

MADISON COUNTY LIBRARY
GENERAL DELIVERY
MARSHALL NC 28753

Serving Madison and Buncombe Counties

Vol. 88 No. 36

Thursday, September 8, 1988

25



Madison County Courthouse hit by arsonists late Sunday night. HUGH KOONTZ PHOTO

Arsonists' Blaze Rips Courthouse

S.B.I. Offers \$10,000 Reward

By H.D. KOONTZ III
The News Record Editor
Madison County's 81-year-old courthouse was torched about midnight Sunday by arsonists who broke through a rear window of the recently renovated building.

Three separate fires which were apparently set in office and courtroom trash cans left an estimated \$100,000 in damage to the main courtroom on the second floor and to the first floor clerk's and tax collector's offices, Madison County Sheriff Dedrick Brown said.

A \$10,000 reward has been offered by the N.C. State Bureau of Investigation for information leading to the arrest and conviction of those responsible for the fire.

The courtroom was the hardest hit, with the judge's oak bench gutted by flames which apparently came from an adjacent trash can which was set ablaze.

Brown said no gasoline was used to start the fires.

No vital records were destroyed; nothing was reported stolen.

No motive has been established, but Brown speculated the arsonists believed they had a score to settle with the Madison County courts system.

"It could have been someone tried there who didn't think he got a fair shake," Brown said.

Brown said the tax collector's office window had "a hole big enough to throw a cow through" after the arsonists broke in.

Once inside, he said the arsonists used a mop to break through the glass

door at the clerk of court's office. Although some small change was left sitting inside one of the offices, none of the money was taken.

Brown said his department received the fire call about 12:24 a.m. Monday.

Eddie Fox, Director of Emergency Services, said the Mars Hill Fire Department had 15 firemen and Marshall Fire Department had 19 men on the scene.

The heat inside the courtroom was so intense it shattered a water pitcher and melted hardened chewing gum

Phillips said there was a lot of hand-made wooden portions in the courtroom.

He said the "minimum" cost of repairing the building would be \$100,000.

Brown called the break-in and arson "very amateurish" and added he believed more than one person was involved.

He said the department had several suspects, including one person who apparently cut himself during the break-in. Blood was found inside the building, apparently the result of breaking through the glass window.

Brown said the department would have to subpoena information about the injured suspect from Memorial Mission Hospital in Asheville, where a Madison County man was treated for hand lacerations Monday.

"We've got two or three people we're checking out who have done this sort of thing before," Brown said.

S.B.I. Agent Brian Hallman said blood samples and fingerprint samples have been sent to the state crime lab in Raleigh for analysis.

Madison County spent nearly \$300,000 two years ago renovating the county landmark. The dome was removed so the roof and other structural portions of the building could be repaired.

Nearly \$30,000 worth of drapes were installed in the courtroom.

Spectators said flames could be seen licking out the sides of the dome at the height of the fire.

-Continued on back page

Courthouse Break-in, Arson 'Very Amateurish' Sheriff Brown

on the bottom of chairs.

The recently installed fire-retardant curtains which were used to improve acoustics in the room probably helped save portions of the walls, said architect Wayne Roberts, of Woodard and Roberts of Asheville, the firm that handled the renovation two years ago.

Smoke and water damage was evident throughout the building, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Bob Phillips, a Madison County homebuilder, estimated it would cost up to \$200,000 to "put it back like it was."

River Week Begins Sept. 10

By H.D. KOONTZ III
The News Record Editor
This weekend residents of Madison and three other counties will dive into activities celebrating the 12th annual French Broad River Week.

The week - Sept. 10 through 18 - will feature stream cleanups, raft rides, festivals, contests, displays, picnics, music, fishing derbies, bike rides and even a junk sculpture contest.

All this just to celebrate the river that flows a twisting, often rocky path through Madison, Transylvania, Buncombe and Henderson counties.

Groups and organizations from throughout the river basic area hope to once again make a big splash with the public, said Ruth Gregory, president of the French Broad River Foundation.

The week's festivities are being sponsored by the Foundation and the Land-of-Sky Regional Council.

This year's theme is "Water for Life."

The highlight of the week's events will be "Riverfest," a two-day celebration Sept. 10-11 of the French

Broad River featuring free entertainment, raft and canoe rides, kids fishing clinics, and other events at the Jean Webb River Park - named after the foundation's longtime president - beneath the Haywood Road Bridge in Asheville.

In Madison County photos and other items pertaining to the river will be on display at the Madison County Library at Marshall throughout the month.

