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Journal

Official Publication of  
the National Lum & Abner® Society

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December 1999

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# Lum and Abner® to the Rescue



The wife of one of our members (who prefers to remain anonymous) is a hospice nurse. One day, she and one of her patients were discussing his need for a good, clean laugh, and when the nurse mentioned Lum and Abner, the man said how he wished he could see one of their movies... but did not know of their availability. The nurse said that her husband had copies of all seven of their movies; the patient asked to see them, and watched *So This Is Washington*, *Partners In Time*, and *The Bashful Bachelor*. In fact, the man watched each of

them four or five times, and even asked visitors and his wife to enjoy them with him. According to his wife, the handwritten thank you note expressing his appreciation was one of the last he wrote himself. He spoke of the joy these movies brought to him in such a period of his life. If it had not been for our old friends Lum and Abner, this would not have been possible.



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# THE JOT 'EM DOWN JOURNAL

## December 1999

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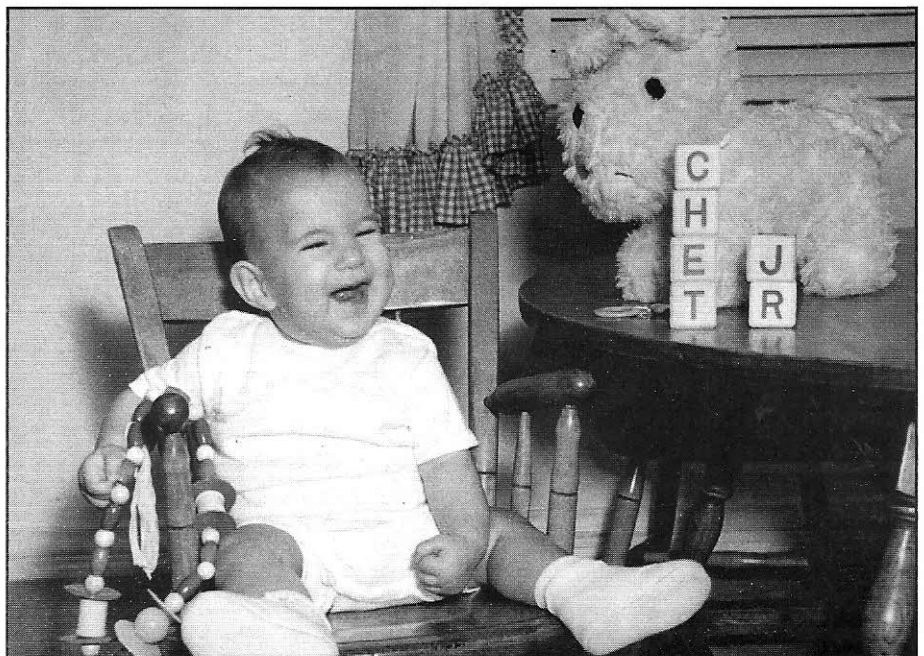
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**Cover:** Norris (Abner) Goff, Chet  
 (Lum) Lauck, and organist Sybil  
 Chism discuss their upcoming  
 special program promoting the sale  
 of Christmas Seals, 1939.

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The holiday season of 1939 had an extra reason for being joyous around Chet  
 (Lum) Lauck's Beverly Hills home. On December 31, Chet, Harriet, Shirley, and  
 Nancy welcomed the family's first son, Chester Lauck Jr.

**HAPPY BIRTHDAY, CHET!**

# LUM & ABNER: NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 1949

As you know, we have begun a series of articles examining the two seasons of the weekly half-hour version of *Lum and Abner* in observance of that ill-fated format's 50th anniversary. Our last installment appeared in the June issue of *The Jot 'Em Down Journal*, and covered the last two months of the first season. Our series now resumes with a look at what was going on down in Pine Ridge in the autumn of 1949.

Things were not looking so good as the long summer came to an end. Apparently Frigidaire, the sponsor of the entire first season of 30-minute shows, was not satisfied enough with that series to choose to continue their sponsorship in the fall. We have no way of knowing just when Chet Lauck and Tuffy Goff would have been made aware of this fact, but as the usual fall premiere months of September and October passed, and there was still no *Lum and Abner* series on the air, they must have had a sinking feeling that something was wrong.

Their first known appearance on the air that fall took place on the October 26, 1949, broadcast of *The Bing Crosby Show*, which at that point was being sponsored by Chesterfield cigarettes. It is a well-known fact that Crosby was the first performer in radio to be allowed to record his program instead of performing it live, and this fact accounts for some interesting differences between the script of this show (which is in the NLAS archives) and the recording of it (which may be found on tape #274 of the NLAS Tape Library).

The script indicates that L&A's segment was taped on October 18, over a week before the air date. Lum & Abner report that they have made one previous trip to California (WRONG!), that being when they attended the "Arkansas Picnic" in Long Beach in 1921. In the recording, Crosby remarks, "I remember one picnic where they must have had a quarter mile of apple pie alone... There was cheese clear to La Jolla." This is different from the scripted line, which reads, "Three and a half miles of food, not counting cole slaw. They have a slew of slaw!" Also, says Crosby of Long Beach, "That's the only seacoast town in the

world where the halibut have heartburn," but the script calls for him to say, "where the grunions eat onions." Sounds like the gag writers were having a hard time making up their minds on this one!

