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Office Space Controversy Rocks County Courthouse

By CONNIE BLACKWELL,
Asheville Citizen Staff Writer

A controversy between the new Madison County Board of Commissioners and Superior Court Solicitor Clyde M. Roberts over office space for Roberts came to a head here Monday.

Roberts, who was solicitor for Madison and Buncombe counties until the new district court system went into effect, and is now solicitor for Madison, Yancey, Mitchell, Avery and Watauga counties, has had an office in the Buncombe County courthouse and maintained a private office in Marshall.

Shortly before the Republican board of commissioners (defeated in November) left office on Dec. 7, the board gave Roberts as an office the room in the

courthouse used for the past 10 years for driver's license examinations two days a week, for social security and unemployment commission work space, and for the meetings of the board of commissioners.

The new Democratic board, according to Chairman Dr. R. Bruce Sams of Mars Hill, had to hold its December and January meetings in the office of Robert Edwards, superintendent of Madison

County schools.

And, Sams said, no driver's license examinations have been given since Dec. 7 because State Highway Patrol Examiner D. G. McClure said the room Roberts is now using is the only one in the courthouse with enough space in which to give eye tests.

Sams said in a statement late Monday that he, the other two board members, W. K. Moore of Spring Creek and Ervin Adams of Laurel, and

County Auditor Emery Metcalf, who serves as courthouse custodian, "have tried persistently for the past two weeks to negotiate with Roberts and offered him either of two other offices in the courthouse or his choice of two private offices some 100 feet away from the courthouse."

He said, "Roberts has declined and refused to cooperate and finally said Monday that he would take the

matter to court before he would move out of the office space assigned to him by the past Republican board."

Sams said the previous board not only assigned the commissioners' meeting room to Roberts for an office but ordered and paid for in advance several thousand dollars worth of furniture and four window shades costing \$285.35. He said Roberts would be allowed to use the furniture that he will need if for

whatever office he uses, but that the window shades wouldn't fit anywhere else.

Our predecessors in collaboration with their friend, Clyde M. Roberts, have attempted to inconvenience a lot of people and lay the blame at our door," Sams said, and added that the board has taken steps to see that it has preserved the much needed office space and that the driver's license examinations will resume Tuesday for the regular Tuesday and Thursday hours each week.

Sams said, "We will furnish Roberts adequate space to carry out the duties of his office if he will only show some spirit of cooperation."

Roberts, in a telephone conversation from his home in Marshall late Monday, declined to comment on the situation but said he would make a complete statement later.

Commissioners Lock Solicitor's Office

By CONNIE BLACKWELL,
Citizen Staff Writer

Clyde M. Roberts, 24th Judicial District solicitor who found his office in the Madison

County Courthouse here padlocked Tuesday morning, said courts in the five counties in his district "are going to be bogged down."

He said late Tuesday that all his files and confidential material for district and superior courts in Madison, Yancey, Mitchell, Avery and Watauga were in the office, which was locked on Monday night by the county board of commissioners.

Emery Metcalf, county auditor who also acts as courthouse custodian said late Tuesday that all furniture in Roberts' office and all his files—"everything but the sweepings"—had been placed in the board of elections office. Metcalf said the key to the elections office was offered to Roberts Tuesday, but that he refused to take it.

Roberts said he was not sure at this time what his course of action would be, but that he wanted everything to "proceed legally." HGE said he did not know where his things were.

A Republican, he has been involved in a controversy over the two-room office space with the newly-elected Democratic Board of County Commissioners since the board took over in December.

The office was assigned to him by the previous board, which was Republican. The outgoing board also paid for the furniture for the office in advance.

Both Roberts and the current board charge "politics" is behind the other party's attitude.

Roberts said Tuesday that "this is just some more petty politics. They're just not satisfied with winning everything." Formerly

McClure To Resume License Exams Here Next Wed.

Announcement has been made that D. G. McClure, auto license examiner, will resume his schedule on next Wednesday in the Madison County courthouse. Mr. McClure is in Marshall every Wednesday

solicitor for Madison and Buncombe counties, he is now (since the district court system went into effect) solicitor for the five counties.

Dr. R. Bruce Sams of Mars Hill, chairman of the present board, said Monday that "our predecessors along with their friend Clyde M. Roberts have attempted to inconvenience a lot of people and lay the blame at our door."

Roberts said late Tuesday that the offices were not assigned him at the last minute before the administration changed as the present board claims, but had been given him much earlier in the fall.

Roberts said he read a letter from Bert M. Montague, director of the administrative office of the North Carolina Courts in Raleigh, to the board at a meeting Monday. He said the letter, received in July, advised him that counties are required by statute to provide the solicitor with office space and furniture in the county in which he resides.

The letter, however, did not say that an office in the courthouse is mandatory but that it was highly desirable, he said.

