

In Memory Of

ELSIE MAE EMERSON

Lum and Abner organist Elsie Mae Emerson passed away on January 28.

Mrs. Emerson began her career in Chicago during the 1920's. Her husband was organist Ralph Waldo Emerson II, son of the famous poet. Mrs. Emerson was the organist for many different radio shows on Chicago's WLS, and she also played the organ during sporting events at Chicago Stadium. The Stadium's organ was considered to be the largest pipe organ in the world at that time, and it had been designed and built by none other than Ralph Emerson himself.

The Emersons later moved to California, where Ralph became the organist for *Lum and Abner* around 1945. The next year he and Mrs. Emerson collaborated on writing a new theme song for the show, called "Down On The Old Party Line." When Mr. Emerson died in April 1948, Mrs. Emerson took over

the organ until the show switched to a half-hour format later that year. When the 15-minute broadcasts resumed in 1953, Mrs. Emerson again provided organ accompaniment. In the famous Gary Cooper film *High Noon*, Mrs. Emerson could be glimpsed briefly in a wedding scene, playing (of all things) an organist.

In 1987, Mrs. Emerson made a special recording of "Down On The Old Party Line" for the National Lum and Abner Society, and it has been used at many NLAS functions since. She suffered a stroke late in 1989, and had been hospitalized off and on until her death. We at the NLAS extend sympathy to her family, and are very grateful for the help and encouragement she has given us.

(Biographical info. provided by $\it The\ Hollywood\ Reporter$.)





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THE JOT'EM DOWN JOURNAL

APRIL 1991

In This Issue:

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COVER: The first publicity photograph of Chet Lauck and Norris Goff in makeup as Lum and Abner, taken by Oscar Plaster of Mena, May 1931. (Photo is printed from the original nitrate negative preserved by Mrs. Eloise Plaster and donated to Prof. Harold Coogan of Rich Mt. Community College, Mena.)

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Our comical strip returns

EDITOR'S NOTE

In last issue's MEET THE MEMBERS column, we listed Mr. Paul Corzine as living in St. Louis, Missouri. Mr. Corzine actually lives in St. Charles, Missouri. We're awful sorrowful fer th' mistake. Fer pity sakes.

&A MUSEUM

LUM AND ABNER®

60th Anniversary 1931 - 1991

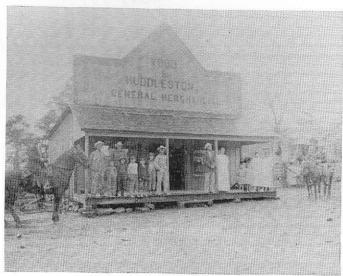
This month marks a major anniversary in Lum and Abner history. It was on Sunday, April 26, 1931, that Chester Lauck and Norris "Tuffy" Goff first made the journey from their hometown of Mena, Arkansas, to Hot Springs, to appear on radio station KTHS. Now, on the event of the 60th Anniversary of the debut of Lum and Abner, we wish to take a closer look at those early, formative years of the show.

In 1986, the Arkansas Educational Television Network (AETN) was busy producing its fine documentary on L&A's career, titled Lum and Abner: Laughter Never Dies. The AETN crew literally traveled across the country to record interviews with people who had played a part in L&A history. Because of the NLAS's assistance, we were able to obtain from AETN the unedited raw footage of their interviews... over eight hours' worth of material. For this special issue, we selected four interviews that specifically dealt with the early and pre-history of Lum and Abner. The interviewees will be introduced as we go along. So, let's look in on Polk and Montgomery County, Arkansas, in the 1910's and 1920's, and see just what kind of influence went into the creation of... LUM AND ABNER.



ETHEL HUDDLESTON BALL

(Pine Ridge general store owner Dick Huddleston and his wife Nancy had only one child: a daughter, Ethel. Now Ethel Ball, she continues to live in Pine Ridge. Because of her father's involvement, she became acquainted with Chet Lauck



The original 1909 Wood & Huddleston Store in Pine Ridge (then called Waters), Arkansas.

and Tuffy Goff when she was quite young. In this interview, she puts her family and Pine Ridge into their proper perspective in L&A history.)

