



Sandwiching in History Tour

Huddleston Store and McKinzie Store (Lum & Abner Jot 'Em Down Store)

4562 Hwy 88, Pine Ridge

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Special thanks to: Kathy Stucker



ASHLEY SIDES

Hi. Welcome to Sandwiching in History. I'm Ashley Sides, and we're in Pine Ridge—our first ever tour in Montgomery County. Today I want to introduce you to the Huddleston Store and the McKinzie Store, better known as the Lum and Abner Jot 'Em Down Store and Museum, where fact and fiction are integral parts of these structures' amazing history. They have a fascinating story to tell, and they really put Pine Ridge on the map.

Nestled among the forested hills of the Ouachita Mountains, this little settlement used to be called Waters, after the man who first opened the post office here in 1886. Like any other small unincorporated community, it had the basics: a church, a school, and stores. In 1904, A.A.

McKinzie built a little general store across the dirt road from the post office. Dick Huddleston built a bigger store facing it in 1909, which the community helped him rebuild in 1912 after a fire. Life went on like normal for a couple of decades. The stores supplied local residents with everything from medicines, lamp wicks, and wash kettles to plow points and ladies' clothing. People from the countryside came to town on Saturdays to trade goods and the latest gossip. Little did Mr. Huddleston and Mr. McKinzie know that two clever boys from down the road in Mena would soon bring them national fame.

Through the general store, Dick Huddleston developed close relationships with a couple of Mena businessmen: a wholesale supplier named Goff and a banker named Lauck. Sometimes the men's sons, Norris (or "Tuffy") Goff and Chet Lauck, would accompany their fathers on trips to Waters, where they got to know Huddleston and the other locals. But Chet and Tuffy were more interested in hanging around with the old-timers on the store's front porch and picking up on the local gossip than they were in succeeding their fathers in the family businesses.

Tuffy and Chet were good friends back in Mena, too, where they were known as the class clowns. Here's Kathy Stucker with the Lum and Abner museum:

KATHY STUCKER

Chet and Tuffy were class clowns all the way through school. The teachers knew not to turn their backs because they would have something going on behind them in the classroom. The minister would know that by the time he got out of church, they would be on the corner doing parodies on his sermon that he'd just done. The schoolgirls that they dated always complained that they didn't have any fun, they didn't get any attention from them. They never outgrew it. When they were old men, they were still class clowns.

ASHLEY

They were especially adept at impersonating the rural folk they had gotten to know in places like Waters. They created comedy routines to amuse their friends and performed for the local public at community events. On April 26, 1931, they took their talents to Hot Springs for a charity radio broadcast that was raising funds for relief from recent floods. They created a couple of impromptu characters named Lum Edwards ("Eddards") and Abner Peabody, two backwoods old-timers, and their witty banter was such a hit that KTTH signed them to do a weekly radio show. This only lasted eleven episodes, because the station's director, quickly recognizing their talent, set them up with an audition in Chicago for national radio broadcasters. Lauck and Goff's act got picked up by NBC, and by the end of the year, "Lum and Abner" was a national sensation. Chet Lauck and Tuffy Goff moved their families up to Chicago and entered a long career in showbiz that ultimately took them to Hollywood, but through it all they stayed true to their small-town Arkansas roots.

The premise of "Lum and Abner" was simple. Two old codgers run a general store called the Jot 'Em Down Store in the fictional town of Pine Ridge. Every episode sees them tangled up in the goings-on of the community and—more often—misadventures of their own making. The local townsfolk had names like Grandpappy Spears, Cedric Weehunt, or Squire Skimp, but they were

all inspired by actual people from Waters and the vicinity, and Lauck and Goff voiced all of them.

[From an old "Lum and Abner" recording]

ABNER

Well there's Lum now!

GRANDPAPPY SPEARS

Yeah, I's jest noticin'. What's he limpin' about there?

ABNER

I don't know, he walked off all right a while ago. Eh, what's a-matter with yer leg, Lum?

LUM

Oh, yeh, it's ma foot! Buncha these smart alecks with their April Fool pranks!

ABNER

Well, wha- what heppened?

LUM

Oh I... Well, I's walkin' along in front of the blacksmith shop there 'n seen a paper sack layin' in the road 'n hauled off 'n kicked it like a feller will. Some idiot'd put a rock in it 'n might nigh broke my foot!