Roberts said he read the letter to the board Monday and repeated that he had been given the rooms "in good faith by the preceding board" and wanted to keep them. He said the present commissioners "just want to push me around down there."

He said the alternate offices (at one of four locations according to Dr. Sams) were not appropriate for an office housing records for five counties. And he charged that the rooms he was occupying had not been used as much or for the purposes the com-

missioners said. Metcalf said two carpenters will begin work at 8 a.m. Wednesday transforming a 30 by 40-foot room on the third floor into a two-room office for Roberts. He said tile would be installed and general improvements

made to Parkville.

ASCS Is Accepting Feed Applications

Because of the severe drought conditions this past summer, Madison County was approved as a natural disaster area and an emergency livestock feed program has been activated, according to Emory Robinson, chairman of the Madison County Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation committee.

Farmers with eligible livestock who suffered a feed shortage due to the drought may make application and secure approval to purchase CCC owned corn at a discount price to feed their livestock if they meet all the eligibility requirements, Robinson said.

Eligibility requirements include the filing of a financial statement on which the applicant lists his assets and liabilities. Other requirements that must be met are: (1) he does not have sufficient feed (including hay or pasture) for his livestock for the authorized period; (2) a serious loss of his crops (including his available hay or pasture) must have been suffered by him because of the emergency; (3) feed purchases (including forage) larger than usual are necessary because of the emergency; and (4) it would be an undue financial hardship for him to obtain sufficient feed through normal trade channels. In explaining this, Robinson stated that undue financial hardship is deemed to exist only when the applicant's financial resources preclude his obtaining required feed from

normal suppliers without imperiling continuance of his farming operations; (2) defaulting on existing financial obligations; (3) unsound borrowing; or (4) excessive disposal of livestock.

The chairman said that for use in feeding primary livestock which include dairy cows, cows and bulls for breeding, and replacement heifers and calves the cost of corn purchased through the program will be \$1.13 per bushel, and for secondary livestock (all other livestock) the cost will be \$1.48 f.o.b. at an Asheville handler's place of

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Courthouse Hours Changed: Open Sat. A.M.

Following their meeting on Monday, the Board of County Commissioners announced new office hours for the Madison County courthouse.

Beginning Tuesday of this week the courthouse offices will be open from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday and from 8:30 a.m. to 12 o'clock noon on Saturday.

The commissioners stated that the reason for the change in office hours is due to the fact that the courthouse, which had previously been closed all day on Saturday, will now be open until noon on that day.

County Airport Plans Are Discussed Here

The Madison County Board of Commissioners agreed Monday to invite mayors, or their representatives, of Mars Hill, Hot Springs and Weaverville to the February commissioners' meeting to discuss an airport for the county.

Dr. Bruce Sams, former mayor of Mars Hill and chairman of the board, said he was in favor of an airport "if we can get the funds" but suggested that other towns in the county, and Weaverville in Buncombe County, be invited to discuss the possibility.

William Reeves of Weaverville, county attorney, told the board that there were no uncommitted funds in the present budget and that all that could be done now on construction of an airport is "to weigh the sentiment."

He said, however, that preliminary studies and discussions should be made so that the board would know what was feasible and desirable before June and time to plan next year's budget.

The airport would primarily benefit the towns and developments along the U. S. 19-23 artery. It would not be in competition with Asheville Airport, according to Zeno Ponder, area farmer and businessman, who spoke in favor of the airport, but would be used as "a supplement to Asheville and would be a big step in the development of Madison and North Buncombe," he said.

Miss Sally Ann Webster of the Asheville office of the N. C. Department of Local Affairs presented information on preliminary plans to the current board.

The department had a contract which expires March 1 with the old county board to aid in planning in several areas, such as the airport, housing and a sanitary landfill.

The airport was discussed in December at a meeting in Mars Hill and was referred to the county commissioners because the first step would be hiring a consultant to study sites and the county, or a local group, must pay the consultant's fee.

Miss Webster told the board that the fee was reimbursable, if the airport is eventually built. If not, the fee will have to be paid in full by the local group, she said.

She said about 75 per cent of the total construction cost, which could run from about \$260,000 on up, was available from the Federal Aeronautics Administration, the state, and other federal sources. Ideally, she said, the county might be able to get 90 per cent help, but "realistically you can expect 75 per cent."

The department's planning is for a "basic utility" installation that will accommodate about 95 per cent of all propeller aircraft under 12,500 pounds and will include a one-mile runway (about 4,000 feet to begin with), paved runways, clear approaches, an apron, a taxiway from the apron to the runway, and entrance roads. Turnarounds at each end of the runway would be optional at first as would runway lights, she said.

The consultant, whose fee would be between \$5,000 and \$6,000, would select a site to be approved by the board of commissioners.