L&A report that while they are out of town they simply locked up the Jot 'Em Down Store to keep the cattle out. In the recording, Abner remarks about the trouble they have with cows and their brooms: "A cow can chew a broom down to a cake testin' straw." In the script, he says,

"They chew 'em into the nicest cud you ever saw." This is followed by a bit of dialogue that doesn't take much imagination to figure out why it was deleted in those censor-happy radio days:

*ABNER: We're stayin' in a ho-tel.*

*CROSBY: Oh, you got a room, eh?*

*LUM: We got two rooms. One's got a birdbath in it.*

*ABNER: The birds around here must be awful shy because the birdbath's got a cover on it.*

*CROSBY: Well, that's Hollywood for you. Nothing but the best.*

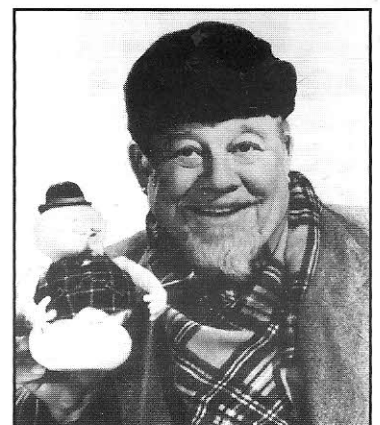
It is hard to know whether the scriptwriter actually thought they could get this bit of "bathroom humor" on the air, but needless to say... they didn't. The recording jumps immediately to the next segment of the routine, in which L&A explain that they are looking for a singer to entertain at the Halloween party down in Pine Ridge. In the scripted version, Abner reports that they have a great singer back home, Otey Kemphorn. However, in the actual recording this name becomes Opie Cates, but otherwise continues as written. (Opie came down with that fancy new disease, penicillin, which he got from eating moldy bread.)

The discussion then turns to the subject of country doctors, and L&A talk about their Pine Ridge physicians, Old Doc Jones and his son, Old Doc Jones Junior. (So whatever happened to Doc Miller? Did he go on to his "presarved seat in the better world"?) O.D.J. Jr. recently installed a new fleuroscope; Bing's scripted remark that does not appear in the show is, "That's a great machine. I like 'em better than television. The picture's clearer too." However, just to preserve some semblance of live radio, the recording leaves in a "bloop" by Chet Lauck. According to the script, he is supposed to say, "The minute Old Doc Jones Jr. put that fleuroscope in his office, everything in town stopped for a week while everybody rushed up to get their scopes fleured." However, as he read the line, it came out, "Everybody rushed up to get their scores floped." The audience (and Crosby and Tuffy) collapse in hysterics.

L&A finally get around to the purpose of their visit: "We figure you're a pretty important singer, Bing... And we figured an important singer like you would know where we could get ahold of Burl Ives." There is a deleted (and not too funny) passage in which L&A insist that Burl Ives brings his own orchestra ("a gittar"), then discuss the type of food available back home. The broadcast version covers the same ground, but with completely different dialogue. The scripted exchange features the following remark from Bing, which might have infuriated a certain number of listeners: "I had no idea I had



*Bing Crosby*



*Burl Ives*

such a big following in Arkansas... I thought that was Eddy Arnold country." After Bing leaves to pack for the trip, L&A get a telegram from Burl Ives announcing that he will be happy to perform at the party. Now they have to break the news to Bing. The following bit does not appear in the recording:

**ABNER:** *Oh, Bing will throw a fit! All them singers are jealous as can be of one another.*

**LUM:** *Well, I guess you're right, Abner... when you get right down to it they all do sound alike. All of 'em are imitatin' Ernest Tubb.*

The L&A segment of the recording ends rather abruptly, as L&A get Bing to back out of the trip on his own accord... sort of. Anyway, the script indicates that that was not the conclusion of the routine as originally written. Before leaving, L&A decide to give Bing a copy of "I Grannies, I Doggies, I Love You," the song Lum "wrote" on the June 12 episode of their program. The script then calls for Lum, Abner, and Bing to all perform the song together. It is not known whether this priceless musical trio was actually recorded and then left on the editing room floor, or if it was given the axe before the show was committed to tape. Instead, the balance of the program is made up of Chesterfield commercials and non-L&A songs by Bing, including a Halloween ditty called "The Headless Horseman," which he performed in the 1949 Walt Disney animated version of *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*. L&A do return in the closing seconds in order for Bing to plug the season premiere of their own program next Wednesday night, November 2, and for L&A to get in some gags about Bing's upcoming guest, Bob Hope. In an unusual move, at the very end of the show Bing says, "Thanks, Chet and Tuffy," two names that may have made the radio listeners wonder whom he was talking to.

When the new season of *Lum and Abner* did begin, the lack of a sponsor did affect the actual appearance of the show. The most immediate change was that the program no longer used the large supporting cast of radio character actors that was so prominent in the Frigidaire series. Except for very occasional guests, the whole show consisted of L&A themselves, plus ZaSu Pitts and Opie Cates (playing themselves) and Dink Trout (as crabby Luke Spears). The other regular cast member went through an unusual transformation between the first and second seasons. Andy Devine had been portraying barber Mose Moots since the end of February, but for no reason at the beginning of the second season he became known simply as Andy Devine... although he was still the Pine Ridge barber. Wendell Niles was still the announcer, but with no commercials to deliver he had very little to do on the show.

