

## Hoke Man Sentenced For Murder

By Sherry Matthews

An apparent "domestic squabble" last May has ended with a Hoke County man being found guilty of voluntary manslaughter in Superior Court last week.

John Lewis McNeill, 55, was charged with the May shooting death of Joyce Cunningham, a woman who had, according to McNeill's testimony, been "living with him since before Christmas" of 1981.

In testimony during the three-day trial, McNeill said he had been drinking heavily the night before the shooting and apparently had a couple of drinks the morning of the murder.

"Joyce snatched the bottle away from me and began scratching me and arguing with me," McNeill said.

"After I had two or three more drinks of vodka, and we argued, I went to get the gun to scare her," he said.

McNeill claimed throughout the trial that he only meant to scare the deceased, not actually shoot her, and that the safety mechanism on the 12 gauge shotgun had not worked properly.

"The gun went off while I was fiddling with the safety," McNeill said.

"I was just trying to stop her from scratching and fighting. I just wanted to scare her," McNeill kept repeating during cross-examination by Assistant District Attorney Jean Powell.

"Why did you load the gun if you only wanted to scare her," Powell asked.

McNeill's only answer was that he "didn't recall".

Being unable to remember was a major part of McNeill's testimony as he continuously repeated "I don't recall" to Miss Powell's questions.

The jury, after a short deliberation, found McNeill, who was charged with second degree

(See SENTENCED, page 12A)

## Around Town

by Sam Morris

The rain last Friday was almost three inches and on top of all the other rain recently, the fields are too wet to plow. It was nice Saturday, Sunday and Monday with the temperatures in the 70s. The rain Sunday night didn't harm any outdoor activities.

The forecast is for colder weather Tuesday and Wednesday. A warning has been issued to the peach and apple growers of the state. We hope that the temperatures will stay above 30 degrees and not destroy these crops again this year.

Next week the Franzen Bros. Circus will come to Raeford. There will be two performances at Armory Park Friday, April 1st. Time for the shows will be at six and eight p.m.

Sponsor of the Circus is the Raeford Kiwanis Club and all proceeds will go to the Children's Center.

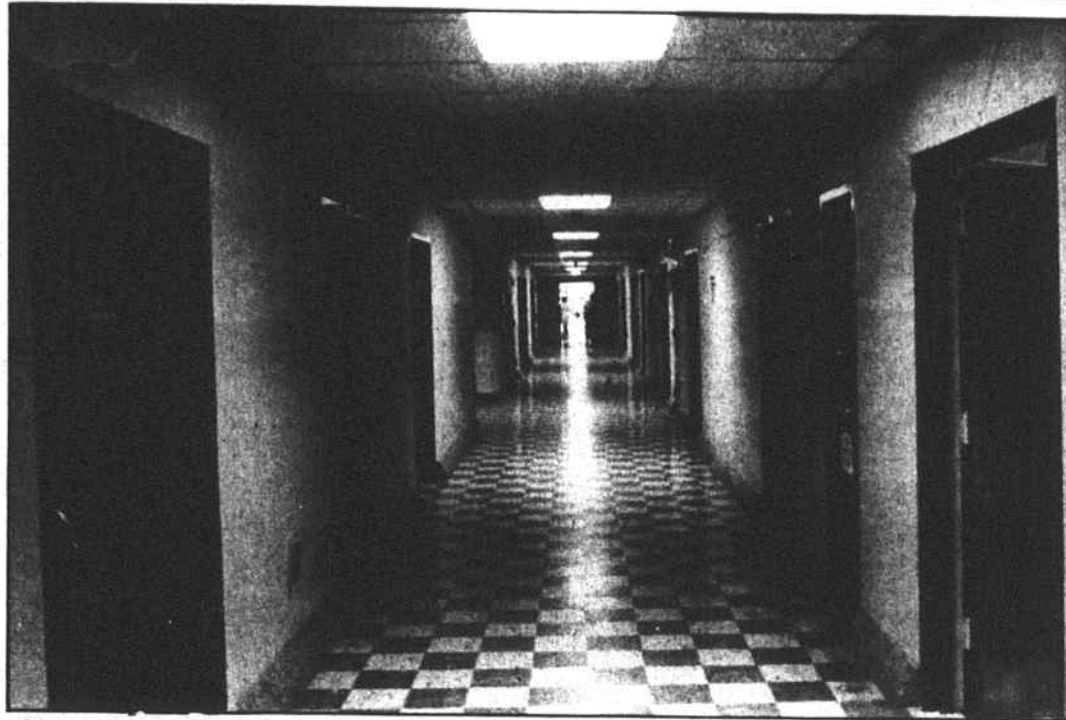
Tickets can be purchased from any Kiwanian and from some business places in Raeford.

Don't forget that the Easter Sunrise Service will be held at a new location this year. The new site is the front steps of the Raeford Presbyterian Church. The service will be Sunday, April 3 beginning at 5:40 a.m.

If you get up too late for coffee, don't stay home because the Senior High Fellowship of the Church will serve coffee and doughnuts after service.

I don't know the weather forecast for Easter, but maybe the cool weather this week will be the last of the season.

