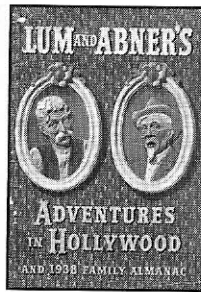
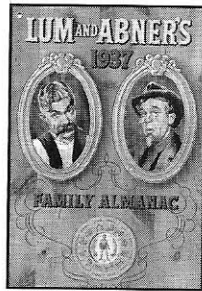


OCTOBER 1999

SALE

Well, folks, the feed room at the NLAS World Headquarters has gotten overloaded again, and that means it is time for us to put on another sale of ORIGINAL LUM & ABNER COLLECTIBLES. These prices are marked WAY DOWN to get the stuff to sell; if you're waiting for them to get any lower than this, you just haven't checked out the antique & collectibles market lately! To reserve items, call the Executive Secretary, Tim Hollis, at (205) 674-0101, or e-mail CampHoll@aol.com.

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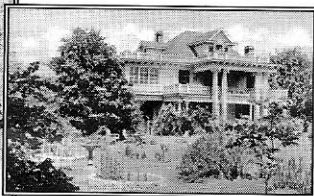


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THE JOT 'EM DOWN JOURNAL

October 1999

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Zekatif Ossifers

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Cover: A broadcast of *THE OPIE CATES SHOW* is on the air, 1947. Opie himself is seen with his clarinet at far left; seated behind him is Francis X. Bushman. The announcer (either Hy Averbach or Lou Cook) appears at right, while musical director Buzz Adlam strikes up the band. (Photo courtesy of Dinah Mae Cates)

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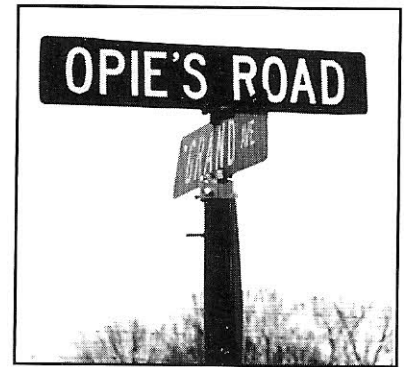
NLAS LOSES MEMBER #1



Raymond & Elva NeSmith in 1984, the year the NLAS was founded.

With over 600 members in the NLAS, we usually do not print obituaries for anyone other than those who were directly connected with *Lum and Abner*. However, we felt it only right to acknowledge that Elva NeSmith, officially designated as the NLAS's first member, passed away at the age of 79 on August 25, 1999. A lifelong resident of Dora, Alabama (the NLAS's world headquarters), when the Society was formed in 1984 Mrs. NeSmith insisted on being the very first person to officially pay dues (which were \$1.50 at the time). When the first issue of *The Jot 'Em Down Journal* was published in August 1984, she further insisted on having the initial copy to emerge from the photocopier (the first *Journal* was the only one not to be professionally printed). Mrs. NeSmith had survived her late husband Raymond by many years. The NLAS is sorry to have lost such a longtime supporter.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF OPIE GATES



My father, Opie Taft Cates, was born on October 10, 1909, in Clinton, Arkansas (a locale that would often be mentioned in his days with *Lum and Abner*). His father died when Opie was around six years old, and his mother soon remarried. Opie's stepfather, Lee Reaves, worked for the railroad as a crosstie loader, and one summer he talked the company into hiring Opie and his stepbrother, Jack Reaves, as a rail cook and cook's helper (Opie said he was the helper), working in the caboose, cooking for the hands who repaired the rail tracks throughout northwestern Arkansas. Opie didn't think much about that summer job throughout his later career, until one day when he turned 65 and the railroad sent him a fat retirement check for a few thousand dollars! What a chuckle we all got from that.

It was Opie's parents who introduced him to the world of music by taking him to local hoedowns all over central Arkansas, but the defining moment came when Opie was in high school and discovered the clarinet. He immediately fell in love with the instrument and played it incessantly. Grandma told me when I was a kid that Opie would take it everywhere he went, and during any spare time he would practice, practice, practice... to baseball games, in between innings, when his team was at bat, etc.



Opie Cates and his saxophone (not clarinet) at the beginning of his swing band career.

He was a drum major at Joplin High School in Joplin, Missouri, and won the state high school contest for clarinet playing. After graduation from high school, he joined up with the "Memphis Collegians," a jazz band act on the Keith-Orpheum vaudeville circuit.

After two years or so of college, and running out of money, he formed a band of his own with his college friends, and hit the road playing dance dates all over the northeast, southeast, and south-central United States. In Cleveland, Ohio, he met Kathryn Virginia Stein; to court her, he borrowed a car belonging to fellow bandleader Les Brown (of

"Band of Renown" and *Bob Hope Show* fame). Years later, in 1965 when Les was accompanying Bob Hope on his overseas Christmas tours, I met him and told him I wouldn't be here if it hadn't been for him! Anyway, Opie's courtship of Kay went on until they were married in Evansville, Indiana, on May 16, 1931.