Another change involved the writing team behind the scripts. Longtime L&A writer Roz Rogers had never liked the switch to the half-hour format in the first place, and after the end of the first season he said "That's all I can stand 'cause I can't stand no more." For the second season, Roz's regular co-writer Betty Boyle was paired with up-and-coming comedy scribe Jay Sommers. (After the half-hour *Lum and Abner* ended in 1950, Sommers created his own rural radio situation comedy, *Granby's Green Acres*, which was later adapted as the famous TV series starring Eddie Albert and Eva Gabor.)

Now, as we have been doing in the past, we will examine the extant L&A programs from 1949-50 in sequence.



*Betty Boyle*



*Jay Sommers*

**NOVEMBER 2, 1949:** This is one of the scripts that was donated to the NLAS archives by Wendell Niles himself, and its cover page gives some detailed information as to just how *Lum and Abner* was put on the air during this period. The program originated in CBS's Studio #C from 7:30 to 8:00 p.m. Pacific Time. The cast and sound effects technicians rehearsed in Script Room #2 from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m., with the dress rehearsal in Studio #C from 6:00 to 7:30 p.m. The orchestra rehearsed in Studio #3 from 4:00 to 5:00 p.m. and arrived in Studio #C for the dress rehearsal an hour ahead of the cast (5:00 p.m.). Larry Berns was listed as producer/director; Carl Harwood as assistant director; Vern Tashner as engineer; and Bill Gould in charge of sound effects. Wendell Niles and Paul Masterson each did announcements, and music was by Opie Cates.

The plot begins with L&A greeting each other after their summer vacation, ignoring the fact that they were together just one week earlier on the Bing Crosby show. (Abner, as usual, was visiting Lizabeth's relatives in Mineola, Texas.) They get sentimental as they reminisce about how they have been friends for so long and have never had an argument. They then get into an argument over whether they have been friends for 40 years or 45 years. Opie Cates arrives to tell what happened to him when he planned a trip to New York during the summer:

**OPIE:** *I took a job so I could save enuff money to make the trip, but when the time come, I couldn't leave cause I was workin.*

**ABNER:** *Oh, that's too bad.*

**OPIE:** *It woulda been, but Gomer Bates helped me out.*

**LUM:** *Well, did Gomer work fer you?*

**OPIE:** *No, he made the trip fer me.*

After Opie leaves, L&A get into another loud argument over which one is the best friend to the other. Predictably, this culminates in Lum getting out the rope and dividing the store in half. ZaSu Pitts is still with the County Home Economics Bureau, and arrives to give "Ten Red Hot Suggestions for a Cold Winter." She gets caught in the middle of the price war between "Mad Man Eddards" and "Smilin Abner Peabody" (LUM: "He smiles at you when you're buyin and laughs at you when you leave"). Ex-Mose Moots Andy Devine fares little better: "I can't out holler you fellers... My voice jist ain't been the same since the sand and gravel strike."

Andy devises a plan to reunite the fightin' pals. He takes Lum aside and begins running down Abner, telling Lum how smart he is to sever his relationship with the little crook... even insinuat-

ing that Abner is responsible for the money missing from the collection plate at church. This has the desired effect on Lum, who angrily runs Andy out of his side of the store. Andy then pulls the same stunt on Abner, telling him what a crook Lum is. L&A finally run Andy out of the store together and belatedly realize what he was doing.

In the spot where the closing commercial would normally have appeared, Paul Masterson promotes CBS's Sunday night lineup of *The Jack Benny Show* and *The Red Skelton Show*, and the Monday night presentation of *Arthur Godfrey, My Friend Irma*, and *The Lux Radio Theatre*. Wendell Niles gets into the act by advertising the Wednesday night group: *The Bing Crosby Show*, *You Bet Your Life* with Groucho Marx, *Burns and Allen*, and *Lum and Abner*. This is followed by a jingle that gets a laugh from the studio audience itself... either because it is so corny or because of someone's on-stage antics while it is playing: "Tune in, tune in this fall / For the shows you enjoy best of all / Listen carefully, here's the address / It's C..B..S... CBS!" (Some promotions person at the network today probably got a hefty bonus for coming up with their current slogan, "The address is CBS.") As the show ends, L&A get into another argument over who is going to take the rope down. They decide to just leave it up!

**NOVEMBER 9, 1949:** No script or recording has been located for this week's episode.

**NOVEMBER 16, 1949:** Lum learns that Andy Devine secretly has a crush on ZaSu Pitts (a more physically mismatched couple is hard to imagine), and while singing "Some Enchanted Evenin'" he plots to get the two lovebirds together by giving a "comin' out party" for Andy. L&A plan entertainment for the party. Abner wants to have a coon hunt, but Lum explains that they don't have coon hunts in high society. "They hunt sompin' high class, like mink." For music, he will hire the MacMillan Boys and Mother.

