



RETURN WITH US NOW...

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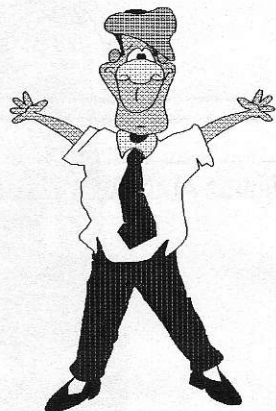
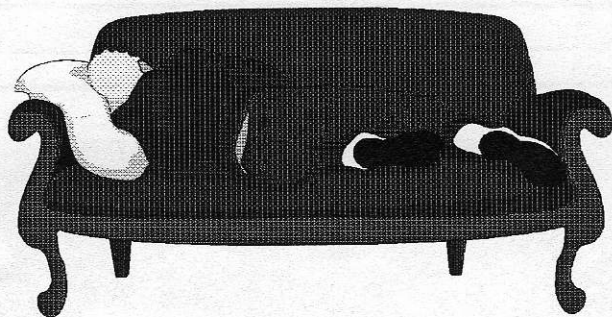
June, 1996



Lum and Abner - Begun in 1931, "*Lum and Abner*" radio series was still very popular in 1949 when this photo was taken. Their show continued into 1953.



BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING: There will be **NO** board meeting in **June, 1996.**



RETURN WITH US NOW... is the official publication of *The Radio Historical Association of Colorado, Inc.*, a non-profit organization. Cost of membership is **\$25.00** for the first year with \$15.00 for renewal. Each member has full use of the club resources. For further information contact anyone listed below.



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From the

King's

Roost

It may have been raining the past week both here and in the eastern part of the country, but the weather was GREAT for our presentation of "The Shadow" with our guests John and Ann Archer. John was the familiar voice of Lamont Cranston and carried the role very comfortably, as he did for years when it was on the air.

The audience of RHAC members and Windsor Garden residents were all very appreciative of the show. John and Carol Rayburn did a skit of "Ethel & Albert," "The Pencils," and kept the audience laughing all the time. The following day we were able to show the Archers some of the wonderful scenery that we have within thirty miles of Denver.

We are planning some changes in our newsletter. What did radio mean to

you? Do you remember a particular show or time in your personal life that radio was a part of? Such as: Maletta remembers the radio announcement of the bombing of Pearl Harbor, and telling her brother and brother-in-law about it when they returned from a day in the mountains. The next day, her brother signed up for service in the air corps. He was one of the many that died in service. December 7th and the radio broadcasts about it made a deep impression on her.

There are many other times that radio was an important part of our memories of times we lived through, and we would like to have you share some of your memories with us. Please send us anything from a paragraph to three or four pages and share with the rest of us what was an important day in your life and radio was a part of it. Maybe it was just that radio was your companion and kept your thoughts off of the outside world when you were alone, as are so

many of today's "latch-key" kids,

We would like you to contribute your feelings about radio and the part it played in your life. We are constantly offered book reviews by publishing houses, but we do not want to become their sales tool. If you have read a particular book and some part of it really stuck with you, send it along and share it with all of us. Maybe a particular quote or slogan from someone on the radio influenced you and you still remember or are guided by it. Maybe it will help someone else if you share it with us.

We have received a mailer from Jayme & Laura Simoes in Hillsborough NH. They have started an inn, featuring Old Time Radio for their guests. They offer "Radio Maplewood Farm," sending programs into rooms over antique radios in each room. The Simoes are not RHAC members, but we felt their idea was worth mentioning. Their phone number is 603-464-4242. Their schedule looks good in the brochure.

Let's hear from some of our Canadian members, as they may have more memorable thoughts about radio in their lives. Just send your notes to

RHAC Newsletter

P. O. Box 1908

Englewood CO 80150

We Take You to Pine Ridge

By Coy Williams

And Some Hitherto
Untold Tales That Will Help You
to Know It Better

A town is born—To radio followers of *Lum & Abner*, the little Arkansas village of Pine Ridge is an astonishing place, akin in its homely, old-fashioned way to the fabulous country of Shangri-La, and just as mythical. The villagers get involved in amusing situations, but tragedy rarely appears. All in all, it's the sort of place you and I would like to keep in mind for spending our declining years—if such a place existed.

Well, some day when peace and tires come again and you're touring through Ouachita National Forest on the western edge of Arkansas, slip over to the Lum & Abner State Highway (formerly Highway 88) and head east from the Polk County Seat of Mena. Twenty-two miles out you'll turn off onto a bumpy dirt road, the Ouachita River, and a tiny cluster of stores, a few homes, a post office and a filling station.

One of the stores will look very prosperous. It's called "Dick Huttleston—of Lum & Abner." Dick's very proud of being a friend of the famous pair and he advertises it to the world. Another emporium, opened by a rival, is labeled the "Jot 'em Down Store." One glance will cover the town. That's Pine Ridge, site of the *Lum & Abner* radio series—and it was born because Lum & Abner were born.