Near Hot Springs in Madison County free whitewater raft trips will be offered for those willing to help clean up along the banks of the French Broad Sept. 18 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. This event, sponsored by the Nantahala Outdoor Center, the Carolina Wilderness and French Broad Rafting Company, provides equipment and guides, but participants should bring a change of clothes and lunch. You must be at least 10 years old.

John Worstell, manager of French Broad Outpost, with the Nantahala Outdoor Center, said the cleanup trip will cover about six to eight miles and

-Continued on back page

Democrats Oppose Poll Judge Named

By H.D. KOONTZ III
The News Record Editor
The chairman of the Madison County Board of Elections and the county's top Democrat disagree over who should be the Democrat poll judge at Hot Springs.

Bill Powell, elections board chairman, called the dispute a "little bit of a misunderstanding" that amounts to a "whole lot of nothing."

E.V. Ponder, chairman of the County Democratic Party, said it's a little more than that and that the state law directs chairman of board elections to accept recommendations for poll judges from each of the two political parties.

The dispute began when Ricky D. Ponder's original recommendation for a judge had to resign because of a conflict with Judge Ponder's primary role as an administrator in the Madison County Board of Elections.

mended Powell name Debbie Ponder, a relative of Ponder's.

But instead of following Ponder's request, Powell named Reeves Church, a Democrat who is married to Madison County Republican Chairman Jewell Church.

"Madison County Democrats did not approve of the choice because Church had Republican posters placed on his term buildings during the 1986 election, hence making him less than a level Democrat," Ponder said.

Ponder said he knew of Church but knew nothing about Debbie Ponder. The state law says until June 30, 1988, if a poll judge resigns or dies, then it was the prerogative of the elections board chairman to appoint a judge of the political party.

Ponder said, "That was the whole idea," he said of the law. "I thought that was the intent of the law, that if a poll judge resigns or dies, then it was the prerogative of the elections board chairman to appoint a judge of the political party."

-Continued on back page



Bon-Worth of Henderson opens plant in Hot Springs

Hot Springs Plant Opens

By H.D. KOONTZ III
The News Record Editor
Springs Manufacturing Company, a subsidiary of Bon-Worth of Hendersonville, opened its sewing operation in Hot Springs this week.

The company expects to employ up to 30 people but began with just eight Tuesday.

Leonard Comer, who was installing the sewing equipment last week in the building across from the Trail Cafe,

said Barbara Waldrop would be the plant manager.

"There's a lot of competition for the labor in Hendersonville," he added.

Bon-Worth has its own chain of stores, hence the elimination of the "middle-man," Comer said.

He said the average wages for piece-work employees is about \$30 a day, depending on how experienced the worker is.

Workers installed 28 sewing machines last week in the building.

"We're convinced this is the way to

go because everybody else is doing it.

"There's a lot of competition for the labor in Hendersonville," he added.

Bon-Worth has its own chain of stores, hence the elimination of the "middle-man," Comer said.

He said the average wages for piece-work employees is about \$30 a day, depending on how experienced the worker is.

Workers installed 28 sewing machines last week in the building.

Weaverville May Raise Water Rates

By R.T. KOENIG
Weaverville water customers will see their monthly bills increase if the recommendations of a new study are approved.

Weaverville's Town Council met with the town's engineer Tuesday night to discuss a recently completed study of the town's water system. Gary McGill of McGill Associates explained the results of the study during the special called meeting at Town Hall.

Earlier this year, the council had asked McGill Associates to study the town's water system to determine if a long-standing moratorium on water hook-ups could be lifted. McGill was also asked to determine if the town could expand water service to outlying areas of northern Buncombe County.

McGill's study of the system recommends a 20 percent increase in water rates for customers within the town limits. At present, water customers within the town are charged \$5.02 for the first 2,000 gallons each month. Additional water up to 200,000

-Continued on back page

Weaverville Plant Gets Defense Bid

A Weaverville industry is among four Buncombe County companies recently awarded defense industry contracts.

Conrad Industries won the contract for \$27,189 to make shoulder sleeve insignias for the 60th Infantry Division of the U.S. Army.

The largest single contract for \$1.28 million was awarded to Mills Manufacturing Corp. of Asheville. That firm makes deceleration parachutes for the F-4 and F-16 fighter planes.

The company recently donated materials to Madison County schools for use in the school program.

Vanover Industries of Weaverville recently received a contract to make and assemble 100,000 shoulder sleeve insignias for the 60th Infantry Division of the U.S. Army.

-Continued on back page