

THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

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A Modest Proposal Or A Serious Switch?

It was about a year ago that a Sunset Beach Taxpayers' Association meeting ended with member Bud Knapp floating a tongue-in-cheek proposal that the island of Sunset Beach secede and become a part of Bermuda.

Bud's joke was met with nervous laughter, and after the meeting, several SBTA members sought to reassure themselves that the only reporter present understood that the remark was in jest. "Wouldn't want people to take it the wrong way," they said.

This past Easter, the subject arose again and actually went to vote but failed 24-19 after spirited debate. Then last Saturday SBTA—complete with news release and position paper and in the presence of several reporters—agreed to "pursue establishing the island of Sunset Beach as an independent, incorporated town, separate from the Town of Sunset Beach...." No affiliation with the government of Bermuda was mentioned.

Is it "A Modest Proposal" or for real? Remember back in high school English reading Jonathan Swift's satiric essay? Swift set forth "A Modest Proposal for Preventing the Children of Poor People in the Land from Becoming a Burden to their Parents or Country, and for Making them Beneficial to the Public." His proposal, put forth oh-so-seriously and articulately, was to turn poor peoples' babies into food and leather.

The secession plan might work for the islanders, who seek a way to hold on to their quaint surroundings and protect property values that they perceive as threatened. For that matter, Swift's proposal would have worked too except for a few prickly moral and ethical hindrances.

SBTA members' frustration with "taxation without representation" has been steadily escalating in recent years. But a majority of its members don't live here, bringing to mind another lesson from high school, this one from civics class. In representative democracy, the right to "control the destiny" of any town belongs to those who vote there. The right to vote, of course, is determined not by monetary investment, but by residency. People who care about freedom wish it ever to remain so.

Stay in or pull out—the fact remains that the majority of people backing this proposal happen to live and vote in towns, counties and states elsewhere, and do not speak for a majority of Brunswick Countians or even Sunset Beach residents. That fact alone should be sufficient to keep Brunswick County's legislative delegation from seriously considering any proposal, no matter how modest, to create a tiny new 19th municipality.

The chance that Senator R.C. Soles and Reps. David Redwine and Dewey Hill will support a secession proposal for the island of Sunset Beach seems pretty slim. The chance that the General Assembly will back one without them is virtually nil.

Complete Four-Laning With A Pair Of Lights

After nearly three years of construction and more than a decade of serious congestion before that, motorists can now glide virtually unimpeded through Brunswick County on four lanes of U.S. Highway 17—that is, if they make it past a couple of treacherous intersections in one piece.

New Hanover County Sheriff Joe McQueen and his family were among several carloads who almost didn't on Labor Day. The sheriff's family was involved in one of two crashes at U.S. 17 and N.C. 904, known in local parlance as the Grissetown intersection. The site of numerous accidents over the years, the risky intersection is doubly so with two lanes of faster-moving traffic in both directions.

The McQueen family was smart and lucky—everyone in the customized van was wearing a safety belt when the vehicle flipped and landed in the median, and no one was seriously hurt. That won't be the case every time.

"I don't want to become a statistic," one commuter from Grissetown to North Myrtle Beach said in a letter to the editor last week. She makes the valid point that the majority of people trying to turn onto N.C. 904 have no idea how to get across U.S. 17. The same is true of the U.S.17 Business/Bypass intersection on the south end of Shallotte.

Expect more frequent and more deadly crashes as the new improved route is discovered by truckers and local folks who long ago abandoned visits to the Grand Strand because of the traffic. While the four-laning of U.S. 17 all the way through Brunswick is a bona fide asset to the area, the package should be completed with a pair of traffic lights.

I Think It's Time To Check Our Priorities

It's amazing how communities differ in priorities.

At least one week every year I head to the North Carolina mountains, to let the clear, crisp air blow out the cobwebs and to gain a little perspective on Brunswick County that only distance can provide.

The area we frequent is the mountain version of Brunswick County. At one time, not too long ago, it was rural, provincial. Its people were mired in poverty, lacking formal education and frankly, having little need of it.

