

## Ways Are Being Sought To Improve Warren's Tax Collection Rate

By KAY HORNER  
News Editor

Warren County has one of the lowest rates of tax collection in the state, and County Manager Charles Worth told county commissioners at their regular meeting Monday that it was a "problem we cannot let continue."

The ad valorem tax collection rate for the county, according to County Tax Collector

Susan W. Brown, has for the past two years been around 92 percent.

However, the collection rate has traditionally been about 94 percent.

The delinquent tax rate affects the county's budgeting process because state statute provides that a county can only budget 97 percent of what was collected the previous year, Worth explained.

By law, the tax collector can garnish wages

of delinquent taxpayers, as well as put a lien on real and personal property.

While it is not unusual for the county to garnish wages, the lien and subsequent sale of property is a costly route and one the county does not use.

The poor, rural makeup of the county is one of the factors contributing to the comparatively low collection rate, according to Mrs.

Brown.

"If you took all our big corporations and utilities, you'd find that they account for only something like 10 percent of the tax levy," Mrs. Brown said.

In many counties, corporations compose a much larger percentage of the entire tax base.

Mrs. Brown estimated that in Warren County, as many as 75 percent of the tax bills are for \$200 or less. That category

also has the most delinquent taxpayers.

Because so many of the delinquent taxpayers are unemployed, garnishing of wages is not an option for collection, Mrs. Brown explained.

The county collected about \$10,000 several years ago through garnishing of wages, a measure which Mrs. Brown said it is not unusual for her office to use.

One of its primary

drawbacks is the time involved on the part of tax office staff.

"Some counties collect a higher percentage of their taxes, but those are the same counties that have larger staffs," she said. The county tax collector's office employs one full-time and one part-time person in addition to Mrs. Brown, who also serves as the county finance officer, a position which is separate in most counties from that

of tax collector.

Mrs. Brown also indicated that the county's rate of collection is significantly affected if one of the top 10 or 20 taxpayers has a delinquent account, as happened recently with Norlina Mills when it claimed bankruptcy. (The mill has since satisfied its delinquent account and was taken over by a larger mill.)

Figures from the tax collector's office show

that the county's top five taxpayers and the amount of their 1984 tax levy are as follows:

—Carolina Telephone and Telegraph Company, \$59,573;

—Carolina Power & Light Company, \$56,004;

—Peck Manufacturing Company, \$30,527;

—Champion International, \$25,984

—Halifax EMC, \$25,476.

According to Worth, (Continued on page 10)

## Murder Trial Under Way

The trial of Hattie Mae Kersey of Ridgeway in the October 1983 shooting death of her husband was scheduled to go to the jury this morning (Wednesday) after two days of testimony.

Kersey, who was 41 at the time of his death, died two days after he sustained a 22-caliber rifle wound to the head.

Superior Court Judge Henry V. Barnette, Jr. of Raleigh was expected to charge the jury to return a verdict of guilty to second degree murder, guilty to involuntary manslaughter, not guilty, or not guilty by reason of insanity.

In testimony Monday, Warren County Sheriff's Deputy Lawrence Harrison said that he arrived at the Kersey home about 10:38 p.m. on Oct. 2, 1983 and found Kersey unconscious and lying partially in the bed and partially on the floor with a gunshot wound to the head.

Mrs. Kersey, Harrison testified, was kneeling over her husband crying and repeating, "I didn't mean to shoot him."

Most of Monday morning was devoted to jury selection and Monday afternoon District Attorney David Waters presented the state's case that Mrs. Kersey had shot her husband, who was disabled by amputation of his leg at mid-thigh, for "no apparent reason."

Defense Attorney Charles T. Johnson of Warrenton argued unsuccessfully for dismissal of the charges due to insufficient evidence after the state rested and prior to the closing arguments.

In the second motion, Johnson asserted that the evidence presented was circumstantial, and that no evidence had been produced linking Mrs. Kersey with the weapon or identifying as the murder weapon the rifle submitted into evidence.

Johnson also argued that the state had presented no motive in the shooting, and no evidence of what transpired prior to the incident.

According to Harrison, the rifle was found at the foot of the bed and two spent cartridges were on the floor and three live rounds remained in the rifle.

