

## County Had \$380 Error In \$2,073 In Food Stamps

# Stamp Errors Blamed On Rules, Clients

### Around Town

BY SAM C. MORRIS

We haven't had any more snow or ice as this is being written Monday afternoon, but there has been both over the state in the past week. Snow is forecast for tonight, but not for Hoke County.

I don't recall schools staying closed for as many days straight as they did in some of the schools around this county. We were closed for three days, but others were closed for over a week. Some couldn't make up days last Saturday because of the icy roads.

Even with what cold weather and ice we have had, it is so much better than other parts of the nation.

Maybe it will warm up before too long and I can get out on the golf course.

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While on the subject of weather and the golf course, I understand from reliable sources that Kathy Hendrix of the Arabia Golf Course stated last Wednesday, that it was the first day players had been on the course in 11 days. This sounds impossible for North Carolina!

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The sound of sirens could be heard here Sunday night and Monday morning. I couldn't tell if they were coming from fire vehicles or ambulances, but they were so often that you would think you were in a large city. The cold weather can cause people to become careless with fire.

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The damage to the awning over the sidewalk in front of Vardell Hedgpeth Insurance Agency was not caused entirely by the wind. I understand that a truck struck the awning last week and loosened some of the slats in the frame. Then on Sunday the wind blew the loosened slats out of the frame onto the sidewalk.

That's a sturdy awning that took two accidents to cause much damage.

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The political season is warming up and even if we don't know when the primary date will be have plenty of candidates.

The only races so far, involving Hoke County people, are for county commissioner and for district judge. Judge Joe Dupree will have opposition for the first time since he was first elected.

There is still a few more days to file and this could bring forth more candidates. The filing deadline is noon, Monday, February 1st.

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Don't forget that the deadline is near for listing your taxes. Be sure to do so before the deadline and save the penalty.

Also, don't forget to purchase your city tag. They are on sale at city hall and must be displayed by February 15th.

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The Super Bowl that was played Sunday afternoon in the Silverdome in Pontiac, Mich., was more like a football game with the temperature around 68 degrees inside the stadium. The outside reading was about zero degrees.

I think that this type of condition should become a must for the big game.

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The following letter was received last week from Charlton Campbell of Chapel Hill. I thought it would be of interest to many that remember him, but also to bring back memories of others that worked here in the late 1930s.

Dear Sam:  
Upon reading of your retirement as general manager of *The News-Journal* recently I began reminiscing about my own employment

(See AROUND TOWN, page 10)

Hoke County's 18.34 per cent dollar error in overpayments and underpayments of food stamp benefits between October 1979 and March 1981 can be attributed to food-stamp recipients' failing to report changes in income and to confusion created on the part of workers by changes in federal regulations.

By U.S. Justice Department

## House Redistricting Plan Vetoed

A General Assembly redistricting plan which would have left Hoke, Scotland and Robeson counties in the same State House of Representatives district was rejected Thursday by the U.S. Justice Department.

Scotland and Hoke Democratic and Republican leaders and city and county officials had signed a letter sent to the department opposing the plan and favoring a Hoke-Scotland district.

The letter contends the three-county district among other things does not comply with the one

person, one vote federal requirement, since Robeson's population is nearly twice that of Hoke's and Scotland's combined. The present district, the 21st, is represented by three men, all Robeson County residents.

Before the three-county district was formed in 1965, Hoke and Scotland had one representative each. In the 1971 redistricting, the district lost a representative, bringing the 21st's to the present total of three, because Robeson showed a loss of population by the U.S. Census of 1970, though Hoke and

information each recipient is given when he or she is approved to receive stamps.

This includes a statement of the requirement to notify the department of changes in income; it also includes a statement of penalties to which recipients are liable for violations of regulations.

The dollar error amounted to a

total of \$380, which included \$139 in underpayments (people eligible not receiving as much as they were entitled to), \$190 in ineligible households; and \$51 in overpayments to recipients. This total dollar error was in a total of \$2,073 in food stamps issued in the 17-month period.

Furthermore, Gov. Jim Hunt's

and Dr. Sarah Morrow's publicized comments about the statewide food stamp error situation came about 13 months late, and the state Social Services director's letter to each county Social Services director was written about seven months late, as far as Hoke County was concerned.

The letter, written by John M. Syria, state Social Services Division director, on August 26, 1981, explains that its purpose is "to present to you and comment upon errors occurring in the Food Stamp Program, identify results of such errors in terms of USDA sanctions, and suggest measures which can be taken to reduce the State's Quality Control error rate."

