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End of an era

Flames tower over the McLauchlin Company around 3 a.m. Tuesday, as Hardin's Food Store and the hardware store are destroyed by the fire which was reported about 2:15 a.m. The fire is believed to have started at the rear of the grocery store. Investigators plan to probe the cause of the blaze Wednesday when

the structure is cool enough to enter. Efforts were still being made to extinguish flames on Wednesday morning. McLauchlin Company was the oldest firm in Hoke County. The business has operated on the Main Street site since 1902.

Photo by Pam Frenck

County's oldest business destroyed by Tuesday fire

Raeford firefighters were back on the scene Wednesday morning pouring water on the remains of a Main Street building which was destroyed in an early morning blaze Tuesday.

Flames broke out again around 6 a.m. in the remains of the McLauchlin Company building, and Raeford volunteer firemen were called back.

The blaze, which destroyed the oldest business in Hoke County as well as Hardin's Grocery, was believed to have been out around midnight Tuesday, almost 24 hours after it was first reported.

Before the fire was under control Tuesday, firemen had poured over 1.3 million gallons of water on the flames and by Wednesday it is believed over 2.5 million gallons had been pumped.

Because of the draw on the municipal system Tuesday morning, residential water had a black color and at least one industry was forced to curtail operation.

The House of Raeford, which

uses water for processing poultry, was forced to shut down Tuesday because of the poor quality of the water.

The plant was to reopen on Wednesday.

The McLauchlin Co., Inc., which shared a building with Hardin's Food Store on Main Street in Raeford, was burned to the ground as the result of a fire which apparently began in the rear of the food store.

The blaze started in a back corner of Hardin's near a fish cooler at approximately 2:20 a.m., Raeford Fire Chief Crawford Thomas said.

Around 3 a.m. firefighters believed the blaze was under control, however, the fire rekindled in a crawl space along the roof of the building.

About 3:15 a.m., witnesses said the fire broke through the roof and reddish-orange flames reached heights of more than 20 feet above the building.

All the county's volunteer units

were called to battle the fire. The Hoke units fought the blaze from ground level and from the roof of a warehouse behind the hardware company, Thomas said.

It was about 3:30 a.m., and after assistance arrived from Cumberland County's LaPayette Village Fire Department, before the firemen were able to regain control.

Heat from the fire was so intense, that firefighters and spectators had to retreat across Main Street to avoid being burned.

McLauchlin Company opened its doors for business in 1902 and in 1910 occupied a wooden frame building on the same site.

The present building was believed to have been constructed during the 1920's, and was noted as being one of the more attractive structures in the downtown business district.

The building was owned by John W. McPhaul and the McLauchlin (See FIRE, page 11A)

Murder investigation moving to Wake Co.

By Ron Anderson

An investigation into the murder of two Raleigh women whose skeletal remains were found in a wooded area near McCain on January 13 is moving to Wake County this week, Hoke County Sheriff Dave Barrington said Tuesday.

On Monday afternoon, a suspect, Edward Lee Cummings, 44, was arrested in Wake County by the Wake County Sheriff's Department and charged with two counts of murder.

At 6:15 p.m. on Monday, Cummings arrived at the Hoke County jail where he was later questioned by authorities.

Cummings is being held in jail without bond.

"Our investigation will move to Wake County on Thursday," Barrington said.

More physical evidence will be sought and potential witnesses will

be questioned, the sheriff said.

Cummings' residence is listed as 7380 James Austin Road, Willow Springs, N.C., but he was building a home in Hoke County.

Cummings, 44, is charged with murdering Marie Puryear, 22, and her sister, Teresa Ann Puryear, 15, both of Raleigh.

Remains of the bodies, later identified as the two sisters, were found wrapped in plastic and partially buried in graves approximately 100 feet apart in a pine forest a half mile off the Line Road (SR 1219) near Strother's Crossroads.

Physical evidence gathered over the weekend from a house owned by Cummings on the Line Road approximately one mile from the site where the bodies were discovered, led to the arrest, Barrington said.

The house had been deeded to Cummings by his father, Curtis

Cummings, 74, who lives in Red Springs.

Cummings, a native of Hoke County, became a suspect in the case after Barrington had a conversation with the elder Cummings.

"He (Edward Cummings) had been the only person all around," Barrington said.

"We expect one to both of the murders occurred in Hoke County," Barrington said.

Teresa Puryear was murdered approximately two years ago, and Karen Puryear was murdered sometime in November, authorities say.

An autopsy performed by state Medical Examiner Dr. Page Hudson showed both women were killed by a single gunshot wound to the back of the head.

"The evidence so far indicates first degree murder," Barrington said.

A grand jury, however, will

decide whether the charge will be first degree murder, Barrington said.

Karen Puryear was reported missing by her mother, Faye Puryear, on November 19, 1985, according to Sgt. C. A. Watson of the Hoke County Sheriff's Department.