Lum has great ideas about Andy "baskin' in the lime's light, bellin' around the ball, an' trippin' over the light fantastic," but Emily Post's book on etiquette doesn't seem to fit the situation. Tuffy Goff cracks himself up when he remarks about Andy's voice, "Sounds like a bulldozer with stripped gears climbin' out of a gravel pit." Lum goes to Miss Pitts' house to invite her to the party, but while he is gone ZaSu visits Abner in the store. For the first time she reveals her secret crush on Lum (probably a carryover from her work with the boys in the 1942 movie *The Bashful Bachelor*), and of course by the time Abner gets through talking to her, she thinks it is Lum who is planning to ask for her hand in marriage instead of Andy.

In the middle of the program, where a commercial would have appeared had there been a sponsor, Wendell Niles introduces a new feature for the show: a musical number by "Opie Cates, his clarinet and his orchestra." Their rendition of "Digga Digga Doo" serves to reinforce the fact that Opie's musical talents have long been underrated by radio fans. After this interlude, we get back to the story. Opie tells Abner about a party he attended back in Clinton, Arkansas, with a girl named Sam Bidbault. (Her two sis-



*ZaSu Pitts started pursuing Lum in the 1942 movie THE BASHFUL BACHELOR, and was still at it during the 1949-50 radio season.*

ters were named Clyde and Dudley.) Meanwhile, Lum and ZaSu are having their mixed-up conversation about marriage, with Lum completely unaware that Miss Pitts has the hots for him.

In the wrapup, a furious Andy shows up in the store accusing Lum of stealing ZaSu away from him. He announces that ZaSu is going to sue Lum for breach of promise, a familiar situation from the 15-minute days but one that is not carried out here nor mentioned again. Wendell Niles delivers a PSA for United States Savings Bonds. This is one of the few shows this season in which Dink "Luke Spears" Trout does not appear.

**NOVEMBER 23, 1949:** Lum bemoans the fact that no one has invited him to Thanksgiving dinner, until Abner reminds him that people think it is about time that Lum returned the favor and invited them to his house. Fortunately, Lum gets a letter from his Aunt Clara in Sheboygan Falls, informing him that she is sending him one of her prize birds to brighten his Thanksgiving. In anticipation of this, Lum invites 15 people to his house for dinner and draws a diagram dividing the turkey up like a piece of real estate. (ABNER: "What do ya call this project, Gobbler's Gables?")

Lum sends Opie Cates to the county seat to pick up the turkey at the express office. Opie tells about the time Miz Bidbault made a plum pudding containing a generous helping of brandy, which Mr. Bidbault quickly consumed. When he lit a cigar, he shot a streak of blue flame clear across the room. "You shoulda seen the surprised expression on Miz Bidbault's face," says Opie. "She had it fer weeks... til her eyebrows grew back." Luke Spears is furious that Lum has taken all of his Thanksgiving business away from his lunch room, until Lum invites him to dinner too. Andy Devine says he hasn't eaten all day so there will be plenty of room in his stomach for turkey. Says Abner, "Ther's enough room in ther fer Turkey, Spain, and half o' Russia!"

Opie Cates and his orchestra play "Calling All Clarinets," a tune that had been a part of Opie's



*Dink (Luke Spears) Trout*

repertoire for years (it is not known whether he was its composer, but it is possible). On Thanksgiving Day, Lum has a housefull of hungry citizens waiting on dinner, but he has to stall because Opie hasn't made it back from Mena with the turkey. His attempts to keep everyone's mind off food are less than successful; he finally invites everyone to sit in a circle on the floor while he tells the story of the first Thanksgiving. ABNER: "If I'm goin' to go to all th' trouble to git down on the floor, I'd druther hear 'Peter Rabbit.'" Just as Lum finishes his delightfully warped story of the Pilgrims (Christopher Columbus was on board and it took them 40 days and 40 nights to reach America), Opie shows up with the bird Aunt Clara sent: a caged canary!

**NOVEMBER 30, 1949:** Wendell Niles is absent this week, so his assistant Paul Masterson handles all the announcements. Lum is disgusted with the lack of culture in Pine Ridge, and demands a higher standard of ignorance. Instead of reviving the Golden Era Discussion Club, he has another solution: he will write an opera and direct the performance himself. (ABNER: "What kind of opry is it, horse er soap?") To increase ticket sales, Lum decides he needs a big name star, such as Caruso (first name is Robinson, of course). Opie Cates will direct the Silver Cornet Band during the opera, and describes his musical background. "I took up the saxophone once, but I had to give it up. Stretched my mouth all out of shape. I played that thing for two years before I found out I was blowin' it on the wrong end." Opie knows a graduate of the Clinton Conservatory of Music who will be happy to star in the opera, and brings him to town: Tennessee Ernie Ford.

If it seems a bit strange that someone with the star potential of Ford would be making an appearance during these rather financially lean days of *Lum and Abner*, we must remember one thing. At this particular time, Ford was definitely making a name for himself in the recording industry, but he was far from his later prominence. In fact, his hillbilly-accented "Tennessee Ernie" characterization which he used in this show was known only to listeners of the local Los Angeles radio program on which he was a featured comedian. His main claim to fame in November 1949 is mentioned several times during the show... "I made a record of 'Mule Train,'" he says. Replies Lum, "Well, who hasn't?" A few



*Tennessee Ernie Ford and Andy Devine were reunited for an episode of Ford's TV series in the 1950s.*

years after this appearance with L&A, Ford's recording of "Sixteen Tons" hit the music charts and he would remain a major celebrity until his death.