When the store first opened in 1909, it was "Wood and Huddleston." S.I. Wood was married to my father's sister, and he more or less put my father up into the mercantile business... my father was a very young man at the time. The Woods, the Laucks, the Goffs, the Watkins... these are the old affluent names of people around Mena. Well, the store burned in 1912, and then it became "Dick Huddleston's Store" when he rebuilt it as it is today. Back in those days he would go into Mena in a John Deere wagon with a beautiful team of horses, and it would take him all day to get there. At night, he would put the horses in the wagon yard, and stay with his sister and her husband, "Aunt Jo" and "Uncle Silas."

Now, Mr. Goff, Tuffy's father, would come out here on horseback and take care of his business, and he would always stay with my father and mother. So my father wound up knowing the boys too; he actually knew Tuffy better than Chet, because Chet was older and away from home quite a bit. After we got cars and had bridges, when Tuffy was home he would drive his car out here and get my dad's order for groceries, then come back later in a truck with all the things my father had ordered. Mrs. Goff has told me that a lot of times in the winter, long before *Lum and Abner* days, Chet & Tuffy would sit around their fireplace, chew tobacco, spit, and talk like hillbillies... or sometimes they would switch to Amos 'n' Andy, or German or Italian dialect... it was just a fun thing they

'CHET' AND 'TUFFY' AND ORCHESTRA MADE HIT

Mena Folks Will Broadcast Again Over KTHS Next Sunday.

Those who provided the Polk County program sponsored by the Mena Lions club over Station KTHS Sunday afternoon, pleased so many that the entertainers were given another place on next Sunday's program. Those who went to Hot Springs for the broadcast Sunday were Chester H. Lauck, Norris Goff, Cecil Cartwright, Olen Wilhite, Bill and Cliff Beavers. "Chet" and "Tuffy" had the talking parts and the other four. members of Beaver Brothers orchestra, furnished the music. A guitar solo by Cecil Cartwright was a pleasing feature. The musical four played instruments made by J. B. Watkins of this city. Before the Lions club program was ended, the station management announced that the Polk County entertainers would be back again next Sunday, this announcement being in advance of the invitation later extended to the players themselves.

This article appeared in THE MENA STAR on April 27, 1931; in retrospect, it was the debut of Lum and Abner.

had.

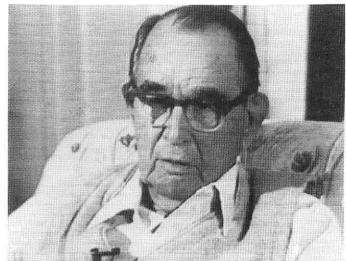
Well, everybody probably knows the story of how they had the Lions' Club luncheon and they came out with their *Amos 'n' Andy* skit. They were so good that my dad, who was sitting next to the man who ran KTHS in Hot Springs, said, "You know, you ought to get them boys to come over and put that on... they're good." So everyone knows how they went over to put on their Amos 'n' Andy act, but there had been two other skits like that on that same day, as I remember it. So they changed theirs to hillbillies right there in the studio. When they finished the program, the manager of the station said, "Now we want you boys back next Sunday." So they went over every Sunday for two or three months, just for fun... they never dreamed it would ever become anything. Then they got a contract with Quaker Oats, then Horlick's Malted Milk, and everything went on from there.

I might mention that I used to stand around behind the counter in the old store when I would be home from school, and these old pioneer people would come down to the store to visit more than anything else... or "trade," as they called it. They would sit around and swap yarns and tell things, and I would jot down these original sayings that you just don't hear any more. I would send these to Chet & Tuffy, and sometimes they would make practically an entire program out of them!

As for my own memories of these boys, I know that in the

summertime when I would be home from school, Tuffy would sometimes be home from the University at Fayetteville, and we would all get together and have one rip-roaring time. We would go swimming in the park at Mena, or maybe go out to the Commonwealth College, and we'd be out until late at night. Now, my Uncle S.I. Wood was a very stern and reserved man, but when we would come in and park the cars, Tuffy might get the lawnmower and start running around the house mowing the lawn at 1:00 in the morning, singing *The Old Gray Mare Ain't What She Used To Be*, and Aunt Jo said Uncle Silas would lie in there and just crack up laughing. Tuffy was always just one of the funniest fellows you ever saw in your life.

His mother and father were very wealthy, affluent people, but they would make you feel just as at home as we are right here. Tuffy had such a great sense of humor, he made you have a good time no matter where it was. After my mother died in 1959, my father went out to California to visit Tuffy, and he said he was just treated royally.