The victories by N.C. State remind me of the year Carolina won (See AROUND TOWN, page 10A)



### Clean Halls

Although patient numbers are down, McCain Hospital maintains a clean, well maintained facility. State Legislators are considering converting the 60-year-old TB sanatorium to a prison hospital.

## Coop Board Shuns Court Order

By Sherry Matthews

During an executive session last week, Lumbee River Electric Membership Cooperative directors withdrew their alleged support of a court ruling earlier that day requiring them to hold a recall election if 10% of its customers signed a petition asking for such a meeting.

"Being the tyrants that they are, I expected something like this from them," membership Action Group leader Carl Branch said Tuesday.

The 12-member board of directors voted last Tuesday not to go along with the consent order agreed to March 15 in Robeson Superior Court.

The vote apparently came at the same time as Interim General Manager Ronnie Hunt was holding a press conference in the same building and was saying that the board had agreed to the order.

The board members were asked to join the March 15 press conference, but refused, just minutes before going into an executive session meeting.

Hunt, who was asked why he felt the board withdrew their support of the agreement, refused to comment Tuesday.

"I would be putting words in their mouths if I attempted to answer for them," Hunt said.

"We anticipated this kind of silly maneuver from that bunch," Branch said.

"We are going full steam ahead with this thing. We already have

1,600 signatures on the petition and expect to have about 5,000 when we are finished," Branch added.

If the recall meeting is denied once again, Branch says the action group will consider boycotting.

"Those tyrants don't think we are serious, but we believe it is better to go without electricity for a week than pay out our nose for the rest of our lives," Branch said.



Branch

Another matter that has Branch and group members upset is the board's recent change of the by-laws of the 40-year-old cooperative.

"I know they are making changes, and it is unbelievable for them to do so," Branch said.

According to Branch, the board changed the by-laws around March 10, allowing the board to select the time, date and place of the recall meeting.

"It is a real thorn in their side that we want the meeting held in Fayetteville," Branch said.

"To them it is blasphemy to hold the meeting anywhere but Pembroke," he added.

"There has never been any dignity to that bunch and there is even less now," Branch said.

If the board refuses to hold the recall election after 10% of the

membership has signed the petition, a contempt of court ruling will be sought, Horace Stacy, lawyer for the action group said.

If held, the election could give the membership a chance to oust the present directors.

The recall election has been pushed from the start by Carl Branch and the action group because of alleged expense account privilege abuse by the coop directors, and the firing of the coop's general manager without explaining the reason for the dismissal to the membership.

Two weeks ago another group was formed by the Rev. Grover Oxendine in support of the board of directors.

"If they (the group for the board) present the 100% honest-to-God truth, we'll accept this group or any group with open arms," Branch said.

"We are not fighting any group; we are fighting one outfit, and that is the tyrannical board," Branch said.

An attempt was made to try and reach Lumbee board members, but none were available for comment at press time.

According to Hunt, some of the board members are in Florida at the 1983 Directors Conference.

Branch said his group was going to do everything possible to insure that the April 28 recall meeting is held.

"We are pulling out all the stops and moving full steam ahead, no matter what," Branch said.

## Commission Reviews Pound Report

By Sherry Matthews

No action was taken Monday night by the Hoke County Commissioners on whether to support a new animal shelter proposed by a study committee for a site at the end of North Main Street.

Jack McGinnis, chairman of the study committee, said the eight-member group reviewed several sites before unanimously agreeing on a 2.5-acre tract donated by Ray Calloway of Elizabethtown.

The group decided on the Calloway property because the land is close to the city, yet isolated enough to pose no nuisance and has been donated to the cause for no cost, McGinnis said.

McGinnis presented the commissioners with drawings of the proposed site and a complete rundown of what could be included in the facility.

The committee's proposal also included a "ballpark" estimate of the cost, which according to McGinnis should be less than \$25,000.

According to the recommendations, the building would be 1,924 square feet, and would include: 20 dog runs, an office facility, internal parking for vehicles, two half baths, a treatment room for a veterinarian's use, a quarantine room for dogs, a facility for cats with separate cubby holes and a

room for puppies and pregnant dogs.

The commissioners made no commitment despite the committee's quick action in making the recommendations and McGinnis' own plea to get something done before "winter rolls around again".

Hoke County Commission Chairman John Balfour said that the commissioners next move would be to study the recommendations and look over the site.

### Tank Sought

In other action, a public hearing was held to discuss the commissioner's decision to apply to the North Carolina Department of Natural Resources and Community Development (NRCD) for a Community Development Block Grant.

The grant would supply funds for the construction of an elevated water tank, which would be part of a proposed county water system.

Skip Green, of the Lumberton engineering firm Koonce, Noble and Associates, presented to the board and the audience a plan on how to cut cost.

High "cost per unit" played a vital role in the rejection of the county's 1982 application.

Green suggested that Tylertown

be used as the target area for the 1983 application.

That area has an existing water system and could decrease the cost per unit while serving the same number of people that last year's target area, South Hoke, would have served.

The commissioner's main concern over the new application seemed to deal with the amount of local funds put into the project.