Teresa Puryear was reported missing on September 18, 1983.

Karen Puryear had been dating Cummings since 1979, and had lived with him, both at her mother's residence and at the address in Willow Springs, according to a search warrant filed by the Hoke County Sheriff's Department.

Karen Puryear had three children by Cummings, one of those children died of crib death.

Karen Puryear left Cummings in May, 1985, and later took out a warrant for non-support against (See SUSPECT, page 10A)



Suspect arrives

Edward Lee Cummings (left) arrives at the Hoke County jail at 6:15 Monday night. Cummings has been charged with two counts of murder in connection with the slaying of two Raleigh women whose partially decomposed bodies were discovered in the McCain area on January 13.

Commission to pay balance of county memorial expense

By Ron Anderson

The balance of the expense of constructing Hoke County's first monument honoring those who have died in the service of their country will be paid with tax dollars.

Members of the Hoke County Commission unanimously agreed Monday to pick up the remaining expenses for the monument.

Figures submitted by Hoke High student Josh Pate say the remaining expenses for the memorial by

sculptor Art Gore are approximately \$1,045.

The expenses include \$120 to finish the sculpture, \$325 for a bronze inscription, \$100 for landscaping and \$500 for a base.

The monument is the Eagle Scout project of Josh and his brother, Jay.

"So far we have sent Art Gore \$3,000," Josh Pate said in a letter to the commissioners.

No location for the monument has been determined, although the

commission's building and grounds committee has suggested displaying the monument in front of the courthouse.

"Really, I'd like to see it outside," building and grounds committee member Wyatt Upchurch said.

When the monument arrives, it will be Hoke County's first and will be dedicated during the celebration of the 75th Jubilee in May.

An inscription by Gore on the

monument will read: "When the guns of war are forever tombs of rust, and the innocents have no need for arms."

In other actions on Monday night, the commissioners unanimously agreed to a request by American Legion Commander Freddie Williams to remove a fence at the old armory park baseball field.

Removal of the fence would allow American Legion baseball teams to play night games at the

field, Williams said.

The field could also be used by high school teams.

"If a portable fence were put out there, you could have four different fields instead of three," Williams said.

Included in a motion made by Commissioner James A. Hunt to remove the fence was a provision to replace the old fence with a portable one.

The cost of a new fence is \$1,855.

The old fence would be moved to the new Burlington baseball field at a cost of \$525.

Money to pay for the fences will come from a revenue sharing contingency fund, according to County Manager William Cowan.

Commissioner Wyatt Upchurch asked who was going to pay the electricity bills for the night games played by the Legion team.

Williams said he hopes coaches (See COUNTY, page 10A)

Balfour not seeking re-election to office

Hoke County Commission Chairman John G. Balfour announced Monday he is not running for re-election in the upcoming Democratic primary.

Balfour, who has served as a commissioner for the past 24 years, made the statement during a mid-month commissioners meeting.

"Being a county commissioner is very time consuming and with the agriculture situation as it is at the present, I feel that I must concentrate all of my time on my farming operation and other related investments," Balfour said in a prepared statement.

"I agonized over this thing long enough," Balfour said.

Balfour asked the commissioners to consider finding a replacement to serve out his term as chairman since he was now a lame duck.

"We've got high regard for your ability and don't think you're going to let the county down during the last days," Commissioner Wyatt Upchurch said.

Balfour began serving as a commissioner on December 1, 1964, and has been chairman for the past nine years.

A native of Hoke County, Balfour received the 1984 Kiwanis Club's Citizenship Man-of-the-Year Award.

In 1985, he was named the Outstanding County Commissioner of North Carolina.

The decision not to run is not one "that I have made hastily or easily because I care about Hoke County," Balfour said.

See Letter To Editor
page 2 section B



Giving up post

Hoke County Commission Chairman John Balfour reads a prepared statement during a meeting on Monday night announcing that he will not be seeking re-election. Balfour has served on the commission for 24 years.

Around Town

By Sam Morris

The weather has been nice for the past few days. We have had temperatures of 50 and 60° in the daytime and it has not been freezing at night. We even had about 1/2 inch of rain Sunday and it was needed.

The forecast is for the weather to stay warm until about Saturday.

I played my first golf of the year last Friday. Maybe I can get in another round this week.

Last week while watching the news on a Durham television station, a name was mentioned that caused me to sit up and listen more carefully. The sports news was on and the announcer said they would take us to an interview between a reporter and an old baseball player.

When the reporter came on I didn't know the man he was interviewing, so my mind was wandering. (See AROUND, page 2A)



Hoke heritage

The Hoke County Extension Service recently sponsored a quilt documentation day at the T.B. Lester Building. We take a look at what was discovered on page one of Section B in today's News Journal.