The Appalachian Parkway made the first big dent in that way of life, bringing tourism and a demand for the crafts and folkways of the area. That was followed by the growth of a small school into a good-sized member of the state university system (Now there's a way to rapidly increase the average SAT score at a high school—import students whose parents have money and are well-educated.).

Outsiders were at first resented and unwelcome, then used to advantage, and finally accepted as a permanent facet of life. Today, there as in Brunswick County, the "outsiders" make up an increasingly large portion of the population and an even larger share of the people typically considered "movers and shakers."

Like Brunswick County, the area is growing in leaps and bounds, largely because of its attractiveness as a retirement and nearly year-round resort area.

Like many non-resident property owners here, we've tried keeping up



Susan Usher

with goings-on up there through the local newspapers and by talking to the "locals" when we visit. I'm always struck with how familiar the stories sound; I could have written many of them myself and just changed a few proper names.

As in Brunswick County, DOT is trying to do its part to keep up with the pace of change, building bypasses and three-lane roads here and there.

County and municipal governments there are coping with the demands for expanded services as they are here. Almost concurrently (just a step or two ahead of Brunswick County, though we're growing faster here), the commissioners there have been dealing with the need for more landfill space, improved waste collection, expanded library services, recycling (way ahead of us), 911 and road/street name adjustments and to a slightly lesser degree, suitability of soils for waste disposal and efforts to meet new standards for sewer installations.

The area has had the same kinds of divisive disputes over incorporation of new communities versus their annexation/absorption into nearby municipalities, and the same

kinds of concerns about balancing economic and environmental interests. Like us, the people in this mountain area are beginning to realize just how special a place they have.

What I haven't seen there is a county government's seeming disinterest in public education as a high priority, though their constituency mix is very similar to ours here. They don't just talk support of education, as candidates for county commissioner have done the past two election years. They believe in education and they support it with the county's resources.

Just as school was starting, two large elementary school expansions and a two-story addition to the local high school were nearing completion and the board of education and commissioners were consulting on the bidding schedule for building additional projects.

Local newspapers have featured recent stories about new technology in the schools and high public interest in a year-round elementary school continued this year by popular demand of parents.

Nothing about commissioners balking over funding construction needs or disputing the operating needs of the school system.

Meanwhile, here I sit at the terminal on Friday afternoon, about the time Brunswick County Commissioners are considering whether to appeal a judge's decision to uphold a jury's award of \$14 million to the Brunswick County Schools.