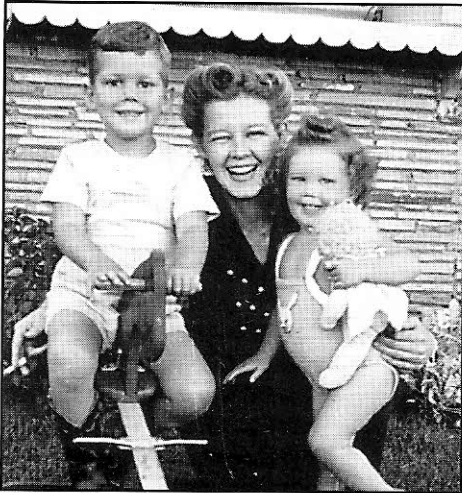
After a period of playing in the famous Chicago speakeasies of the Prohibition era, Opie said that his first real break into the big band business was in 1934, when he was hired by the great Ben Pollock, whose other orchestra members included Harry James and Tommy & Jimmy Dorsey. The Ben Pollock aggregation traveled all over the United States, eventually settling down to stay in Culver City, California, in 1936.

Now came Opie's introduction into the world of radio. He was hired for the NBC staff orchestra under the direction of Gordon Jenkins, and two years later he was featured with his own band in a program known as *The Kid With the Stick*, sponsored by Ranier Beer. He continued playing on other shows as well, but then World War II broke out. Patriotically, Opie went down to enlist. He took the physical and found out that he was blind in one eye, a fact of which he had previously been unaware.

Next to music, farming was always one of Opie's greatest loves in life, and he was able to preserve this facet of his background even while working in Hollywood. In 1944, Opie bought a 10-acre farm in downtown Van Nuys, California, where he



Opie Cates (left) encounters another legend of the big band era, Stan Kenton (right).



Opie's wife Kathryn with their first two children, Robert and Dixie, circa 1941.

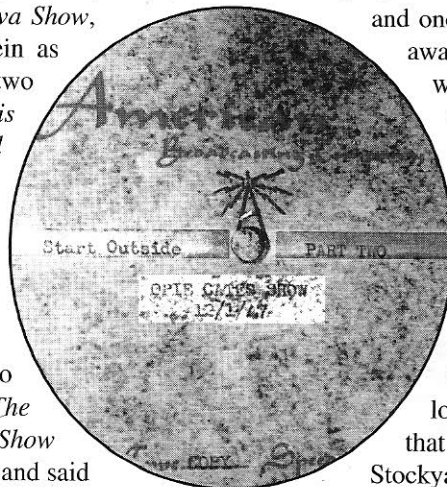
raised sweet corn, hogs, layer chickens, and the five of us kids: Robert Taft (that's me), and my four sisters who were all named after Southern songs... Dixie Lee, Dinah Mae, Linda Lou, and Liza Jane. Our neighbors were Lum & Abner's good friend Andy Devine and their head writer, Roz Rogers.

Opie's music was really in demand during the immediate postwar years. He was musical director on *The Judy Canova Show*, *Meet Me At Parky's* (starring Harry Einstein as "Parkyakarkus"), *Club Good Cheer*, and two shows starring actor Barry Fitzgerald, *His Honor the Barber* and *The Barry Fitzgerald Show*. During this time he also did freelance radio work for Bob Burns, Dick Haymes, Eddie Cantor, Abbott & Costello, and Frank Sinatra.

One of the actors on *Meet Me At Parky's* was Sheldon Leonard, who always seemed to be cast as a gangster in his movie and radio appearances. Later, Sheldon produced *The Danny Thomas Show* and *The Andy Griffith Show* for television. One day, Sheldon called Opie and said they were casting a boy named Ron Howard as Andy's son, and would it be okay if they used Opie's name? "Why heck, yes," was Opie's reply. As an aside, when Opie fell ill and Ron heard about it, he used to call occasionally to check on his namesake's condition.

[EDITOR'S NOTE: Other sources' versions of this story claim that it was Andy Griffith himself who remembered the name "Opie Cates" from the days of radio, and suggested that his fictitious son be named Opie. Probably Griffith and producer Sheldon Leonard both had a hand in this momentous decision.]

Finally, 1947 saw the debut of Opie's own half-hour situation comedy, *The Opie Cates Show*, on ABC. This series will be discussed in more detail elsewhere in this issue of the *Journal*, but I will mention here that the scripts were written by our good friend Roz Rogers, and each episode began with Opie's catchphrase, "The doggonedest thing happened to me th' other day..." Lana Turner tried out as a singer for the show but didn't pass the voice test; Opie noted that she was really being pushed into the limelight by her mother. When vocals were called for, Martha Tilton usually did the honors. I remember that Opie took me to one of the shows to watch the rehearsal, but I snuck out and watched Dick Haymes rehearse instead.



One day, Opie got a call from his local draft board. Even with his one blind eye, Opie thought, "This is it, they're sending me off to war." When he showed up at the draft board, he found out that all they wanted were tickets to his radio show. He gave them a bushel basket full of tickets to ALL the ABC shows!