The bullet which entered Kersey's skull splintered and could not be recovered, according to testimony from Dr. John D. Butts, associate chief medical examiner (Continued on page 10)



White's Building Supplies, Inc. on West Franklin Street, a 62-year-old Warrenton landmark, will this month close its doors and vacate the property which has housed the business since it was incorporated in January, 1923. (Staff Photo)

## Business Is Closing After Six Decades

By MARY CATHERINE HARRIS  
Staff Writer

A recent snowy afternoon found 80-year-old Warrenton carpenter Eugene Branch dozing in a cozy corner of White's Building Supplies, Inc. on West Franklin Street, a corner where for 61 years he and other area builders have gathered to await the filling of their orders and to "swap tales" of the building industry. Branch appeared to be savoring the final days of the company which has become a Warrenton landmark and which, according to manager Al Williams, III, will vacate the property in mid-February.

Empty shelves and half-filled boxes mark the area which in years past was packed with assorted paints, brushes, hardware, samples, and similar necessities for builders and home-owners. Changed, too, is the "carpenters' corner" from which has been moved what may have been, according to Williams, the trademark of the business. It is a high-arm green rocking chair custom-made years ago for one of the company's original owners, the late Hugh White. The chair, though moved from the usual corner in preparation for closing the business, will remain in safekeeping, Williams emphasized.

Al Williams, III speaks with respect for the business which is almost three times his age and for the father whose death put the younger Williams in the manager's shoes.

In January, 1923, White's Building Supplies was incorporated with three stockholders sharing ownership, Hugh White, Edmond White, and D. R. Mustian, all of Warrenton. A primary purpose of the corporation as stated in the Certificate of Incorporation was "to buy and sell, wholesale and retail, building material."

Since that January day, untold number of homes and other buildings in Warrenton and the surrounding area have taken shape within the walls of the unimposing structure on West Franklin Street which has been the home of the

business since its incorporation.

Warren County native Al Williams, II bought the company from the White family in the early 60's and until his death in 1983 extended his customers the hand of friendship while assisting them with their building needs.

The fact that friendship has been a keynote of the business is underlined by Branch, who stated that he has always found at White's Building Supplies a pleasant atmosphere and a warm invitation to "sit around and chat with old cronies." The carpenter said that life would not be the same for him when the business closes. Nor will it be for numerous other persons in the county.

Al Williams, II majored in engineering at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and began working for White's Building Supplies in 1935. Except for brief stints of employment in Richmond, Va., Baltimore, Md., and Durham, the local company was his work home from then until his death. He sought to accommodate his customers, opening the doors for business early in the morning and often co-signing notes to enable financing of customers' building projects.

Al Williams, III described in a recent interview the fascination that his father's business held for him as a child. He recalled that at age 14 he began "working" there during time off from school. The peephole in the office of Hugh White, the drink machine which takes nickels only and which still is in working order, and the numerous tools and machines were special attractions to him as he moved among the men who worked and traded there.

A subtle sadness entered the conversation as he remembered the people and things of years gone by which had been the very essence of the business — his father who had a talent for design and shared it generously, and who in spite of his frequent amusement at the building questions and predicaments (Continued on page 10)

## Plans Unveiled On Monday

# Nat Macon Plantation Eyed As 4-H Camp Site

By KAY HORNER  
News Editor

Prospects for the future of the historic Nathaniel Macon Buck Spring Plantation were brightened this week when county commissioners gave approval in concept to initial plans by Warren County 4-H to locate a camp at the site about 12 miles northeast of Warrenton.

Macon served continuously in the United States Congress for 37 years, from 1791 until 1828, serving first as a representative and then as a senator.

Seventy-one acres of what at one time was a 500-acre plantation is now owned by Warren County; one-quarter acre having been bought in 1901 and the remaining acreage in 1934.

Although the property is on the National Register of Historic Places and several restorations at the site have been undertaken, the area has not been maintained in recent years.

George Koonce and Glenn Woolard, 4-H extension agents, presented to the commissioners a preliminary proposal that calls for the area to be developed as a 4-H Camp which would also be available for use by other county groups.

According to Woolard, a buffer zone would be established between the historical buildings at the site and the 4-H activity areas.