This information was obtained from Ken Witherspoon, director of the Hoke County Department of Social Services, Thursday. That same day he had written letters to Hunt and Morrow, secretary of the State Department of Human Resources, objecting to the way the situation was handled publicly by them.

The underpayments and overpayments are being corrected. Delores McLeod, a supervisor of the county program, said 26 cases of overpayment were listed for repayment December 31. She also said two cases of alleged felony fraud in connection with food stamp receipts by clients have gone to court for prosecution, and four others were being investigated.

Whether the added notification system is eliminating errors caused by failure to report income changes, Witherspoon said, won't be known within the next 18-months report is issued. This will be about mid-1984.

He said, however, showing figures, that since the notification system was started, the numbers of clients reporting income changes have increased. For one example, in October 1980, a total of 68 income changes were reported, and in October 1981, the total reported was 196. For another, 84 changes were reported by recipients in March 1980, and 167 in March 1981.

To arrive at the percentage of dollar errors, Witherspoon explained, 21 food stamp cases were taken from the county's files. Nine were found to contain errors -- overpayments or underpayments. The value of the errors then was divided by the value of the amount of all the cases checked and multiplied by 100 to get the percentage.

Witherspoon also said in effect the percentage figure is misleading. He said failure of a client to report receiving disability income accounted for an error of \$141 ineligible payments. This, he said made a difference of nearly 6 per cent in the error figure for the county. Without this single case, the percentage is 11.53, he said.

Regarding federal regulations covering the food stamp program, he said they are "constantly changing," and the human mind cannot absorb that just so much information. "To get the staff to understand the government regulations is a problem," Witherspoon added.

Witherspoon said that the system itself creates problems. He added that clients and government share the problem. Witherspoon added, however, that "pointing fingers" of blame won't solve the problem. His staff, he said, worked to find the causes.

The department currently has 1,600 households receiving food stamps. The program is handled by a fulltime staff of five eligibility specialists and two supervisors.

Regarding supervision, Mrs. McLeod said that after an eligibility specialist interviews a candidate for food stamp benefits, the report is reviewed, and a log is kept on every specialist. For example, she said, she found three discrepancies in 24 cases handled by one specialist. She brought them to the specialist's attention for correction, before the stamps were issued. The same process is used for the cases handled by every specialist.

However, she added, the supervisor has no control over what the client (applicant for food stamps) is telling the specialist.

Witherspoon said in regard to errors caused by recipients of the

(See FOOD STAMPS, page 10)

### In School Drug Violations

## One Expulsion Upheld, One Dissolved

One Upchurch Junior High School student's expulsion was upheld and another's for drug violations was dissolved in effect Monday night by the Hoke County Board of Educa-

tion in the closing minutes of a 3¼-hour hearing.

The action allowing the student to return to school was taken on grounds of insufficient evidence.

The student had been expelled January 12 for allegedly taking an illegal pill at school. The other student was expelled October 13 for smoking a marijuana cigarette.

### 3 Deputies, 2 Civilians

## 5 Hurt In Arrest Try

Three sheriff's officers and two black civilians were injured Saturday night in a fight that started when an officer attempted to make an arrest for alleged driving under the influence on Rockfish Road near Scurlock School.

Raeford Policeman George Baker, answering the call for help, was forced off U.S. 401 Business about a mile north of Raeford by a civilian car. His cruiser struck a power pole and two mail boxes, and he suffered bruises. The collision with the power pole knocked out electric service to homes throughout a wide area of the accident for up to several hours.

An undetermined number of blacks joined the affray after the officers were attacked but dispersed when several other sheriff's deputies arrived in response to a radioed call for help made by one of the attacked officers.

Other blacks formed later outside the Hoke County Sheriff's Department and a physician's office after two men in the civilian car had been brought from the scene. Shouts of "police brutality" and obscene remarks came from the group outside the sheriff's department, but no violence occurred.

All the people in the groups left by about 2 a.m. Sunday.

The information about the Rockfish Road incident and the deputies' roles in it was provided Monday afternoon by Sheriff David M. Barrington.

He said the driver of the car, Benjamin Franklin Green, about 30, was taken to Moore Memorial Hospital at Pinehurst after he started vomiting at the jail. He said a hospital spokesman informed him Green had sucked vomit into his lungs and that his condition was "not good."

The sheriff said Green's brother, Joseph, 29, was being held in jail. The Greens were placed under bond on misdemeanor charges, the sheriff said. The Greens live in the Scurlock community, he said.