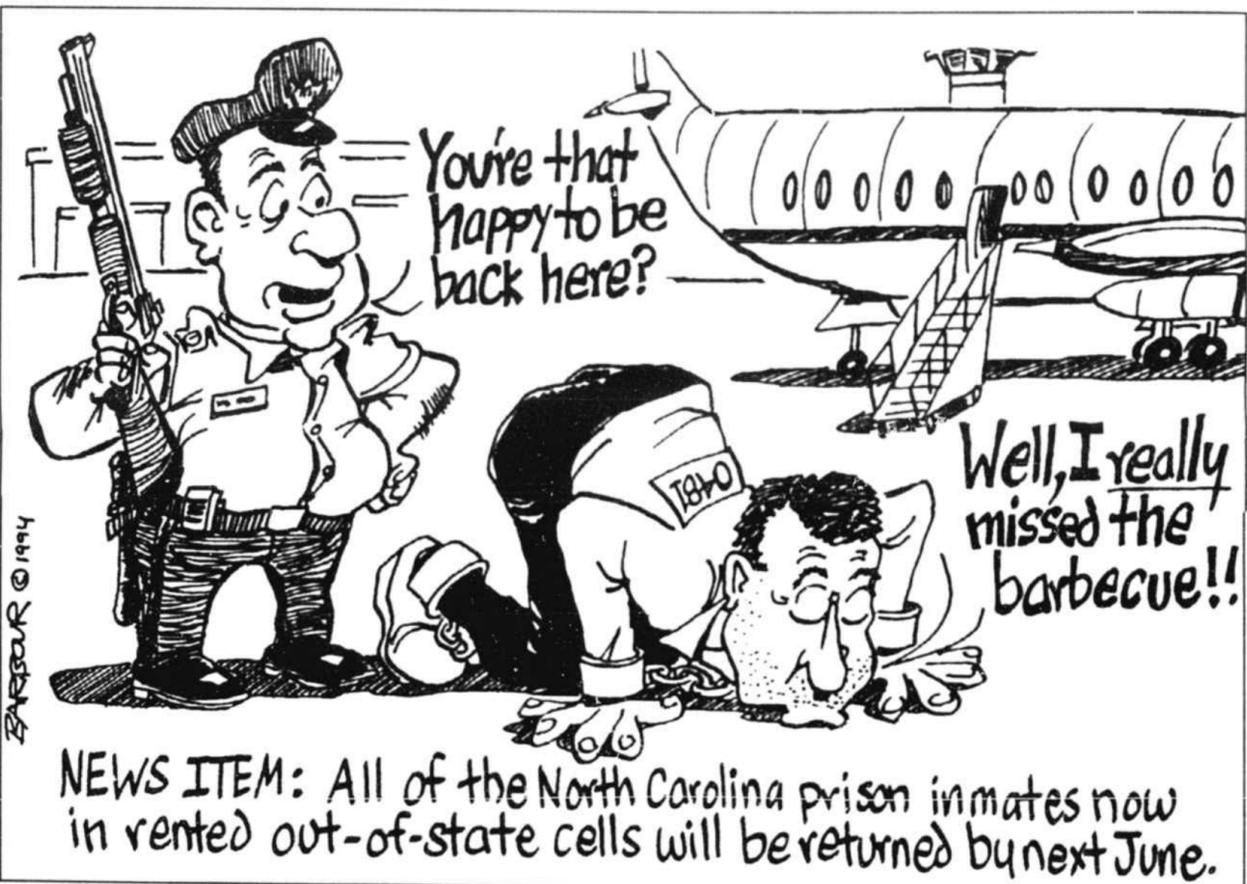
I'm sitting here waiting for the county to either go ahead with or

forget its very public proposal to seek an audit of the schools' central office, a quest that faded in interest rapidly once commissioners found out the school board thought it was a good idea.

I'm sitting here waiting for resolution of funding for a new elementary school in Leland. Commissioners and school board members still haven't settled, apparently on all the details of financing the project. Meanwhile, the school system's 10-plan construction plan is already several years behind schedule. Expansion projects at West and North high schools were cut to minimum stop-gap projects that will have to be expanded later. We need a new elementary school in the Calabash-Thomasboro area, especially considering the growth that's expected to result with the planned South Brunswick Water & Sewer Authority project.

I doubt Brunswick County cannot "afford" new schools. If for some reason, the growth that is creating the demand for new landfills, new schools, new water and sewer lines isn't generating enough money to cover those demands, that can be fixed. Most other high-growth counties in North Carolina have already imposed additional growth-related income measures. Among the most popular, the real estate transfer tax, paid at the time land changes hands.

Maybe it's time Brunswick County looked again at needs versus resources and make sure growth is paying its way and that our schools aren't shorted in the process. Until we do, I personally think our priorities are badly skewed.



Worth Repeating...

- *The theater needs continual reminders that there is nothing more debasing than the work of those who do well what is not worth doing at all.* —Gore Vidal
- *Civilization advances by extending the number of important operations which we can perform without thinking about them.* —Alfred North Whitehead
- *The fickleness of the women I love is only equaled by the infernal constancy of the women who love me.* —George Bernard Shaw

Once Upon A Time, Long Ago And Far Away

This is one of those weeks when nothing happened that seemed particularly interesting to me. So I'm going to tell you about another day, a long time ago, when a lot of interesting things happened.

It was the fall of 1972. I was hitch-hiking around Europe during a year off from college. I had been in Great Britain for several weeks, after taking the Belgium to Dover ferry and bumming around England, Wales and Scotland.

I woke up before dawn at a youth hostel in Edinburgh and decided it was a fine morning to start heading back south. Downstairs in the group kitchen, I shared breakfast with a Chinese student who made us a delicious omelet in his little wok, while I contributed tea and day-old biscuits from my rucksack.