Woolard and Koonce said they hoped the camp would eventually be self-supporting, and that initial funds were being sought from the Legislature and from various grant programs.

The commissioners were enthusiastic about the proposal, and J. T. Fleming, a longtime advocate of additional recreational programs for county youth, said it was "the most positive thing I have heard in a long time."

"We're going to have to start to do something for our youth or we're going to pay in other ways like juvenile delinquency," Fleming said. "The land is lying there doing nothing and this would be a positive step for us."

Eva M. Clayton, chairperson of the board, noted that the site has "not been well used" and

that it could be a real attraction for the county.

One attraction of the property, according to Woolard, is its proximity to Lake Gaston. It is located within a half-

mile of the water, and the adjoining property is owned by Champion and Union Camp paper companies. According to Woolard, both have been instrumental in develop-

ment of a 4-H Camp in Halifax County and Woolard felt they might grant a right-of-way to the water for users of the

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## At Warrenton Office

# Vance County Man Named To Postmaster Vacancy

The U. S. Postal Service has announced the appointment of Sherwood W. Knight of Henderson to the position of postmaster of the Warrenton Post Office.

The appointment, which is effective Feb. 16, will move Knight from the post of superintendent of postal operations in Henderson which he has held for the past eight years.

Knight, who plans to move his residence to Warrenton in the future, noted that although the Warrenton office is smaller than others where he has worked he anticipates no problems. He noted that his primary goal will be to "serve the customers in the best way possible." Knight said that he plans to "operate the office as efficiently and economically as possible."

The newly appointed postmaster said that he looks forward to the move and views the new responsibility as a challenge. One immediate task will be making preparation for rural route inspections in March, a routine usually scheduled for September.

Knight has been employed with the post office for approximately 28 years, most of them in the Henderson office. For a brief term, he served as officer-in-charge at the Wise Post Office.

The Henderson native is a life-long resident of Vance County, with the exception of nine years of his childhood spent in Chester, Pa. He is a graduate of Henderson High School and has retired with 30 years of service with the N. C. National Guard in Warrenton and Henderson.

Knight is married to the former Dorothy Wilson of Henderson

and they have two children, Sherwood Knight, Jr. who works with Parkway Mobile Homes, and Krista Knight, advertising director with Kerr

Drugs in Raleigh. Knight will assume the position which has been vacant in Warrenton since the retirement last fall of former postmaster, Bruce Bell.

## Two Are Charged

Two Manson men were arrested Monday and charged with breaking, entering and larceny at Boyd's Shell Station at Manson on Interstate 85.

According to the Warren County Sheriff's Department, Orlander A. Bullock, 16, of Route 1 and Gregory Wayne Watkins, 21, of the same address, were released on \$500 unsecured bond pending their April 13 court date.

Carl Eugene Boyd reported on Jan. 30 that he discovered \$500 missing from the station and gave police the names of several suspects. He had hidden the money the night before, (Continued on page 10)

## Tree Strikes Victim

# Man's Life Lost In Freak Accident

A freak logging accident Monday morning took the life of 22-year-old Henry Vernon Evans of Vaughan when a tree fell and hit him.

The victim and his father, Arthur Evans, were cutting trees behind their home when the accident occurred. Rescue personnel took Evans to Halifax Memorial Hospital in Roanoke Rapids, where he died during attempts to stabilize his condition.

Funeral services will be conducted at 2 p. m. today (Wed.) at Macon Baptist Church. Burial will be in the family cemetery near Vaughan.

Surviving are his parents, Mrs. Bonnie Walker Evans and Arthur Lee Evans; a

sister, Miss Bonnie Dawn Evans of the home; two brothers, Arthur Evans and Ernest Evans of the home; his maternal grandmother, Mrs. Ethelyn H. Walker of Warrenton and his paternal grandmother, Mrs. Nettie K. Evans of Warrenton.

Pallbearers will be Billy King, David Smith, Paul Harris, Jimmy Roy Clark, Frankie Stegall and James H. Robinson.

Serving as honorary pallbearers will be Stanley Rodwell, Nat West, Macon Robertson, Roy Pat Robertson, Jim Clark, Mike Spragins, and Tollie Randall Harris.

Memorial contributions may be made to the Macon Baptist Church Parsonage Fund.