ABNER

[Laughing]

ASHLEY

Even Dick Huddleston was one of the regular characters, but they didn't use a pseudonym for him.

[From an old "Lum and Abner" recording]

ABNER

Well, hidy, Dick!

LUM

Yeh, come in Dick, come in!

DICK HUDDLESTON

Well, hidy fellas!

ASHLEY

And just like in real life, Lum and Abner's Dick Huddleston ran a general store across the road. It was good, clean humor, and although the characters were often portrayed to some degree as

simple, uneducated, and sometimes conniving caricatures, they were always treated with dignity and humanity. Lauck and Goff would travel back when they could and spend time with the locals so they could keep their material fresh and authentic.

The residents of Waters embraced their newfound notoriety and proudly answered to their fictitious names when travelers began pouring into the community to see “Pine Ridge” for themselves.

KATHY

The characters you see on the wall over there—Cedric, for example, he never gave it up. Even when he was in the Army, he was Cedric; he didn’t go by his real name.

ASHLEY

Dick Huddleston rode the wave of fame for all it was worth. Cashing in on his name-recognition as a radio character, he wasn’t content to just attract tourists to Waters, A.K.A. “Pine Ridge.” He also headed up a vaudeville show called “Pine Ridge Follies” and toured the country, serving as “Arkansas’s Ambassador of Goodwill.”

Huddleston and the other Waters residents petitioned the government to officially change the name of their community to Pine Ridge. On April 26, 1936, the fifth anniversary of “Lum and Abner,” the change was formally made in a big ceremony on the steps of the Arkansas State Capitol with both Lum and Abner taking part, along with the real-life versions of Dick Huddleston, Grandpappy Spears, and Cedric Weehunt.

[From an old recording of the event]

DICK HUDDLESTON

It’s a pleasure and an honor to me to receive this afternoon on behalf of the people of Pine Ridge this new charter changing the name of our little town and post office from Waters to Pine Ridge, which has been made famous by two of the most famous radio stars that are on the air today: our own Lum and Abner.

ASHLEY

“Lum and Abner” was on the air for nearly 25 years. In the 1940s, Lauck and Goff branched out and began making Lum and Abner movies. By the time the seventh and final movie was shot in 1956, the rigors of showbusiness were getting to be too much for Goff, who had been in ill health, and TV was already supplanting radio as the most popular medium. By the time Lauck and Goff retired “Lum and Abner” in 1954, they had performed some 5,800 live shows, popularized the genre of hillbilly comedy entertainment, and brought fame to Arkansas and to a backroads community in Montgomery County.

Even then, they still found themselves playing the characters, whether for fun or for corporate sponsorships.

KATHY

They just kept being Lum and Abner their whole lives. When they retired, they didn't give it up.

ASHLEY

Tuffy Goff and his family stayed in LA, where he died in 1978. Chet Lauck and his family eventually moved back to Arkansas, and he spent his latter years in Hot Springs.

KATHY

He liked the horse races, he liked golf. He and his wife moved close to where the golf courses were. They did really well.

ASHLEY

He also enjoyed making trips back out to Pine Ridge to spend time with the folks there. Lauck died in 1980.

Meanwhile, the old Huddleston Store and McKinzie Store, which had inspired Lum and Abner's fictional Jot 'Em Down Store, had entered a new era in their histories. Dick Huddleston had operated his store until his death in 1963. Then his daughter, Ethel, reopened the store as a tourist attraction. Ralph and Dorothy McClure bought it from her in 1969, and the following year, Ethel also gave them the McKinzie Store. After 1930 it had been a private home, then was moved off-site in 1958 when the road was widened, and after that it had been used as a hay barn. The McClures relocated it next to the Huddleston Store, joined the two buildings through an addition at the back, and opened them as the Lum and Abner Jot 'Em Down Store and Museum in 1972.

In 1984, the Huddleston Store and McKinzie Store were listed in the National Register of Historic Places with national significance.