Barrington said Benjamin Green was charged with driving under the influence, assaulting three law enforcement officers, and resisting arrest. Joseph Green, he said, was charged with assaulting four officers and resisting arrest.

Barrington said Joseph Green

weighs about 175 pounds and stands about 5 feet 8 inches high, and Benjamin Green, about 6 feet 1 and about 210 pounds.

He said Joseph Green was taken to the jail after being treated by Dr. Riley Jordan for a laceration suffered in the fight near the school. He said seven stitches were taken to close the cut, which was on the right eyebrow.

When the prisoner started vomiting, he was taken back to Jordan immediately and then taken to Moore Memorial.

Barrington had gone to the sheriff's department in response to a call from jailer Ralph Tyndall at about 10:40 p.m.

He said Joseph Green also was treated for a smaller cut which jailer H.E. Bowen discovered Monday morning on the back of the prisoner's head but which Joseph Green had not reported.

Barrington said that Joseph Green started fighting again, though handcuffed, at the jail, striking Deputy Sheriff Ronnie Odom in the chest and kicking at the sheriff though not hitting him. He said Joseph Green is charged with assaulting Odom at the jail and Deputies Jimmy Riley, James Madden and John Wood at the scene on Rockfish Road.

Flesh was bitten from Riley's lower left cheek allegedly by Benjamin Green, and Madden and Wood suffered relatively minor head lacerations and, elsewhere, scratches and bruises, the sheriff said. He said they and the Green brothers were treated by physicians assistants, then by Jordan.

The sheriff said Riley's wound required more treatment, consequently he would be off duty for several more days.

"We will not tolerate this type situation ever again," the sheriff said. "We will use whatever force necessary to affect an arrest."

The sheriff said: "What should have been a routine DUI (driving under the influence) case developed into a bad situation, because not only the ones charged resisted arrest but because other people living in the area became involved."

Barrington added: "We will not tolerate this type situation ever again. We will use whatever force necessary to affect an arrest."

Scotland gained. This information is contained in the letter sent to the Justice Department.

The General Assembly is expected to hold a special session February 9 to study the House redistricting problem.

In Thursday's decision, William Bradford Reynolds of the U.S. Attorney General's staff said the House's use of large, multi-seat districts effectively submerges sizeable concentrations of black populations into majority white electorates. This was in reference to the

statewide redistricting plan. The Scotland and Hoke officials' letter on the point of "dilution" says, however, "It (the three-county plan) does not dilute the vote of minorities, but, in some instances, actually enhances their voting power. This is readily apparent in the population figures (according to the 1980 Census) shown on exhibit A attached to this letter."

Reynolds' objection was similar to his objection filed last month to a State Senate redistricting plan. He is assistant attorney general for civil rights.

In a related action, the board adopted a motion to employ a fully qualified teacher for the second semester, which will start Monday, at a site other than Upchurch for students expelled, consequently excluded from attending their regular classes. County Schools Supt. Raz Autry explained the provision is being made for excluded Upchurch students.

The school system provides for instruction of expelled students in the Extended Day classes at Hoke County High School. Extended Day classes are held not only for expelled students but for all students who cannot attend regular classes because of job requirements or other reasons. The classes are held from 3 p.m. to 8 p.m. on school days through the week.

Under the new arrangement authorized Monday night, expelled students will be allowed to ride school buses to their "excluded" classes.

Autry said the site will be announced before Monday.

The student whose expulsion was dissolved was allowed to return to his regular classes Tuesday morning. At the hearing, Upchurch Principal Allen Edwards testified in effect that the student had taken a "speed" pill, an amphetamine-type drug which is classified as a controlled substance under state law. The school system rule provides that a student consuming or possessing a controlled substance on school property shall be expelled for the remainder of the school year. The expelled student is eligible for readmission at the start of the following school year.

Testimony for the student was in effect that he took the pill but didn't know what it was and that the pill wasn't "speed" but a diet pill of the type sold legally over the counter without a prescription in drug stores.

The two expelled students were represented by Julian Pierce, an attorney of the U.S. government-financed Legal Services Inc., office at Lumberton. Legal Services provides legal assistance to low-income people.

The school board went into executive session after hearing evidence for about two hours, then after an hour of discussion and hearing more statements, reopened the meeting and adopted the motions.

### Correction

A reference in last week's report of the county commissioners' meeting to the proposed establishment of a lake as a water supply should have read, "between Nicholson and Rockfish creeks," instead of "Richardson and Rockfish creeks."