In early 1949, Opie joined the cast of *Lum and Abner*, which had changed its format to a weekly half-hour show the previous fall. Roz Rogers was still writing for Lum & Abner, so he was probably influential in casting Opie on the program. Initially Opie was strictly a cast member of the program, while the music was handled by Felix Mills. About a month after his debut, Opie became musical director for *Lum and Abner* as well. During the show's second season, when there were several weeks when the program had no sponsor (this was known as "sustaining," and it became a familiar word in our home!), Opie would often fill time in the middle of the show by playing a band number that featured himself on the clarinet.

In July 1949, most of the *Lum and Abner* cast went to New York City to film a pilot for an L&A TV series for CBS. They stayed, I believe Opie told me, in the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, and one day, while dressed in their country costumes awaiting transportation to the filming site, they were perceived as bums and asked by the management to leave the premises! They all had a good laugh over that.

The TV pilot didn't sell, of course, but that trip was to play an important part in the rest of Opie's life. En route back to California from New York, Kay and Opie stopped off in Fort Smith, Arkansas. He visited the local Rotary Club, meeting several key figures in the Fort Smith area, and mentioned that he was looking for a farm in the region. It so happened that Leon Williams, part owner of the Fort Smith Stockyards, had a 6800-acre ranch for sale just north of Fort Smith on the Oklahoma-side of the state line. Opie and Kay bought the ranch for \$7.00 per acre; a 160-acre farm in the Arkansas River bottom was thrown in at a much higher price.



L to R: Opie Cates, legendary radio writer/producer Carlton E. Morse, and Irish actor Barry Fitzgerald, circa 1945.



Opie and Kathryn Cates in an undated portrait.

We didn't move to the farm right away, but Opie was prepared for the future.

During those years, there was always some type of promotion going on for radio personalities, and one day Art Linkletter's *Breakfast With The Stars* radio show was produced and recorded in our living room. I thought, "Oh boy, a big breakfast for a change, instead of oatmeal!" I purposely missed the normal breakfast that morning, awaiting the "big breakfast." Boy, was I wrong! Kay had coffee cups, saucers, plates, and silverware all laid out on the living room coffee table, in the center of which was a turntable making the recording on a 16-inch transcription disc, BUT THERE WAS NO FOOD! Art Linkletter would act as if he were eating breakfast with Opie and Kay, but it was just a gimmick. I'm glad Art didn't ask me anything, as my stomach was growling throughout the entire recording.

Well, in the spring of 1950 the half-hour version of *Lum and Abner* ended forever, and the boys themselves went into semi-retirement for three years. In September of that year, my dad and I journeyed back to Moffett, Oklahoma, to put in our first wheat crop on the 160-acre farm. During that fall and winter, our family's great migration from Hollywood to the Oklahoma farm began. It took many trips, plus a railroad freight car, to bring back everything we would need for farm living. Not one to skimp on making a buck or two, Opie, to make expenses, would haul back hardwood flooring from Malvern, Arkansas, to the tract homes being built in southern California. We were all settled into our new home by the summer of 1951.

(Even after Opie had been long departed from radio, Lum & Abner continued thinking of him. In a broadcast of January 1954, L&A have a humorous discussion about Opie... still supposedly residing in Pine Ridge... buying his wife a pump handle for Christmas.)

Opie was very innovative in the agricultural field. He brought southern California farming techniques to Oklahoma that were unheard-of in that part of the country. He successfully raised

crops such as wheat and corn, which people said couldn't be grown in our area. All of us kids helped out with the farming. In 1968, Opie sold the 6800-acre ranch to a group that wanted to develop it into a housing project and golf course; he used the proceeds from that sale to buy another 1240-acre ranch 50 miles west, in Stigler, Oklahoma. The next year, he bought a 960-acre ranch three miles north, an operation he sold in 1977.

In the summer of 1978 he became a little dizzy while baling hay. He visited a cardiologist who put a 24-hour heart monitor on him. After sending the tape to Little Rock to be analyzed, the doctor called back and asked where Opie was. "Out baling hay," was the answer. The Little Rock doctor said, "Better get him to a hospital quick, because he is getting ready to have a heart attack!"

Opie made medical history by being the first person to have a quadruple bypass operation in which one of the arteries was repaired on the back side of his heart. Unfortunately, while recovering from this, he was diagnosed with cancer of the pituitary gland. He underwent radiation treatments, and to replace the chemicals normally generated by the pituitary gland, he was taking 13 different medications, including cortisone. This caused him to gain a lot of weight, but he was still able to get around, and he often walked to the Arkansas River, which he loved so dearly. When the first NLAS Convention was held in Mena in June 1985, he very badly wanted to attend and see his old L&A colleagues Roz Rogers and Clarence Hartzell again, but his health was too fragile to even think about making the trip.



One of Opie's last photographs, probably Christmas 1985.

Finally, after a long and hard-fought battle, congestive heart failure took its toll and he passed away on November 6, 1987. His funeral was held in the Moffett High School gymnasium.