AEIT

JOHN FAULKNER

(Mena resident John Faulkner, a former college football coach, was acquainted with Tuffy Goff dating back to their high school days. Here he shares some of his memories of that time.)

What is your earliest memory of meeting Tuffy Goff?

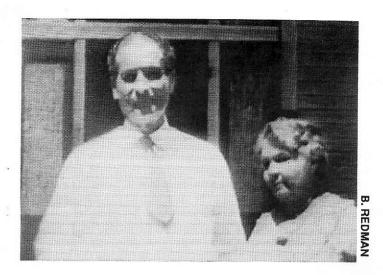
Well, the first memory I have of meeting Tuffy was down on the football field. I was new, and of course he was born here in Mena... or at least reared here. We were playing football down there, and had a pretty rough bunch of boys... big old country boys. He was so tiny compared to them that I was afraid to tackle him or hit him hard, but he proved to be very tough. You could stop him but you couldn't keep him down. You could knock him down, but he'd just spring up and take off again. That's the way he got his name "Tuffy."

What do you remember about Tuffy's family?

Tuffy's family was considered wealthy, and there was a little resentment between us "commoners" and him because he drove a big, pretty, red Buick... a sports car... and if we had any kind of car at all it was just an old Ford. So we were a little resentful, but we admired his toughness... his ability to play football even though he was little. We admired him very much.

What was his father like?

His daddy was a typical businessman. He ran the wholesale business. He had trucks going out all over the area here



Norris Goff's parents, Rome and Dora Goff.

delivering groceries to the little country stores. I didn't know Tuffy's mother... I've seen her, but I never knew her.

Were Chet and Tuffy friends before Lum and Abner?

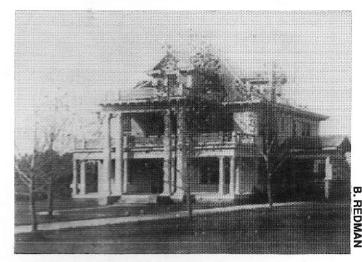
Well, they both went to college and didn't stay put. So they came back and Chet was down there fooling around with his dad's lumber company, and Tuffy, who didn't have anything to do either, was sitting around the produce company down there. Chet was a member of the Lions' Club... I don't think Tuffy was ever a member... and since there wasn't any activity around Mena they just sort of fell together. Both had money and nothing to do, so they just ran around together, even though Tuffy was two or three years younger than Chet.

What do you remember about Chet?

He was active in the Lions' Club, but he wasn't involved with athletics. He was a student here ahead of me... he and Tuffy both. Then he went to the University and stayed up there a couple of years, then came back.

You mentioned that there was some resentment against Tuffy because of his car and so forth. Was there that kind of resentment toward Chet?

I don't think so. He wasn't as involved in local activities and the kids as Tuffy was. Tuffy could date any girl he wanted to,



The Goff family's affluence is evidenced by their home in Mena, long since demolished.

of course, because of that car and his money, and us poor boys sort of resented that a little bit. We would take him on a drinking spree occasionally; he was a good sport. He had to be, or he couldn't have played football like that. He was always cracking jokes and making comedy. That was kind of natural with him.

Tell a little about Mena in those days; what kind of town was it that you were all growing up in?

Well, of course I was out at Pine Ridge, and I didn't get into Mena but once or twice a year as a kid. Then, there was another resentment between the Mena kids and the country kids because we were "green country hicks." So until I got big enough to take care of myself, the Mena boys gave us a pretty rough life.

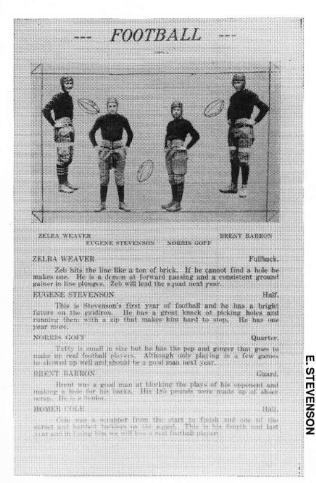
How did you entertain yourselves or make your own fun?

Well, I can tell you that the kids today are much more civilized than we were when I was growing up. When I grew up, on Halloween we tore up the whole countryside. Chet and Tuffy's activities weren't around Mena too much. They had money, and their families would take them on vacations to Hot Springs, Missouri, Kansas City... or even California. They were the "cream of the crop."