Lum tries to give Ernie a bit of dialogue coaching, his hillbilly accent being a bit jarring. This is one of the most ill-conceived routines in L&A history... the concept of L&A trying to correct the grammar of someone even more rural than they are just does not fit somehow. Tennessee Ernie claims he was born in Georgia. "Why didn't they call ya Georgia Ernie then?" asks Lum. "Cause that'd sound silly," says Ernie. (Ford was actually a native of Bristol, Tennessee.) When Lum tries to run through the vowels, A, E, I, O, U, Ernie has trouble: "A, E, I, O, Y'all."

Ford is not the only cast member of Lum's opera, which is (very) loosely based on the story of Samson and Delilah. ZaSu Pitts is cast as Delilah, but while practicing the scale she overextends her vocal cords and develops laryngitis. Her part in the show is filled (to overflowing) by Andy Devine. The pun-filled opera itself is something of a masterpiece for Opie Cates' orchestra, consisting of thundering selections from "The Poet & Peasant Overture," "Carmen," "Pagliacci," "The Barber of Seville," "The Blue Danube," and the Chesterfield cigarettes jingle. It ends with Tennessee Ernie and Andy Devine (aka Delilah) in a wild rendition of his oft-mentioned hit "Mule Train." (Apparently the repeated references to this song up until now were intended solely to set up this closing routine.)

Unfortunately, we have no recordings of any of the *Lum and Abner* shows from December 1949 (although it is known that they do exist). There is a slight possibility that the Tennessee Ernie show discussed above may have been aired on December 7 rather than November 30, but there is no concrete evidence to support either theory. We do know that the December 21 program involved their traditional Christmas story, probably a "remake" of the December 19, 1948, show. (Since that script involved a number of supporting characters, including Ben Withers, Ezra Seestrunk, and Sister Simpson, it is anyone's guess as to how they adapted it for this pared-down second season.)

Join us in our next issue to learn what is known about the show during January and February 1950!

- Tim Hollis



*The original conception of the "Tennessee Ernie" character was even more backwoods than Lum and Abner!*

# 1939: A YEAR TO REMEMBER

In this issue we have been talking a lot about what was going on during Lum and Abner's second half-hour season in 1949, but we should not let this year get away without taking a look at a decade earlier. The world of 1939 and the world of 1949 are so different as to almost seem as if they occurred on two different planets... not just in the case of *Lum and Abner* but in every other facet of life as well. However, for our purposes we will here be looking at the world of L&A as 1939 came to a close.

The tourism industry in Pine Ridge was growing on a daily basis by this time. To give something of the flavor of the period, we present here an open letter that Dick Huddleston sent to the editor of *The Mena Star* in 1939, reporting on the phenomenal growth in the number of tourists visiting his Pine Ridge store:

*To The Editor, Mena Star:*

*We had an interesting lot of visitors here in Pine Ridge this afternoon. And it is interesting and funny to answer the many questions that are asked. Here are a few of them.*

*"Really, are Lum and Abner from this part of the country?" "Did you ever see them?" "Do you know them personally?" "Were they wealthy or poor boys?" "How did they get started on the radio?" "What did they do before they became radio stars?" "Are they married?"... (especially do the young ladies ask this question) "Do they have any children?" "How come they talk about you?" "Are the other characters really living characters?" "Are old Squire Skimp and Snake Hogan as mean as they say they are?" "Did they ever attend college?" "Who writes their script?" These are just a few of the many and all kinds of questions that are asked us every day by our visitors.*

*Fourteen of the visitors today were from Illinois. Among them were the Smiths, who were never blessed with much of this world's goods until last year when they struck oil on their land near St. Alma. But they are doing real well for themselves now, both financially and raising a family.*

*Charles Smith has ten children and thirteen oil wells. He leased his land for \$50,000 or 3-16 of the oil and he is the man we read in the papers about last year, buying six new autos at one time.*

*He had never owned anything but an old T model Ford, and could not buy gas for it until he leased his land. And the first purchase he made when he received his lease check was a new car for himself and one each for the five oldest children. The baby being too young to drive, he placed the price of a new car in the bank to its credit, to be spent for a car when it gets old enough to drive.*

*Mr. Smith stated he aimed for his children to have something different to what he ever had to ride in. G. W. Bledsoe, a short, stocky, pleasant and smiling man, banker of St. Alma, who has the baby's money, was one of the party.*

*It is interesting to wait on our visitors' trade and notice the different things they buy to take home to show their friends they have visited Pine Ridge. One bought a pair of overalls for himself and a friend; one bought a pair of bridle bits; another a tin cup apiece for he and his wife; another two old-time split bonnets and two house aprons, and sent to his sisters who live in Boston; others buy cob pipes; straw hats, and pocket knives; the ladies buy pottery, souvenirs and pictures, talking and asking questions just as fast as they can all the time.*

*One very wealthy man from New York sat on my store porch the other day and had his picture made. He said, "I would not take anything for this; I can go back home and show my friends I have been to*