Exactly one year ago this month, the town of Moffett paid tribute to Opie with the following proclamation:

"In honor of the service of Mr. Opie Cates as a dedicated town official to the town of Moffett, for his many contributions, let the record of the town clerk show the following change this 30th day of October, 1998:

That certain portion known as 6th Street running north and south from the east/west boundaries of Grand Avenue to the Moffett Township Range will now be realized as OPIE'S ROAD. Further, in dedication to the family of Opie Cates, let the records of the town clerk record that I have entered into the Official Town Calendar this date as being celebrated each and every year as OPIE'S DAY, and will cause our town flags to be displayed in honor of OPIE CATES and the Cates Family."

- Robert Taft Cates

The Doggonedest Thing Happened To THE OPIE CATES SHOW

Even though the world of radio did produce a few "spinoff" programs (the most notable being *The Great Gildersleeve*, begat by *Fibber McGee and Molly*), there is no show that could truly be called a "spinoff" of *Lum and Abner*. However, the production that comes closest to fitting that description would have to be *The Opie Cates Show*. In fact, the only thing that prevents this program from being a true L&A spinoff is the fact that the show came and went over a year *before* Opie Cates had ever worked with Lum & Abner! Other than that, *The Opie Cates Show* employed many of the same staff and cast members, and some of its elements were directly connected with "what was going on down in Pine Ridge."

Radio historian John Dunning has determined that *The Opie Cates Show* was broadcast on the ABC network on Monday evenings between October 20, 1947, and February 2, 1948. In the first of many crossovers with *Lum and Abner*, most of the scripts were written by longtime L&A scribe Roz Rogers. Roz once explained that the concept of the show originated when Opie was assigned to introduce band numbers on one of his earlier series; Opie's natural Arkansas twang was inordinately hilarious to the studio audience, and someone got the idea to make a comedian out of him. This was no doubt fine with Mr. Cates, who from all reports possessed a quite strong sense of humor anyway. Sadly, *The Opie Cates Show* failed to attract a sponsor, explaining why its run was so brief.

With Roz Rogers as head writer, it is no wonder that many of the supporting cast members were drawn from the pool of talent used regularly on *Lum and Abner*. Opie's primary comedy foil was to be his boss, Malcolm Brown, played to the hilt by former matinee idol Francis X. Bushman, who by the late 1940s had created a whole new career for himself as a character actor. Bushman had appeared on *Lum and Abner* as far back as March 1945, and had since been used whenever the situation called for a pompous stuffed shirt or a lovable eccentric. Bushman's role as Malcolm Brown carried many traits that would later be familiar to Gale Gordon's roles on the various Lucille Ball TV programs.

The female members of the cast included Myra Marsh as Mrs. Brown, and radio ingenue Barbara Fuller as Kathryn Brown, the boss's daughter and Opie's "dream girl." (Inside joke time:

Kathryn was Opie's wife's name in real life.) A third female character, Mr. Brown's sarcastic secretary, was unidentified in the credits, but was probably played by Carol Brown.

From the show's run, only eight and a half episodes have surfaced, those existing as 16-inch transcription discs that were stored in Opie's barn in Moffett, Oklahoma, for some 30 years. In the early 1980s, L&A collector Joe Riddle made initial transfers of the discs to tape, and this year the NLAS was able to retransfer the recordings from the original discs using modern technology. Following will be brief descriptions of the extant shows and notes on how they fit into the overall picture of Opie's career in *Lum and Abner* in particular.

NOVEMBER 17, 1947: The fifth show of the series is the earliest one currently available. Like all of the episodes, the program opens "cold" with Opie's trademark line, "The doggonedest thing happened to me th' other day..." This is followed by a brief clarinet solo by Opie, even though for once he was not credited as the orchestra leader on this series (presumably being the star was considered enough work). The announcer, Hy Averback, introduces the show: "The American Broadcasting Company presents the trials and errors of Opie Cates... spelled O-P-I-E-C-A-T-E-S, a statement which no other character can make."

While waiting for a streetcar, Opie and Kathryn encounter a fast-talking character who is selling pet rabbits. This slick gent is played by none other than L&A's frequent supporting player Jerry Hausner, who would appear in many episodes of *The Opie Cates Show*. The slicker talks Opie into buying a rabbit for Kathryn; only later does Opie learn that Mr. Brown hates rabbits with a passion. To put Brown in an even more foul mood, he is dreading an upcoming stint of jury duty. Between Opie and the rabbit, Brown's sanity is soon in question. A bit part in the show is played by another longtime L&A associate, Horace Murphy, known as the voice of Ira Hodgekins in the 15-minute shows and Ezra Seestrunk in the half-hour days. The judge before whom the supposedly looney Mr. Brown is brought is Peter Leeds, who would later play various roles with L&A and who is best known for his work with Stan Freberg. Kathryn's boyfriend (Opie's rival) is played by ubiquitous radio actor Sam Edwards.

A sure giveaway that Roz Rogers is behind this script comes when Opie launches into a long and pointless story about Lester



Opie and his radio girlfriend, Barbara Fuller, demonstrate the running gag about Opie's cap.

Watford, a friend of his Aunt Minnie back in Clinton, Arkansas. Opie's tales of this type, which would be featured in every episode, are only thinly disguised versions of the material Roz was turning out for Ben Withers (Clarence Hartzell) and his odd-ball cronies from Mt. Idy on *Lum and Abner*. In fact, some of the names assigned to Opie's friends in these programs eventually turned up in Ben's L&A dialogue.