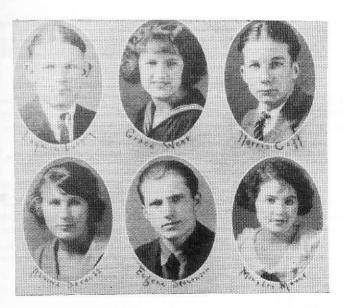
Chet Lauck's parents: (left) Lumber company executive W.J. Lauck, and (right) Mena social leader Cora Mae Lauck.



A page from the Mena High School yearbook for 1923, with a view of Norris Goff's football career.

When they became a success in radio, how was that news accepted in Mena?

Well, the truth of the matter is that their success followed after them. When they left here to make their first presentation over the radio at Hot Springs, people thought, "Well, there's Chet and Tuffy with nothing to do; they'll just go on



Tuffy Goff's high school portrait as it appeared in the yearbook. This is provided to us courtesy of Ed Stevenson, whose father appears at Tuffy's lower left.

over there to play around." And that was right. They had loafed around Pine Ridge a lot, so they just decided they'd be a couple of old natives down there. They didn't have to work for a living. They had cars and money and could go anywhere they wanted to go. Their families certainly didn't "put on airs" after they became famous, because they were in the elite class to begin with. They had a lot of prestige and a lot of power. Was Chet as popular with the girls as Tuffy was?

Well, Chet and I didn't run around together like Tuffy and I did. Tuffy and I would drink together and run around together, but Chet had already gone through that stage. He must have been pretty popular, because he made one of the better fraternities at the University. <u>All</u> young people left Mena in those days, because there was nothing for them here.



ELOISE PLASTER

(In the early 1930's, Mr. Oscar Plaster and his wife Eloise were the owners of Mena's leading photography studio. After Chet & Tuffy's first KTHS appearances, they approached the Plasters with the idea of having some publicity photos made in costume as the characters. One of these photos appears on the cover of this issue. Here, Mrs. Plaster discusses her memories of that historic period.)

It has been said that Chet & Tuffy could almost read each other's minds in the way that one of them could start a routine and the other could finish it. Did you ever see any kind of evidence of this?

Oh, definitely. When they came down to have their picture made, they were going on with each other and talking that lingo. We had a real good time that evening, making those pictures. They had made the appointment for 8:00 that night... we usually had to do this kind of thing at night, because everybody worked. So we went down and we waited and waited, and they didn't show up. Now, my husband was a man who liked to have things on time, and he said, "Well, let's go home." I looked out, and here they came. They had bundles of clothes under their arms, and all kinds of paraphernalia... you never saw anything like it. So they came in and went back to the dressing room, and started fixing all up. Well, I had to powder their hair, and their mustaches were made from rope... we just had a ball doing all that. And all the time they were going on with this lingo: "Now, Abner...", you know. And Abner would say, "Now Lum, I grannies..." so and so.

What was Mena like in those days?

Mena was a very small town... I would say around 3000 or



The city of Mena was certainly proud of its connection with L&A in those days, as evidenced by this postcard and the billboard at top right.

3500. It had been a railroad town, but it had sort of let up after the railroad division moved. People were just enjoying the beauty of it, and the friendliness. Mr. Lauck had a lumber company, and I think that at this time timber and cotton were the main businesses. It was just a lovely, lovely town.

How much did you keep up with Chet & Tuffy after the photographs were taken?

Oh, we tried to keep up with them pretty well all along, because they were a <u>part</u> of Mena... they were part of our business! We sold <u>thousands</u> of those pictures, and the more pictures that got out, the more they liked it.

Do you think they had any idea what was going to happen after they went on the radio?

I do, in a way. I remember what Tuffy said as they left, the night we made those first pictures. We were all ready to go, and he said, "Well, I grannies, if we make a SUK-sess of this, we'll give you some credit, Oscar." I never will forget that. I really believe there was something there that pushed them on and on. Because it wasn't easy to leave Mena and leave their homes.

Did anyone ever resent what they were doing, the way some people resented Bob Burns?

I'm not sure, but Mena didn't. I don't think that ever entered into it. There might have been people who didn't know them who thought they might be hurting Arkansas, but I don't



know about that. Their humor was "down home" stuff... it had been part of <u>every</u> family. We could relate to them that way. They changed their personalities to something that we all understood.

Did you see much of them after their success?