When Chester Lauck and Norris Goff first hit upon their rural characters for the air, the village 22 miles from the county seat was known as Waters. But the value of publicity is not unknown, even in the remotest districts—and civic pride burns as brightly in the

Ozarks as in the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce.

Five years to the day after *Lum & Abner* first hit the airwaves, dignitaries from all over Arkansas gathered at the crossroads of Waters and read a proclamation from the U. S. Post office Department. By virtue of two garrulous old characters who didn't exist, the wheels of government turned ponderously—and Pine Ridge won its place on the map.

No moral here—Lum & Abner are air headliners today because eleven years ago they were late for their very first broadcast.

The copy-book moralists won't like that, and we hope it doesn't inspire little boys to be tardy at school tomorrow, but the fact remains that Lum & Abner's failure to follow Ben Franklin's pet maxim has made them one of radio's top acts since their beginning on April 23, 1931.

In those short-pants days of the industry, seconds weren't so precious as today, and all the boys figured what they lost that afternoon in Hot Springs was their place in line for a benefit program. What they gained was a million-dollar idea.

When Chet Lauck and Tuffy Goff chugged over to Hot Springs from Mena for their first airing they meant to do a blackface act. But being not only conscientious but gregarious by instinct, they stopped to rehearse their act every time they met an acquaintance on the road. By the time they arrived the broadcast was underway. They sat down to listen.

A blackface act was at the mike. It wasn't very good. Chet and Tuffy looked at each other and called the announcer over.

"How many blackface acts you got booked here?"

"Four, confound it!"

Lauck and Goff turned a trifle green and began whispering. The announcer looked at his list. "What are you fellows doing?"

Chet hemmed: "We're gonna talk like two hill fellers—I think." (He hoped that field was open.)

"What's the name of the act?"

Chet and Tuffy went into another huddle. Said Lauck: "Call me Lum." Chimed Tuffy: "I'm Abner (know an old guy at Waters named Abner)."

"O. K.," said the announcer, "I'll bill you as *Lum & Abner*."

Thus casually are history's pages sometimes flipped.

Tale of a mouse—and how did that catchall Jot 'Em Down Store get in the picture? Well, that goes back to a mouse in the Goff Wholesale Grocery in Mena, and young Tuffy's weakness for the hunt. Tuffy's dad owned the wholesale house, so in the natural order of things, Tuffy was put to work doing odd jobs in the concern. Tuffy dutifully kept his slingshot in his hip pocket and did very well until the morning a careless mouse strayed across his path.

Out came the slingshot, off went the mouse, *bop!* went the rock against the big plate glass window. And Tuffy was called into conference in the back room.

The senior Goff saw that Tuffy's nature called for more elbow room than the wholesale house afforded, so as soon as possible he sent sonny off visiting the retail grocers in the hills. Tuffy's first stop was always at the home of his pal, Chester, and the pair became familiar peddlers of the Goff wares—which were usually forgotten while they swapped yarns with the hill folks at the crossroads.

Their heads became crammed with the outlandish expressions, idioms, and humor of the hills, and when they looked for a locale for their counterparts, it was inevitable that they put the old codgers in a grocery store. And there they are to this day...

Directors' meeting—to make a radio serial like *Lum & Abner* seem real all these years, there has to be a little of Lum & Abner in their real life progenitors. This came out early when Lauck

and Goff won their first sponsor back in Chicago in the summer of 1931. Fresh out of Arkansas on a vacation, the boys learned auditions were being held by a cereal company (they weren't quite sure what a sponsor was) to get a summer replacement for Gene and Glenn.

Through a pal in the company, who told the directors glowingly of a couple of centenarians, they got an auditions. When they showed up, though, with their youth as evident as the wart on Aunt Fanny's nose, the directors looked askance. A crisis was in the making.

"Where are the old fellows?" the chairman demanded impatiently.

Goff had an inspiration. "They're outside—bashful, you know. If you gentlemen will kindly turn your chairs to face the wall, we'll call 'em in."

Astonished, the directors looked at each other, then turned obediently like school children caught by teacher—and Lum & Abner swung into their act.

The directors' chuckles told them it went over big, but at the close, when the vested interests turned back to face them, amusement was replaced by irritation.

"Where do they keep running off? We can't sign them until we see the."

Chester gulped and stammered: "We're them—or they're us, I don't know which."

The humor of the situation struck the Directors. Lum & Abner were not given the gate—they were given the air, and with options.

Little Lums & Abner—There is no doubt that Lum & Abner have caught on, and we make a safe prediction that there'll be Lums & Abners 50 years from now. Maybe they won't be on the air—maybe the originals will be taking it easy, waited on hand-and-foot by their grandchildren, but there'll be Lums & Abners around... in Tennessee, Georgia, Kentucky, South Carolina and Michigan that we know of.