One of the biggest laughs in this episode results from an inside joke. Mr. Brown is stuck under the porch while trying to catch Opie's rabbit (don't ask how), and Opie starts describing a recent movie he has seen involving a group of men trapped in a submarine. "Cary Grant was in the picture," muses Opie. Bellows Mr. Brown at the top of his voice, "I don't care if Francis X. Bushman was in it!!" The audience responds admirably!

DECEMBER 1, 1947: This installment is a political satire of sorts. Opie gets involved in a Christmas toy fundraiser for charity, and prepares to "buy" enough votes to make Kathryn the "princess" of the event. Some oily ward heelers overhear him bragging of his "vote buying," and conspire to have him help them control the election for city officials.

A running gag in these programs never really seems to go over very well. Every time a character encounters Opie, some remark is made about the cap he always wears. Why this is supposed to be so humorous is not exactly clear (and apparently the audience feels the same way), but at least the existing publicity photos show just what sort of cap was intended. Not only did Opie wear a large, checkered cap for the broadcasts, but so did each member of the Buzz Adlam orchestra!

Another L&A veteran appears as corner druggist Mr. Hornsby: he is Griff Barnett, a crusty old character actor who was heard often on *Lum and Abner* beginning in 1942 ("I believe you're right, Mr. Skimp... This IS my lucky day"). His role here may have been another inside joke, since according to John & Larry Gassman, Barnett's most common radio role was as "your friendly Rexall druggist" on various shows sponsored by that apothecary chain. In this show, Opie tells a story about Clinton, Arkansas, resident Ed Schultz.

After the closing gag of each show, Opie and his clarinet return to the microphone for a foot-stomping jazzy closing theme. We also learn that Roz Rogers' co-writer for this episode was another well-known name in radio, True Boardman, and that the show is produced by Glenhall Taylor (who would later serve as producer on the half-hour *Lum and Abner*).

DECEMBER 1947: There is one program for which the first half only exists (it required two transcription discs to record a 30-minute program in those days, and apparently the second disc for this week's show was lost). It has no date on it, but has several references to "early Christmas shopping." Mr. Brown sends Opie to a department store to buy perfume for his wife; to make sure Opie doesn't goof again, Brown writes the name of the perfume, "Sweetheart," on his own letterhead. When Opie gets to

the store, he finds that they don't sell that particular brand, but the saleslady writes down the others that they do sell ("Meet Me At Midnight," "Our Secret Rendezvous," "Yours Forever," "Impatient"). Of course, when Kathryn stops by the perfume counter and sees this list of phrases on her dad's letterhead, she immediately assumes he is having an affair. Unfortunately that is as far as the recording goes, so we don't know how it came out!

DECEMBER 22, 1947: While Christmas shopping (again), Opie and Kathryn discuss the newspaper headlines about the growing number of people on "relief" (today called "welfare"). When Opie goes to visit Kathryn at her new job at Dayton's department store, he is told she is "on relief" (on her coffee break), and assumes the Browns are now broke. He contacts all of their old friends to arrange charity for the Browns on Christmas Eve!

Opie's story this week concerns Finley McDermott of Clinton, Arkansas, who was "cleaned out in the crash"... when someone's water tank toppled onto his general store. ("Sure liquidated his dry goods.") The closing scene is an appropriately sentimental one for a Christmas episode: as "The First Noel" plays in the background, Opie and the Browns distribute their oversupply of food and toys to a local orphanage. The ending gag, though, falls a little flat: Mr. Brown's Christmas gift to Opie is a new cap. The audience doesn't seem to get it. We find out that Roz's co-writers for this week were David Swift and Bob Shelley.

DECEMBER 29, 1947:

With the holidays over, things are back to their usual slapstick. This episode opens with one of the funniest scenes in the series,

as Opie innocently causes Mr. Brown to be inundated with the entire contents of the office water cooler. Bushman's playing of this scene is absolutely hilarious. Afterward, Brown sends Opie to deliver an insurance policy to socialite Mrs. Dexterhaven and obtain her signature. Opie arrives just as her butler has quit and she is about to throw a fancy party... she blackmails Opie by refusing to sign the policy unless he acts as her substitute butler. You can well imagine how this goes.

To improve his mind, Opie reads comic books, and his reaction is much like Abner's has been in the past: "I wonder where the Batman gets that purple underwear?" (The clerk at the magazine counter is Peter Leeds again.) Opie tells about Slick Hair Carter back in Clinton, who used to go around kissing all the girls in town. "He weren't no good at baseball, so he had to have some-thin' to do." A new announcer replaces Hy Averback, but says his name so fast it is hard to understand... it sounds like he says Reed Browning.

JANUARY 5, 1948: Before the plot proper begins, Opie has an amusing scene in which he picks up the phone to call an old friend back home in Clinton: Hank Truman. "He lives in a big white house." Naturally enough, a succession of long distance operators connect him with another White House in Washington



It's caps awhile for the orchestra on THE OPIE CATES SHOW; Opie (right) looks over the group with music director Buzz Adlam (left).