They didn't come back to Mena very often after they became famous. When they did, it was to visit their families, and that was personal. Nobody bothered them, and they had their privacy.



HARRIET LAUCK

(It goes without saying that Chet and Tuffy's wives were probably closer than anyone besides themselves to the early creation of *Lum and Abner*. In this segment, Mrs. Harriet Lauck answers some questions about those days.)

What was college life like at the time you first met Mr. Lauck?

I was going with one of Chet's fraternity brothers who had had his final exams that day and had gone home, and was late picking me up at the sorority house. So he sent Chet and Hamilton McRae over to pick me up. Someone downstairs in the living room kept calling "Harriet Wood;" I would go down, and I didn't see anyone I knew, so I went back upstairs. They called a second time, and I went back again. By this time, I really thought they were teasing me, and I almost didn't go down the third time. But finally I asked if anyone had called for me, and Chet said, "Yes, I did." Then he explained why he was there, that the other fellow was late getting dressed, and



These postcards advertising L&A's weekly show on KTHS were distributed during May and June of 1931.

was there, that the other fellow was late getting dressed, and he had offered to come pick me up. That's how I met him.

Tuffy came up the next day, and they each had a convertible... but instead of the original canvas tops, they had each gone to a tent place and bought green-and-white striped awning, and had another top made for their cars. Each of them had the same kind of car! Everyone on the campus was just in awe of it, because not many people had cars then. This was back in 1926.

Is it true that they were both such funny men to be around all the time?

It was so spooky. One of them would start a silly conversation, and the other would automatically pick it up. They could talk for hours, really saying nothing, but amusing each other. I can't tell you how many parties they spoiled by doing this... entertaining each other, and everyone else was just there. Back in those days we had to make our own entertainment, so we had a lot of plays and minstrel shows and so forth, and they were always in them... competing not with each other, but with everybody else!

When the Mississippi River flooded in either 1929 or 1930, the people in all of the bordering states were just destitute and suffering. So the different Chambers of Commerce were asked if they had any entertainers that could go on radio and maybe raise some funds to help all these people who were having such hard luck. So the Chamber asked Chet and Tuffy if they would do it, and on the way over from Mena to Hot Springs they decided that instead of their usual blackface minstrel act, maybe they should do it in rural dialect... which they knew better than they did blackface anyway. So that was decided, and KTHS put them on. Right before they started, someone asked, "What do you callyour act?" Of course, they didn't have

an act! But finally Chet said, "I'll be Lum," and Tuffy said, "I'll be Abner," and that's how they were named. Right in the middle of their 15 minutes, the station broke down, and they thought that maybe they were so bad the station had just turned them off! But they were invited to come back the following Sunday, and we went over 11 times, I think it was. They had enough material on one of their shows to have written 13 weeks of scripts. They were just talking and adlibbing.

Had they been close from boyhood?

Yes, Tuffy was five and Chet was nine when Chet's family moved to Mena from Alleene, where he was born. They were just good friends all that time. Chet went off to college first, to the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts. He was one of the greatest cartoonists you ever saw.

Did any of you have any anticipation that the characters of Lum and Abner were going to be the big hit that they were?

No, actually we were sort of freaks in the entertainment business, because none of us were from the entertainment world at all. It just sort of snowballed on us. Tuffy's father had the wholesale grocery business, and Tuffy was the salesman.



Before radio entered the picture, Chet Lauck is seen here in Mena with daughter Shirley May, 1929.



work the word "varmint" in, because he knew he could break Chet up. Then they'd <u>both</u> get tickled, the announcer would get tickled, and somebody said, "You've got to stop this; you're going to laugh yourselves right off the air if you don't!" They got all this mail and phone calls from people wanting to know what was so funny... and they didn't know, because only Tuffy could do it by saying this one word!

What kind of impression did Mr. Lauck make on you the first time you met him?

Well, I told you how I was going with this fraternity brother of his. Well, Tuffy was smitten with my best friend who lived here in Hot Springs, so the following weekend, when we were to come home for the summer, he made a date. In order to not have to drive all the way over here from Mena by himself, he got Chet to get a date with me so that we could have a foursome. I already had a date, but I had never had a date with the boy I was getting ready to have one with. So I just apologized and told him that something had come up and I wouldn't be able to have that date with him. Then Chet came with Tuffy... we were just going along to fill up the foursome. We thought Tuffy and Bess Curl, my friend, were going to get married, and we were just having fun. Well, they broke up and we got married. So you can see that apparently there was no planning in our lives at all!