Dorothy McClure's son, Lon Stucker, and his wife Kathy are the current owners of the store and museum, which they have operated for the past 40 years. The larger building, the Huddleston Store, still has its original display cases and is arranged much as it would have been in Dick Huddleston's day, only now it sells Lum and Abner memorabilia and local gifts. The McKinzie Store now serves as the core of the Lum and Abner museum, but its exhibits go beyond Lum and Abner and feature artifacts from real-life Pine Ridge and its inhabitants. You can get a glimpse of the local way of life that inspired Lum and Abner in the first place.

KATHY

This wall here in the McKinzie Store has old products from these two buildings—when they were the old, old general stores in the 1900s, early 1900s. So this was all inside this store and the Huddleston Store. Do you see the old medicines that actually are illegitimate now? Chill tonic—"tastes good"—well, it does not taste good. These things are what were in the stores. Here's one a lot of people have never seen. You get live little chicks delivered to you in this container. And they would just stay in here until the mail got them here, and they would be chirping by then, but with the lid down, they can't get out. So this just comes in the mail.

Over here is stuff for getting your beard done. And these are beautiful shoes, but they're so narrow!

They didn't have a lot of choices. In Huddleston's store, he could stock some things. This store was only this big, so they just had to order them out of the Sears catalog.

ASHLEY

Kathy is an artist, and as a tribute to Lum and Abner, she adapted a couple of mannequins to their likenesses.

KATHY

This is Abner, this is Lum. I picked these mannequins up at a clothing store. These were broken, along with some other ones we have on the other side. I painted them and put glasses on Abner to make them look like their pictures. And Lum too—his clothing is what he wore in the movies that they did.

ASHLEY

On the back of the McKinzie Store building, the hallway connecting the two stores is a gallery of Lum and Abner photos.

KATHY

These two rooms are all about Lum and Abner and Chet and Tuffy. This is their real families, where they grew up in Mena, their parents—just as real-life people. This side is their movies, the Hollywood movies. They made seven movies, and it was... The radio stars had begun to start going to Hollywood, and it worked out quite well for Chet and Tuffy.

ASHLEY

Two additional rooms added to the back house local artifacts—everything from historic household items to farm implements and tools—which people have donated over time.

The Huddleston Store still operates as a store. You can buy Lum and Abner souvenirs, old time toys and trinkets, and locally made crafts.

KATHY

These tables and everything along here is what we sell. This is lye soap, pure lye soap. We have a friend who makes it down the road. We just have all kinds of things, including the sorghum—pure sorghum, all different kinds—the honey, it's excellent—the jams. I designed this T-shirt based on a picture of Lum and Abner. The other museum in the county also sells the Lum and Abner Christmas ornament and the other ones—each year is a different one—but this is the Pine Ridge Christmas ornament.

ASHLEY

At various points in the community's history, the post office has been housed in this building. Dick Huddleston operated it here, and the Stuckers used to as well until it was closed down in recent years. The pot-bellied stove is a replacement, but it's like the original one that was here. And it still works.

KATHY

This is from World War I, I think, possibly II. But this is our heat in the winter. We have wood outside. We have 25 acres of wood in our back yard.

ASHLEY

Kathy Stucker and her husband, Lon, live right behind the store in Dick Huddleston's old home. They've run the Lum and Abner Museum and gift shop for over 40 years, but now they are ready to pass the torch.

KATHY

We have talked about how much fun we had here, how much we liked it. But what we are doing now is trying to find somebody to buy the museum, buy the store, buy our home, buy our land. Because it's just too hard for people in their eighties who really don't have the health that we used to have. So if any of you want to take part in that, you could come learn while we're still here. You can change everything that's in here if you want to. You can turn it all into something else in here. I've had several people say they'd do the same thing, but turn this into something where you could eat.

ASHLEY

Maybe it could even be called the Meadowlark Restaurant and serve Lumbergers just like in the old Lum and Abner show!

At any rate, there's a window of opportunity opening up here for historic preservation. The Huddleston Store and McKinzie Store have been the heart of Pine Ridge for over a century, and they also hold a place in the hearts of old-time radio fans from across the nation. They preserve the legacy of a very small community that became a very big deal.

Next month, Sandwiching in History takes us to Madison County. It's our first ever tour there. We'll be in Huntsville at the Orval Faubus House. Yes, it was built for the former governor. But the real story is its architecture. It is a masterpiece by the renowned architect Fay Jones. So join us and we'll take you on a tour.

For more information about the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, go to ArkansasPreservation.com.

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