DC, where we hear the piano strains of "The Missouri Waltz" (a gag that would be repeated a year later when Lum & Abner traveled to Truman's inauguration). Opie also tells about the time that the oldest Johnson boy lost control of his truck and crashed through the back wall of the Bijou Theatre, where *Ben Hur* was playing. "It was durin' the big chariot race, and Johnson crossed the finish line ahead of Francis X. Bushman," says Opie.

The Browns go out of town while their house is being repainted, and putting Opie in charge of the redecorating proves not to be Mr. Brown's wisest move. By the time they get back home, their home is inhabited by a young soldier (Jerry Hausner again), his extremely pregnant wife, and a doctor who keeps insisting that Opie boil water... to make a cup of tea. The young lady ends up having quadruplets, whose crying is, naturally, performed by Hausner. Opie describes the time he held the ladder while Ed Schultz painted his barn. Mr. Brown growls, "Schultz was a fool. With you holding the ladder, he probably broke his neck." Opie replies, "No he didn't... He grabbed hold of the edge of the roof just in time." This week, the announcer is Lou Cook.

JANUARY 12, 1948: One of the best installments available to us. Opie buys a Model T from used car dealer Punch Drunk Pierre (Peter Leeds in an amazing performance). When Kathryn and her boyfriend Robert (named after Opie's real-life son?) are presumed lost in a snowstorm during a skiing trip, Opie and Mr. Brown set out in the jalopy to find them. There are some great gags about Opie's "new" car: when Brown turns on the radio, he hears news reports about President Herbert Hoover.

Opie and Brown end up rescuing (or being rescued by, depending on how you look at it) a group of Boy Troopers. They enthusiastically bandage Mr. Brown's non-existent wounds, and then find that he cannot sit down in the car because of the bandages. Their solution is to tie the protesting grouch onto the fender of the car! Returning back home, Brown splutters when trying to describe the trip to his wife: "Now, Malcolm, watch your language, there are children present," she admonishes him. Opie, in his dry delivery: "Oh, when he was strapped onto the fender they heard some beauties!"

Even though Roz Rogers is not credited as one of the writers on this episode (David Swift and Bob Shelley were apparently going it alone), he apparently left some material to be used for it. Opie tells about the automotive escapades of Earl Bidbault in Clinton... of course, stories about the Bidbaults would be featured in nearly every one of Opie's *Lum and Abner* appearances.

JANUARY 19, 1948: Opie gets his head stuck in the office

mimeograph machine just as Jerry Hausner arrives playing a telegram delivery boy. Opie ends up with Apex Insurance Co. slogans printed on his forehead and necktie, which makes quite an impression when company vice-president George Maddox comes to the Browns' house for dinner. The Browns' cat eats some dinner mints that are actually Mrs. Brown's sleeping pills, and Opie also tests some canned tuna by feeding it to the cat. Later, discovering the sluggish feline, Opie, Brown, and Maddox assume their food was poisoned!

This is one of the weaker entries in the series, with some of the "morbid" gags that would eventually become so prevalent in the half-hour *Lum and Abner*.

JANUARY 26, 1948: Mr. Brown is to be interviewed on a

radio program, *Meet Your Local Businessman*, and wants to make sure his speech comes off without a hitch. Opie knew someone in radio once: Lyle Greenow, another name that would be turned over to Ben Withers on *Lum and Abner* a year later. Brown's interview is supposed to be impromptu, but just to be safe he has his notes all written out. Of course, Opie accidentally folds the notes into a paper airplane and sails it out the window.

After some confusion while trying to rescue the paper airplane from first the public library and then an elementary school, Opie hotfoots it for the radio station. The crew mistakenly believes he is Mr. Brown, learning differently only seconds before airtime. (The announcer at the radio station is our old friend Jerry Hausner again.) All Opie has to do is read Brown's prepared notes, but there was a mixup at the elementary school and Opie instead has a report about Eskimos. The interview is so funny, the station wants Brown to appear on their prime-time

show, *The Eagle Peanut Butter Playhouse*.

Apparently there would be only one more episode after this one. When Opie made his *Lum and Abner* debut a year later, in February 1949, it would be almost as a continuation of this series. Again he would be recently arrived from Clinton, sent to Pine Ridge by his Aunt Minnie. One aspect that was added for his L&A character was that he was the supposed nephew of Luke Spears... if Opie is Luke Spears' nephew, and Luke Spears is Grandpappy Spears' nephew, how does that make Opie related to Grandpappy Spears? Interesting, isn't it? And just think, if it hadn't been for Opie's sojourn with Mr. Brown and the Apex Insurance Company, he might never have made it to Pine Ridge at all!

- Tim Hollis



Barbara Fuller and Opie continue gagging it up with Opie's trademark caps.

The Autobiography of Opie Cates:

From RAgS to RICHES to RAgS

IN ONE EASY LIFETIME!

We could think of no more fitting way to close our salute to Opie Cates than by letting Opie have the last word himself. Back in the 1960s, Opie wrote this very humorous autobiographical sketch for daughter Liza Jane, one of the very few times he chose to talk about himself and his career. We first published this piece upon the occasion of his death, in the February 1988 issue of THE JOT 'EM DOWN JOURNAL, but are pleased to present it again here.