*Pine Ridge, the place Lum and Abner talk about so much."*

*A man and party from Cleveland, Ohio, came in the store yesterday and the first thing he said was, "Have you got any cheese and crackers." I said, "Yes." And he said, "Give me a pound. Now have you any horehound candy?" I said, "Yes." "Give me two pounds." Then he called his friends around and said, "Help me eat this." He said, "By golly, I can go back home and tell my partner in the bank that I sat in Dick Huddleston's store and ate cheese and crackers just like I have heard about Lum and Abner doing." These are just a few of the things they say and do almost every day.*

*A lot of our visitors are interested in seeing the county seat, the real home of Lum and Abner, but when they learn they have to cross the splatter creeks that come up in their car and sometimes drown out the motor they shake their head and return over the same road they came.*

*I have just now had six more visitors in the store from West Virginia.*

*Yours truly,  
DICK HUDDLESTON*

The situation Dick was speaking of in his closing paragraphs was a longtime problem confronting L&A tourism. State Highway 88, which ran through Pine Ridge and onward to Mena, may have been named the "Lum & Abner Highway"



that summer, but in the autumn of 1939 it was still a dirt road with no bridges over the several streams that separated Pine Ridge from the larger town. Mena had its own tourism business, but its visitors generally approached from directions other than on Highway 88. The following article (or press release) appeared in *The Mena Star* also in 1939, and gives "the county seat's" perspective on how its reputation could benefit from the two old codgers:

*Among the many things of which Mena has to be proud is one of which no other city in the world can boast, and that is Mena is the home town of Lum and Abner. Doubtless you have heard this comedy pair over the radio, and many perhaps are intimately acquainted with them or have met them, but in the event that your knowledge of the two young men is limited, Lum in real life is Chester H. (Chet) Lauck, son of Mr. and Mrs. W. J. Lauck of Mena, and Abner's signature to a check is Norris Goff. He is the son of Mrs. R. Goff, also of Mena, and is better known to local friends as "Tuffy."*

*Lum and Abner's phenomenal rise to fame in the radio world is with pardonable pride pointed to by relatives and friends in their old home town. Their climb to their present position was not easy, but ancestral traits of perserverance won out for the young men until now they occupy a place among the first four ranking comedy teams on the air.*

*Lum and Abner have a following all over the country because they speak the universal language of rural people and in*

*most instances the dialogue and expressions are not particularly overdrawn. The dialogue and psychology is essentially the same in all hill sections and communities of the United States, and the act has a following in the metropolitan areas because many of the people there have come from the country or have friends or relatives in the country.*

*The boys worked up their programs in the beginning by imitating well-known characters who live in the hill country in and around where the scene of their daily skits is laid. As the programs went on and on, they let their active imaginations work and to date they have never missed a program for want of material. Each plays the part of several characters and on occasions when one or the other of the young entertainers is forced to be off the air through illness or death in the family, the remaining member of the team carries on, and no one listening in is the wiser.*

*Probably nothing has ever been done for any community that has created so much favorable comment as the fact that these radio stars come from Mena.*

*Mena shows her appreciation of the goodwill created by the boys by stressing in every possible way that MENA IS THE HOME OF LUM AND ABNER. The city license stickers for automobiles carry this slogan and large signs on the outskirts of Mena apprise the motoring public that they are approaching "The Home of Lum and Abner."*

These were heady times indeed. In September 1939, the news came out that the Lauck family had purchased a fine home in Beverly Hills. The description was as follows:

*Chester Lauck of the team of Lum and Abner bought this spacious French provincial home from James F. Dickason for*

*the sum of \$65,000. It is located on the southwest corner of Rexford Drive and Sunset Boulevard in Beverly Hills. Among the residence's features are a tennis court, swimming pool, barbecue, 40-foot play room and artistic library in leather.*

(Okay, you Southern California members... you now have the address. Is or is not the former Lauck residence still standing in Beverly Hills?)

The people back home were not seeing very much of their two local celebrities these days. That is why it was such a news item when on November 8, 1939, the following small item appeared in *The Mena Star*: "A poster on display in the lobby of the Union Bank makes the announcement that 'Lum & Abner' will make personal appearances at the Orpheum Theatre in Memphis, Tenn., starting November 9.

The poster came to Postmaster W. B. Martin, and beyond the information it contains, no one else in Mena seems to know more about the Mena radio stars getting this close to home."

December saw the seventh consecutive broadcast of their famous Christmas story, as well as a special promotional recording made to promote the sale of Christmas Seals. (This program may be found on Tape #270 in the NLAS Tape Library; also see the photo relating to it on the cover of this issue!)

Unknown to anyone at this time, *Lum and Abner* would only be on the air for three months during 1940... but when it ended in March of that year, what a huge reason it would have for doing so. Join us in our issues during 2000 to find out what was going on in L&A's world in 1940... and also 1950, 1960, 1970, and 1980!!

- Tim Hollis



**The Orpheum Theatre in Memphis, Tenn.**



**Lauck and Goff visit the Veteran's Hospital in Memphis while in town for their personal appearances, November 11, 1939.**

# Christmas in 30 Minutes

In the December 1998 issue of the *Journal* we had a brief discussion of how the famous Lum & Abner Christmas program was adapted for use during the show's first half-hour season. Since the program was reused for Christmas of 1949, we thought it might be a good idea to examine this unusual "hybrid" script a little closer.

