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## In Hot Springs Grave Robbery Trial

### Lewis Sentenced To 20 Years

By NICHOLAS HANCOCK  
Editor

Three men received active sentences and one a suspended sentence in the Hot Springs grave robbery trial which was concluded early Saturday evening in a special session of Madison County Superior Court presided over by Judge Lacy Thornburg of Webster.

Stanley Lewis, of Hot Springs, the only defendant to plead not guilty to two counts of grave robbery and one of conspiracy to rob a grave was sentenced to 20 years in the state's penal system.

Luther Aikens, 24, of Hot Springs, was given a 10-year active sentence; Lewis Bollo, 19, of Jacksonville, Fla., was sentenced to five years; and Kevin Sams, 18, of Greeneville, Tenn., received a 10-year sentence suspended for five years.

The jury of three women and nine men deliberated approximately one and a half hours before rendering a verdict of guilty about 7 p.m. in the Lewis trial.

Lewis, 50, went to trial last Thursday afternoon after the jury was selected

for the special court session. Most of the Thursday and Friday sessions was used to hear the testimony of Aikens, Bollo and Sams who had pleaded guilty to the charges and appeared among the prosecution witnesses. Sams identified several objects recovered from the June 14, 1980 disturbance of the graves in the Safford mausoleum in Hot Springs, and he testified that Lewis had told the three there were \$4,000 to \$6,000 in gold in the crypts and that he (Lewis) would have the gold melted down and would divide the money profited from the sale of the gold among them.

Aikens, the final witness of the day, said he did not recall what happened in the incident.

When court resumed Saturday, Lewis took the stand and denied having ever robbed a grave and having any connection with the robbery carried out by the younger three men. He denied knowing Lewis Bollo and said he only knew Sams and Aikens because he had hired them to do some work on his property last June.

Lewis said he recalled shortly after June 14 that Aikens and Sams were on

his back porch making hammering noises and when he went to investigate the racket, he saw them removing gold from some skeletal teeth and saw several gold teeth laying on the porch floor. "I told them to get the hell off my back porch," Lewis told the court.

Lewis said he didn't know who was buried in the private cemetery located up a hill behind his house. The desecrated mausoleum belonged to the once wealthy Safford family of Hot Springs.

At one point during the Saturday afternoon proceedings, an emotional and tearful Lewis told the prosecuting attorney James T. Rusher, "I have never robbed any graves. Good God, No."

Lewis was arrested on October 20, 1980 after reporting to Madison County Sheriff E.Y. Ponder what he had witnessed concerning the gold teeth and the three younger men on his back porch.

"Reporting it to Sheriff Ponder was the biggest mistake I ever made in my life," Lewis said.



Stanley Lewis



JAMES LEDFORD, county commissioner chairman, (center) listens to a taxpayer during the Board of Equalization and Review hearings on Monday in the Tax Supervisor's office in the courthouse. County commissioners will be sitting on the board through Friday, May 1 from 10:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. in order to hear taxpayers who have questions regarding the valuation of property in the county. This is the only time commissioners have the authority to change valuation of real estate.

## Democrats Elect Zeno Ponder County Chairman

By NICHOLAS HANCOCK  
Editor

Approximately 100 Democrat officials and supporters turned out for the Democrat County Convention Saturday at Marshall and elected Zeno Ponder, long-time Madison County political kingpin, as county chairman of the party for the next year.

Ponder will replace retiring county chairman W.T. (Bill) Moore who has served in that capacity for two years. County Democratic Party chairmen and first vice-chairmen cannot serve more than two consecutive terms, according to the party's plan of organization.

Moore assured party members that he "by no means is quitting the Democratic Party. I'm only taking a different seat," he said.

Moore told the convention to never doubt his loyalty to the party, and added, "When I

retire from the Democrat Party, you can come see me at the funeral home."

Moore recommended Ponder as a nominee for the chairmanship, and the convention unanimously voted to have Ponder lead the party for the next year.

With Ponder at the helm, the convention got down to business by electing a new slate of officers for the coming year. All officers were elected unanimously; 1st vice-chairman — Debbie Ponder Baker, Madison County School Food Service director; 2nd vice-chairman — Bobby Jean Rice, Madison County School Supervisor; 3rd vice-chairman — Wayne McDevitt, director of the Governor's Western Office in Asheville; secretary — Jena Lee Buckner, register of deeds; and treasurer — David Caldwell, county finance officer.