Our hero... we'll call him Bill for easy identification... was born in a little washed-out hole of a town in the middle of the Ozark Mountains, and listed on your road map as Clinton, in the great state of Arkansas... more recently known as "Faubus Land."

Being born in October of the year 1909 (too late for the log cabin era and too early for the Stucco period), our hero had to settle for the conventional-type dwelling of that time, called the "board and bat style." Now obviously, this dampened his prospects as presidential material, for as we know, all presidents of any importance were foaled in log cabins... so, as a consequence, Bill's and his parents' aspirations in this direction were practically nil at the very start.

In story books, the farmer is always "poor but honest," and Bill's father was no exception, 'cept maybe he was a little more poor than some of them. But he could do something that a lot of other farmers couldn't: he could play the fiddle like crazy. And he managed to fall in love with a sweet young 19-year-old that could play the "geetar" real well... so you can readily see that Bill had set himself up in a little "One Family Dance Band." He did this by choosing his parents very carefully, something we should all give serious thought to.

Now please remember that this was in the times before Carnation had invented the contented cow that put the milk in the cute little tin cans which Mother could warm up and feed to her little offspring while she

could continue sipping contentedly on her "old fashioned;" this was pioneer days. Women did it the hard way...they nursed their young, and at two-hour intervals at that. In history we have an A.D. and a B.C. We might call this period of Bill's life BBS: Before Baby Sitters. So, Bill, of a necessity must accompany the Mother, even though it took him to the Saturday night dance at which the One Family Band played. Thus Bill, even before he had ever cut his baby teeth, was in the dance business; not dancing as we know it, but dancing nevertheless to the Irish jigs, Scottish reel, and Old English folk songs that later (in modern times) became known as "hillbilly music."

From this beginning it was inevitable that Bill should be taught the fiddle; the only joker in this deal was, Bill just didn't cotton to the fiddle. So, we'll just skip over a few years of the family's migration through the Southern states until we find our hero attending high school in Joplin, Missouri... where for the first time Bill discovers the clarinet: MAN, THIS IS IT! A few blues records are being released in 1927, enough to get a guy fired up on this clarinet playing. He plunges into the clarinet so devotedly that he almost drives his parents into insanity from his constant practicing.

The result: in two years, Bill wins the state high school contest for clarinet playing. He represents the state of Missouri in the national contest at Joliet, Illinois, judged by the most famous musician of the day, John Phillip Sousa. He wins First Place, and is the town hero for a few days. This is the big year in the kid's life; this is the year he graduates from high school, along with a couple of classmates that later gain much prominence: John Beal and Bob Cummings.

After graduation, he spends one year on Keith-Orpheum vaudeville with a jazz band act called the "Memphis Collegians," where for the first time he meets and hears in person the great "Satchmo," Louis Armstrong, playing the downtown "Loop" in Chicago. Then to Missouri University with his own band to work his way through school. A year on the road with Music



Opie is at far right; the fellow in front with the three saxophones is believed to be Ben Pollock.

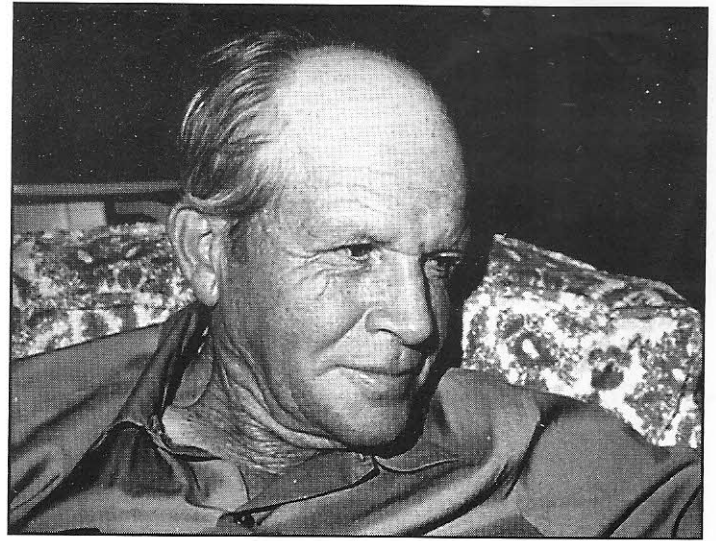


Opie's most famous publicity shot.

Corporation of America, where on one of his stands he met a cute little blonde named Kay in the city of Cleveland... MARRIAGE... the Great Depression really sets in!...

Back to Missouri University for another year, this time with a wife. Then he gives up his own band and leaves school to work for dance bands from coast to coast. 1934: California, \$40 and no union card. Ben Pollock organizes a new band and auditions clarinet players... Bill joins the great Ben Pollock. Two years on the road and then we find Bill with Pollock at Sebastian's Cotton Club in Culver City, California. From there, the luck of the Irish really started to work: from Pollock he joins the NBC staff orchestra under the direction of Gordon Jenkins. Two years later he has his own band on a program called *The Kid With the Stick*, sponsored by Rainer Beer, while also doing freelance work with other orchestras on the Dick Haymes show, Bob Burns, Abbott & Costello, Sinatra, Eddie Cantor, and many more of the great names of show business.

