

Shoplifters sought after return of clock

By Ed Miller

An unusual twist led to the discovery of a shoplifting theft last week after an unidentified man tried to sell a clock in an Ashley Heights area store.

According to Hoke County sheriff's reports, a man attempted to sell Fred Riley a clock that had been stolen from Riley's store earlier.

The report said that store management identified the clock by a price tag and store code on the back of the clock.

The man and a woman had allegedly been in the store last Friday, and had looked at two clocks.

Reports say that upon examination of inventory, Riley also found that the other clock was missing.

County officers say they have a

suspect, but no arrests have been made.

Carolyn H. McIntyre reported a break-in to sheriff's deputies last Thursday.

The report said that she heard a noise that awakened her.

McIntyre reported that she thought the noise was her son. She called out her son's name and apparently scared the intruder.

He was last seen leaving the house.

Realtor, J.H. Wright reported to sheriff's deputies that someone damaged property he had under repair.

The report said that four door knobs were taken off doors and apparently used to break out windows.

There was also damage done to

foundation vents.

Three were "kicked out" and one was damaged, the report said. No arrests have been made.

The Buck Stop, just off the 401 by-pass, was victimized by theft last Monday.

A stolen newspaper vending box was reported by *The Fayetteville Observer* carrier.

Raeford police reports show that there was only about \$7 in the machine; however, the report also showed that the machine itself was worth about \$315.

A break-in was reported to local police last Thursday.

Raeford Apartments manager, Arthur Stellnag told police that the hotel portion of the complex was broken into and some items of food and some keys were stolen.



Peaches ready for a good year

Despite two years of harsh weather, peach farmers are looking forward to a banner year "if the weather holds" through the rest of April. The warm weather and plentiful rains have apparently helped trees like these in the Montrose area blossom and move to fruit on schedule.

Two Hoke County men indicted on charges of child abuse

Two Hoke County men were indicted Monday by the grand jury on separate charges involving child abuse.

James Alton Watkins, 24, was indicted for "inflicting serious second and third degree burns on a three-year-old child" he was apparently "supervising."

Reports show that the child's mother was at work when the incident occurred.

Watkins was jailed March 16 after evidence showed that he had allegedly "submerged both of the

child's hands in extremely hot water."

The youth was hospitalized a week earlier and treated for the burn injuries.

Watkins, who was released March 19 under a \$5,000 bond, is scheduled to make his first appearance in Hoke Superior Court this week for motions and arraignments.

In an unrelated child abuse case, Pope Air Force Sergeant Clarence E. Bennett, 40, was bound over to

superior court by the grand jury Monday on charges of "felonious incest" against his 16-year-old stepdaughter.

Bennett was arrested March 21 and released a day later under a \$5,000 unsecured bond.

Reports show that Bennett had allegedly been "sexually abusing" the youth since the child was six years old.

The Air Force Sergeant is also scheduled to make his first appearance in Hoke Superior Court later this week.

... Suspects to be arraigned

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A resident alerted sheriff's deputies after discovering that the store had been abandoned with the door open and lights still on inside.

The victim, who was not identified, told authorities that she had been robbed at gunpoint by at least one black man, wearing gloves and a stocking mask.

The victim is believed to have seen another man and one woman enter the store just before she was blindfolded.

During the robbery, Boyd allegedly took the victim's rings and money orders, Barrington said.

After the victim was blindfolded she was apparently forced into her car and taken to another area near the Robeson-Hoke County line, the sheriff said.

"That is where the sexual assault took place," Barrington said.

Following the assault, the victim was released on a deserted dirt road.

Hoke Detectives found the stolen car Wednesday morning, abandoned near Highway 71 in Robeson County.

"I think everyone did a fine job on this case," Barrington said.

Johnson, Sinclair and Boyd are set to appear in Hoke District Court April 20.

The cases are expected to go before the Hoke Grand Jury during the next session of Superior Court slated to begin May 14.

Unemployment rate shows increase

By Sherry Matthews

Hoke County's jobless rate increased by .2% in February. There were 890 local residents out of work during the month, figures released this week by the North Carolina Employment Security Commission (ESC) show.

February figures show that there were 7,200 residents among the ranks of the employed with a work force of 8,090, leaving 890 workers without jobs.

In addition, Hoke was the only county in the six-county area to show an increased unemployment rate.

"I think the increase can mostly be attributed to temporary

layoffs," ESC spokesman Debbie Farmer said.

"The industries in this area are not back to full force yet, and it is reflected in the figures," she added.

Farmer also attributed the increase to bad weather conditions that have decreased construction jobs in the area.

"We are hoping that with spring coming things will get better and

the rate will decrease," Farmer said.

In February, the jobless rate was 11.2%, .2% higher than January's figures.

Although Hoke's unemployment figures have increased over the past two months, February's figures are down .6% from last year's rate.

Hoke was the only county in the area to show a rise in unemployment

... Weather not hurting

(Continued from page 1A)

peach farmer Raz Autry said.

"Right now we have got a fine crop. If we can get through Easter I think we will be fine," he added.

According to Autry, the peach crop last year was destroyed by the cold temperatures and not the late frost.

"The peaches can tolerate frost but not extremely cold temperatures. We lost our crop last year right after the snow, when the temperatures dropped to below 20°," Autry said.

Autry is anxiously waiting for April's end.

"If we can get through the next couple of weeks, I think we will have a good crop," Autry said.

While farmers are trying to get their tractors in the muddy fields, local gardeners are also preparing for the coming summer and a bountiful harvest.

"We are seeing more and more people who want to plant a garden," Featherstone said.

"Many have already started their cool vegetables," he added.

Garden peas, cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower and some sweet corn has already been dispensed into the soil.

"Those who have not started their gardens should begin preparing their soil pretty soon," Featherstone said.

Although Featherstone said that

garden preparations should begin in April, he was quick to add that gardeners "should not plant" tomatoes, lima beans and pepper too soon.

"The soil needs to warm up before they go in the ground," Featherstone said.

"The ground is still too cool for those plants," he added.

"Everything is coming along well," Featherstone said.

"We need to be real cautious and keep our eye on the weather for the next two to three weeks," he added.

"If we can get through that, I think we are going to have a good crop this year," Featherstone said.

... Around Town continued

(Continued from page 1A)

if you didn't register you will have to wait until after the primary. According to reports the registration was heavy at Rockfish last Saturday. All it takes is a little effort and you can get people on the books. But remember after you register, you must vote for it to count.

Don't forget if you are going to vote an absentee ballot, you should make an application now. Also remember that all absentee ballots must be received by the Board of Elections by five o'clock on Monday afternoon, May 7. So if you are going to be out of town on May 8, vote absentee.

ty and district that will be on the ballot. You don't have to be introduced because they will look you up and give you a political card. Most of the cards have the candidate's picture.

Delegates to the district and state convention will be elected at this convention. These are the people that will be selecting your candidate for President on the Democratic ticket. So you see, it is important for you to attend.

I hope to see you there!

out of the bank? These are the questions put to me on Wednesday. I haven't been able to find out, but hope this item will be read by someone that can put some light on the subject. Time will tell.

I was in the National Guard before World War II and also in the first unit formed in North Carolina after that war. So I have a close association with this organization.

We all know that they will serve our country in time of war, but they are also looked to in time of peace. This was brought out recently when the tornado hit in this area. Many of these men and women are still pulling duty in the stricken areas. They are to be commended on their fine work during this disaster.

Many others have aided, but we think that the readiness of people like our local National Guard unit should make us feel safer in the years ahead.

Thank you, Guardsmen, for a job well done.

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