The Lauck family in 1909: Mr. & Mrs. W.J. Lauck with (left to right) Chet, Dudley, Jesse, and Mary Ellen.

in the finance business, he had loans out that he would go to collect, so he also had contact with the outlying areas. And it was from this contact that so much of their thinking came. We just thought we were going to be there in Mena; we had just built a little home there that we were proud of, and Tuffy & Liz hadn't been married too long when it all happened to us. We had no idea where we were going or what was going to happen. This was just something exciting: nobody dreamed it would ever last as long as it did!

What were their plans for the future before Lum and Abner came into being?

Well, I guess Tuffy was going to step into his father's shoes in the wholesale grocery business. Chet was working in the bank, and I suppose, if he thought about it at all, he thought he would step into the banking business. Chet's father was a lumberman, but Chet wasn't interested in that. He loved art... he loved to draw and paint, and acting was just something to pass the time.

Of course, Tuffy was one of the funniest men there ever was. He could break Chet up in a minute... and would do it on purpose! One time, when we lived in Chicago, Tuffy had said this word "varmint." And I've forgotten how he used it, but it tickled Chet. Well, for a solid week, Tuffy would manage to



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Meet the MemberS

Send Your Article & Photo To: MEET THE MEMBERS, P.O. Box 869, Carthage, TX 75633

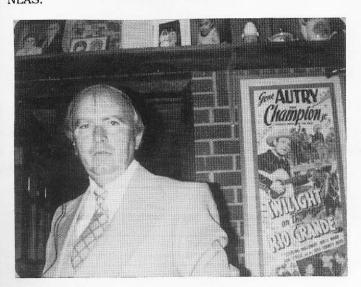
JIMMIE PARKER

of Jackson, Alabama

Jimmie Parker writes to say, "I have been a member of the National Lum and Abner Society for six years. I have three Lum and Abner movies on 16mm film, and many of their radio shows on tape.

"I made a trip to Pine Ridge to see the Jot 'Em Down Store, and collect anything I can on Lum and Abner.

"Keep up the good work! You are doing a great job with the NLAS."



JOHN E. JONES

of Kingsport, Tennessee

John E. Jones (nicknamed "J.J.") tells us, "I was born in Scott County, Virginia, in 1935. I spent four years in the Air Force. I worked seven years at Raytheon Company in Bristol, Tennessee, and have worked for the past 25 years at Tennessee Eastman Company.

"I was married to Evelyn Martin in 1958. We have no children.

"I collect old radio shows; one of my favorites, of course, is Lum and Abner. I visited Pine Ridge in the fall of 1989 and really enjoyed it. We hope to make it to the annual NLAS Convention in the next year or so."



"COUSIN CLIFF" HOLMAN

of Birmingham, Alabama

Our spotlight this time is on a member who has had quite a career in show business himself, although on a more local level than L&A. Cliff Holman began performing magic tricks in 1943, at the age of 14. His stage appearances led to television, and he got his own children's show in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1950. In 1954, he became known on TV as "Cousin Cliff," and this title has remained with him right up through today.

Cliff is best known in Alabama for hosting Popeye cartoons on WAPI-TV, Channel 13, from 1958 to 1969. Afterward, he appeared on a UHF station until 1972, by which time the demand for local kid show hosts had pretty much run dry. He continued working as a stage performer until he was called upon to revive his act for cable television in 1985. He is currently seen on Birmingham's WBRC-TV, Channel 6, in an update of his traditional format, Cousin Cliff's Clubhouse. (See the February 1991 "AND NOW..." column.)

Long a friend of Zec Sec Tim Hollis, "Cuz" joined the NLAS at its very beginning in 1984. The pair are now busy promoting

Hollis's new biography of Cliff, a 152-page volume entitled Coustn Cliff: 40 Magical Years In Television. Anyone wishing to read about the career of a classic local children's TV personality can order the book from Campbell's Publishing, P.O. Box 310727, Birmingham, AL 35231. The price is \$14.95; please add \$2.00 for postage.





REMEMBER... THE 1991 NLAS CONVENTION IS COMING! SATURDAY, JUNE 22 MENA, ARKANSAS

Celebrating L&A's 60th Anniversary with special guests and events!



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