Greater love hath no man than that he name his beloved twin offspring "Lum

& Abner"—but it's been done no less than five times and the kids are all prospering. The youngest pair is some six months old, the oldest seven years, and their burdens are not yet heavy upon them.

Superstitious, eh?—Sure you're still hearing *Lum & Abner*, but did you know that a little superstition and a big war almost took *Lum & Abner* off the air.

It was a funny superstition, anyway. When they first started writing scripts Lum & Abner didn't own a typewriter. Buying one on such slim prospects seemed not only wasteful but kicking Old Man Luck right in the teeth. Where did they get off assuming they'd be on the air so long?

So Lum & Abner rented a typewriter. Times were good. They kept renting, and times got better. For 11 years they rented that—and succeeding—typewriters, refusing all suggestions from astonished typewriter people to buy the machines. They weren't superstitious—but why take a chance? They'd heard strange tales—you know those theatrical yarns.

Came the war. And frozen typewriters. And an hour to buy their machines or go without a script. What would good old Blue Network say to that? No scribe, no programee, that's what.

And so Lum & Abner gave up share-typing and joined the property owners. Those old superstitions? Phooey!

RADIO LIFE, December 6, 1942

Lum & Abner Back to Work

By Don Sabre

After an absence of a year from air merchandising, Lum & Abner this week had the Pine Ridge Jot "em Down Store open for its eighth consecutive day. We went down the other night to see them and came in when Cedric

Weehunt was putting up a howl about still having an interest in the store, despite the fact that he sold the due bill to a Pine Ridge lady for \$35. Originally he had given Lum & Abner \$23 for the interest, getting the due bill as evidence of the honest intentions of the two quaint Ouachita mountain characters who run the store.

My guess is that Cedric isn't as dumb as Lum & Abner think. If I guess rightly, that apparently dull-witted hill-billy will run that due bill into an industrial empire. The fact that he has relinquished claim to it in the sale to the lady does not, in his mind, impair the validity of the original understanding with Lum & Abner. As Abner puts it, philosophically:

"'Taint no use explaining to Cedric. When we done give him that thar due bill he got a interes' in the store. Fac' he sold the due bill to the widow only means to him that she gets store credit but it don't mean to him he loses his interes'. I beats all. He-he-he."

Lum moodily observed: "Wal, all I got to say is—if any more people get to livin' off the store we all goin' to starve."

On the way to the store, which is actually a small studio tucked away in the block-long NBC building in Hollywood, we paused to listen to a public relations staff man, earnestly assuring over and over again a group of skeptical people:

"Lum and Abner are not an audience show. I'm sorry there are no tickets... Yes, I know there are several characters, but all of them are played by Lum and Abner."

Inside we were met by Hal Bock, NBC's sharp-minded, capable western publicity director. We went down a narrow hallway and into the little studio. Lum and Abner were seated at a small chrome legged table, microphone suspended between them. It lacked one minute of air time. Lew Crosby on a booth signal started the Alka-Seltzer announcement. He finished it. We leaned back, closed our eyes, heard Abner's voice break in, and away we went to Pine Ridge up in the foothills of the ancient Ozarks. Well, you know what they do, these two simple souls. But

here's a way to enjoy them more. Sit back with eyes closed, the mind focused imaginatively on gently upsloping fir clad-hills, see Ozark suns and moons thrust light fingers down into the verdant lowlands, the drowsy precincts of Pine Ridge, smell balsam and field flower odors as a tang in lungs. Picture Lum and Abner. Abner with his penchant for trading. Lum with his instinct for caution. See them set against the simple background of a part of America that is rolling and towering, earnest and unspoiled. Through them, as kindhearted storekeepers, are recaptured pastoral essences, lovely as waltz time, fundamental as cold water out of the Ozarkian hills, as neighborly, sociable and helpful as a friend down the street.

Listen to "Evalina," the theme song written by Sybil Chism, the Lum and Abner organist. It has a bucolic agreeableness that recalls greetings on backwoods roads by men and women and children who have no desire to take from you, are but interested in you as a human being—a shy, yet happy composition that bespeaks a program whose appeal is the simple life.

Chester Lauck who is "Lum" and Norris Goff who is "Abner" are as Ozarkian as the hills themselves. Lum and Abner, Cedric Weehunt, Gran'pappy Spears (Lum's characterizations), Dick Huddleston, and Squire Skimp (Abner's) are composites of true mountain people. Chester was born in Allene, Arkansas, February 9, 1902, Norris in Cove, Arkansas, a few miles away on May 30, 1906. Both families moved to Mena, Arkansas, where the boys met at school. Despite the four year age difference they became pals. Goff was nicknamed "Tuffy" and worked in one of his father's wholesale grocery stores. Chet Lauck stacked lumber in his dad's yards.