Outgoing party secretary,

Debbie Baker, seated the following delegates at the convention (by precinct): South Marshall — Paul Gurewitz, Bill Roberts, Mike Bradley and Barbara Hensley; Spring Creek — Joe Justice, Sue Pangle, Larry Plemmons, Billy Crowder and Sandra Fowler; North Marshall — Roger D. Haynie, Christine Lunsford, Mrs. Jim Baldwin, Zeno Ponder, Mrs. Zeno Ponder, Sammy Lunsford, Jim Baldwin, Teresa Banks, Coy Haynie, Mrs. Arthur Banks; Grapevine — Bobby Jean Rice, T.D. Coates; Laurel — Emery Wallin, Fronia Genter; Sandy Mush — Mrs. Hughes Treadway, Jo Ann Sprinkle; Walnut — Robena Adams, David Caldwell, Teddy Tody, Tom Wallin; Beech Glen — Levi Hunter, Robert Carter, Gene Boone, Dwayne Thomas, Marie Anders, Judson Edwards; Mars Hill — J.O. Rice,

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Bill Moore... outgoing chairman



Zeno Ponder...new county chairman

## Bill Seeks Tax Relief

A large majority of North Carolina small-business owners support a repeal of the state inventory tax, according to a spokesman for the state's largest small-business organization.

David Stephenson, director of North Carolina governmental relations for the National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB), based his conclusion on a recent survey of NFIB's 9,050 North Carolina Members. Sixty-six percent of the respondents voted in favor of repealing the state inventory tax paid by retailers and wholesalers. Twenty-one percent supported a tax credit rather than a repeal, and five percent favored keeping the inventory tax.

"Many small-business owners are against the tax because their inventories do not necessarily represent the incomes of their businesses. Merchandise often will sit on a shelf gathering dust and will

subsequently be taxed year after year," said Stephenson. "Unfortunately, a repeal of the tax does not seem likely at this point in the legislative session since no such bill has been proposed."

To provide some relief from the burden of inventory tax, S.B. 329 has been introduced by Sen. Marshall Rauch (D)Gaston. The bill, now in the Senate Finance Committee, would give a tax credit to wholesalers, retailers and manufacturers for inventory taxes paid. Small-business owners — most of whom are retailers and wholesalers — support S.B. 329 over H.B. 127, said Stephenson, because the latter would provide a tax credit only to manufacturers.

In other results of the NFIB survey, 66 percent of the respondents favored exempting North Carolina residents from a provision of the Federal Bankruptcy Reform Act of 1978. Two identical bills,

H.B. 312 and S.B. 156, would make the liberal exemptions provided by this law unavailable to the state's residents, said Stephenson.

"The federal law has made bankruptcy a profitable alternative. If the federal exemptions are unavailable to North Carolina residents, all bankruptcy exemptions in the state would be provided for under the more stringent allowances contained in state law."

An overwhelming majority of survey respondents, 83 percent, favored extending veto power to the Administrative Rules Review Committee as a means of strengthening the review process for regulations promulgated by state agencies. Although Stephenson said that there is no bill before the Legislature at this time granting absolute veto power, he pointed out that S.B. 329 would give the committee a vehicle for repeal.

## Public Meetings

The Madison County Board of Commissioners will meet Friday, May 1 at 7:30 p.m. in the courtroom at the courthouse in Marshall.

The Madison County Board of Education will meet Monday, May 4 at 10:30 a.m. at the courthouse in Marshall.

Marshall's Town Council will meet Monday, May 4 at 7:30 p.m. in the Marshall Town Hall on Main Street.

The Mars Hill Board of Aldermen will meet Monday, May 4 at 7:30 p.m. in the Mars Hill Town Hall.

## Half Of State's Bridges Unsafe

Jimmy D. Lee, head of the state's bridge maintenance unit in the N.C. Department of Transportation, said recently that findings of the Governor's Blue Ribbon Study Commission on Transportation Needs

and Financing revealed that 8,000 of North Carolina's 16,000 bridges cannot support the legal weight limit. Of these 8,000 bridges, 4,000 cannot support the weight of a fully loaded school bus.

## Crime Commission Lists Seven Priorities

Crime Control and Public Safety Secretary Burley Mitchell and Governor's Crime Commission Chairman James R. Van Camp have announced the priority areas of study for the Governor's Crime Commission during the coming year.

Each issue will be studied and a report will be made to Gov. Hunt and the North Carolina General Assembly containing specific recommendations about each issue. The seven priority areas of the Commission are:

Addressing prison inmates' idleness through work, study programs, and community service restitution. Improving criminal case management including the en-

tire process from case screening with law enforcement to scheduling witnesses in court to calendaring of criminal cases and reporting case dispositions.

Reducing juvenile delinquency with particular emphasis on the violent juvenile offender (ages 15 and under) and youthful offenders (ages 16-20).

Improving arrest rates by addressing law enforcement employee turnover and department management.

Improving the public's knowledge and perception of crime and the criminal justice system.

Addressing the problem of drunken driving.

Considering ways to implement deferred prosecution with various approaches such as community service restitution.

The priority issues were chosen from a group of over 20 issues considered to be the most pressing issues facing the criminal justice system in North Carolina.

The Crime Commission is the lead crime control/criminal justice system agency for North Carolina, and its membership includes representatives from all areas of law enforcement, prosecution, courts, corrections, juvenile justice, education, and the general public.