Probably the peak of his career was in the 1940s when he is conducting, playing clarinet, and writing the music for his own band, which is featured on four network shows weekly: the *Lum and Abner* show, Judy Canova, the Barry Fitzgerald show, and *Meet Me At Parky's*, which starred Parkyakarkus (whose real name was Harry Einstein) and featured Sheldon Leonard. With a combined radio audience of 35 million each week, this required a considerable amount of work for Bill: 48 to 50 hours over the drawing board each week arranging the music, plus rehearsal



Opie in the 1960s, around the time he penned this autobiography.

time for each show... also rehearsal time with the cast, as he worked in the script in *Meet Me At Parky's* and *Lum and Abner*. Needless to say, the pay was very good and the government allowed him to keep a small part of it for his very own...

Then television reared its ugly screen and we find our hero sadly contemplating the future. By this time, he's nearing the "life begins at 40" stage; that wavy hair is getting a touch of gray around the edges... and on top she's slowly moving back. Pioneering television is just like starting all over again in radio, where you played for nothing just to get an audience of some sort: instead of \$500 to \$1000 per show, they slapped you with that union wage scale of \$27.50. Boy, this was for the birds.

Also about this time, due to the pace he had been going for the past ten years, that great occupational disease, ulcers, was beginning to show around the edges. The family doctor had a little chat with him and said, "Bill, my boy, you're gonna hafta slow down a little or you're gonna be a pretty fair candidate for Forest Lawn one of these fine days." So Bill sat down and had a very serious talk with himself and came to the conclusion that he was gonna get out of that rat race while he was still free and clear... and that's exactly what he did.

He planed back to eastern Oklahoma, near his native Arkansas, bought 7000 acres of ranch land and 500 acres of Arkansas River bottom land, and began the great exodus from Hollywood. The clarinet now hangs on the bedroom wall gathering dust while Bill is busy gathering dust from the seat of a tractor or from the heels of a herd of beef cattle... and to tell the truth, I think he's mighty happy doing all of this.

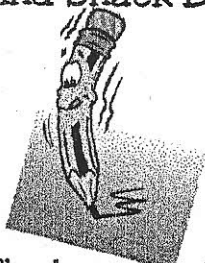
Incidentally, I might add that Bill and that little blonde he met up with in Cleveland raised five children during this hullabaloo: Robert, and four girls named after songs from the deep South, Dixie, Dinah, Linda, and Little Liza Jane.

It may puzzle some of you as to why I know so much about Bill and his family. Well, to tell you the truth, I was foolin' you a little. His name isn't really Bill... he is known as

- Opie Cates



H.O & Julia
"Jot'em Down Store"
 And Snack Bar



We'll make you a good deal
 AND a good meal !!

It's time for another look at the L&A sights that are to be seen along the highways of the USA!

First, we find yet another "Jot 'Em Down Store," this time in Beaumont, Texas. The owners, H. O. and Julia Pope, are NLAS members... but were not aware of the NLAS's existence when they chose that particular name for their shop. It is actually located in the King Mart Flea Market there in Beaumont, so if any of you happen to be in the area, be

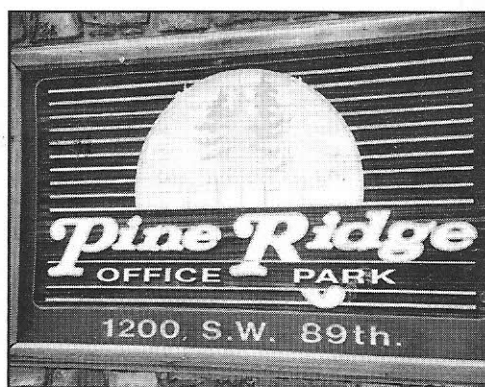
sure to drop in and tell the Pops "Howdy do you do."

Longtime NLAS member John Knuppel of Yukon, Oklahoma, happened to be in nearby Oklahoma City when he ran across the locale where all of our old friends would undoubtedly be doing

business today: the Pine Ridge Office Park. John says that when he stopped by, Ulysses S. Quincy told him he thought Oklahoma was OK.

Finally, member Loren Cox Jr. of Lexington, Kentucky, informs us that last year Robert Terrell, proprietor of the Lexington "Jot 'Em Down Store," passed away at the

age of 68. Mr. Terrell's father was the founder of the store, which received its L&A name in 1938 when Chet Lauck & Tuffy Goff themselves came through Lexington on business and had an official sign painted for it. The store still operates under that monicker today.



It's easy to imagine the businesses that occupy this office park in Oklahoma City: the Jot 'Em Down Store, Mose Moots' barber shop, Luke Spears' lunchroom, etc etc.



NLAS members H.O. & Julia Pope in their "Jot 'Em Down Store" at the King Mart Flea Market in Beaumont, TX.



The Lexington, KY, "Jot 'Em Down Store" as it appeared in 1943. Notice the hanging sign, which was personally commissioned by Lauck & Goff.