Every Christmas since 1933 (except Christmas of 1942, for some reason) the *Lum and Abner* broadcast had followed the same script: L&A and Grandpappy Spears hear of a poor couple having to spend Christmas night in an old barn on the outskirts of Pine Ridge, and the three old codgers trudge through the snow bearing gifts to make the impoverished man and his pregnant wife more comfortable. It was a beautifully-written 15-minute masterpiece that people looked forward to hearing each Yuletide season.

Then, in 1948, *Lum and Abner* became a weekly half-hour show, and when Christmas came around, how was this traditional story going to be used in a 30-minute format... before a live audience, yet... without destroying its delicate structure? The solution was to leave the existing quarter hour script as it had always been, but precede it with 15 minutes of newly-written continuity that could possibly lead into the story without interfering with it.

Announcer Wendell Niles announced at the very beginning of the show that because of this program's special nature, it would be presented without interruption. However, that did not preclude an opening commercial promoting Frigidaire products as the perfect Christmas gifts! (Try wrapping a refrigerator and getting it to fit under your Christmas tree.)

The first part of the script takes place in Abner's parlor, where Lum, Abner, Ben Withers (Clarence Hartzell) and Ezra Seestrunk (Horace Murphy) are enjoying the Christmas carols being sung outside by the Mitchell Boys' Choir. Things get philosophical when Abner starts to close the window:

*ABNER: I jist hated to shet out the music...*

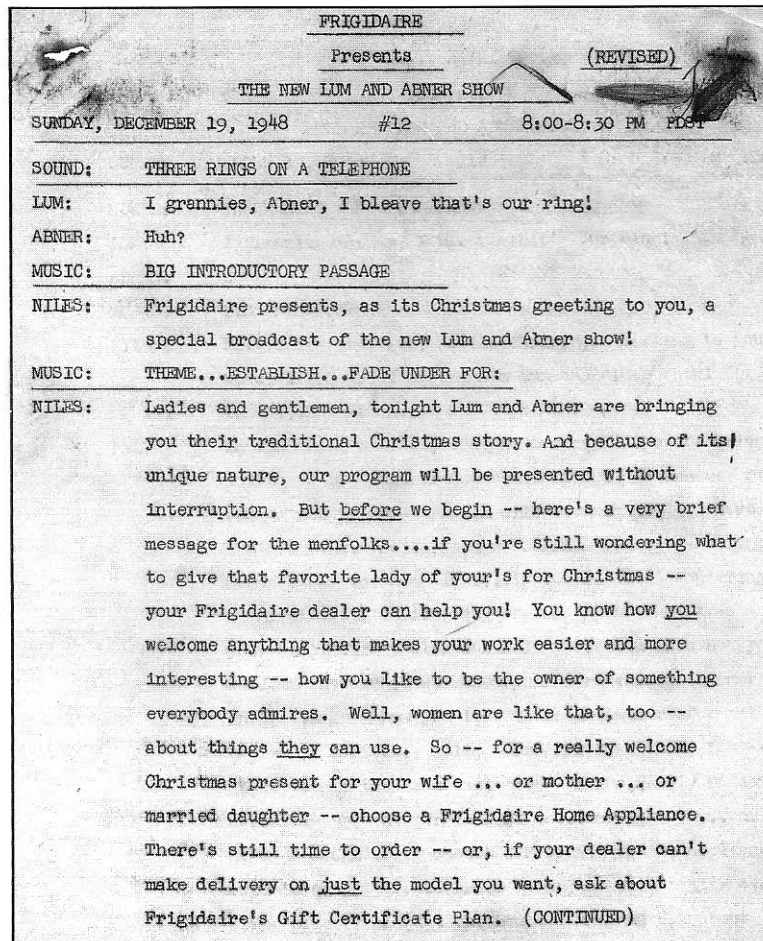
*LUM: (MUSING) Hated to shet out the music. I don't blame you, Abner... I'm afeard that's jist what we do too often... Sorta shut the music right out of our lives...*

There are no real gags as such in this scene, as is fitting... What humor there is is of a much subdued nature, and consists mainly of a retread of L&A's long-established routine about women enjoying themselves in the kitchen so much. Even Ben Withers, who by the time of these half-hour shows was not much more than a buffoon, refrains from telling any half-witted stories. With Sister Simpson (Vivian Lasswell) on the organ, these four harmonize on "Oh Come, All Ye Faithful," and do a creditable job on it too. (In a running gag... if you can call it that... Ezra keeps wanting to sing "Noel," but no one will listen to him.)