The \$47,500 in local funds is the same amount used in last year's application but is going towards a smaller amount of grant money, County Manager James Martin said.

The commissioners decided to hold off on committing those local funds until the next public hearing which is scheduled for April 18 at 7 p.m.

In other matters, the board: \*Approved the 1908 right-of-way dedication for State Road 1312 and requested that the Department of Transportation do the survey work required so that improvements can be made to the road.

\*OK'd a petition signed by eight Hoke County property owners along a rural dirt road east of State Road 1455 and south of S.R. 1458

(See COMMISSION, page 12A)

## NC Prison Hospital Proposed For McCain

By Warren Johnston

A state General Assembly appropriations committee studying McCain Hospital will probably recommend that the facility be funded during the next fiscal year under the North Carolina Department of Corrections as a medical care unit, members of the local Legislative Delegation said this week.

However, also included in the recommendation will be the provision that the 200 employees of the present facility be placed in other state jobs and that appropriate institutional space be provided for "hard core" tuberculosis patients, District 30 Sen. David R. Parnell said.

McCain, as North Carolina's last tuberculosis sanatorium, has been under fire from the state Department of Human Resources and has been in a funding limbo status for several years.

North Carolina Gov. James B. Hunt Jr., after meeting last fall with a Hoke County task force, decided to leave the future of the hospital up to the General Assembly.

Both Parnell and 16th District Rep. Daniel H. DeVane said the Legislature would "definitely" make a decision on the hospital during this year's session.

Because of sweeping state budget cuts, the once 700-patient

sanatorium was not likely to be funded for more than a 75-bed TB treatment facility, and had Human Resources Chief Dr. Sarah T. Morrow had her way, McCain would have been closed.

"Under the circumstances, I think the prison unit is going to be about the best we can do," DeVane said.

Members of McCain task force, representing city and county government and the Chamber of Commerce, were briefed about the proposals last week in a Raleigh meeting with the delegation.

Two proposals are under consideration for McCain, but Parnell and DeVane believe the prison hospital is the most likely to be funded.

The other proposal would be to upgrade McCain as a 75-bed facility and to use the remainder of the facility as a privately leased rest home.

"We have been doing everything that we could do to make sure the hard core TB patients were taken care of and to make sure those 200 jobs were saved," Parnell said.

"This way the jobs won't be lost, and a Department of Corrections hospital might grow to be something good for Hoke County," the Senator added.

Tuberculosis patients, who are drug resistant, will be cared for in

(See McCAIN, page 3A)

## Tex-Elastic Sale Given Approval

By Warren Johnston

A sale of \$3.25 million in industrial revenue bonds, which will allow an Asheboro firm to purchase the Tex-Elastic Corporation plant here, was approved Tuesday night by a Hoke County financing authority.

If the deal is consummated between JRA Industries and Tex-Elastic, about 90 employees of the firm's present 180 workforce will be assured of retaining their jobs.

Although JRA President Edward R. Askew would not confirm it Tuesday night, the sale will apparently save the local elastic yarn plant from closing.

According to state and federal regulations in order for the low-interests, county-sponsored, bonds to be issued, the use must be to save or create jobs.

Askew said he could not speak for Tex-Elastic, but he was sure that the purchase would meet the criteria of saving jobs.

Tex-Elastic was not represented at the Tuesday night meeting of the Hoke County Industrial Facilities and Pollution Control Financing Authority.

JRA, which is a subsidiary of the national firm Jung Incorporated, plans to continue making fine elastic yarn for the use in women's support hose, Askew said.

The mill will be operated at full capacity, and Askew said the company's conservative figures show that at least 90 employees will be retained.

JRA also plans to maintain the wage scale which is being paid at Tex-Elastic, he added.

"If we can run all the machines on a consistent basis, our employee level would hit what it is now (180)," Askew said.

However, the Asheboro firm's president said he was unsure why Tex-Elastic's employment was so high because current production levels did not justify the number of workers at the plant.

"We can't see going below the level of 90 fulltime employees," he said.

Machines will be run for three shifts on a seven-day-a-week basis, Askew said.

The nature of the nylon elastic weaving process requires machines be operated constantly.

If the machines go off, "you don't hear nice expressions," Askew said.

Under the bond plan, taxpayers have no liability, and the county will benefit from the continuous employment.

"We have no plans to move the plant and no interests in moving equipment out of the county," Askew said.

The bonds will cover the costs of the purchase of the 65,000 square foot manufacturing facility and the 6.2-acre site located on North Bethel Street in Raeford.

There is enough room on the site for future expansions, and the Raeford plant is better suited for building than the firm's Asheboro location, Askew said.

The only disadvantage of the Raeford plant, is that electrical power has to be purchased from Carolina Power and Light (CP&L), he said.

CP&L charges higher rates than Duke Power, but Askew said he believes prices will level off in the future.

The low-interest bonds and the better expansion site, outweigh the advantage of moving the plant to a Duke Power service area, Askew said.

(See TEX-ELASTIC page 4A)

## Inside Today



### Spring Is Here

With spring officially arriving on March 21, trees are bursting into bloom and planting time is drawing to a close for spring gardening. We take a look at gardening today on page 1-B.