Riding a trolley to the outskirts of the city, I scrawled "London" in big magic-marker letters on the back of a folded map. The driver let me off at a southbound highway on-ramp, where I stood by the entrance holding my sign.

About the only people who pick up hitch-hikers in Britain are truck drivers (or lorrymen, as they call themselves). This makes for great long rides, sitting high above the other traffic, listening to the endless stories of men who spend their lives on the road.

The driver who picked me up was heading for a small town within a hundred miles of London. Like most English lorrymen he was a great talker who loved to tell visitors about his homeland. He had grown up along the coast of the North Sea. His eyes brightened when I told him of my own love for the ocean.



Eric Carlson

"If'n yer nutt in a horry, I could tek ye thar," he announced.

"Sure," I said, having learned long before that a fixed itinerary is the bane of great adventure.

And so we left the four-lane highway and began a twisting, turning tour along a tiny road hugging the high cliffs overlooking England's northeast coastline. It was one of the most incredibly beautiful visual feasts I would ever see.

Being in Britain (where they drive to the left), I was perched in the seaward seat, high in the cab of an 18-wheeler rumbling along inches from the unguarded precipice. One slip of the wheel would have sent us plummeting hundreds of feet to the rocky shore below.

But there was little need to fear, this being the home of my driver, who confidently wrestled the wheel with one hand while pointing out islands and birds and fishing boats and villages with fanciful names like Blyth and Tynemouth and Seaham and Hartlepool.

I shared his silent sadness as we turned back inland and re-joined the highway hustle. In the approaching darkness, we said goodbye at the exit for Nottingham, where he assured that I could easily find a room for the night.

Living on a vagabond's budget, I

had no plans for such extravagance. Instead I headed for the big stone church at the center of town. In those days, needy travelers could generally count on a local minister to allow you a dry place to unroll your sleeping bag for the night.

The church, high on a knoll overlooking Nottingham, was one of those giant Gothic structures, probably built before George Washington was born. I found the door unlocked and no one inside, so I stashed my rucksack behind the choir pews.

I decided to speak with the minister later that evening and walked down the hill to find some refreshment at the pub across the street. Being just past supper time, the place was filling with a boisterous crowd of working-class regulars who evidently gathered there every night.

No sooner had I ordered a pint of bitter ale when a muscular arm around my shoulder began herding me toward a table full of young people. They were all locals who worked in various trades and offices around Nottingham. This was their hangout.

They wanted to hear all about America. Yet, like so many Europeans, they already understood a good deal more about my country and its place in the world than I would ever come to know about theirs.

We drank many beers. We played darts. We sang idiotic songs. I showed them my stupid bar tricks. They showed me theirs. One guy could put a half-lit cigarette in his lips, suck it into his mouth, then push it back out—filter first—and blow smoke out the end! I was im-

pressed.

When closing time arrived (much earlier than here), one of my new friends invited me to stay the night. Cheerfully accepting, I asked if he wouldn't mind waiting while I went across the road to retrieve my pack.

"No problem. We'll wait," they said, stifling a mischievous laugh as I headed for the door.

By then I was more than a little bit tipsy. So a stroll in the fresh air seemed like a good idea. But as I stepped outside and looked up at the big stone church on the hill, I froze.

Gone was the peacefully dark outline I remembered from before. Now the great stained-glass windows were glittering like a Las Vegas casino. The parking lot was full. A chorus of singing voices and the resonant tones of a giant pipe organ boomed down from above.

I'll always remember the sea of rosy-cheeked English faces that turned toward me as I slipped in through the back door. The great organ's final chord faded into silence as the priest, fully outfitted in colorful silken robes, motioned for me to approach.

Edging sheepishly toward the altar, I whispered my predicament into the priest's ear. He gave me a knowing smile and graciously escorted me to the last row of choir pews. He even lifted my rucksack and helped me hoist it onto my back.

Blushing like a new bride, I walked back down the aisle shrugging and nodding apologetically to the chuckling congregation. A hundred warm smiles assured me I would not be judged harshly by those gentle people as I faded back into the night, feeling reborn.