abner, a bit of business that seems to run rampant throughout these 30-minute shows. Noticeably absent are the "Old Eddards Sayin'" routines, which presumably would have taken up too much time in these faster-paced shows.

OCTOBER 24, 1948: This week's show is expanded from the short scene that was tacked onto the end of the July pilot disk. Lum serves as substitute postmaster of Pine Ridge while regular postmaster Ed Stoddard is laid up in bed. Absolutely no reference is made to Dick Huddleston's longstanding position as postmaster, with the post office in his store... in fact, as of yet no references to Dick turn up at all in the 30-minute episodes.

We witness the return of Vivian Lasswell as Sister Simpson. This time she does not keep blowing her lines, so the three weeks she has had to study since her debut performance must have done her good. Ben Withers wants to send a letter by registered mail, because it contains the cash he is sending for a can of Captain Sproog's Quick Caulk. He relates in excruciating detail the story of how Mt. Idy resident Captain Sproog demonstrated his wonderful substance, which could repair boat leaks under water: "45 minutes later, they had all the water pumped out of Captain Sproog, and were making plans to dredge for the canoe."

Ben returns for the middle commercial, in which Wendell Niles tries to sell Miz Bates a Frigidaire electric range because her cakes keep falling. Ben explains that the only reason they keep falling is because Mr. Bates built the shelf for them, and he is a very poor carpenter.

Another returnee from an earlier show is Gloria Blondell, this time cast as Mamie the telephone operator. This gives her the opportunity to recreate the same whining phone routine she was doing on the Bob Sweeney/Hal March show that brought her to L&A's attention. The post office department gets wind of the little improvements Lum is making in their system (two money orders for the price of one, postage stamps for half price), and Inspector Burton shows up to investigate. Burton has a voice that should be very familiar to radio listeners: he is Ken Christy, the bass-voiced actor who was heard for years as Chief Gates on *The Great Gildersleeve*. He had been heard on *Lum and Abner* as far back as 1945, when he played one half of the father-and-son Talbert team that robbed the Jot 'Em Down Store (Howard McNear was the other crook). From this point on, Ken Christy would be making many, many appearances on the half-hour L&A programs.

OCTOBER 31, 1948: The calendar may have said it was Halloween, but this week's dose of *Lum and Abner* has nothing to do with trick or treat. Lum is suffering from insomnia ("so bad I cain't hardly sleep"). Meanwhile, Squire Skimp is conferring with one of his old cohorts, Duke, who has a new scheme up his sleeve. Duke is played by the multi-voiced actor Frank Graham, who had logged countless performances of the 15-minute L&A shows since 1942 (he was Diogenes Smith, B. J. Webster, Gregory W.W.



Frank Graham

Dobbs, Professor Sloane, and scores of one-shot characters as well). Duke explains to Squire that he poses as an art teacher, convinces a gullible student that they have created a masterpiece, and gets the hapless pupil to pay his expenses to Europe to sell the painting.

By strange coincidence, when Lum shows up Squire suggests that he needs to relax his mind by taking up surrealist painting. (This plot is only slightly based on the 1943 series involving Lum and the flighty Mabel Melrose.) "Did the fellers that painted them pitchers get well?" asks Lum. "No," Squire replies, "but they got rich enough so that nobody could tell the difference." Lum signs up with "Rembrandt Van Duke," and goes to work creating such works of art as "Marbles in Action," "Bananners in Repose," "Lamb Chops with Two Pairs of Pants," and "Sunrise in the Mornin," which eventually has its title changed to "A Fried Egg by Lum Eddards."

Abner thinks Lum has already lost his mind, so Ben Withers calls up Orin J. Watford in Mt. Idy to see if he knows a good psychiatrist. Orin knows a fellow who has been studying psychiatry for 30 years, Granville Hodson, and agrees to send him out to Pine Ridge. In the middle commercial, Wendell Niles demonstrates to Lum how a Frigidaire can be marked up with crayons and then cleaned off easily.

Hodson shows up, played by Herbert Rawlinson. He sees through Duke's little scheme in the nick of time, and with his help the avaricious artist and Squire have soon paid Lum \$2900 for an option on all his future paintings. After they depart gleefully, Hodson reveals that he knew Duke wasn't really Rembrandt... "Because I am!! Hahahahahah!" As Ben explains to Abner, Orin J. Watford was a little mixed up when he said Hodson had been studying psychiatry for 30 years. "It turns out that psychiatrists have been studying HIM for 30 years."

Join us in our next installment as we slog our way through the L&A episodes of November and December 1948!

- Tim Hollis

Roswell B. Rogers

1910-1998

The NLAS was sorry to learn of the death of Roswell (Roz) Rogers, head writer of the *Lum and Abner* programs from 1941 to 1953, on August 6, 1998.

Those who have been with the Society for a number of years will recall that Roz Rogers was a guest at the very first NLAS Convention back in 1985. He was literally the first person directly associated with the program to throw his wholehearted support behind the newly-formed NLAS in August 1984, and con-



tinued to contribute material to *The Jot 'Em Down Journal* until his declining health forced him to curtail such activities in 1992.

His career as a comedy writer, not only for *Lum and Abner* but many other radio and television series, deserves far more attention than we have space for here. Therefore, the December 1998 issue of the *Journal* will be devoted entirely to the life and work of this irreplaceable friend of the NLAS. Join us then for the complete story!