"Dealing with the town and hill folk we got to playing a sort of game after work," Chet recalled. "We'd mimic some of the folks we knew. Gradually—long before we dreamed of going into the show world—we laid the foundation for Lum and Abner."

Somewhat more privileged than the average Ozarkians, both boys were sent through University of Arkansas. They separated, Goff transferring to University of Oklahoma, Lauck going to Chicago Academy of Fine Arts.

Formal education has sharpened their perceptions, made possible a refinement of the characters they play on the program. In childhood in Mena they were acid tested by the local characters they elected to use in their mutual bid for air and theatrical fame.

"We'd do blackface stunts for the home folks," Norris said. "One night at an amateur show we decided to try out some of the mimicry we had been working on. It was kind of forced on us, because both of us thought we were killer-dillers as blackface comedians. The night of the show, however, it seemed as though everybody else thought they were. Burnt cork was on faces all over the place. We had to do something."

That something was to do a comedy act based on Ozark characters they had met in business. It was all impromptu. Even the names of characters were coined as the show went on the air for the Mena Lion's Club.

"I took the name of Lum because I didn't know anybody with that name," Lauck averred. "Norris became 'Abner' because he did know somebody by that name."

The applause that greeted their effort decided them. They would pal up for a career in entertainment.

In 1931 Lauck and Goff broadcast for the first time over a large network, and began their rapid climb to nationwide fame.

During their long vacation from the air, the NBC comedy team completed their first feature picture based on the Pine Ridge stories, "Dreaming Out Loud," which had its premiere in Arkansas, with many of the real-life prototypes of the *Lum and Abner* show characters attending.

Integrally to be regarded with Lum and Abner is blonde, deft-fingered and altogether lovely Sybil Chism. A superbly attractive girl, she is the wife of Hal Bock, a fact that is no asset to her career as an artist. For Mr. Bock with the sensitivity of a public relations man with a wife in the show business has a blunt way of regarding the professional side of Sybil.

"She'll make good on her own without assistance of publicity superlatives," a statement which Mr. Bock may note has been more than justified by capable Sybil. She has asked no breaks from the man who, were he not the chap he is, might

have expediently smoothed the way for her.

"But the game's not played that way," Sybil said softly when we talked with her. "The public pays for radio entertainment in general. It has a right to good artistry. And," she said it with modest conviction and understatement—"I'm trying..."

In "trying" Sybil has proved that the royal road to success in entertainment is paved with jouncy cobblestones of effort, disappointments and heartaches for a great part of the way. This part of the way is behind Miss Chism now, but there is no letting down in constant preparation for whatever the future may bring.

Sybil was born in Carrolton, Illinois. She played the piano in movie theaters in Carrolton and Decatur while still a kid in pigtails. After finishing high school, she studied at Chicago. She took every opportunity to play piano, became interested in pipe organ. She arranged for lesson, but first spent six months studying organ construction.

When her family moved to Long Beach, the NBC organist and her sister, Naomi, a singer, decided to try their luck on Southern California theater circuits. Sybil played the organ at Long Beach theaters, and later in Los Angeles film houses. When talking pictures quietly buried most "live" music, Sybil was still featured as an organ soloist at a Los Angeles theater.

"One Man's Family" moved to Hollywood in 1937. Sybil was one who answered Carlton E. Morse's call for audition. Each organist was given a number, told in what key to play. Everyone obeyed but Number 6, who changed key. Number 6 was Sybil and the winner.

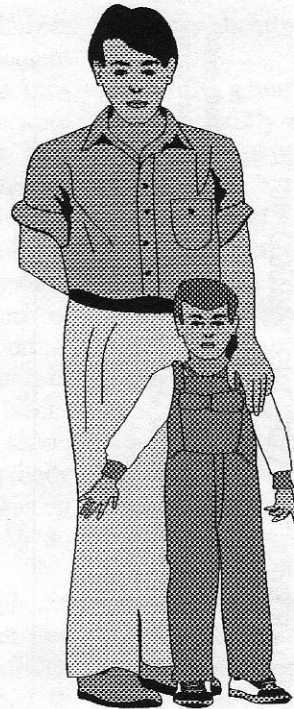
She was with the Family until *Lum and Abner* started airing from Hollywood, has been with them ever since. She also played Bill Stern's music for "Sports Newsreel," has played on "The O'Neills."

When the organ plays Mondays and Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays at 7:15 p.m. you will know that Sybil Chism's fingers are deftly weaving the musical patterns that set Lum and Abner "plum in the middle" of new and amusing situations in Pine Ridge, flanked by the eternal fir-clad Ozarks, where a "whoop and a holler is about a mile" and, breaking all rules for the nonce—thanks to Alka-Seltzer.

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Happy Father's Day



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