After the singing, the telephone rings, and Abner seems as surprised as the rest of us to find that it is Grandpappy Spears, a character who had for all practical purposes been dropped from the cast when the half-hour series began. He asks if L&A can join him on an errand of mercy out to the old Gaddis place, and

there is a brief montage of scenes in which L&A pack up groceries, borrow an oil heater from Ben, and gather blankets from Ezra. Finally, we come to the traditional beginning of the Christmas program, which is played out exactly as it had been in all of its previous broadcasts. After Doc Miller's climactic line, "Well, men, it's a fine baby boy" and the boys' choir rendition of "Silent Night," the script calls for Wendell Niles to return to the microphone to deliver the closing and wish everyone a merry Christmas from the fine folks at Frigidaire... but the slow pace of the Christmas story sequence must have taken the show's producers by surprise, because in the recording of the program, "Silent Night" is followed only by the announcement, "This is CBS, the Columbia Broadcasting System."

Now, before we continue, we must tell you the strange fate of this program's script



*The actual first page of the half-hour L&A Christmas script. Notice Tuffy Goff's own name (rather smudged) in the top right hand corner.*



**Former Frigidaire dealer Walter Graves presents his original 1948 Christmas script to Executive Secretary Tim Hollis for the NLAS archives, June 1999.**

after the broadcast's conclusion. In the studio audience that night was one Walter Graves, formerly of Arkansas but at that time a Frigidaire dealer in southern California. Naturally enough, the Frigidaire dealers in that area were provided with tickets to see L&A's broadcasts, and Graves happened to attend the Christmas program. He recalls that before the show started, the audience was asked to remain totally silent throughout the Christmas story sequence, so as not to disturb the mood.

After the show was over, Graves went backstage and asked to see Lauck and Goff, only to be told that was not permitted. Said Graves, "You just tell Tuffy Goff that Walter Graves from Cove, Arkansas, is here to see him." (Cove, of course, was Goff's actual town of birth.) Tuffy indeed responded to that information, came out to visit with Graves, and as a parting gift he presented Graves with his own copy of the script he had used that night.

Graves kept his script, which still bore Tuffy's own identifying signature on the first page, until June 1999. He attended the annual NLAS convention in Mena, and at that time most unselfishly donated this one-of-a-kind artifact to the NLAS archives. We deeply appreciate this vote of confidence on Mr. Graves' part!

Now, about the next Christmas, 1949... All indications are that this same script was performed again, but since we have not yet gained access to the recording of it we can only speculate. Since the characters of Ben, Ezra, and Sister Simpson were long gone from the show by that time, we can assume that their roles were filled by the current cast members. It is not much of a stretch to imagine Opie Cates delivering Ben's lines (in fact, Opie was given Ben's part in several "remakes" of earlier scripts). Probably Andy Devine would have had the Ezra Seestrunk role, but it is somewhat difficult to imagine ZaSu Pitts doing Sister Simpson's part. It is not out of the realm of possibility, however.

Not much of L&A's fan mail from the radio days has survived, but part of what does exist ranges from late 1949 through 1950. After the 1949 Christmas broadcast, several people wrote in to comment on it. Following are some of their remarks:

Morristown, New Jersey:

*I enjoyed your Christmas story better than any of the Christmas special features. It takes skill and timing to make lines like that "come off," and they did! I found myself sitting on the edge of the chair, waiting for "Doc" to say it was a boy.*

Battle Creek, Michigan

*CBS Station: Wish to congratulate you and Lum & Abner on their program of Wednesday, December 21. I appreciate a different atmosphere to tell the Holy Story in this original manner... it was excellent.*

Cliffside, New Jersey:

*I don't know who writes the script for your heart-warming program, but I just heard your December 21 Christmas broadcast, and all I can say is keep it up!*

*It was the most beautiful program of all I've heard so far this year. It had the true spirit and meaning of Christmas. Not enough programs re-live the real purpose of Christmas, which of course is the birth of Jesus!*

*I really can't tell you how perfectly human and touching your program was. Congratulations, it is programs like yours that keep this country in a spirit of love and good will.*

New York City

*Congratulations on your program of Wednesday, December 21. It has indeed been a pleasure to listen to your Christmas program. You brought home and made me think more of the true meaning of Christmas, something we are all inclined to forget in the rush and maze of commercialism and "modern" diplomacy. You really put over a message as you do in all your programs, and I'm sure that thousands of people are much the better for it. Congratulations to you and your excellent cast, and all those who share in preparing your program.*

*To you all, a very Merry Christmas and a joyous and Happy New Year. And thank you.*

Perhaps the strangest thing about all of these letters is their seeming overtone that these people had just heard Lum & Abner's Christmas story for the first time... even though the same script (or at least the main part of it) had been broadcast each year since 1933. Perhaps it was true that the show was continuing to pick up new listeners.

(In future issues of the *Journal* we will be looking at some of the mail they received during 1950... and unfortunately, not all of it was quite as happy with the show's change in format as the above letters!)

Christmas of 1950, 1951, and 1952 passed without *Lum and Abner* being on the air. We do not know if any arrangements were made to broadcast the Christmas show during those years or not (when they were off the air in December 1940 they had returned to CBS for a "special" broadcast of the story). When the story was done again in 1953... no doubt for the final time... it was back to the traditional 15-minute script, and the half-hour adaptation of it was nothing more than a hazy memory.

Merry Christmas to all the members of the NLAS!!

- Tim Hollis



## *Time has done run out!*

It may be hard to believe, but this is the last issue of *The Jot 'Em Down Journal* to be published with a cover date in the 1900s.

***We (and Lum & Abner too) will see you in February 2000!***